

*Book Review*

# Think Tanks, Foreign Policy and the Emerging Powers

James G. McGann (ed.)

Think Tanks, Foreign Policy and the Emerging Powers (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), xxx + 456 pp. 59,99 € (Hardcover),

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All rising powers, or emerging powers, are not rising in vacuum; they are confronted with a variety of challenges at home and abroad. How to meet these external challenges and thus make their rise more smoothly vis-à-vis the status quo power (aka established power) have not only bothered the leadership of these countries, but also concerned International Relations (IR) scholars and foreign policy experts. The current literature makes great contribution to people's understanding of grand strategies that rising powers pursue.<sup>1</sup> But these research fails to demonstrate where these "grand strategies" are from, or how they are made, and who made them. The volume *Think Tanks, Foreign Policy and the Emerging Powers* edited by James G. McGann has shed some light on these questions by concentrating on the role of security and international affairs (SIA) think tanks in emerging powers and illustrating how these policy institutions facilitate to cope with challenges via designing, revising and legitimizing foreign policy in the ever-changing context of world politics.

James G. McGann is a senior lecturer in International Studies at the Lauder Institute and senior fellow at Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania. He is also a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a well-known SIA think tank based in Philadelphia. As director of the Lauder Institute's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), Dr. McGann has been examining the evolving role and character of think tanks since the inception of TTCSP in 1989 by collecting data and conducting research on think

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Mares, David R. & Trinkunas, Harold A. 2016. *Aspirational Power: Brazil on the Long Road to Global Influence*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press; Leverett, Flynt & Wu, Bingbing. 2016. *The New Silk Road and China's Evolving Grand Strategy*. *The China Journal*, no.77, pp.110-132; Paredesi, Manjeet S. 2017. *American Global Primacy and the Rise of India*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: East-West Center.

tank trends in policymaking process. Referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP has developed and launched its first annual Global Go to Think Tank Index Report since 2007. Dr. McGann has authored more than fifteen books on think tanks in the past thirty plus years.

The volume under review is one of the latest books on think tanks by Dr. McGann. It aims to “explore how security and international affairs [SIA] think tanks in emerging powers collaborate with their policy-makers to meet current and anticipate future foreign policy and security challenges” (pp.13-14). To achieve this goal, the book examines 12 think tank cases that are broken down into four parts and 25 chapters by region, i.e., Part II Africa (Nigeria and South Africa: Chapter 5-8), Part III Asia (China, India, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam: Chapter 9-19), Part IV Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico: Chapter 20-25), and Part V Middle East (Qatar and Turkey: Chapter 26-29). The four parts explicate the unique foreign policy challenges that the emerging powers face and strategies that have been developed to effectively respond to these policy issues by think tanks. The introduction part is composed of 4 chapters, in which Chapter 1 and 2 provide a detailed exposition of the literature on and evolution of SIA think tanks and the role they have played in shaping foreign and defense policies; Chapter 3 analyzes the changing character and context of world politics and the role of emerging powers in the multipolar world; Chapter 4 examines the definition of “emerging powers” and their main groupings and development. The conclusion part contains the sole Chapter 30, which assesses the ongoing trends and major challenges for SIA think tanks in rising powers by comparing the think tank cases analyzed in the volume and provides some suggestions for future research.

The case studies in this book show that think tanks “have become a permanent part of the political landscape and are now an integral part of the policy process in many countries” “irrespective of their structure or level of autonomy” (p.8). For example, the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) actively conducts track-two diplomacy and defines the Chinese role in the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and energy security and development (Chapter 10) while the AI Jazeera Center for Studies (AJSC) in Qatar serves as a gateway for the world with scientific research in knowledge disseminated through the media and strategic thinking in the Arab world. When comparing with different cases of think tanks contained in the book, the editor arrives at some interesting conclusions. It is argued that different think tanks emphasize varying agendas. Concretely speaking, “most Asian think tanks have research strands on regional organization on the continent, while the Latin American counterparts focus on their own region” (p.423). The volume also points out that “emerging-power think tanks are situated in critical regions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and their local expertise pro-

vides in-depth and expert analyses of regional events with a global impact” (p.424). It is needless to say that these think tanks have made great achievements and contributed to the development of emerging powers in which they are located by in-depth theoretical research and policy analysis. However, they are confronted with various, and sometimes shared, problems. For example, both the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and the AJSC suffer from the lack of funding, while many other think tanks such as the CIIS are yet to broaden the scope of research, enhance the depth and systematicity of studies, and double down efforts to deal with relations with government as well as overcome leadership challenges.

An outgrowth of the G20 Foreign Policy Think Tank Summit between TTCSP and Brazil’s Fundação getulio Vargas (FVG) in 2012,<sup>2</sup> the edited volume is also a product presenting Dr. McGann’s decades-long experience of research of and consulting on think tanks. Some major merits in the book are worth mentioning. Firstly, the cases are properly selected from the TTCSP database of nearly 7,000 think tanks worldwide based on “a clearly articulated mission and programs that are focused on SIA research,” “a date of establishment that spanned the Cold War period and fell within the overall parameters of the longitudinal study,” and “a globally representative set of think tanks for the study” (pp.14-15). By doing this, secondly, it makes these cases comparable and helps target shared challenges, paving the way for solutions to improve the development of think tanks in emerging powers at large. Thirdly, the insider insights by contributors, most of who are managers and research fellows at the think tanks they analyze, make arguments of this volume more convincing. Lastly, the structure of this book also deserves recognition. An overview of the emerging power provided before the think tank(s) of this country is (are) examined, for instance, makes the book more reader-friendly. The appendix provides readers with detailed analysis of the relations between the correlation of events with the category of think tanks established in rising powers. However, it does not mean that the book is without any demerits. For example, in the case of China, where the past decades have witnessed the upsurge of all types of think tanks and their growing influence in foreign policy, it is suggested to introduce and analyze a private/social think tank so as to open another window to observe the second largest power.

The volume edited by McGann has provided quite a novel insight into the role think tanks play in emerging powers, particularly their contribution in “aiding the transition and, most importantly, aiding the transformation of the nation’s foreign policy to better reflect its changing status globally” (p.11). In the post-COVID-19 era where the great-power competition between China and the United

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<sup>2</sup> For details of the summit, see Doherty, Christopher, et al. 2012. G20 Foreign Policy Think Tank Summit: Summit Report, [https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=ttcsp\\_summitreports](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=ttcsp_summitreports).

States is more likely to intensify, think tanks in both countries are expected to take more responsibility in smoothing the power transition. Taking into account of think tanks' advantage of collaborating separate groups of researchers and engaging stakeholders in the policy process, think tanks from outside China and the United States could and should also play a due role in preventing the two powers from heading into the alleged Thucydides' trap. In this case, this book is recommended to practitioners, including policy makers and diplomats as well as think tank managers. People who have strong interests in public/foreign policy, international development, and IRs, particularly teachers and students of IRs and political science would also find it helpful and interesting.

### **Bio**

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