
AI translation · View original & related papers at
chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-201711.00240

Strategic Positioning and Operational Model of China' s New-Type Think Tanks (Postprint)

Authors: Ke Yinbin

Date: 2017-11-05T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To provide an analytical framework and methodology for the strategic positioning and operational models of new-type think tanks in China, thereby facilitating their strategic design and operational management. [Method/Process] This study draws on business model theories and methods from business administration, and in combination with the characteristics of different types of think tanks in China, proposes an analytical framework and methodology for the strategic positioning and operational models of new-type think tanks in China. [Results/Conclusions] Strategic positioning addresses the question of “what to do,” aiming to “do the right thing,” and involves four elements and their combinations: service targets, research fields, geographical scope of research, and functional choices. The operational model addresses the question of “how to do it,” aiming to “do things right,” and involves five elements and their combinations: funding sources, core resources, key activities, partner organizations, and cost structure.

Full Text

ChinaXiv Cooperative Journal

Strategic Positioning and Operation Model of China' s New Think Tanks

Center for China & Globalization (CCG), Beijing 100004

Abstract: [Purpose/Significance]

This paper provides an analytical framework and methodology for the strategic positioning and operation model of China' s new think tanks, aiming to facilitate their strategic design and operational management. [Method/Process] It adopts business model theory and methods from business administration, incorporating the characteristics of different types of Chinese think tanks. [Result/Conclusion] Strategic positioning addresses “what to do,” with the goal of

“doing the right thing,” encompassing four elements: service object, research field, research region, and function selection. The operation model addresses “how to do it,” with the goal of “doing things correctly,” encompassing five elements: funding sources, core resources, key activities, partners, and cost structure.

Keywords: China’s new think tanks; strategic positioning; operation model

Classification Number: C932.4

Strategic positioning and operation model are practical issues in the construction of China’s new think tanks. Strategic positioning refers to the goals and direction of think tank development, as well as the selection of research fields and functions, primarily concerning the decision of “what to do.” The operation model refers to the approaches and methods through which think tanks utilize resources and capabilities to achieve their strategic positioning, primarily concerning the decision of “how to do it.” As public policy research and consulting institutions, think tanks are neither typical academic research institutions nor conventional consulting firms. Among all organizations, profit-oriented enterprises are the pioneers and practitioners of strategy and operations. Think tank construction can draw upon theories and methods from corporate strategy and operations to enhance their management capabilities and expand their decision-making influence and social impact.

1 Definition of New Think Tanks

According to official definitions, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics are non-profit research and consulting institutions that focus on strategic issues and public policy as their main research objects and aim to serve the scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making of the Party and government [1].

At the strategic and operational level, the author argues that China’s new think tanks must adopt innovative strategic positioning and operation models in the new environment (political multipolarization, economic globalization, social informatization, and cultural diversity) to provide forward-looking, high-quality intellectual products for their service objects. This paper primarily explores innovative strategic positioning and operation models.

To more clearly define “what a new think tank is,” it is necessary to discuss “what a new think tank is not” from a reverse perspective. Currently, some people often confuse think tanks with academic research institutions or consulting firms. These three entities have both differences and commonalities (see Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison of New Think Tanks, Academic Research Institutions, and Consulting Companies

Dimension	Academic Research Institutions	New Think Tanks	Consulting Companies
Core Mission	Generate new knowledge	Propose new strategic policies	Satisfy client needs
Service Objects	Academic peers	Party/government departments, media	Clients
Research Objects	Theoretical or practical problems	Strategic/public policy issues	Client-specific problems
Research Methods	1. Single discipline 为主 2. Literature-based 3. Individual-based	1. Multidisciplinary 为主 2. Survey/interview-based 3. Team-based	1. Multidisciplinary 为主 2. Survey/interview-based 3. Team-based
Output Forms	Papers/monographs	Research reports/internal references	Consulting reports
Disclosure	Public	Public/non-public	Non-public (client-only)
Research Level	Basic/applied	Development/applied	Applied
Personnel Skills	Studying/thinking/writing	Editing/translating/writing	Investigating/writing/presenting

The author believes that think tanks are not academic research institutions, but their research must be grounded in academic research, and academic institutions can possess think tank functions. Think tanks are not consulting firms, but their strategy and operations must learn from consulting companies, and consulting firms can also have think tank functions.

2 Elements of Business Models

There are two approaches to exploring the strategic positioning and operation model of new think tanks: first, induction and summary from the practice of China's new think tanks; second, borrowing and transplantation from other organizations. Since China's new think tank construction has just begun and there is limited content to summarize from practice, the only viable approach is to borrow and transplant from other organizations.

Which type of organization is appropriate to learn from? Human society comprises political, economic, and social organizations, all of which face issues of strategic positioning and operation model selection. In terms of both organizational practice and theoretical research, corporate enterprises as economic

organizations not only possess rich practical and theoretical achievements but also influence other organizations. Therefore, this paper selects corporate enterprises as the learning object for new think tanks.

Regarding corporate enterprises, there are already abundant practices and theories both domestically and internationally, forming the discipline of business administration. The author believes that business model theory and methodology in business administration have the greatest reference value for the strategic positioning and operation model of new think tanks, because “a business model describes the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value” [2].

A business model can be described by nine elements: (1) Customer Segments (CS), the different groups of people or organizations an enterprise aims to reach and serve; (2) Value Propositions (VP), the bundle of products and services that create value for a specific Customer Segment; (3) Channels (CH), how a company communicates with and reaches its Customer Segments; (4) Customer Relationships (CR), the types of relationships a company establishes with specific Customer Segments; (5) Revenue Streams (R), the cash a company generates from each Customer Segment; (6) Key Resources (KR), the most important assets required to make a business model work; (7) Key Activities (KA), the most important things a company must do to make its business model work; (8) Key Partnerships (KP), the network of suppliers and partners that make the business model work; and (9) Cost Structure (C), all costs incurred to operate a business model [2].

This paper adapts and redefines these nine business model elements according to the characteristics of China’s new think tanks to explore their strategic positioning and operation model.

3 Strategic Positioning: Doing the Right Thing

For a specific think tank, its strategic positioning should follow three steps: (1) comprehensively understand the possible space for think tank strategic positioning; (2) establish basic criteria for strategic positioning based on the specific circumstances of the think tank; and (3) select the specific positioning for the think tank according to these basic criteria.

3.1 Possible Space for Strategic Positioning

The possible space for think tank strategic positioning can be described by two matrices and four dimensions: first, the Service Object/Function Realization Matrix, which addresses to whom intellectual products are provided and what functions are realized. This corresponds to Customer Segments in business models (see Table 2).

Table 2 Service Object/Function Realization Matrix for Strategic Positioning

Service Object	Policy Consultation	Theoretical Innovation	Public Opinion Guidance	Social Service	Public Diplomacy
Party/Government					
Mass Media					
Founding Institutions/Board					
Units					
Peer Think Tanks/Social Elites					
Foreign Institutions					

Although official documents clearly state that the service object of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is the “Party and government,” their functions also include policy consultation, theoretical innovation, public opinion guidance, social services, and public diplomacy. Therefore, the actual service objects of Chinese think tanks should also include mass media, founding institutions/board units, peer think tanks/social elites, and foreign institutions (think tanks/media, etc.).

Second, the Research Field/Region Matrix, which addresses what kind of intellectual products are provided. This corresponds to Value Proposition in business models, solving the problems or meeting the needs of service objects (see Table 3).

Table 3 Research Field/Region Matrix for Strategic Positioning

Research Field	China	Asia	Global
Economy/Technology			
Politics/Party Affairs			
Society/NGOs			
Culture/Education			
Ecology/Environment			

The blank spaces in these two matrices represent the possible space for think tank positioning. For the national think tank system, all possible spaces should be covered, which constitutes “rational layout.” For a certain type of think tank,

it should focus on certain areas while ignoring others, which constitutes “distinctive features.” For a specific think tank, comprehensive think tanks have larger space, while specialized think tanks have smaller space, which constitutes “clear positioning.” Only in this way can we “promote the coordinated development of Party and government departments, academies of social sciences, Party schools and administrative institutes, universities, military units, research institutes, enterprises, and social think tanks, forming a new think tank system with Chinese characteristics that has clear positioning, distinctive features, moderate scale, and rational layout” [3].

3.2 Basic Criteria for Strategic Positioning

How to determine a specific think tank’ s position in the above possible space requires case-by-case analysis. First, it is necessary to understand and master the basic criteria for strategic positioning, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

Figure 1 Basic Criteria for Strategic Positioning

The basic criteria are: (1) analyze “want to do,” “can do,” and “able to do” one by one, and list detailed inventories; (2) compare the three inventories to find commonalities between each pair and among all three; (3) make the appropriate decision, i.e., Strategic Positioning = Want to Do + Can Do + Able to Do. “Want to Do” is determined by the subjective desires of the specific think tank; “Can Do” is determined by laws, regulations, and policies; “Able to Do” depends on the resources and capabilities of the specific think tank.

Under current Chinese circumstances, the “Can Do” scope is relatively large. Therefore, strategic positioning mainly depends on the match between “Want to Do” and “Able to Do.” Logically, there are three scenarios: first, the “Want to Do” work exceeds the “Able to Do” work, which is the most common scenario; second, “Want to Do” and “Able to Do” are basically matched, which is the scenario for stable organizations; third, “Want to Do” is less than “Able to Do,” which is the scenario for conservative organizations.

Focusing on the first scenario in the actual development of Chinese think tanks, this paper explores how to conduct strategic positioning. First, after determining “Want to Do,” it is necessary to clearly understand its resource and capability requirements. Then, compare these requirements with the existing resource and capability levels to identify gaps—resources and capabilities that are required but not currently available. Finally, analyze and discuss methods to narrow these gaps.

These methods mainly fall into two categories: first, through cooperation, borrowing resources and capabilities from other organizations to compensate for the think tank’ s deficiencies. If the borrowed resources and capabilities can meet the requirements of the “Want to Do” work, then a match between “Want to Do” and “Able to Do” is achieved. However, in most cases, some resources

and capabilities are difficult or impossible to obtain through cooperation, such as the core resources and capabilities of other organizations. Therefore, we must adopt the second category of methods, which is to accumulate resources and enhance capabilities through “learning by doing” in the process of engaging in the work. When the speed and results of learning are greater than or equal to the requirements of the work, this “Want to Do” work becomes “Able to Do” work, achieving a match between the two and thus realizing its strategic positioning.

Strategic positioning is the primary issue in the construction of China’s new think tanks. With appropriate positioning, think tanks will develop continuously along the correct goals, direction, and path. With inappropriate positioning, think tank development will be aimless and directionless, and no matter how many resources are invested, it will be difficult to achieve expected results.

3.3 Strategic Positioning of the Charhar Institute

To help readers master the above positioning approach in practice, this paper uses the Charhar Institute, where the author once served as Secretary-General, as an example. In October 2009, the Charhar Institute was founded by Dr. Han Fangming, with the author serving as Secretary-General. At its founding, the Charhar Institute defined itself as a think tank planning to research international crisis issues and provide crisis solutions for the Chinese government. However, at the end of 2009, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) decided to launch a work magazine themed on public diplomacy, appointing Han Fangming, Deputy Director of the Foreign Affairs Committee and convener of the Public Diplomacy Group, to be specifically responsible. After consultation, the magazine was named “Public Diplomacy Newsletter” (renamed “Public Diplomacy Quarterly” from the second issue), hosted by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the CPPCC, organized by the Charhar Institute, and academically supported by the China Foreign Affairs University. At this point, the strategic positioning of the Charhar Institute changed, with its main research field becoming public diplomacy, involving China’s public diplomacy with major powers (the United States, Japan, European countries, etc.). Its work content was to conduct research and promotion of public diplomacy in China, with its main mission being to promote the development of China’s public diplomacy cause. Its service objects included various ministries and commissions of the central government, local government foreign affairs management departments, domestic diplomatic and international relations academic circles, and mainstream international issue media. Its main functions included public opinion guidance, policy consultation, and social services, basically not involving theoretical innovation and public diplomacy.

Except for the resources and capabilities of the founding chairman Han Fangming, the Charhar Institute had no other resources or capabilities at its founding, with serious insufficiency to achieve the above strategic positioning. To solve this problem, the first step was borrowing: leveraging the political status of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the CPPCC and the intellectual resources of its

members, as well as the brand and academic resources of the China Foreign Affairs University. Simultaneously, a large number of pioneers in public diplomacy research from domestic diplomatic and international relations academic circles (Zhao Kejin, Wang Yiwei, etc.) were invited to join the institute as senior researchers to conduct public diplomacy research. The second step was learning: secretariat staff not only had to learn public diplomacy knowledge but also how to promote and disseminate theoretical knowledge. Practice has shown that the above methods of borrowing and learning effectively achieved the institute's strategic positioning.

In the report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, it was explicitly proposed to “vigorously promote public diplomacy and cultural exchanges,” indicating that public diplomacy had become part of the country's foreign strategy. In early 2013, according to Dr. Han Fangming's instructions, the institute added “peace studies” to its research fields and moved toward internationalization. Consequently, the institute's strategic positioning changed again, simultaneously facing new resource and capability deficiencies.

The same methods of borrowing and learning were adopted. The institute invited Professor Liu Cheng, a representative figure in China's peace studies, to join, who provided all academic and network resources. The institute established a special research group on “Case Studies of International Think Tank Internationalization” to learn from the experiences of foreign think tanks. Simultaneously, members of the International Advisory Committee and senior researchers were mobilized not only to advise on the institute's internationalization but also to personally participate in international exchanges and cooperation. Building on the resources and capabilities accumulated from 2010 to 2012, the Charhar Institute began in 2013 to add resources and capabilities needed for peace studies research and international development according to the adjusted strategic positioning requirements. Practice once again demonstrated that borrowing and learning remain effective methods to compensate for resource and capability deficiencies and can facilitate the realization of strategic positioning.

On January 27, 2016, the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania released the “Global Go To Think Tank Index Report 2015.” The Charhar Institute was listed in four rankings: ranked 108th among the top think tanks in the world in foreign policy and international affairs (out of 133), 45th among the best independent think tanks in the world (out of 144), 55th among top think tanks in China, India, Japan, and South Korea (out of 65), and 20th among top think tanks in China (out of 35).

4 Operation Model: Doing Things Correctly

Strategic positioning solves the problem of “what to do,” with the goal of “doing the right thing,” while the operation model solves the problem of “how to do it,” with the goal of “doing things correctly.” Drawing upon business model theory and methodology, this paper, combined with the specific circumstances

of China's new think tanks, summarizes the think tank operation model into five elements and their combinations: funding sources, core resources, key activities, partners, and cost structure.

4.1 Funding Sources: Multi-channel and Sustainable

Enterprises rely on cash flow generated from revenue for survival and on profits after deducting costs for development. Think tanks differ from enterprises. As non-profit organizations, they have no revenue or only minimal revenue and require continuous funding supply for survival and development.

Think tank financing models mainly include the following five types: government funding, social donations, market operation income, PPP models, and commissioned research project funds [4].

In China, different types of think tanks have different funding sources. Official think tanks primarily rely on government fiscal appropriations and commissioned research project funds, university think tanks and social think tanks mainly depend on social donations and market operation income, and corporate think tanks rely on funding from their founding enterprises.

Different types of think tanks also face different funding pressures. Official think tanks and corporate think tanks generally have funding guarantees and the least pressure. University think tanks vary significantly: think tanks founded by prestigious universities can more easily obtain social donations and face little funding pressure, while think tanks founded by ordinary universities have greater difficulty seeking social donations and face greater funding pressure. The greatest funding pressure falls on social think tanks, whose founders or directors must prioritize fundraising.

Based on the author's observations, the main funding sources for Chinese social think tanks are:

4.1.1 Social Donations, Mainly from Enterprises and Individuals This depends on the founder's network resources and appeal (especially in the initial stage) and the think tank's brand influence. Donation methods can be diversified, such as temporary donations for specific research projects or activities, long-term fixed donations through annual council membership fees, and donations through co-hosted activities with donor organizations. From a sustainable development perspective, establishing a council and collecting annual membership fees is the direction for social think tanks. When conditions are mature, social think tanks or their founders should consider establishing special foundations to use fund income for think tank development.

4.1.2 Commissioned Research Project Funds The commissioning party proposes research projects and provides research funding, while social think tanks undertake the projects and obtain funds. This depends on the research strength and influence of the social think tank in a particular research field,

which cannot be built in a day or a year but requires years of accumulation, representative figures in the research field, good communication between think tank staff and the commissioning party, and quality services.

4.1.3 Market Operation Income This mainly includes publication sales revenue, conference and event income, membership fees, venue rental income, and investment income. Obtaining these incomes requires not only high-quality intellectual and activity products but also specialized market operation teams (currently rare) or owned property and investment funds. This may be one of the future funding channels for Chinese social think tanks. According to the experience of foreign think tanks, such income accounting for about 20% of total funding sources is considered quite high.

4.1.4 Government Funding There are two forms of government funding: first, direct government appropriations to think tanks, such as the China High-End Think Tank Construction Action Plan. However, the number of social think tanks that can obtain such appropriations is extremely limited. Second, tax exemption for think tank income and tax reduction for enterprises and individuals donating to think tanks. This requires the government to formulate special tax preferential policies to benefit all social think tanks.

Therefore, for Chinese social think tanks, establishing diversified funding channels is crucial. Simultaneously, to ensure sustainable development, it is necessary to explore long-term fixed funding channels such as councils and foundations.

4.2 Core Resources: Human Capital, Data/Methods, Brand

The core resources of China's new think tanks are the foundation for conducting key activities, cooperating with other institutions, and building their influence. In addition to funding, core resources must include human resources, databases and unique model methods, and reputation assets centered on brand.

4.2.1 Human Resources This is the most valuable asset of think tanks, mainly including three categories:

First, expert teams. Many think tanks have expert or academic committees that bring together renowned experts and scholars in their research fields and related areas. Generally, the roles of expert committees include determining the think tank's research direction and priorities, evaluating the quality of think tank research results, and leading research projects. Effectively leveraging the role of these experts and scholars requires joint efforts from the think tank's work teams and research teams.

Second, research teams, referring to personnel specifically engaged in research work. Researchers in official think tanks are almost all full-time, sometimes hiring part-time personnel. Researchers in university think tanks mainly come from

the university's faculty, with the vast majority being part-time. Researchers in social think tanks are mainly part-time, hiring personnel from relevant research institutions, with a small number of full-time researchers. Full-time and part-time each have advantages and disadvantages. Full-time personnel can devote all their time and energy but may not be competent for all research projects; part-time personnel combinations can be competent for research projects but cannot devote sufficient time and energy. The ideal structure for social think tank research teams is a small number of capable full-time personnel and a large number of multidisciplinary part-time personnel.

Third, work teams, referring to full-time personnel engaged in various management, assistant, secretarial, and administrative work. Based on the three major links of the think tank value chain—research, dissemination, and exchange—work teams should at least have corresponding functional departments: (1) Research Services or Academic Cooperation Department, responsible for communication and liaison with expert committees and research teams, and organization and management of research projects. (2) Dissemination or Media Department, responsible for external dissemination of research results and establishment and consolidation of media cooperative relationships. (3) Exchange/Activities Department, responsible for planning, organizing, and servicing conferences and activities, and preparing and ensuring interpersonal exchanges between think tank leaders and leaders of service object institutions and partner organizations. Additionally, social think tanks need to establish specialized fundraising departments.

The above three types of teams each have their own work content and responsibilities. Communication, exchange, and cooperation among them are crucial. Only in this way can they form an integrated whole, play their effective roles, and promote the continuous progress and development of the think tank.

4.2.2 Data/Method Resources This is an important resource for ensuring the quality of think tank research results and a resource urgently needed in the construction of China's new think tanks but generally neglected. These resources must be unique to play their role as core resources and constitute the core competitiveness of think tanks.

Currently, Chinese think tanks' research mainly relies on public information/data and methods, generally lacking unique data/method resources. Data resources mainly refer to databases and case banks needed for research, which must be electronic. Method resources mainly refer to models and methods formed during research processes, exclusively developed and reusable.

Think tanks mainly research public policy and strategic issues. These issues may appear "new," but similar problems have usually occurred historically, occurred in foreign countries, or even been researched by the think tank before. Presenting historical, foreign, and previously researched problems and solutions in the form of databases/case banks not only improves the efficiency of think tank research

but also ensures the quality of research results. If these databases/case banks are unique, they will be the core competitiveness of the think tank and can also attract other think tanks to discuss cooperative research.

How can unique data/method resources be developed? First, previous research results and related literature of the think tank should be collected and organized to form a foundation. Second, learn from the practices of famous foreign consulting companies by continuously enriching data and developing unique methods. Third, utilize big data technology to grasp frontier dynamics in research fields and obtain data. Fourth, when conditions are mature, cooperate with other think tanks to conduct joint research, enrich data, and develop methods.

4.2.3 Brand Resources Like enterprises, intangible assets such as think tank brands are also core resources. With a good brand and image, think tanks can obtain more social donations, undertake more commissioned research projects, and attract better experts and scholars to join expert and research teams, as well as attract more competent staff.

How to develop brand resources and establish and consolidate a good think tank image? In one word: learn and borrow corporate branding methods, which can even be completely copied (but must replace corporate customers/consumers with think tank service objects and corporate products/services with think tank research results). For example, we can learn and borrow methods from the book *The Brand Gap* [5] to build a cohesive and influential think tank brand.

The author believes that a brand consists of four components: (1) Core Values, the fundamental values of the think tank that support all our messages. (2) Core Message, the key message we want to communicate, with all other messages supporting it and adding credibility. (3) Brand Personality, the overall tone and attitude we use to communicate messages. Brand personality is the key emotional factor determining whether our brand is liked. (4) Brand Identity, the executive tools used to communicate brand messages and personality, including colors, fonts, voice-over, logos, layout design, music, etc. Brand identity makes our marketing activities unique. If these elements can be communicated in a consistent and cohesive manner, we have the materials to build a long-lasting, successful brand.

In practice, think tanks can recruit personnel with corporate brand management experience to join work teams and be responsible for brand building. They can also hire brand experts and consulting companies to help establish think tank brands.

4.3 Key Activities: Research, Dissemination, Exchange

Resources and activities are two sides of the same coin. Resources are the conditions needed to carry out certain activities, and activities are where resources exert their utility. They also promote each other: quality resources ensure activity quality, and effective activities can accumulate and enhance resources.

Borrowing from corporate value chain theory, this paper divides think tank key activities into three links: research, dissemination, and exchange. Different links have their own content and methods, and all links connect to form an integrated whole that constitutes the progress and development of the think tank.

4.3.1 Research: The Foundation of Think Tank Strength Research mainly includes four sub-links: project design, team formation, project execution, and results evaluation and acceptance. For commissioned research projects, think tanks can learn from the rules, means, and methods of scientific research project management in academic research institutions and the management systems and methods of consulting projects in consulting companies.

For self-initiated research projects, there are differences from project management in academic research institutions and consulting companies, mainly manifested in: (1) Project design: academic research institution projects are mainly basic and theoretical; consulting company projects are specific issues commissioned by particular clients; while think tank self-initiated projects must suit the needs of service objects and have certain forward-looking characteristics, with applied and policy features, not targeting any specific organization. (2) Main forms of results: academic research results are usually carried by papers and monographs, publicly disclosed. Consulting company results are consulting reports, customized for clients with specific problem analysis and solutions, provided only to clients. Think tank research results are carried by research reports/internal references, with public policy as the main content, publicly disclosed or not. (3) Results evaluation and acceptance methods: academic research results are mainly evaluated and accepted by peers; consulting company reports are evaluated and accepted by clients; think tank research results should be evaluated and accepted by expert committees and their specially organized teams.

4.3.2 Dissemination: The Key to Think Tank Influence Influence is an indicator for evaluating think tanks, including decision-making influence, academic influence, social influence, and international influence. Therefore, building think tank influence has become a key task in think tank construction, just as competitiveness is to enterprises.

Research strength and dissemination capability are the “dual wheels” of think tank influence. Research strength is the foundation, and dissemination capability is the key. Dissemination without research foundation can create short-term visibility but cannot form long-term influence. Research without dissemination promotion can at most generate influence in academic circles but is difficult to form decision-making, social, and international influence.

Dissemination mainly refers to the behavior and process of providing think tank research results to target audience groups through mass media and self-media. So how can think tanks improve their dissemination capability? The following practices can be considered: (1) Establish a specialized dissemination

department, recruit professional dissemination and media personnel, and be fully responsible for think tank dissemination work. (2) Require all dissemination staff to learn relevant knowledge in think tank research fields, master news writing and dissemination skills, understand and follow dissemination laws, and be adept at using new dissemination technologies. (3) For different audience groups, assign dedicated personnel, formulate dissemination strategies suitable for that audience group, and execute them, including dissemination theme planning, audience preference analysis, content editing and processing, and media cooperation plans. (4) Establish a dissemination effect evaluation system, with each dissemination activity undergoing self-evaluation, audience evaluation, or third-party evaluation. Continuously improve dissemination work and enhance dissemination capability based on evaluation results.

4.3.3 Exchange: The Center of Think Tank Cooperation Exchange refers to interpersonal exchanges, including non-public working visit exchanges and public conferences, forums, and other research result exchanges. The former generally does not disseminate its content externally, while the latter undergoes secondary dissemination through mass media and self-media. Broadly speaking, interpersonal exchange also belongs to the category of dissemination. To highlight its characteristics and importance, the author lists it as a key activity of think tanks.

One party in the exchange is the think tank leader, researcher, or dissemination personnel, and the other party is the leader and researchers of the service object or partner. Good exchange and communication are conducive to establishing long-term stable relationships between think tanks and service objects or partners. Poor exchange will greatly diminish think tank research strength and dissemination capability, which is not conducive to enhancing think tank influence.

Exchange is face-to-face. To achieve expected results, it requires strategies and methods different from media dissemination. Enhancing think tank personnel's exchange capability requires efforts in at least the following aspects: (1) Integrity and trustworthiness. Whatever is agreed upon must be done. If force majeure occurs, the other party should be informed in advance. (2) Sincerity. Words must come from the heart, and words and deeds must be consistent. (3) Understand the other party's preferences and styles, choose appropriate exchange locations and times, and try to use the other party's discourse system. (4) Learn and apply exchange and communication knowledge and methods, regularly evaluate exchange effects, identify shortcomings, and improve them.

4.4 Partners: Mutual Learning and Common Progress

Utilizing one's own core resources to do key activities well is not all of a think tank's work. First, no think tank will have all the resources needed to engage in key activities or have expertise in all links of key activities. Second, as think tank strategic positioning adjusts, new core resources and key activities are

objectively needed. Obtaining needed core resources through cooperation and jointly carrying out key activities is an effective way to achieve new strategic positioning. Finally, in a globalized environment, many domestic public policy issues exhibit international and global characteristics. Research on these issues requires cooperation to provide effective solutions. Therefore, finding suitable partners, learning from each other, and making common progress are also important contents of think tank work.

Generally, the possible partners (excluding service objects) for a specific think tank mainly include the following types:

- (1) Academic research institutions in the same or related research fields. The existing academic theoretical achievements of such institutions may be the theoretical foundation needed for think tank policy research, and new public policy proposals put forward by think tanks need theoretical support.
- (2) Big data and knowledge management technology providers. China's new think tanks must continuously adopt new technologies to enhance their research and dissemination capabilities, which requires establishing partnership relationships with new technology providers, not just transactional purchase relationships.
- (3) Other think tanks in the same field/region. In a certain research field or region, there are usually multiple think tanks. People often believe that these think tanks have competitive relationships. The author believes that they need cooperation more. Through cooperation, they can pool respective advantages, compensate for respective deficiencies, and provide higher-quality think tank intellectual products.
- (4) Media and publishing institutions. Think tank intellectual products usually need to be disseminated to target audience groups through mass media (newspapers, television, advertising, internet, etc.) and publishing institutions. The quality of cooperation between the two parties is an important factor determining think tank influence.
- (5) Foreign think tanks and academic research institutions. Exchange and cooperation between Chinese think tanks and foreign think tanks and academic research institutions are not only needed for Chinese think tank research and dissemination but also the main way for Chinese think tanks to realize their public diplomacy functions.
- (6) International non-governmental organizations in relevant fields. Almost all research fields have international non-governmental organizations. China's new think tanks should regard joining these organizations as important work content. By joining, attending conferences, speaking at conferences, and holding middle and senior management positions, Chinese think tanks can gradually expand their influence. By proposing Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions, Chinese think tanks can gradually enhance their discourse power.

How to select partners and establish high-quality cooperative relationships for mutual learning and common progress? This requires Chinese think tanks to learn and master *The Art of Partnership* [6], which the author will discuss in a separate paper.

Professor Zhong Xin of Renmin University of China and others have conducted specialized research on the Charhar Institute. In their paper “Development Model and Functions of Chinese Social Think Tanks: A Case Study of the Charhar Institute” [7], they believe that multi-subject cooperation is the development model of the Charhar Institute and introduce, analyze, and research the specific partners, cooperation content, and methods of the Charhar Institute.

4.5 Cost Structure: Cost-Driven, Value-Driven, Indirect Costs

Cost structure in corporate business models has two types: first, cost-driven, aiming to create and maintain the most economical cost structure, adopting low-price value propositions, maximum automation, and extensive outsourcing. Second, value-driven, characterized by value-added value propositions and highly personalized services.

Which type China’s new think tanks should adopt depends on the specific circumstances of the particular think tank. However, the following basic questions need to be answered: - What are the most important fixed costs in our operation model? - Which core resources cost the most? - Which key activities cost the most?

Additionally, indirect costs and their allocation are the main difficulties in think tank financial management [8]. However, due to the author’s limited capabilities, this requires us to gradually develop a systematic approach.

Applying corporate business model theory and methods to study the strategic positioning and operation model of China’s new think tanks is feasible and effective.

Strategic positioning can use two matrices (service object/function matrix, research field/region matrix) as an analytical framework and be realized through basic positioning criteria. The key lies in the match between the resources and capabilities required for strategic positioning and the existing resources and capabilities of the think tank.

The five elements of the operation model (funding sources, core resources, key activities, partners, cost structure) provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining think tank operation issues. Specific think tanks can use it to diagnose operation problems and propose appropriate solutions for improvement.

Like Chinese enterprises, Chinese think tanks are latecomers globally. The basic way for latecomers to catch up with and surpass pioneers is learning and innovation. The current main task for Chinese think tanks is learning—learning

from the experiences of think tanks in Western developed countries and from corporate management theories and experiences.

- [1] Full Text of “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics”[EB/OL]. [2016-07-29]. http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2015-01/21/c_133934292.htm.
- [2] Alexander Osterwalder, Yves Pigneur. Translated by Wang Shuai, Mao Xinyu, Yan Wei. Business Model Generation [M]. Beijing: China Machine Press, 2016: 4, 7-31.
- [3] Full Text of “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics”[EB/OL]. [2016-07-29]. http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2015-01/21/c_133934292.htm.
- [4] Xiong Li, Lu Yue. Research on the Financing Model of Chinese Think Tanks: Inspiration from Famous Foreign Think Tanks [J]. Think Tank: Theory & Practice, 2016, 1(1): 63.
- [5] Mike Moser. Translated by Yu Hongyan, Zhao Chunxiao. The Brand Gap: How to Bridge the Distance Between Business Strategy and Design [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2005.
- [6] Ed Rigsbee. Translated by Tang Yan, Wang Qianfang. The Art of Partnership (2nd Edition) [M]. Beijing: China CITIC Press.
- [7] Zhong Xin, Zhou Yifeng. Development Model and Functions of Chinese Social Think Tanks: A Case Study of the Charhar Institute [J]. Think Tank Review (First Series). Beijing: China Social Sciences Literature Press, 2016: 39-58.
- [8] Raymond J. Struyk. Translated by Li Gang et al. Managing Think Tanks: A Practical Guide for Maturing Organizations [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2016: 147-170.

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

Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.