



Scientometric Analysis of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

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Abstract. Against the complex landscape of the global economy, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership represents one of the most prominent free trade agreements worldwide. It seeks to reduce tariffs, unify economic and trade rules, and offer tailored cooperation pathways for member economies at varying stages of development. It is an influential driver of reconstructing future dynamics of international pattern development, issuing a strong signal against unilateralism and protectionism. This article conducts a comprehensive research on the Web of Science database and gathers 539 articles retrieved from 1984 to 2026. Subsequently, use Vosviewer and Bibliometrix software to visualize the data. The results show that this topic has attracted more attention since 2021, with the main keyword being “economy”. China is the most relevant country in the literature of this research field. It encompasses numerous important research fields, including economics, law, sustainable development studies, energy, the environment, and international trade. The outcomes of this analysis can provide valuable references and guidance for future research in related areas.

Keywords: RCEP, International Trade, Economy

1 Introduction

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership(RCEP) consists of 15 countries, becoming the largest free trade agreement around the world. It is committed to promoting regional economic integration by means of tariff reduction and the harmonization of economic and trade rules^[3]. The establishment of RCEP has led to new opportunities and challenges in a complex global background, which is full of uncertainties^{[1][7]}. Not only does it foster economic development of all member countries, but it also promotes sustainable development in the context of energy shortages^[11]. The implementation of RCEP helps enhance the economic efficiency and competitive edge of its members^[5]. Global trade is in the process of structural reshaping, with a visible trend shifting from extreme globalization toward regionalization^[4]. RCEP plays a role in increasing regional economic integration and enlarging the volume of cross-border flows, furthermore becoming an influential driver of international trade reconstruction^[6]. And over the long run, the spillover impacts generated by RCEP are anticipated to boost global economic progress, raise social well-being, and promote international trade flows^[9].

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Nevertheless, while RCEP brings economic benefits, it may also lead to climate risks. For instance, trade liberalization can lead to increased carbon emissions and energy consumption^[2]. While the digital economy acts as a critical engine for the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, its contribution to enhancing energy efficiency remains limited^[8]. In addition, RCEP has faced substantial challenges arising from various divergences among member states^[10].

To provide researchers with a deeper understanding of RCEP, this paper reviews 539 articles collected from the Web of Science (WoS) database to fill research gaps and discover new research trends.

2 Data and Methods

To obtain literature associated with RCEP, this paper performed an advanced search in the WoS database:

TS=(“RCEP” or “Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership”)

A total of 539 articles were acquired, with the deadline of January 17, 2026. Data visualization analysis was performed by using VOSviewer and Bibliometric software. The total number of citations for all papers in the literature is 7072, with an average of 13.12 citations per project and an h-index of 30.

3 Research Findings

3.1 Three-Field Plot

Figure 1 links data from three dimensions to show the connections within the literature. The left side lists the most highly cited papers in this field, and this literature serves as an important theoretical and empirical foundation for RCEP research. The “Author” field is in the middle, and the right side represents “Keywords Merged”, which reflects the research hotspots and core topics. As the figure shows, “RCEP”, “China”, “trade”, and “impact” are the hotspots of research.

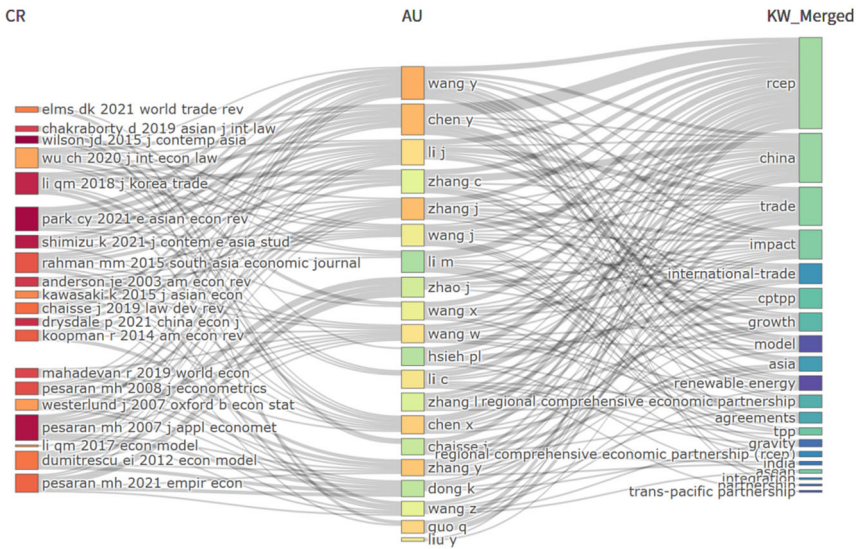


Fig. 1. Three Field Plot

3.2 Keyword Co-occurrence Network Map

Figure 2 is a commonly used visualization tool in bibliometric analysis. Seven principal clusters can be clearly divided as follows:

The red cluster focuses on the driving function of RCEP in economic growth and Global Value Chain (GVC), while also pinpointing its impacts on agricultural trade, carbon emissions, and other issues associated with sustainable development. The green cluster comprises keywords related to geopolitics and regional patterns, including China, Asia-Pacific, India, and Japan.

The blue cluster is the core cluster of this map, linking RCEP with ASEAN, CPTPP, and TPP, which researches on paths and mechanisms of Regional Integration. This is the core research issue in RCEP studies. The yellow cluster shows the external shocks and analytical methods of RCEP, keywords such as COVID-19, gravity, and model. The purple cluster concentrates on the multilateral trading system, including digital trade, APEC, WTO, etc. The cyan cluster is structured around tariff trade facilitation, trade agreements, trade in services, and GTAP. It focuses on trade policy and quantitative analysis. The orange cluster is the smallest of the seven clusters and represents the edge cluster in Networks.

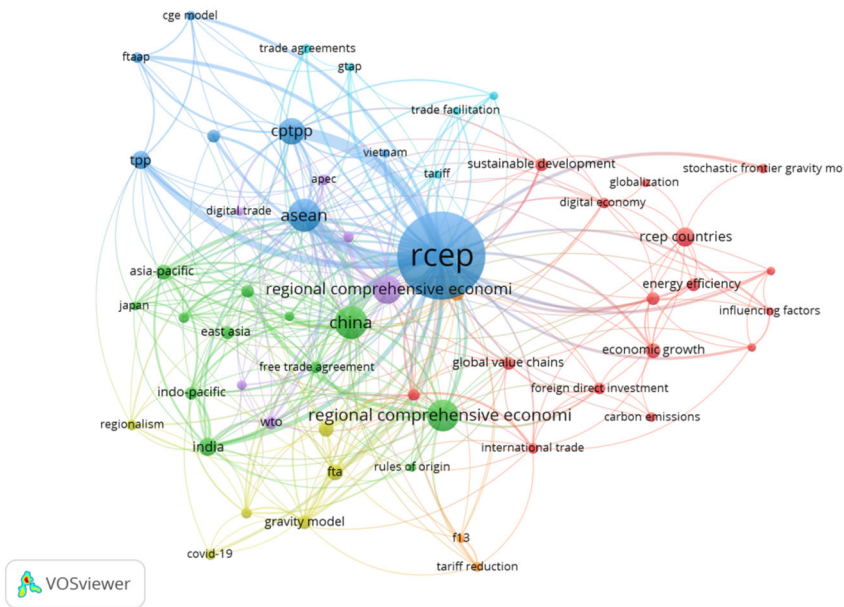


Fig. 2. Keyword Co-occurrence Network Map

3.3 Thematic Map

Figure 3 serves as an instrument for assessing the significance and evolutionary trends of research topics within bibliometric analysis. The horizontal axis indicates the degree of correlation among topics, while the vertical axis reflects the level of development of those topics. As shown, motor themes are RCEP, China, ASEAN, and basic themes are impact, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and international trade. We can draw the conclusion that RCEP research is shifting from conventional trade and investment effect analysis to emerging issues, including green low-carbon development and the digital economy, mirroring the new trends of global economic governance.

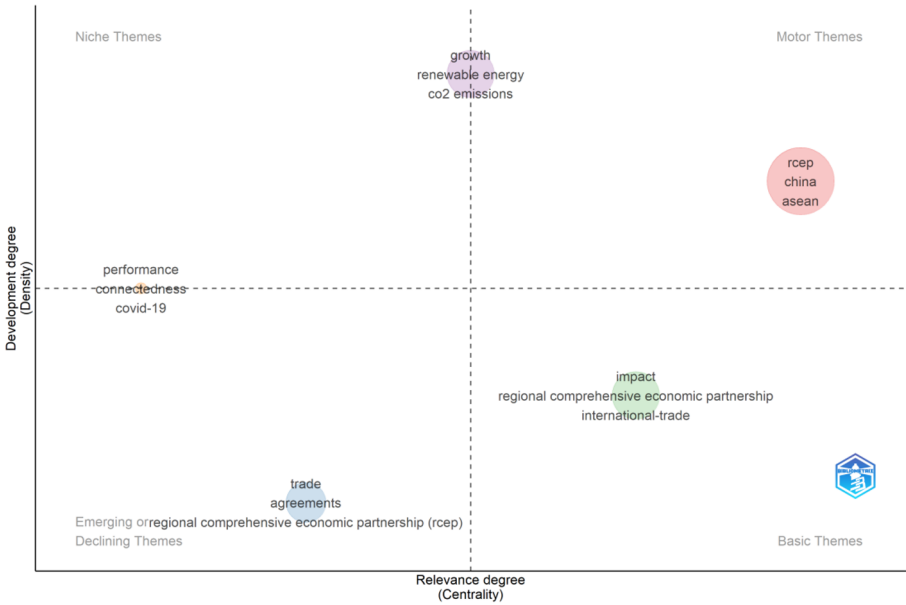


Fig. 3. Thematic Map

4 Conclusion

This paper researches and analyzes the literature on RCEP, and the results show that: The research hotspots and core research topics are mainly “China”, “trade”, and “economy”. Energy and environmental issues have become increasingly severe in the modern era, but research on these aspects remains relatively scarce. Topics such as green trade and the digital economy are on the rise, which may evolve into key research focuses in the years ahead.

As the reform of the multilateral trading system progresses, RCEP has evolved into a pivotal institutional framework for deepening regional economic integration and re-shaping trade patterns at regional and global levels. This paper could offer future researchers a deeper understanding of RCEP and assist them in their studies.

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