

Studying Xi Jinping' s ‘Think Tank Perspective’ and Promoting the Healthy Development of Chi- nese Think Tank Construction (Post-print)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper commemorates the fourth anniversary of General Secretary Xi Jinping' s important “April 15” instruction on think tank construction, studies Xi Jinping' s “think tank philosophy,” and aims to promote the healthy development of Chinese think tank construction. [Method/Process] This paper reviews General Secretary Xi Jinping' s important speeches, instructions, and his participation in major think tank-related activities since 2013, seeks to grasp the important connotations of Xi Jinping' s “think tank philosophy” from these materials, and attempts to interpret it from both theoretical and practical perspectives. [Results/Conclusions] First, it proposes and summarizes Xi Jinping' s “think tank philosophy” and its rich connotations. Second, it attempts to elaborate on the theoretical and practical nature of Xi Jinping' s “think tank philosophy.” Third, it advocates consciously arming minds with Xi Jinping' s “think tank philosophy” to guide practice, following the path of developing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. In light of the current state of think tank construction, it emphatically proposes the urgent establishment and improvement of a “think tank decision-making consultation system,” holding that establishing such a system is an important guarantee for the healthy development of think tanks.

Full Text

Preamble

Learning Xi Jinping' s “Think Tank Vision” to Promote the Healthy Development of China' s Think Tank Construction—Commemorating the Fourth Anniversary of General Secretary Xi Jinping' s “4.15” Official Comment on Think Tank Construction

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper commemorates the fourth anniversary of General Secretary Xi Jinping’ s “4.15” official comment on think tank construction, aiming to study Xi Jinping’ s “think tank vision” and promote the healthy development of China’ s think tank construction. **[Method/Process]** This paper systematically reviews General Secretary Xi Jinping’ s important speeches, official comments, and participation in think tank-related activities since 2013, summarizing the essential connotations of his “think tank vision” and offering theoretical and practical interpretations. **[Result/Conclusion]** First, the paper proposes and summarizes Xi Jinping’ s “think tank vision” and its rich connotations. Second, it attempts to elaborate on the theoretical and practical nature of this vision. Third, it argues for consciously applying Xi Jinping’ s “think tank vision” to guide practice and taking the development path of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Considering the current state of think tank construction, the paper emphasizes the urgent need to establish and improve the “think tank decision-making consultation system,” viewing it as a crucial guarantee for the healthy development of think tanks.

Keywords: Xi Jinping’ s “think tank vision” ; “4.15” official comment on think tank construction; think tank decision-making consultation system; Chinese characteristics

Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has proposed a series of new concepts, ideas, and strategies in its new practice of governing the country, providing scientific theoretical guidance and action guidelines for advancing Party and national development under new historical conditions. General Secretary Xi Jinping’ s proposal to “strengthen the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics” represents his “think tank vision,” which constitutes an important component of the Party Central Committee’ s new concepts, ideas, and strategies for governance. In China’ s think tank construction, adhering to and implementing Xi Jinping’ s “think tank vision” serves as the fundamental guide and guarantee for the healthy development of Chinese think tanks and holds great significance for improving the Party’ s governance capability and national governance capacity.

1. Comprehensively Grasping the Rich Connotations of Xi Jinping' s “Think Tank Vision”

Think tanks play an increasingly important role in national governance and prosperity. They are organizations that serve public affairs decision-making and society, engaging in public policy research and decision-making consultation in a standardized, institutionalized, and scientific manner. As external brains for public decision-making and a crucial component of modern public decision-making, think tanks provide ideas and action plans for public decision-making, innovate theories, disseminate knowledge, influence the public, guide public opinion and social trends, and conduct public diplomacy. Within modern national governance systems, think tanks exert powerful influence as integral components of both the governance system and national soft power. New-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics are non-profit research and consulting institutions that focus on strategic issues and public policies and aim to serve the scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making of the Party and government.

Since the 18th Party Congress, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has attached great importance to think tank construction in response to new situations and tasks, and to achieve the “Two Centenary Goals” and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The Central Committee has proposed a series of new concepts, ideas, and strategies on think tank construction, forming Xi Jinping' s “think tank vision.” According to incomplete statistics, since 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping has made over 50 important statements, instructions, and comments on think tank construction. These 主要包括: first, strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics; second, clearly demanding that this construction be grasped as a major and urgent task, reflecting the Party and state' s urgent need and earnest expectations for high-quality think tanks; third, making clear strategic deployments for key tasks and directions in think tank construction; fourth, providing clear research directions, tasks, and major research topics for various think tanks; fifth, pointing out the direction for institutional innovation, organizational construction, and management reform in think tanks; sixth, putting forward specific requirements for Party school think tanks, united front and CPPCC think tanks, national defense and military think tanks, think tank diplomacy, and Belt and Road think tank networks, along with a batch of major decision-making consultation topics; seventh, clearly identifying existing problems in current think tank construction and providing specific guidance; eighth, convening symposiums with think tank experts to lead the implementation of the decision to strengthen new-type think tank construction; and ninth, requiring Party committees and governments at all levels to attach great importance to think tank construction.

1.1. The “4.15” Official Comment on Think Tank Construction

On April 15, General Secretary Xi Jinping made an important comment on the think tank construction research report “Suggestions on Accelerating the Construction of Policy-Consulting Think Tanks in the New Period” submitted by the Research Group on “Research on Foreign Think Tank Management Systems” from the Development Research Center of the State Council’s Institute of Public Administration and Human Resources, known as the “4.15” official comment on think tank construction. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that think tanks, as an important component of national soft power, will play an increasingly significant role with the development of the situation. China’s think tanks are still relatively lagging behind and should play a greater role. It is necessary to actively explore organizational forms and management methods for new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, adopt effective measures to guide various think tanks in strengthening their own construction, and actively provide high-quality intellectual support for the Central Committee’s scientific decision-making. General Secretary Xi Jinping’s “4.15” official comment represents the most explicit and richly conclusive comment made by central leadership on think tank construction, reflecting the Party Central Committee’s high regard and earnest hopes for think tanks. It constitutes an important component of Xi Jinping’s “think tank vision,” with its core being the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

1.2. Taking the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics as a Major and Urgent Task

On October 27, 2014, the sixth meeting of the Central Comprehensive Deepening Reform Leading Group reviewed the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics” (hereinafter referred to as the “Opinions”). At the meeting, Xi Jinping emphasized that intellectual resources are the most precious resources for a country and a nation. In governing the country, we must be adept at pooling wisdom from all quarters and rallying the broadest possible forces. The more arduous and onerous the reform and development tasks, the greater the need for strong intellectual support. In recent years, China’s think tanks have developed rapidly, achieving great success in producing ideas, results, and talent, and making important contributions to promoting reform, opening-up, and modernization. However, with the development of the situation, the problem of think tank construction failing to keep pace and adapt has become increasingly prominent, particularly the lack of high-quality think tanks with significant influence and international reputation. From the strategic height of promoting scientific and democratic decision-making, advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capability, and enhancing national soft power, we must take the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics as a major and urgent task. We must uphold Party leadership, maintain correct orientation, and fully embody Chinese characteristics, style, and demeanor; uphold

the scientific spirit and encourage bold exploration; focus on the overall situation and serve central work; and persist in reform, innovation, and standardized development. We must coordinate the development of Party and government departments, academies of social sciences, Party schools and administrative institutes, universities, the military, science and technology enterprises, and social think tanks to form a think tank system with clear positioning, distinctive features, moderate scale, and rational layout, focusing on building a batch of high-end think tanks with significant influence and international impact while attaching importance to specialized think tank construction.

1.3. Improving Decision-Making Mechanisms and Giving Play to the Role of Think Tanks

On October 29, 2015, in his speech at the second plenary session of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping pointed out that China's development fields are constantly expanding, division of labor is becoming increasingly complex, forms are more advanced, and domestic and international linkages are closer, placing higher demands on the Party's ability and level to lead development. Whether analyzing situations or making decisions, whether solving development problems or addressing issues involving people's interests, professional thinking, professional competence, and professional methods are required. The practice of making decisions based on gut feelings, relying on administrative orders, or formulating special policies beyond laws and regulations is no longer suited to new situations and tasks. We must pay greater attention to analyzing and forecasting domestic and international economic situations, improve decision-making mechanisms, emphasize the role of think tanks and professional research institutions, and enhance scientific decision-making capabilities to ensure that major strategies and important policies formulated conform to objective laws. We must more consciously use rule-of-law thinking and methods to deepen reform, promote development, resolve conflicts, and maintain stability, govern the economy according to law, and coordinate and handle various interest issues according to law to avoid creating future problems.

1.4. Focusing Think Tank Construction on Improving Research Quality and Promoting Content Innovation

In his speech at the Symposium on Philosophy and Social Sciences on May 17, 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping made specific remarks on think tank construction. He noted that Party committees and governments at all levels should give play to the important role of philosophy and social sciences in governance. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee proposed strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing and improving decision-making consultation systems. The Fifth Plenary Session emphasized implementing philosophy and social sciences innovation projects and building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. In November 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping chaired a meeting of the

Central Comprehensive Deepening Reform Leading Group that approved the pilot work plan for building national high-end think tanks, and the first batch of high-end think tanks has been established and is operating. At that meeting, he stressed the need to build a batch of high-end think tanks that are urgently needed by the state, have distinctive features, institutional innovation, and lead development, focusing on forward-looking, targeted, and reserve policy research around major national strategic needs. In recent years, enthusiasm for building think tanks in the field of philosophy and social sciences has been high, with many achievements providing helpful support for decision-making at all levels of Party and government departments. However, some think tank research has emphasized quantity over quality, some have focused on formal dissemination over content innovation, and others have resorted to formalistic practices such as setting up platforms, inviting celebrities, and holding forums. Think tank construction must focus on improving research quality and promoting content innovation. We must strengthen information sharing and interactive communication between decision-making departments and think tanks, closely integrate policy research by Party and government departments with countermeasure research by think tanks, and guide and promote the healthy development and better functioning of think tanks.

1.5. Broadening Consultation Channels for Various Think Tanks

In his speech at the conference celebrating the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on September 21, 2014, Xi Jinping stated that we must hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, strengthen friendly exchanges with people, political organizations, media, and think tanks from various countries in accordance with the overall plan for foreign affairs work, and make positive contributions to promoting the noble cause of human peace and development. Consultation must be genuine, occurring before and during decision-making, with decisions and work adjusted according to opinions and suggestions from all sides, ensuring consultation results are implemented institutionally to better align with public opinion and reality. We must conduct extensive consultations on major issues concerning reform, development, and stability, especially those involving people's vital interests, through various channels and methods, respecting the wishes of the majority while accommodating the reasonable demands of minorities, widely soliciting opinions and pooling wisdom to build consensus and strengthen synergy. We must broaden consultation channels for the Communist Party of China, people's congresses, people's governments, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, democratic parties, people's organizations, grassroots organizations, enterprises and institutions, social organizations, and various think tanks, conduct various forms of consultation including political, legislative, administrative, democratic, social, and grassroots consultation, establish and improve various consultation methods such as proposals, meetings, discussions, demonstrations, hearings, public notices, evaluations, consultations, and online platforms, and continuously improve the scientific nature and effec-

tiveness of consultative democracy.

1.6. The United Front as a Large Think Tank

In his important speech at the gathering with non-Party personages to welcome the Spring Festival on January 29, 2016, Xi Jinping emphasized that the united front brings together talented individuals and intellectual resources, making it a large think tank. He hoped that comrades would focus on development during the 13th Five-Year Plan period, grasp the new normal of economic development as the overarching logic, and provide valuable opinions and suggestions for the Central Committee's decision-making and governance on major economic and social development issues, difficult points in comprehensively deepening reform, and key issues in promoting innovation and creativity. They should exert solid efforts, do practical work, and seek tangible results, particularly focusing on addressing weaknesses, pooling intellectual resources from all sectors of the united front, and stimulating creative vitality. We must improve democratic supervision, strengthen oversight of major reform measures, the implementation of important policies, and important binding indicators during the 13th Five-Year Plan period to promote relevant work.

1.7. Enabling Orderly and Smooth Talent Mobility Among Government, Enterprises, and Think Tanks

In his speech at the symposium on cybersecurity and informatization on April 19, 2016, Xi Jinping pointed out that talent mobility must break institutional boundaries, enabling orderly and smooth movement of talent among government, enterprises, and think tanks. We can also learn from the advantages of foreign “revolving door” systems.

1.8. Strengthening International Exchange Activities and Building Think Tank Cooperation Networks

Xi Jinping attaches great importance to think tank diplomacy, which has become one of his “high-frequency terms.” In his major state activities involving bilateral, multilateral, and international organizations, Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized strengthening think tank diplomacy and international exchange activities and enhancing cooperation among think tanks. He has made think tank exchanges a priority in foreign affairs, placing think tank interactions alongside those of governments, political parties, and parliaments as an important component and new channel for people-to-people exchanges and cooperation between nations. He has stressed the important role of think tanks in consolidating the popular and social foundations of friendly state relations, noting that “when people unite, they become strong” and that mutual understanding among peoples must be deepened. He has also advocated for think tanks to extensively participate in international cooperation networks and build think tank international exchange and cooperation networks.

1.9. Prioritizing Intelligence for the Belt and Road Initiative and Strengthening Think Tank Support

On June 20, 2016, when attending the opening ceremony of the Silk Road International Forum and the China-Poland Local and Economic Cooperation Forum, Xi Jinping emphasized that “intelligence should come first, strengthening the supporting and leading role of think tanks, strengthening research on the Belt and Road construction plan and path, and serving as advisors and assistants to the government in planning alignment, policy coordination, and institutional design, while acting as bridges and bonds in concept dissemination, policy interpretation, and public opinion communication.” On June 22, 2016, in his speech at the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, Xi Jinping pointed out the need to strengthen cooperation in cultural fields, deepen collaboration in education, science and technology, culture, sports, tourism, health, archaeology, and other areas, establish big data exchange platforms, and jointly build a Belt and Road think tank cooperation network.

1.10. Giving Play to the Role of High-End Party Building Think Tanks

On March 23, 2016, Xi Jinping made important instructions to the sixth 会员代表大会 of the National Party Building Research Association, setting clear goals and directions for high-end Party building think tanks. He hoped that the association would maintain the correct political direction, give play to its role as a high-end Party building think tank, build on its achievements and advantages, conduct in-depth research on theoretical and practical Party building issues around the coordinated advancement of the “Five-Sphere Integrated Plan” and the “Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy,” and summarize practical experience in comprehensively enforcing strict Party discipline. The association should make new and greater contributions to building a sinicized Marxist theoretical system on Party building and to strengthening and improving Party leadership to ensure that the Party remains the strong leadership core of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics.

1.11. Party Schools Becoming Important Think Tanks for the Party and State

In his speech at the National Party School Work Conference on December 11, 2015, Xi Jinping pointed out that Party schools, by bearing the Party’ s name, must focus their scientific research on the Party’ s central work, make achievements in the Party’ s ideological and theoretical research, and contribute to upholding and consolidating the Party’ s leadership over ideological work and Marxism’ s guiding position in the ideological field. Party schools must strengthen theoretical summarization and innovation according to changing times and practical development, striving to contribute to the development of 21st-century Marxism and contemporary Chinese Marxism. They must conduct in-depth research on the Party and state’ s central work, major decisions and deploy-

ments of Party committees and governments, and hot and difficult social issues, promptly reflect important ideological and theoretical trends, and propose valuable countermeasures and suggestions. Party schools must become important think tanks for the Party and state.

1.12. Strengthening National Defense and Military Think Tank Construction

On March 23, 2016, during his inspection of the National Defense University and meeting with all delegates and division-level and above leading cadres of the university' s sixth Party congress, Xi Jinping pointed out that we must persist in theoretical research and decision-making consultation, serve talent cultivation and combat effectiveness construction, combine teaching with scientific research, make breakthroughs in war and operational theory innovation, and contribute to forming a military theoretical system with contemporary, leading, and unique characteristics. We must closely follow the development trends of the world' s new military revolution, conduct in-depth research on the winning mechanisms of informationized warfare, study the development and application of high technology and its impact on warfare, research major practical issues in military struggle preparation, and build an advanced operational theoretical system with our military' s characteristics that conforms to the laws of modern warfare. We must give full play to the role of high-end think tanks, conduct policy research around the decision-making needs of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission, focus on major issues concerning national security, national defense, and military construction, and propose countermeasures and suggestions.

1.13. Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering as High-End Science and Technology Think Tanks

On July 17, 2013, during his inspection of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), Xi Jinping pointed out that the Party Central Committee has high hopes for China' s scientific and technological community. The CAS must remember its responsibilities, take the lead in achieving leapfrog development in science and technology, take the lead in building a national highland for innovative talent, take the lead in building a national high-level science and technology think tank, and take the lead in building world-class scientific research institutions. On June 9, 2014, in his speech at the Academician Conference of the two academies, Xi Jinping further emphasized that the CAS and the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE) are the highest academic institutions in China' s scientific and technological fields and engineering fields and serve as the national science and technology think tank. The two academies must organize academicians to conduct strategic consulting research on global issues concerning economic, social, and technological development, support scientific decision-making with scientific consultation, and guide scientific development with scientific decision-making. On May 31, 2016, at the National Science and

Technology Innovation Conference, Xi Jinping again emphasized that the CAS and CAE, where China's science and technology masters gather, must give play to their function as national high-end science and technology think tanks, organize academicians to address global and long-term issues concerning scientific and technological innovation development, grasp the general trend of world scientific and technological development, judge new directions of the world scientific and technological revolution, and provide accurate, forward-looking, and timely suggestions for national science and technology decision-making. They must also give play to their role as the highest academic institutions in leading academic development.

1.14. Leading by Example and Setting Benchmarks for Party and Government Leaders at All Levels

On July 8, 2014, when presiding over the economic situation expert symposium, Xi Jinping pointed out that the 18th Party Congress and the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Party Central Committee required strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing and improving decision-making consultation systems. The economic situation expert symposium held that day represented an important manifestation of implementing this decision and deployment. Institutionalizing the broad solicitation of opinions from experts and scholars is of great significance for improving the Party's governance capability and national governance capacity. He hoped that experts and scholars would go deep into reality, among the masses, and at the grassroots level, listen to the people's voices, grasp real situations, conduct extensive research, devote themselves to study, continuously produce insightful results, offer suggestions for the Party Central Committee's scientific decision-making, and contribute more to promoting scientific and democratic decision-making.

2. Deeply Understanding the Theoretical and Practical Nature of Xi Jinping's "Think Tank Vision"

Xi Jinping's "think tank vision" not only demonstrates that think tank construction is an important component of modernizing the national governance system and governance capability but also points out the fundamental direction and puts forward overall requirements for building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. It reflects the objective necessity of modernizing the national governance system and governance capability and represents a product of socialist political theory and practice with Chinese characteristics. We must fully recognize the important position of think tanks in modern politics and in achieving the Two Centenary Goals and the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, as think tanks will become increasingly important with development.

General Secretary Xi Jinping's high regard for think tank construction has its

practical and objective necessity. First is the complexity of decision-making and the demand for scientific decision-making. In an era of economic globalization, world multipolarization, and information networking, decision-making complexity is unparalleled, requiring professional, extensive, confrontational, balanced, and internationalized analysis. Issues such as adapting to the new economic normal, promoting transformation and development through supply-side structural reform, implementing the Belt and Road strategy, developing a new type of major-power relationship with the United States to avoid the “Thucydides Trap,” promoting inclusive economic globalization, and establishing a new international peace order are so complex that they cannot be accomplished by individual advisors or small teams. They require wisdom from all over the world, thus leading to the development of think tanks. Second is the demand for democratic decision-making. New-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics constitute an important element of socialist democratic political construction, an important component of modernizing the national governance system and governance capability, and an important part of national soft power. Third, think tank participation in public decision-making has its inherent logic. The public decision-making process includes agenda setting, consultation research, formulation, implementation, feedback, revision, or abolition, with think tank activities being an important internal link that runs through the entire public decision-making process, including consultation research, evaluation, and interpretation of each link. Fourth, modern countries increasingly emphasize the role of think tanks in decision-making consultation, with decision-makers drawing support from think tanks composed of multidisciplinary experts through in-depth investigation and research to obtain optimal theories, strategies, methods, and suggestions.

2.1. Reflecting the Internal Requirements of Modernizing the National Governance System and Governance Capability

The “Decision” of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Party Central Committee proposed that the overall goal of comprehensively deepening reform is to improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and modernize the national governance system and governance capability. National governance includes multiple actors, with think tanks being one of the main entities in the national structural system. From the perspective of think tanks, they expand channels for social forces to participate in politics and policy discussion and improve the scientific and democratic level of government decision-making. From the perspective of social development, the development level of think tanks reflects, to a certain extent, a society’ s openness, the vitality of its intellectual elites, and a country’ s cultural soft power. In terms of social utility and function, think tanks play multiple roles: improving the scientific, democratic, and law-based level of national government decision-making, expanding channels for mass political participation, diversifying consultative democracy, and reserving talent, innovating ideas, and providing information for national development and social progress. From the perspective of national governance, think tanks,

as one of the multiple actors in national governance, embody the concept of modern national governance. Thus, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that we must take the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics as a major and urgent task from the strategic height of promoting scientific and democratic decision-making, advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capability, and enhancing national soft power.

A review of the modernization processes of today' s world shows that think tanks play an increasingly important role in national governance, becoming an indispensable component of the national governance system and an important manifestation of national governance capability. The history of think tank development also shows that modern think tanks emerged in Western countries in the second half of the 19th century as a result of refined social division of labor and scientific and democratic decision-making. Since the mid-20th century, with scientific and technological progress and continuous major changes in the world political landscape and economic order, the complexity of situations and environments facing all countries has increased. Individual advisors and counselors in human society development history can no longer meet decision-makers' needs to address challenges, urgently requiring team-based think tanks to provide higher-quality professional consultation and policy solutions for decision-makers. Consequently, various think tanks have developed rapidly, continuously improving decision-making consultation service levels, expanding policy influence, and strengthening relationships with decision-making bodies. According to relevant institutional data, by 2015, there were 6,846 relatively active think tanks worldwide. Before World War II, the United States had only about 20 think tanks such as the Brookings Institution and the Hoover Institution, but by 2015, the number had increased to 1,835, forming a relatively complete decision-making consultation system adapted to its social governance structure.

China' s national governance system is a series of institutions and mechanisms different from those in the West, established by the Communist Party of China in leading the people in building and developing socialism, ensuring the Party leads the people in effectively governing the country. It embodies the unity of Party leadership, the people being masters of the country, and law-based governance, including continuously encouraging and guiding diversified participation, enhancing the diversification, coordination, and interaction of specific governance mechanisms, and modernizing the national governance system and capability. In specific governance processes, it avoids coercive methods, serves as an interest coordinator, direction guide, and resource integrator, builds service platforms, creates institutional environments, and fosters cooperative atmospheres for national governance, and summarizes and promotes governance achievements. Think tanks play important roles in all these relationships, becoming an indispensable component of the national governance system. Building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics aims to provide effective intellectual support for comprehensively deepening reform and modernizing the national governance system and governance capability. Therefore, the "Opin-

ions” identify new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics as an important component of modernizing the national governance system and governance capability.

2.2. Reflecting the Objective Requirements of Decision-Making Scientification

Decision-making emerges and develops in certain historical stages, reflecting the characteristics of the times. Scientific decision-making is the process by which decision-makers use scientific theories and methods to systematically analyze subjective and objective conditions to make correct decisions in order to achieve specific goals. It is an interactive process involving decision-makers, experts, and practitioners. Scientific decision-making has characteristics of procedure, creativity, optimization, and guidance. The procedural nature emphasizes that decision-making is not simply making final calls, arbitrary decisions, or impulsive, dictatorial actions, but rather, under correct theoretical guidance and according to certain procedures, fully relying on the collective wisdom of leadership groups, the broad masses, and various think tanks, and correctly applying decision-making techniques and methods to select action plans.

Scientific decision-making cannot be separated from think tanks, which constitute an important link in the scientific decision-making system. The reason think tanks have become components of the decision-making system lies in their organizational forms and research results’ ability to reflect the professionalism and scientific nature of decision-making consultation. Complex decision-making problems often involve multiple objectives, time dynamics, and state uncertainties, which are far beyond individual capabilities. Decision-makers cannot be expected to excel at solving all types of problems or making all types of decisions. The interconnected nature of decision-making objectively requires active participation from people in different fields to provide relevant information and understand problems from different perspectives. Group decision-making involving think tanks can compensate for decision-makers’ limitations in cross-disciplinary knowledge when facing increasingly complex internal and external environments. Therefore, it is necessary to give play to collective wisdom, and group decision-making has gained increasing recognition from decision-makers due to its unique advantages.

Giving play to the role of think tanks in scientific decision-making reflects new characteristics of decision-making, with the most typical being group decision-making, which has received attention and developed rapidly. Group decision-making is a discipline with a long research history and modern application value in decision science. It studies how to aggregate individual preferences on certain matters into group preferences within a group, enabling the group to rank all matters or select the best option. As a means of choice, group decision-making is a powerful tool for handling major qualitative decision-making problems. Yin Wenzhi, a famous philosopher during the Warring States period, once pointed out that “what is valued in the governance of sages is not their ability to govern

alone, but their ability to govern with the masses.”

Think tanks embody the inherent requirements of group decision-making. Intellectual resources are the most precious resources for a country and a nation. Think tanks are organizations that bring together experts from different fields with different educational backgrounds, work experience, and research experience, possessing broad complementarity and tremendous knowledge advantages and team organizational strengths. As General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, in governing the country, we must be adept at pooling wisdom from all quarters and rallying the broadest possible forces. The more arduous and onerous the reform and development tasks, the greater the need for strong intellectual support. Therefore, with extensive participation from experts, think tanks can consider issues more comprehensively, formulate more satisfactory action plans, and improve the relevance and scientific nature of decision-making when addressing increasingly complex decision-making problems. This fully demonstrates that Xi Jinping’s “think tank vision” embodies the inherent requirements of scientific, democratic, and high-quality decision-making.

2.3. Reflecting the Urgent Need to Enhance National Soft Power

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that think tanks are an important component of national soft power. The rise of great powers is not only a process of increasing hard power such as the economy but also a process of increasing soft power such as ideology and culture. Soft power, proposed by Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye in the early 1990s, refers to a country’s influence in culture, values, ideology, and public opinion—its ability to get what it wants by attracting and persuading other countries to comply with its objectives. As Confucius said, “If people from afar are not submissive, cultivate cultural virtue to attract them” —cultural virtue is soft power. Think tanks have always played a role in the rise of great powers and power politics, and their internationalization is accelerating.

The public diplomacy function of think tanks makes them an important carrier of national soft power, an increasingly important factor in international competitiveness, and an irreplaceable actor in foreign exchanges. Traditional public diplomacy theory holds that public diplomacy is diplomatic behavior with the government as the main actor and foreign publics as the target audience. With changes in the world political landscape and the development of globalization and information technology, traditional public diplomacy can no longer meet the needs of increasingly complex international relations, giving rise to new public diplomacy. The actors in new public diplomacy have expanded from the government to a government-led, diversified group including think tanks, interest groups, media, and ordinary citizens, collectively forming today’s multi-track public diplomacy system. Think tank public diplomacy is classified as “Track II diplomacy,” a non-governmental diplomacy that is more flexible and extensive than “Track I diplomacy” between governments and can often play roles that official channels cannot. For example, on July 5, 2016, the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China and other think tank in-

stitutions hosted the “China-U.S. Think Tank South China Sea Dialogue” in Washington, D.C., creating tremendous impact and positive influence. At the dialogue, former Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo’ s statement that “the South China Sea arbitration award is nothing more than a piece of waste paper” was widely reprinted by global media. The reason for such impact is that new public diplomacy aims to influence the formulation and implementation of government foreign policies by shaping public attitudes, with the core being the cross-border flow of information and ideas, in which think tanks play a unique and important function and role by virtue of their special relationship with official decision-making and their identity as professional policy researchers.

Strengthening public diplomacy is an important way to solve China’ s practical diplomatic challenges. In today’ s world, “black swan” events occur frequently, uncertainty intensifies, and challenges abound. Think tanks are needed to carry out and give play to public diplomacy functions, requiring more “combination punches” in global affairs, with both official diplomacy and meticulous behind-the-scenes public diplomacy work. In modern international relations, non-state actors often play major roles, and China’ s diplomatic practice has also encountered the challenge of how to deal with non-governmental organizations. Faced with the diversification of international actors, public diplomacy is an important means to improve diplomatic work.

In reality, deepening international exchanges and cooperation and enhancing international influence have become increasingly important content in think tank construction. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that today’ s world is an open world, and today’ s China is an open China. The relationship between China and the world is undergoing historic changes, with China’ s rise as a global power requiring China to better understand the world and the world to better understand China. Expanding international influence and discourse power, establishing China’ s image, telling China’ s story well, and spreading China’ s voice to create a favorable international environment for China’ s economic and social development, establishing a good image of socialist China, and promoting Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese values to the world and making China’ s voice heard on the international stage urgently require giving play to the important role of think tanks in public diplomacy and continuously enhancing China’ s international influence and discourse power.

3. Consciously Applying Xi Jinping’ s “Think Tank Vision” to Guide Practice and Taking the Development Path of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics

Studying Xi Jinping’ s “think tank vision,” improving our consciousness in taking the development path of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, and promoting the continuous improvement of China’ s think tank system are important tasks in current think tank construction. From the supply side of think tank construction, the general principles and policies have been basically

established. From the demand side, the process of integrating China's think tanks into the decision-making consultation system has also begun. The current problem is the need for detailed rules and specific management regulations for think tank participation in decision-making consultation. Therefore, this paper emphasizes that establishing and improving the "think tank decision-making consultation system" is an important guarantee for the healthy development of think tanks. Due to space limitations, other issues are not discussed here.

Since General Secretary Xi Jinping's "4.15" official comment on think tank construction in 2013, China has experienced a spring in think tank construction, with rapid development and many achievements. First, a series of top-level design documents, opinions, and plans for think tank construction have been issued, marking that China's think tank construction is entering a new stage of institutionalization. Second, think tank construction has presented a new scene, with substantive steps in high-end think tank construction, accelerated transformation and development of traditional think tanks, great vitality and competitiveness demonstrated by social think tanks, high attention and proactive development of think tank public diplomacy functions, rapid development of specialized think tanks, and continuous innovation in think tank organizational forms.

At the same time, we also see that with the development of the situation, the problem of think tank construction failing to keep pace and adapt has become increasingly prominent. Main manifestations include: many vague understandings remain regarding basic theories, basic concepts, and think tank functions, causing many misunderstandings and confusion in think tank practice and constraining innovation in think tank organizational forms and management methods; some traditional think tanks, constrained by their orthodox status advantages, have lagged in transformation and development; the important position of think tanks has not received universal attention; think tank participation in decision-making consultation lacks institutional arrangements; there is a lack of truly influential and internationally renowned high-quality think tanks; insufficient high-quality research results are provided; overall planning for think tank construction is unclear; innovation in think tank organizational forms and management methods has become formalistic; think tank resource allocation has not formed synergies; and particularly, there exist the problems criticized by General Secretary Xi Jinping: "think tank research emphasizes quantity over quality, some emphasize formal dissemination over content innovation, and others resort to formalistic practices such as setting up platforms, inviting celebrities, and holding forums." Therefore, we must further consciously apply Xi Jinping's "think tank vision" to guide practice, continuously strengthen the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, and establish and improve decision-making consultation systems on the development path of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

3.1. Current State of Think Tank Construction

Since the “4.15” official comment in 2013, China has witnessed a spring in think tank construction with rapid development and numerous achievements. First, a series of top-level design documents, decisions, opinions, and plans for think tank construction have been issued, marking the entry of China’s think tank construction into a new stage of institutionalization. Second, think tank construction has shown a new landscape, with substantive progress in high-end think tank construction, accelerated transformation of traditional think tanks, social think tanks demonstrating great vitality and competitiveness, think tank public diplomacy functions receiving high attention and proactive development, specialized think tanks developing rapidly, and continuous innovation in think tank organizational forms.

However, we also observe that with evolving circumstances, think tank construction increasingly faces problems of failing to keep pace and adapt. Main issues include: persistent vague understandings of basic theories, concepts, and functions, leading to confusion and misunderstandings in practice that constrain organizational and managerial innovation; delayed transformation among some traditional think tanks due to their orthodox status; insufficient recognition of think tanks’ importance; lack of institutional arrangements for think tank participation in decision-making consultation; shortage of truly influential and internationally renowned high-quality think tanks; inadequate supply of high-quality research outputs; unclear overall planning; formalistic organizational and managerial innovation; and failure to achieve synergistic resource allocation. Particularly problematic are the issues criticized by General Secretary Xi Jinping: “emphasizing quantity over quality in think tank research, prioritizing formal dissemination over content innovation, and resorting to formalistic practices like platform-building, celebrity-inviting, and forum-hosting.” Therefore, we must further apply Xi Jinping’s “think tank vision” to guide practice, strengthen new-type think tank construction with Chinese characteristics, and establish and improve decision-making consultation systems.

3.2. The Necessity of Establishing and Improving the “Think Tank Decision-Making Consultation System”

First, without high attention from the decision-making demand side and specific institutional guarantees, think tank construction would be like a barber’s pole—hot at one end only. Analyzing current problems in think tank development, the primary issue is the institutional integration of think tanks into the Party and government decision-making system to guarantee their legal status and specific implementation rules in decision-making. This is an important guarantee for implementing Xi Jinping’s “think tank vision.” As General Secretary Xi Jinping stated, “we must strengthen information sharing and interactive communication between decision-making departments and think tanks, closely integrate policy research by Party and government departments with countermeasure research by think tanks, and guide and promote the healthy development and better

functioning of think tanks.” Currently, China’s think tank construction needs promotion and improvement from both supply and demand sides to achieve further healthy development. China’s think tank construction must both task think tanks with “centering on the overall situation and serving the big picture” to provide more high-quality intellectual support for decision-making and create a favorable external institutional environment for think tank development. Whether think tanks can give full play to their role depends on creating a sound external institutional environment, which has become a pressing issue. Only in this way can we avoid the current situation where some local and departmental Party committees and governments do not attach importance to think tanks and treat them as dispensable, which in turn causes think tanks to accomplish nothing, creating a vicious cycle. In other words, if think tanks do not receive attention from Party and government decision-makers, they can only be like a barber’s pole—hot at one end only. This illustrates one necessity for detailing think tank participation in decision-making systems.

Second, it is necessary to put think tank construction on a legal and institutional track. Currently, the concepts and general policies for think tank construction have been initially established. In November 2013, the “Decision” of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Party Central Committee proposed strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing and improving decision-making consultation systems. In January 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics.” On November 9, 2015, the 18th meeting of the Central Comprehensive Deepening Reform Leading Group reviewed and approved the “National High-End Think Tank Construction Pilot Work Plan,” along with the “National High-End Think Tank Management Measures (Trial)” and the “National High-End Think Tank Special Fund Management Measures (Trial).” In February 2017, the “Several Opinions on the Healthy Development of Social Think Tanks” was released, with various departments and localities actively responding and formulating their own think tank construction plans in accordance with the “Opinions.”

The aforementioned documents show that principle-based provisions for incorporating think tanks into major administrative decision-making statutory procedures have been established, representing a major sign that China’s think tank construction has entered a new stage of legalization. The “Opinions” issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council contain principle-based provisions for think tank participation in decision-making, including Article 19 on “improving the major decision-making opinion solicitation system,” Article 6 on “strengthening organizational leadership,” Article 23 on “attaching great importance to think tank construction,” and Article 24 on “continuously improving think tank management,” all of which stipulate that think tank construction should be listed as an important agenda item as a crucial component of promoting scientific and law-based governance and enhancing government credibility. However, a clear set of think tank decision-making

consultation work rules and methods is still lacking. The “State Council Work Rules” also emphasize that “administrative decision-making procedures and rules should be improved, with public participation, expert demonstration, risk assessment, legality review, and collective discussion as mandatory procedures for major decisions,” and that “major decisions must undergo in-depth investigation and research and be evaluated and demonstrated by research and consulting institutions for legality, necessity, scientific nature, feasibility, and controllability.” The decision of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Party Central Committee in October 2014 pointed out that law-based decision-making mechanisms should be improved, with public participation, expert demonstration, risk assessment, legality review, and collective discussion as statutory procedures for major administrative decisions to ensure scientifically sound systems, proper procedures, open processes, and clear responsibilities. Practice has proven that without specific “think tank decision-making consultation work rules,” provisions often become formalistic. Establishing and improving the “think tank decision-making consultation system” or “think tank decision-making consultation work rules” is an important guarantee for the healthy development of think tanks. On February 6, 2017, the 32nd meeting of the Central Comprehensive Deepening Reform Leading Group reviewed and approved the “National Science and Technology Decision-Making Consultation System Construction Plan,” an important document for ensuring the healthy development of science and technology think tanks with significance as work rules for science and technology think tank decision-making consultation.

Third, establishing and improving the think tank decision-making consultation system is necessary to achieve the overall goal of modernizing the national governance system and governance capability. Continuously improving national institutions is a basic requirement for modernizing national governance. In his 1992 Southern Tour talks, Comrade Deng Xiaoping proposed that it would take another 30 years to form a more mature and 定型 system in all aspects. The Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core attaches great importance to modernizing the national governance system and governance capability. The national governance system includes the governance structure system, governance function system, governance institution system, governance method system, and governance operation system, representing the sum of national governance methods and approaches. Article 2 of the “Opinions” stipulates that “new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics are an important content of modernizing the national governance system and governance capability.” The Third Plenary Session proposed “strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing and improving decision-making consultation systems,” reflecting the logical inclusion relationship between think tanks and decision-making consultation systems. To perfect the national governance system, establishing the think tank decision-making consultation system is a matter of course. Therefore, establishing and improving the think tank decision-making consultation system must be regarded as an internal requirement of “comprehensively deepening reform, improving

and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, modernizing the national governance system and governance capability, promoting extensive, multi-level, and institutionalized development of consultative democracy, and establishing a more mature and 定型 institutional system.” It must be earnestly placed on the agenda to ensure that think tanks give full play to their important role in governance. Attaching great importance to and institutionalizing the role of think tanks is one of the governance approaches determined by the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core and represents a new governance method advocated by General Secretary Xi Jinping, holding great significance for improving the Party’s governance capability and national governance capacity.

3.3. Recommendations for Establishing and Improving the Think Tank Decision-Making Consultation System

The primary task in establishing the think tank decision-making consultation system is to incorporate think tank decision-making consultation into decision-making procedures and formulate a clear set of “think tank decision-making consultation work rules” and “methods,” namely, establishing relevant mechanisms, specific work rules, and implementation measures that are “effective” and “feasible.” For example, we should establish scientific management methods for submitting and initially reviewing think tank results, ensuring that carefully researched results can be included in decision-making references and presented to decision-makers, rather than being subjectively dismissed by a few individuals or departments, especially not being stifled by individual officials based on their limited perspectives.

Currently, the focus of think tank construction lies in establishing and improving the think tank decision-making consultation system, which mainly includes the following ten aspects. First, place the establishment of the think tank decision-making consultation system on the important agenda, establish a national think tank decision-making consultation system, and formulate specific national think tank decision-making consultation work rules and methods. Second, incorporate various forms of think tank consultation such as think tank research reports, attendance at decision-maker-hosted symposiums, and participation in drafting important national documents into decision-making procedures. Third, formulate think tank construction plans that, from the perspective of structural optimization, continuously cultivate various specialized think tanks to avoid low-level, fragmented duplication among think tanks while attaching great importance to building high-level think tanks with strong comprehensive capabilities. Fourth, encourage innovation in think tank organizational forms by establishing think tank communities, alliances, and networks while fully mobilizing, giving play to, and protecting the enthusiasm of each think tank. Fifth, establish a topic release system to maximize open bidding for research projects to think tanks. Sixth, encourage the development of various think tanks, fully introduce competition mechanisms, give play to the enthusiasm of all think tanks,

and implement dynamic management of national high-end think tanks. Seventh, establish a national think tank evaluation system and mechanism, drawing on some effective international management methods such as the German Leibniz Association evaluation system. Eighth, actively build a Chinese think tank talent development and governance system, attach particular importance to think tank talent exchanges, enrich talent with various experiences at all levels, formulate new management methods for think tank human resource incentives and constraints, and highly cultivate think tank talents with passion, mission, and responsibility for the Party, country, and nation. Ninth, formulate think tank international exchange methods to promote think tank international exchanges and cooperation and extensively carry out effective think tank diplomacy. Tenth, establish a national think tank database to implement new think tank management methods in the information age.

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

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