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Knowledge Mapping and Frontier Trend Analysis of Comparative Research on Chinese and Western Modernization from the Perspective of Text Data Mining

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

Comparative research on Chinese modernization and Western modernization has become a prominent field in philosophy and the social sciences in the new era. To systematically grasp the research status, hotspot topics, and evolutionary trends of this field, this study takes 500 articles from CSSCI source journals indexed by the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as the sample and, with the aid of the visualization software CiteSpace, conducts a bibliometric analysis along the dimensions of annual publication volume, journal distribution, author collaboration networks, keyword co-occurrence, and time-zone evolution. The results show that publication output in this field has grown explosively since 2022 and has stabilized at a high level; journals such as Studies on Marxism and scholars such as ZHOU Wen, TIAN Pengying, and HAN Qingxiang constitute the main research force, whereas the author collaboration network remains relatively loose overall. Research hotspots focus on the critique of the "modernization equals Westernization" narrative, the critique of capital logic, human modernization, common prosperity, and a new form of human civilization. The evolutionary path exhibits a staged progression from "road interpretation" to "comparative transcendence" and then to "civilization construction." Further content analysis indicates that existing studies have revealed the essential differences between Chinese modernization and Western modernization along three dimensions: value logic, development path, and civilizational form. Future research should be deepened in the construction of an independent knowledge system, the vision of the Global South, and the integration of interdisciplinary methods.

Keywords: Chinese modernization; Western modernization; CiteSpace; bibliometric analysis; knowledge mapping.

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Introduction

Modernization is the overarching trend of human social development and has also been the goal pursued unremittingly by the Chinese nation since modern times. The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China systematically elaborated the Chinese characteristics, essential requirements, and major principles of Chinese modernization, explicitly stating that Chinese modernization "shares the common features of the modernization of all countries and, more importantly, possesses distinctive features based on China's own national

conditions." This major thesis has evoked a strong response in academia, and the question of the relationship between Chinese modernization and Western modernization has rapidly become a frontier topic of common concern across Marxist theory, philosophy, political science, and other disciplines. Revolving around the fundamental question of "whether modernization equals Westernization," scholars have carried out multi-level research from the perspectives of the critique of modernity [1], world significance [2], and inherent laws [3], accumulating a substantial body of literature.

However, existing studies consist mostly of theoretical speculation at the qualitative level, and there is still a lack of large-sample quantitative characterization and visual presentation of the field's overall knowledge structure, its configuration of research forces, and its evolutionary trajectory. What is the overall knowledge profile of comparative research on Chinese modernization and Western modernization? How have research hotspots evolved? On which thematic dimensions does research on the essential differences focus? Answering these questions requires a systematic review of the field from a bibliometric perspective. On this basis, this study takes 500 articles from CSSCI source journals indexed by CNKI as the sample, uses CiteSpace to map the knowledge structure of the field, and further conducts a thematic content reading on the basis of the bibliometric analysis, with a view to providing a reference for deepening research on the essential differences between Chinese modernization and Western modernization and a basis for subsequent researchers in choosing their topics.

1. Data Sources and Research Methods

As the saying goes, a workman must first sharpen his tools if he is to do his work well. Reliable data sources and a standardized methodological design are the prerequisites for credible conclusions in bibliometric research. The research design is described below at two levels: data sources and tool parameters.

1.1 Data Sources

The research data were obtained from the CNKI academic journal database. A combined search was conducted using "Chinese modernization" and "Western modernization" as subject terms, with the source category restricted to CSSCI source journals and the retrieval time span set to 2016–2026. After non-research items such as conference notices, book reviews, forewords, and interviews were manually excluded and duplicates were removed, 500 valid articles were finally obtained; the years of the actually retrieved articles are concentrated in 2022–2026. The bibliographic records were exported in Refworks format and converted into a data format recognizable by CiteSpace to serve as the analysis sample. In terms of subject matter, the sample articles all involve comparative, critical, or transcendent research on Chinese modernization and Western modernization, and thus can adequately represent the overall research situation of the field.

1.2 Research Tools and Parameter Settings

This study employs CiteSpace 7.0.1 (64-bit) Advanced as the visualization and analysis tool. The parameters are set as follows: the time span is 2022–2026 with a time slice (Slice Length) of one year; the node types are selected in turn as Author and Keyword; threshold selection adopts the g-index criterion, i.e., the top 10% of nodes by citation or occurrence frequency within each time slice are extracted (Top 10.0% per slice, up to 100; LRF = 2.5, L/N = 10, LBY = 5, e = 1.0); network pruning uses the Pathfinder algorithm, with pruning applied to each sliced network (Prune Slices). On this basis, an author collaboration network map and a keyword co-occurrence time-zone map are drawn, and the bibliometric analysis is carried out in combination with annual publication statistics, journal distribution statistics, and high-frequency keyword statistics.

2. Bibliometric Analysis of Research Forces

The configuration of research forces reflects the academic ecology of a field. Clarifying the temporal distribution of publication volume, the core

publishing journals, and the core author community is foundational work for understanding knowledge production in this field.

2.1 Annual Distribution of Publication Volume

Changes in annual publication volume directly reflect the rise and fall of a research field's popularity. The annual distribution of the 500 sample articles was statistically analyzed, and the results are shown in Table 1 (four additional articles with missing year information were not included in the yearly statistics).

Table 1 Annual Distribution of Publication Volume, 2022–2026

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Publications	10	124	126	138	98	496
Percentage/%	2.0	25.0	25.4	27.8	19.8	100.0

Note: The 2026 data are as of the retrieval date and represent an incomplete year.

As shown in Table 1, the publication trend in this field is highly synchronized with the convening of the 20th CPC National Congress. In 2022, only 10 articles were published, marking an initial incubation stage; in 2023, the volume jumped to 124 articles—an explosive growth indicating that, after the 20th CPC National Congress systematically elaborated the theory of Chinese modernization, academia responded swiftly and comparative research on Chinese and Western modernization became a theoretical hotspot; in 2024–2025, output remained stable at the high levels of 126 and 138 articles, suggesting that research has moved from "hotspot tracking" into a mature stage of "intensive cultivation"; as of the retrieval date in 2026, 98 articles had already been published, and at this pace the annual total is expected to reach a new high. Overall, the field has formed a pattern of knowledge production of considerable scale and stable output.

2.2 Distribution of Core Journals

Journals are the primary vehicle for knowledge dissemination. A statistical analysis of the source journals of the sample articles shows that the top ten journals by number of articles published are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Top Ten Source Journals by Number of Articles Published

Rank	Journal	Articles	Rank	Journal	Articles
1	Studies on Marxism	31	6	Studies in Ideological Education	8
2	Philosophical Research	10	7	Southeast Academic Research	8
3	Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education	10	8	Jianghan Tribune	7

4	Academic Journal of Zhongzhou	9	9	Teaching and Research	7
5	Theoretical Exploration	8	10	Academic Exploration	7

Note: Journal names are translated from the original Chinese.

In terms of journal distribution, Studies on Marxism leads by a wide margin with 31 articles, constituting the core publishing venue of the field; Philosophical Research and Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education each published 10 articles, forming the second tier; comprehensive social-science journals and university journals such as Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, Theoretical Exploration, Studies in Ideological Education, and Southeast Academic Research also carry articles steadily. This distribution pattern indicates that comparative research on Chinese modernization and Western modernization is conducted mainly within the discipline of Marxist theory while radiating into philosophy, political science, and the comprehensive humanities and social sciences, exhibiting a distinct ideological attribute and a strong character of theoretical speculation.

2.3 Core Authors and Collaboration Networks

Core authors are the key force driving the development of a field. Statistics show that the most productive scholars are ZHOU Wen (12 articles), TIAN Pengying (11 articles), and HAN Qingxiang (8 articles); scholars such as SHI Wei, JIANG Chang, JIN Wei, ZHANG Ming, and YANG Fan each published 4 articles, constituting the more active author community in this field. An author collaboration network map was further drawn (Figure 1); the network contains 9 nodes and 14 links, with a network density of 0.3689.

Figure 1 Author Collaboration Network Map

As shown in Figure 1, a collaboration team centered on TIAN Pengying has initially taken shape in this field, with relatively close collaborative ties between TIAN and scholars such as LIU Yong, ZHAO Yong, ZHANG Xiaopeng, ZHANG Zhaoming, and TANG Shaolian. This reflects a team-based research pattern anchored in the same academic institution. Overall, however, the number of network nodes is limited and collaborative links among most productive authors are absent; highly productive scholars such as ZHOU Wen and HAN Qingxiang work mainly through independent research or intra-institutional collaboration, and an inter-institutional, interdisciplinary academic community has yet to form. This indicates that knowledge production in the field remains dominated by decentralized individual research, leaving considerable room for improvement in collaborative innovation.

3. Knowledge Mapping Analysis of Research Hotspots

If the configuration of research forces depicts "who is producing knowledge," then co-occurrence and evolution analysis at the keyword level reveals "where knowledge is focused" and "how hotspots shift." On the basis of the distribution of research forces established above, the research hotspots of the field are examined below from three aspects: keyword co-occurrence, time-zone evolution, and phased characteristics.

3.1 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Keywords are a highly condensed representation of an article's subject matter, and their frequency distribution directly reflects the structure of research hotspots. A statistical analysis of the keywords in the sample articles yields the top 20 keywords by frequency, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 High-Frequency Keyword Statistics (Top 20)

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Rank	Keyword	Frequency
1	Chinese modernization	452	11	world modernization	11
2	Western modernization	99	12	historical materialism	11
3	a new form of human civilization	92	13	Chinese civilization	11
4	modernization	28	14	Marxism	11
5	the Communist Party of China	26	15	Chinese characteristics	10
6	a community with a shared future for mankind	20	16	values	10
7	human modernization	18	17	harmony between humanity and nature	10
8	capital logic	15	18	world history	10
9	modernity	15	19	Western-style modernization	9
10	common prosperity	14	20	the "Two Integrations"	9

As shown in Table 3, "Chinese modernization" (452 occurrences), "Western modernization" (99), and "a new form of human civilization" (92) constitute the three most frequent core nodes, indicating that the

field has consistently revolved around the comparison between Chinese and Western modernization, with "creating a new form of human civilization" as its value destination. The secondary hotspots can be divided into three groups: the first concerns the dimensions of agent and path, such as "the Communist Party of China," "Chinese characteristics," and "the path of Chinese modernization"; the second concerns the dimensions of value and critique, such as "capital logic," "modernity," "values," "common prosperity," and "human modernization"; and the third concerns the dimension of world vision, such as "a community with a shared future for mankind," "world modernization," and "world history." Notably, among the 107 articles containing the keyword "Western modernization," the keywords with the highest co-occurrence frequencies are, in order, "a new form of human civilization" (15), "capital logic" (8), "modernization" (7), and "world modernization" (6), indicating that the focus of comparative research centers on the critique of the capital logic of Western modernization and on the elucidation of the civilizational significance of Chinese modernization.

3.2 Time-zone Evolution of Research Hotspots

To reveal the dynamic trajectory of research hotspots over time, a keyword co-occurrence time-zone map was drawn (Figure 2). The network contains 29 nodes and 46 links, with a network density of 0.1133. The time-zone view arranges keywords according to the time slice in which they first appeared, clearly presenting the emergence, continuation, and succession of hotspots.

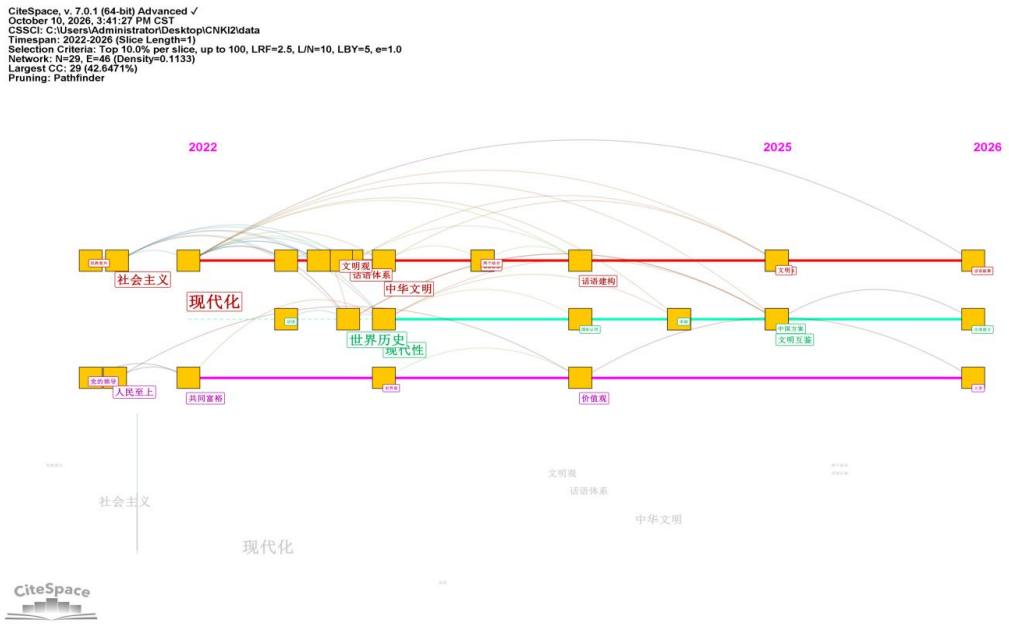

Figure 2 Time-zone Map of the Keyword Co-occurrence Network

As shown in Figure 2, the keywords that first appeared in 2022 include "socialism," "modernization," "putting the people first," and "common prosperity," which laid the conceptual foundation of the field. Around 2023, nodes such as "Chinese civilization," "view of civilization," "discourse system," "world history," and "modernity" emerged in succession, and the research horizon expanded from road interpretation to civilizational comparison and discourse critique. In

2025–2026, nodes such as "discourse construction," "the Chinese solution," and "mutual learning among civilizations" became new growth points. Multiple cross-period links exist among the nodes of different time zones, indicating that the core topics are strongly continuous and cumulative.

3.3 Phased Characteristics of the Hotspots

Combining the time-zone map with year-by-year keyword statistics, the evolution of research hotspots in this field can be divided into three stages. The first is the foundational stage (2022). Around the convening of the 20th CPC National Congress, research mainly revolved around "the path of Chinese modernization," "the Communist Party of China," and "upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground," focusing on interpreting the intrinsic connotations of Chinese modernization itself, while comparative research was still in its infancy. The second is the expansion stage (2023–2024). "A new form of human civilization" (appearing 31 times in 2023) and "Western modernization" (20 times in 2023 and 22 in 2024) became high-frequency terms, and topics such as "common prosperity," "values," "a community with a shared future for mankind," and "discourse construction" flourished at multiple points; research shifted from "self-interpretation" to "comparative transcendence," with the epistemological critique of the "modernization equals Westernization" narrative becoming a landmark topic [4], accompanied by research on overcoming the discursive traps of Western modernization [5]. The third is the deepening stage (2025–2026). The frequency of the keyword "Western modernization" peaked at 32 in 2025, and "capital logic" (6 occurrences in 2026), "Western centrism," "independent knowledge system," "ecological view," and "world modernization" emerged as new hotspots; the research focus further descended to a deeper critique of the internal logic of Western modernization and to the conscious construction of China's independent knowledge system, with the theoretical depth and global vision of comparative research expanding in tandem. Overall, the field exhibits an evolutionary main line of "road interpretation—comparative transcendence—civilization construction," with research topics progressing from the surface to the core and from deconstruction to construction, and theoretical self-awareness continuously strengthening.

4. Thematic Dimensions of Research on the Essential Differences

The bibliometric analysis has outlined the general contour of the research hotspots, whereas the theoretical concerns behind the hotspots must be grasped by returning to the content of the literature itself. On the basis of the high-frequency themes identified above, a close reading of representative articles reveals that scholars' accounts of the essential differences between Chinese modernization and Western modernization unfold mainly along three dimensions: value logic, development path, and civilizational form.

4.1 Differences in Value Logic: Putting the People First as a Transcendence of Capital Logic

The difference in value logic is the most fundamental distinction between the two kinds of modernization. Western modernization is centered on capital: the logic of capital accumulation dominates social production and the lifeworld, leading to the reification of human beings and the comprehensive alienation of social relations. Chinese modernization adheres to a people-centered approach, taking the realization of the people's aspiration for a better life as the starting point and ultimate goal of modernization. Based on a comparative analysis with Western modernization, PU Dexiang systematically elucidated the people-centered logic of Chinese modernization, pointing out that its people-centered nature is the fundamental value marker distinguishing Chinese modernization from Western modernization [6]. AI Qiang and SUN Shaoyong further demonstrated how the people-centered nature of Chinese modernization transcends the capital supremacy of Western modernization [7]. In response to the capital narrative of Western modernization, LI Lin and LI Baogeng revealed the inherent limits of capital logic from the dual

perspectives of critique and transcendence [8], while YANG Jinhua and GU Huiqing clarified the world significance of Chinese modernization's transcendence of the Western capital narrative [9]. The keyword "capital logic" appears 15 times in the sample and is concentrated in the last two years, indicating that value critique is becoming a steadily intensifying theoretical focus of comparative research.

4.2 Differences in Development Path: Parallel Catch-up and the Path Innovation of Common Prosperity

The difference in development path constitutes the practical distinction between the two kinds of modernization. Western modernization underwent several centuries of gradual "sequential" development, achieved at the cost of polarization and external expansion, whereas Chinese modernization is a late-developing, catch-up type of "parallel" modernization in which industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization are advanced in an overlapping manner, with common prosperity for all the people as its goal. LIU Zhigang distinguished the paths of Chinese and Western modernization at three levels: logical starting point, model choice, and value pursuit [10]; LU Xia and CHENG Enfu systematically demonstrated the multidimensional transcendence of Western modernization by Chinese modernization [11]; and ZHAO Feiyan and LIU Lin used the generative logic of "parallel" modernization to transcend the Western narrative of "compressed modernization" [12]. In the dimension of human development, CHEN Hongjuan and PAN Junjie, through an examination of how "the modernization of people" relates to "the modernization of things," clarified the people-oriented developmental character of Chinese modernization [13]. In the ecological dimension, DAI Yanchun revealed, from a Chinese-Western comparative perspective, how the ecological view of harmony between humanity and nature resets and transcends the Western view of controlling nature [14]. ZHOU Wen and TANG Jiaocheng summarized the original contributions of the Chinese modernization path by contrasting the problems presented by Western modernization with China's innovative development [15], and the political-economy inquiry of ZHOU Wen and YANG Zhengyuan further substantiated the essential difference between the two paths at the level of the mode of production [16].

4.3 Differences in Civilizational Form: The Creation of a New Form of Human Civilization

The difference in civilizational form is the historical distinction between the two kinds of modernization. Ranking third among the keywords with a high frequency of 92 occurrences, "a new form of human civilization" clearly occupies a central position in comparative research. LIU Ze demonstrated the generative necessity of Chinese modernization as a new form of human civilization that transcends Western modernization [17]; DING Zhigang and XIONG Kai elucidated the logic by which Chinese modernization creates a new form of human civilization through the critique and transcendence of Western civilization [18]; and XU Qinfa, grounded in historical materialism, revealed the critical transcendence of Western modernization by the civilizational narrative of Chinese modernization [19]. At the level of modernity, CHEN Hong and LI Yan conducted a "debate on modernity" from the comparative perspective of Chinese and Western modernization, identifying the theoretical possibility that Chinese modernization reconstructs modernity [20]; at the level of the value of justice, LI Yitian and CHEN Wenxiang clarified the new standards that Chinese modernization sets for social justice and global justice [21]. Together, these studies demonstrate that Chinese modernization is not a catch-up replication within the framework of Western modernization, but a paradigmatic innovation at the level of civilization theory.

5. Research Frontiers and Future Prospects

The thematic analysis of the three dimensions above presents what research on the essential differences has "already" achieved, whereas the newest nodes at the end of the time-zone map indicate the directions in which the field "will" expand. Combining the

emerging keywords of the last two years with representative literature, the frontier trends of the field can be assessed as follows.

First, the dimension of international space and the vision of the Global South are opening up a new configuration for comparative research. CHEN Zongquan argued from the dimension of international space that Chinese modernization transcends the expansionist logic of Western modernization and promotes a turn toward justice in international space [22]; DAI Xuehong focused on how Chinese modernization resolves the modernization predicament of the Global South and on its significance [23], foreshadowing a shift in comparative research from a binary Chinese-Western contrast toward the plural references of the "Global South." Second, the theory of multiple modernities provides new methodological resources for comparative research. From the perspective of multiple modernities, WEI Hua used the "four global initiatives" to clarify the world significance of Chinese modernization in transforming the Chinese experience into global public goods [24], suggesting that future research will deepen mutual learning among civilizations on the premise of recognizing the diversity of modernization paths. Third, the world-historical narrative and the construction of an independent knowledge system will become twin engines of theoretical deepening. LIN Qing reinterpreted the historical position of Chinese modernization from a world-historical perspective [25], while the concentrated appearance of keywords such as "independent knowledge system" and "discourse construction" in the latest time slice indicates that constructing China's independent theoretical and discursive systems of modernization has become a conscious pursuit of academia. Future research should also promote a deep integration of bibliometric analysis and normative research in methodology, strengthen interdisciplinary dialogue between Marxist theory and economics, sociology, and international relations, and attend to meso- and micro-level empirical investigation alongside macro narratives, thereby advancing research on the essential differences from "posing the question" to "establishing the argument."

6. Conclusion

Based on 500 articles from CSSCI source journals indexed by CNKI, this study used CiteSpace to conduct a bibliometric and visual analysis of the field of comparative research on Chinese modernization and Western modernization, followed by a thematic content reading. The main conclusions are as follows. First, in terms of research forces, publication output in this field has grown explosively since 2022 and has stabilized at a high level; a research configuration has taken shape with Studies on Marxism as the core venue and scholars such as ZHOU Wen, TIAN Pengying, and HAN Qingxiang as representative authors, but the density of the author collaboration network is low, and inter-institutional collaborative research needs to be strengthened. Second, in terms of research hotspots, "Chinese modernization," "Western modernization," and "a new form of human civilization" constitute the core nodes; research themes have evolved along the main line of "road interpretation—comparative transcendence—civilization construction," passing through the foundational, expansion, and deepening stages, with "capital logic" and "independent knowledge system" becoming the latest growth points. Third, in terms of thematic dimensions, existing studies have systematically revealed the essential differences between Chinese modernization and Western modernization at three levels: transcending capital logic by putting the people first; transcending sequential expansion and polarization through parallel catch-up and common prosperity; and transcending the West-centric view of civilization by creating a new form of human civilization. Fourth, in terms of frontier trends, the turn toward international space, the vision of the Global South, the methodology of multiple modernities, and the world-historical narrative constitute directions worthy of continued tracking in this field.

It should be noted that this study has certain limitations: the sample covers only CSSCI source journals indexed by CNKI and does not include foreign-language databases or such document types as books and newspapers; CiteSpace offers limited support for co-citation analysis of Chinese-language

literature, so the bibliometric results mainly reflect the hotspot structure at the word-frequency level. Future research may expand the data sources and combine co-citation analysis with in-depth text mining to produce a finer-grained depiction of the field's knowledge base and theoretical frontiers. Overall, comparative research on Chinese modernization and Western modernization is in a critical period of transition from scale expansion to quality enhancement. As the construction of China's independent knowledge system advances, the field is bound to produce more theoretical results with subjectivity and originality, providing firmer academic support for dispelling the myth that "modernization equals Westernization" and for deepening the understanding of the essential differences between the two kinds of modernization.

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