



# Knowledge Mapping Analysis of International Communication in Chinese Higher Education: A Visualization Study Based on CiteSpace

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## Abstract

International communication in Chinese higher education plays a pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural exchange, enhancing China's global discourse influence, and advancing national strategic objectives. This study employs CiteSpace bibliometric visualization to systematically analyze scholarly literature on international communication research in Chinese higher education from 2010 to 2024. Four key findings emerge from this analysis: (1) Research activity has evolved through distinct phases, demonstrating a marked intensification after 2021, with concentrated attention on themes including "telling China's story well", "new foreign languages" and strategic talent cultivation; (2) Research priorities have shifted in alignment with evolving national strategies, progressing from foreign language education frameworks to international communication capacity building, and subsequently to the construction of a discourse system for Chinese modernization; (3) The field exhibits increasing interdisciplinary characteristics, yet remains constrained by insufficient cross-disciplinary integration and fragmented scholarly efforts; (4) Inter-institutional collaboration networks remain structurally dispersed, hindering the formation of systematic theoretical innovation communities.

This research provides a comprehensive knowledge landscape for theoretical development and practical innovation in international communication within Chinese higher education, offering empirical foundations to advance scholarly inquiry in this domain.

## Keywords

International Communication in Higher Education, Knowledge Mapping, CiteSpace, Research Evolution

## Introduction

The Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization, adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, emphasizes the imperative to "build a more effective international communication system" and to "accelerate the construction of a multi-channel, three-dimensional external communication framework. We must expedite the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, comprehensively enhance international communication efficacy, establish mechanisms for practicing the Global Civilization Initiative, and facilitate 'going out' and 'bringing in' management while expanding international cultural and educational exchanges<sup>1</sup>."

As crucial agents in China's international communication capacity building, higher education institutions play an indispensable role in the current "going out" and "bringing in" strategy. International communication in higher education specifically refers to cross-cultural exchanges, academic collaborations, international student education, and other internationalization activities conducted by higher education institutions. In today's complex international landscape, international communication in higher education fulfills an irreplaceable function in facilitating cultural exchange, enhancing national image, and strengthening global discourse influence<sup>2</sup>.

Shouren and He Ning (2022) explored innovative pathways for cultivating foreign language talent in the new era, emphasizing the critical importance of developing interdisciplinary professionals with global perspectives and intercultural communication competencies<sup>34</sup>. Zhang Hengjun et al. (2022) focused on specific pathways for cultivating international communication talent, proposing multi-dimensional and multi-level training models<sup>5</sup>. Pan Congcong (2021) examined strategies for constructing international communication capacity in "Double First-Class" universities from four dimensions: communication awareness, personnel, content, and media platforms<sup>2</sup>. Cao Han and Wu Haiyan (2024) analyzed exemplary cases from research-intensive universities and the current state of communication in application-oriented institutions, proposing recommendations for building international communication systems across six dimensions—communication objectives, agents, content, platforms, audiences, and impact—thereby providing systematic analysis and practical guidance for application-oriented universities<sup>6</sup>.

Despite these scholarly contributions to international communication in higher education, systematic reviews and comprehensive analyses of this field remain insufficient, particularly regarding the evolution of research hotspots and the distribution of research forces. Specifically, there is a notable absence of big-data-driven visualization analyses. Accordingly, this study aims to conduct a systematic review and visualization of international communication research in Chinese higher education through CiteSpace knowledge mapping, revealing the current state, hotspots, and evolutionary trends in this domain. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

1. What are the publication patterns in international communication research in Chinese higher education?
2. How are research forces distributed across institutions and scholars?
3. What are the research hotspots and their evolutionary trajectories across different periods?

This approach clarifies the domain's epistemological structure, identifies emerging frontiers, and provides evidence-based guidance for future research.

## **Data Sources and Methodology**

### **1. Data Sources**

This study utilized the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) journals in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as the sample database, conducting searches with "higher education" and "international communication" as subject terms. Following manual screening to eliminate obviously irrelevant and duplicate records, 74 valid sample articles were obtained, spanning from January 2010 to July 2024. The bibliographic information was exported in Refworks format and underwent standardization processing to form the final analytical dataset.

### **2. Research Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-method approach combining bibliometric visualization with traditional literature analysis to conduct multi-dimensional examination of the sample data.

#### **2.1. CiteSpace Knowledge Mapping Analysis**

CiteSpace is a visualization citation analysis software designed to analyze knowledge structures and identify research frontiers in scientific literature. This study utilized CiteSpace version 5.8.R3 to construct multi-layered knowledge maps of international communication research in higher education. Node types selected include keywords, authors, and institutions; link types include co-occurrence and collaboration; threshold settings were configured at Top 50. Through co-occurrence analysis, burst detection, and timezone views, the study reveals thematic evolution and the distribution of research forces.

## 2.2. Bibliometric Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted on publication volume, funding distribution, source journals, and disciplinary classifications of the sample literature to assess overall trends in this research domain.

## 3. Current State of International Communication Research in Higher Education

### 3.1. Publication Volume Statistics

Research in this domain from 2010 to 2024 has undergone three developmental phases: gradual accumulation, explosive growth, and fluctuating decline (Figure 错误!未找到引用源。).

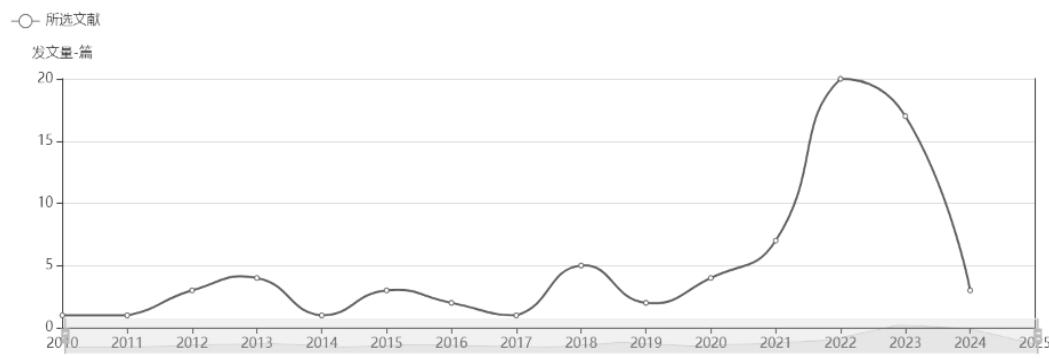


Figure 1 Publication Volume Statistics

**Initial Exploration Phase (2010-2017):** This period witnessed fewer than two publications annually on average, indicating a phase of gradual accumulation with research remaining in its nascent stage.

**Deepening and Expansion Phase (2018-2020):** Annual publication volume began to increase, though remaining at relatively modest levels, averaging 3-5 articles per year.

**Innovation and Development Phase (2021-Present):** Publication volume increased significantly, particularly in 2022 and 2023, which recorded 20 and 17 articles respectively, demonstrating a rapid surge in research intensity. The decline in publication volume during the first seven months of 2024 may indicate that research has entered a consolidation phase.

This developmental trajectory reflects the increasing scholarly attention to international communication in higher education, corresponding with the advancement of China's higher education internationalization and national emphasis on international communication capacity building. Notably, research intensity escalated dramatically following President Xi Jinping's 2021 address on strengthening international communication capacity.

### 3.2. Funding Distribution

According to funding support statistics (Table 1 : Funding Support Statistics), international communication research in higher education has received multi-tiered financial support. The substantial proportion of National Social Science Fund projects (9 projects) reflects national-level prioritization of this research domain. Significant support from the Ministry of Education's Humanities and Social Sciences Fund and provincial social science funds indicates the field's close connection to educational practice and regional development needs. University-based autonomous research funding demonstrates institutional endogenous motivation in this area.

Table 1 : Funding Support Statistics

<b>Fund Type</b>	<b>Number of Grants</b>
National Social Science Fund	9
National Language Commission Fund	2
Humanities and Social Sciences Fund of the Ministry of Education	4
Provincial Social Science Fund	6
University-level Independent Research Fund	5
Other Funds	6

### **3.3. Source Journals and Discipline Distribution**

Assisted Foreign Language Education (3 articles), and Modern Communication (3 articles) (Table 2). The disciplinary backgrounds of these journals are diverse, encompassing journalism and communication studies, education, and linguistics. This distribution pattern reflects the interdisciplinary nature of international communication research in higher education.

Table 2: Source Journal Statistics (Publication Volume  $\geq 2$ )

Journal Name	Publication Volume
Media	5
China Higher Education	4
Foreign Language Audiovisual Teaching	3
Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)	3
Foreign Languages in China	2
Foreign Language World	2
Journal of Chinese Scientific and Technical Periodicals	2
Publishing Research	2
Journalism Lover	2
Journal of Xi'an International Studies University	2
Journal of Shanghai Jiaotong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)	2
Ideological & Theoretical Education	2
Science-Technology & Publication	2
Journal of Liaoning University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)	2

### 3.4. Research Forces

#### 3.4.1. Author Co-occurrence Analysis

The author co-occurrence network exhibits a relatively dispersed pattern (Figure Figure 2 ), with a network density of only 0.0099, and merely seven scholars publishing two or more articles. The scholarly community lacks sustained, close collaboration and has not formed clearly defined core

clusters. Systematic examination of author research content reveals that research directions can be broadly categorized as follows:

Research on International Communication Strategies in Higher Education. Representative scholars include Wang Shouren and Jiang Hongxin. Wang Shouren and He Ning explored innovative pathways for foreign language talent cultivation in higher education during the new era, emphasizing the critical importance of developing interdisciplinary professionals with global perspectives and intercultural communication competencies 错误!未定义书签。<sup>4</sup>. Jiang Hongxin et al. examined the new mission of international communication in higher education from the perspective of civilizational dialogue and exchange, highlighting universities' proactive role in promoting mutual learning among civilizations and constructing a community with a shared future for humankind<sup>7</sup>.

Research on International Communication Talent Cultivation Models. Representative scholars include Zhang Hengjun and Wu Yinghui. Zhang Hengjun et al. proposed multi-dimensional and multi-level training models for international communication talent, emphasizing practical competencies and cross-cultural literacy<sup>5</sup>. Wu Yinghui conducted systematic analysis of academic research in international Chinese language education, revealing research hotspots and developmental trends in this field<sup>8</sup>.

Research on International Communication Pathways in Higher Education in the New Media Environment. Representative scholar Shang Jinghua explored strategies for cultivating high-quality international communication talent adapted to media convergence trends, emphasizing technological literacy and cross-media competencies<sup>9</sup>.

Research on International Communication Capacity Building in Higher Education. Representative scholars include Zhang Wenchao and Wu Haiying. Zhang Wenchao analyzed the objectives and implementation pathways for foreign language textbook development in higher education from the perspective of strengthening international communication capacity, proposing the importance of cultivating students' ability to accurately express China's story in foreign languages<sup>10</sup>. Wu Haiying identified existing problems in English major talent cultivation regarding international communication capacity building, including outdated talent cultivation concepts, weak Chinese cultural identity, and unreasonable curriculum design, proposing reform recommendations including clarifying cultivation objectives, strengthening Chinese cultural education, and optimizing curriculum configuration<sup>11</sup>.

These research directions reflect the diversification trend in international communication research in higher education, spanning multiple levels from macro-strategic considerations to specific practices. However, research remains somewhat fragmented, lacking systematic theoretical construction and long-term empirical research accumulation.

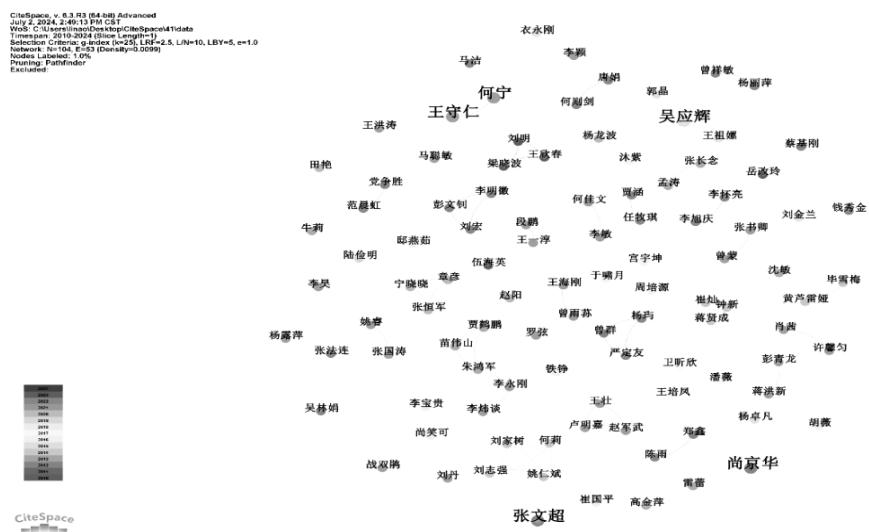


Figure 2 Author Co-occurrence Map

### 3.4.2. Institutional Co-occurrence Analysis

Institutional collaboration network analysis reveals that foreign language and communication universities occupy dominant positions in this research domain, including Beijing Foreign Studies University (6 articles), Communication University of China (5 articles), Shanghai International Studies University (4 articles), and Xi'an International Studies University (3 articles). However, inter-institutional collaboration remains limited, and cross-institutional, cross-regional collaborative research requires strengthening (Figure Figure 3 Institutional Co-occurrence Analysis3).



Figure 3 Institutional Co-occurrence Analysis

### 3.5. Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

This study integrates keyword co-occurrence maps, keyword burst detection maps, and timezone views to analyze research hotspots and evolution in international communication research in higher education.

#### 3.5.1. Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

The keyword co-occurrence network comprises 121 nodes and 196 links (Figure 4). The co-occurrence map reveals that high-frequency keywords such as "international communication," "talent cultivation," "international communication capacity," and "international Chinese language communication" have larger nodes with purple outer rings, indicating high betweenness centrality. These nodes serve as intermediaries among numerous nodes and can be identified as research hotspots in Chinese higher education international communication research.



Figure 4 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

#### 3.5.2. Research Theme Evolution Analysis

CiteSpace's burst detection analysis reveals dynamic evolutionary characteristics of research themes. "Burst" refers to sudden high-frequency appearance of certain keywords during specific periods, reflecting concentrated scholarly attention on these themes. Timezone views, based on temporal axes, present the distribution and evolutionary trajectories of disciplinary themes. By

integrating keyword burst detection (Figure 5) and timezone views (Figure 6), the evolutionary trajectory of research themes in international communication in higher education can be delineated.

**Initial Exploration Phase (2010–2017):** Primary keywords during this phase include "Chinese language education," "internationalization of higher education," "technological application," "university foreign language portal websites," "public diplomacy," and "cultural communication." Research during this period focused on foreign language education and technological applications, reflecting early understanding of international communication in higher education—namely, participation in cultural communication and public diplomacy through foreign language discipline construction, talent cultivation, and technological applications.

**Deepening and Expansion Phase (2018–2020):** Emerging keywords during this phase include "international Chinese language education," "international communication capacity," "Belt and Road Initiative," and "global discourse influence." With the development of new media and the proposal of national strategies, research themes began to deepen. International communication strategies in the context of media convergence and higher education international communication practices under the Belt and Road Initiative emerged as new research hotspots, with increased emphasis on international communication capacity building and innovative talent cultivation models.

**Innovation and Development Phase (2021–Present):** Burst keywords during this phase include "new foreign languages", "new liberal arts", "Chinese modernization", and "telling China's story well". International communication research in higher education during this period continued to respond to national strategic imperatives. With rapid digital technology development, research focus shifted toward innovative transformation, emphasizing applications of new technologies and strategies in international communication in higher education, with particular attention to constructing China's discourse system and effectively communicating China's narratives.

## Top 25 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	2010 - 2024
汉语国际传播	2012	1.04	2012	2018	
对外汉语专业	2012	0.68	2012	2012	
课程设置	2012	0.68	2012	2012	
人才培养模式	2012	0.68	2012	2012	
高校	2013	1.38	2013	2018	
复合型人才	2013	0.75	2013	2020	
汉语教育	2014	0.69	2014	2014	
汉语教师培养	2014	0.69	2014	2014	
高等教育国际化	2015	0.7	2015	2021	
本土化	2015	0.65	2015	2015	
技术应用	2015	0.65	2015	2015	
高校外文门户网站	2015	0.65	2015	2015	
文化传播	2015	0.65	2015	2015	
高校英文科技期刊	2017	0.68	2017	2017	
层次分析法	2017	0.68	2017	2017	
汉语国际教育	2019	0.68	2019	2019	
热点分析	2019	0.68	2019	2019	
研究排名	2019	0.68	2019	2019	
国际新闻	2020	0.64	2020	2020	
人才	2021	0.95	2021	2022	
新文科	2022	0.86	2022	2022	
新外语	2022	0.86	2022	2022	
讲好中国故事	2023	0.96	2023	2024	
中国式现代化	2023	0.96	2023	2024	
人才培养	2013	0.76	2023	2024	

Figure 5 Keyword burst detection map

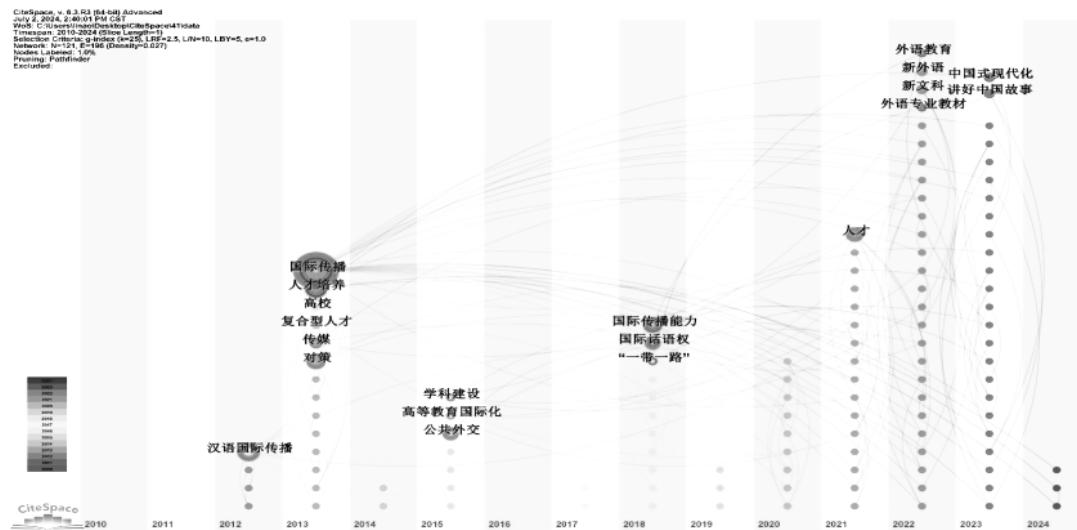


Figure 6 Timezone view

This evolutionary process reflects the close connection between international communication research in higher education and temporal developments and national strategies. Research themes have progressively expanded from singular foreign language education to diversified international communication practices, demonstrating research deepening and innovation.

## Conclusions and Prospects

Through systematic CiteSpace-based knowledge mapping analysis of international communication research in Chinese higher education from 2010 to 2024, this study reveals the current state, hotspot trends, and evolutionary trajectories of this field, providing empirical foundations for theoretical construction and practical innovation. Based on these findings, we conduct in-depth discussion across three dimensions: research evolution, pluralistic ecology, and future landscape.

### 4.1. Research Evolution: From Instrumental Positioning to Strategic Elevation

International communication research in Chinese higher education exhibits distinctive evolutionary characteristics, progressing through three critical phases:

**Initial Exploration Phase (2010-2017):** Timezone mapping and keyword burst detection analysis indicate that research during this phase remained in its nascent stage, with fewer than two publications annually on average, accounting for approximately 12% of the total sample. Research primarily focused on foundational topics including "Chinese language education," "internationalization of higher education," "technological applications," "university foreign language portal websites," "public diplomacy," and "cultural communication." This reflects the early conceptualization of international communication in higher education predominantly as an instrumental tool for foreign language education and technological application, characterized by relatively rudimentary and fragmented positioning with insufficient systematic theoretical construction.

**Deepening and Expansion Phase (2018-2020):** Keyword co-occurrence and burst detection analyses reveal emerging research hotspots including "international Chinese language education", "international communication capacity", "Belt and Road Initiative", and "global discourse influence" during this phase, with annual publication volume increasing to 3-5 articles, representing approximately 20% of the total sample. Research priorities shifted from singular foreign language education toward more macro-level international communication capacity building, demonstrating expanding research horizons. This transition signals a strategic reorientation in international communication research in higher education, corresponding with deepening implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative and escalating national imperatives for global discourse influence construction.

**Innovation-Driven Phase (2021-Present):** Publication volume analysis (Figure 1) demonstrates explosive growth from 2021-2023, with significantly elevated annual publication volumes; publications during these three years constitute 64% of the total sample. Keyword burst detection map (Figure 5) and timezone view (Figure 6) indicate that "new foreign languages," "new liberal arts," "Chinese modernization," and "telling China's story well" have emerged as recent research hotspots, embodying profound integration between research themes and national strategies. President Xi Jinping's 2021 address on strengthening international communication capacity directly catalyzed intensified research activity in this domain. Although publication volume declined somewhat in early 2024, research is anticipated to experience renewed growth

following the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee's strategic mandate to "build a more effective international communication system."

Funding distribution statistics (Table 1 : Funding Support Statistics) reveal multi-tiered support for this field through the National Social Science Fund (9 projects), Ministry of Education Humanities and Social Sciences Fund (4 projects), and provincial social science funds (6 projects), signifying that international communication research in higher education has become crucial academic support for national cultural soft power construction and global discourse influence enhancement. Journal distribution analysis (

Table 2: Source Journal Statistics (Publication Volume  $\geq 2$ ) further confirms the interdisciplinary characteristics of this research, with findings primarily published across multiple disciplinary domains including journalism and communication studies, education, and linguistics.

This evolutionary trajectory clearly demonstrates how international communication research in higher education has progressively elevated from initial focus on foreign language teaching instruments to serving national strategies and constructing China's discourse system, reflecting profound resonance between academic inquiry and national imperatives and manifesting the continuously ascending strategic value of this research domain.

#### **4.2. Pluralistic Ecology: Interdisciplinary Convergence and Collaborative Deficiencies**

Multi-dimensional analysis of author networks, institutional distribution, and thematic evolution reveals distinctive ecological characteristics of international communication research in higher education:

**Dispersed Distribution of Research Forces:** Author co-occurrence analysis (Figure 2) demonstrates that the author collaboration network density measures only 0.0099, with merely 7 scholars publishing  $\geq 2$  papers, lacking a core author cohort with sustained influence. Primary research directions encompass four areas: research on international communication strategies in higher education (representative scholars including Wang Shouren and Jiang Hongxin), research on international communication talent cultivation models (representative scholars including Zhang Hengjun and Wu Yinghui), research on international communication pathways in higher education within new media environments (representative scholars including Shang Jinghua), and research on international communication capacity building in higher education (representative scholars including Zhang Wenchao and Wu Haiying). However, these form relatively independent research clusters, lacking systematic coordination.

**Fragmented Inter-institutional Collaboration Networks:** The institutional co-occurrence map (Figure 3) indicates that foreign language and communication universities—including Beijing Foreign Studies University (6 articles), Communication University of China (5 articles), Shanghai International Studies University (4 articles), and Xi'an International Studies University (3 articles)—occupy dominant positions in this research domain. However, collaborative connections among institutions remain weak, with insufficient cross-institutional and cross-regional collaborative innovation. This relatively dispersed research landscape constrains systematic theoretical construction and sustained knowledge accumulation.

**Diverse and Intersecting Research Themes:** The keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 4) comprises 121 nodes and 196 links. High-frequency keywords including "international communication," "talent cultivation," "international communication capacity," and "international Chinese language communication" exhibit larger nodes with purple outer rings, indicating their central positioning within the network and constituting core research themes. Research content spans multiple disciplinary domains including education, communication studies, linguistics, and international relations, embodying significant interdisciplinary characteristics. However, deep integration across disciplines remains insufficient, with no systematic interdisciplinary theoretical framework yet established..

Research Methods and Theoretical Innovation Requiring Breakthroughs: Content analysis of the literature reveals that existing research predominantly employs literature reviews and experiential summaries, with empirical research and quantitative analysis remaining relatively limited. Particularly regarding theoretical construction, no theoretical framework for international communication in higher education with distinctive Chinese characteristics has yet emerged, and appropriation and localized transformation of Western theories remain inadequate. Research on the integration of digital technologies with international communication in higher education lags behind, necessitating strengthened in-depth exploration of how artificial intelligence, big data, and other emerging technologies reshape international communication paradigms in higher education..

These characteristics simultaneously reflect the vitality and pluralism of international communication in higher education as an emerging interdisciplinary research domain, while revealing current research limitations regarding systematicity, coordination, and innovation. Future research should strengthen interdisciplinary integration, construct more systematic theoretical frameworks, and enhance overall research quality and international influence.

#### **4.3. Future Landscape: Constructing an Academic System for International Communication in Higher Education with Chinese Characteristics**

Based on systematic analysis of research evolution and ecological characteristics, combined with the complex transformations in the new era's international communication environment, we propose future developmental pathways for international communication research in higher education:

Constructing Theoretical Innovation Communities: Transcending current limitations of dispersed research forces, establish interdisciplinary and inter-institutional academic communities to facilitate deep integration across education, communication studies, linguistics, international relations, and other disciplines. Grounded in Chinese practice, distill experiential principles of international communication in higher education to construct a theoretical system with distinctive Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese ethos. This holds significant value for addressing challenges within the international discourse system and enhancing the global influence of Chinese educational discourse.

Deepening Empirical Research and Methodological Innovation: Transform the current landscape dominated by theoretical research by strengthening methodological innovation and data support, systematically conducting empirical research on cross-cultural communication effectiveness. Particularly crucial is constructing scientific, multi-dimensional assessment systems for international communication effectiveness in higher education, developing corresponding evaluation tools and platforms to provide evidence-based evaluation foundations for international communication practice. Keyword analysis indicates that "international communication capacity" and "telling China's story well" have emerged as research hotspots, yet systematic research on assessing capacity levels and communication effectiveness remains necessary.

Advancing Digital Technology-Enabled Communication Innovation: Actively embracing the digital technology revolution, explore transformative impacts of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, big data, and other emerging technologies on international communication in higher

education. Research new models for content production, channel expansion, and effectiveness assessment in digitalized environments, focusing on frontier topics including "intelligent content creation," "immersive communication experiences," and "precision audience analysis," thereby providing theoretical guidance and practical pathways for digital transformation of international communication in higher education.

**Innovating International Communication Talent Cultivation Models:** Keyword analysis demonstrates that "talent cultivation" constitutes a sustained research hotspot. Future research should deeply explore innovative pathways for cultivating international communication talent within "new liberal arts" and "new foreign languages" contexts, investigate interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary talent cultivation mechanisms, and strengthen coordinated cultivation of students' international communication capacity and Chinese cultural identity. Particularly important is exploring the core competency composition and cultivation strategies for international communication talent in higher education during the digital era, providing talent support for constructing national international communication systems.

**Constructing Integrated Industry-Education-Research Innovation Systems:** Promote deep integration of international communication research in higher education with educational instruction and social services, establishing virtuous cyclical mechanisms connecting "research—teaching—practice." Advance transformation of research findings into instructional content, refine practical experiences into theoretical innovations, and establish integrated industry-education-research platforms oriented toward international communication capacity cultivation, thereby enhancing the applied value and practical guidance significance of research

In summary, international communication research in higher education has undergone evolutionary transformation from instrumental positioning to strategic elevation over the past decade-plus, playing an increasingly vital role in facilitating cultural exchange, enhancing global discourse influence, and serving national strategies. Future research should transcend the current pluralistic yet dispersed research landscape, strengthen theoretical innovation and disciplinary integration, and construct an academic system for international communication in higher education with Chinese characteristics, thereby providing robust support for accelerating the construction of China's discourse and narrative systems and comprehensively enhancing international communication efficacy. In this new developmental stage characterized by deep integration of globalization and digitalization, international communication research in higher education can effectively respond to complex and volatile international environments and serve the great practice of Chinese modernization only through continuous innovation and breakthroughs.

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