

Original Paper

The Evolution of Scholarship and Paradigm Shifts in China's Long-March Research (2011-2025): A Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer and CiteSpace

Mijia Chen, Wenjun Lu & Linda Zhang

Hangzhou Dianzi University Information Engineering College, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China
+86 13777361582, comic0622@163.com

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Abstract

Drawing on bibliometric records of Long March-related scholarly articles indexed in the CNKI database from 2011 to 2025, this paper identifies a three-stage developmental trajectory, demarcated by the pivotal years 2016 and 2021. Employing VOSviewer and CiteSpace for co-occurrence and co-citation analyses, we construct a comprehensive visual mapping of the knowledge structure and thematic contours characterizing this body of research. Empirical analyses generate three salient observations on Long-March-related scholarship. First, it features a distinct two-tiered intellectual structure: foundational canonical historical themes (e.g., Mao ZD, the Zunyi Conference) dominated research in 2011-2015, while contemporary agendas such as the Long March National Cultural Park and rural revitalization prevailed during 2021-2025. Second, the field has undergone a paradigmatic shift from historical textual criticism and archival compilation toward policy exegesis and applied inquiry, moving from discipline-driven historical scholarship to applied and cultural-communication-oriented research. Third, journals display functional stratification: core outlets prioritize theoretical elaboration and historical contextual reconstruction, whereas non-core journals mainly publish practice-centered and pedagogy-focused studies on Long March culture. This study clarifies the evolutionary logic and disciplinary layout of Long March research, provides theoretical reference and practical implications for the innovative inheritance and international cross-cultural communication of Chinese Red Culture.

Keywords

Long March, Long March Spirit, Red Culture Communication, Bibliometric Analysis, VOSviewer, CiteSpace

1. Introduction

2026 marks the 90th anniversary of the victory of the Long March; Chinese universities and academic institutions have launched a series of themed seminars, essay competitions and commemorative activities to review the historical heritage and contemporary value of the Long March. The Long March was a great strategic military movement launched by the Party and the people's army under its leadership at a critical moment of life or death for the revolution. The great Long March Spirit nurtured in this process embodies the finest portrayal of the Chinese nation's perseverance and self-perfection (Chen, 2023).

Ouyang Song once pointed out that the Long March is a major topic that should and can be explored anew with constant fresh insights, and it represents a vast "rich lode" for the study of Party history (Ouyang, 2015). In recent years, although academic research on Long March has yielded relatively rich results, bibliometric methods have rarely been applied to the systematic review of Long March studies, which provides an opportunity for methodological innovation in this paper.

2. Data Sources and Research Methods

A preliminary statistical analysis of publications on the Long March over the past two decades reveals two distinct peaks in 2006 and 2016, closely corresponding to the 70th and 80th anniversaries of the victory of Long March. Generally, every decennial commemoration triggers a new surge in academic output (Hu, 2025). General Secretary Xi's keynote speech at the 2016 commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Long March victory greatly promoted related academic research, with the annual publication volume far exceeding the level of 2006. A slight uptick in publications also occurred between the two peaks, such as in 2011 and 2021.

Overall, academic publications on the Long March are highly concentrated in quinquennial and decennial commemorative years, whereas research productivity declines markedly in ordinary non-commemorative years. Notably, in 2021, the Party formally incorporated the Long March Spirit into the the Party's spiritual lineage. This policy-driven initiative brought the 2021 publication volume close to the 2006 level. Such a pattern reflects the strong driving effect of policy agendas on academic production and reveals that Long March research still lacks stable and endogenous developmental momentum.

This study selects the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as the data source, sets "Long March" as the "topic" retrieval term, and covers the time span from January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2025. VOSviewer and CiteSpace are adopted to perform keyword co-occurrence analysis and citation burst detection. Preliminary data screening excluded irrelevant engineering terms related to Long March carrier rockets in aerospace research, such as carrier rocket design and core technical parameters. To ensure the humanities and social science orientation of the sample, literature categorized under Aerospace Science and Engineering was eliminated via disciplinary filtering in formal retrieval.

3. Overall Trend of Publication Volume

This study divides the period 2011–2025 into three stages: Stage 1 (2011–2015), Stage 2 (2016–2020),

and Stage 3 (2021–2025). The selection of 2016 and 2021 as critical nodes is based on the following considerations: 2016 marked the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Long March, at which General Secretary Xi delivered an important speech systematically elaborating the Long March Spirit, which profoundly guided the orientation and paradigm of subsequent academic research; in 2021, the Party officially incorporated the Long March Spirit into the Spiritual Pedigree of Chinese Communists, further elevating its cultural status and strategic value and driving a new round of research upsurge. Both milestone events have become important symbolic nodes promoting the evolutionary iteration of Long March studies. Both milestones mark new phases in Long March research. The 15-year time span ensures sufficient literature samples, complete cycle observation, and high sensitivity for tracing research paradigm evolution.

In terms of publication trends, both All Journals and Core Journals (including Peking University Core and CSSCI journals) followed a fluctuating pattern of “gradual slow decline → sharp explosive growth → subsequent gradual fall” in the first two stages. However, after entering Stage 3, the two groups diverged noticeably: publication volume in Core Journals gradually returned to the level of Stage 1, while publications in All Journals remained two to three times higher than those of Stage 1. Detailed annual publication volumes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Annual Publication Volume of Long March-themed Literature (2011–2025)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Core journals	57	61	62	44	67	292	195	65
All journals	650	488	451	477	520	2989	1314	782
Rate	8.80%	12.50%	13.70%	9.20%	12.90%	9.80%	14.80%	8.30%
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	
Core journals	46	60	50	59	58	50	64	
All journals	977	929	1295	1202	1158	1127	1202	
Rate	4.70%	6.50%	3.90%	4.90%	5.00%	4.40%	5.30%	

The annual publication output of Core Journals remained steady between 40 and 70 papers. Driven by large-scale commemorative events and policy guidance in 2016, the figure peaked at 292, representing a year-on-year increase of about 336% over 2015. The effect continued into 2017 (gradually declining) and then dropped sharply in 2018. Publication volume in 2025 stood at 64 articles, far below the 2016 peak but close to the 2015 level. With the arrival of the 90th anniversary of the Long March Victory in 2026, a new round of academic prosperity and Red Culture research upsurge is highly expected, which will further enrich the theoretical connotation and contemporary communication value of Long March studies.

The overall trend of publications in All journals is generally consistent with that of Core Journals but

with greater volatility, more prominent peaks, and stronger policy sensitivity. The major difference lies in Stage 3: publications in All Journals rebounded to more than 1,000 articles starting in 2021 and remained high, mainly due to the policy impetus of incorporating the Long March Spirit into the Spiritual Pedigree of Chinese Communists. Nevertheless, this policy effect was not significantly reflected in Core Journals. The underlying reason lies in the different acceptance mechanisms of academic discourse: policy discourse needs theoretical abstraction, conceptual systematization and academic argumentation before being recognized and absorbed by Core Journals.

The 2016 keynote speech generated immediate and extensive resonance in Core Journals because it supplied complete theoretical dimensions, clear connotation interpretation, and operable research directions, such as the “five dimensions of the Long March Spirit” (Zhu & Li, 2025) and the “practical significance of the Long March in the New Era” (Liu, 2021), which are academically operable. In contrast, the inclusion of the Long March Spirit in the spiritual pedigree was more of value affirmation and cultural positioning, rather than providing new theoretical frameworks or research paradigms. It requires a longer academic digestion cycle for scholars to refine it into researchable academic propositions, resulting in a lagged and weaker impact on publication in Core Journals.

Further analysis of the proportion of Core Journals publications in All Journals reveals that the proportion stood at about 10% before 2019 and fell to approximately 5% thereafter. In terms of quantity, Annual publications on the Long March in Core Journals did not drop obviously. Therefore, the declining proportion was mainly driven by the “denominator expansion effect”: the rapid growth of publications in Non-Core Journals has naturally diluted the market share of core academic papers.

The expansion of publications in Non-Core Journals is reasonable to some extent in the context of red cultural inheritance: the rise of practical topics such as “integrating Long March Spirit into ideological and political education” and “red cultural tourism” has created publication space for more applied research. However, rapid quantity expansion is inevitably accompanied by obvious quality differentiation and academic homogenization. Long March research has long suffered from problems such as insufficient high-quality academic achievements (Wang, 2006), narrow research perspectives, inadequate depth, and weak theoretical analysis (Gao, 2007). Articles in Non-Core Journals often exhibit repeated topics, thin argumentation, and insufficient innovation (Hong & Hu, 2024), with a considerable share of low-level redundant research. Therefore, the declining proportion of Core Journals objectively reflects the overall scale expansion of Long March research and the gradual differentiation of academic quality, also implies the necessity of optimizing research ecology and strengthening theoretical innovation for future Red Culture Communication studies.

4. Distribution Characteristics of Published Journals

Journals publishing Long March-related literature exhibit a distribution pattern of a few dominant journals concentrating most publications, while the majority of periodicals remain scattered in output volume. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes journal distribution characteristics without categorical

division between Core Journals and Non-Core Journals, and without stage segmentation. Table 2 lists the top 20 journals ranked by the publication volume of Long March-themed papers indexed in the CNKI database.

It should be emphasized that the CNKI database incorporates a large number of non-academic popular periodicals and official newspapers, which focus on cultural popularization rather than rigorous academic research. When examining the academic landscape and intellectual evolution of Long March research, scholars must strictly distinguish professional academic research from general Red Culture popularization and public knowledge communication. Where necessary, researchers should adopt explicit screening criteria, such as restricting samples to core academic journals, to exclude non-academic popular articles from bibliometric analysis. This practice can effectively improve the academic purity, logical rigor and normative interpretation of Long March research mapping.

Table 2. Top 20 for Publishing Literature Related to the Theme of "Long March"

Journal	Publication Volume	Hosting Organization
Guizhou Today	250	Guizhou Provincial Committee of the Party
Literary Circles of party History	206	Party History Research Office of the Jiangxi Provincial Committee of the Party
Journal of Zunyi Normal University	163	Zunyi Normal University
Xiang Chao	153	Party History Research Office of the party Hunan Provincial Committee
Fujian Party History Monthly	152	Party History Research Office of the party Fujian Provincial Committee
Mao's Thought Study	135	The Party History Research Office of the party Sichuan Provincial Committee, etc
Xin Xiang Ping Lun	132	The party Hunan Provincial Committee
Extensive Collection of the Party History	126	Party History Research Office of the party Hebei Provincial Committee
China's Construction of Old Revolutionary Basic Area	114	China Association for Promoting the Construction of Revolutionary Base Areas
Academic Journal of the Long March	113	Party School of Sichuan Provincial Committee (Sichuan Long March Cadre College)
Guizhou Daily	111	Guizhou Provincial Committee of the Party
Origins	103	Guangdong Provincial Association for the Promotion of Old Liberated Area Construction
Dang Dai Guang Xi	102	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Committee

Boys and Girls	85	Guangdong Provincial Writers Association
Guilin Daily	82	Guilin Municipal Committee of the Party
Dang Shi Zong Lan	77	Party History Research Office of the party Anhui Provincial Committee
Yan Huang Chun Qiu	72	Chinese National Academy of Arts
Corpus of Party History	71	Shanxi Provincial Institute of Historical Records
Gan Nan Daily	70	Chinese National Academy of Arts
Hundred Year Tide	68	China Society for the History of the Party

From 2011 to 2025, Long March-related publications are highly concentrated in a small cluster of dominant journals. Five leading journals—Guizhou Today, Literary Circles of party History, Journal of Zunyi Normal University, Xiang Chao, and Fujian Party History Monthly—each have published over 150 articles, their combined publications reach 924, which account for more than 40% of the total output among the top 20 journals in terms of publication volume. Among them, Guizhou Today ranks first with 250 articles, making it the journal with the largest number of publications in this field. It is noteworthy that Boys and Girls, a popular journal sponsored by the Guangdong Writers Association, published 85 articles related to the Long March. The content of these articles primarily covers primary education (47 articles), secondary education (35 articles), and ideological and political education (3 articles), with most authors affiliated with local primary and secondary schools. Although these articles do not constitute strictly academic papers, they objectively demonstrate the popularization of Long March-themed content in basic education, and they objectively reflect the grassroots popularization and youth inheritance of Long March Culture at that level. They also constitute an indispensable foundational component of public cultural dissemination and social value shaping for the inheritance of Red Culture.

Table 3. Classification of Journals by Organizer for Long March-themed Publications

Journal Type	Representative Journals	Publication Volume
Provincial Party journals	Guizhou Today, Xin Xiang Ping Lun, Dang Dai Guang Xi Literary Circles of party History, Xiang Chao, Fujian Party	250/132/102
Party history journals	History Monthly, Extensive Collection of the Party History, Dang Shi Zong Lan, Corpus of Party History	206/153/152/126/77/71
University journal	Journal of Zunyi Normal University	163
Academic journal	Mao's Thought Study	135
Party school journal	Academic Journal of the Long March	113
Newspaper	Guizhou Daily, Guilin Daily, Gan Nan Daily	111/82/70

Journals publishing Long March-related literature cover diverse types, including provincial Party journals, Party history journals, university journals, and newspapers (see Table 3). Among these periodicals, Mao's Thought Study, as the only CSSCI-indexed journal in the list, has published 135 papers and represents the highest academic standard in contemporary Long March research. It serves not only as a core publishing platform for senior Party history experts to release high-level theoretical achievements but also provides an open academic space for cross-border collaborative research between local practical researchers and university scholars, promoting theoretical innovation and regional red resource interpretation.

Provincial Party journals, represented by Guizhou Today and Xin Xiang Ping Lun, rank high in publication volume. Relying on the unique geographical advantages of the Long March route, the former closely integrates historical narration with local development, while the latter focuses on conveying spiritual values through historical accounts, showing a typical Party journal paradigm of publicity and education. They focus on interpreting the spiritual connotation of the Long March through historical reflection and practical observation, forming a typical publishing model featuring official publicity, ideological guidance, and regional cultural inheritance.

Professional Party history journals such as Literary Circles of party History, Xiang Chao, and Fujian Party History Monthly focus on historical data sorting, historical material excavation, and interpretation of local red resources, with solid Party history research attributes, serving as important carriers for local Party history studies.

Journal of Zunyi Normal University is the only university journal among the top 20 journals that has established a special long-term column for Long March Studies. Based on Zunyi's unique historical and geographical endowments, it balances historical textual research, spiritual value interpretation, and applied research on red resource development and utilization. It fully represents the localized transformation of Long March research from pure historical textual research to application-oriented cultural inheritance and social practice.

Academic Journal of the Long March is the only Party school journal in the top 20 and the only domestic academic journal specially dedicated to Long March research so far (Baidu Encyclopedia, 2026), featuring regular special columns such as "Construction of the Long March National Cultural Park" and "Long March History and Culture Research", serving as a crucial observation window for tracking academic frontiers, paradigm transformation and innovative development of Long March studies.

Table 4. Geographical Distribution of Major Journals on Long March Research

Region	Journal	Publication Volume	Distribution of Long March-Related Literature
Guizhou	Guizhou Today, Guizhou Daily, Journal of Zunyi Normal University	250/111/163 (A total of 524)	Zunyi Conference, Four Crossings of the Chishui River
Jiangxi	Literary Circles of party History, Gan Nan Daily	206/70 (A total of 276)	Departure Point of the Long March
Hunan	Xiang Chao, Xin Xiang Ping Lun	153/132 (A total of 285)	The Battle of Xiangjiang
Sichuan	Mao's Thought Study, Academic Journal of the Long March	135/113 (A total of 248)	the crossing of snow mountains and grasslands
Fujian	Fujian Party History Monthly	152	Fujian Soviet Area
Hebei	Extensive Collection of the Party History	126	comprehensive
Guangxi	Dang Dai Guang Xi	102	The Battle of Xiangjiang

Journals with high publication volumes are highly concentrated in core provinces along the Long March route, especially Guizhou, Jiangxi, Hunan, and Sichuan, showing an obvious geographical clustering (see Table 4). Most of these journals carry out provincial and local thematic studies based on their provinces, the Long March route, and red landmarks. This fully reflects the deep linkage and symbiotic development between Long March academic research and the excavation and utilization of local red resources, forming a benign development pattern of mutual empowerment between regional journals and local research topics. It also lays a solid foundation for the future international communication of Long March Red Culture.

5. Analysis of Authors and Research Institutions

From 2011 to 2025, there were a large number of occasional authors in the field of Long March research. The core author group can be divided into four types: first, Party history and military history experts represented by Shi Zhongquan, Jiang Jiannong, and Han Hongquan; second, university scholars represented by Pei Hengtao, Yang Yong, and Yu Anlong; third, scholars from Party schools and cadre colleges represented by Wu Xiaojun; fourth, media communication practitioners represented by Zhao Xiangkang. This diversified subject structure clearly indicates that the knowledge production of Long March research is expanding from being dominated by a single academic institution to diverse social agents.

It is worth noting that authors from non-academic institutions, represented by Zhao Xiangkang (with a total of 26 published articles), have already surpassed some university scholars in terms of total publication volume. His employer, Guizhou Daily, is the newspaper with the highest number of articles on the theme of Long March (111 articles, ranking 11th among the top 20 journals). Zhao Xiangkang

personally contributed approximately 23% of these articles. Although the outputs of such authors are primarily news reports and cultural communication pieces, which differ to some extent from traditional academic papers and whose academic rigor requires cautious evaluation, this phenomenon is itself significant: within the knowledge production and dissemination system centered on the Long March, non-academic institutions such as news media have already assumed an important role in "broad knowledge dissemination." This not only expands the channels for spreading Long March Culture but also diversifies the composition of knowledge producers, representing an indispensable part of the multi-actor participation in the inheritance of Red Culture.

Table 5. Publication Status of Authors of Literature Related to the Theme of "Long March"

Author	Affiliated Institution and Publications		Publications		Total
	Affiliated Institution(s)	Publications in Affiliated Journals	Core Journal Publications	Without Institutional Affiliation	
Han Hongquan	School of Marxism, Fudan University;	35	6	14	49
	College of Politics, National Defence				
	University of the Chinese People's Liberation Army;				
	Shanghai Campus, PLA Nanjing Political College				
Pei Hengtao	School of Marxism, Guizhou University;	41	4	0	41
	Xi'an University of Science and Technology;				
	Zunyi Normal University				
Zhao Xiangkang	Guizhou Daily Newspaper Agency	25	0	1	26
Xue Qingchao	Institute of Party History and Literature	15	0	7	22
Jiang Jiannong	South China Normal University;	18	3	3	21
	Central Party History Research Office				
Yang Yong	Zunyi Normal University	17	8	0	17
Shi Zhongquan	Institute of Party History and Literature	17	6	19	36
Li Danjing	University of Electronic Science	14	11	1	15
	and Technology of China				
Tang Zhenglan	Xiangtan University	15	1	0	15
Yu Anlong	Tianjin University;	15	10	1	16
	Tianjin University of Technology;				
	Nankai University				
Yao Qunmin	Nanjing Xiaozhuang University	13	5		
Wang Qiang	General Office of Wangcang County Party	—	8	—	
	Committee of the Party				

Luo Daming	University of Electronic Science and Technology of China	7	7
Wang Zhaofeng	Hunan Normal University	8	6
Wu Xiaojun	Party School of the party Gansu Provincial Committee (Gansu Academy of Governance)	6	5
Yan Yongqiang	Zunyi Normal University	7	5
Mo Qubo	Zunyi Normal University	10	4

From 2011 to 2025, core authors of Long March research presented a “pyramid” distribution: Han Hongquan (49 publications), Pei Hengtao (41 publications), and Shi Zhongquan (36 publications) were at the top with the highest publication volumes; 10 authors published 15 or more papers. The author group covers diverse affiliations, such as Party history research institutions, military academies, local universities, news media, and local Party committees and administrative departments. This diverse participant composition reflects an increasingly socialized and open approach to knowledge production and helps construct a multi-level communication network for Long March cultural inheritance.

Han Hongquan ranked first with 49 total publications, making him the most productive author in this field. All 6 of his Core Journal articles were independently authored, representing the path of independent research. In addition, three other independent researchers stood out: Shi Zhongquan and Yao Qunmin published all Core Journal articles independently; 9 of Yu Anlong’s 10 Core Journal articles were independently authored. Among them, the absence of institutional affiliation for Shi Zhongquan, a former deputy director of the Party History Research Center, is particularly prominent: 19 out of his 36 total publications had no institutional affiliation, accounting for 53%.

In sharp contrast to independent research, team collaboration is another important academic path in Long March research, with two typical cases. First, the cross-border cooperation between Wang Qiang (Office of the Party Committee of Wangcang County) and Li Danjing, Luo Daming from the University of Electronic Science and Technology. The cooperation mainly focused on the first stage and ended after Wang Qiang was transferred to the Party History Research Center of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee. Wang Qiang published 8 Core Journal articles, ranking third along with Yang Yong. Seven of them were first-authored, representing a typical model of collaborative research between local practitioners and university scholars. This indicates that local workers can be active knowledge producers rather than merely research subjects. Second, the team from Zunyi Normal University consists of two collaborative pairs: Yang Yong & Chu Yanhui, and Mo Qubo & Yan Yongqiang. Yang Yong and Chu Yanhui co-authored 8 papers with equal first authorship, mostly published in Journal of Zunyi Normal University, showing strong dependence on the university’s platform. Yang Yong’s individual publications in Core Journals were mainly independent, with 8 first-authored and 5 independently authored papers, concentrating academic advantages in independent research. Mo Qubo and Yan Yongqiang formed stable cooperation, with 4 co-authored papers published in Core Journals, with Mo Qubo as the first author and

very low reliance on the university's journal.

Despite the large scale of authors publishing Long March-related literature, there are actually few experts and young and middle-aged scholars who have long been deeply engaged in this field and formed stable academic output (Yan, 2016). Long March research is facing the challenge of an aging cohort of authoritative scholars. Taking Li Anbao—an authoritative scholar in China's Long March history research and a professor of the Department of Party History at Renmin University of China—as an example, he has not only published a large number of academic papers on the Red Army's Long March but also authored and co-authored many monographs (Yan, 2016). In the first stage of this study, Li Anbao published 5 journal papers, showing high academic activity. However, his publication frequency dropped significantly thereafter, with only 1 journal paper published in 2018, and he gradually withdrew from the ranks of high-productivity authors (Professor Li Anbao, born in July 1930, passed away in December 2024).

At present, young and middle-aged scholars tend to engage in applied topics such as “Red Tourism” and “Rural Revitalization”. Although this tendency is rational from a practical perspective, it may lead to the weakening of academic accumulation in basic theoretical and historical research on Long March. Faced with this situation, the academic community can guide young and middle-aged scholars to adhere to and deepen basic research while expanding applied frontier topics by optimizing project layout and adjusting academic evaluation orientation, so as to build a benign research ecology that pays equal attention to frontier application expansion and basic theoretical deepening, and promote the long-term and sustainable development of Long March research.

6. Keyword Hotspots and Evolution Patterns

The preceding sections have outlined the overall landscape of Long March research from the perspectives of publication volume, journal distribution, and author demographics. The evolution of keyword hotspots, however, serves as the most direct entry point for revealing shifts in research content. To precisely characterize the research foci across different periods and systematically clarify the hotspot trajectories and evolutionary trends of Long March-themed studies, this study employs a multi-dimensional analysis using two bibliometric software tools: VOSviewer and CiteSpace. The analysis proceeds as follows: first, it examines the distribution characteristics and evolutionary patterns of Core Journals keywords across different phases; second, based on keyword betweenness centrality, it determines the core level and influence of each research hotspot within the knowledge network; finally, using the burst detection function, it accurately identifies the emergence nodes and evolutionary timelines of emerging research hotspots.

6.1 Phase Evolution Analysis Based on VOSviewer

To reveal the diachronic evolution patterns of keyword hotspots in Long March research, this study conducts a keyword co-occurrence analysis on Core Journals literature from three phases. Table 6 presents the top 20 keywords and their frequencies for each phase as well as for the entire period.

Table 6. Hot Keywords of Long March Research in Core Journals by Stage

Rank	2011-2015		2016-2020	
	Keyword	Frequency	Keyword	Frequency
1	Long March	46	Long March	113
2	Long March Spirit	25	Long March Spirit	63
3	Mao ZD	18	The Party	31
4	The Long March by the Red Army	18	The Long March by the Red Army	27
5	Zunyi Conference	17	The Red Army	26
6	The Red Army	13	Mao ZD	24
7	The Fourth Front Red Army	9	Long March Culture	10
8	The Party	8	Ethnic Policies	9
9	The Central Red Army	4	The Long March Period	9
10	Four Crossings of the Chishui River	4	Ideals and Convictions	8
11	Zhang Wentian	4	Zunyi Conference	8
12	influence	4	The Chinese Dream	7
13	Ideological and political education	4	The Central Red Army	7
14	Guizhou	4	Innovation	7
15	The Long March Period	4	Sinicization of Marxism	7
16	Long March route	4	The Long March	6
17	The Chinese Dream	3	Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army	6
18	Central Soviet Area	3	Xi JP	6
19	historical status	3	Ethnic Minorities	6
20	Zhou EL	3	The New Era	6
Rank	2021-2025		2011-2025	
	Keyword	Frequency	Keyword	Frequency
1	Long March	38	Long March	191
2	Long March Spirit	25	Long March Spirit	113
3	The Party	22	The Long March by the Red Army	61
4	Long March National Cultural Park	21	The Party	58
5	National Cultural Park	16	Mao ZD	50
6	The Long March by the Red Army	16	The Red Army	40
7	Red Tourism	14	Zunyi Conference	28
8	Mao ZD	10	Long March National Cultural Park	20
9	Red Culture	10	The Central Red Army	19

10	The Central Red Army	8	Red Tourism	16
11	Red Star	6	Long March Culture	16
12	The Long March Period	6	The Long March Period	16
13	The Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation	5	Ethnic Policies	15
14	Cultural Identity	5	Red Culture	15
15	The Battle of Xiangjiang	5	National Cultural Park	14
16	From Yudu to Jiangtaipu	4	Ideals and Convictions	11
17	Historical Contribution	4	Ethnic Minorities	10
18	Ethnic Policies	4	The Fourth Front Red Army	10
19	Zunyi Conference	4	The Chinese Dream	9
20	Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation	4	Contemporary Value	9

In the first stage (2011–2015), research was dominated by classical historical textual research and revolutionary figure studies. High-frequency keywords centered on key historical events such as Zunyi Conference and Four Crossings of the Chishui River, core revolutionary figures including Mao ZD, Zhang Wentian and Zhou EL, and troop units such as the Fourth Front Red Army and the Central Red Army. This stage reflects the traditional paradigm of Party history research, focusing on historical fact sorting and event narration, with little attention to cultural value interpretation and social application.

The most prominent feature of the second stage (2016–2020) was the emergence of policy-oriented keywords. Terms such as the New Era and Ideals and Convictions directly reflected academia's positive response to General Secretary Xi's systematic elaboration of the Long March Spirit in 2016. This period witnessed a critical paradigm shift: research focus gradually moves away from single historical event examination toward spiritual connotation interpretation, theoretical summarization and ideological value shaping, laying a theoretical foundation for the subsequent transformation to practical application and cultural communication.

The third stage (2021–2025) displayed two distinctive features. First, strong policy orientation: keywords such as the Long March National Cultural Park and Red Tourism directly echoed national cultural strategies. Second, cross-topic integration: keywords such as the sense of community for the Chinese nation and cultural identity indicated that Long March research was increasingly intersecting with ethnology, cultural studies, and other disciplines. As a superordinate concept, National Cultural Park ranked fifth, behind Long March National Cultural Park (fourth), revealing a clear localization preference in Long March research (People's Information, 2024).

Notably, policy buzzwords popular in the second stage such as The New Era and The Chinese Dream no longer appear in the top 20 keywords of the third stage, showing a typical pulse-like fluctuation. This does not mean the decline of related research; instead, explicit policy discourse has been internally

transformed into implicit academic consensus and shared theoretical background, embedded into the theoretical framework of Long March cultural research.

In terms of ranking changes, the Party and Mao ZD displayed an X-shaped crossover pattern. In the first stage, Mao ZD (3rd) ranked higher than the party (8th). In the second stage, the party rose to 3rd place, surpassing Mao ZD (6th) for the first time. In the third stage, the party remained firmly in 3rd place, while Mao ZD fell further to 8th, widening the gap. This structural change indicates that the core narrative of Long March research has shifted from individual hero-centered historical narration to Party organization-led institutional historical interpretation, reflecting the upgrading and maturity of the research theoretical framework. This transformation occurred between 2016 and 2020, closely correlated with major events such as the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Long March and General Secretary Xi's systematic elaboration of the Long March Spirit.

6.2 Centrality Analysis Based on CiteSpace

CiteSpace centrality analysis can effectively identify key nodes that serve as hubs in a knowledge network, thereby determining which concepts act as “intellectual bridges” in the research field. Table 7 presents, from the perspective of centrality, a comparative overview of the top 20 keywords (along with their frequencies and first appearance years) in Core Journals versus All Journals.

Table 7. Keyword Centrality of Literature Related to the Long March Theme

Rank	Core Journals			
	Frequency	Centrality	First Appearance Year	Keyword
1	193	0.52	2011	Long March
2	112	0.31	2011	Long March Spirit
3	60	0.2	2011	The Long March by the Red Army
4	49	0.06	2011	Mao ZD
5	41	0.04	2011	The Red Army
6	25	0.06	2011	Zunyi Conference
7	19	0.02	2012	The Central Red Army
8	13	0.01	2011	Ethnic Policies
9	13	0.04	2014	Long March Culture
10	13	0.06	2011	Red Tourism
11	12	0.01	2015	The Long March Period
12	9	0.01	2012	Ideals and Convictions
13	9	0.01	2012	Ethnic Minorities
14	9	0.01	2013	The Chinese Dream
15	9	0.02	2012	Red Culture
16	9	0.02	2014	Contemporary Value

17	7	0.01	2013	The Long March
18	7	0.01	2015	Historical Contribution
19	7	0.01	2013	Central Soviet Area
20	7	0.03	2016	Innovation

All Journals				
Rank	Frequency	Centrality	First Appearance Year	Keyword
1	431	0.57	2016	Long March Spirit
2	380	0.53	2011	Long March
3	159	0.22	2018	Red Culture
4	153	0.22	2011	The Long March by the Red Army
5	84	0.06	2011	The Red Army
6	68	0.1	2011	Mao ZD
7	65	0.02	2016	College Students
8	60	0.08	2020	Red Tourism
9	58	0.03	2018	The Central Red Army
10	57	0.03	2018	The New Era
11	53	0.04	2018	Long March Culture
12	50	0.01	2018	Contemporary Value
13	46	0.04	2015	Zunyi Conference
14	44	0.01	2019	The Long March Period
15	44	0.03	2018	The Battle of Xiangjiang
16	39	0.05	2021	Rural Revitalization
17	36	0.05	2019	Revolutionary Spirit
18	29	0.03	2017	value
19	27	0.02	2017	red genes
20	27	0.01	2021	Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education (CIPE)

“Long March” and “Long March Spirit” are the only two keywords with high centrality, occupying the pivotal position of the knowledge network and forming the “dual core” of relevant research. In contrast, traditional topics such as “Red Army Long March”, “Mao ZD”, and “Zunyi Conference” generally show low centrality, indicating that although these keywords still maintain high frequency, they are relatively isolated in the knowledge network with weak connections to other themes. This change shows that the knowledge network of Long March research is shifting from being dominated by “figures and events” to being dominated by “concepts and spirits”.

“Red Culture” is an interdisciplinary concept with very low centrality (0.02) in Core Journals (first

appearing in 2012) but relatively high centrality (0.22) in All journals (first appearing in 2018), suggesting that its academic influence is mainly reflected in Non-Core Journals. Specifically, although “Red Culture” was sporadically proposed as a theoretical concept in Core Journals at an early stage, it truly became a “hub” concept with academic popularity capable of connecting different topics only in the third stage, driven by research practices in Non-Core Journals.

Similarly, keywords such as “College Students” and “CIPE” did not enter the high-frequency list of Core Journals but appeared frequently in All journals, further confirming that Non-Core Journals are the main positions for the “application” and “educationalization” of Long March research, while Core Journals tend to publish more theoretical and historical research.

This differentiation stems from the different positioning of the two types of journals: Core Journals focus on theoretical accumulation, thus contributing limited centrality to practical buzzwords such as “Red Culture”; Non-Core Journals are more “pioneering” in capturing and spreading cutting-edge applied and practical topics, thus becoming the main carrier for the diffusion and network construction of hot words such as “Red Culture”.

6.3 Burst Detection Based on CiteSpace

Burst detection is an effective method to identify research hotspots that emerge abruptly within a specific period, and it is a key tool for tracking the dynamic evolution of academic frontiers. To further investigate the temporal evolution characteristics of research hotspots in Long March studies, this paper conducts burst analysis on literature from Core Journals and All journals respectively. Figure 1 and Figure 2 present the top 20 keywords with the strongest burst intensity (BI) in Core Journals and All journals, along with their start and end years of the burst.

Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

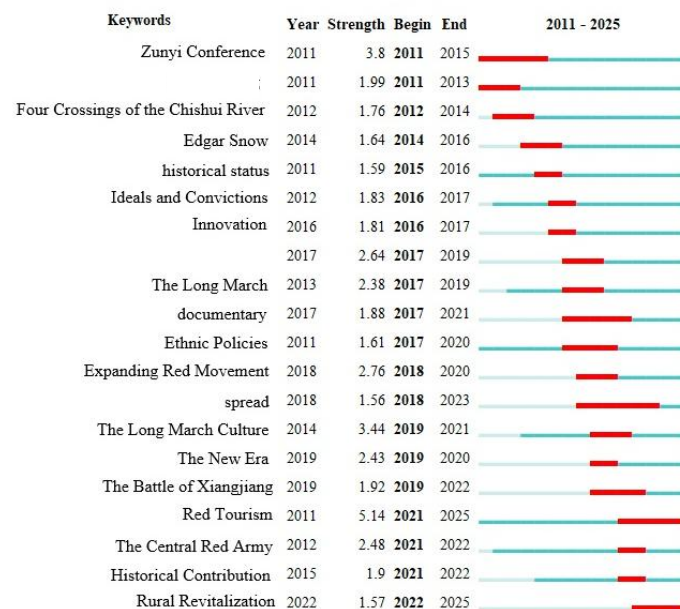


Figure 1. Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts (Core Journals, 2011–2025)

“Zunyi Conference” (BI: 3.8) was the strongest burst keyword in the first stage, with a burst period of 2011–2015; “Mao ZD” burst in 2011–2013, and “Crossing the Chishui River Four Times” burst in 2012–2014. None of these traditional topics re-burst after 2015, marking the end of the climax of traditional historical research.

The burst periods of “Ideals and Convictions” (BI: 1.83) and “Innovation” (BI: 1.81) were relatively short (only 1–2 years), which were direct responses to General Secretary Xi’s speech at the 80th anniversary of the Long March victory in 2016. This suggests that once policy-driven buzzwords are academically internalized, their overt salience fades and they persist as an implicit backdrop. In contrast, “The Battle of Xiangjiang” (BI: 1.92, 2019–2022) represents a “refocus” on a specific battle. Anchored in concrete historical events, rich relics, and ongoing construction practices, it continues to sustain a certain level of scholarly attention through localized research even after the initial policy impetus has subsided.

The burst of “Long March Culture” (BI: 3.44, 2019–2021) signaled a shift in the core concern of academia from pursuing “historical truth” to exploring “cultural inheritance”. This shift directly echoed the National Cultural Park strategy in 2019, laying a theoretical foundation for the emergence of application-oriented topics such as “Long March National Cultural Park” and “Red Tourism” in the third stage.

“Red Tourism” (BI: 5.14) ranks as the most powerful frontier keyword, with the highest citation burst in core journals and a burst period spanning 2021–2025. It remains the most dynamic and influential research frontier up to the present. “Rural Revitalization” (BI: 1.57, 2022–2025) is an emerging applied topic. Both keywords sustained their bursts through 2025, indicating that application-oriented research is still in the rising period, fully reflecting the shaping effect of policy practices such as the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park on the academic agenda.

Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts



Figure 2. Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts (All Journals, 2011–2025)

“Red Army” was the keyword with the highest BI in All journals (BI: 8.79, burst period: 2011–2018), yet it did not appear among the top 20 burst keywords in Core Journals. This discrepancy arises because in Core Journals the prominence of “Red Army” as a basic historical term is diluted by more scholarly expressions such as “Red Army Long March” and “Central Red Army.” By contrast, in Non-Core Journals, “Red Army” remains a concise and accessible basic keyword that continues to appear frequently, reflecting the steady demand for Long March themes in basic education and popularization efforts.

“CIPE” (BI: 4.21) and “Instructional Design” (BI: 3.62) were entirely absent from the burst keywords in Core Journals. Similarly, keywords such as “College Students” and “CIPE” did not rank among the high-frequency keywords in the centrality analysis of Core Journals but appeared frequently in All journals. These phenomena further confirm the “journal stratification effect” of educational and applied topics: Core Journals adhere to their orientation toward theoretical research and historical textual criticism, maintaining a cautious stance toward practical and applied subjects, while Non-Core Journals have emerged as the primary venues for the educational and applied dimensions of Long March research. This stratification is especially pronounced in the domain of “CIPE”, forming a stable division of “non-publication in Core Journals, dominance in Non-Core Journals”. The Journal of Zunyi Normal University, for instance, has established a dedicated “Long March Studies” column and published a substantial body of work on ideological and political education, serving as a clear illustration of this journal stratification pattern.

7. Conclusion

Based on the literature related to the theme of “Long March” in the past 15 years, this study systematically

analyzes the characteristics of keyword evolution, journal distribution and authors through bibliometric and knowledge network analysis, and clarifies the overall pattern and evolution context of Long March research. The main conclusions are as follows:

First, Long March research exhibits a two-tier academic landscape, marked by inheritance at the base and innovation at the frontier. The bottom tier is anchored in classic topics such as “Mao ZD” and “Zunyi Conference”, characterized by documentary research and qualitative interpretation and sustained by profound academic accumulation. The upper tier represents the frontier expansion driven by emerging topics such as the “Long March National Cultural Park” and “Rural Revitalization”, and is characterized by problem orientation and interdisciplinary intersections. The coexistence of these two tiers strikes an organic balance between inheritance and innovation, while supplying rich symbolic resources for the transmission and international communication of Chinese Red Culture.

Second, Long March research has undergone a complete paradigm transformation from historical textual research to policy interpretation and further to practical application. Keyword evolutionary trajectory reveals that the research focus has gradually shifted from pure historical fact verification and documentary sorting to policy response interpretation, and finally to localized practice and social implementation. This evolutionary path of “history–policy–practice” indicates that Long March research is breaking away from narrow historical textual research and moving toward social participation, cultural innovation and cross-cultural value dissemination, with increasingly prominent practical attributes and cultural communication significance.

Third, knowledge production in Long March research is characterized by elite-led dominance combined with diversified social participation. A stable group of highly productive core scholars sustains long-term academic output and leads theoretical construction in the field, while the majority of researchers are occasional participants with short-term involvement and low sustained engagement. In terms of research modes, independent scholarly inquiry coexists with cross-institutional collaboration, giving rise to a pluralistic knowledge production community that encompasses Party history institutions, comprehensive universities, Party schools, media practitioners, and local grassroots departments. This diversified actor structure expands the boundaries of Long March cultural inheritance and builds a multi-actor collaborative system for the popularization and international narrative of Red Culture.

Fourth, a clear functional division of labor has emerged between Core Journals and Non-Core Journals in academic publishing and cultural communication. Core Journals primarily handle theoretical elaboration, historical contextualization, and basic research, concentrating on disciplinary accumulation and theoretical innovation. In contrast, Non-Core Journals serve as the main platform for applied research, ideological and political education, and the grassroots popularization of Long March Culture. Divergent evolutionary patterns of hotspots such as “Red Tourism” and “Rural Revitalization” further confirm this journal stratification effect, giving rise to a complementary arrangement in which Core Journals focus on theoretical deepening while Non-Core Journals prioritize practical communication. This differentiated publishing structure both reinforces the internal transmission of Long March Culture and broadens its

social influence and public acceptance.

This study also acknowledges several limitations. First, the data source is confined to CNKI domestic literature, without incorporating international databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. Consequently, it lacks a cross-national comparative perspective on Long March research and does not offer a comprehensive overview of overseas Red Culture studies. Second, this paper only differentiates between core and non-core journals and does not conduct a detailed classification or comparative analysis of different publication types—such as journal articles, dissertations, conference proceedings, and newspaper articles—which may underestimate the actual academic contributions of certain research outputs. Third, the thematic classification relies primarily on keyword clustering and co-occurrence relationships, which may introduce slight deviations in disciplinary attribution and theme delineation. Fourth, due to journal publication cycles, the latest research spurred by the 90th anniversary of the victory of the Long March in 2026 has not yet been fully captured in the statistical sample.

After nearly a century of scholarly accumulation, contemporary Long March research has developed a mature ecosystem characterized by the deep-rooted heritage of classic topics and the vibrant energy of emerging frontiers. The paradigm shift from historical textual research to policy resonance and practical application reflects an increasingly close interplay among academic inquiry, national cultural strategy, and social practice. As the 90th anniversary of the Long March victory generates a new wave of academic interest, the scholarly community should strike an appropriate balance between foundational historical inheritance and frontier-driven applied expansion. Future research should not only consolidate the theoretical foundations of traditional Party history studies, but also actively pursue interdisciplinary avenues such as red cultural innovation, national cultural park construction, and rural cultural revitalization. More importantly, scholars need to further broaden the dimensions of cross-cultural communication and international narrative, explore the global symbolic value of the Long March Spirit, and build an indigenous discourse system capable of bringing Chinese Red Culture to a global audience. In this way, Long March research can truly fulfill Mr. Ouyang Song's expectation that it be “explored anew with constant fresh insights,” sustaining its lasting academic vitality and continuously fulfilling the contemporary mission of cultural inheritance, value formation, and international cultural communication.

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