

Reflections on Developing Local High-end Think Tanks (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] The construction of local high-end think tank platforms represents an important dimension of national high-end think tank platform development and is of great significance to the building of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. [Method/Process] This study analyzes the functional positioning of local think tanks, reviews experiences from Western high-end think tank platform construction, summarizes existing problems in China's local think tank platform development, and subsequently proposes countermeasures and recommendations. [Results/Conclusions] To strengthen the construction of local high-end think tank platforms, it is essential to highlight the two key characteristics of "local" and "high-end," and to effectively perform five major functions: serving local decision-making, enlightening regional public wisdom, cultivating and consolidating regional talent, promoting regional exchanges, and enhancing collaboration among local think tanks. By actively drawing upon successful international think tank construction experiences and addressing six critical issues in China's local think tank development—administrative fragmentation, collaboration capacity, openness, funding investment, localization, and specialization—priority should be given to six construction areas: first, localized characteristic development; second, specialized capacity building; third, regional cooperation development; fourth, open development; fifth, information technology advancement; and sixth, institutional and mechanism modernization.

Full Text

Some Thoughts on the Construction of Local High-end Think Tanks

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The construction of local high-end think tank platforms constitutes an important dimension of national high-end think tank platform development and holds great significance for building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics. **[Method/Process]** This study analyzes the functional positioning of local think tanks, examines experiences from Western high-end think tank platform construction, summarizes existing problems in China's local think tank platform development, and proposes corresponding countermeasures and recommendations. **[Result/Conclusion]** Strengthening local high-end think tank platform construction should emphasize two key characteristics—"local" and "high-end"—while performing five major functions: serving local decision-making, inspiring regional public wisdom, cultivating and gathering regional talent, promoting regional exchange, and strengthening collaboration among local think tanks. By actively drawing upon successful international think tank construction experiences and addressing problems of administrative fragmentation, weak collaborative capacity, insufficient openness, inadequate funding, lack of local distinctiveness, and low specialization in China's local think tank construction, efforts should focus on six key areas: (1) developing local characteristics, (2) building professional capacity, (3) promoting regional cooperation, (4) advancing open development, (5) enhancing informatization, and (6) modernizing institutional mechanisms.

Keywords: local high-end think tank, international high-end think tank, think tank platform

The *Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Types of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics* issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council clearly states that one of the main manifestations of China's think tank construction failing to meet contemporary needs is the urgent need to innovate organizational forms and management methods. As a crucial component of national high-end think tank construction, local high-end think tanks exhibit even more pronounced deficiencies in this regard. Addressing these issues requires clarifying the connotation and functional positioning of local high-end think tanks on the basis of learning from global high-end think tank construction experiences, targeting problems in domestic local think tank construction, and implementing comprehensive policy measures.

1 What Are Local High-end Think Tanks?

Baidu Baike defines think tanks as professional research institutions that focus on public policy research, aim to influence government decision-making, orient toward public interests, and adhere to social responsibility as their research criterion. Chinese think tanks constitute an important component of the nation's "soft power" and "discourse power," exerting profound influence on government decision-making, enterprise development, social public opinion, and public knowledge dissemination. In terms of organizational form and institutional at-

tributes, think tanks can be either public research institutions with government backgrounds or private research institutions without or with quasi-governmental backgrounds. Wikipedia's entry, citing Frank Fischer, Gerald J. Miller & Mara S. Sidney's *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis*, explains that think tanks are research-oriented organizations, mostly named "institutes" or "societies," that primarily conduct investigations and analyses on social, economic, political, cultural, military, and related issues while providing solutions, generally funded by governments, political parties, or commercial corporations.

Like general think tanks, the organizational forms and management methods of local high-end think tanks can be either government-funded or non-government-funded. What distinguishes local high-end think tanks from ordinary ones are two key aspects: First, local high-end think tanks are grounded in locality or regionality. In fact, locality and regionality are relative concepts. Within China, think tanks established at the provincial, municipal, and county levels can all be called local think tanks. However, from a global perspective, China itself is a locality or region on Earth, and in this sense, various Chinese think tanks can also be regarded as international local think tanks. Second, local high-end think tanks maintain a high-end or holistic perspective. Although their foothold is local or regional, their service content should be high-end. This "high-end" can be understood as either high-quality research output or a high-level service vision. Precisely because local high-end think tanks possess the dual characteristics of regionality and high-end positioning, their construction must successfully accomplish the critical task of "being based locally while serving the overall situation."

2 Basic Functions of Local High-end Think Tanks

The construction of local high-end think tanks should highlight the two key features of "local" and "high-end" while performing five important functions: serving local decision-making, inspiring regional public wisdom, cultivating and gathering regional talent, promoting regional exchange, and strengthening collaboration among local think tanks.

2.1 Serving Local Decision-making

Serving decision-making and development represents the fundamental function of think tanks. As local high-end think tanks, to effectively perform this basic function, they must focus on enhancing their decision-making service capacity. Two misconceptions must be eliminated in this process. The first misconception is equating serving local decision-making entirely with serving local leadership decision-making. Local decisions can be made by either local leadership bodies or national high-level leadership institutions. Providing consultation for local decision-making requires both national high-end think tanks and local high-end think tanks. For instance, the strategy for revitalizing Northeast China's old industrial base is an economic and social development strategy targeting the three northeastern provinces. The implementation of this strategic decision

involves numerous details concerning local and regional development, making it nearly impossible and objectively unreasonable to rely entirely on national high-level think tanks for decision-making consultation. This necessitates the establishment of numerous local high-end think tanks that originate from, are based in, and understand local areas to provide bottom-up think tank services, offering more and better, more meticulous and thoughtful, and more locally appropriate consultation to the state for better local development.

The second misconception is that serving local decision-making means focusing only on local development to the exclusion of all else. This erroneous notion must be abandoned in local high-end think tank construction. If a local think tank's research vision remains fixated on narrow local interests, it can at best be considered a local think tank, not a high-end one. Local high-end think tanks should leverage their advantages and characteristics of being locally based and grounded to provide more valuable think tank outcomes for national and holistic development.

2.2 Inspiring Regional Public Wisdom

Think tank inspiration of public wisdom differs from that of general educational institutions. While general educational institutions provide inductive general educational materials, think tanks employ deductive specific case-based materials that are generally closely related to the interests and development of the educated. From this perspective, local high-end think tanks hold greater advantages than national high-level think tanks in inspiring public wisdom. In recent years, China has placed greater emphasis on people-oriented differentiated development, providing a sound ideological foundation for the cultivation of regional public wisdom. China has a vast territory with significant regional differences in natural endowments, which has given rise to diverse regional cultures. It is therefore unsurprising that people living in different regions exhibit differences in thinking and behavior. For national harmony, stability, and long-term social peace, it is crucial to understand, grasp, and guide the thoughts and behaviors of people in different regions—areas where the role of local high-end think tanks cannot be overlooked. Local high-end think tanks must focus on the cultural characteristics of their regions and local communities, comprehensively employing print media, modern communications, and new media to strengthen public enlightenment platform construction through various forms such as lectures, promotional videos, and seminars, thereby fully performing their important function of inspiring regional public wisdom.

2.3 Cultivating and Gathering Local Talent

Talent constitutes the core of think tank construction. In building local high-end think tanks, cultivating and gathering talent must be prioritized as a core function. Talent meeting the needs of local high-end think tank development should possess not only the grand strategic vision of national high-level think tank talent but also practical grassroots experience. From this perspective,

the standards for local high-end think tank talent appear even more stringent. However, constrained by institutional mechanisms, local think tanks clearly lack advantages in gathering high-end talent, which further highlights the importance of strengthening their talent cultivation and aggregation functions. To enhance these functions, local high-end think tanks should leverage their own advantages. First, they should capitalize on their lower entry barriers. High thresholds represent a common starting point for high-end think tanks in selecting talent, but this also prevents them from accessing all high-end talent. Local think tanks can exploit this by adhering to the principle of “using talent for our own purposes” to gather and select distinctive high-end talent that belongs to them. Second, they should leverage their physical presence in local areas. Many high-end talents who are familiar with and understand local areas have deep life and work experiences there and have developed strong emotional and network dependencies on the locality. Local high-end think tanks can provide them with higher-end development space at the local level, thereby retaining and effectively utilizing these talents.

2.4 Promoting Inter-regional Exchange

Differences and barriers between regions often constitute the origins of social contradictions and international conflicts. As the saying goes, “the one who ties the bell must untie it.” To fundamentally resolve such contradictions, we must begin by promoting inter-regional exchange. For example, China has recently promoted the maritime power strategy—a strategic decision made from a global perspective for China’s long-term development. From a national standpoint, such strategic decisions are undoubtedly correct and visionary. However, recent implementation across various regions has revealed contradictions arising from insufficient regional exchange. China has many coastal provinces with relatively prominent homogeneous development phenomena. If localities cannot strengthen cooperation based on complementary advantages, China’s maritime power strategy could easily be undermined by local self-righteousness. Local high-end think tanks undoubtedly bear important responsibilities in this regard. To substantively advance inter-regional exchange, it is necessary to understand the exchange partners, but more importantly, to have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of one’s own region. Local high-end think tanks should undertake this heavy responsibility. Having long engaged in comprehensive research at the regional level, they are thoroughly familiar with their region’s social, economic, and cultural affairs, while their relatively high-level positioning prevents narrow local protectionist thinking from interfering, thus ensuring to some extent that regional exchange can be realized at a higher level of cooperation and achieve substantive results.

2.5 Strengthening Collaboration Among Local Think Tanks

The construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics is a massive systematic project. This systematic nature is manifested not only in

the integrity of think tank hierarchical structures and functional complementarity but also in the cooperativeness and collaborative nature among think tanks. From this perspective, no think tank can neglect its cooperative exchanges with other think tanks, and local high-end think tanks certainly cannot overlook this function. Compared with collaboration between local high-end think tanks and other types of think tanks, collaboration among local high-end think tanks and other local think tanks within the same region appears more important. Cooperation between high-level think tanks and local think tanks seems innate, with a silent force naturally driving their collaboration, making it easy for them to find mutual interests and achieve complementary development. However, collaboration between local high-end think tanks and other local think tanks within the same region cannot simply follow this pattern. First, there exists obvious competitive exclusion among local think tanks within a region, each serving its own master, with the objects of their “favor-seeking” also generally in competitive relationships, making cooperative gaming difficult to form. Yet, in terms of practical needs, collaboration between local high-end think tanks and other local think tanks within the region is extremely necessary. Only by strengthening such collaboration can we effectively avoid futile “internal friction” and truly enhance cooperative effectiveness. How to promote cooperation between local high-end think tanks and other local think tanks within the same region should become a key consideration in local high-end think tank construction.

3 Typical International Experiences in Local High-end Think Tank Construction

As the saying goes, “stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this one.” China’s local high-end think tank construction is still in its initial stage with few mature case experiences. Relatively speaking, developed countries in Europe and America have accumulated many advanced cases and experiences in local high-end think tank construction that are worthy of our summary and reference.

3.1 Emphasizing Characteristic Platform Construction to Establish Industry Position

Highlighting research platform characteristics is a principle consistently followed in Western think tank construction. Examining the growth paths of relatively large, mature, and internationally renowned Western think tank institutions reveals that they generally start with research in a particular characteristic field, gradually expanding and strengthening their platforms after accumulating sufficient social influence. For example, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in Canada is an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental research institution established in Canada in 1990 and headquartered in Winnipeg—a location far from Canada’s political and economic center. However, this think tank has long focused on conducting project research and policy consultation on environment and sustainable development. Through

more than two decades of effort, it has developed into a world-renowned professional high-end think tank, now maintaining branch offices in Ottawa (Canada), New York (USA), and Geneva (Switzerland), with business operations expanded to over 30 countries and regions worldwide. The think tank's flagship product is the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB)*. Its founders were invited to participate in the preparation and publicity work for the fourth United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 due to their demonstrated excellence in environment and sustainable development research, during which they published the *Earth Summit Bulletin (ESB)*, which became the origin of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB)* and brought the think tank to prominence. Due to IISD's distinctive and professional research characteristics, it has gained favor and cooperative support from numerous professional research institutions worldwide. Currently, influential environmental development organizations and intergovernmental cooperation organizations such as the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR) are all willing to sit at the negotiation table provided by IISD and use the highly distinctive and influential *Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB)* platform to publish their views and recommendations to the world and the United Nations. The International Institute for Sustainable Development's industry position in the global environment and sustainable development think tank field has become rock-solid precisely because of its long-term efforts to build a distinctive research platform.

3.2 Emphasizing Diversified Participation Platforms to Activate Development Vitality

“Brainstorming” is considered a popular modern decision-making method in contemporary management. Building high-end think tanks, especially local ones, should emphasize the application of this method. Many internationally renowned think tanks essentially provide a “table” where thinkers can argue face-to-face. It is precisely such a “table” —theoretically accessible to almost everyone with the opportunity to earn a seat—that has become a high-end think tank renowned nationally and globally. For example, Canada's Public Policy Forum (PPF) is also an independent, non-profit, non-governmental think tank originally established in 1987 in Calgary, southwestern Canada. To date, this think tank has no permanently employed professional researchers; it simply declares that anyone can join the PPF organization provided they have sufficient achievements and capabilities to prove they can “deliver” in advancing public policy development in more appropriate directions. Currently, the Canadian Public Policy Forum has 180 officially registered members from business, labor, academia, government, volunteer sectors, media, and all other fields willing to advance the organization's goals, including Canada's current Prime Minister and some thoughtful ordinary workers. The think tank holds three national think tank consultation forums annually: the “Testimonial Dinner” in Toronto each April, the “Western Dinner” in various western cities each September, and

the “Gordon Osbaldeston Lecture” in the capital Ottawa each November. These three annual forums have become important platforms for the Canadian government to receive suggestions from all sectors of society, playing a crucial role in advancing the improvement of government governance capacity. Canadian government officials gather at these three forums to discuss state affairs with PPF members. Additionally, PPF has established the “PPF Policy Advice Award” to honor think tank members who produce high-quality think tank outcomes, with 3-5 people receiving this award each year, which has become a high honor for Canadian think tank workers. By establishing such a diversified participation platform, PPF has gained tremendous reputation among major non-governmental think tanks in Canada, becoming an important high-end think tank in public policy research.

3.3 Emphasizing Professional Dissemination to Consolidate Social Influence

European and American think tanks attach great importance to the professional construction of outcome dissemination. Most high-end think tanks prioritize lobbying as their primary task. Lobbying has become a fundamental means for Western think tanks to expand their political and social influence. Also known as persuasion, lobbying refers to influencing policy choices and institutional arrangements of target entities (generally referring to courts, governments, political parties, interest groups, social organizations, and other power structures) through persuasive means to achieve benefits for specific beneficiaries. Generally, there are no special restrictions on lobbyists, who can be individuals, groups, or even government officials. Western countries have tacitly accepted think tank lobbying as a legitimate form of outcome dissemination. Since the establishment of the European Union, lobbying groups in European countries have developed rapidly. As early as 2003, the total number of professional lobbyists stationed in Brussels by EU countries had approached 20,000, aiming to influence EU legislation, with nearly 3,000 maintaining permanent residences and fixed offices in Brussels. Research shows that 30% of European Parliament staff have become professional lobbyists after leaving office, primarily serving the interests of large commercial groups such as Uber, ArcelorMittal, Goldman Sachs, and Bank of America Merrill Lynch—a phenomenon that has become quite common in European and American countries. American researchers have studied the input-output benefits of think tank lobbying. Through surveys of 50 large corporate groups, they found that even during the economic downturn before 2011, corporate lobbying expenditures continued to show astonishing growth because they still believed the input-output effect of lobbying could pull them out of the economic slump. Other studies have conducted quantitative analyses of this input-output relationship, concluding that the return on investment for think tank lobbying could be as high as 220 times in certain cases. These analyses sufficiently demonstrate the importance that European and American think tanks attach to the professionalization of lobbying.

3.4 Emphasizing Institutionalized Talent Aggregation Platforms to Safeguard Core Competitiveness

Talent constitutes the core competitiveness of think tank development. European and American think tanks have exhausted almost all possible means to gather high-end talent. The primary means for these think tanks to attract high-end talent benefits from the high degree of tacit acceptance of the “Revolving Door” system in European and American countries. In the EU, there are virtually no restrictions on EU staff using the revolving door mechanism to enter any lobbying group or think tank organization. Transparency International analyzed the career changes of 485 members of the European Parliament and 27 members of the European Commission, concluding that the “revolving door” phenomenon is also quite common at the EU level. EU regulations stipulate that former EU government officials must undergo an “18-month cooling-off period” before they can rotate into the lobbying sector. The U.S. government has even established a “revolving door” talent database website specifically to provide an important information platform for the rotational flow of high-end talent. The website’s promotional page reads, “Only a few miles separate the U.S. Capitol from Washington’s streets, yet for a congressional employee to become a professional lobbyist, there’s no need to take public transportation –just one ‘revolving door’ suffices.” By the end of 2016, the website’s online registered users had approached 8,000. Most core talent in influential American high-end think tanks comes from the “revolving door” mechanism. By 2016, the number of professional lobbyists working in Washington had reached 12,000 according to available data, with the actual number being much larger. In addition to using the revolving door mechanism to network high-end talent, Western think tanks attach great importance to the application of “flexible talent policies” –what we often describe as the talent philosophy of “not seeking ownership, but seeking utilization.” For example, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in the United States has fewer than 80 formal employees. Despite its small fixed staff, the think tank’s research institutions and business areas are distributed globally, and its influence on the U.S. government and the United Nations is equally remarkable. SSRC declares its role as building a bridge between researchers and research fund providers, finding the most generous research funding for researchers and finding the world’s best researchers for funders. Under the influence of this talent aggregation mechanism, the number of Nobel laureates working for SSRC each year reaches double digits. SSRC has successfully operated this talent aggregation platform mechanism for nearly a century, achieving continuous enhancement of think tank influence without significant growth in fixed staff, providing an excellent development 思路 for China’s local high-end think tanks to build talent aggregation platforms.

4 Problems in China' s Local High-end Think Tank Construction

4.1 Administrative Fragmentation Suppresses Comprehensive Influence

Administrative rank itself has become one of the important thresholds for think tank construction. Without reaching a certain administrative level or being within the administrative system, it is difficult to exert the influence that think tanks should possess. In recent years, as the state has attached greater importance to democratic decision-making mechanisms, vertical channels for submitting think tank outcomes have become increasingly smooth. However, many local think tank institutions still adopt a hierarchical reporting mechanism for their outcomes. The lack of institutionalized direct reporting channels for think tank results greatly inhibits the timeliness of local high-end think tank outcomes influencing high-level decision-making. Administrative fragmentation is not only evident vertically but also horizontally. For instance, actual think tank research projects may involve cross-provincial intersections, and certain important think tank recommendations may need to be referenced by decision-makers in other provinces. Yet, almost no think tank institution has established a channel to directly deliver its think tank outcomes to policy decision-makers outside its own province. These are administrative constraints affecting local high-end think tank construction that are difficult for local think tanks themselves to overcome.

4.2 Weak Collaborative Capacity Hinders Synergistic Advantages

Collaboration possibilities among local think tanks abound, including talent exchange, data sharing, channel sharing, and joint project development. However, reality often falls far short of ideal goals. In practice, competition among local think tanks always outweighs cooperation. Considering their own development interests, many think tank institutions have established numerous regulations on talent mobility, including aspects such as professional title recognition and research fund usage, with the goal of keeping talent within their own territory—even if unused, preventing them from falling into “others’ hands.” The same applies to data resources. Many local think tanks have obtained relatively rich survey data using public fiscal funds, but due to limited research capacity and scope, much of this data remains idle. Even so, they will not readily make such data public to peer think tank institutions with research capabilities. These non-cooperative behaviors cause tremendous waste of human, financial, and material resources in local think tank construction, not only failing to achieve synergistic and win-win cooperation but also leading to serious consequences of low-level redundant investment and vicious low-level cycles.

4.3 Low Openness Insufficient for International Vision Construction

Strengthening external exchange is an important pathway to improve local think tank construction levels. Unexpected gains emerge from external cooperation, including management methods, research approaches, and development concepts—all urgently needed for local think tanks to transition from low-end to high-end. Many local think tanks claim to be constrained by funding limitations or institutional restrictions that prevent them from providing more external exchange opportunities, but more importantly, they harbor fear of such exchanges, worrying about unnecessary troubles that exchanges might bring. The lack of specialized external cooperation institutions and talent represents a major shortcoming for local think tanks seeking high-end development. Think tanks are regarded as “second-track diplomacy,” and strengthening think tank diplomacy platform construction naturally requires professionals with certain diplomatic qualities. Such diplomatic qualities include not only considerable language proficiency but also strong professional business capabilities required for think tank cooperation. Local think tank institutions clearly lack reserves of such talent and also lack mechanisms and institutional environments for introducing such personnel. The obvious deficiencies in external exchange have become an important bottleneck constraining local think tanks’ high-end development.

4.4 Insufficient Funding Becomes a Key Shortcoming

China’s current economic and social development is in a critical period of transformation, and the resulting massive incremental livelihood demands further squeeze the fiscal space for local think tank construction investment. Meanwhile, the inability of limited fiscal funds to provide precise, point-to-point support also constrains local high-end think tank construction. Local fiscal departments currently have no specific budget categories for think tank construction, mixing it together with general education and scientific research undertakings. Such a fiscal management system inevitably submerges think tank construction within general education and scientific research. Additionally, since local high-end think tank construction generally relies on existing research institutions without independent financial management authority, this easily leads to internal misappropriation and embezzlement of think tank construction funds—problems that are highly concealed and difficult for outsiders to detect directly. Finally, the lack of institutional channels for private capital to invest in local think tank construction represents another important reason for insufficient funding. From the macro fiscal system to local fiscal investment mechanisms to internal financial management within local think tanks, problems of insufficient investment and management exist at all levels. Without solving these issues, the funding shortage for local high-end think tanks will be difficult to resolve.

4.5 Lack of Distinctive Features Fails to Highlight Local Advantages

For local think tanks to become high-end, they must fully develop their distinctive features. However, most local think tank institutions in China, including academies of social sciences, party schools, and universities, rarely demonstrate distinctive features in institutional setup, disciplinary layout, project initiation, talent cultivation, or database construction. Even when some institutions have established characteristic research institutions or disciplines, they often exist in name only. The reasons for insufficient distinctiveness in local think tank construction are multifaceted, 主要包括 three aspects: First, national think tank construction lacks effective guidance for local characteristic think tank development. Some local think tanks have engaged in blind bandwagon-following in their high-end development efforts, likely resulting in failure to reach high levels while also losing their local foothold. Second, local think tanks themselves lack original innovative spirit. Many local think tank institutions, seeking quick results, lack the patience to study themselves and instead hope to achieve so-called development and progress through simple replication of others, often resulting in drifting further away from their own characteristics. Third, the industry lacks effective evaluation and recognition of local characteristic think tank construction. Without effective evaluation measures to properly understand differences and distinctiveness among think tanks, homogeneous development of local think tanks is likely to occur. Therefore, achieving distinctive development of local think tanks cannot rely on single forces but requires joint participation and concerted efforts from the state, localities, and within the think tank construction system.

4.6 Lack of Professional Development Constrains Sustainable Capacity

Professionalism represents a further upgrade of systematization and constitutes a higher-level goal of think tank construction. China has already launched the selection and cultivation of key specialized think tanks at the national level, indicating that the state has begun to attach importance to and take action on think tank specialization. The problem of insufficient specialization in local high-end think tanks is relatively prominent. First, most local think tanks have long remained in a self-centered development state, lacking external intervention to force reforms toward specialization. Second, most local think tanks' predecessors did not primarily engage in think tank project research, lacking the basic conditions and experience for think tank specialization construction. Third, the demonstration capacity of domestic high-end specialized think tanks is insufficient. The fact that the state is vigorously promoting the construction of national high-end specialized think tanks precisely demonstrates the existence of such problems.

5 Key Focus Areas for Local High-end Think Tank Construction

Local high-end think tank construction should be based on local resources, highlight local characteristics, and follow the overall requirements of national high-end think tank construction, with emphasis on six areas: local characteristic development, professional capacity building, regional cooperation, open development, informatization enhancement, and modernization of institutional mechanisms.

5.1 Highlighting Local Characteristics of Think Tanks

First, emphasize strengthening the construction of locally distinctive disciplines. General Secretary Xi Jinping's speech at the National Conference on Philosophy and Social Sciences made important statements about strengthening the development of advantageous and key disciplines while protecting the construction of unpopular and endangered disciplines. It is no exaggeration to say that most of these disciplines requiring attention are generated and developed locally. Examples include Confucian philosophy studies and Yellow River ecology studies in Shandong, the South Manchuria Railway and Goguryeo studies in Jilin, Longyuan culture studies in Gansu, ASEAN cooperation studies in Guangxi, and cross-strait development studies in Fujian. Second, emphasize exploring local characteristic cultural resources. China's long history and vast territory determine that local cultural resources must embody both profoundness and diversity. Over thousands of years, various regions have nurtured and accumulated globally influential and distinctive think tank cultural resources, such as Longyuan culture characterized by prehistoric civilization, Central Plains culture featuring imperial culture, the middle and lower Yellow River culture represented by the Hundred Schools of Thought, red revolutionary culture represented by Jinggangshan, Xibaipo, and Yimeng Mountain, modern industrial civilization culture represented by the Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta, and ecological civilization culture driving the rise of central and western China. These are all valuable cultural resources supporting China's local high-end think tank construction. Third, properly handle the relationship between local characteristics and overall synthesis. The key to managing this relationship lies in the choice of research perspective. In terms of research topic selection, local high-end think tanks should adopt a high-level stance, focus on local issues, and serve the overall situation. In terms of research mechanisms, they should emphasize open cooperation and actively integrate into broader wisdom. Only by properly handling the relationship between characteristics and synthesis can China's local high-end think tanks be built to be both distinctive and outstanding.

5.2 Strengthening Professional Capacity of Local Think Tanks

First, focus on national strategies to build local high-end think tank research platforms. Guided by the logic of "managing a house and managing the world,"

local high-end think tanks should concentrate on national strategic priorities, strive to occupy high ground, take a long-term perspective, fully explore and utilize their local advantages, integrate various think tank resources from local, domestic, and international sources, and actively build high-end research platforms to effectively fulfill their think tank functions of “being based locally while serving high-level needs.” Second, target leadership decision-making to build local high-end think tank policy consultation platforms. Many high-quality local think tank outcomes remain shelved due to the lack of necessary high-end policy consultation platforms and channels, unable to reach high-level decision-makers. This represents a tremendous loss of national think tank intellectual resources. Only when the state attaches great importance to and substantively responds to local high-end think tanks’ needs for policy consultation platform construction can national leadership and decision-making departments truly achieve “being receptive to advice.” Third, face global development to build local high-end think tank exchange platforms. The state should provide greater financial and policy support for local high-end think tanks to participate in exchanges at various levels and fields, particularly focusing on supporting them to independently build more open and vibrant global exchange platforms according to their own characteristics.

5.3 Emphasizing Regional Cooperation Participation by Local Think Tanks

First, treat regional project cooperation as an important fulcrum for local think tank construction. Projects serve as crucial vehicles for think tank construction. Relying on project operations can drive comprehensive interaction of talent, funding, management, and other details of think tank construction. The deeper the project cooperation, the stronger the influence and stability of local think tanks within and between regions, and the more significant their radiation effect on surrounding areas and even the entire nation. Second, treat promoting the construction of regional think tank talent special zones as an important breakthrough for local think tank construction. Local think tank construction should promote efficient talent mobility within and between regions as an important content of regional cooperation among think tanks, exploring the establishment of efficient and feasible flexible talent introduction systems to maximize the intellectual support of regional think tank talent for local think tank construction and promote optimal allocation of talent among local think tanks. Third, treat promoting information resource sharing within and between regions as an important content of local think tank construction. By strengthening inter-regional data and information cooperation and sharing to enhance their big data possession capabilities, once barriers to information resource exchange between localities are effectively broken, the complementary effects of local information resources will be released explosively, and the potential for information cooperation among local think tanks will be more thoroughly realized.

5.4 Promoting Open Development of Local Think Tanks

First, actively conduct international characteristic cooperative research projects. Boldly placing one's research characteristics within the research vision of international think tanks not only strengthens one's own research characteristics but also tests the confidence in local think tank characteristic construction. Only by actively participating in international debates and cooperation can one establish authoritative characteristics and local confidence on a larger scale. Second, establish long-term cooperative relationships with relevant international characteristic think tank institutions. Properly handle the relationship between information security and cooperative development, making participation in international cooperation a "stepping stone" rather than a "stumbling block" for advancing local think tank construction toward high-end levels. Third, focus on introducing and drawing upon international high-end think tank management concepts and research methods. The management concepts and research methods of international high-end think tanks are key to their success, and these experiences and concepts can be transplanted and utilized for our own purposes. In summary, once a local think tank can boldly and confidently step out, it will not be far from achieving high-end status.

5.5 Enhancing Informatization Levels of Local Think Tanks

First, accelerate the standardization of local think tank management information systems. If local think tank management systems operate independently, it will not only cause more redundant investment but also create unnecessary integration obstacles for think tank resource sharing among local think tanks. If these issues are not detected and prevented early, the harm will be long-lasting and profound. Second, accelerate the construction of modern think tank policy consultation platforms. Due to confidentiality requirements, most think tank consultation channels in China still maintain primitive submission methods, primarily paper-based and manual. Such primitive consultation platforms not only have low timeliness but also fail to achieve truly leak-proof confidentiality. The high-confidentiality information consultation platforms represented by the RAND Corporation have been widely promoted and applied in European and American high-end think tanks, significantly improving submission timeliness while markedly enhancing confidentiality levels. This technology is particularly suitable for local think tanks serving high-level decision-making. Third, strengthen the informatization level of data collection and management in local think tanks. Many domestic local think tanks have not yet consciously shifted their data collection and management technologies toward the application of self-media technologies, which will cause misalignment between local think tank construction and informatization development directions, delaying the pace of local think tank construction in terms of informatization development.

5.6 Innovating Institutional Mechanisms for Local Think Tank Operations

First, strengthen the state's overall planning for local high-end think tank construction. It is recommended that the state incorporate local high-end think tank construction into the "overall plan" of national high-end think tank construction and promptly issue national guiding opinions covering local high-end think tank construction to create a more fair and efficient institutional environment for national local high-end think tank construction. Second, guide the establishment of cooperation and self-discipline mechanisms among local high-end think tanks. The state should stand from a more holistic perspective to plan integrated systems for synergistic cooperation among local high-end think tanks, thereby maximizing national interests in high-end think tank construction. Third, emphasize professional guidance to determine more stable and accurate development 思路 for local high-end think tank construction. It is suggested that, on the one hand, we should actively leverage the professional guidance role of high-end think tank construction entities such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Central Party School, the Central Policy Research Office, and the Development Research Center of the State Council, and on the other hand, emphasize the third-party professional guidance role of various national and local decision-making consultation societies, thereby determining more stable and accurate development 思路 for accelerating national local high-end think tank construction.

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