

## Postprint: Hotspot and Trend Analysis of Research on New Rural Elites' Participation in Rural Governance Based on CiteSpace

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] With the rapid development of urban-rural integration, how to further improve and standardize the institutions and pathways for new rural sages' participation in rural governance is crucial to the modernization of rural public governance systems and the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. By mapping knowledge graphs to reveal the evolution, hot topics, and development trends of research on new rural sages' participation in rural governance, this study can provide reference and guidance for future research. [Method/Process] Using 596 relevant research articles from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) between 2015-2021 as the data source, this paper employs the visualization analysis software CiteSpace to conduct data mining and inductive analysis of the literature. [Results/Conclusions] Research on new rural sages' participation in rural governance demonstrates obvious policy orientation; the number of publications has remained at a relatively high level and stabilized in recent years, but collaboration among researchers and institutions is weak. Research hotspots mainly concentrate on three dimensions: the value and function, practical dilemmas, and optimization pathways of new rural sages' participation in rural governance. Future research still needs to broaden perspectives, deepen content, and enrich methodologies.

### Full Text

#### Analysis on Hot Spots and Trends of New Rural Sages Participating in Rural Governance Based on CiteSpace

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### Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] With the rapid development of urban-rural integration,

improving and standardizing the institutional mechanisms and pathways for new rural sages to participate in rural governance is crucial for modernizing the rural public governance system and implementing the rural revitalization strategy. By mapping knowledge graphs, this study reveals the evolutionary trajectory, hot topics, and development trends of research on new rural sages' participation in rural governance, providing valuable references for future studies. [Method/Process] Taking 596 relevant research articles from China National Knowledge Network (CNKI) published between 2015 and 2021 as the data source, this paper employs the visualization analysis software CiteSpace for data mining and inductive analysis. [Result/Conclusion] Research on new rural sages' participation in rural governance exhibits clear policy orientation, with publication volumes remaining high and stable in recent years. However, collaboration among authors and institutions is weak. Research hotspots concentrate on three dimensions: the value and function of new rural sages' participation, practical dilemmas, and optimization pathways. Future research should broaden perspectives, deepen content, and enrich methodologies.

**Keywords:** New rural sages; Rural governance; Knowledge graph analysis; CiteSpace

In traditional Chinese society, which practiced a “dual-track politics” system where “imperial power did not extend to the county level, and counties governed themselves,” rural sages—as virtuous and capable members of rural communities—served as the primary governance subjects at the grassroots level. As President Xi Jinping has noted, “To govern China today effectively requires a deep understanding of our history and traditional culture, as well as active summarization of ancient Chinese explorations and wisdom in state governance” [1]. Currently, facing numerous rural governance challenges such as village “hollowing-out,” population “aging,” cultural “desertification,” and regime “suspension,” society has increasingly focused attention on the new rural sage group. Central No. 1 Documents in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 explicitly mentioned new rural sages and sage culture, attaching great importance to their positive role in rural construction [2].

New rural sages represent the inheritance and development of traditional rural sages in the new era. Like their traditional counterparts, new rural sages are socially prominent individuals with morality, wealth, knowledge, and prestige. Most are local elites born and raised in these communities who enthusiastically engage in village public affairs. By leveraging their advantages in political, economic, and cultural resources, they actively participate in rural governance and play important roles in promoting the “three-governance integration” (autonomy, rule of law, and rule of virtue) and achieving good governance in rural areas. However, new rural sages tend to be more civilian-oriented, with broader personnel composition and more diverse participation methods. Encouraging, supporting, and guiding new rural sages to return to rural governance and fully utilize their individual value in rural governance and revitalization not only actively responds to rural governance needs but also holds significant meaning

for strengthening the endogenous subject foundation, innovating modern rural governance systems, and realizing the rural revitalization strategy.

Since 2015, scholars have gradually begun researching new rural sages' participation in rural governance from perspectives of management, sociology, political science, ethnology, and other disciplines, yielding increasingly rich research results, including review articles. However, most review papers rely on subjective qualitative analysis, with few retrospective summaries and prospects based on bibliometrics. Applying bibliometric methods for visualized quantitative analysis of the new rural sages' participation in rural governance field can more clearly and objectively demonstrate literature distribution characteristics, quantitative relationships, and evolutionary patterns in chart and data formats, comprehensively presenting research progress and trends. Accordingly, this study employs CiteSpace visualization software to analyze authors, institutions, and keywords related to new rural sages' participation in rural governance, mapping relevant knowledge graphs to intuitively and vividly display the development history, current thematic status, and hot topics in this research field, and to holistically analyze and grasp its development trends, providing theoretical references for subsequent research.

### 1.1 Research Data

This study uses CNKI as the data source, conducting an advanced search with the theme “new rural sages participating in rural governance” for the period 2015-2021, including all journal categories. The search was conducted on May 27, 2022, yielding 631 journal articles. After manually removing invalid data such as literature reviews, conference summaries, journal catalogs, and articles without authors, 596 valid articles were retained as the research sample.

### 1.2 Research Methods

This paper adopts the bibliometric method, utilizing CiteSpace software for visualized analysis of the selected literature data. Information from the 596 articles was imported into CiteSpace, employing functions such as author collaboration analysis, institution collaboration analysis, keyword co-occurrence, clustering, and burst detection to reveal the developmental evolution and clarify hot topics and frontier trends in new rural sages' participation in rural governance research.

### 2.1 Annual Publication Trends

The number of publications in different periods can intuitively reflect the development speed of a research field. Generally, more publications indicate higher research 热度 in that stage. [Figure 1: see original paper] shows annual publication volumes on new rural sages' participation in rural governance from 2015 to 2021. Overall, publications show a yearly upward trend, with research 热度 gradually increasing. Based on publication volume, three stages can be identified: the slow development period (2015-2017), when the research team was

weak and overall publication volume was low, with only 49 articles (8.22% of the total sample), including just 3 articles in 2015; the rapid growth period (2018–2019), when increasing scholars focused on this field, with significantly higher and more variable annual publications, totaling 250 articles (41.95% of the sample); and the stable development period (2020–2021), when publication volume stabilized at approximately 150 articles annually, with 297 journal articles (49.83% of the sample), peaking at 156 articles in 2021.

## 2.2 Author Publication Analysis

Using CiteSpace for author co-occurrence analysis in the new rural sages' participation in rural governance field generated an author collaboration network 图谱 [Figure 2: see original paper]. In this 图谱, node font size represents author centrality, node circle size represents publication volume, and connecting lines represent collaboration, with thicker lines indicating closer cooperation. While some collaboration exists among 部分 authors, overall cooperation is weak, cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary research is rare, and no obvious collaboration network has formed.

To further clarify core authors in this field, statistics were compiled for authors with 3 or more publications. Overall, there are few highly productive authors, with most researchers publishing only 1 or 2 articles, indicating limited scholar focus and a lack of comprehensive, in-depth research. The most prolific author, Zhang Xingyu, published 6 articles, but 5 were co-authored with Ji Zhongyang (ranked second), and both are from the same institution—Nanjing Agricultural University, showing very high overlap. Other authors are from different institutions without connections, demonstrating that no core author group has formed in this research field.

## 2.3 Institution Publication Analysis

Institutional co-occurrence analysis generated an institution collaboration network 图谱 [Figure 3: see original paper], showing very few connecting lines, with most institutions distributed as independent points, indicating weak overall collaboration intensity.

According to Price's Law, the minimum publication volume for core institutions can be calculated to identify key institutions in a field. The formula is  $N = 0.749 \times N_{max}$ , where  $N$  represents the minimum number of publications for core institutions and  $N_{max}$  represents the maximum institutional publication volume during the 统计 period [3]. Based on the data,  $N_{max}$  is 9, so  $N = 2.2$ , rounded to 3, meaning institutions with 3 or more publications are considered core institutions, totaling 15. All 15 core institutions are universities, but their combined 65 publications account for only 10.9% of the total 596 articles, 充分 demonstrating that while universities are important research forces in this field, they have not achieved obvious dominance.

### 3 Main Research Content

The 596 articles were imported into CiteSpace, with time slicing set to 2015–2021, years per slice set to 1, node types set to Keyword, and threshold set to Top 50 (representing the network generated from the top 50 high-frequency keywords in each time slice). Running CiteSpace produced keyword co-occurrence, clustering, timeline, and burst detection 图谱 s for new rural sages' participation in rural governance research.

#### 3.1 Research Hotspots: Keyword Co-occurrence and Clustering Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis yielded the keyword co-occurrence 图谱 shown in [Figure 4: see original paper]. Each circular node represents a keyword, with larger circles indicating greater attention and thus research hotspots. Ring colors gradually shift from cool to warm tones from inner to outer, representing publication time from early to recent periods [4]. Connecting lines represent keyword co-occurrence, with thickness indicating frequency—thicker lines show closer relationships. Additionally, keyword frequency and centrality reveal hotspot status. Centrality measures a keyword's 中介 ability in the co-occurrence network; values greater than 0.1 indicate high 中介 centrality keywords and thus research hotspots [5]. lists the top 15 keywords by frequency and their centrality.

Based on [Figure 4: see original paper] and , four main research hotspots are identified: “new rural sages,” “rural governance,” “rural revitalization,” and “sage culture.” These keywords appeared in early research stages with high frequency and centrality, forming the basic elements of this research field, indicating it remains in a foundational stage. Keywords such as “rural sages,” “grassroots governance,” “rule of virtue,” “dilemma,” “rural good governance,” and “path” have lower centrality but high frequency, representing important research themes.

For deeper thematic and hotspot analysis, keyword clustering analysis was conducted on the co-occurrence foundation, yielding the keyword clustering knowledge 图谱 [Figure 5: see original paper]. The Modularity value (Q value) measures 图谱 network modularity—higher Q values indicate better clustering effects. When  $Q > 0.3$ , the network structure is significant. The Silhouette value measures clustering homogeneity; higher values indicate greater internal similarity. Generally, Silhouette  $> 0.5$  indicates reasonable clustering, while  $> 0.7$  indicates high-quality clustering [6]. The calculated Q value is 0.4382 and Silhouette value is 0.7429, demonstrating significant and high-quality clustering. The clustering produced 10 labels: “rural governance,” “rule of virtue,” “new rural sages,” “sage culture,” “rural good governance,” “rural elites,” “rural,” “dilemma,” “rural society,” and “Party building guidance,” with main content shown in .

Based on keyword co-occurrence and clustering analysis, combined with relevant literature, current research on new rural sages' participation in rural governance focuses on three aspects:

First, the value and function of new rural sages' participation in rural governance. The *Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022)* proposes “actively playing the role of new rural sages” in the section on “enhancing rural rule of virtue.” Scholars have discussed the value and functional manifestations from multiple perspectives. As shown in , clustering identifiers for value/function research include: cultural governance, rural autonomy, rule of law, rule of virtue, talent revitalization, rural elites, rural civilization, and rural good governance. Regarding rural autonomy, rule of law, and rule of virtue, Zhang Xingyu and Ji Zhongyang argue that new rural sages play a moral cultivation role in organizing village governance activities, formulating village regulations, and cultural promotion based on the “negative village governance” context [7]. Additionally, these scholars analyzed the collaborative logic between rural grid management and new rural sages' “rule of virtue” by exploring the cultural logic of “ritual-custom interaction” in local society [8]. Xia Hongli contends that new rural sages' active participation is needed to improve the “three-governance combination” rural governance system and achieve rural good governance, elaborating their functional roles across autonomy, rule of law, and rule of virtue [9]. In rural culture, Qiu Bin explored how sage village governance affects villagers' autonomy, proposing that under sage governance, villagers' autonomy will develop through combined economic and moral-cultural progress [10]. Li Jinzhe affirmed the cultural function of new rural sages, noting they possess both traditional and modern cultural attributes—using traditional culture to participate in rural governance and lead civilized rural customs while promoting rural cultural modernization through their unique sage culture [11]. Regarding talent revitalization, scholars generally agree that new rural sages, as capable individuals born and raised locally, represent typical rural elites. Some scholars, from a talent revitalization perspective, identify new rural sages as important forces for rural talent revitalization. Qian Zaijian et al. investigated talent inflow mechanisms for new rural sages under rural revitalization based on survey research in G District, Jiangsu Province, proposing solutions to talent inflow challenges [12]. Wu Chensheng et al., from a social capital theory perspective, noted that new rural sages can provide strong momentum for rural talent revitalization across normative, network, and trust dimensions [13].

Second, the practical dilemmas of new rural sages' participation in rural governance. As an important bridge for facilitating intelligence, technology, and management going to the countryside, new rural sages' participation aligns with the diversified development trend of rural governance subjects. However, nationwide practice shows that pathways, carriers, guarantees, and effectiveness of participation need improvement, with many factors hindering their return. Scholars have explored these issues. According to , clustering identifiers for practical dilemmas include: dilemma, cultural services, villagers' autonomy, rural governance, and motivation. Yang Jun was among the earliest scholars analyzing problems in new rural sages' rural governance participation, noting that institutional deficits in new rural sage organizations, inadequate emphasis on seeking truth from facts in rural governance, and insufficient emergency

response capabilities of grassroots Party organizations and leaders prevented them from effectively playing their roles [14]. Wu Rong et al. pointed out that cultural services provided by new rural sages face problems such as single supply channels, weak service platforms, and lack of support policies [15]. Li Min et al. proposed that under rural revitalization, new rural sage culture development faces challenges including severe sage outflow, diluted sage culture atmosphere, unclear leading roles, and weak sage organizations [16]. Some scholars elaborated on sage governance dilemmas from the villagers' autonomy perspective. Chen Hanfei et al., based on relationships between new rural sages and village committees, noted that sage organizations and village committees can easily become confrontational, with new rural sages potentially "overstepping" decision-making authority and undermining villagers' autonomy [17]. Sun Lizhen also suggested that in practice, new rural sages' participation may negatively impact grassroots rural governance [18]. Additionally, some scholars attribute dilemmas to new rural sages' internal factors, noting insufficient motivation. Fu Cuilian et al., from a policy mobilization perspective, analyzed dilemmas in new rural sages' participation in rural revitalization, including insufficient endogenous motivation [19]. Zhao Yanan divided main dilemmas into internal and external aspects, with internal dilemmas referring to inadequate return motivation and insufficient knowledge and capabilities [20].

Third, optimization pathways for new rural sages' participation in rural governance. Based on identified dilemmas and challenges, scholars have conducted corresponding pathway research. Related clustering identifiers include: realization pathways, governance paths, sage culture, Party building guidance, and grassroots Party organizations. Zhang Xingyu and Ji Zhongyang, from a social network perspective, explored pathways and practical methods for new rural sages' participation in rural community governance from cooperation co-governance, capital accumulation, and relationship connection perspectives [21]. Fu Cuilian, starting from rural governance model evolution, argued that reshaping the new rural sage governance model currently requires vigorously promoting sage culture and consolidating sage strength [22]. Many scholars have researched how to inherit and promote sage culture. Xia Hongli proposed promoting sage culture through building sage culture squares, establishing sage councils, and creating incentive mechanisms [23]. Bai Xianjun noted that promoting sage culture inheritance and innovation requires fully excavating and organizing sage culture resources, endowing them with contemporary connotations, while strengthening publicity and improving new rural sages' political participation mechanisms [24]. Peng Liang argued that new rural sage culture is a necessary pathway to cultivate more new rural sages, proposing attention to cultural construction among migrant worker groups, college student village officials, and rural migrants to broaden sage culture construction horizons [25]. President Xi Jinping emphasized that strengthening rural governance foundations requires enhancing rural grassroots Party organizations' leading role [26]. Some scholars studied countermeasures from a Party building guidance perspective. Yang Jun, from a collaborative governance perspective, argued for leveraging new rural sages' role

in advancing rural grassroots Party building and constructing combat-effective grassroots Party member teams [27]. Qiu Bin's analysis of Fengyuan Village in Fengqiao Town concluded that governance-oriented sages' role 发挥离不开党组织的统一领导, requiring organic combination of Party building guidance and governance-oriented sage leadership [28]. Xia Ting et al., using Shaoxing's experience as an example, explored the "Party building + new rural sages" rural governance model, summarizing its empowering 启示 for rural revitalization [29].

### 3.2 Research Trends: Keyword Timeline and Burst Analysis

Based on keyword co-occurrence, keyword timeline [Figure 6: see original paper] and burst analysis [Figure 7: see original paper] were generated to further understand research trends. The keyword timeline clearly reflects the temporal correspondence of research hotspots, emphasizing changes in research priorities over time. Burst words are keywords whose frequency suddenly increases during certain periods—higher burst intensity indicates greater attention. Combining [Figure 6: see original paper] and [Figure 7: see original paper], research can be divided into three stages:

First, the initial exploration stage (2015). The 2015 Central No. 1 Document, *Several Opinions on Increasing Reform and Innovation to Accelerate Agricultural Modernization*, proposed in the "strengthening rural ideological and moral construction" section to "innovate sage culture, promote good deeds and righteous actions, use hometown sentiment as a bond to attract and unite people from all sectors to support hometown construction, and inherit rural civilization" [30]. This marked the first appearance of sages in national policy documents. Subsequently, keywords such as "new rural sages," "sage culture," and "rural governance" emerged in this research field, though with limited scholar attention and scarce research 成果.

Second, the rapid development stage (2016-2019). From 2015 to 2018, Central No. 1 Documents consistently proposed building beautiful villages, incorporating sage culture into rural moral civilization construction, and emphasizing the need to "actively play the role of new rural sages" [2]. In 2017, the 19th Party Congress explicitly proposed implementing the rural revitalization strategy, "improving the rural governance system combining autonomy, rule of law, and rule of virtue, and cultivating a 'three rural' workforce that understands agriculture, loves rural areas, and loves farmers," and "promoting the shift of social governance focus to the grassroots level, leveraging social organizations, and achieving positive interaction between government governance, social regulation, and residents' autonomy" [31]. Since then, the sage governance model has attracted widespread academic attention, demonstrating obvious policy orientation in this research field. According to annual distribution, keyword timeline, and burst analysis, this stage saw a surge in publications and significantly increased keywords, including "rural sages," "rural revitalization," "grassroots governance," "autonomy," "rule of law," "rule of virtue," "dilemma," and "realization pathways," with burst words including "villagers' autonomy," "cultural

governance,” “grassroots governance,” “rural rule of law,” and “contemporary value,” mainly discussing the value, dilemmas, and realization pathways of new rural sages’ participation.

Third, the stable development stage (2020–2021). During this period, theoretical and practical 成果 in new rural sages’ participation in rural governance research became increasingly rich, entering a stable development stage. As shown in [Figure 6: see original paper], relatively fewer keywords emerged during this stage, with “cultivation pathways,” “talent revitalization,” “pluralistic co-governance,” and “effective governance” gradually becoming prominent.

#### 4.1 Research Conclusions

Using 596 CNKI articles on new rural sages’ participation in rural governance published from 2015 to 2021 as data, this study systematically analyzed the research status, hotspots, and trends using CiteSpace, yielding three main conclusions: First, publication numbers grew rapidly and stabilized at a high level, but authors are dispersed, with collaboration mostly limited to internal teams within the same field. Second, research themes are relatively concentrated yet broad, with four main themes—new rural sages, rural governance, rural revitalization, and sage culture—focusing on value function, practical dilemmas, and optimization pathways, addressing hotspots like “rural governance,” “rule of virtue,” “sage culture,” “rural good governance,” “rural elites,” “rural,” “dilemma,” and “Party building guidance.” Early research emphasized value, while later research focused more on pathways for sages’ return to rural governance. Third, development trends show clear stages with policy orientation. Timeline and burst analyses reveal three development stages, each linked to relevant policy documents. In the initial exploration stage (2015), the Central No. 1 Document’s mention of sages attracted academic attention, leading to research on “new rural sages,” “sage culture,” “rural governance,” and “rural elites.” In the rapid development stage (2016–2018), three consecutive Central No. 1 Documents emphasized actively playing the new rural sages’ role, deepening research with hot topics including “grassroots governance,” “cultural governance,” “rural revitalization,” and “villagers’ autonomy.” In the stable development stage (2020), the 14th Five-Year Plan proposed “promoting rural talent revitalization,” focusing research on “cultivation pathways,” “talent revitalization,” “pluralistic co-governance,” and “effective governance.”

#### 4.2 Future Outlook

Attracting new rural sages to participate in rural governance, leveraging their resource advantages, strengthening endogenous authority, and transitioning from single government governance to pluralistic collaborative governance represents beneficial exploration for innovating rural governance systems and accelerating rural revitalization. Future research should continue efforts in three areas:

First, broaden research perspectives. As research deepens, scholars have exten-

sively elaborated on new rural sages' participation from management, political science, ethnology, sociology, and other disciplinary dimensions. While this indicates mature research with significant 成果, it also reveals that current perspectives remain insufficiently broad. Research breadth and depth should continue expanding to promote interdisciplinary 交叉 research and enrich the knowledge system.

Second, deepen research content. Overall, most existing research concentrates on functional value, practical dilemmas, and optimization pathways, showing obvious homogenization and limitations. Scholars should continuously expand research extensions and deepen content based on their knowledge backgrounds and interests, pushing research forward.

Third, enrich research methods. Most existing research is qualitative with strong subjective coloring. Although case studies can accurately grasp status quo in specific regions and propose targeted countermeasures, conclusions lack universality due to single or limited samples. Future research should employ in-depth interviews, fieldwork, grounded theory, and quantitative methods to deepen studies.

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*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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