

*A Review of Foreign Language Policy Research Literature in China through  
Bibliometric Analysis of CSSCI: History, Content and Trend*

Tiemei Guo, Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Japan  
Dalian Polytechnic University, China  
Eunyoung Kim, Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Japan

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**Abstract**

This research investigates the structure and dynamics of foreign language policy and planning research in China over the last twenty years by using CiteSpace, a well-established software for bibliometric analysis. The purpose is to aid researchers and policy makers overseas and domestic to attain a clear picture of current state of this field. 203 articles were extracted in China Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) published between January 1998 and December 2018 with the key words “foreign language policy” or foreign language planning”, or “foreign language policy and planning” for topic search. The results show that foreign language policy study in China sprouted around 1999, underwent three stages. By keyword co-occurrence analysis, the main topics changed from foreign language education, foreign language teaching & learning, language policy, education policy, pluralism, globalization, foreign language education policy, language planning, national foreign language capacity, language strategy, language resources, the USA, national interest, to global competence. Those topics fall into two clusters; however, the two clusters converge into the same label as national language capacity development. Reference co-citation analysis shows co-cited references form five clusters with national language capacity development as the largest and latest one. Comparison of the total network and the main network shows the research content is quite concentrated. A continued trend toward national language capacity development and global competence is predicted.

Keywords: review, foreign language policy, bibliometric analysis, CiteSpace

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## **Introduction**

Foreign language policies in China are regarded as an integral part of national development planning. In the recent years, research in foreign language policy and planning has gradually become a prominent topic. Though a few literature reviews have been conducted so far, no bibliometric analysis based on well-established informetric software has been utilized to investigate this field.

The research purpose is to investigate the structure and dynamics of foreign language policy and planning research in China over the last twenty years using CiteSpace, a well-established informetric software with the hope of creating an overview of historical content trends in this field from existing foreign language policy research literature in CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index), and providing assistance to researchers and policy makers to attain a clear picture of current state of this field.

China has the largest population in the world and the largest population of foreign language learners. Therefore, insights into the evolution of research in this domain will contribute to academic research and policy decision making both overseas and domestically.

Foreign language in this paper refers to all languages except Chinese and different dialects of Chinese. Language policy as defined here includes language planning, language policy, and language policy and planning, which are not distinguished in consideration of the multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary nature of language policy domain.

## **Methodology**

### **Source of data**

The data *for* this article *was* retrieved from CSSCI. CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) is a citation index with abstracting and indexing for more than 500 academic journals covering 25 disciplines among over 2700 academic journals of social science. The CSSCI series database has been ordered or used by hundreds of universities and research institutes such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, Renmin University of China, Fudan University, National Library, and Chinese Academy of Sciences. Most Chinese universities and institutes use CSSCI as a basis for the evaluation of academic achievements and promotion.

### **Selection criteria**

The data were collected from the articles related to foreign language policies in China Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) published between January 1998 and December 2018. The following key words “foreign language policy” or foreign language planning”, or “foreign language policy and planning” were used for topic search first in CNKI, another well acknowledged database in China due to more richness of data and retrieval approaches. 257 articles were retrieved; after manually input into CSSCI, 203 articles were selected. The non-academic articles such as calls

for papers, conference information and academic articles whose primary concern was not foreign languages were excluded.

## **Research Methods**

The main method used is bibliometrics, an application of quantitative analysis and statistics to publications, which becomes one of the main ways used globally in research performance evaluation by policymakers, research directors and administrators, information specialists and librarians, and researchers themselves.

The tool used was CiteSpace, which is a well-established and freely available Java application of informetric analysis for visualizing and analyzing trends, patterns and networks in scientific literature. It generates interactive visualizations of structural and temporal patterns and trends of a scientific field and facilitates a systematic review of a knowledge domain through an in-depth visual analytic process (Chen, 2004, 2006, 2010). It is widely used among researchers from a variety of disciplines and countries.

This research chose CiteSpace as the tool for bibliometric analysis instead of other software because it can process citation data from popular sources such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) and CNKI, the latter two being the most important database in China. In addition, CiteSpace, as compared to other bibliometric software, is user friendly, featured with powerful visualization and suitable for citation analysis.

Before the dataset was put in, keywords translation was done for the 14 papers which did not have English keywords by google translate and having been verified according to the content of the articles.

The functions used were timeline view, citation burst, keywords co-occurrence analysis, clustering and evolution of keywords, citation analysis and network visualization such as reference co-citation, cluster of cited reference to investigate the structure and dynamics of foreign language policy research domain.

Based on quantitative analysis and visualization, qualitative method is employed to analyze and describe the history, and content in this domain and clarify the trend of future studies.

## Results and Discussion

### Distribution Characteristics over Time

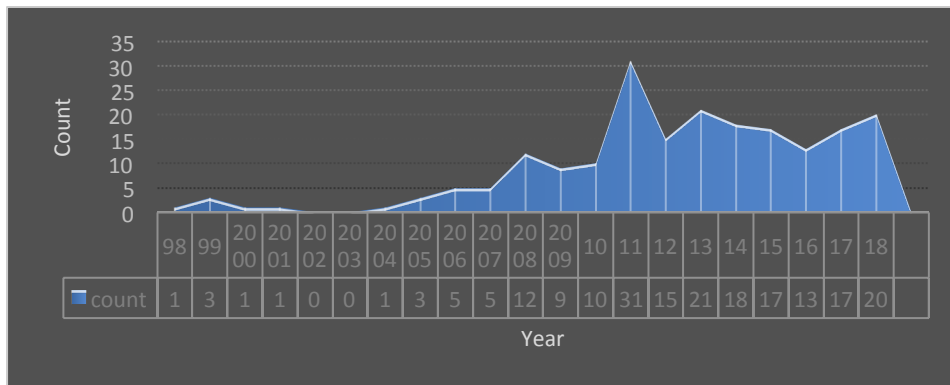


Figure 1. Annual Distribution Curve of Papers on Foreign Language Policy between Jan. 1998 to Dec. 2018

The distribution of papers over time is an important indicator to evaluate research development in a domain. From Figure 1, we can easily see the rise of foreign language policy research started from 2008 and remained rising till 2018 with the peak in 2011. According to the statistics, three phases constituted the 20 years of development in foreign language policy research: initial phase (1998-2005), medial stage (2006-2007) and contemporary stage (2008-present). Research in the first stage was mostly concerned with foreign language education, which related to foreign language policy but was the focus of study. Xu (1999) introduced economics of language to this field and Hu (2001) pointed out the balance between the current political and economic interest and long-run demand of education by reflecting on gains and loss of foreign language planning and practice in the past 50 years. The second phase witnessed foreign language policy as research focus, (eg. KE Fei &FU Rong 2006, LU Ziwen 2006, ZHANG Yi, 2007, JIA Aiwu, 2007 ) mainly introducing language policy overseas, especially the US from the strategic perspective of national security. Hot stage started from 2008 and lasted till now. The research topics and timeline will be shown in the following figures and tables.

### Keyword Co-occurrence Network

Keyword in keyword co-occurrence refers to the noun phrases that appear in the title, and keywords of a paper. The rationale of keyword co-occurrence analysis is to identify the interconnection of topics in a literature dataset by paired presence of noun phrases (Chen, 2006).

The thick colored line at the top of Fig. 2 is the timespan from 1998 to 2018 (Slice Length=1). From the left to the right, colors shift from cold to warm, with the darkest color corresponding to the earliest dates. Every node in the figure indicates keywords in titles and keywords of papers. The larger the node is, the more frequent the keyword occurs. The line between the nodes indicates the co-occurrence of two keywords. The thicker the line is, the more frequent the two keywords present in pairs. The colors of the lines indicate the time just as the above colored timespan.

As shown in Fig 2, there are two groups of keywords, a major one and a minor one. In the major group, the keywords with centrality  $\geq 0.10$  are foreign language education (0.31), the USA (0.23), education policy (0.21), national foreign language capacity (0.14); in the minor cluster, there are no keywords with centrality  $\geq 0.10$ . But the latest research topics are shown in the minor cluster as “China”, “One belt, one road”, “language education policy” and “linguistic economics”, in the major cluster is “the USA”, “language planning”, “language policy” and “foreign language education”.

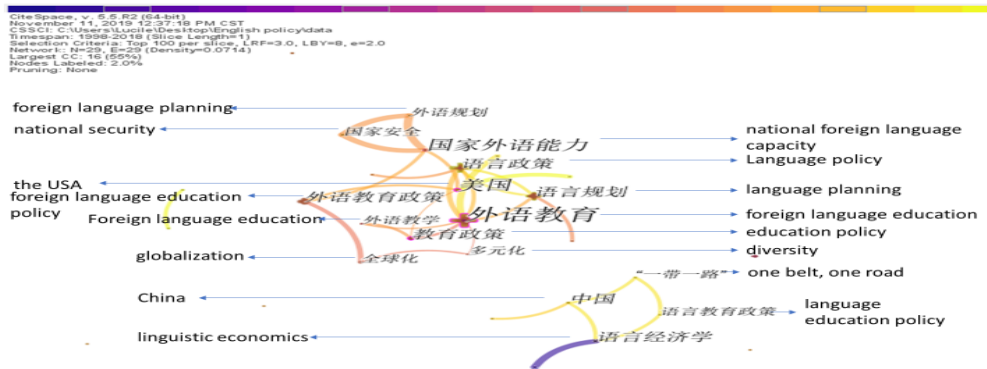


Figure 2. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

### Keyword Clustering Timeline

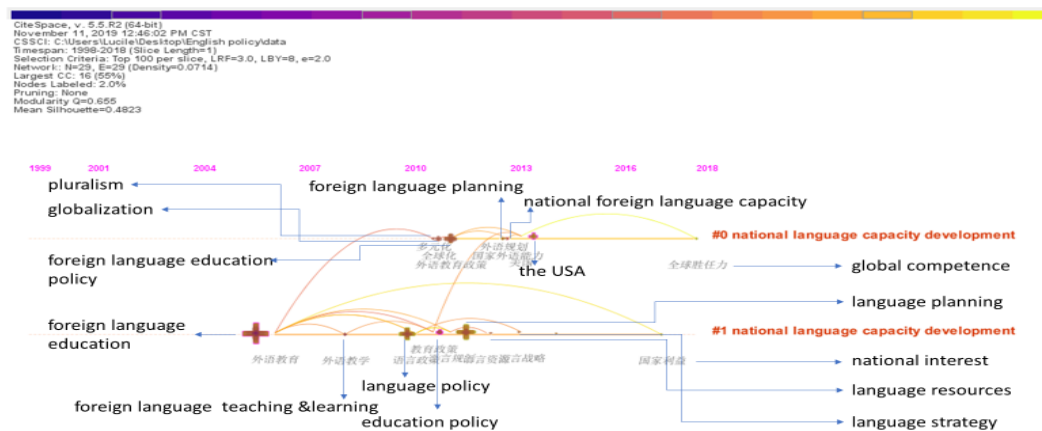


Figure 3. A timeline view of keyword clustering

A timeline visualization (Figure 3) provides an intuitive overview of the development of a field. The largest keyword cluster represented by #0 is national language capacity development. Following the timeline, we can see after 2010, researchers started to focus on pluralism, globalization and foreign language education policy; around 2013, foreign language planning, national foreign language capacity and the USA became topics of research; in 2018, global competence became the most frequently keyword. The second largest cluster represented by #1 is also national language capacity development. In this timeline, the largest node was foreign language education around 2005; the intensive group of nodes started from 2010 and proceeded to 2014 as language policy, education policy, language planning, language resources, language strategy. In 2017, national interest became the node.

From Figure 3, we can see the latest topics are global competence and national interest with both the clusters labelled as national language capacity development.

### Timeline of Reference Co-citation

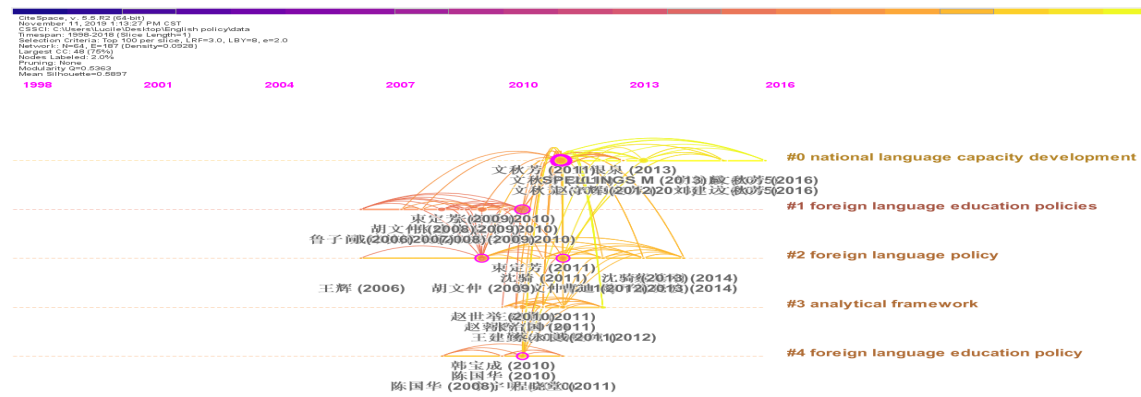
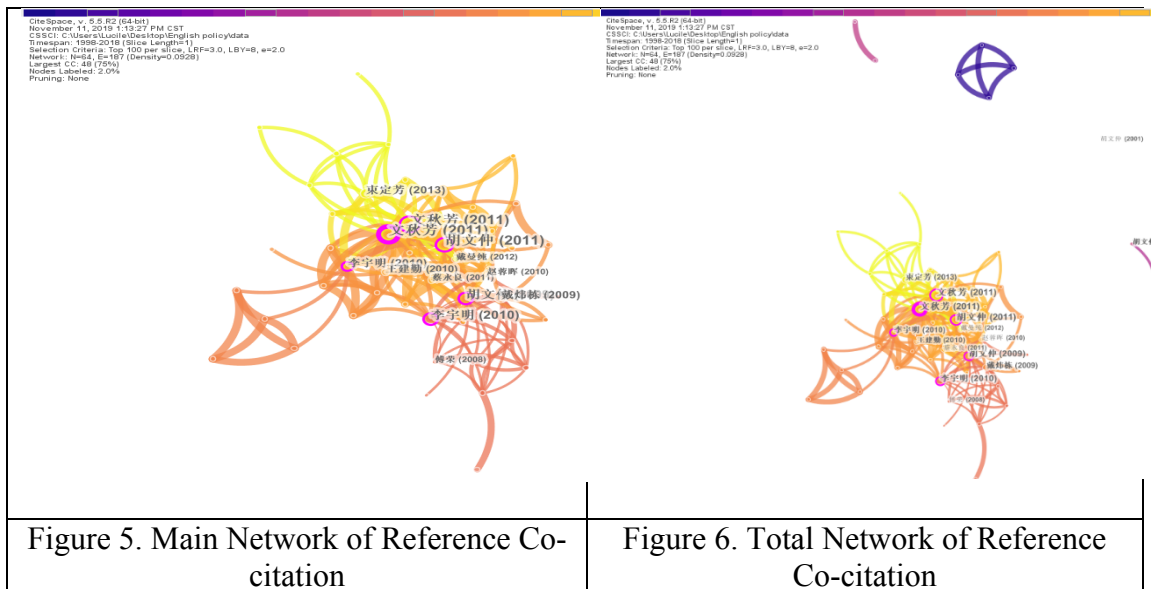


Figure 4. A timeline view of reference co-citation

Fig 4 shows the 5 clusters labelled as #0 to #4 in descending order of the number of papers in each cluster. The papers within a cluster show the closer co-citation relationship each other. The color indicates the time. The largest cluster is also the latest labelled as national language capacity development; the other four ranking in chronological order is #2, #3, #4, #1.

### References Co-citation Network



By comparing Fig. 5 and Fig. 6, we can see the research content of this field quite concentrates as Figure 3 shows.

### Citation Burstiness

## Top 2 References with the Strongest Citation Bursts



References	Year	Strength	Begin	End	1998 - 2018
胡文仲, 2001, 外语教学与研究, V0, P0	2001	3.22	2006	2008	
束定芳, 2013, 外语教学与研究, V0, P3	2013	3.6998	2016	2018	

Figure. 7 Top 2 References with the Strongest Citation Bursts

Citation burstiness indicates the paper is cited by an increased number of papers in a given period, which suggests research hotspots in that period. Two papers are the strongest citation bursts, the first of began from 2006 and ended in 2008; the other began from 2016 and continued till 2018. Hu (2001) pointed out the balance between the current political and economic interest and long-run demand of education by reflecting on gains and loss of foreign language planning and practice in the past 50 years. Shu (2013) addressed the issue of foreign language education planning and distribution in China. She states that foreign language talents are of important resources. The government should plan and distribute foreign language education based on reality as well as with a far vision.

From the above description, we can see that foreign language policy study in China sprouted around 1999, underwent three stages. According to keyword co-occurrence analysis, the main topics in this field changed from foreign language education, foreign language teaching & learning, language policy, education policy, pluralism, globalization, foreign language education policy, language planning, national foreign language capacity, language strategy, language resources, the USA, national interest, and global competence. Those topics fall into two clusters; however, the two clusters converge into the same label as national language capacity development. Reference co-citation analysis shows co-cited references form five groupings, chronologically, foreign language education policies, foreign language education policy, analytical framework, foreign language policy, national language capacity development which makes the largest and latest cluster of co-cited references. In addition, by comparing the total network with the main network, we can see the research content in this field is quite concentrated which indicates lack of diversity. Finally, the predictable trend in this field in line with the above analysis will be national language capacity development and global competence.

## Conclusion

The findings indicate research content in foreign language policy in China converges on national foreign language capacity and global competence, which suggests the nature of language policy that researchers in this domain interpret as “The exercise of language planning leads to, or is directed by, the promulgation of a language policy by government (or other authoritative body or person)” (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997: xi). However, there are other scholars who argue “Language policies do not need to be enacted by an authoritative body – they can emerge from a bottom-up movement or grassroots organization – and not all language policies are intentional or carefully planned” like Harold F. Schinffman, Spolsky, McCartyet (Johnson 2013: 1). Therefore, the future in this domain expects diversity.

The limitations of this research lie in two aspects. One is the small dataset of 203 papers; the other is the references cited by the 203 articles not included. But the limitations are also the merits in that the results of this research demonstrates more explicitly the main studies accomplished by those prestigious researchers of this field.



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**Contact email:** s1920407@jaist.ac.jp  
dlgtm@126.com