

A Comprehensive Visual Analysis of the Research Trends and Hotspots on Zhu Xi

Chuangji Guo¹ and Huichan Ren^{1*}

¹School of Marxism, Aba Teachers College, 623000, Sichuan, China.

*Corresponding Author
Huichan Ren

School of Marxism, Aba
Teachers College, 623000,
Sichuan, China.

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Abstract: This article examines the research trends and hotspots related to Zhu Xi's thought from 2020 to 2025, aiming to offer deep insights into the academic prospects of Zhu Xi's thought study. By utilizing VOSviewer 1.6.18, this paper employs a bibliometric analysis approach to thoroughly organize and visually represent the academic landscape of research on Zhu Xi's thought. The research results indicate that China holds a central position in the field of Zhu Xi's thought research, with a total of 785 academic publications identified. In recent years, the number of academic publications on Zhu Xi's thought has not increased significantly. Le Aiguo and Shen Shunfu have made notable contributions. Shandong University and Xiamen University are the most productive institutions. History of Chinese Philosophy remains the leading core publication platform. Current research on Zhu Xi primarily focuses on aspects such as Heavenly Principle, Theory of Mind and Nature, Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge, and The Great Learning. By analyzing the hot topics, this study offers valuable references and insights for future research, which helps advance the study of Zhu Xi's thought to a deeper level and broader scope.

Keywords: Zhu Xi, Research Trends, Research Hotspots, Visual Analysis, VOSviewer.

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Introduction

Zhu Xi's thought not only inherits the Confucian teachings of Confucius and Mencius but also fully absorbs the doctrines of Northern Song (北宋) scholars. It has formed an ontology that encompasses cosmic evolution, the existence of all things, and the relationship between humans and nature, and it is rich in ecological connotations. In addition, Zhu Xi's ideas of "investigating things to extend knowledge" (格物致知) and ethical concepts such as "upholding the heavenly principle and eliminating human desires" (存天理灭人欲) have always been focal points for scholars. These ideas have profoundly impacted Chinese society throughout history and provided rich intellectual resources for contemporary disciplines such as philosophy, ethics, and political science. Studying the trends and hotspots of Zhu Xi's thought not only holds significant academic value but also has practical implications for philosophical thinking and the construction of ethics and morality in contemporary society. (le,2024) (Yang,2024) (Zhang & Ma,2024)

Employing visualization to analyze complex data is a highly effective approach. Visual analysis not only fosters the creation of new ideas but also provides a foundation for readers to observe and assess objectively (van Wijk, 2005). Examining the academic

contributions of various countries can evaluate their levels of research activities and scientific capabilities in specific fields (Ren & Abdullah, 2024). Furthermore, recognizing the contributions of specific authors on a particular topic may help identify the experts in that area and establish the groundwork for academic collaboration (Akbari et al., 2020). Highly cited publications hold substantial academic value and influence in a specific discipline. Investigating these texts can lead to a deeper comprehension of the evolutionary trajectories and fundamental principles within the academic domain (Chander et al., 2022). Co-occurrence keyword analysis is a widely used technique in bibliometric analysis (Gorzeń-Mitka et al., 2020). By utilizing this method, researchers can examine the structure and patterns of the specified research dataset, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding (Li, 2023).

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the studies on Zhu Xi conducted in China from 2020 to 2025, focusing on five key aspects: the quantity of published literature, the most impactful authors, the most influential institutions, the leading journals, and the keywords co-occurrence. By exploring these five dimensions, researchers can achieve a deeper understanding of the academic landscape regarding Zhu Xi studies in China.



Research Methods

VOSviewer is a software tool designed to construct and visually explore bibliometric networks, enabling users to identify and interpret clustering structures within the data through interactive visualization (Hassan-Montero et al., 2022; Vasudevan et al., 2016). In this study, VOSviewer 1.6.18(0) was primarily utilized for bibliometric analysis and for generating bibliographic knowledge maps.

The research data of this study are sourced from the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database. The screening criteria for the research data include the following aspects: topic (Zhu Xi), publication year (2020-2025), and index (Peking University Library’s Core Journals List and the Chinese

Social Sciences Citation Index). After careful evaluation, the researchers selected 785 pieces of literature that are highly relevant and significant. These documents were specifically chosen for in-depth visual analysis.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the Annual Publication Quantity

Figure 1 illustrates the publication output related to Zhu Xi's thought. Except for the peak of 180 publications in 2022, the annual publication volume from 2020 to 2025 remained below 180. Thus, there were significant fluctuations in the number of publications across different years, with no exciting upward trend observed.

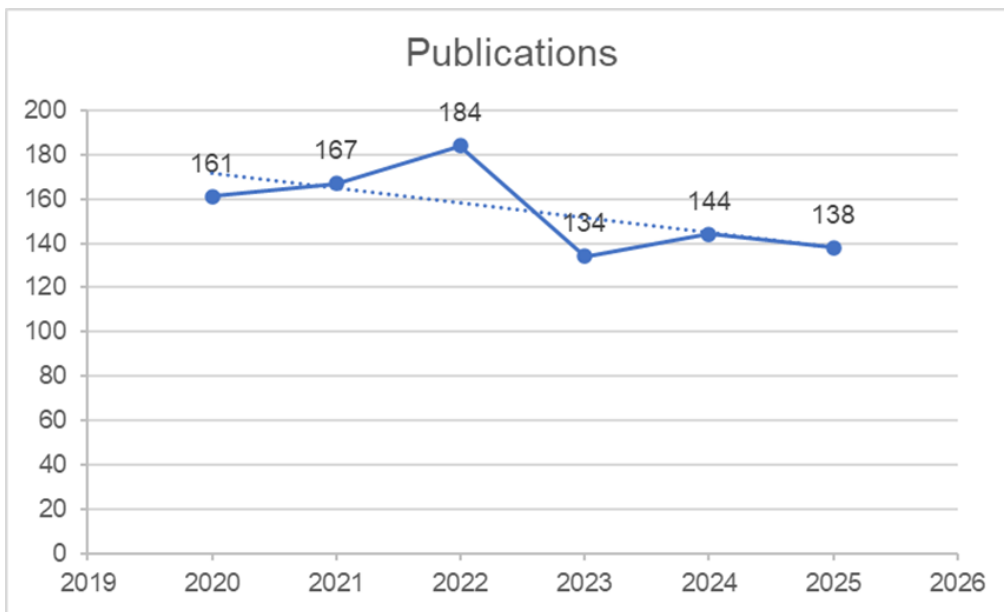


Figure 1: Annual Publication Volume on Zhu Xi Studies

Analysis of Prolific Authors

Figure 2 presents the authors who have significantly contributed to Zhu Xi research, with each publishing five or more papers in this area. Scholar Le Aiguo has published 36 papers on the theme of

Zhu Xi. Shen Shunfu has a total of 12 relevant papers, while both Zhu Hanmin and Huang Yushun have each contributed 8 relevant papers. Therefore, Le Aiguo and Shen Shunfu have demonstrated a strong interest in the research on Zhu Xi, suggesting that they likely possess expertise in this field of study.

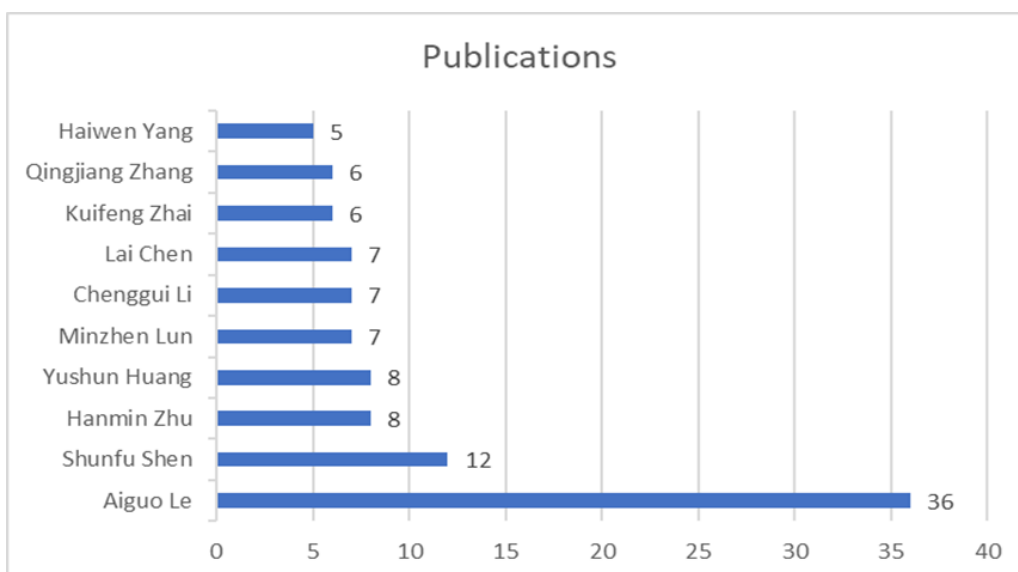


Figure 2: Leading Contributors to Zhu Xi Research

Analysis of high-contributing institutions

The main publishing institutions can reflect their research capabilities and academic influence in Zhu Xi's research trends and hot areas. From the statistical results, Shandong University, Xiamen University, Beijing Normal University, Hunan University, Renmin University of China, Sun Yat-sen University, Nanjing University, Tsinghua University, East China Normal University, Peking University and other units are strong, with more than one-third of the number of papers. They are the main force of Zhu Xi's

research trends and hot areas, contributing to academic inheritance and theoretical innovation, and building a good disciplinary ecology. In addition, from the perspective of institutions, the cooperative relationship between authors is mainly generated internally, and the exchange and cooperation between institutions is relatively lacking. The output structure of papers shows a certain differentiation phenomenon, which restricts the development of academic influence.

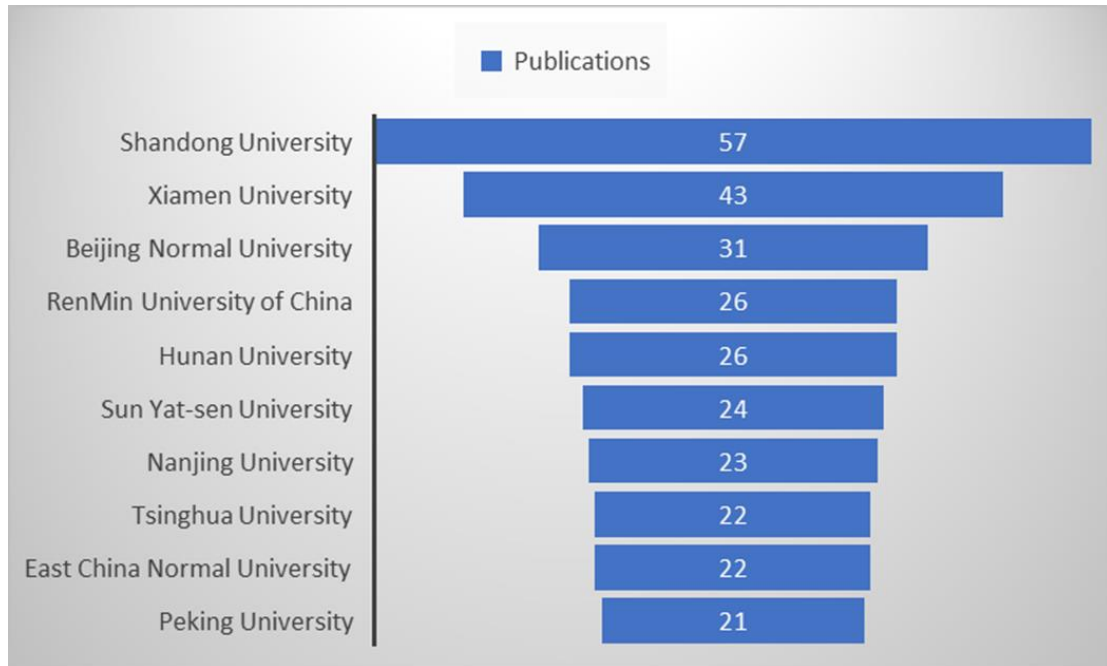


Figure 3 High-contribution journals

Analysis of high-contributing Journals

Journals are the carriers of knowledge dissemination, providing an important platform for scholars' related research. The top ten journals are mainly universities, research institutes, etc. The

publications mainly serve the majority of theoretical workers. The articles mainly reflect the cutting-edge dynamics, effective measures and latest achievements of Zhu Xi's theory and practice, and accumulate wisdom and cohesion for academic research.

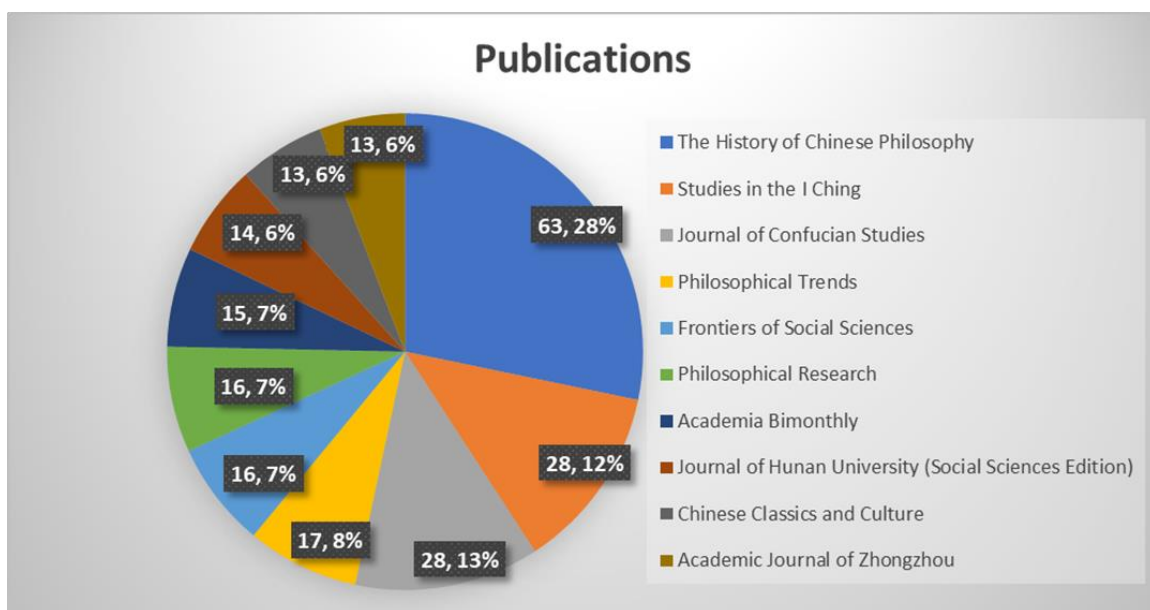


Figure 4 High-contribution journals

Analysis of Keyword Co-occurrence

Figure 5 presents the co-occurrence network of keywords in Zhu Xi's research. Researchers set the minimum co-occurrence threshold at 4, resulting in 47 valid keywords after removing duplicates. The figure shows nine distinct clusters, each marked with a different color. Cluster 1 (marked in red) contains eight nodes, with the most prominent keywords being "Confucius" (total link strength = 12, occurrence = 11) and "Song Dynasty" (total link strength = 8, occurrence = 13). Cluster 2 (indicated in green) includes six nodes, featuring "Mencius" (total link strength = 7, occurrence = 7) as the most important keyword, followed by "Zhang Shi" (total link strength = 7, occurrence = 6) and "Yi-Li" (total link strength = 7, occurrence = 4). Cluster 3 (marked in blue) contains six nodes, with "Dao Tong" (total link strength = 16, occurrence = 15) as the most critical keyword, followed by "Kang Youwei" (total link strength = 6, occurrence = 4). Cluster 4

(marked in yellow) includes six nodes, highlighting "Zhu Xi" (total link strength = 109, occurrence = 169) and "Zhu Xi" (total link strength = 24, occurrence = 17) as the most critical keywords. Cluster 5 (marked in purple) includes six nodes, with "Dao Xue" (total link strength = 10, occurrence = 8) as the keyword. Cluster 6 (marked in light blue) includes five nodes, featuring "Two Chengs" (total link strength = 9, occurrence = 5) as the keyword. Cluster 7 (marked in orange) includes five nodes, with "Li Xue" (total link strength = 32, occurrence = 37) as the most important keyword, followed by "Xin Xue" (total link strength = 9, occurrence = 6). Cluster 8 (marked in brown) includes three nodes, with "The Analects" (total link strength = 14, occurrence = 11) as the most important keyword, followed by "Yi Xue" (total link strength = 8, occurrence = 8). Cluster 9 (marked in pink) includes one node, with "The Book of Songs" (total link strength = 1, occurrence = 4) as the keyword, indicating that it receives relatively limited academic attention in the current research dimension.

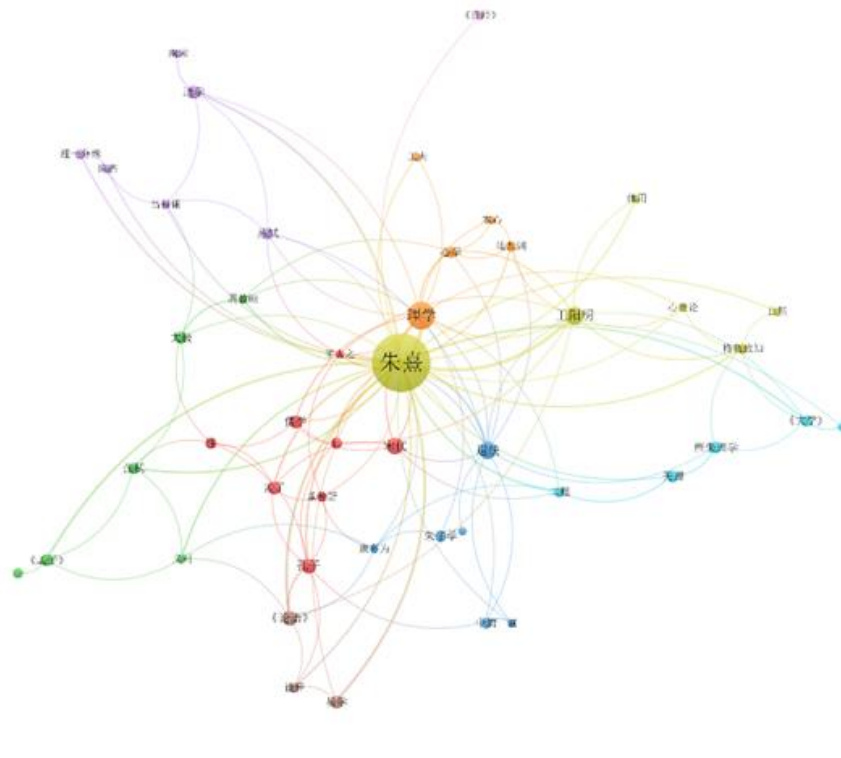


Figure 5: The Keyword Co-occurrence Network of Zhu Xi's Research

Figure 6 presents the co-occurrence overlay network of keywords in Zhu Xi's thought. Through this network, researchers have identified five popular theme terms in this field in recent years: "Heavenly Principle" (frequency of occurrence = 7, average publication year: 2023.86), "Theory of Mind and Nature" (frequency of occurrence = 4, average publication year: 2023.75), "Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism" (frequency of occurrence = 7, average publication year: 2023.71), "Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge" (frequency of occurrence = 7, average publication year: 2023.60), and "The Great Learning" (frequency

of occurrence = 6, average publication year: 2023.50). According to the analysis of the latest popular keywords shown in Figure 7, it can be inferred that the current research focus on Zhu Xi's thought is concentrated on the philosophical connotations of Heavenly Principle and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, interdisciplinary research on the Theory of Mind and Nature, the epistemology and moral cultivation of Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge, and the classic interpretation and educational significance of The Great Learning. It is expected that these themes will become important research trends in the coming years.

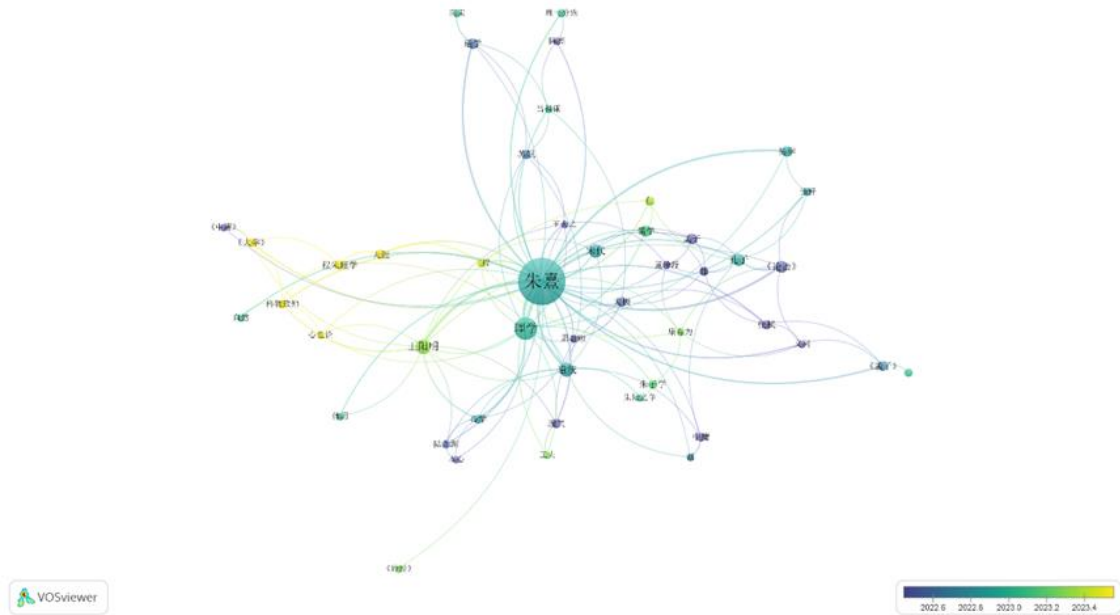


Figure 6 The Keyword Co-occurrence Overlay Network of Zhu Xi's Research

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the current focus of research on Zhu Xi centers on the philosophical connotations of Heavenly Principle and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, interdisciplinary studies of the Theory of Mind and Nature, the epistemology and moral cultivation of Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge, and the classic interpretation and educational significance of The Great Learning. These themes not only reflect the current hotspots in the study of Zhu Xi's thought but also reveal new trends for its future development. Firstly, research content is becoming more refined, as scholars shift from macro-theoretical construction to micro-conceptual analysis, focusing on specific propositions, terminologies, and their historical evolution within Zhu Xi's thought. Secondly, the research paradigm emphasizes dialogue between tradition and modernity. Scholars reinterpret Zhu Xi's ideas in contemporary contexts, exploring their relevance to modern issues such as the unity of mind and nature, moral cultivation, and social order and governance. This promotes the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional thought. This research trend not only expands the academic boundaries of Zhu Xi's thought but also provides new possibilities for reconstructing the modern value of traditional intellectual resources.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the dynamic evolution of research on Zhu Xi's thought. It offers valuable insights to the academic community and points out future research directions. Zhu Xi's thought is a treasure of Chinese culture, capable of advancing Confucianism and providing key ideas for contemporary cultural construction and value reconstruction. However, relying on a single database may limit the comprehensiveness of this study. Future research should enhance systematicness and scientific rigor by integrating multiple

databases, expanding the scope of literature searches, and strengthening international cooperation.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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