

Korea–ASEAN Business and International Management (2006–2025): A Bibliometric Mapping

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Abstract

This study examines the intellectual and thematic structure of Korea–ASEAN business and international management research published between 2006 and 2025 using a systematic bibliometric approach. The analysis draws on 163 Scopus-indexed documents and integrates performance indicators with science mapping techniques to trace publication trends, collaboration patterns, and the field's conceptual organization. Research output increases markedly after 2016, with nearly two-thirds of the corpus published in the past decade and a peak in 2024. The field remains highly dispersed across 118 journals, reflecting its interdisciplinary character. In terms of knowledge production, South Korea is the leading contributor, followed by the United States, China, and Malaysia, alongside substantial international collaboration among major publishing countries. Thematic patterns continue to be dominated by foreign direct investment (FDI) and global value chain perspectives, with growing attention to regional integration and country-specific contexts, particularly Vietnam. Bibliographic coupling identifies four main research fronts: FDI determinants and outcomes, FDI–energy–environment linkages, knowledge transfer and organizational mechanisms, and global value chain restructuring. Co-citation analysis further indicates an intellectual base rooted in FDI–growth and spillover research, complemented by value-added trade and capability-based perspectives. The findings reveal a structural imbalance in the field. While macroeconomic approaches dominate, firm-level and organizational mechanisms remain comparatively underdeveloped despite their strong influence. This study contributes by clarifying this imbalance and outlining a research agenda focused on production-network reconfiguration, digital internationalization, sustainability governance, and multi-level designs linking firm strategy to regional policy frameworks.

Keywords

Korea, ASEAN, Bibliometrics, International Management, Business

Introduction

The economic relationship between South Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has shifted fundamentally since the mid-2000s. What was once primarily an export-oriented relationship has evolved into a production-integrated system embedded within regional and global value chains. Korean firms increasingly treat ASEAN not simply as a market, but as a strategic production base within their international operations. This reconfiguration reflects a combination of structural pressures and strategic responses. Rising labor costs in South Korea, growing geopolitical uncertainty in parts of East Asia, and the need to diversify supply chains have collectively redirected Korean outward foreign direct investment (FDI) toward manufacturing hubs such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. As a result, South Korea now ranks consistently among ASEAN's major investors, with cumulative investment stocks underscoring the depth of this economic integration. Institutional frameworks, including the ASEAN–Korea Free Trade Agreement (AKFTA) and the New Southern Policy, have further accelerated this process, reinforcing the Korea–ASEAN corridor as a key component of contemporary production networks. These developments can be interpreted through established frameworks in international business research. The eclectic paradigm (Dunning, 1993) highlights how firms combine ownership advantages with location-specific benefits and internalization strategies when expanding abroad. In the Korea–ASEAN context, this logic is reflected in the deployment of firm-specific capabilities alongside cost and market opportunities in host economies. The Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 2009) offers a complementary perspective, emphasizing incremental learning and the role of network embeddedness in shaping firms' international expansion. Institutional approaches further suggest that host-country environments condition how strategies unfold in practice (Peng, Wang & Jiang, 2008).

A central debate within this literature concerns the developmental consequences of Korean investment in ASEAN. Early research often framed FDI as a driver of technological catch-up. Subsequent evidence, however, shows that spillover effects are uneven and contingent on local conditions. In particular, the ability of host-country firms to absorb and utilize external knowledge has emerged as a critical factor. At the same time, analytical attention has shifted toward value creation within global production systems. Rather than focusing solely on aggregate investment flows, recent studies examine how value is distributed across fragmented supply chains, often finding that higher-value activities remain concentrated in home economies despite the relocation of production. The scope of the literature has also broadened to include the externalities associated with export-led industrialization. A growing body of work examines the relationships between FDI, energy consumption, and environmental outcomes, raising questions about the sustainability of current development trajectories in ASEAN. Taken together, these strands of research span multiple disciplines and analytical levels. The result is a field that is intellectually rich but increasingly fragmented.

This fragmentation presents a clear limitation. Without a systematic synthesis, it remains difficult to assess how different research streams relate to one another, which areas are well established, and where significant gaps persist. Existing studies provide valuable insights, but they do not offer a consolidated view of the field's intellectual structure or its evolving research fronts.

This study addresses that gap. It applies a systematic bibliometric approach to map Korea–ASEAN business and international management research published between 2006 and 2025. The analysis reconstructs the field's intellectual foundations, identifies its dominant thematic clusters, and examines patterns of collaboration and knowledge production. Three objectives guide the study: first, to document the evolution of the field through publication trends and collaboration networks; second, to identify its intellectual base using reference co-citation analysis; and third, to delineate contemporary research fronts through bibliographic coupling, with particular attention to the divide between macroeconomic and firm-level perspectives. By clarifying the structure of the field, this study provides a foundation for more cumulative and theoretically integrated research on one of Asia's most significant economic corridors.

Research Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a bibliometric science mapping approach to analyse the structure and development of Korea–ASEAN business research. Such methods are well suited to fragmented and interdisciplinary fields, where they enable systematic and reproducible assessment of publication patterns and the underlying intellectual structure through citation-based networks (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). The analysis follows established reporting practices for bibliometric research. A structured search strategy is applied, the screening process is documented using PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021), and key mapping parameters are reported transparently to ensure replicability.

Data source and corpus construction

Bibliographic records were retrieved from Scopus on 22 February 2026. Scopus was selected over Web of Science as the primary source because of its broader coverage of Asian and ASEAN-region journals, which is directly relevant to the domain under study. The search was restricted to journal articles and review articles published between 2006 and 2025. The year 2006 was selected as the start point because it precedes the entry into force of the AKFTA (2007) while capturing any immediately preceding scholarly anticipation of that agreement. The search string combined Korea-related terms with ASEAN-related terms and business-management constructs.

The search yielded 838 records. Non-English and non-accessible full-text documents were excluded prior to screening, reducing the dataset to 313 records for title and abstract review. Screening was guided by two criteria: first, Korea and ASEAN (or individual member states) had to constitute the

substantive empirical or theoretical focus rather than appear incidentally in broader comparative studies; second, the content had to fall within the domains of business, management, or international economics. The screening process was conducted independently by two reviewers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. This stage resulted in the exclusion of 150 records, producing a final corpus of 163 documents for analysis.

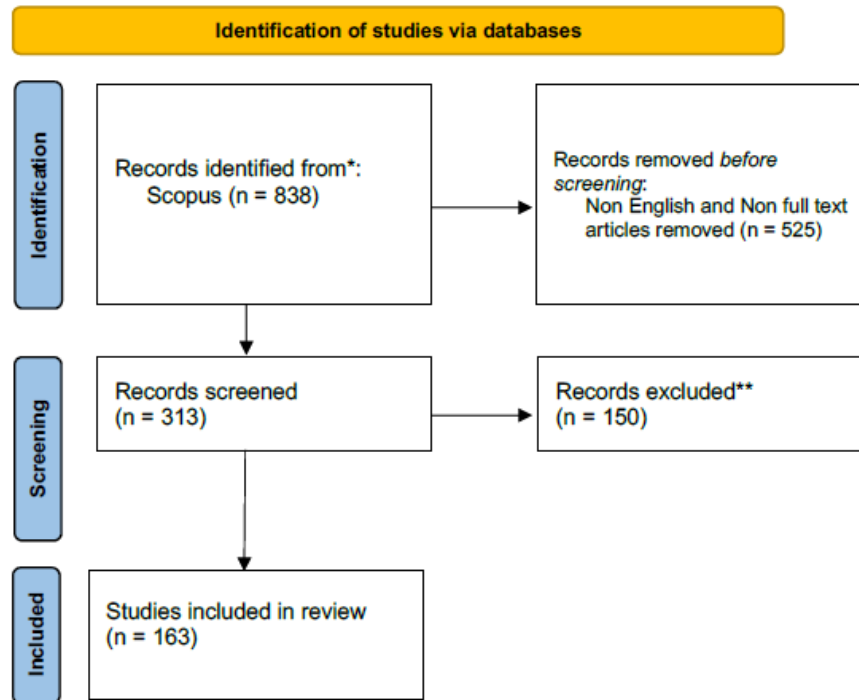


Table 1 PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

Analytical procedures

The analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage focuses on performance indicators, examining publication trends, leading outlets, and geographic contributions. Country participation is based on author affiliations, with all contributing countries counted per document rather than restricting attribution to first or corresponding authors. International collaboration is assessed using multiple-country publication (MCP) counts and corresponding shares.

The second stage applies science mapping techniques using VOSviewer (version 1.6.20; van Eck & Waltman, 2010) to reconstruct the field's thematic and intellectual structure. Three complementary approaches are used. Author keyword co-occurrence is employed to identify dominant topics, with a minimum occurrence threshold of three; this yields 73 keywords from an initial set of 456, which are further reduced to 40 after consolidating near-duplicates. Bibliographic coupling is then used to detect contemporary research fronts by linking documents with shared references. Applying a minimum threshold of five shared references retains 81 documents, of which the largest connected component (43 documents) forms the basis for cluster interpretation. Finally, reference co-citation

analysis is used to identify the field's intellectual foundations, with a minimum co-citation threshold of three resulting in 62 core references from a total of 2,847. All networks are constructed using fractional counting to normalize link weights and are visualized using the VOS layout algorithm with default parameter settings.

Research results

Publication trajectory (2006–2025)

Publication activity in the Korea–ASEAN research domain remains limited in the early years before expanding more rapidly over time. From 2006 to 2012, output is consistently low, averaging around five publications per year. A clear shift emerges in 2013, marking the beginning of a sustained growth phase, although annual output continues to fluctuate.

Growth becomes more pronounced in the late 2010s, culminating in a peak of 18 publications in 2024. The lower count recorded for 2025 ($n = 11$) should be interpreted with caution, as it reflects an incomplete publication cycle at the time of data collection. Overall, the expansion is recent: 103 of the 163 documents (63.2%) were published between 2016 and 2025, indicating that the field has developed primarily within the past decade. This trajectory suggests that Korea–ASEAN business research has transitioned from a marginal topic to a more established area of inquiry, reflecting broader structural shifts in regional economic integration and supply chain reconfiguration. (See Figure 1: The annual number of new scientific articles on Korea-ASEAN business and international management research (2006–2025), $N = 163$)

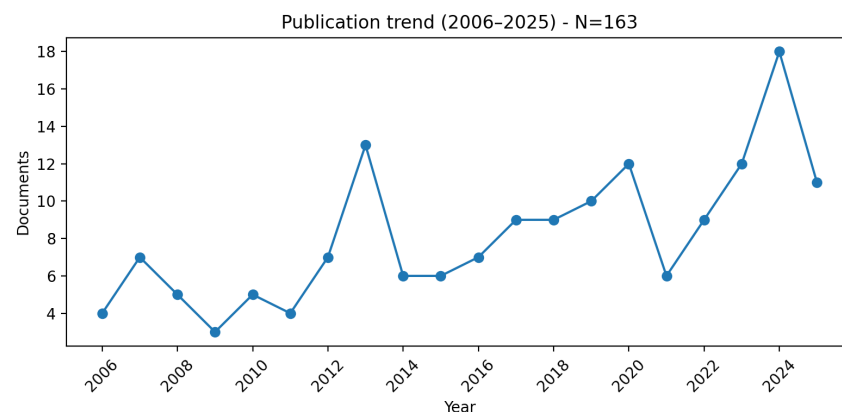


Figure 1. The annual number of new scientific articles on Korea-ASEAN business and international management research (2006–2025).

Disciplinary orientation and leading outlets

The publication landscape is highly fragmented. The 163 documents are distributed across 118 journals, and no single outlet dominates the field. This dispersion reflects the absence of a consolidated

disciplinary core, with Korea–ASEAN research spanning multiple domains rather than clustering within a defined set of international management journals. In terms of publication volume, the Asian Journal of Technology Innovation appears most frequently (10 documents), followed by a smaller group of journals; including International Economic Journal, Seoul Journal of Economics, and International Journal of Business and Society, with four publications each. Several outlets contribute three articles, such as Journal of Asian Economics, Asia Pacific Business Review, and Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity. A different pattern emerges when citation impact is considered.

Journals with relatively few contributions account for some of the highest average citation levels, including Asian Business and Management, Journal of Asian Economics, and Review of International Political Economy. This divergence between publication volume and citation influence suggests that the field's most impactful work is not concentrated in its most frequent outlets. Instead, higher-impact contributions tend to appear in journals with stronger disciplinary positioning, indicating that influence is shaped more by journal context than by publication frequency within the Korea–ASEAN domain itself.

Geographic contributions and collaborative networks

Knowledge production in the field is geographically diverse but unevenly distributed. South Korea accounts for the largest share of publications (31 documents), followed by the United States (20), China (19), and Malaysia (19), with additional contributions from Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. The strong presence of non-ASEAN economies, particularly the United States and China, indicates that Korea–ASEAN research is embedded within broader global debates on East Asian production networks rather than confined to a bilateral scholarly community.

Collaboration patterns reinforce this international orientation. A substantial proportion of publications from major contributors involve cross-country co-authorship, including 51.6% of South Korea's output, 70.0% of the United States, and 87.5% of the United Kingdom's. Anglo-American contexts are predominantly collaborative and internationally embedded. At the dyadic level, the most frequent collaboration occurs between South Korea and the United States, followed by several pairings involving China, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Thailand. A more uneven pattern emerges when authorship is compared with empirical focus. Vietnam appears frequently as a research context in the dataset, yet its institutional representation remains limited. This imbalance indicates that Vietnam is primarily positioned as an object of analysis rather than as a producer of knowledge within the field. Such asymmetry raises broader questions about authorship concentration, research capacity, and the extent to which local perspectives are incorporated into the study of Korea–ASEAN economic dynamics. (See Figure 2: Co-authorship network based on country affiliation, VOSviewer)

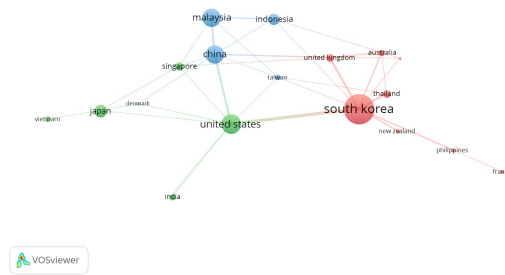


Figure 2. Co-authorship network based on country affiliation, VOSviewer.

Thematic salience and orientation

Author keywords indicate a field still anchored in investment-based analysis. The most frequent terms—foreign direct investment (16) and FDI (12)—confirm the dominance of investment as the primary empirical lens. Production-oriented perspectives are also visible, with global value chain (10) and global value chains (6) suggesting an emerging, though not yet dominant, parallel framework. Geographic markers (ASEAN, Korea, South Korea, Vietnam, China) and institutional terms such as RCEP further point to a strong focus on region-specific dynamics within broader production and trade systems. The co-occurrence structure reinforces this pattern. A central cluster links FDI, economic growth, trade, and Vietnam, reflecting the persistence of macro-level investment–growth analysis. Surrounding this core, global value chain and supply chain concepts form a secondary grouping connected to South Korea and East Asia. Environmental and energy-related terms appear in a more peripheral cluster, indicating that sustainability remains analytically separate from the dominant investment-focused narrative. This separation is significant. It suggests that sustainability constitutes an emerging but still weakly integrated research stream. (See Figure 3: Author keyword co-occurrence network, VOSviewer)

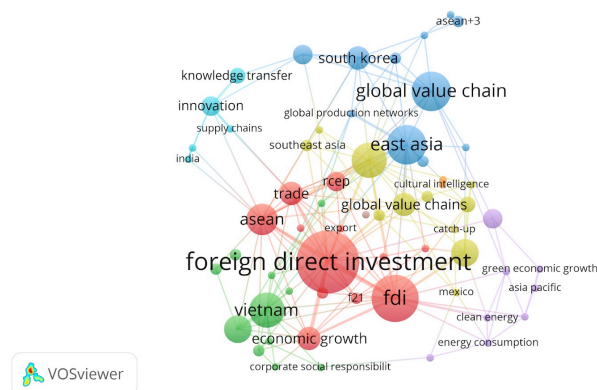


Figure 3. Author keyword co-occurrence network, VOSviewer.

Intellectual foundations: reference co-citation structure

Reference co-citation analysis reveals three interconnected but unevenly developed intellectual pillars that underpin the field. Together, they reflect a persistent tension between macroeconomic explanation and firm-level interpretation.

Pillar 1: The conditional FDI–growth nexus.

The most central and densely connected body of work focuses on the conditions under which foreign direct investment contributes to host-country growth. Foundational studies establish that FDI effects are contingent rather than automatic, depending on factors such as absorptive capacity, trade openness, and institutional quality (Balasubramanyam et al., 1996; Borensztein et al., 1998). Subsequent firm-level evidence complicates this picture, showing that spillovers vary with technological

distance and competitive dynamics (Aitken & Harrison, 1999; Blomstrom & Kokko, 1998). Later contributions introduce financial development as an additional conditioning factor, extending the framework beyond technology transfer alone (Alfaro et al., 2004). This pillar is dominated by panel and time-series econometrics, which continue to shape how FDI outcomes are empirically assessed.

Pillar 2: Global production networks and value-added trade.

A second strand shifts attention from aggregate outcomes to the structure of cross-border production. Rather than treating trade as a flow of final goods, this literature examines how value is created and distributed across fragmented production systems. Value-added accounting approaches (Daudin et al., 2011) and gravity-based models (Anderson, 1979) provide the analytical backbone for this perspective, while the global value chain framework (Gereffi et al., 2005) situates Korea–ASEAN relations within broader patterns of production governance. Despite its conceptual relevance, this pillar is less central in the co-citation network. This suggests that while GVC language is widely used, it has not yet fully displaced the FDI–growth paradigm as the field’s dominant analytical foundation.

Pillar 3: Strategy, organizational capabilities, and cross-cultural management.

The third pillar introduces firm-level perspectives that remain comparatively peripheral in the overall structure. Work in this area conceptualizes multinational enterprises as networks balancing global integration with local responsiveness (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002), and highlights the role of managerial capabilities, such as cultural intelligence, in shaping cross-border performance (Ang et al., 2007). The resource-based view (Barney, 1991) further grounds international outcomes in firm-specific capabilities rather than country-level conditions. However, the relatively low co-citation density of this pillar indicates that perspectives have yet to be fully integrated into the field’s core analytical framework.

Taken together, these pillars reveal a field that remains anchored in macroeconomic explanation, with firm-level and organizational perspectives occupying a secondary position. The

persistence of this structure helps explain the imbalance identified in later sections: while the determinants and outcomes of FDI are well established, the mechanisms through which these outcomes materialize remain comparatively under-theorized. (See Figure 4: Reference co-citation network, VOSviewer)

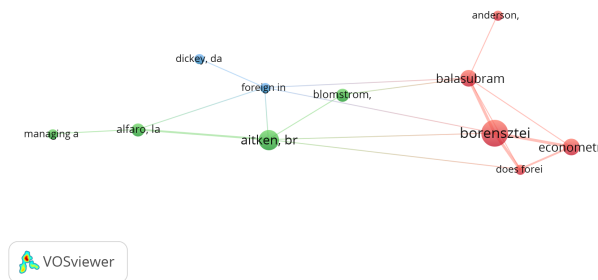


Figure 4. Reference co-citation network, VOSviewer

Contemporary research fronts: document bibliographic coupling

Bibliographic coupling identifies clusters of documents that share reference profiles, capturing active research fronts rather than historical foundations. Within the largest connected component of the network (43 documents), four distinct fronts emerge. Taken together, they show a field still dominated by macro-level investment analysis, but increasingly diversified by sustainability and firm-level perspectives.

Front 1: FDI determinants and growth outcomes.

This is the largest and most central cluster, comprising 15 documents. It reflects the continued prominence of empirical work examining the drivers and consequences of Korean and intra-regional FDI in ASEAN economies. Studies in this front rely heavily on panel econometric methods and focus on bilateral investment determinants, growth effects, and variation in spillovers across host countries. Its moderate citation profile suggests a mature research stream: widely studied, methodologically standardized, and cumulatively influential rather than driven by a small number of highly cited contributions.

Front 2: FDI–energy–environment linkages.

This cluster, with 12 documents, stands out for its high citation impact (mean cited-by: 27.4). It connects investment dynamics to environmental and energy outcomes, examining how FDI interacts with income levels, energy consumption, and emissions across ASEAN contexts. Despite its smaller size, the cluster's citation intensity indicates disproportionate influence. This suggests that

sustainability-oriented perspectives have gained traction beyond their numerical representation, repositioning environmental governance as a central—rather than peripheral—dimension of Korea–ASEAN economic integration.

Front 3: Knowledge transfer and organizational/managerial mechanisms.

Comprising nine documents, this front shifts attention to firm-level processes underlying multinational activity. It focuses on issues such as expatriate management, inter-organizational knowledge flows, and the development of subsidiary capabilities, often in Vietnam-centered contexts. Although smaller in scale, the cluster exhibits a relatively high citation average, indicating strong influence. This pattern highlights a structural imbalance: while the broader literature emphasizes the conditions under which FDI generates spillovers, relatively few studies examine the organizational mechanisms through which such outcomes are produced.

Front 4: Global value chains and regional restructuring.

The smallest cluster (seven documents) reflects a more recent shift toward analysing production networks and regional restructuring. Research in this front moves beyond bilateral

investment relationships to consider value capture, upgrading trajectories, and the distributional implications of network embeddedness within East Asia. Its limited size suggests that this perspective is still emerging, despite its conceptual importance for understanding how Korea–ASEAN integration operates within global value chains.

Taken together, these fronts reinforce a consistent pattern. Macroeconomic approaches centered on FDI remain dominant, but newer lines of inquiry—particularly those focused on sustainability and firm-level processes—are gaining influence without yet reshaping the field’s overall structure. This uneven development mirrors the imbalance observed in the intellectual foundations, where established econometric traditions continue to outweigh more recent organizational and network-based perspectives. (See Figure 5: Document bibliographic coupling network, VOSviewer)

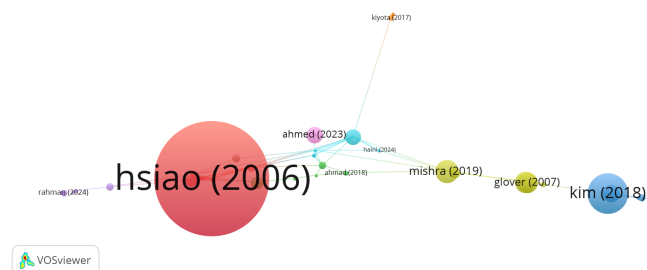


Figure 5. Document bibliographic coupling network, VOSviewer.

Discussions and Future research agenda

Interpreting the structural asymmetry

The combined evidence points to a clear structural imbalance in the field. Korea–ASEAN business research is more developed at the macroeconomic level than at the organizational level, and this imbalance is not incidental. It reflects the theoretical orientation of the field and shapes what it is able to explain. Both the co-citation and bibliographic coupling results support this pattern. The intellectual base is dominated by FDI–growth econometrics, value-added trade approaches, and aggregate institutional frameworks. At the same time, the coupling structure places macro-level empirical work at the centre of the network, particularly studies on investment determinants and outcomes. Research on organizational mechanisms, especially knowledge transfer and firm-level capability development, remains peripheral, even though it exhibits relatively high citation impact.

This imbalance has direct theoretical consequences. The spillover literature, which anchors much of the field, consistently shows that the effects of FDI depend on absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Meyer & Sinani, 2009). However, the processes through which such capacity is developed in host-country firms are rarely examined in detail. In the Korea–ASEAN context, there is limited systematic evidence on how Korean multinational enterprises shape learning dynamics within partner firms in countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia.

A similar limitation arises in relation to global value chain (GVC) theory. Governance structures, whether market-based, modular, relational, captive, or hierarchical, determine how knowledge is transferred and how upgrading opportunities are distributed (Gereffi et al., 2005). Yet these distinctions are difficult to capture using aggregate data alone. The Korea–ASEAN production system encompasses multiple governance forms, from captive relationships in labor-intensive manufacturing to more modular arrangements in electronics assembly. Each carries different implications for capability development, but these differences remain underexplored in the current literature.

Taken together, the dominance of macro-level approaches constrains the field's explanatory depth. While aggregate analyses identify when and where FDI contributes to growth, they provide limited insight into how these outcomes are produced in practice.

The FDI–energy–environment nexus as a reframing opportunity

The high citation impact of Front 2, despite its relatively small size, points to a research stream that is gaining influence rather than one that is already consolidated. This literature challenges a core assumption underlying the FDI–growth paradigm: that capital inflows are broadly welfare-enhancing for host economies. Instead of focusing primarily on productivity gains and technology transfer, this line of work highlights a parallel set of externalities. Investment-driven growth is associated not only with increased output, but also with rising energy demand, higher carbon intensity, and environmental stress. These effects are not incidental; they shape the overall developmental impact of Korean

investment in ASEAN economies. As a result, the net benefits of FDI cannot be assessed without accounting for these environmental costs. This reframing is particularly relevant in the context of Korea's New Southern Policy and ASEAN member states' commitments under the Paris Agreement.

A key analytical opportunity lies in connecting this environmental perspective with global value chain (GVC) governance. The environmental intensity of production is not determined solely by host-country conditions; it is also shaped by how activities are organized within multinational supply chains. Governance structures influence technology choice, production standards, and upgrading trajectories. If this is the case, then interventions targeting Korean multinational enterprises, such as incentives for cleaner technologies or supply chain standards, may be more effective than policies focused exclusively on regulating emissions at the host-country level. This type of cross-level analysis remains largely absent from the current literature. Integrating environmental outcomes with firm-level governance structures would provide a more complete account of how Korea–ASEAN production networks generate both economic and ecological effects.

Supply chain resilience as an emerging research frontier

The cluster centred on global value chains and regional restructuring points to a growing emphasis on supply chain resilience under conditions of geopolitical and economic disruption (Baldwin, 2016; UNCTAD, 2022). In the Korea–ASEAN context, this line of research remains underdeveloped but carries significant analytical potential. A central gap lies in the limited integration between governance-based approaches to global value chains and the quantitative tools used to analyse production networks. Input–output frameworks, including the GTAP database (Aguiar et al., 2019) and value-added trade decomposition methods (Daudin et al., 2011), allow researchers to trace value creation, distribution, and interdependence across countries. However, these tools are rarely combined with perspectives from international business and GVC governance that explain how firms organize and control these networks. As a result, the literature captures either structural patterns or firm-level strategies, but seldom both.

Trade tensions between the United States and China, pandemic-related disruptions, and the strategic reorientation of Korean firms toward ASEAN have exposed vulnerabilities in existing production networks while accelerating their reconfiguration. These dynamics create a setting in which resilience, diversification, and upgrading can be observed in real time. Research that links firm-level evidence on supply chain strategy with macro-level value-added accounting would address this gap directly. Such designs would make it possible to analyse not only where value is created, but also how governance choices shape resilience and adjustment within the network. This would extend existing GVC and international business frameworks and provide more policy-relevant insights into the future of Korea–ASEAN economic integration.

Theoretical implications

The results highlight a clear imbalance in the theoretical foundations of the field. Existing work remains anchored in FDI–growth and spillover perspectives, with more limited engagement with broader international business theory. While methods have generated important insights into aggregate outcomes, they offer only a partial explanation of how Korean firms operate within ASEAN contexts. Notably, several core IB frameworks are underrepresented in the field’s shared reference base. The eclectic paradigm (Dunning, 1993) and the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), both central to understanding internationalization processes, appear only marginally in the co-citation structure. More recent developments, including perspectives on the liability of foreignness (Zaheer, 1995), institutional distance (Kostova & Roth, 2002), and the springboard behaviour of emerging-economy multinationals (Luo & Tung, 2007), are largely absent. This suggests that Korea–ASEAN research has not fully engaged with the theoretical tools needed to explain firm-level entry strategies, adaptation, and network positioning.

The imbalance between macro-level explanation and firm-level analysis also limits how absorptive capacity is conceptualized. Although widely cited, the frameworks developed by Cohen and Levinthal (1990) and Zahra and George (2002) are rarely operationalized in empirical terms. As a result, absorptive capacity is often treated as a background condition rather than as an outcome shaped by organizational processes. Addressing this gap requires a shift in analytical focus. Future research should examine how absorptive capacity is produced within Korean-led production networks, with particular attention to governance structures, expatriate management practices, and inter-firm relationships. Such an approach would move beyond treating learning as an abstract condition and instead explain how it emerges from specific organizational arrangements.

Practical and policy implications

For managers in Korea–ASEAN production networks, competitive advantage is shifting from cost arbitrage to effective coordination and capability building across subsidiaries and partners. Evidence from the knowledge transfer stream highlights the importance of organizational design, particularly expatriate deployment, inter-subsidiary knowledge flows, and the management of cultural distance, in shaping subsidiary performance beyond what aggregate FDI data capture.

For policymakers, sustainability is embedded in Korea–ASEAN investment dynamics rather than peripheral to them. The FDI–energy–environment literature shows that capital inflows are closely linked to energy use, emissions, and environmental outcomes. This underscores the role of policy instruments, such as investment screening, technology-upgrading incentives, and regional carbon pricing, in shaping how multinational activity translates into environmental impact. Existing frameworks offer entry points for alignment. Initiatives under the New Southern Policy, including smart city cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, can support both capability development and sustainability objectives. Linking these more directly to investment governance would strengthen their effectiveness and improve policy coherence.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. The analysis is restricted to Scopus-indexed, English-language publications, which may under-represent regionally grounded scholarship, particularly in Korean and ASEAN languages. In addition, citation-based methods introduce temporal bias, as more established works are more likely to appear prominently than recent contributions. Finally, the screening and mapping process involves interpretive judgment; although conducted independently by two researchers, decisions reflect disciplinary perspectives that may differ across research teams. These limitations are inherent to bibliometric approaches and should be considered when interpreting the field's structure and research fronts.

Conclusion

This study maps the structure and development of Korea–ASEAN business and international management research between 2006 and 2025 ($N = 163$). The results show sustained growth in publication activity, particularly since the mid-2010s, alongside a highly fragmented and interdisciplinary publication landscape. The field is anchored by three main intellectual pillars: the conditional FDI–growth and spillover literature, value-added and production network approaches, and firm-level strategy and capability perspectives. At the same time, four contemporary research fronts can be identified, centred on FDI outcomes, environmental externalities, knowledge transfer processes, and global value chain restructuring.

A consistent pattern across these findings is a structural imbalance in the field's analytical focus. Macroeconomic approaches remain dominant, while research on organizational mechanisms, sustainability governance, and resilience is comparatively underdeveloped. Although the FDI–growth tradition has established well-supported empirical relationships, it provides limited insight into the processes through which these outcomes emerge at the firm and subsidiary level. Future studies need to treat absorptive capacity as an outcome shaped by organizational arrangements, examine how governance structures within global value chains influence upgrading trajectories, and combine macro-level investment and environmental data with firm-level evidence on behavior and strategy.

By establishing the field's performance patterns, thematic structure, and intellectual foundations through a transparent bibliometric approach, this study provides a reference point for cumulative research. Advancing Korea–ASEAN scholarship will depend on integrating macro-level analysis with micro-level explanation, particularly in relation to learning, capability development, and sustainability. Without this integration, the field risks continuing to identify patterns without fully explaining how they are produced.

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