The Specifics of the Formation of Think Tanks’ System in Asia (the Case of Japan) and Australia

Ihor Petrenko

Doctor of Political Sciences, Associate Professor, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Kyiv, Ukraine)
E-mail: i.petrenko.knu@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3328-4102

Vasyl Filipchuk

Ph.D. in Public Administration, Associate Professor, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Kyiv, Ukraine)
E-mail: v.filipchuk@icps.com.ua
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7335-2256

Petrenko, Ihor and Vasyl Filipchuk (2020) The Specifics of the Formation of Think Tanks’ System in Asia (the Case of Japan) and Australia. Ukrainian Policymaker, Volume 7, 43-51. https://doi.org/10.29202/up/7/6

The article deals with the analysis of the specifics of the formation of a think tanks’ system in Asia (the case of Japan) and Australia. It is noted that Japanese think tanks increase their influence on public policy and important public decisions. Initiators and sponsors of think tanks — enterprises, foundations, government agencies, local governments, political parties and individuals. In general, a network of competing think tanks is being formed. It is argued that Australia’s think tanks occupy a specific niche in the country’s political system and help the government to develop a balanced and optimal public policy in all spheres of public life. It is pointed out that the dominant types of think tanks in Australia are autonomous and independent, quasi-independent and university. The emergence of Australian think tanks is generally in line with the global dynamics of growth in the number of think tanks.

Keywords: think tanks, public policy, policy analysis, expert analytical activity, political analytics

Received: 19 August 2020 / Accepted: 23 September 2020 / Published: 3 December 2020

© Petrenko, Ihor, 2020
© Filipchuk, Vasyl, 2020
Introduction

Today, there are 1676 think tanks in Asia or 20.7% of the total number of think tanks on the planet. This is the third step after North America and Europe. The top three in the region’s number of think tanks include China — 512; India — 293; Japan — 116 (McGann, 2018).

In Asian countries — Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China — think tanks are often located within corporations. Chinese — work with the government’s support, and their scientists are often involved in patron-client relationships with political leaders. Many institutions in Southeast Asia are semi-independent, often in close contact with the government, with individual politicians. The notion that think tanks need independence from the state to be “free-thinking” is an Anglo-American norm that does not fit well into other political cultures. Therefore, think tanks increasingly understand the functions of policy research and many analytical and policy advisory practices, rather than a specific organizational and legal structure as a non-governmental, non-partisan, or independent civil society institution (Stone, 2005).

Analytical centers in a number of Asian countries appeared after the World War II. These are organizations such as the Japan Institute of International Affairs established in 1959 (Japan Institute, 2020), or the Singaporean International Institute of International Relations, established in 1962 (SIIA) (Singaporean Institute, 2020). A number of Asian institutions that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s were modeled on the Royal Institute of International Affairs in the United Kingdom or American think tanks. For example, the Singapore Institute of International Relations and the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta (CSIS) can be considered an analytical center (Center for Strategic, 2020). During the 1990s, Asian research institutes relied on the American tradition of think tanks in their organization and work. However, some have sought to export the American model and adapt it to the cultural and institutional context of a particular Asian country (Stone, 2005).

The number of think tanks in Southeast Asia is small but growing. However, although the first think tanks in Asia appeared in the 1960s, they became widespread only in the 1990s, so the diversity of think tanks and their specialization in Asia is less pronounced.

The first generation of think tanks was elite, governmental institutions in most Southeast Asian countries. For example, the Indonesian Institute of Science Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI) (Lembaga, 2020), the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) (The Philippine Institute, 2020) were established as non-standard, nonprofit state corporations. That is, that generation of Asian think tanks was closely associated with the state. Their main goal was to provide information to the government and to act as its mouthpiece. Analytical centers were not independent of the state, so some researchers call them state-oriented entities. Their significance lay in their ability to amplify and convey top-down messages to other sections of society. According to researchers, Asian think tanks tend to operate in a “gain mode” rather than a “criticism mode” (Yamamoto & Hubbard, 1995).

Compared to similar American institutes, Australian think tanks are less independent. The lack of comprehensive information and tactical resources encourages them to cooperate with a wide range of different research and intellectual organizations.

Geographically, Australia belongs to Oceania. According to the study “Global Go To Think Tank,” Oceania accounts for 0.8% of all think tanks in the world, i.e., — 55 organizations, Australian — 39 (McGann, 2018).
Features of the formation and operation of think tanks in Japan

For a long time, dependence on the government and corporations excluded think tanks from Japan’s public and political field. But the complex socio-economic problems facing the ruling elite necessitated the improvement of the quality of government program management by integrating the scientific potential of think tanks. Japan’s main think tanks are for-profit organizations set up by corporations. Funding for think tanks by large foundations, companies, and individuals is an exception. Geographically, Japan’s analytical centers are concentrated in Tokyo (80% of researchers and 90% of studies). They are not very active in making public policy proposals (only 18% of all think tanks are independent, and 80% of research is commissioned). Approximately 22% of all results of their activities are made public. The focus is on corporate and research, analysis and development of optimal corporate strategies. A tiny part of the work relates to an international life, lifestyle, and environmental issues (Modern analytical centers, 1998).

Researchers from the Agency for Humanitarian Technologies note that most think tanks are small, with a narrow field of research controlled by the government and corporate structures. 70% of think tanks in Japan — institutions that employ less than 20 people. Institutions with more than 100 people — only 5% of the total. Accordingly, their activities are dominated by short-term research. Such think tanks cannot afford to work on long-term, broad-based interdisciplinary projects. Since they cannot conduct thorough, large-scale research, these analysis centers fall out of the general picture of think tanks (Modern analytical centers, 1998). Thus, it can be stated that the public resonance of the work of think tanks in Japan is small.

Analytical centers in Japan began to appear in the 1970s. These include the Nomura Research Institute (Nomura, 2020) and the Mitsubishi Research Institute (The Mitsubishi Research Institute, 2020), which dealt with the problems of state development, transport development, environmental protection; Nippon Institute for Research Advance (NIRA) (Nippon Institute, 2020), which became a financial sponsor and center for coordination of policy research on the complex project “Challenges of the 21st century.” The organization of modern integrated research, created to support the implementation of structural reforms, headed by Ed Saburo; Forum of political concepts. There were also small think tanks of local significance. The government’s program of accelerated economic development gave a qualitative impetus to this. Analytical centers acted as subordinate governmental organizations, which provided the preparatory basic research necessary for public administration decisions.

In the ’80s of the 20th century began the formation of think tanks by financial and industrial circles. They focused on increasing profitability and stabilizing corporate governance and also provided consulting services. An example is the Nomura Research Institute (Nomura, 2020).

In the 1990s, think tanks began to emerge, supported by local governments. Then there was a discussion about the need to ensure the independent operation of think tanks as modern tools of democracy. In 1995, the International Forum of Analytical Centers was held in Tokyo. It contributed to the awareness of the importance of think tanks in the life of a democratic state. After the Forum, two more important think tanks emerged — the Japan Center for International Relations in Political Studies and the Foundation for the Promotion of International Studies (later the Tokyo Foundation).
In the late 1990s, a new boom in think tanks began. The following were established: Center for Political Studies of the 21st Century; The concept of Japan — an organization created by former ministers; Future Fujig Management Research Center; Organization of public lawmaking; Forum of political concepts of the 20th century. There were other similar organizations that conducted independent policy research on a nonprofit basis. They differed greatly in funding sources, size, organizational form and composition. In addition to such organizations, special departments were also established at universities and graduate schools, and relevant associations of scholars emerged: the Japanese Society of Scientists, which studied public policy, the Japanese Evaluation Society. The development of their activities were facilitated by the adoption of certain legislative acts, in particular, the Law on Special Non-Commercial Activities and the Law on Openness of Government Information.

Every year, Japanese think tanks increase their influence on public policy and important public decision-making. Initiators and sponsors of think tanks — enterprises, foundations, government agencies, local governments, political parties, and individuals. In general, a network of competing analytical centers is being formed (Filippov, 2007: 26-28).

To better understand the peculiarities of the analytical centers of Japan, it is worth considering their work on specific examples.

The Global Industrial and Social Process Research Institute (GISPRI) was founded in 1988. His focus is on the development of a global society. The Institute’s structure is built to optimally combine research tasks and tasks related to the promotion of expertise to government agencies and the Japanese business community. The structure of this analytical center includes: 1) the board of directors; 2) the board of trustees; 3) auditors; 4) the Chairman of the Board of Directors; 5) senior advisers; 6) advisers; 7) the executive director; 8) Secretariat (Department of Global Environmental Problems; Department of General Affairs; Department of Planning and Research); 9) international forum for industrial and social development policy (research committees) (Global, 2020).

The research is based on the analysis of trends in global resources, environmental issues, international relations, and the links between industry and the economy, culture and society. The institute provides its research-based proposals, both in Japan and abroad, to enhance the international exchange of information and ideas. The main activities of the institute: 1) research activities; 2) development and nomination of political proposals to government and business structures; 3) joint research with other centers of expertise.

The Institute maintains close contacts with 1) government agencies of Japan, including the Ministries of Economy, Trade and Industry; Environmental Safety; Environmental Protection; International Cooperation; Foreign Affairs. As well as the official residence of the Prime Minister; 2) leading business associations: the Japan Foreign Trade Organization (JETRO); Japan Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren); Organization of development of industrial technologies and new energies; 3) expert structures: the National Institute for the Promotion of Research. This institute also cooperates with foreign partners: the International Energy Agency, the World Wildlife Fund.

The main project of the Institute is a forum of global industrial and social policy. The forum’s mission is to prepare draft proposals for the Government of Japan based on GISPRI research and development. Other key products of the Institute include research materials covered in symposia, seminars and publications in the GISPRI Bulletin, in the Institute’s annual report (Global, 2020).
The National Institute for Research Advance. Founded on the initiative of leading representatives of the industrial and scientific community of Japan in 1974. The Institute’s main goal is to conduct independent research that can help solve numerous and diverse problems in politics, economics, sociology, international relations, new technologies, and local government. The center has more than 40 employees permanently. The income of the Institute is about 300,000 US dollars. The Institute receives part of its funding from the Government of Japan, provincial administrations and private businesses.

The institute plans and implements complex research projects that will contribute to Japanese citizens’ prosperity in the long run. It is emphasized that Japan must become a leader in the 21st century, based on the new philosophy of the future adopted by the world community and on the national strategy. According to the Institute, the most important element of the strategy will be information technology, the political potential of which will be realized only if they are not isolated from the world. An important factor in Japanese society’s development is considered creative innovation — Japan’s response to globalization’s challenge.

The structure of the Institute is formed by Board of Directors; co-chairs of the Board of Directors; president; vice president; auditors; financial committee; auditor committee; Planning and General Affairs Department (General Affairs Department; Finance and Accounting Department; Planning and Public Relations Department); Department of Political Studies; Department of International Cooperation; information research center. The work of research groups is autonomous. They exist in the Departments of Political Studies and International Cooperation, as well as in the Center for Policy Research Information.

The institute has extensive governmental relations at the national and regional levels. The Institute also develops direct contacts with business structures (for example, with the Japanese business support organization JETRO) (Nippon Institute, 2020).

Features of the formation and operation of think tanks in Australia

Historically, Australia’s first think tank was considered to be the Australian Institute of International Affairs, which emerged in 1924 and was then a kind of quasi-state “think tank.” The emergence of the first independent centers occurred in the postwar period and was due primarily to the need for big business to legitimize their activities. At that time, think tanks sometimes served as interest groups and lobby groups. They have created an extensive network of interrelated interest groups that have worked hard to lobby and influence the Australian legislature and executive. The dynamics of growth in the number of centers in Australia completely coincides with the global dynamics. Australia’s specificity is that significant growth occurs in the ’90s of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.

The business was replaced by private donations, which usually had the same business origins. Successful businessmen who created their empires moved away from the real management of affairs and focused their efforts on charity, sponsorship. Today, Australia’s think tanks are funded by large corporations and wealthy individual donors who have realized the simple fact that generating ideas is the right and promising direction for investment (Zhurbey, 2011: 109-111).

The following think tanks have become quite active in Australian public policy: Chiefly Research Center, Menzies Research Center, The Lowy Institute for International Policy, Center for Independent Studies, The Australian Institute of International Affairs, Strategic and Defence Studies Center (SDSC) of Australian National University.
Chifley Research Center — seeks to develop and improve the format of public policy debate and encourages the Australian public to think progressively. The Center facilitates policy discussions at universities and at all venues suitable for political forums in the country and provides strategic advice on a wide range of policy issues of the Labor Party of Australia.

The Chifley Center is almost entirely funded by the state budget. The share of income from private investors, compared to other similar centers, is quite small. The fact is that the development of political discourse and raising the level of citizens’ political consciousness is a function of the Chifley Research Center, which is actively approved by the state. That is why the government has been providing large grants to the center every year (Chifley Research Center, 2020).

Menzies Research Center — provides analytical support to the activities of the Liberal Party of Australia. Menzies Center addressed the representatives of the Liberal Party with a proposal to create a public forum for the citizens of the country, in the format of which everyone could bring up important topics for discussion. By accumulating appeals from citizens who come to the forum, the Center’s specialists get an increasingly complete picture of public preferences. With such information, the party can successfully increase its rating and win the election.

It is worth noting that the format of addressing an official with a complaint, request, proposal, etc. — is widely developed in various government agencies in almost all countries. In this sense, nothing supernatural Menzies Center did not invent. The point is in the media positioning of this project.

The news of the creation of the “forum” swept through all the leading media in Australia. Citizens were actively encouraged to take part in it. It was emphasized that the center wants to hear both the voices of its ideological partners and opponents. The head of the Center said that it is important for specialists to know what political decisions irritate the public and how its representatives would like to change the situation. To help the party and the citizens of the country achieve common goals, the Center aims to obtain an objective and complete picture of public sentiment.

The moderators of the forum initially announced various topics for discussion, but soon the number of users increased significantly, it became more difficult to keep the discussion within the previously announced topics — this was the first sign of public response. The most reasoned manifestations of positions on key popular issues are now presented in the form of separate notes on the official website. The center’s experts enter into a dialogue with the visitors of the forum on some issues (Chiefly Research Center, 2020; Akopian, 2010).

The Lowy Institute for International Policy. It was created in April 2003 by Australian businessman Frank Lowy. The organization soon gained a reputation as a respected think tank for Australian politicians, businessmen and the general public. The institute specializes in international politics. It generates new ideas and engages in dialogue on international development and Australia’s role in today’s fast-paced world. Realizes its purpose in two ways: 1) conducting unique research and new policy options; 2) promoting a broad discussion of Australia’s role in institute-initiated discussions, seminars, lectures, dialogues, conferences, etc.

The Institute emphasizes its independent and non-partisan status, which allows it to be an open platform for discussing various political ideas. The Lowy Institute is governed by a Board of Directors, which is made up of well-established people in public policy, science, and business (The Lowy Institute, 2020).
Center for Independent Studies. Founded in April 1976 by G. Lindsay. Today, the center is a leading independent organization in the study and initiation of public policy in Australia. In principle, the center does not use state financial assistance. Actively supports freedom of enterprise and free society, provides government authorities with critical knowledge on an ongoing basis, and stimulates debate among leading scholars, politicians, journalists, and the general public in Australia and the Oceania region (Center, 2020).

The Australian Institute of International Affairs. It was founded in 1924 and became an independent, nonprofit organization whose activities aim to promote the interest and understanding of Australia’s foreign policy and its place in the modern system of international relations. The Institute is a discussion forum, organizes programs of lectures, seminars, symposia, conferences. The Australian Institute of International Affairs is the only such nationwide organization in Australia, with offices in all Australian states. This think tank is funded by membership fees, small government grants, and other sources. Its peculiarity is that it does not officially express its own opinion on certain international issues. This position is enshrined in its statutory documents.

The Institute develops four key areas of activity: 1) providing a discussion platform at the federal level by organizing lectures, seminars and workshops; 2) dissemination of ideas (first of all, thanks to publications on key issues of international relations); 3) training in the field of international relations (socialization, education); 4) active partnership (development of cooperation with related institutions and other organizations in Australia and abroad) (The Australian Institute, 2020).

Strategic and Defence Studies Center (SDSC) of Australian National University. It was founded in 1966. The purpose of the Center is to promote the study of strategic issues affecting military security in the Asia-Pacific region. The Center’s research covers military, political, economic, scientific and other aspects of strategic development in the region, as well as military security and the peaceful settlement of current and potential conflicts. The government actively involves the Center’s staff in consultations on strategy and defense, as well as for numerous lectures and seminars in government agencies. In the activity of the Center it is possible to eradicate three main directions of work: 1) scientific researches and expert-analytical activity; 2) education and training; 3) advocacy and political communications (Strategic, 2020).

The Brisbane Institute. Since its founding in 1999, it has established itself as an idea generator and discussion organizer. It has become a major driver of intellectual exchange between senior officials and practitioners in industry, commerce, government, institutions, and the rest of society, both in Australia and elsewhere. The institute employs about 330 experts. The Corporation’s structure is mixed and is built on both sectoral and territorial grounds and consists of a secretariat, publications department, research programs, sponsorship and business development department, website and information.

The Institute maintains close contacts with Australian government agencies and several municipalities: the Queensland government; Ministry of Roads; managing the affairs of the prime minister and the cabinet; public works management; Queensland Department of the Treasury. The Institute’s main sponsors are educational institutions: the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, Queensland State Library. Contacts have also been established with Australian business such as Castlemaine Perkins, RNH Consulting, Gadens Lawyers, Queensland, Newspapers (The Brisbane Institute, 2020).
Conclusions

Analytical centers in Japan began to appear in the 1970s. Every year, Japanese think tanks are increasing their influence on public policy and important public decision-making. Initiators and sponsors of think tanks — enterprises, foundations, government agencies, local governments, political parties and individuals. In general, a network of competing think tanks is being formed.

Australia’s think tanks occupy a specific niche in the country’s political system and help the government to develop a balanced and optimal public policy in all spheres of public life. The dominant types of think tanks in Australia are autonomous and independent (Center for Independent Research), quasi-independent (e.g., the Lowe Institute) and university (Center for Strategic, 2020). The distribution of Australian analysis centers corresponds to the global dynamics of growth in the number of think tanks.

References


Center for Independent Studies (2020) Available online: https://www.cis.org.au

Center for Strategic and International Studies (2020) Available online: http://www.csis.or.id/

Chiefly Research Center (2020) Available online: https://www.chifley.org.au


Japan Institute of International Affairs (2020) Available online: http://www2.jiia.or.jp/en/

Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (2020) Available online: http://www.lipi.go.id/


McGann, James G (2018) 2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report. Available online: https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=think_tanks


Nomura Research Institute (2020) Available online: https://www.nri.com

Singaporean Institute of International Affairs (2020) Available online: http://www.siiiaonline.org/


Strategic and Defence Studies Center of Australian National University (2020) Available online: http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au


The Brisbane Institute (2020) Available online: http://www.brisinst.org.au

The Lowy Institute for International Policy (2020) Available online: https://www.lowyinstitute.org

