



Ideas change history. The future is remade with a change in one's perspective. The East Asia Institute ([www.eai.or.kr](http://www.eai.or.kr)), based in Seoul, believes in this power of ideas, and takes ideational innovation as its mission. The ideas it embraces are rooted in liberal norms, and inculcate citizen support for liberal democracy and market economy not only for their delivery of good governance and prosperity, but also for their ethical promise of constructing a transparent, tolerant and accountable community. The market and election each constitutes an arena where individuals take charge of their destiny and grow into citizens with rights and duties. The spirit of tolerance, fairness, responsibility, and openness thus acquired also makes society ready for a constructive dialogue with others. From here arises an international community of nations and a zone of democratic peace.

The real question, then, is not what ideas to produce and disseminate, but how. Inspired by Washington's robust network of think tanks, diagnosing this epistemological community as a source of America's "soft power," and concerned over South Korea's lack of similar idea generators, East Asia Institute (EAI) launched itself in June 2002 as a nonpartisan and nonprofit think tank, whose mission is to link cutting-edge social science theories with policy. To be a think tank, however, is easier to be said than done. An idea becomes soft power only when society recognizes it as speaking for public interest and as based on expertise and ethical integrity. To satisfy both requirements, EAI avoids any conflicts of interests. That requires its discipline to maintain independence from political parties, interest groups, and NGOs because once entangled in everyday politics, its credibility as an agent of expertise and integrity working for public interest gets irreparably damaged. Once reputation is hurt and credibility scarred, its voice is heeded by no one.

Thus, keeping EAI "neither too close nor too far" from everyday politics, economics, and social dynamics is a central task of its trustees. To secure independence and construct a good governance

structure, EAI benchmarks its board after top U.S. think tanks, recruiting business executives of diverse career backgrounds, professors from top universities, and practitioners with a scholarly mind. Today, led by former Prime Minister Hong Koo Lee, its board has 24 trustees to pull resources together as well as build a system of checks and balances. The EAI has also set up an international advisory committee of 19 experts, including Larry Diamond (Stanford University), Christopher Hood (Oxford University), Xiabo Lu (Columbia University), Andrew MacIntyre (Australian National University), Gilbert Rozman (Princeton University), Jorge I. Domínguez, Robert D. Putnam, and Ezra F. Vogel (Harvard University).

As critical for institution building as EAI's choice on its board composition is its network strategy. The EAI is a national network of scholars, supported by a small but capable in-house staffs. The network strategy produces a high yield for every penny it invests. Through outsourcing much of research works, it enables EAI to tap on South Korea's best talents, dispersed and isolated from each other, without incurring large sunken costs. Moreover, by restraining from developing a large in-house research team, EAI avoids becoming a "captive" of its own staffs, too. Expertise is a rare commodity. There is neither a panacea nor a jack-of-all-trades. Because every scholar possesses his own distinctive research agenda, pet project, and core competence, opting for a large in-house research staffs restricts what policy issues EAI can tackle and how fast it can produce first-rate research works. In a transition society like South Korea, where policy issues are constantly redefined politically, these restrictions on research scope and speed is a too high cost for EAI. Hence, as issues change, EAI flexibly reorganizes its task forces with "new blood" continuously injected from an outside pool of South Korea's best research talents. Equally critical, this strategy of networking to outsource quality research works makes EAI to be always on its toes, keeping up both global standard and ethical integrity, lest it loses reputation and, with it, network partners. Since its



establishment in June 2002, a total of 151 university professors and researchers have worked in 17 task forces, 8 public survey teams, 2 foreign policy forums, and 12 international conferences.

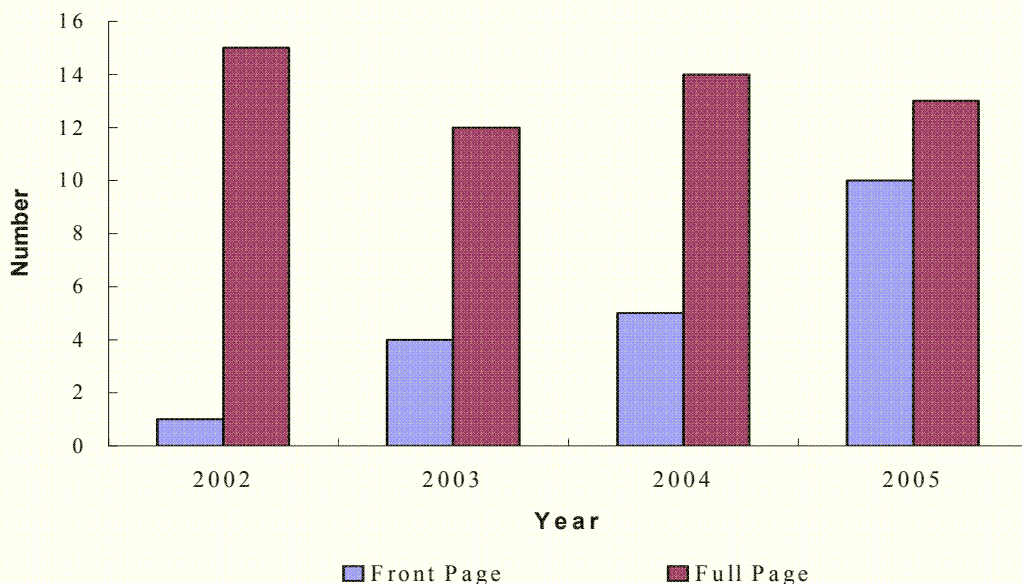
Surely, however, networking works only when there is also a committed capable staffs, who develop research agendas, draw up project plans, recruit partner scholars and institutions, administer budget, and organize logistic support for task forces. The EAI is headed by President Byung-Kook Kim, a political scientist (Korea University) overseeing research in good governance, political economy, and international relations. EAI has five directors, each in charge of a Research Center. Jang Hoon (Joongang University) heads studies on good governance and institutional reform, Lee Nae Young (Korea University) administers public polls and expert surveys, Kim Taehyun (Joongang University) leads foreign policy research teams and forums. and Lee Keun (Seoul National University) orchestrates studies in macroeconomic, international trade, and industrial policy. Kim Sunhyuk (Korea University) newly controls decentralization research.

The EAI relies on networking to disseminate

ideas, too. The producer of policy ideas loses its *raison d'être* when there are no consumers for its ideas. To make itself relevant for society by clarifying policy constraints, dilemmas, and options, EAI closely works with South Korea's major newspapers and TV networks from agenda setting to program planning to news coverage. The media is more than a disseminator of EAI ideas. They are a co-owner of many of EAI programs, funding task force expenses, monitoring research quality, and repackaging policy proposals into a readable everyday language. Since June 2002, EAI has partnered with *Joongang Ilbo* (18 projects), *Chosun Ilbo* (2), *Maekyung Business* (2), *Hankook Ilbo* (3), and SBS (2). The number of times each of its partner newspapers reported EAI policy appraisals and recommendations in their front page shows its robust media network: 10 in *Joongang Ilbo*, 2 in *Chosun Ilbo*, 4 in *Maekyung Business*, and 5 in *Hankook Ilbo*. The full-page coverage likewise totaled 55 since June 2002.

With its network power, EAI has made a remarkable progress particularly in its "Rokus Program" to upgrade South Korea's alliance with America into a more equal and comprehensive partnership, fitting in with its economic and military

**Newspaper Coverage on EAI Policy Reports**



capabilities and based on its liberal values. The EAI has chosen this as one of its core programs because without a newly upgraded alliance system, South Korea cannot deter war, nuclear proliferation, ideological polarization, and, hence, economic instability. The Rokus has grown into six programs and projects since June 2002:

- The Dialogue 21 brings young “386” National Assembly Members to exchange views on foreign policy issues with U.S. Embassy, USFK and AMCHAM Korea representatives three times a year to deepen mutual understanding.
- The Alliance Task Force has teamed up 19 scholars and practitioners to design a “roadmap” to build a robust South Korea-America alliance.
- To reduce misunderstanding on U.S. intentions and clarify South Korean options, EAI brought together 5 security experts and 2 journalists to prepare TV documentaries on America’s strategy of “Military Transformation,” which SBS aired on November 9 and 16, 2004.
- The National Security Panel, with 15 military and economic security experts, publishes a monthly report on foreign policy issues for an audience of 4,044 experts, bureaucrats, and journalists. The issues covered since May 2004 include South Korea’s troop dispatch to Iraq, U.S. military redeployment, and Six Party Talks.
- The EAI Global Net 21, a public forum

with 94 scholars and journalists as members, invites foreign policymakers and experts to speak on key policy issues six times a year. The speakers since July 2003 include John R. Bolton, Christopher R. Hill, Richard Lawless, and Robert Gallucci.

- The 5-member Survey Team conducts a national poll on South Korean perceptions of America twice a year in order to identify trouble spots and trace opinion trends. The Survey Team also annually participates in two or three international survey consortia on U.S. role in global affairs, organized by BBC, GlobeScan, PIPA, and Chicago Council of Foreign Relations. Expert surveys are combined to give a balance to public surveys.

The EAI has succeeded in pioneering new frontiers of policy research in new organizational ways. This has been possible only because it shares common goals and values with a wide range of people. They make up its partner scholars, institutions, and sponsors, believing in the power of ideas as much as EAI and joining in its programs as a co-owner. Or, being a network institution, EAI constitutes their instrument, transforming their hopes and aspirations into doable policy ideas. Whatever impacts EAI has on public opinion and policy are not its own, but those of scholars, journalists, and sponsors sharing its cause and monitoring its expertise and integrity. The EAI’s search for partners will continue strong into 2006.



Dr. Byung-Kook Kim is a President of EAI (East Asia Institute) and a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Korea University. His speciality is Comparative Politics and Political Economy. He received his Ph.D. from the Department of Government at Harvard University. His published works include *Hopes and Disillusions of Latin American Politics and Society*, *Dynamics of national Division and Revolution*, *The Political Economy of Korea and Mexico*, *State, Region and International System: Change and Continuity*, *Korean Politics*, and *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea*. For more information, please visit the EAI homepage at [www.eai.or.kr](http://www.eai.or.kr).