

Progress in international geopolitical research from 1996 to 2015

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Abstract: Focusing on international relations from the perspective of geography, geopolitics exerts powerful influences on the course of economic and political development in the world. In the tide of globalization and information technology, geopolitics has become an important subject for global pattern interpretation and policy making. It is essentially important to have a scientific and systematic review on international geopolitics to promote its development. Based on the bibliometric statistics, the paper reviews the research development of geopolitics on the Web of Science from 1996 to 2015. The history, journals, papers and key research areas of geopolitics have been revealed in the paper. By the analysis of bibliometric statistics, the number of papers recently published in the journals of political geography and related geography journals continues to increase. The key areas of geopolitical papers which are globally highly cited include geopolitical interpretation of the countries and borders, critical geopolitics, emotional geopolitics, feminist geopolitics and other topics. Before the year of 2000, the state and borders were hot topics of the geopolitical research. Yet since 2000, it has been the trend that the geopolitics is increasingly set in the context of geographical implications. At the same time, critical geopolitics appears to be the main area of geopolitical research, especially transitioning from traditional geopolitics towards the humanism-embeddedness (such as emotional geopolitics, feminist geopolitics). The paper then systematically reviews the branch trends of geopolitical research, including the borders and the territory, global geo-culture and geo-economics, Chinese models of geopolitics, resource conflicts and ecological politics, as well as emotional geopolitics. Finally, it puts forward the implication that Chinese geopolitical studies should reinforce the importance of geographical space and scale, use the process of description and multiple methods, as well as integrate humanistic thoughts, in order to further enrich the theories and practices of geopolitical research.

Keywords: geopolitics; discipline development; scientometrics; international research progress

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1 Introduction

Geopolitics is a discipline which has made great contributions to national prosperity and safety (Du *et al.*, 2015), whose research focuses on the process and trend of the relationship between different countries, regions, or nations by analyzing the formation of political and military alliance, union (political and military groups), political confrontation and containment, even war, based on the geographic location, space and historical-geographical factors (Lu and Du, 2013). During the period of great powers' early rising, Ratzel, Mahan and Kjellen were famous political geographers. During the period of imperial wars, Mackinder, Haushofer and Spykman became the master of the national geopolitical strategy. After that (the Cold War and the post Cold War Era), geopolitics was still a powerful and dynamic theoretical foundation for the development of great powers (Agnew *et al.*, 2003). John Mearsheimer, Morgenthau, Cohen, Kaplan, Huntington, Henry Kissinger, Parker, Joseph Nye, Francis Fukuyama, Zbigniew Brzezinski and other modern geopolitical scholars, followed the idea of studying the global geopolitical pattern from the geographical space, but emphasized the impact of regions on the global geo-pattern in the context of realism, as well as the deep impacts of geo-economy and geo-culture on the global geo-structure.

Profound changes are taking place in the current global geopolitical world (Bellamy and Williams, 2011). With the rise of China (and other Asian countries), the relative decline of the United States and European Union, the status and relationships among global powers or regional powers are being remodeled. In particular, the rapid rise of China is changing the existing power structure of the world. The "Belt and Road Initiative" proposed by China reflects its courage and responsibility as a world power to actively participate in the construction of a new world order in terms of fairness, openness and justice. At the same time, main countries in the world have also adapted or developed new global geo-strategies, such as "Return to the Asia-Pacific" and "TTIP" strategies put forward by the United States. While the security of surrounding environment of China is being tightened by those gradually escalating disputes in South China Sea and Diaoyu Islands, these external space effects are caused by the rise of China (Lu and Du, 2013). Under these new geopolitical circumstances, it is urgent to comprehensively review the progress of international geo-political studies and build up Chinese geopolitical research vision. In doing so, Chinese scholars may realize the profound transformation of geo-strategies and predict the trend of geopolitics. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to review the international geopolitical research in the past 20 years, trace the evolutionary characteristics of the global geo-relationship, as well as shed some light on Chinese geopolitical research.

2 General situation of geopolitical research

2.1 Data and methods

This paper analyzes the data from Web of Science, with the application of Histcite scientific measurement software. Histcite is a citation-analysis software, developed by the founder of the Science Citation Index – Garfield, which reviews the development history of a field by identifying key documents and graphs (Liu *et al.*, 2014). In March 2015, 1001 papers in English since 1996 to 2015 were collected in Web of Science by defining "Geography" as

the research direction, “Geopolitics” as the key subject word. By classifying and summarizing the titles, abstracts and key words of the articles, a systematic reflection on the latest research progress of the international geopolitics is displayed.

2.2 Main journals

On the whole, the number of geopolitical-related articles published in the journals of geography is increasing, as shown in Figure 1. Especially after the financial crisis in 2008, geographers have been paying more attention to the importance of geopolitical factors in the context of globalization. Papers were mainly published in *Political Geography*, *Geopolitics*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Environment and Planning—D*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Antipode*, *Geoforum*, *Area* and other journals, as shown in Figure 2.

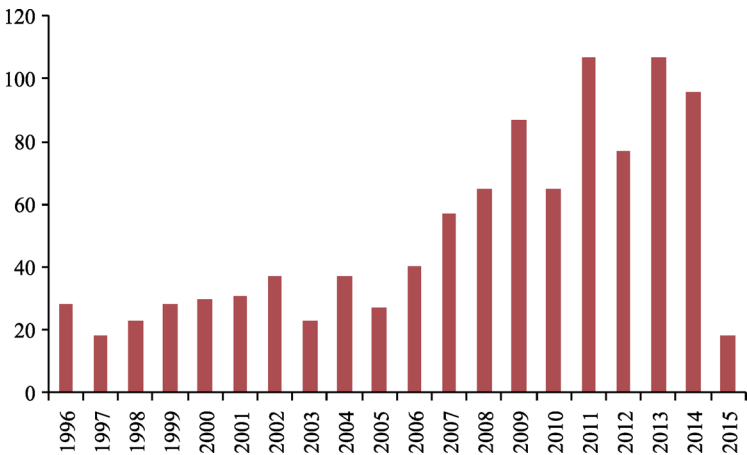


Figure 1 Number of geopolitical articles published in the international journals from 1996 to 2015

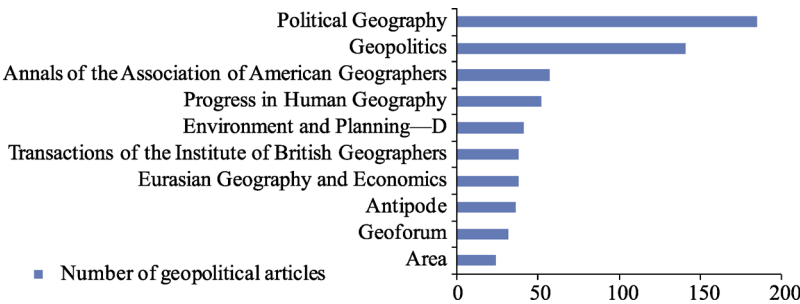


Figure 2 The top 10 journals with most geopolitical articles from 1996 to 2015

2.3 Papers highly cited

It is found that top 10 articles cited in the international journals from 1996 to 2015 focus on national geopolitical interpretation, border area development, critical geopolitics, emotional geopolitics, feminist geopolitics and other themes (see Table 1). When studying the literatures in different periods, the results are as follows: Before 2000, nations and borders were

the core topics of geopolitical research. After 2000, the importance of geography has gradually further emphasized on geopolitics, which also turns to critical geopolitics, especially by reflection on the shift from traditional geopolitics towards more humanism-embeddedness (emotional geopolitics, feminist geopolitics, etc).

Table 1 Top 10 geopolitical articles cited in the international journals from 1996 to 2015

Author	Year	Journal	Citation frequency	Theme	Title	Reference
Newman and Paasi	1998	Progress in Human Geography	180	Border	Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: Boundary narratives in political geography	(Newman and Paasi, 1998)
Pile	2010	Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers	136	Emotional geopolitics	Emotions and affect in recent human geography	(Pile, 2010)
Sparke	1998	Annals of the Association of American Geographers	95	Countries	A map that roared and an original atlas: Canada, cartography, and the narration of nation	(Sparke, 1998)
Sidaway	2000	Progress in Human Geography	82	Critical geopolitics	Postcolonial geographies: An exploratory essay	(Sidaway, 2000)
Hyndman	2004	Political Geography	80	Feminist geopolitics	Mind the gap: Bridging feminist and political geography through geopolitics	(Hyndman, 2004)
While	2004	International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	79	Regional Governance	The environment and the entrepreneurial city: Searching for the urban 'sustainability fix' in Manchester and Leeds	(Aidan <i>et al.</i> , 2004)
Coleman	2007	Antipode	73	Border	Immigration geopolitics beyond the Mexico-US border	(Coleman, 2007)
Pain	2009	Progress in Human Geography	69	Emotional geopolitics	Globalized fear? Towards an emotional geopolitics	(Pain, 2009)
Hyndman	2001	Canadian Geographer	68	Feminist geopolitics	Towards a feminist geopolitics	(Hyndman, 2001)
Roberts	2003	Antipode	62	Neoliberal geopolitics	Neoliberal geopolitics	(Roberts <i>et al.</i> , 2003)

3 The research fields of geopolitics

According to the top 10 geopolitical papers highly cited each year since 1996, this paper summarized the trend of the international geopolitical research, as shown in Table 2. Proportion refers to the percentage of papers on each specific research field in all geopolitical journals since 1996. The research fields include border and territory, globalization and geo-culture, geo-economy, geopolitical hotspot areas and Chinese model, resource conflicts and ecological politics, as well as the value, emotion and cultural geography.

Table 2 Research fields in international geopolitics

Research direction	Research tendency	Proportion (%)
Border and territory	Border security, the development of border areas, cross-border cooperation, geopolitical narrative of territory, discourse of the territory, environmental determinism, map and drawing	16.7
Globalization and geo-culture, geo-economy	Geo-economy, geo-culture, globalization and population migration, geo-effect of information technology, popular geopolitics, foreign investment, network, regional integration, ocean shipping	14.5
Geopolitical hot spot areas and Chinese model	European Union, Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, Russia, Iran, foreign policy, India, Arctic, North Korea, China threat theory, Central Asia	21.1
Resource conflicts and ecological politics	Petroleum, natural gas, cross-boundary river governance, dams, fisheries, international negotiations, global climate change, environmental geopolitics	19.9
Value, emotion and cultural geography	Critical geopolitics, feminism of geopolitics, religion, narrative mode, geopolitical environment, ethnicity, cultural geography, Confucianism, identity, popular culture	18.9
Others	Liberal geopolitics, the marginal zone, the third world, the Eurasian hinterland, governance, radical geopolitics, the fault zone, the state-owned enterprises	8.9

3.1 Border and territory

Border is the interactive space of the territory. It covers a wide range of topics, mainly including: 1) the “disappearance” of boundaries and deconstruction of the territory in the context of globalization; 2) the role of the border in the construction of social identity; 3) characterization, narrative and construction of the border at different spatial scales. Under the influence of globalization, the border has become an important node of cross-border cooperation. The cheap land and available labor will facilitate cross-border cooperation in the border towns of less developed countries (Sit, 1998). However, due to the different interests of cross-border countries, the process of such cooperation often does not go well. The differences of institutional and cultural backgrounds increase the difficulties of cross-border cooperation (Paul, 2006). Due to the lack of bottom-up cooperation mechanisms, cities in growth triangle of Asia tend to develop independently rather than cooperate in an integrated way (Ishima *et al.*, 1999), thus making them far lagging behind Europe and North America in terms of cross-border integration (Bunnell *et al.*, 2006).

Border region is a place of cultural communication, in which the social identities of the border residents will be constructed. In border cities, twin cities are those cities characterized by locations across the border between the two countries, with shared urban hinterland and residents’ senses of belongingness (Ehlers and Buursink, 2000). Research on twin cities emphasized on the integration of two cross-border cities in the economic, institutional and social aspects (Perkmann, 2003). The integration is composed of four gradations: the integration of the built-up area, the integration of behavior, the integration of organization, and the integration of politics and management (Buursink, 1996). This model might serve as a tool to analyze the characteristics of integration of the cross-border cities (Shen, 2013). As for the development stages of twin cities: Hong Kong and Shenzhen, it is revealed that economic integration prevails in the Hong Kong-Shenzhen integrated region. Economic integration has necessitated the institutional integration which in turn attempts to facilitate eco-

conomic integration. However, it is still difficult to achieve the social and governance integration (Shen, 2014). In order to promote the free trade, the real demand for cross-border transnational governance is particularly prominent in twin cities (Sparke, 1998).

There are three kinds of interdependent and interactive spaces in border regions: conceived, perceived and lived spaces (Dean, 2005). In the case of Sino-Burmese border space, conceived space comprises the normative forms of spatial knowledge – the mental images promoted by territorial power. Perceived space is formed by the cross-border trade. Lived space is based on the cross-border marriage and cultural communication. The discordance among these three kinds of spaces makes the border region trapped in the challenging modernist dualism. Ethnographic participant observation could be used to address these problems in border research. This is demonstrated by a case study of the impact of the partial closure in 1999–2000 of the Uzbekistane Kyrgyzstan border in the Fergana Basin (Buursink, 1996). Research on the ethnic space of this border region informs a critique of state violence that is parallel to textual analyses informed by a critical border theory.

3.2 Globalization and geo-culture, geo-economy

Globalization is the process of deterritory, with national sovereignty deeply embedded in the neoliberal environment (Woodward, 2004). However, globalization has not prevailed over geography. Instead, based on the geographical environment, globalization adjusts itself and changes the environment accordingly. Flows of capital and manufacturing outsourcing factories flow into all parts of the world unequally. Their direction of movement is towards coastal countries and regions which are the main markets on a global scale with plenty of skilled labor force with learning capacity yet at inexpensive cost. With the injection of capital and information flows, concerns on border conflicts have been weakened, due to the fact that border land grows to the new core area of capital markets and business activities (Ohmae, 1995).

In the context of globalization, the new media technology, with great geopolitical significance, is recasting geo-cultural and geo-economic industries. This makes the structural relationship between the geopolitics and new media transit radically from the visual representation of the social sphere to social reconstruction and remodeling of geopolitical vision transition (Campbell, 2007). Worldwide trends in the information age will lead to a new paradigm of contemporary geopolitical transition, which is a paradigm for dialogues between different civilizations and different countries. Mutual development of globalization and regionalization will further strengthen the dialogue among civilizations, and gradually build up a global super civilization (Lilov, 2007). As Samuel Huntington (1993) proposed, people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world (Huntington, 1993). The population explosion in Muslim countries and the economic rise of East Asia are changing global politics. These developments challenge Western dominance, promote opposition to supposedly "universal" Western ideals, and intensify inter-civilization conflicts over such issues as nuclear proliferation, immigration, human rights, and democracy. People respond to the clash of civilizations by a variety of reactions, including novelty, indignation and confusion, published in the "Conflict and World Order of Civilizations and the Remaking" (Huntington, 2010). Besides the geo-culture, the geo-economics is a hot topic in geopolitics. State power will be re-interpreted, not only in

the strategic and security as the only content, but also in the “connotation of geo-economics”. Geo-economics is the study of spatial cultural and strategic aspects of resources, with the aim of gaining a sustainable competitive advantage, including geo-economic defense, geo-economic offensive and geo-economic diplomacy intelligence (Luttwak, 1993).

3.3 Geopolitical hot spot areas and Chinese model

Research on global hot spot areas by classical geopolitical theory is also an important part of geopolitical studies. In the process of European integration, such crises exist as trade and currency between the United Kingdom and the European Union, NATO’s enlargement, the Greek debt, TTIP, Russia – Ukraine, etc. Kuus (2004) explained the geopolitical significance of EU and NATO’s enlargement in the perspective of the dichotomy between Europe and Eastern Europe. Solovyev (2004) discussed the new post-Soviet Eurasian doctrine and geopolitical revisionist tendencies in Russia. Traditionalism is inspired by old European and Russian geopolitical theories. The revisionist school, on the other hand, adopts a considerably broader definition of what constitutes geopolitics by proposing to study various forms of organizing spaces on a global scale. Due to deep divisions among peoples and the sovereignty of countries, while heavily influenced by Great Power Politics, Shattered areas in the Middle East have long been geopolitical research hotspots, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and other countries. Scholvin (2011) deconstructs the ideological transition from a geopolitical perspective by the history of Iraq from the First World War to the 1958 revolution, including the Ottoman Empire, Arab nationalism, British imperialism, as well as the national autonomy. Hot geopolitical issues related to America include the US-Canada border Free Trade Zone (FTZ), the United States-Mexico border, etc. As the major core regions wrestling around the world, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and Central Asian countries are becoming key areas of current geopolitical thinking. The level of economic development of these countries varies, with fragmented political systems and different ideologies. In such geopolitical core areas, India-Pakistan conflict (Aidan *et al.*, 2004), cross-border development (Eilenberg, 2012), national division (Glassman, 2005), South China Sea issues, unrests in northern Myanmar, geo-energy issues (Pandian, 2005) are focus of the global geopolitics.

From a critical geopolitical perspective, China is regarded as a long-term rising global power (Kennedy, 1988), which is a sovereign territory within the boundaries, also a “geo-body” with no boundaries (Callahan, 2009). China has a unique historical process – the feudal imperial dynasty in history, and communism worldwide with rejection of capitalism, which shaped China’s unique culture among the world’s major powers (Keith, 2009). With a huge population, China has been subjected to humiliation in history, rather than conquest. These elements affect Chinese diplomatic policies and perceptions on China from the outside world. Chinese intellectuals learned a lot from American pluralistic diplomatic strategies, by transiting from neoliberal (rational actors who want to maximize the relative benefits of national action) to new realism (depending on the benefits from zero-sum game). According to Deng Xiaoping’s “Theory of Chinese Characteristics”, China will protect its sovereignty, take the principle of peaceful coexistence with other countries, as well as solve geopolitical problems by Chinese philosophy, language and expression. In the geopolitical relations with neighboring countries, the concept of “benevolent” in the Confucianism is the

key principle to resolve the conflicts, instead of relying on the force. Interests rather than morality, is the base for geopolitical cooperation between different countries.

3.4 Resource conflicts and ecological politics

The exploitation of strategic resources, such as oil, water, etc. which are highly related to people's livelihood, is the hot topic in geopolitical studies. The production and consumption of global energy, affected by reserves, mining technology and other factors, are the competing interests of geopolitical game between countries. From the geopolitical perspective, nuclear energy in North Africa is likely to be seen with international skepticism, especially for energy exporting countries such as Algeria, Libya, and Egypt. Given their current political power structures and geopolitical constellations, such as the presence of non-democratic regimes and the Arab–Israeli conflict, the adoption of nuclear energy production technologies has the potential to cement the prevailing regime fundamentals. Energy importers such as Morocco and Tunisia enjoy greater credibility if they opt for the use of nuclear energy as a source of economic development (Marktanner and Salman, 2011). Verma (2007) analyzed the importance of Iran–Pakistan–India gas pipeline for India in geopolitical energy security and economic sustainable development (Verma, 2007).

Ecological degradation is one of the key challenges for geopolitics in the new millennium, especially in dealing with tension between the exploitation of natural resources and political regulation on ecological protection under the sustainable development goal (Beier, 1998). As an important strategic ecological resource, water plays an important role in the international geopolitical pattern. For the cross-border co-governance on water resources, hot issues discussed include the improvement of international hydro-graphic cooperation efficiency (Wolf, 1999), geopolitical strategies of international basin (Brichieri-Colombi and Bradnock, 2003), adaptive mechanism of multilateral basin (Shmueli, 1999), as well as multinational governance on international water conflicts (Feitelson, 2002). Taking the Mekong River as an example, the Mekong River is a “commercial corridor”, instead of a geopolitical “frontier” during the Cold War times. Six countries along the Mekong River have endeavored to integrate economic, infrastructure and social development by multilateral and bilateral donors, loans, and other ways.

3.5 Value, emotion and cultural geography

Critical geopolitics is different from classic geopolitics, such as Mackinder's heartland theory (Mackinder, 2004), which focuses on how natural geographical factors influence the political decision-making. Critical geopolitics foregrounds the substantial work on intellectuals of statecraft, popular geopolitics, feminist geopolitics, and resistance or anti-geopolitics. As Taylor (2000) mentioned, geopolitical decoding referred to the perceived value of geopolitical dependencies among different areas. Self-recognitions of different cross-border groups are being marginalized in the globalization process, but still important in the local politics “from below” (Fluri, 2009). The term “from below” is applied to illustrate a dialogue platform beyond the power, domination and control in the public sphere, in which marginalized groups can have impacts on the decision making progress in civil society (Snyder, 2008). Drawing empirically from Central Europe and especially Estonia, intellectuals are central to the production of a particular ‘cultural’ concept of geopolitics – the no-

tion that foreign policy expresses the state's and the nation's identity. Beyond Central Europe, it is underscored that the political and cultural milieu of geopolitical claims and the specific structures of legitimacy are from classic intellectuals (Kuus, 2007).

Cultures of fear, humiliation and hope are reshaping our world (Moysey, 2010). The terrorist attacks and local wars suffered by Western world in this century triggered a new round of geopolitical fears (Pain, 2009). In the traditional realist geopolitical strategy, to seek maximum security interests of the country, the emotion of fear caused by international conflicts is manipulated by politicians (Bleiker and Leet, 2006). Research on the fears is embedded in the geopolitical cultural, economic, social and spatial study. Early research on geopolitical fear focused on portray of prevailing shared fears in community citizens. After 2000, the critical geopolitical research on feminist and other structuralism is increasingly important, shifting from personal emotions to emotions embedded in the complex social and political background (Lee, 2008). One of the contributions to the critical geopolitical research in the feminist geopolitics is to explore the space within the geopolitical dimension, including formal and informal political action (Secor, 2001), and should take into account the impact of gender politics and power (Hyndman, 2007). Feminist researchers emphasize the female daily impacts on the existing hierarchy of power. For example, the reproductive rights are an important component of geopolitical power (Martin, 2004).

4 General research transformation of geopolitics

Based on the specific research fields of geopolitics, this article systematically summarizes the macroscopic research interests of geopolitics after Cold War: (1) the establishment of the new world order in the post-Cold War era, (2) an emphasis on the spatial cognition, and (3) the rise of critical geopolitics which reviews conventional classical theories of geopolitics critically.

4.1 Establishment of the new world order in the post-Cold War era

From 1989 to 1991, the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, German reunification and collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of Cold War. Consequently, geopolitics stepped into the post-Cold War era (Cohen, 2011). Geopolitics has gone through five phases of development since Ratzel presented the National Organism Theory: the struggle of empires, German geopolitics, geopolitics of the United States, the period of Cold War and the post-Cold War era (as shown in Table 3). The struggle of empires was a period in which Europe was the geopolitical center before the two world wars. In this phase, significant theories including National Organism, World Island, Heartland and Sea Power, reflected influences of Social Darwinism and the nation-state. With the support of Nazi Germany, Pan-continentalism became the core of geo-strategy in German geopolitics in which representative scholar was Haushofer. In US geopolitics field, Spykman's Rimland Theory guided the spatial arrangement of the US military and diplomatic strategy. The balance of powers and containment to opponents were advocated by realistic geopolitics during the period of Cold War (Wang, 2003) when numerous scholars proposed putting western forces into Central and Eastern Europe so as to weaken the geopolitical advantages of heartland in Russia's west. They also proposed permeating the Caucasus and Central Asia, and provoking China

against Russia.

In the post-Cold-War era, geopolitics follows two research trends as the following: state-centrism-political and universalism-geographical paradigm. Geo-strategists such as Kissinger and Brzezinski, regarded the end of Cold War as establishment of the “new world order” and geopolitical pattern of the US-led global hegemony. After the Cold War, the political and economic pattern of unipolar world and unilateralism were entirely changed by the rise of emerging Third World countries such as China, the enlargement of European Union, as well as economic globalization and global climate change since the mid-1990s (Mao, 2014). The world pattern of “one superpower and multi-great powers” is developing (Hu *et al.*, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2014). “Vacuum” or “vulnerable” multipolar zones, including Central Asia, Asia-Pacific and the Arctic, are hot spot areas of geopolitical research (Du *et al.*, 2015). Brzezinski, former assistant to the president of the United States for national security, proposed controlling three strategic areas in the grand Eurasian chessboard – Western Europe, the Middle East and East Asia for the US global domination in 1997. Samuel Huntington attributed geopolitical conflicts to “the clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 2010). Universal application of western liberalism and the fade of Marxism-Leninism indicate the coming appearance of a universal, homogeneous state system. Under this idealized worldview, geopolitical cooperation is the primary trend of geopolitics (Fukuyama, 1993). As economic globalization develops in depth, geopolitics exerts influences generally via geo-economics (Wang, 2003).

Table 3 Evolutionary phases of modern geopolitics

	Phase one	Phase two	Phase three	Phase four	Phase five
Phases	Struggle of empires	German geopolitics	Geopolitics of the United States	Geopolitics during Cold War	Post-Cold War era
Representative scholars	Ratzel, Mackinder, Kjellen, Bowman, Mahan	Haushofer, Maul, Banser	Spykman, George Reina, Seversky	Kennan, Kissinger, Brzezinski, Taylor	Fukuyama, Kaplan, Brzezinski, Nye, Huntington, Cohen
Representative view-points	National Organism, World Island, Heartland, Sea Power Theory	Pan-continent alism	Rimland Theory	Containment strategy, balance of power, overall views	Universalistic geopolitics, Critical geopolitics, State-centrism, Clash of civilizations
Geopolitical background	German Empire under the leadership of Bismarck, World War I	Rise of Germany after World War I	Rise of US during and after World War II	US-Soviet confrontation	Iraq War, the war in Afghanistan, counter-terrorism

Reference: Cohen, 2011

4.2 Return of spatial significance in geopolitics

With the innovation of science and technology continuously shortening the spatial distance, the significance of geography was once questioned by numerous scholars, but space has always been an essential factor (Kaplan, 2009). In the geopolitical conflicts occurring in “conventionally geopolitical shattered areas”, such as the wars in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan, contemporary information technology has been applied to ensure spatial and territorial

integrity since the 1990s. Space and territory are yet regarded as significant, essentially crucial factors in foreign and military policy of the US (Ek, 2000). The significance of geography is not only reflected in military and political significance of strategy and tactics, territorial significance from the perspective of culture, but also spatial control and investigation of resources, population and material systems (Mao, 2014). The control of military affairs, politics, civilization, communications and population needs to be changed to respond to technical innovation and spatial reform in the context of globalization (Cohen, 1991). Geographic geopolitics emphasizes the analysis and interpretation of localization rather than globalization. The locality is complex, multiple and heterogeneous space, as well as aggregation of economics, society and environment, thus the “specificity” of localization demonstrating the significance of geography in geopolitics (Pleshakov, 1994). The key of pragmatically geopolitical research is to excavate the development conditions, structure and power of localization so as to mediate and resolve the international conflicts (Tuathail, 2010). The geopolitical research and practice which emphasize space and localization, are reflected in four levels: national geo-strategy formulated by state leaders and diplomats, geo-strategy proposed by numerous strategic research institutes including think-tanks and academia, differentiated geographic spaces of production, distribution and consumption presented by popular geopolitics, which is connected simultaneously through common geo-cultural areas (such as districts, states), as well as structural geopolitics which focuses on how progress, trends and contradictions of globalization affect contemporary geopolitical conditions and geopolitical practice (Kearns, 2010). In practice, the four types of geopolitics merge mutually (Tuathail, 1998), and jointly propel the return of spatial significance in geopolitics.

4.3 Turning to critical geopolitics

The major ideological trend of geopolitical research has been turning to “critical geopolitics” since the 1990s (Figure 3). “Critical” means the suspicion towards state-centrism, and “geopolitics” is closely associated with the alternation of power. Global contemporary politics is increasingly driven by such non-state actors as credit rating agencies, NGO and transnational corporations, so the definition of “critical geopolitics” is not only criticism towards state-centrism but also criticizing the traditional power-centered geopolitics. Critical geopolitics constitutes geopolitical cognition via associating visual images (especially maps) and words (political speeches, analogies and metaphors) with political manifestations (economic and political practice, such as currency and military deployment), so as to guide official foreign policy and facilitate adjustments of various organizations’ strategic policies (Tuathail, 1999).

Different from conventional geopolitics which focuses on the key role of geography in political rights, critical geopolitics applies social-scientific critical thinking to inquire how power works and how it may be challenged (Agnew, 2001). Using inter-disciplinary theories and methods of sociology, GIS, culturology and semantics for references, critical geopolitics analyzes and emphasizes that class, race, gender and other hierarchy of capitalism continue to be the reality and need to be rebuilt in the changing geopolitical context (Agnew and John, 2003), which is reflected through discourse, rhetoric, metaphor and symbolism. Critical geopolitics analyzes geography of social movements which is related to feminism, radicalism and participatory democracy from the perspective of national security (Amin and Thrift,

2005). It is also expounded that geopolitical issues via analyzing processes of non-political development and cooperation, by emphasizing discourse rights and participation processes of NGO, community and individual in geopolitical issues, such as Asian Development Bank and community residents in the Mekong sub-regional cooperation (Painter, 1995) .

In the geopolitical world under the influence of globalism, power will decentralize more universally and hierarchy will be weakened (Cohen, 2011). Global geopolitical maps and panoramic institutionalized strategic viewpoints will yet be the central issues of geopolitics. Under the influence of multiple factors including climate change, nation-states, NGO and religious relations, global geopolitical pattern will differ from the conventionally geopolitical perspectives characterized by the rivalry of powers and global demarcation of powers. Strategic balance of global powers and its approaches to implementation will be the latest trend of geo-strategic research (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Critical thinking of geopolitics (Hu *et al.*, 2015) has become a novel perspective of multiple research subjects including geopolitical processes and discourse rights, thus it is now making great strides forward to a promising tide of geopolitical research.

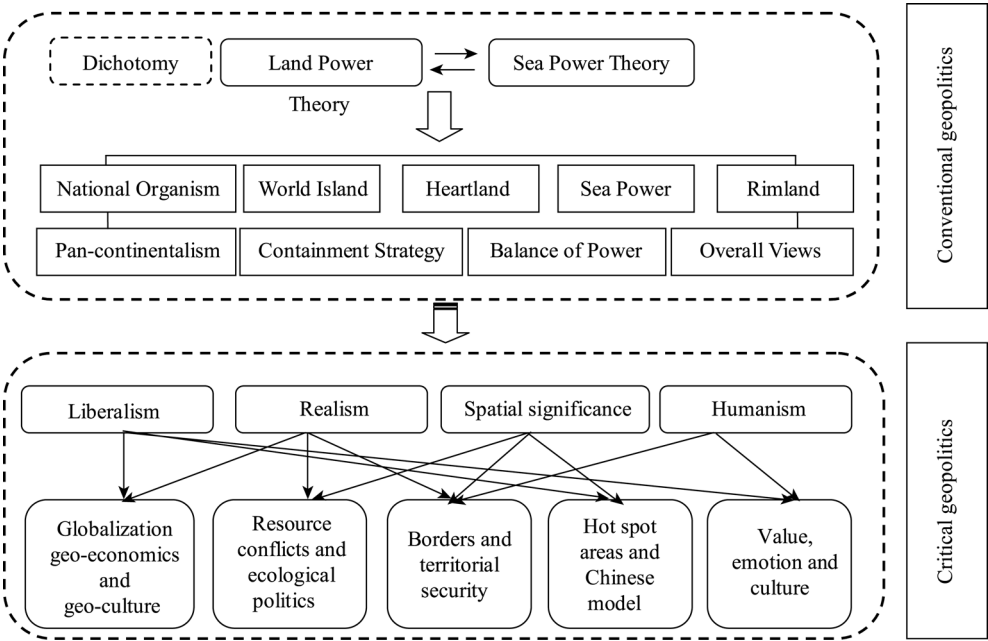


Figure 3 Trends of international research on geopolitics for the last 20 years

5 Conclusion and outlook

In the tide of globalization and informatization, the new profile of international arena begins to form, and geopolitics becomes a significant means for interpreting global pattern and formulating policy. Through systematically analyzing the research trends based on geopolitical articles in Web of Science from 1996 to 2015, this article concludes that: in the recent round of geopolitical research, the number of published geopolitical papers increases gradually. The main research perspective is a critical review of conventionally geopolitical theories, with the emphasis on the significance of geographic space, integration of in-

ter-disciplinary research methods and humanistic factors. The discussion also covers such research fields as borders and territory, geo-economics, conflicts of resources and ecology, value and emotion. International research on geopolitics enlightens the revival of Chinese geopolitics:

(1) Research on China's geo-strategy after Cold War. In the era of "one superpower and multiple great powers" and under the premise of homeland security, communication and cooperation of geo-economics and geo-culture are the key themes. One of the primary missions of China's geographic research in the future is to innovate and apply geopolitical and geo-economic theories with Chinese characteristics on the basis of western geopolitical and geo-economic theories and the need of China's national security and peaceful rise during the new period (Mao, 2014).

(2) Intensification of space and scales. Although geographers' research on geopolitics experienced the revolutionary transformation of cognition on the relationship between human beings and geographical environment that human beings become "participants" of environment from being its "masters" (Sneddon and Fox, 2006), the significance of geospatial dimensions is strengthened in the latest geopolitical tide, in which space is yet the central carrier of military, economic and cultural development. Under diverse scales of globe, state, region and border, the spatial rationalization of geostrategic relationships deserves further consideration from geopoliticians, and the multilateral participation of governments, enterprises and academia ought to be emphasized.

(3) Narration, processes and multiple methods. Geopolitics, a significant sub-discipline of geography, needs to enhance cooperation with numerous disciplines including other branches of human geography, physical geography, GIS, international relations, sociology and politics. Methodologies of geopolitics ought to not only remain in the narration and discussion of physical geographic space, but also integrate multiple research methods such as spatial analysis of geography, semantics, symbolic imaginations and ethnology.

(4) The infusion of humanism. A major research trend of international geopolitics is the infusion of humanistic concepts and category. Chinese geopolitics needs to macroscopically explore geo-strategy from top to bottom and thoroughly analyze multiple subjects including residents, NGO and females from the bottom up. Research on humanistic background behind geopolitical phenomena should be paid more attention.

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