

From System to Mechanism: Reengineering the Development of New-Type Urban Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics—A Case Study of Nanjing (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] In the context of developing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, urban think tanks represent a substantial constituency within the broader think tank ecosystem. Nevertheless, to genuinely meet the developmental demands of the contemporary urbanization tide, they must undergo comprehensive renovation and restructuring upon their existing foundation to actualize their intended functions. [Method/Process] Focusing on the inherent limitations of urban think tanks and the constraints imposed by institutional and mechanistic frameworks, this study employs Nanjing as an illustrative case to investigate novel paradigms for urban think tank development. [Results/Conclusion] The study proposes establishing urban governance efficacy as the fundamental objective, exploring new trajectories for urban think tank construction, reconstructing the urban think tank architecture, innovating institutional mechanisms, and cultivating a development model that embodies distinctive urban characteristics.

Full Text

The Reconstruction from System to Mechanism: Exploring the Construction of New-Type Urban Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics—A Case Study of Nanjing

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Against the backdrop of constructing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, urban think tanks constitute a substantial component of the broader think tank ecosystem. However, to genuinely align with the developmental demands of the current wave of urbanization, comprehensive renovation and reconstruction based on existing foundations are imperative for these think tanks to fulfill their intended roles. **[Method/Process]** This study examines the inherent limitations of urban think tanks and the constraints imposed by systems and mechanisms, using Nanjing as a case study to explore new pathways for urban think tank development. **[Result/Conclusion]** We propose taking urban governance effectiveness as the fundamental objective, investigating new approaches to urban think tank construction, reconstructing the urban think tank system, innovating institutional mechanisms, and forming a development model with distinctive urban characteristics.

Keywords: urban think tank; construction; Nanjing

Classification: C931

Since the reform and opening up, China's modern think tank system construction has truly begun to take shape. Following the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, building new-type think tanks has been elevated to a national strategy, and enhancing think tank construction and development has become an important component of modernizing China's national governance system and capabilities. Across China's vast territory, with its diverse local conditions, a large number of local think tanks—particularly urban think tanks—form the solid foundation of the think tank system.

Developed countries not only possess mature think tank systems but also have well-established urban think tank infrastructures. The United States mandates that cities with populations exceeding one million must establish comprehensive regional development advisory bodies, requiring government decision-making processes to reference consultation proposals and new government projects to include consultation reports at every stage from project initiation, 论证, investment, to acceptance [1]. Nearly all major German cities host think tank-like institutions, such as branches of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, government-controlled management colleges, and investment promotion companies (bureaus) funded by the government, which fulfill urban think tank functions and profoundly influence local economic development [2]. During China's sustained urbanization wave, urban think tanks focusing on city development have already played an irreplaceable role. Yet as a relatively new phenomenon, how should new-type urban think tanks with Chinese characteristics be constructed? How can they truly fulfill their proper functions? These questions warrant further serious investigation.

1.1 New-Type Urban Think Tanks as an “External Brain” for Local Governments to Enhance Governance Capacity

As political and economic landscapes evolve, government decision-makers face more issues across broader scopes. For local governments, new situations constantly emerge and unexpected incidents increase, making it difficult for decision-makers to render timely, objective, accurate, and professional decisions. Particularly in urban environments with complex, coexisting interest structures, public demands for maintaining urban operations, large-scale urbanization, and strategic planning for urban upgrading urgently require urban think tanks to provide forward-looking and strategic solutions for scientific urban governance. Meanwhile, for civil society, cities are the most intimately related public spaces. As society continues to develop and democratic politics advance, public expectations for local government governance capacity are rising. Therefore, new-type urban think tanks familiar with local conditions serve as the most important “external brain” for local governments to elevate decision-making standards and genuinely enhance governance capacity.

1.2 New-Type Urban Think Tanks as Embodiments of Urban Soft Power

Joseph Nye, the originator of the term “soft power,” defined it as “the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion—the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.” In the competition of informatization and economic globalization, think tanks represent an important indicator of national soft power. As urbanization progresses, new-type urban think tanks increasingly embody a city’s soft power, serving as its “IQ,” a reserve of intellectual resources, an innovative source of urban influence, and endowing cities with unique core competitiveness in development.

1.3 New-Type Urban Think Tanks as Designers and Guides of Public Policy

Guiding public opinion and designing new public policies are important functions of think tanks. Think tanks raise public focus on public issues, generate widespread concern and discussion among citizens, and create a public opinion atmosphere for policy formulation—an essential component of the public policy process. Unlike general academic research institutions, think tanks must not only propose their own views and solutions to public problems but also strive to realize these ideas. New-type urban think tanks thus serve as designers and guides of local public policy, providing decision-making consultation solutions that combine strategic, holistic, forward-looking, and operational perspectives from the integration of theory and practice.

1.4 New-Type Urban Think Tanks as Important Pillars of Innovative Cities

Innovative cities are the basic units supporting an innovative nation. Shenzhen was among the first to establish a strategy for building an innovative city, followed by five major national science and technology center cities—Hefei, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Nanjing—proposing similar goals. An increasing number of cities have since updated their concepts and formulated corresponding measures. Think tanks, naturally endowed with innovative characteristics and mission to plan for the future, transform scholars' research findings into government policy products by proposing new ideas, viewpoints, and value goals, thus bridging politics and academia. Against the backdrop of rapidly developing knowledge economy, they can provide maximum intellectual support for innovative city development.

2. Nanjing's Practice in Constructing New-Type Urban Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics—A Case Study of Nanjing Federation of Social Sciences (Academy of Social Sciences)

As research forces positioned between universities and government, urban academies of social sciences established since the 1980s possess outstanding advantages in conducting in-depth research and mastering local and regional economic and social development. With solid theoretical research foundations and extensive engagement in countermeasure research, they maintain close connections with government decision-making departments, forming the mainstay in constructing new-type urban think tanks. During the process of building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, urban academies of social sciences have actively explored transformation paths toward becoming “think tanks” and “brain trusts.”

Nanjing has taken a leading position nationwide in constructing modern new-type think tank systems, providing new pathways and insights for local think tanks to better serve party committee and government decision-making and support strategic responses and countermeasures.

2.1 Basic Practices of Nanjing's New-Type Think Tank Construction

Nanjing, a historic capital of ten dynasties and six dynasties' glory, possesses profound cultural heritage and enjoys an excellent atmosphere for inspiring and leveraging public wisdom to promote governance through intelligence. Since entering the new century, a series of major decisions and deployments by central, provincial, and municipal authorities have continuously posed new and higher requirements for social science development, consistently guiding Nanjing's new-type think tank construction to higher levels. Centered on the urban positioning and strategic goal of building a modern, international, humanistic, and green capital, Nanjing has rapidly developed its new-type think tank system, striving to create the “strongest brain” for policy consultation. Particularly through

integrating the “five-route army” of social science resources in this major social science resource city, Nanjing has highlighted the specialization, internationalization, and integration of think tank construction.

2.1.1 Leading with Policy Consultation Services and Comprehensively Transforming Countermeasure Research

To serve Nanjing’s urban development strategy, Nanjing’s social science community established applied countermeasure research as the primary direction of academic research early on, strengthening decision-making consultation capabilities. Major measures include: (1) Implementing a commissioned research system. Since 2005, major decision-making consultation topics have been designated annually by the municipal party committee and government leaders, with the Nanjing Federation of Social Sciences (Academy of Social Sciences) organizing researchers to conduct in-depth investigations and promptly produce research reports. Over 11 years, more than 200 major social science consultation topics assigned by provincial and municipal leaders have been completed, including “Research on Nanjing’s Characteristic Scientific Development Path,” “Research on Southern Jiangsu Modernization Indicator System,” and “Monitoring, Evaluation, and Construction Strategy for Beautiful China’s Landmark City,” playing an important role in decision-making consultation. (2) Strengthening collaborative research consultation. Numerous high-quality research outcomes have been jointly produced with provincial and municipal party committees, governments, and grassroots departments, including “The Primary Resource—A Concise Reader on the Scientific Talent Outlook” with the Provincial Party Committee Organization Department, and research collections such as “Let the People Judge—A Decade of Government Style Evaluation,” “Blue Book of Civilized Cities,” and “Nanjing—A Hotbed of Innovation” with the Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department and other units. (3) Creating academic activity platforms for policy consultation. Centered on major strategies and development themes, Nanjing has organized the “Nanjing Development High-Level Forum” for 16 consecutive years, the “Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou Regional Collaborative Development Forum” for 8 consecutive years, and the “Nanjing Social Science System Academic Annual Conference” for 10 consecutive years. Additionally, a series of influential large-scale international and domestic academic activities have been held, including the “Global Urban Competitiveness Forum,” “Urban Cultural Innovation High-Level Forum,” large-scale seminars on 30 years of reform and opening up, and the Zheng He and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Forum, forming an important platform for serving policy consultation through academic activities. (4) Strengthening disciplinary construction to consolidate think tank research foundations. Leveraging the advantage of numerous universities in Nanjing and strong basic theoretical research capabilities, Nanjing’s social science community has consolidated and strengthened traditional advantageous disciplines such as philosophy, economics, sociology, education, and historiography while vigorously cultivating and developing emerging and interdisciplinary fields including regional economics, ecological economics, spatial planning, urban culture, and

peace studies, providing important guarantees for the long-term sustainable development of think tanks. Simultaneously, disciplinary position construction has been strengthened. *Nanjing Social Sciences* ranks among the top domestic journals, consistently maintaining first place in various indicators among journals sponsored by social science federations (academies) in sub-provincial cities, and remains the only urban social science journal funded by the National Social Science Fund. The Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences has also become the first liberal arts graduate student training base established by Hohai University and a Jiangsu Province graduate student workstation approved by the Provincial Department of Education and Department of Science and Technology. Disciplinary construction has strengthened policy consultation capabilities, with the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences being designated as a Jiangsu Province Decision-Making Consultation Research Base and a Jiangsu Province Cultural Strength Construction Research Base.

2.1.2 Driving Through Platform Cooperation to Enhance Think Tank Policy Consultation Capacity

Nanjing has integrated multi-party resources using bases as platforms, projects as carriers, and talents as nodes, establishing a think tank development pattern based in Nanjing, gathering surrounding areas, and promoting integration of government, industry, academia, and research. First, extensive cooperation with universities and research institutions both within and outside the province has been carried out to create collaborative innovation platforms. The Nanjing Federation of Social Sciences (Academy of Social Sciences) has jointly established numerous research centers with universities and research institutes, including the “China (Nanjing) Urban Development Strategy Research Institute,” “Yangtze River Delta International Economic and Cultural Research Center,” “Nanjing History and Culture Research Center,” “China (Nanjing) Talent Development Research Center,” “Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou Collaborative Innovation Research Center,” “Nanjing Industrial Collaborative Innovation Research Institute,” “Party Building and Social Governance Research Center,” and “Social Development Evaluation Center.” Notably, this year the “Innovative Urban Development and Evaluation Research Institute,” a provincial-level key cultivation think tank, was established based on the China (Nanjing) Urban Development Strategy Research Institute team—the only think tank among the province’s 24 key think tanks hosted by a municipal unit—while also participating in establishing Jiangsu’s first batch of provincial key think tanks, the “Nanjing Massacre and International Peace Research Institute,” and undertaking the construction of its International Peace School. Second, emphasis has been placed on strengthening cooperation with practical work departments at all levels, extending research tentacles to the grassroots and front lines. The Nanjing Federation of Social Sciences (Academy of Social Sciences) has jointly established numerous research bases and centers with Jianye District, Jiangning District, Jiangdong Gate Memorial Hall, Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau, Xinjiekou Subdistrict, and other entities, including the “Hexi New Town Development Research Insti-

tute,” “Jiangning Population and Development Research Center,” “International Peace Research Institute,” “Nanjing Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Institute,” “Xinjiekou Subdistrict Social Management Innovation Research Center,” “Regionalization and New Organization Party Building Practice Guidance Base,” and “Belt and Road (China-Brunei) History and Culture Research Center.” Particularly noteworthy is that the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences has become one of two direct reporting points for social science theoretical public opinion information to the Central Propaganda Department in Jiangsu Province, and has established 28 social science popularization bases at grassroots subdistrict communities, primary and secondary schools, and large-scale memorial venues. Third, an exchange and research mechanism has been established to learn from advanced domestic and international think tank construction experiences to serve Nanjing’s urban development. In addition to ad hoc arrangements, centralized exchange and research months are scheduled in winter and summer each year, encouraging departments to conduct research individually or jointly. The academy has also participated multiple times in the annual international “New Think Tank Forum” hosted by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, established long-term mutual visit relationships with several foreign institutions including Pusan National University in South Korea and the National University of Singapore, and conducted extensive mutual visits and exchanges with social science circles in sister cities. Fourth, an external researcher system has been established using the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences as a platform, hiring over 100 experts and scholars from within and outside the province to jointly conduct research cooperation.

2.1.3 Targeting Achievement Transformation to Promote Think Tank Value Realization Nanjing’s social science community has actively promoted the realization of think tank functions by constructing diverse policy consultation achievement transformation platforms and carriers. First, experts and scholars are encouraged to serve as mobile theoretical achievement carriers and actively integrate into practical work. They serve as representatives and members in municipal and district people’s congresses, political consultative conferences, and various expert consultation committees, actively offering suggestions and promoting research findings, while extensively participating in drafting legislative bills and policy documents, as well as 论证 and evaluation of major projects. According to incomplete statistics, social science experts and scholars serving as representatives and members in the Nanjing People’s Congress and Political Consultative Conference in recent years alone have submitted nearly 100 proposals and motions, effectively promoting the timely resolution of numerous major practical issues. Second, emphasis is placed on bundled packaging and transformation of outstanding achievements. The Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences holds annual press conferences for research findings attended by major Nanjing media outlets to centrally publicize the year’s major research topics commissioned by municipal leaders and other significant research results. In 2015, a series of research reports implemented in response to General Secre-

tary Xi Jinping' s important instructions on Jiangsu' s development were integrated into the book *Stepping onto a New Level—Nanjing' s Strategic Mission*, representing an innovative rapid transformation of think tank achievements addressing timeliness. In 2016, the academy proactively planned and compiled *Practicing New Concepts, Building a New Nanjing*, theoretically sorting out and summarizing new Nanjing development concepts and practical experiences, equivalent to a comprehensive summary and distillation of recent think tank research findings. The *Blue Book of Nanjing' s Economic and Social Development* is also published annually as reference material for delegates at the “Two Sessions.” Since 2014, the *Jinling Think Tank Series* and *Nanjing Social Science Academic Library* have been published to collectively release the year' s major theoretical research findings from Nanjing' s social science community, becoming influential social science book brands domestically. Third, the “short, flat, and fast” role of internal references is actively utilized to report the latest theoretical research findings and academic frontiers to municipal leaders. To improve the efficiency of pushing dynamic information to Nanjing' s leadership, the municipal federation of social sciences (academy) has recently merged and revised internal publications such as *Policy Consultation Special Report* and *Public Opinion Survey Special Report*. Fourth, two WeChat public accounts, “Jinling Think Tank Circle” (originally “Chengxian Think Tank Circle”) and “Innovative City Research Institute,” have been launched, now becoming authoritative platforms for releasing research findings on new media with continuously increasing attention and forwarding volumes.

2.1.4 Case Examples of Urban Think Tank Construction Transformation During its exploration of comprehensive transformation into an urban think tank, the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences has achieved multiple influential results. Typical cases are presented below as evidence:

Cooperating with Government and Universities to Establish the China (Nanjing) Urban Development Strategy Research Institute. On September 2, 2008, initiated by the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government and jointly founded by Nanjing University, Southeast University, and the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences, this academic research institution is supported by the government, bridging government-intelligence cooperation channels and integrating urban research forces. As a coordinating daily management organization, the institute' s signboard is hung at the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences, while its related research centers are distributed among relevant universities. Three major research centers were initially established: the “China Urban Development Strategy Research Center” led by Nanjing University' s urban studies research forces, the “China Urban Planning, Construction, and Management Research Center” led by Southeast University' s architecture, urban planning, and engineering management disciplines, and the “China Urban Cultural Creativity and Communication Research Center” led by the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences in conjunction with Nanjing University' s Cultural Research Center and Nanjing University

of Aeronautics and Astronautics' Cultural Industry Research Center. The institute has hosted a series of high-level academic forums inviting top industry experts and launched the "China Urban Innovation Capacity Ranking," generating significant influence.

Cooperating with Adjacent Cities to Establish the Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou Think Tank Alliance. In September 2015, the Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou Think Tank Alliance, initiated by the three cities' federations of social sciences, was inaugurated in Nanjing as the province's first regional think tank alliance. This open, regional, and collaborative alliance body is voluntarily formed by the three cities' federations of social sciences (academies), regional social science research institutes, and social organizations, featuring a joint conference and rotating chairmanship system. Its goal is to integrate resources, consolidate human and intellectual capital, break through horizontal and vertical collaboration barriers between research institutions, build a regional social science think tank highland and policy consultation platform for regional development, and serve the integrated, sustainable, and coordinated development of the three cities' politics, economy, culture, society, and ecological civilization in an integrated manner. The three cities' federations of social sciences had previously held nine consecutive "Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou Forums," laying a solid cooperation foundation for establishing the think tank alliance. In October 2016, the alliance held its first regional collaborative innovation forum, coinciding with Jiangsu Provincial Party Secretary Li Qiang's research and planning for the integrated development of Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou, attracting social attention.

Planning Urban Development and 论证 the Hosting of the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games. The Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences participated throughout the entire process of Nanjing's 2014 Youth Olympic Games bid, preparation, organization, and legacy planning. In 2010, during research on the Youth Olympic Games and Nanjing's urban internationalization, Zhou Shuqin, a researcher from the Social Development Institute, participated in the municipal party committee office's research project "Accelerating Nanjing's Urban Internationalization Process with the Youth Olympic Games as an Opportunity," with findings published in nine issues of *Nanjing Research*. In the same year, another researcher from the institute, Zhou Qinggang, was seconded to the Youth Olympic Organizing Committee Office to directly participate in the bid and preparation work. On the eve of the 2014 Youth Olympic Games, Vice President Li Chenghua was transferred to serve as Deputy Director of the Organizing Committee's News and Publicity Department and Assistant Spokesperson for the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, directly engaging in the organization and operation of the games. Since 2014, the academy has undertaken research projects including "Youth Olympic Legacy and Nanjing's Urban Influence" (commissioned by the Youth Olympic Organizing Committee), "Youth Olympic Legacy and Nanjing's Urban Internationalization in the Post-Youth Olympic Era" (key topic of Nanjing Social Science Planning), and "2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games Official Report" (commissioned by the Youth

Olympic Organizing Committee).

Promoting Regional Rise and Advising on the Yangtze River City Cluster Construction. Based on long-term research concerning Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou integration, on July 11, 2016, Li Chenghua, Vice President of the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences and Chief Expert of the Innovative City Research Institute, published “Countermeasures and Suggestions for Building a Metropolitan Belt along the Jiangsu Section of the Yangtze River” in the *Decision-Making Reference* of the Jiangsu Provincial Federation of Social Sciences, and subsequently published the research article “Building an Integrated Metropolitan Belt along the Jiangsu Section of the Yangtze River” in the *Xinhua Daily* think tank edition on the 29th. On the afternoon of September 9, Provincial Party Secretary Li Qiang proposed at an expert symposium that eight cities along the Yangtze River in Jiangsu should strengthen integrated and collaborative development concepts to jointly build the Yangtze River City Cluster. On September 21, during special research on promoting Yangtze River Economic Belt development in Nanjing, he further required the riverine region to intensify integrated development efforts, highlight integration, and jointly build the Yangtze River City Cluster as Jiangsu’s most important growth pole for future collaborative development. On September 30, Li Chenghua published “Countermeasures and Suggestions for the Integrated Construction of the Yangtze River City Cluster” in Issue 46 of the *Think Tank Special Report* by the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department, simultaneously submitting the report directly to Secretary Li Qiang. On October 16, the report received Li Qiang’s instructions—his first instructions to Jiangsu’s provincial think tanks since taking office. Jiangsu has now deployed research topics on Yangtze River City Cluster construction among cities along the river.

2.2 Main Insights from Nanjing’s New-Type Think Tank Construction

Reviewing Nanjing’s sample exploration and practice of new-type think tank construction yields many insights for better implementing the requirements of constructing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, expanding broader spaces, and providing more effective pathways and countermeasures.

2.2.1 Urban Governance Effectiveness as the Fundamental Goal for Enhancing Urban Think Tank Quality

Throughout Nanjing’s think tank construction and development process, while highlighting the basic work orientation of focusing on the center and serving the overall situation, emphasis has been placed on shifting from focusing on the center to integrating into the center, and from serving the overall situation to serving the entire situation. This “integration” and “shift” does not simply involve being interpreters and disseminators of party committee and government decisions but rather serving as the “strongest brain” for party committees and governments—actively thinking, responding rapidly, and achieving seamless integration with party committee and government work across multiple dimensions from program layout and policy

agenda to decision-making evaluation, thereby comprehensively creating a local model of modern urban think tanks.

Serving decision-making is the fundamental manifestation of think tank value and the starting point and destination of think tank construction. The core function of urban think tanks primarily lies in serving local party committees, governments, and economic and social development, focusing on major strategic, practical, and policy issues, targeting the construction of “think tanks” and “brain trusts,” and providing strong intellectual support and smart services for scientific decision-making in urban governance. Enhancing urban think tank quality aims to improve urban governance effectiveness and must focus on the center, serve the overall situation, enhance “closeness” and “fit,” fully exert influence on governance decisions, and truly demonstrate a city think tank’s strength.

2.2.2 Sound Top-Level Design as the Key Measure for Building Urban Think Tank Systems Over the past decade, the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences has continuously demonstrated its position as Nanjing’s core urban think tank. Its construction in research consultation, academic achievements, service platforms, talent teams, and institutional mechanisms has placed it in the first echelon of urban academies of social sciences. *Nanjing Social Sciences* has become a first-class domestic social science academic journal with the greatest influence among similar urban academy journals. From the overall perspective of the “five-route army,” Nanjing, as an education hub with numerous universities, exhibits significant spillover effects from universities and research institutions. Based on this, the continuous strengthening of top-level design in think tank construction has enabled the rapid formation of a modern Nanjing new-type think tank system architecture with the academy as the core, think tank alliances as the central axis, and the “five-route army” as the periphery.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized strengthening high-end think tank construction, and the central government has issued the *Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics*. In 2014, Nanjing issued the *Implementation Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Strong Social Science City*, which, in addition to further implementing the spirit of Jiangsu Province’s 2012 *Implementation Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Strong Social Science Province*, specifically proposed the new goal of building Nanjing into a first-class strong social science city domestically by 2020. More importantly, it proposed constructing a new-type “think tank” system with Nanjing characteristics that meets decision-making needs. On September 15, 2015, Nanjing convened a conference on building a strong social science city, making overall deployments for this work, particularly elevating think tank construction to a new height and requiring the seizing of Nanjing’s multiple national strategic overlay opportunities to implement think tank construction innovation projects. This year, with the breaking of many “ceilings” in the research field, Nanjing is

actively preparing to issue “Opinions on Strengthening New-Type Think Tank Construction,” using top-level design thinking to achieve greater breakthroughs in comprehensively strengthening new-type think tank system construction.

2.2.3 Institutional Mechanism Innovation as a Powerful Driving Force for Urban Think Tank Construction Through years of think tank construction practice, Nanjing has recognized that modern think tanks must serve both decision-making and social work, pursuing not only “leadership instructions” but also public satisfaction. This requires institutional and mechanism innovation, such as establishing research systems that encourage “going out” and “going deep,” implementing the “three basics” project (grassroots, foundation, and bases) to form effective mechanisms and platform carriers, and jointly building numerous research bases with districts, departments, subdistrict communities, and schools—establishing cooperative research institutes, institutes, research bases, and research centers outside the academy to support communication platforms with grassroots levels. The “Think Tank Circle” brand has been created to build think tank communication and idea-sharing platforms for the information society, with core components including WeChat public account publicity platforms and open small-scale academic exchange and discussion platforms to strengthen achievement publicity and transformation.

Institutional construction with long-term and fundamental significance is crucial and requires continuous innovation in working mechanisms as situations change, bringing powerful momentum to think tank construction. China’s think tank development, particularly urban think tank development, remains in its initial stage with imperfect systems and mechanisms awaiting innovation. Therefore, in vigorously promoting new-type urban think tank construction, innovation consciousness must be strengthened. By establishing and improving incentive, competition, cooperation, and supervision mechanisms, the comparative advantages of urban think tank organizations across regions and categories can be fully released, continuously enhancing the vitality of urban think tank development and improving core competitiveness in urban think tank construction.

2.2.4 Aggregating Professional Talent as the Basic Condition for Enhancing Urban Think Tank Services Think tanks provide expert intellectual services, and building a professional talent team constitutes foundational construction for think tank development. The Nanjing Federation of Social Sciences currently has over 80 professionally guided societies with tens of thousands of members. By the end of 2015, six municipal districts had established district-level social science federations, achieving full coverage in the four main urban districts. This constitutes an important component of Nanjing’s think tank talent pool. In recent years, the municipal federation has continuously cultivated teams and trained talents through learning and training, cooperative research, organizing academic salons, and conducting society excellence evaluations, with many society members completing multiple national and provincial-level major research projects with notable achievements. As a specialized academic research

institution of the municipal government, the Nanjing Academy of Social Sciences has achieved a senior professional title rate of nearly 80% and a doctoral degree rate of 90% among its research personnel through high-level recruitment and cultivation, ranking among the top domestic urban academies. Its internal institutions have also expanded from four institutes to five institutes plus one academy this year, with staffing increased by over 50%.

Beyond emphasizing talent construction in leading think tanks, Nanjing also values promoting think tank cooperation and widely absorbing experts from all sectors to form a joint fleet for countermeasure services. In 2013, the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government issued the *Opinions on Strengthening “Think Tank” Support Functions and Improving the Scientific and Democratic Level of Decision-Making*, conducting top-level design for Nanjing’s think tank construction and proposing the establishment of the Nanjing “Think Tank Alliance” to create a think tank consortium based in Nanjing, facing the nation, and looking globally, forming a sound talent aggregation mechanism. In September 2015, Nanjing took the lead in proposing the official establishment of the Nanjing-Zhenjiang-Yangzhou Think Tank Alliance with the three cities’ federations of social sciences (academies) as leaders. This is the first regional think tank alliance in Jiangsu Province—an open, loosely structured, and collaborative think tank alliance body voluntarily formed by the three cities’ federations of social sciences (academies), regional social science research institutes, and social organizations—that will play a role in aggregating cross-regional talent and resources to provide specialized think tank services.

3.1 Challenges in Urban Think Tank Construction

Currently, urban think tanks commonly face several problems. First, there are few high-end think tanks. Most urban think tanks are institutional urban academies of social sciences, party schools, or research departments attached to party and government organs, characterized by small institutions and few personnel with low think tank status. Urban think tanks with dozens or hundreds of researchers are rare, and high-end think tanks with leading positions provincially or nationally are even rarer. As a new phenomenon, social think tanks mostly lack funding channels, policy consultation channels, and professional talent teams, making it more difficult to gain attention, let alone develop toward high-end status.

Second, achievement quality is not high and influence is insufficient. Numerous achievements involve repetitive research that is overly macroscopic and conceptual, lacking innovation and specificity, neglecting specific problems and micro-level research, offering little practical guidance, and demonstrating weak operability. Strategic research achievements lack forward-looking and reserve qualities, with many merely interpreting strategies or annotating leadership intentions.

Third, objectivity and credibility are insufficient. Due to generally small service

scopes and limited business volumes, urban think tanks remain dominated by institutional think tanks. Coupled with their small-circle characteristics, the objectivity and critical nature of their reports are often inadequate, reducing public credibility.

Fourth, talent sources are singular and hierarchically low. Constrained by objective conditions, urban think tanks have relatively singular talent channels, particularly lacking talents from government departments and frontline grass-roots levels. Talent hierarchies are also low, with a severe shortage of think tank scholars with domestic and international influence.

These phenomena are constrained by both the natural defects of urban think tanks and institutional and mechanism restrictions. Specifically, they include: (1) Local government departments lack awareness of purchasing consulting services, the think tank market mechanism remains to be cultivated, and society as a whole lacks intellectual property concepts. (2) Many cities have not fully recognized think tank functions, have not established sound think tank participation in decision-making mechanisms, and lack procedural norms and legal guarantees in decision-making consultation and policy evaluation stages. (3) Think tank construction lacks overall planning, has not formed a think tank system, features unclear positioning, and lacks institutional guarantees. (4) Exchange and cooperation mechanisms are not smooth. Institutional think tank researchers face policy restrictions from government institutions when conducting international exchanges and studies, and think tanks lack open cooperation mechanisms, with dispersed research forces and resources resulting in narrow think tank perspectives and difficulty improving research standards. (5) Research funding faces many constraints. Urban think tank research relies more heavily on fiscal funds, and it is difficult to break through many unreasonable policies in fund management at the local level, seriously affecting think tank research enthusiasm. For social think tanks, although not constrained by fund management, their limited fundraising channels and obvious fund shortages also affect research capacity. (6) Achievement transformation and promotion platforms are lacking. Most urban think tanks have narrow transformation channels, with few media awareness besides a few internal references, and even less new media platforms for public interaction. (7) Achievement evaluation and incentive mechanisms are not adapted to urban think tank positioning. On one hand, think tank evaluation is difficult to scientifically measure, particularly lacking evaluation indicators for policy influence; on the other hand, constrained by institutional performance management, it is difficult to fully mobilize researcher enthusiasm and effectively improve urban think tanks' attractiveness to talent.

3.2.1 Researching New Paths for Urban Think Tank Construction

The primary issue in constructing new-type urban think tanks with Chinese characteristics is exploring their construction paths. Currently, research on Chinese think tanks remains in the stage of historical investigation and experience summarization, without forming a systematic and authoritative theoretical system,

and research on the vast number of urban (local) think tanks is particularly lacking. Drawing on and absorbing research achievements from advanced think tank construction both domestically and internationally, deeply studying China's national conditions, and combining urban local characteristics to explore construction paths from the practical exploration of the macro political ecology of urban think tank development, meso-level relationships with decision-making systems, and micro-level dilemmas in the development of new-type urban think tank systems and mechanisms has important guiding significance for the practice of constructing new-type urban think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

3.2.2 Constructing a New-Type Urban Think Tank System

The construction of a new-type urban think tank system aims to optimize idea production and maximize the benefits of integrated innovation. To build a sound think tank system, the primary requirement is to maintain a firm political direction—an unambiguous fundamental principle. Clearly understanding the political attributes of party and government decision-making departments is the prerequisite for decision-making consultation research. Second, planning and design must be clear and continuously adjusted in practice to achieve the overall requirements of “clear positioning, distinctive characteristics, moderate scale, and rational layout.”

Think tank establishment should distinguish different types and functions, reflecting professional division of labor in research fields while also having institutional arrangements for interdisciplinary and cross-industry collaborative innovation. Key content of system construction should focus on think tank environment cultivation, overall think tank layout, and think tank platform construction, which should highlight specialized development, international vision, and modern management, creating a well-functioning organic whole and forming a vibrant think tank ecosystem.

3.2.3 Innovating Urban Think Tank Systems and Mechanisms

Constructing new-type urban think tanks is required by the new situation and new tasks facing urban development. Comprehensive deepening of reforms and profound social transformation have created numerous social contradictions and problems, making it difficult to ensure scientific decision-making by relying solely on the wisdom of a few individuals. Currently, urban decision-making systems and consultation systems are increasingly demonstrating democratization and scientization characteristics. How to explore more practical paths within the existing institutional framework to enable decision-making suggestions to be more smoothly “delivered upward,” while reducing policy constraints from local governments on think tank development, exploring new vitality in systems and mechanisms, promoting rapid growth of civilian think tanks, improving the independence and scientific nature of urban think tank research, and enabling think tanks to function in more areas requires innovating urban think tank management systems, mechanisms, and methods. This includes policy frameworks and

management norms for think tank construction, guiding ideas and management methods, improving the construction of urban think tank functional institutions, conducting review and evaluation work for think tank construction at all levels and categories, improving internal governance structures of think tanks, establishing standardized think tank evaluation mechanisms, enhancing think tanks' comprehensive capabilities and social credibility, and truly achieving "top-level, ground-level, innovative, and open" operations.

3.3 Countermeasures for Urban Think Tank Construction

China's think tank construction has entered a completely new development stage. Constructing new-type urban think tanks with Chinese characteristics will follow the new requirements, positioning, and direction proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping and the central government's opinions on think tank construction, based on new urban development practices, striving to explore think tank construction patterns, innovate think tank development models, and endow think tank construction with urban characteristics.

3.3.1 Creating a Think Tank-Friendly Environment Regarding environment cultivation, first, it is necessary to standardize the development order of urban think tanks, create a favorable survival environment, ensure relative autonomy for institutional think tanks, maintain relative independence for civilian think tanks, and create conditions for close collaboration and fair competition among think tanks. Second, think tanks should be provided with an ideological market game environment, where urban party and government departments at all levels should form the ideological concept and behavioral pattern of consulting think tanks for major decision-making, conducting full-chain transformation from decision-making methods to policy implementation evaluation to provide embedded space for think tank services. Third, an audience environment should be created for think tanks to enlighten public wisdom, guide public opinion, integrate into and influence society.

3.3.2 Planning a Rationalized Think Tank Layout Regarding think tank layout, based on urban characteristics and development positioning, existing think tanks should be integrated and sorted, distinguishing different natures, types, and functional positions for optimized combination, highlighting advantages, clarifying division of labor, and avoiding homogeneous repetitive construction. Attention should also be paid to controlling scale to avoid following trends and 野蛮 growth. A think tank group should be cultivated with leading dragon-head think tanks and core think tanks as guides, supplemented by small yet specialized characteristic think tanks and social think tanks, forming systematic and powerful decision-making consultation service capabilities.

3.3.3 Building Intensive Think Tank Platforms Regarding think tank platform construction, more is not necessarily better; maintenance costs and

usage efficiency should be considered for intensive design. First, establish multi-level project planning platforms for unified decision-making consultation project planning and release, which can be direct propositions from urban decision-making departments, social science fund projects from social science planning departments, or proactive propositions from think tank associations (alliances) themselves. Second, establish collaborative innovation research platforms to create research bases with different directions and themes for think tank collaboration, encouraging cooperation to solve major strategic problems. Third, establish public information platforms at different levels for information exchange and sharing. Fourth, establish achievement transformation and dissemination platforms, giving full play to the channel role of the city's publishing institutions and news media, and encouraging think tanks to speak out on higher-level dissemination platforms to expand urban influence.

3.3.4 Enhancing Specialized Think Tank Capacity A city is a complex giant system and the largest artificial ecosystem, involving all aspects of economic and social development with increasingly detailed and higher requirements for specialization. As research institutions, think tanks pursue specialization as their foundation for existence [3]. Faced with complex and changing urban society and the current situation of comprehensive deepening reform, new major theoretical and practical problems constantly emerge, urgently requiring high-level countermeasures that transcend the specialization of practical work departments. Under conditions of increasingly vigorous and pluralistic competition in think tank construction, improving specialization levels is also necessary to 争取 survival and development space. Each city has its own characteristics and realities, and building new-type urban think tanks with Chinese characteristics and reflecting unique urban advantages also requires targeted strengthening of specialized construction.

In the era of globalization, building professional think tanks also requires a global perspective and international vision. Globalized urban competition is also competition among urban think tanks. New-type think tank construction must align with international think tank construction. Only by conducting think tank construction from a global perspective, carrying out targeted international urban cooperation, and exploring the establishment of international information communication and acquisition channels can challenges from economic and financial, scientific and technological, and ideological fields be overcome and the ability to resist various risks be enhanced.

The hallmark of specialized development is the high-endization of research findings. High-end achievements are the core competitiveness of think tanks. Therefore, efforts should be made to build a batch of high-level research bases, create a high-quality research team, and form a batch of specialized and refined research products.

3.3.5 Pursuing Modernized Think Tank Governance Without modernized governance, there can be no modernized urban think tanks. Urban think tanks should gradually establish normalized organizational coordination mechanisms, institutionalized decision-making participation mechanisms, specialized division of labor and coordination mechanisms, market-oriented competition and selection mechanisms, multi-path achievement release mechanisms, full-process tracking and evaluation systems, and comprehensive support and guarantee mechanisms in their operational mechanisms, constructing a three-dimensional framework for think tank construction, management, and utilization, and laying the institutional foundation for modernized governance.

Civilian think tanks should be cultivated, managed, and utilized with improved relevant laws and systems. A favorable environment should be provided for civilian think tank development, including fair opportunities to access government information, data, and research topics; channels, bridges, and platforms should be established for communication between civilian think tank institutions and decision-making departments; and various think tanks should be guided to develop orderly and participate in fair competition.

3.3.6 Encouraging Diversified Think Tank Models In today's era, cross-departmental, cross-disciplinary, and cross-cultural integration in think tank research has become a major trend. No single department, discipline, or individual can exhaustively and fundamentally solve any economic, social, or regional development problem. New-type urban think tank construction requires breaking institutional, departmental, and disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, through institutional and mechanism innovation, cooperation must be strengthened and talent aggregated to elevate levels and form synergies. First, encourage diversification of think tank main body forms, allowing government think tanks, social think tanks, and civilian think tanks to blossom together. Second, promote diversification of think tank funding sources, which can include government purchase of services, enterprise and individual donations, profits from think tanks' own public activities and think tank product sales, etc. Third, promote diversification of think tank systems and mechanisms, reducing think tank bureaucratization, hierarchical structuring, and departmentalization, improving think tank talent identification standards, breaking restrictions based on administrative rank, working years, academic degrees, etc., and particularly opening the revolving door between think tanks and government to promote free talent flow.

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

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