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The Operational Mechanisms, Core Values, and Development Trends of The Heritage Foundation: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Understanding the operational mechanisms, core values, and development dynamics of The Heritage Foundation, providing reference and lessons for think tank research and practice in China. [Method/Process] Employing a case study methodology, this study primarily collects data through literature review and website investigation, citing relevant publications and current political commentary released by The Heritage Foundation, while also referencing authoritative international think tank research reports to examine the history and current status of The Heritage Foundation. [Results/Conclusion] The establishment of The Heritage Foundation carries conservative political overtones; however, aside from factors such as political inclination and stance, The Heritage Foundation's operational mechanisms and its success in influencing government decision-making with conservative policies offer many aspects worthy of reference for China's think tank construction.

Full Text

The Operational Mechanism, Core Value and Development Trends of The Heritage Foundation

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study aims to understand the operational mechanism, core values, and development trends of The Heritage Foundation, providing reference for China's think tank research and practice. [Method/Process] Using a case study approach, data were collected primarily through literature

and website investigations, citing relevant publications and political commentaries released by The Heritage Foundation, while also referencing authoritative international think tank research reports to examine the foundation's history and current status. **[Result/Conclusion]** The establishment of The Heritage Foundation carried conservative political overtones. However, beyond political inclinations and positions, its operational mechanisms and successful influence on government decision-making through conservative policies offer valuable lessons for China's think tank construction.

Keywords: The Heritage Foundation; think tank; operational mechanism; core value; Global Go To Think Tank Index Report

Classification: C931.5

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed “giving play to the role of think tanks,” through the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee explicitly stating “strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics,” to the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issuing the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics,” and 25 institutions being selected as the first batch of pilot units for national high-end think tank construction, “new-type think tank construction” has been endowed with an important historical mission, and the think tank community has gradually moved from behind the scenes into public view. China's new-type think tank construction started relatively late, and learning from excellent and mature foreign think tank construction experiences is of great significance for developing think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

This paper conducts an in-depth investigation of The Heritage Foundation (hereinafter referred to as “the Foundation”), sorting out its development history, operational mechanisms, and core values. Particularly, as one of the largest and most influential conservative public policy research institutions in the United States, the paper analyzes its influence and role in government decision-making. Simultaneously, by studying and analyzing authoritative international think tank research reports—the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report—and research reports published by the Foundation, this paper attempts to clarify the changing trends in the Foundation's research directions and characteristics, aiming to present an objective and comprehensive picture of its current development status and path.

1. Establishment and Organizational Structure

1.1 Establishment

Founded in 1973, the Foundation has a 43-year history. Compared with century-old think tanks such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Brookings Institution, it is a relatively young think tank. However, its establishment with distinct conservative political overtones has made its development

more closely connected with American politics.

The Foundation is recognized as a conservative American think tank headquartered in Washington, D.C. It was founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich, Edwin Feulner, and Joseph Coors. Weyrich and Feulner's original intention was to create an organization that could provide concise and timely position papers to policymakers. In 1970, they used Coors' s \$200,000 to create the Analysis and Research Association. Subsequently, new supporters and board members joined, including oil executives Edward Noble and Richard Mellon Scaife. Eventually, the organization split into a public interest law center and an independent public policy foundation, with the latter merging on February 16, 1973, to become The Heritage Foundation, with Weyrich serving as its first president. Later, during Frank Walton's presidency, the Foundation began using direct mail fundraising, and its annual revenue grew to \$1 million by 1976.

The Foundation's staff conduct timely and accurate research on key policy issues and effectively disseminate these findings among the Foundation's primary audiences: members of Congress, key congressional staff, policymakers in executive agencies, national media, and academic and policy groups.

1.2 Organizational Structure

The Foundation is managed by an independent board of directors and is a separate tax-exempt organization. Its current staff numbers 290, including management personnel, senior management, team members, experts, and interns. The Foundation's staff are distributed across three main organizational bodies, each dedicated to researching and developing conservative principle-based policies to strengthen the American economy and society.

1.2.1 Institute for Economic Freedom and Opportunity Aims to make the economy stronger and consists of the Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies, the Office of the Chief Economist, the Center for Trade and Economics, and the Center for Data Analysis.

1.2.2 Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity Aims to make society stronger and comprises staff from the DeVos Center for Religion and Civil Society, the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics, the Center for Health Policy Studies, and the Domestic Policy Studies department.

1.2.3 Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy Aims to make America stronger and oversees the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy, the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, the Asian Studies Center, and the Defense Center.

Working alongside all three institutes are the Foundation's Edwin Meese III Center for Legal and Judicial Studies and research editorial staff.

1.3 Financial Status

From its inception, the Foundation has clearly stated that its funding relies on private financial support from individuals, foundations, and corporations, and it does not accept government funds. Developing membership and accepting donations are its main revenue channels, used for the Foundation's various research and daily expenses. As an organization qualifying under Section 501(c) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, the Foundation is not required to disclose its donors, and donations are tax-deductible. In 1973, businessman Joseph Coors contributed \$250,000 to establish the Foundation and continued to provide funding through the Adolph Coors Foundation. In 1973, the Foundation had board members from Chase Manhattan Bank, Dow Chemical, General Motors, Pfizer, Sears, and Mobil. According to a 2006 Media Transparency report, donors included the John M. Olin Foundation, Castle Rock Foundation, Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, and Bradley Foundation.

Statistics from the Charity Navigator website show that the Foundation's 2014 income and expenditures were generally operating well. As shown in Table 1, in the donation/revenue section, 97.5% came from contributions, with program services and other revenue accounting for only 2.5%. In the expenditure section, program expenses accounted for 75.1% of total functional expenses, and fundraising expenses accounted for 21.8% of total functional expenses.

Table 1 The Heritage Foundation's Income and Spending Statement in 2014

Item	Amount (USD)
Contributions	\$94,567,106
Program Service Revenue	\$565,920
Other Revenue	\$1,836,880
Total Revenue	\$96,969,906
Program Expenses	\$61,655,491
Administrative Expenses	\$2,533,419
Fundraising Expenses	\$17,918,411
Total Functional Expenses	\$82,107,321
Excess (Deficit)	\$14,862,585

According to incomplete statistics from the Foundation's website[10], the annual donations received by the Foundation from 1995-2012 are shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]. As can be seen, donations increased significantly starting in 1998. In 2006-2008, donations exceeded ten million dollars each year, reaching \$13,137,260, \$12,516,570, and \$13,263,214 respectively. Data also shows that as of November 2016, the Foundation's donations for that year had reached \$147,913,106[11], a historic high.

Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper] The situation of The Heritage Foundation's donations from 1985 to 2012

2. Core Values and Influence of The Heritage Foundation

From its inception, the Foundation’s stated mission has been to “formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.” The three key elements for the Foundation’s successful implementation of conservative policies are effective research, excellent communication, and first-class advocacy. The Foundation played a leading role in the conservative movement during President Ronald Reagan’s tenure and has since maintained significant influence on American public policy, being recognized as the most influential conservative research institution in the United States. After Donald Trump’s election as U.S. President in 2016, the Foundation played a major role in establishing his transition team.

By reviewing the Foundation’s major achievements over its first thirty-five years and analyzing its influence on successive administrations since the Reagan administration, we can see the Foundation’s contributions to conservative political advocacy.

In 2008, the Foundation compiled a review of important developments over 35 years since its establishment in 1973. To make the research more comprehensive, the author collected and supplemented relevant content from 2009-2016. As shown in Table 2, this brief review of the Foundation’s development process illustrates how it has provided strong support for conservative political advocacy through policy research, position publication, and idea transmission.

Table 2 Review of The Heritage Foundation’s Achievements in the Past 43 Years

Year	Milestone Research/Events	Achievements
1973	Foundation established	Provided facts, data, and reliable arguments for conservative principles
1977	Pioneered conservative movement	Created resource bank for freedom-building activities and established domestic conservative opinion groups and expert networks

Year	Milestone Research/Events	Achievements
1980	Published “Mandate for Leadership”	Nearly two-thirds of 2,000 recommendations were adopted by Reagan administration
1981	National fiscal tax reduction research	Reagan appointed Norman Ture, author of tax policy chapter in “Mandate for Leadership,” as Treasury Secretary for Tax and Economic Affairs, eliminating America’s economic “misfortune” from 1981-83 and creating the largest economic expansion in U.S. history
1982	Released first comprehensive study describing missile defense system	This landmark study was presented by Foundation President Ed Feulner to President Reagan at a White House meeting
1983	Launched long-term and dynamic Asia research program	Established Asian Studies Center in an 8-story building on Capitol Hill as headquarters; opened office in Moscow nine years later
1988	Conducted comprehensive guide research on domestic, international, and defense policies	Reagan remained steadfast on Strategic Defense Initiative, an idea originating from “Mandate for Leadership”

Year	Milestone Research/Events	Achievements
1992	Conducted research on consumer choice health plans	Established Health Policy Research Center nine years later
1996	Conducted welfare reform research	Provided detailed reform outline for welfare reform, becoming the leading free-market alternative in Clinton administration proposals; over 5 million people left welfare to find work; poverty among children decreased; for the first time in 25 years, black child poverty numbers declined to historic lows
1996	Conducted religious research	Published “Why Religion Matters: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability” ; established Center for Religion and Civil Society seven years later
2000	Conducted constitutional research	Established Center for Legal and Judicial Studies to defend the Constitution
2001	Conducted homeland security research	Within 30 days after 9/11 attacks, established Homeland Security Task Force and provided 250 newspaper and magazine interviews and 185 radio and TV appearances

Year	Milestone Research/Events	Achievements
2005	After 20 years of effort by the Foundation with adequate groundwork in law, technology, and policy, President Bush abolished the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, paving the way for missile defense deployment	Created “From Tragedy to Triumph: Original Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Communities” in less than a week—a Marshall Plan for the Gulf Coast in response to Hurricane Katrina; White House officials and Congress quickly accepted many of its proposals
2008	Research on poverty in America	Criticized by editorials in The New Republic, The Nation, Center for American Progress, and Washington Post
2013	In Agricultural Bill dispute, U.S. House of Representatives banned Foundation staff from attending weekly meetings in Capitol building	Cooperation still possible through “regular joint events and briefings”
2016	Foundation reported being hacked with donor information leaked	Participated in Donald Trump’ s 2016 U.S. presidential election; became shadow transition team

2.2 Foundation Influence

Think tanks with conservative political overtones exhibit distinct characteristics and demands in their political advocacy and policy recommendations. Whether they can profoundly influence political decision-making depends significantly on whether their ideas align with the ruling party’ s political philosophy. The following enumerates various research projects the Foundation participated in and the roles it played during the Reagan administration and subsequent administrations.

In January 1981, the Foundation published “Mandate for Leadership,” a comprehensive report aimed at reducing the size of the federal government containing over 2,000 specific recommendations to push government in a conservative di-

rection. The report was well-received by the White House, with several authors taking positions in the Reagan administration. President Reagan liked the book's ideas so much that he distributed copies to every cabinet member to read. Approximately 60% of the 2,000 recommendations were implemented or initiated by the end of Reagan's first year in office. Ronald Reagan later said that The Heritage Foundation contributed significantly to the success of his presidency.

The Foundation also advocated for developing a new ballistic missile defense system. Reagan adopted this suggestion as a top defense priority in 1983, calling it the Strategic Defense Initiative. By the mid-1980s, the Foundation had become an important organization in the national conservative movement, publishing influential reports on domestic and defense issues, as well as works by prominent conservative figures such as Bob Dole and Pat Robertson. In 1986, *Time* magazine called the Foundation "the most important new advocacy think tank." During both the Reagan and Bush administrations, The Heritage Foundation served as a think tank for presidential foreign policy.

2.2.2 During the George H.W. Bush Administration The Heritage Foundation remained an influential voice on domestic and foreign policy issues. It was a major supporter of Operation Desert Storm against Iraq. According to Frank Starr, head of the Baltimore Sun's Washington bureau, the Foundation's research laid the groundwork for much of the Bush administration's foreign policy thinking after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On domestic policy, the Bush administration agreed to six of ten budget reforms included in "Mandate for Leadership III" and incorporated them into the 1990 budget proposal. The Foundation also participated in the cultural wars of the 1990s by publishing William Bennett's "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators," which documented how crime, illegitimacy, divorce, teenage suicide, drug use, and fourteen other social indicators had markedly deteriorated since 1960.

2.2.3 During the Clinton Administration The Foundation continued to grow throughout the 1990s, with its publication *Policy Review* reaching a historic high circulation of 23,000 copies. The Foundation opposed Clinton's 1993 healthcare plan. President Clinton's welfare reform was similar to the Foundation's recommendations and resulted in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. In 1995, the Foundation published the first *Index of Economic Freedom*, co-authored by policy analysts Brian Johnson and Thomas Sheehy. In 1997, the index became a joint project of The Heritage Foundation and *The Wall Street Journal*.

In 1994, the Foundation advised Newt Gingrich and other conservatives to sign the "Contract with America," believing this would help Republicans gain a majority in Congress. The principles agreed upon in the "Contract" directly challenged both the political status quo in Washington and many core ideas of the Clinton administration.

In 2005, *The Washington Post* criticized the Foundation for softening its criti-

cism of Malaysia due to business dealings between the Foundation' s president and then-Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir. The Foundation denied any conflict of interest, stating its views had changed following Malaysia' s cooperation with the U.S. after the September 11, 2001 attacks and would change as the country “moved in the right economic and political direction.”

In 2011, a study on poverty in America by the Foundation was criticized in editorials published by *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, the Center for American Progress, and *The Washington Post*.

In July 2013, during the dispute over the Agricultural Bill, 172 conservative U.S. House members from the Republican Study Committee reversed decades of tradition by banning Foundation staff from attending weekly meetings in the Capitol building, though cooperation continued through “regular joint events and briefings.”

From the above review, it is evident that during the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton administrations, the Foundation' s conservative reform ideas and political demands expressed through various policy studies effectively influenced presidential, ruling party, and congressional decisions on domestic and foreign affairs. However, this influence gradually weakened during the George W. Bush and Obama administrations. With the election of a new president in 2016, the Foundation is striving to become an advisor to the new administration and transmit its conservative political ideas to the government and the public.

3. Research Strength and Development Trends

3.1 Research Strength and Performance

Based on two *Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports* released by the University of Pennsylvania in 2014 and 2015, we can more intuitively observe and analyze the Foundation' s overall performance over the past two years. As shown in Table 3 , overall, the Foundation' s performance in the 2015 rankings showed improvement and breakthroughs compared to 2014, but there remains considerable room for progress compared to other historically established think tanks.

In terms of the number of top think tanks selected across various research fields, the 2015 rankings remained the same as 2014, with no indicators ranking in the top three. However, in terms of top think tanks with special achievements, the Foundation added two new indicators in 2015, ranking 3rd in the best advocacy campaign indicator—the only indicator where it ranked in the top three, representing significant progress. Nevertheless, the Foundation' s overall strength and performance still need strengthening.

Table 3 The Number of The Heritage Foundation' s Top Three Cases in 2014-2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report

Category	2015 Top Think Tanks by Research Area	2015 Top Think Tanks with Special Achievements	2014 Top Think Tanks by Research Area	2014 Top Think Tanks with Special Achievements
Total Rank-ings Foundation's Total List-ings Foundation's Top 3 Rank-ings Percentage of Top 3 to Total List-ings				

Table 4 shows the Foundation's strength and development in specific indicators. The Foundation rose five positions in the global top think tank rankings and one position in the U.S. top think tank rankings compared to 2014, representing noticeable progress. Its performance in top think tanks by research field was average, with no major changes from 2014, except for a breakthrough in the international development top think tank category, which was newly listed. The Foundation performed relatively well among top think tanks with special achievements, particularly in 2015 in three indicators: best policy study report, most innovative policy ideas/proposals, and most influential on public policy, showing significant improvement from 2014 with advances of 14, 12, and 5 positions respectively. Combined with its top-3 ranking in best advocacy campaign, this indicates that the Foundation has increased research investment in public policy studies and civil rights advocacy, with noticeably enhanced influence.

Table 4 The Ranking of The Heritage Foundation in 2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report

Indicator	2015 Rank	Change from 2014	Top 3 Think Tanks
Top Think Tank Worldwide		5	Brookings Institution (U.S.), Chatham House (U.K.), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (U.S.)
Top Think Tank in U.S.		1	Brookings Institution (U.S.), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (U.S.), Center for Strategic and International Studies (U.S.)
Top Think Tanks by Research Area			
Defense and National Security		—	Center for Strategic and International Studies (U.S.), International Institute for Strategic Studies (U.K.), RAND Corporation (U.S.)
Foreign Policy and International Affairs		—	Chatham House (U.K.), Brookings Institution (U.S.), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (U.S.)
International Development		New in 2014	Brookings Institution (U.S.), Chatham House (U.K.), Korea Development Institute (Korea)
International Economic Policy		—	Peterson Institute for International Economics (U.S.), Bruegel (Belgium), Brookings Institution (U.S.)

Indicator	2015 Rank	Change from 2014	Top 3 Think Tanks
Top Think Tanks with Special Achievements			
Best Think Tank Network		—	German Marshall Fund (U.S.), German Adenauer Foundation (Germany), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (U.S.)
Best Advocacy Campaign		1	Center for American Progress (U.S.), Amnesty International (U.K.), Center for Strategic and International Studies (U.S.)
Best Policy-Oriented Research Program		1	Chatham House (U.K.), Brookings Institution (U.S.), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (U.S.)

(Note: Data compiled from *2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* and *2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. “—” indicates no change from previous year.)

3.2 Research Areas and Hotspots

The Foundation’s overall performance in the *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* is based on global think tank comparisons, presenting its progress and development in recent years. Meanwhile, examining its specific research directions and hotspots provides better insight into its developmental thinking.

The Foundation’s research areas are divided into two major parts: domestic economy and foreign defense. As shown in Table 5, conventional research directions indicate that the Foundation has more research direction settings and attention in domestic economy than in foreign defense.

Table 5 Research Areas of The Heritage Foundation

Domestic Economy	Foreign Defense
Budget and Spending	National Security and Defense
Energy and Environment	Democracy and Human Rights
Poverty and Inequality	Foreign Aid and Development
Religious Faith and Civil Society	
Family and Marriage	
Welfare and Welfare Spending	

In recent years, the Foundation has focused more on social and diplomatic issues. Research hotspots in domestic economy include federal spending, immigration, Obamacare, and welfare reform. In foreign defense, national security and defense have become important research hotspots.

3.3 Research Results and Dissemination

The Foundation makes its main research results open and accessible to the public through various types of publications.

3.3.1 Main Methods

1. **Research Reports:** The Heritage Foundation's research results are published through a series of different types of publications to meet various policy information needs of different audiences.
2. **Market Research:** Influenced by American public opinion and initiatives, while also supporting conservative policies and advocacy in the United States.
3. **Political Flyers:** Used to help ordinary citizens understand political hotspot issues being debated by Washington authorities.
4. **Testimony and Evidence:** As leading experts in public policy, Foundation analysts are frequently asked to provide testimony and evidence for legislative bodies.
5. **Commentary:** Foundation experts and analysts frequently publish the latest comments and opinions.
6. **Multimedia:** Demonstrates the Foundation's values and commitments through video, audio, and infographics.
7. **Lectures:** The Foundation invites prominent political figures, scholars, and experts from around the world to speak on events and issues of concern to the Foundation.

3.3.2 Important Publications

1. In 1981, the Foundation's policy analysis book *Mandate for Leadership* was a milestone in advocating limited government.
2. In 2001, the Foundation launched the public policy magazine *Policy Review*, later taken over by the Hoover Institution.

3. In 2005, the Foundation published *The Heritage Guide to the Constitution*, which analyzes the U.S. Constitution article by article.
4. In 2015-2016, the Foundation published the *Index of U.S. Military Strength*, providing a complete introduction to the current state of U.S. military power.
5. In 2015, the Foundation published the *Index of Culture and Opportunity*, analyzing current American socio-economic trends.
6. The Foundation publishes the *Budget Chart Book* annually, using visual graphics and charts to show the growth of federal spending, revenue, debt and deficits, and welfare programs. The book relies on 42 visual images to convey its data, which the Foundation provides to the public free of charge.

Figure 2 Examples of Budget Chart Book

7. The Foundation releases the Index of Economic Freedom annually, which is one of its most representative and globally recognized achievements. Created jointly by The Heritage Foundation and *The Wall Street Journal* in 1995 and released annually, this index measures economic freedom worldwide as an annual index and ranking covering 155 countries and regions, making it one of the world's authoritative indicators for evaluating economic freedom. The index values indicate that higher scores mean higher levels of government interference in the economy and thus lower economic freedom. The overall index is calculated by averaging the accumulated values of various indicators. The Foundation's view is that countries or regions with greater economic freedom will have higher long-term economic growth rates and greater prosperity compared to those with less economic freedom. The February 1, 2016, Index of Economic Freedom report showed that Hong Kong had ranked first for 22 consecutive years since the index was first compiled in 1995.

3.3.3 Influence and Role The Foundation effectively transmits its conservative political positions to the public and government through various communication methods and channels. Particularly in online communication, the Foundation was one of the earlier American think tanks to recognize the importance of establishing a website, with Townhall.com, founded in 1995, playing an important role.

In terms of organizing and presenting research results, the publication of important research reports has also been closely integrated with information technology development. The visual big data analysis and presentation methods in the *Budget Chart Book* align with contemporary development and user needs, further enhancing the influence of research reports. Its annually released Index of Economic Freedom is considered one of the Foundation's important contributions to world economic development and receives global attention.

Due to the limitations of the Foundation's conservative political positions, do-

mestic academic circles have conducted relatively little research on it. However, beyond political inclinations and positions, The Heritage Foundation's operational mechanisms and successful influence on government decision-making through conservative policies are commendable. Particularly noteworthy is its refusal to accept government funding while relying on private financial support from individuals, foundations, and corporations—an important foundation for maintaining the integrity of its conservative political positions. For think tanks to achieve true independent operation, they need sound operational mechanisms to guarantee funding sources and income.

Effective research, excellent communication, and first-class advocacy are the three key elements for the Foundation's successful implementation of conservative policies and the crucial factors that have enabled it to play important and even decisive roles and exert influence across multiple administrations, profoundly affecting the handling of both domestic and international issues in the United States. These experiences and practices may offer certain reference value for the construction of high-end think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

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

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