

Research on East-West Collaboration in China: Phases of Evolution, Research Hotspots, and Future Prospects (1996-2025)

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Abstract

This study employs CiteSpace to conduct a visual analysis of 298 publications on East-West collaboration policies from the Peking University Core Journal and CSSCI databases, spanning from June 1996 to September 2025. The research analyzes four dimensions—evolutionary stages, distribution of research forces, current hotspots, and future directions—to identify key developmental pathways in East-West collaboration. A knowledge map was constructed based on highly cited literature, keyword co-occurrence, clustering, emergent terms, and timeline analysis. Findings indicate that research themes have evolved from early focuses on poverty alleviation and targeted assistance to contemporary emphases on common prosperity, rural revitalization, and vocational education transformation, reflecting a conceptual shift from unidirectional “blood transfusion” to bidirectional “blood production”. Academic resources demonstrate a pattern of overall dispersion with localized concentration. Building on current research frontiers, this article suggests that future research and policy should prioritize refining evaluation systems, deepening industry-education collaboration mechanisms, and strengthening interdisciplinary and cross-regional coordination to facilitate the transition of East-West collaboration from policy-driven initiatives to precision governance.

Keywords

East-West Collaboration, CiteSpace, Bibliometrics, Hotspots, Future Prospects

1. Introduction

The report to the 20th CPC National Congress emphasized the need to “advance the implementation of the regional coordinated development strategy and refine

the regional economic layout”. The Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee further proposed “deepening industrial collaboration between the eastern, central, and western regions”. As a key component of China’s distinctive regional coordinated development strategy, East-West industrial collaboration serves as a crucial pathway to advancing common prosperity and achieving harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature in the drive to modernize (Xie, Sun, & Liang, 2024).

East-West collaboration, which began in the mid-1990s, has evolved from its initial form known as “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” into what is now termed “East-West Collaboration”. In terms of specific approaches and content, this collaboration can be broadly categorized into five areas: financial, industrial, talent, labor, and social cooperation (Han & Zhu, 2020; Xie, Sun, & Liang, 2024; Zhang, Feng, & Xi, 2023). Over more than three decades of policy evolution, the collaborative mechanism has shifted from a “point-axis” model to a “networked” approach. It has moved away from voluntary pairing between communities in key impoverished areas, against a backdrop of widespread poverty and underdevelopment, toward a systematic and comprehensive policy-mandated pairing arrangement between eastern and western regions (Liang, 2022). Throughout this developmental process, the government, market, and society have interacted to form a sound dynamic characterized by institutional leadership from the government and active participation from market and societal actors (Mohr & Sarin, 2009). Unlike conventional industrial poverty alleviation, which often relied on one-way assistance with limited consideration of long-term outcomes, the government now increasingly emphasizes tangible benefits and their equitable distribution in the new phase of East-West collaboration. This shift indicates that, compared to the earlier model centered on one-way resource transfer and support, the current phase places greater emphasis on complementary regional strengths and coordinated development. It aims to establish a new framework defined by two-way flows of resources and factors, along with the deepening and expansion of cooperative fields (Liao, Mao, & Zhai, 2022; Xie & Chen, 2023). This evolution reflects a transition in the collaboration model from “blood transfusion” to “blood production”. Here, “blood transfusion” refers to the earlier approach of alleviating poverty rapidly through one-way resource transfers and external aid, whereas “blood production” denotes the current focus on complementary advantages, bidirectional factor flows, and the cultivation of endogenous momentum, all aimed at establishing sustainable mechanisms for coordinated development.

Whether in previous poverty alleviation efforts or current rural revitalization initiatives, the continuous evolution of the East-West collaboration system has effectively facilitated horizontal resource transfers and cross-regional coordinated development. It has played a vital role in narrowing the development gap between the eastern and western regions, addressing regional imbalances, and steadily advancing common prosperity (Liu & Tang, 2024). However, current academic research still lacks systematic analysis of the evolutionary trajectory of East-West

collaboration policies, particularly literature reviews based on quantitative methods.

Based on this, this study employs the CiteSpace bibliometric analysis tool to organize relevant literature on East-West collaboration policies. It subsequently constructs a knowledge mapping of the research in this field, offering a more intuitive and objective representation of its evolutionary stages, research hotspots, and future directions (Luo & Tang, 2021; Wang, 2023).

2. Data Sources and Research Methods

2.1. Data Sources

Since its inception in the 1990s, the evolution of East-West collaboration can be broadly categorized into three phases: the exploratory phase (1994-2005), the institutional standardization phase (2016-2020), and the paired development phase (2021-present). On June 7, 1996, the State Council Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development issued the document Report on Organizing Poverty Alleviation Collaboration Between Economically Developed and Less Developed Regions, which formally introduced the East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration policy—the precursor to the current East-West Collaboration policy. In April 2021, the National Conference on Advancing East-West Collaboration and Targeted Assistance by Central Government Units was held in Yinchuan, Ningxia. During this conference, the term “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” was officially renamed “East-West Collaboration”. Based on this policy evolution, the keywords for this study have been identified and selected.

Since the explicit policy reference to “East-West Collaboration” emerged relatively late, having evolved from the earlier “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration”, this study established specific literature screening criteria. Data were sourced exclusively from journals indexed in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and classified as Peking University Core Journals or included in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI). The keywords “East-West Collaboration” and “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” were used for retrieval. The timeframe was defined from June 1996 to September 2025, based on the formal introduction of the “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” policy in May 1996. Based on these criteria, relevant publications were retrieved and reviewed, excluding conference addresses, press releases, news interviews, and similar non-academic materials. The final dataset consisted of 298 qualifying documents published between June 30, 1996, and September 10, 2025. The extracted literature was saved in RefWorks format, retaining key fields such as article title, author(s), institution(s), keywords, abstract, journal name, and publication date. To support subsequent processing and analysis, the exported data were converted using CiteSpace.

2.2. Research Methods

CiteSpace, the software utilized in this study, serves as a tool for visual literature

mining by condensing the evolutionary trajectory of a specific knowledge domain into a single network diagram. It automatically identifies citation nodes representing foundational literature as well as co-citation clusters that signify research frontiers (Chen, Chen, Liu, Hu, & Wang, 2015). This approach offers an objective bibliometric methodology, effectively countering the subjectivity and arbitrariness often associated with qualitative research, while systematically revealing developmental patterns, seminal literature, research trajectories, hot topics, and knowledge boundaries within specialized fields (Chen, Liu, Hu, & Wang, 2014; Zhang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2018). Accordingly, this paper conducts a visual analysis of research hotspots and evolutionary trends in China's East-West Collaboration Policy literature from 1996 to 2025. Drawing on knowledge maps generated by CiteSpace—including keyword clustering maps, keyword timeline clustering diagrams, and keyword emergence maps—together with relevant author and institutional statistics, it illustrates the developmental pathway of this research domain (Li, Wei, & Liu, 2022).

3. Current State of Research on China's East-West Collaboration Policy

3.1. Publication Trends in China's East-West Collaboration Policy Research

Publication volume serves as an important indicator for assessing the development and evolution of a specific research field over time. It directly reflects fluctuations in research intensity during a given period, offering valuable insights for analyzing developmental dynamics and forecasting future trends (Qiu, Shen, & Song, 2019).

Figure 1 illustrates the publication trend and the annual proportion of total publications over the past three decades in the field of East-West collaboration policy research. As shown, since the concept of “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” was formally introduced by the State Council Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development in 1996, a steady stream of scholars has conducted research and published literature in this area each year. Based on the distribution characteristics of the literature, three distinct phases of significant growth in research output can be identified: the first from 2000 to 2003, the second from 2008 to 2011, and the third from 2022 to 2025. Moreover, since 2018, the overall number of publications in this field has generally maintained a sustained upward trend.

In October 2000, the Western Development Strategy was fully implemented, with the state significantly increasing policy support and financial investment in western regions at the strategic level. As a key component of this strategy, the importance of East-West collaboration grew substantially (Wang, 2024). This led directly to a notable rise in research publications on East-West poverty alleviation collaboration policies in 2000. At the same time, the State Council issued the Outline for Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development in China (2001-2010) in

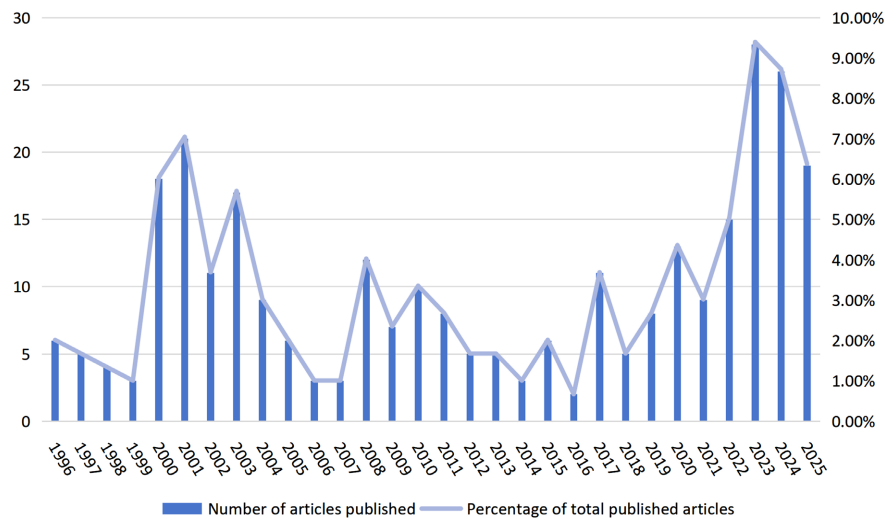


Figure 1. Distribution and proportion of literature on East-West collaboration in China from 1996 to 2025.

June 2001. In 2002, it formally adjusted the pairing arrangements for East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration, adding Zhuhai and Xiamen as counterpart support cities for the newly established Chongqing Municipality. These policy measures introduced further requirements for advancing East-West poverty alleviation collaboration, directly contributing to the increase in policy-related publications between 2000 and 2003.

In May 2008, the Wenchuan earthquake provided a new context and opportunity for innovation in East-West Poverty Alleviation Cooperation, reshaping collaborative relations. To support post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, the central government arranged for eastern regions to provide counterpart assistance to the affected areas. Although this assistance was tailored to specific disaster-related needs, its mechanisms shared conceptual and methodological similarities with East-West Poverty Alleviation Cooperation, thereby offering new case studies and practical experience. In addition, in 2010, the State Council carried out a third adjustment to the pairing mechanism for East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration. These unforeseen events and policy enhancements together brought about a noticeable increase in publications in this field between 2008 and 2011.

The year 2021 marked a critical turning point in the evolution of East-West collaboration. In April of that year, the National Conference on Advancing East-West Collaboration and Targeted Assistance by Central Government Units was held in Yinchuan, Ningxia. The conference was officially renamed “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” as “East-West Collaboration”. This change was not merely nominal but reflected a comprehensive deepening of the policy’s substance, objectives, and mechanisms. The same year, the Assessment and Evaluation Method for East-West Collaboration was issued, systematically refining the evaluation framework for collaborative efforts. These policy developments have broadened and deepened the scope of East-West collaboration beyond the initial

focus on industrial cooperation, labor services, talent support, and financial aid. The cooperation now extends to education, healthcare, cultural development, social governance, and ecological protection, with improved policy precision and institutional refinement (Wu, Wang, & Zhang, 2025). As a result, starting in 2022, the volume of research literature in the field of East-West collaboration policy has risen significantly.

3.2. Analysis of Authors and Institutions in China's East-West Collaboration Policy Research

3.2.1. Author Analysis

In the study of East-West collaboration policy literature, identifying core authors who play a leading role is essential for recognizing the main contributors in this field (Li, Wei, & Liu, 2022).

This study employs CiteSpace to construct author collaboration networks. The time slicing interval was set to one year (1996-2025), with "Author" selected as the node type. Link strength was calculated using the Cosine algorithm, and nodes within each time slice were filtered based on the g-index (with the scaling parameter k set to 25). This study adopts Price's Law, which posits that the number of core producers (high-output authors) is roughly equal to the square root of the total number of authors. The formula used is

$$m = 0.749(n_{\max})^{0.5}$$

where n_{\max} denotes the total number of articles published by the most prolific author in the field, and m represents the minimum number of articles required to be defined as a high-output author. Based on the corresponding statistics, n_{\max} is 18. Substituting this value into the formula gives $m = 3.178$, so m is set to 3. Therefore, among the selected research papers in this field, authors who have published more than three articles are defined as high-productivity authors in East-West Collaboration Policy research, totaling eight individuals. See **Table 1** for details.

Table 1. Authors with 4 or more publications from May 1996 to present.

Serial Number	Volume of Publications	Author	Serial Number	Volume of Publications	Author
1	18	Xie Zhiju	5	5	Chen Xiangning
2	6	Li Ya	6	4	Wen Shixian
3	6	Liang Qin	7	4	Shi Rong
4	5	Wang Xiaolin	8	4	Ye Yiguang

According to CiteSpace statistics presented in **Table 1**, these eight authors each published four or more articles during the study period. Together, they contributed 52 articles, accounting for 17.4% of the total 298 publications—significantly below the 50% threshold required to form a core author group. In addition, the network density of the author collaboration graph generated by CiteSpace was

0.0034. These results indicate that research on China's East-West collaboration policies has not yet formed a stable core author group, and collaboration among authors remains limited. Sustained research efforts and stronger academic cooperation in this field are still needed. That said, the growing annual number of publications reflects increasing scholarly attention to this research domain.

3.2.2. Institutional Publication Analysis

To examine the distribution and collaboration patterns of research institutions, the time slice interval in CiteSpace was set to one year (1996-2025) with "Institution" selected as the node type. The same network construction and pruning parameters used in the author analysis were applied (Cosine link strength, g-index filtering, $k = 25$) to generate institutional collaboration network maps. The resulting network density was 0.0028, reflecting still relatively loose institutional connections that need further strengthening. As shown in **Table 2**, the institution with the highest number of publications is the School of Public Administration at Guangzhou University, which published 20 articles in total. It is followed by the School of Economics and Management at Northwest University, with 8 publications. Other institutions, including the Development Research Institute of Yunnan University and the Sixth Industry Research Institute of Fudan University, also contributed a relatively high number of publications. Geographically, these institutions span both economically developed regions such as the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta, as well as less developed areas in Northwest and Southwest China. This suggests that regions across the country have engaged in research on East-West collaboration policies to varying degrees, with areas more directly impacted by the policy showing relatively higher research engagement.

Table 2. Institutions with 3 or more publications from May 1996 to present.

Research Organization	Volume of Publications
School of Public Administration, Guangzhou University	20
School of Economics and Management, Northwest University	8
Institute of Development Studies, Yunnan University	6
Institute of Six Industries, Fudan University	5
School of Public Administration, South China University of Technology	4
School of Government, Nanjing University	4
Institute for Rural Revitalization, Guangzhou University	4
China Institute of Western Economic Development, Northwest University	3
College of Humanities and Development, China Agricultural University	3
School of Public Administration, Sichuan University	3
School of Economics, Minzu University of China	3
School of Economics and Management, Northwest Normal University	3
School of Marxism, Southwest University of Science and Technology	3
School of Economics and Management, Southeast University	3

4. Knowledge Base Analysis of China's East-West Collaboration Policy Research

The knowledge base of a research field helps clarify the research context and identify foundational sources of knowledge (Wang, 2023). The citation frequency of articles during a specific period reflects the importance and influence of the literature within the relevant field (Yang, Ding, & Zhang, 2019). Highly cited works in a given discipline typically demonstrate strong innovation and broad applicability, playing a critical role in addressing scientific questions and pioneering new research directions (Ren & Zhang, 2009). As such, highly cited literature often forms the knowledge foundation of a field.

Based on the statistical results of the literature, the top 10 most cited articles are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Highly cited publications statistics table.

Serial Number	Title	Citation frequency	Year	Author	Journal
1	Industrial Migration: Models and Policies for East-West Cooperation	98	2000	Zou Lan, Wang Yongqing	Special Zone Theory and Practice
2	East-West Collaboration and Pairing Assistance: From Poverty Alleviation to Common Prosperity	74	2022	Wang Xiaolin, Xie Niyun	Exploration and Free Views
3	Cooperation and Industrial Transfer of China's Textile Industry between East and West	69	2000	Wang Limao	Economic Geography
4	The Predicament of East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration and Its Solutions	58	2017	Wu Guobao	Reform
5	Evaluation of the Policy Effects of East-West Collaboration: From the Perspective of Factor Flow	50	2024	Zhang Keyun, Feng Sheng, Xi Qiangmin	China Industrial Economics
6	A Four-Dimensional Analysis of East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration and Pairing Assistance	47	2017	Li Xiaoyun	Reform
7	East-West Collaboration Empowering Rural Revitalization Under the Guidance of Common Prosperity: Mechanism, Models, and Strategies	44	2022	Liao Chengzhong, Mao Lei, Zhai Kunzhou	Reform
8	From Point-to-Point to Network: The Evolution of Pairing Relationships in East-West Collaboration from the Perspective of Common Prosperity	42	2022	Liang Qin	Journal of Public Administration
9	Industrial Transfer, Capability Structure, and Coordinated Development of Eastern and Western Regional Economies	42	2010	Yang Junsheng	Inquiry into Economic Issues
10	Restructuring the East-West Collaboration Mechanism for Rural Revitalization Under the Guidance of Common Prosperity: A Practical Investigation Based on Four Typical County Governance Models	41	2022	Zhai Kunzhou	Truth Seeking

As shown in **Table 3**, these highly cited studies examine East-West collaboration policies from multiple perspectives, covering strategic evolution, driving mechanisms, and implementation models. Some studies focus on the institutional trajectory of East-West collaboration as it evolved from government-led poverty alleviation assistance toward the goal of common prosperity (Wang & Xie, 2022), arguing for its necessity from the strategic standpoint of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects (Li, 2017). In terms of driving mechanisms, some research takes the textile industry as a case study, analyzing the intrinsic drivers and prospects of industrial relocation (Wang, 2000). Other works emphasize the significant role of factor mobility as a key channel for regional economic growth and structural optimization (Zhang et al., 2023), highlighting the importance of policy-guided flows of coastal production factors and industrial transfers that align with the capacity structure of recipient regions (Yang, 2010; Zou & Wang, 2000). In addressing the practical implementation of East-West collaboration, existing research has also identified challenges and dilemmas (Wu, 2017). It explores pathways to enable rural revitalization through diversified collaboration models (Liao et al., 2022), revealing the evolutionary logic of pairing mechanisms shifting from “point-axis” to “networked” structures (Liang, 2022). Furthermore, it calls for establishing a long-term collaboration mechanism in the new phase that transitions from a government-led to a market-led approach (Zhai, 2022). Together, these studies provide a comprehensive examination of East-West collaboration policies, spanning from macro-level strategy to micro-level practice.

5. Analysis of Research Hotspots and Frontiers in China’s East-West Collaboration Policies

5.1. Analysis of Research Hotspots in China’s East-West Collaboration Policies

Keywords represent highly condensed reflections of a paper’s core content, and their frequency of occurrence is positively correlated with research attention (Luan & Jiang, 2008; Luo & Yu, 2017). Using CiteSpace, we performed keyword co-occurrence analysis on the literature related to East-West collaboration, generating corresponding co-occurrence network maps and compiling statistics on keyword frequency and centrality, as shown in **Table 4** and **Table 5** below.

Table 4. The node frequency sequence of keywords in the co-occurrence network of east-west collaboration.

Serial Number	Keyword	Frequency
1	Common prosperity	40
2	Rural revitalization	25
3	Industrial transfer	16
4	East and West	15
5	Poverty alleviation	9

Continued

6	Pairing assistance	9
7	Vocational education	7
8	The western region	7
9	Targeted poverty reduction	7
10	Regional economy	7

Table 5. The node centrality sequence of keywords in the co-occurrence network of east-west collaboration.

Serial Number	Keyword	Centrality	First Appearance
1	East and West	0.4	2000
2	Common prosperity	0.28	2003
3	Western development	0.19	2000
4	Scientific and technological cooperation	0.19	2002
5	Targeted poverty reduction	0.18	2018
6	Regional economy	0.17	2000
7	Industrial transfer	0.14	2000
8	Poverty alleviation cooperation	0.14	2014
9	Vocational education	0.11	2015
10	Pairing assistance	0.08	2016
11	Rural revitalization	0.07	2021
12	The western region	0.07	1997

Analysis of the keyword frequency statistics in **Table 4** shows that research hotspots in East-West collaboration policies primarily include themes such as common prosperity, rural revitalization, industrial transfer, poverty alleviation, pairing assistance, and vocational education. Among these, “poverty alleviation”, “common prosperity” and “rural revitalization”—as core objectives of East-West collaboration across different stages—have consistently attracted significant scholarly attention. Meanwhile, “industrial transfer”, “pairing assistance” and “vocational education” which serve as key implementation mechanisms and concrete forms of the policy, are essential to its advancement and thus also appear with high frequency.

Keyword centrality reflects the mediating role of a node within a network (Lu & Chang, 2005). A higher centrality value for a keyword in the knowledge network of East-West collaboration policy indicates stronger connective influence, marking it as a topological hub that effectively represents core research themes in the field (An, Teng, Bai, & Xin, 2017). As shown in **Table 5**, keywords including “East

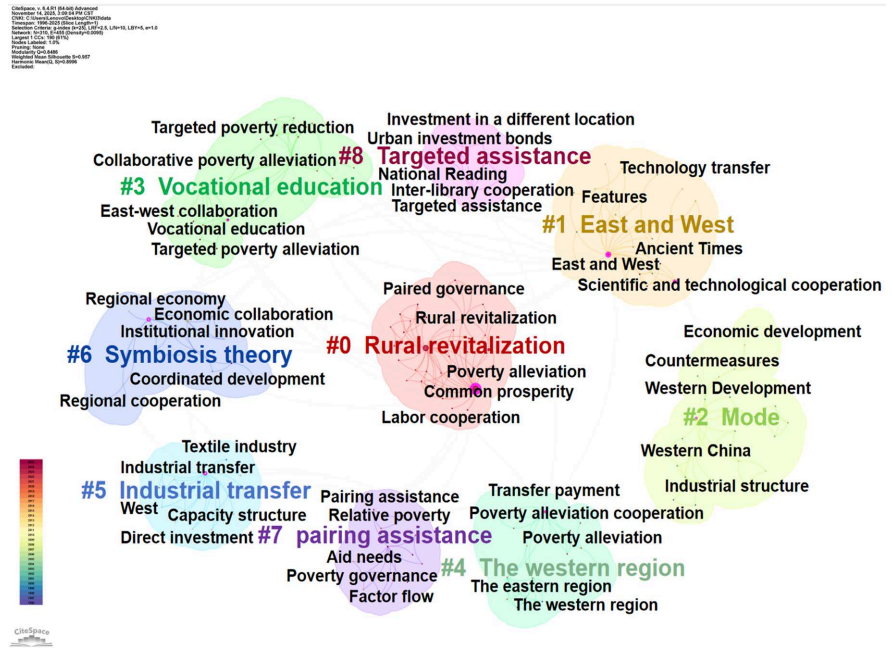


Figure 3. Clustering map of keywords for east-west collaboration.

role. The development trajectory and evolution of objectives in East-West collaboration policies can be broadly divided into three phases: the exploratory phase, the institutional standardization phase, and the paired-development phase.

a) Exploratory Phase of East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration (1994-2015)

In the early years of reform and opening-up, the eastern regions achieved rapid development by leveraging a first-mover advantage, while many central and western regions lagged behind (Wu et al., 2025). In 1996, the Office of the State Council Leading Group of Poverty Alleviation and Development issued *the Report on Organizing Poverty Alleviation Cooperation Between Economically Developed and Less Developed Regions*, formally proposing an East-West collaboration policy. It explicitly required nine coastal provinces and municipalities and four cities with independent planning status to provide targeted assistance to ten western provinces and autonomous regions (Liu & Tang, 2024). Entering the 21st century, the *Outline of China’s Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2001-2010)* emphasized strengthening the sustainable development capacity and comprehensive benefits of western regions. Policy implementation during this period was planning-led and expanded the pairing (or pairing-assistance) mechanism, gradually establishing a collaborative framework involving government, market, and society in a tripartite, multi-stakeholder coordination model. In November 2015, the *Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Winning the Tough Battle against Poverty* called for strengthened targeted matching and corporate partnerships to channel assistance resources to impoverished villages and households. In this phase, East-West collaboration primarily took the form of “blood-transfusion-style” assistance—focusing on industry, talent, and education.

Statistics indicate that fiscal aid from eastern regions to central and western regions during this period totaled 13.27 billion yuan (China Daily, 2016).

b) Institutional Standardization Period of East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration (2016-2020)

On July 20, 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the Yinchuan symposium that East-West poverty alleviation collaboration should enter a new phase aimed at comprehensively winning the battle against poverty. This remark marked a substantive elevation of the collaboration system, establishing it as a core pillar of the national poverty-alleviation framework. In December 2016, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued *Guiding Opinions on Further Strengthening East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration*, highlighting it as an important measure of “the wealthy helping the less fortunate” and optimizing the inter-provincial pairing mechanism. Subsequent documents—such as the 2017 *Assessment Measures for East-West Poverty Alleviation Cooperation (Trial)* and the 2019 *Effectiveness Evaluation Measures for East-West Poverty Alleviation Cooperation*—helped establish a standardized evaluation system covering leadership, talent exchange, fund utilization, and industrial cooperation. These policies pushed East-West cooperation from an advocacy-based arrangement toward institutionalized, standardized, and regularized operation (Xu, 2024). During this period the mechanism deepened, with cumulative investments of 100.5 billion yuan in fiscal and social assistance funds, and some 131,000 exchanges of cadres and technical personnel (Zuo, Liu, & Yu, 2022)

c) East-West Collaborative Paired-Development Period (2021-Present)

In April 2021, the National Conference on Advancing East-West Collaboration and Targeted Assistance by Central Units was held in Yinchuan, Ningxia, officially rebranding the initiative from “East-West Poverty Alleviation Collaboration” to “East-West Collaboration”. This marked a comprehensive shift in focus from poverty eradication to rural revitalization. The pairing system was optimized, moving from scattered, ad-hoc relationships to a sequential model of “province-to-province coordination followed by city-to-county pairing”. With the exception of Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, and Gansu, most provinces adopted a one-to-one pairing approach (Liang, 2022). The Central Document No. 1 of 2023 further emphasized changing assistance methods from “blood transfusion” to “blood production”, calling for deeper collaboration content—promoting labor-intensive industries and implementing the rural revitalization strategy—to strengthen the endogenous development capacity of western regions and steadily advance common prosperity (Xu, 2024).

2) Differences in Implementation Pathways and Forms of East-West Collaboration. Over the nearly three decades since its inception, East-West collaboration has undergone significant evolution in its implementation pathways and specific forms. Scholars have analyzed and categorized these developments from various perspectives. Regarding the specific pathways and forms of collaboration, dif-

ferent scholars propose distinct classifications: Xie et al. (2024) categorize industrial collaboration into financial support, talent assistance, industrial cooperation, labor collaboration, and consumption-based assistance; Zhang et al. (2023) classify it into industrial cooperation, talent exchange, labor collaboration, financial support, and social mobilization; Shan et al. (2025) argue that the primary assistance measures include industrial transfer, employment support, public services, infrastructure development, cadre exchange, and talent cultivation. Although scholars differ slightly in their classification of specific methods, the forms of collaboration can generally be grouped into five categories: financial, industrial, talent, labor, and social cooperation.

3) Exploring the Crucial Role of East-West Collaboration. As a nationwide policy, East-West collaboration has consistently played a vital role—both in past poverty alleviation efforts and in the current phase of rural revitalization. Academic research has examined its underlying mechanisms from multiple perspectives, including social and economic dimensions. Liu & Tang (2024) emphasize the perspective of common prosperity, demonstrating how East-West collaboration helps narrow regional disparities and achieve common prosperity through resource allocation, policy support, and pathway design. Xu et al. (2024) provide empirical evidence through case studies, showing that collaboration breaks through organizational, spatial, and industrial boundaries to facilitate industrial transfer and reception, thereby offering practical pathways for optimizing regional industrial structures and promoting industrial development. Zou & Zhou (2023), focusing on county-level economic development, find that East-West collaboration drives high-quality growth at the county level through industrial upgrading, improved fiscal and investment structures, and enhanced regional development balance (Fama & French, 1998). Wen (2023) emphasizes that collaboration not only yields economic benefits but also deepens ethnic exchanges and integration through economic, cultural, social, and psychological interactions, laying a social foundation for long-term stable development. The aforementioned studies demonstrate from multiple dimensions—including the goal of common prosperity, industrial mechanisms, county-level development, and social integration—that East-West collaboration plays an indispensable role. This role encompasses both promoting industrial and structural optimization and providing systematic support for achieving common prosperity and social stability.

4) Theoretical Development Supporting East-West Collaboration. Throughout its long-term evolution, the theoretical foundation of East-West collaboration has gradually shifted from traditional assistance models characterized by unidirectional support to a symbiotic theory emphasizing coordinated development and two-way interaction. Against this backdrop, scholars have conducted extensive and in-depth multidimensional explorations into the essence of symbiotic theory. In terms of the relational nature of symbiosis theory, East-West collaboration in the new development stage has evolved from the unsustainable assistance common in early industrial poverty alleviation efforts to a focus on the sustaina-

bility of industrial cooperation and the equitable distribution of benefits. This shift signifies a fundamental transformation in the logic of collaboration—moving beyond one-way resource transfers toward a symbiotic partnership based on complementary regional strengths, dedicated to promoting the two-way flow of factors and the in-depth expansion of cooperative domains (Xie & Chen, 2023). Regarding the core objective of symbiosis theory, the current significant disparity in regional economic development between China’s developed and less developed regions is incompatible with the demands of the new development stage (Fang, 2022). This disparity provides long-term, endogenous sustainable development momentum and establishes a mutually beneficial mechanism for East-West collaboration. At the institutional level, leveraging a three-tiered governance structure of “central-provincial-municipal/county” coordination, key collaborative initiatives in industries, labor services, and talent development are implemented systematically. This enhances policy transmission efficiency and fosters synergistic development through joint efforts and shared benefits. At the practical level, paired regions should be supported in leveraging their resource characteristics and comparative advantages. By drawing on proven models such as the Fujian-Ningxia collaboration and Zhejiang-Sichuan partnership, they can explore distinctive pathways tailored to local conditions (He & Kong, 2011). This fosters an implementation system that bridges unified policy guidance with local innovation, continuously enhancing the adaptability and effectiveness of collaborative mechanisms to sustain momentum for coordinated East-West development (Xu, 2024). From the perspective of symbiotic theory’s dynamic mechanisms, the government, market, and society have formed a sound interactive relationship characterized by institutional leadership from the government and active participation from market and societal actors (Mohr & Sarin, 2009). These three forces strengthen coordinated development through embedded participation, incentive-based guidance, and mutual growth, collectively creating a favorable environment for large-scale collaboration (Xie & Huang, 2023).

5.2. Analysis of Research Frontiers in China’s East-West Collaboration Policies

Building on the co-occurrence network and keyword clustering diagrams from the previous section, a Timeline View was generated using CiteSpace to produce a keyword co-occurrence timeline diagram, followed by an emergent term analysis as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5. A total of 11 emergent terms were identified. Emergent terms refer to keywords whose frequency rises sharply over a specific period, indicating active or emerging research trends in a discipline (Yin, Zhang, & Li, 2009).

Analysis of the keyword co-occurrence timeline and emergent terms reveals a clear three-stage evolution in East-West collaboration research themes: The initial phase centered on basic geographical concepts such as “The eastern region”, “The western region” and “regional economy”. As policies advanced, the research focus

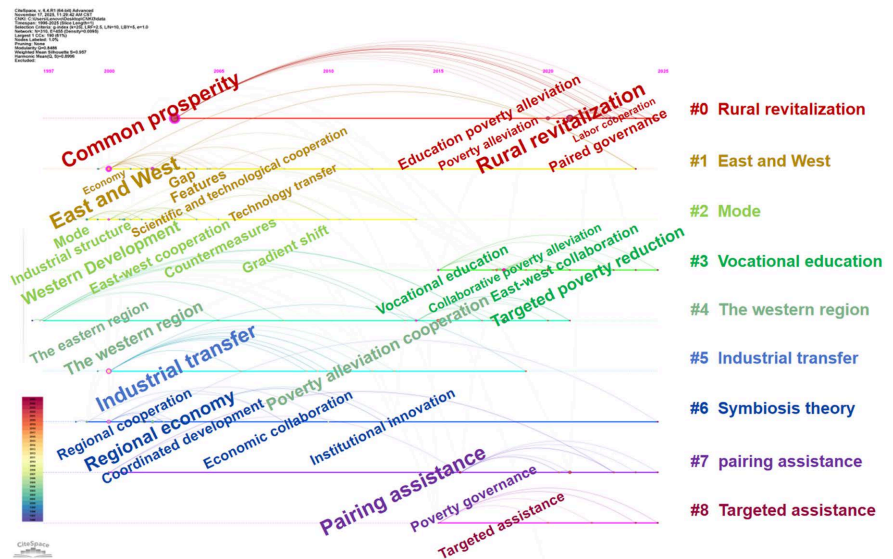


Figure 4. Co-occurrence timeline map of keywords in east-west collaboration.

Top 11 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	1996-2025
East and West	2000	2.89	2000	2005	[Timeline bar]
Western Development	2000	2.47	2000	2003	[Timeline bar]
Countermeasures	2001	2.42	2001	2004	[Timeline bar]
Regional economy	2000	2.57	2003	2010	[Timeline bar]
Technology transfer	2005	3.2	2005	2011	[Timeline bar]
Industrial transfer	2000	6.89	2009	2015	[Timeline bar]
Poverty alleviation cooperation	2014	3.03	2014	2021	[Timeline bar]
Targeted poverty reduction	2018	2.57	2018	2021	[Timeline bar]
Poverty alleviation	2020	3.07	2020	2023	[Timeline bar]
Common prosperity	2003	13.1	2022	2025	[Timeline bar]
Rural revitalization	2021	7.59	2022	2025	[Timeline bar]

Figure 5. Top 11 keywords with the strongest citation bursts.

gradually shifted toward practice-oriented themes aligned with national strategies, including “poverty alleviation cooperation” and “targeted poverty reduction” and extended to specific implementation pathways such as “industrial transfer”, “technology transfer” and “vocational education”. In recent years, the growing prominence of keywords like “education poverty alleviation”, “rural revitalization” and “industrial relocation” marks a shift in the research frontiers of East-West collaboration. This transition corresponds to the decisive achievements in poverty alleviation, the comprehensive advancement of rural revitalization, and the sustained promotion of common prosperity. Research in the following three areas has attracted particular attention, with numerous scholars producing corresponding results.

1) East-West Collaboration Drives Comprehensive Rural Revitalization.

East-West collaboration serves as a central pathway for advancing comprehensive rural revitalization, promoting coordinated regional development, and achieving

common prosperity. Many scholars have conducted in-depth research on this theme from multiple perspectives. Theoretically, [Liao et al. \(2022\)](#) elucidated how East-West collaboration, guided by the principle of common prosperity, fosters regional economic circulation through spatial integration, industrial chain convergence via market mechanisms, and empowerment of rural revitalization through value creation. [Zhai \(2022\)](#) further examined the transformation of collaboration mechanisms, analyzing the shift from a “government-led pressure model” to a “market-driven incentive model” and identified four practical models that shape a “government-market-society” coordination mechanism to enhance inter-county collaborative governance and strengthen county-level endogenous capacity. Regarding specific directions for mechanism transformation, [Li and Ma \(2024\)](#) explicitly proposed restructuring the East-West collaboration mechanism by shifting the dominant logic from government-led to market-driven, transitioning from one-way assistance to two-way interaction, and upgrading from poverty alleviation collaboration to deepened comprehensive cooperation. At the implementation level, [Xie & Peng \(2022\)](#), using consumption-based assistance as a case study, identified four models of government-market relationships and proposed optimization pathways—such as refining industrial chains, improving performance evaluation incentives, and strengthening benefit linkages—to prevent “dual failures” of both government and market. Against the backdrop of East-West collaboration, how can rural revitalization transition from “targeted assistance” to “inclusive development” while ensuring central-local coordination? [Cheng et al. \(2025\)](#), focusing on the “county” level, revealed the transmission and response mechanisms of this institutional transformation. Their research found that the central government clarifies the direction of East-West collaboration through strategic mobilization and provides stable guarantees via “institutional confirmation” while local governments respond differentially based on resource endowments: resource-scarce regions tend to empower local entities, whereas resource-diverse regions excel at integrating resources to form collaborative clusters. The current phase of East-West collaboration has entered a stage of deep multi-stakeholder integration, requiring greater emphasis on balancing central institutional safeguards with local innovation, aligning top-level design with county-level practical needs, and rationally allocating market resources under government coordination to resolve regional development imbalances and advance comprehensive rural revitalization.

2) Implementation of Educational Assistance in East-West Collaboration. The core essence of East-West collaboration lies in empowering the self-development capabilities of populations in western regions, establishing a long-term mechanism for stable poverty alleviation and sustainable development. As a fundamental strategy for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty, educational assistance under East-West collaboration serves as critical support for effectively implementing this mechanism. Currently, academia is engaged in in-depth, multidimensional discussions centered on this pathway ([Xie, 2021](#)). From

a macro-theoretical perspective, Xie (2021) clarified the essence of “group-based” educational assistance, identifying five theoretical shifts: from isolated assistance to cooperative win-win outcomes, from government-dominated approaches to multi-stakeholder participation, from teaching support to management support, from knowledge-based assistance to dual support for knowledge and motivation, and from external aid to self-sustaining capacity-building and mutual contribution. A four-tiered local operational logic—including “high-quality organizations + exemplary Party members”—has been established, covering compulsory education, vocational education, and preschool education. Wang and An (2025) extended the “group-based assistance” theory to vocational education, applying embeddedness theory to analyze how such assistance integrates into teaching practices across institutional, resource, and relational dimensions. Wang et al. (2019), examining micro-level individual perspectives, revealed through education cost-benefit theory that obstacles to East-West vocational education enrollment stem from cognitive biases among learners and their families. Yang et al. (2023) validated Xie Zhiju’s “blood transfusion-blood generation” theory using the “Guangzhou-Bijiang Model” case study, analyzing the “eastern enterprises + western resources” talent cultivation model and the “1 + N + N” collaborative education mechanism, which achieved 100% employment for 1862 students from impoverished backgrounds, directly demonstrating the theory’s practical value. In the early stages of poverty alleviation, vocational education was prioritized for its broad coverage, rapid results, and strong policy support. The current national push to develop vocational education assistance aims to build on poverty alleviation achievements, drive comprehensive rural revitalization, and stimulate endogenous growth momentum in western regions.

3) East-West Collaboration and Industrial Transfer. The role of East-West collaboration in promoting industrial transfer is widely recognized, and its underlying mechanisms can be systematically explained through four closely interconnected dimensions: foundational safeguards, capacity building, environmental support, and fundamental drivers. First, Xie et al. (2024) emphasize that well-established collaborative mechanisms and pairing arrangements form the institutional foundation for orderly industrial transfer. Within this framework, Zou and Zhou (2023) further highlight capacity building, noting that East-West collaboration enhances technological absorption and human capital in central and western regions through technology transfer and knowledge diffusion, thereby providing core competencies for industrial reception. Subsequently, Zhou and Zhang (2024) extend the perspective to environmental support, demonstrating that systematic improvements in both hardware (government funding, infrastructure) and software (public services) create essential conditions for industrial establishment and development. Tracing the fundamental drivers, Ji (2022) reveals, through industrial gradient theory, how East-West collaboration activates and leverages regional differences in factor endowments via policy guidance, transforming potential complementary advantages into tangible industrial mobility. The research of these

scholars interconnects seamlessly, collectively forming a complete causal chain—from institutional frameworks to endogenous capacity building, and from external environments to economic drivers—systematically elucidating the multidimensional pathways through which East-West collaboration facilitates industrial transfer.

Future research is expected to further explore these frontier topics, contributing to the continuous refinement of the theoretical framework for East-West collaboration and the ongoing optimization of its practical models.

6. Conclusion, Policy Implications and Research Prospects

This study employs CiteSpace's bibliometric analysis to systematically examine and visually analyze nearly 300 core publications in the field of China's East-West Collaboration policy research from 1996 to 2025. Through multi-dimensional analysis covering developmental stages, knowledge structure, research forces, hotspots, and frontiers, the following conclusions are drawn.

First, research on East-West collaboration demonstrates strong policy-driven characteristics, with its developmental trajectory closely aligned with national strategic deployments. Corresponding to the three stages of policy evolution—the exploratory phase (1996-2005), the institutional standardization phase (2016-2020), and the paired development phase (2021-present)—publication trends in this field closely mirror these phases. The volume of publications has risen significantly since the introduction of the “rural revitalization” and “common prosperity” objectives, indicating that research has entered a new stage of deepening and expansion.

In response to Conclusion 1, this paper recommends strengthening two-way interaction and institutional feedback between policy evaluation and academic research. Establishing collaborative platforms between policymakers and relevant scholars could institutionalize pre-implementation research consultation and post-implementation third-party academic assessment, thereby making policy iteration more scientific and forward-looking.

Second, the distribution of research forces exhibits a pattern of “decentralization overall but concentration locally”. A core group of authors has not yet formed, and collaboration networks between institutions remain underdeveloped. Research activity is primarily concentrated in universities, with institutions directly involved in collaborative practices—such as Guangzhou University, Northwest University, and Yunnan University—demonstrating a geographical alignment between research focus and policy implementation.

In response to Conclusion 2, it is recommended to focus on establishing institutionalized, cross-regional academic collaboration mechanisms. Led by agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the National Rural Revitalization Administration, an East-West Collaboration Research Alliance could be formed. Through dedicated research projects, scholar exchanges, and data-sharing platforms, this alliance would encourage universities and research institutions in both regions to

establish paired research teams, thereby strengthening collective research capacity.

Third, research themes have evolved from “unidirectional assistance” to “collaborative symbiosis”. The focus has moved from early topics centered on one-way support—such as “poverty alleviation collaboration” and “pairing assistance”—to themes emphasizing bidirectional interaction and sustainable development, including “common prosperity”, “rural revitalization”, “vocational education” and “endogenous growth”. This progression indicates that academic understanding of collaborative mechanisms has deepened from an external “blood transfusion” approach to an endogenous “blood production” paradigm.

In response to Conclusion 3, future policy design and implementation should prioritize fostering endogenous capacity and establishing mutually beneficial mechanisms. Emphasis should be placed on institutional innovation to optimize the two-way flow of production factors—such as capital, technology, talent, and data—between eastern and western regions. This will require strengthening the decisive role of the market in resource allocation while enhancing the guiding and bridging functions of government and social organizations.

Fourth, the research frontier’s focus on exemplary models, policy effectiveness, and implementation pathways indicates that studies are advancing from macro-level conceptual frameworks toward precision governance practices. The recent prominence of keywords such as the “Fujian-Ningxia Model”, “performance evaluation” and “industry-education integration” reflects a shift in research emphasis from macro-strategic discourse to the practical efficacy of collaborative mechanisms. Specifically, research is progressing synergistically along three dimensions: first, through case studies and model refinement that explore replicable implementation pathways by analyzing exemplary practices like “group-based assistance” and the “Guangzhou-Bijiang Model”; second, through policy evaluation and mechanism optimization that establish scientific assessment systems to measure collaborative outcomes and drive the transition from unilateral aid to two-way interaction; and third, through mechanism innovation in key areas, deepening systematic research from institutional safeguards and resource allocation to the activation of incentives in critical fields such as rural revitalization, educational assistance, and industrial transfer.

In response to Conclusion 4, a systematic, multidimensional effectiveness evaluation framework and a mature model-dissemination mechanism should be established. On the one hand, comprehensive evaluation indicators covering economic, social, ecological, and governance dimensions should be developed. On the other hand, the case repository and theoretical refinement of effective models such as “group-based assistance” and “industrial enclaves” should be strengthened to form replicable and adaptable policy toolkits, thereby enhancing the quality and efficiency of collaborative practice.

This study also has certain limitations. First, the data sources are limited to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, which effectively re-

flects mainstream domestic academic trends but may exclude significant international research or policy documents. Second, while bibliometric methods are well-suited for revealing macro-level trends and structural relationships, interpreting the deeper content of the literature still requires supplementation with qualitative research approaches.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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