

Bibliometric and Visualization Insights: Understanding the Trend of Research on Bullfighting Culture

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Abstract

Bullfighting culture has been a subject of scholarly inquiry across various disciplines, evolving alongside shifting societal, ethical, and cultural perspectives. The aim of this study is to apply bibliometric and visualization techniques to comprehensively review and analyse the scholarly literature on bullfighting culture. We explore keyword co-occurrence networks and thematic clusters to identify key research areas and emerging trends via data retrieved from the Web of Science. The results of the study show a significant change in the direction of research from literary criticism to cultural policy, animal welfare and ethics. Additionally, a geographical analysis highlights Spain as the predominant research hub. Despite its limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the maturation and diversification of bullfighting scholars. Future research should integrate interdisciplinary approaches and non-English sources to promote a more comprehensive understanding of bullfighting as a contested cultural practice.

Keywords: Bullfighting Culture, Bibliometric Analysis, Visualization, Research Trends, Animal Ethics

Introduction

Although bullfighting has deeply rooted cultural values, but due to its growing opposition, it has become controversial tradition in Spain and Latin America (Pink, 2020). It maintains a noteworthy feature of Spanish identity and tourism (Brandes, 2009), with regional variances in its forms and practices. Nevertheless, this tradition has been scrutinized by Catalan nationalists, animal welfare advocates, and those who grasp contemporary European values (Hansen, 2016). In Mexico, bullfighting persists as a televised display, yet it is banned legally (Mercado, 2023). Despite its cultural meaning, the future of bullfighting is unclear as it brawls to reconcile with evolving societal values and consumer trends (Hardouin-Fugier, 2005). In Spanish society, the constant debates over bullfighting disclose broader tensions between tradition and modernity (Douglass, 1999). Nonetheless, bullfighting endures to be

of scholarly interest, attracting analysis from diverse fields such as tourism, anthropology, and gender studies (Cohen, 2014).

In recent years, the anthropological research on bullfighting has prolonged to include a wide spectrum of cultural practices. These practices reflect historical development, social values, and contested identities. Bullfighting proposes a convincing case for such inquiry as a cultural phenomenon steeped in tradition and controversy. The culture of countries like Mexico, Latin America and Spain has deep historical connection with Bullfighting. It is more than an art form and sporting spectacle, symbolizing complex interplay of social, ethical, and political issues that continue to resonate in modern society.

Recent methodological advances have refined the way scholars approach literature analysis, especially through the use of bibliometric and visualization techniques. These approaches provide systematic frameworks for quantitatively mapping the evolution of research within a given field. This methodological includes a thorough review and identification of prominent research hotspots (Li, 2023). In bullfighting culture studies, such tools offer objective insights into shifting scholarly perspectives. They help identify influential studies, emerging themes, and collaborative networks.

In addition, traditional qualitative analysis is bridged with quantitative insights by integrating bibliometric methods with visualization tools. Previous studies mainly used narrative descriptions to explore bullfighting culture. This advanced approach reveals nuanced links between cultural, ethical, and political aspects. Such an integrated perspective not only highlights the diversity of scholarly contributions, but also identifies potential gaps in existing literature.

The aim of this study is to apply bibliometric and visualization techniques to comprehensively review and analyse the scholarly literature on bullfighting culture. By mapping the intellectual landscape, the research seeks to identify key trends, influential works, and emerging clusters of inquiry, ultimately offering a robust foundation for future investigations in this area.

Research Objectives

1. To identify research hotspots and clusters in bullfighting culture studies through bibliometric analysis.
2. To examine research trends in bullfighting culture studies over time using bibliometric and visualization techniques.
3. To explore gaps and new opportunities in research directions for future studies on bullfighting culture.

Research Questions

1. What are the main research hotspots and thematic clusters in academic studies on bullfighting culture?
2. How have research trends and intellectual trajectories in bullfighting culture developed over different time periods?
3. What gaps, understudied areas, or interdisciplinary opportunities exist in the current study of bullfighting culture?

Methods and Data Source

Methods

This study aims to identify research trends, collaboration networks, and thematic structures within the selected academic literature through bibliometric and visualization analysis. The methods employed include VOSviewer and Scimago Graphica, which are widely recognized tools for mapping knowledge domains and visualizing complex relationships within scientific publications. VOSviewer is a computer program for creating, visualizing, and exploring bibliometric maps of science (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). SCImago Graphica is a no-code data visualization tool that allows users to create complex visualizations through simple drag-and-drop interactions, making it suitable for both data communication and exploratory analysis (Hassan-Montero et al., 2022). This software has gained popularity in social science research, particularly for analysing research trends, collaborations, and key concept (McAllister et al., 2022). This study uses these tools to explore the field's intellectual structure and development. It identifies key themes, leading scholars, and possible future research paths.

Data Source and Clean

In this study, the identified database is from the web of science. The research identifies the topic "bullfight" and "culture" and documents type that are not included in "review article" or "proceeding papers" or "book chapters." Figure 1 shows 55 articles were selected.

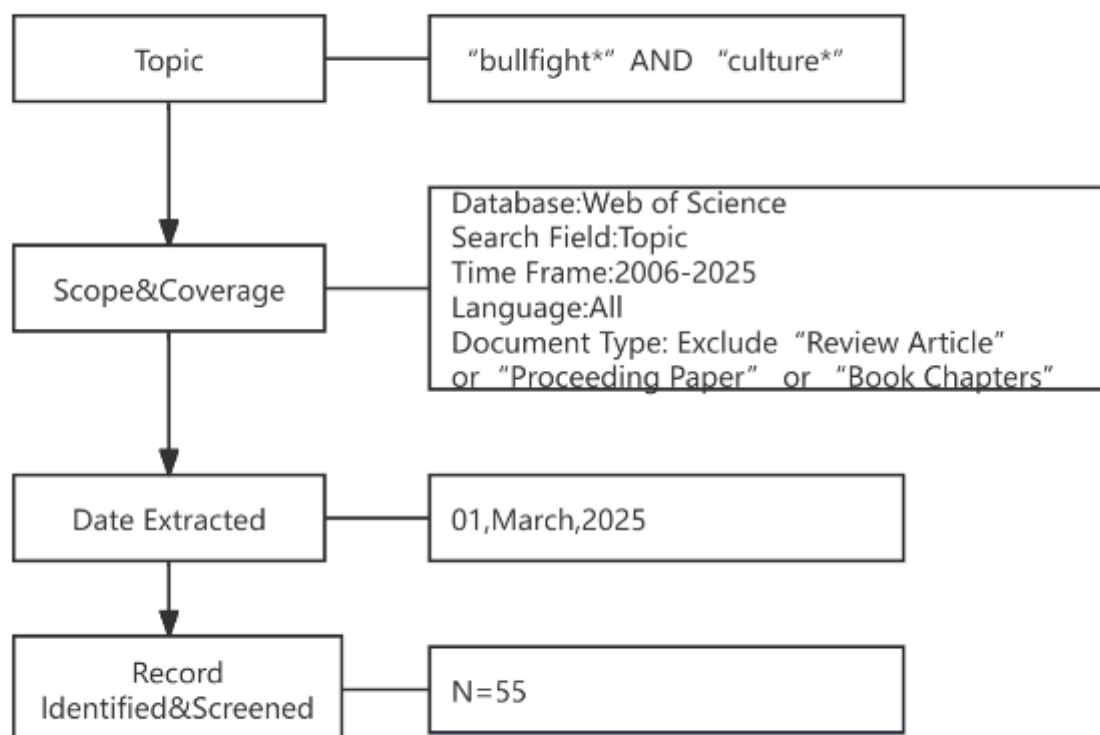


Figure 1 | Search strategy flow chart.

Figure 2 shows the trend in the number of publications (blue bars) and citations (gray line graphs) for the study bullfight and culture articles between 2006 and 2025. Overall, the number of publications increases gradually after 2010 and peaks in 2020 (about 8), then

declines but remains stable. Citations have risen significantly since 2010, peaking in 2020 (nearly 30) and fluctuating but remaining high thereafter. 2025 sees a decline in both publications and citations, likely due to incomplete data. The overall trend suggests that research interest in the field has continued to grow over the past decade or so, with a peak in impact in 2020.

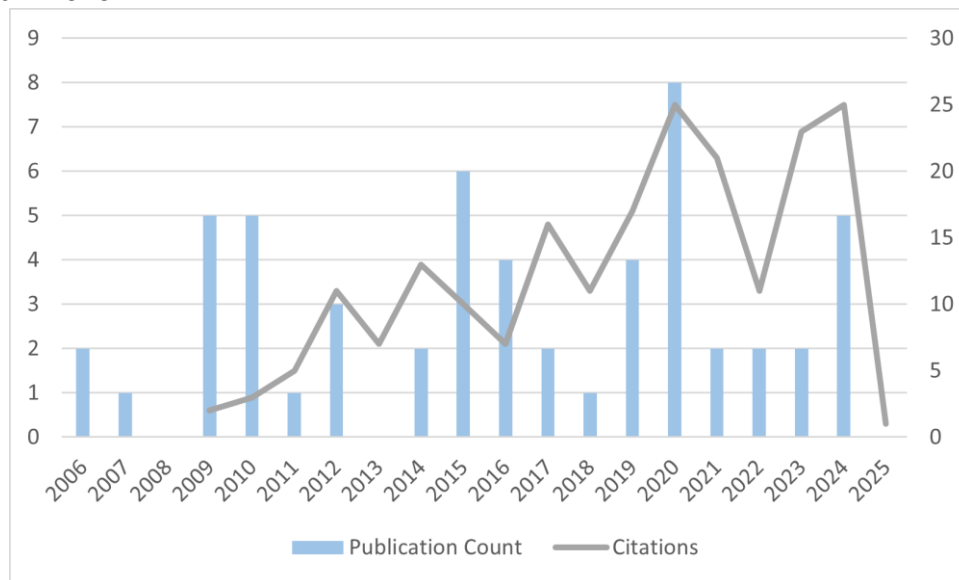


Figure 2: Publication Years and Citations

Results

Table 1 shows the distribution of research records across 18 Web of Science categories in a study comprising 55 total records. Humanities Multidisciplinary and Social Sciences Interdisciplinary are the most represented categories. They represent about 16.364% of the 55 documents respectively. History and Language Linguistics follow, each with 10.909%. Categories such as Cultural Studies, Sociology, and Veterinary Sciences each account for 7.273%. The table highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the study, with significant contributions from humanities and social sciences.

Table 1

Subject Area of the Study

Web of Science Categories	Record Count	% of 55
Humanities Multidisciplinary	9	16.364
Social Sciences Interdisciplinary	9	16.364
History	6	10.909
Language Linguistics	6	10.909
Cultural Studies	4	7.273
Sociology	4	7.273
Veterinary Sciences	4	7.273

Table 2 presents the institutional affiliations contributing to the study, along with their geographic distribution. The Complutense University of Madrid is the most prominent contributor, with 6 records, representing the highest individual institutional output. Spain dominates the affiliations, with six institutions listed. The table underscores the strong representation of Spanish institutions in the study, particularly Complutense University of

Madrid, while highlighting minor contributions from Mexico and Australia. This aligns with bullfighting's deep-rooted cultural significance in Spain.

Table 2

Affiliations of the Study

Affiliations	Record Count	Country/Region
COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY OF MADRID	6	Spain
UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA DE YUCATAN	2	Mexico
UNIVERSIDAD CARLOS III DE MADRID	2	Spain
UNIVERSIDAD DE MALAGA	2	Spain
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTONOMA DE MEXICO	2	Mexico
UNIVERSITY OF GRANADA	2	Spain
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA	2	Australia
UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA	2	Spain

Figure 3 illustrates a world map with colourful circles representing the publication countries. Scholars from 19 countries have contributed to bullfighting culture research. These countries span North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, but none are identified in Africa. The first is Spain, including 23 documents. The second is USA, including 9 documents. The third is Mexico, including 6 documents. Table 2 highlights Spain's leading role in bullfighting culture research. Mexico, inheriting Spain's colonial legacy, has developed its own bullfighting traditions. Research explores how these traditions differ from Spain's and emphasizes cultural indigenization.

This map shows that bullfighting is studied in countries on five continents, demonstrating the global impact and cultural differences of bullfighting. Europe has the highest number of labeled countries, including Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic. This reflects bullfighting's deep historical roots and lasting cultural presence in the Mediterranean and Western Europe.



Figure 3: The Publication Countries. Source: Microsoft Office

Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis is a powerful technique for mapping knowledge structures and research trends in various fields. It involves constructing networks where keywords are nodes and their co-occurrences form links (Weerasekara et al., 2022). Figure 4 is the keyword co-occurrence network which shows conceptual relationships between terms associated with bullfighting, culture, and related themes. Different colours represent clusters of related terms, indicating thematic groupings based on their co-occurrence in academic literature. Researchers set the minimum number of keyword occurrences at two. 26 keywords out of 261 pass the criterion. There are six clusters are identified in the keywords co-occurrence network.

Cluster Divisions

(a) Cluster1 with the color red specifies seven keywords, with an emphasis on the Spain, Andalusia, poetry, flamenco, cultural policy, Spanish, João cabral de melo neto as the topic. Spain is the most keyword (Total lines strength = 25, Occurrences = 14). And the second keyword is Andalusia (Total lines strength = 5, Occurrences = 3). This cluster closely linked to cultural identity, poetry, and regional traditions such as flamenco and Andalusia, it highlights bullfighting's role as a cultural heritage practice.

(b) Cluster 2 with the color green specifies five keywords, with animal right, animals, anti-bullfighting, history and sports as the topic. Animal is the most keyword (Total lines strength = 11, Occurrences = 3). And the second keyword is history (Total lines strength = 7,

Occurrences = 2). The third keyword is anti-bullfighting (Total lines strength = 6, Occurrences = 2). Suggests opposition to bullfighting from ethical and animal welfare perspectives.

(c) Cluster 3 with the color blue specifies four keywords, with bullfighting, Catalonia, nationalism and popular culture as the topic. Bullfighting is the most keyword (Total lines strength = 32, Occurrences = 21). This cluster shows how bullfighting intersects with popular culture and nationalist discourse. The most prominent node, indicating it as the primary focus of the network. It is connected to various themes such as culture, Spain, animal rights, and national identity. The presence of Catalonia reflects the regional political struggle to ban bullfighting and how it is linked to broader identity politics. Combined with the purple clustering it can be seen that the inclusion of animal welfare points to tensions between tradition and modern ethical concerns.

(d) Cluster 4 with the color purple specifies two keywords animal welfare and national identity with as the topic.

(e) Cluster 5 with the color light blue specifies two keywords, with ethics and speciesism as the topic.

(f) Cluster 6 with the color orange specifies two keywords, with culture and vernacular architecture as the topic.

(g) The color yellow cluster with the specifies four keywords, with bull, diagnosis, eradication, tuberculosis as the topic. This smaller cluster demonstrates a correlation between bullfighting and veterinary or medical studies, particularly with regard to disease management in livestock. The terms "diagnosis" and "eradication" in the context of tuberculosis imply the presence of discourse surrounding the health management of bulls, as they are animals involved in cultural practices, in relation to broader animal health management.

“Bullfighting” and ‘culture’ are the most central terms in the study, serving as connecting points for all the clusters and emphasizing their centrality in the academic discussion. In particular, “Spain” serves as an important node, emphasizing its cultural influence and dominance over the theme of bullfighting. Network analysis reveals a strong connection between cultural identity, particularly in Spain and Andalusia, and ethical debates on animal rights, highlighting the ongoing conflict between tradition and morality in bullfighting culture. In addition, the association between popular culture and nationalism suggests significant differences in attitudes towards bullfighting across regions. In the context of Catalonia's opposition to bullfighting, the phenomenon that further highlights the controversial nature of bullfighting in modern society.

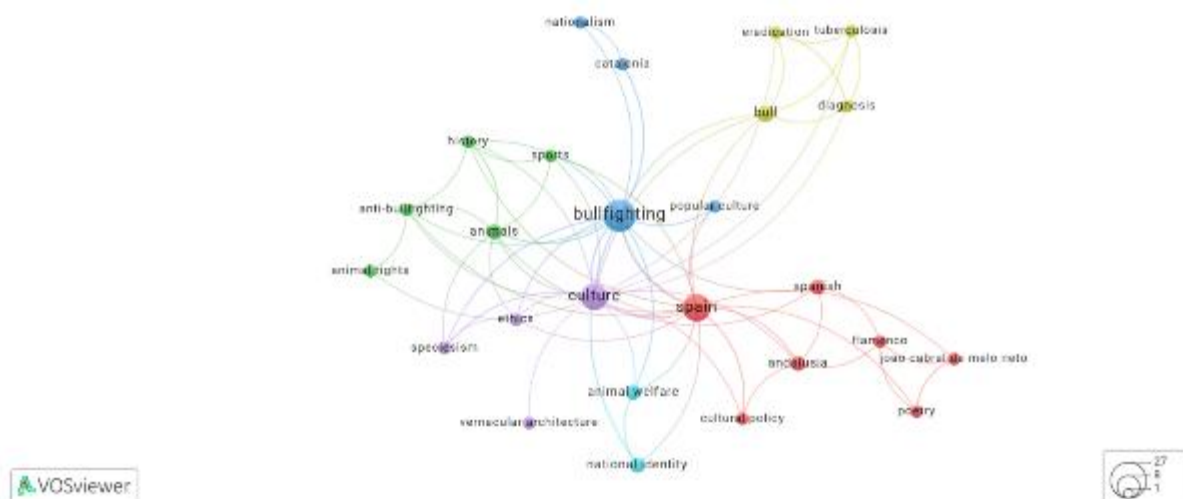


Figure 4: Keyword Co-Occurrence Network. Online link: <https://tinyurl.com/24mgej98>

Figure 5 shows the keyword co-occurrence overlay in the studies of bullfighting and related cultural, ethical, and regional. The color gradient (from blue to yellow) represents the average publication year of documents associated with each keyword. The blue keywords pertain to studies conducted during the early phase. The green keywords relate to studies conducted during the intermediate period.

The yellow keywords correspond to studies conducted during the late phase. The keywords "animal rights," "animals," "anti-bullfighting," "speciesism," "ethics," "history," and "sports" of these keywords exhibit a yellowish tint, indicating ongoing ethical debates surrounding bullfighting, such as "speciesism" and "animal rights." A notable surge in discourse against bullfighting was observed, reaching a zenith between 2016 and 2018. The presence of "anti-bullfighting" in this slightly yellowish tone suggests a rising discourse against the practice, influenced by growing concerns regarding animal rights and ethical considerations.

The terms "Spain" and "cultural policy" are more yellow, indicating recent scholarly focus on how bullfighting relates to cultural policy and national identity. "Catalonia" appears in blue-green, suggesting older studies reflecting the banning of bullfighting in Catalonia (2010) and ongoing debates about cultural autonomy vs. national identity. The visualization suggests that while debates around national identity and regional distinctions (especially Catalonia) have been discussed for over a decade, interest in how bullfighting fits within national and cultural policies continues to grow.

The key words of bull, diagnosis, eradication tuberculosis are primarily blue to purple, indicating that the medical and veterinary discourse around bulls was more prominent in the early 2010s. The focus appears to be on disease control in bulls, which relate to health and safety regulations or biological studies rather than cultural aspects.

Flamenco, poetry, and João Cabral de Melo Neto appear with a dominant blue-purple gradient, showing that connections between bullfighting, literature, and art were more prevalent in earlier studies before 2015. The inclusion of João Cabral de Melo Neto, a poet

recognized for his critical depiction of bullfighting, emphasizes the historical role of literary critique in engaging with this tradition.

Additionally, the connection to flamenco suggests an interdisciplinary discourse on Spanish cultural expressions, where bullfighting was examined alongside other traditional art forms. But the shift in academic focus over time suggests that artistic and literary depictions of bullfighting have become less central to recent scholarly debates, giving way to ethical, political, and animal rights perspectives.

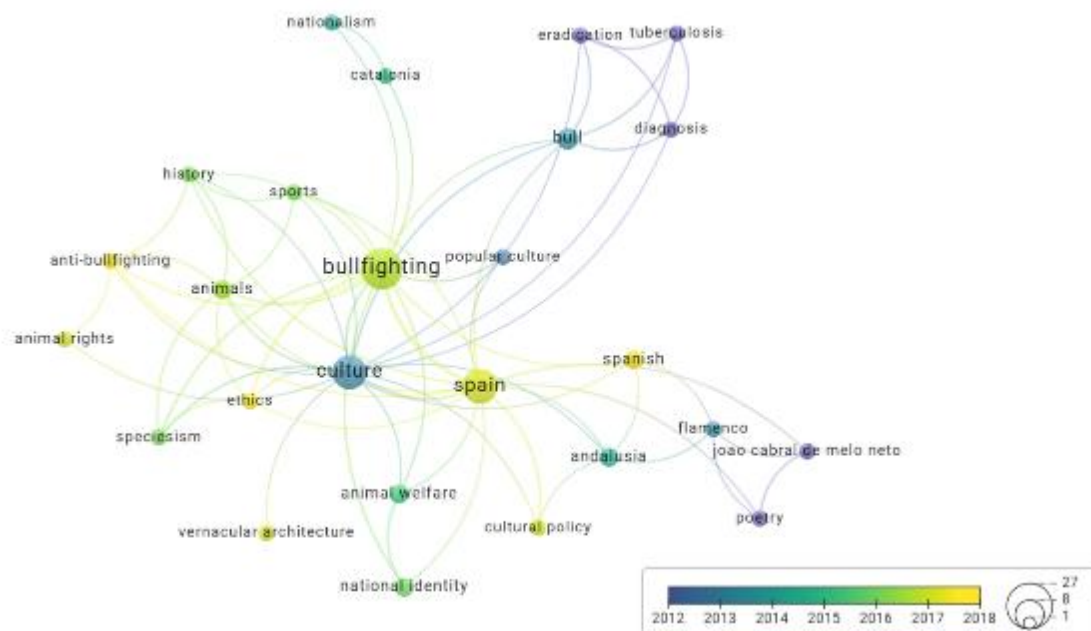


Figure 5: Keyword Co-Occurrence Overlay. Online link: <https://tinyurl.com/24mgej98>

The temporal shifts in the keyword co-occurrence map reveal a transition from blue such as medical aspects and literary critique to yellow like cultural policy, animal welfare, and ethics. This shift highlights a growing academic focus on ethical concerns and cultural identity debates, reflecting evolving societal attitudes toward bullfighting.

Discussion

In this article, VOSviewer and SCImago Graphica are used to evaluate the selected dataset of research studies. There are 55 articles from Web of Science are examined from the dataset. With the descriptive analysis and keyword co-occurrence, and three findings are identified in this study and that are discussed below.

First, there has been a gradual upsurge in the volume of academic publications examining the keywords "bullfighting" and "culture" in recent years. This trend illustrates a mounting interest in scholars and researchers in the subject, potentially driven by broader, social, ethical, and cultural debates. The upsurge may also be endorsed due to the expanding interdisciplinary nature of bullfighting research studies, which now incorporate history, anthropology, sociology, and political science. Such growing interest highlights how bullfighting is no longer observed as a sporting event or a tradition, however, as a multifaceted cultural issue deserving deeper study.

Second, there has been a vibrant variation of countries and research institutions involved in studying bullfighting culture. While traditional bullfighting nations such as Spain continue to lead the research output. However, there is a rising number of studies from the countries outside the Iberian Peninsula, including Asia, Latin America, and the United States. Such global expansion highlights the shifting research focus from regional traditions to transnational perspectives. Bullfighting is extensively analyzed in relation to tourism, globalization, and cultural and national identity. Besides, institutions from various academic fields, such as law, ethics, and environmental studies, are now contributing to the discourse, indicating that bullfighting is beyond the realms of history or folklore and eligible for broader study in scholarly debates.

Lastly, discussions about bullfighting regarding ethical concerns, political debates, and animal welfare issues have become increasingly relevant in academics. These topics are among the last keywords in recent studies, reflecting developing shift toward critical perspectives on the practice. The rise of animal rights movements, legislative measures, and restricting bullfighting in certain regions, have contributed to this trend. Researchers and Scholars are now examining the role of bullfighting in national and regional identity, moral implications, and the legal frameworks surrounding this practice. Furthermore, there is a tension between ethical considerations and cultural preservation leading to intense debates on whether bullfighting should be banned, restricted or reformed.

Conclusion and Limitations

This bibliometric review from 2006 to 2025 of bullfighting and culture research studies offers significant insights for the researchers. It presents a structured overview of the development in the discipline, enhancing to a better understanding of its academic progression by mapping key research clusters and identifying gaps. It applies bibliometric analysis and visualization methods to thoroughly scrutinise the developing research trends in bullfighting culture studies. Apparently, the review portrays that by the time, the focus of scholars has gradually shifted from early explorations of bullfighting in literary and artistic context to more multifaceted discussions encompassing political dimensions, ethical considerations, and cultural identity debates. It provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual landscape of bullfighting research. By tracing key thematic shifts and emerging areas of interest within the field by mapping these transitions.

Despite offering valuable findings, the study has some limitations. The bibliometric analysis relies mainly on the Web of Science, which may omit relevant studies published in other database or non-indexed or regional journals. The study captures global research trends but it lacks in an in-depth comparative analysis of bullfighting traditions in non-Spanish speaking regions, such as Miao bullfighting in China.

To overcome these limitations, future research studies should magnify the data sources. Adopting interdisciplinary approaches by integrating anthropology, and animal studies to offer a more comprehensive view of bullfighting culture. This bibliometric review provides a substantial foundation for understanding research trends in bullfighting culture and paves the way for further exploration, including deeper engagements in indigenous traditions like for Miao bullfighting and others. It also combines animal ethics, multi-species ethnography, and an Anthropocene perspective in the current phase of animal studies. This

will open up new paths for the study of bullfighting culture, promote a deeper understanding of human-animal relationships. And it will help to promote ethical reflection and sustainable development of cultural practices.

This study makes important contributions to theory and context. By combining bibliometric analysis with new anthropological perspectives, such as multispecies ethnography and post humanist thought, it deepens our understanding of bullfighting culture. Rather than treating bullfighting as a fixed tradition or regional spectacle, the study approaches it as a culturally dynamic practice that is shaped by evolving ethical debates, identity formations and the relationships between humans and animals.

By mapping the evolution of scholarly interest over time, the study illustrates how academic approaches to bullfighting have shifted from symbolic and aesthetic interpretations to more intricate concerns involving environmental ethics, emotional connections, and moral discourse. This shift reflects broader changes in how culture and species relations are understood within the social sciences.

In terms of its contextual scope, the review challenges the long-standing Eurocentric narrative that has shaped bullfighting studies. By acknowledging underrepresented traditions such as Miao bullfighting in China, the study encourages a more inclusive, comparative approach that recognises the diversity of cultural expression. In doing so, it highlights the importance of cross-cultural analysis in demonstrating how practices such as bullfighting can provide meaningful spaces for negotiating continuity, transformation, and the boundaries between species and societies. Ultimately, this research enriches academic discourse on bullfighting and situates it within contemporary conversations on cultural sustainability, ethical coexistence and global pluralism.

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