

Development Trends and Characteristics of International Think Tanks and the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks in China (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] As the nation initiates the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, think tanks will play an increasingly important role in the government' s scientific and democratic decision-making. Building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics requires both integrating China' s national conditions and learning from the experiences of other countries.

[Methodology/Process] This study employs multiple methods including investigation, case analysis, and scientometric analysis to examine the main trends in international think tank development, summarizes and elaborates on the primary characteristics of top-tier foreign think tanks, and on this basis, proposes several recommendations for the construction of new-type think tanks in China.

[Results/Conclusions] The research shows that the number of global think tanks is expanding rapidly, government decision-making' s reliance on think tanks is deepening, think tanks have become opinion-leading institutions that guide and influence public opinion, the social influence of think tanks continues to expand, competition among think tanks for international discourse power is intensifying, and the think tank phenomenon has become an important issue in academic research. International first-class think tanks have distinctive characteristics, mainly including a clear orientation toward policy pragmatism, a branded characteristic of professing independence and objectivity, a council-based organizational management mechanism, a unique talent organization and mobility mechanism, a value orientation that pursues high-quality output and influence, policy innovation research based on data, information, and tool methods, publicity and marketing approaches that enhance policy and social influence, and development trends in building international networked think tanks. On this basis, the study proposes recommendations for constructing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, including establishing and improving

institutional arrangements, establishing communication and results reporting mechanisms, cultivating think tank-oriented research talent, establishing new-type think tank governance mechanisms, establishing scientific evaluation systems for think tanks, and promoting the development of international networked think tanks.

Full Text

International Think Tank Development Trends and Characteristics and Construction of New-Type Chinese Think Tanks

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Abstract: The report of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in 2013 proposed “strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establishing a sound decision-making consultation system.” The “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics” issued by the central government in January 2015 marked the formal elevation of this construction to a national strategy. In November 2015, the “Pilot Work Plan for National High-End Think Tank Construction” was approved, designating 25 pilot high-end think tanks and launching comprehensive construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. It is anticipated that think tanks will play an increasingly important role in researching and consulting on strategic and policy issues for scientific and democratic government decision-making, thereby promoting continuous improvement of the national decision-making consultation system.

The term “think tank” was originally translated as “思想库” (thought reservoir). The earliest authoritative international concept defines a think tank as a stable, relatively independent policy research institution whose researchers employ scientific methods to conduct interdisciplinary research on a wide range of policy issues, providing consultation on policy matters closely related to government, enterprise, and the public. Subsequent definitions describe think tanks as “independent organizations engaged in multidisciplinary research that strives to influence public policy.” Thus, think tanks are relatively stable, independent policy research and consulting institutions outside the political system and represent important participants in the policy process, playing an increasingly vital role in modern social development. Since the concept emerged in the 1940s, over 60 years of development have led to a relatively unified academic understanding: the organizational form is policy research institutions, the work content is policy research, the service targets are policymakers and the public, the work objective is influencing public policy, and they exhibit independence, non-profit

nature, multidisciplinary, and multiple professional fields and types.

Constructing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics requires both adapting to China's national conditions and learning from other countries' experiences. European and American think tanks have undergone long periods of professional development with smooth decision-making consultation mechanisms, forming valuable experiences in construction, management, and operation that offer important insights for Chinese think tank development. This paper focuses on analyzing major international development trends in think tanks, summarizes distinctive features of world-class think tank development, and proposes recommendations for constructing and developing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

1. Main Trends in International Think Tank Development

1.1 Rapid and Continuous Growth in Global Think Tank Numbers

Over the past several decades, the number of global think tanks has increased rapidly. The "Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program" (TTCSP) led by James G. McGann at the University of Pennsylvania has conducted annual surveys and evaluations of global think tank development since 2007, publishing the *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* each year since 2008. According to this project's statistical analysis, from the 1940s to the 1990s, the annual increase in global think tanks grew from 12 to 142. Although the growth rate has slowed over the past decade, the overall number continues to grow steadily. Table 1 shows changes in global think tank numbers since 2007. In 2014, 6,618 think tanks were included in the statistical system, primarily concentrated in North America, Europe, and Asia.

Overall, global think tank numbers have experienced steady growth since 2007, increasing by several dozen annually. Notably, the number jumped from 5,465 in 2008 to 6,305 in 2009, likely due to the inclusion of previously uncounted think tanks rather than newly established ones. Similar explanations apply to sudden increases in other regions. By region, only Latin America and the Caribbean saw decreases in 2013 and 2014 compared to the previous three years; all other regions showed growth. Even in mature markets like the United States and Europe, several dozen new think tanks are added annually.

Specifically, regional and national development of think tanks remains uneven. In 2014, North American think tanks accounted for 30% of the global total, European think tanks 27.5%, and Asian think tanks 16.7%. These three regions combined represent 74.2% of global think tank numbers, with Europe and the Americas continuing to dominate think tank development.

Moreover, some newly established think tanks have quickly gained influence. These often emerge around major new challenges facing humanity, such as climate change think tanks (e.g., the Pew Center on Global Climate Change) and energy think tanks, rapidly achieving influence in strategic and policy research

and consultation. Newer institutions like the Center for American Progress, New America Foundation, and Center for a New American Security have also become notably influential in U.S. foreign policy.

1.2 Growing Government Reliance on Think Tanks for Decision-Making

Major national think tanks, particularly government-affiliated ones, are increasingly becoming sources of important public policies, designers of policy content, evaluators of policy effectiveness, marketers of policy implementation, and leaders and guides of social discourse power.

As national decision-making consultation services become more professionalized, countries' demand for think tank ideas and talent grows stronger. Facing increasingly complex domestic and international situations, governments need think tanks to provide intellectual support while also requiring them to serve as opinion leaders and elites who can interpret policies and provide innovative perspectives to enhance credibility.

The status and role of think tanks in contemporary Western society are becoming increasingly prominent, particularly in the United States. Almost every policy and decision by the president, cabinet, Congress, CIA, Pentagon, or National Security Council is directly or indirectly influenced by think tanks. The Center for American Progress, established in 1989 as the policy arm of the Democratic Leadership Council, has had enormous influence on the Clinton and Obama administrations. Many of its strategic research reports and policy recommendations in recent years have been adopted by the Obama administration, some even accepted wholesale. Its 2007 reports *Progressive Growth: Revitalizing America's Economy Through Clean Energy, Innovation, and Opportunity* and *Rebuilding America's Defenses: A New Way Forward for National Security Strategy*, along with its 2008 *2009 Nuclear Posture Review*, provided relatively complete frameworks for the Obama administration's adjustments to U.S. climate change and military policies.

In the United States, specific institutional arrangements require expert and public consultation before important federal and departmental policies are issued. Federal, state, and municipal/county governments all attach great importance to expert consultation and public consultation in the public policy decision-making process. Public consultation is a crucial procedure in U.S. public policy decision-making, particularly for policies requiring parliamentary approval and public support, with clear legal procedures ensuring comprehensive public access to information and opportunities to participate in policy formulation and express opinions.

1.3 Think Tanks as Opinion Leaders Influencing Public Opinion

Research reports from internationally renowned think tanks on international and global challenges and on economic and social development worldwide often

become important intellectual tools for guiding and influencing public opinion.

Researching and proposing ideas is the core competence of think tanks. The essence of think tanks is an “idea factory”—a place that produces knowledge, wisdom, and ideas. Ideas and perspectives are the primary elements for think tank survival. Think tanks excel at identifying key issues affecting social, political, economic, and diplomatic development, applying new ideas and theories to conduct convincing analyses, and proposing solutions. Through multiple dissemination channels, they spread these ideas to the public, guide social thought, and thereby influence government decision-making. Internationally famous think tanks have risen to become world-class institutions based on new ideas, perspectives, and theories. For example, the Club of Rome gained fame with its 1972 report *The Limits to Growth*, which sparked global concern about unlimited human growth causing planetary catastrophe and launched a major debate that lasted for years. Lester Brown’s 1994 report *Who Will Feed China?* from the Earth Watch Institute triggered long-term international discussion about China’s population and development issues.

1.4 Expanding Social Influence and the Emergence of the “Idea Industry”

Most think tanks vigorously promote the objectivity, independence, and neutrality of their policy and strategic research to demonstrate to the public that their research conclusions, perspectives, and policy recommendations are objective and closer to reality and truth—approaching the “truth” of problem and factual logic—so that the public can “accept with confidence” their viewpoints. Consequently, think tanks’ social influence continues to expand.

In Western developed countries, think tank voices can be heard on everything from national security, foreign relations, and development strategies to pension plans, community health, and even school lunches—think tanks participate in and even influence decisions on all these issues. Major international issues also feature think tank voices. The influence of think tanks on contemporary Western society and the entire world can be described as far-reaching.

Think tanks have become an important form of social organization. With the rise of the knowledge society and increasing specialization in knowledge services and consultation, think tanks’ professional decision-making consultation role will be further strengthened, and the think tank phenomenon will intensify. Modern think tanks are increasingly developing into an “idea industry” phenomenon—researching and proposing ideological concepts to influence public policy debate, promoting government departments to transform ideas and policy concepts into public policy action, making think tanks a powerful and enduring presence in the public policy environment. As think tanks continuously improve their governance mechanisms and effectively combine interpersonal networks with social networks and modern communication networks, disseminating ideas will become more convenient. Think tanks with innovative ideas will have more significant

influence in modern society, and institutions that survive and develop by producing, disseminating, and marketing “ideological concept” products will continue to exist long-term.

1.5 Intensifying Competition Among Think Tanks for International Discourse Power

Major international think tanks strive to position themselves as influential international strategic and policy research institutions in their orientation. Some important think tanks actively work to become setters and researchers of important international issues and authoritative leaders and guides of discourse.

Taking China studies as an example, research on China has become one of the important issues of concern for various famous think tanks, which have established specialized research teams to study China. In 2006, Brookings Institution Council Chairman John L. Thornton donated a large sum to establish the John L. Thornton China Center, which provides cutting-edge research, analysis, dialogue, and publication services focusing on China’s rise and its impact on the United States, China’s neighbors, and the world. Additionally, China studies are a research priority for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which established the “Carnegie China Net” (<http://carnegietsinghua.org>) to introduce the foundation’s publications, magazines, activities, and other information resources to policymakers and scholars, enhancing academic exchange and mutual understanding in international politics and public policy between China and the United States. The *Carnegie China Insight Monthly* e-newsletter utilizes the foundation’s human and information resources to provide analysis and reflection on current China issues. The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars operates the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States and the China Environment Forum, while the Center for Strategic and International Studies has the Freeman Chair in China Studies, focusing on issues in U.S.-China economic and trade relations, the impact of China’s military modernization on regional security, and the influence of China’s domestic transformation on U.S.-China relations and American interests. These targeted research efforts and ideological dissemination on the same major issues demonstrate think tanks’ efforts to publish and spread their viewpoints on important international issues, attempting to influence more relevant stakeholders and control discourse power on these issues.

Think tanks not only compete for international discourse power, but some countries’ think tanks often play the role of a country’s “shadow government” internationally, acting as lobbyists for relevant national government policies or serving as quasi-diplomatic forces. It can be said that all think tanks necessarily have national attributes and strong national positions.

1.6 The “Think Tank Phenomenon” as an Important Academic Research Topic

As think tank institutions’ social visibility increases and their status in society rises, academic research on the think tank phenomenon continues to heat up, making it an important object of academic study. This paper searched the Web of Science database using think tank, thinktank, think tanks, thinktanks, think-tank, and think-tanks as subject terms, limiting document types to Article and Proceedings Paper, yielding 867 relevant articles (search date: July 10, 2015). The annual changes in these international think tank research papers are shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

As Figure 1 shows, academic research on think tanks has generally shown an upward trend (the 2015 decline is due to incomplete data). Since the concept of think tanks was proposed, research on them did not initially receive much attention from researchers, with fewer than 10 articles annually before 1991. However, after 1991, research articles began to grow slowly, increasing more rapidly after 2001, and becoming a hot topic since 2005, with the number of articles rising significantly to 83 papers in 2014.

By discipline, think tank research 主要集中在 concentrates primarily on engineering, government & law, public administration, environmental science & ecology, business & economics, international relations, social sciences, computer science, education & educational research, public, environmental & occupational health, and area studies (Table 2).

In terms of research hotspots, the top 10 keywords (excluding “think tank”) are: neoliberalism, education, public policy, experts, network, advocacy, policy recommendations, politics, research, and risk (Table 3). Through co-occurrence analysis of keywords (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]), main research content can be summarized as: exploring think tanks’ influence on public policy, think tank talent, and think tank advocacy around think tanks and public policy; education policy research; foreign policy, particularly China studies; research and evaluation on innovation and sustainable development; and think tank leadership, dissemination, and risk.

Highly cited references also reveal the most frequently cited articles/books in think tank research. The top 10 highly cited papers/books are shown in Table 4. These highly cited works represent current hot topics in think tank research, focusing primarily on think tanks and public policy, exploring the impact of think tanks and their idea production on public policy from different angles, followed by research on Chinese think tanks, the history of neoliberalism, and think tanks and civil society research.

2. Characteristics of World-Class Foreign Think Tanks

2.1 Clear Strategic Positioning and Policy Pragmatism Mission

Think tanks are not academic research institutions. Although their research must be based on scholarship, their goal is not academic research but policy design and policy recommendations. Influencing public policy and decision-making is the important historical mission and social responsibility of think tanks. Therefore, the development goals or missions of think tanks are entirely pragmatic in influencing policy formulation—using research results to influence government decisions and public policy. If think tank research results do not attract attention from international and national governments or the public, such research is meaningless. Thus, foreign think tanks never shy away from stating that their goal is to influence international and national public policy, representing a completely pragmatic goal orientation.

Brookings Institution's values are “quality, independence, and impact.” This statement is now regarded as the common mission and goal orientation for think tanks and also explains their foundation. Other famous think tanks also have clear, pragmatic, and distinctive descriptions of their strategic positioning. For example, the Council on Foreign Relations' purpose is “to organize government officials, business leaders, journalists, teachers, students, and community and religious leaders to help them better understand the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other countries.” RAND Corporation' s purpose is “to help improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis.” The Heritage Foundation, as a major policy research institution for America' s new right-wing, advocates for small government, defends individual freedom and traditional American values, and argues that America needs strong national defense.

Given the large number of think tanks and the continuous emergence of new ones in recent years, newer think tanks are developing more toward specialization, not pursuing comprehensive multi-field research but conducting integrated consulting research on specific issues. In fact, famous foreign think tanks all pay great attention to their research characteristics. For example, RAND Corporation has formed unique decision-making consultation field characteristics in U.S. military strategy and policy and advanced military equipment research, while the Center for American Progress has done so in U.S. foreign policy.

2.2 Claiming Relative Independence and Objectivity as Label Features and Credibility Foundation

Claiming independence is the most unique characteristic of American think tanks. Although many think tanks have strong partisan colors—for example, the Hoover Institution (The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace) is a long-standing conservative think tank known as the Republican Party' s “shadow government,” and many think tanks are embedded in complex director networks with close ties to business, politics, universities, and media—they

all uniformly claim their independence. So-called independence includes positional independence, financial independence, and research independence, with research independence being the most basic requirement and an important factor in American think tanks' success. Research independence means starting from facts, relying on reliable evidence, rigorous logic, and scientific analysis to find true and objective answers to problems. To maintain research independence, institute members must comply with regulations related to political activities: they can provide public policy analysis and recommendations to government officials and public office candidates on a non-partisan basis that does not exclude other viewpoints. However, if institute members provide advice for candidates' campaigns or political organizations, such as political action committees or party campaign committees, they must use time outside work and must indicate that their actions are purely personal and do not represent the Brookings Institution. They cannot endorse candidates in public or media interviews, nor can they use Brookings Institution equipment and other resources in campaigns or interactions with candidates, including assistants' time, email accounts, computers, and telephones, or use Brookings Institution venues for political activities. If researchers violate these regulations, they must resign.

American think tanks are also mostly financially independent. They accept donations from governments, enterprises, various organizations, and even individuals but refuse donors' interference in think tank affairs. To maintain independence, Brookings Institution places certain restrictions on government funding. The institution's annual expenditure is about \$100 million, with 84% from private donations and only 3% from government—mostly foreign governments—with the remainder from publications and foundations. The institution also does not accept secret research where results cannot be made public. Meanwhile, no donor can interfere with the institution's research.

Think tanks view research quality and objectivity as the cornerstone of their development and the foundation of their influence. They emphasize that their research results are based on scientific and objective analysis, with objectivity including political independence and rigorous research processes and scientific research methods. RAND Corporation explicitly lists "quality" and "objectivity" as its core values, for which it has established strict quality review standards and pioneered multiple scientific research methods.

2.3 Council-Based Governance Mechanisms and Management Operation Mechanisms

Foreign think tanks generally adopt council-based (or board-based) governance mechanisms. Council governance features councils composed of major donors, mostly prominent entrepreneurs, foundation heads, former government officials, and renowned scholars with strong economic strength and networks. The council is the highest decision-making body of the think tank, responsible for appointing leadership, determining development frameworks and research plans, raising funds, and expanding influence. Daily management and operation are

the responsibility of think tank leadership (president, etc.).

Most European and American think tanks adopt council decision-making mechanisms. Taking Brookings Institution as an example, its council aims to provide business and academic governance for the institution and approve the scope of academic research to ensure academic independence. Brookings Institution's council has 83 members serving three-year terms, primarily famous entrepreneurs, bankers, and scholars.

The adoption of council governance is determined by think tanks' institutional attributes, funding methods, and operation models. Few foreign think tanks are direct government subordinate agencies or government think tanks; instead, they are non-governmental, socially operated, and socially funded non-profit institutions. Therefore, think tanks' fundraising capabilities directly determine their development quality. Funding sources generally include council donations, foundation grants, membership donations, and other institutional fundraising.

Think tanks mostly adopt flat organizational structures, generally divided into research departments and administrative management departments. Administrative management departments basically include human resources, finance, foreign affairs, and publicity departments. Research departments mostly use research fields or research themes (often called "project teams") as organizational units. Research organization methods include permanent research departments (Research Programs) and research centers, as well as project teams established according to project needs. Typically, research departments and centers are permanent units, while project teams are temporary tasks that are automatically disbanded after completion.

2.4 Unique Research Talent Organization and Mobility Mechanisms

European and American think tank researchers generally include three categories: first, resident researchers primarily composed of renowned scholars; second, external visiting fellows; and third, various types of visiting researchers. Well-known foreign think tanks are generally not large in scale. Except for RAND Corporation, most have fewer than 300 resident researchers, with most having fewer than 100. However, most European and American think tanks, while employing renowned scholars or former government officials as resident researchers, also extensively hire temporary project researchers through contracts, who automatically leave after project completion. Simultaneously, European and American think tanks provide various opportunities for visiting researchers to conduct research at the think tank. This talent organization method helps think tanks absorb and utilize knowledge and skills from personnel of various backgrounds worldwide to conduct research on specific themes and enhance research capabilities. RAND Corporation currently has 1,700 employees, including about 800 professional researchers and about 600 special consultants and visiting fellows. Hoover Institution's personnel can basically be divided into three categories: first, resident researchers primarily composed of renowned

scholars; second, various types of visiting researchers; and third, support personnel primarily composed of project management, technical support, media relations, and library and archives management professionals. The ratio among these three categories is basically 1:1:1. Japan's National Institute of Science and Technology Policy (NISTEP) has maintained a fixed number of about 50 researchers since 2005 (between 47-54 from 2005-2013). Although NISTEP is a small think tank, it employs a relatively large number of visiting researchers through cooperation with other institutions, maintaining about 100 (between 96-122, with 2-6 international visiting researchers), roughly a 1:2 ratio with fixed staff.

Establishing think tank expert cooperation networks is also an important talent organization method for utilizing external intelligence to conduct strategic research. On one hand, some think tanks organize high-level academic seminars on specific major issues for in-depth and extensive discussion, using expert brainstorming to generate wisdom on major strategic and policy issues. On the other hand, establishing expert cooperation networks forms a "strong core, large network" research team organization model that leverages both power and brains.

In talent organization, European and American think tanks basically attract mature talent familiar with or understanding government policy formulation processes and possessing high-level research capabilities, rarely directly accepting recent graduates as fixed researchers; graduate students are only used as short-term interns.

Regarding talent mobility, a notable feature of European and American think tanks, particularly in the United States, is the well-known "revolving door" mechanism. There is a smooth talent exchange and mobility mechanism between think tanks and government departments, with think tanks sending large numbers of personnel to government positions and former government officials rotating into think tanks for policy research after leaving office. This talent "revolving door" mechanism is closely related to American partisan politics. Each time political parties alternate in power, there is a "rotation" exchange between think tank talent and government officials, as American think tanks more or less have partisan colors. Taking Stanford University's Hoover Institution as an example, it has provided numerous talents to the U.S. federal government. During Reagan's first term, as many as 50 Hoover Institution scholars served in federal legislative or executive agencies. In 2000, several senior Hoover Institution fellows served as policy advisors for Bush's presidential campaign, and after Bush took office, these senior fellows assumed important positions such as Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and Presidential Economic Advisors. The Hoover Institution also provides research positions for relevant government personnel; former U.S. President Reagan, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, former U.S. Secretaries of State Condoleezza Rice and George Shultz have all served as senior fellows at the institution. The revolving door talent exchange with government also widely exists in other think tanks such as the

Center for American Progress, American Enterprise Institute, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Council on Foreign Relations, and Heritage Foundation.

2.5 Pursuit of High-Quality Research Output with Strict Internal and External Review Mechanisms

High-quality output is the foundation of think tanks' high influence. To ensure research quality, think tanks employ highly educated and knowledgeable senior researchers while also reviewing research quality through quality review standards. Most think tanks organize academic advisory committees to review and supervise the quality of think tank output.

RAND Corporation has established an internal quality standard called *Standards for High-Quality Research and Analysis*. In addition to conventional standards, RAND has also established standards for outstanding research that reflect its strategic research ambitions and heritage. RAND uses these high-quality standards as essential markers of "RAND-type" strategic research. RAND's research review mechanism is called the "internal review system." Each RAND research project is assigned 2-3 senior researchers in the field who are not involved in the research plan as reviewers by the academic department head, responsible for mid-term review after project initiation and final review near project completion, writing review reports to determine whether RAND's requirements have been met. Any professional researcher may be required to participate in review work. Review meetings are then organized where project completers answer reviewers' questions. Reports must be reviewed and approved by 2 people from the department and 1 from another department before they can pass. They are then reviewed and approved by the vice president in charge of the department before they can be released or published. RAND reports must go through this review process.

The National Research Council (NRC), affiliated with the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, is renowned worldwide for providing high-quality science and technology policy consultation to the government. NRC can not only recruit and organize America's top science and technology experts to provide strategic consulting services to the government but also has a standard organizational process and review mechanism for its consulting research. The entire strategic research process implements supervision and conflict-of-interest review, making its strategic consulting reports highly valuable and earning government and public trust and recognition. Any NRC report must undergo strict expert review before public release. The review mechanism is peer review. NRC has a review committee composed of about 30 members from the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and National Academy of Medicine, responsible for supervising the review process. The project management unit and review committee negotiate to designate a group of independent review experts holding various viewpoints on the report's key

issues. Report authors submit drafts to review experts, who provide written review comments based on the review standards manual. After receiving all review comments, report authors must provide written responses, which are ultimately evaluated by supervisors (designated by the report review committee) and/or review coordinators (designated by the management department). Reports are only submitted to project clients or made public after the review process is fully completed and all authors agree to the revised draft.

The World Resources Institute (WRI) has a dedicated “Science and Research Department” (S&R, similar to “science and technology departments” in domestic research institutions) responsible for reviewing research knowledge outcomes. WRI’s quality requirements for research outcomes are “comprehensive reports, well-written, neutral perspectives, and outstanding value.” WRI has strict internal and external review procedures for different products such as research reports and issue briefs, working papers, technical documents, online tools and application software, and data infographics. Taking research reports and issue briefs as an example, the cycle from publication plan (jointly reviewed and approved by research department heads and S&R) → draft report (jointly reviewed by research department heads and S&R) → internal review (S&R agrees and sends to internal experts for review) → external review (S&R agrees and sends to external experts for review) → formal publication (S&R agrees to publish or release) requires review and approval by research department heads and the Science and Research Department. The review process generally takes 6 months to complete. Strict quality requirements and outcome review processes have made WRI a top international think tank in the resource and environmental field.

2.6 Development of Innovative Methodological Systems and Data Information Systems to Support Professional Policy Analysis Based on Data and Information

Foreign think tanks emphasize deriving scientific and credible conclusions based on rigorous academic research, attaching importance to the use and development of scientific research methods.

Emphasizing methodological research and use is an important feature of RAND’s strategic research. Scientific methods employed in its research include benchmarking, case study analysis, cost analysis, economic analysis, modeling simulation and optimization, performance evaluation, policy analysis, program evaluation, risk assessment and analysis, strategic planning, survey research, and technology evaluation. RAND has also pioneered many unique research methods and models, including Delphi method, modeling and forecasting, gaming, and roadmapping for prediction; system analysis method; portfolio analysis tool, exploratory modeling, discrete choice modelling, robust decision-making, and long-term policy analysis for prediction methods and models; and continuous quality improvement (CQI) (for program evaluation), multimode interviewing capacity (for survey research), semi-structured interviews and focus groups (for data collection), actionable hot spot (AHS) (for decision-making), expert lens

(for expert surveys), and assumption-based planning (for handling uncertainty) for various other research methods. As an internationally influential science and technology intelligence research institution, Japan's National Institute of Science and Technology Policy (NISTEP) attaches great importance to the application of standardized research methods in science and technology strategic intelligence research. Its main research methods include: bibliometrics and scientometrics, patent analysis, statistical analysis, roadmapping, benchmarking, case analysis, policy analysis methods, surveys, Delphi method, expert panel methods, scenario analysis, as well as investment analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and input-output analysis. A large proportion of NISTEP's work consists of survey research, employing various forms of survey methods in the process. NISTEP's particularly prominent work is its technology foresight research, which mainly employs survey methods, Delphi method, and scenario analysis.

Additionally, foreign think tanks attach importance to accumulating research outcomes and data, building domain databases and knowledge bases, and constructing visualization platforms for domain knowledge. For example, RAND Corporation has developed and accumulated numerous specialized databases in its business research, including statistical databases, survey databases, and case libraries. Many databases are also open for use, mostly statistical and survey databases such as RAND State Statistics, RAND Texas Statistics, and RAND California Statistics. The International Institute for Strategic Studies maintains an "Armed Conflict Database" through which conflict reports and data since 1997 can be accessed.

RAND Corporation established the Survey Research Group (SRG) in 1972 to ensure survey data quality, possessing multi-method specialized survey capabilities to conduct population surveys, special population surveys, stakeholder participation in data collection, cooperation with various institutions, and international data collection. After more than 30 years of development, RAND SRG has become renowned for innovative survey planning, data collection, and methodological research, and began providing professional services to external users in 1992. RAND also established the RAND Statistics Group (RSG) in 1976 to ensure provision of statistical skills to all its researchers. RSG is composed of professional statisticians with doctoral and master's degrees, mainly conducting research and development on statistical methods necessary for RAND, providing statistical consulting for RAND research projects, and providing statistical education for all RAND employees through short courses and monthly academic forums. RAND Corporation's high-quality research is fundamentally supported by scientific data survey analysis and scientific statistical methods.

2.7 Global Development Vision and Construction of International Network Think Tanks

World-class foreign think tanks have international research and development visions, mainly manifested in two aspects: first, committing to solving domestic and global common concerns such as energy, environment, climate change,

sustainable development, diplomacy, nuclear weapons, etc.; second, building international network think tanks by establishing branch research institutions in countries and regions of significant importance, extending research reach to important countries and regions.

As the international environment becomes increasingly complex and humanity faces more and more common challenges, famous European and American think tanks conduct research on political, international relations, diplomatic, energy, and environmental issues facing the world with broad vision and holistic thinking, committing to solving common human challenges. This also gives European and American think tanks important international discourse power, helping their countries be in advantageous positions when handling international affairs. For example, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has research fields with strong global perspectives, mainly including defense and security policy, energy and climate change, global health issues, human rights, technology, economy and trade, global challenges, and regional transformation. The center's research on global challenges and regional transformation covers almost all major global hotspots, maintaining strong financial and personnel investment in important regional and national research projects. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's research includes Asian studies, China studies, Russian and Eurasian issues, international economic research, and global policy research.

Approaches to building global networks include establishing overseas offices, cooperating with overseas think tanks to establish research centers, and hiring overseas researchers to conduct relevant research. In addition to its headquarters in California, RAND Corporation has offices in Washington, Pittsburgh, Boston, and New Orleans; RAND Europe is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, with an office in Cambridge, UK. RAND Corporation also has a Chinese official website, translating research reports related to China and East Asia into Chinese and publishing them online to influence Chinese public and decision-makers. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has not only established research branches in China, Russia, India, and other countries but also hired local researchers to strengthen localized research. Brookings Institution and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace have cooperated with Tsinghua University to establish the Brookings-Tsinghua Center for Public Policy and Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, respectively. These measures invisibly give European and American think tanks powerful public opinion influence and international discourse power, becoming important components of their countries' soft power.

2.8 Emphasis on Dissemination and Marketing to Strengthen Policy and Social Influence Generation and Amplification

Think tanks take policy research as their responsibility and influencing public policy and public opinion as their purpose. There are two ways to influence public policy: one is direct participation in policy formulation through consul-

tation, statements, submitting reports to government, participating in hearings, and sending talent to government; the other is promoting viewpoints to the public, guiding public opinion, thereby influencing public policy. Therefore, to prove their value and significance, think tanks must attach importance to external communication, media public relations, and communication strategies.

European and American think tanks' outcome publicity and development marketing methods mainly include: publishing journals, books, and reports; launching policy and strategic popular publications that influence the public; recommending research experts to participate in government hearings and press conferences in professional fields; frequently holding seminars and high-level academic forums; recommending experts for media interviews; building websites and public information platforms; and using new media such as blogs and Twitter for publicity. Some foreign think tanks also use membership systems to publicize and spread their research results and viewpoints. For example, Chatham House promotes think tank concepts and disseminates research results by developing members, inviting them to attend report meetings and seminars, and even inviting members to give reports at the think tank.

Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs) believes that first-class reports, papers, books, and other research products are important resources for government leaders and decision-makers, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Therefore, it serves members and policy decision-making departments by publishing books, special pamphlets, research papers, policy briefs, and international research publications annually. Chatham House publishes two journals: *International Affairs* and *The World Today*. *International Affairs* is a top British journal in international relations research. Chatham House is characterized by inviting domestic and foreign political leaders and experts from different fields to give reports at the institute, frequently holding speeches by important figures, mainly inviting foreign prime ministers and ministers visiting Britain to speak on international issues. The institute also irregularly holds special lectures, inviting not only institute members but also important figures to participate, mainly for speeches and exchanges on international issues. Chatham House emphasizes disseminating research results through media, establishing a special outreach department, and creating a "daily media delivery" system to send policy insights to media at the first moment. At the same time, it provides more convenience to media and society. As long as one logs into the institute's website, they can see regularly updated research trends and activity information on the webpage, and can also watch expert comment videos and listen to activity audio information online.

3. Suggestions for Constructing New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics

The construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics faces a new complex development environment: new normals of international and regional competition and cooperation development and adjustment and recon-

struction of international relations and order rules; new changes in regional and global challenging issues faced by countries and humanity; new transformations of disruptive scientific and technological innovations and their applications continuously reshaping business and economic models; new requirements for modernizing national governance capabilities and systems; new demands for scientific and democratic government decision-making development; new situations of diversified and personalized social values, public opinion, and public understanding; new characteristics of multi-level nested social networking and instantaneity in information dissemination methods; and new trends in think tank governance mechanism innovation and influence diffusion competition. New-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics must be think tanks adapted to this new development environment. Based on observations of the development history and experience of world-class foreign think tanks, combined with the current situation and needs of Chinese think tank development, this paper proposes the following suggestions for developing new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

3.1 Improve Institutional Arrangements for Think Tank Survival and Development

As specialized research and consulting institutions on policy and strategic issues, think tanks' direct clients for consulting services are specific decision-making subjects, particularly government departments. Their important driving force for development is the demand for policy advice and consultation from these decision-making subjects, especially government departments. Without decision-making users' demand for policy consultation, think tanks have no soil for their own development. Therefore, to promote the development of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, the first step is to break through and establish institutionalized and even legalized arrangements for scientific government decision-making consultation, incorporating research and consultation on various policy issues before decision-making into normalized institutional mechanisms. Only by continuously expanding the scope and intensity of government decision-making consultation and government purchase of knowledge services can we provide good soil for think tank development.

Second, we must create policy environmental conditions for equal competition and development among multiple types and diversified think tanks. Although China currently has many policy research and consulting institutions, a good environment for competitive development among various think tanks has not yet formed. Government-affiliated think tanks can exert special influence on decision-making processes through internal channels, but their policy research and recommendation scope is limited to government-designated research projects, using research results to disseminate and publicize government policy measures. They are large but not strong, with research quality and academic independence needing improvement; they are relatively detached from the general public, lacking social credibility and insufficient leadership in guiding social

thought and mainstream values; and they lack external competitive development pressure and internal development motivation. University think tanks are numerous but weak, with relatively loose organizational structures; they have greater research and recommendation autonomy, but their emphasis on academic orientation rather than real-world problem orientation weakens the feasibility of policy recommendations, resulting in limited decision-making consultation influence; think tanks and scholars lack internal quality control mechanisms for research output and publication, with some researchers emphasizing academic freedom and arbitrarily expressing viewpoints, inevitably creating negative social impacts. Private independent think tanks, although able to conduct empirical and neutral analysis and consultation, face extremely limited development space due to their low status, encountering institutional development dilemmas in legal status, funding channels, research talent recruitment, and policy influence channels. Currently, less than 5% of think tanks are considered private think tanks, making it difficult to form obvious influence in the short term.

Therefore, the current focus of think tank development is not to invest huge sums to establish new think tanks but to eliminate institutional and systematic obstacles to think tank development, promoting independent and diversified think tank development to improve research quality and enable think tank voices to reach domestic and international decision-making arenas. We should encourage and support the development of independent, non-profit think tanks, allowing private think tanks to compete equally and bid for research projects and resources. This can provide a new competitive development force for the Chinese characteristic think tank system, promoting competitive development among various think tanks and enabling the rise of influential new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics through survival of the fittest.

3.2 Establish Regularized Communication and Results Reporting Mechanisms Between Think Tanks and Decision-Making Departments

As policy research and consulting institutions, think tanks face a very practical problem: how to deliver their research results and consulting suggestions to government decision-making users. In this regard, government think tanks, due to their special status as internal and subordinate government agencies, can provide consulting suggestions to government through “internal reference” documents and internal expert consultation. Other types of think tanks, due to their low status and lack of institutionalized communication and consultation channels with government departments, are marginalized in decision-making consultation.

In consulting research, on one hand, think tanks must adhere to a “decision-making problem-oriented” research mechanism, conducting research around government decision-making-related issues, providing targeted services, and developing sustainably to accumulate research influence in specific directions and

specialized policy fields. This requires establishing regularized communication channels between think tanks and government to achieve good interactive relationships for “problem downward transmission” (government designation, commissioning, and bidding mechanisms for research issues) and “consulting suggestion upward transmission.” On the other hand, think tanks are also academic institutions that should have academic foresight and predictive capabilities and can adopt a “potential decision-making problem foresight-oriented” research mechanism, selecting topics ahead of time and conducting forward-looking research on potential policy issues. To play a consulting role, their research results also need regularized channels to deliver decision-making consultation suggestions to government decision-making users. Therefore, we should establish and smooth appropriate channels and institutionalized mechanisms for different types of think tanks with different affiliations to conveniently submit consulting suggestions (especially important consulting suggestions) to superior government departments.

3.3 Build a Top-Tier Talent Cultivation and Utilization Mechanism for Strategic and Policy Research

Think tanks are “idea factories” and “policy workshops”—think tank-type research institutions. Proposing innovative policy ideas and influencing and consulting government decision-making is the fundamental pursuit of think tanks. Therefore, the cultivation and utilization of top-tier strategic and policy research talent is key to think tanks producing important consulting outcomes and generating policy consultation influence.

As the country further deepens reform and opening up, the small government, large society development model is increasingly taking shape. The government is promoting the establishment of a scientific decision-making system, and the institutionalized and even legalized mechanism for government decision-making consultation is being established, making decision-making consultation work develop normally. For think tanks to adapt to the development of decision-making needs and play an irreplaceable role in decision-making consultation, they must improve the relevance of research topic selection, scientific nature of research results, decision-making guidance of consulting suggestions, and operability of outcome application and transformation.

To achieve coupling rather than disconnection between think tank policy consultation research and decision-making application needs, think tanks need to absorb researchers who understand government management and decision-making processes. In this regard, we can learn from the “revolving door” talent mechanism between think tanks and government departments in European and American countries. On one hand, we need to explore establishing talent exchange mechanisms for government civil servants who understand government management and policy formulation processes and possess policy research capabilities to move to think tanks. On the other hand, the government should absorb outstanding think tank research talent into government departments to improve the

scientific level and efficiency of government management and decision-making. This two-way talent exchange model is beneficial for both think tank development and government management. The “Opinions on Building High-Level Science and Technology Innovation Think Tanks” issued by the China Association for Science and Technology in September 2015 proposed incorporating “former government officials” into think tank expert teams, representing a breakthrough in this talent mechanism.

Additionally, we should support in-depth exchanges between domestic think tanks and international counterparts, support domestic think tank research talent to go abroad to broaden international perspectives, and conduct internationalized think tank research talent cultivation to promote think tank internationalization development and research network construction.

3.4 Establish a Guiding Classification Evaluation System to Guide Healthy Development of Various Think Tanks

Influencing public policy is the main goal of think tank work. Quantitative measurement and evaluation of think tanks’ policy influence is an important topic in think tank research and a matter of high concern to think tanks themselves and stakeholders such as funders.

Think tank evaluation systems depend on think tank institutions’ development positioning and goals, with evaluation objectives being to observe and assess the degree to which think tanks achieve their development positioning and goals.

Think tank consulting suggestions receiving instructions from leaders and high-level decision-makers and being adopted by government departments are undoubtedly the most important yardsticks for measuring think tank performance. In this regard, government think tanks have unique advantages. Due to lack of channels and opportunities to communicate with leaders and high-level decision-makers, non-government think tanks find it difficult to obtain evaluation in this regard.

Think tanks have various types and can be classified from different perspectives such as affiliation (official, semi-official, university, social), research field (comprehensive, economic, scientific and technological, military, diplomatic), and funding source (government commission, foundation, membership fees, etc.). Although various types of think tanks are all policy research and consulting institutions with the same or similar major development goals, they certainly have their particularities. Not every think tank can obtain leaders’ instructions on research reports. Establishing a one-size-fits-all unified evaluation system for all types of think tanks is obviously unscientific. In think tank evaluation, we should not judge by institutional nature and affiliation but by research outcomes and consulting contributions.

Therefore, we should establish classification evaluation systems oriented toward different types of think tanks’ development positioning and goals. At the same

time, no evaluation system will be perfect. The role of evaluation systems should not be mandatory but guiding. Therefore, we must establish guiding classification evaluation systems. Such systems can have the same evaluation indicators as well as different special evaluation indicators, which is conducive to guiding the healthy development of various think tanks. Moreover, evaluation systems should be dynamically developed and require continuous revision and improvement.

3.5 Explore Establishing Modern Governance Structures and Operation Mechanisms Suited to New-Type Think Tank Characteristics

Think tanks are not general pure academic research institutions but policy research and consulting institutions based on high-level academic research capabilities. Think tanks are positioned for decision-making consultation, their output is idea products, and their influence lies in consultation effectiveness. Therefore, the focus of think tank development is not buildings or large scientific infrastructure but attracting professional and ideological talent to conduct strategic and policy issue research and consultation oriented toward decision-making subjects. Therefore, think tank institutions have both mechanisms similar to general research institutions and special management mechanisms.

Strengthening new-type think tank construction requires exploring and establishing modern management mechanisms according to the characteristics of different types of think tanks. In think tank management systems, according to different think tank types, we can explore establishing boards, councils, academic committees, and other mechanisms, and formulate management charters. Members of boards, councils, and academic committees are representatives of funders, field-related parties, and strategic experts who play key roles in think tank development.

Related to think tank management systems, think tanks must also explore suitable personnel management mechanisms, focusing on talent cultivation and utilization mechanisms, personnel salary systems, professional title review systems, and incentive mechanisms.

Regarding research project funding and resource use systems, engineering-style project management methods and funding expenditure methods that “emphasize things over people” are obviously unsuitable for think tank development. Therefore, in funding and resource use, we must focus on “tilting toward people,” allowing think tank institutions to use the majority of project funds for talent expenses.

We must strengthen the application of standardized scientific research methods while adapting to the characteristics of the big data and big information era, innovating scientific methods and analytical tools for data and information analysis and domain knowledge discovery, and building and continuously improving business research field-related data, information, and knowledge systems. On this basis, we must conduct rigorous strategic and policy research that inte-

grates professional, computational, strategic, policy, and methodological types to ensure that think tank research results combine academic rigor, scientific nature, and policy nature. China's policy research institutions and relevant researchers often do not attach importance to or are not adept at applying and developing scientific methods and systematically analyzing scientific data, making some policy research understandings and conclusions often unable to withstand scrutiny, misleading people and harming the country.

In outcome review and quality control mechanisms, to ensure research quality, think tanks must establish standardized outcome review and quality control mechanisms. According to different types of outcome products, we must form specific quality standards, review processes, and release mechanisms to ensure the academic rigor, scientific nature, and objectivity of think tank outcomes.

3.6 Encourage Networking and Internationalization Development of Think Tanks Conducting International Issue Research

For think tanks, particularly national-level ones, that research important international issues, strengthening network-type think tank and internationalization development is an important foundation for forming international influence.

Think tanks conducting research on major international issues must develop international perspectives, strengthen think tank internationalization network construction, and build "network-type think tanks" that speak internationally, form international discourse power, and expand international influence. Simply building "think tank alliances" is at best a loose possible form of cooperation and cannot achieve the effects of network-type think tank construction.

Think tanks must strengthen academic field specialization development. International think tanks generally have small personnel scales, with think tanks of about 100 people being the norm. Clear research fields and directions are the foundation for forming research influence. A think tank should not research everything, and not all think tanks should be built as comprehensive think tanks. They must have clear research professional fields and strengthen think tank specialization development. Specialized think tank development and comprehensive multidisciplinary research are not contradictory. Conducting comprehensive, all-round, systematic research on professional issues does not mean building comprehensive think tanks. Specialized think tanks are more conducive to forming international development advantages.

Think tank internationalization development and mastering international discourse power also require proactively and forward-looking setting research agendas to guide relevant think tanks, government departments, social institutions, and other stakeholders to actively participate in discussions. The ability to proactively set agendas, successfully organize seminars, and guide discourse direction will undoubtedly become an important capability for think tank internationalization development.

We must strengthen internationalized think tank talent cultivation and conduct international academic exchanges. Around major research issues, we must actively organize or actively participate in international academic forums, continuously voicing Chinese think tanks' perspectives on major international issues, proposing Chinese solutions, and providing Chinese solutions to problems. We cannot simply echo others. In this regard, internationalized talent is key to participating in international think tank academic exchanges.

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