

Politics, Knowledge, and Inter-Korean Affairs: Korean Public Think Tanks Not as Policy Advocates but as Knowledge Producers*

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There were four critical undercurrents for the growth of Korean think tanks in the 1990s: democratization, the end of the Cold War, globalization coupled with local autonomy, and the expanded government budget accompanying Korea's rapid economic growth. In contrast to American think tanks which are private but normally serve as public policy advocates, most of the important Korean think tanks are supported by the government and they are not independent public policy advocates. The Korean public think tanks are highly susceptible to domestic political dynamics: for instance, the presidential office's power over the appointment of the directors. The susceptibility originates not only from the delayed democratic institutionalization of the Korean presidential system

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but also from the absence of financial independence, limits to the accessibility of information on policy, and the lack of professionalism in the bureaucracy. The Korea Institute for National Unification, an exemplary public think tank regarding the issue of inter-Korean relations, now focuses on research and analysis rather than policy advocacy. Alternatively, it acts as a producer of knowledge and vocabulary to envision an epistemic community for deliberating strategies of engaging with North Korea.

KEYWORDS: Korean public think tanks; policy advocate; knowledge producer; Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU); inter-Korean relations.

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The purpose of this article is to examine the role of Korean public think tanks, particularly those that pertain to inter-Korean affairs. Around the world, there are 6,603 think tanks in 182 countries that are actively engaged in the industry of creating and diffusing knowledge and information.¹ However, their roles differ from country to country. Ideally, think tanks are considered policy-idea advocates, and their targeted consumers are government branches—such as the executive and the legislative—and social groups influencing the policymaking processes. According to this perspective, think tanks will be of little use if their voice is not heard by policymakers.² The main think tanks in Washington D.C. are prime models functioning as policy-idea advocates. Most of them are private, and their funding sources are diversified. They present certain policy ideas, often reflecting their organizational ideology, but most of their policy ideas are based on rigorous analyses and professional prescriptions.³ To be sure, the American think tanks are not simple research institutes.

¹James McGann, *2012 Global Go to Think Tanks Report and Policy Advice* (Philadelphia, Pa.: 2012 Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 4.

²Diane Stone, "Think Tank Transnationalisation and Non-profit Analysis, Advice and Advocacy," *Global Society* 14, no. 2 (July 2010): 154-55.

³Frank Fischer, "American Think Tanks: Policy Elites and the Politicization of Expertise," *Governance* 4, no. 3 (July 1991): 332-53; Kent R. Weaver, "The Changing World of Think Tanks," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 3 (September 1989): 563-78.

By contrast, flourishing Korean think tanks are public ones that are finally supported by the government. They function not as advocates but as research institutes. (There are many private think tanks that are affiliated to civil organizations. Some others are affiliated to private firms and religious organizations. Many of the private think tanks suffer difficulties in finding funding sources.⁴) Why do Korean think tanks differ from those in the United States? Do the Korean public think tanks concerning inter-Korean relations have their own values and missions? What prevents them from becoming policy-idea advocates?

In addressing these questions, the first section of this article traces the background of the growth of public think tanks in the 1990s—democratization, the end of the Cold War, globalization and local autonomy, and the government’s budget expansion owing to rapid economic growth. The second section describes five public think tanks related to inter-Korean affairs (four government-supported think tanks and one private, public-oriented think tank). The third section examines how the public think tanks are susceptible to domestic political dynamics and why they cannot become independent policy-idea advocates. The Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) is examined as a case study. In the fourth section, KINU’s alternative role is examined: acting as a producer of knowledge and vocabulary to envision a “transformative idea” of constructing an “epistemic community” concerning inter-Korean affairs, to use Howorth’s terms.⁵ Finally, the article appraises the overall role of

⁴Some private think tanks are in good financial shape. Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI) and Asan Institute for Policy Studies are prime examples. SERI, with Samsung’s background, has successfully solidified its eminent private think tank status in the field of economic policy. The budget of SERI is larger than that of the Korea Development Institute, the largest government-supported economic institute in Korea. SERI’s budget in 2005 exceeded 85 billion Korean won, which is equivalent to USD 76 million. With the generous funding source of the Hyundai group, Asan Institute, established in 2008, has been able to project itself as a premier private think tank in the field of international affairs and international public policy. See Yun-Won Hwang, “Jongchaekgyoljong gwajong esoui mingan think tank yokhal gwa baljon bangan yongu” (The role of private think tanks in the policy making process and future policy implications), *Hanguk governance hakhoebo* (Journal of Korean Association for Governance) (Seoul) 16, no. 3 (December 2009): 6.

⁵Jolyon Howorth, “Discourse, Ideas, and Epistemic Communities in European Security and

Korean public think tanks related to inter-Korean affairs.

Growth of Think Tanks in the 1990s

In examining the growth of think tanks around the world, James McGann points out three factors: democratization, globalization, and modernization.⁶ Of the three factors, democratization and globalization have significantly contributed to the general development of Korean think tanks. It should be noted that the thawing of the Cold War coincided with the processes of democratization and globalization in Korea. In this section, therefore, I need to underscore the three processes that occurred simultaneously in Korea: democratization, the thawing of the Cold War, and globalization coupled with local autonomy. First, democratization, more than anything else, was conducive to the rise of think tanks in Korea. On June 29, 1987, Roh Tae-woo, the authoritarian ruling party's presidential candidate, made a sudden statement proposing the introduction of direct presidential elections, which had been a controversial issue over the years. The "June 29 Statement" was welcomed by opposition forces who had long fought for democratic transition. It was a model case of the desirable "moderate pact" between the ruling camp and the opposition forces for a gradual democratic transition, to use O'Donnell and Schmitter's terms.⁷ After the statement, the prominent opposition leader Kim Dae-jung was released from house arrest and the presidential election became heatedly contested. Furthermore, the former opposition forces expanded the scope of democratization from political opposition to a proactive movement for expanding various types of rights. Civil society was em-

Defence Policy," *West European Politics* 27, no. 2 (March 2004): 211-34.

⁶James McGann, "Think Tanks: The Global, Regional and National Dimensions," in *Think Tanks in Policy Making: Do They Matter*, ed. Andrew Rich et al. (Shanghai: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Briefing Paper Special Issue, 2011), 10.

⁷Guillermo A. O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

powered; diverse civil organizations and labor unions sprang up. Civil society addressed new issues, such as Korean unification, economic justice, the environment, and labor-management relations. Civil society started uncovering old problems left unexplored in the previous authoritarian period.⁸ Before the June 29 Statement all stripes of the opposition movement focused on the fight for democratization, whereas after the statement the movement started democratic consolidation, which seemed an arduous march at that time. As the civil society's struggle aimed for changes in the government's policies, the movement needed to dig out hidden information about the past authoritarian rule and had to make rigorous counterarguments to dispute authoritarian vestiges in policies and practices.

In this context, many civil organizations established their own think tanks in the 1990s. The think tanks served as informational and educational units in order to make their patron organizations strong and rigorous policy advocates. The People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), one of the most steadfast progressive civil organizations, established the Institute for Participatory Society to further enhance its capacity of appealing PSPD's policy alternatives to the government and the public as well. In the same vein, the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice and Hung Sa Dan (Young Korean Academy) established the Institute for Economic Justice and the Hung Sa Dan Headquarters of National Unification, respectively. Interestingly, some model civil organizations dealing with environmental issues created think tanks; exemplary cases were the Citizens' Institute for Environmental Studies, the Baedal Environment Institute, and the Urban Reform Center.⁹ Most of the private think tanks, nested in the civil organizations, were small in scale but began producing

⁸See Hagen Koo, "Strong State and Contentious Society," in *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, ed. Hagen Koo (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 231-49; Su-Hoon Lee, "Transitional Politics of Korea, 1987-1992: Activation of Civil Society," *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 351-67; Sunhyuk Kim, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 105-36.

⁹Hwang, "Jongchaekgyoljong gwajong esoui mingan think tank yokhal," 12-13.

reports criticizing the continuing old vestiges in the new democratic era.

It is noteworthy that the civil organizations and their think tanks did not directly align with the opposition parties, albeit having identical agenda items. For example, unlike the Taiwanese anti-nuclear power movements and their organizations aligned with the rising opposition party named the Democratic Progressive Party, the main Korean civil organizations independently engaged in rallies against the construction of both nuclear power plants and the storage of nuclear wastes.¹⁰ However, the absence of a direct political tie in the Korean case did not mean that civil activists were apolitical. Some Korean civil activists were politically inclined and ran elections, leaving their organizations.¹¹

Second, the end of the Cold War resulted in a need for ideas and knowledge particularly concerning inter-Korean relations. Whereas democratization had a great impact on domestic issues, the end of the Cold War had enormous consequences for external issues and the grand strategy. As early as 1988, the Roh Tae-woo Administration began seriously seeking a reduction in tensions on the Korean Peninsula, thus launching the so-called Northern Politics analogous to Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the East European systems in the following year brought an unprecedented shock to the authorities involved in inter-Korean relations. The expedited process of German unification forced them to rush to propose concrete actions. One of the actions was to accumulate knowledge related to the prospective Korean unification. It is noteworthy that, in August 1990, lawmakers in the National Assembly, regardless of party affiliation, unanimously supported legislation to establish the Research Institute for National Unification, affiliated to the Ministry of Unification (MOU). In 1999, its name was changed to

¹⁰For the discussion about the Taiwan case of party-civil organization connections, see Ming-Sho Ho, "The Politics of Anti-Nuclear Protest in Taiwan: A Case of Party-Dependent Movement," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003): 683-708.

¹¹Exemplary cases are Park Won-soon, who was a founding member of PSPD and was later elected Mayor of Seoul in 2011, and Kim Ki-sik, who was the secretary-general of PSPD and later became a member of the National Assembly in 2012. Such practices may be considered partly the civil society's incorporation into or cooptation to the state.

the Korea Institute for National Unification, and its affiliation also changed from MOU to the National Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences under the Prime Minister's Office. As shall be discussed in detail later, KINU is a leading public think tank that concentrates on inter-Korean relations and Korea's relations with neighboring powers.

Third, globalization as a worldwide trend on the one hand and local autonomy in Korea as a domestic political change on the other contributed to the nurturing of knowledge capacity and then to the rise of think tanks. Globalization in general was not only materialized in the economic field, but it also permeated diverse realms such as culture, knowledge, and ideas. Globalization provided non-state actors with more opportunities for agenda-setting and making inputs to policymakers, both in domestic and international affairs. Networks and transnational connections facilitated these changes, either intentionally or spontaneously.¹² Korea in the 1990s rode the trend of globalization. The Kim Young-sam Administration declared *seggyehwa* (literally meaning globalization) in 1994 and made efforts for Korea to enter the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996. With *seggyehwa* and OECD membership, the Kim Administration undertook liberalization of the economic system, in accordance with international standards.¹³ To be sure, such rapid change in Korea needed enhanced knowledge capacity, particularly organizations to accommodate and supply policy ideas and expertise. The Kim Administration made efforts to improve the university research environment and raise a new breed of intellectuals. One of the attempts was the allocation of a large amount of money to the so-called Brain Korea 21 project. This project indeed produced many young scholars with higher education degrees, both doctoral and master's degrees.¹⁴

¹²Diane Stone, "Non-Governmental Policy Transfer: The Strategies of Independent Policy Institutes," *Governance* 13, no. 1 (January 2000): 45-62.

¹³C. S. Eliot Kang, "The Developmental State and Democratic Consolidation in South Korea," in *Korea's Democratization*, ed. Samuel Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 226-34.

¹⁴See BK21. The project has continued until now despite political power shifts. For the project, 130 billion Korean won was allocated from 1999 to 2005, and 180 billion Korean

This new breed of intellectuals enriched not only the elite pool in the society but also the overall culture of professionalism.

Korea's globalization efforts paralleled the long-delayed implementation of local autonomy. The election of heads of local governments in June 1995 finally inaugurated the era of local autonomy. While this new era gradually eroded the remains of the top-down authoritarian rule, local governments and their officials—not to mention the newly elected provincial governors and city mayors—sought competitive policy ideas. They not only relied on local constituents and organizations but also established new local government-supported think tanks to deal with development issues and other local problems.¹⁵ As of November 2013, there were twenty-three public think tanks affiliated to local governments.¹⁶ As many theorists argue, globalization involved interconnectedness not only among specialized parts but also between each part and the global entirety. This interconnectedness was possible because of the weakening of state boundaries.¹⁷ In Korea, the local governments and their think tanks had to consider various types of networks and interactions at the same time. Rather than simply looking up to the central government, they began exploring for their own economic project partners and seeking international networks and trading partners. In addition, they started engagements with North Korea in the 2000s. For instance, Gangwon Province was the forerunner

won from 2006-2012. At least one tenth of the total project budget was allocated to the social sciences. <http://bnc.krf.or.kr/home/link.do?method=get&menuSN=020102> (accessed March 28, 2013).

¹⁵Yun-Won Hwang, "Jongbu bumun think tank ui siltae bunsok gwa baljon banghyang" (Governmental think tanks in Korea: past, present, and future), *Hanguk governance hakhoebo* (Journal of Korean Association for Governance) (Seoul) 13, no. 3 (December 2006): 390.

¹⁶The local governments are one special city (Seoul), six metropolitan cities, eight provinces, and one special autonomous province (Jeju).

¹⁷See M. Kearney, "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (October 1995): 547-65; Roger Keil, "Globalization Makes States: Perspectives of Local Governance in the Age of the World City," *Review of International Political Economy* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 616-46; Karen Lyons, "Globalization and Social Work: International and Local Implications," *British Journal of Social Work* 36, no. 3 (April 2006): 365-80.

in terms of providing humanitarian aid to its divided half, North Gangwon Province in the North, as well as to Pyongyang. Because of Gangwon's geographical proximity and industrial characteristics, the aid focused on the forest-insect-prevention project and the providing of potato seeds and salmon fry. Likewise, Gyeonggi Province, bordered with North Korea, was a model case of establishing humanitarian interactions with North Hwanghae and South Hwanghae Provinces in the North. Through ground transportations, Gyeonggi provided them with medical facilities, agricultural machines, and food processing facilities.¹⁸ The two exemplary local governments' interactions with the North Korean counterparts were partly assisted by the Research Institute for Gangwon and the Gyeonggi Research Institute, respectively. It is worth noting that their projects were stimulated by the 2000 South-North summit, but it was possible because the local autonomy was already institutionalized in the second half of the 1990s.

Finally, a robust Korean economy and the expanding governmental budget contributed to the expansion of the idea industry. In the 1990s, the growth of public think tanks was remarkable and, as a result, forty-two public think tanks existed as of 2006.¹⁹ Each ministry was able to have at least one research institute, even if the latter was not always officially affiliated to the former. With related public think tanks, ministries were now able to secure necessary information sources such as systematically-collected databases and survey results. In particular, the ministries in economic and welfare affairs assigned projects to public think tanks for examining the feasibility of policy options. The financial crisis in 1997 resulted in a change in the affiliation of those public think tanks at the end of the 1990s. With the exception of think tanks in defense and science-technology, most think tanks in the humanities and social sciences came to belong to either the National Research Council for Humanities and

¹⁸Dae-suk Choi et al., *Jibang jachidanchae daebuk gyoryu 10 nyon baekso* (White paper of the local governments' ten-year cooperation with North Korea) (Seoul: Institute of Unification Studies, Ewha Womans University, 2009), 79-112.

¹⁹Hwang, "Jongbu bumun think tank," 391. Today there are sixty-seven think tanks that financially rely on the central government to varying degrees.

Social Sciences or the National Research Council for Economics, both of which were housed in the Prime Minister's Office. The main purpose of the change was to cut down the budget and to simplify management. With this change, those public think tanks in the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences were no longer directly dependent on related ministries in both budget and performance evaluation. As the financial crisis receded, the individual think tanks enjoyed gradual budget increases and took advantage of the expanded research independence owing to a certain extent to organizational distance from their related ministries. In exchange, they became further alienated from the ministries: less impact on policymaking, and less acceptance by the ministry officials.

Public Think Tanks on Inter-Korean Affairs

Inter-Korean affairs require secrecy in many instances. During the Cold War, inter-Korean contacts and South Korean initiatives in them were not publicized until any concrete measures were taken. A prime example was the announcement of the July 4 Joint Statement in 1972, for which top officials of the South and North Korea secretly met beforehand in Pyongyang to make an agreement on the coexistence of the two Korea. Even in the post-Cold War era, important policy-related matters regarding national security and inter-Korean relations have been in the hands of a few close associates in the presidential office and those of a few top officials in the administration. Given this, there has been little chance for public think tanks to access crucial information related to governmental initiatives.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, public think tanks have played a certain role in sustaining governmental policies pertaining to national security and inter-Korean relations. There are five exemplary public think tanks.²⁰ First, the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National

²⁰See <http://www.knda.go.kr/english/main/index.jsp>; <http://www.inss.re.kr/app/main/en.act>; <http://www.kida.re.kr/eng/>; <http://www.sejong.org/> (accessed March 30, 2013).

Security (IFANS) was the first governmental think tank in the field of national security. It was in 1963 that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) established this think tank to train newly recruited diplomats and to conduct analyses of international affairs. When a ministry-level organizational change in 2012 resulted in the creation of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy, IFANS became a research institute belonging to the Academy. IFANS conducts research on the topics of national security, unification, regional issues, international economy and trade. Those who belong to IFANS are public servants, and thus they normally do not challenge the incumbent administration's foreign policy.

Second, the Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS), whose origin can be traced back to the Research Institute for International Affairs (RIIA) founded in 1977, is a research arm of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), formerly the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. It is said that the founders of the RIIA tried to emulate the Brookings Institution and wanted to make it a premier think tank on national security and international affairs.²¹ Such ambition was a pipedream in the authoritarian era. The RIIA expanded its organizational and functional capacity to become the present INSS in 2007. Because of its affiliation, however, the main function of the INSS is inter-organizational service. The researchers' status is civilian, but their activities are limited to some extent.

Third, the Korea Institute for Defense Analysis (KIDA) was established in 1979. Although the researchers of KIDA are not public servants but civilians, the institute is a research arm of the Ministry of Defense. Today it houses 143 researchers with either doctoral or master's degrees. No other public think tank in Korea has such manpower. Furthermore, it has built networks of cooperation with defense-related think tanks around the world. With a couple of exceptions recently, ex-generals are appointed to the director position, and many researchers are of military origin. KIDA conducts projects on various topics related to defense such

²¹Interview with In-young Chun, Professor Emeritus at Seoul National University, February 13, 2013.

as the security environment, defense buildup, weapons systems, resource management, and military information.

Fourth, the Sejong Institute was established in 1986 as a think tank dealing with national strategy and inter-Korean relations. It is not a government-supported organization, but a non-profit public-oriented institute. Sejong is officially registered at the MOFA, but is not affiliated to the ministry. Because of its independent system of finance, management, and recruitment, Sejong autonomously conducts mid- and long-term projects related to national strategy, unification, area studies, and international political economy.

Finally, KINU, which was established in 1991, is the most active government-supported institute on inter-Korean affairs. The topics that KINU covers include analysis of North Korea, unification policy, international relations, and human rights in North Korea. Inasmuch as the topics are diverse, the disciplines of KINU's researchers are likewise diverse, ranging from political science, sociology, and economics, to history, law and education. Just like their disciplines, the academic backgrounds of the researchers are also diverse: universities in Korea, the United States, Japan, China, Russia, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, etc. Owing to this variety, the researchers can take advantage of relevant language skills to expand KINU's worldwide networks. Probably the most unique aspect of KINU is the North Korean studies. In their approaches and methods, the researchers of KINU differ from its predecessors that operated during the Cold War—such as the Office of Investigative Studies at MOU and the Naewoe News Agency. The latter were basically North Korea watchers who decoded North Korean news media and primary documents, whereas the new breed of scholars at KINU has adopted social science methods and analytical quantitative and qualitative approaches.

For the above-mentioned public think tanks, how to deal with or cope with North Korea is the central issue.²² The North Korea issue con-

²²Likewise, for the think tanks in the United States, the hottest issue in regard to the Korean peninsula is the North Korea issue, particularly its nuclear weapons development.

sumes the highest level of energy and manpower of the MOFA, MOU, and the NIS. Also, the North Korea issue is of utmost importance in Korean diplomacy.²³ Thus, it is natural for the public think tanks to take into account the main concerns of the related ministries in setting research agendas, although they are organizationally independent of the ministries.

Public Think Tanks Susceptible to Domestic Politics

Public think tanks in Korea, particularly those institutes related to inter-Korean relations, have been vulnerable to domestic political dynamics both during the authoritarian period and until the present. On that issue, the president's ideological position and his or her perception of North Korea are the dominant factors for the administration's North Korea policy direction, formulation, and implementation. Furthermore, the ideological position about and the perception of the North are closely related to the administration's foreign policy—that is, how to value the alliance with the United States and how to frame the relations with Japan, China, and Russia. In presidential elections, individual candidates start putting their positions forward from the beginning. Once elected, the newly inaugurated president tries to change the main tenets of the previous administration's policy toward North Korea, and relevant policies toward neighboring countries. President Kim Dae-jung tried to eradicate the Cold War legacy, or the so-called Cold War culture, as soon as he was inaugurated.²⁴ He formulated the Sunshine Policy, a new engagement strategy toward the North, and implemented it despite persistent resistance by conservatives. President Roh Moo-hyun mostly followed his predecessor's policy, slightly modifying it into the Peace and Prosperity Policy. However, President Lee

²³Interview with Sung Chul Yang, then Republic of Korea Ambassador to the United States, May 24, 2001.

²⁴Soon-young Hong, "Thawing Korea's Cold War: The Path to Peace on the Korean Peninsula," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 3 (May-June 1999): 8-12; Young-Kwan Yoon, "South Korea in 1999: Overcoming Cold War Legacies," *Asian Survey* 40, no. 1 (January-February 2000): 164-71.

Myung-bak reversed the previous policies and adopted a coercive strategy toward North Korea, stressing the North's denuclearization as the condition for the expansion of inter-Korean economic cooperation.

To be sure, in Korean politics from the late 1990s to the present time, no other external policy has been more divisive than the North Korea policy. The epithets of "red elements," "red complex," "North Korea followers," and "backbone conservatives" have been used to depict political opponents.²⁵ The importance of the view on North Korea has been evidenced in public opinion as well. According to a survey, most individuals in Korea identify their ideological positions, either conservative or progressive, in terms of their view on North Korea. That is, how a person views North Korea is the independent variable of his or her ideological position. If he or she sees the North as a dialogue partner, then he or she is highly likely to identify himself or herself as a progressive.²⁶ In this divisive atmosphere and the ensuing polarized politics with regard to North Korea, every administration pursues a national consensus as an important requisite for the efficacy of the policy. Top officials make efforts to promote new policies and concepts and gain public support or tranquilize opposing views.²⁷

Owing to differing ideologies and perceptions of the different administrations in the last two decades, public think tanks related to inter-Korean affairs can hardly be independent policy-idea advocates. They are financially government-supported research institutes, and thus they are supposed to present policy options from which the administration may choose to formulate an official policy. In reality, however, the ideological divide in Korean politics, mentioned above, has made those issues related to the inter-Korean relations sensitive and delicate to the top leaders. Therefore,

²⁵As an example of depicting Korea's divisive politics using such epithets, see "Editorial: Red Complex," *Korea Herald*, April 2, 2012, <http://www.koreaheald.com/view.php?ud=20120402000361> (accessed July 12, 2013).

²⁶Myoung-kyu Park et al., *Unification Attitude Survey 2012* (Seoul: Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, 2012), 55.

²⁷Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies toward North Korea* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2002), 33-88.

public think tanks have not been able to present ideas that might be critical of or inconsistent with the existing administration's policy direction.

In KINU's case, because the timing of its establishment coincided with the German unification, the founding spirit was engagement with North Korea rather than punitive measures. This spirit has persisted for two decades at KINU. Engagement needs the development of rigorous logic, strategy, and instruments, and thus it requires more painstaking efforts than is necessary for coercion with punitive measures.²⁸ Ironically, the progressive Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations did not acknowledge KINU's such stance, but sidelined it. The two presidents, Kim and Roh, were more proactive than other intellectuals and opinion leaders and also more progressive than any high-ranking bureaucrats in the ministries related to inter-Korean relations. The progressive administrations tended to rely on a few associates to obtain policy advice and recommendations: Lim Dong-won and Park Ji-won in the Kim Dae-jung Administration and Lee Jong-suk in the Roh Administration. The two administrations recruited rank-and-file officials from the so-called 386 generation, which was a group of young progressive, nationalist intellectuals who were in their 30s, were born in the 1960s, and attended college in the 1980s. In the eyes of the policymakers in the two administrations, KINU's spirit seemed to be insufficiently proactive and already obsolete. What they wanted from KINU was to play the role of propagating the administrations' policy. On the contrary, as President Lee Myung-bak concentrated on the containment of North Korea, KINU was again sidelined in a different context. For his North Korea policy, Lee relied on people who were unfamiliar with the North Korea issue or who stressed the alliance with the United States—for example, Minister of MOU Hyun In-taek, NIS Director Won Se-hoon, National Security Advisor Kim Sung-hwan, and Kim's associates in the National Security Council.²⁹ These

²⁸See Sung Chull Kim and David C. Kang, "Introduction: Engagement as a Viable Alternative to Coercion," in *Engagement with North Korea: A Viable Alternative*, ed. Sung Chull Kim and David C. Kang (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2009), 1-19.

²⁹Hyun In-taek was a political science professor at Korea University specializing in security

people either checked the activities of the KINU with vigilant eyes or ignored its reports. As a result, when the Lee Administration needed a policy change during the last phase of his presidential term, it was too late for public think tanks such as KINU to play the role of policy-idea advocate.

Because of the political gravity of the North Korea policy, the Korean public think tanks concerning inter-Korean relations can hardly maintain independence.³⁰ Also, there are other reasons why they lack independence. First of all, the Blue House—that is, the presidential office has in most cases exercised power over the appointment of the directors of the public think tanks. Following the overall organizational change of those think tanks in 1999, the directors are, officially speaking, supposed to be chosen by the personnel affairs committee at the related field's research council under the Prime Minister's Office. The committee members are composed of vice-ministers of relevant ministries and some external members. However, the role of the personnel affairs committee is nominal at best. The presidential system of Korean politics virtually dictates the top-down appointment of the directors. The hand-picked directors have to carefully read the government's policy orientation during their tenure.

Second, the financial dependence constrains the level of independence. Since the nature of the issues is related to unique public affairs, for which it is difficult to attract private funding, those think tanks have to rely solely on the government budget.³¹ As for the budget, KINU rests on the National Research Council of Humanities and Social Sciences, KIDA

studies and Asia-Pacific alliances; Kim Sung-hwan and top NSC officials were recruited with MOFA officials or proponents of the U.S.-Korea alliance. On the other hand, Won Se-hoon was not a security person but a career bureaucrat to become Vice Mayor of Seoul under Mayor Lee Myung-bak. As the composition of the Lee Administration's team of security affairs advisors illustrates, the inter-Korea relations and the North Korea policy had no place to be considered seriously by them and thus was subordinated to international security matters such as the nuclear issue.

³⁰It is fair to say that a lack of independence is a critical problem for the public think tanks in general. See Ihn-hwi Park, "Segehwa sidae ui woegyojongch gwa think tank" (Foreign policy and think tanks in the age of globalization), *Kukje chongchi nonchong* (Korean Journal of International Studies) (Seoul) 52, no. 2 (June 2012): 93-116.

³¹An exception is the Hyundai group, a top conglomerate, which has been active in inter-Korean relations, but it also has its own private think tank.

relies on the Ministry of Defense, and INSS depends on NIS. Their financial reliance has interfered with independence not merely during the period of the financial crisis in the late 1990s but ever since their establishment.³² After the crisis was over, the government was able to gradually expand its budget allocation to the think tanks in the 2000s, especially for research funds. However, the budget increase has not provided them with independence.

Third, the lack of independence can be attributed to the scarcity of information necessary for the public think tanks to do their job properly. For example, they cannot access top-secret intelligence. At the time of preparing for the Kim Dae-jung-Kim Jong-il summit in 2000, KINU had no opportunity to access information related to the Hyundai group's deal with North Korea—a US\$500 million aid package that paved the way for the summit.³³ Without such information, but with only a flurry of rumors, KINU's reporting to MOU and the Blue House could be neither a rigorous analysis nor relevant policy recommendations for the scheduled summit. Along with many other reasons, the lack of information sidelined the public think tank at this important juncture in inter-Korean relations.

In this context, the public think tanks cannot advocate new, innovative policy ideas. Inter-Korean issues are politically too sensitive; the policies related to inter-Korean relations are controlled directly by the Blue House or at best by the collectivity of Blue House-MOFA-MOU-NIS. Frequently, the presidents rely on close associates, from the initial stage of policy planning, to the stage of examining its feasibility, and up to the final stage of implementing and executing it. Examples of such

³²Kwangho Jung, "Jongchaek gwajong esoui miguk think tank ui hwaldong gwa yokhal e gwanhan yebijok bunsok" (A preliminary analysis of policy activities and roles of U.S. think tanks), *Haengjong nonchong* (Korea Journal of Public Administration) (Seoul) 44, no. 1 (March 2006): 265-304.

³³The so-called remittance scandal was later revealed by the independent counsel's special investigation team in August 2003. The team found that the remittance was intended to succeed the summit and that the government arranged for Hyundai Asan to get loans from the Korean Development Bank in an illicit way.

close associates were Park Cheol-eon in the Roh Tae-woo Administration, Lim Dong-won and Park Ji-won in the Kim Dae-jung Administration, Lee Jong-suk in the Roh Moo-hyun Administration, and Hyun In-taek and Kim Tae-hyo in the Lee Myung-bak Administration.³⁴

Alternative Role: Knowledge Producer

As the public think tanks cannot play the role of policy-idea advocates, they have sought an alternative role and at least have made progress toward becoming self-sustaining. Let me focus on KINU's case. First, KINU now focuses on research and analysis rather than playing a short-range policy-idea advocate role. The researchers consider short-term policy suggestions a secondary, obligatory job. For them, the analysis of the current situation and its mid- and long-term policy implications are more important criteria than the short-term effects of policy outcomes for their self-evaluation and external evaluation. At KINU there are three pillars of research focus: (1) the analysis of North Korea, (2) unification policy, and (3) the analysis of the environment for unification. These pillars are interconnected in that each supports the others. KINU's basic function is analysis, and this is also true from the consumers' perspective. For the media, the most interesting topics are analyses of the North Korean situation regarding food, politics, human rights, etc. (see table 1). Furthermore, unification policy analysis does not aim at advocating short-term policy ideas, but mid- and long-term projections. In part, this trend can be attributed to the new organizational structure that is supervised by the National Research Council of Humanities and Social Sciences belonging to the Prime Minister's Office. While KINU does not have to be held accountable for its relevant ministry MOU, it now has to be attentive to the evaluations made by that research council.

³⁴Interview with Chang Yong-suk, a former NSC official in the Roh Administration, November 5, 2013.

Table 1
News Coverage of KINU (Research Reports, Presentations, and Interviews)

Date	Content	Type
03/04/2013	NK human rights in prison camps	Analysis
02/15	Policy toward NK	Policy
02/13	NK internal meeting	Analysis
02/07	NK nuclear test	Analysis
01/28	NK food shortage	Analysis
01/28	NK food shortage	Analysis
01/02	NK internal illicit practices	Analysis
01/02	NK new year address	Analysis
12/14/2012	NK nuclear issue	Analysis
12/11	NK missile issue	Analysis
12/09	NK missile issue	Analysis
12/04	NK internal politics	Analysis
11/24	NK missile issue	Analysis
11/23	Policy toward NK	Policy
11/17	Policy toward NK; SK-US-NK relations	Policy
11/15	NK arms sale; UN sanctions	Analysis; Policy
11/08	NK-US relations	Analysis
11/05	Aid to NK refugees	Policy
10/09	NK missile issue	Analysis
10/08	NK internal control	Analysis
10/04	NK political system; nuclear issue	Analysis
09/28	NK internal politics	Analysis
09/21	Multilateral engagement in NK	Policy
09/19	Policy toward NK	Policy
08/28	NK internal politics	Analysis
08/21	Inter-Korean economic project	Policy
08/10	NK economic policy	Analysis
08/08	NK-Japan relations	Analysis
08/04	NK-Japan relations	Analysis
08/01	NK internal politics; economic policy	Analysis
07/18	NK internal purge	Analysis
07/17	NK internal purge	Analysis
07/02	NK-China economic relations	Analysis
06/14	International cooperation on NK human rights	Analysis; Policy
06/13	International cooperation on NK human rights	Analysis; Policy
06/05	NK internal festival	Analysis
05/22	NK-China relations; NK internal politics	Analysis
05/18	NK food shortage; human rights	Analysis (cited by Le Figaro)
04/24	NK politics and military	Analysis
04/23	NK-China-SK relations	Analysis; Policy
04/16	NK internal politics	Analysis
04/14	NK internal politics	Analysis
04/12	NK political succession	Analysis
04/04	NK missile and internal politics	Analysis

Source: *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 1, 2012 to March 20, 2013, http://news.donga.com/search?p=1&query=%ED%86%B5%EC%9D%BC%EC%97%B0%EA%B5%AC%EC%9B%90&check_news=1&more=1&sorting=1&search_date=2&v1=&v2= (accessed March 31, 2013).

Analytical monographs on North Korea are most quoted and used by officials, academics, and the media. In KINU's early years, representative basic research focuses were either annotated bibliographies on works written by the North Korean leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, or quantitative and qualitative analyses of the main periodicals published by the Korean Workers' Party in North Korea.³⁵ Today the researchers also regard the production of basic but usable knowledge as their main task.

Second, KINU has expanded its networks at the institutional level. In the globalized world, partners of think tanks can not only be other think tanks, but also local and international organizations.³⁶ This is the case for KINU as well. The Research Council of Unification Policy, presided over by the director of KINU, is a prime example of domestic networking. The council is now composed of 42 organizations: many government-supported institutes and some private think tanks. Engagement with North Korea requires concerted efforts in various fields, including economic cooperation, the connection of infrastructures, cultural and academic exchanges, medical assistance, energy supply, the exploration of tourist sites, etc. The member organizations of the Council have worked together not only among themselves, but also with local governments and their auxiliary organizations. An exemplary case of such collaboration was a workshop held in November 2002 to explore the possibility of linking inter-Korean tourist cooperation to local tourism—that is, Mount Kumgang (located in North Korea) tourism to Mount Sorak (the adjacent area in South Korea) tourism. Indeed, this kind of cooperation requires the active participation of relevant local governments as well as an improvement in overall inter-Korean relations.

These new efforts are both a response to KINU's less effective policy-idea advocacy and a consequence of deepening globalization. Knowledge

³⁵Philo Kim, *Kim Il-sung jojok haeje* (Annotated bibliography of the collected works of Kim Il-sung) (Seoul: KINU, 1993); Philo Kim, *Kim Jong-il jojok haeje* (Annotated bibliography of the collected works of Kim Jong-il) (Seoul: KINU, 1993); Kyo-Duk Lee, *Joson jonsahaeje* (Annotated bibliography of Korean History) (Seoul: KINU, 1994) and *Gulloja haeje* (Annotated bibliography of workers) (Seoul: KINU, 1995).

³⁶Stone, "Non-Governmental Policy Transfer," 49-51.

diffusion has already become a norm for this public think tank. Conferences and workshops are not merely an opportunity to learn about others; they provide the participating organizations with a chance to build an epistemic community for deliberating the strategy of engagement with, rather than containing, North Korea. KINU's international partners are the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies in Shanghai, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations and the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (belonging to the Russian Academy of Sciences) in Moscow, the Institute for International Policy Studies and the National Institute for Defense Studies in Tokyo.

In general, the mode of operation of Korea's public think tanks differs from that of influential American think tanks, most of which are private. The latter's basic role is to put forward policy ideas, and close political connection is customary. In the United States, the think tank members participate in politics as opportunities arise, and then return to their original positions at their think tanks as the need ends. This so-called revolving-door practice is considered normal. By contrast, in the Korean case—as illustrated by KINU—think tanks strive to be free of politics.

As a knowledge producer and networker, KINU may enjoy some advantages as well. It can draw wide public attention, and its knowledge consumers are diverse. These consumers consist not only of the MOU, MOFA, and NIS, but also of academics and international organizations. For instance, KINU opened the Center for North Korean Human Rights in 1994 and started the publication of the annual *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* in 1996.³⁷ The annual white paper is often cited by the U.N. Human Rights Council's special rapporteur, Human Rights Watch, and the U.S. Department of State, etc. The White Paper and other

³⁷Precursors of the studies on human rights in North Korea, before the launching of the KINU Center for Human Rights in North Korea, are Asia Watch (later Human Rights Watch/Asia), the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, and Amnesty International.

projects do not simply uncover serious violation cases such as political prisoner camps and public executions, but also illuminate the North Korean cases through the lenses of international laws and norms.

Since the 1990s, KINU has often been the first-time user of some new vocabularies with which Korean government officials and the general public had been unfamiliar. The use of such terms as “durability” (or sustainability), “private channels,” “engagement,” “unification cost,” “unification clock,” “human rights in North Korea,” “governance,” and “humanitarian aid” has expanded the scope and domain of studies related to inter-Korean relations.³⁸ Rich, an American think tank analyst, views a think tank’s influence in terms of its role in framing issues and addressing policy alternatives from the early stages in a debate.³⁹ Following Rich’s view, KINU’s provision of new vocabulary has certainly influenced the government’s policy making. Indeed, KINU researchers professed the need to open “private channels” in inter-Korean relations in the second half of Kim Young-sam’s presidency (1993-1998). This was intended to resolve the deadlock that could be attributed to Kim’s refusal to provide further humanitarian aid to the North after Pyongyang’s humiliation of a Korean governmental food aid shipment in 1995.⁴⁰ The use of private channels eventually became a norm in the successor administration led by Kim Dae-jung.

³⁸Related works are, to name a few only, Young-ho Park and Hyung-gi Kim, *2011 nyon tongil yeochuk sigye* (The unification clock in 2011) (Seoul: KINU, 2011); Kyu-ryoon Kim, Han-bum Cho, and Kang-taek Lim, *Tongil biyong, pyeonik sarye yeongu* (A comprehensive study of unification cost and benefit) (Seoul: KINU, 2011); Korea Institute for National Unification, ed., *Kukjesahoeui gaebal jiwoon iron gwa silje: Bukhan gaebal jiwoon ul wihan mosaek* (Theory and practice of international institutions’ development assistance) (Seoul: KINU, 2008); Sung Chull Kim et al., *North Korea in Crisis: An Assessment of Regime Sustainability* (Seoul: KINU, 1997); Soo-am Kim, “Policy Environment and Directions for North Korean Human Rights,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 21, no. 2 (December 2012): 33-60.

³⁹Andrew Rich, “U.S. Think Tanks and the Intersection of Ideology, Advocacy, and Influence,” *NIRA Review* (Winter 2001): 54-59; Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰In 1995, North Korea forced a South Korean ship that carried rice to fly the North Korean flag at the Chongjin port. Korean conservatives in particular considered this incident a humiliation, symbolically depicting it as “giving rice, but slapped on the cheek.”

As for methodology, comparative studies have become one of the most frequently used methods in North Korean studies. Complex systems theory, decision-making models, and game theory have been applied to the analysis of North Korean behavior and inter-Korean relations. Also, the potential utility of international institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has been an important area of analysis.⁴¹ All in all, the projects represent analyses relevant to long-term visions of inter-Korean relations and to the institutionalization of a prospective unified Korea.

Conclusion

From a broad perspective, it is fair to say that the delayed democratic consolidation has made politics prevail over innovative policy-ideas about inter-Korean relations, in which public think tanks, particularly KINU in this study, should have been the main actors. The national division has been the long-term causal source of the ideological polarization, and the latter, paired with regional divide, has contributed to retarding democratic consolidation. Apparently the North Korea policy has been one of the top agenda items both during the authoritarian rule and in the democratic era. The policy has not only captured much public attention, but has also consumed tremendous national energy as well. But the public consensus, or public opinion, has not been the main source of the policymaking. The

⁴¹For instance, Keum-soon Lee and Soo-am Kim, *Kukjesahoe ui ingwongaeseon jeonryak: iron gwa silje* (The international society's strategy of improving human rights: theory and practice) (Seoul: KINU, 2008); Kuk-shin Kim et al., *Bokjapgye iron ul tonghan Bukhan ui jeongsang gukgahwa bangan yeongu* (A policy study for the normal statization of North Korea: complex systems approach) (Seoul: KINU, 2009); Woo-taek Hong, *Bukhan haekmunje ui jeonmang gwa daeungchaek: jeongchaek gyojjeong model ul iyonghan jeollyak bunseok* (Prospects and prescription of the North Korean nuclear issue: a strategic analysis applying the decision-making model) (Seoul: KINU: 2012).

president, close associates to the president in the Blue House, and like-minded ministers in the administration have dominated related information and policymaking processes. That is, the expansion of civil society and the growth of public think tanks have not been followed by the full advocacy of policy ideas in Korea's democratic processes.

The lack of professionalism in the Korean bureaucracy has also contributed to discouraging the public think tanks' role of policy-advocate. Upon a new president's taking power, bureaucrats line up to read the president's motives and the Blue House's policy line.⁴² They are sensitive to the top only; they are neither attentive nor receptive to any ideas different from the superior offices, as otherwise they cannot be protected. The bureaucrats do not want the public think tanks to become independent advocates providing ideas that are not in accordance with those of the superior offices. Given this, there has been little room for public think tanks to play the role of policy-idea advocates in the field of inter-Korean relations.

On the other hand, different roles of think tanks should be acknowledged in different political systems.⁴³ The Korean presidential system in the situation of national division has provided the presidents with prerogatives over external policies, sidelining the power of the unicameral legislature. This situation differs substantially from that of the U.S. presidential system in which the bicameral legislature has a powerful check over the president. The U.S. case creates an authority structure in which think tanks, either private or public, can make their best efforts to put their ideas through legislation as well as in the public domain. By contrast, Korea and Japan have shared a commonality with regard to the public think tanks' limited role particularly in recent years. While exerting

⁴²The lack of professionalism differs from bureaucratic exclusiveness. For the latter argument, see Yeonho Lee, "Jagun jongbu rul mandulgi wihan think tank ui yokhal" (The role of think tanks to make a smaller and more effective government), *Kukje chongchi non-chong* (Korean Journal of International Studies) (Seoul) 49, no. 2 (June 2009): 129-53; Park, "Segehwa sidae ui woegyojongchaek," 111.

⁴³See Donald Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

Tokyo's proactive role in the international security realm, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (2006-2007, 2012-present) has relied more on private consultative panels than ever before for both obtaining ideas on crucial national security issues and rationalizing his ideas on them.⁴⁴ The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) is the top public think tank in Japan pertaining to national security and international relations issues. As of 2012, JIIA was ranked second among the think tanks in Asia, including China, India, Japan, and Korea.⁴⁵ But Abe has chosen to request reports from the private panels that are composed of scholars, retired diplomats, and business leaders. Abe's case is similar to the Korean presidents' dependence on close associates.

In inter-Korean affairs, the voice of public think tanks will likely not be heard by the top policymakers until Korean politics undergoes a dramatic change in the system, culture, and practice. In the meantime, public think tanks must find a way of achieving financial independence, even if partly. Achieving the latter will not discourage think tanks even in the case of political intervention in their organizational affairs, such as the appointment of directors. Otherwise, public think tanks may choose to remain research institutes, particularly as producers of usable knowledge and vocabulary. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the role of Korean public think tanks related to inter-Korean affairs is not necessarily disappointing. As the KINU case shows, they have played a certain

⁴⁴For instance, Abe, as prime minister, asked the Panel on the Reconstruction of the Legal Foundation of the National Security to present a report on a reinterpretation of the constitution. The report, published in June 2008, made a revisionist interpretation of Article 9 of the constitution: allowing collective self-defense based on the strengthened U.S.-Japan alliance. This report became the foundation of another report delivered in October 2013 by the successor panel. The recent report states that: "the national security should become a top agenda cutting across the entire governmental tasks." See Panel on the Reconstruction of the Legal Foundation of the National Security, "Report of the Panel on the Reconstruction of the Legal Foundation of the National Security," June 24, 2008, <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/anzenhosyou/houkokusho.pdf> (accessed November 7, 2013); and "Kokka anpo senryaku no gaiyo yoshi" (Summary of the strategy of national security), *Sankei Shimbun*, October 22, 2013, <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/politics/print/131022/plc13102209010004-c.htm> (accessed November 7, 2013).

⁴⁵McGann, *2012 Global Go to Think Tanks Report*, 57-58.

alternative role—trying to envision a transformative epistemic community of engagement with the North. Also, their spirit of engagement, neither radical nor reserved, has become a norm in various policy-oriented intellectual circles.

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