

Postprint: Construction of Distinctive New-Type Think Tanks in the Context of Economic Transformation and Development

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] Addressing the issues in think tank construction during China's current economic transformation and social development, establishing a new type of specialized think tank with distinctive features that meets local development needs can conceptually drive the successful transformation of local economies. However, with the rise of a nationwide think tank wave, numerous irregularities have emerged during the construction process, making characteristic new-type think tanks key to resolving the phenomenon of redundant construction across different regions. [Method/Process] Taking Henan, a major agricultural province, as an example, "Three Rural Issues" think tanks will become distinctive, special, and specialized platforms within China's think tank construction wave. Henan must take the lead in constructing "Three Rural Issues" think tanks, seizing first-mover advantages and comprehensively enriching the marketplace of ideas. The transformation of Henan's rural society fundamentally depends on the impetus of ideas; a society lacking ideas will fall into stagnation, rendering transformation and development impossible. The marketplace of ideas is the source of emergence and dissemination of new concepts, as well as an important condition for the supply and optimization of government public policies. [Results/Conclusions] Research indicates: focusing on constructing a Central Plains Rural Development Think Tank Demonstration Zone, actively exploring new models for coordinated development of the Central Plains Economic Region, the construction pathways include: (1) in overall planning, adhering to diversified development of official and non-official think tanks, letting a hundred flowers bloom; (2) in the focus of think tank construction, adhering to substance over form; (3) in the institutional guarantee for think tank development, adhering to governing think tanks according to law; (4) based on the differentiated characteristics of different regions and industries, constructing corresponding specialized think tanks.

Full Text

Building Characteristic New-Type Think Tanks in the Context of Economic Transformation and Development: A Practical Exploration Based on Henan' s “Three Rural Issues” Think Tank

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] In response to think tank construction issues during China’ s current economic transformation and social development, establishing a new-type, characteristic, and specialized think tank that meets local development needs can conceptually drive successful local economic transformation. However, as a national wave of think tank construction has risen, numerous problems have emerged. Building characteristic new-type think tanks is key to eliminating redundant construction across regions. **[Method/Process]** Taking Henan Province, a major agricultural province, as an example, the “three rural issues” think tank will become a distinctive, special, and specialized platform within China’ s think tank construction wave. Henan must take the lead in building “three rural issues” think tanks, seizing first-mover advantages and comprehensively enriching the market for ideas. The transformation of Henan’ s rural society fundamentally depends on conceptual drivers, as a society lacking ideas will fall into stagnation, making transformation and development impossible. The market for ideas is the source of new concepts and their dissemination, as well as an important condition for the supply and optimization of government public policies. **[Results/Conclusion]** Research shows that efforts should focus on building a Central Plains rural development think tank demonstration zone and actively exploring new models for coordinated development in the Central Plains Economic Zone. The construction path includes: (1) In overall planning, adhere to diversified development of both official and non-official think tanks, allowing all flowers to bloom together; (2) In the focus of think tank construction, insist that content is more important than form; (3) In institutional guarantees for think tank development, adhere to governing think tanks according to law; and (4) Based on differentiated characteristics of different regions and industries, build corresponding specialized think tanks.

Keywords: transformation and development; think tank; characteristic new-type; three rural issues

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As China's economy and society gradually enter a new normal, the task of transformation and development becomes increasingly urgent. Economic development and social transformation fundamentally depend on the driving force of ideas. Particularly when economic and social development reaches a certain height, a society lacking in ideas will fall into stagnation, making transformation and development impossible. The market for ideas is the source of new concepts and their dissemination, as well as an important condition for the supply and optimization of government public policies. To thoroughly study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's important instructions on think tank construction and conscientiously implement the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics," this paper conducts in-depth research on the development status of think tanks in Henan Province, particularly the important position of "three rural issues" think tanks in the construction of characteristic new-type think tanks in Henan. We believe that for Henan, a major agricultural province in central China, if it does not take the lead in think tank construction, leverage first-mover advantages, and comprehensively enrich the market for ideas, it will lose strategic opportunities for transformation and development and waste valuable opportunities to catch up with developed provinces. Undoubtedly, "three rural issues" think tanks will become a distinctive, special, and specialized platform in China's think tank construction wave. How to specifically build this characteristic new-type think tank platform and how to effectively prevent blindness and redundancy in the think tank construction process are the key questions this paper seeks to answer.

1 The Necessity and Particularity of Building Characteristic New-Type Think Tanks to Serve Economic Transformation and Development

1.1 The Necessity of Building Characteristic New-Type Think Tanks

As China's modernization advances rapidly, think tanks play an increasingly important role in national governance, becoming an indispensable component of the national governance system and an important manifestation of national governance capacity. To establish a more mature and stable socialist institutional system, China must strengthen the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. International experience shows that think tank development can become the "engine" of government policy systems. However, in terms of quality and effectiveness, China currently suffers from a severe shortage of high-end think tanks. When examining specific regions, the polarization phenomenon becomes even more serious. Most of China's think tanks, particularly high-end ones, are located in economically developed eastern cities such

as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, while the development of high-end think tanks in central and western regions is seriously inadequate. Within provincial regions, political and economic center cities concentrate the vast majority of the province' s think tanks. Taking Henan Province as an example, the region has not only few think tanks but also low quality. Even university think tanks with the most development potential are in a very nascent stage, unable to form an effective mechanism for generating ideas. Relying on individual renowned scholars to “fight alone” yields obviously low effectiveness, seriously constraining the region' s economic and social transformation and development. This leads to an inability to pool collective wisdom on transformation goals and paths, with most cases simply following or simply replicating development paths from developed regions. However, due to different resource endowments and widely varying development stages and environments, the development paths of pioneering regions cannot be simply transplanted to less developed regions. The result is that the task of transformation and development is repeatedly delayed, missing opportunities for transformation.

1.2 The Particularity of Building Characteristic New-Type Think Tanks

Meanwhile, new-type think tank construction must also highlight its particularity. Think tank construction in different regions and fields requires adaptation to local conditions and strengthening of respective characteristics and specialization. Taking think tanks in the agricultural field as an example, since China' s “three rural issues” have long troubled China' s economic and social development, and agriculture' s fundamental and strategic position is extremely special, this requires particular emphasis on basic policy characteristics in the construction of “three rural issues” think tanks. Obviously, achieving agricultural modernization under new circumstances necessarily requires improving land use efficiency, increasing agricultural output, and releasing the productive potential of agricultural factors. Considering the weak nature of agriculture, Chinese agriculture can only fundamentally meet society' s demand for basic necessities through market-oriented, scaled, and specialized production. This poses new requirements for the management methods of China' s traditional agriculture. In a modern agricultural management system, more and more agricultural production and management are characterized by individual participation. The separation of workplace and residence brought by the modern market economy also enables family members to organize their lives more freely, substantially increasing their freedom in career choice. So what adaptive contradictions exist between modern agriculture and traditional agricultural management methods? And how should a new agricultural management system be constructed to meet the needs of modern agriculture? These are special issues that “three rural issues” think tanks must confront.

2 New Opportunities and Challenges for Central Plains Rural Think Tanks Under the New Normal

Under the new normal, Henan's rural development faces important strategic opportunities. On the one hand, we must enhance confidence, adapt to the new normal, and seize strategic opportunities for transformation and development in the province based on the current phased characteristics of national and provincial economic development. From a national perspective, the new normal means that economic growth will basically bid farewell to the traditional extensive growth model, with growth speed "stepping down," growth structure showing new trend changes, and growth drivers undergoing transformation [1]. However, from the perspective of Henan Province as a regional component, the new normal presents more new opportunities, with the possibility of "stepping up" in development quality and level. Whether this opportunity can be seized depends on whether Henan can take the lead in deepening rural economic system and mechanism reforms under the new normal, optimizing institutional supply, and improving the level of "three rural issues" policy formulation and public service capacity.

2.1 New-Type Urbanization Boosts Central Plains Rural Transformation and Development

Currently, many cities in Henan Province face excessive population pressure in main urban areas and prominent "urban diseases," while industrial agglomeration is insufficient in peripheral and remote areas, and rural population outflow is prominent. Urbanization has reached a new stage where transformation and development is imperative. Under the new normal, the scale and quality of new-type urbanization need substantial improvement, requiring coordinated development between urban and rural areas. The urban consumer group will further expand, urban and rural consumption structures will further upgrade, and consumption potential will be continuously released [2]. This will also generate huge demand for urban and rural infrastructure, public service facilities, industrial development carriers, and residential construction, thereby boosting the optimal allocation of urban and rural elements and industries in space and providing valuable opportunities for Henan's rural transformation and development.

2.2 The New Normal Leads Capital to the Countryside and Shifts Livelihood Priorities

Under the new normal, China's overall economy will become less dependent on investment, but investment in certain regions, especially vast rural areas, urgently needs to be strengthened. While the scale of investment declines, the adjustment of investment structure and investment subjects becomes more important. Particularly for the underdeveloped Central Plains rural areas, investment in rural infrastructure and livelihood fields remains very weak. Therefore, under the new normal, there is enormous space for public consumption-oriented

investment and livelihood investment in Henan's vast rural areas. Meanwhile, as Henan's fiscal resources are not abundant and private capital is not as strong as in developed regions, this determines that while the government increases public investment, it must also plan how to attract external capital to the countryside, how to coordinate the layout and rationally allocate capital flows across different villages and fields, how to ensure the smooth entry and sustained profitability of external and private capital [3], and how to properly handle rural contradictions under the new normal to achieve interactive governance and shared development [4]. These are major issues that Henan must resolve to achieve sustained, harmonious, and stable growth.

2.3 The Differential Pattern Brought by New-Type Urbanization to Central Plains Rural Development

Under the new development situation, with the introduction of the national new-type urbanization plan and corresponding household registration system reform opinions, institutional barriers between urban and rural areas and between regions are gradually being broken down, and labor mobility and migration will become more free. Against this backdrop, the possibility of more than 11 million migrant workers from Henan and their family members achieving urbanization in their employment locations has greatly increased. The absolute population reduction in the province will shift from possibility to reality. After the completion of new-type urbanization, Henan's permanent resident population and rural population may decrease substantially, and the scale and structure of most township populations and even some county town populations may undergo new changes, with new changes occurring in the differential pattern between regions. Faced with this changing situation, Henan must both prevent unreasonable expansion of small villages, towns, and counties during the new-type urbanization process and prevent resource misallocation and waste of public resources between regions [5]. This is a major challenge Henan faces under the new normal.

2.4 Challenges Facing Agricultural Provinces Under the New Normal of Agriculture

Agriculture is the foundation of the national economy, and agricultural development has always been a top priority in Chinese government work. Since the reform and opening up, China's agricultural development achievements have attracted worldwide attention, with annual increases in grain output and farmers' income. However, as industrialization and urbanization deepen, China's overall economy and agricultural sector have entered a new normal: rapid increases in agricultural production costs, continuous intensification of water and soil resource constraints, prominent structural contradictions in agricultural product supply and demand, increasingly serious price inversions between domestic and international grain prices and domestic grain inventory backlogs, farmers' income not increasing despite increased output, severely dampened enthusiasm for grain planting, and grain purchase and storage policies facing unsustainable

situations. This severe new agricultural situation urgently demands proactive transformation in China's agricultural sector. The practice of maintaining farmers' enthusiasm for cultivation through high grain prices has become unsustainable. Reducing agricultural operating costs and improving agricultural operating profits and agricultural product competitiveness are fundamental to attracting quality factors into agriculture under the new normal.

As the process of land transfer accelerates across China, appropriately scaled agricultural management methods have quietly emerged. However, this year's grain price decline has cast a shadow over agricultural transformation again, with frequent waves of large grain growers forcibly withdrawing from land due to inability to pay, triggering various contradictions between farmers and large growers and village committees, shaking the foundations of grassroots stability. If this continues for long, China's overall grain security situation will inevitably be affected. Thus, on the one hand, agricultural provinces face challenges in continuously increasing farmers' income, while on the other hand, national grain security must be guaranteed. Under this dilemma, where is the way out for agricultural provinces? This is another important aspect where characteristic new-type think tanks must play an intellectual leadership role.

2.5 Inefficient Land Transfer Constrains the Transformation of Agricultural Management Modes

Survey data shows that smallholder production remains the main mode of grain production in China, with farmers' grain planting scale generally being very small, which is not conducive to mechanized operations and scaled management, resulting in generally low per-mu grain yields in China. In sharp contrast, large grain growers have significantly higher per-mu yields than smallholders, with obvious scale effects in farming [6]. However, constrained by various conditions, the overall scale of land transfer in China remains small, with most farmers still 倾向于 (preferring) household-based production. As China's industrialization and urbanization processes accelerate, the differentiation and transfer of agricultural populations intensifies, and village and agricultural labor populations decrease sharply, making it inevitable that agricultural transformation through land transfer to achieve appropriately scaled management will be irreversible. However, according to our surveys, only some large grain growers hope to achieve scale effects in agricultural management through land transfer, while others aim to obtain financial support from local governments or use land for other non-agricultural purposes. With this year's sharp decline in grain prices, many large grain growers cannot pay land rent on time or even breach contracts and withdraw from land, causing large tracts of land to lie fallow and seriously threatening the next year's grain harvest. Faced with such breaches, many farmers express a lack of reasonable solutions, and village committees are helpless, often triggering local mass incidents that threaten grassroots stability.

Under these circumstances, how to effectively promote rational land transfer and form appropriate land management scale has become the key to transforming

China's agricultural management mode and a major challenge that characteristic new-type think tank construction must confront. Therefore, how to find suitable pilots to orderly advance the land transfer process while adhering to the three bottom lines of not changing the nature of public land ownership, not breaking the cultivated land red line, and not harming farmers' interests has become a key exploration area for think tanks. The agricultural characteristics and rural culture of the Central Plains region also have significant differences from other regions, making highlighting Central Plains characteristics the key to building a new-type think tank in Henan's "three rural issues" field.

3 The Strategic Value of Building a Characteristic "Three Rural Issues" Think Tank in Henan

Looking back at Henan's development over the past three decades, the achievements are astonishing. Looking forward, Henan's transformation and development faces an important problem: the lack of a market for ideas and insufficient think tank construction. Once an open, free, competitive, and powerful market for ideas is lacking, suitable ideological concepts or public policies for specific development stages cannot or cannot timely emerge [7]. Strong think tank construction and development will enable Henan's economic development to be more knowledge-driven, more sustainable, and more creative. More importantly, through interaction and integration with the diverse modern world, it can better promote Henan's revival or transformation of its rich cultural traditions and even become a national center for commodity and idea production and circulation.

3.1 Think Tanks Provide Strong Intellectual Support for "Three Rural Issues" Development

Timely promotion of a city or industry's development cannot be separated from intellectual support. For example, Beijing's development cannot be separated from the intellectual support of central ministries, commissions, academies, and universities; Tianjin's development cannot be separated from the intellectual support of the Eastern, Central, and Western Regional Development Research Institute; Hainan's development cannot be separated from the support of the China (Hainan) Institute for Reform and Development; Shanghai's development cannot be separated from the support of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies and the SHU Think Tank Industry Research Center. A continuous stream of intellectual support provides development foresight for cities and industries. Similarly, Central Plains rural development cannot be separated from strong think tank support. Currently, China's "three rural issues" think tanks are still very rare. Based in Henan, the Central Plains Rural Development Think Tank will be the first to break this situation and become powerful intellectual support for "three rural issues" development.

3.2 Characteristic Think Tanks Are an Important Component of Soft Power for Central Plains Rural Development

Think tanks are an important component of national soft power, and “three rural issues” think tanks are an important manifestation of soft power for rural transformation and development. Traditional rural development has overly relied on top-down government mandatory policies. Rural development in the new era needs to find its own voice, stimulating and reflecting more farmers’ autonomy, initiative, and enthusiasm to form endogenous development. This requires attaching great importance to and actively exploring new organizational forms and management methods for Central Plains rural characteristic think tanks, taking effective measures to guide “three rural issues” development think tanks to strengthen their own construction, actively offer suggestions, and provide high-quality decision-making support for Central Plains rural development.

3.3 Using the “Three Rural Issues” Think Tank as a Lever to Build a Think Tank Industry Cluster

Based on Henan’ s basic provincial condition as a major agricultural province, building a characteristic think tank centered on “three rural issues” research is Henan’ s basic path to distinguish itself from other regions in think tank system construction. Through the “three rural issues” think tank as a carrier and demonstration zone and incubator for the think tank industry, continuously gather high-end intellectual resources to serve Henan’ s “three rural issues” policy formulation, saving regional strategic costs and government governance costs. At the same time, adapt measures to local conditions, lead and gather high-end industry clusters, build think tank industry chains, form cluster effects, drive and form new regional development patterns. Ultimately, make think tanks an important content of Henan’ s soft power construction and an important support for Henan’ s economic leapfrog development.

3.4 Attracting Talent Through Wisdom to Drive Talent Aggregation and Transformation Development

From a broad perspective, while providing public policy research and consulting services, think tanks can also integrate intellectual resources from inside and outside the province and from home and abroad, coordinate resource allocation, leverage the think tank’ s talent aggregation effect, drive the in-depth development of surrounding industries and think tank industry chains, and enhance the scientific and technological innovation capacity and knowledge content of regional economic development. Therefore, characteristic new-type think tanks with the “three rural issues” think tank as their banner will also help improve the scientification and democratization of public decision-making in Henan, help fully combine central policies with Henan’ s unique advantageous resources, stimulate the vitality of the regional economy, and promote Henan’ s economic and social transformation and development under the new normal.

4 Strategies for Building the Central Plains Rural Development Think Tank Platform

While the strategic position of think tank construction becomes prominent, Henan's emphasis on think tanks, particularly "three rural issues" think tanks, remains insufficient. On the one hand, there is a lack of overall planning; on the other hand, resource allocation is not scientific enough. In the future, Henan must increase and accelerate efforts in think tank construction, highlight local characteristics, draw on beneficial experiences from inside and outside the province and from home and abroad, and forge a think tank development path that fully embodies Central Plains characteristics, Central Plains style, and Central Plains spirit.

In overall planning, adhere to diversified development of both official and non-official think tanks, allowing all flowers to bloom together. Coordinate the development of party and government departments, academies of social sciences, party schools and administrative institutes, universities, science and technology enterprises, and social think tanks to form functionally complementary think tanks of three types: official, university, and civilian [8], based in the Central Plains and "three rural issues," radiating to the north and influencing the nation, forming a Central Plains characteristic new-type think tank system with clear positioning, distinctive features, moderate scale, and rational layout.

In the focus of think tank construction, insist that content is more important than form. Overall, Henan's think tank construction is still in the primary development stage. Some decision-making and advisory bodies are approaching or even converging with those in other regions in form, while "three rural issues" think tanks lag far behind other regions in both form and content. Therefore, Henan's think tanks must pay greater attention to content construction and "three rural issues" research, as only on this basis can they provide profound, scientific, and comprehensive policy recommendations for the Henan provincial government.

In institutional guarantees for think tank development, adhere to governing think tanks according to law. Promptly formulate systematic decision-making consultation policies, improve laws and regulations for think tanks, and perfect policy systems regarding think tank nature and attributes, behavioral patterns, behavioral guarantees, and work evaluation.

In terms of think tank quantity and quality, combine with Henan's provincial conditions to build a professional think tank system with broad coverage and deep influence in batches. Currently, the speed, quantity, and quality of Henan's think tank construction are far from meeting new situation demands, particularly in the "three rural issues" field where think tank quantity and influence are very weak with great room for improvement. Therefore, Henan should further strengthen the influence and discourse power of "three rural issues" think tanks, shape an intellectual and public opinion environment conducive to Henan's agricultural development, and provide higher-quality policy consultation.

5 Recommendations for Strengthening the Central Plains Rural Development Think Tank

Build corresponding specialized think tanks based on differentiated characteristics of different regions and industries. It is recommended to integrate advantageous resources from different industries and fields, accelerate the establishment of the Central Plains Rural Development Research Institute, jointly build a high-end think tank platform for Central Plains rural development, and jointly launch regular regional joint meetings with various cities in the Central Plains to promote collaborative and innovative development of Central Plains rural areas. With the Central Plains Rural Development Research Institute as the vanguard, give full play to the think tank's leading role and decision-making consultation function at the levels of intelligence, comprehensive judgment, strategic planning, and innovation.

Build a Central Plains rural development think tank demonstration zone and actively explore new models for coordinated development in the Central Plains Economic Zone. The Central Plains urban agglomeration is a public space with multiple integration of society, economy, environment, and culture, but connections between rural areas across the Central Plains are very loose, and connections between urban and rural areas are also very disorderly. In the future, an economic system supported by industrial development will become the key to sustainable development of cities and rural areas and the key to building collaborative development across regions. Therefore, it is necessary to timely build a Central Plains rural development think tank demonstration zone, explore and test new models for Central Plains rural collaborative development, explore new urban-rural relations supported by industrial agglomeration, follow the concept of "think tanks as the core, culture as the soul" in building industrial systems, and strive to achieve breakthrough progress in think tank and talent aggregation in Henan Province and remarkable results in demonstration zone construction within about five years.

Adjust government support methods and actively promote the establishment of think tank funds. First, establish a provincial-level "Central Plains Brain" plan, explore the establishment of expert studios and expert committees in different industries and fields, promptly improve decision-making consultation policies and regulations, and incorporate decision-making consultation into the normal procedures of Henan's decision-making process. Second, legalize the expert consultation system, ensuring that all stages of government project demonstration, operation, and performance evaluation must have different consultation reports as references, providing legal support for think tank development. Clarify which government decisions must undergo expert consultation and demonstration, define the functions and authority of expert consultation institutions, and ensure that expert consultation work has laws to follow. Third, establish a purchasing mechanism for think tank intellectual products to incentivize the supply of intellectual products from various think tanks. Fourth, establish a project bidding system to select think tank intellectual products through competitive methods.

Fifth, incorporate government public services and policy supply work into the target assessment system at all levels of government, ensuring government demand for think tank intellectual products through institutional guarantees.

Increase data support and enhance decision-making publicity and information disclosure. Think tanks require large amounts of relevant information and data when conducting public policy research, and access to comprehensive and accurate information is crucial for think tank survival and development. Therefore, consider consolidating existing “three rural issues” research teams in Henan to establish specialized databases focused on Central Plains rural development, including a rural survey database, rural social dynamics tracking database, rural village conditions observation database, and rural intelligence and informatization database, mutually supporting and jointly serving think tank research. Additionally, Henan should centrally organize and summarize information data from different departments, uniformly disclose public policy-related statistical data and information to the outside world, expand the scope of government information sharing, and provide an analytical foundation for high-level policy research.

Encourage innovation and ensure think tank independence. Since think tanks focus on public policy consultation and services, this inevitably leads to close relationships between think tanks and government. From the perspective of long-term think tank development and the scientific and open nature of public policy research, it is essential to encourage think tanks to innovate in thought and concepts, institutionally guarantee their independent operation, and grant think tank workers more freedom and independent space.

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

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