Adjustments and Explorations in East Asian Think Tank-Government Relations (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] East Asian think tanks mostly exhibit an "East Asian characteristic" of "dedicated to 'system improvement' rather than 'system criticism' " in their interactions with government. Analyzing and interpreting the root causes beneath the surface of this phenomenon will help further optimize the relationship between China's rapidly developing think tank industry and the government. [Method/Process] By observing and analyzing how think tanks in Japan, South Korea, and Singapore adjust and explore their relationships with government, this paper captures the behavioral logic behind measures such as "re-engagement" with government, parallel "separation" and "integration" , and the combination of "government deployment" and "senior official participation" . [Result/Conclusion] The widespread manifestation of the "East Asian characteristic" in East Asian think tanks is, on the one hand, because governments in this region generally maintain more active and direct intervention in social organizations including think tanks, but on the other hand, it also demonstrates that these think tanks themselves have a different understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power compared to the West.

Full Text

The Adjustment and Exploration of the Relationship between East Asian Think Tanks and Governments

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] East Asian think tanks, in their interaction with governments, generally exhibit "East Asian characteristics" characterized by a commitment to "regime enhancing" rather than "regime critical" approaches. Analyzing

and interpreting the roots of this phenomenon beneath its surface will help further optimize the relationship between China' s rapidly developing think tank industry and the government. [Method/Process] By observing and analyzing how think tanks in Japan, South Korea, and Singapore adjust and explore their relationships with government, this paper captures the behavioral logic behind measures such as "reintegration" with government, parallel "separation" and "integration," and the combination of "government layout" and "senior official participation."[Result/Conclusion] The widespread manifestation of "East Asian characteristics" in East Asian think tanks is partly due to governments in this region generally maintaining more proactive and direct intervention in social organizations including think tanks, but on the other hand, it also demonstrates that these think tanks themselves have a different understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power compared to their Western counterparts.

Keywords: East Asian think tanks; government relations; Japan; Korea; Singapore
Classification: G311

1 Introduction

The ideal think tank, even if most of its funding comes from the government, should strive to maintain a high degree of freedom in academic and policy research. These institutions should prefer to influence policy through knowledge-based analysis and reasoning rather than strategic lobbying or pressure. In seeking information and improving policy, think tanks should embody an egalitarian public spirit. However, research from the University of Warwick suggests that many Asian think tanks do not shy away from presenting themselves as elite organizations (with close relationships to power and wealth) [**?**]. From a Western perspective, East Asian think tanks are "more committed to regime enhancing rather than regime critical" [**?**]. In fact, the aforementioned characteristics of East Asian think tanks cannot be separated from the social ecology in which they are situated.

Warwick scholars argue that compared to the West, governments in most East Asian countries and regions generally maintain more proactive and direct intervention in social organizations, including think tanks. Against this backdrop, a considerable number of think tanks in these countries and regions are neither willing to be purely dependent nor able to be completely independent. Faced with state power, they often strategically hover between departure and return. Of course, independence or dependence, departure or return are not absolute. Based on practical experience in East Asia (excluding mainland China) , both think tanks and governments prefer to advance and retreat with measured steps in the adjustment and exploration of their mutual relationship, rather than allowing any one-sided situation to prevail.

As a geographical concept, the scope of East Asia does not have a very clear definition. Based on practical needs and following the classification convention

of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore, this paper selects Japan and South Korea in East Asia, as well as Singapore in Southeast Asia as research objects. Two points require brief explanation here. First, this chapter discusses only "external experience,"so mainland China is not within the scope of discussion. Second, although Singapore is located in Southeast Asia, it belongs to the same Confucian cultural circle as the aforementioned regions and is traditionally regarded as a Chinese society, hence its inclusion in this discussion. The 2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report counted 1,262 think tanks in Asia. After excluding 435 from mainland China, the distribution in other East Asian regions is as follows: Japan 109, South Korea 35, and Singapore 12.

2 Japan: "Reintegration" of Think Tanks with Government

According to the 2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report [**?**], Japan ranks ninth globally in think tank numbers, with a total of 109 institutions. Contemporary Japanese think tanks can be categorized from various perspectives, covering broad research fields. While commissioned research constitutes the mainstream research form, autonomous research is actively developing. In terms of legal status, Japanese think tanks mainly fall into three categories: first, for-profit think tanks, subdivided into for-profit corporate entities and general incorporated foundations ; second, non-profit think tanks, subdivided into public interest corporations, public interest foundations, and specified non-profit activity corporations (NPOs) ; and third, intermediate legal entity think tanks . Additionally, based on their relationship with the Japanese government, think tanks can be divided into official think tanks (with government background or even directly affiliated with ministries) and private think tanks (privately funded and independently operated), with the latter constituting the majority in Japan. Representative official think tanks include the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the National Institute for Defense Studies (Ministry of Defense), and the Institute of Developing Economies (Japan External Trade Organization), among others; representative private think tanks include PHP Research Institute, Japan Research Institute, and Nomura Research Institute [**?**].

For-profit corporate entities: operate with profit-making as the goal and implement corporate-style operations. Corporate think tanks such as Nomura Research Institute, Daiwa Institute of Research, and Japan Research Institute all belong to for-profit corporate entities. According to 2014 statistics from the Japan Association of Research Institutes for Advancement, among 181 Japanese think tanks that participated in the survey, 82 (45%) were for-profit corporate entities. Before November 2008, all incorporated foundations in Japan were public-interest oriented, but with the reform of the public interest corporation system, from December 2008 onward, a form of incorporated foundation not for public interest purposes emerged: "general incorporated foundations."

For example, the Japan Institute of Research and Development and the World

Economic Research Association belong to public interest corporations; the Institute for International Policy Studies and the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) belong to public interest foundations; while SOHO Think Tank and Think Tank Kyushu belong to the NPO legal entity type.

Intermediate legal entity type: groups that aim for members' common interests and do not distribute surplus funds to members, being groups that are neither public interest (common benefit) nor profit-oriented. For example, the "Public Policy Platform" established by the Democratic Party belongs to this category.

In Japan' s think tank ecosystem, privately funded and independently operated think tanks do have considerable room for survival, but it is undeniable that without the "backstop" of public funds, their viability is weaker when the overall market cools. Research on Japanese think tanks by scholars such as Wu Jinan, Liu Shaodong, and Zhu Meng all points out that after entering the 1990s, Japanese think tanks entered a "consolidation" phase of gradually slowing development [**?**]. Due to Japan' s prolonged economic stagnation and continuous decline in social donations, some think tanks lacking stable funding sources were forced to close, with the total number of think tanks decreasing by approximately 20% at one point. Clearly, private think tanks suffered considerable losses during this period. However, the other side of the story is that new industry leaders also emerged during this stage. Taking the Tokyo Foundation as an example, this institution exhibits quite distinct characteristics of "reintegration" with the government. Established in 1997 with the Japan Foundation as its main sponsor, the foundation is considered a right-wing organization in China. The Tokyo Foundation has assembled a group of top scholars to provide policy recommendations on Japan' s domestic and foreign affairs, maintaining very close relationships with the central power structure during the administrations of Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe, whose China policies leaned to the right [**?**].

Domestic scholars observing the evolution of the relationship between Japanese think tanks and government over recent decades point out that particularly since entering the 21st century, with the rise of China and changes in Japan's domestic and international political environment, Japan' s foreign policy decision-making mechanism has gradually shifted from unitary to pluralistic, with increasingly diverse issues available for think tanks to address. Most of these research institutions are funded by the government or directly affiliated with relevant government departments, while others, although legally independent entities, also maintain close connections with government agencies. These institutions exert considerable influence on the Japanese government' s foreign policy decision-making, with some policy recommendations regarding how to respond to China' s rise having been adopted by the Japanese government.

For example, the Ocean Policy Research Foundation can be considered Japan' s most influential think tank on maritime strategy and policy. In Japan' s maritime policy formulation, the political-academic-official-military coalition centered on the Ocean Policy Research Foundation frequently voices its positions

through media, seminars, and forums, manipulating public opinion and influencing decision-making. Particularly in recent years, Japan' s maritime policies, strategies, and legislation regarding remote island management, low-tide line maintenance, exclusive economic zone establishment, extended continental shelf and marine resource development, and maritime security responses have all been closely related to the Ocean Policy Research Foundation and its associated political, official, academic, and military circles [**?**]. Some institutions or individuals within them have gone even further. Scholars such as Hisahiko Okazaki of the Okazaki Institute and Ryusei Yama of the Japan Institute of International Policy have published quite sharp views on China' s military spending growth, Sino-Japanese territorial disputes, particularly the Diaoyu Islands issue, East China Sea issue, and Taiwan issue ; the PHP Research Institute has predicted that China will become a major power capable of rivaling the United States around 2020, subsequently issuing strategic warnings to the Japanese government . These views have objectively provided endorsement and public opinion preparation for the diplomatic policies of right-wing governments, making it difficult not to evaluate them as a form of (pre-positioned) "reintegration" with the ruling authorities.

Hisahiko Okazaki believes that "once mainland China unifies Taiwan, it will pose a threat to Japan' s maritime oil transportation routes and create China' s strategic advantageous position in Southeast Asia, thereby causing the 'Finlandization' of Southeast Asia. If mainland China unifies Taiwan and increases its influence in Southeast Asia, it will represent the revival of a 'worldwide Chinese empire,' and these possible prospects will damage Japan' s interests." Ryusei Yama mentions in his research report "The Process of Improving Sino-Japanese Relations and the Role of the United States—History, Values, and Realism in a Changing World" that "the Taiwan issue, East China Sea issue, and historical issues are the three major structural contradictions in Sino-Japanese relations." Ryusei Yama also believes that the Diaoyu Islands are Japanese territory, that East China Sea oil and gas fields should be divided according to the "median line" principle, and that China wants to "turn the entire East China Sea into its own sphere of influence and extend China' s power to the doorstep of Okinawa."

The PHP Research Institute, which occupies an important position in Japan' s policy research field, published the "Final Report on Japan' s Comprehensive Strategy Toward China" in June 2008. The report predicted that China would become a major power capable of rivaling the United States around 2020, and proposed 16 strategies that Japan should adopt in its future dealings and cooperation with China. The report received high attention from all sectors in Japan, particularly the Japanese government.

3 South Korea: "Separation" and "Integration" of Official Think Tanks; "Supplement" and "Sharing" by Private Think Tanks

A report by the Research Group on Special Investigation of Korean Think Tanks of the Development Research Center of the State Council in 2013 (hereinafter referred to as the "DRC Research Group") points out [?]: Rather than focusing simply on the increase or decrease in institutional numbers, South Korea's exploration in the management mechanisms of official think tanks and the guidance methods for private think tanks is more noteworthy. Regarding official think tanks, after the outbreak of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, in order to coordinate and consolidate the strength of government research institutions, the South Korean National Assembly passed the Act on the Establishment, Operation, and Fostering of Government-Funded Research Institutions in January 1999. Based on this law, five research councils directly under the leadership of the Prime Minister (the head of South Korea's executive cabinet) were successively established in March 1999, including the Economic and Social Research Council and the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council, to implement unified management of various government research institutions. In 2005, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council merged to form the present National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences (hereinafter referred to as the "Research Council") (NRCS), responsible for managing 23 government-established research institutions. Correspondingly, all government research institutions were placed under the Research Council, no longer being directly affiliated with their original supervising ministries, with no personnel, financial, or material relationships with these ministries, only business relationships. This move undoubtedly created a "separation" between official think tanks and administrative organs.

However, "separation" does not equate to "detachment." The Research Council has in fact formed a new type of "integration" from another perspective. The primary purpose of establishing this organization is to provide support services for 23 government-affiliated economic, humanities, and social science research institutions, to support research on national economic, humanities, and social science policies, and to contribute to the development of the policy research industry. The highest leader of the Research Council is the Chairperson, a position selected through open recruitment and appointed by the Prime Minister. The Research Council is a non-governmental department directly accountable to the government. Its staff members are not civil servants but are similar to civil servants, comparable to China's "public service" system. Due to its fundamental positioning for management purposes, the Research Council does not have research functions itself, only responsible for the overall management of research plans for government research institutions.

Government research institutions must obtain approval from the Research Council for self-determined research topics, and only after its consent can budgets be allocated from the national treasury to each research institute. The DRC

Research Group also noted that the establishment of self-determined topics by government research institutions requires multi-party consultation and comprehensive coordination. Each research institution must first communicate with its business supervisory ministry to clarify the general scope of policy research coverage. After receiving research plans submitted by various research institutions, the Research Council conducts overall coordination from a holistic perspective, reviews and approves the research plans of each institution, and submits budget reports to the National Assembly for approval.

In terms of budget amounts, the Research Council' s total budget in 2013 was 25 billion Korean Won, while the total budget of the 23 research institutions under its management was 1,073.7 billion Korean Won. Of the total budget of the 23 research institutions, fiscal appropriations accounted for 456 billion Korean Won, with autonomous income reaching 617.7 billion Korean Won, making fiscal appropriations 42% of the total budget. This demonstrates that the Research Council plays an important but non-monopolistic role in funding. Although the think tanks under its management are of an official nature, fiscal appropriations account for less than half of the total budget, effectively achieving partial "separation" from state finances. However, all projects receiving fiscal appropriations, regardless of amount, are subject to the Research Council' s approval and supervision, undoubtedly reflecting government-led "integration."

Figure 1 NRCS Research Plan Communication Mechanism [**?**]
Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper] The Communication mechanism of NRCS research projects

However, even the most perfect official think tank system has its shortcomings. In highly marketized and specialized fields such as industrial dynamics, employment conditions, and technology trends, the acumen of official think tanks may not be sufficiently sharp. At such times, South Korea' s corporate think tanks often utilize their comparative advantages to "supplement" official research functions, even raising part of the funds themselves in the process to "share" the nation' s financial burden. According to statistics from the DRC Research Group, South Korea's private think tanks are primarily research institutes established by large corporations: "There are very few private research institutions without support from large corporations, and very few research institutions established in personal names." While complete statistics on the personnel numbers of research institutions affiliated with South Korea' s major corporations are unavailable, currently known data indicates an average staff size of 100 per institution, which is actually not small by global standards. South Korea' s private think tanks mainly consist of economic research institutes affiliated with powerful corporations such as LG, Samsung, and Daewoo. Research institutions affiliated with large corporations primarily provide consulting services for their own enterprises' strategic development. Due to their long-term focus on industrial development trends, they possess stronger advantages than government research institutions in areas such as industrial technology, product markets, and future technology development directions. The government therefore com-

missions private research institutions to conduct policy research. For example, the LG Economic Research Institute has undertaken government-commissioned projects on promoting employment in ICT (information industry). According to the DRC Research Group's report, it is particularly noteworthy that government-commissioned topics generally have very low fees; if research institutions lack their own strength, they simply cannot complete these commissioned studies. Therefore, South Korea' s private think tanks can be said to "supplement" the research shortcomings of official think tanks functionally and "share" the nation' s research costs financially.

4 Singapore: "Government Layout"and "Senior Official Participation" Effectively Contributing to "Regime Enhancement"

Due to its national scale, Singapore' s number of think tanks (12) is not particularly large, but in terms of quality as reflected in the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports, they are quite impressive. Beyond the rather general comprehensive international rankings, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in international affairs, the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) in defense, and the Energy Studies Institute (ESI) and Institute of Water Policy (IWP) in energy and resources have all achieved excellent world-class professional rankings.

Even beyond the system established by the Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports, it is not difficult to observe the influence projected by Singapore' s think tanks in their region and on relevant stakeholder countries. For instance, the East Asian Institute (EAI), as a Singaporean think tank with long-term focus on China issues, has established long-term cooperative relationships with Chinese officials and academia. Its leading academic' s "China Model" theory provides an angle for interpreting China' s development journey since the reform and opening-up that can be understood by the West yet is different from Western perspectives. Additionally, the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), together with Malaysia' s Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), the Philippines' Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS), Indonesia' s Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and Thailand' s Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) jointly established the ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Think Tank Network) (ASEAN-ISIS network) in 1988 . This organization later added the Brunei Darussalam Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (BDIPSS), Cambodia' s Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), Laos' Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Myanmar' s Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MSIS), and Vietnam' s Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV) (formerly the Institute of International Relations (IIR)), thereby providing substantial intellectual input for ASEAN' s exploration of regional integration and increasing the weight of these regional countries (as a collective) on the international stage.

ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS): http://www.siiaonline.org/page/isis/

While the development of think tanks in any country or region is based on the combined result of numerous complex factors, making it naturally difficult to attribute Singapore' s impressive think tank development achievements simply to one or two factors, the exceptionally obvious traces of government participation in Singapore' s think tank construction have led many academic viewpoints to attribute the achievements primarily to government support. Scholars holding this view generally believe that the key to Singapore's think tank experience lies first in "government layout," and second, likely in "senior official participation." Taking several well-known international affairs think tanks as examples, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), East Asian Institute (EAI), Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) were all established by Singapore government departments according to their needs at the time, and have continuously adjusted according to changes in Singapore' s, regional, and global circumstances, gradually becoming renowned think tanks in Singapore and the region. Behind this lies the continuous important roles played by founding President Yusof Ishak, former Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Goh Keng Swee, former Minister for Defence and Security Tan Keng Yam, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, and others [**?**].

To this day, the practice of hiring former ministerial-level senior officials or national leaders as heads of major international affairs think tanks has become an industry convention in Singapore.

Thus it can be seen that in Singapore, political elites operating from the base of the People' s Action Party have unhesitatingly played the role of founders of the local think tank industry, and have consistently maintained certain guidance and control over the industry in subsequent years. This role trajectory of first being "founding fathers" and then serving as "nannies" clearly reveals an authoritarian (or at least quasi-authoritarian) paternalistic style. However, such guidance and control are very skillfully operated in Singapore; they are not necessarily heavy-handed and generally do not overtly jeopardize academic freedom and value independence. Yet they are tenacious, profoundly shaping the problem consciousness of think tank practitioners (for instance, the belief that "constructiveness" is naturally superior to "criticalness") and even the elitist sentiments of society as a whole. It should be acknowledged that think tanks have symbolic functions: the growth of a think tank also plays a symbolic role in political, economic, and educational development. In Britain, which once colonized Singapore, think tanks are "a symbolic appendage of a free, democratic, and advanced society"; in Singapore's neighbor Malaysia, the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) is a powerful embodiment of the moderate and inclusive Islamic values of the Mahathir government [**?**]; therefore, in Singapore, it is only fitting that think tanks should shoulder the mission of

implementing national strategy to play a "regime enhancing" role.

5 East Asian Think Tanks' Exploration of Independence in Interaction with Government

Through the general review of the relationships between think tanks and governments in the three East Asian countries discussed above, this paper believes it can be confirmed that long-term interaction exists between East Asian think tanks and governments. Although this interaction model differs significantly from that between think tanks and governments in Western countries, particularly the United States, the East Asian model has nevertheless made many beneficial attempts for the prosperity of the global think tank industry, among which some have achieved remarkable success. However, simultaneously, a most fundamental question in think tank research has become increasingly prominent: how can East Asian think tanks guarantee their independence?

As stated at the beginning of this paper, from the government' s perspective, governments in most East Asian countries and regions generally maintain more proactive and direct intervention in social organizations including think tanks; from the think tank perspective, think tanks in East Asia seem willing to present themselves as elite organizations (with intimate relationships to power and wealth). This East Asian model, which does not appear to excel in independence, inevitably raises concerns: is the currently generally positive interaction between East Asian think tanks and governments, at least in terms of outcome evaluation, merely accidental and temporary? In future development, will state power represented by the government generate an uncontrollable impulse to hijack knowledge, thereby ultimately rigidifying the interaction between East Asian think tanks and governments?

If we conduct an academic deduction of this viewpoint, the following reasoning process emerges: First, assume that the relationship between government and think tanks, that is, the relationship between power and knowledge, is essentially a relationship of power subject versus knowledge object. Second, this relationship subsequently creates in actual social life what is typically a subject-object rule pattern, demonstrating the subject' s control and supervision over the object, with acts of providing care and distributing opportunities resembling paternalistic bestowal. Finally, the natural conclusion is that there actually does not exist, and fundamentally is not needed, genuine interaction between government and think tanks.

However, in reality, even in Singapore, where government intervention in think tanks is deepest among the three countries discussed, these concerns have not ultimately materialized. Professor Yang Mu, who worked at the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore for 23 years (1992-2015) , believes that Singapore' s think tanks have close relationships with government authorities, objectively exhibiting certain subject-object relationship characteristics, yet have not completely fallen into the subject-object rule pattern: on the

one hand, the government has indeed exercised overall control and supervision over think tanks for a long time; on the other hand, the relative independence of think tanks in policy research and institutional management has gradually been established .

Yang Mu is currently Executive Dean of the Institute of Public Policy at South China University of Technology

Yang Mu, interview by author, tape recording of the NYP Pacific Affairs journal article The Development and Characteristics of Think Tanks in Singapore: Between Dependence and Autonomy, IPP, Guangzhou, 20 Jan 2017.

Specifically, first, the funding support for Singapore' s six major think tanks undoubtedly comes primarily from the government. However, government financial support for think tanks is not an iron rice bowl; it is directly related to whether think tanks can guarantee the quality of their policy reports, whether they can have reference value in government decision-making, and whether they can achieve corresponding international influence. In other words, the government' s evaluation of think tank products has an indirect but crucial impact. Second, government officials (former or current) also hold key positions (usually as board members) in think tanks, which inevitably determines to a considerable extent the ease with which think tanks can obtain resources from the government and participate in decision-making. Therefore, in these two respects, the relationship between Singapore's government and think tanks does exhibit some basic characteristics of a subject-object relationship .

(1) Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA); (2) Yusof Ishak Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS); (3) East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore (EAI); (4) Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore (ISAS); (5) Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (IPS); (6) Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University (IDSS).

In contrast, the issue of autonomy in think tanks' policy research is much more complex. In principle, the selection of topics, methodological approaches, and viewpoint preferences for think tank policy reports are all determined by the think tanks themselves, with relevant government departments connected to the think tanks making no stipulations or instructions. However, since Singapore' s major think tanks were all established by the government and mainly rely on public funds to maintain their operations, it is necessary to vigorously avoid problems such as functional overlap, redundant investment, and internal competition (within the national system) that may be criticized by taxpayers. Therefore, when research topics of two or more think tanks overlap, the government may resort to administrative means for adjustment. For instance, in the early 1990s, some research at the East Asian Institute was suspended by the government because its research topics involved South Asian countries. However, as Singapore' s economic strength has continuously strengthened, cross-regional and cross-disciplinary research has increasingly become an international trend,

and a "policy ideas market" has gradually formed, cases of such restrictions still existing in the institutional design being put into practice have become fewer and fewer since entering the 21st century, basically disappearing after 2010 . The starting point of this historical change was the Singapore government' s control and supervision of think tanks as subjects over objects, but the endpoint lies in the increasingly solid independence of think tanks in policy research, while the government has simultaneously retained the right to intervene when necessary in principle. From this perspective, this should absolutely no longer be regarded as a typical subject-object rule pattern. It could even be said that Singapore' s model is freer than South Korea' s model of consolidating all project review authority for 23 public think tanks engaged in economic, humanities, and social science research into a single Research Council.

Additionally, independence in policy research certainly cannot exist separately from independence in institutional management. The management models of Singapore' s six major think tanks do not differ significantly; internal management has the authority to decide on important matters such as staff recruitment, salaries, research topics, evaluations, and promotions. However, the situation is entirely different when it comes to financial issues. Most of Singapore' s think tanks are established within public universities, which on the one hand provides a good research environment for think tank operations, and on the other hand allows the government to supervise think tanks, particularly financially, through the university management system. Universities have strict management methods and procedures for all financial expenditures of think tanks. Directors of various institutes (such as the East Asian Institute and South Asian Institute) have almost no room for independent decision-making. Even so, the university' s financial management department still hires accounting firms annually to audit the think tanks' accounts. The strict financial system somewhat limits the autonomy of think tank internal management, but it also reduces potential loopholes in financial matters, ensures transparency and integrity, and thereby protects relevant responsible persons in the think tanks [**?**].

The empirical experience from Singapore undoubtedly demonstrates that in reality, the division of rights between government and think tanks does not present a subject-object rule pattern; that is, the government does not comprehensively dominate the relationship with think tanks as knowledge objects from the position of a power subject. The more mainstream situation is that both sides advance and retreat through mutual adaptation. More precisely, think tanks play a bridging and linking role between knowledge and power, becoming a buffer zone between knowledge and power that enables positive interaction between them.

The rise and improvement of think tanks have at least partially resolved the dilemma between knowledge and power in political decision-making. This means that the relationship between government and think tanks is not applicable to the subject-object rule pattern, but rather exhibits more characteristics of inter-subjectivity issues. What Habermas advocates in his philosophical exposition of

intersubjectivity is precisely the interaction between power and knowledge; that is, policy consultation is indeed not a linear process from knowledge to power at the pure theoretical level, but rather a network structure of exchange and interaction. On this web, a think tank platform is needed that can facilitate exchange and interaction between knowledge and power [**?**].

Based on the analysis above in this section, this paper believes this explanation can fully serve as the relevant theoretical interpretation for East Asian think tanks' exploration of independence in interaction with government.

Furthermore, although the above part of this section analyzes the experience of other East Asian countries and regions, it also offers certain reference significance for discussions on independence issues in China' s think tank construction. First, it can be affirmed that the relationship between government and think tanks exhibits more characteristics of intersubjectivity issues. Second, if we further elevate this to the level of value discussions, we can also conduct comparative interpretations using Habermas' s exposition on the "knowledge-value" relationship between science and politics. Habermas distinguishes three models of the "knowledge-value" relationship: decisionism, technocracy, and pragmatism. Decisionism means politics determines values and knowledge becomes a tool for achieving political purposes; technocracy means science occupies a dominant position; pragmatism is a middle path "where science and politics are interdependent and engage in dialogue and exchange" [**?**].

This paper believes that in the past, various levels of government in China did exhibit decisionist tendencies when seeking external opinions. However, with conceptual innovations in recent years, adhering to pragmatism when seeking think tank consultation has become a basic consensus. In this context, since government and think tanks have an interdependent, dialogic relationship, there is no need to deliberately weaken think tanks' independence (when principled issues are not involved) or exploit possible loopholes in institutional construction regarding think tank independence at the present stage to intentionally diminish the role of think tanks in the public policy domain. From this perspective, although not adopting the traditional American theoretical approach of discussing think tank independence from the state-civil society framework, this remains a worthwhile line of thinking.

6 Conclusion

On the one hand, governments in East Asia generally maintain more proactive and direct intervention in social organizations in their respective countries or regions; on the other hand, in reality, it is rare to observe such strength becoming polarized. This is because both parties in the think tank-government relationship make necessary interactions with each other, striking a distance that is relatively beneficial to both. Specific operational methods naturally vary across different East Asian countries and regions: in Japan, primarily because a relatively stable elite group (such as the powerful factions within the Liberal

Democratic Party) has been in power for a long time, creating adhesion to public power, and coordinating with certain factions within this group politically on "left" and "right" naturally becomes an opportunity for some think tanks to "reintegrate" with power; from the perspective of South Korea' s national interests, the government has concurrently achieved "separation" and "integration" of its official think tanks, and effectively mobilized private think tanks to "supplement" and "share" the research of official think tanks, which is clearly a quite desirable form of "regime enhancement" ; in Singapore, the long-term stable governance system of the People' s Action Party since the nation' s founding has undoubtedly endowed this elite group with a political role beyond that of Western-style political parties, making it a hybrid of "founder" and "people' s nanny." Setting aside mainstream Western opinions on this system, it has objectively promoted Singapore' s think tanks to clearly demonstrate a sense of national strategic vision and mission. It is evident that the state' s role in think tank construction can and needs to continuously adjust with the times to adapt to the real environment. Finally, think tanks in East Asia are indeed more committed to "regime enhancing" rather than "regime critical," and they can never stray too far from state power. However, in their interaction with government, they have likewise made beneficial explorations to consolidate think tank independence.

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