

## Research on Platform Carriers in the Construction of Jiangsu' s New-Type Think Tank System (Postprint)

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To provide support for the platform carrier construction within Jiangsu' s new-type think tank system. [Method/Process] This paper analyzes the connotation of think tank platform carriers from a theoretical perspective, and summarizes and reviews the experiences and main problems faced in the construction of Jiangsu' s think tank platform carriers over the past three years from a practical perspective. [Results/Conclusion] The construction of Jiangsu' s platform carriers must adhere to the principles of specialization, systematization, and economy, through overall planning and resource integration, to enhance the quality and level of think tank platforms from five aspects.

### Full Text

## Research on Platform Carriers in the Construction of Jiangsu' s New-Type Think Tank System

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### Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] This paper aims to provide support for the platform carrier construction within Jiangsu' s new-type think tank system. [Method/Process] From a theoretical perspective, we analyze the connotation of think tank platform carriers, and from a practical perspective, we summarize the experiences and main challenges faced in Jiangsu' s think tank platform construction over the past three years. [Result/Conclusion] We recommend that Jiangsu' s platform carrier construction should adhere to the principles of specialization, systematization, and cost-effectiveness, with coordinated planning and resource integration to enhance the quality and level of think tank platforms across five key dimensions.

**Keywords:** new-type think tanks; system; platform carrier

The construction of a new-type think tank system is a massive systematic project, and think tank platform carriers constitute a crucial component of this endeavor. Taking Jiangsu as a case study, this paper delves into the connotation of think tank platform carriers, comprehensively summarizes experiences and existing problems, and further explores methods and pathways to improve platform carriers and strengthen their supporting role in the construction of new-type think tank systems, with the aim of providing reference for building new-type think tank platform carriers nationwide.

### 1.1 The Meaning of Think Tank Platform Carriers

Since the 18th Party Congress, strengthening new-type think tank construction has risen to a national strategic level, ushering in a new era for think tank development and research. Over the past three years, a substantial body of literature on think tank construction has emerged. However, research specifically focusing on think tank platform carriers remains relatively scarce. Between 2014 and June 2017, literature on think tank platform construction accounted for only 11.89% of all think tank-related publications (see Table 1 ). Moreover, existing research on think tank platforms has significant limitations, typically approaching the topic from specific professions, disciplines, or fields—such as information technology, database systems, or library retrieval—or from departmental and regional perspectives, including newspaper publishing, news media, or local characteristics.

According to Baidu’ s Wiki definition, a platform broadly refers to the environment or conditions required for undertaking certain work, serving as a highly interactive stage for communication, transactions, and learning. From this perspective, we conceptualize think tank platform carriers as the environment and conditions for think tank work, as well as the stage for think tank activities. Think tank platform carrier construction involves creating these environments and stages to facilitate the dissemination of think tank products, enable policy proposals to enter the public policy agenda, and ultimately influence decision-making departments to promote social development.

There exists both significant distinction and close connection between think tank platform carriers and think tanks themselves. Generally, think tanks comprise three dimensions: personnel, resource elements, and platform carriers. Platform carriers serve as connectors between personnel and resource elements, functioning to optimize resource allocation and effectively organize staff. The purpose of think tank platform construction is to enhance think tank influence, making it a critical node for implementing overall think tank construction. In a sense, the success or failure of think tank platform carrier construction determines the outcome of the entire new-type think tank system.

## 1.2 The Scope of Think Tank Platform Carriers

Not every activity in think tank system construction qualifies as platform construction, yet platform construction must center on think tank work itself. As think tanks' primary mission is "to explore knowledge and concepts and disseminate them outward, gradually enabling policymakers to accept their research findings and ultimately translating ideas into legislation and policy formulation" [1], platform construction should focus on the entire think tank workflow: "research investigation—production processing—outcome promotion." Centering on these three major stages, we identify the following components of think tank platform carriers:

**1.2.1 Research Platforms** Research platforms refer to the organizations that create think tank products and constitute the most important component of think tanks, characterized by specialization, organization, and substantiation. Specialization means research institutions possess expertise in specific fields or disciplines, enabling sustained and scientific research. Organization means research platforms are organic research collectives, "not self-amusement clubs or 'workshop-style,' 'smallholder-style' knowledge processing, but rather akin to industrial mass production, where new knowledge is generated through multi-level and integrated knowledge development, and new understandings are implemented in strategies, measures, and other practical actions" [2]. Substantiation means research platforms must possess professional research conditions and capabilities, which serve as the prerequisite foundation for organization. Research platforms differ from think tank institutions themselves. Although think tank institutions evolved from specific research platforms, modern think tanks have long surpassed research platforms in both organizational scale and functional scope. Generally, research platforms are specialized research departments established within think tank institutions, such as research institutes, centers, or bases.

**1.2.2 Support Platforms** Support platforms provide various technical support and information assistance to research platforms, with functions including information collection, storage, organization, screening, analysis, and computation. Particularly in the big data era, " 'big data' has become the most important resource and tool for the present and future, enabling new-type think tanks to shift from 'emergency-oriented' to 'forward-looking' approaches" [3]. Generally, support platforms include: literature and information platforms (primarily basic theoretical literature databases and policy information databases); material databases (featuring local or professional characteristics accumulated over time); and scientific research technical analysis platforms (primarily using computer-assisted systems and modern analytical methods to support forecasting and judgment in specific fields).

**1.2.3 Outcome Carrier Platforms** For think tanks, products are primarily ideas, concepts, or theories. Generally, think tank outcome carriers include blue

books, research reports, promotional articles, journals, and interview commentaries. A crucial yet often overlooked mobile outcome carrier is outstanding policy experts. In renowned European and American think tanks, researchers frequently rotate between government and think tank positions, with researchers assuming government posts and former government officials joining think tanks based on their capabilities. This “ensures the high-end quality of think tank talent, prevents think tanks from falling into purely theoretical research ruts, and facilitates policy influence by bringing think tanks closer to decision-makers” [4]. Consider the policy impact when policy researchers themselves become policy-makers.

**1.2.4 Outcome Dissemination Platforms** For modern new-type think tanks, value lies in proactively disseminating think tank products and bringing them into the policy agenda, enabling think tank experts to “form supply-demand linkages with decision-makers and exert valuable influence on decision-making” [1]. The operational effectiveness of dissemination platforms concerns the very lifeblood of think tanks. Chinese think tanks generally face weak dissemination platforms. According to the University of Pennsylvania’s 2012 Global Go To Think Tank Index, China ranked second globally with 429 think tanks, and three Chinese think tanks placed among the top 50. However, “in global rankings for most innovative policy proposals, best use of internet and social media, best use of multimedia technology, and best external relations and public engagement, no Chinese think tanks appeared” [5]. This represents a common challenge for Chinese think tanks. Dissemination platforms are diverse, generally including conference exchange platforms, outcome release platforms, research report submission platforms, and online media, television, and broadcasting platforms.

For Jiangsu, the goal of new-type think tank system construction is “to break through regional, institutional, disciplinary, and identity boundaries based on the functional positioning of various think tank entities and platforms, optimize the allocation of think tank talent, funding, projects, and outcomes, and achieve vertical and horizontal integration of think tank entities, interconnectedness of think tank platforms, and optimal reorganization of think tank elements” [6]. The objective of think tank platform carrier construction should similarly be to achieve organic integration of think tank research entities and resource elements for optimal allocation and production of think tank products. Therefore, Jiangsu’s platform carrier construction in its new-type think tank system should follow relevant development patterns and focus tightly on the three major stages of think tank product production to build research platforms, support platforms, outcome carrier platforms, and dissemination platforms.

### 2.1.1 Continuous Improvement in Research Platform Levels and Quality

First, provincial-level professional think tank platform carriers have achieved initial scale. In November 2015, Jiangsu inaugurated its first batch of nine provincial key high-end think tanks. In 2016, the Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department further selected 15 provincial key cultivation think tanks, including the Jiangsu Yangtze River Economic Belt Research Institute. These think tanks, built upon participating units' distinctive disciplines and strengths (units that already possessed think tank functions), used this opportunity to optimize internal resources and establish new research platform carriers, such as the Yangtze River Industrial Economy Research Institute and Regional Modernization Research Institute, thereby enhancing the quality of Jiangsu' s provincial think tank research platforms.

Second, municipal-level professional think tank research platforms have made new progress. Official think tanks such as the Provincial Academy of Social Sciences and Provincial Federation of Social Sciences have continuously explored new approaches to research platform construction within their systems. Since 2015, the Provincial Academy of Social Sciences has coordinated with municipal party schools, social science federations, and government departments across the province to establish various new think tank research platforms, including municipal academy branches, the North Jiangsu Development Research Institute, and the South Jiangsu Development Research Institute—eight research platforms in total. The Provincial Federation of Social Sciences has also established a series of decision-making research bases in collaboration with municipal federations and local universities.

Third, university think tank research platforms have gradually expanded. Among Jiangsu' s nine provincial key high-end think tanks, eight are based in universities. The Yangtze River Industrial Economy Research Institute at Nanjing University has become a candidate for the second batch of national high-end think tanks, while Southeast University is actively promoting the establishment of a national-level think tank research platform. In April 2017, the Provincial Department of Education launched the selection process for Jiangsu University Humanities and Social Sciences Off-campus Research Bases, which serve as innovative research platforms jointly built by universities and party-government organs, large and medium-sized enterprises, communities, and townships.

### 2.1.3 Flourishing Outcome Carrier Platforms

First, research reports display considerable variety. Beyond publishing their own research reports, Jiangsu' s nine provincial key high-end think tanks irregularly submit their findings to the Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department, which compiles and prints them as *Think Tank Special Reports* for provincial leaders. The Provincial Academy of Social Sciences primarily com-

piles *Decision-Making Consultation Special Reports* and *Jiangsu Development Report*. The Provincial Federation of Social Sciences edits *Decision-Making Reference* based on 39 decision-making consultation research bases and renowned experts across the province's social science community. The Provincial Party School (Provincial Administration Institute) issues *Research Reports*, sometimes selected from the municipal party school system.

Second, think tank journals have begun to emerge. Jiangsu has achieved breakthroughs in think tank periodicals. In 2015, the *Masses* magazine launched *Masses • Decision-Making Information*. The Chinese Academy of Sciences Documentation and Information Center and Nanjing University jointly established *Think Tank: Theory and Practice* in February 2016, a professional academic journal for think tanks. *Xinhua Daily* has created the Jiangdong Point New Think Tank and *Xinhua Daily • Think Tank* special edition as platforms for disseminating think tank outcomes.

Third, blue book compilation has seen new exploration. With their academic, social, and policy-making influence, blue books have become the subject of continuous exploration by Jiangsu's professional think tanks. Since 1997, the Provincial Academy of Social Sciences has annually published *Jiangsu Blue Book: Analysis and Prospects of Jiangsu's Economic and Social Situation*; the Provincial Party School has published *Jiangsu Government Governance Innovation Blue Book* since 2016; and cities like Yangzhou and Taizhou have compiled their own economic and social development blue books, forming a two-tiered provincial-municipal blue book system.

#### 2.1.4 Vibrant Outcome Dissemination Platforms

First, high-end think tank forums have growing influence. The “Jiangsu Development High-Level Forum,” jointly initiated in January 1997, has successfully held 35 sessions to date. Currently organized by Nanjing University, the Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, and the Provincial Federation of Social Sciences, it provides forward-looking consulting services for party committees and governments at all levels and has become an important platform for the provincial party committee and government to promote scientific and democratic decision-making. The “Jiangsu Think Tank Summit,” jointly hosted by the Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department and the Provincial Federation of Social Sciences, aims to strengthen exchanges among think tanks and enhance the social impact of think tank outcomes. The Provincial Academy of Social Sciences organizes the “Modern Think Tank Forum,” which has held 23 sessions to date. The Jiangsu Zijin Media Think Tank is also working to build the “Zijin Think Tank Summit” as an international high-end think tank forum.

Second, outcome release conferences have increased in number. The Provincial Academy of Social Sciences irregularly holds press conferences to release important research findings such as the *Jiangsu Blue Book*. In June 2017, the Jiangsu Internet Finance Association and the China Inclusive Finance Research and De-

velopment Center jointly released the *Jiangsu Inclusive Finance Development Report (2017)* Blue Book. In July, the Zijin Media Think Tank and Nanjing Jiangbei New Area jointly released the *2017 Nanjing Jiangbei New Area Innovation Vitality Index Report*.

Third, online platforms and self-media public platforms have rapidly developed. Various professional think tanks in Jiangsu are working to optimize, update, and build official websites, Weibo accounts, WeChat public accounts, and mobile newspapers. Major platforms include the “Jiangsu Think Tank Network” hosted by the Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department Planning Office, the WeChat public account “Yangtze River Industrial Economy Think Tank” developed by the provincial key think tank Jiangsu Yangtze River Industrial Economy Research Institute, and the *Qiushi Mobile Newspaper·Masses Edition* launched by the *Masses* magazine.

Fourth, television and broadcasting platforms have made innovative attempts. Television represents an important information dissemination platform. In Europe and America, “think tank senior researchers frequently appear as opinion leaders and interview guests on national television and radio programs, addressing hot topics for audiences, expressing viewpoints, and guiding public opinion” [4]. In November 2016, the Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department planned and guided a joint activity titled “‘Two Concentrations and One High Level’ in Jiangsu—Think Tank Experts and Media Executives’ Provincial Tour” with Xinhua Newspaper Media Group, Provincial Radio and Television Station, Phoenix Publishing Media Group, and provincial think tank experts, generating strong effects in disseminating think tank ideas, enlightening public wisdom, and leveraging policy impact.

## 2.2 Main Problems Facing Jiangsu’s Think Tank Platform Carrier Construction

Despite many achievements, Jiangsu’s think tank platform carrier construction faces numerous difficulties and challenges, primarily manifested as large but not high-level, numerous but not refined, and scattered strength, with a lack of renowned top-tier think tank platforms.

**2.2.1 Large-Scale Research Platforms with Uneven Quality** The defining characteristic of research platforms is “specialization” —specialized talent, specialized knowledge, and specialized methods—requiring relevant foundations and capabilities for construction. While Jiangsu has established various professional think tank research platforms in increasing numbers, “in an increasingly complex policy environment, the research capabilities and policy information upon which excellent research findings depend are becoming increasingly fragmented and fluid, meaning ordinary think tanks may not possess all the capabilities and information required for policy research” [8]. This has led some research platforms to face virtualization dilemmas, characterized by a “one presence, three absences” state: they bear the name of research platforms but

lack specialized talent, specialized knowledge, and specialized research methods. Municipal-level research platforms suffer from weak capacity, while the “sprouting everywhere” approach to think tank platform construction in university systems has created overlapping institutions and resource waste. Various social think tanks show great disparity, lacking either sufficient organization or specialization. Although these think tanks and their research platforms “have played different important roles in economic and social development, there remains a considerable gap from the requirements of ‘new-type think tanks’ ” [9].

**2.2.2 Rich Outcome Carriers but Few High-Level Ones** Nearly all think tanks in Jiangsu have their own research reports, with diverse types and numerous names. While this provides diversified support for government decision-making, quantity without quality inevitably impacts policy influence. For instance, several years ago, the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee and Government General Offices issued a document specifically to clean up certain reports. Regarding blue books, problems include limited variety and insufficient quality. Taking the Provincial Academy of Social Sciences’ *Jiangsu Blue Book* as an example, while publication continuity is maintained, its influence has not 同步提高 (synchronously increased). Think tank talent represents a crucial outcome carrier, yet in Jiangsu, outstanding think tank talent still rarely undertakes temporary positions in government departments, requiring active change.

**2.2.3 Weak Support Platforms** Building literature information platforms, material databases, and scientific research technical analysis platforms requires substantial capital, technology, and human resources, which most Jiangsu think tanks cannot afford. Meanwhile, support platforms feature strong interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary characteristics, while Jiangsu’s think tanks have narrow disciplinary scope and singular knowledge structures, encountering many difficulties in building support platforms. The Provincial Academy of Social Sciences has continuously strived to build professional support platforms but has yet to achieve breakthroughs due to resource constraints. Many Jiangsu think tanks remain accustomed to qualitative and experiential analysis, rarely utilizing modern information technology or econometric techniques for support, rendering support platform construction relatively weak.

**2.2.4 Urgent Need to Enhance Dissemination Platform Influence** Regarding high-end think tank forums, Jiangsu lacks nationally renowned high-end think tank forums. While many think tanks have begun emphasizing outcome release and promotion in recent years, the number of think tank outcome release conferences remains small, with low caliber and insufficient specialization. For example, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Shandong Provincial Academy of Social Sciences frequently release important research findings in Beijing to expand social influence. Many Jiangsu think tank newspapers and periodicals are strong politically and academically but lack popularization for

ordinary citizens. Although Jiangsu think tank networks, self-media, and digital platforms have developed rapidly, many think tanks severely lag in information updates, and the timeliness of research findings is poor. Television and broadcasting platforms represent the weakest link in Jiangsu think tank dissemination platform construction, yet these platforms are precisely the most direct, timely, rich, and effective carriers for enhancing think tank social influence and guiding public opinion.

### 3 Policy Recommendations for Platform Carrier Construction in Jiangsu' s New-Type Think Tank System

Jiangsu' s think tank platform carrier construction must follow three principles. First, the **specialization principle**: research platforms, outcome carrier platforms, support platforms, and dissemination platforms all demand high specialization. For example, at the RAND Corporation, “administrative personnel are all highly experienced ‘amphibious talents’ combining strong management and research capabilities” [10], not to mention the specialization of their researchers and technical support staff. Second, the **systematization principle**: supporting efficient think tank operation requires a diverse, complete platform carrier system. Many renowned foreign think tanks produce high-quality outcomes through the combined efforts of high-end research platforms, professional information databases, extensive relationship networks, and advanced computer technology analysis platforms. Jiangsu lags considerably in these areas, requiring planned, goal-oriented, and step-by-step platform construction that identifies problems, addresses weaknesses, and pursues improvement. Third, the **economization principle**: think tank platform carrier construction requires resource investment. Jiangsu' s various think tanks should combine actual needs with social procurement and cooperative relationships to utilize resources from all sectors, ensuring necessary platform support while minimizing costs and avoiding redundant construction and resource waste.

#### 3.1 Overall Planning, Resource Integration, and Coordinated Platform Construction

Coordinated planning and resource integration represent important pathways for strengthening new-type think tank system construction. Jiangsu has established a “one body, two wings” work pattern for think tank development platforms and mechanisms. The “body” refers to the Jiangsu New-Type Think Tank Construction Council, which bridges supply and demand sides, while the “two wings” are the “Think Tank Research and Evaluation Center” and the “Think Tank Research and Exchange Center,” providing wings for rapid takeoff. We must strengthen coordination, enhance measures, and fully leverage the important driving role of the “one body, two wings” in new-type think tank system construction. For research platform construction, we should incorporate party committee and government policy research systems into the think tank platform system and give full play to their core role. We should fully tap into the advantages of university think tanks, rationally layout their quantity and scale, avoid excessive proliferation, and prevent hollowing-out of university

think tank platforms. We should increase support for social think tank development and initially explore establishing a Jiangsu Social Think Tank Alliance to create conditions for the standardized, orderly, and healthy development of social think tanks.

**3.2 Highlighting Key Points and Strengthening Vertical System Construction of Think Tank Research Platforms** Currently, the Jiangsu Yangtze River Industrial Economy Research Institute at Nanjing University has become a candidate for the second batch of national high-end think tanks. We should seize this opportunity to implement focused support with matching measures and increased assistance. We should establish the “Jiangsu Development Research Center” as a new-type think tank research platform to enhance the core competitiveness of Jiangsu’s official think tanks. Municipal-level think tank platform system construction could follow the “Jiangsu Development Research Center” model, integrating relevant municipal think tank resources, increasing various inputs, strengthening research capacity, and establishing specialized think tank research platforms as “Municipal Development Research Centers,” forming an official think tank research platform system of “provincial development center—municipal development research center—county-level and below research bases.”

**3.3 Increasing Investment and Enhancing Support Platform Specialization** We should fully utilize information databases from universities, think tanks, and relevant government departments, integrate related resources, build public resource data platforms, and achieve optimal resource utilization. Each think tank entity should independently or collaboratively build relevant professional support platforms based on research field characteristics. We should concentrate efforts on building computer-assisted analysis systems, data information databases, and library and information management system platforms, particularly by collecting relevant information through field research to continuously build the Jiangsu Provincial Conditions Database. Simultaneously, we should equip technical support talent to enable think tank researchers to “focus their energy on thinking about problems in their own fields without worrying about other technical issues, thereby greatly improving work efficiency” [10].

**3.4 High Priority for Improving Outcome Carrier Quality** We should moderately compress the variety and quantity of research reports, innovate research report writing and layout methods, and improve report quality. Simultaneously, we should establish institutionalized submission systems to ensure timely delivery of policy research findings to the Provincial Party Committee, Provincial Government, and provincial policy research offices. We should enhance blue book compilation quality, focusing on building nationally influential blue book brands. Jiangsu’s think tank entities must first recognize the importance of blue books as think tank outcome carriers. Second, blue book compilation should focus on specific fields for long-term tracking research, ensuring

systematic, continuous, and locally distinctive publication. Third, we should strengthen cooperation to improve blue book research and writing quality.

**3.5 Emancipating Mind and Innovating Dissemination Platform Efficiency** Think tank entities must “beyond cultivating internal capabilities, also possess social public relations awareness, emphasize promotion mechanisms, establish diverse communication channels, and enhance all-media marketing capabilities” [4]. We should continue advancing the “Jiangsu Development Forum” construction, focus on building the “Zijin Media Summit,” and enhance the vision, stature, quality, and social influence of think tank forums. Drawing from the “Xinhua News Agency Think Tank · Jiangsu Center” experience, we should continue promoting the development of media think tanks represented by Xinhua Newspaper Group to expand the social impact of think tank outcomes. We recommend creating a “Jiangsu Satellite TV · Think Tank” program for live or recorded broadcasts, where think tank experts comment on relevant social hot topics.

**3.6 Creating Conditions for Two-Way Flow of Think Tank Talent** We should further improve the two-way interaction mechanism between think tank talent and policy personnel, expanding the scope and scale of talent exchanges. We should fully leverage the advantages of party school (administration institute) systems and university systems in cultivating think tank talent, training personnel for government departments through training programs, and arranging relevant government staff for short-term work at think tanks through temporary positions, providing policymakers with new perspectives on theoretical learning and policy formulation to enhance policy-making capabilities.

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**Author Contributions:**

Zhang Shourong: Topic selection, manuscript revision and finalization;  
Liang Jian: Data collection, initial draft writing.

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