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Hot Spots and Trends in Chinese Corporate Ethics Research over the Past 100 Years
—CiteSpace Based Visual Analysis

Jie Wang*, Qing Zhao

School of Economics Management and Law, University of South China, Hengyang, China
Email: *m15135153855@163.com

Abstract

Background: Enterprise morality is the synthesis of moral principles, moral norms and moral activities in a specific socio-economic organization, relying on social public opinion, traditional habits and inner beliefs, and evaluating good and evil as the standard; it is the lifeline of the development of the modern enterprise, so strengthening the education of enterprise morality is a powerful measure to improve the image and credibility of the enterprise, and then to enhance the comprehensive competitiveness of the enterprise, and is a source of strength for the sustainable development of the enterprise. Strengthening corporate ethics education is a powerful measure to improve the image and reputation of enterprises, and then enhance the comprehensive competitiveness of enterprises, which is a source of strength for sustainable development of enterprises (Huang, 2016). **Purpose:** This paper systematically grasps the hot trends of the research on corporate ethics in Chinese academia, forms the main framework of corporate ethics research, and provides important references for the subsequent research work. **Methods:** Using the corresponding analysis function of the bibliometric visualization tool CiteSpace, this paper presents an overview of the research on corporate ethics in the domestic academic circles, clarifies the research network and hotspots formed by the research results of different scholars, and puts forward the direction for the in-depth development of the research on corporate ethics. **Conclusion:** Over the past hundred years, the theme of research on corporate ethics has been mainly at the theoretical and practical levels, which is in line with the background of the times and advances with the times. In the future, the research on corporate ethics in China must be more cutting-edge and systematic. The research methodology needs to strengthen the theoretical and in-depth research, so as to promote the theoretical innovation by scientific research method.

1. Introduction

Over the past hundred years, with the continuous development of reform and opening up, China's economy has been developing steadily and people's living standards have been improving. China's corporate ethics have also changed, and more researchers and scholars have different concepts and research directions on corporate ethics. Using the corresponding analysis function of CiteSpace, a bibliometric visualization tool, we present an overview of the research on "corporate ethics" in the domestic academic community, clarify the research network and research hotspots formed by the research results of different scholars, and grasp the hot trends of the research on corporate ethics in the academic community, in order to provide important references for the subsequent research work. Relevant studies on corporate ethics include "An empirical study on the impact mechanism of corporate ethics on employee satisfaction—an analysis of the mediating effect of corporate social responsibility based on employee perception" by Liu Gang and Li Feng in Economic Theory and Economic Management, and "An empirical study on the impact mechanism of corporate ethics on employee satisfaction—an analysis of the mediating effect of corporate social responsibility based on employee perception" by Zheng Qinqin. "Research on Corporate Moral Slippage Behavior under the Dynamic Perspective" and "Analysis of the Current Situation of Contemporary Chinese Corporate Ethics and Its Development Strategy" by Wang Xiaoxi of Social Science Front; meanwhile, there are also some outstanding scholars in the related fields, such as Wei Xinqiang, Zhou Zucheng, Qi Shanhong, Fan Liqun and Yang Fugui, who laid the theoretical foundation for the subsequent research on corporate ethics and provided important references for the research and development of corporate ethics. However, the research is mainly qualitative, this paper uses CiteSpace software tools and bibliometric methods to carry out scientific and quantitative research, organizes the relevant academic achievements over the past 100 years, and draws the knowledge map of corporate ethics research, presenting its deduction history and research dimensions.

2. Data Sources and Research Methodology

2.1. Data Samples and Pre-Processing

Based on the rigor of China Knowledge Network (CNKI) in reviewing articles and its own authority in the academic world, this study utilized the general library of China Knowledge Network (CNKI) to conduct a literature search with a limited timeframe from June 1923 to June 2023. The search was further conducted through the specialized search input "(TI = corporate ethics)", and a total

of 289 documents were retrieved. It was also exported in Reworks format according to the software format requirements.

2.2. Research Tools and Research Process

This study focuses on graph visualization and analysis of exported literature information in Reworks format using the knowledge graph analysis software CiteSpace 6.1.R3.CiteSpace is a modeling software for bibliometrics. It supports many types of bibliometric studies, including institutional co-citation, author collaboration network analysis, and visualization of theme and domain co-occurrence, using scientific mapping procedures in order to help visualize and analyze the structure, dynamic patterns, and trends in the field of corporate ethics for research, so that the researchers can intuitively identify the evolution path of the discipline's frontiers and the classic foundational literature for scholars of subsequent research on the brand experience The bibliometric methodology used in this paper is a bibliometric approach.

The bibliometric method used in this paper is a kind of educational research method that describes, evaluates and predicts the current situation and development trend of science and technology with the help of the number of various characteristics of the literature, and adopts mathematical and statistical methods to analyze quantitatively, so as to correctly explore the problem to be studied. The specific steps of the study are: first, analyze the time distribution and journal distribution of the papers in the field of corporate ethics by using the data statistics function of CiteSpace software, and draw the network mapping of authors and institutional cooperation in the corporate ethics research literature with the help of its network analysis function, so as to grasp the core strength of this research field. Secondly, CiteSpace's keyword co-occurrence and cluster analysis functions are utilized to grasp the current hot topics of corporate ethics. Finally, based on CiteSpace's mutant word analysis and the systematic grasp of the research profile of corporate ethics, an outlook on the future development of corporate ethics research is made.

3. Bibliometric Analysis of Business Ethics Research

3.1. Annual Analysis of the Literature

The annual temporal distribution of the amount of literature in a particular field of study provides a more intuitive picture of the current state of the field of study and further highlights overall trends. The 289 business ethics research literatures published from 1923 to 2023 are counted by year, as shown in Figure 1.

From Figure 1, we can see that the literature on business ethics before 2004 was very little and almost zero, and since 2004 the year began to appear and reached a small peak, the number of journals reached 12. 2004 to 2006 again showed a downward trend, and reached its lowest point in 2006. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of research papers on corporate ethics increased in a wave-like manner, with the number of papers published reaching a historical

peak in 2011, and then briefly "warmed up" in 2013, and then declined slowly and steadily from 2014 to the present. From **Figure 1**, we can see that the overall distribution is positive, and the 10-year period from 2004 to 2013 is the concentration point of the positive distribution, the research on corporate ethics fluctuates and reaches the highest point during this period, and then returns to a calm state after 2013. 2011, a number of major safety accidents attracted widespread social attention, and the number of articles published by academics is also increasing. Because of this, academics have also been focusing on corporate ethics.

3.2. Number of Publications in Core Journals

The analysis of the source and number of journals of literature can provide reference for future researchers in this field, and it is of great significance for identifying the hot spots in this research field. In this regard, this paper organizes the information of journals and finds that 71 of the 289 documents are from core journals, accounting for about 24.57% of the total, and 30 documents are from CSSCI, accounting for about 10.40% of the total. From **Figure 2**, we can clearly see that, among them, Modernization of Shopping Malls (a general publication)
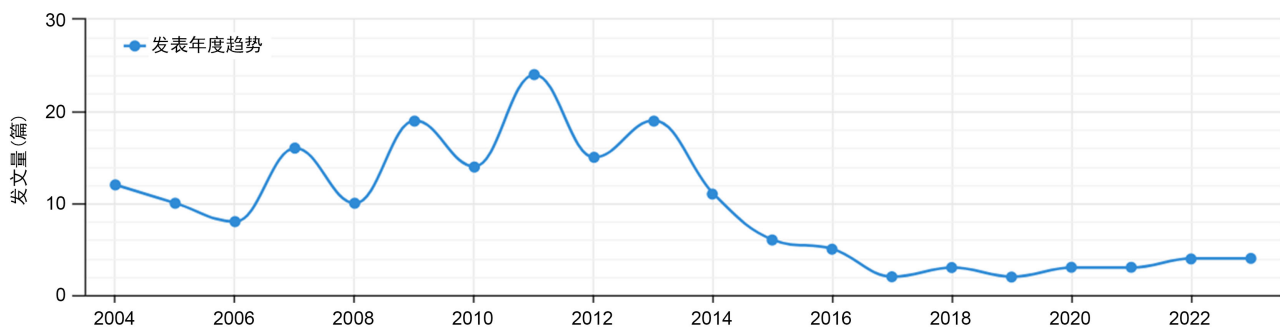

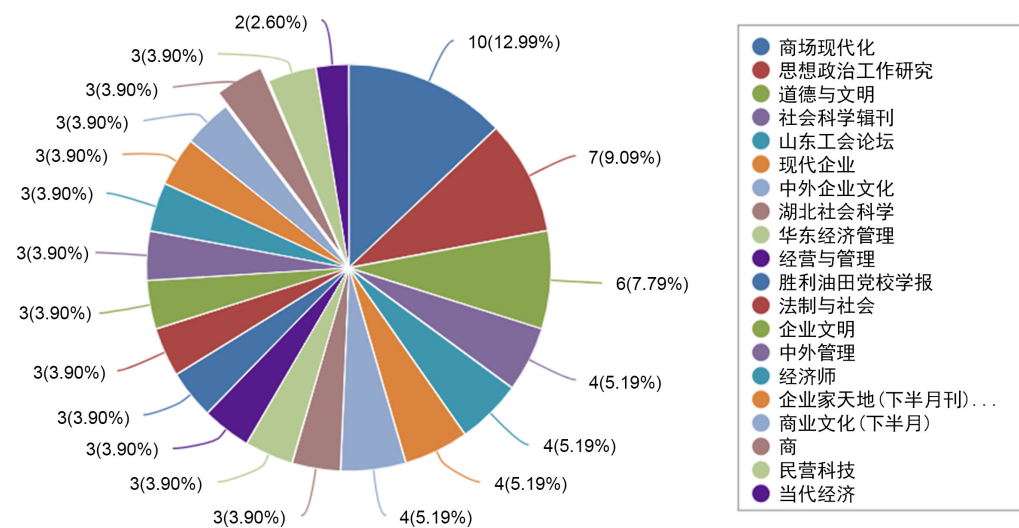**Figure 1.** Annual trends in the research literature.

Figure 2. Distribution of sources of literature journals.

is the main publishing platform for corporate ethics research, with 10 pieces of literature, accounting for about 12.99% of the total. The top seven are Research on Ideological and Political Work (9.09%), Morality and Civilization (7.79%/C journal), Social Science Series (5.19%/C journal), Shandong Trade Union Forum (5.19%), Modern Enterprise (5.19%), and Chinese and Foreign Enterprise Culture (5.19%), which are excellent journals that play an important role.

3.3. Analysis of Research Cooperation

The collaboration network analysis function of CiteSapce software was utilized to analyze the status of scientific collaboration in corporate ethics research. The data processed in Reworks format according to the requirements of the CiteSpace software system were imported into the software, and the corresponding parameters were set, with the time span set to 1923-2023, the time slicing unit to 1, and the node type to "Author" and "Institution", so as to map the author collaboration network of corporate ethics research (**Figure 1**), and "Institution", so as to draw the author cooperation network mapping of corporate ethics research (**Figure 3**) and institutional cooperation network mapping (**Figure 4**), in which the nodes in the mapping indicate the authors or institutions, the size of the nodes indicates the number of publications, and the thickness of the line indicates the degree of cooperation between the authors or institutions, degree of cooperation between institutions.

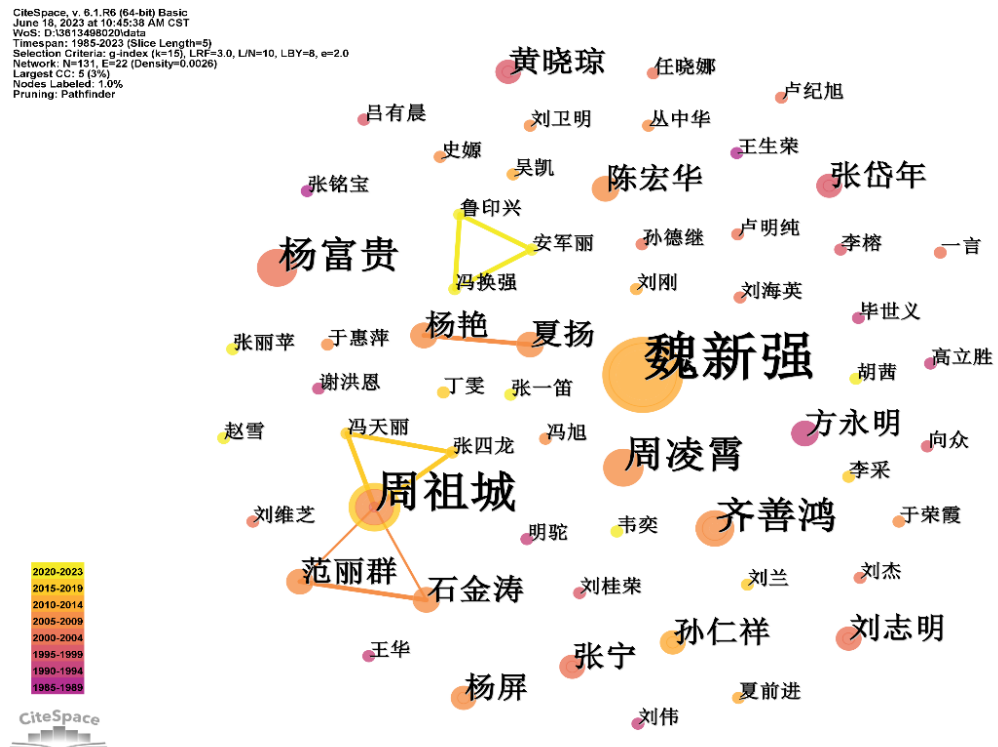This can be seen through **Figure 3** & **Figure 4**:

Figure 3. Mapping of collaborative networks of business ethics research authors.
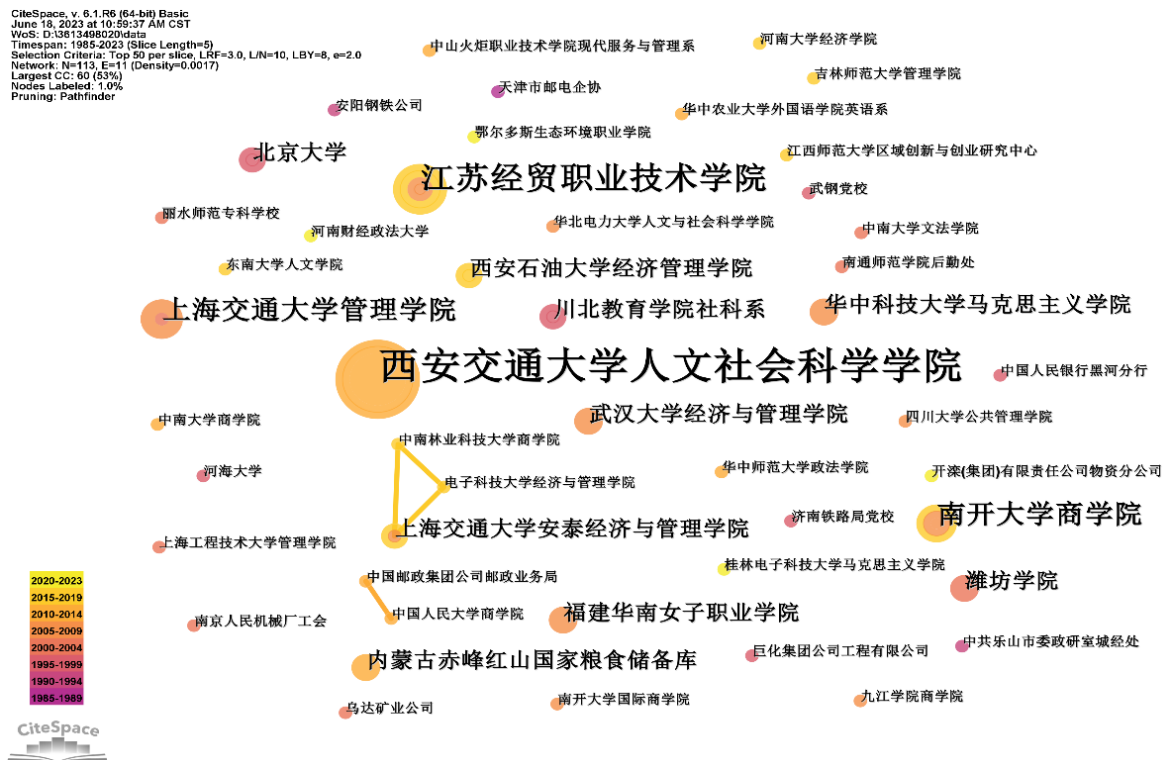
Figure 4. Mapping of collaborative networks of corporate ethics research organizations.

3.3.1. Core Authors

The core authors are the navigators of the field of study, and the field of study is worth focusing on. This paper statistically analyzes the authors of 412 retrieved documents, among which 13 authors have published more than 3 articles (see Table 1), and none of the scholars ranked in the top three have published more than 10 papers, indicating that there is no core author in the field of corporate ethics research in the real sense at present, and most of the authors are teachers in colleges and universities, for example, excellent scholars such as Wei Xinqiang and Zhou Zucheng, who are working in Xi'an Jiaotong University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, etc. At present, there is almost no connection between them, and only a few scholars have direct cooperation with each other.

3.3.2. Analysis of Research Institutions and Cooperation

Statistical analysis of the author units of 289 pieces of literature found that there are 8 institutions with more than 3 pieces of business ethics research published (see Table 2), among which the number of literature on business ethics research of Xi'an Jiaotong University, Wuhan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University accounts for a larger number of pieces of literature, which indicates that their three institutions have a certain status in this research field. Moreover, we can see that the institutions in the field of corporate ethics research are mainly concentrated in key universities in China, and the more prominent ones are the business and economic and management specialized institutions of Chinese high-level universities in economically developed regions.

Table 1. Authors with 2 or more publications, 1923-2023.

Serial number	author	Number of communications	Serial number	author	Number of communications
1	Wei Xinqiang	6	8	Yang Ping	2
2	Zhou Zucheng	4	9	Zhou Lingxiao	2
3	Qi Shanhong	3	10	Xia Yang	2
4	Fan Liqun	3	11	Chen Honghua	2
5	Yang Fugui	3	12	Huang Xiaoqiong	2
6	Shi Jintao	2	13	Yang Yan	2
7	Sun Renxiang	2			

Table 2. Institutions with 4 or more publications, 1923-2023.

Serial number	Organization	Number
1	College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Jiaotong University	7
2	Wuhan University School of Economics and Management	5
3	Antai College of Economics and Management, Shanghai Jiao Tong University	5
4	Jiangsu College of Economics and Trade	4
5	Nankai University Business School	4
6	Weifang College	3
7	Beijing University	3
8	College of Arts and Law, Central South University	3

The analysis of the cooperation mapping of business ethics research institutions from 1923 to 2023 (see Figure 4) shows that, except for the School of Economics and Management of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the University of Electronic Science and Technology, and the Central South University of Forestry Science and Technology, which have one point of node connectivity, the dispersed distribution of most of the research institutions also indicates that business ethics research institutions are mainly independent researchers, and that there is a lack of cooperation and communication between research institutions, which is also the direction of future business ethics research efforts.

4. A Hot Research Topic

4.1. Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

Keywords are the essence and core of a piece of literature, a highly condensed and summarized version of the article's subject matter, and an important indicator of bibliometric research (Han, 2017). If a keyword is used many times, it indicates that the subject content becomes the hot topic of its research theme. The high-frequency keywords in the statistical literature help us to grasp the hot topics of research on corporate ethics. In CiteSpace, the analysis item is set as Keyword, and the time is set as 1923-2023 for keyword co-occurrence mapping analysis (Figure 5).
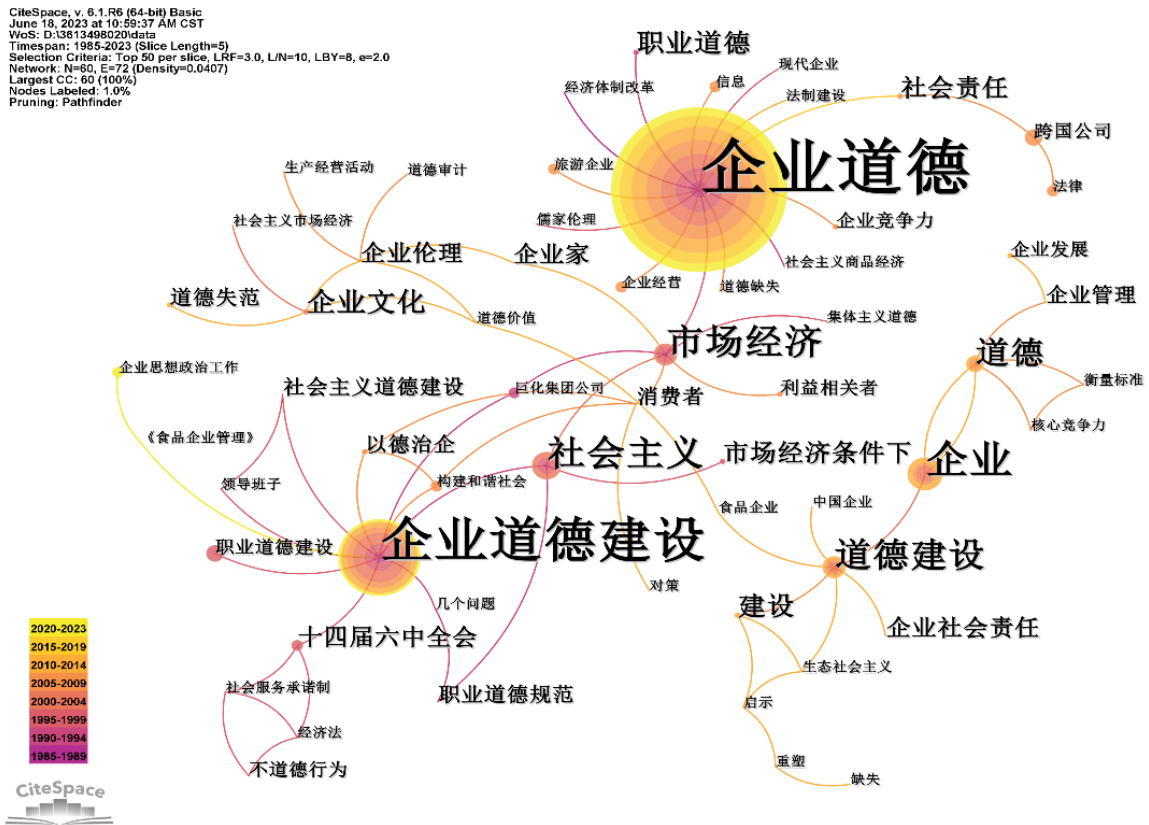
Figure 5. Co-occurrence mapping of keywords in business ethics research.

As shown in **Figure 5**, high-frequency words with mediator centrality greater than 0.1, play a larger role in contact and transit in the relationship network. And the higher the frequency of occurrence, the larger the node, is the hotspot of corporate ethics research. From **Figure 5**, we can see that the keywords with larger nodes are corporate ethics, corporate moral construction, socialism, market economy, enterprise, moral construction, corporate culture, professional moral construction, socialist moral construction, professional moral construction, corporate social responsibility, stakeholders, corporate ethics, consumers, moral misconduct, socialist moral construction, etc., which are related to each other, and together form a complex and diversified network mapping.

4.2. Keyword Cluster Analysis

By comparing the co-occurrence analysis of its keywords, cluster analysis can be based on the characteristics and patterns of data in the literature, such as the multivariate statistics of people, things and other influencing factors, and the keywords that are closely related are gathered together to form a category. It can usually be used to systematically summarize research themes, and can also reveal the path of theme evolution in a certain research field. In this regard, on the basis of keyword co-occurrence analysis, LLR algorithm was used to generate the corporate ethics keyword clustering map 1.0 (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Corporate ethics keyword clustering mapping 1.0.

In clustering mapping, the scientific level of clustering is mainly measured according to the Modularity (also called Q value) and the average contour value (Silhouette also called S value). The larger the Q value, the better the structure of its clusters, and the S value indicates the degree of homogeneity of the clusters. Where when Q > 0.3, S ≥ 0.5 (where S > 0.7, the clustering is efficient and convincing), it indicates that the clustering results are reasonable, credible and scientific, and have some research value. In this study, the clustering map has Q value = 0.7478, S value = 0.9491, Harmonic Mean (Q, S) = 0.8365, which indicates a high level of confidence.

The co-occurrence clustering of keywords is based on the homogeneity of keywords as the criteria for clustering, therefore, the focus of the study can be analyzed by the combination of keywords into clusters. In the keyword co-occurrence clustering mapping of corporate ethics research, the seven clustering results (#0 Corporate Ethics, #1 Corporate Ethics Construction, #2 Corporate Culture, #3 Moral Governance of Enterprises, #4 Moral Construction, #5 Morality, #6 Unethical Behavior) were coded and grouped in terms of both theoretical and practical dimensions (see Table 3).

4.2.1. Theory

A theoretical study of corporate ethics (#0 corporate ethics, #5 morality, #6 unethical behavior). First of all, from the meaning of the term, enterprise morality is the sum of behavioral norms that adjust the relationship between enterprises and workers, workers and employees, and enterprises and society, etc. (Han, 1998). And for the time being, the research on enterprise morality and its

Table 3. Grouping of keywords after clustering.

Dimension	Encodings	Clustering results
Theory	#A What are business ethics	#0 Corporate Ethics, #5 Ethics, #6 Unethical Behavior
Practice	#B How business ethics should be built	#1 Corporate ethics, #2 Corporate culture, #3 Ethical corporate governance

construction in China is still in the primary stage, so many scholars still do not have a corporate ethics Therefore, many scholars still do not have a standardized definition of corporate ethics.

Prof. Luo Guojie believes that morality is a social phenomenon in the real life of human beings, which is determined by economic relations, evaluated by the standard of good and evil, and maintained by social opinion, inner beliefs and traditional habits.

Chen Bingfu, Zhou Zucheng believed that there is a distinction between business ethics in the broad sense and in the narrow sense. In the broad sense, corporate ethics is a norm that guides the good and bad behavior of all parties involved in business operations. In addition to the enterprise and its employees, the participants in business activities should also include customers, suppliers, competitors, government, community and other business stakeholders. Enterprise ethics in the narrow sense is to guide the enterprise and its members of the norms of good and bad business behavior. Since the status of the parties involved in business activities is not the same, enterprises and their members play different roles in business activities. They believe that enterprise morality in the narrow sense has the following characteristics: First, enterprise morality is the norms about the behavior of the enterprise and its members. Secondly, corporate ethics is about the norms of good and evil, should and shouldn't of corporate business activities. Thirdly, corporate ethics is about how to correctly deal with the relationship between the enterprise and its members and stakeholders. Fourth, business ethics works through social opinion, traditional customs, inner beliefs and internal norms. Fifth, business ethics is both external and internal. This is by far the more comprehensive definition of business ethics (Chen & Zhou, 1997).

Wang Xiaoxi believed: The enterprise ethics is enterprise morality. It refers to the good and bad value orientation and its behavioral norms of what should or should not be done to improve the quality of the enterprise staff and coordinate the internal and external relations of the enterprise in the economic activities of the enterprise (Wang, 1994). This is the representative view of the equivalence theory of corporate ethics and business ethics.

Lastly, some scholars have also used experimental and research methods to find out whether there are unethical behaviors in corporate ethics that make employees dissatisfied in terms of four dimensions (whether there is a code of ethics, whether there is ethics training, the promotion of the code of ethics, and the duration of ethics training) (Liu & Li, 2011).

4.2.2. Practice

Research on how to build corporate ethics (#1 Corporate Ethics, #2 Corporate Culture, #3 Rule by Virtue, #4 Moral Construction). The construction of enterprise morality is of great significance to the future development of enterprises, because the competition in the market also contains moral competition, nowadays the rapid development of the information age, people for high quality and good reputation of the enterprise "love", the enterprise needs to be honest and trustworthy, to build their own corporate image to adhere to the quality of the socialist market competition needs to be regulated by morality, with enterprise self-discipline, there will be industry self-discipline. The healthy development of socialist market competition needs the regulation of morality, with the self-discipline of enterprises, there will be self-discipline of the industry, market competition will be fair and orderly, the market economy can develop healthily (Liu, 2002).

Most of the scholars pointed out that most of the scholars pointed out that the first should strengthen the ideological and moral education, the only enterprise has the consciousness and thought, can better carry out the next step, and at the same time on the basis of the establishment of the correct core values, which set up the correct concept of righteousness and profitability is the core of the construction of enterprise morality (Lv, 1997). Secondly, the enterprise leaders should be the first to take the lead, the leadership is the key to enterprise moral construction. Leading cadres are the decision makers and leaders of an enterprise, the moral level of its directly determines the development of corporate moral construction of good and bad, while leading cadres are both the promoter and implementer of corporate decision-making, but also a prominent representative of the enterprise and an important image, in a sense, it also represents the moral image of the enterprise. Therefore, leading cadres should focus on shaping their own good moral image, recognize the importance of their own morality as well as that of the enterprise, and start from me, from now on (Zhang & Jiang, 1997). Finally, enterprises should strengthen the cultural activities of their employees as well as organize cultural activities to strengthen the construction of corporate culture and incorporate the construction of corporate ethics into the management mechanism of the enterprise. Strengthen the staff's moral education, in the staff's education and training, the enterprise can hire ethical experts for their classes, but also to hire moral consultants to guide the staff, and do a good job of human resources management training and development; corporate culture construction includes shaping the corporate spirit, building a cultural atmosphere, carry out healthy recreational activities, beautifying the corporate environment, etc., are all part of the scope of the construction of the enterprise's culture; in the management of the enterprise's staff must follow the moral norms as the external provisions, set up for the industrial company system mandatory implementation, and strive to make this external in the management, the moral norms as the external provisions, set up for the industrial company system to

enforce, and strive to make this external mandatory provisions into the internal requirements of the enterprise employees consciously comply with (Zhang & Zhang, 2004).

4.3. Analysis of Mutated Words

Words with a sudden increase in frequency in certain years are mutated words, which are usually used to analyze the change of topics in a research field. Business ethics research hotspots have a certain epochal nature, in order to understand the evolution of business ethics research hotspots in different time periods, the authors drew the Strongest Citation Bursts view (Figure 7).

The Corporate Ethics Keyword Burst Mapping demonstrates the sudden increase or decrease in the citation frequency of literature over a certain time period. These time nodes reflect the turn of research hotspots during this period. In this paper, we use the Burstness function in CiteSpace software to detect the burstness of keywords, and obtain the keywords of socialism, market economy, professional ethics, under the condition of market economy, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 14th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), socialist morality construction, immoral behaviors, enterprise morality construction, moral construction, ruling enterprises with morality, morality, construction, corporate social responsibility, stakeholders, social responsibility, 20 mutant keywords of corporate ethics, corporate development, moral misconduct, business and corporate morality. We can divide the evolution of the research hotspots of corporate ethics into, three stages based on the 20 mutant words:

Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

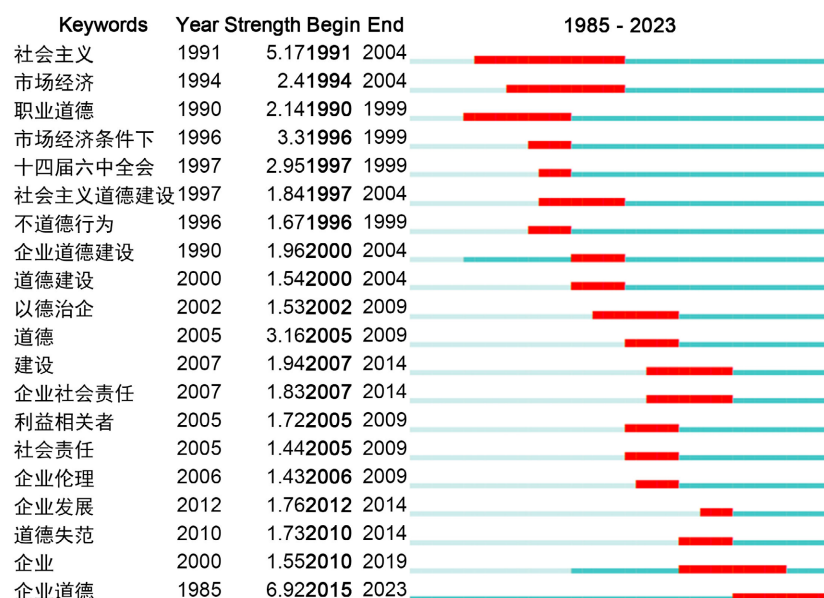| Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	1985 - 2023
社会主义	1991	5.17	1991	2004	
市场经济	1994	2.4	1994	2004	
职业道德	1990	2.14	1990	1999	
市场经济条件下	1996	3.3	1996	1999	
十四届六中全会	1997	2.95	1997	1999	
社会主义道德建设	1997	1.84	1997	2004	
不道德行为	1996	1.67	1996	1999	
企业道德建设	1990	1.96	2000	2004	
道德建设	2000	1.54	2000	2004	
以德治企	2002	1.53	2002	2009	
道德	2005	3.16	2005	2009	
建设	2007	1.94	2007	2014	
企业社会责任	2007	1.83	2007	2014	
利益相关者	2005	1.72	2005	2009	
社会责任	2005	1.44	2005	2009	
企业伦理	2006	1.43	2006	2009	
企业发展	2012	1.76	2012	2014	
道德失范	2010	1.73	2010	2014	
企业	2000	1.55	2010	2019	
企业道德	1985	6.92	2015	2023	

Figure 7. Mapping of corporate ethics keyword bursts.

First of all, the emergent words socialism, market economy, professional ethics, under the condition of market economy, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 14th Central Committee, socialist moral construction and immoral behavior began to be highlighted mostly in the period of 1991-2004, of which the "socialism" The intensity of "socialism" is 5.17, which is a high intensity. At this stage, China's reform and opening-up dividend stage, people have gone to sea to make money, the socialist market economy system is taking shape, and there are more concerns about the related market economy.

Secondly, unethical behavior, corporate moral construction, moral construction, ruling the enterprise with morality, morality, construction, corporate social responsibility, stakeholders, social responsibility, corporate ethics, enterprise development, and moral misconduct are a few emergent words that began to be highlighted during the period of 2004-2014, of which The intensity of "ethics" is 3.16, which is relatively high. At this stage, the inadequacy of the market economy and the frequent occurrence of unethical behavior of enterprises have begun to show, which has led people to pay more attention to the unethical behavior of enterprises and the ethical construction of enterprises.

Finally, the two emergent words of enterprise and enterprise morality began to be highlighted in the time period of 2014-present, in which the intensity of "enterprise morality and ethics" is 6.92, which is a large intensity of highlighting. Now with the continuous development of the market economy and the continuous improvement of the relevant legal system, enterprise morality has been given a new significance of the times, and people also pay more attention to the "enterprise morality" as a professional term, which has lasted until now.

To summarize, both the general public and research scholars pay high attention to the current political hotspots and the background of the times, and the "hotspots of corporate ethics research" develop and change along with the current political hotspots in China, advancing with the times.

5. Wrap-Up

Overall, in terms of quantity, there are relatively few research results on corporate ethics, and it has attracted less attention. Since 2004, an average of about 10 articles in related fields have been included in core journals every year, and as of June 2023, the research in the field of corporate ethics has a total of 289 documents included in academic journals, the total amount is not very large, and its development trend tends to stabilize in recent years.

Regarding the researchers of corporate ethics, the research scholars are relatively scattered, and the individual research results are relatively weak. At present, there is no core author in the field of corporate ethics research in the real sense, which indicates to a certain extent that the construction of the talent team in this field is still relatively weak and lacks leading figures. And the overall research of multidisciplinary perspective is relatively weak and needs to be further strengthened. Cross-unit and interdisciplinary cooperation still needs to be streng-

thened.

Regarding the sources of corporate ethics, the sources of related research are scattered and mostly from universities, with Xi'an Jiaotong University, Wuhan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University as the most prominent research institutions, and the overall quality of the literature needs to be improved. The quality of literature in general needs to be improved. Moreover, the research on corporate ethics has received less funding, so it is necessary to strengthen the support for the research on corporate ethics through more channels.

The hot topics of corporate ethics mainly focus on the discussion of corporate ethics theory, ethics construction, ethics, corporate ethics and stakeholders, corporate culture, ruling the enterprise by virtue, and unethical behavior. It is summarized as the theoretical study of corporate ethics, the relationship between corporate ethics and stakeholders and how to strengthen corporate ethics. In general, the research hotspots are more concentrated, highlighting the "construction of corporate ethics", but the research is not cutting-edge and systematic enough. In terms of research methodology, there are fewer theoretical researches, and the breadth of researches is larger, while the depth of researches is lacking. It is worthwhile to recognize that the research hotspots of scholars on enterprise morality are closely connected with the current political hotspots of the country and the background of the national era, and are advancing with the times.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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