Decision-making in Europe and Asia - Epistemic Actors and Communities: The Role of Think Tanks

Johannes Dragsbæk Schmidt
Associate Professor
Development and International Relations/Global Development Studies
Aalborg University
Fibigerstraede 2
9220 Aalborg, Denmark
Tel. +45 9940 8404
Fax. +45 9940 0044
Email jds@ihis.aau.dk
http://www.dir.ihis.aau.dk/

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Agenda

1) Think-Tanks: Epistemic Communities or Lobbying

2) Think-Tanks National and Regional levels – Differences and Similarities

3) What is the role of think tanks at the inter-regional level in Asia-Europe relations?

4) What have been areas of action where think tanks have been influential on an inter-regional level, e.g. through articulation of issues or the recommendation of policies?

5) How can the co-operation between think-tanks in Asia and Europe be fostered? Are there existing alliances?
1) Think-Tanks: Epistemic Communities or Lobbying

Think tank:

Knowledge-based, policy-oriented institutions

Serve and lobby governments, intergovernmental (and inter-regional) organizations, and civil society

Generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues

Engage policymakers, the media and the public on key policy issues

Enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues

Different types of actors: institutional, non-institutional, governmental, non-governmental and ‘epistemic communities’

As a concept, 'epistemic community‘ (Experts) as Think-tanks are influential policy actors (Peter Haas 1992) lobbying policy-makers and politicians
Other types of think-tanks

1) Epistemic
2) Corporate
3) Ideological

Overlaps ..... Example:

The European Roundtable of Industrialists
Encompassing contacts with the European Council, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

"Every six months the ERT strives to meet the government that has the EU presidency to discuss priorities. At national level, each member communicates ERT's views to its own national government and parliament, business colleagues and industrial federations, other opinion-formers and the press."

In short, the ERT's aim is to set the agenda at the highest levels of the EU, most notably the European Commission

The evidence of two decades suggests that it has been extremely successful at almost all levels and by most criteria
2) Think-Tanks National and Regional levels – Differences and Similarities

1960s and 1970s
   – TTs start to appear in large numbers, especially in OECD countries

1980s
   – Global expansion of TTs begin as TTs start to specialize
   – First studies of TTs in literature appear

1990s
   – Explosive increase in number of TTs worldwide

2000s
   – Global and regional networks of TTs form the most comprehensive source of information internationally available for policy makers
The Top Think Tanks for 2009

Brookings Top Think Tank (US)
Fraser Institute (Canada and Mexico)
Chatham House (Western Europe)

Think-tanks are engaged in the policy-making process:

– Through publishing studies, briefings, conferences and seminars
– Commentaries, establishing liaison offices, boards,
– Commissions, task forces, transition teams, testifying

Think-tanks often supply administrations with bureaucrats.
– The Trilateral Commission supplied Carter two dozen people
– Reagan got more than that from Heritage and Hoover
– George W. Bush hired people from AEI and Heritage
Asian Forum Japan (AFJ) is placed 2nd in Japan and 18th in Asia in the ranking of University of Pennsylvania’s Global “Go-To Think Tanks” report.

This year, the number of think tanks covered by the survey increased significantly from approximately 5,000 to 6,305 in 169 countries. The survey covered 108 think tanks in Japan among which AFJ placed 2nd, and 1183 think tanks in Asia among which AFJ placed 18th. This is the third year in a row that the AFJ has featured in the rankings.

Due to the expansion in scope of the survey, the former list of the Top 25 Think Tanks in Asia has now been replaced with a list of the Top 40 Think Tanks in Asia. Those Japanese institutions included in the rankings were Japan Institute of International Affairs (1st place), Asian Forum Japan (18th place), Institute for International Policy Studies (19th place), Institute of Energy Economics Japan (20th place), National Institute for Research Advancement (26th place), Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (REITI) (28th place) and National Institute for Defense Studies (34th place).

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<tr>
<th>Top 40 Think Tanks in Asia</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) – Japan</td>
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<td>2. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) – China</td>
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<td>3. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, RSIS-Singapore</td>
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<td>4. Center for Strategic and International Studies – Indonesia</td>
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<td>5. China Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) – China</td>
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<td>6. Hong Kong Centre for Economic Research (HKCER) - Hong Kong</td>
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<td>7. Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy-Singapore</td>
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<td>8. Shanghai Institute for International Studies – China</td>
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<td>9. Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses – India</td>
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<td>10. Lowy Institute for International Policy – Australia</td>
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<td>11. Centre for Policy Research-India</td>
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<td>12. Korea Development Institute – South Korea</td>
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<td>13. Center for Civil Society – India</td>
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<td>14. China Institute for International Studies (CISS) – China</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), Singapore</td>
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<td>16. Liberty Institute – India</td>
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<td>17. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Beijing)-China</td>
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<td><strong>18. Asian Forum Japan (AFJ) – Japan</strong></td>
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<td>19. Institute for International Policy Studies – Japan</td>
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<td>20. Institute of Energy Economics Japan (IEEJ) – Japan</td>
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<td>21. India Council for Research on International Economic Relations-India</td>
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<td>22. Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS)-Malaysia</td>
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<td>23. Taiwan Foundation for Democracy – Taiwan</td>
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<td>24. Cathay Institute for Public Affairs – China</td>
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<td>25. Centre for Development Studies- India</td>
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(The Global “Go-To Think-Tanks,” pp.40-41)
In many Asian countries close linkages between the state and societal actors, epistemic policy networks and think-tanks (China, Vietnam, Laos, Singapore, Thailand etc).

Government officials and epistemic communities form mutually dependent cross-boundary relations in think-tanks etc.

Policy makers and governments hold formidable resources and their decisions are binding on society and are sustained by the potential use of legitimate power.

Societal actors hold expertise, knowledge and information - indispensable for formulating public policies in specific issue-areas - also legitimate particular actions taken by political actors.

Think-tanks assemble such resources, expertise and power in formal and informal settings: objective to attain certain policy objectives.

Ex.
China’s Standing Committee of the Political Bureau (or the Politburo Standing Committee, PBSC) and a few other top-level managers of the Communist Party’s institutions located in the Zhongnanhai – coordinate and coopt the think-tanks.

Central Committee’s China Institute of Contemporary International Relations is decreasing relative to the Foreign Ministry’s China Institute of International Studies (CIIS).

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and Almost all think-tanks and NGOs belong to this category.
The US, EU and Japan through APEC and ASEM have promoted and funded various think-tank initiatives with varying agendas – some more accessible than others.

Ex.

National Institute for Research Advancement

The Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) - is also the secretariat for the Pacific group of the Trilateral Commission and for the Asian side of Council of Asia-Europe Cooperation

Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR)
EU many of the think-tanks and networks of think-tanks that study it, lobby it, and/or deliver functions on its behalf or the other are in actual fact depending on either EU or national funding.

Also many other think-tanks that work outside this network of relationships–some of them on a national scale only–and others still who act in some form of opposition to what they perceive to be the errors or omissions of either their national governments, the EU, or both.
3) What is the role of think tanks at the inter-regional level in Asia-Europe relations?

First, there is the inter-regional level of activities between Asia and the European Union. Based on the Asia-Europe Cooperation framework 2000 (AECF), Think-tanks should promote and enhance mutual understanding and awareness through a process of dialogue and lead to cooperation on the identification of priorities for concerted and supportive action. ASEM also aims to foster political dialogue, reinforce economic cooperation, and promote cooperation in other areas.

The second level is the decision-making level within Europe as well as within Asia and bilateral relations between individual think-tanks.

The third level is collaboration between TTs at the national decision-making process.

Finally, think tanks should also work harder on a society-level to prepare the groundwork for improved Asia-Europe relations. That would mean, for example, that think tanks would accept a bigger share of responsibility to "manage a public discussion" about Asia Europe including EU relations - specifically special interest groups, non-government organisations, labor and farmers groups etc.
Examples before the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the present global recession:

The Council of Asia-Europe Cooperation (CAEC): "to encourage and facilitate greater cooperation among Asian and European intellectuals and policy specialists in order to enhance discussions about the future direction of Asia-Europe relations“. CAEC studied ASEM's functional and institutional contributions to global governance and security-related topics.

The Asian-European policy networks - bumpy political dialogue - Focus: economic relations

Neither did little to predict or prevent the crises.

Some argue that the Asian-European dialogue accelerated the unfolding of the crisis.

It induced European banks and other investors, who as latecomers felt they were losing out in the race for a foothold in the world's economically most dynamic region, to indiscriminately step up investments. The race to Asia's markets resulted in less than prudent investment decisions as investors teamed up with dubious partners and channelled large amounts of money into intransparent projects.

CAEC - as most think tanks and track two networks, responded belately to the crisis.

A steering committee meeting in November 1997 decided to set up a task force on the "Changes in the Global Financial System" – half a year after the crisis erupted.

None of CAEC's task forces addressed the social security issue. This was surprising, as the crisis tragically exposed the lack of social security in Asia

ASEM in cooperation with the World Bank set up a trust fund to study social security systems but the question is whether the situation is or will repeat itself today?
EU-ASEAN Think Tank Dialogue

Think tanks somehow failed in the wake of the Asian financial crisis.

The ASEAN-EU network - ASEM process a higher priority.

Think tanks tried to overcome the backlash against improved relations with East Asia in several European countries after the Asian crisis. Think tanks tried to work out proposals about "confidence-building measures" in ASEAN-EU relations – and put them high up on the agenda of the political decision-making process.
The EU-East Asia Think Tanks Dialogue

The EU-East Asia Think Tanks Dialogue more successful - aims to dialogue on common issues facing the respective regions, to exchange best practices and lessons learned in meeting similar challenges and to provide inputs to inter-regional cooperation. This Dialogue was initiated by ISDS Philippines and the KAS Regional Programme in Asia in 1999.


The 2004 Dialogue in Lisbon on “Completing the Triangle – East Asia, EU and the United States: Recent Developments, Challenges and Prospects for Inter-Regional Cooperation” was, for the first time reconfigured as the ASEAN+3 EU Think Tank Dialogue.

Since then, think tank representatives from China, Japan and South Korea are regularly taking part in the conferences, i.e. in the last three Think Tank Dialogues, held in Singapore (“Community Building in Europe and East Asia: Challenges, Opportunities and Future Prospects” 2005), Berlin (“Strengthening Regional and inter-regional Cooperation in Responding to Rising Extremism and Resurging Nationalism/2006) and Tokyo (“Global Governance in the 21st Century and the Role of Europe, East Asia and the US”/2007).

Participants in these meetings include ASEM Senior Officials, representatives of the Asia-Europe Peoples Forum and the Asia-Europe Business Forum, leading Asian and European think tanks, and experts from other regional forums like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and Asian Development Bank (ADB).
4) What have been areas of action where think tanks have been influential on an inter-regional level, e.g. through articulation of issues or the recommendation of policies?

1) EU-ASEAN Think Tank Dialogue
Was unable to provide significant warnings of the upcoming Asian financial crisis but initiated dialogue

2) EU-East Asia Think Tanks Dialogue
• Security; Environment; From information sharing to common policies between Europe and Asia? Overcoming the complexity of an enlarged inter-governmental forum”; Enhancing, streamlining agenda and making ASEM more visible in wider public; Social market economy! Etc.

3) Many bilateral think-tanks and other think-tank networks also play an increasingly important role within the existing inter-regional frameworks—frameworks that have largely been established by statist action (either individually or through state-led regional organisations). And while we might hypothesise that some state and EU level action is on behalf of the interests of non-state (commercial) actors—often in competition with interests of other non-state (commercial) actors—it is not just a one way street
How can the co-operation between think-tanks in Asia and Europe be fostered? Are there existing alliances?

Apart from the inter-regional think-tank networks a whole variety of bilateral think-tank links (ex. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Friederich Ebert Stiftung – two opposing views, ideologies and types of networks).

Promote elder statesmen and women helping to set up more international think tanks and other track-2 actors. In East Asia the number of intergovernmental institutions is still small but growing. In addition, an ASEAN or ASEM secretariat in charge of an increasing number of ASEAN/ASEM centred gatherings, a committee and three councils are taking shape. Civil society and Track-2 actors and processes are trying to mediate and promote a greater role for more independent, civil society organisations. From the above, we may hypothesise that generalised domestic democracy is not a prerequisite for regional processes to have an external dimension. Currently, the risk of not broadening global multi-level governance is that it becomes technocratic and not democratic.

Issues that need to be covered and broadened by existing alliances: economic and financial policies to climate change and social inclusion and more dialogue with civil society.

Include Labor and farmers think-tanks – focus on the unfolding of the triple crisis finance and social; climate; energy, food and water.