

CiteSpace-based Analysis of Research Hotspots on Rule of Law Literacy of Chinese College Students

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Abstract: To clarify the current research status on the issue of college students' legal literacy and grasp the research hotspots and development trends in this field, this study provides new ideas for related work on cultivating college students' legal literacy in China. Using the CiteSpace 6.4.R1 visualization tool, this study selects 257 relevant literature articles on college students' legal literacy from the CNKI database in the past 20 years as the research sample and conducts a knowledge graph analysis of the number of articles published, authors, institutions, and research hotspots. The study found that the overall research on college students' legal literacy in China has shown a positive trend and has developed in the following stages: the foundation stage, the deepening stage, the expansion stage, and the innovation stage. The research hotspots have expanded from the importance of legal education to its application and effect in the higher education system, and have begun to focus on specific practical pathways and educational objectives. Future research should continue to deepen college students' legal literacy education, expand the cross-disciplinary and international research perspective on legal literacy, promote the synergistic development of legal construction and higher education reform, and adapt to the transformation of legal education in the digital era.

Keywords: College students; Rule of law awareness; CiteSpace; Visual analysis

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1. Introduction

Legal literacy, comprising the dual elements of “rule of law” and “literacy”, is a multifaceted and dynamic concept. An individual's legal literacy encompasses not only the educational aspects of learning, understanding, and knowing the law but also extends to the realms of legal thinking, legal philosophy, and legal methods^[1]. It represents an integrated entity of belief and capability, where citizens' cognition, orientation, attitude, belief, and identification with the rule of law are shaped through continuous learning, training, and practical engagement^[2-3].

With the development of the new era, the cultivation and enhancement of the rule of law literacy of the entire population has become an important issue of the times. The level of young students' rule of law literacy should be reflected in their mastery of legal rules and legal systems, their understanding and recognition of the

concepts and principles of the rule of law, and their ability to use legal rules and legal systems to protect their legitimate rights and interests and solve problems^[4].

This study uses CiteSpace software to draw a scientific knowledge map, to visualize and analyze the research hotspots and cutting-edge trends of the rule of law literacy among college students, and to sort out the current situation of domestic research in the past 20 years, to provide reference and reference for the development of the cultivation of the rule of law literacy among college students and the development of the rule of law education.

2. Time distribution mapping and data analysis

In CiteSpace, the time span was set to 2004–2024, China Knowledge Network (CNKI) was used as the data source, the search formula was “SU=(‘rule of law literacy’)*(‘university students’)”, and the type of literature was selected as “academic journals”, the search results were manually screened to obtain a total of 257 valid literature that meets the requirements of the study, and the final map is shown in **Figure 1**.

In the past 20 years, the papers related to the research on the rule of law literacy of college students in China have generally shown an upward trend, and 2014 is an important turning point. Overall, the number of papers issued has roughly gone through a period of germination (2004–2012), a period of continuous growth (2012–2016), and a period of gradual explosion (2016–2024).

Between 2004 and 2012, China’s research on the rule of law literacy of college students was still in the embryonic stage, with a relatively small number of articles published and research results not yet visible. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of articles published on the rule of law literacy of young people made a big leap, and academics began to pay attention to the role of the rule of law literacy in higher education and the cultivation of young people. In 2014, the comprehensive rule of law rose to the strategic height of realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, socialism with Chinese characteristics achieved the historic transformation of the “rule of law”, and the publicity and education of citizens on the rule of law became the long-term basic work of the rule of law, which greatly promoted the research heat of the issue of rule of law literacy among college students^[5-6]. Since 2016, although the number of articles issued has fluctuated, it has remained at a high level overall, and in special years, such as 2018 and 2022, there has been a gradual explosion in the number of article output.

Overall, academic attention to the issue of rule of law literacy among university students has increased significantly over the past 20 years, and research has been generally positive.

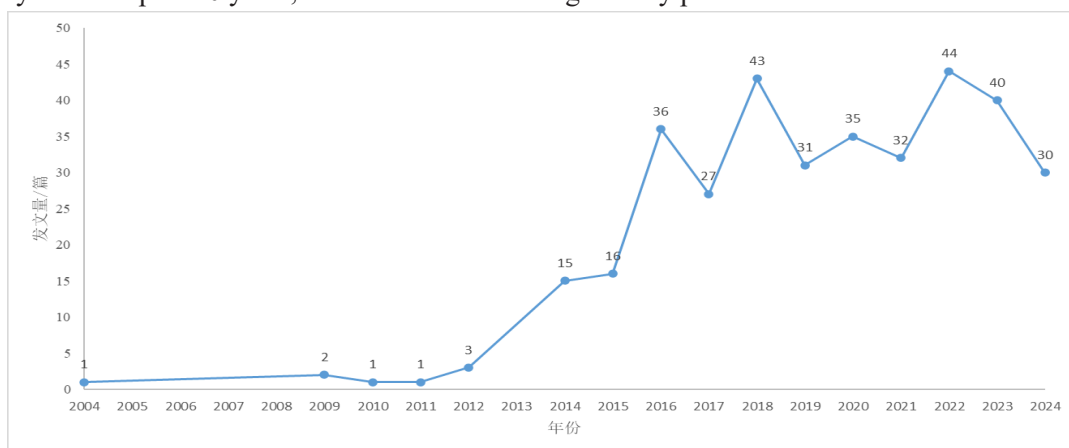


Figure 1. Graph of annual publication volume of research on college students’ legal literacy

3. Knowledge mapping and analysis of research hotspots

3.1. High frequency keywords analysis

Using CiteSpace, Node Type was set to Keyword, keeping the default parameters unchanged, and the top 10 frequency (**Table 1**) and top 10 centrality (**Table 2**) of high-frequency keywords were counted.

Table 1. High-frequency keywords frequency statistics table

Serial number	Centrality	High frequency keywords	Frequency
1	0.45	University students	167
2	0.50	Rule of law literacy	147
3	0.94	Legal education	86
4	0.09	Rule of law education	57
5	0.19	New era	37
6	0.07	Rule by law	27
7	0.06	Legal literacy	27
8	0.01	Cultivation	26
9	0.01	Legal awareness	12
10	0.13	Rule of law	11

Table 2. Centrality statistics table of high-frequency keywords

Serial number	Centrality	High frequency keywords	Frequency
1	0.94	Legal education	86
2	0.50	Rule of law literacy	147
3	0.45	University students	167
4	0.19	New era	37
5	0.13	Rule of law	11
6	0.09	Rule of law education	57
7	0.08	Talent cultivation	5
8	0.07	Rule of Law	27
9	0.06	Legal literacy	27
10	0.06	Teaching reform	6

Using CiteSpace to draw the relevant keyword co-linear mapping (**Figure 2**), there are 351 nodes and 804 connecting lines, and the network density is 0.0131. Combined with **Table 1**, **Table 2**, and **Figure 2**, it can be seen that frequency and centrality show a positive relationship, and the influence and importance of the relevant issues with high research heat are also higher. The current research on the rule of law literacy of college students in China mainly focuses on the exploration of the connotation of the rule of law literacy in the new era, and the study of the path and countermeasures for cultivating the rule of law literacy of college students. At the same time, thinking about the different orientations and ethical values of rule of law education and rule of law literacy in the context of the digital age has also become the focus of attention of related research in the past two years.

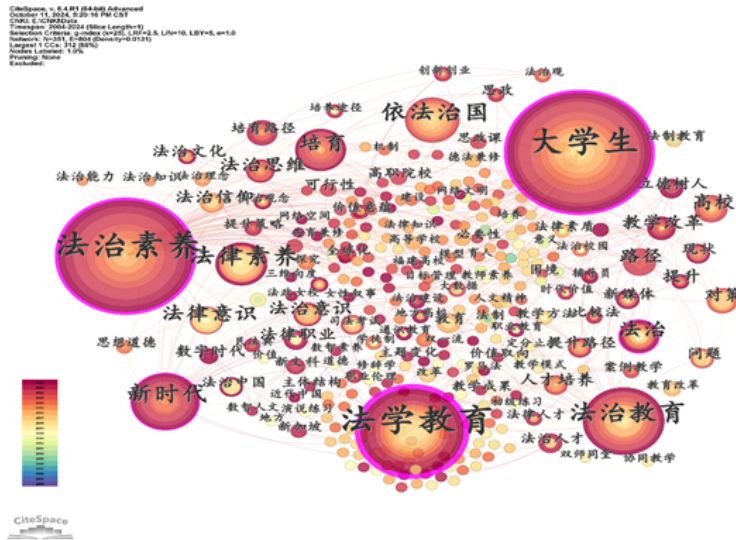


Figure 2. Keywords co-occurrence map

3.2. Research hotspot cluster analysis

To further grasp the current status of research related to the rule of law literacy among college students in a holistic manner, CiteSpace was used for keyword clustering, with the parameters as default, and the LLR algorithm was selected to obtain the keyword clustering mapping of research in the field of the rule of law literacy among college students (Figure 3). According to the mapping, there are 351 nodes, 804 connecting lines, $Q = 0.5816 (>0.3)$, $S = 0.886 (>0.5)$, thus, the structure of keyword clustering in the field of research on the rule of law literacy among college students in this paper is significant and the results are reasonable.

Summarizing the clustering numbers and their corresponding keywords, it can be concluded that the current domestic research related to the rule of law literacy of college students focuses on the following aspects: the study of the rule of law education and rule of law literacy of college students, and the development of legal education and the new liberal arts.

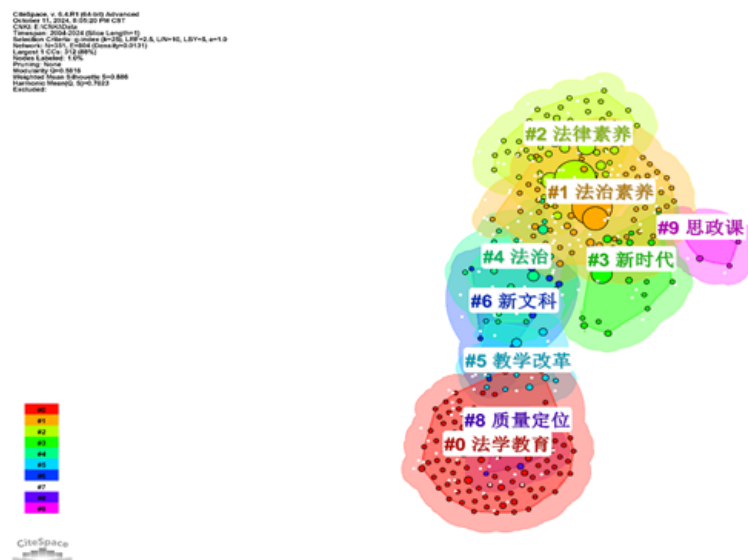


Figure 3. Keywords clustering map

3.2.1. Research on the rule of law education and law literacy among students

Generally speaking, the research vision of rule of law education for college students in China is more diversified, and the research content attaches importance to pragmatism, which mainly includes the research of relevant concepts and connotations, disciplinary affiliation research, educational content research, educational object research, educational characteristics research, and research on outstanding educational issues and practical ways^[7-9]. At the same time, domestic scholars have also studied the rule of law education for college students in foreign countries, with a view to learning from relevant experiences and helping the development of rule of law education for college students in China. From the perspective of thinking logic, the academic research on the field of rule of law education for college students mainly consists of explaining its necessity, explaining the reality of the dilemma, and the path of countermeasures. College students, as the core force of the rule of law and the builders of socialist modernization, their level of rule of law literacy has an important impact on the effectiveness of national governance^[10]. The current lack of assessment systems and assessment methods for the effect of college students' rule of law education restricts the effectiveness of college students' rule of law education^[11].

College students' rule of law literacy and college students' rule of law education have not formed a clear consensus on the concept, the number of academic research on college students' rule of law literacy is relatively small and focuses on the analysis of the status quo and cultivation research^[12-13]. In recent years, some research results have also appeared in response to the generation of the rule of law literacy of college students and the value of the times^[14].

3.2.2. Legal education and the development of new liberal arts

The advent of the digital intelligence era represented by AI is accelerating the deconstruction of the traditional education ecology and education model, while constantly strengthening the cross and integration between different disciplines, how to link digital (data) with knowledge, society, culture, history and people is the common problem and challenge facing the social and human sciences at present. Research related to legal education in the context of new liberal arts mainly focuses on theoretical investigation, paradigm shift, and path exploration. Legal education will achieve the overall transformation of the digital rule of law amid change, and call for the current law to be oriented towards the educational concept of the digital rule of law, rooted in the knowledge system of digital jurisprudence, and constructing a deeply overlapping and interactive educational model^[15]. The innovation of the legal education paradigm oriented to the new liberal arts should point to the complex change of the discourse system, discipline system, knowledge system, and talent system^[16]. At the practical level, the discipline of law is oriented to the needs of society, breaks disciplinary barriers, innovates the cross-fertilization mechanism, promotes the interdisciplinary development of legal education, and cultivates the ability of law students to integrate knowledge across fields^[17].

3.3. Evolutionary phase analysis

CiteSpace 6.4.R1 software was used to generate the timeline of the relevant research high-frequency keywords being used in the literature in the past 20 years, to observe the active degree of research hotspots and the research trend in the stage time. Set Node Type as Keyword, select Burstness, Minimum Duration is set to 2, $\gamma = 0.4$, and keyword mutation mapping is obtained (**Figure 4**).

Combined with the analysis of **Figure 4**, it can be obtained that from 2004 to October 2024, the research

hotspot of the rule of law literacy among college students in China has experienced four stages of development, namely, the foundation stage (2004–2009), the deepening stage (2010–2015), the expansion stage (2016–2020), and the innovation stage (2021 to the present).

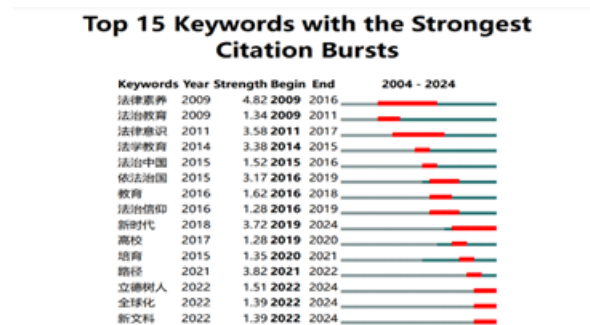


Figure 4. Keywords burst map

The period from 2004 to 2009 was the basic stage of research on the rule of law literacy of college students, during which research on the rule of law literacy of college students began to receive attention, but overall it is still in its infancy. The research mainly focuses on the definition of basic concepts and the importance of rule of law education. The keywords “legal literacy” and “rule of law education” have become the keywords in the research, reflecting that scholars have begun to pay attention to the promotion and practice of rule of law education among college students.

2010–2015 is the deepening stage of the research on the rule of law literacy among college students. With the proposal of the construction of “China under the rule of law”, the research hotspots began to shift from pure education to more in-depth topics such as the belief in the rule of law and the rule of the country according to law. During this period, “Rule of Law China” and “Rule of Law” became the hotspots of research, reflecting the state’s attention to the construction of the rule of law and its expectation of the cultivation of college students’ rule of law literacy.

2016–2020 is the expansion stage of the research on the rule of law literacy of college students, in which the research on the rule of law literacy of college students begins to expand into more fields, such as “education”, “colleges and universities” and other keywords appear, indicating that the research begins to focus on the rule of law education [18]. The emergence of keywords such as “education” and “university” indicates that research has begun to pay attention to the application and effect of the rule of law education in the higher education system [19–20]. At the same time, the emergence of the keyword “new era” reflects that the research on rule of law literacy has begun to be closely integrated with the overall situation of national development, emphasizing the importance of the rule of law literacy for the cultivation of talents in the new era.

The period from 2021 to the present is an innovative stage of research on the rule of law literacy of college students, in which the research hotspots began to focus on more specific practical paths and educational goals such as “path” and “moral education.” This change shows that researchers are beginning to explore more effective methods and approaches to rule of law education to meet the needs of the new era [21]. At the same time, the emergence of keywords such as “globalization” and “new liberal arts” also reflects that the study of the rule of law literacy has begun to take on an international and interdisciplinary perspective [22].

4. Conclusion

By visualizing and analyzing the literature in the field of rule of law literacy among college students in China from 2004 to October 2024, it can be found that the overall trend of relevant research on rule of law literacy among college students is positive, with the content of the research continuously enriched and the perspective of the research continuously broadened. In the future, continuing to deepen education on the rule of law literacy among college students, promoting the construction of the rule of law and educational reforms in colleges and universities, thinking about the transformation of legal education to adapt to the age of mathematics and intelligence, as well as expanding the internationalization and interdisciplinary perspectives of research on the rule of law literacy will become the main development trends of relevant research in China.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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