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## **Employing a Multi-pronged Strategy to Build a New-Type Think Tank: Practical Exploration of New-Type Think Tank Construction at the Party School of the Henan Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China (Postprint)**

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### **Abstract**

Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] Party schools constitute an important component of China' s think tank landscape. This paper systematically analyzes the practical explorations of the CPC Henan Provincial Committee Party School in think tank construction, aiming to provide reference and inspiration for the development of local party school think tanks. [Method/Process] Employing textual analysis, field investigation, and case study methods, this paper systematically reviews the measures undertaken by the CPC Henan Provincial Committee Party School in developing a new-type think tank and summarizes the relevant experiences. [Results/Conclusion] Through the adoption of comprehensive measures, the influence of the CPC Henan Provincial Committee Party School' s think tank continues to grow. However, think tank construction is a long-term and continuous process that requires both courageous commitment and optimistic expectations.

### **Full Text**

## **Building New Types of Think Tanks with Integrated Measures: Practical Exploration of New-Type Think Tank Construction at the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee**

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## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** Party schools constitute an important component of China's think tank landscape. This paper systematically analyzes the practical exploration of think tank construction at the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee, aiming to provide reference and lessons for the construction of local party school think tanks. **[Method/Process]** Through text analysis, field investigation, and case study methods, this paper examines the measures undertaken by the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee in its new-type think tank construction and summarizes relevant experiences. **[Result/Conclusion]** Through comprehensive measures, the think tank influence of the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee has been continuously enhanced. However, think tank construction is a long-term and sustained process that requires both courageous commitment and optimistic expectations.

**Keywords:** think tanks of party schools; construction of new types of think tanks; practice and exploration

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Party schools represent an important category of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics and a crucial component of China's think tank landscape. As the decision-making process in China becomes increasingly scientific and democratic, and as the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics has been elevated to a national strategy, party school think tank construction has become both an urgent contemporary need and a golden historical opportunity. Against this backdrop, the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee has consciously positioned think tank construction and decision consultation work at a strategic level concerning its long-term development. To build itself into a first-class local party school think tank with an international perspective, the school has adopted comprehensive measures and conducted active exploration.

## 1. Upholding Correct Orientation and Clarifying Research Priorities

The school focuses its research on three key areas. First, it conducts forward-looking research aligned with the central work and major deployments of the provincial party committee and government, emphasizing issues that the party committee and government intend to address but have not yet tackled, and paying attention to emerging, globally significant, and incipient or trend-based problems that require advance investigation. Representative projects in this category include "Policy Recommendations for Accelerating the Construction of Zhengzhou-Luoyang-Xinxiang National Independent Innovation Demonstration Zone Centered on Strategic Positioning." Second, it carries out policy-oriented

research on hot and difficult issues in Henan's economic and social development, such as "Policy Recommendations for Further Improving and Promoting Targeted Poverty Alleviation Work in Henan Province." Third, it engages in applied research on practical problems identified through teaching, research, and field investigations, exemplified by projects like "Problems and Countermeasures in the Reform of Province-Managed County Systems."

## 2. Improving Organizational Structure and Building Platform Carriers

In 2015, the school established a Decision Consultation Department as a specialized agency serving its think tank construction and decision consultation work—essentially a “think tank within the think tank” responsible for planning, proposing suggestions, and providing services for the school's think tank development. Since its establishment, this department has offered multiple rational recommendations on think tank construction, implemented various deployment decisions, organized bidding for key decision consultation research projects, and undertaken the compilation and reporting of internal references, playing an effective role in guidance, planning, organization, implementation, and coordination. Additionally, the school formed a Think Tank Construction Leadership Group and an Expert Academic Committee to exercise macro-level coordination and directional guidance. The Leadership Group, headed by the Executive Vice President with specific responsibilities assigned to relevant school leaders and department heads as members, has clarified the strategic position of think tank construction, ensured its normalization, and promoted collaborative efforts across departments. While the Leadership Group forms the decision-making and execution system, the Expert Academic Committee, composed of high-level experts from various disciplines, handles academic affairs by guiding project selection, supporting research team formation, and ensuring research quality, thereby establishing correct research orientation, fostering a strong research atmosphere, and continuously improving research standards. The school has also strengthened the construction of key provincial social science research bases by continuing to leverage the “Henan Provincial Research Center for the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” and the “Central Plains Economic Zone Construction Research Center,” while obtaining the designation of “Henan Provincial Soft Science Research Base for Provincial Conditions Study” in 2015, becoming one of the first nine soft science research bases supported by the Henan Provincial Department of Science and Technology. These bases serve as important platforms for think tank construction, expanding project sources, deepening research in relevant fields, strengthening external connections, and extending think tank influence.

### 3. Perfecting Systems and Mechanisms to Enhance Operational Efficiency

Since 2015, the school has successively issued multiple documents including “Implementation Opinions on Strengthening New-Type Think Tank Construction at the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee,” “Implementation Opinions on Promoting New-Type Think Tank Construction Across the Provincial Party School System and Improving Decision Consultation Service Levels,” and “Management Measures for Decision Consultation Research Projects,” gradually improving its institutional framework. These systems articulate goals for think tank construction, deploy relevant tasks, and regulate various measures and activities, covering overall planning as well as specific provisions on organizational development, funding arrangements, operational procedures, and incentive mechanisms. The school has also continuously optimized its operation mechanisms. First, an external exchange and collaboration mechanism: think tank construction requires high positioning, long-term vision, and an open mindset. The Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee actively strengthens external connections with decision-making bodies, academic institutions, think tanks, and media organizations through regular communication and collaboration. By “bringing in” government officials and university scholars as distinguished professors or researchers and “sending out” teaching and research staff for temporary government positions or academic visits, the school has achieved positive interactions with external parties, significantly enhancing its influence and reputation. Second, a vertical linkage mechanism: the school actively promotes exchange and cooperation among provincial, municipal, and county-level party schools to build a think tank network and system across the province. Given their respective proximity to different levels of party committees and governments, each level of party school possesses unique advantages in problem identification and research. This vertical linkage mechanism facilitates resource sharing, complementary strengths, timely communication of research information, and joint investigation of major projects, markedly stimulating enthusiasm for think tank construction and decision consultation work across all levels. Third, a joint research mechanism: traditional discipline-based research institutions are unsuitable for think tanks, whose purpose is to address real-world problems rather than accumulate disciplinary knowledge. This requires multidisciplinary perspectives, knowledge integration, and methodological diversity. Accordingly, the school has broken down internal disciplinary and departmental boundaries while actively incorporating external research forces to establish an open and cooperative decision consultation model. The rational combination of researchers from different disciplines generates intellectual sparks, broadens research perspectives, compensates for individual limitations, and yields more objective, comprehensive, and systematic conclusions, substantially improving research quality. Fourth, a funding guarantee mechanism: the school’s funding for key decision consultation research projects has increased consecutively in recent years, now matching the funding level of provincial social science planning projects. Additional rewards are provided for research outcomes that receive

affirmative comments from provincial-level leaders or are adopted by provincial-level party committees or governments. This robust financial support alleviates researchers' concerns, enables access to first-hand research materials, and effectively prevents potential quality issues arising from funding shortages. Fifth, a personnel incentive mechanism: the school incorporates decision consultation work into the evaluation systems for professional title promotion and outstanding teacher selection, substantially enhancing the enthusiasm and initiative of teaching and research staff. With improved incentive mechanisms, staff have clearer role positioning, striving to become both excellent scholars and effective policy advisors and advocates, thereby producing richer research outcomes with broader influence. Sixth, an integration mechanism for teaching, research, and consultation: the school vigorously promotes mutual enhancement and coordinated development among teaching and training, scientific research, and decision consultation. In recent years, outstanding decision consultation achievements such as "Investigation and Reflection on Improving the '4+4+2' Party Building System and Promoting Mechanism" have been incorporated into classroom teaching for main training programs, receiving positive feedback from trainees. Furthermore, each trainee in main programs must write research reports based on their learning and work experience, from which we regularly select outstanding submissions for provincial leaders. Multiple reports written by trainees have attracted the attention of provincial leaders and received their affirmative comments. These mechanisms operate stably in the school's think tank construction work, effectively ensuring standardization and normalization while continuously improving efficiency and quality.

#### **4. Strengthening Quality Consciousness and Producing High-Quality Works**

Western scholars classify think tanks into academic, contract, and advocacy types, each with different styles and emphases, yet all requiring research as their foundation. Without high-quality research outcomes and intellectual products, think tank influence would be "a tree without roots." President Xi Jinping emphasized in his speech at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Work Symposium on May 17, 2016, that think tank construction must focus on improving research quality and promoting content innovation. The Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee always regards the quality of research outcomes and intellectual products as the lifeline of think tank construction, taking knowledge innovation, theoretical innovation, and policy innovation as its research goals and mission, and adopting systematic measures to continuously produce high-quality works. First, it strictly controls project selection to allocate limited research resources to the most valuable topics. The school believes that the choice of research topics largely determines the significance and value of the research. Therefore, it insists that project selection must extensively solicit opinions from relevant parties and undergo thorough evaluation by the Expert Academic Committee. Projects lacking preliminary accumulation, research foundation, or practical significance are not approved, avoiding the pursuit of

“eyeball effects” and preventing the waste of limited resources on topics where the school lacks advantages or that are irrelevant. Second, it strictly controls the production process of intellectual products. Research outcome production is a process that requires appropriate methods and adequate investment without cutting corners or arbitrarily omitting research steps, ensuring that intellectual products are built on solid research foundations and that conclusions are based on science and evidence. The school requires research teams to maintain detailed records of collected textual materials, field surveys, and seminars held during the research process, demonstrate the complete process of analyzing information using specific research methods and technical routes, and explicitly explain how theory and evidence are connected in the research. Third, it strictly controls the output of intellectual products through rigorous quality review, preventing unqualified products from entering dissemination channels. Each research outcome must first undergo internal review and, when necessary, external review. Based on review comments, research teams often need to revise their work repeatedly until the expected effect is achieved; otherwise, it will not be submitted to decision-makers or disseminated through news media.

## 5. Expanding Dissemination Channels and Enhancing Participation Levels

In recent years, Western think tanks have increasingly emphasized the promotion and dissemination of intellectual products, as think tank influence depends not only on high-quality products but also on effective communication. To broaden dissemination channels and continuously enhance participation in policy processes, the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee has proactively strengthened connections with government, media, academia, and other relevant parties, striving to utilize both direct and indirect communication channels. Regarding direct channels, first, the school submits research outcomes to decision-makers through internal reference channels. In 2013, it established an internal reference publication titled “Research and Recommendations,” which selectively publishes decision consultation reports by teaching and research staff and trainees, directly submitting them to provincial leaders for their reference. Second, the school actively participates in major decision-making research activities and third-party policy evaluation organized by party committees and governments, as well as decision consultation meetings and policy hearings. Its experts have been repeatedly invited by departments such as the Henan Provincial Poverty Alleviation Office to participate as third-party experts in fieldwork assessments and the formulation or review of local and departmental “13th Five-Year Plans.” Third, the school invites decision-makers to engage in problem discussions and intellectual exchanges through forums and theoretical seminars, with provincial leaders and department heads delivering over 30 reports at the school annually. Regarding indirect channels, first, the school emphasizes the dissemination of academic achievements through academic monographs, journals, and conferences, striving to make its voice heard on high-end academic platforms and exert long-term influence. It encourages teaching and research

staff to produce substantial theoretical works and papers, with multiple works receiving provincial and ministerial-level awards in recent years and publication levels continuously improving, enabling more staff to participate in high-level academic dialogues. Second, the school fully utilizes modern information and communication technologies, emphasizing all-media dissemination of intellectual products and seizing “time window” opportunities to enhance immediacy, relevance, and effectiveness. Its teaching and research staff closely align with the central work of party committees and governments, publishing over 50 theoretical articles annually in mainstream central and local newspapers such as *People’s Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *Economic Daily*, *Study Times*, *Henan Daily*, and *Party Life*. Their voices also frequently appear in news reports and special programs broadcast by mainstream radio and television stations. In addition to traditional media, emerging social media such as WeChat and Weibo have gradually played important roles in disseminating the school’s intellectual products, with many external professionals and the public increasingly learning about the school’s perspectives on public affairs and policy issues through these channels, thereby increasing both awareness and trust in the school.

## 6. Cultivating Think Tank Culture and Shaping Brand Image

International first-class think tanks such as the Brookings Institution possess unique think tank cultures that reflect their brand image and affect their long-term development. The Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee emphasizes both tangible institutional construction and intangible cultural development. First, it strengthens mission consciousness and a spirit of responsibility. Think tanks need inspiring missions and must clarify their role positioning in policy communities and arenas, understanding the significance and value of decision consultation work. The school organizes extensive discussions among teaching and research staff on how to play their roles and realize their values in the contemporary era. Through repeated discussions, consensus has been reached that the current era provides broad scope for their talents while calling for achievements in decision consultation, making service to scientific decision-making by party committees and governments and promotion of public welfare their conscious mission. Second, it strengthens innovation consciousness and a pioneering spirit. Both intellectual products and think tank construction work itself require innovation, as only by continuously breaking through existing obstacles and bottlenecks can new development space be created. Therefore, whether for researchers or managers, the school encourages them not to be bound by convention, content with the status quo, or complacent, but rather to unleash innovative dynamism and vitality, constantly surpassing themselves to reach higher levels of development. The school guides researchers to focus less on the quantity of outcomes and more on their innovativeness and on continuously producing landmark and representative works, while also requiring managers to strengthen problem awareness, promptly identify deficiencies in think tank operations, and innovate management approaches, making innovation an inter-

nalized work philosophy. Third, it strengthens professional consciousness and professional spirit. Strictly speaking, think tanks result from social division of labor, with specialization being both their rationale and advantage. Think tank research activities involve professionals doing professional work, and a think tank cannot do everything or research every topic. Only through long-term accumulation and in-depth cultivation in specific professional fields can a think tank gradually form its own brand characteristics and truly win respect and recognition from peers. The school vigorously advocates that teaching and research staff develop strong professional identity, abide by professional ethics, maintain professional standards, and strive to become authoritative experts in certain fields. Under this atmosphere, many staff members have clarified their professional development directions and significantly improved their professional skills.

With strong support from all sectors of society and the active efforts of all faculty and staff, the Party School of CPC Henan Province Committee has achieved certain accomplishments in think tank construction and decision consultation work in recent years, with over 20 decision consultation reports submitted by its teaching and research staff receiving affirmative comments from provincial leaders annually, and its decision-making and social influence as a think tank institution gradually increasing. Simultaneously, we are keenly aware that think tank construction is an ongoing journey, with much work just beginning its foundation and numerous problems remaining on the path ahead, such as the construction of full-time and part-time research teams, further smoothing information source channels, cultivating core competitiveness, and deeply participating in policy processes through agenda-setting and program design. These issues remind us that we bear heavy responsibilities and must not slacken our efforts for a moment. However, we face the future with both courageous commitment and optimistic expectations. Moving forward, we will address existing problems and deficiencies in think tank construction by drawing on advanced experiences from domestic and international think tanks, further gathering high-quality think tank resources, enhancing integration capabilities, highlighting distinctive features, building think tank brands, and systematically and phase-by-phase elevating think tank influence, thereby living up to the historical mission entrusted by the era to serve decision-making and benefit the people.

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*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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