

## Research Hotspots and Emerging Trends in Dong Zhongshu's Thought- A Visualization Analysis

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### Abstract:

The research examines studies related to Dong Zhongshu's thought in the CNKI database from one thousand nine hundred ninety-two to two thousand twenty-four, offering valuable insights into the academic landscape surrounding Dong Zhongshu's studies. Using VOSviewer 1.6.18(0) and Excel, along with bibliometric analysis methods, this research provides a thorough outline of Dong Zhongshu's thought studies. Key findings indicate that scholarly publications on Dong Zhongshu's thought have not significantly increased in recent years. Yu Zhiping and Zhou Guidian have made notable contributions. Beijing Normal University and Shandong University stand out as the most prolific institutions. The journal Confucius Studies continues to be the leading core publication platform. Current Dong Zhongshu studies primarily focus on building political philosophy systems, establishing cosmology and ontology foundations, and understanding the interactive mechanism between ethics and politics. This research thoroughly maps the academic landscape of Dong Zhongshu studies, providing theoretical guidance and practical references for future advancements in this field.

**Keywords:** Dong Zhongshu's thought; visual analysis; VOSviewer; research hotspot; research trend

### Introduction:

Dong Zhongshu was a pivotal ancient Chinese statesman, educator, and philosopher (Gao, 2010; Ji, 2018). Drawing on his analysis of the Spring and Autumn Annals, and based on the cosmological framework of "timeless principles of heaven and earth and the universal norms governing past and

present (天地之常经，古今之通谊)，" Dong Zhongshu carefully examined the interconnectedness of Confucian concepts of benevolence and righteousness with the philosophy of kingcraft (Lin, 2024; Chao, 2024). This dual achievement established a value system integrating

classical ideals with pragmatic statecraft and facilitated a historic breakthrough in Confucian political thought through his innovative design of mechanisms for harmonizing interests between rulers and the ruled (Meng, 2023). Dong Zhongshu's philosophy illuminates the vital continuity of historical-cultural traditions (Li, 2010). His doctrine of "curbing imperial authority while elevating cosmic principles (屈君而伸天)" retains contemporary cautionary significance in interrogating power-obligation dynamics (Chen, 2016). Furthermore, his paradigm of "virtue-oriented governance supplemented by penal measures (德主刑辅)" provides theoretical insights for constructing a socialist rule of law culture with Chinese characteristics, particularly regarding the ethical foundation of legal systems (Liu, 2022; Ren, 2023; Zang & Dun, 2024). Dong Zhongshu facilitated the creative transformation of the traditional ritual-law system into a modern state governance framework. This intellectual endeavor laid the crucial groundwork for the evolution of a distinctively Chinese governance paradigm, particularly in reconciling civilizational heritage with institutional innovation.

Visualization analysis encourages the formulation of novel ideas and offers readers a basis for objective observation and assessment (van Wijk, 2005). There are a number of visualization tools available in academia to help scholars effectively navigate the complex and staggering volume of scientific research (Akbari et al., 2020; Chander et al., 2022; Gorzeń-Mitka et al., 2020). CiteSpace and VOSviewer are such tools that help scholars understand new trends in their field of study. This study uses VOSviewer to analyze Dong Zhongshu's research trends and hot spots.

This research comprehensively reviews Dong Zhongshu's thought studies in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) from five key perspectives: publication volume, leading authors and their collaborations, high-impact journals, contributing institutions, and co-occurring keywords. By examining these five dimensions,

researchers can better understand the current academic landscape in Dong Zhongshu's thought research. This analysis serves as a valuable reference for academia, facilitating further in-depth exploration of Dong Zhongshu's philosophical system.

## **Research Methods and Data Collection:**

### **Research Methods:**

VOSviewer is a tool for comprehensively examining clustering solutions utilizing visualization (Hassan-Montero et al., 2022; Vasudevan et al., 2016; Ren & Abdullah, 2024). Excel software is a robust visualization tool that can immediately create maps from input data (Au & Rischpater, 2015). This study primarily utilizes VOSviewer 1.6.18(0) and Excel software for conducting bibliometric analysis and generating literature knowledge graphs (Ren & Abdullah, 2024).

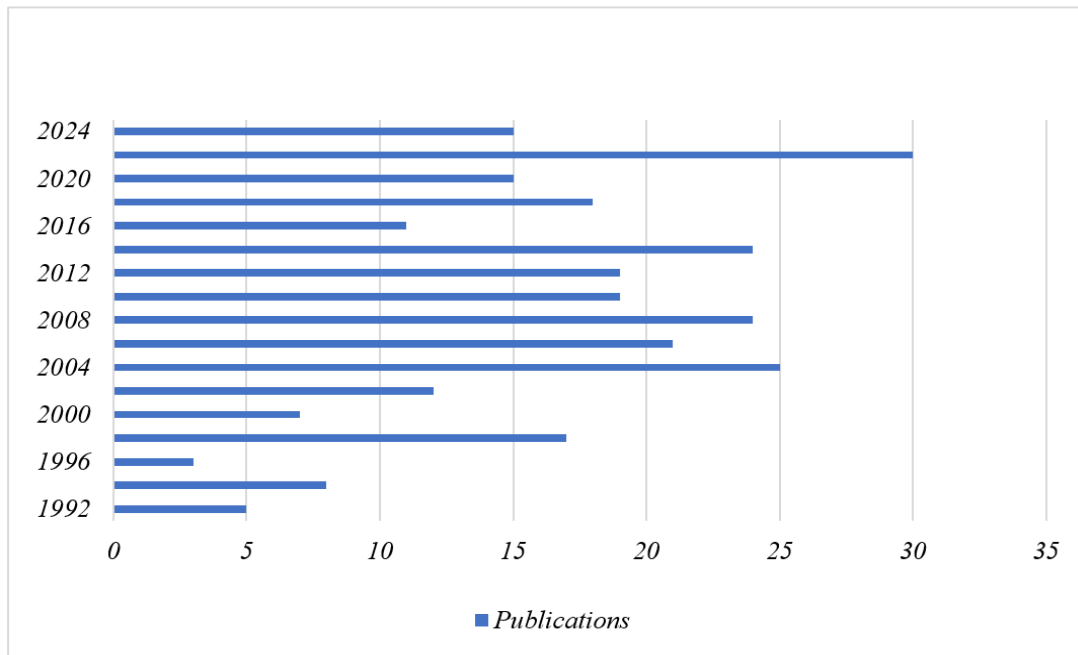
### **Data Collection:**

This research collects data from the CNKI database. The selection criteria were established as follows: topic ("Dong Zhongshu" + "Dong Zhongshu's thought"), document type (journal articles), and index (CSSCI+Peking University Core Journals). Following a rigorous screening process, four hundred and eighty-eight articles were initially retrieved. After excluding two publications with incomplete metadata, four hundred and eighty-six high-quality documents were specifically selected for in-depth visual analysis.

### **Results and Discussion:**

#### Analysis of annual publication

Figure 1 illustrates the publication output related to Dong Zhongshu's thoughts. Except for the year two thousand and twenty-two, which saw a peak with thirty publications, the annual publication volume from one thousand nine hundred ninety-two to two thousand twenty-four remained below thirty. Hence, there is significant fluctuation in the number of publications across different years, and no exciting upward trend is observed.

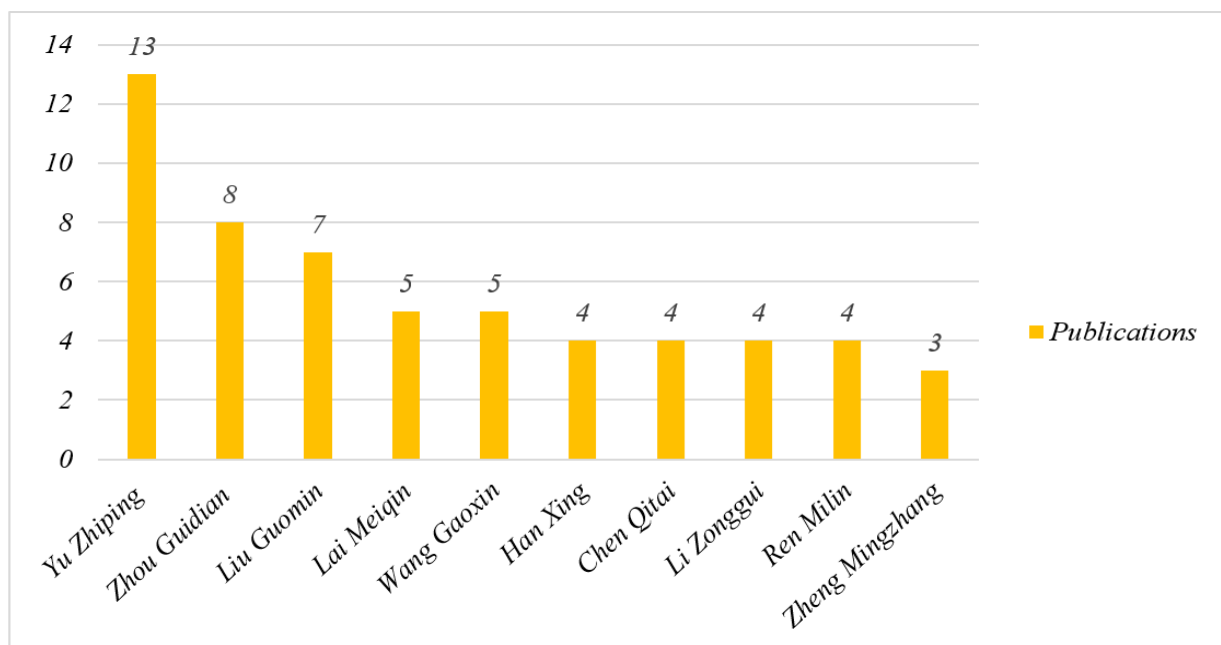


**Figure 1. The publication output related to Dong Zhongshu's thought**

**Analysis of High-Contributing Authors**

Figure 2 identifies scholars who have made significant contributions to Dong Zhongshu studies by publishing three or more works. Professor Yu Zhiping has authored thirteen papers on Dong Zhongshu's thoughts to date. Zhou Guidian has

contributed eight works, Liu Guomin has published seven, and Lai Meiqin and Wang Gaoxin have each published five. This demonstrates the strong research interest of Yu Zhiping, Zhou Guidian, Liu Guomin, and others in Dong Zhongshu studies and suggests their solid expertise in this field.

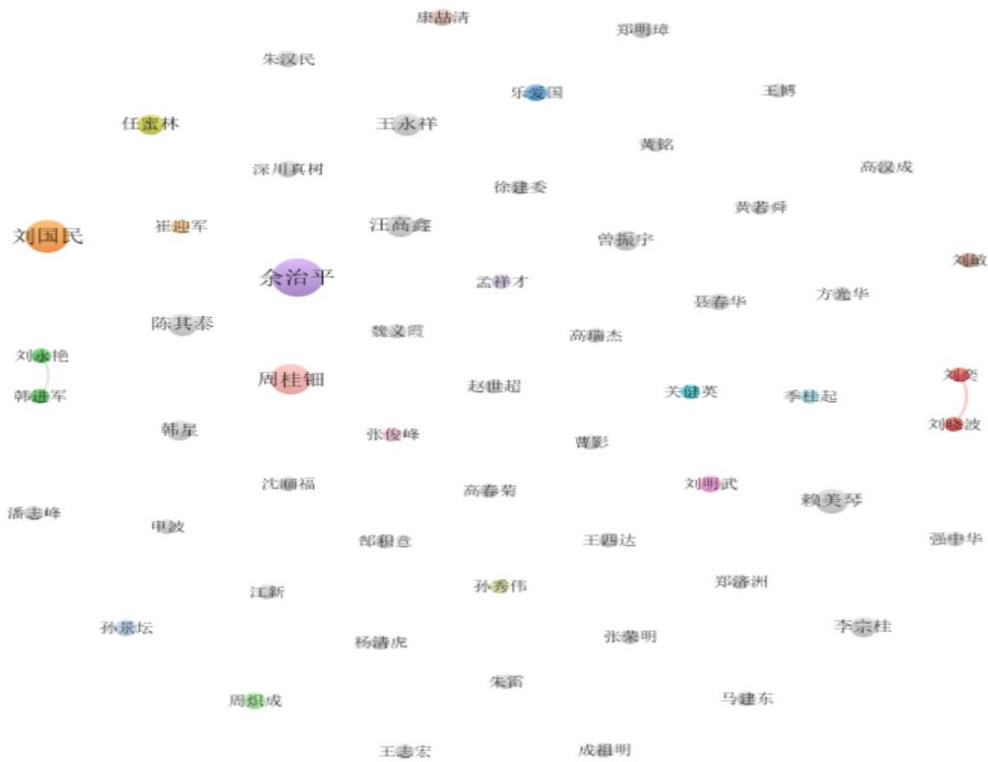


**Figure 2. The most contributing authors to Dong Zhongshu studies**

**Author Collaboration Analysis**

Figure 3 shows that the authors have limited cooperation in publishing relevant research. This

might stem from the belief that independent work best showcases academic ability.

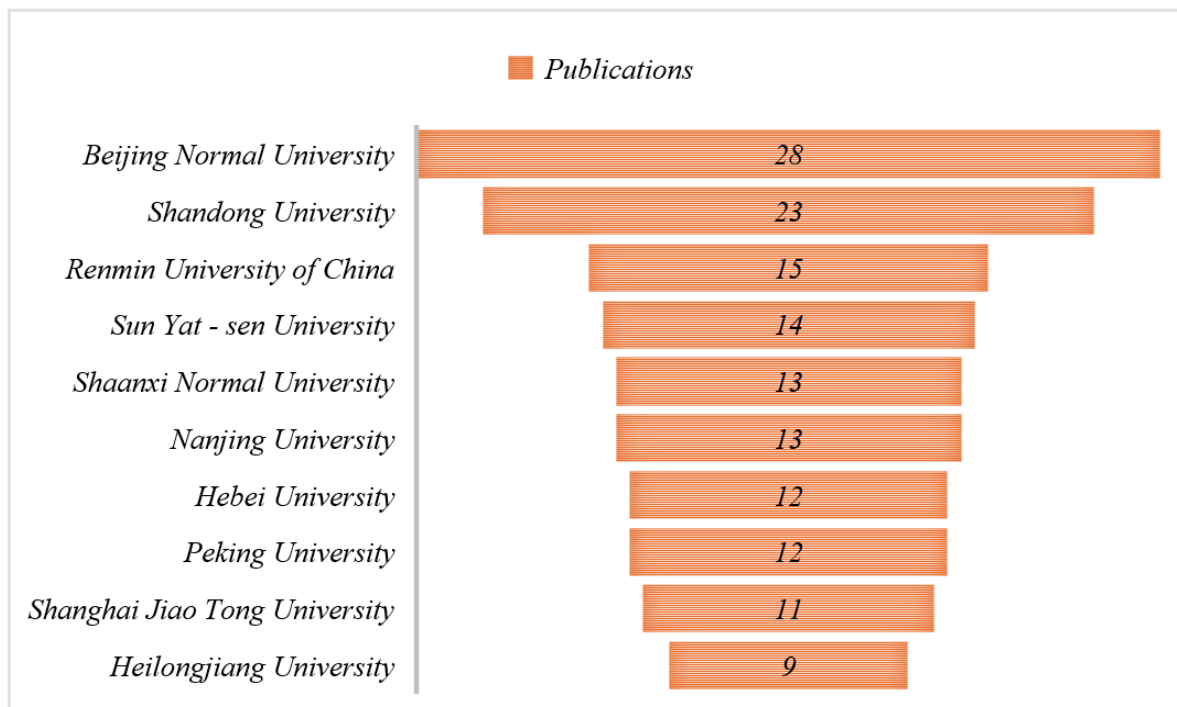


**Figure 3. Author collaboration on Dong Zhongshu's thought studies**

High-Contributing Institutions Analysis

Figure 4 presents the top ten institutions contributing to Dong Zhongshu studies. Beijing Normal University and Shandong University lead with twenty-eight and twenty-three publications, respectively. This indicates a relatively sparse

research activity in this field across institutions, likely influenced by resource allocation, research focus, and academic interests. It also suggests that Dong Zhongshu studies have significant room for expansion and development.



**Figure 4. The top ten institutions contributing to Dong Zhongshu studies**

High-Contributing Journals Analysis

Figure 5 lists the top ten journals. Confucius Studies has the most publications on Dong Zhongshu's thought, with twenty-nine. Hebei Academic Journal is second with twenty-five. This

reflects the significant challenges in promoting academic research on Dong Zhongshu's thought. To maintain the field's innovation and leading position, it is crucial to explore new research directions and tap into potential academic areas.

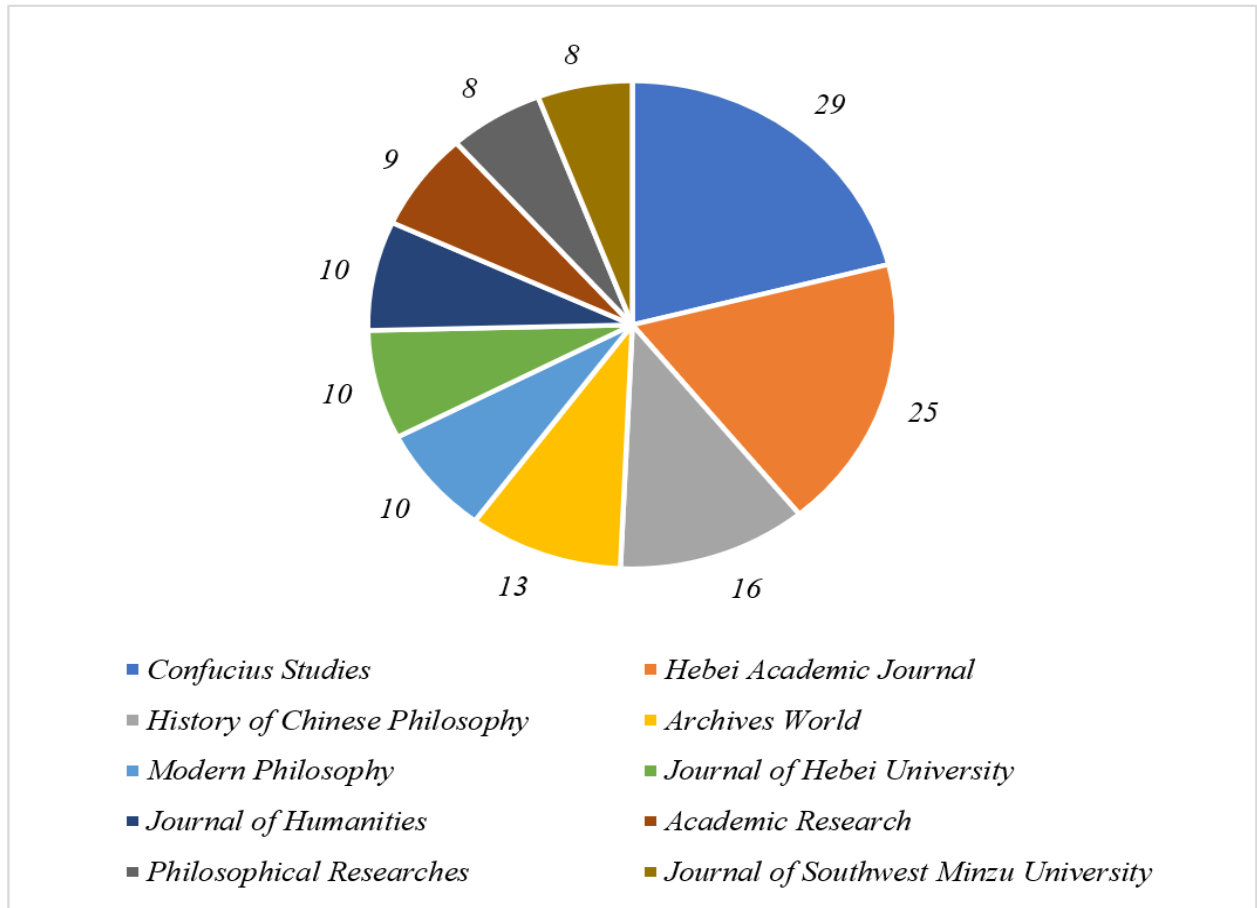


Figure 5. The top ten journals related to Dong Zhongshu's thought

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Figure 6 presents a keyword co-occurrence network for Dong Zhongshu's studies. Researchers established a minimum co-occurrence threshold of four, resulting in thirty-one valid keywords after duplicates were removed. In Figure 6, seven distinct clusters are identified, each highlighted in a different color. Cluster one (red), comprising eight nodes, predominantly concentrates on the ideological origins of Dong Zhongshu and the transmission of classical scholarship. The most prominent keyword is Dong Zhongshu (total link strength=two hundred and fifty-nine, occurrence frequency=three hundred and fifty-two), Spring and Autumn Annals (total link strength= thirty-five,

occurrence frequency= nineteen), and He Xiu (total link strength= twenty-five, occurrence frequency= thirteen). Cluster two (green), represented by seven nodes, is principally devoted to the core theoretical system of Dong's ethical philosophy. Key conceptual markers include moral cultivation (total link strength=nineteen, occurrence frequency=twelve), Yuan (total link strength=thirteen, occurrence frequency= eleven), human nature (total link strength= eleven, occurrence frequency=seven). Cluster three (blue), containing five nodes, systematically investigates the Confucian lineage and historical positioning of Dong's thought. Central terminology encompasses Confucianism (total link

strength=thirty-six, occurrence frequency=twenty-one), Xunzi (total link strength=eighteen, occurrence frequency= eleven), and Han Dynasty (total link strength=fifteen, occurrence frequency=ten). Cluster four (yellow), composed of four nodes, centers on Dong's political philosophy and state governance concepts. The predominant conceptual triad comprises great unification (total link strength=forty-eight, occurrence frequency=twenty-nine), political philosophy (total link strength= eleven, occurrence frequency=seven), and Diao Gun (total link strength=seven, occurrence frequency=four). Cluster five (purple), with three nodes, primarily examines Dong Zhongshu's theory of Heaven-human resonance. The most frequent keywords are Heaven-human resonance (total link strength=twenty-six, occurrence frequency=twenty-four), Yin-yang (total link

strength=fifteen, occurrence frequency=twelve), and portent anomalies (total link strength= eleven, occurrence frequency=eight). Cluster six (cyan), containing three nodes, focuses on Dong's Confucian policy implementations and historical impact. Main terms include Emperor Wu of Han (total link strength=twenty-eight, occurrence frequency=sixteen), canonization of Confucianism (total link strength=thirty-one, occurrence frequency=thirteen), and suppression of hundred schools of thought (total link strength=fourteen, occurrence frequency=six). Cluster seven (orange), represented by a singular node, concentrates on the systematic construction of Dong's humaneness philosophy, benevolence (total link strength=four, occurrence frequency=five), demonstrating relatively limited academic attention in current research dimensions.

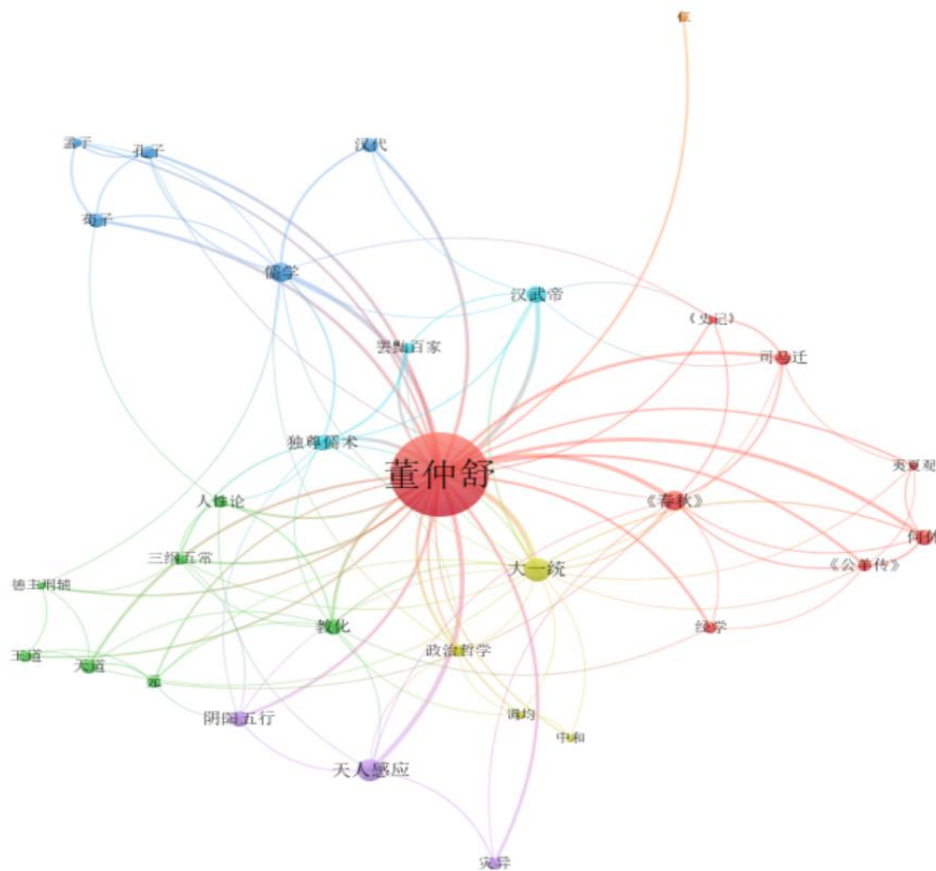


Figure 6. The keyword co-occurrence network of Dong Zhongshu thought

Figure 7 presents the keyword co-occurrence overlay network of Dong Zhongshu's thought. Using this network, researchers have identified four hot-topic terms in this field recently years: political philosophy (occurrences = seven, Avg. pub. year: two thousand and nineteen. twenty-nine), Yuan (occurrences = seven, Avg. pub. year: two thousand and sixteen. zero), benevolence (occurrences = five, Avg. pub. year: two thousand and fifteen. sixty),

and kingcraft (occurrences = seven, Avg. pub. year: two thousand and fifteen. forty-three). Based on the analysis of the latest popular keywords shown in Figure 7, it can be inferred that the current research focus of Dong Zhongshu's thought is concentrated on his political philosophy system, cosmological foundation, and the interaction between ethics and politics. It is expected that these topics will become significant research trends in the coming years.

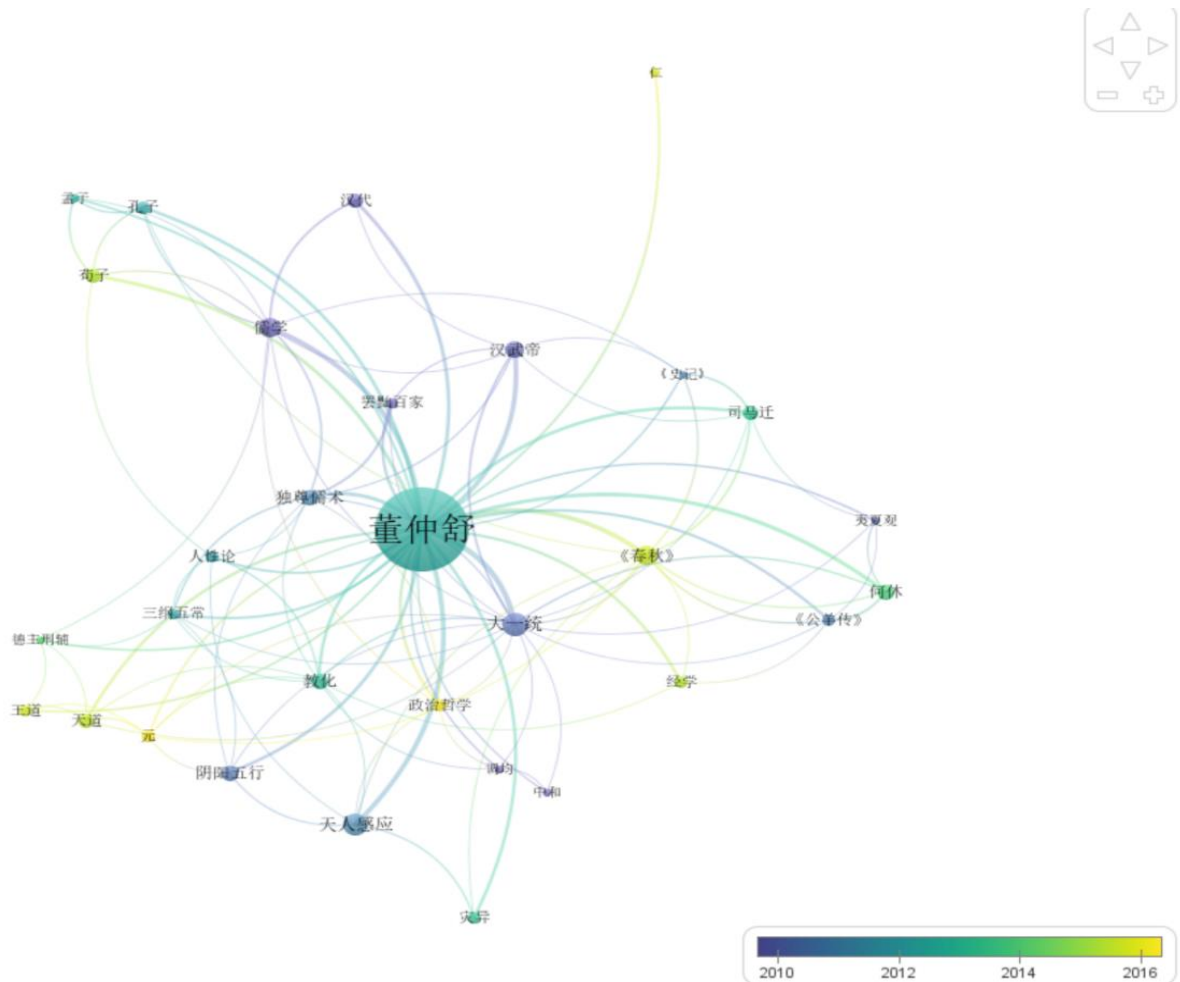


Figure 7. The keyword co-occurrence overlay network of Dong Zhongshu's thought

**Conclusion:**

This research shows the current Dong Zhongshu studies focus on his political philosophy system, cosmological basis, and the interaction of ethics and politics. These topics are expected to stay dominant in Dong Zhongshu research in the coming years. These topics not only reflect the current hotspots in Dong Zhongshu's thought research but also reveal new trends in its future development. Firstly, research content is becoming more refined, with scholars shifting from macro-theory building to micro-concept analysis, focusing on specific

propositions, terms, and their historical evolution in Dong Zhongshu's thought. Secondly, the research paradigm emphasizes the dialogue between tradition and modernity. Scholars reinterpret Dong Zhongshu's thought in the contemporary context, exploring its relevance to modern issues such as social governance, ethical construction, and cultural identity. This promotes the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional thought. This research trend not only expands the academic boundaries of Dong Zhongshu's thought but also

offers new possibilities for reconstructing the modern value of traditional thought resources.

This research comprehensively analyzes the dynamic evolution of Dong Zhongshu's thought studies. It offers valuable academic insights and suggests future research directions. Dong Zhongshu's thought, a treasure of Chinese culture, can boost Confucian studies and offer key ideas for today's cultural building and value reconstruction. However, the current study, relying solely on a single database, may lack comprehensiveness. Future research should improve by integrating multiple databases, broadening literature searches, and enhancing international cooperation to increase systematization and scientific rigor.

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### Disclosure Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

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