

In Focus

# How the Global Industry of Ideas Has Spread in Asia

think tanks

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# Think Tanks, ‘Think Nets’ and Their Evolution in Asia

By Peter Hayes

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The taxonomy of think tanks is a complex subject, reflecting the myriad forms these organizations take and the functions they perform from one country and culture to another.

While the US dominates the think tank landscape, followed by Europe, their emergence in Asia has produced organizations that are beginning to provide a uniquely Asian voice in debates over global and regional issues and the policies needed to address them. Peter Hayes provides an analysis of the dynamics at work.

THINK TANKS come in many shapes, sizes and flavors, depending upon function, political culture, leadership and orientation. In the United States, there is a long history of think tanks playing an important role in the formulation of domestic and foreign policy. As insiders, they are an integral part of the national security state. They can also serve as outsiders banging on the door of government to get their ideas incorporated into policy. In Asia, think tanks have different origins and roles, and increasingly diverge from the American think tank archetype.

In this essay, I visit the generic types, roles and indicators of the impact of think tanks in the orthodox Western model. I note the transition from traditional think tanks competing with each other for influence and funding to a virtualized transnational “think net” that fulfills many of the same functions, only faster and better. Finally, I note the rise of the Asian think tank and describe a South Korean one that exemplifies the trend towards local innovation in Asia.

## TRADITIONAL THINK TANKS

The RAND Corporation typifies what most people think of as a traditional think tank. It evokes the image of a bunch of pointy-headed intellectuals paid by the military to sit in a secure room to solve hard security problems for the US Air Force. This image was distilled in a New Yorker cartoon last year that showed a tank with a think-bubble projectile emerging from its cannon.

In reality, the think tank universe is far more diverse and nuanced than this image suggests.

Think tanks trace their origins to the role

played by advisors to leaders in many different political cultures. Traditional think tanks address the age-old problem of how to organize and deliver knowledge in ways that support the pursuit and exercise of political power. Because there are many ways to advise leaders, and many ways to relate knowledge to public policy, the think tank must be defined more specifically than merely as a purveyor of knowledge to the public or to officials.

One way in which to categorize think tanks is by function. Two American scholars suggest that these roles include:

- 1) Playing a mediating function between the government and the public;
- 2) Identifying, articulating, and evaluating current or emerging issues, problems or proposals;
- 3) Transforming ideas and problems into policy issues;
- 4) Serving as an informed and independent voice in policy debates; and
- 5) Providing a constructive forum for key stakeholders to exchange ideas and information in the process of policy formulation.<sup>1</sup>

Emphasis may vary across the 3,000-4,000 think tanks that now exist, but arguably a think tank must fulfill all five functions to be counted.

A particularly important dimension is their degree of autonomy from the state that is their primary constituency; thus, national think tanks may be more or less civilian, or more or less state-controlled. In some countries, a growing third sector of civil society has spawned major think tanks that provide policy advice independent of the state and market.

Some think tanks straddle the boundary between state and market, or state and civil society, or civil society and market. Wherever civil society-based think tanks are found, they must also be civilizing agents as well as civilian — that is, to be part of global civil society, they must

have a shared commitment to universal values of peace, security and sustainability.

Although rarely noticed, this latter element in an era of globalization suggests that civilian think tanks that promote ethnocentric and xenophobic perspectives, and in some instances, unsustainable, violent and even genocidal public policies — including, and perhaps especially, many think tanks found in the leading industrial countries — are not part of global *civil* society, whatever else they may be.

This recent normative emphasis on the accountability of civil society and its think tanks is debated hotly among political scientists and non-governmental practitioners. But it suggests that even domestically oriented think tanks cannot circumvent global norms. Indeed, the role of some think tanks in promoting xenophobic policies or revisionist accounts of history, as in controversies over text books or disputed territories, is a case in point.

## THINK TANK TAXONOMY

To fulfill their functions, think tanks conduct research and analysis; advocate for policy positions by drawing on extant research or analysis (or none at all, in cases of ideologically-driven think tanks); evaluate government programs and disseminate their views; and engage in networking and information exchange via workshops, seminars and briefings. Some think tanks also train and supply staff to state agencies. Many also focus on interpreting policy issues for the mass media, equating appearance in the media with impact.

This general breakdown leads two think tank researchers, James McGann and Kent Weaver, to group think tanks into four types, *academic*, *contract research*, *advocacy*, and *party-affiliated* think tanks. However, this categorization is neither cross-cultural nor universal, because

<sup>1</sup> J. McGann, R. Kent Weaver, ed, *Think Tanks & Civil Societies*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See J. A. Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite*, Free Press, New York, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2000; see also D. Stone and A. Denham, *Think Tank Traditions*,

*Policy research and the politics of ideas*, Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Readers can display dynamic constellations of interlinked TTTs by providing web site addresses to Touchgraph [www.touchgraph.com/TGGoogleBrowser.html](http://www.touchgraph.com/TGGoogleBrowser.html)

the types and characteristics of think tanks vary according to the openness of different political cultures to think tanks.

In the US, think tanks have evolved to reflect the specific political culture of the federal government. Thus, it is easy to find *revolving-door* and *holding-shelf* think tanks (where officials jostle for appointments by the administration, or wait out an incumbent administration until the opposition party returns to the White House). Washington also has plenty of *lapdog* think tanks that provide legitimating advice to contending policy currents, or lend credibility to policy-makers already committed to a particular policy line.

The more critical *greyhound* think tanks running in the endless race for reform in Washington are far less prevalent. *Bloodhound* think tanks that search out corruption and scandal to overturn the established powers are even more rare. *Pitbull* think tanks — that is, insurgent think tanks willing to bite the official hands that feed them by trying to overthrow elite consensus and the entrenched status quo, are the most rare of all. Of course, there are also hybrid think tanks, often built around one creative individual or a retired senior official. These *poodle* think tanks are sometimes referred to as vanity think tanks.

#### THEORIES OF THINK TANK INFLUENCE

Many people assume that think tanks have a lot of influence, some of it inordinate or even corrupting of the democratic political process. This might seem obvious. But in reality, it is not easy to document such influence. It may be overstated, in part by self-serving think tankers competing for profile and funding.

Of course, influence only exists in relation to a specific political culture, and these vary enormously across countries. American political scientists view think tanks as either part of the political elite or as one of many institutional interests com-

peting for policy-makers' attention in a pluralist framework.<sup>2</sup> However, even in the US, these characterizations do not offer much to determine what level of influence think tanks have on domestic or foreign policy. As Donald E. Abelson points out,<sup>3</sup> who is at the table tells us little *per se* about which voice was influential. Some voices may whisper privately with great impact but completely out of public sight. Other voices can change public opinion without ever being heard face-to-face by a policy-maker in a briefing room.

Thus, Abelson suggests, we need a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes influence and how it is measured before we can specify how these different types of think tanks achieve their impact. He suggests that influence should be tracked and measured by direct and indirect indicators at various points in the policy cycle as follows: *issue articulation; policy formulation; policy implementation*.

However, measuring such influence is even harder than specifying what counts as influence. Some indicators that suggest influence might be exerted (leaving aside the counter-factual problem that arises when attempting to prove that a given think tank exerted influence in a specific instance) include:

*Supply indicators:* Proximity, funding and staffing levels, fraction of total donor resources in the US, networks of key players

*Demand indicators:* Media exposure, testimony, briefings, official appointments, perched officials, consultation by officials or departments/agencies, conducive or receptive political environment

*Mission indicators:* Recommendations considered or adopted by policy-makers; perceptions of users; network centrality;<sup>4</sup> advisory role to parties, candidates, transition teams, awards, publications in academic journals, listserv and website dominance, adoption of contrarian positions (that is, opposed to official line), etc.



5 Private email message to author from a senior foundation official.

6 M. Shuman, "Why do Progressive Foundations Give Too Little to Too Many?" *The Nation*, Jan. 12 1998, online at [www.tni.org/archives/shuman/nation.htm](http://www.tni.org/archives/shuman/nation.htm). NCRP, *Moving a Public Policy Agenda: The Strategic Philanthropy of Conservative Foundations*, online at: [www.mediatransparency.org/movement.htm](http://www.mediatransparency.org/movement.htm)

7 For a profound insight into networks and global problem-solving,

see the writings of Tony Judge of the Union of International Associations and editor of *Transnational Associations* online at: <http://laetusinpraesens.org/>

8 Francis Pisani and John Arquilla, *Global Dislocations, Network Solutions*, Nautilus Institute, March 7, 2004, online at: <http://nautilus.org/gps/scenarios/GlobalDislocation-NetworksMarch6-043.pdf>; Philip E. Agre, "The Dynamics of Policy in a Networked World," paper at Internet and International Systems: Information

Technology and American Foreign Policy Decision-making Workshop, Nautilus Institute, San Francisco, December 10, 1999, online at [www.nautilus.org/gps/info-policy/workshop/papers/agre.html](http://www.nautilus.org/gps/info-policy/workshop/papers/agre.html)

9 Kevin Bacon, *The Small-World, and Why It All Matters*, online at [www.santafe.edu/sfi/publications/Bulletins/bulletinFall99/workInProgress/smallWorld.html](http://www.santafe.edu/sfi/publications/Bulletins/bulletinFall99/workInProgress/smallWorld.html)

10 P. Hayes, W. Huntley, T. Savage, G. Wong, "The Impact of the Northeast Asian Peace and Security Network in US-DPRK Conflict

Resolution," Nautilus Institute, online at [www.nautilus.org/gps/info-policy/workshop/papers/Napsnet\\_Cases.htm](http://www.nautilus.org/gps/info-policy/workshop/papers/Napsnet_Cases.htm)

11 Wolfgang H. Reinecke, *Global Public Policy: Governing Without Government?* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1998). Also, by the same author, "The Other World Wide Web: Global Public Policy Networks," *Foreign Policy* 117 (1999-2000): 44-57; see many related analyses at Global Public Policy Institute online at: [www.globalpublicpolicy.net/](http://www.globalpublicpolicy.net/) and the case studies at: [www.gppi.net/index.php?page=cms&id=55](http://www.gppi.net/index.php?page=cms&id=55)

In the US, private philanthropy plays an important funding role in selecting which think tanks will exist, and which will go out of business. For donors who care about the performance of the think tanks they fund, measuring impact is urgent. Absent systematic analysis of the think tank sector, one private American donor official explained how his foundation relies on indirect indicators to judge think tank impact:

Actual policy initiative/change/implementation is the most obvious indicator of impact. Research (case studies) and data on causality is always sorely lacking because funders tend to neglect such needs. So anecdotes, policy-maker testimony, and circumstantial evidence are the common fallback in lieu of hard evidence. If one is skeptical about such claims and the value of such evidence, there are other ways to measure a program's relevance to the policy process and potential to shape outcomes:

- Relationships or contacts with policy-makers or implementers;
- Relationships with individuals (Board members etc.) with relationships with policy-makers;
- Extent or quality of circulation of research products;
- Uptake of products by policy-makers (public references);
- Uptake by other influential elites: editorial boards, columnists, media commentators;
- Uptake by political pressure groups and other civic actors;
- Cumulative media references to research products;
- Reflection of research products in policy statements and documents... conceptual and textual reflections etc.<sup>5</sup>

To summarize, the basic Western model groups think tanks into four types (academic, contract research, advocacy, and party-affiliated) that can play one or more of five roles (mediating between government and salient publics; articulating issues; formulating policy options; providing independent policy voices; offering constructive forums with key stakeholders) at one or more of three phases of the policy cycle (articulation, formulation and implementation). Within this loose framework, a given think tank may choose

from many possible combinations of type, role, and policy cycle pressure point, and many possible indicators exist as to the impact achieved by that think tank given its specific focus.

#### GENERALIZATIONS FROM THE US MODEL

Despite this diversity, a few generalizations can be made about the impact on US foreign policy of established think tanks. Most of the major Washington, DC-based think tanks such as Brookings, Carnegie Endowment, Cato Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Heritage Institute, conduct foreign policy research and analysis (at a quality and scope that ranges from less to more superficial in order of listing). These think tanks all provide extensive media and congressional material, some more user-friendly than others (in reverse order in this listing).

All play a networking role and build alignments and coalitions that feed into policy currents that transect foreign policy executive agencies. Depending on who is in the White House, some supply key policy-makers and staff who formulate and implement actual policy, and draw on think tanks to display, test or implement policies, at least in a supplementary manner. Others, such as RAND or the Institute of Defense Analysis, work continuously on a contract basis with executive agencies and are largely insulated from the media and the electoral cycle, but also supply staff or policy input to key bureaucrats.

In general, these American think tanks have a competitive advantage in the formation of public opinion and the uptake by high level policy-makers of policy options, but are less well-placed when it comes to implementation, where they often find themselves outgunned and poorly informed relative to well-supported professionals working for the executive branch — unless the think tank has a unique asset that is essential to policy implementation.

A few work both sides of the street, playing a role in public opinion and media discussion of specific issues and policy options, but also serving on a contract basis to implement policy — a strategy that can endow a think tank with competitive advantages over other less-well positioned or endowed think tanks in the battle for donors.

Also, think tanks may have a competitive advantage over officials in the executive and legislative branches in relation to international agencies, allies, friends, and especially adversaries, where they have excellent access to leaders or may activate networks or public opinion in ways that out-manuever flatfooted and large bureaucracies guided more by auto-pilot than by smart, well-informed decision-making.

#### POLITICAL CRITIQUE

Many American analysts have argued that the traditional think tank sector has been dominated and distorted by targeted funding by conservative donors in search of organizations that can advocate and implement ideologically driven policy options. Specifically, the argument is made that the extreme right in the US has used a small number of highly effective think tanks to "change mental maps" (Heritage) and move the center of political gravity toward the right. The conservative funding model, which is to make long-term grants, concentrated on a few think tanks motivated by ideology is combined with mass marketing techniques to create a mobilized constituency on the right.

In contrast, liberal-progressive donors give away more money overall than the right, but their short-term, project driven orientation reduces the effectiveness of this investment in political returns.<sup>6</sup> Thus, donors have choices regarding which think tanks will prosper. Think tanks have choices about how they communicate funding needs to donors both individually and as a sector.

#### RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL THINK NETS

In many respects, the era of traditional think tanks with large buildings and staff has been eclipsed by the rise of virtual think tanks or *transnational think nets*. The latter originated alongside the Internet and responded to a variety of global needs. They take on various forms such as global public policy networks, single-issue global social movements, diasporic networks, and transecting transnational networks.<sup>7</sup> Arguably, transnational think nets respond to the shift in the policy-making environment associated with the dislocation caused by globalization.<sup>8</sup> Many of them see their strategy as rooted in the dotcom era and based on e-commerce as well as complex network theory such as that developed by the Santa Fe Institute.<sup>9</sup>

Central to transnational think net strategies are the notions that the information milieu of the global public sphere is the critical domain for policy articulation and implementation, because it contains the common knowledge and shared reference points that are critical to successful negotiation in intractable conflicts. Relatedly, transnational think nets seek to identify individuals and organizations that could be linked by a trusted intermediary and who share common information or interests. This could lead to organizational partnerships to address complex, interrelated global problems with shared solutions. Using networks also helps solve the "small worlds" problem in that links between separated, dense clusters of policy-makers and analysts can ensure rapid dissemination of common knowledge on a global scale and across many barriers and borders.<sup>10</sup>

A form of transnational think net that is more akin to a traditional think tank is the global public policy network, a phrase and type that was coined by former World Bank official Wolfgang Reinecke.<sup>11</sup> However, this approach is usually focused on a single issue and may even be

12 See "The Nexus Network" (n.d.). Jeremy Allouche, "Does the Nexus Mask a Bigger Debate? Rethinking the Food-Energy-Water Nexus and a Low Water Economy," IDS blog "Knowledge,

Technology and Society" (2014), [www.water-energy-food.org/en/news/view\\_\\_1607/does-the-nexus-mask-a-bigger-debate.html?rethinking-the-food-energy-water-nexus-and-a-low-water-economy](http://www.water-energy-food.org/en/news/view__1607/does-the-nexus-mask-a-bigger-debate.html?rethinking-the-food-energy-water-nexus-and-a-low-water-economy).

13 J. Schneider, *Globalization and Thinktanks: Security Policy Networks*, Prague, May 2003, online at: [www.policy.hu/schneider/GlobalTTs.pdf](http://www.policy.hu/schneider/GlobalTTs.pdf)

14 J. Chen, "The Chinese Landscape of Foreign Policy Think Tanks," Fudan Development Institute, May 14, 2012, online at: <http://fdidi.fudan.edu.cn/en/index.php?c=article&a=show&aid=47>

15 K. Nachiappan et al, *Think Tanks in East and Southeast Asia, Bringing Politics Back into the Picture*, Overseas Development Institute, December 2010, unpaginated; this quote is from section 3, at: [www.odi.org/resources/docs/6377.pdf](http://www.odi.org/resources/docs/6377.pdf)

bureaucratic in its form (often requiring a central hub/secretariat), although it does invite multi-sectorial participation.

In contrast, transnational think nets strive to focus on multiple issues and to identify common problems and solutions. A good example of the latter is oneworld.org and its focus on organizational learning on policy options and implementation in the fields of sustainability, security and development. Opendemocracy.net in Europe is a good example of a vibrant site that targets 10 global themes and aims at issue articulation with a policy edge. The Nexus Network, established in the UK in 2014, attempts to distill lessons learned from such linkages among problems — in this case, water, food, energy and the environment, which were perceived by development agencies to be critically important after the food and energy crises of 2007 and 2008.<sup>12</sup> This distributed network performs the same functions as a traditional think tank but moves far more quickly to assemble, synthesize and apply information than would a traditional think tank.

Transnational think nets also strive to reflect their real diversity of perspective, recognizing that learning comes from listening and reflecting the views of others, especially others who are alien from oneself in almost every respect. The best transnational think nets tend to be noisy, busy and very dynamic (they veer into the blog world as a result).

Traditional think tanks and transnational think nets belong in the same box because they achieve similar outcomes from very different approaches; and because many traditional think tanks are trying to compete with or even double as transnational think nets — with limited success. However, the people behind transnational think nets generally do not aspire to power in the same way that those staffing traditional think tanks (at least in Washington) do. If they

## Asia's Finest?

The top 20 think tanks in China, India, Japan and South Korea as listed in the 2014 *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, compiled by James McGann of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at The Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania

- 1) Korea Development Institute (South Korea)
- 2) Japan Institute of International Affairs (Japan)
- 3) China Institute of International Studies (China)
- 4) Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (South Korea)
- 5) China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (China)
- 6) Asan Institute for Policy Studies (South Korea)
- 7) Asia Forum Japan (Japan)
- 8) Observer Research Foundation (India)
- 9) Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy (China)
- 10) Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (India)
- 11) Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (China)
- 12) National Institute for Defense Studies (Japan)
- 13) Development Research Center of the State Council (China)
- 14) Centre for Civil Society (India)
- 15) East Asia Institute (South Korea)
- 16) Institute of International and Strategic Studies, FKA Center for International and Strategic Studies (China)
- 17) Centre for Policy Research (India)
- 18) Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (China)
- 19) Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (Japan)
- 20) Japan Center for International Exchange (Japan)

have staff at all, they are not looking for official jobs, nor to translate a reputation into a political appointment. Indeed, many transnational think nets are started by individuals who are sickened by their personal experience of the corrupting or debilitating effects on policy making that often comes with the exercise of official power.

Consequently, transnational think nets tend to be either highly effective because they communicate across borders and behind the scenes; or speak truth to power without inhibition. Transnational think nets often outperform traditional think tanks in terms of timeliness, accuracy, insight (especially early warning of pending events, emerging issues, or anomalies in conventional perspectives) combined with *connectivity* to networked policy-makers. For this reason, smart policy-makers, especially the younger, Internet savvy ones, tend to pay attention to them as well as the traditional think tanks whose product and style is usually predictable.<sup>13</sup>

### THE RISE OF ASIAN THINK TANKS

The mainstream model outlined above reflects the hegemonic power and role of the US in the region, especially in allied states. Unsurprisingly, many think tanks in Japan and South Korea emulate US think tanks. However, the end of the Cold War, the emergence of new transnational and global problems, China's rise and the impact of globalization have underscored that think tanks in Asia differ greatly from their Western counterparts. Indeed, many analysts argue that the typical Western definition of think tanks must be abandoned and a new framework created.<sup>14</sup>

An important overview of this Asian perspective is summarized in a 2010 study, *Think Tanks in East and Southeast Asia*:

We argue that the three overlapping strands of the evolving political context [nationalism; the extent of pluralism or liberalization; and the con-

centration of power] have shaped think tanks in three ways; 1) their location relative to the bureaucracy and the market; 2) their thematic focus; and 3) the political interests they represent ... [M]ost think tanks that initially emerged in the region were essentially manifestations of their countries' developmental state and the regional dynamics that emerged between them. At first glance, the centralization of knowledge, power and resources meant that think tanks were an arm of the bureaucracy or had strong links with it. Moreover, the fierce nationalistic thread informed the establishment of regional security think tanks. Furthermore, the goal of rapid economic growth led most countries to set up think tanks to provide technocratic economically oriented advice and solutions. And the widely witnessed concentration of power in the hands of a regime or a leader resulted in a number of highly politicized, ideological and even loyal think tanks devoted towards advancing narrow agendas.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, far from a separation of state and think tank, in many Asian countries, think tanks house scholar-officials who oversee a synthesis of research and policy-making, and move seamlessly from university, think tank and government office. Given their location in the political system, Asian think tanks are not oriented towards independence and may constitute part of the state itself, rendering the very concept of influence problematic.

It may not be surprising that South Korea — given its centralized political power, orientation toward development and profound security dilemmas — presents a distilled version of this divergence of modern Asian think tanks from the archetypical American model, as we shall see in the conclusion of this essay.

### A SOUTH KOREAN CASE STUDY

In the last decade, South Korea has seen a number of high-level think tanks burst onto the regional and global policy landscape. This is particularly remarkable in light of the legacy left by the country's long period of military dictatorship. Until

16 Seoul Forum, "Brief History - History of 20 Years," (n.d.).

17 East Asia Institute, "Eai East Asia Institute: 2002-2012", (Seoul, Korea: East Asia Institute, 2012), pp. 4-5.

18 Ibid. p. 7.

19 Ibid. p. 14.

20 East Asia Institute, "East Asia Institute 2008-2009 Annual Report," (Seoul, Korea, 2009), pp. 11-13).

21 Byung Kook Kim, "Kim Byung Kook - Education and Work Experience," (Political Science & International Relations, Korea University, n.d.).

22 East Asia Institute, p. 11.

23 Exchange Panel for Interdisciplinary Knowledge network, "EpiK Spiders - Background," (n.d.).

24 East Asia Institute, p. 35.

25 East Asia Institute, "EAI Increasingly a Go-To Think Tank in a World of Globalizing Knowledge," Feb. 3, 2015, at: [www.eai.or.kr/type/panelView.asp?idx=13541&code=eng\\_announcement&bytag=p&catcode=](http://www.eai.or.kr/type/panelView.asp?idx=13541&code=eng_announcement&bytag=p&catcode=)

26 For one trenchant critique, see G. Buldioski, "The Global "Go-To Think Tanks" and Why I Do Not Believe In It!" Feb. 2, 2010,

at: <http://goranspolicy.com/ranking-think-tanks/>

27 East Asia Institute, "Expanding the International Role of Korean Think Tanks," forum announcement, Jan. 22, 2015, at: [www.eai.or.kr/type/panelView.asp?bytag=n&catcode=+&code=eng\\_event&idx=13537&page=1](http://www.eai.or.kr/type/panelView.asp?bytag=n&catcode=+&code=eng_event&idx=13537&page=1)

the overthrow of the military in 1987 and the creation of a formally democratic political system concurrently with the collapse of the rigid Cold War international system in 1991, South Korea had only weak intellectual traditions and institutions in the fields of foreign policy and security, especially outside academia or government-affiliated organizations such as the Korea Institute for Defense Analysis (under the Ministry of National Defense), the Korea Institute of National Unification (under the Ministry of Unification), or the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (now the Korea National Diplomatic Academy).

Many of South Korea's research institutes were created to house and support retiring presidents (for example, Ilhae Institute, a corrupt charitable foundation established to support General Chun Doo Whan, overthrown in the 1987 democratic uprising, which later became the prestigious Sejong Institute) or ministers (for example, Ilmin International Relations Institute, Korea University, founded by former Foreign Minister Sung Joo Han in April 1995). Still others were essentially switchboards where senior South Korean diplomats, officials, and security intellectuals — often professors at leading South Korean universities — could exchange views with overseas counterparts, especially Americans. The Seoul Forum for International Affairs, established in 1986 to promote "international understanding of Korea in the global community," is a good example of this kind of think tank.<sup>16</sup>

On this uneven and shifting terrain emerged the vision of Professor Byung-kook Kim. Kim had studied at Harvard, served as a presidential advisor in the Kim Young Sam administration and, by 2001, had become a major intellectual force in Korean political science as editor of *Journal of East Asian Studies* and co-editor of the *Korean Political Science Review* from his home base at Korea University. Positioned as he was at

the nexus of knowledge, influence and political power, he saw the opportunity to create the East Asia Institute (EAI), a think-tank he conceived to be comparable to the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC.

In the spring of 2002, Kim began working with former South Korean Prime Minister Hong Koo Lee and Seok-Hyun Hong, then chairman of the *JoongAng Ilbo* newspaper, and convened a Founding Committee of 15 sectorial representatives to support the EAI, which consisted of Kim and one staffer.<sup>17</sup> From the outset, Kim understood the networked nature of the post-Cold War era and the need for powerful ideas that responded to the multi-dimensional, interconnected nature of domestic and international problems and the need to reform the extraordinarily centralized presidential office inherited from the pre-democratic era in South Korea. This led to the production of a major study on the nature of Park-Chung Hee's regime and a two-volume proposal for restructuring the presidential office and powers,<sup>18</sup> which directly influenced reforms in the administration of President Roh Moo-hyun.<sup>19</sup>

The EAI was particularly influential in its conceptualization of how South Korean diplomacy, its alliance with the US and its response to China and North Korea should incorporate the challenges posed by post-Cold War complexity in a new grand national strategy.<sup>20</sup> In 2004, this work began at the EAI with serious research led by Young Sun Ha (who chaired the EAI's board of trustees and led many of its research task forces) and educational outreach to policymakers, leading to a full-fledged articulation in 2006. Embraced in 2011 by then Minister of Foreign Affairs Sung-hwan Kim, it became the new paradigm for South Korean diplomacy. Byung-kook Kim moved from the EAI to senior positions in foreign policy in the Blue House, where he eventually served as Senior Secretary on For-

eign Affairs and National Security to President Lee Myung-bak in 2008, and then as President of the Korea Foundation from 2010 to 2012.<sup>21</sup>

The EAI also created a global and regional network of advisors, fellows and interns by convening conferences, hosting international fellows and supporting bilateral and multilateral research projects, especially the Network of the Northeast Asian Security Challenge Cluster, which brought together counterpart think tanks from China (Tsinghua University, Center for RimPac Strategic and International Studies, Shanghai, Jiao Tong University), Taiwan (National Chengchi University), South Korea (Korea University and Seoul National University), and the US (Peterson Institute for International Economics).<sup>22</sup> The EAI also convened bilateral dialogues with scholars and officials from China, Australia and the US. It also convened a social network of hundreds of former interns in its Exchange Panel for Interdisciplinary Knowledge (EPIK Spiders) in the belief that the next generation of leaders must be nurtured and shaped by new and creative ideas that break with the past.<sup>23</sup> The EAI's board of South Korean and international advisors, combined with its publishing role in a stream of briefs, reports and books, as well as its role as publisher of the *Journal of East Asian Studies* (transferred from Seoul National University to the EAI in 2002) make the EAI a highly competitive force in the marketplace for ideas on South Korean foreign policy. No other South Korean independent research institute has established such an intellectually potent presence in the think tank world, let alone proved as influential in shaping public and foreign policy in South Korea.

This has been achieved on a remarkably small budget, roughly US\$1 million to US\$2 million per year, which relies on the convening power of the EAI's senior leadership to induce profes-

sors and intellectuals to contribute to its many task forces on key issues.<sup>24</sup> In short, the EAI has created a global "knowledge-net" that sets the benchmark for competing institutions — such as South Korea's Asan Institute — but still falls short of a bottom-up transnational think net of the type driven by civil society organizations.

Think tanks such as the EAI often refer to their celebrity think tank status. In 2015, the EAI posted an announcement, "EAI Increasingly a Go-To Think Tank in a World of Globalizing Knowledge," that highlighted its ranking of 60th on the "Global Go To Think Tank Index," and noted that (except for the quasi-governmental Korea Development Institute), the EAI was the "most ranked and celebrated institute in Korea."<sup>25</sup>

Many think tanks play a competitive game for perceived status. Moreover, McGann's survey methodology is opaque and non-replicable, and is questioned by many scholars and practitioners on theoretical and practical grounds.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, there is little doubt that South Korea's new breed of think tanks punch above their weight in regional and global public policy affairs and have contributed many new concepts and cosmopolitan strategies to policy deliberations on a range of local, regional, and global problems.

And they are not shy to promote their own think tank model. Thus, in 2015, the EAI convened a forum on "Expanding the International Role of Korean Think Tanks" in partnership with the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy and *Hankyung Magazine*.<sup>27</sup>

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