

# Trend and Hot issues of Governance Research in China from the Perspective of Government Funding

## ——Based on the National Social Science Fund Project from 1991 to 2021

Hui Yu <sup>1, a</sup>, Chengwu Lou <sup>1, b</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Northeastern University School of Humanities and Law, 110819, China

<sup>a</sup> youyuweilan@126.com, <sup>b</sup> 839479412@qq.com

**Abstract.** Government funding is an important way to promote the academic development, discipline construction and cultivation of scientific research talents in China. Based on the data of 3911 projects funded by the National Social Science Foundation from 1991 to 2021, this paper analyzes the development process and evolution of the hottest topic of "governance" research. The research shows that governance research in the field of social sciences in China has experienced through three stages: sprout development, quasi-localization and full-speed climbing. The academic contribution rate and competitiveness present a "Pareto's law" distribution in terms of disciplines and regions. The research topics mainly focuses on the modernization of national governance system and capacity, rural and ethnic region governance, grassroots governance of urban communities, collaborative governance of ecological environment and network security governance are carried out in the core clusters. Social governance, national governance and collaborative governance are the most concerned research topics at present.

**Keywords:** Governance Research; National Social Science Fund Projects; development trend; hotspot; visualization methods.

## 1. Introduction

The study of governance is the core and frontier issue in the field of Chinese philosophy and social sciences in recent years. Combing the development context and hot trends of governance research in the field of social sciences in China from a panoramic perspective can judge the level of the academic system of governance research in China, which has directional value for subsequent relevant research. Government funding is an important perspective to examine and evaluate academic research development. The National Social Science Foundation (hereinafter referred to NSSF) is the only state-level humanities and social science research funding project led by the government. It reflects the intensity and guidance of the state's academic funding for philosophy and social sciences, and is also a powerful tool for comprehensively examining the all-caliber discipline construction, academic focus and scientific research competitiveness. Therefore, this study takes the NSSF project as the view to analyze the process, hot spots and trends of the governance research in China's social science field, which can provide a factual basis for the systematic development of China's governance research.

## 2. Research Design

This study used the data source from the NSSF project database. With the help of Python software, all the searchable public data of the database (1986-2021) was crawled and cleaned, and a total of 82066 valid terms were obtained. With "governance" as the keyword for screening, 3911 valid social science foundation project entries from 1991 to 2021 with governance project data records were obtained as the analysis data for this study. Firstly, statistical analysis was conducted on the development characteristics of governance research, including annual evolution changes, differentiation between disciplines and spatial heterogeneity. Subsequently, with the help of Python

and COOC (Co-occurrence) data processing software<sup>1</sup>, the project name information in the database was text cleaned. VOSviewer visualization software was used to analyze hot keywords clustering and dynamic development trends. This paper makes a comprehensive comparison, summary and prospect of the research and development of social science governance in China.

### 3. Overview of Governance Research Supported by NSSF

#### 3.1 Interannual Trend of Project Establishment

The annual number of social science fund projects can directly reflect the speed of academic production, research enthusiasm and attention[1]. Figure 1 shows an exponential increase in the development of governance research, with the annual number of projects rising from single digits in the 1990s to several hundred annually in recent years. The interannual change can be divided into three stages.

##### 3.1.1 The nital stage of germination from 1991 to 2006

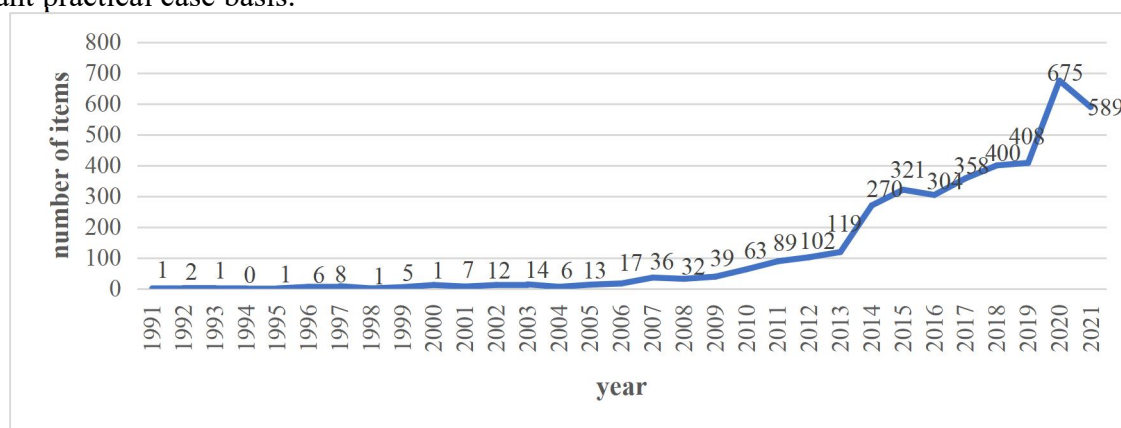
At this stage, the issue of governance has just entered the research horizon of Chinese academic circles, and the number of projects is scattered and the disciplines are scattered. In terms of content, economics and corporate governance dominate the project establishment. After Yu Keping[2] introduced the western concept of "governance" into China in 1999, more disciplines began to explore the connotation and application of governance.

##### 3.1.2 The quasi-localization phase from 2007 to 2013

The average annual number of projects in this phase increased from 36 in 2007 to 119 in 2013. China's governance research ushered in the first turning point of development. The analysis and application of western governance theories are constantly integrated into the Chinese context. Studies have shifted from economics to political science and management. In the fields of government, society and rural governance, important scientific research results have been gradually obtained, and the localization of theory and practice have been further enriched.

##### 3.1.3 The full speed climbing phase from 2014 to 2021

China's governance research has entered the gushing development mode, and the number and level of projects have been greatly improved. The total number of projects has surged to 3,325, accounting for 85% of the total number of projects in the past 30 years of governance research. The number of approved projects reached a peak of 675 in 2020, accounting for 10.39% of all approved projects in that year. The topic of "governance" has become the most popular research direction of NSSF projects, which is inseparable from the top-level design guidelines of the state and the abundant practical case basis.



<sup>1</sup> COOC software was jointly developed by the wechat public platform "Academic Dots" and "Literature Metrology" teams for the production of various types of matrices and network maps.

Fig.1 Distribution of Governance Research in NSSF projects (1991-2021)

### 3.2 Comparison of Project Distribution among Disciplines

The discipline categories of NSSF projects reflect the differences in the distribution of academic productivity in the field of discipline. This paper analyzes the number, proportion and annual increase in each discipline, which is helpful to grasp the discipline performance of governance research. In the past 30 years, the top three major disciplines that have obtained the most projects are political science, management and sociology, with the number of 616, 605 and 483 respectively and accounting for more than 12%. The total number of projects in the top 10 disciplines was 3,164, with a cumulative percentage of 80.9%. In addition, due to the absence of discipline classification, major projects are counted as a single discipline. 143 project proposals and ninth ranked results show that the importance of discipline integration in governance research.

### 3.3 Differences between Regions

The comparison of regional project establishment can further understand the differences in the development of regional academic research on governance. As shown in Table 1, the establishment of projects in governance research areas shows three distribution characteristics. First, there are significant regional differences. The outstanding performance of projects in the eastern and western regions exceeded 1000, but the average number of projects in the western region was only 86, far lower than the average of 126. Secondly, from the perspective of provincial average project, the average quantity of many regional provinces is below the average level. The best is 195 in the eastern region, and the average number of projects in the other three regional provinces is not reached the average level. There is a large gap in project approval among provinces in each region. Finally, the overall performance of Northeast China is weak. Several indicators are relatively inferior compared with other regions which means governance research in this region needs to be strengthened. In general, there is still a long way to go for the regional balanced development of the research and academic capacity building of China's governance studies.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Regional Distribution in Governance Research

region	number of provinces	number of items	item proportion	mean value of items in each province within the region
Eastern region	10	1949	50.0%	195
Central region	6	723	18.6%	121
Western region	12	1035	26.6%	86
Northeast China	3	189	4.9%	63
Total and Mean	31	3896	100%	126

## 4. Hot Topics and Evolutionary Trends in Governance Research

By analyzing the data of the number of projects, discipline distribution, units and institutions of governance research in social science fund projects, we can examine the external evolution characteristics of governance research development from the overall level. To grasp the hot topic trend of governance research, we need to start from the project name. Article title and project name usually contain key information such as research background, theoretical perspective, content and method[3], which is a concise summary of academic research. Therefore, the content analysis of the project name can intuitively show the core theme and development trend of governance research.

### 4.1 Theme Clustering Analysis

COOC software was used to calculate the co-occurrence matrix for high-frequency keywords with word frequency of more than 100, and VOSviewer software was used to draw the keyword cluster map, so as to obtain the focus topics and correlation degree of topics in the establishment of

NSSF projects in governance research. Finally, the 33 high-frequency keywords were divided into five clusters.

Cluster 1: Study on the modernization of national governance system and governance capacity. It includes keywords such as national governance, governance capacity, governance system, the new era, modernization, etc. Some projects use these keywords as a research unit to explore the concept definition, index construction, path construction, and effect evaluation. "Research on the reform of Chinese Government governance Model from the perspective of National Governance Modernization" of management science and "Research on the construction of Contemporary Chinese Ideology from the perspective of National Governance" of Marxist-Leninist Science and Social Sciences are the examples of this cluster.

Cluster 2: Governance of rural and ethnic areas. China's borders and rural areas are vast and overlapping with ethnic issues, Attention has been paid to social governance, rural governance, cultural governance and public participation. The project focuses on maintaining national unity, social stability in border areas and improving people's livelihood in remote areas. "Systematic Theory and Indexation study on the modernization of China's Border governance system" and "Research on rural problems and Governance in the Middle and Western minority Areas from the perspective of Urbanization" are representatives of this category.

Cluster 3: Research on Urban Space and Community Grassroots Governance. The development gap caused by urbanization and unbalanced construction makes the contradiction of urban governance increasingly serious. On one hand, the reconstruction of urban public space and the improvement of people's livelihood services have become the focus of research in recent years. On the other hand, the increase in studies on grassroots governance highlights that the country attaches more and more importance to the reform of grassroots political governance. "Research on spatial mismatch and governance model of Megacities" and "Research on China's experience of epidemic prevention and Control in rural areas and optimization of grassroots governance system" have become hot research topics.

Cluster 4: Research on collaborative and cooperative governance in environmental, ecological, and other fields. The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China made a new plan and comprehensive deployment for promoting the "five-in-one" overall layout in the new era. Economic and industrial optimization, environmental and ecological improvement and other topics have attracted wide attention. Projects such as "Research on Regional Collaborative Governance of Air Pollution in China" show that cooperation and collaborative governance are becoming the core starting point and landing point of governance research.

Cluster 5: Research on Network security and risk governance. Project such as "Disaster Management Research for the Era of Artificial Intelligence" shows that governance research in China will enjoy more transformative power brought by the development of science and technology in the future. Also it is necessary to think about how to deal with emerging governance scenarios and changeable challenges arising from technology.

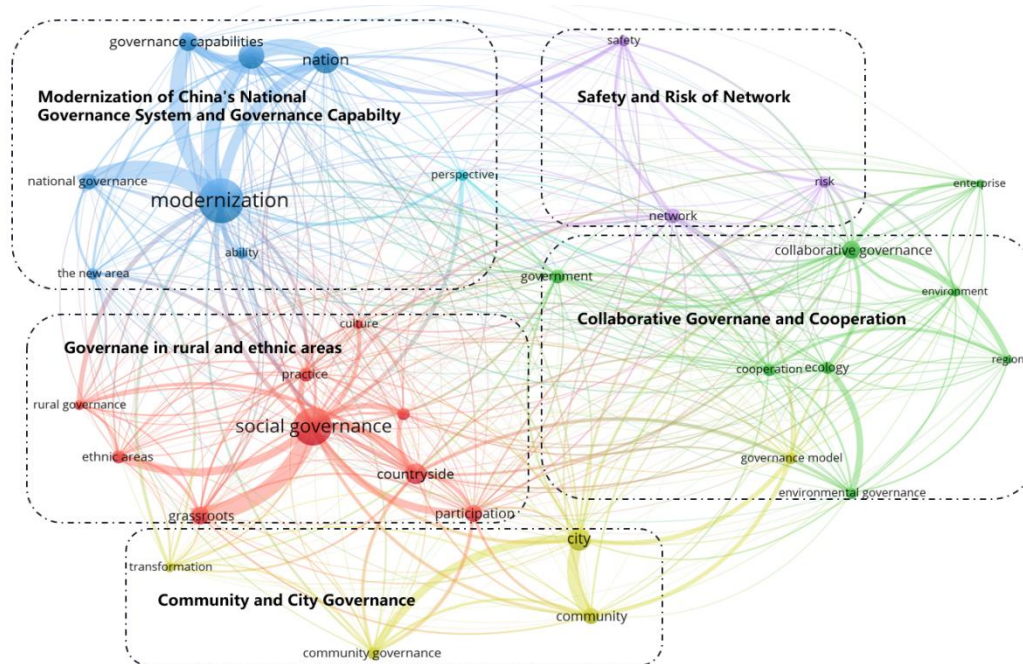


Fig. 2 Theme Clustering Analysis

## 4.2 Evolution of Hot Topics

The frequency of keywords is positively correlated with their popularity in the research field. Keyword frequency is positively correlated with its popularity in the research field. Table 2 shows the phased changes of the top 10 high-frequency keywords. Statistically, there are significant differences in the three stages.

In the period from 1991 to 2006, comprehensive governance, state-owned enterprises, social security issues were studied. This is closely related to the gradual establishment of the socialist market economic system and the reform measures of state-owned enterprises. At this time, the western concept of "governance" has just entered China, and the relevant research is still in its infancy. In the period from 2007 to 2013, governance research in China is becoming scientific and systematic. A number of projects explore the "Chinese model" of governance based on Chinese issues, closely related to the main line of national development and the main contradiction of social transformation. The use of governance research in western learning has been further enriched.

In the period from 2014 to 2021, the emphasis on governance in the top-level design of the country continues to deepen. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee and the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee both listed "governance issues" as a major strategic task for the whole Party. Social governance, national governance and its modernization have become the absolute core of research. The diversification of governance subjects and the complexity of governance issues have made collaborative governance one of the important paths. Topics such as rural governance, issues in ethnic areas, and environmental governance are highly consistent with China's current rural revitalization strategy and new development concepts. The development of governance research is in the rising and refining stage of academic life cycle. It will still have scientific research advantages and maintain a strong momentum of development for a period of time.

Table2. Keywords and Theme Evolution Trends in Governance Research

ranking	1991-2006 keywords	frequency	2007-2013 keywords	frequency	trend	2014-2021 keywords	frequency	trend	1991-2021 keywords	frequency
1	corporation governance	18	governance model	25	↑	social governance	327	↑	social governance	342
2	comprehensive	8	corporation governance	22	↓	national governance	201	↑	national governance	205

	Administration									
3	state-owned enterprise	7	rural governance	22	↑	collaborative governance	178	↑	collaborative governance	182
4	governance model	6	local government	16	↑	governance system	158	↑	governance system	163
5	rural governance	5	Social governance	15	↑	rural governance	112	↓	rural governance	139
6	government governance	4	community governance	15	↑	community governance	95	—	governance model	121
7	civil society organizations	3	government governance	15	↓	governance capability	92	↑	community governance	112
8	public security	2	ethnic areas	15	↑	governance model	90	↓	governance capability	93
9	community governance	2	environmental governance	9	↑	environmental governance	81	—	ethnic areas	92
10	Marxism	2	public governance	8	↑	ethnic areas	75	↓	environmental governance	90

## 5. Summary and Prospect

China's governance research has gone through a development process of "from slow to urgent and few to many". Its academic life is still in a period of continuous rise and refinement development. Governance research in NSSF funds focuses on the subjects of management, political science, and sociology. In terms of spatial differences, the capacity of governance research in the eastern region is significantly higher than that in other regions, and the regional balanced development needs to be strengthened.

With the deepening of the research, the hot topics of governance research are constantly enriched, covering the national governance system and governance capacity at the national level, the governance of rural and ethnic areas at the regional level, the grass-roots governance of communities at the urban level, and the governance of political economy, ecological environment and network environment at the domain level. Guided by the national strategic goals, the governance-related NSSF project is constantly summarizing and optimizing the theoretical framework, practical model and innovative program for governance research in China. These studies have made important academic contributions to promoting the improvement of people's better lives, deep-level social reforms and the modernization of governance. Of course, there is still room for improvement in governance research. In the future, we can continue to make breakthroughs in strengthening academic cooperation between regions, deepening theoretical research on Chinese localization and global governance in order to comprehensively raise the strategic height of China's governance studies, and truly contribute Chinese wisdom to global academic research.

## References

- [1] Zhang Yuchen, Qiu Junping, Zhao Teng. Analysis on the Competitiveness and characteristics of Provincial Humanities and Social Science Research in China in the New Era: Based on the Statistical data of the National Social Science Foundation Projects from 2009 to 2019. Information Theory and Practice, 2021,44(08):68-74.
- [2] Yu Keping. Introduction to Governance and Good Governance. Marxism and Reality, 1999(5):37-41.

- [3] Liao Jiaqi. Research Hotspots and Development Trends of Chinese Information Science in the past five Years: Based on the Project of the National Social Science Fund from 2014 to 2018, Information Science, 2020,38(03):160-166.
- [4] Hu Jintao. Report of Hu Jintao on the 18th National Congress of the CPC, [http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2012-11/17/content\\_2268826.htm](http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2012-11/17/content_2268826.htm).