

Globalization of Chinese International Law Scholarship: A Bibliometric Analysis (2005–2025)

Xinrong Tan*

Despite the growing number of international publications by Chinese scholars in the field of international law, there has been limited attention given to the distinctive characteristics of their contributions. This study examines the features and trends of international publications by Chinese international law scholars, using data from international law journals from 2005 to 2025. The results reveal a steady increase in the number of articles published by Chinese scholars, with a sharp rise since 2020. University rankings reveal geographical imbalances and a two-track pattern of internationalization. While scholars from mainland institutions have made rapid progress, their presence in international legal discussions is still heavily dependent on being at universities in Hong Kong and Macau. Collaboration remains the most common publication model taking the form of both domestic and international partnerships. This research provides an empirical baseline for understanding China's contributions and offers insights into the shifting power dynamics in global legal discourse.

* Ph.D. candidate at the School of International Law of Zhongnan University of Economics and Law (ZUEL), Wuhan, China. LL.M. (ZUEL). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7428-1265>. The authors may be contacted at: xinrong2073@163.com / Address: Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, 182# Nanhu Avenue, East Lake High-tech Development Zone, Wuhan 430073 P.R. China.

All the websites cited in this article were last visited on May 4, 2026.

Keywords

Chinese Law School, International Law, International Legal Course, Bibliometric Methods, Web of Science

1. Introduction

International legal scholarship provides a ground for shaping foreign policy of a country with legitimacy, defining the boundaries of “appropriate” behavior.¹ It often rebrands power dynamics as “legal legitimacy,”² helping states maintain order and security. In today’s international community, shaping legal discourse has thus become a core element of strategic competition. Developing international legal theories based on national interest is an effective way to build and expand such influence in the global community. Specific narratives of international law are used to shape the perception of global events, thereby securing interpretive authority.³ In academic research, the primary focus is on mainstream knowledge.⁴ In international law studies, particularly, each voice across global academic and policy circles are often released through the publication at academic magazines.

China has increasingly sought to diversify international legal discourse. This is not merely a quest for normative influence, but a critical intellectual endeavor to lead a theoretical framework as an influential stakeholder of the international community. China’s international law scholarship has been rapidly developing since 1978. It has been closely aligned with the country’s opening-up policy and its active engagement with global governance.⁵ In this regard, China has been actively participating in international lawmaking process in order to keep a broader range of its national interests. To this end, Chinese government is conducting mega research projects to promote international law.

Domestic scholarship has long been prolific in China. Recently, however, scholars and practitioners are increasingly encouraged to engage with global readership through highly reputed international law journals.⁶ The global

1 Ian Hurd, *The Empire of International Legalism*, 32(3) ETHICS & INT’L AFF. 265 (2018).

2 Martti Koskeniemi, *Imagining the Rule of Law: Rereading the Grotian ‘Tradition,’* 30(1) EUR. J. INT’L L. (2019).

3 Julia Otten, *Narratives in International Law*, 99(3) CRITICAL Q. LEGIS. & LEGAL SCI. [Kritische Vierteljahresschrift für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft] 187 (2016).

4 Jan Klabbers, *On Epistemic Universalism and the Melancholy of International Law*, 29(4) EUR. J. INT’L L. 1057 (2018).

5 Gang Tang, *A Concise History of International Law in China—Conflicts, Fusion, and Development*, 15(1) J. E. ASIA & INT’L L. 179 (2022).

6 Xin Xu, *A Policy Trajectory Analysis of the Internationalisation of Chinese Humanities and Social Sciences Research (1978–2020)*, 84 INT’L J. EDUC. DEV. 102425 (2021).

landscape of legal publications nevertheless remains starkly asymmetrical.⁷ Eurocentric or pro-American perspectives and methodologies still exert an influence disproportionately in the international academic sphere,⁸ often marginalizing non-Western contributions. Despite China's burgeoning presence in global scientific output, its legal scholarship remains surprisingly underrepresented in mainstream academic discourse.

In particular, international law has received remarkably little attention in systematic bibliometric analysis. Since current debates on the rise of non-Western scholarship often rely on descriptive narratives,⁹ there is an urgent need to understand the evolving epistemic boundaries of the field base on a robust empirical approach. Beyond anecdotal observations, this study moves to establish a reliable empirical benchmark for the performance of Chinese international law scholars within global academic circuits. Academic data existing offer a pioneering qualitative overview of the research systems and developmental trajectory of international law in China.¹⁰

Against this backdrop, the author will systematically analyze publication patterns in leading journals to provide a rigorous assessment of China's scholarly output and preliminary insights into the shifting landscape of global legal discourse in the twenty-first century. To achieve it, the study addresses the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What are the longitudinal trends in the publication volume and research impact of Chinese international law scholarship?;
- RQ2: Which domestic institutions and individual scholars are the primary drivers of this internationalization trend?;

7 Julia Emtseva, *Practicing Reflexivity in International Law: Running a Never-Ending Race to Catch up with the Western International Lawyers*, 23(5) GER. L. J. 756 (2022); James Gathii, *International Law and Eurocentricity*, 9(1) EUR. J. INT'L L. 184 (1998); Birte Vogel et al., *Upholding Hierarchies of Knowledge Production: Mundane Obstacles to Global International Relations*, 27(1) INT'L STUD. PERSP. 66 (2024).

8 Stefan Kirmse, *Sleepy Side Alleys, Dead Ends, and the Perpetuation of Eurocentrism*, 25(1) EUR. J. INT'L L. 307 (2014); Arnulf Lorca, *Eurocentrism in the History of International Law*, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW 1034-57 (Bardo Fassbender & Anne Peters eds., 2012).

9 CONGYAN CAI, THE RISE OF CHINA AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: TAKING CHINESE EXCEPTIONALISM SERIOUSLY 1-12 (2019); Zhaojie Li, *China*, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL LAW IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC 299-319 (Simon Chesterman et al. eds., 2019); Guo Ran, *Why Will China's Belt and Road Initiative Bring a Bright Future to the World? An International Lawyer's Perspective*, in REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL LAW 21-54 (Eric Lee ed., 2023); Congyan Cai, *The Belt and Road Initiative and the International Legal Order: Why It Happened, What It Does and How, and What It Brings About*, in THE CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF CHINA AND INTERNATIONAL LAW 31-48 (Ignacio Rasilla & Congyan Cai eds., 2024).

10 Lin Zhang & Lingsheng Zhang, *Research and Teaching of International Law in Contemporary China: A Landscape Sketch*, 10(2) J. E. ASIA & INT'L L. 427 (2017).

- RQ3: How is knowledge production distributed across various modes, ranging from solo authorship to complex domestic and international co-authorship networks?; and
- RQ4: What are the predominant themes and publication patterns, and how do they reflect the interplay between academic inquiry and broader geopolitical trajectories?

In this paper, the author would like to make a threefold contribution to the field. First, she fills a critical empirical lacuna with the first comprehensive bibliometric analysis of Chinese international law scholarship, shifting the conversation from impressionistic claims to rigorous, data-driven evidence. Second, by distinguishing between the research outputs of mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, and Macao SAR, she illuminates the diverse channels and collaborative models that characterize China's engagement with global legal discourse. Finally, by mapping thematic concentrations, she reveals how closely scholarly research aligns with strategic legal narratives. In doing so, she provides a nuanced understanding of how non-Western powers navigate and potentially reshape the international legal order.

2. Analytic Methodology

A. Scholastic Arguments

Since China initiated its reform and opening-up policy in 1978, international law has seen notable development, making extraordinary strides in recent years. This trend is reflected in both the significant growth of academic output and the deepening rigor of scholarly inquiry.¹¹ Over the past half-century, approximately 80 international law teaching and research institutions have been established within Chinese universities,¹² and a variety of international law journals have been launched in succession.¹³ International law has emerged as a distinguished field of study in China, underpinned by an increasingly diverse and robust

11 Yang Zewei, *Seventy years of international law in New China: Course, contribution and development direction* [新中国国际法学70年:历程、贡献与发展方向], 36(5) CHINA LEGAL SCI. [中国法学]178, <https://doi.org/10.14111/j.cnki.zgfx.2019.05.010>.

12 Yang Zewei, *China's public international law in the forty years of reform and opening-up: Characteristics, issues and trends* [改革开放四十年来的中国国际公法学:特点、问题与趋势], 2(6) INT'L L. REV. WUHAN U. [武大国际法评论] 33 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.13871/b.cnki.whuilr.2018.06.003>.

13 Zhang & Zhang, *supra* note 10.

research community. In terms of global influence, however, Chinese international law research remains relatively obscure.¹⁴

A central focus for Chinese international law scholars thus has been to bolster China's discursive influence by expanding its presence in global academic publications. It is widely acknowledged that China's influence in international legal discourse remains significantly disproportionate to its growing national strength and broader international contributions.¹⁵ As Meng Yuqun has observed, the prevailing international legal order and its norms are primarily the product of Western influence.¹⁶ Historically, developing countries, including China, functioned primarily as passive rule-takers, seldom attempting to create international legal frameworks. He Zhipeng argues that China's engagement with international law has been predominantly reactive. He suggests that China must transition toward a more proactive stance, enhancing its capacity for agenda-setting on its own strategic terms.¹⁷

In response to these limitations, scholars have formulated strategies to bolster China's voice in international legal circle. He Tiantian explores the strategic utility of the "community with a shared future for mankind" concept in amplifying China's discursive influence in international law.¹⁸ Chen Yifeng suggests that Chinese scholars examine the construction of narratives in international law. He argues that China build a compelling and rigorous case—grounded in the authoritative legal instruments of international organizations—to engage effectively in the global discursive competition.¹⁹ Cai Congyan maintains that high-level legal reasoning is the key to bolstering discursive power amidst

14 Zewei Yang, *The People's Republic of China and the Development of Contemporary International Law: Review and Prospects*, 13(2) J. E. ASIA & INT'L L. 337 (2020).

15 Zhang Qian, *International law and the enhancement of China's international discourse power: Guided by the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind* [国际法与中国国际话语权的提升—以人类命运共同体理念为引领], 29(2) J. N. CHINA ELEC. POWER U. (SOC. SCI.) [华北电力大学学报(社会科学版)] 72 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.14092/j.cnki.cn11-3956/c.2023.03.31>; Chaoyi Jiang, *Conditions and strategies for China to effectively influence the formulation of international law rules* [中国有效影响国际法规则制定的条件与策略], 42(3) INT'L POL. RES. [国际政治研究] 61 (2021).

16 Yuqun Meng, *Analysis on the cognitive system of international law discourse power* [国际法话语权认知体系论析], 10 J. INT'L RELS. & INT'L L. [国际关系与国际法学刊] 32 (2023).

17 Zhipeng He, *National image-driven construction of foreign-related rule of law discourse system* [国家形象驱动的涉外法治话语体系构建], 45(6) Soc. Sci. [社会科学] 13(2023), <https://doi.org/10.13644/j.cnki.cn31-1112.2023.06.007>.

18 Tiantian He, *Chinese discourse on the value of international legal order: From the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" to "Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind"* [国际法秩序价值的中国话语—从“和平共处五项原则”到“构建人类命运共同体”], 38(5) L. & BUS. RES. [法商研究] 61 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.16390/j.cnki.issn1672-0393.2021.05.006>.

19 Congyan Cai, *The debate between Dao and Qi: Argumentation and transcendence in China's efforts to enhance the influence of international legal discourse* [道器之辨：中国提高国际法律话语影响力中的论辩及其超越], 44(3) Soc. Sci. YUNNAN [云南社会科学] 50-8 (2024).

global uncertainties. In his view, China needs to transform its historically passive approach to communication and adopt a more sophisticated and consistent mode of legal argumentation on the global stage.²⁰ Zhang Lei argues that innovative legal interpretation, as seen in the BBNJ Agreement, is essential for asserting influence over the evolving normative architecture of international law.²¹ However, whether these strategic discursive pathways have been substantively adopted and developed in the broader output of Chinese legal scholarship remains an under-examined empirical question. This study fills these empirical gaps by conducting a comprehensive analysis of Chinese scholarship published in top-tier global international law journals.

B. Bibliometric Methods

Bibliometric methods are employed to systematically map China's engagement in international legal discourse, encompassing publications from 25 leading international law journals. This approach provides a robust empirical foundation for identifying longitudinal trends and shifts in research focus. Primary data were retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection, a premier repository for high-impact legal scholarship.²²

C. Sampling Strategy and Journal Selection

Given the absence of a dedicated thematic tag for international law in most academic databases, keyword-based searches entail a significant risk of systematically underestimating the field's true scope. Consequently, this study adopts a journal-level sampling approach to ensure analytical precision. In order to establish a standardized and replicable sampling frame, an initial pool of 156 legal periodicals was drawn from the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) Law category (as of January 2026).²³ This was followed by two rounds of iterative screening: first, identifying international law journals via title keywords (e.g.,

20 Yifeng Chen, *Narrative, narration and discourse power: A narratological study of international law* [叙事、叙述与话语权：一个国际法的叙事学研究], 44(3) SOC. SCI. YUNNAN [云南社会科学] 40-9 (2024).

21 Lei Zhang, *On the construction of international law institutional discourse power from the perspective of the BBNJ Agreement* [论BBNJ协定视阈下国际法制度性话语权的构建], 16(3) SJTU L. REV. [交大法学] 37 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.19375/j.cnki.31-2075/d.2025.03.008>.

22 Zlatan Meskic, *A Study on the Underperformance of Civil Law in the University Rankings and Research Databases*, 14(4) LAWS 50 (2025); Philippe Mongeon & Adèle Paul-Hus, *The Journal Coverage of Web of Science and Scopus: A Comparative Analysis*, 106(1) SCIENTOMETRICS 213 (2016).

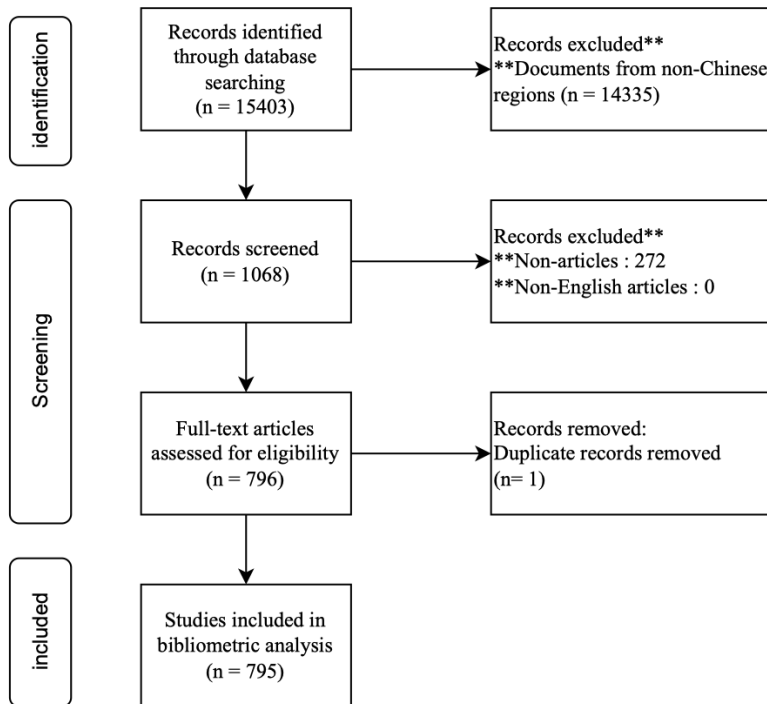
23 Clarivate, 2024 Journal Citation Reports: Law Category, <https://jcr.clarivate.com> (filtering for journals indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index only).

“International,” “Transnational,” “World,” and “ICSID”); and second, conducting a manual review of each journal’s aims and scope to exclude domestic or niche legal fields. This process yielded a final sample of 25 core international law journals (SSCI indexed), ensuring a clearly bounded scope focused on mainstream global publication venues.

D. Data Extraction and Cleaning

To ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility, data were extracted on January 18, 2026, following the PRISMA protocol.²⁴ The specific PRISMA flow diagram employed in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Selection for the Bibliometric Analysis



Source: Compiled by the author based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and data retrieved from Clarivate’s SSCI database (2024 data).

24 David Moher et al., *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement*, 339 *BMJ* b2535 (2009).

The initial query yielded a total of 15,403 articles published between 2005 and 2025. This corpus was subsequently refined to isolate a “China-affiliated” dataset, defined as containing articles with at least one author affiliated with a Chinese institution (encompassing mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, and Macao SAR). This filtration process resulted in 1,068 documents. After restricting the scope to English-language research articles and removing duplicates, a final sample of 795 articles was retained for analysis.

E. Software and Analytical Metrics

Methodological rigor and analytical depth were ensured by processing the final dataset using Bibliometrix 4.1, an open-source R-based tool designed for comprehensive science mapping. The analysis was conducted in two primary stages. First, descriptive bibliometric indicators—including annual production, journal distribution, and citation metrics—were calculated to assess the scale and international visibility of the scholarship. Second, science-mapping techniques were employed to visualize structural linkages. Keyword analysis identified predominant research clusters and tracked the conceptual evolution of international legal topics. This layered approach enables a nuanced understanding of both the quantitative growth and qualitative shifts in China’s engagement with international legal discourse.

3. Longitudinal Trends

As illustrated in Table 1, the annual publication output of Chinese international law scholars has undergone substantial expansion over the past two decades. In 2005, Chinese contributions accounted for only 2.99% of the global total (4 out of 134 articles); by 2025, this figure had climbed to 12.78% (97 out of 759 articles). This represents a more than fourfold increase in China’s relative global share of international legal scholarship.

The data reveal two distinct phases of growth. Between 2005 and 2014, output remained relatively modest, fluctuating below the 7% threshold. However, a pronounced upward shift occurred from 2015 onwards, with the proportion of Chinese-authored articles consistently exceeding 8% during the most recent five-year period (2021–2025). Notably, the annual growth rate for Chinese publications stands at 17.28%, nearly double the global average of 9.06%. ‘This divergence underscores China’s accelerating integration into and influence within the global

international legal academic circuit.

Table 1: Annual Publication Volume and Growth Rate (2005–25)

Year	Total	China	%
2005	134	4	2.99
2006	202	4	1.98
2007	220	5	2.27
2008	342	16	4.68
2009	367	13	3.54
2010	438	25	5.71
2011	483	25	5.18
2012	504	20	3.97
2013	459	32	6.97
2014	475	33	6.95
2015	480	39	8.13
2016	590	26	4.41
2017	603	36	5.97
2018	618	36	5.83
2019	753	43	5.71
2020	777	73	9.40
2021	714	60	8.40
2022	783	77	9.83
2023	665	63	9.47
2024	767	68	8.87
2025	759	97	12.78
Total	11133	795	7.14
Annual growth rate	9.06	17.28	

Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1)
based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database.

4. Research Impacts

Data from Table 2 indicate that Chinese international law scholarship has achieved significant global resonance. With over 5,000 total citations and an average of 6.3 citations per article, the field demonstrates a robust intellectual footprint.

The attainment of an H-index of 9 among top contributors highlights the rise of authoritative voices within the discipline. Moreover, the Mean TC per year of 0.3 serves as a proxy for citation velocity, confirming that these works provide lasting scholarly value and avoid the pitfall of being mere transient outputs. This trend confirms the deepening integration of Chinese legal perspectives into global academic circuits.

Table 2: Citation Metrics and Academic Impact of Chinese International Law Research

Metric	Indicator	Value
Global impact	Total citations	5,022
	Average citations per doc	6.317
Leading Nodes	Top H-index (individual)	9
Longevity	Mean TC per year	0.3

Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1) based on citation data from Clarivate's SSCI database.

5. Distribution of High-Productivity Institutions and Key Scholars

Table 3 identifies the top ten institutions contributing to international law scholarship, including leading scholars and primary journal outlets. The data reveal a notable concentration of research output within a select group of elite universities, reflecting a distinct dual-engine growth model that leverages the combined strengths of mainland China and the Special Administrative Regions (SARs). Wuhan University, the birthplace and foundational bedrock of the discipline of international law in China,²⁵ ranks as the top-performing institution in this field (n=141). Its Institute of International Law, designated as one of the first cohort of China's National Think Tanks, secures this dominant position in academic publication output by virtue of its large, well-established cohort of researchers. Nevertheless, the factors of "academic density" and institutional efficiency must also be taken into account. When evaluating per capita research

25 Yongping Xiao, *The origin, characteristics and future of the LuoJia School of International Law* [珞珈国际法学派的源流、特质与未来], 76(6) WUHAN U. J. (PHIL. & SOC. SCI.) [武汉大学学报 (哲学社会科学版)] 5-19 (2023), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14086/j.cnki.wujss.2023.06.001>.

productivity—understood as how high-impact academic publication output aligns with the size of the international law faculty—leading institutions such as Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Peking University demonstrate a markedly stronger performance. Despite having a significantly smaller faculty size compared with established leading institutions in the field, these elite bodies maintain a sharp focus on top-tier research outputs, and often strategically target publication in prestigious peer-reviewed journals including the CHINESE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW.

A striking feature of this institutional landscape is the prominent representation of Hong Kong and Macao. Of the ten most productive entities, four are institutions based in the special administrative regions, which together account for a substantial portion of the total high-impact output. The high concentration of Hong Kong and Macao universities confirms their status as intellectual hubs. These institutions align Chinese legal scholarship with global standards, utilizing their special jurisdictional status and international faculty to sustain a prominent profile in leading international law journals.

Table 3: Ranking of Top 10 Institutions Based on their Publications

Affiliation	Articles	Leading Scholars	Primary Journal Outlets
Wuhan University	141	Yee Sienho, de la Rasilla Ignacio, Su Jinyuan	Chinese Journal of International Law, International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law
Chinese University of Hong Kong	77	Mayer B, Chaisse J	Journal of World Trade, World Trade Review
University of Hong Kong	67	Weber RH, Arner DW	Asian Journal of WTO International Health and Policy
City University of Hong Kong	54	Chaisse J · Lando M	Journal of World Trade, World Trade Review
China University of Political Science and Law	49	Gao Jianjun, Kong Qingjiang	Chinese Journal of International Law
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	31	Shen Wei	Journal of International Dispute Settlement

Affiliation	Articles	Leading Scholars	Primary Journal Outlets
University of Macau	31	Neuwirth RJ, Wang C, Su XJ, Tu GJ	Chinese Journal of International Law, Asian Journal of WTO International Health and Policy
Tsinghua University	30	Jia Bingbing, Zhang Xinjun	Chinese Journal of International Law
Peking University	28	Liao Xuexia, Chen Yifeng	Cornell International Law Journal, Chinese Journal of International Law
Zhejiang University	27	Qian Xu, Zhao Jun, Zou Keyuan	Chinese Journal of International , World Trade Review

Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1) based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database.

Table 4 lists the top 10 most-cited scholars in the field of Chinese international law scholarship, together with their primary research fields and top-cited works. Their core research areas are predominantly concentrated in international economic law, law of the sea, and international dispute resolution—the most dynamic and high-impact subfields in contemporary Chinese international law research. Meanwhile, the citation metrics presented in Table 4 highlight a striking feature of Chinese international law scholarship: while international scholars hold a dominant position in terms of citation influence, mainland Chinese scholars have delivered sustained, foundational academic output for the discipline. This points to a hybrid institutional structure: a large domestic academic core, whose global influence is being rapidly amplified by high-impact international scholars. This two-tier structure appears to be a key driving force behind China's growing weight in global legal discourse.

The top-cited papers of these two cohorts also reflect distinct strategic approaches. Mainland Chinese scholars adopt an "Issue-Driven Strategy," their publication peaks coincide with regional geopolitical crises, most notably the South China Sea disputes. By providing authoritative doctrinal justifications for state sovereignty and rigorous legal interpretations of the UNCLOS, their papers have become indispensable, must-cite references for global scholarship on these specific regional issues. Owing to the inherent nature of international maritime dispute resolution, sustained scholarly output is a prerequisite for responding

to frequent legal developments and treaty negotiations. This ensures that their work remains the most up-to-date reference point within the fast-evolving citation cycle.

Table 4: Professional Profiles and Strategic Drivers of the Top 10 Most-cited Authors

Author	Primary Field(s)	Total Citations	Top-cited Work
Mayer, Benoit #	Climate Change Law	283	Climate Change Mitigation as an Obligation Under Human Rights Treaties?
Arner, Douglas W*	FinTech & RegTech	280	FinTech, RegTech, and the Reconceptualization of Financial Regulation
Chaisse, Julien *	Int'l Investment Law	266	China's 'Belt And Road' Initiative: Mapping the World Trade Normative and Strategic Implications
Buckley, Ross P. *	Int'l Financial Law	259	FinTech, RegTech, and the Reconceptualization of Financial Regulation
Barberis, Janos*	FinTech & Law	236	FinTech, RegTech, and the Reconceptualization of Financial Regulation
Jia, Bingbing #	Law of the Sea	213	The Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea: History, Status, and Implications
Chang, Yen-Chiang #	Ocean & Coastal Law	166	International Legal Obligations in Relation to Good Ocean Governance
Gao, Zhiguo*	Int'l Maritime Law	152	The Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea: History, Status, and Implications
Yee, Sienho #	Public Int'l Law	147	The South China Sea Arbitration (The Philippines v. China): Potential Jurisdictional Obstacles or Objections

Author	Primary Field(s)	Total Citations	Top-cited Work
Matsushita, Mitsuo*	WTO & Trade Law	141	Taming Leviathan as Merchant: Lingering Questions about the Practical Application of Trans-Pacific Partnership's State-Owned Enterprises Rules

Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1) based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database.

Note: Symbols denote authorship preferences: asterisk (*) indicates a strategic focus on co-authored research, while pound sign (#) signifies a focus on solo-authored doctrinal analysis. Additional source data is available upon request or in the supplementary materials.

In contrast, international scholars employ a “Frontier Positioning Strategy,” strategically aligning their research with cutting-edge international agenda items. Their high citation rates stem from the cross-disciplinary appeal of their work, which garners attention not only from legal academics but also from economists and policymakers. For instance, collaborations between Hong Kong-based international scholars and their counterparts in Japan and other Asian jurisdictions embody a “Regional Integration Strategy.” These scholars strategically leverage Hong Kong's unique status as a common law gateway to bridge Eastern and Western legal systems.

Beyond publication venues and thematic focus, the collaboration patterns of these top-cited scholars fall into two distinct models. One is dominated by solo-authored publications, a pattern most prevalent among the founding scholars of Chinese international law. In this regard, their solo works typically carry greater theoretical weight and disciplinary influence, forming the core of their long-term citation accumulation. The other relies on strategic co-authorship, which is far more common among scholars based in the Hong Kong and Macao SARs.

A longitudinal analysis of the contributing authors in Table 5 reveals that Chinese domestic scholars were early and successful entrants into the global legal academic arena rather than latecomers to international publication. For example, prominent scholars such as Yee Sienho and Gao Jianjun initiated their international publication trajectories as early as 2008, followed by Jia Bingbing in 2009. These domestic pioneers have not only maintained high productivity over nearly two decades – with Yee leading the cohort with 24 publications – but have

also secured substantial academic influence.

Table 5: Top 13 Most Productive Authors

Author	Number of Publications	Publication Year Start
Yee Sienho	24	2008
Chaisse Julien	17	2011
Chang Yen-Chiang	14	2010
Gao Jianjun	14	2008
Mayer Benoit	12	2017
Shen Wei	12	2015
Su Jinyuan	11	2010
Jia Bingbing	9	2009
Zhou Weihuan	9	2017
Kong Qingjiang	8	2012
De la Rasilla Ignacio	8	2020
Zou Keyuan	8	2015
Chen Li	8	2019

Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1) based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database (accessed Jan. 2026).

Note: The list comprises 13 authors due to ties in publication counts (positions 9–13).

6. Patterns of Authorship and Collaborative Dynamics

The authorship patterns identified in Table 6 provide insights into the structural transformation of China's legal research ecosystem. The 2005–2007 period was defined by the absolute dominance of single-authored publications, aligned with the discipline's tradition of systematic theoretical construction in China. In 2008–2015 period, total annual publications saw a surge alongside the normalization of domestic collaborative research, driven by explosive demand for practice-oriented legal research amid China's deepening participation in global governance.

The 2016–2025 data maps the complete structural transformation of Chinese international law scholarship's publication patterns. After an initial 2016–2019 transition phase that broke the long-standing absence of international collaboration, 2020 marked a pivotal inflection point with a near-70% surge in

total outputs and an all-time peak in international co-authorship. This structural shift is further amplified by the systemic return of young Chinese international law scholars with overseas academic backgrounds. Since 2015, a growing cohort of early-career scholars trained at top global law schools have taken up academic positions in mainland China. They brought established international collaborative networks and deep familiarity with global academic norms, acting as a core driver of normalizing both domestic and international co-authorship. By 2025, collaborative publications had overtaken single-authored works for the first time, with domestic collaboration as the core growth engine. The data reveal a current parity between single-authored and domestic co-authored publications – a distribution that suggests a strategic maturation of the field. The high proportion of domestic co-authorship reflects the growth of internal research clusters and the formalization of professional academic teams within Chinese law schools, reflecting the continuation of the discipline’s foundational tradition of aligning academic output with the evolving practical demands of China’s foreign-related rule of law development. More details should be provided for this analysis.

Table 6: Temporal Evolution of Publication Patterns by Collaboration Type (2005–2025)

Publication Year	Domestic Collaboration	International Collaboration	Single-authored	Total
2005			4	4
2006			4	4
2007	1		4	5
2008	3		13	16
2009	4		9	13
2010	7		18	25
2011	9		16	25
2012	3		17	20
2013	7		25	32
2014	9		24	33
2015	16		23	39
2016	7	1	18	26
2017	8	1	27	36
2018	11	4	21	36
2019	10	4	29	43

Publication Year	Domestic Collaboration	International Collaboration	Single-authored	Total
2020	13	14	46	73
2021	21	3	36	60
2022	31	7	39	77
2023	23	2	38	63
2024	23	2	43	68
2025	44	6	47	97
Total	250	44	501	795

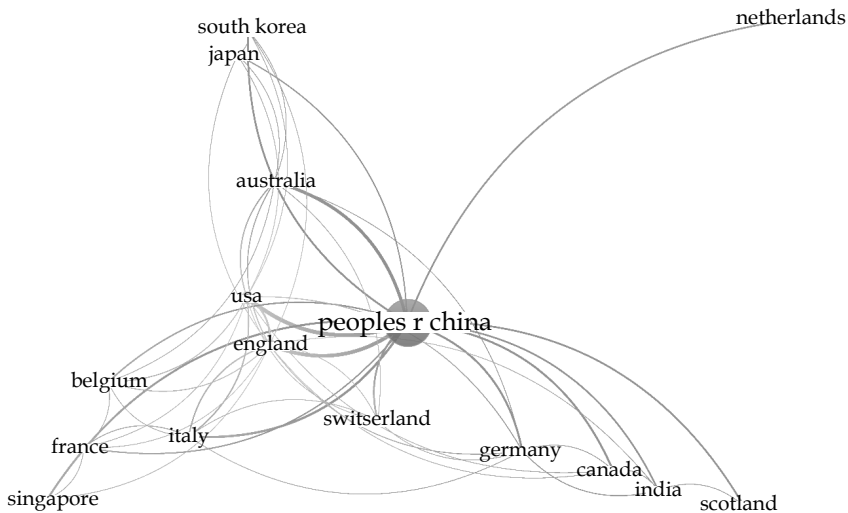
Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1) based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database.

7. Co-authorship Network of Countries

The third research question aimed to reveal the collaborative structure among scholars from various countries contributing to China's international law literature. To achieve this goal, a co-authorship analysis was conducted. Figure 2 illustrates the resulting network, identifying China as the central hub of the collaboration map.

The highest volume of co-authored outputs and the strongest collaborative links were established with scholars from institutions in Australia, the US, the UK, and Germany. The network reveals that while scholars in geographically proximate countries, such as Japan and South Korea, engage in significant cooperation, those in distant nations—including Canada, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—also maintain active co-authorship links. This mapping demonstrates that China's international law research is deeply integrated into a global network, bridging both regional partners and major Western academic powers.

Figure 2: The co-authorship network, identifying China as the central hub



Source: Compiled by the author using VOSviewer based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database.

8. Research Themes

An analysis of author-defined keywords was conducted to identify the primary thematic focuses of scholarship affiliated with Chinese institutions. As detailed in Table 7, “China” emerges as the most frequent keyword ($n=59$), indicating that a significant portion of the research maintains a primary focus on the domestic legal and regulatory landscape.

Beyond this emphasis on national identity, the research landscape is heavily oriented toward international economic and environmental law. Collectively, “WTO” ($n=35$) and “World Trade Organization” ($n=7$) constitute the primary substantive area of interest, followed by “climate change” ($n=17$) and “sustainable development” ($n=7$). Furthermore, the data reveal a significant concentration on maritime and security issues, with keywords such as “law of the sea” ($n=9$), “UNCLOS” ($n=8$), and “maritime delimitation” ($n=7$) appearing frequently. The prevalence of these terms suggests that Chinese scholarship is deeply engaged with the challenges of contemporary global governance, particularly where they intersect with economic stability and territorial sovereignty.

Table 7: The Most Frequent Key Words of Published Articles (2005–2025)

Key Words	Occurrences
China	59
WTO	35
Climate change	17
Human rights	9
Law of the sea	9
Public health	9
UNCLOS	8
Intellectual property rights	7
Maritime delimitation	7
National security	7
Sustainable development	7
Transparency	7
World Trade Organization	7
Environmental protection	6
International investment agreements	6
Safeguards	6

Source: Compiled by the author using Bibliometrix (v4.1) based on data retrieved from Clarivate's SSCI database.

9. Conclusion

This study aims to delineate the longitudinal growth, scholarly contributions, collaborative dynamics, and research frontiers of Chinese scholarship in international law. To this end, a bibliometric and thematic content analysis has been conducted on 795 articles published between 2005 and 2025.

The findings offer a comprehensive assessment of the evolution and impact of this research corpus. The evidence reveals a transformative shift in China's academic standing over the past two decades, characterized by a surge in volume and an accelerated growth rate. This development occurred in two distinct phases: an initial period of moderate output from 2005 to 2019, followed by a rapid expansion from 2020 to the present. Notably, China's share of global publications rose from a negligible 2.99% in 2005 to 12.78% by 2025; its annual growth rate of 17.28% is nearly double the global average of 9.06%. This upward

trajectory aligns with China's geopolitical emergence, as international law research increasingly serves as a critical instrument for articulating national stances on global governance. These results suggest sustained momentum and a commitment to enhancing discursive power, marking China's transition from a passive recipient of international legal norms to an active shaper of global discourse.

In terms of intellectual impact, Chinese scholarship is increasingly competitive with its international counterparts. The data from Table 2 offer a balanced yet promising evaluation: A H-index of 9 and an average citation count of 6.317 suggest that Chinese legal research is successfully moving beyond the academic periphery. However, the relatively low annual average citation count (0.3) indicates a persistent recognition lag. This may be attributable to the Western-centric orientation of premier international law journals, where non-Western perspectives often encounter higher evidentiary or linguistic barriers to long-term citation. While Chinese scholars have secured visibility in top-tier journals, translating this presence into normative authority remains an ongoing process of academic integration and influence.

The institutional and individual distribution of high-productivity scholarship reveals a bifurcated pattern of internationalization within China's international law research. In the hierarchy of global legal discourse, universities in Hong Kong and Macau exert a disproportionate influence, maintaining a dominant and consistent presence in elite journals. By contrast, mainland Chinese universities – with Wuhan University serving as a representative model – have achieved “leapfrog development” through state-driven strategic initiatives. This disparity underscores that universities in Hong Kong and Macau function as pivotal nodes in cross-regional collaboration and resource mobilization.²⁶ This competitive edge is primarily rooted in a path-dependent advantage derived from Anglo-American legal traditions, a highly cosmopolitan faculty, and a long-standing proficiency in English-language scholarship.

While the overall scholarly output from Chinese institutions has risen significantly, a clear structural imbalance persists simultaneously: the highest levels of academic influence, as measured by citations, remain concentrated among internationally recruited faculty. Through the strategic recruitment of globally renowned scholars, China has effectively bolstered its university rankings – a

26 Wanlin Cai et al., *Constructing a Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area Social Space: Cross-Sectoral Experiences of Key Node University Faculties*, HIGH EDUC. (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-025-01508-x>.

deliberate step in its broader strategy to cultivate academic discursive power.²⁷

However, this reliance on “imported” prestige invites scrutiny regarding the substantive authenticity of China’s role in shaping international legal discourse. Although these publications carry Chinese institutional affiliations, they frequently adhere to Western methodological orthodoxies to satisfy global audiences. Meanwhile, the “citation gap” faced by indigenous Chinese scholars indicates a persistent recognition deficit in the global arena. While China has effectively secured institutional visibility through talent acquisition, the transition from quantitative presence to qualitative normative influence—driven by indigenous scholarship and distinct legal perspectives—remains a formidable challenge.

Regarding authorship patterns, China’s international law publications exhibit a notable degree of academic autonomy, characterized by a equilibrium between domestic and international collaboration. The 36% share of single-authored works indicates that Chinese scholars are increasingly capable of engaging independently in high-level global dialogue. Domestic co-authorship similarly accounts for 36%—slightly surpassing the proportion of international collaborations—which reflects the maturation of internal scholarly networks. Meanwhile, the 28% international co-authorship rate demonstrates that Chinese scholars are becoming progressively integrated into global knowledge networks.

The co-authorship networks reveal that the US and Australia maintain the most robust collaborative ties with Chinese international law scholars. This depth of cooperation is largely attributable to the fact that many prolific, highly cited scholars affiliated with Chinese institutions have previously studied or taught at leading American and Australian law schools. Such partnerships illustrate that China’s international legal scholarship is not developing in isolation; rather, it is co-created within some of the world’s most influential academic legal networks.

Chinese scholars exhibit distinct journal preferences aimed at maximizing scholarly impact. While consistently supporting journals with Chinese institutional affiliations, they have also successfully placed high-impact work in specialized international venues — such as *OCEAN DEVELOPMENT & INTERNATIONAL LAW* — particularly in fields like the law of the sea and environmental law. This dual-track publication strategy ensures that Chinese legal perspectives are effectively disseminated to the global academic community within these targeted, strategically significant domains.

The recurring themes and keywords in these international publications

27 Xin Xu, *China ‘Goes out’ in a Centre–Periphery World: Incentivizing International Publications in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 80(1) *HIGH EDUC.* 157 (2020), <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10734-019-00470-9>.

further illustrate how Chinese scholars are amplifying their voice in international law through strategic collaboration and global engagement. While the frequency of the keyword “China” reflects a distinct regional focus, this should not be dismissed as mere exceptionalism. By applying global norms to distinctive domestic contexts – for instance, providing empirical evidence of China’s specific engagements in the WTO compliance or climate governance – these scholars are challenging and refining existing Western-centric legal theories. In doing so, they contribute to a more pluralistic understanding of international law. Consequently, China is shifting from a passive recipient of international legal discourse to an active contributor, enriching global scholarship with localized experience. The predominance of keywords such as “China,” “WTO,” and “UNCLOS” reflects an academic response to national interests, including trade security and territorial sovereignty. This localized approach introduces non-Western perspectives and practical interpretations, effectively diversifying global discourse – a pivotal step in China’s construction of its own international legal voice.

Despite the rigorous methodology employed, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the data were exclusively retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection. While this is a premier database for high-impact legal scholarship, it may not encompass all relevant entries indexed in Scopus. Second, this study adopted a journal-level sampling approach to define “international law.” Although this method ensures thematic consistency, it inevitably excludes international law articles published in generalist law reviews or interdisciplinary political science journals. Finally, while providing a longitudinal perspective over two decades, the study is constrained by the timing of data extraction. The dataset represents a comprehensive snapshot up to January 2026; consequently, any articles published or indexed after this date are not reflected in the current bibliometric mapping.

Another limitation of this study is that while the findings from the 25 sampled journals are representative of high-impact scholarship, they also underscore the necessity of dedicated platforms like *JOURNAL OF EAST ASIA AND INTERNATIONAL LAW*. Such journals provide a critical corrective to the potential Western-centric biases inherent in the broader SSCI generalist corpus, offering a vital space for regional legal perspectives.

Received: Mar. 20, 2026

Modified: April 20, 2026

Accepted: May 1, 2026