

# **Managing Power Transitions in a Shifting Global Order: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric and Science-Mapping Analysis of U.S.-China-Russia Competition and Conflict Management (1994-2026)**

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## **Abstract**

The contemporary international system is undergoing a profound redistribution of material power, institutional influence, and normative authority, intensifying competition among major powers while creating new challenges for managing geopolitical tensions. This study maps the intellectual, conceptual, and collaborative structure of scholarship on power transitions, great-power competition, and conflict management, with particular attention to the United States, China, and

Russia. Using a Scopus dataset of 1,087 documents published across 507 sources between 1994 and 2026, the study combines bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping through Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer. The results reveal sustained growth in scholarly attention, with an annual growth rate of 15.33%, particularly following 2020. China emerges as the most frequent keyword (263 occurrences), followed by great power competition (141), the United States (137), power (106), power transition (88), international relations (86), and Russia (76). The United States occupies the most central position in the country collaboration network, followed by China, although international co-authorship remains relatively limited at 13.06%. Citation and keyword co-occurrence analyses indicate strong intellectual connections with realism, power-transition theory, international-order scholarship, and strategic studies. At the same time, recent research increasingly emphasizes the Indo-Pacific, Ukraine, geopolitics, cybersecurity, and strategic rivalry. Overall, the thematic structure of the literature is more strongly oriented toward power competition and redistribution than toward conflict resolution and conflict management. Building on this identified gap and relevant theoretical literature, the study proposes a layered conflict-management framework centered on strategic stability, institutionalized crisis communication, bounded economic interdependence, inclusive regional and middle-power mechanisms, and negotiated pluralism. The findings suggest that managing contemporary power transitions is unlikely to depend on a single comprehensive settlement; rather, it may require overlapping institutional and diplomatic arrangements that reduce the risk of escalation while accommodating a more pluralistic and contested global order.

**Keywords:** Power transition, Great power competition, United States, China, Russia, Global order, Conflict management, Bibliometric analysis, Biblioshiny, VOSviewer

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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary international system is undergoing a profound redistribution of material power, institutional influence, and normative authority (Ikenberry, 2024). China's economic and strategic ascent, Russia's renewed geopolitical assertiveness, the growing influence of regional powers, and a series of crises that have revealed limitations in present institutional frameworks have challenged expectations about the persistence and stability of the post-Cold War order (Zürn, 2026; Harrison, 2004). The debate therefore spreads beyond whether the international system is becoming bipolar

or multipolar. It also concerns how competition can be achieved in a context in which rules, institutions, and hierarchies are being renegotiated. Ikenberry (2024) encapsulates this shift in terminology, defining it as ‘Three Worlds’: the global West, dominated by the United States and the West; the global East, dominated by China and Russia; and a global South, which is becoming increasingly divided. In this perspective, the new order is not a series of fixed blocs but a process of competition over institutions, rules, legitimacy and routes to modernity (Muller, 2020; Bharti, 2025). This framing is particularly helpful, as it moves beyond a focus on a bilateral power shift between the United States and China to a broader arena in which other actors such as Russia, middle powers, regional institutions, and developing states are influencing the rules governing order-building (Hofmann et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop of systemic flux and contested order-building, the theoretical literature offers competing predictions about the consequences of power redistribution. Power transition and hegemonic-order theories have been associated with an increased likelihood of conflict during periods of major shifts in relative strength (Ikenberry & Nexon, 2009; Kristinsson, 2022; Attinà, 2021). However, more recent scholarship suggests that power changes do not automatically lead to war. Acharya (2014), for instance, suggests that domestic political transformation (and the newfound economic interdependence and the role of multilateral institutions) can help limit both China’s power-maximizing actions and extreme balancing reactions by the United States and its allies. Similarly, He, et al, (2026) delineate systemic, institutional, and systems transitions and contend that these are often more conducive to peaceful rather than earlier historical transitions because of the “new” conditions of today’s international environment: nuclear deterrence, defensive technologies, soft balancing, economic statecraft, informal multilateralism, and agency of non-great powers.

Despite the significance of these discussions, the existing scholarship is scattered across international relations, strategic studies, security studies, regional studies, and foreign-policy studies (Çalışkan, 2025). So it is hard to determine which intellectual paradigms are more dominant, which documents have been written, which countries and institutions are responsible for these documents, and whether there has been a development of conflict-resolution and conflict-management approaches in addition to the competition discourse. A bibliometric approach is beneficial, as it can be used alongside a narrative review to detect publication growth, key sources

and authors, collaboration networks, citation patterns, and thematic networks across a large number of publications (Donthu et al., 2021).

The present study aims to fill this gap by examining a Scopus corpus of 1,087 documents published between 1994 and 2026, using Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer for bibliometric and science mapping analyses. The paper follows two interrelated objectives. First, it outlines the evolution and conceptual contours of scholarship on power transition, great power competition, and global order within the context of the United States, China, and Russia. Second, it identifies a substantive research gap: while terms such as “rivalry,” “power,” “geopolitics,” and “strategic competition” feature prominently in the literature, conflict-management mechanisms remain comparatively underexplored. Building on this identified gap and drawing on prior theoretical insights, the study advances a synthesized conflict-management pathway framework adapted to an evolving and increasingly pluralistic global order.

To achieve these objectives, the paper addresses four research questions: (RQ1) What has been the volume and impact of scholarship on power transitions and great power competition from 1994 to 2026? (RQ2) What are the key scientific and intellectual frameworks in the field, including sources, authors, institutions, and countries? (RQ3) What are the organizing concepts and themes of the field, and how have they evolved? (RQ4) How do these patterns inform future research directions on conflict management involving the United States, China, and Russia in the evolving global order?

## **2. Conceptual Background**

### **2.1. Power transition and the changing global order**

Power-transition theory starts with the hypothesis that when a new power state approaches or challenges a dominant power, shifts in relative capabilities can destabilize the dominant power's hierarchy (Tammen et al., 2012; Tammen et al., 2012; Organski, 1958). The realist and hegemonic views are linked by a focus on the distribution of power, alliance stability, and the capacity of dominant states to create order. China plays the leading role among the emerging powers in the current debate (Assenova & Bugajski, 2016). At the same time, the United States remains the most powerful incumbent power, and Russia is a significant military and geopolitical player whose actions have a significant impact on the security of Europe, the alignments in Eurasia, and the

struggle over the global order within institutions. Global change, as Kappel (2015) defines it, is a shift in influence, with China, Russia, India, Brazil, and other regional powers increasing in relative importance while the influence of the West diminishes. His analysis highlights the difference between having a resource and delivering a global public good – a new player can gain influence without effectively displacing the governance of existing players (Keohane, 2002). Similarly, Sanaei (2024) reviews the various scenarios uni-polarity, multi-polarity, new bipolarity, non-polarity, multiple regional hegemonies – and finds none of them to be likely to establish themselves in a short time. The process of transition itself may then continue to be lengthy, precarious, and institutionalized hybrid. The “Three Worlds” approach supplements these structural descriptions with a political-sociological perspective. Ikenberry (2024) suggests that the preferences and agency of the global South will mediate the West-East contest. For power transition management, this is important because it is not only a matter of preventing direct war between great powers, but also of whether institutions and rules are inclusive enough to become legitimate in the eyes of powers that refuse to align themselves on the binary poles.

## **2.2. Peaceful change, conflict management, and institutional accommodation**

For this study, it is helpful to distinguish between conflict resolution and conflict management. Conflict resolution suggests that significant issues can be addressed and resolved, and conflict management is about controlling situations in which conflict arises or exists, reducing the costs of conflict, and maintaining viable rules even in the presence of ongoing political conflicts. In the current context of U.S.-China strategic competition, the break in U.S.-Russia relations, and the U.S.-Russia strategic partnership, the more realistic organizing concept is managing conflict, not war.

The concept of consociation security order, developed by Acharya (2014), holds that mutual accommodation among unequal and culturally different actors is the key to such an order. The framework does not imply that competition is eliminated; rather, it points to conditions of equilibrium, interdependence, institutional constraints, and area-level arrangements that can ensure that neither hegemony nor extreme balancing will set in. This fits in well with the perspective of order as negotiated co-existence, not based on ideological alignment (Evans, 2015; Dinu, 2022). He et al. (2026) offer an alternative model of peaceful change. They believe that by making it more expensive to pursue direct great-power war, nuclear deterrence and defensive

military capabilities can produce a general decrease in the incentives for direct great-power war, and that states are increasingly shying away from the use of great-power balancing and great-power soft balancing and instead relying on “economic statecraft” and “informal multilateralism”. The analysis also focuses on the emergence of non-great powers as increasingly influential actors and on the potential for the diffusion of influence beyond the state through emerging technologies. On a practical level, it means that conflict management needs to be not only about strategic-stability mechanisms between great powers but also about institutional mechanisms that enable other parties to influence (Gong, 2026; Kempkey et al., 2026; Howe, 2020). For a long transition to peace, Sanaei (2024) stresses the importance of dialogue among key powers, consensus on rules, and recognition of cultural and civilizational differences. Deterrence, strategic stability dialogue, transparency, and institutional solutions to minimize accidental or escalating conflicts also form the basis of Karaganov and Suslov’s (2018) approach from a Russian perspective. Their advice is politically hot and should be read not as disinterested but as analytically valuable, because it illustrates how discussions of Russian strategy link deterrence to demands for the construction of a pluralist order.

### **2.3. Why a bibliometric mapping is needed**

This conceptual literature describes several avenues of peaceful change – deterrence, interdependence, institutional accommodation, regional inclusion, informal multilateralism and dialogue over rules. It remains uncertain, however, how influential such concepts are in shaping the broader research arena, compared with the much more overt language of power transition and strategic competition. This imbalance can be identified using bibliometric mapping by comparing the prominence, connectivity and evolution of themes. It can also detect changes in the field's internationalization and whether it is being limited to a few national and institutional hubs.

## **3. Data and Methods**

### **3.1. Data source and corpus**

Scopus is the empirical basis for the study, obtained from the provided bibliometric analysis file. The corpus spans the years 1994-2026 and includes 1,087 documents from 507 sources, amongst which 708 are journal articles, 255 book chapters, and 124 books. There are 72,326 cited references, 1,017 Keywords Plus/index terms, and 1,964 author keywords and 1,328 authors. The

average age of the documents is 4.92 years, and the mean citation rate is 8.809 citations per document. These attributes are features of a relatively new, growing research field. The provided analysis file does not contain the exact search string used for the Scopus search, the export date, the language filters, or the deduplication/cleaning log. The items cannot be reliably reconstructed from the bibliometric output and are thus best added in before journal submission by the author(s). The results reported below merely reflect and comment on the given corpus; they do not generate a new query<sup>1</sup>.

### 3.2. Bibliometric tools and indicators

The study is a mix of performance analysis and science mapping. Descriptive statistics, source and author productivity, citation indicators, thematic analysis, temporal topic evolution, Bradford's Law, Lotka's Law, and other bibliometric outputs are computed using the web interface of the Bibliometrix R package (Biblioshiny). Bibliometrix is developed for complete science-mapping workflows (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). VOSviewer has been chosen to visualize networks due to its ability to generate distance-based maps in which node size reflects prominence, node closeness reflects proximity, and link strength reflects relatedness (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

The analysis covers annual scientific production, annual growth, source productivity, Bradford zones, author productivity, Lotka-law fit, institutional affiliation, corresponding-author countries, country co-authorship, locally cited sources, globally cited documents, keyword frequencies and frequencies in the keywords, keyword co-occurrence, thematic mapping, topic evolution, word-frequency trends, and Reference Publication Year Spectroscopy (RPYS). The indicators were chosen to reflect the structure of the field as well as its conceptual and intellectual organization.

Additionally, an exploratory logistic growth model for cumulative scientific production is included in the original analysis. The saturation forecasts are derived from an incomplete 2026 publication year, and fields in bibliometric change quickly in response to geopolitical issues; hence, they are interpreted as indicators of a descriptive scenario rather than a deterministic forecast.

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<sup>1</sup> Recommended reporting fields to insert before submission: Scopus search date: [INSERT]; exact TITLE-ABS-KEY query: [INSERT]; language restrictions: [INSERT]; document-type restrictions: articles, books, book chapters as retained in the supplied corpus; duplicate-removal and keyword-cleaning rules: [INSERT].

### 3.3. Analytical logic

The analysis is carried out in 4 steps. The performance indicators determine the size, growth and field concentration. Second, source, author, institution, and country measures, which can be analyzed, can help to identify who are the major producers and who is involved in collaborations. Thirdly, citation and RPYS outputs mark the foundations of ideas and periods of historical significance. Fourth, keyword networks, thematic maps and temporal trend analyses do show the conceptual structure and its evolution. The conflict management discussion is an interpretive synthesis which is constructed on the basis of the bibliometric results and the theoretical literature; the bibliometric frequency is not proof of the effectiveness of a policy strategy.

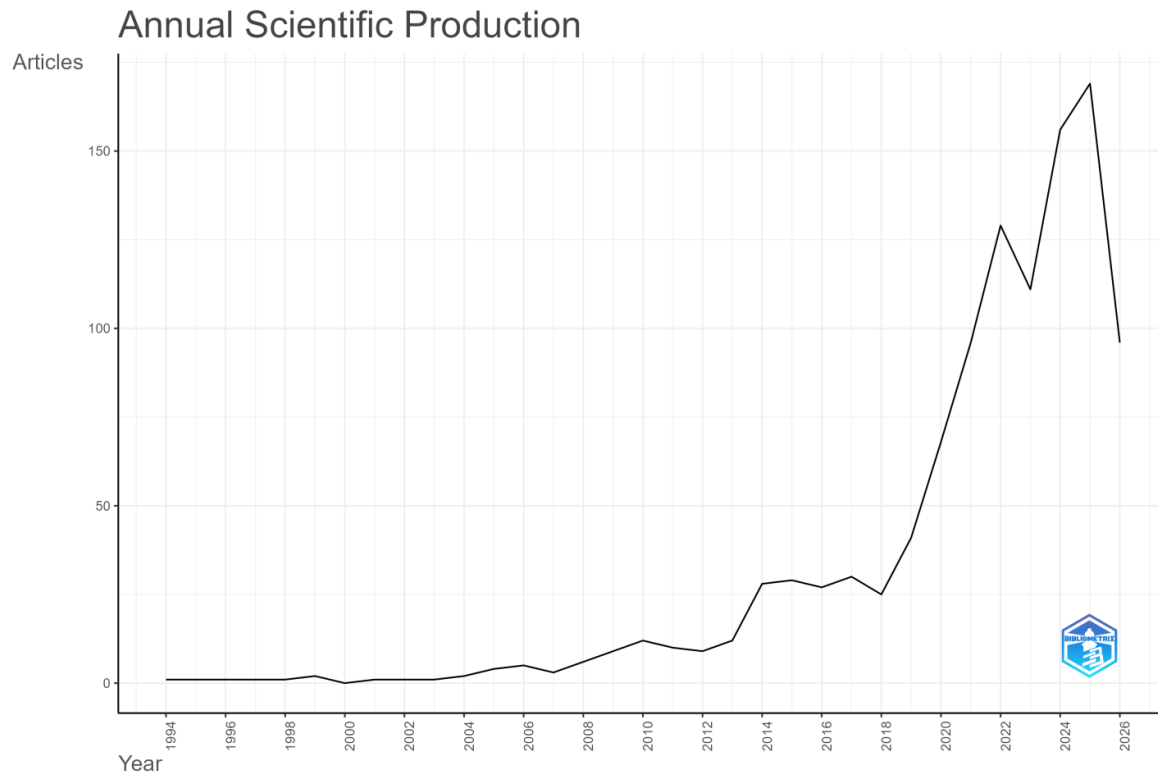
## 4. Results

### 4.1. Growth and general characteristics of the field

**Table 1:** Main characteristics and bibliometric profile of the dataset.

| Indicator                      | Value      |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Timespan                       | 1994-2026  |
| Sources                        | 507        |
| Documents                      | 1,087      |
| Annual growth rate             | 15.33%     |
| Average document age           | 4.92 years |
| Average citations per document | 8.809      |
| References                     | 72,326     |
| Keywords Plus / index terms    | 1,017      |
| Author keywords                | 1,964      |
| Authors                        | 1,328      |
| Single-authored documents      | 719        |
| Co-authors per document        | 1.5        |
| International co-authorship    | 13.06%     |
| Articles                       | 708        |
| Book chapters                  | 255        |
| Books                          | 124        |

There are 1,087 documents in the corpus, published across 507 sources, and the corpus is growing by 15.33% annually. The average document age (4.92 years) and the high growth rate suggest that the research field has grown significantly in recent years. Authorship is still fairly individualistic, with 719 being single-authored, an average of 1.5 co-authors per document, and international co-authorship at 13.06%.



*Figure 1: Annual scientific production, 1994-2026*

*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer.*

There are three general phases in the annual series. The production was extremely low during the 1990s and early 2000s, rose steadily in the 2010s, and jumped significantly after 2020. In the last ten years of the supplied data, annual output rose from 30 documents in 2017 to 68 in 2020, 96 in 2021, 129 in 2022, 156 in 2024, and 169 in 2025. The 96 documents recorded in 2026 should be seen only as a partial-year figure, not as an indication of a shortfall or a substantive change. It is largely in line with the rising salience of U.S.-China competition, the Indo-Pacific, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, sanctions and economic security, and the future of the international order.

**Table 2:** Annual scientific production in the last ten years of the dataset

| Year | Documents |
|------|-----------|
| 2017 | 30        |
| 2018 | 25        |
| 2019 | 41        |
| 2020 | 68        |
| 2021 | 96        |
| 2022 | 129       |
| 2023 | 111       |
| 2024 | 156       |

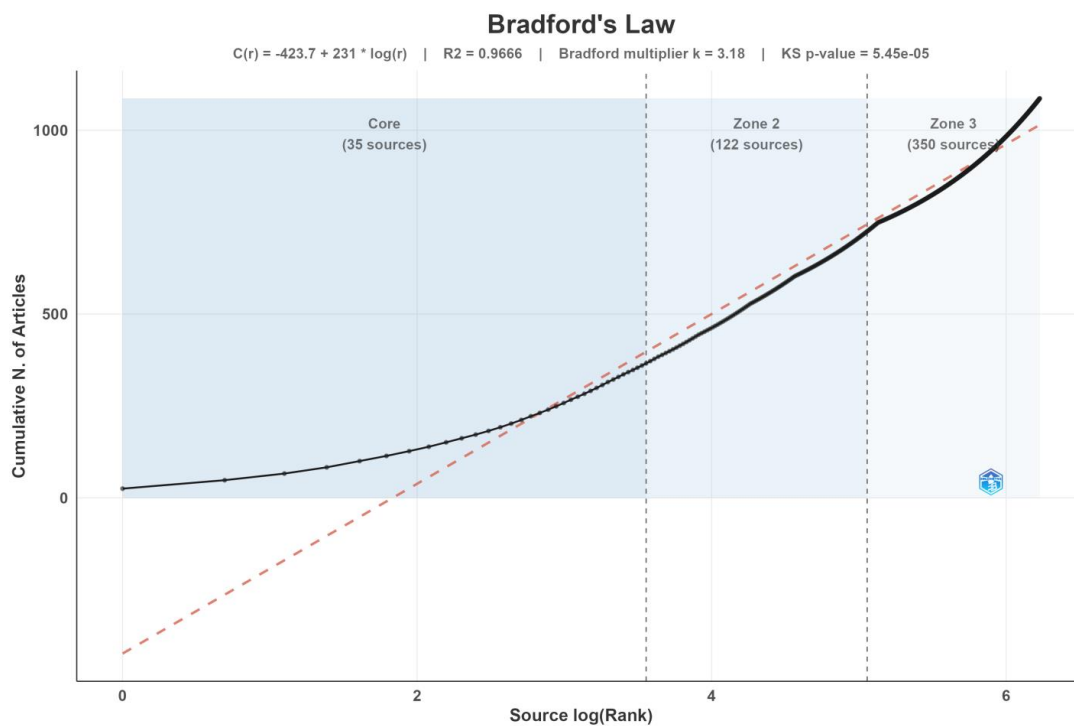
|      |                   |
|------|-------------------|
| 2025 | 169               |
| 2026 | 96 (partial year) |

## 4.2. Source concentration and authorship structure

**Table 3:** Ten most productive publication sources

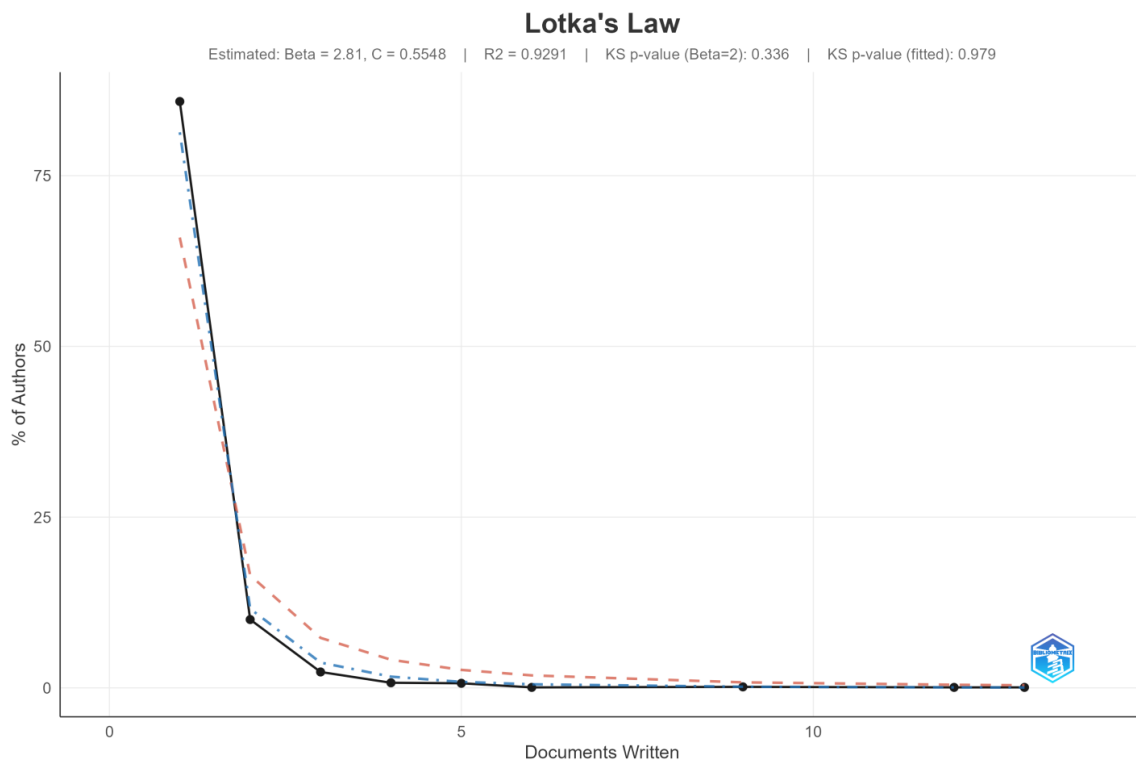
| Source                                             | Documents |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Pacific Review                                     | 25        |
| Survival                                           | 23        |
| International Affairs                              | 18        |
| Asian Perspective                                  | 17        |
| Chinese Journal of International Politics          | 17        |
| China International Strategy Review                | 14        |
| Adelphi Series                                     | 13        |
| Australian Journal of International Affairs        | 12        |
| The Great Power Competition, Vol. 1                | 12        |
| China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies | 11        |

Pacific Review is the most productive source with 25 documents, followed by Survival (23) and International Affairs (18). Asian Perspective and the Chinese Journal of International Politics each contribute 17. The source profile confirms that the field sits at the intersection of international relations, strategic studies, Asian security, and foreign policy.



*Figure 2: Bradford-law distribution of publications across sources*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer.*

There is also strong source concentration, as evidenced by Bradford's Law. Zone 1 contains only 35 of 507 sources (6.9%) but produces 366 documents (33.7%). There are a total of 122 sources and 359 documents in Zone 2 and 350 sources and 362 documents in Zone 3. The fitted model explains the data well, with an R-squared of 0.9666. However, the significant Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ( $p = 5.45 \times 10^{-5}$ ) indicates that there is still some discrepancy between the empirical distribution and the theoretical Bradford distribution. So it is not the actual conformity that is the substantive conclusion, but rather concentration.

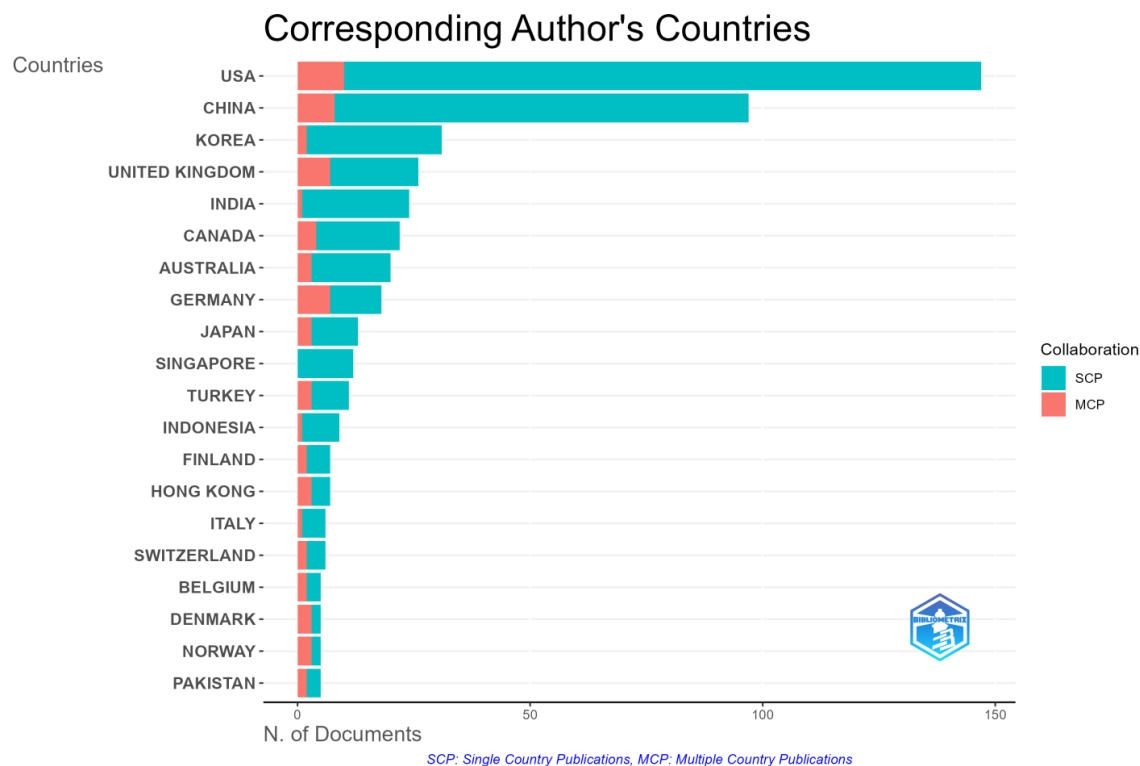


*Figure 3: Lotka-law pattern of author scientific productivity.*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer.*

Productivity tends to be even more focused among authors. Of 1,328 authors, 1,141 (85.85%) published only one document, 133 (10.01%) published two, and 31 (2.33%) published three. The goodness-of-fit for the fitted inverse power-law model is R-squared = 0.9291, and the estimated beta is 2.81. The non-significant Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests from the original analysis are consistent with a Lotka-type distribution. In real life, the field has a broad fringe of one-time donors and a small core of regular donors.

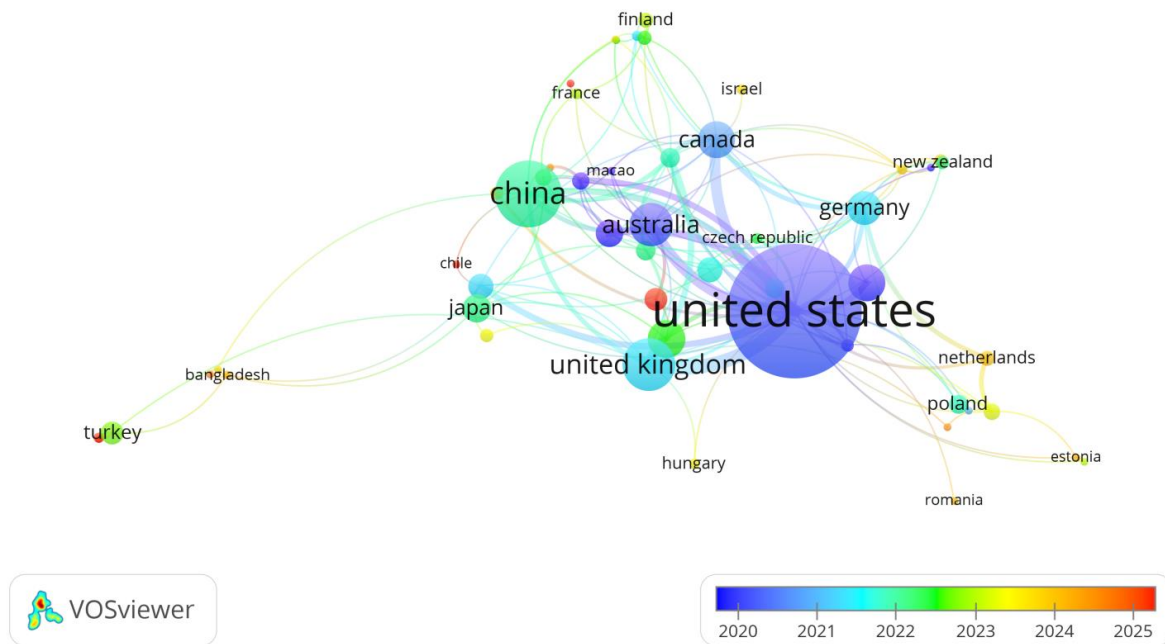
### 4.3. Institutions, countries, and collaboration

The University of South Florida has the most prolific institutional affiliation (13 documents). Tsinghua (10), Georgetown (10), and Fudan (10) are followed by the Australian National University (9). Each of the George Washington University and the National University of Singapore would send seven. This affiliation reflects that the literature exists across a variety of national academic systems, including the USA, China, Australia, Singapore, and South Korea, not just in one.



*Figure 4: Corresponding authors' countries by single-country and multiple-country publications*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer*

The United States has the largest number of corresponding-author publications at the country level, followed by China, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and India. In most cases, single-country publications significantly outnumber multi-country publications. This is typical of the international co-authorship rate across the entire dataset, at 13.06%, suggesting that a topic defined by international competition is explored predominantly within national and/or domestic collaboration networks.



*Figure 5: Country co-authorship network and temporal evolution of collaboration*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer*

The VOSviewer country network centers the United States in the network of collaborations. Other key nodes include China, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and Japan. Temporal overlay shows that collaboration is diversifying over time, and that more recent collaborations include China, Poland, New Zealand, Turkey, and others. Despite that, the network remains unequal and concentrates heavily on a few high-output research systems.

#### 4.4. Intellectual influence and citation structure

Local citation counts are used to determine the intellectual bases within the corpus. The most frequently referenced sources are Mearsheimer (299 citations), Allison (288 citations), Organski (259 citations), Ikenberry (252 citations), Chan (204 citations), and Gilpin (200 citations). Jervis, Buzan, Johnston, and Walt also rank highly. Theories of realism and power transition, strategic rivalry and security-order analysis, and liberal/institutional order scholarship, all of which are central to the core knowledge base, are not developed as distinct literatures, but rather coexist in this configuration.

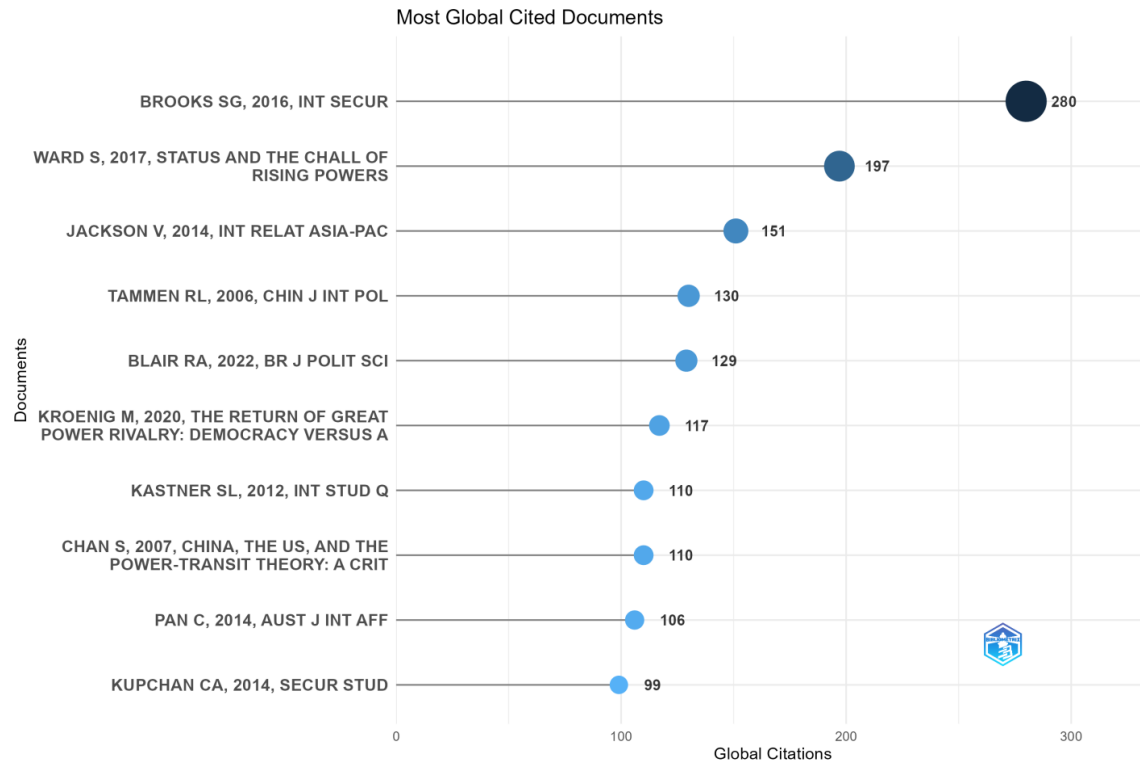


Figure 6: Ten most globally cited documents in the analyzed corpus

Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer.

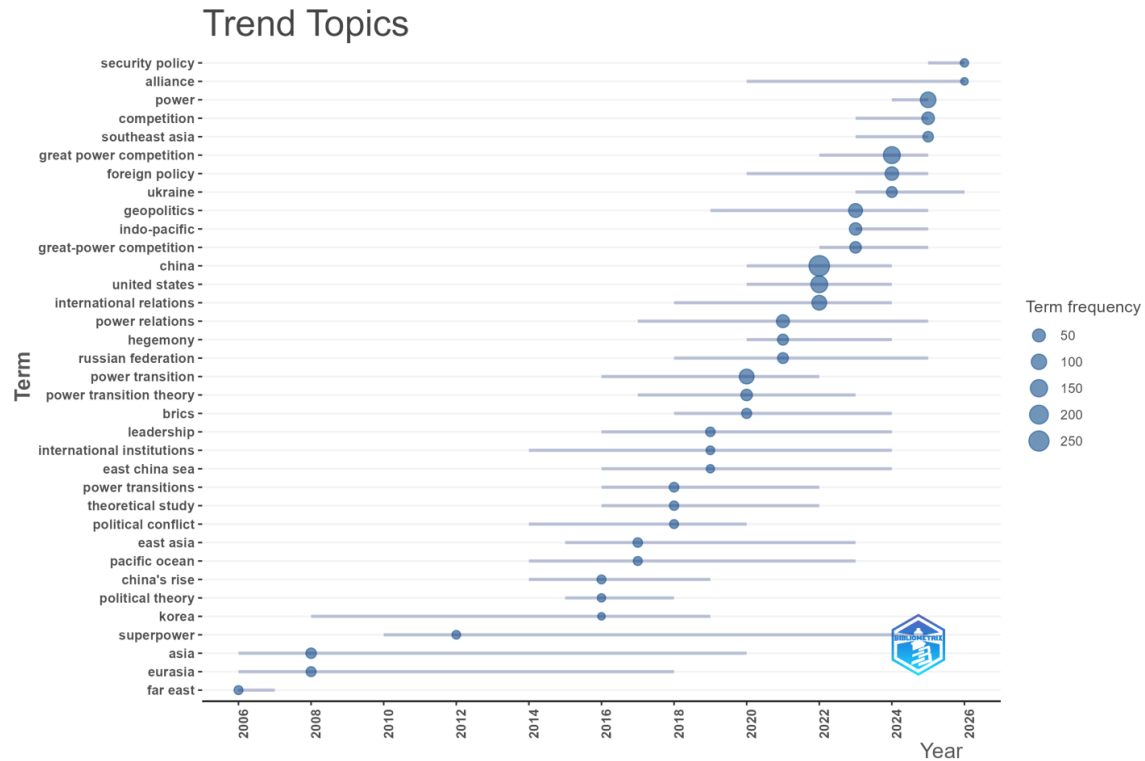
Brooks (2016) leads the list of globally cited documents with 280 citations, followed by Ward (2017) with 197 and Jackson (2014) with 151. Other highly cited studies include that of Tammen (2006) (130 citations) and Blair (2022) (129 citations), as well as the work of Kroenig, Kastner, Chan, Pan, and Kupchan. The rise of powers, power transition, security, strategic competition, and international order are all core themes of the highly cited core.

#### 4.5. Conceptual structure: keywords, networks, and thematic evolution

Table 4: Ten most frequent keywords in the dataset

| Keyword                 | Occurrences |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| China                   | 263         |
| Great power competition | 141         |
| United States           | 137         |
| Power                   | 106         |
| Power transition        | 88          |
| International relations | 86          |
| Russia                  | 76          |
| Geopolitics             | 64          |
| Foreign policy          | 58          |





*Figure 8: Evolution of major research topics over time*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*

There is a clear substantive shift in the topics. Previous studies highlighted the Far East, Eurasia, Asia, superpowers, and Korea. Power shifts, the rise of China, political tension, and international institutions increased in prominence beginning in the mid-2010s. More recent studies focus on China, the U.S., great power rivalry, the Indo-Pacific, geopolitics, Ukraine, foreign policy, and Southeast Asia. The field is shifting more towards being event-driven and strategically oriented.

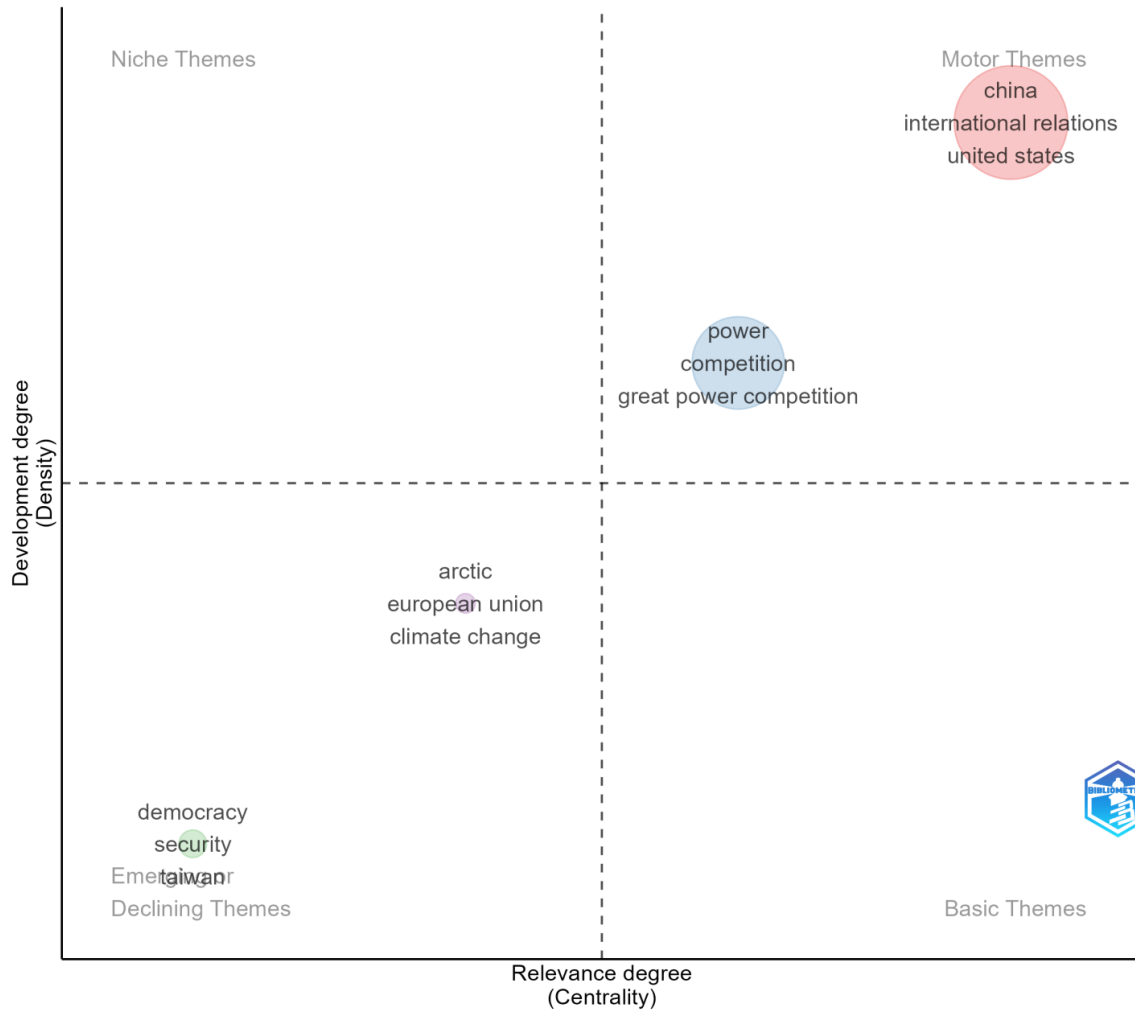


Figure 9: Thematic map of the intellectual structure of great-power competition research.  
 Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny

China and international relations were found in the motor-theme quadrant, as they were highly developed and strongly linked to the field. Also central and relatively developed are the concepts of power, competition, and great power competition. In contrast, the themes of the Arctic, the European Union, and climate change are less central. At the same time, democracy, security, and Taiwan appear to be in a less-developed, emerging, or declining state on the provided map. It is clear throughout the book that competition is a more developed research programme than conflict management, a point reinforced by the thematic structure.



interests. This is confirmed by the publication boom that followed 2020. The acceleration comes as U.S.-China strategic rivalry is growing, the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a global toll, technology and trade restrictions are tightening, Russia is waging full-scale warfare against Ukraine, and more fundamental discussions of de-risking, sanctions, NATO, the Indo-Pacific, and the liberal international order are becoming more prominent. The bibliometric growth, therefore, is not just a part of academic maturation, but also an indication of a more turbulent empirical environment.

## **5.2. U.S.-China-Russia competition and the "Three Worlds" problem**

The results also explain why the U.S.-China-Russia nexus is not a symmetrical triangle. There are dominant nodes of publication and conceptual interest in the United States and China, and Russia is a significant thematic node due to its nuclear capabilities, Eurasian security, the war in Ukraine, and its strategic alignment with China. The country-production and collaboration results also reveal that the country of origin is unequally producing scholarship, as evidenced by a higher percentage of collaborations between the United States and China. In contrast, collaboration between other countries is more limited. This can lead to a national-level focus on the problem, with global implications.

Notably absent from the bibliometric core is the global South, but Ikenberry's (2024) Three Worlds framework points to what is relatively quieter, though no less important, about the global South: it is not a dominant keyword or motor theme, though non-Western and developing states have significant agency in shaping institutional legitimacy, sanctions coalitions, trade routes, security alignments, and governance reforms. The conflict between these two indicates a disconnect between research based on the great-power perspective and the bargaining dynamics of the current order. Future research should therefore link the U.S.-China-Russia struggle to the decisions of non-binary actors such as India, ASEAN countries, African powers, Latin American countries, Gulf countries, and others.

## **5.3. A multi-layered approach to conflict management**

Many of the paper's substantive contributions can be summed up in translating the literature on peaceful change into a structured conflict-management agenda, which is the paper's central contribution, particularly in a field dominated by the vocabulary of competition. The framework

below is not a causal finding based on citation counts, but rather an interpretive synthesis grouping mechanisms that recur in the theoretical literature.

**Table 5:** Layered conflict-management framework for a shifting global order

| Layer                                         | Operational content                                                                                                                                                                            | Literature anchor                                  | Primary risk addressed                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Strategic stability and escalation control | Nuclear risk reduction, deterrence clarity, military-to-military communication, incident prevention, crisis hotlines, and renewed arms-control or risk-reduction talks.                        | He et al. (2026); Karaganov & Suslov (2018)        | Direct war, accidental escalation, misperception          |
| 2. Institutionalized crisis management        | Regular bilateral and minilateral channels; issue-specific rules; confidence-building; informal multilateralism; use of G20, UN and regional mechanisms where formal institutions are blocked. | Acharya (2014); He et al. (2026); Sanaei (2024)    | Crisis spirals, institutional paralysis, rule ambiguity   |
| 3. Bounded economic interdependence           | Preserve selective trade and financial ties while creating guardrails for strategic sectors; avoid indiscriminate decoupling that eliminates stabilizing constituencies.                       | Acharya (2014); Kappel (2015)                      | Economic coercion, zero-sum securitization, fragmentation |
| 4. Regional and middle-power inclusion        | Give ASEAN, India, the EU, Gulf states, African and Latin American actors meaningful roles in regional security and order-building rather than forcing binary alignment.                       | Ikenberry (2024); Acharya (2014); He et al. (2026) | Bloc polarization, legitimacy deficits, proxy competition |
| 5. Negotiated pluralism over order rules      | Seek overlapping agreement on sovereignty, non-use of force, crisis restraint, trade rules, technology governance, and global public goods without requiring ideological convergence.          | Ikenberry (2024); Sanaei (2024)                    | Order contestation, normative exclusion, governance gaps  |

The first layer of stability is strategy. With the U.S., Russia, and China all possessing nuclear arms, military victory is an unlikely basis for peace. The authors of the article, He et al. (2026), suggest that there is space for a more peaceful systemic change through nuclear deterrence and defensive technologies. A focus on predictable doctrines, crisis communication, nuclear risk reduction, and

processes to reduce the likelihood of conventional incidents' domaining up should therefore be a priority in conflict management.

The second layer is institutional crisis management. In times of intense competition, formal institutions may be politically shut down, making informal and issue-specific institutions all the more valuable. Regular military contacts, working groups, multilateral confidence-building measures, and functional cooperation on common threats and risks can help alleviate uncertainty without requiring strategic trust. This incremental approach is further supported by both Acharya's concept of "institutional restraint" and He et al.'s concept of "informal multilateralism."

The third part is economic interdependence. Strong connections between China, power, foreign policy, geopolitics, and competition are found in the literature mapped here, pointing to an economic securitization of relations. But complete decoupling might eliminate the price of escalation and increase bloc cohesion. A conflict-management approach would set aside critical security sectors from economic exchanges, maintaining limited interdependence that fosters communication, mutual stakes and constraints, while also managing real vulnerabilities.

The fourth layer is regional and/or middle power inclusion. But both Ikenberry's Three Worlds thesis (and Acharya's regional framework) suggest that a U.S.-China condominium and exclusively bipolar great-power bargaining are not viable options for stabilizing order. Smaller and medium powers want independence and are not always comfortable with the two choices. Their involvement can help to legitimate, to create avenues for mediation, and to avoid the automatic absorption of local issues into great-power confrontation.

The fifth is negotiated pluralism. There is considerable disagreement during the current transition over hierarchy, sovereignty, intervention, security architecture, rules governing technology, and the legitimacy of Western-led institutions. It doesn't mean these differences have to go away when you're dealing with conflict. It needs to be more subtle agreements on restraint and coexistence, with different types of political systems and regional solutions existing under common minimum rules. Sanaei (2024) stresses the need for dialogue and consensus on rules for the system, whereas Ikenberry (2024) suggests that it will take more accommodating of the global East as well as the global South.

#### 5.4. Implications for future research

The bibliometric results indicate four directions for future research. First, the study of ‘conflict management’, ‘crisis management’, ‘arms control’, ‘mediation’, and ‘confidence-building’ needs to be conducted as a cluster of integrated research topics, rather than as second subjects in the study of great-power competition. Second, research on the agency of the Global South and middle powers should be systematically embedded in the study of power transition. Third, the use of cross-national co-authorship should be expanded, as should international collaboration, in a discipline focused on the international order (only 13.06% of articles were co-authored internationally). Thirdly, emerging technologies need to be linked more directly to the research on peaceful change, particularly in the context of AI, cyber technologies, autonomous systems, and space technologies and their impact on crisis stability and power diffusion.

These goals would also strengthen the conceptual integration of the empirical world and the scholarship developed in this map. A field dominated by the dynamics of China, the United States, Russia, and strategic competition has the potential to reinforce a great-power paradigm that downplays institutional change, regional agency, and practical methods of restraint. The next research step would thus be to compare the outcomes of various forms of rivalry that minimize the escalation of conflicts in situations of continued strategic distrust.

### 6. Limitations

There are some limitations in this study. Firstly, it relies on a Scopus-only dataset, meaning that publications included only in databases such as Web of Science, regional databases, policy repositories, or non-English databases may be underrepresented. Second, the query used to analyse the provided dataset is not the same as the one used by Scopus, and the exact export date or the full cleaning procedure are not included. These data will be necessary for reproducibility purposes and should be returned from the original search record before submission. Third, the year 2026 is an interim year, and comparisons should be made with great care—for annual output and projections of future growth.

Fourth, the bibliometric indicators do not reflect theoretical validity or policy effectiveness. A very central keyword does NOT have to be a more important causal mechanism. Fifth, the number of citations favors older publications and can reflect database and language biases. Sixth, there are

choices regarding thresholds and normalization, and the network's output can vary accordingly; the original analysis does not preserve all VOSviewer parameters. Last, the corpus covers a wide range of power transition and great power competition. Not all documents necessarily address all three states at once, so the results should be interpreted as the organization of the surrounding knowledge field rather than a census of trilateral studies as such.

## 7. Conclusion

This bibliometric and science-mapping analysis demonstrates that the field of power transition and great power competition has become a rapidly growing area of research. The Scopus corpus contains 1,087 documents from 507 sources, with an average annual growth rate of 15.33% and a significant increase after 2020. The geographic and conceptual architecture is dominated by the United States and China, with Russia serving as a significant node in power transition, foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and the reordering of Eurasia and Europe today. Its intellectual roots are realism, power transition, strategic studies, and the international order.

The most salient substantive finding is that of imbalance between diagnosis and management. The concepts of conflict-resolution and conflict-management are not as strongly concentrated as some other concepts, such as China, great power competition, United States, power, power transition, or Russia. It means that the literature has matured in its ability to explain rivalry. Still, it is not yet unified in its description of the mechanisms that can sustain rivalry without escalating into catastrophic conflict.

The current research agenda would, then, be better served by a discussion of how to live with a power transition. Strategic stability, crisis communication, selective institutional cooperation, bounded interdependence, middle-power inclusion, and negotiated pluralism provide a multi-layered architecture to limit escalation without implying that geopolitical competition will be extinct. Stability is more likely to come in a world ordered by a “contested West,” an “assertive East,” and an “autonomous global South” through overlapping systems of restraint and accommodation than through a resurgent unipolarity or a single great-power settlement.

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## Appendix A

### Supplementary Bibliometric Figures From The Original Analysis

The following figures retain additional outputs from the supplied analysis file. They are included to preserve the original quantitative work while keeping the main text focused on the results most directly relevant to the research questions.

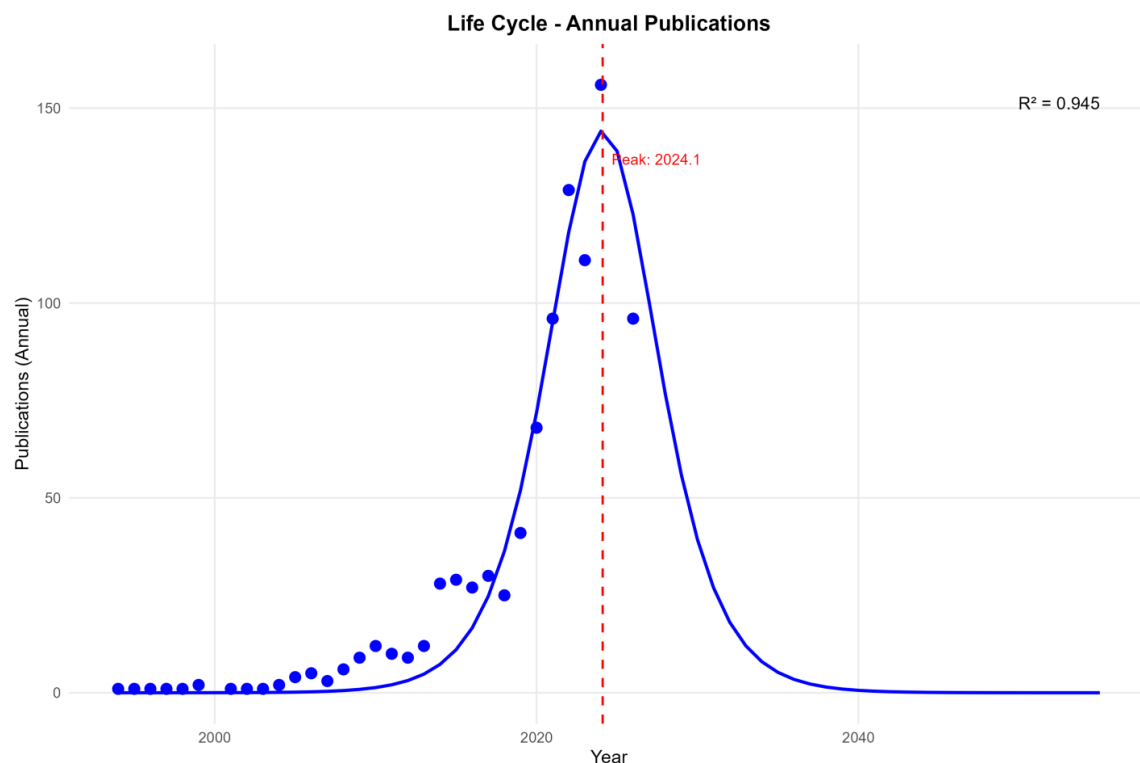
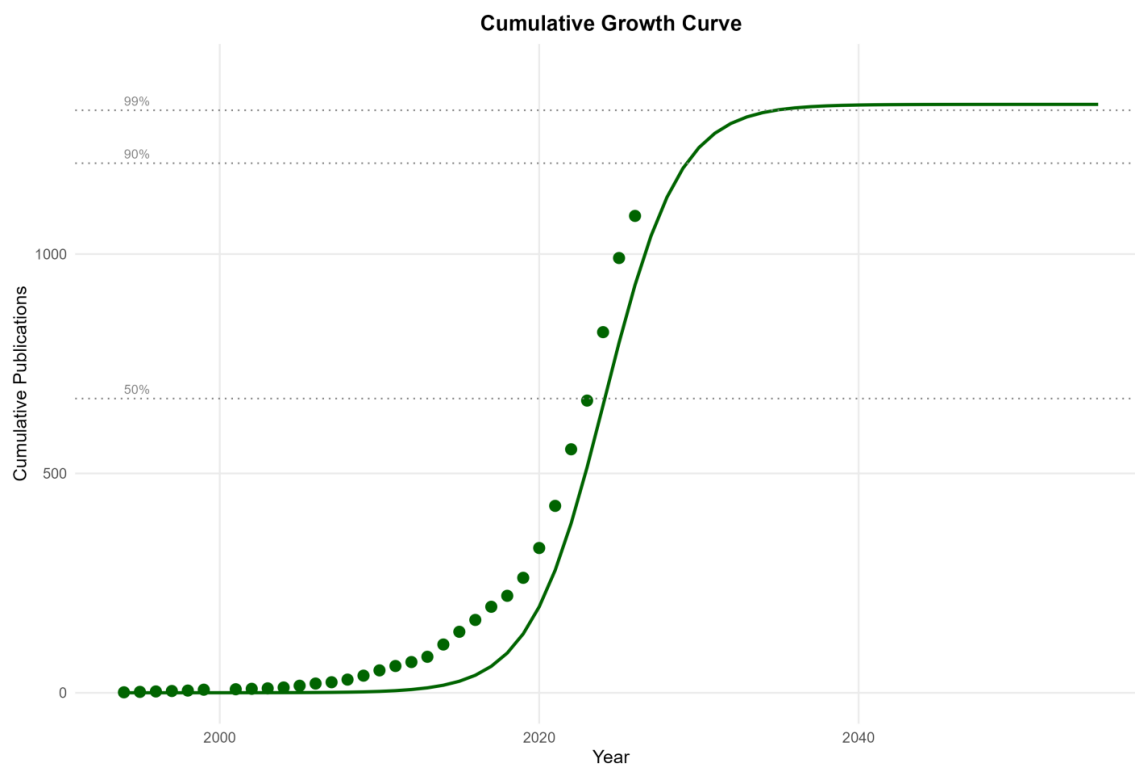
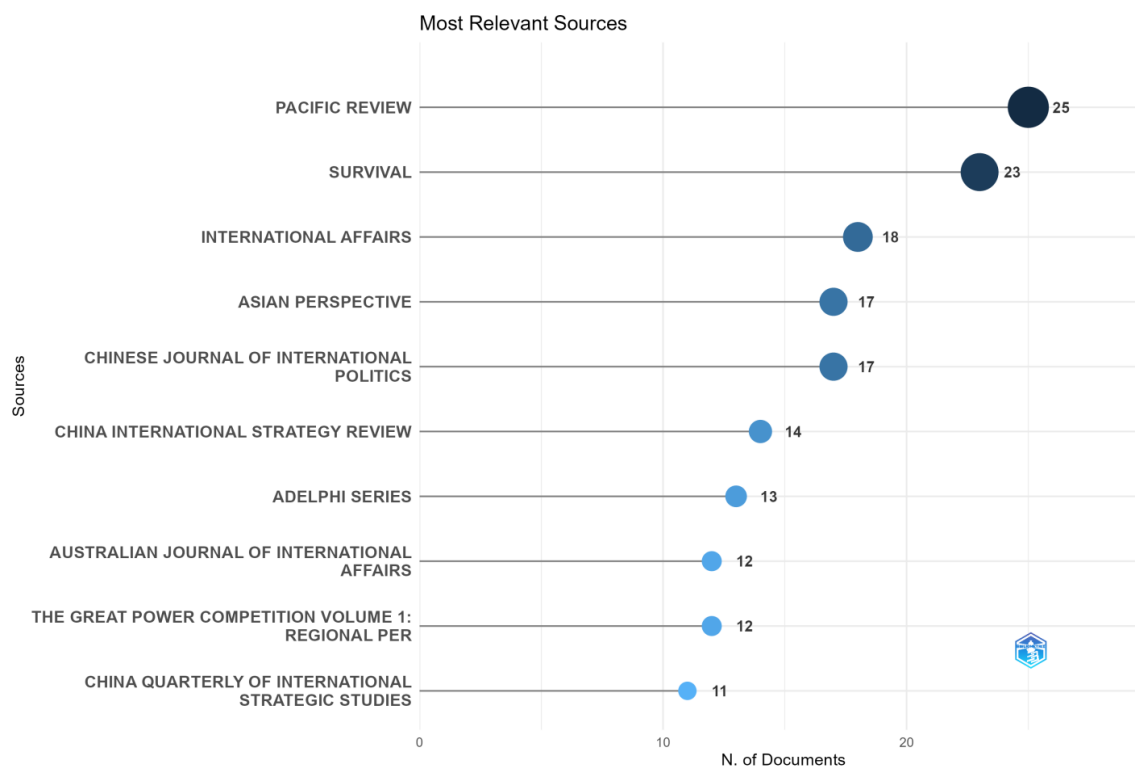


Figure A1: Exploratory life-cycle pattern of annual scientific production.

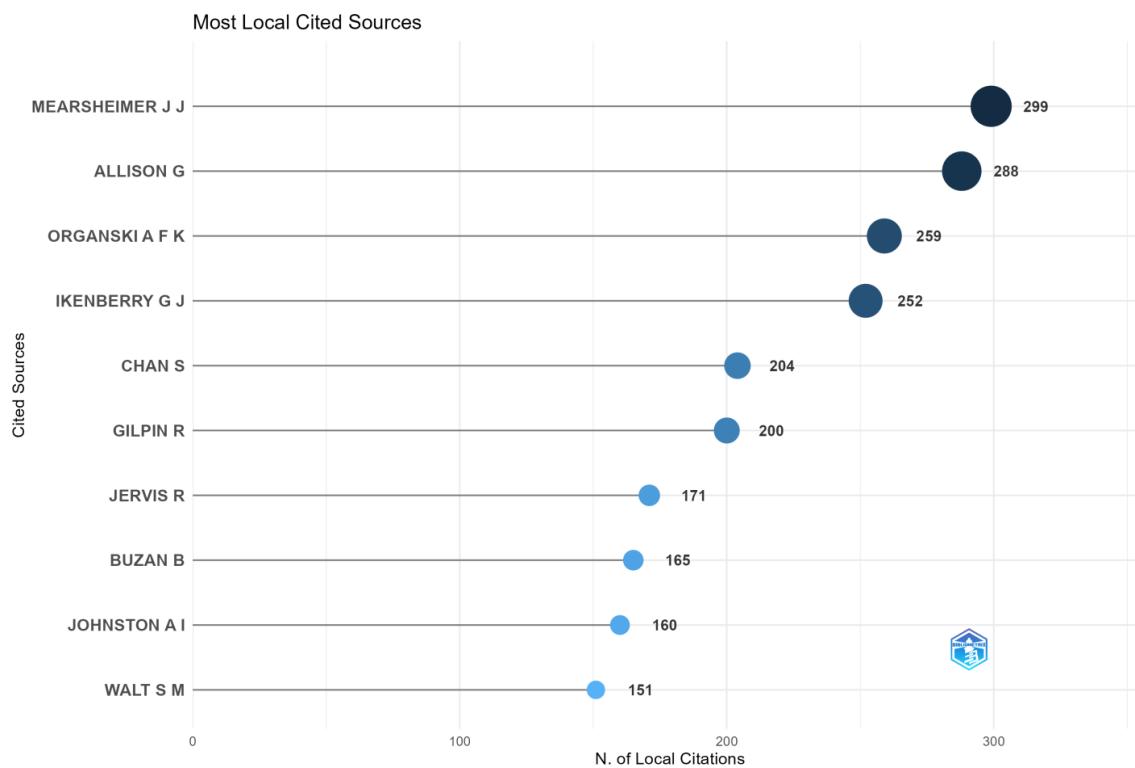
Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny



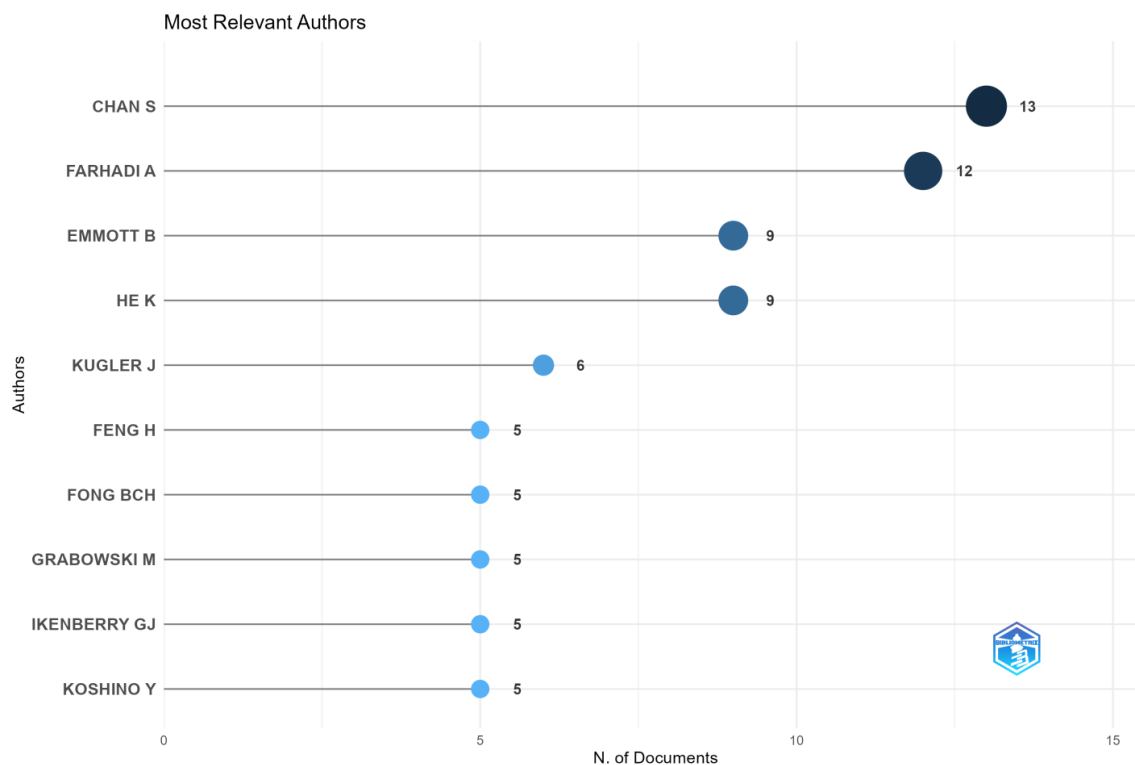
*Figure A2: Exploratory cumulative growth curve of scientific production.*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*



*Figure A3: Ten most relevant sources by publication count*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*

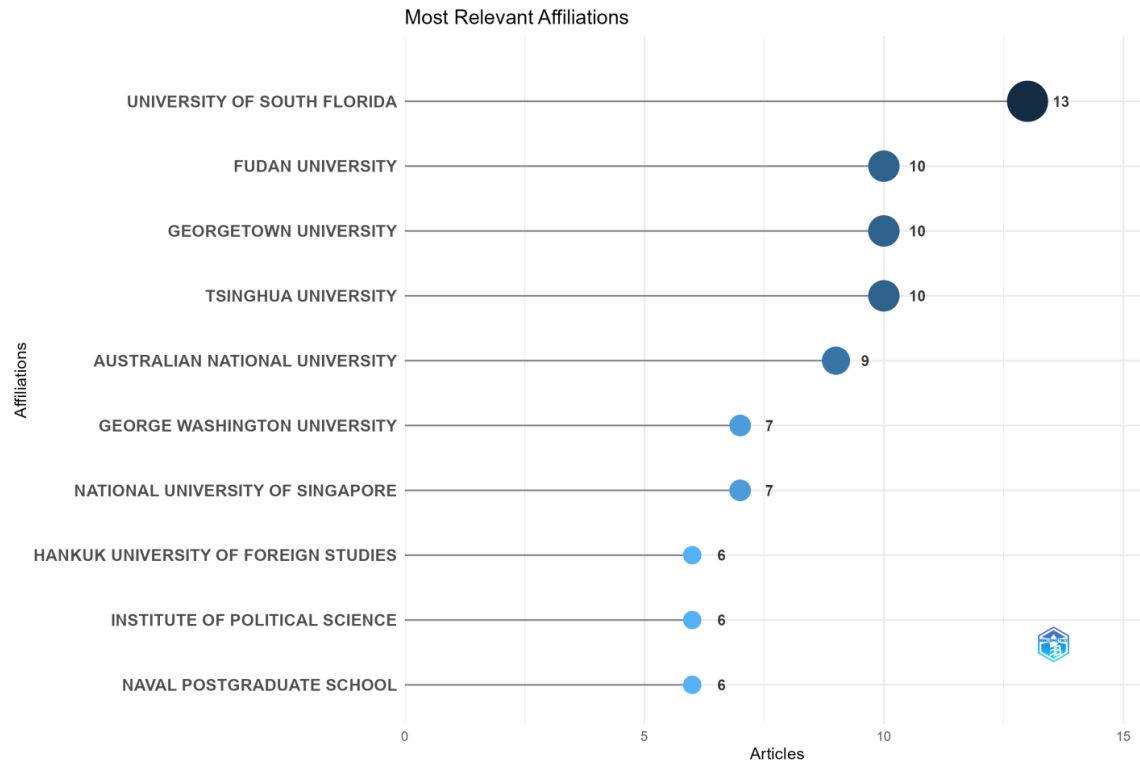


*Figure A4: Ten most locally cited sources*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*



*Figure A5: Ten most relevant authors by scientific production*

*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*



*Figure A6: Ten most relevant institutional affiliations*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*

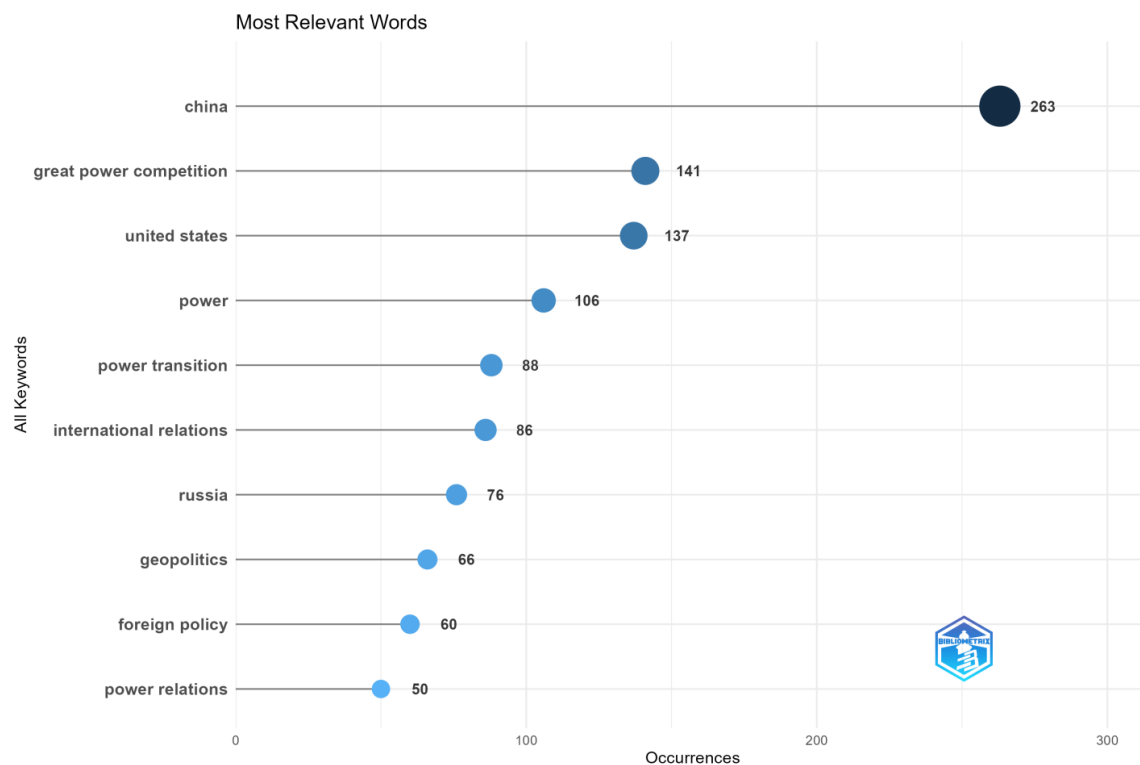


Figure A7: Ten most frequent keywords  
Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny

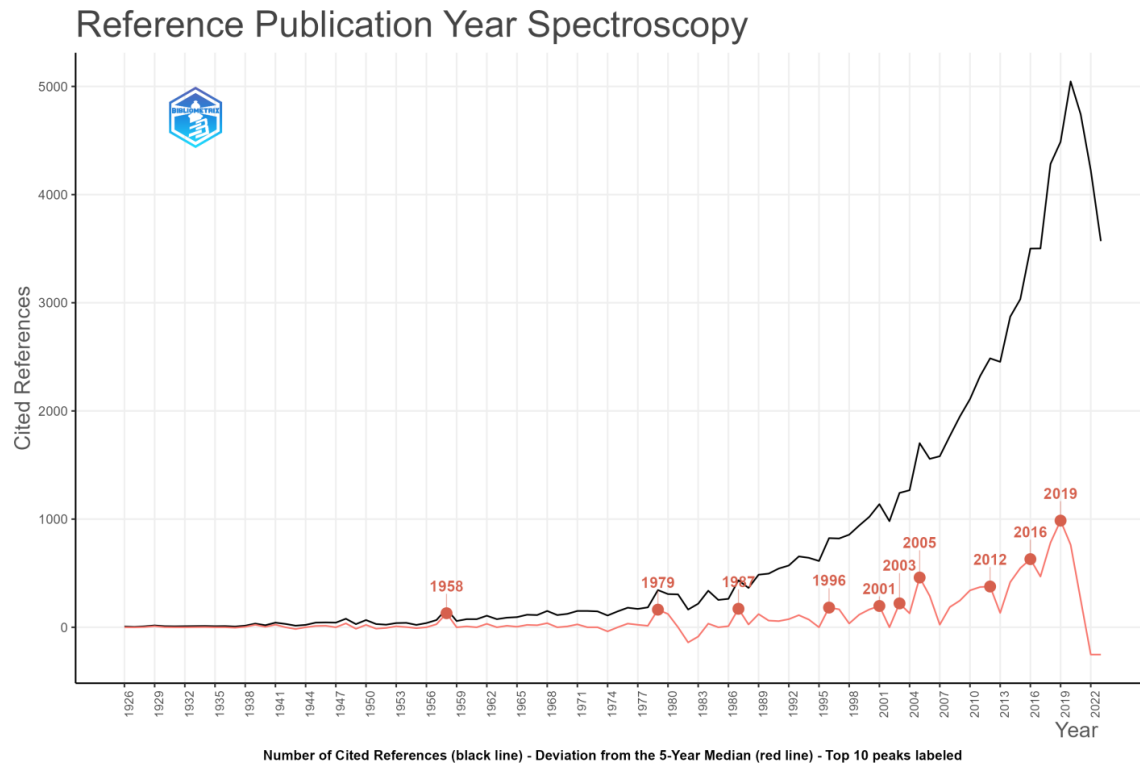
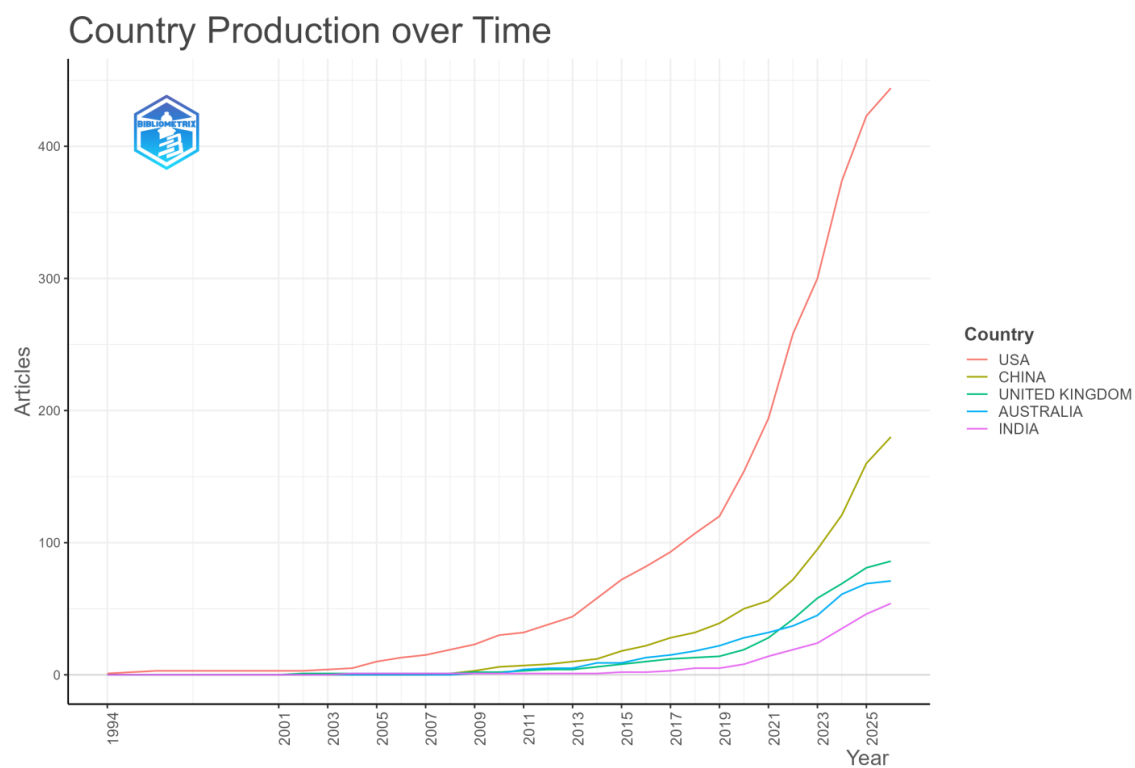


Figure A8. Reference Publication Year Spectroscopy (RPYS)  
Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny

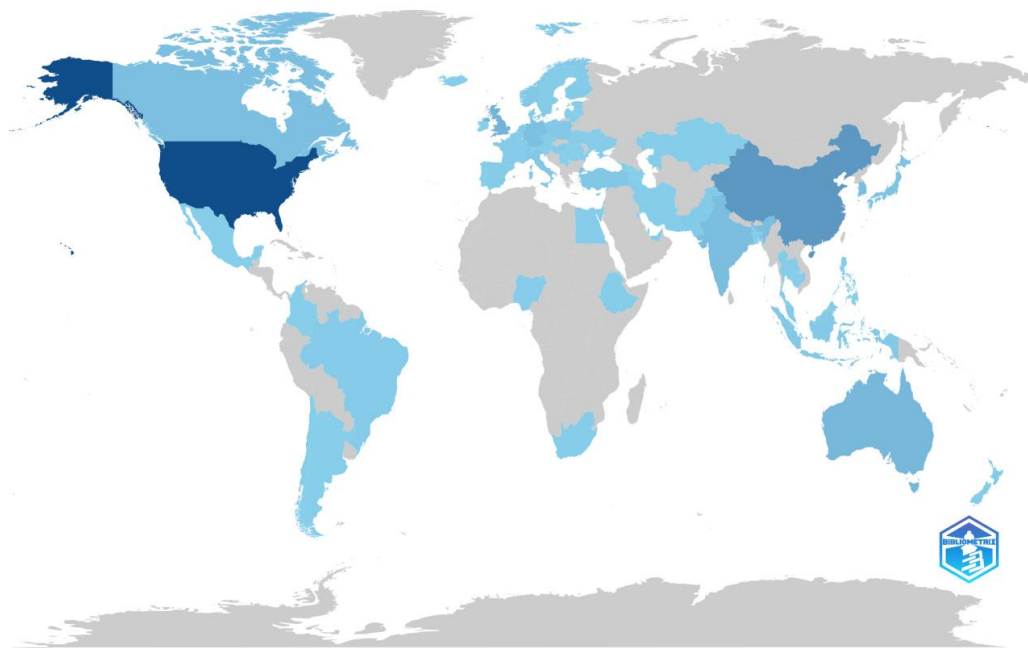


Figure A9: Word cloud of frequent terms  
Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny/Bibliometrix and VOSviewer.



*Figure A10: Country-level scientific production over time*  
*Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny*

### Country Scientific Production



*Figure A11: World distribution of country scientific production*

Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny

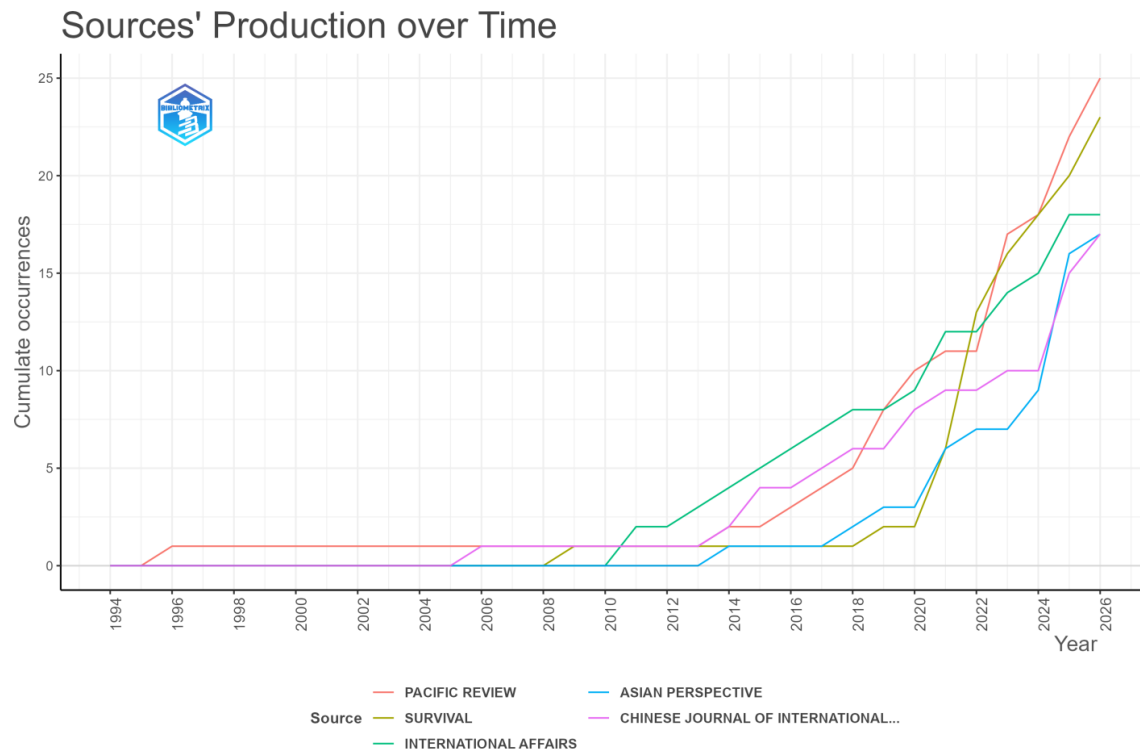


Figure A12: Production trends of the most relevant sources over time  
Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny

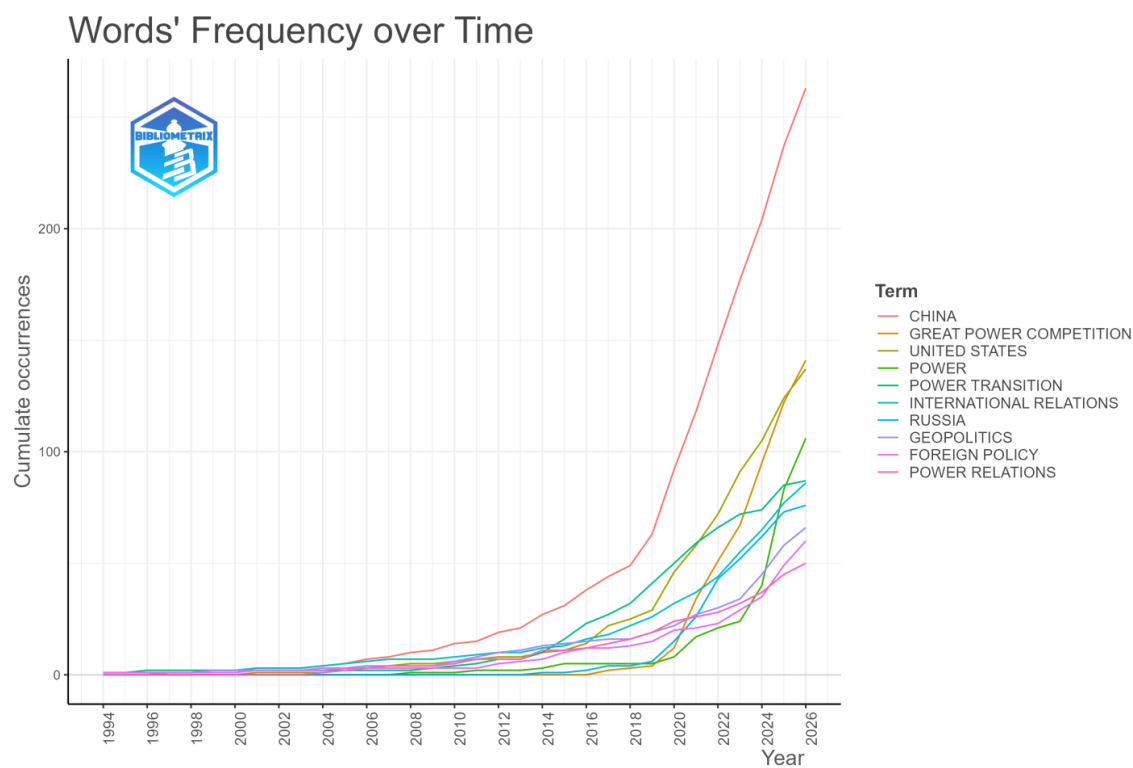


Figure A13: Evolution of high-frequency keywords over time

Source: Author's Scopus dataset analyzed with Biblioshiny