



Research Progress and Prospects of United Front Work in Universities Based on CiteSpace

Hongpeng Zhang, Yongchen Huo*

School of Economics and Management, Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, China

Email: zhanghp@zjou.edu, *1983513631@qq.com

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Abstract

United front work in universities is an important component of the Communist Party of China's united front work. It plays an irreplaceable role in uniting people, pooling strength, and serving the overall reform, development, and stability of higher education institutions. This study selects 911 core academic papers on university united front work published in the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database between 2014 and 2024, and employs the CiteSpace visualization tool to conduct in-depth analyses of publication volume, core authors, research institutions, and keyword co-occurrence and clustering. The results show that research output on university united front work in China has generally exhibited a fluctuating upward trend, which can be divided into three phases: slow development, rapid growth, and deepening expansion. A number of core authors and key research institutions have emerged, but the density of cooperative networks remains low, and a broad collaborative research community has yet to be formed. Current research hotspots revolve around themes such as constructing the "grand united front" framework, online united front work, cultural united front work, and innovations in working mechanisms. This study systematically reviews the research progress and thematic evolution of the past decade, with the aim of providing references for advancing theoretical and practical innovations in university united front work in the new era.

Subject Areas

Politics

Keywords

University United Front Work, CiteSpace, Visual Analysis, Knowledge Mapping, Research Progress

1. Introduction

The united front is a powerful instrument for rallying public support and consolidating collective strength [1]. It constitutes both a political advantage and a strategic policy of the Communist Party of China (CPC), serving as a crucial tool for securing victories in the revolutionary, construction, and reform processes [2]. As a hub for intellectuals, a primary base for talent cultivation, and a frontline of ideological work, universities occupy a fundamental and strategic position within the CPC's overall united front framework. United front work in universities is directly linked to the Party's governing foundation, the long-term stability of the nation, and the pursuit of high-quality development in higher education [3] [4].

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Central Committee has attached great importance to united front work, promulgating a series of significant documents, including the *Regulations on the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China*. These measures have charted the direction and provided a fundamental basis for advancing united front work in universities in the new era [5]. With the advent of socialism with Chinese characteristics entering a new era, profound transformations have also taken place in both the internal and external environments of universities. On the one hand, the composition of united front work targets has become increasingly diverse, encompassing non-Party intellectuals, members of democratic parties, returned overseas students, ethnic minority faculty and students, among others [6]-[8]. On the other hand, the scope of work continues to expand, the tasks have grown more demanding, and universities are confronted with new challenges and issues [9], such as how to consolidate the shared political foundation under new circumstances, how to innovate working approaches and methodologies, and how to enhance their effectiveness in serving the reform, development, and stability of higher education. Particularly against the backdrop of digital transformation and media convergence, emerging domains such as online united front work [10]-[12] and cultural united front work [13] have become urgent areas for exploration.

Within this context, both academia and practitioners have increasingly engaged in theoretical inquiry and practical innovation concerning united front work in universities, producing a substantial body of research. Some studies adopt a macro perspective, examining the construction of a grand united front framework [14]; others explore the mechanisms for specific groups, such as democratic parties [15], returned overseas students, and non-Party intellectuals; still others focus on the application of new media technologies [16] and the integration of red culture, offering unique insights for advancing innovation in this field. Nevertheless, a review of existing scholarship reveals that most studies remain largely qualitative, consisting of policy interpretations or case-specific analyses. Systematic bibliometric reviews and visualized analyses of the research literature over the past decade are still lacking. As a result, it is difficult for the academic community to obtain

a holistic understanding of the distribution of research forces, knowledge structures, thematic evolution, and frontier trends in this domain, which, to some extent, has limited the depth and breadth of research.

In light of this gap, this study adopts a bibliometric approach, utilizing CiteSpace software to conduct quantitative analysis and knowledge mapping of 911 core academic papers on university united front work collected in the CNKI database between 2014 and 2024. Specifically, this research aims to: 1) identify the developmental stages and policy-driven features of the field through a temporal analysis of publication trends; 2) examine the distribution of research forces and patterns of collaboration by analyzing author and institutional cooperation networks; and 3) objectively identify and visually present the structure of research hotspots and the dynamics of frontier developments through keyword co-occurrence, clustering, and burst detection. By systematically mapping the research landscape and evolutionary trajectory of the field, this study seeks to provide theoretical support and decision-making reference for constructing a new pattern of united front work in universities and promoting theoretical and practical innovation in the new era.

2. Research Methods and Data Sources

2.1. Research Methods

CiteSpace is a software tool designed for conducting scientometric analysis of publications within a specific field. It can transform bibliometric data into visual knowledge maps, thereby helping researchers to identify research hotspots and track the evolution of frontiers in the discipline. In this study, CiteSpace was employed to conduct a visual analysis of the literature retrieved from the CNKI database. By examining publication trends, author networks, and keyword clustering, the study systematically reviews the research status, focal themes, and developmental trajectories of united front work in universities.

2.2. Data Sources

The primary data source for this research is the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. “The search was conducted in the CNKI database with the following strategy: (SU = ‘高校统战工作’ OR SU = ‘大学统战工作’ OR TI = ‘高校统战工作’ OR TI = ‘大学统战工作’) AND (PY = 2014-2024). The search fields included subject (SU) and title (TI). No English synonyms were used because CNKI primarily indexes Chinese-language literature.” The retrieval period was set from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2024. The initial search yielded 970 documents. “After the initial search, 970 records were retrieved. We manually screened the results by (1) removing conference abstracts, news reports, and book reviews (n = 32); (2) excluding papers with no substantive discussion of university united front work (n = 18); and (3) deleting duplicate records (n = 9). A total of 59 records were excluded, leaving 911 valid papers for analysis.”

3. Current Status of Research on United Front Work in Chinese Universities

3.1. Temporal Distribution of Research Publications

Annual publication volume is an important indicator of research activity within a given field, as its changing trends directly reflect the degree of academic attention and the developmental stages of the discipline. Based on the 911 valid papers collected from the CNKI database between 2014 and 2024, this study constructed a line chart of annual publication volumes (**Figure 1**). Overall, research on united front work in Chinese universities over the past decade demonstrates a distinct three-stage evolutionary pattern—“slow development, rapid growth, and deepening expansion”—which aligns closely with the introduction and implementation of national policies [4].

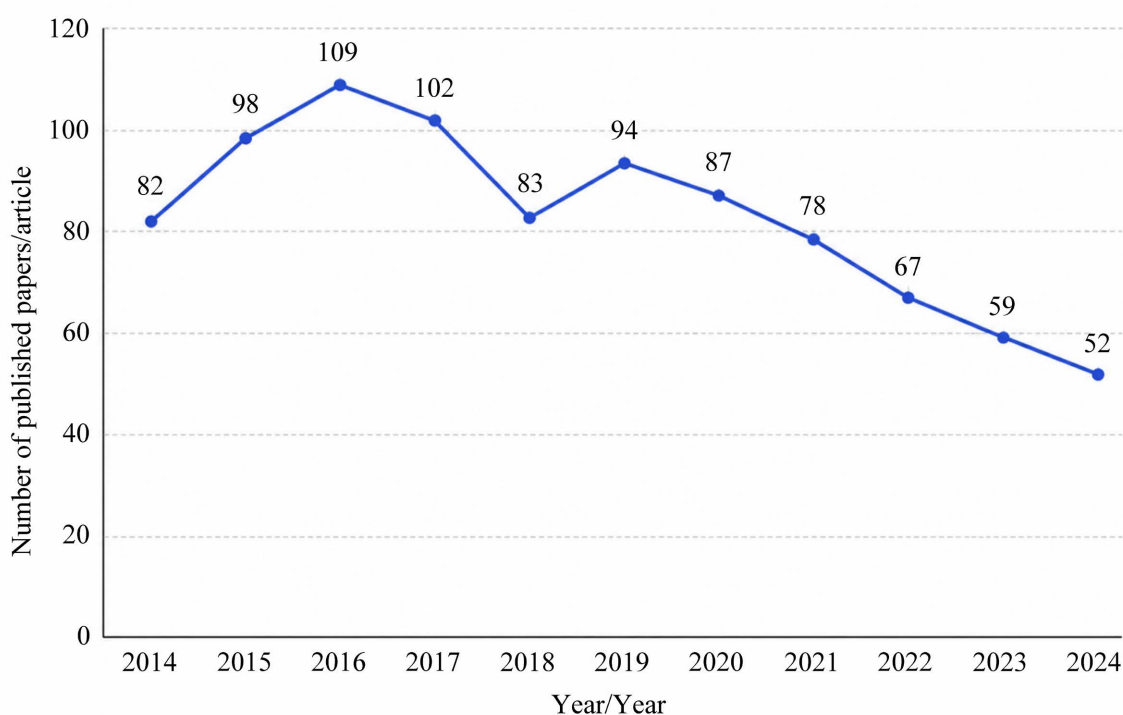


Figure 1. Publication volume on united front work in Chinese Universities, 2014-2024.

Phase I: Slow Development (2014-2016).

During this period, the annual volume of publications remained relatively low, with fewer than 50 articles published each year, indicating that research was still at an exploratory stage. Although the promulgation of the *Provisional Regulations on the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China* in 2014 provided an initial institutional framework, systematic academic inquiry into united front work in universities had not yet fully emerged. Most studies during this stage took the form of policy interpretation, theoretical introduction, or localized practice summaries, lacking both depth and breadth.

Phase II: Rapid Growth (2017-2020).

The convening of the 19th CPC National Congress marked an important turning point, as the report explicitly emphasized the need to “consolidate and develop the broadest possible patriotic united front.” This significantly heightened scholarly attention to united front work in universities. After 2017, the annual volume of publications increased markedly, surpassing 80 articles per year and peaking in 2019. This surge was facilitated by the issuance of several intensive policy documents, such as the *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee on Strengthening the Party’s Political Construction*, which underscored the role of united front work in university governance. Consequently, research themes shifted from macro-level theoretical frameworks toward meso-level institutional mechanisms and micro-level practical analyses, exhibiting increasing diversification.

Phase III: Deepening Expansion (2021-2024).

With the official implementation of the revised *Regulations on the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China* in 2020, universities received a more comprehensive institutional guarantee and clearer policy guidance. Publication volumes stabilized at a high level, averaging over 100 articles annually. The research focus deepened further, concentrating on frontier issues such as constructing a “grand united front” framework, online united front work, cultural united front work, and precise policy implementation. Particularly in the context of digital transformation and pandemic prevention and control, new domains such as digital united front work and smart united front work have emerged as research hotspots, reflecting how university united front work is actively responding to both social change and practical needs.

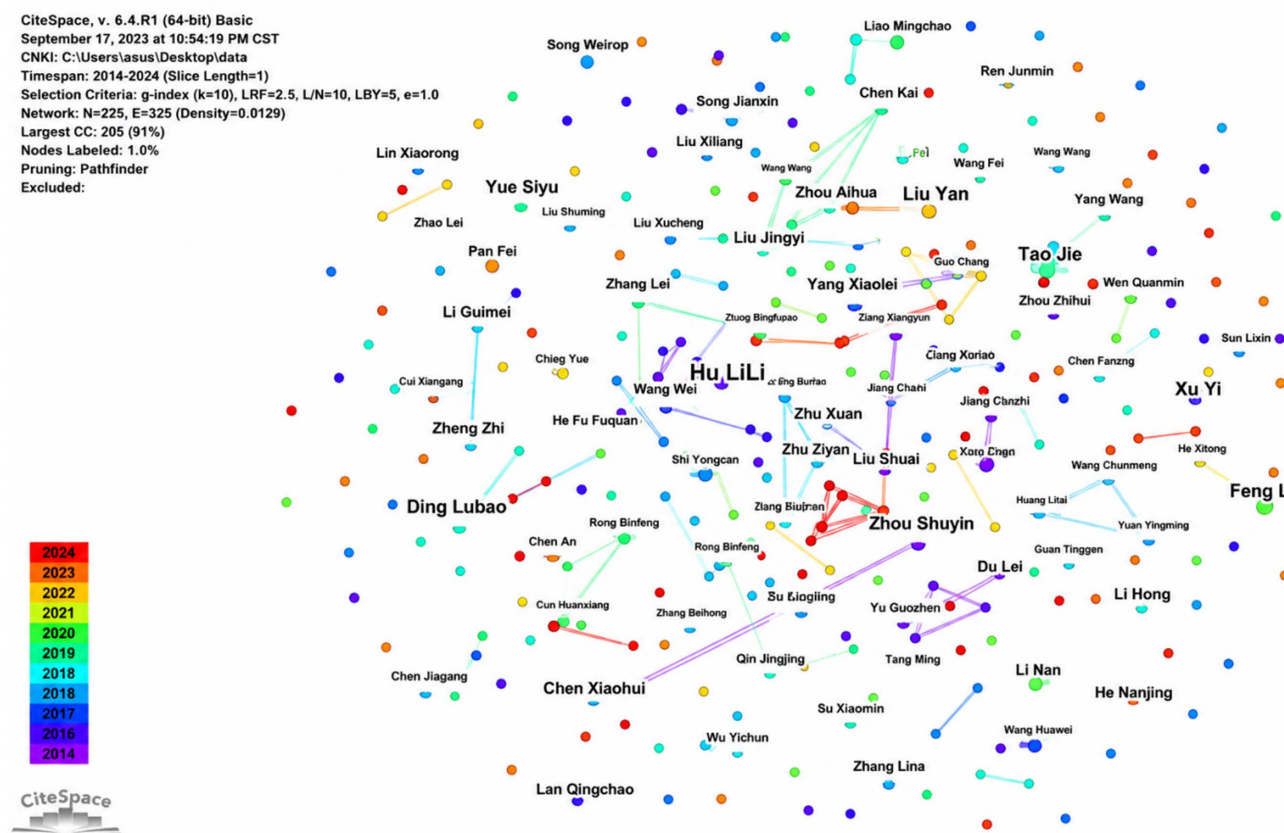
3.2. Spatial Distribution of Research Publications

1) Analysis of Authors

The author collaboration network generated using CiteSpace (**Figure 2**) contains 308 nodes and 76 links, with a network density of 0.0016. This indicates that while preliminary collaborative networks have formed, the overall intensity of collaboration remains weak, characterized by a pattern of “high dispersion and small clusters.” According to Price’s law, the threshold for core authors can be calculated as $M = 0.749 \times \sqrt{N_{\max}}$ (where $N_{\max}$ denotes the maximum number of publications by a single author). In this study, the most prolific authors, including Ding Liubao and Luo Baocheng, each published four papers, yielding a threshold of approximately 1.5. Thus, authors with two or more publications were identified as core authors. As shown in **Table 1**, 25 core authors were identified, with the top five—Ding Liubao, Luo Baocheng, Feng Li, Yang Xiaohui, and Zhou Shuyan—each publishing four papers. Collectively, these 25 authors produced 49 papers, accounting for only 5.38% of the total. This falls far short of the 50% concentration predicted by Price’s law, suggesting that the field has not yet developed a stable and productive core author group and that research capacity remains fragmented, lacking leading scholars and deep collaborative teams.

Table 1. Statistics of publication volume by core authors.

Serial Number	Author	Publication Quantity (Articles)	Serial Number	Author	Publication Quantity (Articles)
1	Ding Liubao	4	14	Du Fei	2
2	Luo Baocheng	4	15	Liu Jihua	2
3	Feng Li	4	16	Liu Chang	2
4	Yang Xiaohui	4	17	Wen Guannan	2
5	Zhou Shuyan	4	18	Cao Chuanming	2
6	Liu Yan	4	19	Wang Hu	2
7	Chen Xiaohui	4	20	Hu Lili	2
8	Tao Jie	4	21	Xu Yi	2
9	Zhang Jie	3	22	Liu Yirong	2
10	Yang Guang	3	23	Chang Hong	2
11	Hou Wei	3	24	Shen Kai	2
12	Guo Zan	2	25	Qian Yingwei	2
13	Liu Xiufeng	2			

**Figure 2.** Author collaboration network.

2) Analysis of Institutions

The institutional distribution of publications (**Table 2**) reveals that Dalian Ocean University, the School of Marxism at Yunnan University, and Dalian University of Technology each published five papers, ranking first in research output and demonstrating relatively strong research capacity. These were followed by institutions such as the United Front Work Department of Dalian University of Technology, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, South China Agricultural University, Liaoning University, and Dalian Polytechnic University, each contributing four papers. This distribution indicates that Marxism schools, university united front departments, and comprehensive universities are the primary forces in this research area. However, the institutional collaboration network shows that cooperation is largely limited to intra-university or regional collaborations, with relatively few cross-regional or inter-institutional partnerships. For example, universities in the Dalian region demonstrate close cooperation, but collaboration with universities in central and western regions is nearly absent. Geographically, research output is concentrated in areas with abundant higher education resources, such as Northeast and East China, while central and western regions remain underrepresented—with the exception of Yunnan University. This regional imbalance constrains the widespread dissemination and cross-fertilization of research findings and highlights the need for enhanced resource allocation and regional collaboration in advancing united front work research in universities.

Table 2. Statistics of publication volume by institutions.

Serial Number	Institution	Publication Quantity (Articles)	Serial Number	Institution	Publication Quantity (Articles)
1	Dalian Ocean University	5	9	School of Marxism, China University of Mining and Technology	3
2	School of Marxism, Yunnan University	5	10	Shenyang Conservatory of Music	3
3	Dalian University of Technology	5	11	Liaoning University of International Business and Economics	3
4	United Front Work Department of Dalian University of Technology	4	12	Wuhan University of Technology	3
5	Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology	4	13	University of Science and Technology Beijing	3
6	South China Agricultural University	4	14	Ocean University of China	3
7	Liaoning University	4	15	Shenyang Normal University	3
8	Dalian University of Technology	4			

4. Research Hotspots in United Front Work in Chinese Universities

4.1. Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis is an effective method for identifying research

hotspots and structural features within a particular field. Using CiteSpace, this study conducted a co-occurrence analysis of the 911 selected papers on university united front work, generating a keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 3). The network consists of 225 nodes and 225 links, with a density of 0.0089, a modularity value $Q = 0.851$ (>0.3), and an average silhouette value $S = 0.9764$ (>0.7), indicating that the network structure is significant and the clustering is reliable. Node size reflects keyword frequency, while link thickness indicates the strength of co-occurrence.

As shown in Table 3, keywords such as “universities” (frequency: 329, centrality: 0.63), “united front work” (frequency: 323, centrality: 0.60), “united front” (frequency: 106, centrality: 0.42), and “united front work in universities” (frequency: 85, centrality: 0.60) have both high frequencies and centrality scores, highlighting their central role in this research domain. In addition, terms such as “new era,” “new media,” “innovation,” “path,” and “grand united front” also demonstrate significant research attention, reflecting a growing emphasis on innovation and practice in the context of the new era. The dense linkages between “universities” and “united front work” in the co-occurrence network further confirm their position as the core thematic nexus of the field.

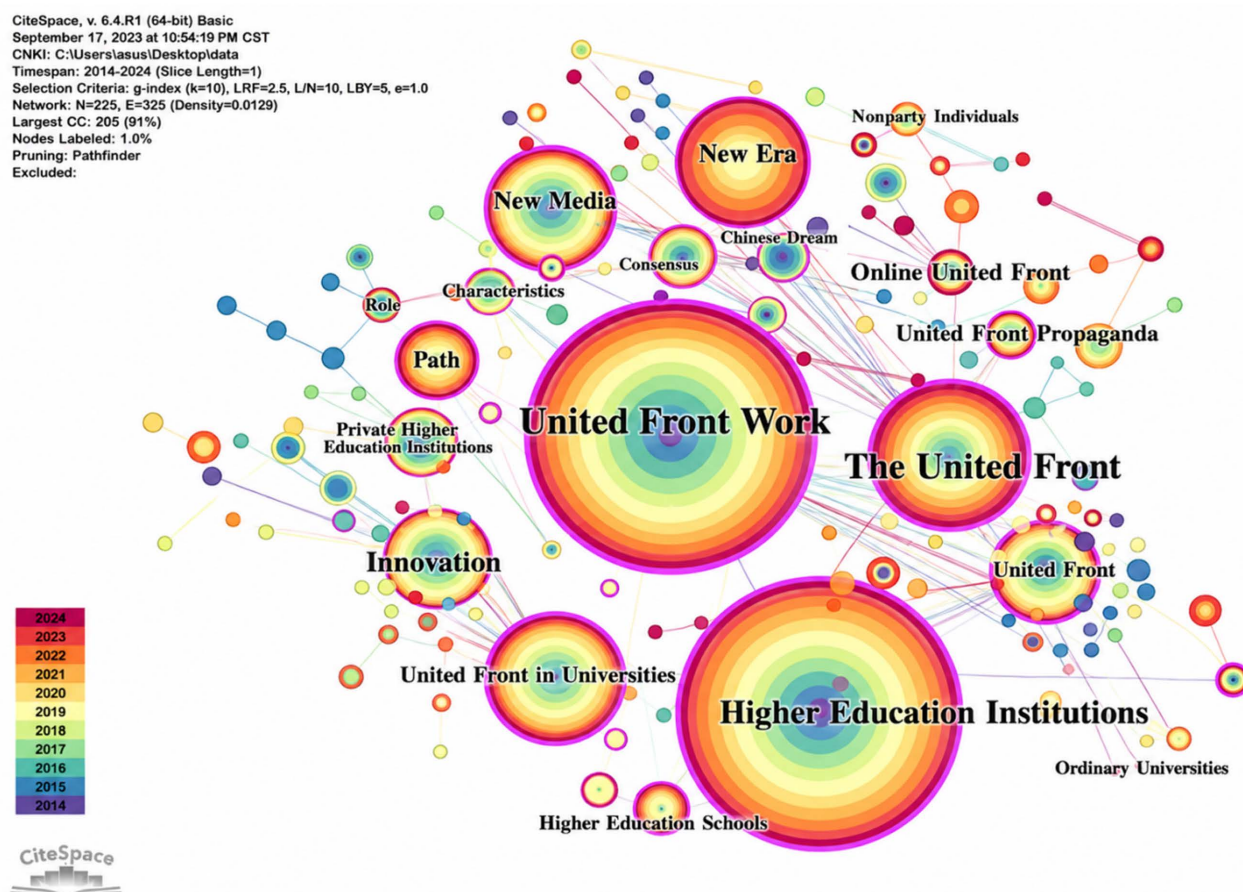


Figure 3. Keyword co-occurrence network.

Table 3. Keyword frequency table.

Serial Number	Keyword	Frequency	Centrality	Year of First Appearance
1	Colleges and Universities	329	0.63	2014
2	United Front Work	323	0.6	2014
3	United Front	106	0.42	2014
4	United Front Work in Colleges and Universities	85	0.6	2014
5	New Era	69	0.11	2017
6	New Media	64	0.41	2014
7	Innovation	52	0.17	2014
8	United Front	49	0.74	2014
9	Path	30	0.24	2016
10	Private Colleges and Universities	23	0.14	2014
11	Countermeasures	22	0.29	2014
12	New Situation	15	0.03	2014
13	Online United Front Work	11	0.06	2014
14	United Front Propaganda	11	0.16	2016
15	Chinese Dream	11	0.22	2014
16	Grand United Front Work	10	0.14	2017
17	Colleges and Universities	10	0.23	2018
18	Colleges and Universities	9	0.02	2017
19	Characteristics	9	0.10	2015
20	Cultural United Front Work	8	0.00	2014
21	New Era	8	0.02	2020
22	Working Mechanism	7	0.00	2015
23	College Students	7	0.00	2019
24	Democratic Parties	7	0.07	2019

4.2. Keyword Clustering Analysis

Through keyword clustering analysis, ten valid clusters were identified (see **Table 4**). The clustering structure is visually presented in **Figure 4**. The cluster labels were extracted using the LLR algorithm, and all silhouette values were greater than 0.7, indicating high clustering quality. The clustering results reflect the main subfields of research on united front work in universities.

Cluster #0 (united front work) encompasses the fundamental concepts, working mechanisms, and practical pathways of united front work in universities, emphasizing its foundational role in university governance. Cluster #1 (united front) focuses on the theoretical construction and practical expansion of the united front, particularly the implementation of the multi-party cooperation and politi-

cal consultation system in universities. Cluster #2 (university united front) highlights the specific characteristics of united front work in universities, including engagement with non-Party intellectuals, members of democratic parties, and ethnic and religious groups. Cluster #3 (innovation) stresses methodological and institutional innovation, especially in the context of digitalization and networking. Cluster #4 (path) addresses implementation pathways and countermeasures, with a strong practical orientation. Cluster #5 (new media) reflects the application of new media technologies in propaganda and public opinion guidance. Cluster #6 (new era) embodies the new requirements and missions of united front work in the context of the new era. Cluster #7 (cultural united front) focuses on the integration and innovation of traditional Chinese culture and red culture within united front practices. Cluster #8 (college students) highlights the role and significance of students in this domain. Cluster #9 (international united front), though relatively small, suggests the initial exploration of an international perspective in university united front work.

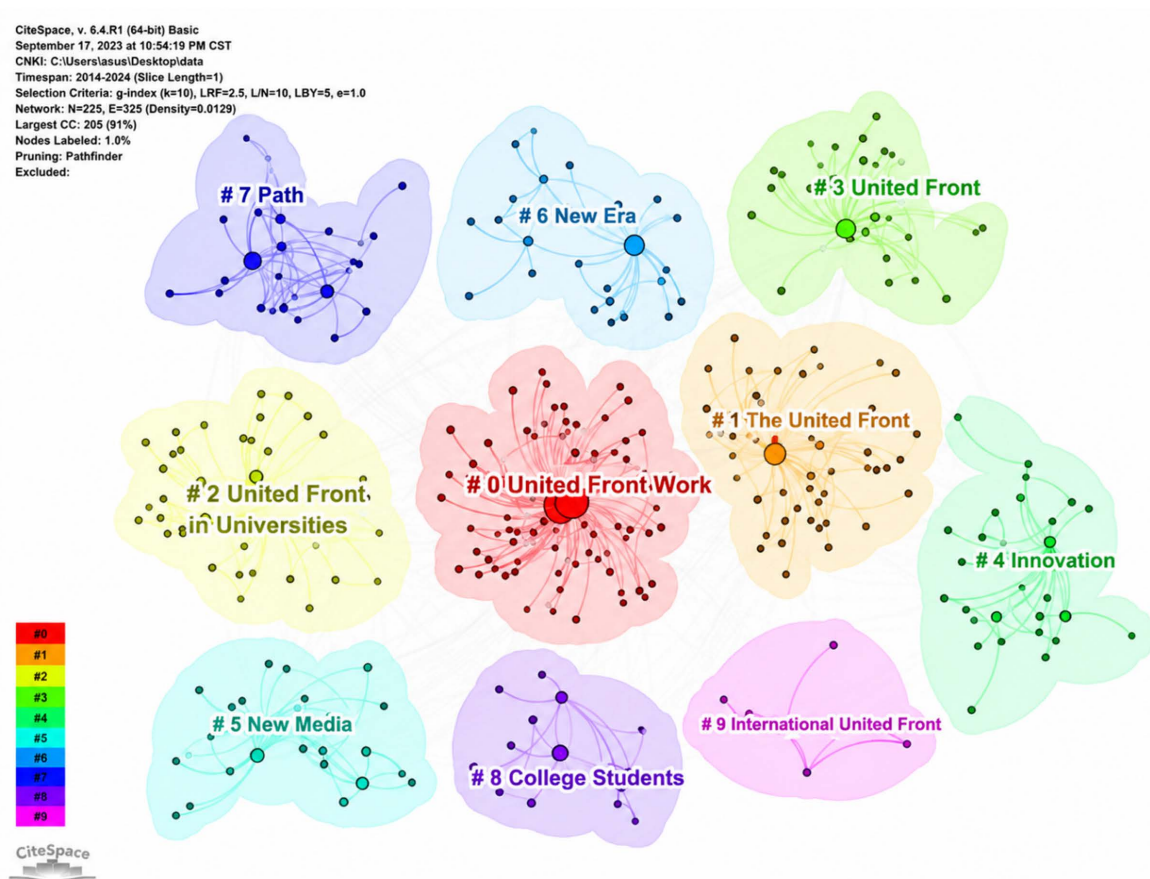


Figure 4. Keyword clustering map.

As shown in **Table 4**, all silhouette values exceeded 0.7, indicating high internal consistency and clear thematic boundaries. The emergence of Cluster #5 (new media) and Cluster #7 (cultural united front) illustrates a research trend toward dig-

ital transformation and cultural integration. Overall, ten valid clusters were generated ($Q = 0.7395$, $S = 0.9234$), as summarized in **Table 4**. Clusters #0 (united front work), #1 (united front), and #2 (university united front) represent the core domains of the field, while Clusters #4 (innovation), #5 (new media), and #6 (new era) indicate a shift in research hotspots. For example, Cluster #5 (new media) encompasses subtopics such as “united front propaganda,” “online united front work,” and “innovative paths,” suggesting that digital tools are reshaping the modes of united front work.

Table 4. Statistics of keyword clusters.

Cluster Number	Quantity	Contour Value	Label (LLR)
0	105	0.799	United front work; Colleges and universities; United front work in colleges and universities; United front
1	53	0.881	United front; Private colleges and universities; War work; Informatization; United front work in colleges and universities
2	44	0.877	United front in colleges and universities; Colleges and universities; United front work; Value; Effectiveness
3	34	0.828	United front; Breakthrough; United front work; Empirical investigation; Challenge
4	31	0.827	Innovation; Working mechanism; Political guidance; United front in colleges and universities; New approach
5	29	0.792	New media; United front propaganda; United front targets; Innovative path; Network
6	28	0.703	New era; Yunnan colleges and universities; Ideological guidance; Colleges and universities; Collaborative innovation
7	28	0.894	Path; Connotation; Characteristics; Countermeasures; Grand united front
8	17	0.916	College students; New situation; Ethnic minorities; New characteristics; Ideological and Political education
9	8	0.946	International united front; Domestic united front; New normal; Self-improvement; New countermeasures

4.3. Keyword Burst Analysis

Keyword burst analysis is a valuable method for identifying topics that experience a significant rise in scholarly attention within a specific time period, thereby revealing the dynamic evolution of research hotspots and frontier trends [17]. In this study, the burst detection function of CiteSpace was applied to the literature on united front work in universities published between 2014 and 2024, producing a keyword burst map (**Figure 5**). A total of 25 burst keywords were identified, clearly demonstrating the temporal shifts and intensity changes of research hotspots in this field over the past decade.

In terms of burst strength, all keywords recorded values above 1.2. Among them, two exceeded 3.0, five fell between 2.0 and 3.0, and eighteen ranged between 1.0 and 2.0. The keyword “new era” ranked first with a strength of 7.55, indicating its overwhelming prominence in the literature. “New period” (3.42) and “private uni-

versities” (3.06) followed in second and third place, respectively, reflecting their significant influence in this field.

Regarding burst duration, most keywords lasted only 1 - 2 years, highlighting the rapid turnover of research hotspots. However, five terms—“grand united front,” “big data,” “new era,” “universities,” and “value implications”—lasted until 2024, each with a duration of three years or more. This indicates that these are ongoing frontier directions with strong potential for further development. Based on the beginning and ending times of bursts as well as strength changes, the evolution of research hotspots in university united front work can be divided into three distinct phases.

The first phase, defined as the period of preliminary exploration and conceptual cognition (2014-2016), featured relatively few burst keywords, with six in total, all of low intensity (below 3.1). Research themes centered on basic concepts, regional practices, and initial problem identification. The keyword “private universities” (Strength = 3.06, 2014-2016) was the most prominent, underscoring early scholarly focus on this particular context. The bursts of “northwestern Liaoning” (Strength = 1.22, 2014) and “harmonious campus” (Strength = 1.46, 2015-2017) suggest attention to regional case studies and micro-level campus governance practices. The burst of the term “problems” (Strength = 1.74, 2015) reflects growing awareness of practical challenges and difficulties in united front work.

The second phase, characterized as the period of policy response and mechanism expansion (2017-2020), saw an increase to five burst keywords, with higher strength values. Research themes shifted toward policy response, target differentiation, and situational analysis. The bursts of “new situation” (Strength = 1.77, 2017-2018) and “Yunnan” (Strength = 1.50, 2017-2018) indicate a combination of macro-level contextual change with localized practice. The burst of “united front” (Strength = 2.49, 2018) reflects a return to the theoretical core of the field. During this period, against the backdrop of new Party and state requirements for united front work, studies increasingly explored working mechanisms and target group management.

The third phase, defined as the period of new era leadership and frontier deepening (2020-2024), witnessed the largest number of bursts (14 in total), the highest intensities, and the longest durations. Research during this stage demonstrated clear features of theoretical deepening, technological integration, and carrier innovation. At the level of theoretical construction and framework building, “new era” (Strength = 7.55, 2022-2024) emerged as the core guiding concept, alongside “new period” (Strength = 3.42, 2020-2021), “grand united front” (Strength = 2.35, 2021-2024), and “value implications” (Strength = 1.46, 2022-2024), together constituting a theoretical framework for united front work in the new era. At the level of working objects and carrier innovation, the bursts of “democratic parties” (Strength = 2.22, 2021-2022), “students” (Strength = 1.55, 2020-2021), “innovative research” (Strength = 1.55, 2020-2021), and “innovative carriers” (Strength = 1.23, 2022) indicate a stronger focus on specific groups and methodological innovation. From

the perspective of technological empowerment and pathway exploration, the sustained burst of “big data” (Strength = 1.64, 2021-2024) demonstrates that digital transformation has become a major trend and frontier direction of university united front work. The recent burst of “path” (Strength = 1.35, 2023-2024) further reflects growing attention to concrete and operational strategies.

Keyword burst analysis clearly shows that research on united front work in Chinese universities has evolved from conceptual cognition, to policy response, and finally to theoretical deepening and technological empowerment. At present, the research frontier centers on the theme of the “new era,” expanding simultaneously in two dimensions: the construction of a “grand united front” framework and the application of “big data” technologies on the one hand, and innovation in working carriers and pathways, as well as theoretical value exploration on the other.

Future research is expected to deepen along several lines: first, strengthening the study of collaborative mechanisms among different subsystems of universities under the framework of the grand united front; second, exploring the deep integration and application models of big data, artificial intelligence, and other technologies in united front opinion analysis, targeted services, and smart management; and third, aligning with the fundamental mission of moral education, further excavating the value implications and practical pathways of united front work in ideological guidance and cultural identity.

The third phase (2021-2024) can also be described as the period of digital transformation and cultural integration. This stage featured the largest number and strongest bursts, particularly “online united front work” (Strength = 5.42, 2021-2023), “cultural united front” (Strength = 4.86, 2021-2023), “integrated media” (Strength = 3.95, 2021-2023), and “red culture” (Strength = 3.50, 2022-2024). The 2020 revision of the *Regulations on the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China* explicitly called for “strengthening online united front work,” thereby accelerating the integration of united front work with information technologies. Against the backdrop of normalized pandemic prevention and control, universities increasingly shifted their united front work online, making “online united front work” a major hotspot that includes applications such as big data analytics, IoT platforms, and public opinion management. At the same time, the bursts of “cultural united front” and “red culture” reflect the close integration of united front work with cultural construction and value guidance, especially in strengthening the sense of a shared Chinese national identity and the transmission of red revolutionary traditions.

In addition, the emergence of new burst keywords such as “precise policy implementation” (Strength = 3.20, 2022-2024) and “community consciousness” (Strength = 2.95, 2022-2024) indicates a shift toward more refined, differentiated, and value-driven approaches. These emphasize the need to conduct targeted united front work for specific groups—such as ethnic minority students, returned overseas scholars, and non-Party intellectuals—while reinforcing education and integration around the sense of the Chinese national community.

Top 25 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

	Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	2014 – 2024
1	Privately Operated College	2014	3.06	2014	2016	
2	Northwest Of Liaoning	2014	1.22	2014	2014	
3	Scientization	2015	1.74	2015	2015	
4	Concern	2015	1.74	2015	2015	
5	Harmonious Campus	2015	1.46	2015	2017	
6	New Normal	2015	1.41	2015	2016	
7	Nniversity Students	2016	2.33	2016	2016	
8	United Front Targets	2016	1.75	2016	2016	
9	New Situation	2014	1.77	2017	2018	
10	Yunnan	2017	1.50	2017	2018	
11	United Front	2014	2.49	2018	2018	
12	New Era	2014	3.42	2020	2021	
13	Higher education institutions	2017	1.87	2020	2021	
14	Student	2020	1.55	2020	2021	
15	Innovative Research	2020	1.55	2020	2021	
16	United Front	2014	2.35	2021	2024	
17	Democratic Party	2019	2.22	2021	2022	
18	Big Data	2017	1.64	2021	2024	
19	New Era	2017	7.55	2022	2024	
20	Higher education institutions	2018	2.69	2022	2024	
21	Establishing virtue and nurturing people	2020	1.62	2022	2022	
22	Value And Meaning	2022	1.46	2022	2024	
23	Character Profile	2022	1.23	2022	2022	
24	Innovation carrier	2022	1.23	2022	2022	
25	Path	2016	1.35	2023	2024	

Figure 5. Keyword burst map.

5. Basic Conclusions and Prospects of Research on United Front Work in Chinese Universities

5.1. Basic Conclusions

In recent years, research on united front work in universities has shown a strong momentum of development, with an expanding scale and increasingly prominent policy-driven characteristics. Through a systematic review and in-depth analysis of relevant literature published between 2014 and 2024, it is evident that the overall publication volume has maintained a steady upward trend. Particularly after the successful convening of the 19th CPC National Congress, research output ac-

celerated markedly, fully demonstrating the powerful guiding and driving role of national policy on academic activity. Notably, the comprehensive revision and thorough implementation of the *Regulations on the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China* not only provided solid institutional guarantees and policy support for united front work in universities in the new era but also injected strong momentum and innovative vitality into related academic research.

From the perspective of research content, current studies on university united front work are characterized by relatively concentrated hotspots and a strong practical orientation. The main topics focus on the systematic construction and improvement of the “grand united front” framework, innovative pathways for online united front work, the deepening of cultural united front connotations, and breakthroughs in work mechanisms [18]. These studies not only emphasize theoretical exploration and systematic construction but also highlight close alignment with practical needs in university united front work. They aim to address the various real-world challenges and specific issues faced in the new era, thereby reflecting a clear orientation of theory serving practice.

At the methodological level, research demonstrates an emerging trend of diversification and interdisciplinary integration. Scholars have actively attempted to approach the subject from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including political science, sociology, education, and information technology [19]. They have applied diverse research methods such as literature review, case study, questionnaire survey, and field investigation [20], driving the field toward broader and deeper development. However, it must be noted that the depth and breadth of interdisciplinary collaborative research remain limited, disciplinary barriers have not been fully dismantled, and further cross-disciplinary dialogue and cooperation are required.

Regarding research teams, a stable core group of authors has yet to be formed, and the construction of academic collaboration networks remains insufficient. Although scholars such as Ding Liubao, Luo Baocheng, and Yang Xiaohui are relatively leading in terms of publication volume, a true core research team or academic community has not yet emerged. From the perspective of institutional collaboration, cooperation is mostly confined to the same region or similar types of universities, with relatively few in-depth cross-regional or cross-institutional studies. This relatively closed research pattern has, to some extent, limited the breadth and depth of the field, thereby constraining the quality and impact of research outcomes.

5.2. Limitations

This study has several methodological limitations. First, all data were sourced exclusively from the CNKI database, which indexes only Chinese-language academic papers. This may introduce language and regional biases and exclude relevant studies published in English or in other Chinese databases (e.g., Wanfang, Chongqing VIP). Second, we restricted our analysis to core journal articles and

did not include dissertations, conference proceedings, or policy documents, which might have offered supplementary perspectives on practical implementations. These choices may affect the completeness of the knowledge base and the generalizability of our findings, particularly regarding international comparisons and cross-cultural adaptations of united front work.

5.3. Future Prospects and Research Directions

Deepening theoretical system construction and improving the framework of university united front theory. Future studies should focus on systematically reviewing and integrating the theoretical foundations of university united front work. Through theoretical and methodological innovation, scholars should aim to build a theoretical system with distinct Chinese characteristics that meets the requirements of the times. Particular emphasis should be placed on interpreting and innovating core concepts such as the “grand united front,” the consciousness of the Chinese national community [21], and cultural identity, thereby providing stronger theoretical support for the practice of united front work in universities [22].

Accelerating digital transformation and building a new pattern of smart united front work. Research should delve into the application scenarios and implementation pathways of emerging technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things in united front work. Efforts should focus on the systematic construction and optimization of “digital united front” and “smart united front” platforms, using technological innovation to drive institutional innovation, thereby enhancing the intelligence and precision of united front work and realizing its modernization [23].

Strengthening empirical research methods and emphasizing the synthesis of practical experience. Future research should place greater emphasis on the use of empirical methodologies. Through in-depth case studies, systematic fieldwork, and comparative analyses, scholars should comprehensively summarize the characteristic practices and successful experiences of different universities and regions. This will help generate replicable and scalable models and developmental pathways, fostering a virtuous interaction between theoretical research and practical exploration.

Expanding international perspectives and enhancing global academic influence. Against the backdrop of deepening globalization, research on university united front work should actively expand its international horizons by systematically examining advanced experiences in foreign university governance and multicultural integration. Strengthening international academic exchanges and collaboration will help produce research outcomes with greater international visibility, thereby enhancing the global discourse power of the Chinese united front theory [24].

Building high-level research communities and promoting deep interdisciplinary collaboration. It is recommended to establish interdisciplinary research bases, launch joint research projects, and create academic exchange platforms as ways to integrate resources from universities, Party schools, and social science in-

stitutes. By breaking disciplinary barriers and institutional silos, a systematic and professional research community can be built, forming research synergies that elevate the quality and level of united front studies in universities.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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