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## The Current Situation and Trends of Think Tank Construction in the National Party School System: Postprint

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### Abstract

**Abstract:** [Purpose/Significance] The issuance of the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics” in early 2015 holds strategic guiding significance for constructing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics in the new era. At the National Party School Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the specific requirement that “Party Schools should become important think tanks for the Party and the country” to the national Party School system, providing fundamental guidance and impetus for think tank construction by the Central Party School and the national Party School system. [Method/Process] In response to General Secretary Xi Jinping’s call and to inaugurate a new chapter in think tank construction for the national Party School system, this article systematically reviews successful experiences currently being attempted or advanced within the national Party School system, seeking to explore the underlying patterns of new-type think tank construction. [Results/Conclusions] This article hopes that the national Party School system can enhance mutual exchange and collaboration, seize the opportunities of the times, leverage its own advantages, avoid blind spots, circumvent pitfalls, actively explore and innovate, form intellectual synergy, and create a new landscape in think tank construction.

### Full Text

## The Status Quo and Trends of Think Tank Construction in the National Party School System

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## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** In early 2015, the promulgation of the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Types of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics” provided strategic guidance for building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics in the new era. At the National Party School Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the specific requirement that “the party school system should become an important think tank for the Party and the state,” providing fundamental guidance and momentum for think tank construction at the Central Party School and throughout the national party school system.

**[Method/Process]** In response to Xi Jinping’s call and to open a new chapter in think tank construction within the national party school system, this paper reviews the successful experiences currently being attempted or advanced across the party school system, seeking to explore the underlying patterns of new think tank construction.

**[Result/Conclusion]** This paper argues that party schools across the system should enhance mutual exchange and collaboration, seize the opportunities of the times, leverage their unique advantages, avoid blind spots and pitfalls, actively pioneer and innovate, and form intellectual synergy to create a new situation in think tank construction.

**Keywords:** party school system, leverage advantages, era responsibility, avoid misunderstandings, ideas and suggestions

**Classification:** C932.6

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## 1. Leveraging the Unique Advantages and Characteristics of Party School Think Tanks

The Central Party School and the broader party school system possess distinctive advantages in performing think tank functions. These resources represent a rich mine for our think tank construction efforts that requires deep exploration and careful utilization.

### 1.1 Advantage of an Excellent Tradition in Policy Consultation

The Central Party School and the party school system have a long-standing tradition of offering advice and suggestions to the Party and government. On May 10, 1978, the internal publication *Theoretical Trends* published the article “Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth,” which was reviewed and finalized by Hu Yaobang. On May 11, the article was published in *Guangming Daily* under the name of a special commentator, incorporating relevant research findings and sparking a nationwide discussion on the issue of truth that broke long-standing ideological rigidity. Moreover, when the Party and government

make major decisions or draft important documents, they often invite party school experts to participate in discussions or write articles, enabling them to directly engage in the decision-making process.

### 1.2 Advantage of Disciplinary and Research Personnel Structure

The Central Party School boasts a large contingent of teaching and research personnel with strong political qualities, high academic attainments, significant social influence, and strong dedication and sense of responsibility. The school has numerous renowned experts and scholars in philosophy and social sciences both domestically and internationally, as well as outstanding young and middle-aged academic leaders. Historically, luminaries such as Ai Siqu, Yang Xianzhen, Sun Dingguo, Guo Dali, Wang Xuwen, Huang Songling, Fan Ruoyu, Zhang Ruxin, Li Jianwei, Xu Bangyi, Hu Sheng, Lü Zhenyu, Zhou Wen, He Qifang, Wang Mingheng, and He Jiahuai have graced its halls, making it a truly stellar institution. The entire party school system features a complete disciplinary layout in basic Marxist theory, with distinctive disciplinary construction characteristics and clear advantages in Marxist theory, Marxist philosophy, Marxist political economy, scientific socialism and international communist movements, and the history of the Communist Party of China.

### 1.3 Advantage of Results Reporting Platforms

Currently, Comrade Liu Yunshan, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau and Secretary of the Central Secretariat, concurrently serves as President of the Central Party School, with Comrade He Yiting as Executive Vice President, indicating that the Central Party School's think tank construction enjoys a high starting point and platform. The two internal reference platforms, *Internal Reference on Ideology and Theory* and *Research Report*, are submitted directly to the top level of central decision-making bodies and have attracted high-level attention. Additionally, the Central Party School possesses media resources with broad social influence and academic reputation, including *Study Times*, *Theoretical Trends*, *Chinese Party and Government Cadres' Forum*, *Theoretical Vision*, *Journal of the Central Party School*, and *Scientific Socialism*.

### 1.4 Advantage of Student Resources

Party schools at both central and local levels benefit from their student resources. As the highest institution for training and retraining senior and mid-level Party cadres and Marxist theory cadres, party schools enroll students who are leaders from Party, government, military, and state-owned enterprises with rich front-line practical experience, many of whom are themselves policy implementers and formulators. They come to party schools with suggestions and questions, engaging in exchanges and discussions with teaching and research personnel during their studies. This interaction helps teaching and research staff accurately grasp problem areas while also enabling them to answer questions and resolve

doubts for students, integrating party school intellectual resources into decision-making consultation and achieving mutual benefits in teaching and learning, thereby fully leveraging the think tank function of party schools.

### **1.5 Advantage of Systemic Integration**

In addition to the Central Party School, there are 33 provincial-level party schools, 15 sub-provincial party schools, over 360 prefecture-level party schools, and nearly 2,500 county-level party schools nationwide, employing nearly 100,000 teaching and administrative staff. Furthermore, many Party and government departments, state-owned enterprises, institutions of higher learning, and military units have also established party schools. This nationwide network of party schools and the large contingent of party school workers provide a solid structural foundation for collaborative cooperation within the party school system. How to effectively consolidate and mobilize the intellectual resources of the party school system is crucial for building the party school think tank brand.

While having advantageous conditions is important for building a national high-end think tank, the key lies in making good use of these advantages. The most critical aspect is to concentrate superior forces and resources on research areas most needed by the Party and the state, focus on the most important and urgent major issues, and form a long-term mechanism for continuous tracking research.

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## **2. Achievements in Party School System Think Tank Construction**

Since the National Party School Work Conference, the construction of the Central Party School's national high-end think tank has entered the fast lane, with unprecedented enthusiasm for think tank construction at local party schools. Many attempts have been made in practical work, achieving certain results.

### **2.1 Innovating Management and Guarantee Mechanisms**

Innovations have been made in leadership mechanisms, with collective leadership by the school committee, direct involvement by the executive vice president, and responsibility assigned to the vice president in charge of research work to ensure smooth progress of think tank work. Institutional innovations include improving the regulatory framework for think tank construction, issuing relevant reward and evaluation measures, establishing a decision-making consultation project review and management committee, and promoting the institutionalization, systematization, and standardization of decision-making consultation work. Specialized management institutions such as decision-making consultation centers and provincial situation research centers have been established to coordinate think tank construction and management. Collaborative mechanisms have

been advanced, with the research office or decision-making consultation center taking the lead in coordinating think tank construction, teaching and research departments organizing project implementation, the general office handling results submission, and the finance office managing funds, creating a situation where all school departments work together.

## 2.2 Optimizing Think Tank Construction Layout

Local party schools actively participate in major decision-making consultation work for provincial (municipal) Party committees and governments. They organize participation in drafting important documents and leaders' speeches for provincial (municipal) Party committees and governments, as well as various decision-making consultation thematic meetings centered around the work of these bodies. They actively undertake major research tasks, including those directly assigned by provincial (municipal) leaders and organized decision-making service project research. Simultaneously, they undertake research tasks commissioned by provincial (municipal) Party committee propaganda departments and other units, submitting research results through special reports on provincial (municipal) social science fund projects and public opinion digests of provincial (municipal) Party committee propaganda departments.

## 2.3 Connecting with Student Resource Advantages

Making use of the valuable student resource advantage, party schools have carried out multi-level research cooperation. Using research-based teaching as a link, they have conducted multi-level and multi-perspective research and policy consultation cooperation with students, effectively achieving the integration of teacher resources and student resources and enhancing the relevance and practicality of decision-making consultation. Through continuously strengthening theoretical discussions and exchange activities with students, teaching and research personnel gain access to more professional theoretical information, thereby promoting teaching and research activities.

## 2.4 Cultivating Young Research Backbone Personnel

In recent years, from the Central Party School to local party schools, many young teachers have been recruited, and various measures have been taken to accelerate talent cultivation. Many party schools annually organize teachers in planned batches to pursue advanced studies in universities abroad and domestically, comprehensively improving their capabilities and theoretical foundations. They regularly hold "New Think Tank High-end Academic Forums," inviting external experts and relevant department leaders to give special lectures on think tank construction to improve professional capabilities and research levels. They select groups of young and middle-aged teachers for temporary posts at county and township levels to understand local realities and accumulate grassroots work experience. They also conduct "Young Scholars' Forums" for regular exchange

and discussion on specific themes to promote team building and increase interdisciplinary collaboration.

### **2.5 Strengthening Organized Research**

Research is the foundation for producing high-quality results. Party schools at all levels consistently organize teachers and students from main training classes to conduct research on major theoretical and practical issues in current economic and social development. They strengthen research organization, including careful design of topics, selection of supervisors, and post-research improvement of results, with functional departments such as the research office providing full tracking services, building platforms for cooperation between teachers and students, and enhancing the close integration of party school teaching with Party committee and government work.

### **2.6 Emphasizing Incentive and Reward Systems**

Party schools have established school-level projects with funding and rewards, created special awards for decision-making consultation results, added points for school-level projects, highlighted scoring for outstanding results, and weighted scoring for decision-making consultation results to effectively mobilize the enthusiasm of teaching and research personnel. They have formulated preferential policies that favor decision-making consultation research in professional title evaluation and appointment, workload assessment, achievement award review, work organization award review, and research base and innovation team construction. They have established a post-funding system that provides additional funding for consultation results achieved without prior school funding, given the time-sensitive and results-oriented nature of decision-making consultation research. They have integrated think tank results as important factors into teaching and research, professional technical position evaluation, and position appointment, establishing an achievement evaluation and incentive mechanism to ensure both results and talent development.

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## **3. The Era Responsibility of Party School Think Tank Construction**

The core of party school think tank construction is the cultivation of people. If think tank construction is a precision instrument, then each individual is a component part, and precise, efficient components are crucial for the machine's operation.

### **3.1 Upholding Seeking Truth from Facts and a Down-to-Earth Approach**

Seeking truth from facts is the school motto of party schools and the primary principle that think tank construction must follow. The target of decision-making consultation is Party and government organs, the direct formulators and implementers of policies who have accurate grasp of practical problems and development trends. If research results reflecting objective problems involve falsification, they will directly lead to information asymmetry for decision-makers and result in decision-making errors. Therefore, researching problems, reflecting issues, and solving them in a down-to-earth manner is the research attitude that party school think tank builders should uphold.

### **3.2 Maintaining Focus and Directionality in Research**

Although think tank research must have a theoretical foundation, it is not entirely equivalent to pure theoretical or academic research. Its research objects are often time-sensitive, and its research focuses on major issues in the Party and state's strategic layout, practical problems in economic and social development, and strategic issues concerning national sovereignty and development. It should focus on current major work initiatives, people's livelihoods, and social contradictions, determining research priorities and directions with clear directionality and problem-orientation. Think tank research exists to identify and solve problems. What the central leadership concerns about, what decision-making requires, and what society expects are what we need to research and provide. When writing research results, we should be direct, changing traditional academic writing habits, reducing redundant background introductions and definitions, explaining matters clearly in concise language, and emphasizing clear expression.

### **3.3 Shouldering Responsibility and Proposing Valuable, Ideological, and Strategic Recommendations**

This is what we call "expounding theories and offering suggestions." Political direction determines value orientation and development path. Party school think tank builders should be "lookouts" of the era, recognizing the mission and responsibility entrusted by the times, and connecting their research with national development and national rejuvenation. They should maintain a broad perspective and vision, be adept at observing changing times, grasping development trends, thinking about current issues against a large background, and proposing major concepts, judgments, and conclusions through attention to the era and practice, thereby contributing to the realization of the Chinese Dream.

### **3.4 Leveraging Advantages with Focus While Respecting Diversity**

Think tank research should, under the premise of adhering to Marxism as guidance, combine the characteristics and advantages of respective disciplines to con-

duct both comprehensive and focused thematic research. It should emphasize basic theoretical research, strengthen theoretical summarization, and produce theories and ideas, while also focusing on practical problem research, standing at the forefront, strengthening theoretical innovation, and emphasizing strategic research to strengthen ideological guidance and propose countermeasures, organically combining all three. Think tank construction has a dual nature: it must “conform to laws,” following the laws of think tank construction to fully explore intellectual capital and high-quality results and their ideological and strategic influence, while also “serving purposes,” actively expounding theories and offering suggestions for the Party and people and serving Party and government decision-making.

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#### **4. Avoiding Pitfalls in Party School Think Tank Construction**

In the new era, to give full play to the think tank function of party schools, we must not only be brave in trying new approaches but also avoid falling into pitfalls and guard against several tendencies.

##### **4.1 Avoiding Superficiality and Formalism**

Think tank construction is a long-term endeavor requiring persistent effort and in-depth research. It cannot follow the path of “old wine in new bottles” or “changing the soup but not the medicine,” nor can it simply hang a “think tank” sign while continuing original work. To develop think tank construction, we must change previous teaching and research approaches, adopt problem orientation and focused thinking, pay attention to the Party and state’s major decision-making strategies and social hot and difficult issues, offer suggestions and ideas, and propose countermeasures with practical reference value.

##### **4.2 Avoiding Single Evaluation Criteria**

The functions of think tanks are diverse. The Party Central Committee’s requirement for the Central Party School’s think tank construction is to “incorporate the construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics into the overall development plan, promote the mutual advancement and collaborative development of teaching training, scientific research, and decision-making consultation, and play a greater role in decision-making consultation.” This aims to achieve the integration of “teaching, research, and consultation.” Party schools should not only conduct decision-making consultation work but also promote teaching training and scientific research, playing important roles in major theoretical propaganda, social opinion guidance, and social development trend judgment. While leadership instructions are an important component of the evaluation index system for decision-making consultation work, the system

should also include other elements. Based on China's national conditions, objectively reflecting existing conditions, solving current difficulties and problems, and accurately predicting future trends are also directions that think tank work should adhere to.

### **4.3 Avoiding Working in Isolation or Blindly Copying Foreign Models**

To build a new type of party school system think tank, we should strengthen external exchange and cooperation, achieving both “going out” and “bringing in.” Using the relatively flexible identity of think tanks, we should actively build academic exchange platforms with clear division of labor and complementary functions, aiming to absorb and learn from excellent foreign think tank experiences while actively and skillfully making the voice of party school think tanks heard, broadening international research perspectives, and striving to demonstrate greater capabilities. We should pay more attention to Western think tanks' research on China to know both ourselves and others. However, we must also recognize that foreign think tank experiences cannot be copied mechanically, and we cannot blindly “Westernize.” Unlike the “one-sided” situation of independent think tanks in Western countries, our think tank development is not driven by commercial interests but mainly represents the voice of the Party and the state. Therefore, we should consider the actual environment of building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics, select and learn from lessons suitable for China's national conditions in Western think tank development, and better serve our own construction.

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## **5. Proposals for Party School System Think Tank Construction**

The key to enhancing the capacity and level of party school system think tank construction lies in leveraging party school advantages, clarifying our positioning, and taking multiple measures simultaneously to form synergy. The main proposals are as follows:

### **5.1 Clarifying Strategic Positioning**

Positioning is the foundation and prerequisite. There is growing clarity across party schools (administrative institutes) at all levels regarding the strategic positioning of focusing on the central work of the Party and the state, reflecting ideological and theoretical trends, and proposing valuable countermeasures and suggestions. Aiming to build a “domestically first-class and internationally renowned” think tank, the Central Party School's national high-end think tank construction should focus on giving play to the roles of “cadre training, ideological guidance, theoretical construction, and decision-making consultation,” the roles of “having a voice, presenting viewpoints, and building platforms,” and the

role of “expounding theories and offering suggestions,” thereby demonstrating the power of ideas.

### **5.2 Promoting the Integration of “Teaching, Research, and Consultation”**

This is the key to think tank construction. We must make full use of student intellectual resources and actively build an integrated mechanism where “teaching raises questions, research produces answers, and results enter classrooms and decision-making.” This requires breaking down the boundaries between teachers and researchers, adjusting evaluation methods for teaching, research, and consultation work, removing barriers between teaching and research/consultation, and achieving parallel progress in teaching, research, and consultation with mutual complementarity. We should revise student assessment regulations to attract student participation, making clear provisions on channels, assessment methods, and reward measures for student participation in decision-making consultation research, and providing decision-making consultation services for student leaders. We should strengthen the decision-making service function of party school teaching activities, establishing teaching-research-consultation topics around major strategic deployments of the central and provincial (municipal) Party committees, organizing teachers and students for concentrated discussions to propose ideas and countermeasures, with some important research results directly transformed into teaching topics that provide decision-making services for current students.

### **5.3 Strengthening Top-level Design and Macro Guidance**

Top-level design provides the framework, objectives, and ideas. The Central Party School should play a leading and exemplary role in coordinating party school system think tank construction, fully mobilizing and consolidating system-wide strength. In line with the spirit of the National Party School Work Conference, the Central Party School could issue guiding documents on national party school system think tank construction, making key directional deployments on how local and lower-level party schools should strengthen their own think tank construction and play a decision-making consultation role, from top-level design to policy measures. We need to develop and promote a set of methods system-wide on how think tank councils and academic committees should operate, how expert databases should be established, how professional academic teams should be built, how think tank funds should be used, how donated funds should be properly utilized, how think tank projects should be managed, how think tank platforms should be constructed, how key research bases should be distributed, how exchange and collaboration among party school think tanks should be realized, how external exchanges should be promoted, and how think tank result brands should be created.

#### 5.4 Strengthening Project Leadership and Process Management

Project leadership is the strategy. We should implement the concept of decision-making consultation into every aspect of existing research project management. Regarding research topics, the focus should be on understanding needs, grasping current Party and state policies, conducting research in relevant departments, soliciting topics from experts both inside and outside the school, strengthening demand research, and scientifically formulating annual decision-making consultation project guidelines. Regarding project approval, the focus should be on precision—precisely targeting currently urgent problems, research advantages of teaching staff, and decision-making consultation team building. Regarding project implementation, the focus should be on efficiency—responding quickly and producing high-quality work in research, summarization, and countermeasure studies. Regarding results management, the focus should be on promoting transformation, encouraging and supporting the “diversification of result value,” producing both stage results to form timely suggestion reports and encouraging follow-up research on decision-making application feedback to reprocess results and expand their social influence and applicability.

#### 5.5 Emphasizing Talent Reserves and Building Decision-making Consultation Teams

Success depends on human effort. We must carefully design major topics with conceptual, theoretical, ideological, strategic, and countermeasure significance; select leading figures and implement a chief expert responsibility system; provide funding support through commissioned projects; negotiate the formation of several professional think tank teams with academic community consciousness; continuously conduct academic discussions and research 攻关 to produce high-quality think tank results with clear direction, research depth, and major value; increase rewards for mid-to-late stage results; build high-end academic exchange platforms; and establish think tank result promotion and release systems. We should adopt a principle of preferring quality over quantity in forming several professional think tank teams that can play active roles in closed-door meetings, in-depth academic discussions, academic exchanges, field research, and international exchanges. Think tank teams should organically combine medium-to-long-term research with current research. We should establish a think tank expert database that, while covering excellent teaching and research personnel within the party school system, can also fully leverage “external brain” functions. Additionally, students should be allowed to bring their own topics to the school through application, with party school faculty able to join their research groups to produce decision-making consultation results during their study period.

#### 5.6 Establishing Decision-making Consultation Platforms for System-wide Resource Sharing

Human effort requires platforms. The Central Party School should take the lead in establishing an information sharing and internal exchange platform, forming

a two-way information exchange mechanism. On one hand, it can collect data on teaching and research personnel within the party school system, including their disciplinary backgrounds and research results, to establish internal expert and research result databases. On the other hand, led by the Central Party School and focusing on current hot issues, it can gradually improve the mechanisms of topic guidance, open solicitation, and manuscript feedback to enhance the relevance of research results. We should coordinate the interconnection of library database resources across the system, publish outstanding decision-making consultation reports from the party school system, and create a think tank resource sharing platform within the system.

### **5.7 Establishing Think Tank Research Bases and Conducting Disciplinary Cooperation**

Human effort also requires forming synergy. We should select regions with typical representative significance to establish research bases that strengthen the connection between theory and practice and improve the relevance and effectiveness of decision-making services. For hot and difficult issues, we should hold thematic seminars periodically, gathering relevant experts to break regional restrictions for concentrated discussions and exchanges, producing high-quality decision-making consultation reports for submission or external release through the most appropriate channels. We should encourage regional cooperation, with party schools in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, and areas along the “Belt and Road” strengthening cooperation on regional issues through mutual research, learning, and feedback, breaking regional restrictions and demonstrating the integrated advantages of the party school system.

### **5.8 Creating a High-quality Think Tank Results System**

This is the core purpose of think tank construction. We should focus on innovation and creation, working hard on think tank result development, quality, and systematization to continuously improve the level and effectiveness of decision-making consultation. Party school think tanks can plan comprehensively and advance systematically around functions such as policy advice, theoretical innovation, public opinion guidance, and social service to create an independent results system. Think tank results should be targeted and hierarchical, including both internal reference reports on practical economic and social development issues submitted to provincial Party committees and governments to fulfill the policy advice function, and theoretical achievements reflecting ideological and theoretical trends and major strategic thinking for relevant leaders to fulfill the theoretical innovation and ideological guidance functions, as well as continuously released research results and third-party evaluation reports for the public to fulfill public opinion guidance functions at major time nodes.

### 5.9 Presenting a Unified External Image and Forming a Party School System Think Tank Brand

This is the identity marker of think tank construction. We should establish a unified identity, strengthen brand awareness, utilize existing multi-platform resources to produce different forms of think tank products, regularly showcase outstanding achievements of party school system think tank members through forums, papers, publications, and authoritative research reports to expand brand influence, and establish rapid information notification and release mechanisms open to the media. By cooperating with mainstream media, we can amplify the voice of the party school system think tank in advantageous fields and continuously enhance the overall brand image.

The above are our proposals and suggestions, which require further improvement and standardization.

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

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