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Postprint: Analysis of the Policy Influence Mechanisms of Chinese Social Think Tanks

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The lack of policy influence channels constitutes a critical constraint on social think tanks' ability to exert policy influence. If social think tanks can successfully overcome these channel limitations and forge distinctive yet effective policy influence mechanisms, this would represent a substantial contribution to establishing democratic and scientific public policymaking in China. [Method/Process] This paper first systematically reviews the theoretical literature on think tank policy influence. On this basis, it synthesizes the policy influence channels of social think tanks both domestically and internationally, and conducts a case study analysis of the Center for China and Globalization's (CCG) influence on international talent policy. [Results/Conclusion] The findings indicate that social think tanks can influence policy through multiple avenues, including participation in government research projects and organization of academic conferences. Although mechanism establishment provides social think tanks with opportunities to engage in various policy stages—including proposal, drafting, and revision—their probability of accessing the substantive influence phase of policy consultation remains considerably lower than that of official think tanks. The study recommends that the government provide enhanced support to social think tanks in areas such as funding and information access.

Full Text

Research on the Policy Influence Mechanism of China's Social Think Tanks: A Case Study of the Center for China & Globalization (CCG) and Its Promotion of International Talent Policies

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] The lack of access to policy-making processes constitutes a major constraint on the policy influence of social think tanks. If social think tanks can overcome these channel limitations and develop distinctive, effective policy influence mechanisms, this would represent a tremendous contribution to establishing democratic and scientific public policymaking in China. [Method/Process] This paper first systematically reviews theories of think tank policy influence at the theoretical level. On this basis, it summarizes policy influence channels for social think tanks both domestically and internationally, and conducts a relevant analysis using the Center for China & Globalization's (CCG) influence on international talent policies as a case study. [Result/Conclusion] The study finds that social think tanks can influence policy through multiple means, including participation in government research projects and hosting academic conferences. Although social think tanks theoretically have opportunities to participate in policy formulation, drafting, and revision stages, their probability of entering the substantive policy consultation phase remains low compared to official think tanks. The paper recommends that the government provide greater support to social think tanks in terms of funding and information access.

Keywords: China's social think tanks; public policy influence mechanism; think tank case study; Center for China & Globalization (CCG)

Classification Number: G201

In 2015, the General Offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics," which defined such think tanks as non-profit research and consulting institutions focusing on strategic issues and public policy to serve the Party and government's scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making. The opinions explicitly identified social think tanks as a component of this system. Regarding the connotation of social think tanks, we believe they are non-official, non-profit public policy research institutions that meet three characteristics:

Characteristic 1: Financial Independence. Diversified funding sources without attachment to any interest group.

Characteristic 2: Research Independence. Research topics, processes, and conclusions are free from interference by other forces.

Characteristic 3: Intellectual Independence. Intellectual products are detached from any vested interests, advocating policies from an objective standpoint.

Compared with government-affiliated think tanks, social think tanks enjoy greater financial independence, conduct more "down-to-earth" policy research, and can better reflect public demands. However, social think tanks currently lack policy influence channels, which significantly constrains their impact. If they can overcome these limitations and develop distinctive, effective policy in-

fluence mechanisms, this would constitute a major contribution to establishing democratic and scientific public policymaking in China.

According to the 2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report published by the University of Pennsylvania's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), CCG ranked 7th among China's top think tanks and 110th globally, making it one of the two highest-ranked social think tanks in China. Over the past two years, CCG has received five directives from central and Beijing municipal leaders. Since its establishment in 2008, CCG has directly participated in or promoted the introduction of numerous policy documents, including the Thousand Talents Plan, talent visas, benefits for Chinese green card holders, regulations on entry and exit administration for foreigners, and China's accession to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This paper analyzes the establishment process of policy influence mechanisms for China's current social think tanks, using CCG's promotion of international talent-related policies as a case study.

Since the 1970s, research on think tanks has gradually developed a relatively mature theoretical framework. As an important field in think tank studies, theories of think tank policy influence can be divided into three levels: macro, meso, and micro.

1.1 Macro-Level Theories

1.1.1 Pluralist Theory Pluralist theorists such as Truman [1] and Dahl argue that policy represents the outcome of the state or government weighing the interests and demands of various groups. Pluralist theory presupposes the policy process as a coordination mechanism among different interest groups within a nation, with competition among different factions' interests and policy proposals during the policy process leading to final policy outputs. Think tanks, by virtue of their independence and professionalism, can participate in this competition to influence policy [2].

1.1.2 Elite Theory Elite theorists such as Mills and Dye contend that policy is determined by a small number of powerful social elites. According to elite theory, the directors and researchers of think tanks are the most critical factors affecting and even determining think tank influence. This theory presupposes the policy process as an interactive mechanism among different elite strata, where the key to successfully influencing decisions lies in whether different strata can mobilize their respective political resources [2].

1.1.3 State Theory State theorists such as Theda Skocpol argue that although policy is influenced by administrative bureaucracies and other factors, the state itself is an important policy actor, and think tank efforts do not necessarily translate into final policy outputs.

1.2 Meso-Level Theories

Beyond macro perspectives, scholars have introduced theoretical studies of think tank policy influence to the meso-level by examining the policy process. Ripley et al. [3] divide the policy process into agenda setting, goal and plan formation and legitimation, plan implementation, evaluation of implementation and impact, and decisions about the future of policies and programs. John Kingdon [4] proposed the famous Multiple Streams Framework, attributing the policy agenda-setting process to the convergence of three forces in the government decision-making system: the problem stream, the political stream, and the policy stream. He argues that only when these three streams converge, with policy entrepreneurs driving the opening of a “policy window,” does the likelihood of policy alternatives entering the decision-making agenda increase substantially.

1.3 Micro-Level Theories

Beyond macro and meso levels, a micro-level theory for studying think tank policy influence is the “knowledge utilization” theory. Carol Weiss and Sundquist are important representatives of this school. Their primary concern is “what paths knowledge takes to influence policy” or “how knowledge is transformed into policy.” To this end, scholars have developed numerous models. For instance, Wittrock [5] argues that knowledge transformation into policy can be divided into four modes: the enlightenment model, the classical bureaucratic model, the technocratic model, and the engineering model. Weiss argues that research as data, research as ideas, and research as argument exert influence on policy at different stages and in different contexts of the policy process.

2. Policy Influence Mechanisms of American Think Tanks

After a century of development, American think tanks lead the world in both quantity and influence. Among the most internationally renowned American think tanks, the majority are social think tanks, such as RAND Corporation, Brookings Institution, and The Heritage Foundation. Therefore, this paper primarily examines American social think tanks, hoping to derive lessons for China’ s social think tanks.

Research [2] shows that American social think tanks employ different emphases in achieving policy influence. For instance, The Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute place great importance on media promotion, supporting public forums, and publishing opinion journals. In contrast, the Project for the New American Century and the Center for Security Policy emphasize private exchanges with policymakers. We believe these differences are closely related to both the political environment in which think tanks operate and their own resources. Overall, however, American social think tanks primarily achieve policy influence by playing roles such as “the government’ s external brain” and “the public’ s intellectual guide.”

2.1 The Government' s External Brain

A major characteristic of the American decision-making system is the separation of powers, creating a system of checks and balances among Congress, the government, and the judiciary during the decision-making process. America' s open political system, unique political culture, diverse government communication mechanisms, convenient revolving door mechanism, and comprehensive laws and regulations enable social forces such as think tanks to wield strong policy influence. The American decision-making system allows think tanks to influence national policy decisions by affecting the president, Congress, and government departments.

2.1.1 Influencing Congress American think tanks influence Congress through three main channels. First, they establish liaison offices in the Senate and House of Representatives to continuously explain their support or opposition to specific proposals to members of Congress and their advisors. Second, they pay attention to hearings organized by various parliamentary committees, spreading ideas to influential members through testimony. In 2015, Brookings Institution experts testified before Congress 32 times, providing reliable foundations for legislation. Third, they regularly invite important congressional leaders to give reports and attend relevant meetings at think tanks. For example, the Hoover Institution has hosted Washington seminars in Palo Alto since 1980, inviting bipartisan members of Congress and members of various Senate and House committees.

2.1.2 Influencing the President American think tanks' influence on the president and presidential team manifests in two aspects [6]: First, after taking office, presidents often obtain various policy recommendations through relatively fixed advisory teams and think tank groups. Second, presidential candidates use think tanks to understand the internal rules of Washington' s political circle while acquiring substantial professional knowledge, deepening their understanding of political issues, and strengthening the theoretical foundations of their policy ideas.

2.1.3 Influencing Government Departments American think tanks' influence on government departments [6] is primarily reflected in their impact on government decision-making and personnel. On one hand, American think tanks influence decisions by undertaking government research projects and using their research findings. On the other hand, they emphasize personnel exchange and training with government departments to achieve integration with decision-making circles. Notably, interpersonal communication is an important form through which American think tanks exert policy influence. The "revolving door" mechanism builds interpersonal networks, allowing researchers to directly hold positions in government, contact government officials via phone, email, and social media, maintain close relationships with members of Congress, directly participate in government decision-making hearings, and engage in high-level

decision-maker consultations. During research in Washington, the author found that among Brookings Institution's more than 200 current researchers, approximately half have previously worked in government, including six who have served as ambassadors abroad. Using interpersonal networks to disseminate research findings and exert policy influence is quite common.

2.2 Influencing the Elite Class

Although elites are not at the core of decision-making and do not have direct influence over decisions, their social status and influence determine their enormous indirect impact on policymaking. American think tanks influence elite classes by publishing academic papers in scholarly journals, publishing books, and organizing seminars. For instance, Brookings Institution has a strong book-publishing culture and even maintains its own publishing house, which published 38 books in 2015.

American think tanks also frequently use various academic seminars and press conferences to publicly articulate new ideas and viewpoints, conducting broad social dissemination through media power to seek public opinion support for think tank ideas. Again using Brookings Institution as an example, the institution's annual reports show that it holds approximately 200 public events each year.

2.3 Influencing the General Public

As the ultimate audience of policy decisions, the general public directly affects policy implementation effectiveness. Consequently, the public constitutes a force that cannot be underestimated in the government decision-making process. American think tanks often use mass media platforms such as television, newspapers, or online media to publicly express their views, providing ideas and perspectives to the public, guiding public understanding of specific policies, and influencing public opinion.

Particularly noteworthy is that in the internet era, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other platforms have become "new frontiers" for American think tanks to promote their ideas. For example, the Center for Strategic and International Studies uses iPhone apps to publish research findings, facilitating users' access to new think tank perspectives.

3. Policy Influence Channels of China's Social Think Tanks

In terms of channels, the diversification of policy influence channels represents the greatest characteristic of China's social think tank policy influence mechanisms.

3.1 Participation in Discussions and Drafting of Important Party and Government Program Documents

The government forms specific policy issues into research projects and requires think tanks to provide policy recommendations or alternative solutions through directed commissioning or bidding. These projects are closely related to major current decisions, allowing social think tanks to intervene in the policy process by participating in publicly bid projects.

3.2 Conveying Research Perspectives to Decision-Makers Through Various Internal References

Chinese think tanks, especially official ones, frequently convey research perspectives to decision-makers through internal reference reports, such as the Central Party School's "Theoretical Internal Reference" and the Chinese Academy of Governance's "Consultation and Research." CCG regularly submits timely and targeted "Policy Recommendations" to relevant central ministries on important domestic and international social, political, economic, and educational issues, receiving directives from national leaders on multiple occasions. For example, Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), issued directives regarding CCG's recommendations on solving social security issues for returned overseas talents.

3.3 Influencing Decisions Through Academic Conferences and Forums

Hosting academic conferences and forums provides a platform for think tanks to connect domestic and international political, academic, and business circles. On this platform, think tanks can actively set topics and agendas, and achieve face-to-face exchanges with policymakers by inviting decision-makers to participate. Carefully edited conference records can be transformed into policy recommendations, books, and public opinion viewpoints. CCG hosts more than 60 international activities annually, creating several think tank activity brands such as the "China and Globalization Roundtable Forum," "China Talent 50 Forum," "China Enterprise Globalization Forum," and the "Forum on Chinese Students Studying Abroad," which it has organized for ten consecutive years. Tens of thousands of domestic and international guests have participated in CCG events, generating numerous policy recommendations and building consensus through these public activities, thereby directly or indirectly influencing policy.

3.4 Influencing Decisions Through Lectures and Training

In China, some important experts and scholars have opportunities to lecture decision-makers, explaining important practical issues and elaborating their viewpoints, thereby exerting important influence on decisions. For instance, CCG Director Dr. Wang Huiyao was invited by the Organization Department

of the CPC Central Committee to deliver a lecture on international talent competition strategy to nearly 300 officials. CCG experts have also been invited to the China Executive Leadership Academy in Pudong and the Central Party School on multiple occasions.

3.5 Influencing Elite Groups and Subsequently Policy Through Publications

The influence of publications can transcend time and space. By publishing works that influence elite readers and build consensus, think tanks can indirectly achieve policy influence. CCG publishes approximately five Blue Books annually through the Social Sciences Academic Press, including the “Report on the Development of Chinese Returnees,” “Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad,” “Report on International Migration in China,” and “Report on Chinese Enterprise Globalization,” which have become branded Blue Book series. CCG has published dozens of Chinese and English books, among which the book “National Strategy: Talent Changes the World” was recommended by Vice Premier Wang Yang.

3.6 Influencing Public Opinion Through Media Relations and Self-Media Platforms

Social think tanks can also actively utilize news media to set agendas, thereby influencing domestic and international public opinion. CCG has established relationships with nearly 100 domestic and international media outlets, including *People's Daily*, *Global Times*, *Time*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and *Lianhe Zaobao*. CCG has also built self-media platforms including Chinese and English websites, blogs, Weibo, WeChat, Twitter, and Facebook. Its Sina blog has received more than 4.5 million visits. As an international social think tank, CCG emphasizes influencing international public opinion and amplifying the voice of Chinese think tanks in the international arena.

3.7 Influencing Relevant Policies Through Impact on International Community, Organizations, and Academia

International organizations and research institutions exert enormous influence on international public opinion and public sentiment. Chinese think tanks can actively set agendas by participating in international organization activities, establishing cooperative relationships with international research institutions, and jointly releasing reports, thereby influencing the international community and subsequently affecting policy. CCG cooperates with more than 20 international organizations and research institutions.

4.1 Case Study: CCG' s Influence on International Talent-Related Policies

Since its establishment in 2008, CCG has called for reforms in international talent policies through multiple forms, including publishing works, conducting research projects, and submitting internal references. CCG advocates for more open talent policies, including relaxing foreigner entry-exit visa policies (such as establishing long-term valid visas and expanding visa exemption agreements), lowering thresholds for foreign talent residence (including canceling current restrictions on positions and age), attracting foreign talent including international students to China (through talent programs, allowing foreign students to work and reside in China, and attracting overseas Chinese talent), strengthening international talent services (such as improving social security services for overseas talent), promoting China' s accession to IOM, and calling for the establishment of a national immigration bureau and a World Talent Organization (a “WTO for talent”).

In early 2008, the United Front Work Department planned to hold a symposium on overseas students. As one of the organizers, CCG invited experts including Qian Yingyi to discuss introducing high-level overseas talent. In the same year, CCG participated in the feasibility research for the “National Medium- and Long-Term Talent Development Plan (2010-2020)” organized by the Organization Department, responsible for the special research topic “International Talent Competition Strategy,” submitting a 100,000-word “Research Report on International Talent Competition Strategy.” At a time when the global financial crisis was unfolding, CCG recommended accelerating the “bottom-fishing” for international talent, which became an important factor in the early introduction of the Thousand Talents Plan at the end of 2008. During the implementation of the Thousand Talents Plan, CCG repeatedly made recommendations on operational issues. In 2009, CCG submitted a “Report on Improving the Thousand Talents Plan” to the Organization Department, proposing specific implementation suggestions. In 2013, CCG organized a symposium attended by officials from the Organization Department, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the United Front Work Department, where CCG submitted “Recommendations for Improving the Thousand Talents Plan.” CCG also repeatedly proposed expanding the scope of the Thousand Talents Plan at various consultation meetings, promoting the introduction of the Foreign Expert Thousand Talents Plan and the Young Thousand Talents Plan.

4.1.2 Promoting Talent Visas in Immigration Law Immigration laws and regulations in developed countries place great emphasis on talent introduction, whereas Chinese laws and regulations have traditionally focused more on security and management. In 2011, CCG submitted recommendations to the National People' s Congress and state ministries to “add a ‘talent visa’ category to the Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People' s Republic of China.” Subsequently, CCG repeatedly recommended adding a “talent visa” to

the Organization Department, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Ministry of Public Security, United Front Work Department, and National People' s Congress. In March 2012, in an interview with *China Youth Daily* [7], CCG again proposed that “the Chinese government could further emancipate its thinking on the issue of talent mobility access, such as whether it could establish a talent visa category like other developed countries to better attract international talent to develop in China.” On June 30, 2012, the “Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People' s Republic of China” was officially passed at the 27th session of the Standing Committee of the Eleventh National People' s Congress. One of the brightest highlights of this law was the inclusion of “talent visa” as a new category.

4.1.3 Promoting Green Card Benefits In 2004, China first implemented a permanent residence permit system using internationally accepted practices. However, the threshold for China' s green card was very high, with very few issued, leading media to call it “the world' s most difficult green card to obtain.” Since 2011, commissioned by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, CCG completed research on “Improving China' s Green Card System.” CCG experts repeatedly recommended relaxing green card thresholds in media interviews. For example, on February 28, 2012, CCG Director Dr. Wang Huiyao suggested in an interview with *The China Press* that China should “implement overseas citizen cards and overseas Chinese cards, continuously relaxing the existing green card system to attract more overseas talent (including overseas Chinese) to serve China.” In December 2012, 25 ministries including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Organization Department, Ministry of Public Security, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly issued the “Measures for Relevant Benefits for Foreigners Holding Chinese Permanent Residence (Green Cards),” stipulating that green card holders could enjoy a series of conveniences in life and work, including purchasing property, buying train and plane tickets, and accommodation. In 2015, the Ministry of Public Security announced further expansion of the scope of work units for foreigners applying for green cards, and China' s green card threshold began to “loosen.” On June 16, 2015, CCG published an article titled “Don' t Let Talent Recruitment Get Stuck on the ‘Green Card’ ” in *Global Times*, proposing multiple recommendations for further lowering the green card threshold. Major mainstream media widely republished this article, arousing broad social attention.

On January 12, 2016, the Ministry of Public Security announced “20 Entry-Exit Policy Measures to Support Beijing' s Innovation-Driven Development,” involving permanent residence permits, entrepreneurship and employment, and naturalization for foreigners and ethnic Chinese, to be implemented from March 1, 2016. CCG participated throughout this research project, and multiple recommendations for lowering green card thresholds, such as allowing foreign Chinese with doctoral degrees to directly apply for green cards and canceling the 65-year age limit for green card applications, were adopted by the Ministry of Public Security.

4.1.5 Promoting Balanced Development of Outbound and Inbound Study In the “Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad 2014,” CCG pointed out that there were too few international students in China and recommended increasing efforts to attract foreign students, granting universities autonomous enrollment authority, and improving scholarships, subsidies, and financial support for universities. CCG experts participated in a symposium on overseas study work convened by Premier Liu Yandong at the end of 2014 and made corresponding recommendations based on Blue Book research. At the end of 2014, the National Conference on Overseas Study Work was held, first proposing “equal emphasis on inbound and outbound study.” Within the following three months, the Ministry of Education increased subsidies for international students. According to the Ministry of Education’s latest statistics, the number of international students in China receiving government scholarships in 2015 increased significantly to 40,600, accounting for more than 10% of the total.

4.1.6 Promoting China’s Accession to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) On June 30, 2016, the IOM approved the Chinese government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ application for membership through a resolution, and China officially became a member state of this international organization. China’s accession to the IOM helps strengthen immigration services and management, enhances China’s participation in global governance and international influence, better attracts international talent, and shares China’s experience in domestic immigration services and management internationally.

CCG has conducted research on global international migration policy issues for many years and frequently undertakes research projects for the IOM. Since 2013, CCG has jointly published Chinese versions of the “World Migration Report 2013” and “World Migration Report 2015” with the IOM, achieving broad social impact. Additionally, CCG has frequently organized forums and seminars on international migration-related fields, such as the 2015 International Migration and Talent Mobility Forum and the 2016 Immigration and Urban Policy Seminar. These forums have gathered authoritative international organizations in the migration field, including the IOM and the International Labour Organization. CCG Director Dr. Wang Huiyao is the only Chinese member among the 10 members of the IOM’s International Advisory Board. He has participated in multiple IOM meetings, sharing research and experience on China’s immigration policies with the advisory board composed of former political leaders and migration experts from various countries, calling on international organizations to recognize China’s value in this field and strongly promoting China’s accession to this international organization.

4.2 Summary of CCG’s Policy Influence Forms and Experience

Through the above case analysis, CCG’s policy influence forms mainly include: directly participating in government research projects, directly submitting pol-

icy advisory reports to decision-makers, participating in government work symposia as expert advisors, disseminating policy concepts through media, and influencing relevant policies through international organizations. Its policy influence mechanism can be simply summarized in the following figure.

Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper] Policy Influence Mechanism of CCG

CCG's policy influence primarily benefits from its emphasis on establishing and maintaining long-term consultation channels and on shaping and promoting its policy influence brand. Overall, CCG's consultation channels mainly include: government agencies, democratic parties, people's congresses and political consultative conferences, public activities and media dissemination, and research projects and government consultation meetings. Through participating in research projects and sending experts to government consultation meetings, CCG can directly incorporate policy recommendations into project reports or engage in face-to-face exchanges with policymakers. This approach is more direct, often the fastest method, and can more profoundly influence policymakers' policy concepts. Additionally, through think tank leaders and experts serving as members of political consultative conferences, expert advisors to people's congresses, and members of democratic parties, these consultation channels have all become pathways for CCG to influence policy. Based on CCG's policy influence forms, the following experiences can provide references for other social think tanks:

4.2.1 Establishing Regular Channels Government agencies, people's congresses, and political consultative conferences, and democratic parties constitute CCG's established regular channels. In form, CCG regularly writes policy advisory internal references and submits them to relevant ministry leaders. As of March 2016, CCG had written more than 130 policy advisory internal references, enabling more ministries to understand CCG and achieving relatively good brand promotion effects. Additionally, by establishing stable reporting channels to government agencies through institutional internal references, this form of policy influence is more significant. Between 2014 and 2016, CCG received directives from four national and ministerial-level leaders.

4.2.2 Establishing a "Revolving Door" Mechanism Being among the first to establish a "revolving door" mechanism represents CCG's advantage in influencing policy compared to other social think tanks. CCG has established an advisory expert committee composed of senior government officials, with more than 20 former high-level officials currently participating. They provide guidance for CCG's policy research and can also assist CCG in promoting new policy viewpoints through their social influence. Due to achievements in policy consultation, CCG Director Dr. Wang Huiyao was appointed as a Counselor of the State Council in early 2015, becoming the first person from a social think tank to hold this position in China, enabling CCG to participate in the State Council Counselors' Office's consultation channels.

4.2.3 Emphasizing Policy Reform Through Influencing Public Opinion

Public activities and media voice influence public opinion on one hand, pushing policy improvement from the bottom up, and on the other hand, can attract policymakers' attention and develop more consultation channels. Before formally participating in the Ministry of Public Security's "20 Entry-Exit Policy Measures to Support Beijing's Innovation-Driven Development" project, CCG had long advocated through media and public activities for advanced policy concepts such as lowering green card thresholds and allowing foreign students to work and start businesses, laying considerable public opinion groundwork for the smooth advancement of this policy. Through public opinion monitoring, policymakers can understand positive public demand for such policies.

Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper] Channels for CCG to Deliver Policy Advisory Reports

4.2.4 Emphasizing Government Relations Maintenance and Building a Government-Industry-Academia Consultation Platform

By participating in numerous government research projects, CCG directly understands government needs. Unlike many early civil think tanks, CCG believes that building good government-think tank relations requires learning to communicate with officials harmoniously and smoothly in government language, which is a prerequisite for think tanks to exert policy influence. The heads of CCG's Government Project Division are all senior professionals with years of policy consulting experience, very familiar with the methods of dealing with government agencies. CCG is one of the few domestic research institutions active in all three areas of government, industry, and academia. By organizing high-level exchange activities, it builds face-to-face consultation platforms for government officials, scholars, and industry elites. CCG also frequently recommends advisory experts to the government through its network of social elites, becoming a "reserve think tank talent pool" for the government.

5. Policy Recommendations for Promoting the Policy Influence of Social Think Tanks

Compared with government-affiliated think tanks, social think tanks often require years of reputation accumulation and long-term maintenance of government relations to gain recognition from government decision-makers. From a mechanism establishment perspective, although social think tanks have opportunities to participate in policy proposal, drafting, and revision stages, they often need to be "selected" and are frequently treated as secondary choices to official think tanks. The number and probability of social think tanks entering the substantive policy consultation phase remain very low compared to official think tanks. Therefore, we recommend:

First, provide more financial support and policy preferences to social think

tanks. Establish channels for think tank funding support, encourage corporate donations to think tank endeavors, and clarify the legal status of private non-enterprise policy research institutions.

Second, establish a dedicated government procurement system for social think tanks, opening government research outsourcing service bidding to social think tanks with transparency. Support civil think tanks, explore stable support mechanisms, and promote sustainable think tank development.

Third, break down information flow barriers between inside and outside the system and eliminate information silos. Official think tanks can access key government data, which plays a crucial role in think tank policy consultation. The government should strengthen trust in social think tanks, break information silos, publicly disclose information, or boldly open information during consultation processes with social think tanks. Government information confidentiality regulations can also apply to social think tanks to serve normative and supervisory functions.

Fourth, promptly establish a normalized revolving door mechanism between social think tanks and government. Regularly reserve government positions for social think tank professionals to undertake temporary assignments, and regularly dispatch government officials to work and provide guidance at social think tanks.

Just as developing private enterprises energized China's market economy in the early stages of reform and opening up, encouraging the development of more social think tanks can similarly energize China's policy market. Compared with the West, China's public policy formulation features high efficiency and rapid implementation, giving China an incomparable advantage in "concentrating resources to accomplish major tasks." However, this advantage is a double-edged sword; if decision-making scientificity cannot be improved, the consequences of erroneous decisions can also be severe. From the perspective of socio-economic development, China has entered a "high-incidence period" of public policy issues—both domestically and internationally, China needs innovative and constructive research on a large number of public policy issues. Social think tanks [6] can leverage their flexibility and down-to-earth advantages to become beneficial supplements to official think tanks.

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

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