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A visualized quantitative analysis of area and country studies on Latin America in China over the past two decades

Análisis cuantitativo visualizado de los estudios regionales y nacionales sobre América Latina realizados en China durante las dos últimas décadas

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Abstract

Research problem: a lack of a comprehensive understanding of how scientific production related to regional and country studies in Latin America and the Caribbean has evolved and become interconnected over the last two decades. **General objective**: Analyze research papers published between 2005 and 2025. **Classification and design**: quantitative and non-experimental; descriptive and bibliometric; **Collection methods**: documental. Longitudinal study. **Sample**: Corpus of papers published between 2005 and 2025. **Research methods:** CiteSpace software and CNKI database**. Research instrument validation:** Filtered data and 1281 validated documents**. Data analysis:** descriptive statistics with bibliometric analysis, knowledge mapping, co-occurrence analysis of keywords, authors, and institutions, cluster analysis, burst term analysis, analysis of research trends, and scientific collaboration networks**. Results**: Over the past two decades, the overall number of publications in Latin American area and country studies has exhibited a declining trend. **Conclusions**: Research on Latin America in universities needs to be strengthened.

Keywords: area studies; bilateral relations; China; Latin America.

Resumen

Problema de investigación: Falta de comprensión integral de la evolución e interconexión de producción científica sobre estudios regionales y nacionales en América Latina y Caribe de las últimas dos décadas. **Objetivo general**: Analizar artículos de investigación publicados entre 2005 y 2025. **Clasificación y diseño**: cuantitativo, no experimental; descriptivo y bibliométrico. **Métodos de recopilación**: documental, longitudinal. **Muestra**: corpus; artículos publicados entre 2005 y 2025. **Métodos de investigación**: análisis con software CiteSpace, base de datos CNKI. **Validación del instrumento**: datos filtrados y 1 281 documentos validados. **Análisis de datos**: estadística descriptiva; análisis bibliométrico, mapeo del conocimiento, análisis de coocurrencia de palabras clave, autores, instituciones, análisis de clústeres, de términos de auge, de tendencias de investigación y redes de colaboración científica. **Resultados**: En las últimas dos décadas, el número de estudios regionales y nacionales de América Latina muestra tendencia a la baja. **Conclusiones**: Es necesario reforzar la investigación sobre América Latina en las universidades.

Palabras clave: estudios regionales; relaciones bilaterales; China; América Latina.

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Introduction

Research Problem

Area and country studies is an interdisciplinary field devoted to the comprehensive study of the politics, economy, culture, society, humanities, geography, resources, and other dimensions of countries and regions around the world (Luo, 2026). It provides important intellectual support for promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind (Wang, 2025).

Latin America and the Caribbean region (hereinafter referred to as “Latin America”) is a crucial stage for China to deepen international cooperation and fully participate in economic globalization (Ni, 2010). Notably, since the beginning of the 21st century, Latin America has become the most dynamic growth pole for China’s foreign economic and trade cooperation (Yue, 2025). The China-Latin America community with a shared future is an integral part of the broader community with a shared future for mankind (Luan & Jin, 2023).

Latin American studies constitute one of the most significant research fields within China’s international relations and area and country studies (Jiang, 2024). Hence, there is a need to have a comprehensive understanding of how scientific production related to regional and country studies in Latin America and the Caribbean has evolved and become interconnected over the last two decades. While existing studies have examined Latin American regional and country studies from specific perspectives, few have systematically mapped the field’s development over the past two decades through bibliometric visualization. This study therefore fills this gap by analyzing CNKI core journal publications from 2005 to 2025 using CiteSpace (6.4.R1), providing a systematic reference for future academic research and policy-making, particularly for advancing China–Latin America cooperation, Belt and Road Initiative-related scholarship, and research on cultural communication and Latin American countries. By constructing knowledge maps and applying burst term detection techniques, this study provides a diachronic, in-depth analysis of the research hotspots and frontiers in this field, aiming to answer the following questions:

1. What is the publication trends of Latin American area and country studies in China from 2005 to 2025?

2. What are the influential topics, institutions, and authors in the field of Latin American area and country studies in China?

3. What are the major research trends and themes of Latin American area and country in China from 2005 to 2025?

Theoretical basis of Citespace

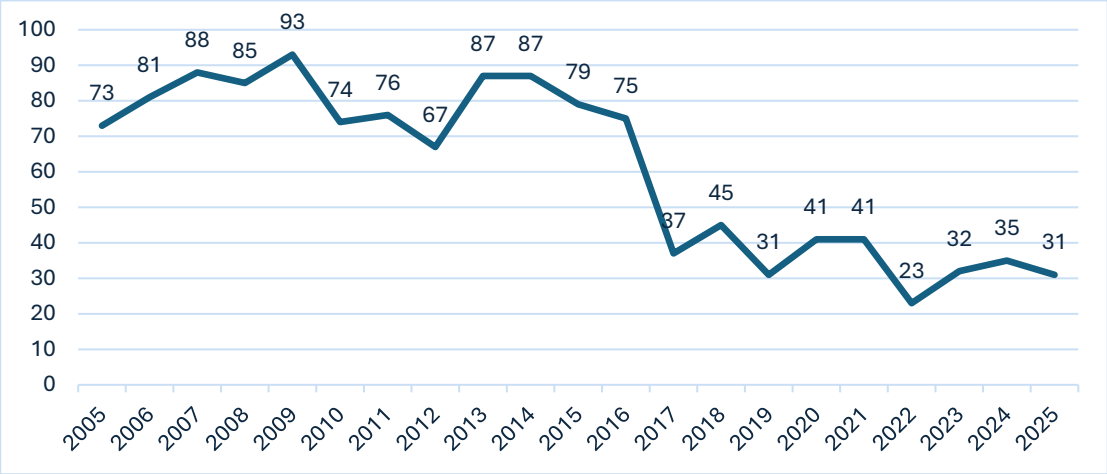
CiteSpace draws on bibliometric and scientometric theories of scientific knowledge mapping and conceptualizes scientific literature as a dynamic knowledge domain in which research fronts and intellectual bases are interrelated over time. Following Chen (2006), a research front is understood as an emergent and transient grouping of concepts and research issues, while its intellectual base constitutes the citation and co-citation footprint of those research-front concepts; a specialty is thus modeled as a time-variant mapping from a research front to its intellectual base, $\Phi(t)$: $\Psi(t) \rightarrow \Omega(t)$, which enables the detection and visualization of emerging trends and transient patterns rather than mere static publication counts. Methodologically, CiteSpace extracts research-front terms from titles, descriptors, and identifiers and applies Kleinberg's burst-detection algorithm to identify terms with sharp frequency increases, uses Freeman's betweenness centrality to locate pivotal points that bridge clusters and may signal intellectual transitions, and constructs heterogeneous networks of research-front terms and intellectual-base articles alongside co-citation networks to represent the dynamic duality between research fronts and intellectual bases. These procedures are combined with time slicing, cluster views, and time-zone views to reduce network complexity and reveal temporal and structural patterns in the evolution of a knowledge domain. Grounded on Chen (2006), the three research questions form a progressive chain from temporal description to structural explanation and then to frontier identification, corresponding to how the field has changed, who produces what knowledge and where, and where it is evolving.

Analysis of Publication Trends in Latin America Research.

An analysis of Latin America research data over the past two decades (see Figure 1) shows that Latin American area and country studies can be divided into four phases. The first phase was a period of rapid development: 2005-2009, research topics centered on the challenges and transformations in Latin America's economic, social, political, and international relations development, such as the transformation of development models and development dilemmas in Latin American countries (Yang, 2006). The probable reason might be that after President Hu Jintao visited Latin America in 2004, high-level exchanges between China and Latin America have become increasingly frequent and the need for cooperation has aroused academic interest in the political and economic situation in Latin America; the second phase was a period of sharp slowdown: 2010 - 2012, research mainly

explored structural changes, social inequality, and opportunities for China-Latin America cooperation in the region, such as institutional changes (Weyland & Fan, 2012) and social changes (Isuani & Mao, 2012) in Latin America.

Figure 1. *Number of Publications per Year.*



Note: This figure is generated in Excel based on the annual number of publications.

The economic crisis in 2008 might account for the decline in research concerning LAC between 2009 and 2012; the third phase is a plateau period: 2013 - 2016. Topics included the reconstruction of development models in Latin America, left-wing political practices, and China-Latin America strategic cooperation, such as China-Latin America trade cooperation strategies (Tian & Wu, 2014).

For the plateau period, the establishment of the China-LAC Forum in 2014 marked the entry of China-Latin America relations into a new phase of cooperation. Accordingly, scholars might need time to come to terms with new concepts such as the “community with a shared future” and “cross-regional exchanges”; the fourth phase is a period of slow growth: 2017 - 2025. Research has focused on political ecological transformation, development model innovation, China-Latin America strategic cooperation, cultural identity reconstruction, and global governance, such as China-Latin America civilizational exchanges and the global governance wisdom of Chinese civilization (Teng, 2018).

Although research on Latin America has yielded abundant results, the overall trend shows a decline, and the reasons behind this trend warrant in-depth exploration, especially for the fourth period. The slowdown may be connected to changes in the evaluation criteria

for the discipline of area studies in China, because the focus of research shifted to countries along the Belt and Road, while the distant LAC region received relatively less attention.

Research objective

To analyze research papers published between 2005 and 2025 related to regional and country studies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Methods

Research Classification and Design

This study is quantitative and non-experimental. It is a descriptive statistical bibliometric analysis. The method for collecting data is documentation. It is a longitudinal study. The sample is a corpus of studies collected between 2005 and 2025. The research methods for analyzing the data use CiteSpace software and the CNKI database. To validate the data and procedures, the data were filtered, and 1281 documents were validated (See the section of Data collection and analysis). The analysis included descriptive statistics with bibliometric analysis, knowledge mapping, co-occurrence analysis of keywords, authors, and institutions, cluster analysis, burst term analysis, analysis of research trends, and scientific collaboration networks.

Study sample

The sample consisted of research papers published between 2005 and 2025 related to regional and country studies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Data collection and analysis

This study used CiteSpace (6.4.R1). This study combines bibliometric methods, scientific knowledge mapping, and burst term analysis to review Latin America-related research. The data were sourced from CNKI. The specific procedures for data collection were as follows: First, an advanced search was conducted in the CNKI database, with the scope set to “Academic Journals,” including all fields of research, the time range set to January 1st of, 2005 to December 31th of, 2025, and a time slice of 1 year.

Second, journal sources include core journals and the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) database.

Third, a search was performed using the keywords “Latin America,” OR “Latin American region,” OR “Latin American countries,” yielding a total of 1,323 literature samples. After removing items such as “journal annotation guidelines,” “conference notices,” “author

profiles", "journal advertisements", "editorial postscripts," and "academic news", 1,281 valid literature items remained.

Results and Discussion

Results

Research Themes

This study employed CiteSpace software to perform co-occurrence analysis of keywords. Ranking by centrality indicates that the main keywords in China's Latin American area and country studies include "Latin America," "Lamei" (Chinese Pinyin of the abbreviation of Latin America), "Latin American countries," "China-Latin America relations," "China," "Latin American region," "the United States," "economic growth," "China-Latin America Cooperation," "financial crisis", and "urbanization" (see Table 1). This indicates that Latin America itself and China-Latin America relations are the core of research in this field, with centralities above 0.1 and ranking among the top five in terms of number of documents.

In addition, "economic growth" and "the United States" are also major research foci, with centralities above 0.03. Thus, economic topics constitute the main content of Latin America research, followed by Latin American politics and related fields (Guo et al., 2020).

Table 1. *Keyword Co-occurrence in Latin America Research.*

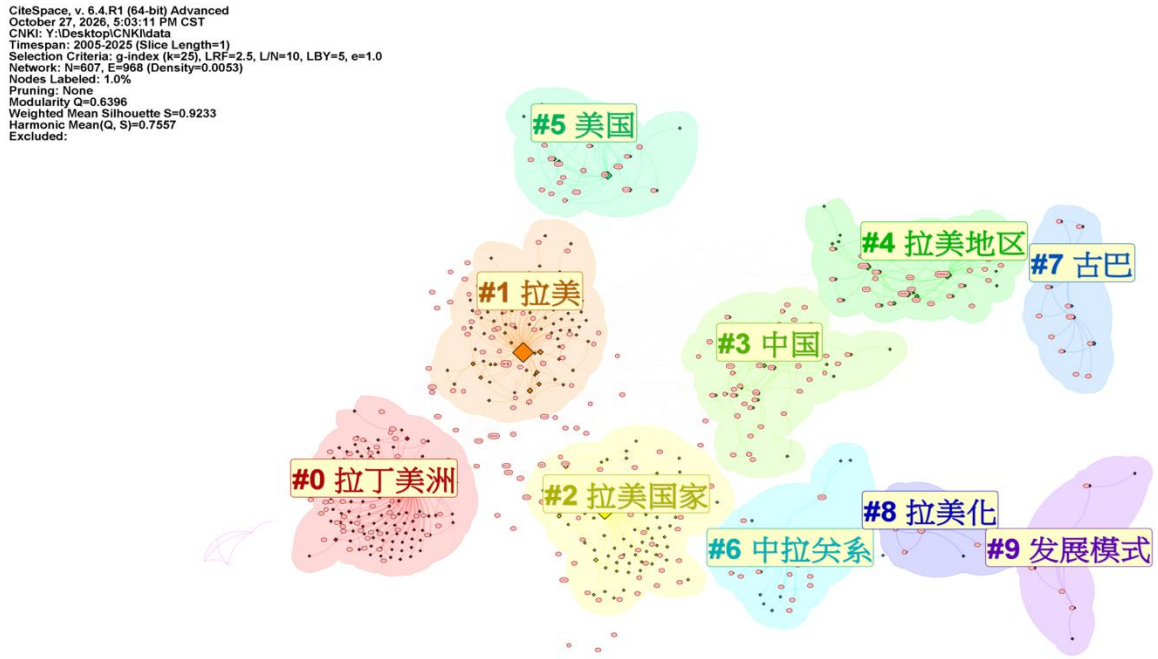
No.	Number of Documents	Centrality	Year	Keyword
1	251	0.64	2005	Latin America
2	200	0.46	2005	Lamei
3	85	0.25	2005	Latin American countries
4	45	0.14	2005	China-Latin America relations
5	54	0.11	2005	China
6	34	0.10	2008	Latin American region
7	35	0.04	2006	United States
8	12	0.04	2005	Economic growth

No.	Number of Documents	Centrality	Year	Keyword
9	18	0.03	2008	China-Latin America Cooperation
10	9	0.03	2006	Financial crisis
11	7	0.03	2006	Urbanization

Note: CiteSpace software generates a visual map of keyword clusters through clustering (see Figure 2). In the keyword clustering network, “N (number of nodes) = 607 and E (number of links) = 968, Density (network density) = 0.005,” indicating a certain degree of correlation among the keywords. Additionally, in this map, “Q (clustering module value) = 0.6396 and S (average silhouette value) = 0.9233” (Q > 0.3 indicates a significant clustering structure; S > 0.7 indicates convincing clustering).

Thus, the clustering structure is significant and credible. The following 10 main clusters are obtained: #0Latin America, #1Lamei, #2Latin American countries, #3China, #4Latin American region, #5United States, #6China-Latin, #7Cuba, #8Latin Americanization, #9Development model. Based on the clustering results, this study summarizes Latin American area and country studies in China into three themes: Latin America regional studies, China-Latin America relations, and U.S.-Latin America relations. First, the theme of Latin America regional studies covers the politics, social development, economy and trade, regional governance, debt crises, fiscal policies, infrastructure, bilingual education, etc., of Latin American countries and regions. Second, research on China-Latin America relations mainly includes national image, the Belt and Road Initiative, urbanization construction, and models of China-Latin America cooperation. Third, research on U.S.-Latin America relations primarily covers globalization, income distribution, social policies, populism, conservatism, anti-Americanism, among others.

Figure 2. *Keyword Clustering Visualization.*



Note: This figure was generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on keyword clustering.

The high centrality of core clusters “Latin America,” “Lamei,” “Latin American countries”, “China-Latin America relations”, and so on, reflects how the focus of research in Chinese academia has shifted from the early days of analyzing internal issues in Latin America to exploring bilateral relations with China. This change might be the result of the improvement of economic, trade, and political cooperation between China and Latin America since the 21st century. Meanwhile, the independent cluster of “the United States” indicates an “invisible triangular relationship” within Latin American studies: given the United States’ traditional hegemony in Latin America, Chinese scholars inevitably treat the U.S. factor as a key variable when investigating China-Latin America relations, thereby constructing a unique research perspective. As for clusters such as “Cuba”, “Latin Americanization,” and “Urbanization”, although they take up a smaller number of nodes, they represent specific problem domains that are rooted in Latin America’s unique history and current realities. These issues have formed independent clusters in that Latin America’s experiences with the “middle-income trap,” left-wing political cycles, and social movements provide a rare case repository for China’s comparative political economy research.

Research Institutions

As shown in Table 2, the top five institutions in terms of publication volume in Latin America research are the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the Graduate School of CASS, the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, CASS, and the Center for World Modern History Studies at Nankai University.

Meanwhile, Latin America-related research is relatively concentrated: the vast majority (212 papers) were completed by the Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS, while the other institutions each have no more than 15 publications. Although many domestic universities, such as Peking University, Nankai University, Tsinghua University, and Fudan University, have established Latin American research centers, and more than 100 universities offer Spanish majors (Guo et al., 2020), the main research institutions are research institutes, with relatively few university-based academic institutions.

Table 2. *Co-occurrence of Latin American Research Institutions.*

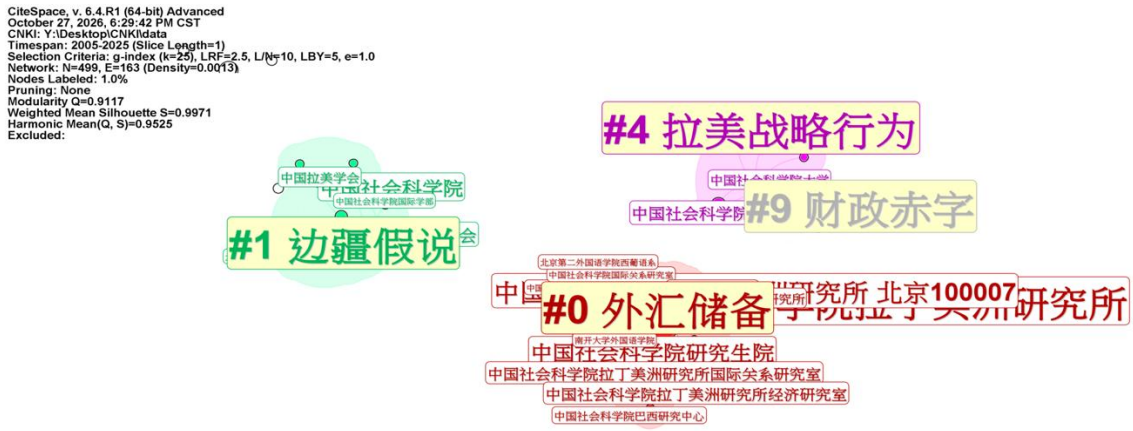
No.	Number of Documents	Centrality	Year	Institution Name
1	212	0.02	2005	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
2	14	0.00	2005	Graduate School, CASS
3	13	0.00	2011	School of International Studies, Renmin University of China
4	11	0.00	2008	CASS
5	9	0.00	2005	Center for World Modern History Studies, Nankai University

Note: In the table, “No. 4: CASS” refers to the institution not labeled “Institute of Latin American Studies”; it may be another research institute under CASS.

Utilizing CiteSpace software, a visualized map was generated with institutions as the node type. The results show that in Latin American research, “N = 499 and E = 163, Density = 0.0013,” indicating that collaborative relationships among research institutions exist, but there is still room for improvement in the depth and closeness of collaboration. Furthermore, CiteSpace software generated an institutional clustering visualization map through

clustering (see Figure 3). In this map, “Q = 0.9117 and S = 0.9525,” indicating a highly significant and credible clustering structure. The following four main clusters were identified: #0 Foreign Exchange Reserves, #1 Frontier Hypothesis, #4 Strategic Behavior in Latin America, #9 Fiscal Deficit. The corresponding representative research institutions are, respectively, the Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS; the Chinese Association of Latin American Studies; the School of International Studies, Renmin University of China; the Development Research Center of the China Geological Survey; and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies.

Figure 3. *Visualization of Institutional Clustering.*



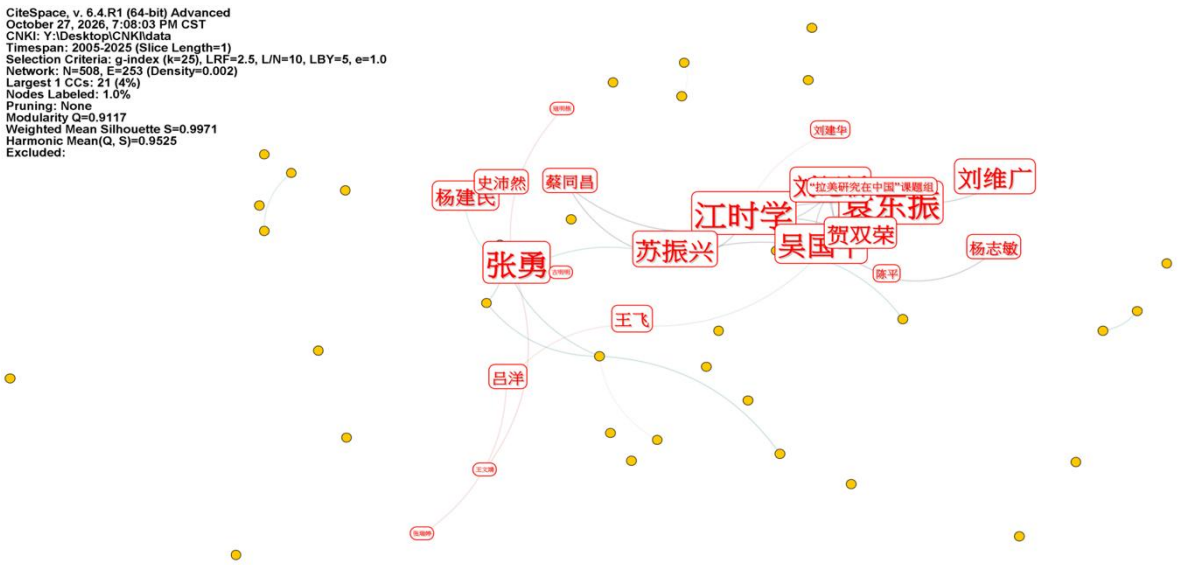
Note: This figure was generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on institution clustering.

Researchers

As research in this discipline deepens, a group of core scholars with significant academic influence is to emerge in the field. As the backbone of discipline’s development, these core scholars not only promote the expansion of academic frontiers but also guide the evolution of research directions. A systematic analysis of core scholars’ research outputs, academic networks, and influence can effectively capture the research hotspots, development trajectories, and future trends in the discipline. This study adopted CiteSpace to construct a co-authorship knowledge graph, setting the threshold to 2 to generate an author co-occurrence map (Figure 4). In the map, the size of nodes is proportional to the number of publications by the author, and the lines between nodes represent collaboration between authors. As shown in Table 3, from the Institute of Latin American Studies, Chinese

Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Yuan Dongzhen, Jiang Shixue, Zhang Yong, Wu Guoping, Su Zhexing, Liu Jixin ; Liu Weiguang along with Sun Hongbo from the Graduate School of CASS, have each published more than 10 papers, while the publication counts of the remaining authors are in single digits. Figure 4 also shows three larger research networks, including the collaboration team of Yuan Dongzhen, Jiang Shixue, Wu Guoping, and Liu Weiguang; the collaboration team of Zhang Yong and Yang Jianmin. Smaller research networks are in the process of forming, such as those led by Wu Hongying from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations and Cui Shoujun from the School of International Studies, Renmin University of China. Overall, research institutions are relatively fragmented, and collaboration between different institutions is limited, a situation that requires further improvement.

Figure 4. *Author Co-occurrence Map.*



Note: This figure is a co-occurrence network generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on the author data.

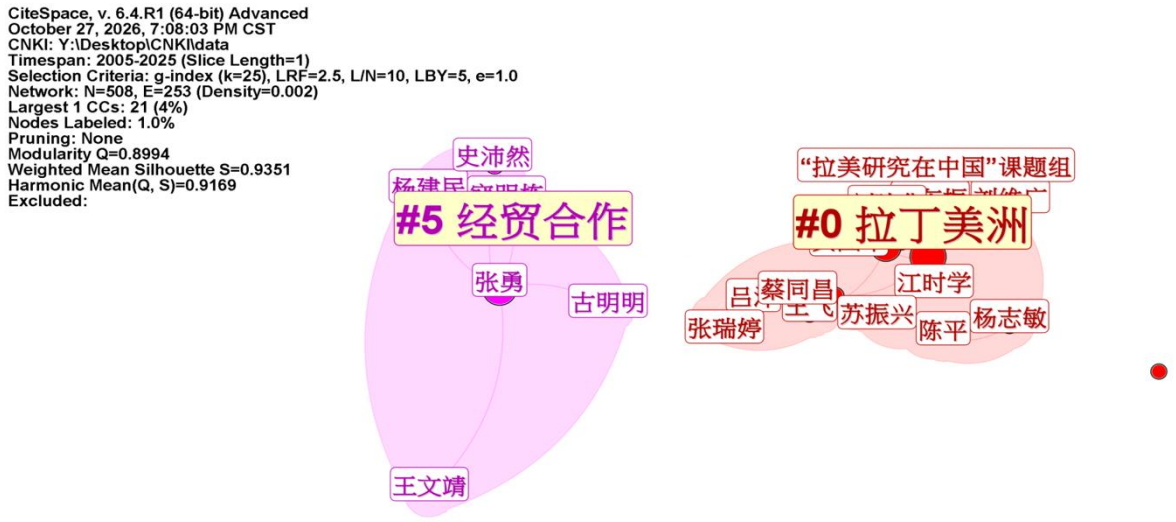
Table 3. *Author Co-occurrence in Latin American Research.*

No.	Number of Documents	Centrality	Year	Author	Author Affiliation
1	25	0.00	2005	Yuan Dongzhen	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
2	25	0.00	2005	Jiang Shixue	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
3	24	0.00	2008	Zhang Yong	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
4	18	0.00	2005	Wu Guoping	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
5	13	0.00	2005	Su Zhenxing	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
6	11	0.00	2005	Liu Jixin	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
7	11	0.00	2005	Liu Weiguang	Institute of Latin American Studies, CASS
8	11	0.00	2005	Sun Hongbo	Graduate School, CASS

Note: CiteSpace software generates a visualization map with authors as the node type. The results show that in Latin American research, "N = 508 and E = 253, Density = 0.002," indicating that there are collaborative relationships among researchers, but the collaboration is not very close. The author clustering visualization map generated by CiteSpace (see Figure 5) shows that "Q = 0.8994, S = 0.9169," indicating a highly significant and credible clustering structure. The following two main clusters are obtained: #0 Latin America, #5 Economic and Trade Cooperation.

The main researchers on Latin America are Yuan Dongzhen, Jiang Shixue, et al., for example, “The experience of modernization in Latin American countries: general laws and diversity of path choices” (Yuan, 2025), and “On the 'country risk' of Latin American countries” (Jiang, 2021). Research on economic and trade cooperation is represented by Zhang Yong and Shi Peiran, for example, “Opportunities for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean under the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative” (Zhang & Shi, 2018).

Figure 5. *Author Clustering Visualization.*



Note: This figure was generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on author clustering.

Research Hotspots and Development Trends in Latin American Studies

Dynamic Changes in Research Hotspots

The burst detection calculation in CiteSpace software can effectively identify dynamic changes in research hotspots within a discipline. By analyzing burst keywords, it is possible to reveal emerging research directions that have attracted attention in the field. To accurately identify whether a topic constitutes an emerging research hotspot, two conditions must be met simultaneously: first, the topic has appeared relatively recently in academic research; second, the sudden increase in research interest in that topic has also occurred relatively recently. Nodes marked with a red bar indicate that the research topic experienced a significant increase in academic attention during specific years. The timeline view of burst keywords generated by CiteSpace is arranged vertically, displaying research topics in chronological order of their burst onset: topics at the top of the chart represent earlier research hotspots, while topics closer to the bottom indicate recently emerging frontier directions. This presentation method reflects the evolutionary trajectory of research hotspots within the discipline.

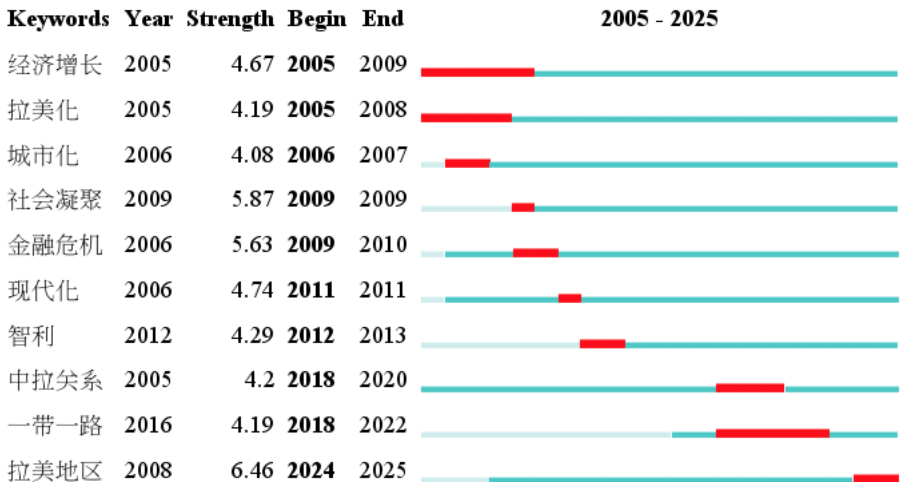
The greater the burst strength, the more significant the research frontier of the topic. According to the timeline list of keywords burst strength (see Figure 6), the keywords “economic growth” and “Latin Americanization” all began to burst in 2005 and ended in 2009

and 2008 respectively. During this period, research primarily explored economic development in Latin America and its implications; for example, studies on the export-oriented development model of Latin American economies (Yue, 2009). “Social Cohesion” and “Financial crisis” were research hotspots between 2009 and 2010, directly stemming from the global financial crisis that broke out in 2008.

Research during this period mainly analyzed the impact of the global financial crisis on Latin American countries (Li & Xu, 2009). Following the global economic crisis, Chinese senior officials frequently visited Latin America, and China-Latin America economic and trade relations developed rapidly (Wu, 2009). The number of Chinese scholars studying Latin American countries increased continuously, especially research on major Latin American countries and those with close relations with China. Consequently, countries such as “Chile” became research keywords from 2012 to 2013. However, existing literature shows insufficient research on smaller Latin American countries (Guo Cunhai et al., 2020). The keywords “China-Latin America relations,” “Belt and Road”, and “Latin American region” burst within the time range from 2018 to 2025.

Although Latin America was not formally incorporated into the Belt and Road cooperation framework until 2017, currently, more than twenty independent countries in the region have signed cooperation documents with China on jointly building the Belt and Road. The Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America not only carries forward historical ties but also builds a key bridge to promote coordinated progress and achieve mutual benefit and win-win cooperation between China and Latin America (Lou, 2023).

Figure 6. *Timeline List of Keyword Burst Strength.*



Note: This burst figure was generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on keywords.

In line with the trend of economic globalization, both China and Latin America have continuously deepened practical cooperation in trade, investment, finance, technology, infrastructure construction, and other areas. These keywords also reflect, to a certain extent, that China's Latin American studies align with this trend. However, due to misleading information from Western media and historical cognitive biases, there remain certain misunderstandings regarding Chinese culture in Latin America (Yan & Yu, 2023). Moreover, keywords related to the dissemination of Chinese culture in existing Latin American studies are scarce (Meng, 2019).

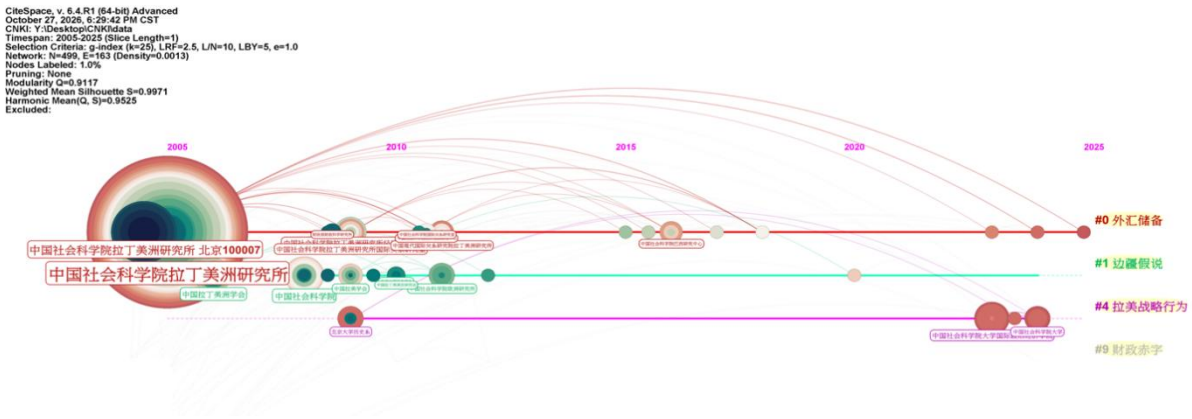
Changes in Research Themes across Institutions

Institutional timeline analysis is an extension of the institution clustering results along the time dimension, revealing changes in research themes across different institutions from a temporal perspective. The timeline spectrum can clearly reflect the research outputs, development trajectories, and inter-cluster correlations of each clustering unit (Chen et al., 2025).

To visually demonstrate the evolutionary trends of Latin American research across different institutions, this study used CiteSpace software, set thresholds, and generated a Timeline visualization map (see Figure 7). This map illustrates the evolution of Latin American research institutions over the past two decades. The lines between nodes indicate the degree of association between institutions; the darker the connecting line, the stronger the association. It can be observed that for research on the Latin American region, from the early stage (2005) through the middle stage (2015) to the recent stage (2020), there has been relatively strong inter-institutional linkage. Notably, the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has been the core institution for research on the Latin American region throughout these years. During the middle stage (2011–2019), the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, the Center for Latin American Studies at Renmin University of China, the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, and Peking University focused their efforts on research concerning foreign exchange reserves, frontier hypothesis, strategic behavior in Latin America, and fiscal deficit. However, the linkages among these institutions have been relatively weak. In the recent stage (2020–2025), the institute of Latin American studies, CASS has engaged

in research on strategic behavior in Latin America and exchange reserves. The linkages among these institutions are also not strong.

Figure 7. *Timeline Knowledge Map of Latin American Research at Different Institutions.*



Note: This timeline figure was generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on institutions.

As a national-level think tank, the Institute of Latin American Studies at CASS has long played a major role in this field, making it less competitive for other universities, even those that have established Latin American studies centers, to rival it in terms of scale and influence. At the same time, the current system for disciplinary evaluation and project review in China tends to favor first authors and independently completed works from a single institution.

Cross-institutional collaboration is not considered an outcome in academic performance assessments, which might hinder scholars' motivation to actively seek external collaboration. Furthermore, although universities such as Renmin University and Shanghai International Studies University have begun to emerge in the mid-term, their research largely relies on their respective strengths in language or international relations to achieve breakthroughs in specific areas, and they have not yet established stable cross-university collaboration networks.

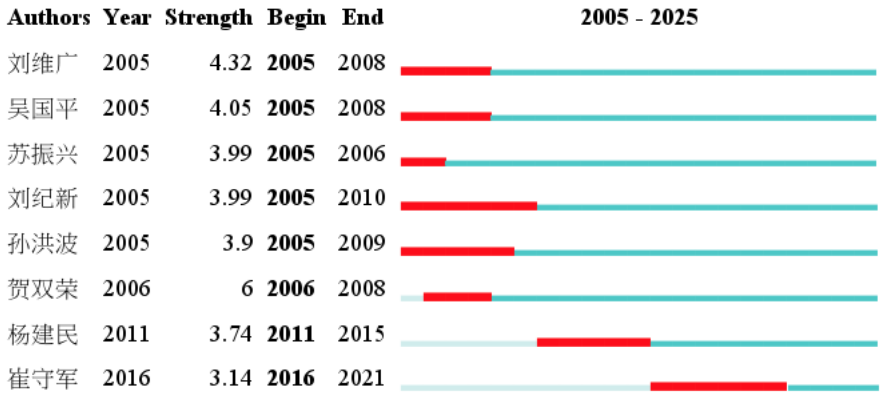
Changes in Burst Strength of Researchers

According to the timeline list of author burst strength (see Figure 8), the authors "Liu Weiguang," "Wu Guoping," "Su Zhenxing," "Liu Jixin," "Sun Hongbo," and "He Shuangrong" began their burst periods in 2005 or 2006 and ended between 2006 and 2010. This period was generally a time of rapid development in Latin American research. These authors were the leading researchers during this period, focusing on topics such as the challenges and

transformations in the economic, social, political, and international relations development of Latin America.

The author “Yang Jianmin” had a burst period from 2011 to 2015. This stage represented an important opportunity for China-Latin America cooperation, and the research theme accordingly focused on China-Latin America relations (Yang, 2013). The author who burst from 2016 to 2021 is “Cui Shoujun,” who mainly explored China-Latin America relations, as exemplified by “An Analysis of China-Latin America Relations Research in American Academia” (Cui & Zhang, 2018) and “Research on China’s Development Finance Cooperation with Latin America” (Cui & Jiao, 2020).

Figure 8. *Timeline List of Author Burst Strength.*



Note: This burst figure was generated by Citespace (6.4.R1) based on authors.

The shift in author burst reflects the paradigm shift in Chinese Latin American studies over the last two decades, moving from a “discipline-building-driven” approach to a “policy-demand-driven” one, and then to a “theoretical self-awareness and internationalization-driven” approach. Specifically, the active period of early prominent authors (e.g., Wu Guoping and Jiang Shixue) coincided with the rapid foundational phase of the discipline of Latin

American studies in China; their research primarily focused on political and economic transformations within Latin America with the purpose of establishing a basic understanding. Meanwhile, the peak of mid-period prominent authors (e.g., Yang Jianmin) coincided with the elevation of China-Latin America relations to a comprehensive partnership, and the focus of their research consequently shifted to bilateral economic, trade, and strategic cooperation, exhibiting distinct characteristics of policy responsiveness; recently emerged

scholars (e.g., Cui Shoujun) treat Latin America as a testing ground for theoretical innovation, focusing on issues such as China's development financing and initiating theoretical dialogue with the international academic community. This generational evolution not only reveals the succession of new and old generations within the academic ranks but also profoundly indicates that the academic focus and mainstream discourse in Chinese studies on Latin America have gradually shifted from early, isolated analyses of Latin America's "essence" to exploring the mechanisms of "China-Latin America interaction" and its implications for global governance.

Discussion

Using CiteSpace software, this study conducted a visual analysis of Latin American area and country studies over the past two decades. The results indicate that Latin American research in China is broad in scope and deep in content. However, several problems and shortcomings exist, mainly manifested in the following five aspects.

First, Latin American area and country studies are showing an overall downward trend. Although Latin American studies is one of the most "established" research fields within area and country studies (Jiang, 2024), the number of publications on Latin America has been declining continuously after 2014. In particular, over the past eight years, the volume of research has decreased by half. This decline is inconsistent with the sustained warming of China-Latin America relations in recent years, and the reasons behind this discrepancy urgently need to be explored.

Second, there is a lack of extensive communication and deep cooperation among Latin American researchers and institutions. As can be seen from the results of this study, although domestic Latin American research covers a wide range of topics and involves numerous researchers and institutions, there is a lack of exchange and deep cooperation among Latin American scholars, peers, and institutions. This insufficiency in communication and in-depth collaboration makes it difficult for Latin American research to absorb international frontier results in a timely manner and directly affects scholars' ability to conduct in-depth studies of Latin American issues (Li, 2012).

Third, research on the dissemination of Chinese cultural influence is insufficient. Due to historical cognitive biases in Latin America and the limited channels for spreading Chinese culture, the dissemination of Chinese culture in the region has been inadequate (Meng, 2019). For example, there are 22,430 English-language reports related to the "Belt and Road," but only 1,561 in Spanish and 1,027 in Portuguese, which together account for less

than 7% of the English reports (Bai, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to increase research on the dissemination of Chinese culture in Latin America and continuously optimize the pathways for such dissemination.

Fourth, Latin American research focuses on large countries, with relatively little research on smaller countries. Existing Latin American research has mainly concentrated on large countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. However, Latin America comprises 33 countries, which vary greatly from one another. Smaller Latin American countries, such as Peru, have long histories and rich cultures as well as abundant resources. Since 2013, bilateral relations between China and Peru have been upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership, and cooperation between the two sides in trade and other fields has continued to deepen (Meng, 2025). Nevertheless, only two papers in the existing literature involve research on Peru. Therefore, it is necessary to balance research on both large and small Latin American countries (Guo, 2020).

Fifth, Latin American research is concentrated among a small number of institutions, with an uneven distribution. Over the past two decades, Latin American research in China has been mainly conducted by the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and it has been relatively concentrated. Although there are more than one hundred Chinese universities offering Spanish majors, and Spanish is spoken in 19 Latin American countries, only a very small number of universities are currently engaged in Latin American research. Consequently, more universities should be encouraged to participate in Latin American research, thereby providing important intellectual support for promoting the “Belt and Road” construction in Latin America.

Conclusions

This study draws upon Latin American area and country studies published between 2005 and 2025 in the core journal database of CNKI as its data source. Employing the visual analysis software CiteSpace, it analyzes the research status and trends in this field from the perspectives of publication volume, keywords, institutions, and authors. The results show that over the past two decades, the overall number of publications in Latin American area and country studies has exhibited a declining trend.

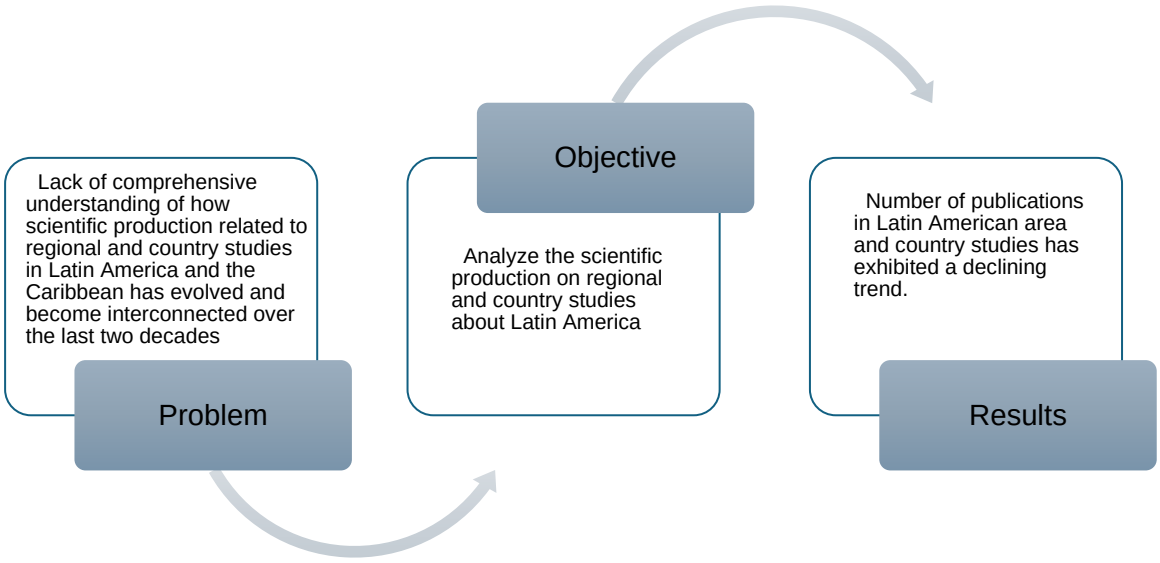
Research hotspots have shifted from Latin American regional studies to China–Latin America relations and the Belt and Road Initiative. Other areas, such as the dissemination of Chinese culture in Latin America and research on smaller Latin American countries, are

insufficient. The main research institutions are primarily research units such as the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, whereas research on Latin America in universities needs to be strengthened.

The top ten authors in terms of publication volume are relatively concentrated and have formed sizable research networks, but there are few authors engaged in cross-institutional collaboration. In response to the above problems, this study proposes the following recommendations:

First, it is suggested that the pool of Latin American researchers should be expanded, as well as continuously increase research on Latin American area and country studies. Second, there should be deeper communication and intensive collaboration among Latin American researchers and institutions to produce high-quality research outcomes. Third, increase research on the dissemination of Chinese culture in Latin America. Fourth, research on smaller Latin American countries must be strengthened. Fifth, it is advisable to encourage universities—especially those offering Spanish majors—to fully leverage their language advantages and conduct Latin American area and country studies, thereby providing greater intellectual support for advancing the national Belt and Road construction.

Figure 9. *Synthesis of the research.*



Source: Authors

Limitations

We must admit that this study has several limitations. First, the data sources were limited to CNKI Core Journals and the CSSCI database and excluded monographs, theses, and conference papers, which may have omitted significant research findings. Second, CiteSpace has limitations in processing Chinese word segmentation, which may have biased keyword clustering. Future research could consider integrating international databases such as Web of Science to carry out comparative analyses of Chinese and foreign studies on LAC, or incorporate qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews, critical literature reviews, and so forth, to address the shortcomings of quantitative analysis.

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AI use statement

Name of AI tools used.

Grammarly. (s.f.). *Grammarly* [software de corrección y asistencia a la escritura basado en IA]. Recuperado el 11 de octubre de 2026, de https://www.grammarly.com/

AI tools

AI was used as a writing assistant in the introduction. It was used as a writing assistant in the methods section. It was used as a writing assistant in data collection and analysis. It was not used in the results and conclusions sections. It was used as a writing assistant in the conclusions section.

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Tepic, Nayarit; México

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