INVESTIGATE TRENDS AND HOTSPOTS IN STUDYING WANG FUZHI'S THOUGHT USING VOSVIEWER

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ABSTRACT

This study employs bibliometric methods to systematically analyze 707 CSSCI-indexed journal articles on Wang Fuzhi's thought from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database 1998–2024, aiming to map the academic development trajectory and frontier developments of this field. The results of annual publications reveal three distinct phases of development: a period of steady accumulation, followed by rapid growth, and fluctuations with adjustments. Philosophy and Chinese literature are core disciplines, while institutions such as Peking University and Beijing Normal University emerge as leading hubs. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies 11 thematic clusters, including critiques of Neo-Confucianism, hermeneutics of the Yijing, and philosophy of history, with recent scholarly attention pivoting toward Ontology of Qi Studies, intellectual dialogues with Fang Yizhi, and the reconstruction of Confucian orthodoxy. Methodologically, the field is undergoing transformative shifts: digital humanities are redefining traditional metaphysical frameworks in Qi studies, cross-school comparative approaches are expanding interpretive horizons in Ming-Qing philosophy, and historical-philosophical analyses are deepening insights into the modern applicability of Wang's thought. By providing a visual analytical framework, this study advances scholarly understanding of the modernization pathways inherent in traditional Chinese philosophy and offers actionable strategies for the innovative revitalization of China's cultural heritage.

Keywords: Wang Fuzhi, Research Trends, Bibliometrics Analysis, VOSviewer, Visualization

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692) was a renowned thinker, philosopher, and educator in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Having personally experienced the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties, after his failure in the anti-Qing resistance, he took "summarizing the lessons of the fall of the Ming Dynasty and reconstructing the academic system" as his mission (Xu, 2008; Gao, 2024). Although Wang Fuzhi's academic environment could not be compared to that of the Western historical philosophers Jean Bodin and Giambattista Vico during the same period, through the theoretical innovation of the Six Classics Entrust Me to Open Up New Horizons (六经责我开生面), he integrated Chinese and Western philosophies and elevated Chinese historical philosophy to the peak of the world's ideological field (Zhou, 2003; Xu, 2012). Based on the Monism of Qi（气一元论）, Wang Fuzhi constructed a dialectical cosmology and historical philosophy, broke through the theory of human nature, integrated ontology, epistemology and historical view. He not only critically summarized the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties, but also provided theoretical resources for

modern enlightenment thoughts.The depth of his thoughts and the degree of innovation can be seen as a pivotal point in the transformation of traditional Chinese philosophy to modern philosophy (Xu, 2006; Xu & Du, 2008).

As the master of the thoughts of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the study of Wang Fuzhi has significant practical importance for inheriting and developing traditional culture (Yan, 2025; Xiong & Yang, 2004). In recent years, the study of Wang Fuzhi has gradually gained academic attention. However, existing research primarily focuses on a single disciplinary perspective, lacking a systematic exploration of the overall context of this field.

VOSviewer, a free bibliometric analysis software, realizes the visual presentation of knowledge fields by constructing multi-dimensional scientific maps. Its remarkable advantage lies in the combination of visual expression, high information density, and the integration of multi-dimensional scientific research perspectives. It is renowned for the professionalism of its visualization effects and the comprehensiveness of its functions among similar tools (Gao, 2015; Song & Chi, 2016). This study aims to comprehensively summarize the research fields and development models of Wang Fuzhi's thoughts by using VOSviewer. The research covers aspects such as research methods, data collection, the annual publication quantity of academic papers in the research, subject distribution, high-frequency authors and their cooperation distribution, the institutions where high-contribution authors are affiliated, the distribution of high-contribution journals, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Through these, the knowledge structure and development prospects of the research on Wang Fuzhi are determined, and then the emerging themes are identified.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODS

Bibliometrics employs mathematical and statistical methods to conduct quantitative analyses of disciplinary literature, aiming to evaluate research status and predict development trends (Qiu et al., 2021). This study focused on applying professional bibliometric analysis methods, with core tools selected as VOSviewer 1.6.18 (0). The data for this study were collected from the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database on April 3, 2025. The following criteria were applied when screening the research data: the topic was restricted to Wang Fuzhi; the primary document type was academic journal articles; the publication period was limited to 1998–2024; the source category was the CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index). After a rigorous screening process, 710 relevant documents were retrieved from the database. Subsequently, 3 documents with incomplete information were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 707 documents that met the requirements for high relevance and significance. These documents were specifically used to conduct an in-depth visual analysis, aiming to reveal the trends and hotspots in Wang Fuzhi studies.
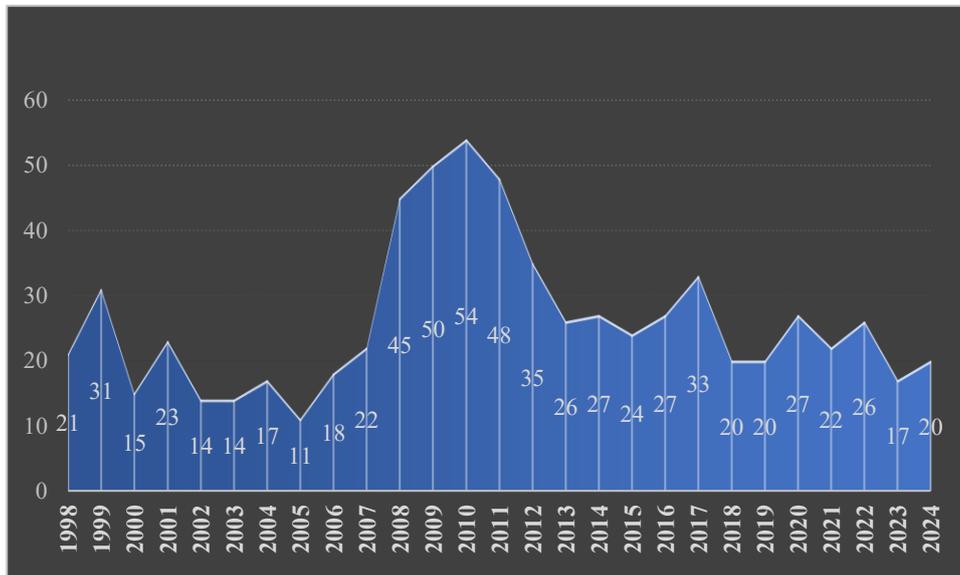
3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Analysis of Annual Publication

The dynamic changes in the number of academic papers serve as a crucial quantitative indicator of disciplinary development. Historical statistics and visual analysis using bibliometric methods can effectively identify stages of disciplinary development, reveal the evolution of research hotspots, and provide data support for trend prediction and resource allocation, thus

becoming an important methodological tool for disciplinary evaluation (Qiu et al., 2012). This paper conducts a quantitative analysis of the publication years of papers on Wang Fuzhi in CNKI over the past 27 years, and the temporal distribution of the number of articles is shown in Figure 1.

As indicated in Figure 1, the number of academic papers on Wang Fuzhi studies fluctuated between 1998 and 2024. From 1998 to 2004, the number of published papers remained relatively stable at a low level, fluctuating between 11 and 31 articles. Between 2005 and 2010, the quantity increased significantly, reaching a peak of 54 articles in 2010—a period of rapid growth in research momentum. This surge can be attributed to several factors: academically, there was a deep (long-term accumulation), with foundational achievements by predecessors and the inheritance of academic echelons; in the publishing sector, relevant scholarly works were released, and academic exchanges became active; against the backdrop of national emphasis on traditional culture, Wang Fuzhi's ideas aligned with the needs for cultural inheritance and innovation; and educational policies called for strengthened traditional culture education. From 2011 to 2014, the number of publications declined from 48 to 24 articles. Subsequently, between 2015 and 2024, the quantity fluctuated within a relatively stable range of approximately 17 to 33 articles. Given recent academic expansions, digital intelligence support, growing demands for cultural inheritance, educational promotion, frequent academic exchanges, and the relevance of his ideas to contemporary issues, research on Wang Fuzhi may heat up in 2025.

Figure 1: Annual Distribution of Publication Counts for Academic Papers on Wang Fuzhi Studies

Source: CNKI

3.2 Analysis of Disciplinary

Based on the statistical analysis in Figure 2, the academic research on Wang Fuzhi's thought in China exhibits a distinct interdisciplinary nature. Philosophy, as the core discipline, leads in the number of publications with 342 articles, accounting for 49.85%, guiding the mainstream

research direction. The field of Chinese Literature also contributes significantly, with 175 articles constituting 25.51% of the total, offering rich literary interpretations for exploring this ideological system. Additionally, disciplines such as Chinese Ancient History, Ethics, and Historical Theory, although yielding relatively fewer publications, provide unique academic perspectives that support a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Wang Fuzhi's thought. The collaborative involvement of these disciplines has established a multi-layered and multi-dimensional research framework for Wang Fuzhi's thought, fostering systematic and comprehensive development in this field.
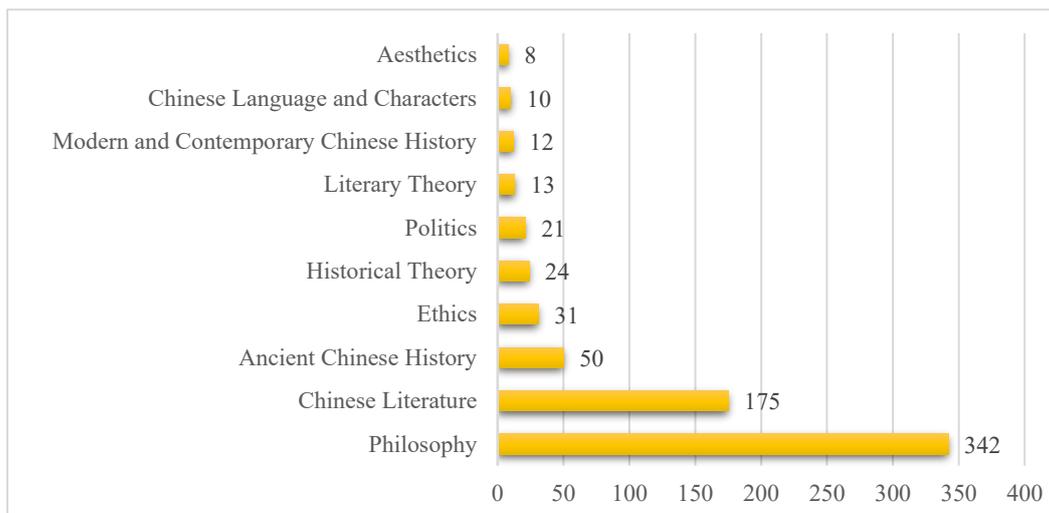

Figure 2: Disciplinary Distribution of Studies on Wang Fuzhi's Thought

Source: CNKI

3.3 Analysis of Authors

A statistical analysis of academic papers on the study of Wang Fuzhi's thought in CSSCI journals found that a total of 10 authors have published 5 or more papers (see Figure 3). Among them, Zhang Xuezhi stands out as the most prominent contributor in this field with 16 published papers. Xu Sumin has published 12 papers, forming a core contribution echelon with Zhang Xuezhi. Xiao Jianyuan has produced 9 papers, showcasing remarkable achievements in research. The distribution of the number of papers published by these authors not only highlights the concentrated contributions of core researchers but also reflects the diverse participation of the research group. Their continuous output of results indicates an in-depth exploration of the study of Wang Fuzhi's thought and demonstrates their professional accumulation and academic influence in this research field.

By constructing a cooperation network of 45 authors who have published three or more papers (Figure 4), it becomes evident that no significant core author group has emerged in the field of Wang Fuzhi's thought research. The author cooperation network illustrated in the figure is sparse. Although some collaboration exists, the overall connections are weak, possibly because Chinese scholars tend to publish single-authored works to showcase their academic value and status. Additionally, the scattered distribution of nodes highlights the diverse disciplinary backgrounds of researchers, which offers an opportunity for interdisciplinary studies but may also impact the systematic nature and coherence of the research. To enhance the research in

this field, it is recommended to strengthen collaboration among authors, broaden research perspectives through the advantages of teamwork, stimulate more innovative ideas surrounding the theme of Wang Fuzhi's thought, promote the in-depth development of the study, and address the current deficiencies in cooperation and the issue of fragmentation.
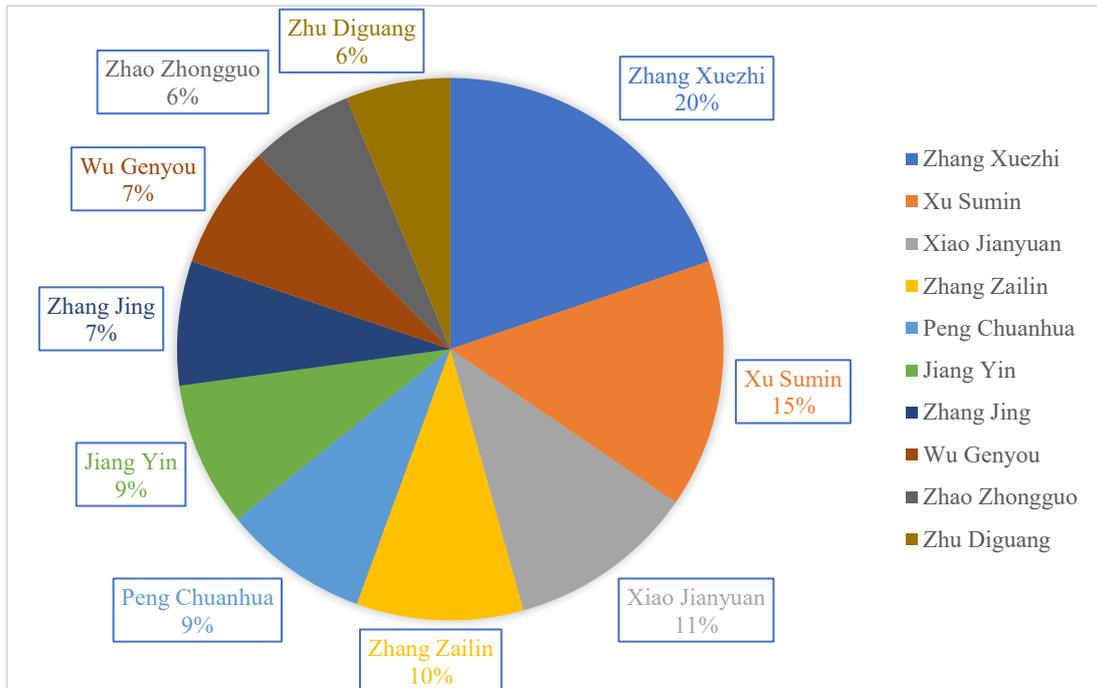

Figure 3: Distribution of High-Contributing Authors
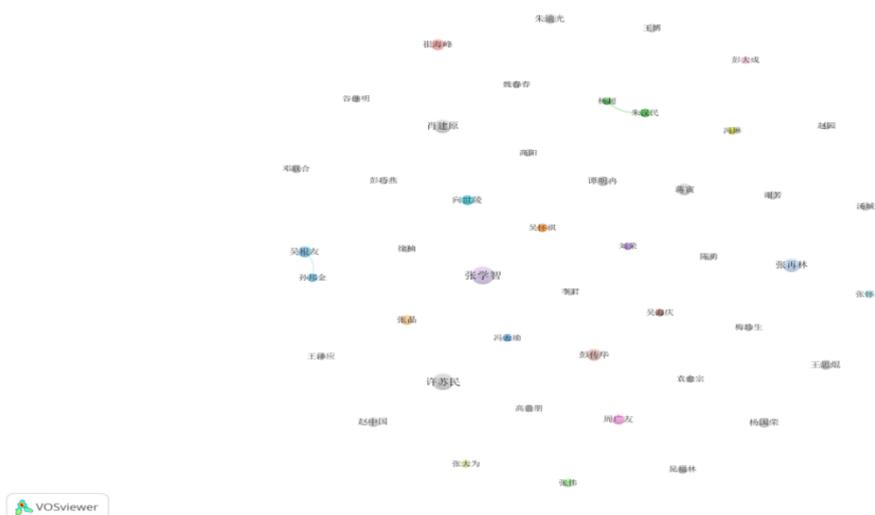
Source: CNKI

Figure 4.: Author Collaboration Map

Source: CNKI

3.4 Analysis of Institutions

In the literary output of institutions hosting high-contributing authors in the field of Wang Fuzhi's thought studies (Figure 5), Peking University (35 articles), Beijing Normal University (34 articles), and Wuhan University (33 articles) lead in publication counts, highlighting their profound research accumulation and academic strengths in this domain. Given their frequent literary contributions, these institutions demonstrate advantages in research teams, academic resources, and cumulative achievements, providing critical references for deepening studies on Wang Fuzhi's thought. For future research, concentrating on core institutions such as Peking University, Beijing Normal University, and Wuhan University to systematically integrate their academic achievements and explore their research methods could advance investigations into Wang Fuzhi's thought to more profound dimensions.
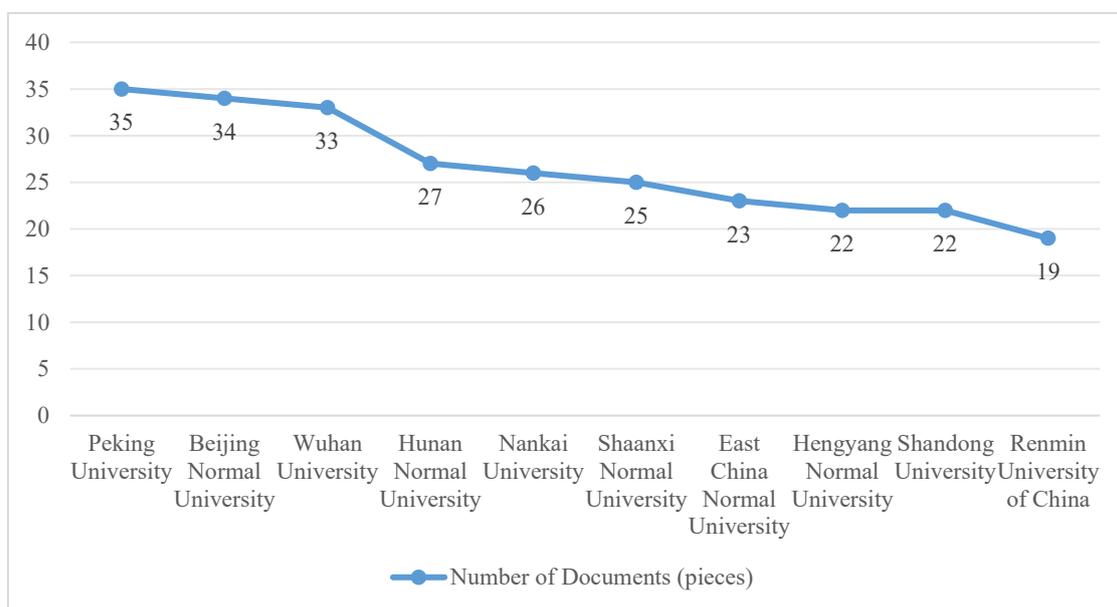

Figure 5: Distribution Map of Institutions of High-Contributing Authors

Source: CNKI

3.5 Analysis of Journals

Through systematic bibliometric analysis, it is evident that academic papers in a specific research field exhibit an uneven distribution across various journals. A total of 9 journals with 10 or more articles were identified (see Table 1), spanning diverse disciplines such as philosophy and literature, which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of this research topic. Chuanshan Journal leads with 79 articles, accounting for 34.65% of the total, fully demonstrating its core leading role in this field—likely attributed to its precise journal positioning, broad academic influence, and sustained attention to and support for research on Wang Fuzhi's thought. Following closely, Journal of Chinese Philosophy publishes 33 articles (14.47%), indicating its pivotal role in advancing academic research and disseminating findings in this field, which reflects the deep focus of philosophy on this topic. Studies of the Book of Changes contributes 19 articles (8.33%); Jianghan Tribune, Chinese Literature Studies, Qiushi, and Philosophical Research each publish 15 articles (6.58% each); Confucius Studies and Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences) both have 13 articles (5.70% each); and Literary Theory Research publishes 11 articles (4.82%). While these journals have

fewer articles than the top two, they contribute to the field's academic development from different dimensions through their unique academic perspectives and professional strengths. These data reveal diverse dissemination channels for academic outputs in this field, with varying levels of participation and contributions from journals across disciplines, highlighting its interdisciplinary influence and providing a reference for future research to promote its advancement.

Table 1: Distribution of the Top 10 Journals on Wang Fuzhi's Thought

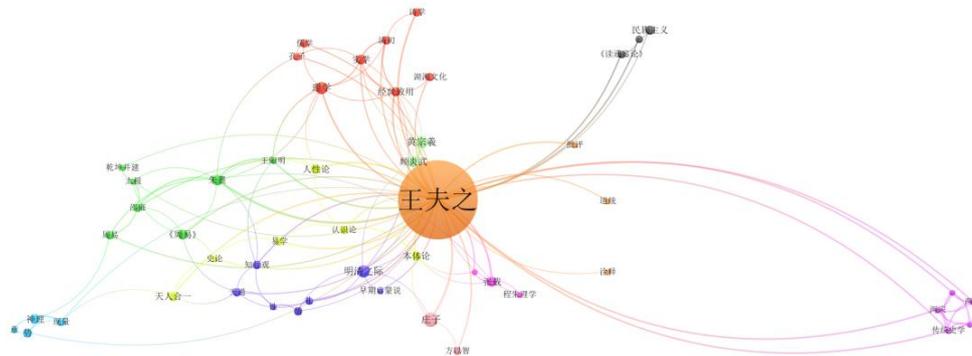| journal	Number of Published Articles(pieces)	Proportion of Published Articles
Chuan Shan Xue Kan	79	34.65%
History of Chinese Philosophy	33	14.47%
Studies on the Book of Changes	19	8.33%
Jianghan Tribune	15	6.58%
Studies in Chinese Literature	15	6.58%
Qiushuo	15	6.58%
Philosophical Researches	15	6.58%
Studies on Confucius	13	5.70%
Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)	13	5.70%
Studies in Literary Theory	11	4.82%

Source: CNKI

3.6 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Figure 6 displays the keyword co-occurrence network in the study of Wang Fuzhi's thought. Researchers set the minimum co-occurrence frequency of keywords as 4, screening out 63 eligible keywords and obtaining 51 valid keywords after removing duplicates. The figure shows 11 different clusters, each marked with a distinct color. Cluster 1, marked in red, includes 14 items. The most critical keyword is Neo-Confucianism (理学) (total connection strength = 13, occurrence frequency = 11), followed by Practical Learning (实学) (total connection strength = 12, occurrence frequency = 8). Cluster 2, in dark green, contains 7 items. Zhu Xi (total connection strength = 23, occurrence frequency = 9) is the most important keyword, with Shao Yong (total connection strength = 10, occurrence frequency = 5) following. Cluster 3, marked in dark blue, has 7 items. The key keywords are Ming-Qing Transition (total connection strength = 8, occurrence frequency = 11), followed by Knowledge-Action View (知行观) (total connection strength = 7, occurrence frequency = 6) and Heavenly Way (天道) (total connection strength = 7, occurrence frequency = 6). Cluster 4, in yellow, includes 6 items, with Ontology (本体论) (total connection strength = 10, occurrence frequency = 7) as the primary keyword and Theory of Human Nature (人性论) (total connection strength = 9, occurrence frequency = 8) as the secondary. Cluster 5, marked in

purple, contains 5 items: Traditional Historiography, Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern Dynasties, Two Han Dynasties, Two Song Dynasties, and Orthodoxy(正统观念), all with equal weight in the network (total connection strength = 20, occurrence frequency = 4). Cluster 6, in light blue, has 4 items: Divine Principle (神理) (total connection strength = 9, occurrence frequency = 8) is the most important, followed by Direct Perception (现量)(total connection strength = 7, occurrence frequency = 6). Cluster 7, marked in orange, includes 4 items: Wang Fuzhi (total connection strength = 147, occurrence frequency = 229) is central, with Criticism (total connection strength = 4, occurrence frequency = 4). Cluster 8, in black, has 3 items: Discussions on the Song Dynasty (total connection strength = 6, occurrence frequency = 5) and Reflections on the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government (读通鉴论) (total connection strength = 5, occurrence frequency = 5). Cluster 9, marked in dark pink, contains 3 items: Zhang Zai (total connection strength = 12, occurrence frequency = 8) and Qi Philosophy (气学) (total connection strength = 6, occurrence frequency = 4). Cluster 10, in light pink, has 2 items: Zhuangzi (total connection strength = 9, occurrence frequency = 14) and Fang Yizhi (total connection strength = 5, occurrence frequency = 6). Cluster 11, marked in light green, includes 2 items: Huang Zongxi (total connection strength = 21, occurrence frequency = 11) and Gu Yanwu (total connection strength = 20, occurrence frequency = 10).
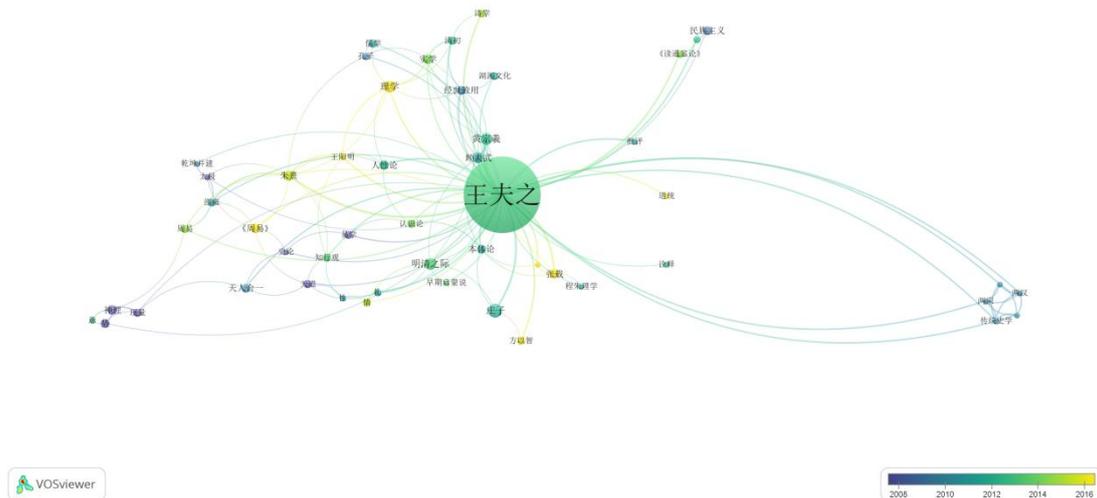
By examining the semantic connections of core keywords in each cluster, it can be found that: Cluster 1 focuses on the modern transformation path of Confucian traditions within the early Qing Huxiang cultural context; Cluster 2 takes Book of Changes exegesis as a hub to analyze the dialogic relationship between Wang Fuzhi's Concurrent Establishment of Qian and Kun (乾坤并建) cosmology and the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian lineage; Cluster 3 emphasizes exploring the reconstruction logic of Heavenly principle-human nature studies and ethical practice paradigms during the Ming-Qing ideological transition; Cluster 4 is dedicated to placing the theory of human nature within the Book of Changes interpretive framework, constructing dual dimensions of ontology and epistemology; Cluster 5, from a historiographical perspective, investigates the discursive construction mechanism of orthodoxy concepts in different historical periods; Cluster 6 revolves around the ontological framework of Trend-Divine Principle (势-神理) to dissect its interaction with the Intention-Direct Perception (意-现量) cognitive system; Cluster 7 highlights the threefold logic of deconstruction-interpretation-reconstruction in Wang Fuzhi's thought, showcasing his creative transformation of the Confucian orthodoxy narrative; Cluster 9 uses Discussions on the Song Dynasty (《宋论》) and Reflections on the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government (《读通鉴论》)as textual bases to systematically expound the historical-philosophical foundations of his nationalist thought; Cluster 10 focuses on the intertextuality between Wang Fuzhi, Zhuangzi, and Fang Yizhi, highlighting the cross-school characteristics of his ontological construction; Cluster 11 takes Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi as reference points to explore the unique theoretical positioning of Wang Fuzhi's Practical Learning thought. These research directions, through the keyword co-occurrence network, construct a multi-dimensional interpretive space for Wang Fuzhi's thought—one that not only demonstrates the theoretical contributions of each academic branch but also provides a structured analytical framework for holistically grasping the internal logic of his philosophical system.

Figure 6: Keyword Co-occurrence Network in the Study of Wang Fuzhi's Thought

Source: CNKI

Based on bibliometric analysis, research on Wang Fuzhi's thought has exhibited a discernible decline in innovative momentum since 2021, necessitating a breakthrough from traditional interpretive frameworks through interdisciplinary research paradigms. The co-occurrence overlay network in Figure 7 identifies keywords such as Qi philosophy (气学) (occurrence = 4, Avg. pub. year: 2021.00), Fang Yizhi (occurrence = 6, Avg. pub. year: 2020.00), Confucian orthodoxy (道统) (occurrence = 4, Avg pub year: 2020.00), and Wang Yangming (occurrence = 4, Avg pub year: 2020.00) as recent research hotspots, signaling three pivotal paradigm shifts within the field: firstly, ontological studies of Qi philosophy （气学本体论） leverage digital humanities technologies to achieve methodological innovation, transcending conventional metaphysical interpretations of the relationship between Qi (material force) and Li (cosmic principle); secondly, investigations into the interaction between the ideological lineages of Fang Yizhi and Wang Yangming foster cross-school dialogue within the Ming-Qing philosophical network; thirdly, research on the reconstruction of Confucian orthodoxy engages with historical philosophy to explore its modern transformative value. These emerging directions not only offer academic frontiers for overcoming single-discipline limitations but also provide a methodological pathway for constructing a holistic interpretive framework for Wang Fuzhi's thought through the integrative convergence of philosophy, history, and philology. Notably, the digital turn in Qi philosophy research (Avg. pub. year: 2021.00) and the sustained ascendance of Fang Yizhi studies (occurrence = 6) presage a future trajectory wherein the modern transformation of traditional scholarship will be driven by the dual forces of digital humanities and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Figure 7: Keyword Co-occurrence in the Overlay Network of Wang Fuzhi's Thought Study

Source: CNKI

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study, through bibliometric and visual analysis, reveals the multidimensional landscape of studies on Wang Fuzhi's thought. Temporally, the research has evolved in three stages: "stable accumulation—rapid growth—fluctuation and adjustment," and currently enters a plateau period driven by cultural inheritance needs and academic accumulation. Core topics cluster around philosophy (49.85%) and Chinese literature (25.51%), forming 11 research clusters such as Criticism of Neo-Confucianism, Interpretation of the Yijing, and Historical Philosophy. Institutions like Peking University and Beijing Normal University serve as research hubs, with scholars such as Zhang Xuezhi and Xu Sumin as key contributors. However, the collaborative network remains loose, indicating untapped potential for interdisciplinary synergy. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies Qi-based ontology, （

气学本体论) interaction with Fang Yizhi's thought, and reconstruction of the Confucian

orthodoxy (道统重构) as recent hotspots, reflecting a shift from single-discipline interpretation to cross-paradigm dialogues. The integration of digital humanities techniques and historical philosophy perspectives is breaking through the traditional metaphysical framework, offering new pathways to understand the modern transformation of his thought.

Looking ahead, Wang Fuzhi studies are poised to enter a new phase driven by dual momentum: First, policy support and technological empowerment may catalyze a new growth period in 2025, as deepened cultural inheritance policies and popularization of digital humanities tools propel research. The digital turn in Qi studies will shift ontological interpretation from

conceptual speculation to interdisciplinary modeling. Second, academic paradigms will continue to innovate, with cross-school dialogues (e.g., comparative studies with Fang Yizhi and Wang Yangming) and multidisciplinary integration (philosophy, history, and philology) becoming mainstream, facilitating the construction of a holistic interpretive framework for his thought. Strengthening research collaboration and breaking disciplinary barriers will further unlock the contemporary value of his historical philosophy and practical rationality, providing richer theoretical resources for the creative transformation of fine traditional Chinese culture.

4.1 Research Limitations and Prospects

This study is constrained by the coverage of CSSCI data in CNKI. For future research, it is necessary to analyze the data in high-quality databases such as Ctext, Philosopher's Index and Bibliography of Asian Studies.

4.2 Funding

4.3 Disclosure Statement

The authors (s) declare no potential conflicts of interest.

4.4 Data Availability

Access to the datasets used in this study is restricted and they are not publicly available, as these datasets were used under license from Clarivate. These datasets can be found in Clarivate's CNKI database.(https://www.cnki.net/).

4.5 The Authors' Contributions

Ting Fu was responsible for drafting the initial version of the research report or paper, encompassing data collection, content organization, text writing, and preliminary formatting adjustments.

Huichan Ren conducted comprehensive revision and improvement of the initial draft, including language polishing, logical optimization, content enrichment, and formatting adjustments, significantly enhancing the quality of the report or paper.

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