



## Research Trends and Hotspots in Zhu Xi Studies: A Visual Analysis Using VOSviewer

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**Abstract:** As a preeminent Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi has exerted a profound and lasting influence through his contributions to Confucianism, classical studies, ritual studies, and historical studies scholarship. This study employs VOSviewer to conduct a bibliometric analysis of 631 articles on Zhu Xi published in CSSCI journals on China National Knowledge Infrastructure from 2021 to 2025. The research reveals that in recent years, the number of publications on Zhu Xi has shown a fluctuating trend. Scholars such as Le Aiguo and Shen Shunfu have achieved remarkable results, and institutions like Shandong University and Xiamen University have played important leading roles. The co-occurrence analysis of keywords identifies the focal directions of Zhu Xi's studies in the development of Neo-Confucianism during the Song and Ming dynasties, Confucian orthodoxy, and the philosophy of mind and nature. This study indicates that the field of Zhu Xi research holds broad prospects and is expected to continue gaining momentum against the backdrop of cultural renaissance. Future research can be advanced by deepening interdisciplinary explorations and integrating diverse perspectives, such as the history of science and cultural anthropology. This approach will facilitate a deeper integration of Zhu Xi's ideas with contemporary practices and further uncover the modern value and application potential of his work.

**Keywords:** Zhu Xi, Neo-Confucianism, Visualization Analysis, VOSviewer.

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## Introduction

As an eminent Confucian master of the Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi integrated Neo-Confucianism, classical studies, and ritual studies into a cohesive system. His ideas not only received academic endorsement from the Qing Dynasty's leading ritual scholar, Huang Yizhou, but also made significant contributions to the fields of historical education, historiography, and bibliography through works such as the *Zizhi Tongjian Gangmu* (Lan, 2024; Gao, 2023). Exploring the inclusive characteristics of Neo-Confucian thought serves multiple purposes. First, it deepens our understanding of Chinese philosophical thought. Second, it enhances our recognition of the inclusive nature of Chinese civilization. Third, it offers insights for the exchange and mutual learning among different civilizations in the context of globalization. In the study of Zhu Xi's ritual studies, the academic community often regards it as a "ritual interpretation based on Neo-Confucianism." This is the unity of heavenly principle and human culture. (Li, 2024; Yang,

2024). Exploring the characteristics and significance of Zhu Xi's conception of Li is essential for grasping its central role within the Chinese metaphysical system. The refinement of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism signifies the maturation of Chinese metaphysics (Li, 2024; Deng, 2024).

Visualization analysis tools, like VOSviewer, not only enable scholars to deconstruct complex issues in scientific research but also offer more diverse perspectives for academic communication, promoting the construction and innovation of academic systems and opening up new research dimensions (Vasudevan et al., 2016; Ren & Abdullah, 2024). This study aims to use VOSviewer to comprehensively organize the research field of Zhu Xi. Firstly, we analyzed the publication trends of the relevant literature. Subsequently, the study conducted an analysis of authors with high co-occurrence rates and institutions with significant contributions. Additionally, the study analyzed the co-occurrence of keywords through the use of heatmaps. This approach is employed to analyze the trends and hotspots in the research on Zhu Xi.



## Research Methods

VOSviewer is a tool that employs visualization techniques to comprehensively examine clustering solutions (Hassan-Montero et al., 2022; Vasudevan et al., 2016). This study primarily utilizes VOSviewer 1.6.18(0) to conduct bibliometric analysis and generate literature knowledge graphs.

The data for this study were collected from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). The study conducted a search on the CNKI using the topics "Zhu Xi," "Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism," "Zhu Xi's thought," "Zhu Xi studies," and "Zhu Xi's philosophy," with the time frame limited to 2021–2025 and the source category restricted to CSSCI journals, yielding a total of 639 documents. After careful screening by the researchers, 631 documents were identified as highly relevant and important. These documents were specifically selected for in-depth visualization analysis.

## Result and Discussion

### Annual Publication Analysis

A statistical analysis of the publication situation in the field of Zhu Xi studies from 2021 to 2025 was conducted. In 2021, the number of related publications was 167, which increased to 184 in 2022, reaching a peak within the statistical period. Subsequently, the number of publications decreased to 134 in 2023, increased to 144 in 2024, and as of the current time in 2025, there have been 128 publications. Overall, the number of publications in the field of Zhu Xi studies initially showed a certain downward trend. However, in the past two years, the number of publications has rebounded. This change in data indicates that the academic community's attention to Zhu Xi studies is gradually increasing. It can be inferred that in the future, the field is expected to experience ongoing growth in both the intensity and depth of academic research.

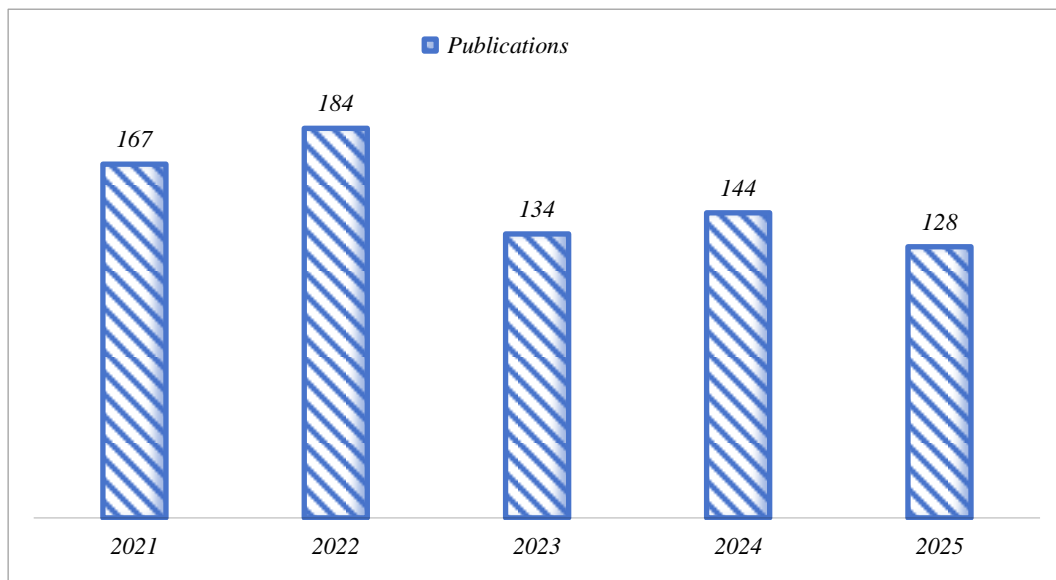
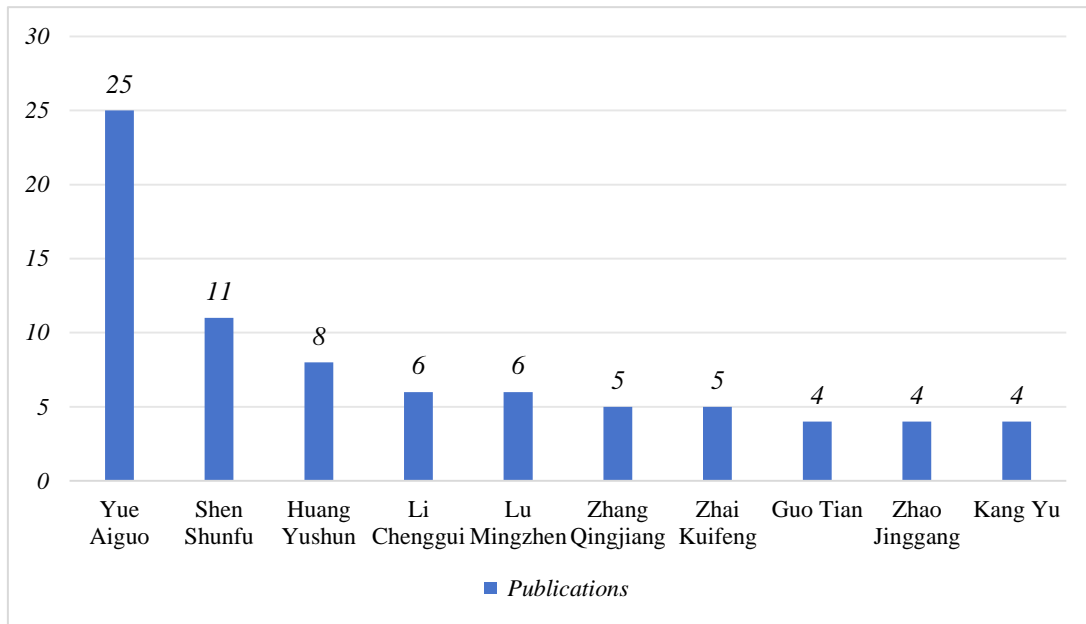


Figure 1: Annual Publication Volume of Zhu Xi's Literature

### Highly Co-Occurring Authors

Figure 2 presents the top ten authors with the highest publication volumes in the field of Zhu Xi studies. These scholars, with their extensive research achievements, have made significant contributions to the academic advancement of this field. Among them, Le Aiguo published 25 works, a number that far exceeds that of his peers and has played a crucial role in advancing the

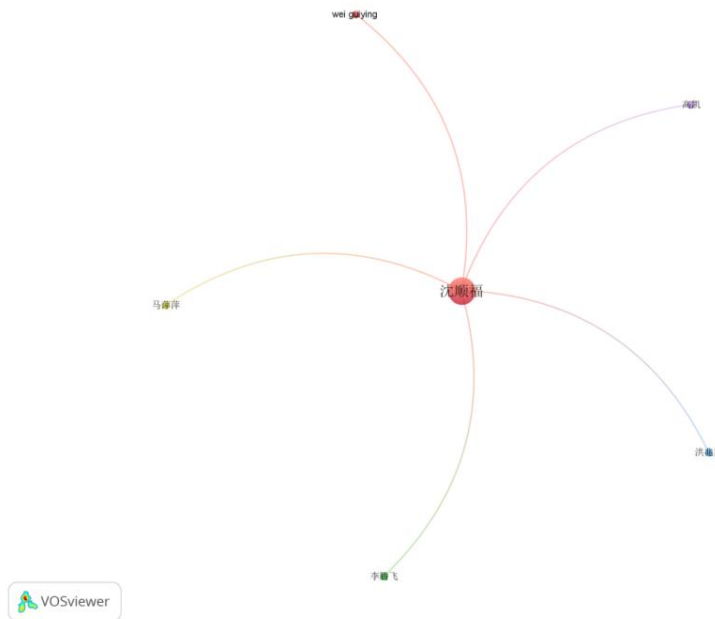
academic progress of Zhu Xi studies. Shen Shunfu has published 11 articles on this topic and has achieved remarkable results in this research area. Hence, Le Aiguo and Shen Shunfu have made outstanding contributions to the field of Zhu Xi studies. This clearly demonstrates that both scholars possess profound academic foundations and specialized expertise in this field, establishing them as significant academic forces in the ongoing development of Zhu Xi studies.



**Figure 2: Authors and Contributions to Zhu Xi's Research**

Figure 3 illustrates that Shen Shunfu serves as the core node, showcasing co-occurrence links to authors like Wei Qiyang, whereas the connections among other authors remain relatively sparse. Collaboration among multiple scholars can lead to more

innovative insights, and cross-disciplinary cooperation can enrich Zhu Xi studies from various dimensions. Therefore, the authors should prioritize collaborating with one another in the future.

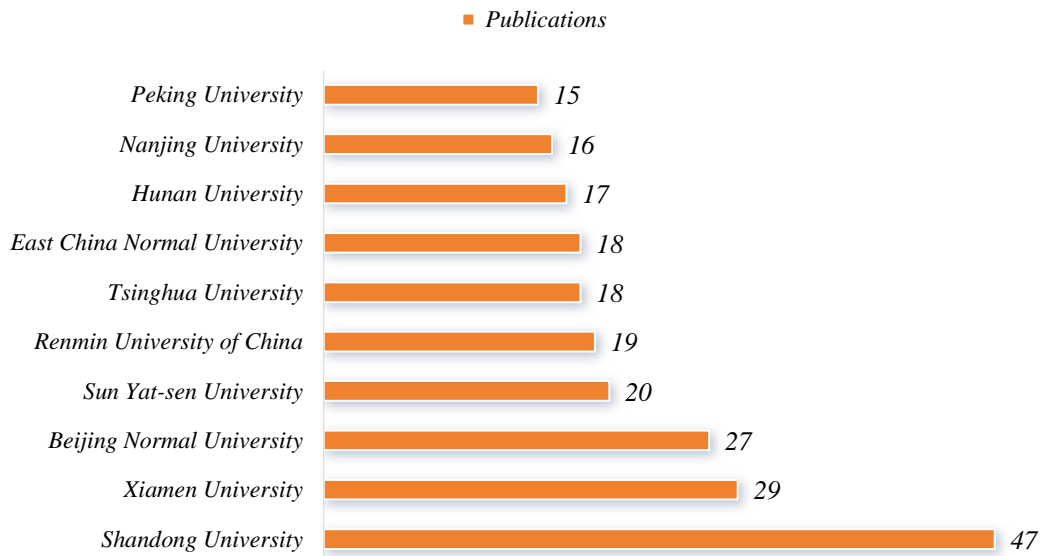


**Figure 3: Author Collaboration Network in Zhu Xi Studies**

**Analysis of High-Contribution Institutions**

Figure 4 presents the top 10 institutions with the most prominent research output in the field of Zhu Xi studies, arranged in descending order based on the number of publications. The data indicates that Shandong University tops the list with 47

publications, followed closely by Xiamen University and Beijing Normal University with 29 and 27 publications, respectively. This chart not only systematically reveals the activity levels of different academic institutions in the field of Zhu Xi studies but also indirectly reflects the necessity of conducting Zhu Xi research and its significant position within the Chinese philosophical system.



**Figure 4: Distribution of Institutions in Zhu Xi Studies**

### Co-Occurrence Keyword

Figure 5 displays the co-occurrence network of keywords in Zhu Xi studies. Researchers set the minimum co-occurrence frequency of keywords to 5, excluding duplicates and semantically similar words, and ultimately selected 33 valid keywords.

In Figure 5, six clusters are distinguished by different colors. The first cluster, marked in red, contains eight nodes and primarily focuses on the development and evolution of Neo-Confucianism during the Song and Ming dynasties—an exploration of Neo-Confucian thought from Mencius, the Cheng brothers, and Zhou Dunyi to Kang Youwei. The most important keywords are Neo-Confucianism (total line strength=13, occurrences=33), Zhou Dunyi (total line strength=10, occurrences=14), and the Cheng brothers (total line strength=6, occurrences=11). The study focuses on the second cluster, which is represented by seven nodes displayed in green and primarily explores the theoretical development of the Confucian orthodoxy from the Doctrine of the Mean, Confucius, and Mencius to Zhu Xi, Su Shi, and Dong Zhongshu. Zhu Xi (total line strength=26, occurrences=91) is the most important keyword. The second is "orthodoxy" (total line strength=10, occurrences=14), and the third is Confucius (total line strength=7, occurrences=9). The third cluster, depicted in blue and comprising six nodes, primarily investigates the core concepts of Confucian philosophy of mind and nature. The keywords include reason (total line strength=11, occurrences=24), mind (total line

strength=10, occurrences=13), and nature (total line strength=7, occurrences=9). The fourth cluster, composed of five nodes and presented in yellow, primarily focuses on the heavenly principle and theory of mind and nature in the Great Learning from the perspective of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, as well as their practice and theoretical development in the process of investigating things to extend knowledge. The most important keywords are investigating things to extend knowledge (total line strength=6, occurrences=10), heavenly principle (total line strength=5, occurrences=8), and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism (total line strength=5, occurrences=7). The fifth cluster is presented in purple, containing four nodes, and primarily explores the relationship between Taiji and the principle of Qi in Zhu Xi's philosophy, as well as their theoretical significance within the Neo-Confucian system of the Song and Ming dynasties. The key terms include Zhu Xi (total line strength=12, occurrences=15), Taiji (total line strength=8, occurrences=15), and principle of Qi (total line strength=5, occurrences=8). The sixth cluster is presented in blue, containing three nodes, and primarily focuses on the comparative study of Wang Yangming and Lu Jiuyuan's thoughts from the perspective of the philosophy of mind and their contributions to the development of this field. The key terms include Wang Yangming (total line strength=14, occurrences=30), philosophy of mind (total line strength=6, occurrences=10), and Lu Jiuyuan (total line strength=4, occurrences=5).



## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the current research on Zhu Xi is primarily focused on the development of Neo-Confucianism during the Song and Ming dynasties, the Confucian tradition of the Dao, and the philosophy of human nature and mind. These themes are projected to continue to dominate the research on Dong Zhu Xi in the coming years. These themes not only reflect the current hotspots in the study of Zhu Xi's thought, but also reveal new trends in its future development. Future research needs to not only delve deeper into traditional fields such as philosophy and history but also broaden its interdisciplinary perspective by incorporating research methods from the history of science, cultural anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines to interpret Zhu Xi's thought from a richer array of perspectives.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the dynamic evolution of research on Zhu Xi's thought, offers valuable academic insights, and points out the direction for future research. Against the backdrop of cultural confidence and the revival of traditional culture, Zhu Xi, as the culmination of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, will increasingly attract attention for the contemporary value of his thought. While we have obtained a reasonably satisfactory forecast of the research prospects for Zhu Xi studies, relying on a single database for data collection may result in a lack of comprehensive coverage in our study. This is an aspect that we need to refine in the subsequent stages of our research.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

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