

A Bibliometric Analysis of Foreign Literature Research on the Theme of “Ghost” in the CSSCI Database (1998-2023)

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Abstract: This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of foreign literature journals centered on the theme of “ghost,” published in the CSSCI database from 1998 to 2023. The analysis delves into three key dimensions: distribution patterns, critical methodologies, and research trends. The results highlight that core journals exploring the theme of “ghost” exhibit limited publication frequency as platforms. Notably, these journals predominantly focus on novel and drama studies, with a significant emphasis on Shakespearean drama research. In terms of critical methodologies and research perspectives, there is an observable upward trajectory in the adoption of innovative approaches such as “literary cultural history,” “interdisciplinary research,” and “literary cartography.” A burgeoning interest in cross-text analysis has emerged as a fresh research avenue. The integration of new methodologies and emerging research interests offers a more comprehensive elucidation of the depth encapsulated in foreign literary works themed around “ghosts.” Nevertheless, considering the lenses of literary text analysis and real-world applicability, it becomes evident that domestic research concerning foreign literature with a “ghost” motif should transcend academic boundaries and encompass broader real-world contexts.

1. Introduction

“What art thou that usurp’st this time of night, together with that fair and warlike form in which the majesty of buried Denmark. Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee, speak.” [1] This is what Horatio asks the ghost of the old king in *Hamlet*. Ghost, often appears in drama and fiction, refers to a supernatural phenomenon in which the phantom of the dead reappears in front of the person related to the dead person. “The typical gothic story made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences (which in a number of novels turned out to have natural explanations). The principal aim of such novels was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors. Many of them are now read mainly as period pieces, but the best opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind.” [2] Gothic novels make people feel the characteristics of mystery, terror and death through depiction and the use of exquisite

narrative art. The charm and significance of literature lies in getting enlightenment and understanding the author's deep meaning while feeling terror.

Based on CSSCI database, this paper mainly searches and analyzes the journals with “ghost” as the main topics. At present, there are no detailed statistics and analysis of foreign literature studies centered on “ghosts” published in Chinese core journals since 1998 (The first foreign literature journal studying on the theme of “ghost” in CSSCI database was published in 1998). In order to show the latest trend of domestic research on ghosts more intuitively, this paper adopts bibliometrics method. The data of CSSCI journal papers from 1998 to 2023 is analyzed statistically.

The quantitative statistics and analysis of literatures related to ghosts is conducive to the transformation of qualitative research into quantitative research, which has important methodological significance. With the help of electronic media such as CSSCI database of CNKI and through full-text search of “ghosts” as the subject, a total of 95 foreign literature journals related to ghosts and ghost studies have been included in CSSCI from 1998 to 2023. Among them, 44 are included in *Foreign Literature*, *Foreign Literature Studies*, *Foreign Literature Review*, *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, and *Foreign Literatures*, and 51 are included in other foreign literature CSSCI journals. It mainly focuses on novels and plays; Among them, there are 20 novels with ghost as the theme, accounting for 21%, mainly focusing on the *Exit Ghost*; There are 14 drama studies, accounting for 14.7%, mainly focusing on August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Poetry research 1, accounting for 1%. There are 43 novels with ghost as the theme, accounting for 45.3%, mainly focusing on ghost narration and characters. There were 7 drama studies, accounting for 7.4%, mainly focusing on Shakespeare and his work *Hamlet*; There are 3 myths and legends, all about the *Yue Territory*, accounting for 3.2%. There were 7 other related papers, accounting for 7.4%.

In terms of journal distribution, the number of papers published in the five major foreign literature journals is about 86% of that in other CSSCI journals, accounting for about 46% of the total. In terms of the research topics of the journal, it mainly focuses on Shakespeare, August Wilson, Phyllis Ross, Zuckerman, Toni Morrison and other people, as well as the works of *Hamlet* and *Exit Ghost*, ghost narrative, ghost characters and other perspectives. The research methods mainly focus on interdisciplinary and cross-cultural comparative studies of ghosts, cultural criticism studies, literary geography studies, etc., which not only regenerates and reinterprets traditional criticism methods, but also applies and develops new methods and new perspectives. In terms of the distribution of works, fiction and drama are still the focuses of research, while myth and poetry are relatively less studied.

2. Study of novels and plays as focus

Novel and drama research is the focus of ghost research. The number of related research papers has kept growing and the number of papers published in the past nine years is more than the previous two stages. In the past twenty-six years, there have been new developments in both depth and breadth of related research (table 1).

Table 1: Taking “ghost” as the theme word, the foreign literature data of CSSCI journals from 1998 to 2023

Years	Keywords			Post
1998-2006	<i>Hamlet</i>	Ghost Image	<i>Macbeth</i>	12
2007-2014	Shakespeare's Plays	White Americans	Rose	34
2015-2023	<i>Hamlet</i>	Feminism	Revenge	49

In the study of novels, the research focuses on the study of ghost narration and trauma. Jin Bing, a scholar, discusses the physical ethics and cultural significance of the ghost narrative in Byatt's *The Conjugal Angel* through the analysis of the ghost narrative, thus revealing the realistic and current

significance of Byatt's historical novels. At the same time, in the article *Controversy over Spiritualism: On the Ghost Narrative in A S Byatt's Possession*, through the psychic experience and perception of the characters in the novel, the ghost narrative is placed in the tension between science and religion in the Victorian era to study, revealing the paradox of the relationship between material and spiritual [3]. Scholar Zhuang Yan put the ghost story narrated by Natsume Sōseki in *Illusory Sound of Koto* into the popular spiritual research tide after the middle of 19th century. In *On Natsume Sōseki's Short Story Illusory Sound of Koto*, he points out that the narrative of "ghosts" in "Koto" challenges the Meiji government's "heroic soul" death discourse by analyzing Sōseki's views on post-death consciousness (ghosts) and combining with the large number of deaths caused by the Russo-Japanese War [4]. In the study of trauma, from the perspective of intergenerational ghost trauma, scholars Huang Lijuan and Tao Jiajun analyze the pain of maternal love, double sex and sisterly love caused by black intergenerational ghost trauma in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* in their article *The Unbearable Agony in Life: A Study of the Black Transgenerational Trauma in Toni Morrison's Novel Beloved*. It reveals the intertextuality between black trauma history, black fiction narrative, black generation spiritual autobiography and torture history [5]. Scholar Jiang Dongyuan uses trauma narrative and trauma theory to interpret the intergenerational ghost trauma and gender trauma of children and women caused by polygamy in Mormon religion. In the article *A Study of the Traumatic Narrative in The 19th Wife*, he discusses how to "write" to help people out of the traumatic haze, so as to "forget" the painful memories of the past [6].

In the aspect of drama research, the research literature mainly focuses on *Hamlet*. Yang Lijuan, a scholar, analyzes *Hamlet* from the perspective of ghosts and their words. She points out that *Hamlet* is a "seemingly" world constructed through ghosts and their words in "starting from ghosts". Under the appearance of revenge in this world, there is the desire of the dead to stay in the world through the memory of the living, and the hope of the spirit to stay in the world through words, which carry the eternity of life and the transmission of mission [7]. By analyzing the letters in *Hamlet*, scholar Zhao Shankui interprets some details which are important for understanding the intention of the play. His *Mystery of Letters and the Name of "Claudio" in Hamlet* suggests that the messenger "Claudius" mysteriously appears during the delivery of the letter, suggesting a secret connection to the "ghost" of the play, and his naming suggests a literal connection to "Claudius" and "Horatio." In the letter transmission link, Claudio as a "combination" and Hamlet as a "loneliness" are juxtaposed to establish the "identity" of Hamlet, Horatio, Claudius and the ghost [8]. Ni Ping, a scholar, discusses the new meaning of ghost. She points out in her article *Remembering and Forgetting: The Living and the Dead in Hamlet* that in the Catholic cultural context of the late Middle Ages, the focus of the ghost in *Hamlet* is not to avenge it but to remember it. Through the fate of ghosts, the play reveals the destruction of the traditional relationship between the dead and the living by the Reformation movement, which denies the doctrine of purgatory. At the same time, Hamlet's dilemma between old and new beliefs reflects the special religious and cultural background of early modern England, which tried to reshape the relationship between the living and the dead [9]. All the above studies give new research perspectives and methods to ghost research. In addition to the novel and drama studies with the same number of papers and explanatory power, the author finds that poetry and myth studies may become another important focus of ghost studies.

3. The application of new research methods

The first is the application of the research method of "literary cultural history." The research method of "literary cultural history" emphasizes interpretation and investigation of the text in the social, historical, and cultural context of its generation. Through the social and cultural atmosphere of text's circulation, scholars examine it with this research method, which is convenient to clarify the

writer's creative intention, the social and historical environment in which the text is produced, and the other social contents contained in the text, such as economy, politics, philosophy and so on. Hu Peng's *Divisibility, Vacuum, and Atheism: Atomism in King Lear* traces Shakespeare's time background and finds that he was in a period of rapid development of science and technology. His theory is based on knowledge of mathematics and physics, especially the early modern scientists' discussion of the nature of matter. Taking *King Lear* as an example, Shakespeare points out that the essence of the world lies in the exploration of the origin of the formation of the world, combining with the atomistic concept of his time, reflecting the transition between the breaking of the old cognitive concept and the establishment of the new cognitive concept - mechanical philosophy [10].

The second is the development of interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary research emphasizes the intersection and fusion of different disciplines, which is often reflected in the composite application of multiple critical perspectives in literary criticism. In *The Hauntological Narrative of Time and Space in Lan Samantha Chang's Hunger*, scholar Lu Wei uses an interdisciplinary cultural research method and combines the space and time theories of 20th century culture, western art and literature to study the narrative art of this novel from the dimension of time and space, exploring how the author breaks the linear time frame. Crossing the boundaries of life and death, it reproduces the unspoken historical pain of ethnic minorities in the United States in a surreal narrative space [11].

The third is the introduction and follow-up of the research methods of literary cartography. A literary map is a record of a guide or geographical location in the imaginary world of a writer and his work. The object depicted can be either a writer's work or a literary tradition. In her article *Specters of Colonialism: Aporias of Space in Contemporary Native American Literary Cartography*, scholar Xiang Xinni points out that we must break through the prison of language and face the reality that the ghosts of colonialism still haunt the third space of contemporary native Americans [12]. Our understanding of literary map should not only stay in its rhetoric and literary nature, but should re-base it on social and political reality, because imitation is a metaphorical reference to reality in the final analysis. These articles study ghosts through new research methods and have important academic significance for clarifying the various functions of ghosts.

4. Cross-text analysis as a fresh research avenue

By studying the relationship between Yeats' *Purgatory* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Li Puluo explores Shakespeare's influence on Yeats' *Purgatory*. In the article *A Soul Lingering on the Storm-beaten Threshold of Sanctity: The Ghost of Hamlet in Purgatory*, scholar analyzes that there are obvious similarities between the two plays, not only in the way in which the "ghost" is used, but also in the attitude of the protagonist of the two plays towards Hamlet's mother [13]. In the article *The Changes of Shakespeare's "Ghost"*, through the intertextuality study of ghosts, Zhang Wei explores the old king's ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which has a profound impact on Marx, Derrida, and contemporary American scholars Peter Stallybrass and Richard Halpern [14].

Scholars Chen Hongwei and Li Changli also use the method of cross-text research. They believe that in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, playwright Daniel David Moses introduces the ghost narrative in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* into the ritual culture and history of North American Indians, thus constructing an Indian epic drama based on the structure of Shakespeare's play. In *Shakespearean Narrative in Brébeuf's Ghost*, through the ghost of Brébeuf, the Huron Exodus, and tales of "ogres" among the tribe, they explore that the play not only reveals the "cannibalism" behind the religious fanaticism of the European colonists, but also reproduces the poetic beliefs and spiritual world of the Indians through the ritual culture. The Huron migration in the play is not only a journey of exile, but also an Indian version of the "Exodus" of the tribe through oral stories [15].

Scholar Li Yi also uses cross-text research method, in the article *Revenge of the Ghost and*

Revolution of the Weak: A Cross-Reading between Lu Xun's Forging the Swords and Shakespeare's Hamlet, from the narrative structure of *Forging the Swords* and *Hamlet* similarity. The four chapters in *Forging the Swords* correspond to the four stages of revenge. This work is very similar to Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* in narrative structure. And these two works are under the common theme of "revenge", using the action of "ghost" to get revenge. There is a strong intertextual relationship between *Forging the Swords* and *Hamlet* [16].

Scholar Tan Yanwei believes that both *Beloved* and *Baby No-Eyes* have ghost narratives centered on blood relations, which highlight the racial body as the presence factor once relied on by colonial oppression and suggest the difficulty of expressing ethnic trauma related to special experiences in the context of post-colonial universalism. In *Ghost Narratives and the Construction of Ethnic Identities in Beloved and Baby No-Eyes*, he analyzes the construction process of national identity that is integrated into the physical dimension and transcends racial essentialism in the two novels through cross-text research. The historical and cultural factors beyond the body also make the national identity construction of New Zealand Maori and American black people show different paradigm characteristics [17].

5. Conclusion

Based on the above quantitative data and characteristic analysis, the author finds that the future domestic ghost research needs further breakthroughs in the interpretation of late works and the introduction of new cutting-edge critical methods and perspectives. From the perspective of the distribution of interpretation of works, China has long focused on novels and dramas, novels focus on the study of ghost narration and trauma, and dramas mainly focus on Shakespeare's plays, and attention to other genres is still insufficient. The distribution of works in novels is scattered and diverse, so future research can dig out different works of other writers and comparative studies of styles based on this. For example, there are a lot of gothic factors in the novels of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, and the comparative study of the two is of great academic value. Lisa Harrison, in her article *The Ghost: Memory and Magical Thinking in As I Lay Dying and Beloved*, states that "As I Lay Dying and Beloved both captivate us with witchcraft, drawing us into the spell of the text and into the witchcraft it describes. By virtue of their aesthetic power, these novels embody the magic of literary creation itself, showing how reading can achieve a spiritual intimacy in which language itself 'fights for a kiss' and we can temporarily, weirdly, magically substitute the 'me' of these novels; It illustrates how the author's omniscient perspective reflects a telepathic process in his imagination. It emphasizes the magical way in which literature conjures up the past, evokes an emotional response in the reader, engages both the present and the absent, and 'transmits' to us experiences that are not our own." [18] Ghost, as a gothic factor, appears in gothic novels in large numbers. The use of new cutting-edge critical methods and perspectives to analyze and excavate the text and its history has important academic significance for clarifying the various functions of ghosts.

From the perspective of critical methods and research, the introduction and further exploration of new perspectives, including traditional research methods, is conducive to showing the richness of foreign literary works with "ghost" as the theme. However, in the process of statistics and analysis of CSSCI journal papers from 1998 to 2023 based on CNKI database by bibliometrics method, the author found that no scholars used bibliometrics method to analyze foreign literature with "ghost" as the theme. As an important branch of philology, bibliometrics is an interdisciplinary subject that uses statistics and numerical methods to quantitatively analyze knowledge carriers, and has important methodological value in the field of humanities and social research. Different critical methods and research perspectives are helpful for researchers to clarify their own research content.

From the perspective of literary text research and realistic consideration, the domestic foreign

literature research on the theme of “ghost” has little connection with the current reality. By actively exploring the author’s creative meaning and skills, researchers still need to combine the research content and results with the present to find its practical significance. It is an inevitable trend of humanities and social science research in the new century to give full play to the realistic value of academic research and provide suggestions and guidance for the development of mankind and the world. Therefore, the study of foreign literature with the theme of “ghost” should not only go out of the study, but also go to the broad real world.

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