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Postprint: Reflections on the Transformation and Development of Party School Libraries from the Perspective of Think Tank Services

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics has become an important national strategy of the Party and the state. Libraries, as functional departments of Party schools, play an important role in serving the construction of new-type think tanks.

[Method/Process] This paper conducts a literature and web-based investigation into the current state of theoretical research and practical exploration regarding Party school library services for think tank construction.

[Result/Conclusion] This paper identifies several major problems in current Party school library services for think tank construction, including imbalanced funding, outdated methods, and shortage of professional talent. It discusses transformation and development strategies for Party school library services in think tank construction from perspectives such as updating service concepts, broadening funding channels, focusing on resource integration, improving digital networks, perfecting the subject librarian system, and cultivating talent teams.

Full Text

Thoughts on the Transformation and Development of Party School Libraries from the Perspective of Think Tank Services

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics has become an important national strategy. As a functional department of party schools, libraries play a significant role in serving the construction of new think tanks. [Method/Process] This paper conducts a literature and web-based investigation into the current state of theoretical research and practical exploration of party school library services for think tank construction. [Result/Conclusion] This paper identifies that current party school library services for think tank construction still face major issues such as unbalanced funding, backward service methods, and a shortage of professional talent. It explores transformation and development strategies for party school library services in think tank construction from the perspectives of updating service concepts, diversifying funding channels, emphasizing resource integration, improving digital networks, perfecting the subject librarian system, and cultivating talent teams.

Keywords: Party School Library; Think Tank Construction; Transformation and Development

Classification Number: C932.6

Think tanks, also known as brain trusts, first emerged in the United States during World War II. Against the backdrop of rapid globalization and informatization, modern think tanks have gradually become external brains in government governance and decision-making systems, representing an important manifestation of national “soft power” and “discourse power.” In current Chinese academic discourse, think tanks are generally regarded as professional research institutions that take public policy as their research object, influencing government decision-making as their research goal, public interest as their research orientation, and social responsibility as their research criterion. Academia generally classifies them into three types: official think tanks, university think tanks, and non-governmental think tanks. Overall, official think tanks occupy the dominant position among the three types in China. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has specifically instructed on building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics, and a series of documents promoting think tank development have been issued, elevating the construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics to a strategic deployment of the Party Central Committee and an important national development strategy. According to the latest “Global Go To Think Tank Index Report 2017” compiled by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania, China has 512 think tanks, ranking second globally [1]. This demonstrates that China’s think tank construction has entered a “golden age” with more urgent needs, higher requirements, and more rapid development.

In January 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the “Opinion on Strengthening the

Construction of New Types of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics,” which clearly stated that by 2020, China aims to establish a new think tank system with Chinese characteristics. This system integrates party and government departments, academies of social sciences, party schools and administrative colleges, universities, the military, research institutes, enterprises, and social think tanks, with coordinated development, rational layout, and clear positioning [2]. To catch up with this golden development period, party school think tank construction must focus its efforts in this direction. According to data from the “2017 Chinese Think Tank Report” published by the Think Tank Research Center of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the comprehensive influence of the CPC Central Party School think tank ranked 3rd in 2016 and 4th in 2017 [3]. Therefore, as an important department of the party committee and the main front for decision-making consultation for party committees and governments, party schools have great significance in developing new think tank construction. Party school libraries have always been the information resource centers of party schools, playing an important role in ensuring teaching and research activities for teachers and students. Building party school think tanks also cannot be separated from the guarantee and support of library knowledge resources, while new think tank construction also puts forward requirements for party school libraries to achieve service transformation. Party school libraries must fully grasp the valuable opportunities facing think tank construction, give full play to their own information resource advantages, improve characteristic resource databases, carry out higher-quality services more suitable for party school think tank construction, and allow new think tank construction to provide substantial support and guarantee for libraries to achieve service transformation.

2.1 Current State of Theoretical Research on Party School Library Services for Think Tank Construction

Regarding how to utilize libraries to serve think tank construction, some scholars have already conducted relevant research. In the CNKI database, using “library + think tank” as keywords, 189 relevant documents were retrieved from the past 10 years (as of April 8, 2018). The chronological distribution of these documents is shown in Table 1 .

Table 1 The distribution of literature research on library service for think tank construction by year

As can be seen from Table 1, only 23 papers were published from 2009 to 2014, while the number reached 76 in 2017, and 20 related articles had already been published in the first three months of 2018. This is inseparable from the Party Central Committee’ s high attention to think tank construction since the 18th National Congress. From the perspective of research themes, only 16 of these 189 documents studied party school library services for think tank construction, indicating that research on party school library services for think tank construction—party school libraries being the main front for party committee and government decision-making consultation—is relatively weak in the overall

research on library services for think tank construction. The number of literature research documents on various types of library services for think tank construction is shown in Table 2 (as of April 8, 2018).

Table 2 The number of literature research on various library service for think tank construction

From the literature on party school library services for think tank construction, scholars' research on this topic began in 2013, with a total of 7 articles published by 2016, but 7 documents were already published in 2017 alone. This reflects, to a certain extent, that party school library institutions have long lacked sufficient awareness and attention to serving new think tank construction, as well as confidence and reasonable planning, and have not clearly recognized the functional effectiveness and identity positioning of party school library institutions in the think tank construction process. Encouragingly, the increasing trend in the number of documents published in 2017 shows that some scholars have begun to realize the important role of party school library services in think tank construction. Libraries are an important component of party school new think tank construction, providing indispensable knowledge and service guarantee work for think tank construction. In 2013, Shi Jing et al. first proposed the possibility of party school library think tank construction and suggested paths for party school library think tank construction from the perspectives of cultivating policy analysis markets, strengthening information resources for governance consultation, and building organizational management mechanisms supporting think tank construction [4]. Subsequently, some scholars conducted related research and discussions on how to integrate think tank concepts into party school library decision-making consultation services. Yang Weiqi pointed out that with the continuous deepening of the "think tank" concept, libraries face both new challenges and rare development opportunities, and party school libraries must clarify their role positioning and vigorously carry out service innovation [5]. Chu Liujie proposed that serving party school think tank construction is an objective necessity for library transformation and development, that libraries have great potential in serving party school think tank construction, and that party school libraries possess advantages in resources, technology, services, and talent, which can provide strong foundational support and service guarantee for party school new think tank construction [6]. Zhang Peng et al. summarized four major elements required for party school libraries to carry out think tank-type services: resource advantages, technical support, professional librarian support, and good service awareness [7]. Zhao Qihua analyzed problems in China's party school libraries such as low utilization rates, insufficient investment, and high service management costs, and proposed solutions and strategies from the perspectives of establishing service awareness, building characteristic resource think tanks, and planning special activities to strengthen cooperation with government departments [8].

These studies have conducted theoretical explorations for party school libraries to achieve transformation and upgrading and better serve think tank construc-

tion. The logical starting point for most existing scholar research is how party school libraries can play a good service guarantee role in building party school think tanks under the background of new think tank construction; only a few scholars believe that party school libraries themselves have certain conditions and possibilities for think tank construction. The author believes that there are currently large gaps between party schools at various levels, and party school libraries should, according to their own circumstances, first do a good job in guaranteeing think tank information resources. Party school libraries with relatively better resource conditions and greater investment, such as the CPC Central Party School Library and some provincial and sub-provincial party school libraries, can gradually explore their own transformation and development path for think tank construction while doing well in think tank service work.

2.2 Practical Situation of Party School Library Services for Think Tank Construction

Currently, the construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics has emerged as an upsurge, and party school libraries at all levels have actively responded to the call, providing various forms of services for party schools to build new think tanks. Using website investigation methods, 10 party school library websites with relatively better resource conditions were selected for examination to summarize the practical models of think tank-type services carried out by these libraries, as shown in Table 3 (some party school library websites are internal networks, and some data information is not comprehensive).

Table 3 The practice of carrying out think tank service in some party school libraries

It can be seen that, compared with other party school libraries in municipalities directly under the central government and provincial capitals, the CPC Central Party School Library has relatively strong capabilities and distinctive features in its think tank service practice. First, its resources are more abundant and service forms are more diversified. It not only compiles internal publications such as “Online Dynamics” and “Web Articles for Reference,” but also edits the public publication “Reference for Party and Government Cadres.” “Reference for Party and Government Cadres” is a semimonthly publication whose main content is to publicize the party’s line, principles, and policies, and to reflect key, hot, and difficult issues in reality. Its basic purpose is to enhance the theoretical level, policy level, and overall quality of party and government cadres at all levels across the country. Second, it has rich characteristic resources and has achieved remarkable results in promoting the construction of characteristic resources in the party school system. The CPC Central Party School Library not only strengthens its own characteristic resource database construction, such as the CPC Central Party School Library Collection, CPC Central Party School Ancient Books Collection, and CPC Central Party School Self-built Book Collection, but also took the lead during the “Twelfth Five-Year Plan” period in promoting the construction of the “Three Major Databases” in the national

party school system, namely the Chinese Communist Party History Database, Marxist Theory Database, and Chinese National Conditions and Local Chronicles Database. During the “Thirteenth Five-Year Plan” period, it vigorously promoted the construction of the “Four Major Thematic Databases,” namely the Marxist Theory Education Thematic Database, General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Important Speech Spirit Thematic Database, Leading Cadres’ Party Spirit Cultivation Thematic Database, and New High-end Think Tank Construction Thematic Database. These characteristic databases integrate resources from party schools at different levels, achieving co-construction and sharing in the national party school system, and providing important information resource guarantees for party school library services for think tank construction in the new era. Third, its service institutions are relatively sound. The CPC Central Party School Library has a Reference Consultation Department that mainly carries out daily reference consultation work, provides subject-based services centered on the school’s teaching and research work, and conducts secondary development and research on library collection resources, all of which serve the new think tank construction of the CPC Central Party School.

From the perspective of local library services for think tank construction, some municipalities directly under the central government and provincial party schools have conducted explorations that have achieved certain results. The Beijing Municipal Party School Library also functions as the Beijing Municipal Party School Municipal Conditions Research Center. The “Beijing Municipal Conditions Data Handbook” compiled annually mainly reflects basic and comparative data on various aspects of Beijing’s annual conditions. The center has also preliminarily established the Beijing Municipal Conditions Research and Local Chronicles Database. In addition, the library edits the internal publication “Guanyuan” magazine, which focuses on reflecting major theoretical and practical problems faced by leading cadres in governance, and on solving problems arising in Beijing’s construction of a world city with Chinese characteristics. It plays a positive role in broadening the vision, expanding leadership thinking, and improving work capabilities of leading cadres.

The Shanghai Municipal Party School Library began exploring subject-based services at the end of 2007. After years of practice, its subject services have achieved certain results. The library also has an Information Consultation Department mainly responsible for information consultation, special topic compilation, and subject services, and compiles the internal publication “Decision-Making · Theory · Reference.” Its collection includes thematic databases such as the 19th CPC National Congress Thematic Database, Chinese Communist Party Ideological and Theoretical Resources Database, “Belt and Road” Strategic Support Platform Data, People’s Public Opinion Information Database, and Global Case Discovery System, providing abundant electronic resource guarantees for serving think tank construction and playing a decision-making consultation role. The Guangdong Provincial Party School Library also has an internal Reference Consultation Department and compiles publications such as “Teaching and Research

Information,” “Guangdong Provincial Conditions Express,” and “Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao Digest” for relevant leaders, school teachers, and students to consult. The library has also self-built characteristic resource databases such as the Chinese Communist Party Guangdong History and Figures Special Research Database, Guangdong Provincial Conditions Research Special Database, and Guangdong Provincial Conditions Express. The Zhejiang Provincial Party School Library, in addition to setting up traditional business departments, also has attached Provincial Conditions Research Institute and Social Science Information Center specifically providing decision-making consultation services. The library compiles electronic publications such as “Information Briefing,” “Contemporary Social Science Perspectives,” and “Reading,” and has self-built databases such as “Comrade Xi Jinping in Zhejiang,” Zhejiang Provincial Conditions Research and Local Chronicles Full-text Database, and Zhejiang Party History Research and Figures Full-text Database. Since 2007, municipal party schools throughout the province have been able to share the provincial party school’s digital library resources through the party school virtual private network, making the Zhejiang Provincial Party School Library the information consultation and information service center for the provincial party school system. In addition, many other party school libraries are also actively carrying out transformation and upgrading to serve think tank construction and conducting different types of think tank service work.

Although party school libraries have achieved considerable results in think tank service work in recent years and have explored some innovative paths, from the perspective of the entire party school system, party school library think tank service work is still in a gradual growth stage. In particular, grassroots party school libraries at the county (city) level still face some difficulties and problems in transformation and development that need to be continuously overcome and resolved in future work practice.

3. Main Problems in Party School Library Services for Think Tank Construction

3.1 Unbalanced Funding and Large Regional Disparities

Web surveys reveal a significant gap in think tank services provided by party school libraries between economically developed eastern regions and underdeveloped western regions. Since the funding sources for party school libraries mainly rely on unified appropriations from national and local finances, economically developed regions invest more in party schools and their libraries, while less developed regions invest less. In particular, some party schools consider libraries as marginal departments, allocating minimal office funds. Party school libraries in these regions can only maintain traditional book lending and returning services and do not have sufficient human resources and funds to carry out diversified think tank services. Party school library websites in municipalities directly under the central government and developed provincial capitals are gen-

erally external networks, allowing broad user access to information. Moreover, these websites have rich content, basically all having library-published journals and abundant self-built characteristic database resources. However, some western region party school library websites are inaccessible, and the capacity for library-published journals and database construction needs improvement. Unbalanced funding has affected the transformation and upgrading of grassroots party school libraries from traditional service models and constrained their integration into the think tank construction process.

3.2 Backward Methods and Insufficient Service Levels

New think tank construction in party schools requires libraries to actively integrate into frontline teaching, research, and decision-making consultation work, and to provide effective information resources for leading cadres, teachers, and students in a timely manner. However, services in many party school libraries nationwide still remain at the traditional stage of literature lending and returning, with backward and monotonous service methods, weak information acquisition and sensitivity, and insufficiently close connections with think tank users. All these factors have led to the gradual weakening of library functions, and in some party school libraries, they have even become dispensable departments.

From current practice, even party school libraries that currently provide relatively good think tank services are still at the basic service level, that is, collecting relevant information and materials through the internet and newspapers according to user needs and delivering them to users, or conducting simple information processing based on collected original texts and organizing them into summarized special abstracts. These belong to the information transmission and reference consultation stage, far from reaching the decision-making consultation stage of deep information processing and proposing original viewpoints and suggestions, which affects the development strength of party school library services for think tank construction.

3.3 Shortage of Professional Talent and Lack of Professional Service Functions

The key to think tank construction and library construction lies in talent. Party school library services for think tank construction require a group of high-end talents to provide professional and efficient information consultation services. For libraries to transform toward this type of professional service, they must attach importance to improving staff comprehensive quality, professional skills, and knowledge levels. In recent years, the CPC Central Party School Library and party school libraries in municipalities directly under the central government and economically better-off provincial and sub-provincial party schools have continuously introduced professional talents with doctoral and master's degrees, optimizing the disciplinary structure of librarians and improving their comprehensive quality, which has played an important role in exploring the establishment of a subject librarian system and carrying out different types of

think tank service work. However, overall, some municipal and county party school libraries, due to insufficient investment, relatively low income, lack of geographical advantages, and unclear development prospects, cannot attract outstanding graduates to work with peace of mind, resulting in problems such as imbalanced personnel structure, serious aging, low overall quality, and weak research capabilities. Some libraries have few talents with bachelor's degrees, and there are even cases where not a single person has a background in library science, which greatly constrains the development of party school library think tank service work and the exertion of professional service functions.

4. Transformation and Development Strategies for Party School Library Services in Think Tank Construction

4.1 Update Service Concepts and Comprehensively Enhance Awareness of Governance Consultation Services

Party schools are important departments of party committees and the main channel for cadre training and education. Compared with other institutions, they have closer connections with party committees and governments. Providing decision-making consultation references for decision-makers and building new party school think tanks is the general trend. For party school libraries to transform toward a work model serving party school think tank construction in the new era, they must first attach great importance from the ideological perspective, clarify their own positioning, and strengthen awareness of providing suggestions and consultation services for party school think tank construction. For a long time, some libraries have rarely innovated their services, merely sticking to traditional lending services with relatively narrow service targets and distant relationships with users. The main reason lies in insufficient proactive service awareness and inadequate understanding of libraries' participation in party school think tank service construction. Only when librarians fully realize the importance of playing a governance consultation role, establish relevant internal governance consultation institutions, actively organize related research, plan projects, and compile governance consultation special issues, can libraries truly achieve transformation and development and improve their think tank service capabilities and effectiveness.

4.2 Diversify Funding Channels to Provide Financial Guarantee for Think Tank Construction Services

Adequate funding sources are the prerequisite and guarantee for libraries to comprehensively carry out think tank service work. Party school libraries should, in accordance with relevant state regulations and by referring to the office funding standards of party school libraries at the same level, actively apply for business special funds from local finance through their unit's financial departments, request appropriate increases in investment ratios, and strive for full funding allocation with maximum policy support. They should also learn from outstanding

foreign think tanks and social research institutions to attract more funds from other departments. Party school libraries can integrate internal resources and undertake research work on topics and scientific research projects outside the party school, such as strengthening cooperation with social science institutions like propaganda departments and social science federations, thereby obtaining certain funding support and providing financial guarantees for expanding think tank service scope, improving reference consultation capabilities, and further optimizing transformation.

In addition, party school libraries must also conduct reasonable planning and allocation of annual funds, strictly supervise fund usage, and strive for openness, transparency, and no waste to ensure the smooth realization of the library's think tank service goals.

4.3 Emphasize Resource Integration and Strengthen Literature Resource Development and Thematic Database Construction

Rich literature and information resources are the foundation for think tank research activities. In transformation and development, party school libraries should further strengthen the collection, processing, and organization of literature information, pay attention to the completeness and systematic nature of literature collection, and ensure that thematic materials are closely centered around the party and state's central work and principles and policies. They should closely monitor developments and changes in domestic and international situations, focus on hot and difficult issues in society, and for local party schools, thematic material selection should also combine more with local economic and social development, staying close to party school development and student training needs. At the same time, party school libraries should also pay attention to collecting and organizing grey literature that is not publicly published, such as outstanding student theses, student research reports, internal information materials exchanged between government agencies, and teaching and research achievements of party school teachers. These documents constitute characteristic collection resources of party school libraries, covering wide information areas with novel content and unique viewpoints, playing an important role in timely understanding the latest policy trends of party committees and governments and various viewpoints of decision-makers. Furthermore, party school libraries should continue to strengthen the construction of characteristic thematic databases. Collection databases should reflect not only world conditions, national conditions, and party conditions but also highlight local characteristics. These characteristic databases systematically, standardize, and orderly organize scattered literature resources through deep-level processing and mining, facilitating user learning and consultation, helping to improve the utilization rate of collection resources, and providing a solid foundation for libraries to carry out think tank services.

4.4 Improve Digital Networks and Promote Co-construction and Sharing of Information Resources Among Party Schools at All Levels

From the practical situation of party schools in various regions, there are great differences in financial appropriations at various levels. Some grassroots party school libraries in backward regions have tight funds and simply cannot afford to carry out literature resource construction work. Under such circumstances, on the premise of improving the provincial party school network system, resources from party school libraries in various cities and counties can be integrated to achieve co-construction and sharing of party school resources in a region. This can compensate for and solve the problems of insufficient funds and technical deficiencies in grassroots party school libraries, and also improve the utilization efficiency of digital resources. The Zhejiang Provincial Party School began organizing joint procurement of digital resources for the provincial party school system in 2003, officially launched the co-construction and sharing mechanism for digital resources in the provincial party school system in 2005, and has currently achieved interconnectivity of virtual private networks for provincial, municipal, and county-level party schools, making the co-construction and sharing of literature and information resources possible [9]. The sharing mechanism of network resources in the party school system is conducive to improving the overall level of decision-making consultation in party school libraries and helps libraries further play their role in serving think tank construction.

4.5 Perfect the Subject Librarian System and Vigorously Optimize Service Methods

Party school libraries should take the opportunity of serving think tank construction to transform service concepts, innovate service methods, change from passive service to active embedded service, vigorously implement the subject librarian system, and carry out high-end subject-based information services. Subject librarians need not only basic library business work capabilities but also certain disciplinary professional backgrounds. Their main responsibilities are to actively contact service targets, timely understand user needs, and provide users with needed information materials or special materials for reference consultation. At the same time, in daily work, they should closely monitor the latest developments and frontier information in corresponding disciplines, collect and organize some focal and hot issues, and regularly or irregularly recommend updated information consultation to users, building a bridge for communication and interaction with users. In addition, they should continuously improve subject navigation systems, integrate network information resources from various disciplines, and provide users with one-stop information resource services. The Shanghai Municipal Party School began exploring subject-based service work at the end of 2007, established a part-time subject librarian team corresponding to the then seven teaching and research departments, and preliminarily established basic channels and mechanisms for subject librarians to connect with teaching and research departments [10]. On the basis of serving teaching and research

department teachers, subject librarians should also use some think tank service projects as starting points to expand service targets to relevant party and government organ staff, thereby enhancing the influence of party school libraries and creating characteristic think tank service brands.

4.6 Cultivate Talent Teams and Comprehensively Improve Librarian Comprehensive Quality

Think tank service talents should be interdisciplinary compound talents with strong investigation, research, and countermeasure analysis capabilities. Establishing a high-quality talent team that understands national conditions, policies, and has solid theoretical foundations is the key to party school library services for think tank construction. Libraries should optimize the organizational structure of existing personnel and guide librarians to gradually integrate into the state and atmosphere of scientific research. By actively securing various training opportunities, expert forums, and special research for librarians, libraries can improve their research capabilities and work levels, promoting the transformation and upgrading of talent teams. They should improve talent evaluation and appointment standards and incentive systems to fully mobilize librarians' work enthusiasm and initiative. They should do well in disciplinary planning and construction, systematically and purposefully introduce some high-education talents with different professional backgrounds to solve current talent bottleneck problems. They should encourage librarians to "go out" and learn from and exchange more with public libraries, university libraries, and brother party school libraries, and actively participate in research projects and topics of various teaching and research departments. Only in this way can they truly improve librarians' comprehensive quality, promote librarian transformation and upgrading, and provide high-level information services for party school think tank construction.

Party school new think tank construction is an important component of building new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Think tank construction provides opportunities and platforms for party school libraries to transform traditional service models and achieve upgrading. Party school libraries should improve political acuity, enhance think tank service awareness, and play the front-end supporting role of party school think tank information sources and information service windows. By continuously tapping their own potential, innovating service methods, and cooperating fully with other departments, they can maximize services and guarantees for party schools to build new think tanks.

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