Visualizing the Landscape of "Indo-Pacific Strategy" Research in China (2013-2023): A CiteSpace-Based Analysis

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Abstract: This study conducted a systematic analysis of 531 articles on the "Indo-Pacific Strategy", published in CSSCI and Peking University Core journals between 2013 and 2023, sourced from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. By employing CiteSpace visualization software and bibliometric methods, we constructed networks of author collaboration, institutional collaboration, and keyword co-occurrence. This approach revealed the developmental trajectory, research hotspots, and evolutionary trends within this field. The key findings indicate that: (1) Research interest in the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" has shown a consistent upward trend since 2018; (2) Primary research themes encompass the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India, the United States, China-U.S. relations, the Indo-Pacific region, and regional order; (3) High-frequency keywords such as "Trump (Administration)", "U.S.-Japan Alliance", and "India-U.S. relations" delineate the current research frontiers; (4) Research outputs are highly concentrated in 15 core journals; (5) A stable core research community has yet to emerge, as evidenced by the fragmented nature of the author collaboration network. Based on these findings, this paper proposes several future research directions, aiming to provide empirical data and theoretical references for further exploration in this field.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific Strategy; CiteSpace; Bibliometrics; Research Hotspots; Academic Evolution; China

I. Introduction

In recent years, the Indo-Pacific region has increasingly become the focal point of global geopolitical competition. The concept of the "Indo-Pacific" was first introduced in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech before the Indian Parliament, where he emphasized the strategic and economic linkage between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Since then, the United States has gradually built a China-focused strategic framework centered on the "Indo-Pacific Strategy." Under the Trump administration, key policy documents such as *the National Security Strategy* (2017) and *the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (2019) formally integrated this concept into the U.S. national strategic agenda, although these early efforts lacked detailed content and operational clarity. The Biden administration has since reinforced this strategy by institutionalizing the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and promoting a more systematic regional order in the areas of security, economy, and technology. A series of policy documents, such as *the National Defense Strategy* and *the updated Indo-Pacific Strategy* (2022), reflect the transformation of the Indo-Pacific concept from a broad strategic vision to a more actionable operational framework.

The Indo-Pacific Strategy is not only a key component of the U.S. approach to managing China's rise but also a source of concern for many countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. China has issued strong diplomatic responses, arguing that the strategy—while presented under the banner of "freedom and openness"—in practice fosters division and confrontation. Chinese State Councilor Wang Yi explicitly stated that the Indo-Pacific Strategy is intended to contain China and undermine regional peace and stability, especially through its stance on Taiwan and the South China Sea.

As of 2023, Chinese academic research on the Indo-Pacific Strategy has expanded substantially, with a primary emphasis on international relations and geopolitical analysis. However, the majority of these studies adopt qualitative approaches and lack systematic bibliometric analysis. Existing review literature is largely framed from the perspective of the U.S. strategic intentions, leaving a noticeable gap in quantitatively mapping the trajectory of Chinese domestic research on this topic. To address this gap, the present study employs CiteSpace to analyze 531 articles on the Indo-Pacific Strategy published from 2013 to 2023 in CSSCI and Peking University Core Journals. Through constructing knowledge maps of authors, institutions, and keywords, alongside co-occurrence and cluster analyses of key terms, this study systematically uncovers the developmental trajectory, thematic evolution, and research frontiers of Indo-Pacific Strategy studies in China. The aim is to offer a visualized reference and empirical data to support future academic inquiry and policy formulation.

Research Questions
Based on this background, this study is going to find the answers to the following questions:

- How did key geopolitical events drive abrupt shifts in Chinese research focus, as evidenced by keyword bursts and publication spikes?
- Why does the EU remain underrepresented in co-occurrence clusters compared to the U.S./Japan/India, and how does this reflect China's strategic perception biases?
- How does the prominence of "Belt and Road Initiative" in cluster analysis signify Chinese scholars' framing of the Indo-Pacific Strategy primarily as a counter-BRI geopolitical project rather than an autonomous regional order?

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives to analyze the evolution of Chinese academic research on the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS). First, geopolitical realism—drawing on Mearsheimer's offensive realism and Spykman's rimland theory—frames IPS as a U.S.-led containment strategy targeting China's rise. This lens explains the predominance of power-balancing narratives in Chinese scholarship, such as the clustering of "China-U.S. relations" and reactive keyword bursts to events like Trump's FOIP launch. It contextualizes why Chinese research prioritizes major-power rivalry over cooperative multilateralism, reflecting a realist interpretation of IPS as a tool for sustaining U.S. regional hegemony through alliances like QUAD and exclusionary frameworks like IPEF.

Second, bibliometric epistemology treats keywords as units of knowledge, using co-occurrence patterns to map cognitive structures. Metrics like betweenness centrality—which identifies bridging concepts that connect disparate themes despite low frequency—reveal latent knowledge hierarchies. Similarly, burst detection captures reactive shifts in scholarly attention, such as the delayed focus on the EU (2021 burst vs. 2021 strategy release). This approach exposes methodological gaps in Chinese research, including the underrepresentation of meso-level mechanisms despite their policy relevance.

Third, discourse institutionalism examines how Chinese scholars construct IPS through institutionalized cognitive frames. The prominence of "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) in cluster analysis signifies a discursive resistance strategy that frames IPS primarily as a destabilizing countermeasure to China's BRI-led regional vision. This explains persistent biases, such as the EU's low centrality (0.02) despite its strategic engagement, revealing how institutionalized narratives shape research priorities.

II.Overview of Research on the Indo-Pacific Strategy

In recent years, academic interest in the Indo-Pacific Strategy has grown steadily within Chinese scholarly circles. The research landscape may be analyzed across multiple dimensions, including publication volume, thematic focus, core journals, author collaboration, and institutional distribution.

2.1 Development Trends of Research Themes

An analysis of 531 articles indexed in CSSCI and Peking University Core Journals reveals a clear upward trend in Chinese research on the Indo-Pacific Strategy to 2023 (see Figure 1). Notably, 2018 and 2022 represent key inflection points, marked by significant increases in publication volume. The period from 2013 to 2017 may be considered a nascent phase, characterized by a relatively limited number of studies, primarily focused on macro-level topics such as China–U.S. relations and the South China Sea. Since 2018, the field has entered a phase of rapid development, marked by notable growth in both the volume and analytical depth of academic output.

Figure 1. Annual Number of Publications on the Indo-Pacific Strategy

In 2018, the number of publications surged to 63—more than ten times the figure in 2017. This sharp increase was driven by several key developments. First, the Raisina Dialogue held in New Delhi on January 18, 2018, elevated the prominence of the "Indo-Pacific" discourse within regional security policy debates. Second, during President Donald Trump's visit to Japan in November 2017, the U.S. and Japanese leaders reached a consensus on promoting a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", emphasizing shared values, economic prosperity, and regional stability. Third, the U.S. National Security Strategy (2017) officially designated the Indo-Pacific as a core strategic priority. Additionally, several countries—including the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—launched their own Indo-Pacific initiatives, contributing to a convergence of strategic narratives. These developments collectively intensified Chinese scholarly interest, leading to a

notable increase in policy-oriented studies and theoretical reflections on the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

In the years that followed, research momentum remained robust, with another publication peak observed in 2022. This sustained interest reflects not only the enduring strategic relevance of the Indo-Pacific construct but also its growing academic salience in the context of intensifying geopolitical competition.

2.2 Thematic Distribution

The timeline visualization generated by CiteSpace (Figure 2) illustrates the evolution of research topics related to the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" from 2013 to 2023. The clusters are arranged in descending order of significance, with larger - numbered clusters indicating greater academic attention.

These clusters can be broadly categorized into two thematic domains: (1) macro-level strategic discourse and (2) issue-specific analyses. The size of the nodes in each year represents the volume of publications associated with each topic, while the color-coded citation rings reflect the temporal intensity of scholarly attention, with warmer colors indicating more recent citation activity.

The development of research on the Indo-Pacific Strategy can be broadly divided into two phases:

(1) Initial Development Phase (2013–2017) During this period, keyword linkages remained relatively sparse, indicating limited thematic integration. Research primarily focused on geopolitical issues such as the South China Sea, U.S.–India relations, the U.S.–Japan alliance, and Australia's strategic role. Several nascent clusters emerged during this stage, including "China–U.S. relations," "China–Japan relations," "China–India relations," and "Trump," reflecting early scholarly interest in major power interactions within the Indo-Pacific framework.

(2) Rapid Development Phase (2018–2023) Between 2018 and 2020, keyword frequency and interconnectivity increased significantly, with growing academic focus on themes such as U.S.–Japan–India–Australia cooperation(QUAD), ASEAN's strategic posture, and regional security risks. Between 2021 and 2023, the field entered a phase of accelerated diversification. Research began to incorporate emerging issues such as the Biden administration's strategic recalibration, the European Union's engagement, strategic autonomy, the Russia–Ukraine conflict, and the broader restructuring of regional order.
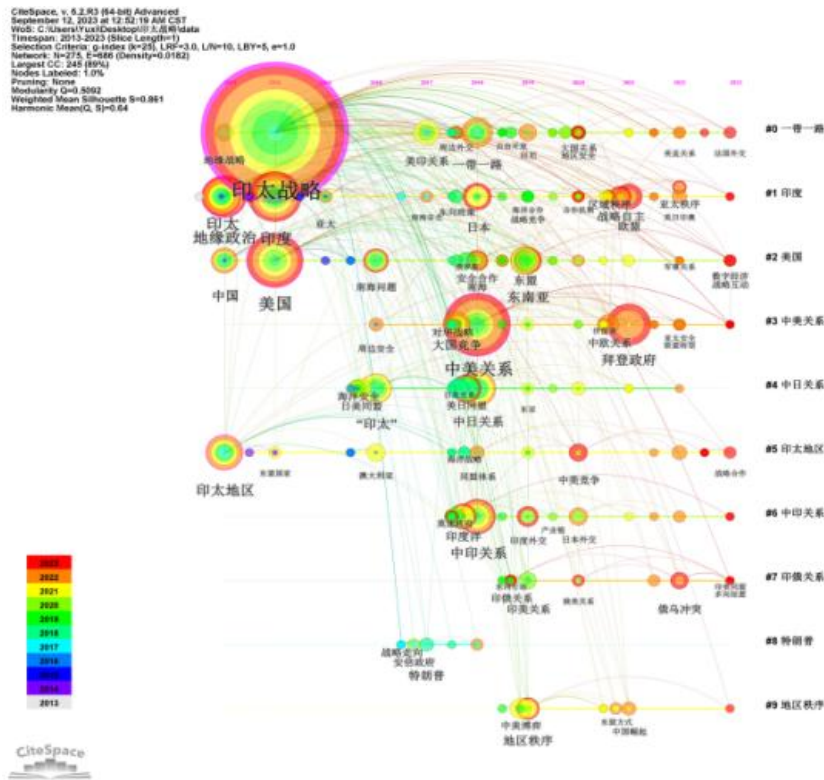

Figure 2. Keyword Cluster Timeline of Indo-Pacific Strategy Research

Overall, the keyword timeline analysis reveals a clear trajectory: research has evolved from initial conceptual and strategic frameworks toward more concrete and diversified policy analyses. This shift reflects both the continued scholarly attention to the Indo-Pacific region and a progressively deeper understanding of its complex geopolitical transformations.

2.3 Co-occurrence and Cluster Analysis

The keyword co-occurrence map generated using CiteSpace software consists of 275 nodes and 686 links, with a network density of 0.0182. The analysis of keyword co-occurrence reveals research themes and their interconnections based on two key dimensions: frequency of occurrence and betweenness centrality. Betweenness centrality quantifies a keyword's function as a critical bridge connecting otherwise disconnected themes within a research network. It measures how frequently a node lies on the shortest path between other keyword pairs, revealing its capacity to integrate diverse

research topics. In this study, keywords exhibiting   high centrality but low frequency, such as regional order with centrality 0.11, serve as pivotal thematic connectors. These terms facilitate knowledge flow between distinct clusters like geopolitics and alliance systems, despite their infrequent citation.

In terms of research subjects, the keywords mainly fall into two categories: Asian countries and regions, such as India, China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and ASEAN; external powers, such as the United States, European Union, and Australia.

Regarding research content, high-frequency keywords predominantly concentrate in political and security domains, including: "Indo-Pacific Strategy" (253 occurrences, centrality 1.11), "China-US relations" (58, 0.15), "Geopolitics"(29 , 0.11), "Biden administration", "China-Japan relations", "Indo-Pacific region", among others.

Notably, certain keywords such as "Australia", "China-US competition", "regional order", and "security cooperation" demonstrate relatively low frequencies but high centrality. This indicates their role as bridging nodes within the research network, signifying significant associative importance in connecting various research topics.

The bibliometric analysis employed CiteSpace 6.2 with the following parameters: (1) Time slicing from 2013–2023 (1-year intervals), (2) Term source set to 'Title/Abstract/Keywords' with noun phrase extraction, (3) Thresholds of g-index (k=25) to balance network density and clarity, (4) Pathfinder network pruning to eliminate weak links while preserving structural integrity, and (5) Modularity (Q > 0.4) and Silhouette (S > 0.7) thresholds to ensure significant cluster validity. These settings followed Chen's (2016) recommended protocols for knowledge domain visualization.

Table 1 Top Keywords in Indo-Pacific Strategy Research (2013–2023)

Keywords ranked by frequency				Keywords ranked by Centrality		
rank	Keywords	Frequency	Centrality	Keywords	centrality	Frequency
1	Indo-Pacific Strategy	253	1.11	Indo-Pacific Strategy	1.11	253
2	China–U.S. Relations	58	0.15	China–U.S. Relations	0.15	58
3	The United States	46	0.1	Indo-Pacific	0.12	26
4	India	39	0.09	Geopolitics	0.03	29
5	Geopolitics	29	0.11	Indo-Pacific Region	0.11	19
6	Indo-Pacific	26	0.12	The United States	0.1	46
7	Biden Administration	26	0.03	"Indo-Pacific"	0.1	14
8	China–Japan Relations	20	0.02	Great Power Competition	0.04	12
9	Indo-Pacific Region	19	0.11	Australia	0.04	5
10	China–India Relations	19	0.01	Biden Administration	0.03	26
11	"Indo-Pacific"	14	0.1	Regional Order	0.03	8
12	China	13	0.03	China –U.S. Competition	0.03	6
13	Belt and Road Initiative	13	0	China–Japan Relations	0.02	6
14	Great Power Competition	12	0.04	Southeast Asia	0.02	5
15	Japan	12	0.03	ASEAN	0.02	5

Note: Keywords in this table are ranked first by frequency. If frequencies are identical, they are ranked by centrality. If both values are identical, they are sorted alphabetically.

Figure 3. Keyword Clustering Map of "Indo-Pacific Strategy" Research

CiteSpace, v. 6.2.R3 (64-bit) Advanced
September 12, 2023 at 12:36:42 PM CST
WoS: C:\Users\Fux\Desktop\P II.2\RAWdata
Timespan: 2013-2023 (Slice Length=1)
Selection Criteria: g-index (k=25), LRF=3.0, L/N=10, LBY=8, e=1.0
Network: N=275, E=566 (Density=0.0152)
Largest CC: 245 (89%)
Nodes Labeled: 1.0%
Pruning: None
Modularity Q=0.5092
Weighted Mean Silhouette S=0.861
Harmonic Mean(Q, S)=0.64

#4 中日关系
#7 印俄关系
#5 印太地区   #1 印度
#3 中美关系
#2 美国   #8 特朗普
#6 中印关系
#9 地区秩序   #0 一带一路

The keyword cluster map (Figure 3) further illustrates the thematic structure and evolutionary trajectory of research on the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The modularity value (Q = 0.51) and mean silhouette value (S = 0.86)indicate a significant and reliable clustering structure, suggesting that the identified clusters are both distinct and internally consistent.
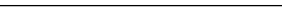
The top ten cluster labels are:"Belt and Road Initiative" "India" "United States" "China-US relations" "China-Japan relations" "Indo-Pacific region" "China-India relations" "India-Russia relations" "Trump" and "Regional order". These clusters collectively highlight the current research emphasis on major power interactions, regional security architectures, and strategic alignments within the evolving Indo-Pacific framework.

Notably, although the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) registers a relatively lower co-occurrence frequency, it occupies the top position among all clusters. This underscores its growing significance as a long-term research focus. Clusters such as "India," "United States," "China-US relations," and "China-Japan relations"consistently rank within the top five, signifying their role as enduring core themes in the field. The emergence of multiple clusters centered on bilateral relations and shifts in regional order suggests that scholarly inquiry into the Indo-Pacific Strategy is gradually shifting from macro-level strategic narratives to country-specific policy analyses, demonstrating a broader trend towards thematic diversification and analytical refinement.

III. Evolution of Research Hotspots in "Indo-Pacific Strategy" Studies

The evolution of research hotspots in the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" studies can be analyzed through Keyword Burst Graphs and Cluster Timeline Graphs. While the former identifies sudden surges in scholarly attention to specific topics over short periods, the latter traces the developmental trajectory and temporal sequencing of thematic clusters.

3.1 Keyword Burst Graph

Keyword burst analysis serves as an effective method for tracking emerging trends and research frontiers. By detecting keywords that exhibit a sharp increase in frequency within a given time window, this approach highlights shifts in scholarly interest and the rise of new areas of focus.

Using CiteSpace to conduct burst detection on keywords related to the Indo-Pacific Strategy, we observe that—due to the relatively recent emergence of this research field—the burst strengths are modest, ranging from 1.57 to 4.4. Despite this, the analysis of high-burst keywords, in terms of both duration and intensity, provides valuable insights into the dynamic evolution and temporal characteristics of research within this domain.

Table 2 Keyword Burst Table for "Indo-Pacific Strategy" Research

Keyword	First Appearance	Burst Strength	Burst End	From 2013 to 2023
Indo-Pacific	2013	4.4	2016	
China	2013	2.16	2016	
United States	2014	1.6	2016	
Trump	2017	1.6	2018	
US-Japan Alliance	2018	3.34	2019	
Russia	2018	1.57	2019	
ASEAN	2019	2.95	2020	
India-US Relations	2019	1.57	2020	
Security Cooperation	2018	1.7	2021	
European Union	2021	2.09	2023	

Note:Red bars indicate keywords with significant bursts.Blue bars indicate keywords with moderate bursts.White bars indicate no burst detected.
Data source: Created using CiteSpace 6.2.Research data.

3.2 Keyword Burst Analysis

The burst detection results generated by CiteSpace reveal that keywords such as "Indo-Pacific," "Trump," "U.S.-Japan Alliance," "Russia," "ASEAN," "India-U.S. Relations," "Security Cooperation," and "EU" have experienced significant surges at different points since 2013. These bursts reflect dynamic shifts in scholarly focus, closely aligned with evolving geopolitical developments and strategic reconfigurations.

1. "Indo-Pacific": Conceptual Establishment and Strategic Formalization

The keyword "Indo-Pacific" exhibited the highest burst strength (4.4), first emerging in 2013 and rapidly evolving into a core concept in geopolitical discourse. Following the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia," the U.S. began expanding its its strategic reach across the Indo-Pacific region. Post-2013, strategic discourse shifted from "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific," underscoring heightened strategic attention to the Indian Ocean.

In 2017, the Trump administration formally launched the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (FOIP), elevating Indo-Pacific cooperation at multilateral forums such as APEC and positioning the region as a a central pillar of U.S. national security and diplomatic. Consequently, the term "Indo-Pacific" became institutionalized in U.S. strategic terminology, triggering rapid academic proliferation.

2. "Trump": Policy Shift and Reconfiguration of China Policy

During 2017–2018, the keyword "Trump" emerged as a high-burst keyword (burst strength 1.6). The Trump administration explicitly designated China as a "strategic competitor," replacing the previous "engagement and containment" approach with a "competition and containment" framework. This marked a sharp escalation in tensions across the domains of trade, technology, and regional security.

The release of the December 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, followed by the Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework, further consolidated the Indo-Pacific's centrality in U.S. global strategy. These policy shifts prompted intensified scholarly interest in the logic, mechanisms, and regional ramifications of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

3. "U.S.-Japan Alliance" & "Russia": Traditional Alliances and Multipolar Dynamics

In 2018–2019, the keywords "U.S.-Japan Alliance" (burst strength 3.34) and "Russia" (1.57) emerged prominently, reflecting renewed academic attention to traditional security alliances and the evolving multipolar structure.

Under the Trump administration, the Cold War-era U.S.-Japan Alliance was further consolidated as a cornerstone of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, with enhanced cooperation in maritime security, infrastructure development, and strategic coordination.

Concurrently, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) revived in 2017 and advanced substantively at the 2018 Raisina Dialogue, with Japan, the U.S., India, and Australia strengthening collective counterbalancing against China. Conversely, Russia voiced strong criticism of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, denouncing it as a vehicle for "military bloc formation" and a threat to its strategic space in Eurasia. Russian think tanks predominantly expressed skepticism or outright opposition toward the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific framework.

4. "ASEAN" & "India-U.S. Relations": Multilateral Responses through Meso-Level Structures

From 2019 to 2020,the keywords "ASEAN"(2.95) and "India-U.S. Relations"(1.57) gained prominence, signifying a shift in focus toward regional multilateralism and bilateral functional cooperation.

In response to concerns over marginalization, ASEAN issued the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019, emphasizing inclusivity, ASEAN centrality, and a rules-based regional order, thereby articulating its independent vision within the Indo-Pacific discourse.

Meanwhile, India-U.S. relations deepened significantly. The 2019 U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy Report explicitly positioned India as a pivotal strategic partner. The second "2+2 Dialogue" held in December 2019 institutionalized cooperation across security, economics, and rule-making domains, marking a qualitative shift in bilateral strategic engagement.

5. "Security Cooperation" & "EU": Emergence of Meso-Level Mechanisms and Non-Traditional Security Agendas

From 2021 to 2023, "Security Cooperation"(1.7) and "EU"(2.09) emerged as key burst terms, indicating a growing academic focus on practical security arrangements and non-traditional security cooperation.

Studies under this theme analyzed initiatives such as France-India maritime collaboration, U.S.-Japan-India joint patrols, Thailand-India defense frameworks, the Australia-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Japan-UK naval cooperation, and U.S.-Vietnam joint exercises. These studies reflect a pivot from macro-level rivalry to meso-level cooperative mechanisms, examining state interactions on specific security issues.

The EU's engagement became a new research focus. The release of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in September 2021 and subsequent joint communiqué emphasized a commitment to a rules-based order, maritime governance, and expanded its ties in digital, climate, and trade domains—reflecting efforts to balance China's influence.

Despite U.S.-EU divergences on China policy, strategic convergence grew visible. The Indo-Pacific Strategy transformed EU-China relations into an arena of strategic competition, prompting scholarly analysis of the EU's evolving role.

Analysis of keyword bursts and clustering timelines demonstrates that Indo-Pacific Strategy research has evolved through three phases: an initial focus on U.S.-China rivalry, a subsequent examination of regional cooperation mechanisms, and a more recent expansion into multilateral frameworks and non-traditional security. This keyword evolution not only traces policy shifts but also reveals an academia's shift from macro-strategic logic to meso-level institutional structures. Such trends provide a systematic lens for understanding the Indo-Pacific Strategy's complexity and regional order transformation, thereby offering critical insights for China's policy response research and diplomatic practice.

IV. Trends and Prospects

Over the past decade, the "Indo-Pacific Strategy"has evolved from a vague geopolitical concept into a concrete and operational policy framework. Academic research on the topic has increasingly exhibited trends toward structuralization, institutionalization, and multilateralization, reflected in the following dimensions:

First, there has been a shift from theoretical speculation to policy-oriented analysis.

In recent years, both Chinese and international scholarship on the Indo-Pacific Strategy has moved beyond abstract theorization, gravitating toward the detailed analyses of concrete policy implementation. This reflects a significant paradigm shift in the academic community. As the U.S. continues to institutionalize its Indo-Pacific Strategy, this initiative has evolved from a geopolitical concept into a multidimensional policy system encompassing security, economics, technology, and diplomacy.

Following the Trump administration's establishment of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"(FOIP) framework, the Biden administration has further refined and operationalized this strategy by consolidating multilateral mechanisms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and AUKUS. These developments have generated policy-rich analytical materials, prompting scholars to adopt more applied and case-based approaches in their research.

Concurrently, European countries have begun to actively engage in Indo-Pacific affairs. France and Germany released their own national Indo-Pacific policy guidelines, while the EU issued its "Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" in 2021, explicitly committing to "enhancing its strategic presence" in the region. This marks the strategy's evolution from a U.S.-Japan-India-Australia vision to a transregional agenda integrating multipolar Eurasian actors.

Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022 further amplified the strategy's geopolitical significance. As the U.S. consolidated its leadership in NATO and European security, it simultaneously strengthened Indo-Pacific alliance networks, seeking coordinated containment across Eurasia. In response, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the geopolitical functions, policy logic, and operational mechanisms of the Indo-Pacific Strategy—indicating a shift from theoretical debate to nuanced policy deconstruction.

Second, the dimensions of research have become increasingly refined.

As the Indo-Pacific Strategy continues to evolve into a more institutionalized and multilateral framework, related scholarship has moved beyond macro-level analyses of strategic intentions toward issue-specific deepening and structural transformation. Increasingly, researchers adopt meso-level analytical lenses to examine the operational components and implementation pathways of the strategy—such as alliance architectures, security mechanisms, and policy instruments.

The keyword evolution reveals a rising scholarly focus on themes like "security cooperation", "alliance transformation", "India-U.S.relations", and "strategic coordination mechanisms", indicating a shift from conceptual exploration to practical policy logic. This reflects a rising interest in how key actors—including Japan, India, and Australia—navigate their strategic positioning, policy tools, and interaction dynamics within the Indo-Pacific framework. In particular, studies highlight these countries' efforts to balance between U.S.-China rivalry while safeguarding their own regional influence.

Furthermore, research has branched into specialized domains. These include the geoeconomic implications of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the renewed risks of nuclear proliferation associated with AUKUS, and the Quad's expanding role in non-traditional security areas such as maritime security and infrastructure development. This trend demonstrates a methodological shift from abstract theorizing toward concrete, policy-oriented issue analysis.

The third is the Rise of the "Alliance and Partnership System(APS)".

The U.S.-led geopolitical restructuring ihas given rise to an Indo-Pacific Alliance and Partnership System (APS)—a multi-layered security network anchored in traditional treaty alliances and extended to non-treaty partners via value-based diplomacy, military interoperability, and institutional cooperation. As "allies" and "partners" functionally converge, APS has emerged as a critical research subfield.

Under the Biden administration's vision of "mutually reinforcing latticework", the APS strengthens linkages among core treaty allies —U.S.-Japan, U.S.-Australia, U.S.-ROK—while incorporating a second tier of strategic partners including India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore. Key pillars of this system comprise: Quad institutionalization, Enhanced U.S.-Japan- ROK trilateral coordination, AUKUS military integration and EU engagement and NATO's Indo-Pacific outreach.

Recent scholarship has focused on APS's implications for China's strategic environment. The first is the constriction of Strategic Maneuverability. U.S.-driven value-based coalitions constrict China's diplomatic and military options in the region. The second is Pan-securitization Trends. APS increasingly integrates ideological alignment, defense interoperability, and technological cooperation, intensifying geopolitical tensions.

In sum, the APS represents an extension of U.S. strategic architecture into the Indo-Pacific, reshaping China's strategic periphery. Future research should probe its operational mechanisms, internal cohesion and divergences, and long-term sustainability.

Fourth, the methodological focus has transitioned from macro to meso-level mechanisms.

In recent years, international relations research has undergone a significant methodological transformation—from macro-level narratives such as national grand strategies, regional order construction, and broad geopolitical rivalries, to a meso-level analytical focus centered on functional mechanisms,issue-specific dynamics, and operational processes.

For example, in the context of U.S.-China relations, the traditional emphasis on overarching "strategic competition" is increasingly giving way to more targeted analyses of meso-level themes such as maritime security cooperation, technology containment strategies, and infrastructure development rivalry. Similarly, alliance studies have witnessed a shift in emphasis from the structural configurations of formal institutions to the practical mechanisms of strategic alignment, such as strategic alignment processes, intelligence-sharing frameworks, and joint military exercises, rather than limiting their analysis to the structural composition or formal institutional arrangements of alliances. This shift reflects a growing interest in how international relations are concretely practiced and negotiated at the level of specific sectors and cooperative functions.

At the methodological level, this trend has prompted scholars to adopt more targeted research approaches, such as comparative case analysis, policy document interpretation, and institutional constructivist perspectives, thereby advancing

the transition of research from narrative to explanatory. At the same time, interdisciplinary integration has become increasingly prominent, with fields such as security studies, diplomatic studies, area studies, international law, and international organization studies converging to form a multidimensional analytical framework.

Also, recent research has focused on topics like how the QUAD is organized, how AUKUS is building undersea warfare capabilities, and how the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) helps reshape supply chains. These studies make it easier to understand how the Indo-Pacific Strategy is being put into action and provide useful ideas for making better policy decisions.

Conclusion

Based on a systematic bibliometric analysis of 531 CSSCI and Peking University Core journal articles from 2013–2023, this study reveals that Chinese scholarship on the Indo-Pacific Strategy has evolved through three distinct phases: an initial conceptualization stage (2013–2017) focused on U.S.-China rivalry and regional geopolitics; a rapid institutionalization phase (2018–2020) driven by QUAD's revival and Trump's FOIP framework; and a recent diversification era (2021–2023) incorporating EU engagement, non-traditional security, and meso-level operational mechanisms. Despite this thematic expansion, significant research gaps persist—notably, the underrepresentation of non-traditional security domains and regional actors like ASEAN in keyword centrality analyses, alongside a persistent disconnect between macro-strategic narratives and granular policy implementation studies. The dominance of "Belt and Road Initiative" clustering and reactive keyword bursts (e.g., delayed EU focus until 2021) further indicates Chinese academia's tendency to frame the Indo-Pacific Strategy through a geopolitical countermeasure lens rather than examining its autonomous institutional logic. These findings highlight an urgent need for future research to adopt meso-level analytical frameworks that dissect functional mechanisms—such as AUKUS technology-sharing protocols or IPEF supply-chain governance—while integrating underrepresented regional perspectives, thereby transforming reactive scholarship into proactive policy-relevant knowledge for navigating the Indo-Pacific's evolving strategic landscape.

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