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Understanding of Several Issues in the Current Construction of Chinese Think Tanks - Postprint

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Abstract

Purpose/Significance: This paper emphasizes that the “new type of think tanks with Chinese characteristics” represents the overall starting point and direction for Chinese think tank construction, constitutes the key issue in Chinese think tank development, and embodies the original aspiration of Chinese think tank construction. **Method/Process:** Centering on the overarching concept of the “new type of think tanks with Chinese characteristics,” this paper adopts a problem-oriented approach to conduct multi-faceted, targeted in-depth analyses of relevant issues. **Results/Conclusions:** This paper primarily explores three aspects: first, it makes a judgment on the new era of Chinese think tank development, arguing that China’s think tank development has been incorporated into a legal and institutionalized track; second, it examines the rich connotations of the new type of think tanks with Chinese characteristics from multiple perspectives, and theoretically and practically analyzes some controversial or ambiguous issues in current think tank construction; third, it explores issues concerning the organizational forms and management methods of think tanks from both macro and micro levels, summarizing new practical experiences while also offering recommendations.

Full Text

Thoughts on Several Issues in China’s Current Think Tank Construction

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper emphasizes that the “new think tank with Chinese characteristics” represents the overarching starting point, direction, and

fundamental mission of China' s think tank construction. [Method/Process] Centering on this core concept, the paper adopts a problem-oriented approach to conduct multi-faceted and targeted in-depth analysis of relevant issues. [Result/Conclusion] The paper explores three key dimensions: first, it assesses China' s think tank development in the new era, arguing that Chinese think tanks have entered a trajectory of institutionalization and legalization; second, it examines the rich connotations of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, analyzing controversial or ambiguous issues in current think tank construction from both theoretical and practical perspectives; third, it investigates organizational forms and management approaches of think tanks at both macro and micro levels, summarizing new practical experiences and offering recommendations.

Keywords: new think tanks with Chinese characteristics; think tank theory; policy advice

Classification Number: C932

On April 15, 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping made important instructions on the think tank construction research report submitted by the "Foreign Think Tank Management System Research Group" of the Public Management Institute of the Development Research Center of the State Council, known as the important "4.15" instructions on think tank construction. What constitutes a new think tank with Chinese characteristics and how to build one are questions that require serious answers and constitute our mission. To develop core capacities in think tanks, we must first clarify what a "new think tank with Chinese characteristics" is, and what the tasks, starting points, and original intentions of think tank builders should be. Clarifying this proposition is a matter of great significance that will run through the entire process of think tank construction, serving as the prerequisite and direction for successful think tank development in China. A comprehensive understanding of the "new think tank with Chinese characteristics" is critical to China's think tank construction, encompassing three specific aspects: first, the development status of Chinese think tanks; second, in-depth exploration of the rich connotations of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and related issues; and third, active exploration and innovation in think tank organizational forms and management approaches.

1.1 Two Main Indicators that China' s Think Tank Construction Has Entered a New Period

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the new central leadership has attached great importance to think tank construction, proposing new requirements, new positioning, and new directions. On the path to modernizing China' s national governance, think tanks will play an unprecedented role, ushering in what is often called the "spring of think tanks." China' s think tank construction has entered a completely new period, marked by two main indicators: first, General Secretary Xi Jinping' s important "4.15" instructions on think tank construction, and the inclusion of think tank construction

in the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform* by the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, which called for “strengthening the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing a sound decision-making consultation system,” making think tanks an important component in advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities; and second, the requirement by the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee to “improve the mechanism for law-based decision-making,” integrating think tank construction into the legal system of public decision-making. These two indicators also serve as the fundamental basis for promoting think tank construction.

1.1.1 General Secretary Xi Jinping’ s Important “4.15” Instructions on Think Tank Construction

The Communist Party of China has always emphasized investigation, research, and policy studies, valuing fact-based and scientific decision-making. After the 18th National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping attached great importance to think tank construction, issuing the important “4.15” instructions in April 2013. This represents the most explicit and richly connotative instruction specifically on think tank construction by central leadership, possessing strong logical coherence and intellectual depth. The instructions contain six main aspects: first, explicitly stating that think tanks are an important component of national soft power and will play an increasingly significant role as national circumstances develop, elevating think tank development to a national strategic height; second, pointing out that China’ s think tank development is relatively lagging and should play a greater role; third, clearly proposing the new goal of building “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” as the basic direction for China’ s think tank development in the current and future periods; fourth, specifically identifying the focus of think tank construction as actively exploring the organizational forms and management methods of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics; fifth, adopting effective measures to guide various types of think tanks in strengthening their internal construction, proposing the concept of “various types of think tanks” and calling for their development; and sixth, requiring think tanks to actively provide high-quality intellectual support for scientific decision-making at the central level. The “4.15” instructions constitute the fundamental guideline for constructing new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and must be seriously studied and implemented.

In January 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the *Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics* (hereinafter referred to as the *Opinions*), which comprehensively implemented the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping’ s important “4.15” instructions, reflecting the Party Central Committee’ s guiding ideology and policy deployment of attaching great importance to “scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making.” The *Opinions* point

out the direction for China's think tank development ideologically and theoretically, and provide institutional and mechanism guarantees for think tanks to play their roles. This important programmatic document has ushered China's think tank construction into a new era of "building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing a sound decision-making consultation system" from an institutional perspective. The *Opinions* comprehensively deploy the significance, guiding ideology, basic principles, main tasks, direction, and path of think tank construction[1]. Therefore, all types of think tank construction should now seriously study the "4.15" instructions and the *Opinions*, which constitute the basic basis for carrying out think tank construction.

1.1.2 Integrating Think Tank Construction into the Legal and Institutional Framework[2]

In November 2012, the report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC proposed: "Adhere to scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making, improve decision-making mechanisms and procedures, and give play to the role of think tanks." The *Rules of Procedure of the State Council* adopted at the first plenary meeting of the new State Council presided over by Premier Li Keqiang emphasized "improving administrative decision-making procedural rules, making public participation, expert demonstration, risk assessment, legality review, and collective discussion decision-making the necessary procedures for major decisions," and stipulated that "major matters under consideration must undergo in-depth investigation and research, and be evaluated and demonstrated for legality, necessity, scientificity, feasibility, and controllability by research and consulting institutions."

The Decision of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee stated: "Improve the law-based decision-making mechanism, establish public participation, expert demonstration, risk assessment[4], legality review, and collective discussion decision-making as statutory procedures for major administrative decisions, ensuring scientifically sound decision-making systems, proper procedures, open processes, and clear responsibilities." In other words, in public decision-making, these elements have been established as statutory procedures for major administrative decisions. Although this has been written into the Decision of the Fourth Plenary Session, it remains to be further refined with supporting documents. Much in-depth work remains to be done in this area.

The *Opinions* of the General Office also clearly require improving the system for soliciting opinions on major decisions. Decision-making matters involving public interests and the vital interests of the people should widely listen to opinions and suggestions from think tanks through various forms such as hearings, symposiums, and seminars, enhancing decision-making transparency and public participation. The *Opinions* encourage cooperation between think tanks and NPC deputies, CPPCC members, government counselors, and cultural and historical scholars. They also call for exploring the establishment of response and feedback mechanisms for consulting departments regarding think tank opinions,

promoting positive interaction between government decision-making and think tank recommendations[5].

1.2 The Party and State's Emphasis on Strengthening Think Tank Construction Has Its Practicality and Objective Necessity

The Party and state's emphasis on strengthening think tank construction has its practicality and objective necessity. First is the complexity of decision-making and the demand for scientific decision-making. In the era of information explosion, decision-making complexity is unprecedented, requiring professional, extensive, confrontational, balanced analysis of people's livelihood interests, and international perspectives. For instance, decisions on issues such as economic transformation and development under the new normal, supply-side structural reform, and how China and the United States can avoid the "Thucydides Trap" to promote a new type of major-country relationship are so complex that they cannot be accomplished by individual consultants of the past; they require wisdom from across the nation. Second is the demand for democratic decision-making. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics constitute an important component of China's socialist democratic political construction, an important element of national governance system and governance capability modernization, and a vital part of national soft power. Third is the inherent logic of think tank participation in public decision-making. The public decision-making process includes agenda setting, consulting research, formulation, implementation, execution, feedback, revision, or abolition. Think tank activities are an important internal link in public decision-making while also running through the entire decision-making process, including consulting research, evaluation, and interpretation of each link. Fourth is the experience of modernized countries internationally and the development of domestic think tanks.

2 The Connotation of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics

Building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is a component of comprehensively deepening reform. Their connotation and requirements must be clearly answered before reform measures can be accurately deployed. We can compare them with ancient counselors, general think tanks, Western think tanks, and the socialist political system with Chinese characteristics to explore where the "characteristic" lies, where the "newness" is, and how to build them.

2.1 Think Tanks Are Different from Ancient Chinese Counselors

China had counselors two thousand years ago, referring to resourceful individuals who specialized in planning and advising for others, assisting governance with wisdom. In ancient Chinese society, counselors belonged to a personal-color-heavy auxiliary official system[6], such as retainers, strategists, private

advisors, remonstrance officials, guests and followers, the Hanlin Academy, and the shogunate system. These could be said to be the embryonic form of China's think tanks. Lord Mengchang, one of the four gentlemen of the Warring States period, had three thousand retainers. Liu Bang, Cao Cao, Li Shimin, and Zhu Yuanzhang possessed four relatively well-known ancient Chinese think tanks. For example, Liu Bang relied on the "Three Heroes of Early Han" to win his empire, evaluating himself as "inferior to Zhang Liang in planning strategies within a command tent that determined victory a thousand miles away; inferior to Xiao He in governing the country, managing finances, and preparing provisions; and inferior to Han Xin in leading troops into battle and defeating enemies."

Professor Fu Guangwan of Central China Normal University divided the ancient Chinese counselor system into germination, revitalization, and peak periods, selecting five representative periods: the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the Qin Dynasty, the Tang Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty, and the Qing Dynasty[7]. The evolution from counselors to think tanks is a continuous historical process. Think tanks differ from counselors in that they are standardized, institutionalized, and scientific consulting organizations, centers for intellectual concentration, serving society as their purpose and serving decision-making as their means of achieving that purpose.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modern think tanks emerged worldwide. The refinement of decision-making and social division of labor drove continuous think tank development. At that time, American think tanks developed first, but there were only about twenty of them. The rapid development of think tanks occurred after World War II. The background and conditions for their development included four aspects: first, the advancement of political democratization, such as the "muckraking movement" in the late 19th century and the progressive movement in the 1920s; second, the need for evaluation of American mistakes in the globalization process during the 1940s and 1950s, such as the Korean War; third, the prominence of political participation culture, enhanced awareness among intellectuals to participate in politics, and the impact of scholars with foreign backgrounds, such as Jews entering universities like UC Berkeley; and fourth, close cooperation between think tanks and government, providing and reserving the ideological foundation for national strategy and policy formulation. For example, in 1947, *Foreign Affairs*, sponsored by the American think tank Council on Foreign Relations, proactively published George Kennan's "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" by the then US Chargé d' Affaires in the Soviet Union, which proposed the policy of "containment" toward the Soviet Union and became the ideological foundation for the US "containment strategy" during the Cold War[8].

The structure and development models of think tanks are closely related to the political, economic, and social conditions of their respective countries, with no fixed pattern. Think tanks can be classified according to different attributes, and different think tanks vary greatly in organizational structure, management,

operation methods, research project design, funding sources, and approaches to influencing public policy.

Generally speaking, think tanks share common characteristics or stipulations: they are public policy research and decision-making consulting institutions, external brains of the decision-making system, important links and components of modern public decision-making, vital components of national soft power, providing ideas and action plans for public decision-making, influencing government policy formulation, evaluating government operational efficiency, disseminating social knowledge, guiding public opinion and social trends, and playing a strong role in modern national decision-making.

2.3 What Constitutes a “New Think Tank with Chinese Characteristics” Is an Important Question Requiring In-Depth Understanding and Comprehensive Elucidation

Scientifically answering what a “new think tank with Chinese characteristics” is^[9] concerns the direction of China’s think tank development and the deepening of think tank system reform.

2.3.1 Wherein Lies the “Characteristic” of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics?^[10] The most significant characteristic of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is adherence to Party leadership over think tanks. Based on China’s national conditions and compared with Western think tanks, the “characteristic” lies in the fact that the Party is the leadership core of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics. Think tanks, under Party leadership, adhere to the socialist path with Chinese characteristics, with multiple subjects including official and non-governmental think tanks coexisting and developing together, while encouraging competition among various think tanks to provide public policy research, decision-making consultation, policy interpretation, and decision-making plan evaluation services for the Party, government, and society. If Chinese think tanks do not serve the Communist Party of China, such think tanks are not needed. Therefore, building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics must unequivocally uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China and must center on the Party and government’s decision-making, serving the overall decision-making situation.

In summary, the “characteristic” of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics mainly includes the following points: first, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the correct political direction; second, being oriented toward serving decision-making, focusing on the overall situation and centering on work priorities; third, adhering to scientific spirit, seeking truth from facts, and encouraging bold exploration; fourth, developing official and social think tanks together—on November 9, 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping presided over the 18th meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform, which reviewed and approved the *Pilot Work Plan for the Construction of National High-End Think Tanks*, after which the Na-

tional High-End Think Tank Construction Pilot Work Conference identified the first batch of 25 national high-end think tank pilot units, many of which are social think tanks; fifth, adhering to reform and innovation, and actively guiding various think tanks to develop in a standardized and orderly manner.

2.3.2 Wherein Lies the “Newness” of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics? Currently, with the development of the situation, the problems of think tank construction not keeping up and not being adapted have become increasingly prominent, mainly manifested in: the important status of think tanks not being universally recognized; lack of institutional arrangements for participation in decision-making consultation; lack of high-quality planning and judgment and truly practical research consultation results, and lack of interactive feedback mechanisms with decision-makers; lack of high-quality think tanks with significant influence and international reputation; lack of overall planning for think tank construction and unscientific resource allocation; and lack of leading figures and outstanding talents. These deep-seated problems in think tanks precisely reveal the direction of where the “newness” of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics lies. Think tanks must purposefully break the old and establish the new, transform and develop. The “newness” is manifested in the following ten aspects: first, moving from counselors to think tanks; second, transforming from traditional to modern think tanks, integrating think tanks into the public decision-making system as an indispensable link; third, moving from think tank concepts to standardized and law-based construction; fourth, multiple subjects, shifting from a single subject to multiple subjects, including social think tanks as new subjects; fifth, multiple fields, shifting from relatively single fields focusing mainly on economic policy research to comprehensive development in economic, political, social, diplomatic, and military fields; sixth, multiple functions, shifting from single policy research functions to multiple functions including policy research, interpretation, and evaluation; seventh, establishing new systems suitable for the scientific operation of think tanks, encouraging and supporting the healthy development of non-governmental think tanks, and promoting joint development of both in-system and out-of-system think tanks; eighth, shifting from general attention to becoming a component of national governance; ninth, promoting open and international think tank construction, shifting from closed to international think tank construction in the new era of “Internet+,” from domestic research to international research and “track-two diplomacy,” competing for international discourse power; tenth, shifting organizational forms from fragmentation to collaboration among think tanks and think tank consortium development.

2.4 The “Independence” and “Non-Partisanship” of Think Tanks Are Pseudo-Issues

In think tank construction, some people with ulterior motives advocate for the “independence” and “non-partisanship” of think tanks. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between political independence, academic independence, intellec-

tual independence, and research independence of think tanks. The author does not oppose the academic, intellectual, and research independence of think tanks and has always advocated that “research has no forbidden zones, but external publicity has discipline.” However, the author opposes the political independence of think tanks, a view mainly directed at some people who attempt to use this to deny the principle of “Party leadership over think tanks” in China’s think tank construction.

In fact, with a little global perspective, we can see that so-called foreign think tanks are by no means non-partisan or independent. For example, the Brookings Institution has close ties with the Democratic Party, with many important members being Democrats who plan strategies and reserve and provide talent for Democratic administrations. Since the Truman administration, successive Democratic governments have appointed personnel from this institution to important positions, earning Brookings the nickname “the Democratic Party’s government-in-exile.” Think tanks claim “high quality, independence, and influence,” but in reality, their relationships with political parties, governments, and the military are much more complex[11].

Researchers conducting policy research have always been required to think independently, conduct objective and fair investigations and research, and submit reports to provide valuable, actionable opinions and suggestions for decision-makers, thereby winning opportunities to submit reports in the future. Otherwise, the function of think tanks to influence decision-making cannot be well fulfilled. High-quality think tank reports must be based on independent research while upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China.

Currently, decision-makers attach great importance to opinions from all sides. The author has contacted some county party secretaries to understand how they make decisions, how they listen to opinions and through what channels, how they treat different opinions, and how they coordinate, integrate, and balance them. It can be found that county party secretaries also hope to hear high-quality opinions from all sides when making decisions, in order to formulate comprehensive, scientific, and effective decision-making plans.

2.5 Comprehensively Understanding and Fulfilling the Various Functions of Think Tanks

Why emphasize the need to comprehensively understand and fulfill the various functions of think tanks? This concerns the healthy development of modern think tanks. Currently, some people do not understand the functions of think tanks and even have criticisms. Traditional think tanks such as party committee and government research offices and development research centers mainly conducted policy research and decision-making consultation in the past. Now, with think tank construction, these traditional functions are far from sufficient. The *Opinions* of the General Office define think tank functions as “important functions such as providing policy advice, theoretical innovation, public opin-

ion guidance, social services, and public diplomacy,” which is consistent with the aforementioned stipulations of think tanks. Think tanks are public policy research and decision-making consulting institutions, important links and components of modern public decision-making, playing roles throughout the entire public decision-making system, including agenda setting, policy consultation, policy research, policy execution, policy implementation, pre-, mid-, and post-policy evaluation, as well as policy revision, abolition, and termination. Policy research is only one link. Therefore, think tank construction should be understood from the perspective of the public decision-making system, which is the only way to find the proper position of think tanks. For example, conducting policy evaluation can continuously improve policies, so the policy formulation process needs an evaluation component. Last year, the author evaluated Beijing’s scientific and technological progress policy and discovered many problems, including issues concerning the residence of foreign talents in Beijing. This evaluation promoted the improvement of relevant policies.

Currently, the public has many misunderstandings about think tank functions. For instance, some belittle policy interpretation as “singing praises” or “being a mouthpiece,” and consider policy evaluation as beyond their duties. Some so-called leading experts simply disdain policy interpretation, viewing it as “being a mouthpiece.” This only shows that these so-called “leading experts” are rigid and still indulging in their narrow self-contained world, not understanding the purpose of policy research. Think tanks conduct policy research to serve decision-making, influence decision-making, help everyone understand policies, and ensure policy implementation. While conducting policy research, they must also do well in policy interpretation and evaluation, disseminating research results through appropriate channels so that both decision-makers and ordinary people can understand them, which better facilitates policy formulation and implementation. Only when policies are implemented can research fulfill its effectiveness.

Comprehensively understanding think tank functions is conducive to consciously implementing them, including matching organizational structures. Traditional think tanks only had the policy research link, but now they involve multiple functions. Therefore, think tank organizations need to match the requirements of full think tank functions. Thus, comprehensively understanding think tank functions is not an abstract concept; without understanding, there will be no such consciousness.

2.6 On Think Tank Influence

Think tank influence includes decision-making influence, academic influence, media influence, social influence, and international influence. Among them, think tanks’ influence on public decision-making is an important goal of think tank construction. Influencing decision-making through internal materials or circulation documents is an important form of realizing think tank influence on decision-making. Therefore, decision-makers’ instructions have become an indi-

icator for evaluating think tank influence. How should we view decision-makers' instructions? Some people consider this as "following the leader's lead" and lacking "independence." This problem either reflects a vague understanding of think tank positioning or a distorted understanding of the relationship between think tanks and party and government decision-makers, intentionally setting think tanks against decision-makers.

The instruction rate issue is actually a question of the pathways and mechanisms through which think tanks play their roles, and a question of think tank communication channel construction. First, think tank work must influence decision-making, and think tank results must be submitted to decision-makers. Whether decision-makers are aware of them and whether they give instructions is an indicator. If results are not submitted to decision-makers to influence decision-making, no matter how perfect the opinions are, they are useless. Therefore, instructions represent direct influence on decision-making. Compared with publications and articles, direct submission of think tank results to decision-makers greatly simplifies the procedure for influencing decision-makers, so the instruction rate should be valued. Of course, whether a research report can become policy goes through many stages. Generally speaking, policy formation is not the achievement of a single report but the crystallization of wisdom from many people and the result of influences from many aspects.

However, as think tank professionals, we should actively participate in public decision-making through various forms, including attending seminars, forums, and symposiums convened by decision-makers at all levels, and should earnestly seize any opportunity for direct communication with decision-makers. Meanwhile, decision-makers should value communication with think tanks, attach importance to think tank results, and give serious responses.

On May 17, 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping spoke at the Symposium on Philosophy and Social Sciences, affirming the achievements of think tank construction in recent years while also pointing out many existing problems. He demanded that "think tank construction should focus on improving research quality and promoting content innovation." He also noted that some think tank research has the problem of emphasizing quantity over quality, some emphasize formal dissemination over content innovation, and some engage in formalistic practices such as setting up platforms, inviting celebrities, and holding forums. General Secretary Xi's speech once again demonstrates the Party Central Committee's high regard and earnest expectations for think tanks, as well as its spur to think tank construction. The construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is a major and urgent task. Think tank governance issues are divided into macro and micro problems. The construction of think tank organizational forms and management methods includes both macro and micro levels. Therefore, we should promote the reform, innovation, and development of China's think tanks from both macro and micro aspects.

3.1.1 Decision-Making Bodies Should Make Full Use of Various Think Tanks to Form Think Tank Consortia

In the public decision-making process, decision-making bodies should leverage the expertise of various think tanks, actively coordinate and organize various think tanks to conduct relevant policy research and decision-making consultation, so that decision-making plans possess global, comprehensive, strategic, and forward-looking qualities. Otherwise, decision-making consultation plans would be incomplete. Think tank alliances and think tank communities are excellent organizational forms, mainly because think tanks should not be studied behind closed doors but must be studied openly. This form can be used by the government and by individual think tanks.

3.1.2 Macro-Level Planning of Think Tanks Should Be Done Well

Based on decision-making needs, we should rationally promote the construction of think tanks with different functions and expertise, including think tanks for economic research, livelihood research, national defense research, and other aspects. Within a province, there should be think tanks researching developed areas as well as those researching underdeveloped areas. This is an organizational structure issue in think tank management.

3.1.3 Topic Selection for Think Tanks Is Very Important

Decision-making levels should strengthen guidance on think tank topic selection. Topics should widely solicit opinions, break through departmental and regional interests, and enable better alignment between think tank research and decision-making. Doing well in macro-level management of think tank research topic selection is very important and necessary. The author once led a team to investigate South Korean think tanks. South Korea integrated 23 think tanks formerly affiliated with national ministries. Research topics for think tanks are determined through several rounds of discussion from top to bottom and bottom to top, from the Blue House to professional think tanks. This makes think tank topics highly targeted and capable of solving practical problems.

3.1.4 Innovative Management of Think Tank Research Project Organization

It is recommended that at the macro level, resources of think tanks at all levels and of various types be effectively combined and innovatively managed in terms of organizational forms and management methods, focusing on overall coordination of topic selection and research, and concentrating efforts on major research projects. Like the writing of government work reports, which assembles experts from relevant departments and units to form special research groups for concentrated writing, this is an effective organizational method to guarantee quality. In reality, due to internal division of labor and limited human resources in each think tank unit, it is difficult to form high-quality research groups, resulting in

many research reports being the work of individual researchers rather than team achievements, which seriously affects the quality of think tank results. To enable think tanks to conduct strategic, comprehensive, forward-looking, targeted, and reserve-oriented major policy research and decision-making consultation, and to propose professional, constructive, and practical policy recommendations, attention should be paid to using the national special research group as an organizational form and management method, concentrating resources to accomplish major tasks.

3.1.5 The Issue of Government Procurement of Think Tank Services

Specific regulations for government procurement of think tank services should be established as soon as possible. This issue cannot be delayed and requires collective advocacy, including from provincial departments managing think tank construction. When decision-making departments commission projects, they must pay attention to input-output balance, which truly helps think tanks solve funding problems. Therefore, regulations for government procurement of think tank services should be established promptly. In the process of regulating and guiding the healthy development of social think tanks, emphasis should also be placed on providing them with channels for submitting research results and platforms for participation.

3.2.1 On the Construction of Think Tank Talent Teams

First, establish talent retention and mobility mechanisms. In past talent competition, the basic idea was to attract and retain people. Now, in the “Internet+” information age, talent management requires an open concept. We must change traditional thinking and establish retention and mobility mechanisms, as no think tank can bring in all the world’s talented people. For example, the Development Research Center of the State Council previously participated in discussions on the Three Gorges Reservoir project but could not bring in all water conservancy experts. Therefore, the think tank talent issue requires combining retention and mobility mechanisms.

Second, in constructing a think tank talent database, attention should be paid to forming a complete think tank talent structure, including multi-type and compound talents, theoretical research talents and policy research talents, strategic research talents and tactical research talents, think tank management experts and research personnel. We should strive to build high-end think tank talent teams, select high-end think tank talents from both domestic and international sources, and implement dynamic management. From these, we should select chief experts and position experts by field. With chief experts as the core, position experts as the backbone, and reserve talents as support.

Third, regarding the quality requirements for think tank talents, as think tank professionals, they must be loyal to the Party, the country, and the nation, establish a sense of mission, responsibility, and the Communist’s spirit of re-

sponsibility, and carry forward the moral mission and concern for the country and people of Chinese scholar-officials who would “exhaust their efforts until death.” They must be familiar with national and people’s conditions and possess professional...

3.2.2 Innovating the Organizational Methods of Think Tank Research

Handle the relationship between self-directed research and organized research, between official and non-governmental think tanks. Focus on building good policy research platforms and leveraging the functions of already influential think tank platforms and channels, such as the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China and the Center for China and Globalization. Use these channels to present important decision-making consultation results from other think tanks or experts to the decision-making level, acting as a think tank for think tanks. This is very important. Handle the relationship between team research and individual scholar research, focusing on scholars setting agendas, guiding debates, and designing policies, while placing greater emphasis on teamwork and especially encouraging self-selected topics. Based on the author’s many years of research experience at the Development Research Center of the State Council, the research that achieved relatively obvious consultation effects was mostly self-selected, such as “selecting and determining geographic information as a strategic emerging industry” and “vigorously supporting micro-enterprise development and adding micro-enterprise category research,” which received attention from State Council leaders and played a positive role in promoting work in relevant fields. Therefore, in the author’s view, researchers should be strongly encouraged to conduct self-selected topic research.

3.2.3 Promoting the Transformation and Development of Official Think Tanks Is an Important Task in Current Think Tank Construction

Currently, vigorously promoting the transformation and development of official think tanks, which occupy the dominant position, should be a key task. Previously, most official think tanks had single functions, narrow research fields, closed and biased research perspectives, single research organizational forms, rigid management methods, fragmented research content and institutions, single research methods and tools, and insufficient decision-making attention. All these urgently require accelerated transformation and development to meet central requirements. Some official think tanks, including some high-end think tanks, have done considerable work and achieved many accomplishments since the important “4.15” instructions on think tank construction. However, many think tanks engage in superficial work, fail to deeply study and consciously follow the laws of think tank construction and management, and lack sufficient strength in think tank transformation and development. In think tank construction, research work lacks practical topics, scientific organizational forms and management methods, and multi-plan comparisons. Generally, they still follow

some old management methods that are no longer suitable for the new situation, making it difficult to produce high-quality think tank innovation results. Therefore, an effective assessment mechanism and competition mechanism should be established to spur and motivate existing official think tanks to first promote internal transformation and development, especially not to fall into the trap of seeking staffing and funding. Official think tanks should strive to enhance consciousness and achieve transformation and development as soon as possible according to the laws of think tank construction.

3.3 Actively Exploring the Establishment of a Think Tank Evaluation System with Chinese Characteristics

Think tank evaluation and ranking have certain guiding, directional, and demonstrative functions and roles for think tank construction, as well as database functions, and are effective tools for think tank management. Scientifically using think tank evaluation tools is conducive to promoting the healthy development of think tanks, with the key lying in a sound evaluation system, objective evaluation process, and scientific evaluation methods. Currently, to establish a scientific think tank evaluation system and method, the following relationships should be considered: first, combine correct evaluation orientation with scientific evaluation methods to give full play to the guiding, promoting, and demonstrative roles of evaluation; second, in terms of methods, combine questionnaire evaluation with field visits and surveys, and with evaluations by professional authoritative institutions and individuals; third, combine specialized think tank evaluation with evaluation by multiple social subjects; fourth, combine the decision-making consultation process with high-quality, “useful” decision-making consultation results, and combine think tank evaluation with decision-makers; fifth, combine subjective evaluation with objective evaluation; sixth, combine output and effectiveness, process and result, scale and quality, characteristics and professionalism, openness and cooperation, self-directed research and organized research; seventh, focus on promoting the construction of a new think tank culture with Chinese characteristics.

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

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