Analysis of Hotspots and Trends in Social Governance Research in China*

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Abstract—Since the 1990s, Chinese academic circles have gradually carried out theoretical and practical research on social governance, which has become a hot topic of concern to the academic community. In order to understand the development status of social governance research in China, and sort out the hot issues and development context of this research field, the article uses CiteSpace software for document visualization analysis. It mines information on the social governance research results published in the core journals of CNKI and CSSCI from 1993 to 2019. It is found that there are four main research trends in social governance literature: the research of social governance practice follows the social transformation, the action system of social governance tends to be diversified, the research on the evaluation of social governance level has increased, and the research on the choice of social governance path is more abundant.

Keywords: social governance, national governance, visualization research, research hotspots

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the reform and opening up started 40 years ago, China's economy has developed rapidly and the people's living standards have improved. As the main contradictions in society have been transformed into contradictions between the people's growing need for better life and the development of uneven and inadequate development, the demands of the people and the state for social governance are growing. Social management in a broad sense is actually social governance. Social management in China is social governance in addition to economic governance and state governance. [1] It includes social self-management, self-management and collaborative management, while narrow sense social management refers specifically to the government's management of society. [2] Social governance should promote social management network, which contains the interconnection between government regulation mechanism and social coordination mechanism establishment, the complement of government administrative function and social autonomy, and the interaction between government management power and social adjustment force, to form a system for effective coverage and overall governance of the whole society. [3] At the same time, social governance should also "regard the achievement and safeguard of the masses' rights as the core, play the role of multiple governance subjects, and address social issues in state governance, improve society Welfare, guarantee to improve people's livelihood, resolve social contradictions, promote social equity, and promote the process of orderly and harmonious development of society." Although scholars have a diverse definition of the concept of social management, they all agree that social management should be understood from the perspective of governance. From social management to social governance, it not only shows that there is a difference between the relationship between the government and the society, the role of the government, the governance concepts, means, methods and objectives, but also enables us to think about social governance issues from a broader perspective.

Chinese scholars have carried out various discussions on the strengthening and innovation of social governance, and have achieved fruitful results. The relevant research content has been continuously accumulated, and research has been gradually improved. However, with the transformation of major social contradictions and the strategic requirements of national governance modernization in the new era, social governance research has a broader expansion space, and it is necessary to carry out innovative evolutionary dynamic tracking and research hot content exploration. Based on this, this paper takes the literature of Chinese social governance from 1993 to 2019 as a sample, uses CiteSpace software to
conduct visual analysis, clarify the trend of time series, explore the hot topics of research, and look forward to the future research direction, and provide ideas for deepening the theoretical research and the social governance practice in the new era.

II. RESEARCH TOOLS AND DATA SOURCES

Since the 1990s, Chinese academic circles have gradually carried out theoretical and practical research on social governance. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee clearly pointed out that "innovating social governance systems, improving social governance methods, building social conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, and improving public security systems" means that "social governance" has officially become an important content of national governance system. This paper takes the literature of Chinese social governance from 1993 to 2019 as a sample and uses CiteSpace software for visual analysis. The Chinese Academic Journals Network Publishing Library (CNKI) is the source of the literature data. The search conditions are: the theme setting "social governance"; the journal source setting "core journal" and "CSSCI", the search time is September 1, 2019, a total of Obtained 4,879 articles related. At the same time, in order to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the research, 142 articles were excluded, and 4,737 valid journal articles were finally selected. The earliest document on "social governance" was Zheng Jiewen's Concept of Confucius' Social Governance published in 1993. From 2000 to 2019, "Social governance" gradually became a research hotspot, especially since the 18th National Congress (in 2013); the study of social governance has shown a surge. ("Fig. 1")

![Fig. 1. Change in the number of social governance literature.](image)

III. RESEARCH HOTSPOTS

A. Top 10 literature cited

The top-ranked literature in the cited literature reflects wide acceptance and representative views. ("Table I") Jiang Xiaoping analyzes the internal logic of social governance system innovation and national governance system, clarifies the functional orientation of social governance system innovation in the modernization of state governance, and put forwards implementation strategy to promote social governance system and the modernization of governance capabilities from eight aspects which include the improvement of the social policy system, the construction of civil rights security system, optimization of basic public service system, strengthening of social organization cultivation system, establishment of social behavior norm system, innovation of community governance system, consolidation of public security system, improvement of social risk early warning and response mechanism. [4] Wang Puzhen analyzed the basic meanings of state governance, government governance and social governance, as well as their interrelationships of inclusive relationships, intersectional relationships, and distinctive connections, based on the theory of Chinese Communist Party governance and China's national conditions. [5] Zhang Kangzhi in the article argues that in the process of establishing a new social system, social governance innovation is the focus and breakthrough, and needs to adapt to the realistic requirements of the diversification of social governance subjects, and transforms the government Monopoly social management into cooperation with other social governance forces. [6] He also proposed from the article Views on Participation in Governance, Social Autonomy and Cooperative Governance that participation in governance emerged in the ideal pursuit of democratic administration. Social autonomy was demonstrated in the growth of non-governmental organizations and other social self-governing forces. And cooperative governance is the inevitable result of the growth of social self-governing forces, and it is also a sublation of the first two social governance models. What's more, Cooperative governance is a social governance model that is becoming mainstream. [7] Zhang also states that in recent years, in the pursuit of social governance reform, participation in governance is a strongly recommended reform direction. In the sense of social governance, it presents a situation where the multiple governance entities coexist and proposes to construct a cooperative governance model. [8] Wu Yuanyuan believes that how to effectively shock food safety violations is the key to cracking the food safety supervision dilemma. The food safety credit file should be the center to establish a legal system that integrates information production, grading, disclosure, propagation, and feedback, ensuring that the illegal information of enterprises quickly enters the public's cognitive structure in order to lay the foundation for consumers to promptly initiate reputational punishment. At the same time, we should take the opportunity of the reputation mechanism as a chance to actively explore the social governance of food safety, respond to the cost logic contained in the historical
development of law enforcement, and achieve law enforcement optimization. [9] Xu Yaotong and Liu Qi believe that China's national governance must have Chinese characteristics, that is, the government must play a leading role in national governance, and the focus of governance is to innovate social governance systems. [10] Fan Ruguo proposed to strengthen and innovate social governance. It is necessary to analyze the complex network structure and characteristics of the social system, establish a collaborative innovation mechanism and institutional arrangements for social governance, and carry out synergy social governance. [11] In general, among the top ten representative literatures, keywords such as cooperation, network, and innovation are the contents advocated by scholars. The analysis of specific representative viewpoints requires further analysis of keywords with higher frequency.

### TABLE I. Top 10 Literature Cited on Social Governance

| Title                                                                 | Author          | Citation Frequency |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Social Governance System Innovation in the Process of National Governance Modernization | Jiang Xiaoping | 646                |
| The Inherent Meaning and Interrelationship of State Governance, Government Administration and Social Governance | Wang Puq | 463                |
| The Interaction between Listed Company Accounting Information Disclosures and Corporate Governance Structure: A Framework Analysis | Qiao Xudong | 418                |
| Study on Social Governance under the Condition of Diversification | Zhang Kangzhi | 410                |
| Information Foundation, Reputation Mechanism and Law Enforcement Optimization: A New Vision of Food Safety Governance | Wu Yaoyuan | 359                |
| Analysis of Contemporary Chinese National Governance System | Xu Yaotong, Liu Qi | 345             |
| Participatory Governance, Social Autonomy and Cooperative Governance | Zhang Kangzhi | 340                |
| Macro Thinking on China's Judicial Reform | Gu Peidong | 340                |
| Cooperative governance is the end result of social governance change | Zhang Kangzhi | 318                |
| Synergetic Innovation in Social Governance in a Complex Network Structural Paradigm | Fan Ruguo | 302                |

### B. Top 30 keywords

Keyword analysis can analyze hot topics in the field of social governance. ("Table II") "Social governance" is the most frequent keyword in the field because it is widely mentioned. The vitality of "social organization" is the key to social governance and plays a pivotal role. The participation of social organizations in the practice of grassroots social governance and social services by the government, and promoted the transformation of government social functions and the construction of a new social system whose core is "political and social division of labor and cooperation". [12] In order to exert the power of social organization, it is necessary to activate the vitality of social organizations, release the potential of social organizations, and foster the growth of social organizations into structural forces in the social governance structure under the policy logic of strengthening social construction and promoting social governance. The key is to adjust the relationship between the government and social organizations, clarifies their respective activities and functional boundaries, and builds a cooperative relationship structure through the necessary institutional arrangements and rules system. [13] Because the social governance at the grassroots level is close to the public life, scholars focus more on the subject matter. "Community governance" and "grassroots social governance" have become keywords with high keyword frequency. China's grassroots social governance has problems such as diversified interests, prominent contradictions, and difficulties in adapting the governance system and methods to the requirements of the new situation. The reasons for this are largely because of the lack of participation of residents and the fact that social co-governance has not yet fully formed. It is necessary to further improve governance content and technical support. We will pay more attention to public opinion orientation and legal system construction, and build a new model of grassroots social governance with positive interaction between government, society and citizens, and improve grassroots social governance capacity and governance. [14] In strengthening the construction of the community governance system, the "three social linkages" is an effective practice exploration of the goal of "achieving the benign interaction between government governance and social regulation and resident autonomy". The community training mechanism actively guides community residents to participate in community affairs and gathering the social organization forces serve the community in a cooperative way, promote the professionalization of social work, and develop in a localized way, laying a solid foundation for the people to create a social governance model based on collaboration, participation and common interests [15] "Innovation" and "rule of law" and "legalization" are the principles that China adheres to in promoting social governance. The social governance model, institutional innovation together with the rule of law guarantee, and the realization of the rule of law run through the social governance process. At present, China's social contradictions are still relatively sharp. We must actively construct an orderly political participation mechanism for citizens to better resolve social contradictions. It is necessary to start from constructing a scientific and rational democratic decision-making mechanism, a public opinion integration mechanism, a dispute resolution mechanism, and an emergency response mechanism, the five aspects of the government and people communication mechanism. [16] The rule of law is the proper meaning of social governance. Only by taking the cultivation of the social rule of law culture as a direction, the establishment of a sound and unified social governance legal system as a breakthrough, the rule of law and the establishment of the rule of law as the premise, the comprehensive promotion of substantive rule of law, procedural rule of law, and the rule of law of the people's livelihood as the implementation point, the door to good governance of social governance can be opened with
the key to the rule of law. [17] With the development of society, the use of "big data" to promote social governance innovation has become the main theme, how to combine the two gets the widespread attention of scholars. Along with the complexity of the governance environment in the era of big data, the diversification of governance claims and the networking of governance scenarios, the construction of multi-agent collaboration, information equilibrium, and data-driven intelligent social governance system based on big data has become the development trend of social governance innovation. [18] To meet the people's growing needs for a better life is our starting point, the law is the bottom line, safety is the criterion, and social good governance is the ultimate goal of social governance. We grasp the opportunities of social governance innovation, rationally avoid governance risks, and improve the effect of social governance. [19] The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposes that China has entered the "new era", and later on the literature on the background of social governance has suddenly increased.

The key tasks of social governance in the new era are more contemporary. It is manifested in the overall importance of promoting risk management and emergency response, and the status of public safety. Coordinating the implementation of real social governance and network social governance, the construction of social psychological service system is valued, urban and rural grassroots become the focus of social governance. [20] Relatively weak "national area" is regarded as an important practice field of social governance. under the background that traditional social governance in ethnic minority areas can no longer meet the new requirements of economic and social development, the government-society-citizen three-level effective governance pattern, the concept-mode-mechanism three-dimensional flow governance pattern, the cognitive-media-behavior triple grid governance pattern, and the establishment of a solid system of social governance patterns in ethnic minority areas have become the logical starting point for strengthening the forward-looking and democratic foundations of social governance. [21]

| Year | Key Words                  | Citation Frequency | Year     | Key Words                  | Citation Frequency |
|------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 2002 | Social Governance          | 1746               | 2011     | Rural Governance           | 54                 |
| 2013 | Social Organization        | 171                | 2012     | Deliberative Democracy     | 53                 |
| 2005 | Social Governance Innovation| 139                | 2014     | Modernization              | 51                 |
| 2014 | Community Governance       | 124                | 2014     | Governance Capability      | 51                 |
| 2012 | Grassroots Social Governance| 123                | 2008     | Collaborative Governance   | 50                 |
| 2006 | Governance                 | 113                | 2018     | New Era                    | 49                 |
| 2014 | State Governance           | 104                | 2014     | Governance System          | 49                 |
| 2012 | Innovation                 | 99                 | 2008     | Good Governance            | 47                 |
| 2003 | Rule of Law                | 94                 | 2005     | Public Service             | 45                 |
| 2009 | Cooperative Governance     | 86                 | 2014     | Modernization of State Governance | 44               |
| 2015 | Grassroots Social Governance| 84                 | 2014     | Ethnic Area                | 44                 |
| 2011 | Social Management          | 73                 | 2014     | State Governance System    | 44                 |
| 2015 | Big Data                   | 60                 | 2013     | Social Construction        | 43                 |
| 2014 | Social Work                | 56                 | 2005     | Service-oriented Government| 43                 |
| 2003 | Government                 | 54                 | 2012     | Legalization               | 42                 |

C. Number of authors’ literature published in the top 10

By the number of documents published, the top ten can focus on the authoritative authors in the field of social governance, and provide reference for future research directions and research content. Zhang Kangzhi is the author with the most published literature in the field, and published 143 articles, among which "Social Governance under the Conditions of Pluralistic Subjects "and" Cooperative Governance is the Home of Social Governance Reform, have had a wide impact. Zhang Qianyou published 23 articles, including "The Decline of Democracy and the Spread of Publicity — The Logic of Social Governance Change Going to Cooperative Governance" published in cooperation with Zhang Kangzhi which is the article with the highest frequency of citation. Xiang Yuqiong, Zhou Qingzhi, Gong Webin and others have published 10 or more papers and have become the backbone of promoting high-quality development research. Xiang YuQiong studied social governance from the aspects of empirical rationality,
precision and situationality. Zhou Qingzhi focused on grassroots social governance. Gong Weibin paid attention to the trend of social governance and related processes and prospects. Xu Xuanguo, Xu Hanming and others published six or more articles and played an important role in promoting social governance research. ("Table III")

| Author          | Frequency | Author       | Frequency |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| Zhang Kangzhi   | 143       | Li Qiang     | 10        |
| Zhang Qianyou   | 23        | Zhou Jun     | 10        |
| Xiang Yuqiong   | 17        | Xu Xuanguo   | 10        |
| Zhou Qingzhi    | 14        | Xu Hanming   | 9         |
| Gong Weibing    | 13        | Lu Bin       | 8         |
| Sun Tao         | 13        | Xiong Guangqing | 7        |
| Yu Jianxin      | 12        | Shi Yungui   | 7         |
| Chen Qian       | 12        | Wang Ming    | 7         |
| Jin Taijun      | 11        | Ma Quanzhong | 7         |
| Zheng Jiaxiao   | 11        | Chen Peng    | 6         |

### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Study after major trends in existing research

The study of social governance can be said to be abundance. Combined with the previous literature review and knowledge map analysis, the Chinese research on social governance has the following four development trends:

1) **Research on social governance practices follows social transformation:** Relevant research on social governance practice, whether it is social governance innovation, social governance ability, social governance model, or social governance pattern, etc., closely follows social transformation and change, mainly with the transformation of China's service-oriented government and refined government. The modernization of the state's governance, the advancement of the rule of law, and the social transformation of the new era of "the establishment of a social governance model based on collaboration, participation and common interests" social governance pattern ("Fig. 2"). At the same time, the existing research is mainly aimed at the main structure, power and responsibility system, and methods of social governance, and the focus of social governance research transforms from central governance to grassroots governance, especially rural governance and social governance. It is worth mentioning that the state's major policies will directly or indirectly affect the relevant research in the academic world, and the academic research is in sync with the national policy. For example, "social management" is changed to "social governance". Academic research is also closely related to system governance, legal governance, source governance, comprehensive policy, and adherence to system governance. It is a transition from government single governance to social common governance; from governance by law to the guarantee of the rule of law. Adhering to comprehensive governance is the transition of a variety of means to comprehensively use. It is necessary to emphasize the fundamental resolution of contradictions, in order to adhere to the source of governance. After that, multi-governance and rule of law governance are the research directions and achievements that have attracted much attention in the academic community.

2) **The action system of social governance tends to be diversified:** The definition of social governance, especially the diversification of social governance subjects, more and more scholars began to analyze the subject's actions of social governance in China and establish a governance system where there is a multi-subjects equal participation, consultation and cooperation, from the perspectives of multi-center governance, cooperative governance, collaborative governance and overall governance, which is widely concerned by the academic community. But the discussion on how to achieve the systematicness and normalization of cooperative and coordinated governance is not enough. How to follow the matching of incentives and constraints, and how to promote the study of social governance by the principle of equal rights and responsibilities are difficult problems, and there is also a lack of practical analysis that can put theory into action.

3) **Research on the evaluation of social governance level has increased:** Chinese scholars have an increasing trend in the evaluation of social governance level. But in general, it is mainly a theoretical discussion on the construction of social governance level evaluation index system, while there is a serious lack of analysis on the level of social governance at the empirical level. The existing empirical research has a single perspective. The research area is limited to the national level and a few region cases,
and there is no empirical research on the evaluation of social governance level in the frontier ethnic areas. China has a large area of frontier ethnic areas, and social governance on frontier ethnic areas is an important part of the national governance system, so we should innovate the social governance in frontier ethnic areas. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's frontier ethnic areas have undergone earth-shaking changes, and the economy and society have continued to advance. However, due to various reasons, there are still some difficulties in social governance, and it is necessary to strengthen and innovate the social governance of the frontier ethnic areas. [22]

4) Research on the path of social governance is more abundant: Many Chinese scholars mainly have two mainstream directions. One is to explore the socialization, legalization, intelligentize and professionalization of social governance from different perspectives, starting from the five-in-one social governance system of "party committee leadership, government responsibility, social coordination, public participation, and rule of law protection". The other is to proceed from the modernization of social governance and promote the modernization of social governance from the two dimensions of social governance system and social governance capacity. In addition, it is trying to propose a concrete path to promote social governance from the technical means such as big data and artificial intelligence. That is to say, the existing research lacks a systematic, comprehensive and holistic research framework from the macroscopic perspective, from theoretical innovation, practical innovation, institutional innovation, cultural innovation and other aspects of supporting innovation.

B. Space for future research

1) The perspective of social governance research needs to be increased: The research perspective of social governance level is relatively simple, and the research area is limited. At present, it is only based on national inter-provincial research, and research based on grassroots governance, community governance, and ethnic minority governance is rare, and case studies are scarce. In addition, there are many similar research methods and lack of more dimensional, comprehensive and systematic research methods. Based on this, social governance research should go deeper into the grassroots and pay attention to the areas that need to promote social governance. Besides, social governance research should also introduce quantitative analysis, whose proportion should be increased, and use quantitative and qualitative analysis to promote research to help objectively analyze governance and demonstrate the governance path under the combination of practice and theory.

2) Research on social governance evaluation needs to be strengthened: With the development of economy and society, China's social contradictions have changed, and the logic of action, main goals, means and techniques of social governance are changing. The public has more demands for social governance, but there is still a lack of economic, social, cultural, and technological research on the evaluation index system of social governance level that adapts to the change. At the same time, the evaluation system of social governance level constructed by scholars currently has the characteristics of "polarization", some are large and comprehensive, and it is difficult to operate at the actual level. Some are small and simple, and have not covered the main content and many links of social governance. Social governance evaluation mostly focuses on level evaluation, and the analysis of performance and influencing factors of social governance is relatively lacking.

3) The role of social organizations in social governance needs to be increased: Social organization and social governance are highly compatible. The characteristics of social organization's service-oriented governance reflect the requirements of a social governance model based on collaboration, participation and common interests. Social organizations should make a contribution to improving the social governance model based on collaboration, participation and common interests by constructing public opinion environment, and promoting rational participation and development of their own capabilities. Meanwhile the refined services of social organizations are also required. In the future, it is necessary to establish a "guided" social organization management system from the establishment of service-oriented government, and improve the social organization operation mechanism to achieve the de-administration of social organizations.

4) Research on social governance in ethnic areas needs to be increased: At present, researches are mostly based on the theoretical discussion of social governance innovation or case-based case studies of frontier ethnic areas. There lacks a systematic and comprehensive normative research, and sporadic theoretical discussion and practical summary can not form a system content framework and research scope. Research especially on the evaluation of the level of social governance in the frontier ethnic areas is almost blank. As an important field to promote modernization of governance, how to better promote social governance is a key research topic in the future. Increasing the evaluation of social governance level can help analyze the disadvantages of social governance in the frontier ethnic areas and come up with specific optimization strategies.

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