

## RESEARCH TRENDS AND HOTSPOTS IN WANG YANGMING STUDIES: A VISUALIZATION APPROACH USING VOSVIEWER

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### ABSTRACT

This study employs VOSviewer 1.6.18(0) and Excel to conduct a bibliometric visualization analysis of 620 CSSCI-indexed journal articles on Wang Yangming's philosophy published in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure from 2020 to 2025. By systematically mapping publication trends, thematic clusters, and author collaborations, the research aims to identify core academic dynamics and evolutionary trajectories in Wang Yangming scholarship. This study reveals a publication pattern characterized by a surge, adjustment, and recovery, peaking at 145 articles in 2022. Key contributors include highly productive authors such as Fu Xihong and Li Chenggui. It highlights that research on Wang Yangming centers on key themes such as Xinxue, liangzhi, and the unity of knowledge and action. These high-frequency keywords reflect the primary focus of scholarly inquiry. While author co-occurrence analysis reveals a lack of sufficient cross-cluster collaboration. High-impact journals such as History of Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Research dominate academic dissemination. Future research trends are likely to involve deeper cross-disciplinary studies and international dialogue. This study offers a novel paradigm for Wang Yangming studies through structured knowledge maps. It provides theoretical insights for modernizing and globally disseminating Chinese traditional culture while offering empirical guidance for future research topics and interdisciplinary methodologies.

**Keywords:** Wang Yangming, Research Trends, Visualization Analysis, VOSviewer

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Wang Yangming (1472–1529), a prominent Ming dynasty philosopher, military strategist, politician, and educator. He is a giant in Chinese intellectual history due to his virtues and achievements. Wang Yangming's philosophy, marked by its practical orientation, emphasizes the pivotal roles of aspiration, self-cultivation, and practical application. These elements not only define the core of Wang Yangming's thought but also highlight the dynamic relationship between his personal journey and intellectual contributions, offering profound insights for contemporary academic research. Wang Yangming was not only a master of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism but also a significant figure in the history of traditional Chinese political thought, with lasting influence. His military accomplishments and unique insights into strategy make him a rare all-around Confucian scholar in Chinese history (Weng, 2015). The three political philosophies of the mind is the principle, extending innate knowledge, and the unity of knowledge and action form the epistemological core of Wang Yangming's thoughts. They profoundly encapsulate the political wisdom of ancient China. Not only have they significantly influenced Chinese intellectual and academic circles as well as literary creation since the late

Ming Dynasty, but they have also played an important role in talent development and social governance. These philosophies provide a valid value framework for contemporary political talent cultivation and social harmony in China. The Qing Dynasty scholar Ji Yun offered high praise for Wang Yangming, “Wang Yangming’s remarkable achievements and moral integrity are prominently displayed in his actions. His writings are extensive and lucid, and his poetry is elegant and refined. He is commendable not only for his accomplishments but also for his literary works, which are sufficient to be passed down through generations.”

Visualization analysis is a powerful approach for analyzing complex data. It not only fosters idea generation but also provides readers with a foundation for objective observation and evaluation (van Wijk, 2005). This article comprehensively reviews the research landscape of Wang Yangming studies in China from 2020 to 2025, focusing on key aspects such as publication output, highly cited works, influential institutions, prolific authors, author co - occurrence, and keyword co - occurrence. This exploration of six key dimensions offers researchers deeper insights into the academic landscape of Wang Yangming studies as depicted in China National Knowledge Infrastructure. It provides significant academic perspectives and propels the field forward.

## 2.0 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

### 2.1 Research Methods

VOSviewer is a tool for visualizing and comprehensively examining clustering solutions (Hassan-Montero et al., 2022; Vasudevan et al., 2016). Excel is a powerful visualization tool that can quickly generate maps based on input data (Au & Rischpater, 2015). This study uses VOSviewer 1.6.18 and Excel to analyse publication trends, high-frequency authors and their collaborators, and highly cited papers related to Wang Yangming’s philosophy in CNKI. We also construct knowledge maps to visualize these findings (Zeng, 2025).

### 2.2 Data Collection

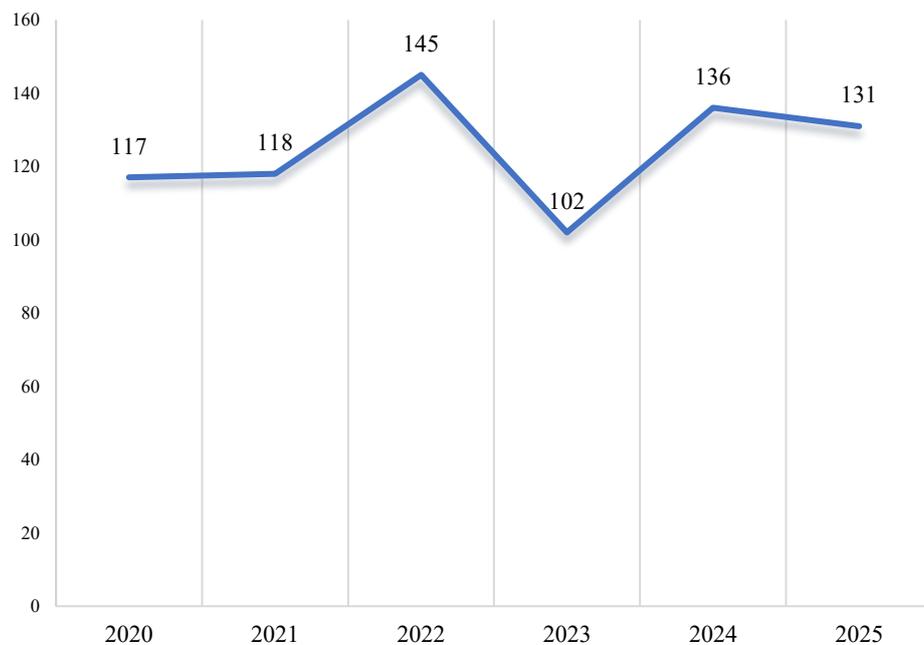
To ensure comprehensiveness, scientific rigor, and clarity, this study sourced data from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database. The search criteria were set as follows: time span = 2020–2025; topic = Wang Yangming; and source = CSSCI journals. An initial retrieval yielded 636 relevant articles. After meticulous individual comparison and screening of the information, 620 articles meeting the analysis criteria were selected for further examination. Data were collected using the Export References feature of CNKI in RefWorks format, including titles, authors, journals, institutions, keywords, publication dates, and abstracts (Aydal et al., 2020). All sources are open-access English-language publications. After rigorous evaluation and selection, researchers finalized 620 high-quality and significant studies for in-depth visualized analysis.

## 3.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Annual Publication Output

Figure 1 illustrates the annual publication output of literature related to Wang Yangming from 2020 to 2025. The data shows that 117 articles were published in 2020, with a slight increase

to 118 in 2021, indicating a period of relative stability. There was a significant surge in 2022, with 145 articles published, marking the peak of the observation period. A reduction to 102 articles occurred in 2023, representing a temporary low. The output then rebounded to 136 articles in 2024, while the projected value for 2025 stands at 131 articles. Overall, the publication trend follows a surge-adjustment-recovery pattern. The study highlights that 2022 marked the 550th anniversary of Wang Yangming's birth, which spurred international academic events like the World Conference on Wang Yangming Studies. These events fostered global academic engagement, drawing scholars from over 30 countries. By integrating newly unearthed documents and archaeological findings, these gatherings advanced cross-cultural dialogue and deepened the study of Wang Yangming's philosophy. Policy initiatives across regions have fueled a surge of interest in Yangming culture. For instance, Zhejiang Province's Yangming Culture Heritage Innovation Project and Yuyao City's 800-million-yuan hometown preservation project have provided financial support and digital infrastructure, such as the database of Complete Works of Yangming, directly stimulating academic output.



**Figure 1: Publications**

### 3.2 Highly Productive Authors Analysis

Figure 2 illustrates authors who have made substantial contributions in the research domain of Wang Yangming studies, specifically those who have published six or more related papers. Fu Xihong leads with 19 publications on Wang Yangming, followed by Li Chenggui with 17, Gong Xiaokang with 13, and Shen Shunfu and Le Aiguo with 9 each. Other notable contributors include Ouyang Zhenren and Wang Keyou, each with 8 publications, and Ding Weixiang, Hou Jian, and Chen Lisheng, each with 6 research outputs. Publications volume directly reflects the research activity of scholars. High-output authors such as Fu Xihong and Li Chenggui, constitute the core force in this research field, providing quantitative support for the analysis of academic collaboration networks and the identification of disciplinary leaders.

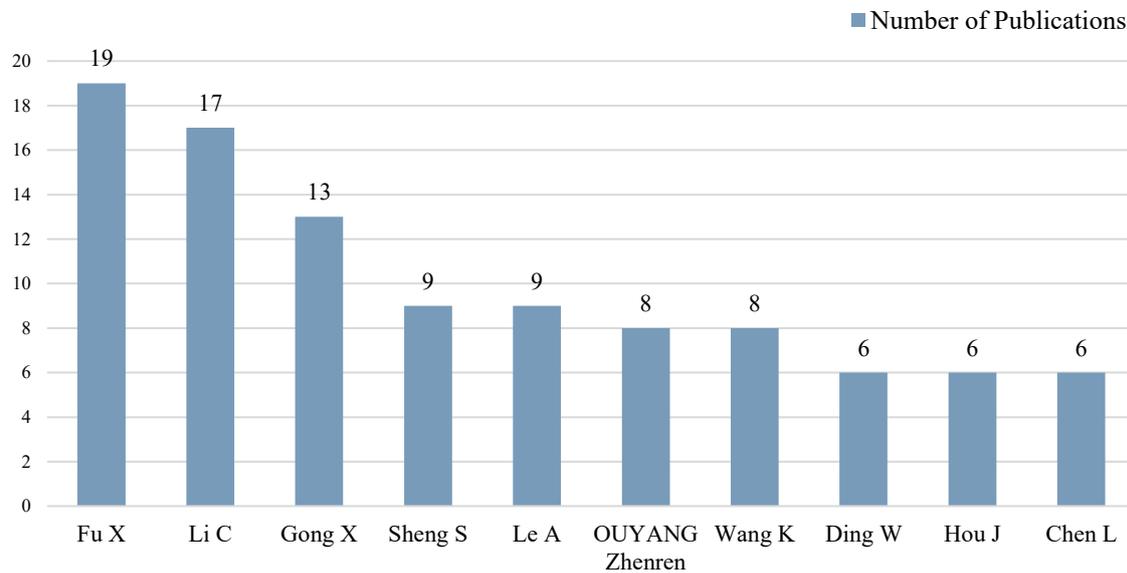
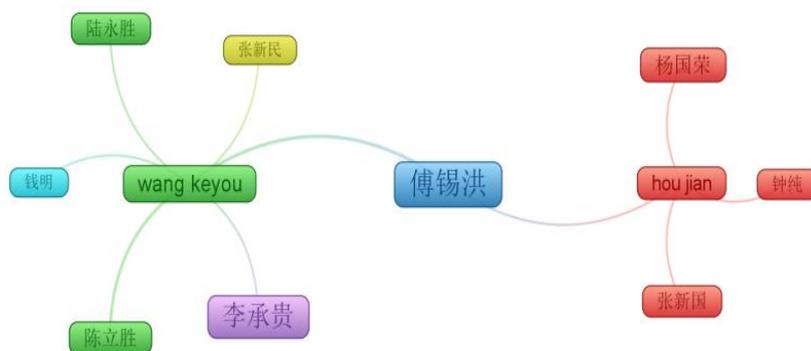


Figure 2: Authors and Contributions to Wang Yangming Research

### 3.3 Author Co-occurrence Network

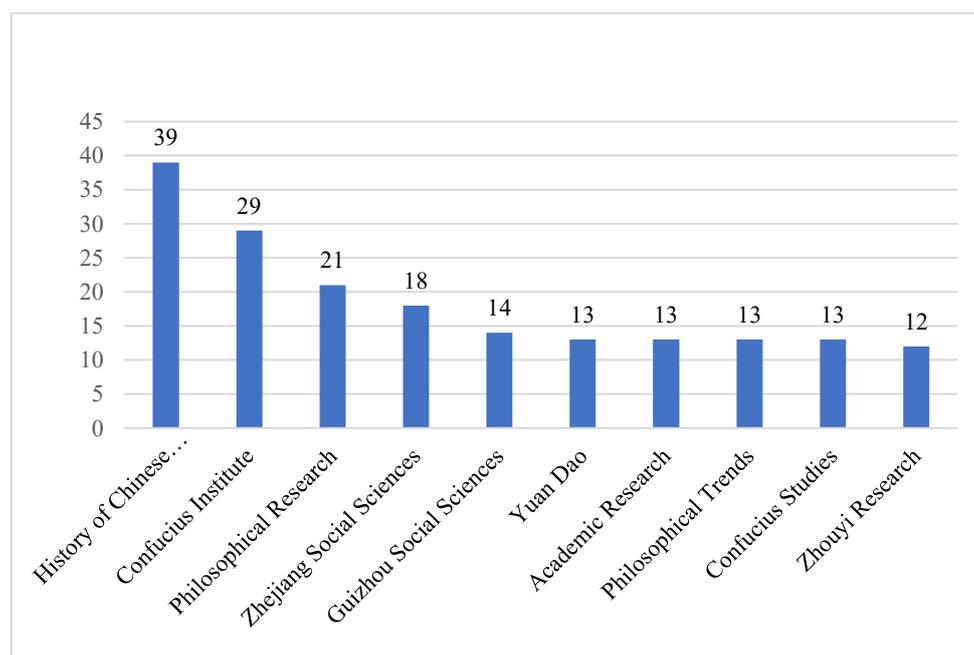
Figure 3 illustrates the author co-occurrence network in Wang Yangming studies. Researchers set a minimum threshold of 3 publications per author. Among 534 authors, 41 met this criterion. The figure displays six distinct clusters, each marked by a unique color. The green cluster, centered on Wang Keyou, is closely linked with scholars like Lu Yongsheng and Qian Ming, forming a core research group. Fu Xihong, acting as a cross-cluster node, connects with the red cluster composed of Yang Guorong and Hou Jian, showing potential links between different research groups. The co-authorship network analysis reveals tight intra-group collaboration but insufficient direct connections between clusters. To address this, researchers are encouraged to enhance cross-cluster academic interaction, leveraging bridge authors like Fu Xihong. This approach can promote methodological integration and collaborative agenda-setting among research groups, enrich theoretical depth, and boost innovation in Wang Yangming studies, fostering a more cohesive academic ecosystem. See Figure 3 for details.



**Figure 3: Author Co-occurrence Network in Wang Yangming Research**

### 3.4 High-Contributing Journals Analysis

Figure 4 presents the top ten journals contributing to Wang Yangming studies. History of Chinese Philosophy ranks first with 39 articles, followed by Confucius Institute (29 articles) and Philosophical Research (21 articles). These journals serve as core academic dissemination platforms by publishing concentrated research findings, playing a critical role in theoretical interpretation, historical contextualization, and exploration of modern values in Wang Yangming's thought. Based on the above suggestions, further collaboration with core journals is recommended. Developing a dedicated column on Wang Yangming's philosophy would deepen research on this topic. Greater involvement in interdisciplinary journals, such as those focused on education and culture, could expand the applied research dimensions of his philosophy. Additionally, leveraging emerging academic dissemination platforms to create a diverse publication system that complements traditional core journals and new media would enhance the academic ecosystem surrounding Wang Yangming studies. For details, see Figure 4.



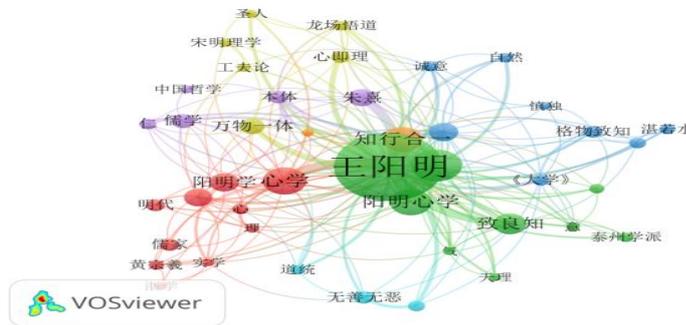
**Figure 4: High-Contributing Journals**

### 3.5 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

As a typical approach in knowledge graph analysis, keyword co-occurrence reveals the semantic associations among keywords via a visualized network. Figure 4 illustrates the co-occurrence network of keywords in the research on Wang Yangming. Researchers set the minimum co-occurrence frequency of keywords at 5, screening out 48 keywords that met the criteria. After removing duplicates, the final list comprised 43 valid keywords. This method ensures a systematic approach to keyword selection, enhancing the precision of subsequent analyses. Figure 5 visualizes seven distinct clusters, each distinguished by color. The first

cluster, marked in red and comprising 10 items, highlights Xinology (total link strength = 58, frequency = 43), Angiology (total link strength = 19, frequency = 22), and Neo-Confucianism (total link strength = 23, frequency = 20), focusing on the core theoretical framework of Wang Yangming's philosophy and its relationship with Neo-Confucianism. The second cluster, marked in green and containing 9 items, centres on Wang Yangming (total link strength = 208, frequency = 205), Liangzhi (total link strength = 72, frequency = 55), and Yangming Xinology (total link strength = 22, frequency = 39), emphasizing the core theoretical framework of Wang Yangming's thought system. The third cluster, marked in blue and consisting of 8 items, includes key terms such as Kungfu (total link strength = 32, frequency = 22) and Ge Wu Zhi Zhi (total link strength = 15, frequency = 10), exploring the methodological aspects of moral cultivation in Wang Yangming's philosophy, particularly the practice of integrating knowledge and action. The fourth cluster, marked in yellow and containing 6 items, focuses on Wang Yangming's ontology and cosmology, with key terms like Wanwu Yiti (total link strength = 20, frequency = 16) and Xin Ji Li (total link strength = 14, frequency = 10), examining the unity of "mind" and "heavenly principle" and its ecological and ethical implications. The fifth cluster, marked in purple and comprising 5 items, highlights Zhu Xi (total link strength = 25, frequency = 19), Ben Ti (total link strength = 18, frequency = 11), and Confucianism (total link strength = 16, frequency = 14), focusing on the ontological differences between Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi and the paradigm conflicts within Confucianism, underscoring Wang Yangming's innovative reconstruction of traditional Confucianism. The sixth cluster, marked in light blue and containing 3 items, includes key terms such as Wu Shan Wu E (total link strength = 13, frequency = 11), Si Ju Jiao (total link strength = 13, frequency = 9), and Dao Tong (total link strength = 10, frequency = 7), studying the philosophical implications of Wang Yangming's non-good and non-evil doctrine and its practical guidance for self-cultivation, and exploring its connection with the Confucian tradition. The seventh cluster, marked in orange and consisting of 2 items, includes key terms such as Zhi Xing He Yi (total link strength = 41, frequency = 37) and Phenomenology (total link strength = 8, frequency = 5), focusing on the modern interpretation of Wang Yangming's philosophy and its interdisciplinary research pathways.

By analyzing the key terms in each cluster, researchers can identify focal issues in Wang Yangming studies, centered on high-frequency keywords such as Xinology, liangzhi, and the unity of knowledge and action. The co-occurrence patterns of these terms reveal research hotspots and emerging trends within specific timeframes, offering insights into the dynamic evolution of the field. This approach highlights the interconnectedness of theoretical constructs and their significance in advancing scholarly discourse on Wang Yangming's philosophy. This analysis highlights the sustained interest in classical philosophical propositions such as the integration of knowledge and action, while also pointing to emerging research directions like phenomenological comparisons. It offers scholars a visual framework to quickly identify research focal points and discover interdisciplinary connections. By examining the semantic strength and frequency distribution of keywords, it provides researchers with quantitative and theoretical support to trace academic evolution and predict future research trends (Zhang et al., 2024). Specific details are presented in Figure 3

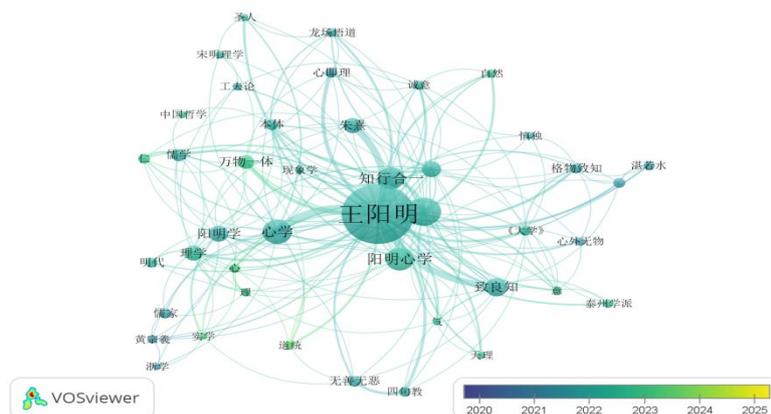


**Figure 5: Keyword Co-occurrence in the Network of Wang Yangming Research**

The overlay network in Figure 5 visualizes co-citation patterns in Wang Yangming studies, pinpointing four trending terms from recent years: unity of all things (16 occurrences, avg. pub. year 2022.08), mind (8 occurrences, avg. pub. year 2023.12), Dao tradition (7 occurrences, avg. pub. year 2023.04), and practical learning (5 occurrences, avg. pub. year 2023.02). These data offer insights into the evolving focus of scholarship in this field.

The latest trend keyword analysis in Figure 5 shows that current research on Wang Yangming’s philosophy focuses on several key areas. First, the concept of unity of all things, which encompasses its philosophical foundation, ethical implications, and relevance to contemporary ecological ethics. Second, the central role and mechanism of mind learning, including in-depth interpretations of propositions such as the mind is principle and nothing exists outside the mind, as well as the role of the mind in moral cognition and practice. Third, Wang Yangming’s position and influence within the Confucian Dao tradition, exploring his inheritance, innovation, and the transmission trajectory of the Dao tradition across different historical periods. Fourth, research from the perspective of practical learning, focusing on its applications and value in education, social governance, and personal cultivation.

Future research themes are expected to expand in the following directions. First, the interdisciplinary integration of Wang Yangming’s philosophy. Second, the modern interpretation of its core concepts. Third, the in-depth exploration of the micro-level branches of this ideological system. These efforts will further enrich its philosophical depth and practical value.



## Figure 6: Keyword Co-occurrence in the Overlay Network of Wang Yangming Studies

### 3.6 Analysis of Highly Cited Articles

Table 1 presents the top five most cited articles on Wang Yangming studies in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure. The article by Yu Zeyuan and Wang Kaidi (2021), published in *Educational Research*, examines teacher ethics development. It integrates Wang Yangming's moral education philosophy with contemporary teacher ethics cultivation, emphasizing moral self-cultivation and practical exercises to enhance teachers' ethical standards (Wang & Wang, 2021). Gao and Liang (2022) critically reflect on the metaverse phenomenon in *Academics*, revealing the nihilistic dilemma underlying Western tech-driven illusory imaginaries while introducing Wang Yangming's philosophy as a Chinese philosophical reference for overcoming nihilism. The article highlights the core role of liangzhi (良知) in Wang's thought as an inner transcendental and the methodological significance of achieving "unity of heaven and humanity" through daily practice, offering theoretical resources from Eastern wisdom to reflect on existential challenges in the era of digital capitalism. Additionally, it provides a new perspective on the application and influence of Wang's Mind Learning in virtual worlds from the intersection of modern technology and philosophy (Gao & Liang, 2022).

Wu Zheng (2021) systematically establishes the theoretical status of Wang Yangming's liangzhi as a systematic moral metaphysics through rigorous textual analysis and philosophical reconstruction in an article published in *Academic Monthly*. This work bridges the gap of conceptual fragmentation in traditional Mind Learning (心学) research and opens new pathways for dialogue between Confucianism and modern philosophy. By clarifying the internal logic of Yangming philosophy's ontology and theory of moral cultivation, Wu's research not only deepens understandings of its philosophical foundations but also provides a methodological paradigm for the creative transformation of Confucian ethics in global contexts, offering critical insights into the core of Wang Yangming's philosophy (Wu, 2021). In his 2020 article published in *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences Edition)*, Wu Zhen explores the ideological interaction between Mind Learning and Qixue (气学). This study reveals that Wang Yangming's Xinxue, through absorbing and transforming Qixue concepts, not only preserves the Confucian "emotion-based theory" tradition of Confucius and Mencius but also achieves an ontological breakthrough in moral philosophy. The ideological shift triggered by his proposition "qi is human nature" restructures the argumentative logic of Confucian theories of innate goodness and provides critical intellectual resources for the Ming-Qing theoretical shift questioning "how material qi connects to morality". This work highlights Xinxue's pivotal role in the transformation of Song-Ming Confucianism and uncovers the complex interplay between Wang Yangming's Xinxue and Ming-dynasty Qixue (Wu, 2020). Xu (2021), in an article published in *Philosophical Trends*, explores the emotion-rationality logic within Confucian ethics, a discourse that deeply intertwines with the moral philosophy of Wang Yangming's Mind Learning. The study demonstrates that Wang's philosophy achieves metaphysical transcendence in moral philosophy through the ontological construction of emotional rationality—thereby maintaining the Confucian tradition of emotion-centred ethics while establishing a dynamic modern interpretive framework for Confucian ethics. This scholarly contribution advances understandings of the interplay between moral emotions and

rationality in Wang Yangming's thought, offering an insightful perspective for contemporary ethical inquiries (Xu, 2021).

Authors	Publication Date	Title	Source	Citation
Yu Zeyuan & Wang Kaisheng	2021/3/28	Fostering Morality and Cultivating Virtue: The Path to Cultivating Teachers' Professional Ethics	Educational Research	71
Gao Qiqi & Liang Xingzhou	2022/2/15	Illusion and Nothingness: Critical Reflection on the Metaverse Phenomenon	Academic Circles	38
Wu Zhen	2021/1/20	Systematic Construction of Wang Yangming's Conscience Theory	Academic Monthly	29
Wu Zhen	2020/1/25	Ideological Interactions Between Mind Learning and Qi Learning	Fudan Journal (Social Science Edition)	29
Xu Jia	2021/7/26	The Logic of "Sentiment and Reason" in Confucian Ethics	Philosophical Trends	27

**Table 1: Top 5 Cited Wang Yangming Research Articles in CNKI**

These highly cited papers likely have high citation rates due to their authority in respective fields, rigorous research methods, and content that is innovative and in-depth. They provide a systematic and comprehensive exploration of topics related to Wang Yangming studies, offering a solid theoretical foundation and important reference value for subsequent research (Ren & Abdullah, 2024).

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Wang Yangming, a pivotal figure in Chinese philosophy, is renowned as the synthesizer of the Mind School. His philosophy, centred on the tenets of Mind and Reason Are One, Realizing Innate Knowledge of Goodness and Unity of Knowledge and Action, has redefined the theoretical framework of Confucian moral metaphysics. Beyond its historical significance in Chinese philosophy, his thought has profoundly influenced the East Asian cultural sphere and continues to offer insights for modern governance and social practice. This study underscores the enduring relevance of Wang Yangming's ideas in both academic and practical contexts. This visualization analysis of 620 CSSCI journal articles from 2020 to 2025 shows that Wang Yangming studies have fluctuated with a surge, adjustment, and recovery. The peak was in 2022, with 145 articles, driven by policy and academic activities. Scholars such as Fu Xihong and Li Chenggui, along with influential works like Wu Zhen's systematic analysis of liangzhi (良知), have shaped the research agenda in Wang Yangming studies. However, interdisciplinary and international engagement in this field remains limited. Greater academic exchange and methodological integration are needed to advance global discourse on Wang Yangming's philosophy. The keyword co-occurrence network indicates that current research is concentrated on established themes such as the ontology of xinxue, innate moral self-

awareness, and the unity of knowledge and action. Meanwhile, emerging research directions like phenomenological comparisons and the ecological ethics interpretation of interconnectedness are becoming increasingly prominent. Future research on Wang Yangming's philosophy may undergo two major paradigm shifts. First, there will be a transition from macro-systematic construction to micro-conceptual analysis, such as refined interpretations of the Four Aphorisms and the neither good nor evil doctrine, with an emphasis on integrating ontology and practical methodology. Second, interdisciplinary integration will accelerate, leveraging tools from phenomenology and cognitive science to modernize the concept of liangzhi. This shift aims to expand its application potential in fields such as artificial intelligence ethics and social governance.

While our assessment of the current state of research on Wang Yangming is considered accurate, it is important to acknowledge that our data sources are limited to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure, which may result in the omission of non-Chinese contextual works. Future research should integrate multiple databases, such as Web of Science and Scopus, to enhance the global perspective and methodological innovation. Collaboration with international scholars and the application of digital humanities technologies for text analysis are also encouraged to ensure a more comprehensive analysis.

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