



A CiteSpace Analysis on Mapping International Research Trends on Chinese Traditional Culture (1999 – 2019)

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Abstract: As China's influence continues to grow on the global stage, its rich cultural heritage has garnered increasing attention from researchers worldwide. This study employs CiteSpace, a visualization tool for bibliometric analysis, to explore the international research landscape of Chinese traditional culture over the past two decades (1999–2019). By examining 866 relevant articles retrieved from the Web of Science, this study aims to provide insights into the general state of research, the most influential works, emerging themes, and the role of funding agencies in supporting these studies. The findings reveal a significant increase in research output, particularly after 2013, reflecting heightened global interest in Chinese culture. The research spans a range of disciplines, from philosophy and social sciences to health and tourism, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Key trends include a growing focus on topics such as Chinese traditional medicine, cultural values, intercultural communication, and the concept of "harmony". The study also identifies the leading authors, journals, and funding agencies contributing to this field, with China, the USA, and Canada emerging as primary supporters. The findings offer valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and funding bodies interested in furthering the global exchange of Chinese cultural knowledge.

Keywords: Chinese traditional culture, CiteSpace, international advances

I. Introduction

With the rapid development of the global economy and society, China has emerged as a key player on the world stage. Its growing influence spans various domains, from economics and politics to culture and science. Numerous scholars have highlighted the significant contributions of Chinese people to the advancement of science and technology in Europe, showcasing the global impact of Chinese innovation and intellectual efforts [1]. The attitudes, behaviors, and achievements of the Chinese people are deeply rooted in their rich cultural heritage and enduring values, which continue to shape their perspectives and interactions [2][3].

In recent years, Chinese traditional culture has garnered increasing interest from scholars worldwide. This heightened attention stems from its profound historical significance, unique philosophical underpinnings, and its relevance in a globalized context. Chinese traditional culture, as a vital component of the broader global cultural mosaic, has drawn the focus of academics across various disciplines. Researchers have examined topics such as the intrinsic characteristics of Chinese culture, its influence on sectors like tourism, and the interplay between traditional Chinese medicine and cultural practices.

However, despite the substantial body of research in this area, much of the existing literature remains centered on Chinese traditional culture itself or its localized applications. Few studies have systematically examined international advancements in the research on Chinese traditional culture, especially during the two-decade span from 1999 to 2019. There is a lack of comprehensive analysis that explores global research trends, emerging themes, and the impact of Chinese traditional culture on the international academic landscape. To address this gap, CiteSpace—a visualization tool for bibliometric and network analysis—provides an effective framework for examining the evolution and trends in this field.

This study aims to bridge the existing research gaps by addressing the following key questions:

- (1) What is the general state of international research on Chinese traditional culture over the past two decades?
- (2) Which articles, scholars, and journals are the most frequently cited in this field?
- (3) What are the emerging themes and topics related to Chinese traditional culture in international research, and what are their distinctive characteristics?
- (4) What is the role of funding agencies in supporting research on Chinese traditional culture?

The study will use CiteSpace to analyze foreign literature on Chinese traditional culture, to identify significant trends, hotspots, and influential works from 1999 to 2019. The findings will provide valuable insights into the international research trajectory of Chinese traditional culture, contributing to a deeper understanding of its global scholarly impact and future development pathways.



II.Literature Review

In recent years, Chinese traditional culture has captured the imagination of researchers worldwide. Scholars from diverse fields have explored its rich history, profound philosophies, artistic achievements, and vibrant social customs. As globalization connects the world more than ever, interest in this ancient culture has grown, sparking cross-cultural exchanges and inspiring new studies. This review takes a closer look at some of the key areas where international research has made significant progress: philosophical thought, artistic expressions, social practices, and contemporary relevance.

Philosophical Thought

The philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism form the backbone of Chinese traditional culture and have become a major focus for international scholars. These systems of thought have offered timeless lessons on ethics, spirituality, and social harmony. For instance, Tu Weiming's work on Confucian ethics dives deep into its call for self-cultivation and societal balance, ideas that remain relevant even today [5]. Similarly, Robert G. Henricks' interpretation of Daoism sheds light on its emphasis on living in harmony with nature and practicing "non-action" (wu wei) [6].

Beyond classical philosophy, researchers have also examined how these ancient ideas can address modern issues. One study explored how the values of traditional Chinese philosophy and religion could shape a more holistic approach to health and nursing, bridging Eastern and Western systems [7]. This work highlights the enduring practicality of these ancient philosophies in solving contemporary problems.

Artistic Expressions

The artistic side of Chinese traditional culture, from calligraphy and painting to poetry and drama, has long fascinated the world. These art forms are not just visually stunning—they tell stories of cultural values and historical moments. James Cahill's influential work on Chinese painting showcases its technical brilliance and emotional depth, giving readers a window into the creative spirit of past generations [8]. Similarly, Peter Lovrick and Wang-Ngai Siu's study of Chinese opera captures the magic of this performance art, with its dramatic costumes, intricate staging, and unique storytelling methods [9].

These artistic traditions have stood the test of time, continuing to inspire not only academics but also artists and cultural enthusiasts. Their ability to convey both personal expression and collective memory makes them a universal language that transcends cultural boundaries.

Social Practices

The daily lives, traditions, and rituals of the Chinese people have also become a key area of international research. From family structures and festivals to unique communication styles, scholars have uncovered the layers of meaning behind these practices. Edward T. Hall's *Beyond Culture* offers insights into how Chinese people interact and build relationships, emphasizing the cultural nuances that shape their social behaviors [10].

Historical studies, like Pamela Kyle Crossley's exploration of specific time periods, provide context for how these traditions evolved over centuries [11]. Meanwhile, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has been the focus of studies bridging ancient practices with modern healthcare. For example, Lam's research surveyed Hong Kong Chinese perspectives on TCM and Western medicine, showing the importance of understanding patients' diverse attitudes for better healthcare outcomes [15].

Tourism and globalization have also brought Chinese culture into sharper focus. Li and Lu's research compares how Chinese and international scholars approach cultural tourism, identifying similarities, differences, and untapped areas for exploration [16]. Wang and Ma suggest writing Chinese literary history in both English and Chinese, broadening its reach and impact [17].

Other studies zoom in on specific elements of Chinese culture, like the concept of "harmony," the development of cultural industries, or the influence of Confucian ethics [18][19][20]. These targeted inquiries enrich our understanding of how traditional culture shapes the present.

Contemporary Relevance

In today's fast-changing world, the relevance of Chinese traditional culture is more evident than ever. Scholars have examined how its values and practices intersect with modern life, from business and politics to global cultural exchanges. For instance, one study explored how traditional Chinese business ethics adapt to and influence a market economy, highlighting the resilience of these principles in a competitive world [21].

The globalization of Chinese culture has also sparked interest. Stephanie Donald's research on media and culture examines how Chinese traditions are shared and received in the global arena, showing how ancient ideas can resonate in modern contexts [22]. Such studies underline the importance of Chinese culture not just as a historical artifact, but as a living, evolving force in today's interconnected world.

The international exploration of Chinese traditional culture has opened new doors to understanding its depth and complexity. From the wisdom of ancient philosophies to the beauty of artistic expressions, from time-honored social practices to its ongoing relevance in the modern world, scholars have uncovered a treasure trove of insights. Their work not only enriches our understanding of China but also reminds us of the universal value of cultural heritage in fostering connection and mutual appreciation across borders.

III.Methodology

3.1 Research Instrument

This study utilizes CiteSpace V, a powerful information visualization tool for knowledge mapping. CiteSpace was

developed by Dr. Chaomei Chen, a professor at the College of Information Science and Technology at Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA, USA. The software has been widely applied across various research fields, both domestically and internationally. CiteSpace provides a comprehensive overview of a specific research field while highlighting key documents critical to its development [23]. Thus, it serves as an effective tool for gaining deeper insights into the scope and trends of international research on Chinese traditional culture.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for this study was sourced from the Web of Science database, which is renowned for its coverage of the most influential academic research worldwide, offering significant reference value [24]. On December 31, 2019, the researcher retrieved literature on Chinese traditional culture research from the Web of Science Core Collection, including the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) databases.

The search was restricted to English-language articles. Using the "advanced search" function, the researcher entered "Chinese traditional culture" as the theme, selected "English" as the language, and specified "article" as the document type. The time frame was set from 1999 to 2019. After comparison with manual research, a total of 866 relevant articles were identified as the effective dataset.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis is made using the software CiteSpace 5.3.R4. Firstly, input all the cited data (author, title, source publication, abstract, references) of the 936 pieces of literature into the software and save in the computer. Secondly, set the related parameters: time slicing from 1999 to 2019, years per slice 1; term source including title, abstract, author keywords, and keyword plus; term type including noun phrase; node type including keyword and cited reference. Lastly, get and download the data results of the analysis.

IV. Results and Discussion

After a thorough and rigorous reading and analysis of the software results, in this paper, I mainly analyze the following cardinal aspects including the whole status and characteristics of publication, documents co-citation, hotspots and funding agencies.

4.1 The Whole Status and Characteristics of Publication

4.1.1 Annual Publication Tendency

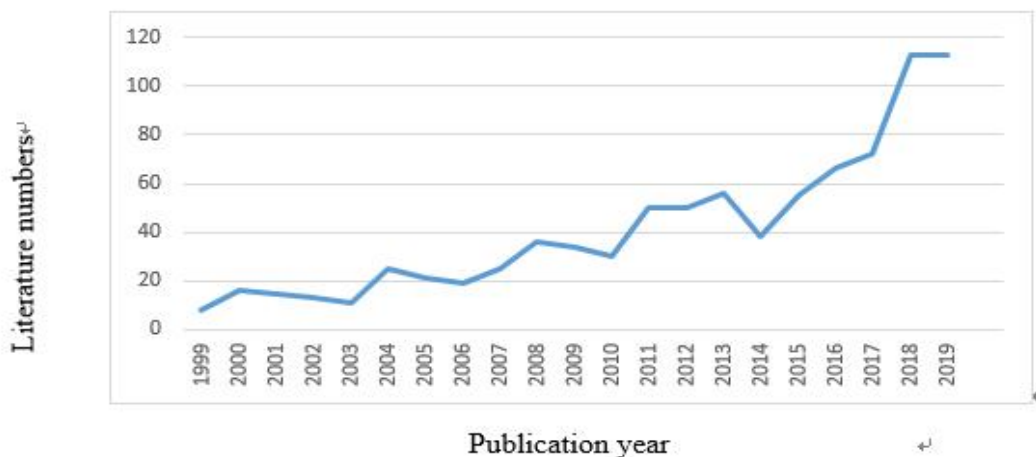


Figure 1 The number of documents from 1999 to 2019

The progression of papers published related to Chinese traditional culture during the 21 year period 1999-2019 is showed in Figure 1. On the whole, the number of documents grows year by year from 1999 to 2019. Specifically speaking, there is a very slight rise before 2013, and the number of those that published in the past 15 years (1999 to 2013) is just 409, while there was a considerable increase from 2016, and the number of those that published in recent 6 years(2014 to 2019) is 457. The clear upward trend indicates the increased attention to Chinese tradition culture by researchers. In 2013, Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the People’s Republic of China, put forward a strategic plan named “one belt and one road” which motivates the global communication of Chinese traditional culture all over the world.

From above, we can see that research on “Chinese traditional culture” has entered a steady-growth stage, and more and more attention also has been paid to it.

4.1.2 Author Publication Status

There are altogether 1903 authors contributing to Chinese traditional culture research and the top 10 authors are presented in Table 1. Wang, evidently, is the most frequent contributing author to the field of Chinese traditional culture. He works in Nantong University School of Nursing, meanwhile he has been studying in School of Nursing, Duke University in USA since 2014. As far as the department/faculty is concerned (Table 1), most of the authors in the top 10 list are affiliated with the department/faculty related to the health care and psychology.

Table1 Top 10 authors based on frequency

Author	Freq.	Institution
Wang, J.	7	School of Nursing, Nantong University, China Duke University, USA
Wang, X.	6	University College, University of Oxford, UK
Wang, Y.	6	School of Psychology, University of Western, Australia
Zhang, J.	6	Department of Educational Administration and Policy, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
Zhang, X.Y.	6	Department of Psychology, Southern Medical University, China
Choi, Y.	5	School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, USA
Li, J.	5	Beijing Key Laboratory of Applied Experimental Psychology, Beijing Normal University, China
Peng, K.P.	5	Department of Psychology, Tsinghua University, China
Song, Y.	5	School of Nursing, Nantong University, China University of Leicester, UK
Yang, X.L.	5	Department of Psychology, Southern Medical University, China

4.1.3 Journal Publication Status

The retrieved articles were published in 546 different referred journals. Ten out of the 546 journals published more than 10 percent of the articles. The number of articles in each journal ranged from 1 to 14. Among the journals, *Sustainability* published the largest number of articles about Chinese traditional culture (14), followed by *Hermathena* (11) and *Chinese Management Studies* (10). In a word, the three journals that published the most articles were *Sustainability*, *Hermathena* and *Chinese Management Studies*.

Table 2 Top 10 Journals based on frequency

No.	Journal	No. of articles retrieved
1	Sustainability	14
2	Hermathena	11
3	Chinese Management Studies	10
4	Frontiers in Psychology	9
5	Journal of Clinical Nursing	9
6	Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology	9
7	International Journal of Human Resource Management	8
8	Asian Journal of Social Psychology	6
9	Chinese Studies in History	6
10	Internal Journal of Psychology	6

4.2 Document Co-citation Analysis

The most cited articles are usually regarded as landmarks due to their grounded-breaking contributions^[25]. Table 3 shows the top 10 most cited papers with co-citation frequency of over 48 times. Chen's paper entitled "*Chinese value, health and nursing*", is the most cited article in the data-set with 149 citations^[7]. This paper made an introduction to Chinese philosophies, religion, basic beliefs and values and explored how these ideas influenced the development of health and nursing. The findings suggested a better way to Chinese health care system by considering both western science and Chinese philosophical and aesthetic tradition. The second article with 119 citations was published by Super and Harkness, indicating that culture affected the course of environment development^[26]. Lam's paper is at the third position with 93 citations, revealing that medical practitioners should attach importance to the health-attitudes of their patients from different ethnic backgrounds in order to get a better patient-doctor relationship and better compliance of treatment^[15]. Qin and Mortensen's paper entitled "*Specific characteristics of suicide in China*", is at the fourth position with 87 citations, interpreting the specific characteristics of suicide in China in terms of traditional culture, social force, political environment and economic status^[27], which were compared with that in Denmark. With 70 citations, the article at fifth position was published by Wong, Wong, Hui, and Law (2001), and the results indicated that comparing with the results of study in the west, organizational commitment among Chinese employees has a much stronger effect on job satisfaction and turnover intention^[28]. That is because traditional Chinese culture values loyalty, guanxi and pao. The other articles published by Lee, Xu, Fu, Cameron, and Chen (2001), Tan and Snell (2002), Hiu, Siu, Wang and Chang (2001), Kennedy (2002) at the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth position, respectively, focus on morality and mentality quality^{[29][30][31][32]}. While the article by Okazaki and Rivas (2002), at the sixth position, has 64 citations and explores cultural values^[33].

Table 3 Top 10 frequent co-cited documents about Chinese traditional culture

Title	Author	Year	Freq.	Source
Chinese Value, Health and Nursing	Chen, Y.C.	2001	149	Journal of Advanced Nursing

Culture Structures the Environment for Development	Super,C.M., Harkness, S.	2002	119	Human Development
Strengths and Weaknesses of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine in the eyes of Some Hong Kong Chinese	Lam,T.P.	2001	93	J Epidemiol Community Health
Specific Characteristics of Suicide in China	Qin, P. & Mortensen, P.B.	2001	87	Acta Psychiatr Scand
The Significant Role of Chinese Employees' Organizational Commitment: Implications for Managing Employees in Chinese Societies	Wong, C.S.; Wong, Y.T.; Hui, C.; Law, K.S.	2001	70	Journal of World Business
A Content Analysis of Multinationals' Web Communication Strategies: Cross-cultural Research Framework and Pre-testing	Okazaki, S. & Rivas, J.A	2002	64	International Research
Taiwan and Mainland Chinese and Canadian Children's Categorization and Evaluation of Lie- and Truth-telling: A Modesty Effect	Lee, K., Xu, F, Fu, G., Cameron, C.A., Chen, S.	2001	55	British Journal of Developmental Psychology
The Third Eye: Exploring Guanxi and Relational Morality in the Workplace	Tan, D., Snell, R.S.	2002	50	Journal of Business Ethics
An Investigation of Decision-Making Styles of Consumers in China	Hiu,A., Siu,N.Y.M.,Wang, C.C.L., Chang, L.M.K.	2001	50	Journal of Consumer Affairs
Leadership in Malaysia: Traditional Values, International Outlook	Kennedy, J.C.	2002	48	The Academy of Management Executive

4.3 Key Words Analysis

The key words have a close relation with the cores of the documents, thus the high-frequency keywords appearing in the subject area are often regarded as hot research topics [34]. CiteSpace has the basic function to judge the relationship between the themes by analyzing the phenomena that the terminologies in the same article[35]. Therefore, the analysis of keywords can help to identify the current research focus and hotspots. Results regarding the range of hot topics in correspondence to the frequency and year of occurrence are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 Top 20 keywords with their time and frequencies

No.	Keyword	Freq.	Year	No.	Keyword	Freq.	Year
1	Social Emotion	193	2017	11	New Zealand	41	2009
2	Yin Yang	136	2015	12	Harmony	40	2013
3	Pregnant Women	110	2012	13	United States	39	2002
4	Culture Difference	75	2000	14	Hong Kong Chinese	36	2014
5	Traditional Chinese Culture	68	2011	15	Immigrants	29	2009
6	Confucian Values	59	2012	16	Gender Differences	27	2013
7	Filial Piety	50	2008	17	Complementary Medicine	25	2012
8	Ritual Practices	48	2002	18	Chinese Language	22	2017
9	Chinese Patients	47	2013	19	Breast Cancer	18	2011
10	Health Care	44	2001	20	Political Culture	13	1999

As we can see from the co-occurrence frequency in Table 4, the most frequently used keywords are the following: social emotion (193 times), Yin Yang (136 times), pregnant women (110 times), culture difference (75 times), traditional Chinese culture(68 times), Confucian values (59 times), filial piety(50 times), ritual practices (48 times), Chinese patients(47 times), health care(44 times), New Zealand(41times), harmony(40 times), United States (39 times), Hong Kong Chinese(36 times), immigrants(29 times), gender differences(27 times), complementary medicine(25 times), Chinese language(22 times), breast cancer(18 times) and political culture(13 times).

Based on the classification of these keywords and analysis of the related papers, we find five characteristics in the international research on Chinese traditional culture.

Firstly, the hotspots range from Chinese social problems, traditional values, health, Chinese medicine to Chinese language, intercultural communication. These research topics change according to the policy, project and planning of China each year. For example, the 18th National Congress of Chinese Communist Party was held from November, 8th to 14th, 2012 in Beijing. “Harmony” is one of the socialist core values which are firstly put forward in that meeting. Thus, after that meeting, there are many articles about “harmony” published in international journals.

Secondly, most of the articles (536 articles) employ qualitative method to carry out the research, some articles (200 articles) use quantitative method while other articles (130 articles) use mixed research methods. For example, Wong et al. (2001) conducted a research by collecting data from two samples from People’s Republic of China and Hong Kong to compare their different attitudes to organizational commitment with the help of interviews and questionnaires^[28].

Thirdly, 58 percentage of the research participants are from Hong Kong, immigrants in New Zealand and USA. For example, in his study, Lam (2001) explored the attitudes of twenty nine participants (Hong Kong Chinese) toward traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine through interviews, with the help of grounded theory approach^[15].

Lastly, most of the authors comes from Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland of China, Canada and USA.

4.4 Funding Agency

There are altogether 312 funding agencies supporting research on the theme of Chinese tradition culture. The top 10 funding agencies are presented in Figure 2. National Natural Science Foundation of China is the largest contributor, supporting 41 papers, followed by National Institutes of Health NIH USA (22) and United States Department of Health Human Services (22). The number of NIH National Institute of Mental Health NIMH is 12 and the agency ranks fourth. Among the top 10 funding agencies, the number of articles in agency ranges from 4 to 41, which occupies more than 10% portion of contributions of the total outputs.

The number of other agencies is as follows: China Scholarship Council (7), Canadian Institutes of Health Research CIHR (5), Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (4), Hong Kong Research Grants Council (4), Ministry of Education China (4), and National Science Council of Taiwan (4).

In general, the number of available research funding is associated with the attitude of the country towards to the theme of Chinese traditional culture. It can be seen that besides China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), USA and Canada are also the most supporters to the research on Chinese traditional culture.

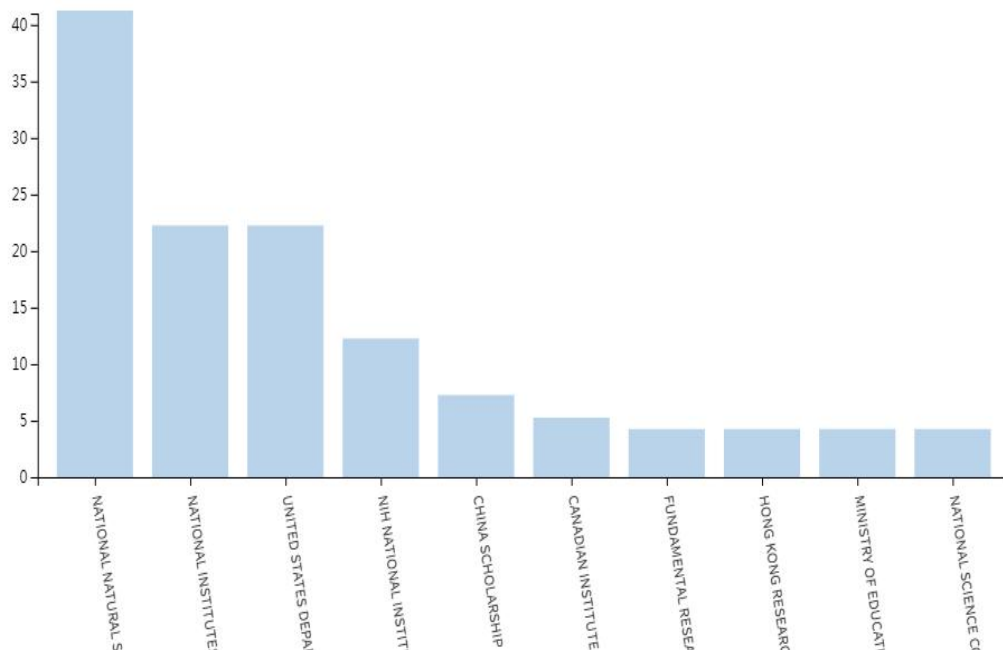


Figure 2 Top 10 funding agencies based on frequency

V. Conclusion

This study, using CiteSpace, offers a unique glimpse into the international progress made in researching Chinese traditional culture. Several key conclusions can be drawn from the findings.

First, the publication data reveals a significant rise in research output from 1999 to 2019, with a particularly sharp increase in the last four years. The study of Chinese traditional culture has become increasingly interdisciplinary, encompassing fields such as education, sociology, psychology, nursing, and psychiatry, among others. This diversity highlights the broad appeal and relevance of Chinese traditional culture across various academic domains.

Second, an interesting observation emerges when comparing the most productive authors to those whose works are most cited. These two groups show little overlap, and the journals publishing the most cited documents often differ from those that are most prolific. Notably, environmental and nursing journals have greater influence than many cross-cultural journals, underlining the multidisciplinary nature of this research area.

Finally, the research on Chinese traditional culture is largely driven by scholars and institutions in Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, Canada, and the United States. These regions not only produce the most prolific authors but also provide substantial funding, reflecting their significant contributions to advancing this field.

- The analysis of 866 articles underscores the substantial international interest in Chinese traditional culture, which has been instrumental in spreading its influence worldwide. However, there is room for further growth and diversification in this research area. To build on the existing work, several recommendations can be made:

Expand Language and Geographic Scope: It is crucial for Chinese scholars to analyze more articles published in international journals across different languages. Comparing these findings with the results of this study could offer deeper insights into global perspectives on Chinese traditional culture.

Incorporate Broader Data Sources: Future research could include books and other types of data to draw more comprehensive and robust conclusions. This would help capture a fuller picture of the scholarly discourse surrounding Chinese traditional culture.

Integrate Advanced Analytical Tools: Combining tools like CiteSpace and UCINET could enhance the visualization of the research domain, providing a more detailed and holistic understanding of trends and connections in the field.

In conclusion, exploring Chinese traditional culture in international contexts calls for diverse paradigms, methodologies, and metrics. By adopting innovative approaches and broadening the scope of inquiry, researchers can uncover how Chinese traditional culture is represented and understood in the global academic community, further enriching its role in fostering cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

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