



Mapping the Research Landscape of Overseas Chinese Literature: Trends and Hotspot from 2006 to 2025

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Abstract. Overseas Chinese literature embodies the historical memory, identity negotiation and cultural expression of diasporic Chinese communities within transnational and cross-cultural contexts, making it an essential component of globalisation and diaspora studies. However, its overall research framework has not yet been systematically reviewed. Existing studies in this field remain thematically fragmented and methodologically limited, highlighting the urgent need for bibliometric and visualised analyses to reveal its research hotspots and evolutionary trends. This study analyses 397 publications retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection (2006–2025) using CiteSpace software and integrates keyword co-occurrence, clustering and timeline mapping techniques within the theoretical framework of globalisation and diaspora studies. The findings indicate a clear evolution from early focuses on immigrant identity and ethnic characteristics to more diversified themes such as gender politics, cultural hybridity and transnational writing, with transnationalism emerging after 2019 as the dominant analytical paradigm in the field. These results not only map the knowledge structure and evolutionary trends of overseas Chinese literature but also demonstrate how integrating globalisation and diaspora theories with bibliometric methods can provide a systematic foundation and analytical framework for future cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research.

Keywords and phrases: overseas Chinese literature, visualised analysis, globalisation and diaspora studies, CiteSpace, trends and hotspot

Introduction

Overseas Chinese literature, as a critical field in globalisation and diaspora studies, encapsulates the historical memory, identity construction and cultural expression of Chinese immigrants within cross-cultural contexts and has gained renewed contemporary relevance amid rising global migration and transnational cultural exchange (Liang et al. 2018). This field focuses on the identity construction, historical memory and cultural expression of Chinese immigrants in heterogeneous cultural environments (Stenberg 2015). At the same time, it reflects the unique experiences of ethnic communities in cross-cultural interaction and cultural reconstruction (Ho and Ming 2021). Although research on overseas Chinese literature has gained increasing prominence within the international literary studies framework in recent years, with its perspectives gradually shifting from localised or regional paradigms to a globally networked framework (Gnutzmann, Jakisch and Rabe 2014). However, research in this field remains highly fragmented, with individual studies often focusing on specific themes, regions, or types of literature, lacking systematic integration. This fragmentation not only risks redundant research and the division of theoretical frameworks but also hinders the formation of knowledge networks among scholars, thereby limiting a comprehensive understanding of the overall development, research trends and cross-cultural significance of overseas Chinese literature. A systematic analysis of the evolutionary trajectory and research hotspots in overseas Chinese literature not only reveals its knowledge structure and academic frontiers but also provides new theoretical perspectives for understanding cultural migration and literary production in the context of globalisation.

Existing research on overseas Chinese literature primarily focuses on identity construction, cultural adaptation and linguistic expression, relying heavily on textual analysis and historical inquiry while rarely incorporating data-driven quantitative approaches (Zhao 2024). While such approaches have contributed to the theoretical foundation of overseas Chinese literature, they have yet to offer a comprehensive and systematic examination of its dynamic academic development, research focal points and evolving knowledge networks. Furthermore, with the increasing application of digital tools in academic research, bibliometric methods have emerged as a significant approach for analysing the developmental trends of scholarly fields (Chen et al. 2024; Dai et al. 2021). Visualised analysis of existing literature can intuitively present research hotspots, their evolutionary trajectories and the knowledge structure of the

field, identifying critical nodes and potential future directions in academic development (Ho 2019). Consequently, a pressing issue in this field is how to systematically unveil research trends and key themes in overseas Chinese literature by integrating bibliometric analysis with existing scholarly discourse.

To address this issue, this study examines overseas Chinese literature research in the 21st century using a bibliometric framework and CiteSpace software for systematic analysis. Through keyword co-occurrence analysis, clustering analysis and temporal evolution mapping, the study aims to identify major research themes, knowledge network structures and their evolutionary pathways within the field. Driven by data analysis, this research seeks to answer three key questions: (1) Through keyword co-occurrence and document clustering analysis using CiteSpace, what are the core themes, hotspot directions and scholarly focuses of overseas Chinese literature research in the 21st century? (2) Based on temporal evolution mapping, how have the knowledge structure and research networks of overseas Chinese literature developed and reorganised over time? (3) By leveraging the knowledge nodes and collaboration networks identified through visualised analysis, what potential research directions can be proposed for future interdisciplinary, cross-regional studies and innovative applications of data-driven methods? By constructing a knowledge map of overseas Chinese literature through visualised analysis, this study not only provides valuable reference for the development of the field's academic framework but also offers empirical support and theoretical insights for strengthening interdisciplinary and cross-regional collaboration and advancing data-driven research in the future.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a quantitative bibliometric research design, complemented by a visual knowledge mapping approach, to systematically examine the knowledge structure, research hotspots and evolutionary pathways of overseas Chinese literature from 2006 to 2025. The study aims to identify research trends, hotspots and developmental trajectories within the field. It is based on database-driven retrieval and screening, with CiteSpace serving as the core analytical platform. Techniques such as keyword co-occurrence, cluster analysis and timeline (time zone) visualisation are employed to provide both descriptive insights and analytical interpretations of the field's development.

Data collection

This study utilises the Web of Science (WOS) Core Collection database as its data source, employing a topic-based search strategy. The search terms include “Overseas Chinese literature”, “Chinese diaspora literature”, “Chinese immigrant literature” and “Sinophone literature.” The retrieval period is set from 2006 to 2025, yielding a total of 1,061 relevant documents. The Web of Science Core Collection database offers high-quality coverage of peer-reviewed literature, comprehensive citation indexing and the ability to integrate interdisciplinary sources, making it a more suitable data source for bibliometric analysis compared to other databases. The inclusion and exclusion of search terms and their combinations were guided by criteria such as topical relevance, academic rigour and retrievability, while also drawing on previous literature reviews and expert recommendations in the field, to ensure that the search strategy was both comprehensive and unbiased (Marzi et al. 2025). To enhance the relevance and quality of the dataset, the collected documents were further refined by applying WOS database filters. This process involved excluding documents with low thematic relevance (e.g., conference papers, book reviews) and duplicate records, while restricting the language to English. After this preliminary screening, 750 documents were identified. To ensure data accuracy and relevance, a manual review was conducted to remove additional documents with limited relevance to the research topic. The final selection of 397 documents adhered to strict criteria of topical relevance, ensuring the data’s representativeness and analytical reliability, while cross-verification was employed to minimise potential biases. A visual representation of the data collection steps is presented in Figure 1.

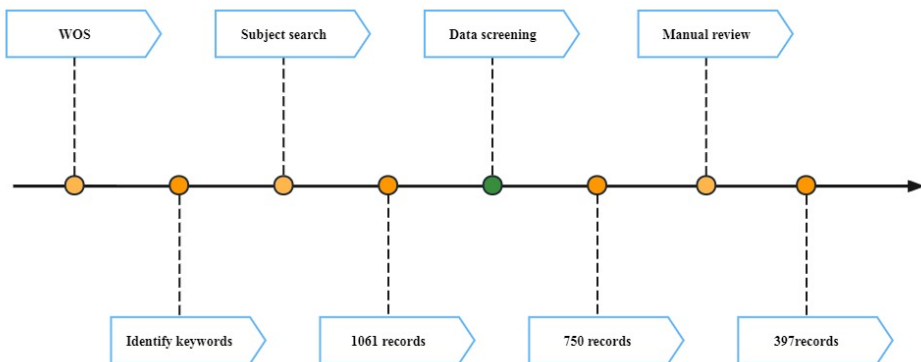


Figure 1. Flowchart of the bibliographical database search (2006 to 2025)

Research instrument

Bibliometric analysis is an objective and scientific quantitative method widely used to examine research hotspots and evolutionary trajectories across various disciplines (Chen et al. 2024; Su, Li and Kang 2019). This study employs CiteSpace to conduct a bibliometric analysis, aiming to identify key research pathways, knowledge turning points and developmental trends in the field of overseas Chinese literature. CiteSpace, developed by Dr. Chaomei Chen, is based on co-citation analysis and the Pathfinder network algorithm and operates within a Java environment (Chen et al. 2024). Integrating methods such as collaboration network analysis, co-occurrence analysis, co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling, CiteSpace provides a visual representation of the evolution of scientific knowledge and its underlying structural relationships (Yan 2024). Due to its scientific rigour, effectiveness and ease of use, CiteSpace has become one of the most widely utilised tools for knowledge mapping in academic research worldwide (Yuan, Vengadasamy and Zheng 2024). The dynamic clustering, timeline visualisation and centrality and burst detection features of CiteSpace enable precise identification of the evolutionary trajectories and knowledge structures of research topics, which closely align with this study's focus on the hotspots, research pathways and developmental trends in overseas Chinese literature.

This study applies CiteSpace to conduct a systematic bibliometric and empirical analysis of literature retrieved from the WOS database on the topic of overseas Chinese literature. Through keyword co-occurrence frequency analysis, centrality analysis and temporal evolution sequencing, this study explores the key research hotspots, evolutionary trajectories and future development trends within this field.

Results

Quantitative analysis of the literature

The annual distribution of research publications from 2006 to 2025 (as shown in Figure 2) exhibits an exponential growth trend and the past two decades of research can be divided into three stages as follows:

1. Stage 1 (2006 to 2011) – The Emergence Period: Annual publications remained in the single-digit range (four to six articles), with slow cumulative growth, indicating that a systematic research framework had not yet been established. Research during this period was mostly

exploratory, such as Fong and Ooka (2006) on social participation among Chinese immigrants and Ng (2018) on the relationship between Malaysian Chinese literature and modern Chinese literature. These studies laid the foundational issues of ethnic identity and cultural adaptation, initiating scholarly attention to overseas Chinese literature.

2. Stage 2 (2012 to 2020) – The Steady Development Period: Annual publications grew steadily from 10 in 2013 to 26 in 2020, with a minor peak of 17 publications in 2014. Although slight fluctuations occurred subsequently, the overall trend remained upward. The accumulation of publications during this stage reflects the expansion of the research community and the deepening of research dimensions. Representative works include Pong and Peng (2016) analysing ethnic consciousness in Malaysian Chinese poetry and Ho and Ming (2021) examining identity negotiation among Bruneian Chinese. These studies not only expanded regional perspectives but also marked the gradual systematisation of discussions on gender politics, cultural negotiation and cross-cultural translation. A key turning point during this period was the growing focus on cultural identity reconstruction in the context of transnational migration and localisation processes.
3. Stage 3 (2021 to 2025) – The Rapid Growth Period: Annual publications jumped to 49 in 2021 (an 88% increase year-on-year) and reached a historical peak of 67 in 2024, with cumulative publications approaching 400. This stage reflects the academic flourishing of overseas Chinese literature research. Representative publications include Chay (2024) on allegorical realism, Jin (2024) on transnational writing in Asian American literature and Feng and Feng (2022) on the construction of cultural images in translation. These studies not only demonstrate cross-linguistic and cross-media cultural practices but also highlight the interactions among historical memory transmission, cross-cultural identity construction and digital media influence. Stage-specific turning points include the diversification of research methods and topics, such as the attention to ethnic identity on digital platforms in a globalised context (Liu 2024) and the systematic analysis of transnational literary networks and cultural dissemination patterns.

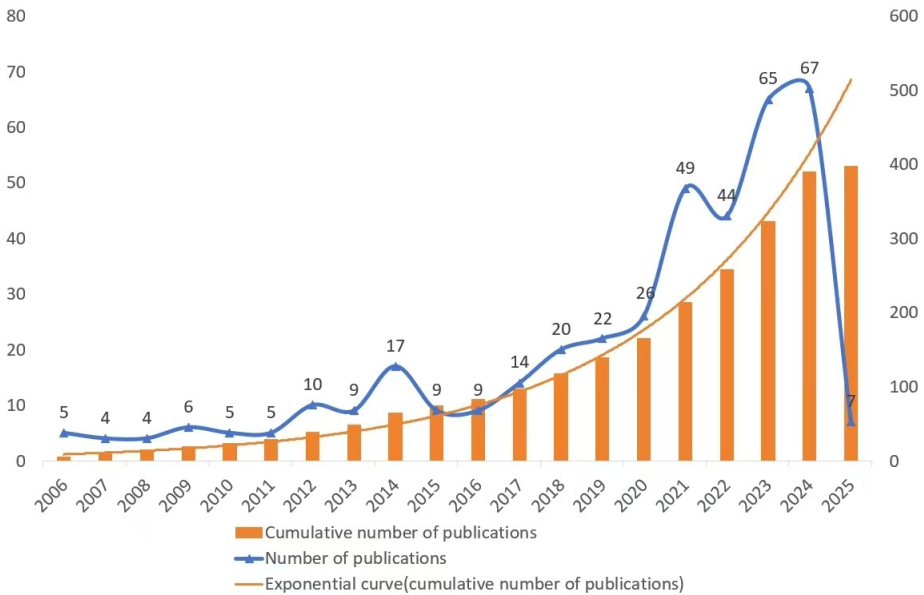


Figure 2. Publication trend of overseas Chinese literature-themed articles

Overall, the publication trends indicate that the field has evolved from a slow initial phase to multidimensional deepening and finally to rapid development, with the notable growth after 2021 reflecting sustained scholarly attention. Although each stage emphasises distinct themes, there is significant overlap and interaction among them; for example, topics of ethnic identity, cultural negotiation and transnational writing increasingly converge during the rapid growth period, forming a more integrated research perspective.

Keyword co-occurrence analysis and cluster analysis

Keywords are words or terms extracted from articles that vividly and intuitively reflect the main content of the article. Research on keywords helps analyse the hot topics in a particular scientific field (Ho 2019). This study employs CiteSpace software to construct keyword co-occurrence and keyword clustering knowledge maps based on the collected literature data to track and analyse the hot issues in overseas Chinese literature research. In keyword co-occurrence analysis, the size of the map labels reflects the frequency of the keywords; larger labels indicate higher frequencies. Generally, the indicators used to measure the importance of keywords include “Frequency” and “Centrality”. “Frequency” is positively correlated with attention, meaning that higher frequency indicates more attention, while “Centrality” reflects the importance of the node. The larger the centrality value, the more important the node is (Chen 2009).

To improve the clustering of the keyword network and highlight hot topics, we merge and eliminate certain original keywords. For example, “Immigrants” and “Chinese immigrants” are merged into “Immigrants”. We also remove keywords that are irrelevant to constructing the knowledge map of overseas Chinese literature, including geographic names like “Hong Kong”, “America”, “Asian American” and “Canada”, conceptually insignificant terms like “People”, “Issues” and “Progress”, and collective nouns like “2nd generation” and “Chinese children”. After keyword merging and elimination, the top 21 important keywords with a co-occurrence frequency greater than 5 are statistically sorted (as shown in Table 1). The most frequent keyword is “Chinese”, followed by “Migration”, “Immigrants”, “Identity”, “Gender”, “Sinophone literature” and “Determinants.”

Table 1. Frequency and centrality statistics of the top 21 keywords in overseas Chinese literature research

No.	Keywords	Count	Centrality	No.	Keywords	Count	Centrality
1.	Chinese	24	0.27	11.	Children	8	0.16
2.	Migration	21	0.04	12.	Adaptation	8	0.05
3.	Immigrants	20	0.16	13.	Culture	7	0.15
4.	Identity	14	0.02	14.	Experiences	7	0.01
5.	Gender	13	0.25	15.	Family	6	0.05
6.	Sinophone literature	12	0.06	16.	Citizenship	5	0.06
7.	Determinants	10	0.03	17.	Ethnic identity	5	0.05
8.	Attitudes	10	0.04	18.	Community	5	0.06
9.	Impacts	10	0.06	19.	Adults	5	0.02
10.	Acculturation	9	0.22	20.	Networks	5	0.03
				21.	Mobility	5	0.04

As shown in Figure 3, the final co-occurrence map of keywords in overseas Chinese literature includes 423 keyword nodes and 1,314 connections between the nodes.

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 Network: 2626/0/0 (Strong Linkage)
 Labels: 1 C.C.: 343 (79%)
 Nodes Labeled: 1 (0%)
 Pruning: None
 Excluded:

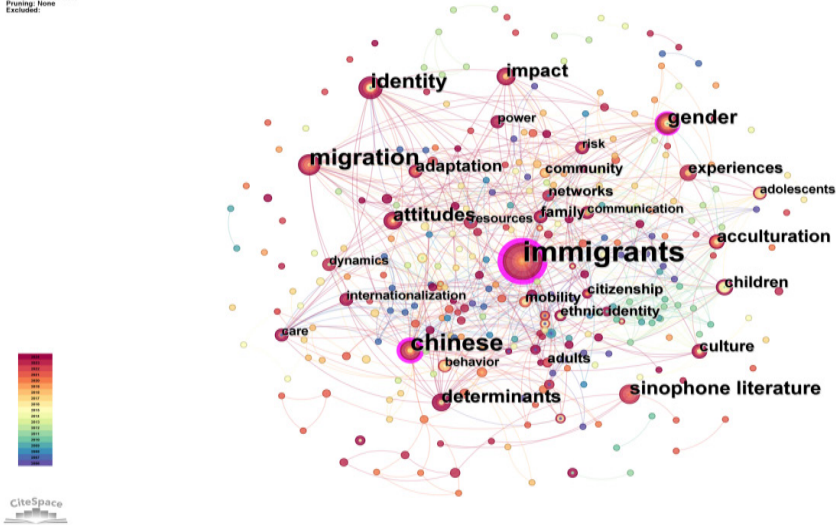


Figure 3. Keyword co-occurrence map

Using the clustering algorithm in CiteSpace, cluster terms were extracted from the original literature keywords to generate the keyword clustering view (as shown in Figure 4). The clustering view emphasises the structural characteristics between clusters and highlights key nodes and important connections. CiteSpace provides two metrics, modularity (Q -value) and silhouette (S -value), to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the clustering results. Generally, the Q -value falls within the range of $[0, 1]$, with higher Q -values indicating better clustering results. When $Q > 0.3$, the network structure is considered significant. The S -value reflects the homogeneity of the network. An S -value > 0.5 is typically considered reasonable for clustering and an S -value > 0.7 indicates that the clustering is highly efficient and convincing (Chen 2009). In the clustering results shown in Figure 4, the Q -value is 0.6654 and the S -value is 0.8602, indicating a well-constructed clustering map. A total of seven clusters were identified, namely: “Transnationalism”, “Asian American literature”, “Ethnic minorities”, “Group orientation”, “Preferences”, “Gender and sexuality” and “Cultural hybridity”.

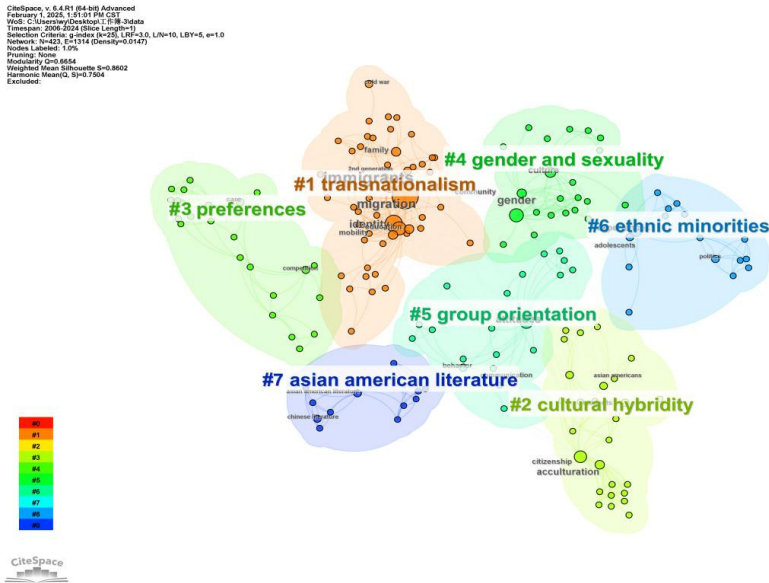


Figure 4. Keyword clustering map

Identification of research hotspots

Through the examination of articles by key authors in the field of overseas Chinese literature, combined with the results of keyword clustering analysis, the current research hotspots in this field can be summarised into five main areas: “Ethnic communities and gender politics”, “Cultural struggle and adaptation”, “Transnational writing of Asian American literature”, “Intergenerational transmission and reconstruction of historical memory”, and “Construction of cross-cultural identities”.

Ethnic communities and gender politics

Research on ethnic communities and gender politics exhibits multidimensional complexity, involving aspects such as identity construction, cultural representation and power relations. In the Southeast Asian context, the literary works of Chinese writers reflect the existence of minority groups under political and cultural hegemony, using diverse narrative strategies to construct resistance to mainstream discourses (Khor 2022; Pong and Peng 2016; Soon and Shy 2013). During the process of transnational migration and localisation, the Chinese community continuously negotiates the relationships between individual, family and transnational identities, with this multiple identity construction reflecting the adaptation strategies of ethnic communities in the

context of globalisation (Ho and Ming 2021). Gender politics plays a crucial role in ethnic identity construction and gender representation in literary translation and creation reflects the tension between traditional gender concepts and modern gender awareness (Chen and Song 2025; Ji and Meng 2023). Especially in the context of global crises like the pandemic, gender inequality and ethnic identity intersect to form unique cultural phenomena (Thornber 2023; Wang 2017). Ethnic relations and gender politics in literary creation are often presented through metaphor and symbolism, revealing the complexity of identity construction in a cross-cultural context (Stenberg 2015). Although this theme primarily focuses on social structures and power relations, in certain cases, its findings also provide social and gender perspectives relevant to cross-cultural identity construction (Chay 2024).

Cultural struggle and adaptation

Cultural struggle and adaptation manifest as a multidimensional dynamic negotiation process. In literary translation practice, when a text crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries, it often requires adjustments at multiple levels. This adaptation involves both maintaining the original cultural connotations and making compromises and reconstructions within the target language's cultural context (Lin et al. 2023; Shan 2024; Yang 2023). In transmedia adaptations, cultural struggle is reflected in the tension between traditional cultural symbols and contemporary forms of expression, illustrating the complexity of cultural identity construction in the context of globalisation (Chen 2018; He and Shi 2023; Inwood 2017). It is noteworthy that this cultural struggle and adaptation exist not only at the textual level but also extend to specific domains such as technological dissemination and educational practices, presenting adaptive strategies at the practical level (Gu and Brooks 2008; Li, Jong and Karreman 2015). In the digital media era, the forms and meanings of cultural struggle and adaptation undergo profound changes, presenting new characteristics, exemplified by the integration of traditional cultural elements and modern forms of communication (He and Shi 2023; Inwood 2017). In commercial operations and cross-cultural communication, the phenomena of cultural misreading and reinterpretation highlight the power relations involved in the cultural struggle and adaptation process (Chevaillier 2011; Lin et al. 2023).

Transnational writing in Asian American literature

Transnational writing in Asian American literature presents a complex cultural tapestry characterised by diverse and interwoven influences. The practice of cross-language writing transcends the limitations of a single language, expanding the expressive space of world literature through creative language

use and the integration of cultural resources (Jin 2024; Pu and Li 2019). This cross-linguistic practice constructs positive cultural imagery by skilfully applying both domestication and foreignisation strategies (Feng and Feng 2022). Regional Chinese-language literature reflects the fusion of diverse cultures and the construction of identities in different geographic locations, embodying the multicultural experiences and sense of belonging within overseas Chinese communities (Xiao 2023). In the Southeast Asian context, Chinese-language writing reveals the tension between cultural nationalism and localised expression, illustrating the complexity of transnational writing (Stenberg 2023). This form of writing not only involves the reconstruction of cultural identity but also serves as a challenge and rewrite of mainstream discursive hegemony. Through experimental writing techniques and critical perspectives, authors have advanced the multifaceted development of global literary discourse systems (Jin 2024). In the context of the new era, the exploration and reconstruction of “Chineseness” has become a key issue in transnational writing, offering new theoretical perspectives for understanding and interpreting transnational Chinese-language literature (Seng 2021).

Intergenerational transmission and reconstruction of historical memory

At the individual and familial levels, historical memory is often preserved and transmitted through specific people and events. This memory encompasses not only the entanglements of power and betrayal but also the historical trajectory of family rise and fall (Chung 2009; Hsu 2023). At the group level, diasporic communities construct and transmit collective memory through literary creation, oral histories and other means. These memories reflect the survival conditions of the group and illustrate the evolution of their cultural identity (Wang and Huang, 2020; Xiao, 2023). Personal experiences during specific historical periods add unique temporal marks to these memories, forming narratives of identity within a cross-cultural context (Tong, An and Zhou 2022). At the institutional level, the transmission of historical memory is manifested in the formulation of national foreign policies (Liu 2011), as well as in the exploration of methodologies in cross-cultural research (Turner, 2010) and the overseas dissemination of classical literature (Je 2024). This multidimensional process of historical memory transmission and reconstruction not only forms a critical perspective for understanding contemporary transnational cultural dissemination but also profoundly impacts cultural dialogue and identity construction between different groups. It provides new research dimensions for exploring cultural inheritance in the context of globalisation. This theme is temporally connected to cross-cultural identity construction, but its core focus remains on the preservation of historical memory and cultural transmission rather than on contemporary identity practices.

Cross-cultural identity construction

Cross-cultural identity construction is a complex cultural practice process that encompasses multiple dimensions. In the context of globalisation, the identity of the Chinese diaspora demonstrates notable fluidity, which is reflected both in vertical intergenerational transmission and horizontal geographic migration (Benton and Gomez 2016; Velasco 2017). Particularly within the Southeast Asian context, the literary works of Chinese writers have become an essential means to understand the cultural memory and real-world situations of diasporic communities, reflecting deep reflections on belonging, displacement and hybridity (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007; Liang et al. 2018; Velasco 2017). With the advancement of digital technologies, both the form and content of identity construction have undergone profound changes. The identity practices of transnational bloggers on social media platforms showcase the dialectical relationship between cultural identity and ethnic differences (Fong and Ooka 2006; Kavada 2009; Liu 2024). At the linguistic practice level, both English as a lingua franca and Chinese as a second language play pivotal roles in the identity construction process (Gnutzmann, Jakisch and Rabe 2014; Li and Gong 2025; Liu and Li 2023). Studies indicate that this process of cross-cultural identity construction often involves the interplay of various factors such as professional identity, collective identity and social networks (Foley et al. 2022; Hardy 2021; Lobbedez and Buchter 2023; Zhu et al. 2022), illustrating the dynamic and context-dependent nature of cross-cultural identity formation. This theme draws to some extent on the research findings of ethnic communities and gender politics, cultural negotiation and adaptation and transnational Asian American literature, but it still independently focuses on the formation and evolution of individual and collective identities in the context of globalisation.

Analysis of research evolution path

Time zone is a perspective that focuses on representing the evolution of knowledge from a temporal dimension, clearly displaying the updates and mutual influences of literature (Dai et al. 2021). Therefore, this article uses CiteSpace to establish a temporal evolution view of keyword evolution in overseas Chinese literature research (as shown in Figure 5), aiming to explore the developmental trends in this field. Based on the literature review and the sequence of keyword appearances, the research on overseas Chinese literature can be divided into three stages. The first stage is the Initial Development Period (2006 to 2012), primarily focusing on foundational issues such as immigrants, identity and ethnic minorities. Research during this phase mainly revolved around the identity and ethnic characteristics of overseas Chinese, laying the groundwork for the fundamental research framework in the field.

The second stage is the Diverse Deepening Period (2013 to 2018), in which research topics expanded significantly. New research dimensions emerged, including cultural hybridity, gender and attitudes. The focus of research broadened from a singular exploration of identity to a more comprehensive investigation of cultural adaptation and gender issues. The third stage is the Flourishing Development Period (2019 to 2025), where research exhibited more mature academic characteristics. Transnationalism became the core research theme, while new topics such as group orientation and preferences emerged. Research on Asian American literature also displayed a robust development trend.

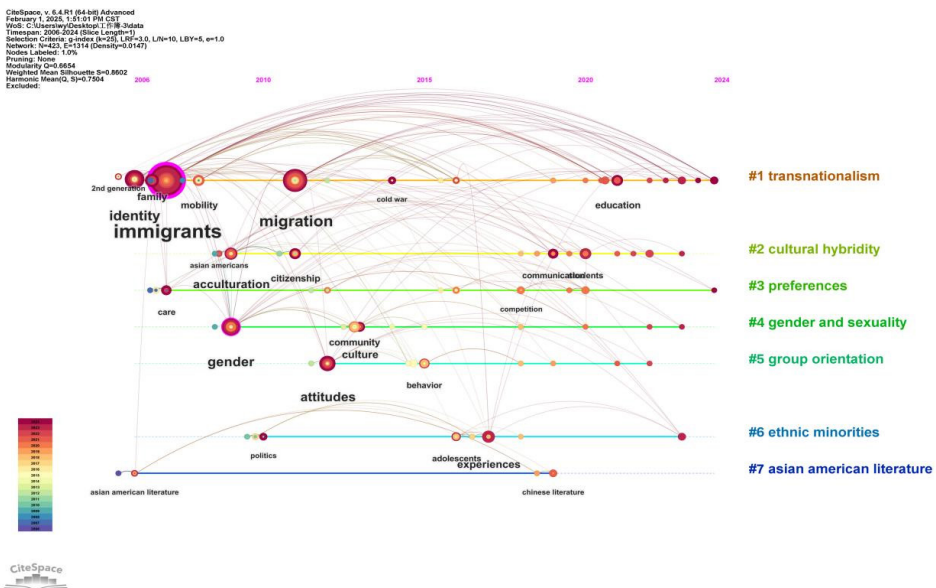


Figure 5. Keyword evolution time zone view

The time zone graph clearly presents the evolution trajectory of research themes, starting with the early focus on immigrant identity, gradually evolving into a multidimensional research system that includes cultural hybridity, gender studies and more. Eventually, this culminated in a comprehensive research framework centred on transnationalism. The intensity of connections between the research themes indicates a close interactive relationship among different topics, collectively contributing to the construction of a systematic knowledge structure in overseas Chinese literature research.

Author and institutional collaboration network analysis

Using CiteSpace software, collaboration network analyses were conducted with authors as the node type, resulting in the author collaboration network map (as shown in Figure 6) and with institutions as the node type, resulting in the institutional collaboration network map (as shown in Figure 7).

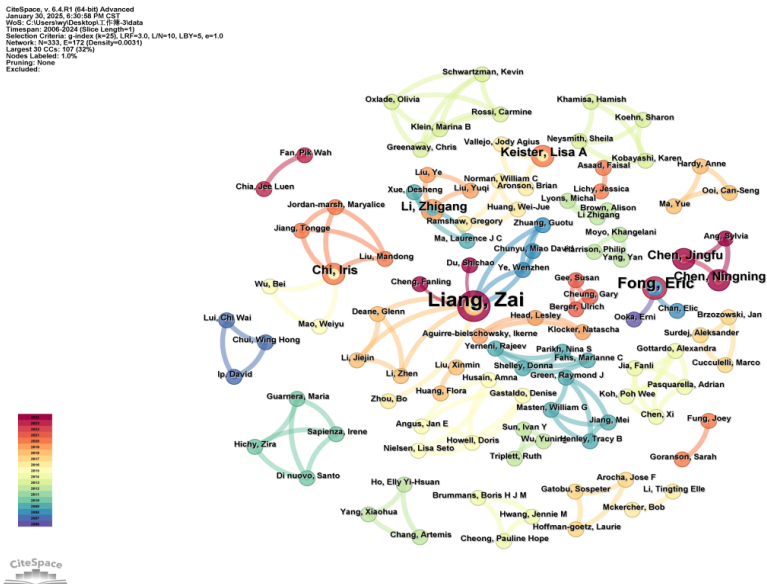


Figure 6. Author collaboration network map

As shown in Figure 6, the scholarly community in the field of overseas Chinese literature research has formed a large-scale collaboration network, with Liang Zai as the central figure forming the largest cluster of cooperation. This scholar has established close collaborative relationships with several other researchers. The map also highlights smaller collaborative groups, such as the research teams in the upper left and lower right corners. These teams have strong internal connections, but there are fewer horizontal ties between them. The node colours indicate that red represents newer collaborations, while blue represents earlier ones, showing that academic cooperation in this field continues to be active.

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 Network: 2247, E=182 (Density=0.0603)
 Labels: 1 (Q=0.31194)
 Nodes Labeled: 1 (0%)
 Pruning: None
 Excluded:



Figure 7. Institutional collaboration network analysis

Figure 7 shows that the institutional collaboration network has developed into three main clusters centred around Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the University of California System and the University of London. Notably, the collaboration network shows clear cross-regional characteristics, including institutions from Mainland China (such as Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Sun Yat-sen University), Hong Kong (such as The Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Europe and North America (such as University College London, University of Oxford). This cross-regional cooperation demonstrates the internationalisation of overseas Chinese literature research. However, it is also evident that, aside from core institutions, the collaborative relationships between other research institutions need to be strengthened. Overall, the field of overseas Chinese literature research has established a collaborative network centred around important scholars and institutions, with a clear international orientation. However, the network structure still shows some fragmentation, indicating the need for further enhancement of communication and cooperation between different research teams, promoting more cross-institutional and cross-regional academic collaborations to foster deeper development in the field.

Discussion

Based on the above research findings, it can be seen that the annual distribution of literature from 2006 to 2025 reveals the development trajectory of overseas Chinese literature research, from exploratory beginnings to systematic development. This process not only reflects the growth in the number of studies but also demonstrates the deepening of research topics and the evolution of academic paradigms. In the initial stage (2006 to 2011), research focused on fundamental issues such as immigrant identity and ethnic characteristics, showcasing the theoretical emergence of the field (Ho 2019). However, the scale of research during this period was limited, mainly driven by individual scholars' exploratory work. Entering the steady development phase (2012 to 2020), research topics gradually expanded to include gender politics, cultural hybridity and other diverse issues, marking the transition of academic attention from a singular identity perspective to multidimensional cultural studies (Ng 2018). The rapid growth phase after 2021 is characterised not only by a significant increase in the number of publications but also by the deepening of international cooperation and the diversification of research methods (Yan 2024). A comprehensive analysis of publication trends, collaboration networks and thematic evolution collectively demonstrates that overseas Chinese literature research has developed a knowledge evolution path progressing from individual exploration to regional interaction and finally global collaboration. This trajectory reveals the inherent logic of the field's gradual progression toward internationalisation and systematisation. This exponential growth trend indicates that overseas Chinese literature research has evolved from a marginalised academic field into an important cultural research topic in a global context. Its diverse research content, methods and participants have laid the academic foundation and future potential for the field. Behind this trend lies the background of globalisation driving the rise of diasporic research, as well as the unique value and academic appeal of Chinese literature in the global cultural landscape.

Through the collaboration network analysis, it is evident that overseas Chinese literature research exhibits distinct international characteristics. The United States, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom are the main contributors to the field. American scholars dominate in research depth and publication volume, while scholars from Hong Kong and the United Kingdom play a crucial role in regional Chinese literature studies (Liu 2011). Major research institutions such as Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Sun Yat-sen University and University College London form region-centred collaboration networks, showing a multipolar pattern of research (as shown in Figure 7). In addition, scholars

represented by Liang Zai have formed larger collaboration clusters, driving the globalisation of Chinese diasporic literature research (Chung 2009). Although the collaboration network shows some horizontal dispersion, the trend of cross-regional and cross-national cooperation has strengthened in recent years, laying a solid foundation for the further development of the field (Fong and Ooka 2006). The interaction between these collaborative networks and research hotspots indicates that international cooperation extends beyond knowledge sharing to exert structural influences on topic selection and methodological innovation. For instance, cross-institutional collaborations are often closely associated with the emergence of themes such as transnationalism and cultural hybridity, demonstrating how research networks shape the direction of knowledge production. In the future, strengthening interregional connections will further facilitate the integration of research topics and the co-construction of theoretical frameworks.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis and clustering results indicate that the main research topics in overseas Chinese literature studies are concentrated in five areas. First, ethnic communities and gender politics research reveal the identity negotiations of the Chinese diaspora in transnational migration and the key role of gender in the construction of ethnic relations (Khor 2022). Second, cultural resistance and adaptation reflect the dynamic negotiation when texts cross language and cultural boundaries, involving both the preservation of cultural content and the adaptation and compromise to external cultural contexts (Yang 2023). Third, transnational writing of Asian American literature demonstrates the diversity of cultural fusion and identity construction, especially in the Southeast Asian context, reflecting the complexity of cultural nationalism and localised expression (Stenberg 2023). Fourth, the intergenerational transmission and reconstruction of historical memory focus on how diasporic groups preserve and reconstruct collective memory through literary creation, reflecting the evolution of ethnic identity (Wang and Huang 2020). Finally, cross-cultural identity construction has become a new research frontier, reflecting the dynamism and complexity of identity recognition in the context of globalisation and digital technologies (Liu 2024). The diversification of these themes, as evidenced by publication trends and collaboration networks, directly results from the expansion of research entities and enhanced international exchanges, marking a disciplinary evolution of overseas Chinese literature from localised topics toward a global discourse system. These research hotspots not only reflect the diversity of the overseas Chinese literature field but also highlight its significance in a globalised context.

From a methodological perspective, overseas Chinese literature research has undergone a shift from qualitative analysis to quantitative analysis. Early studies primarily focused on text analysis and narrative exploration, concentrating on identity construction and cultural expression in immigrant literature (Ji and Meng 2023). In recent years, with the popularisation of bibliometric tools such as CiteSpace, quantitative research methods have gradually been introduced, revealing research hotspots and evolutionary paths through methods like keyword co-occurrence and time zone analysis (Chen 2009). For example, this study utilised keyword clustering analysis to identify core themes such as transnationalism, cultural hybridity and gender issues, providing new perspectives for the field (Yan 2024). Furthermore, the trend of combining qualitative and quantitative research has become increasingly prominent, particularly with the use of mixed methods combining bibliometrics and text analysis, offering more comprehensive tools and paths for research (Dai et al. 2021). This evolution in methodology reflects the richness and innovation of research paradigms and offers more possibilities for future studies.

Conclusions and Perspectives

This study, through systematic bibliometric analysis of the literature in the field of overseas Chinese literature research, reveals the development trajectory of the field and potential future research directions. The core finding of this study shows that overseas Chinese literature has gradually evolved from a marginal exploratory field into a systematic academic discipline. This development not only reflects the sustained scholarly attention to the experiences of Chinese diaspora communities but also highlights the field's unique value in understanding the diversity and complexity of ethnic cultures within a globalised context.

First, this study finds that the rapid growth of research on overseas Chinese literature indicates the field's increasingly prominent position within cross-cultural studies. The significance of this trend lies in its provision of systematic scholarly evidence for understanding the cultural identity and historical memory of Chinese diaspora communities, while also offering new perspectives for the theoretical construction of ethnic literature in a globalised context.

Second, keyword co-occurrence and clustering analyses reveal the diversification of research themes, including “Ethnic identity”, “Cultural hybridity”, “Gender politics”, “Historical memory” and “Cross-cultural adaptation”. The importance of these findings is that they not only uncover the mechanisms of cultural representation and identity negotiation within Chinese

literature but also reflect the mediating role of overseas Chinese literature in global cultural exchanges, providing a theoretical foundation for future studies exploring the interconnections and interactions among different themes.

Third, from a methodological perspective, this study shows that the field is transitioning from traditional textual analysis toward data-driven research. Although existing tools such as CiteSpace effectively reveal knowledge structures and evolutionary paths, they have limitations in detecting low frequency yet potentially significant research directions. This suggests that future scholars could combine diverse analytical methods with qualitative research to deepen theoretical understanding and expand research scope, thereby advancing the academic and practical development of overseas Chinese literature studies.

While this study has revealed numerous characteristics and trends in the field of overseas Chinese literature, it is subject to several limitations. First, at the data level, the predominant reliance on English-language literature fails to fully capture the scholarly landscape of multilingual research. Consequently, the global developmental trends presented in this study should be regarded as indicative rather than exhaustive. Second, in terms of thematic dimensions, there remains insufficient attention to emerging frontier issues. Furthermore, at the methodological level, the limited capacity of bibliometric tools to identify low-frequency publications and non-standardised data may affect the comprehensive understanding of emerging research directions.

Future research should develop an analytical framework that integrates multilingual literature, regional studies and diverse methodologies, while also delving into the operational mechanisms of collaboration networks among authors and institutions to examine whether their nature reflects the formation of academic communities or resource dependency relationships and to reveal how internal power configurations influence knowledge production.

In summary, overseas Chinese literature research, as an important area of cross-cultural studies, has demonstrated its academic value and practical significance. Future research should deepen the focus on hot topics while actively exploring emerging themes, strengthening interdisciplinary and cross-regional cooperation and exploring more possibilities for Chinese literature in the context of globalisation. This will not only enrich the theoretical framework of literary studies but also provide new academic perspectives and practical insights for global cultural understanding and dialogue.

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