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## **Review on the Status Quo of China's Cross-border E-commerce Research Based on Bibliometrics**

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# Review on the Status Quo of China's Cross-border E-commerce

## Research Based on Bibliometrics

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**Abstract:** This paper used Bibexcel, Netdraw and other software to obtain the bibliographic data of the literature, sourcing from CSSCI journals of China national knowledge infrastructure, in order to isolate the major academic groups of cross-border e-commerce and explore the evolution of keywords over the years. Also, the paper drew knowledge mapping according to the word frequency statistics and used keyword co-occurrence methods to investigate research topics and hotspots and clarified possible research trends. Results indicated that the number of cross-border e-commerce research achievements had grown rapidly, and the research themes primarily could be divided into six orientations. The study on cross-border e-commerce along the 'Belt and Road' countries has been increasing year by year. Furthermore, the research process should strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation and the level of theoretical innovation should be improved.

**Keywords:** cross-border e-commerce, bibliometrics, knowledge mapping, the Belt and Road

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border e-commerce (CBEC) is a new type of international trade generated by the development of the Internet to a certain stage <sup>[4]</sup>. A commonly mentioned definition is cross-border e-commerce refers to an international business activity that transaction entities belonging to different customs make transaction, payment and carry out settlement through e-commerce platform and deliver goods to the destinations through cross-border logistics. CBEC is of great strategic significance to the transformation and development of a country's trade. It has aroused wide attention from Chinese academic community and the relevant research is heating up. To understand the current research status and achievements, the bibliometric method was employed to analyze the bibliographic data with the topic of CBEC from China national knowledge infrastructure (CNKI), to investigate the status, themes and hotspots of CBEC study, and to understand the possible orientations and trends of future research.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Bibliometric analysis is defined as 'the quantitative analysis of publications in a given field' <sup>[19]</sup>. A comprehensive bibliometric analysis of a specific topic can help researchers to better understand the knowledge base and the intellectual structure within a topical field <sup>[20]</sup>. It can be used to analyze article information in regard to keywords, authors, references, journals, institutions, countries, and even directions for future research <sup>[21]</sup>.

The research data originated from the bibliographic data of source journals listed in Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) through the database of CNKI. The source journal articles are based on the subject search terms known as 'cross-border e-commerce' or 'cross-border e-business', with the search period from 2008 to 2018 for nearly a decade, and the refinement followed the selection of 'document types = journals'. Finally, 318 documents were retrieved. Since the selected CSSCI journals in CNKI had high academic level and

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great influence in China, revealing the major achievements of Chinese scholars in this field and being at the center of the citation network, the bibliographic data was strongly representative and could accurately characterize the research status and hotspots in this field. We therefore used 'cross border e-commerce' or 'cross border e-business' as search terms. The search details are summarized in Table1 below.

**Table 1. Summary of searching details**

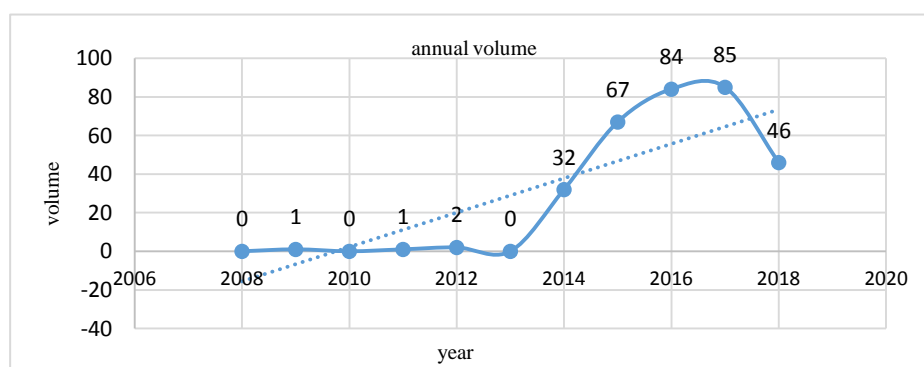
Source database	China national knowledge infrastructure
Citation indexes	CSSCI in CNKI
Years	January,2008 – July, 2018
Subject search terms	'cross border e-commerce' or 'cross border e-business'
Refinement selection	'document types = journals'
Sample size	318

### 3. RESULT

#### 3.1 Status analysis of Chinese CBEC research

##### 3.1.1 Literature quantitative analysis

From the year 2008 to 2018, the total quantity of journal articles about CBEC research in CSSCI reached 318, and the average number each year was 28.9 journal articles, with the maximum of 85 journal articles in 2017(the finishing time of data interception was on July,2018 and the minimum of 0 in the year 2008, 2010 and 2013).



**Figure 1. The total quantity of research literature in CBEC from 2008 to 2018**

Figure 1 suggested that the total quantity of research literature on CBEC developed from nothing. The quantity remained stable at one or two journal article publication annually from 2008 to 2013. However, after rapid growth from the year 2014, the quantity of research in CBEC peaked at both 2016 and 2017, with the average publication of 85 journal articles each year and merely in the first half of the year 2018, the number of publication of journal articles in CBEC reached 46, The increasing quantity of journal articles showed that since 2014, the CBEC research in China had continued to heat up, with new achievements constantly merging.

##### 3.1.2 Literature source distribution

318 journal articles published in 123 different types of journals are retrieved. The maximum publication was in China's Circulation Economy, with 49 journal articles totally. Furthermore, 25 journals published more than 3 journal articles belonging to our research scope and we defined them as top 25 journals, as shown in the table 2 below.

**Table 2 Top 25 journals in publication**

Journal	Number of articles	Journal	Number of articles
China Circulation Economy	49	Shanghai Economic Review	5
International Trade	23	Fujian Forum	4
China Finance	13	Journal of International Trade	4
People's Tribune	10	International Economics Cooperation	4
Contemporary Economy & Management	9	Chinese Software	3
Business Research	8	Enterprise Economy	3
Asia-pacific Economic Review	7	Reform of Economic System	3
Economic Review	7	Management Modernization	3
International Commerce	6	Price Theory and Practice	3
China Opening Journal	6	Modern Economic Research	3
Science and Technology Management Research	6	Social Scientist	3
Macroeconomic Management	6	Reform	3
International Taxation	5		

According to Table 2, the total quantity of journal articles published in top 25 journals (ranking of number of publication on CBEC study from 2008 to 2018 for each journal) was 196, taking up 61.6% of the total publications on CBEC, while the top 25 journals took up only 20.3% of the total number of journals, suggesting that only a few core journals published journal articles on CBEC study. Among these core journals, China Circulation Economy ranked No.1 in publication and International Trade No.2, revealing that CBEC research in the field of circulation economics and trade economics was very active.

### 3.1.3 Analysis of the core authors

To the 318 journal articles retrieved, 439 authors have made contributions, among whom 52 were core authors who wrote more than 2 journal articles in our research scope. Table 3 listed the core authors as follow.

**Table 3 List of core authors**

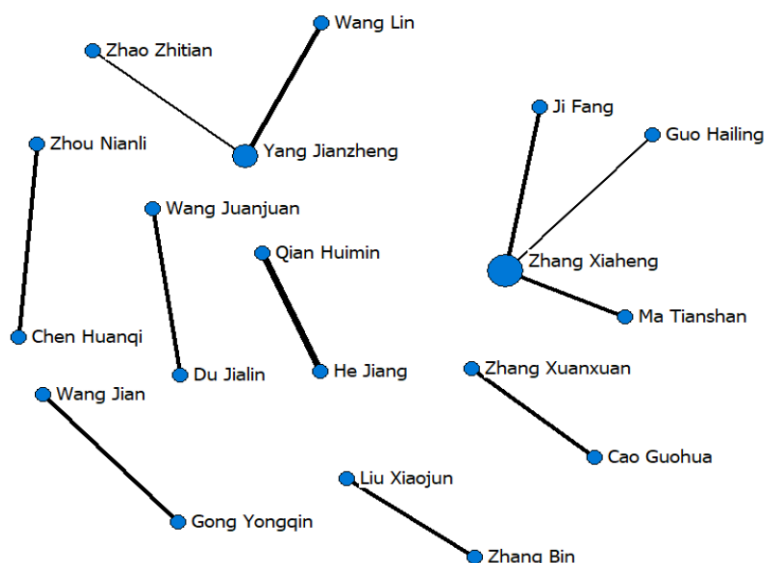
Author	publication	Author	publication	Author	publication	Author	publication
Zhang X H	11	Guo H L	2	Li X Y	2	Cao G H	2
Yang J Z	8	Mu C	2	Li J L	2	Zhang Y B	2
Wang J J	6	Xiang H M	2	Wang H M	2	Chen H Q	2
He J	4	Xia X L	2	Tao T	2	Zhu J M	2
Qian H M	4	Xu L	2	Shen Y L	2	Bai H	2
Wang G M	3	Ma S Q	2	Ji F	2	An C S	2
Wang J	3	Du J L	2	Wang Y	2	Zhang X X	2
Shen N	3	Zhang L	2	Wang T	2	Zhao Z T	2
Ma S Z	3	Ma T S	2	Liu X J	2	Zhou N L	2
Wang L	3	Zhang B	2	Lu Z Y	2	Lin X W	2
Liu J F	3	Yang L	2	Bai S Q	2	Liao Y X	2
Lu X Q	3	Gong Y Q	2	Zhao P	2	Li D W	2
Nie L H	3	Gao Y	2	Zhou L Q	2	Wang W Q	2

The 52 core authors totally published 135 journal articles, taking up 30.8% of the total number of journal articles and the core authors occupied 11.8% of all the authors. Compared with Price's law which says '10% of authors account for 50% of journal articles', there was a big difference, suggesting that the distribution of scholars in the field of CBEC was relatively scattered, and scholars who have not yet formed a voice.

### 3.1.4 Knowledge mapping and analysis on main academic groups and research directions

A co-occurrence matrix was generated by the core authors' cooperation data, and 8 academic groups (group

number  $\geq 2$ ) were formed through cluster analysis as shown in Figure 2. The node size represented the number of journal articles published by the authors. The edge between the nodes represented a cooperative relationship between the two authors. The thicker the line, the more times the authors have cooperated.



**Figure 2. Core authors' cooperation network diagram**

As can be seen from Figure 2, there were two representative academic groups in the authors' cooperation network. One group was formed by Zhang Xiaheng together with Ji Fang, Ma Tianshan and Guo Hailing, among whom Zhang Xiaheng was the key member of the group. Their findings covered a wide range of research fields, which primarily include cross-border logistics and supply chain, CBEC payment, CBEC operation modes, talent training, legislation and risk prevention, etc.<sup>[1]</sup> The second academic group was all from Shanghai University of Science and Technology, and was formed by Yang Jianzheng, Wang Lin and Zhao Zhitian, among whom Yang Jianzheng was the key member of the group. Their representative research results were the study of the CBEC development model of Shanghai Free Trade Zone and the influencing factors of CBEC international logistics performance<sup>[2]</sup>. What's more, He Jiang and Qian Huimin both from Shanghai University of Engineering Science have also closely cooperated, whose research direction primarily involved the selection of B2C CBEC logistics modes and the development of CBEC in China<sup>[3]</sup>. Wang Juanjuan and Du Jialin from Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics have studied the promotion of CBEC development on RMB internationalization and discussed the problems on development of CBEC along the 'Belt and Road' countries. Zhang Bin and Liu Xiaojun from Jilin University primarily studied the development status quo and operation modes of CBEC logistics in China, as well as cross-border logistics cooperation modes between China and countries under the background of 'Belt and Road'<sup>[5]</sup>.

It is known from the core authors and the academic groups formed that most of the core authors haven't formed closely connected academic groups and the cooperation network was loose. The core authors were commonly cooperated, taking the structure of professor together with their postgraduates. Most of the cooperation was supported by fund projects and there was little cooperation after finishing the projects.

## 3.2 Analysis of Hotspots of CBEC research

### 3.2.1 Analysis of keywords and themes

During the research process of a certain field, it is often found that some high-frequency keywords appear in different journal articles. These keywords reveal the research themes and hotspots to some extent. Within the

bibliographic data of CBEC literature, ‘cross-border e-commerce’, ‘cross-border e-business’ and ‘e-commerce’ had the highest frequency for sure, however, these three key words had no significant meaning to main theme analysis. Thus, they were eliminated. Finally, 129 keywords which appeared more than 2 times within the 318 journal articles were found, with their accumulative appearance frequency of 424. After combining the keywords of similar meanings but different expressions, the top 20 high frequency words together with their frequency of occurrence were found, as listed in Table 4.

**Table 4 Top 20 high frequency words of the research literature**

Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency
Belt and Road	31	Corporate management	6
Trade facilitation	11	Finance	6
CBEC platform	10	Treasury finance	6
International trade	10	B2C	7
Logistics	9	the New Normal	6
Cross-border logistics	9	Made in China	5
Overseas warehouse	9	Shanghai Free-Trade Zone	5
Big data	8	Talent training	5
the Silk Road Economic Belt	7	Cross-border RMB business	5
Free trade pilot zone	6	Internet +	5

Through analysis of high-frequency keywords, the topics on CBEC study fell into three types. The first type was trade-related topics with the key words like ‘Belt and Road’, trade facilitation, international trade, and free trade pilot zone. The second type was management and finance-related topics and their presenting keywords were CBEC platforms, logistics, overseas warehouses, corporate management, finance, cross-border RMB business, etc. The third type was industrial economy related topics and the key words included the Silk Road Economic Belt, the New Normal, made in China, and the Internet+. Also some scholars studied CBEC from other perspectives of talent training and big data applications.

From the results of word frequency statistics, ‘the Belt and Road’, ‘trade facilitation’, ‘CBEC platform’ and ‘cross-border logistics’ were the hotspots of current CBEC study, and their frequency was far more than other keywords. As can be seen, how the CBEC development effectively dealt with the ‘The Belt and Road’ initiative was a hot topic in the academic circles. At the same time, as a new model and a new format of trade, CBEC development should solve the problems like industrial planning, financial supervision, trade convenience, platform construction, and logistics supply chains, to which scholars have devoted considerable attention <sup>[6]</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Knowledge mapping and analysis on co-occurrence network of high-frequency key words

We can understand the research subjects and hotspots in a certain field through the frequency statistics of keywords. However, the connection between high-frequency keywords cannot be derived only from the frequency of keywords occurrence. Accordingly, to further investigate the relationship between these high-frequency keywords, co-occurrence analysis was carried out based on the number of times the keywords appeared together in the same journal article. In general, two keywords that appeared frequently in the same paper were considered as relatively closely related. The keyword co-occurrence network could more intuitively investigate the research field and direction of CBEC, as shown in Figure 3.

According to the comprehensive reading of literature contents, together with the previous high-frequency statistics and keyword co-occurrence network, it could be interpreted that the current CBEC study in China primarily focused on the following six orientations.

- 1) Study on the status quo and countermeasures of CBEC development, which primarily discussed the

problems and dilemmas faced by CBEC development in various regions. From the macro-level, the problems covering areas like CBEC platform, supervision, payment, logistics, law and personnel training etc. were analyzed and the according countermeasures were proposed, For example, Xie Na <sup>[7]</sup> made a discussion on the CBEC trade platform model in China, Sun Lei and Wang Fang <sup>[8]</sup> studied the development status and countermeasures of CBEC in China and Jianhua Liu <sup>[9]</sup> analyzed the development status and future trends of e-commerce in China.

2) Study on trade issues arising from CBEC, which primarily involved exploration of trade facilitation, free trade zone construction and CBEC trade rules. For instance, Wang Huimin <sup>[10]</sup> studied the transformation and upgrading of CBEC and international trade, Sun Baowen <sup>[11]</sup> etc., made an empirical study on the impact of geographical distance to China's international trade under the CBEC model and Gong Yongqin and Wang Jian <sup>[12]</sup> studied 18 terms on 'e-commerce' of 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter of TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement), and they considered that these 18 terms could be divided into 4 parts, namely reduction on digital trade barriers, protection of online consumer rights, promotion of digital trade facilitation and acceleration of international coordination and cooperation.

3) Study on CBEC logistics supply chain issues, which involved cross-border logistics, overseas warehouses, manufacturing sea, logistics system planning and other fields. For instance, Li Xiangyang <sup>[13]</sup> proposed five paths to promote the development of CBEC logistics and Meng Liang and Meng Jing <sup>[14]</sup> analyzed the selection of overseas warehouse models for CBEC companies from the perspective of export trade of consumer goods.

4) Study on CBEC financial payment primarily involved cross-border RMB business, exchange rate risk, financial supervision, payment settlement, transaction fraud and other issues. For instance, Zheng Yu studied several legal issues of cross-border electronic payment in the scenario of free trade area and Zhou Liping studied the current situation of CBEC payment and the financial risks encountered. They also proposed corresponding supervision suggestions.

5) Innovation study on CBEC models primarily involved the usage of big data by small and middle enterprises, business model innovation through Internet or Internet +, transformation and upgrading of foreign trade enterprises. For example, Nie Linhai analyzed e-commerce in the era of 'Internet +' and Tian Aiguo studied the issues on cross-border retail e-commerce under the background of 'Internet +' and proposed corresponding countermeasures.

6) Study on policies and institutional issues of CBEC. Keywords e.g., 'One Belt and One Road', 'the New Normal' and 'Internationalization of RMB' represented a high degree of node in the co-occurrence network, suggesting that the academic community paid great attention to the combination of CBEC development and the 'Belt and Road' initiative, as Du Yonghong highlighted under the 'Belt and Road' initiative, CBEC would boost the development of trade and investment through channel expansion and market share increasing to fulfill the goals of long-term economic development like the production division and cooperation, resources and products sharing, and mutual market opening among countries along the route of 'one Belt one Road' countries.

### 3.2.3 Future research

The journal articles retrieved were sorted through keyword frequency statistics on a yearly basis, and were screened by merging synonyms, singular and plural keywords. Given that the number of literature before 2014 was quite small, and the journal articles had less impact than later ones, the keywords appearing more than 2 times after 2014 were defined as core keywords and primarily used in the comparison analysis, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5 Evolution of core keywords**

Year	Core keywords	Frequency	Core keywords	Frequency
2014	Business management	3	Protection of privacy	2
	International trade	2	Free trade pilot zone	2
	APEC	3	Cross-border RMB business	2
	Treasury Finance	2	Trade facilitation	2
2015	One Belt and One Road	8	Free trade pilot zone	2
	The New Normal	4	New business	2
	Cross-border logistics	4	Business environment	2
	Overseas warehouse	4	New growth point	2
2016	One Belt and One Road	10	Trade facilitation	3
	International trade	5	Platforms of cross-border e-commerce	3
	Overseas warehouse	4	Business management	3
	Silk Road Economic Belt	3	Intellectual Property Protection	2
2017	One Belt and One Road	11	International rules	2
	Cross-border logistics	3	WTO (World Trade Organization)	2
	Internet	3	TPP	2
	Consumer rights	2	Intellectual property rights	2

Through the analysis of keywords evolution, the future research trend of CBEC study is concluded as follows:

1) From the high-frequency keywords of 2014 to 2017, it is not difficult to see that the research interest of 'Belt and Road' study has been rising year by year. CBEC, an important carrier to the 'The Belt and Road Initiative' which was a platform for global opening and cooperation, is regarded as the most convenient way to connect domestic and foreign consumers and is the hotspot received continuous attention by Chinese scholars. The relevant research under the background of 'the Belt and Road initiative' primarily involved the construction of e-commerce legal systems along 'the Belt and Road' countries, corporate governance of the e-commerce market transaction, the development of cross-border logistics cooperation, the construction of e-commerce trade rules along 'the Belt and Road' countries, the legal protection of consumer rights, the path selection of CBEC development of the border regions, new model exploration and other aspects of CBEC.

2) According to keyword analysis, cross-border logistics was a topic with high frequency of occurrence in the study. On one hand, the rapid development of CBEC had created considerable development opportunities to China's logistics industry. On the other hand, there were numerous shortcomings in China's cross-border logistics, which were difficult to meet to the demands of new business formats of CBEC. So the related research was quite active. The contents of the major literature on cross-border logistics could be divided into three hotspots. The first part was the planning, construction and operation of overseas warehouses in cross-border B2B trade, the second part was the operation and management of international express logistics in cross-border retail import and export and the third part is the planning and design of multi-modal transportation of cross-border logistics. Since the cross-border logistics and supply chains are the most critical and weak section of CBEC industrial chain in China, the study on cross-border logistics and supply chain will be hot for a long time<sup>[15]</sup>.

3) Based on the evolution analysis of keywords, trade facilitation was one of the most important focuses of CBEC study. In 2014, trade facilitation research was primarily combined with the free trade pilot zone, because the institutional advantages of pioneering tests in the free trade zone were conducive to the implementation of trade facilitation measures. In 2016, the 'The Belt and Road' initiative was vigorously promoted, and measures conducive to trade facilitation were introduced all over China, which enabled domestic scholars to move the study on CBEC trade facilitation to the 'Belt and Road' framework. In 2017, as the share of CBEC trade rose in the total China's import and export trade, domestic and foreign scholars began to discuss how to establish international rules for CBEC and digital trade globally, e.g., the study on applicability of CBEC rules and related



intellectual property issues under WTO, bilateral or multilateral trade agreements.

4) Through the analysis of the latest research achievements, the study on CBEC legal systems and regulatory policies would gradually heat up. Since 2013, CBEC in China has shifted from piloting, testing to rapid growth and gradually became one of the major modes of import and export trade. However, problems like the uneven development of CBEC in various regions and the disunity of regulatory standards remained. So legal and institutional norms were urgently needed. On 8 April 2016, the Ministry of Finance, the General Administration of Customs and the State Administration of Taxation in China jointly issued the 'Notice on CBEC Retail Import Tax Policy', which was a milestone in the construction of CBEC systems. This revealed that China had already recognized CBEC as an important emerging industry and was striving to create fair competitive market environment.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study obtained bibliographic data from the representative journal articles on CBEC study in China in the past decade, through knowledge mapping and keyword co-occurrence methods, the status quo, main research topics, research hotspots and development trends of this field were explored and were summarized as follow.

1) The number of research results rose rapidly while the theoretical innovation needed to be strengthened. China CBEC research was currently in a period of rapid growth, however, the core author group and the core research teams have not been formed. The research achievements were mainly applied research, theoretical innovation was relatively little. There is great room for progress in both breadth and depth of journal articles<sup>[16]</sup>.

2) The research topic is relatively concentrated, and the research process needs to strengthen the interdisciplinary study. CBEC study focused on six orientations: study on the status quo and countermeasures of CBEC development, the trade issues caused by CBEC, logistics and supply chain issues of CBEC<sup>[17]</sup>, financial payment issues of CBEC, CBEC mode innovation research, policies and systems study on CBEC. The subject areas involved in these research orientations include trade economy, management science, law, computer science, etc. Subsequent research should speed up building interdisciplinary theoretical framework and constructing interdisciplinary research teams.

3) The future research hotspots of CBEC primarily focus on four areas, including the study on CBEC development under the background of 'Belt and Road Initiative', research on construction of logistics and supply chain systems to meet the needs of CBEC, CBEC trade facilitation research under the background of free trade zones or free trade ports, the framework research of CBEC policies and legal systems in the global countries. The above four areas are qualified of both basic and leading properties no matter in academic research or industrial development, and are expected to become research hotspots in the future research<sup>[18]</sup>.

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