

## Post-print of Think Tank Analysis in China's Social Governance Field

**Authors:** Chui Guoliang, Yang Ya, Chui Guoliang

**Date:** 2018-08-14T00:00:00+00:00

### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] As social development enters a new stage, social governance, as one of the two fundamental tasks of social construction, has garnered widespread attention from all sectors. How to fully leverage the role of think tanks in the social governance domain to improve and develop people's livelihoods in the new era has become a new topic of the times. [Method/Process] This paper aims to examine the current development status and trends of think tanks in the social governance field to better serve the needs of social construction. Specifically, it investigates the present situation and future trajectory of China's social governance think tanks through analysis of geographical distribution, research type distribution, establishment year, and the proportion of social governance think tanks among all categories of think tanks. [Results/Conclusions] The results indicate that social governance think tanks are predominantly concentrated in the Beijing area; different types of think tanks exhibit distinct emphases in social governance research; there exists a direct relationship between think tank type and establishment period; cultural research and social development research account for relatively high proportions; and official think tanks will remain the backbone of social governance think tanks for a period of time to come.

### Full Text

## Analysis of Think Tanks in China's Social Governance Domain

Chui Guoliang<sup>1</sup>, Yang Ya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Postdoctoral Research Station, Social Sciences Academic Press; Assistant Researcher, Ph.D.; ORCID: 0000-0003-4546-1284; E-mail: zehuacuan@126.com

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Yunnan Provincial Trade Union, Communist Youth League, and

Women's Federation Cadre School; Bachelor's Degree; ORCID: 0000-0002-5940-4582

## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** As social development enters a new stage, social governance—one of the two fundamental tasks of social construction—has garnered widespread attention from all sectors. How to fully leverage the role of think tanks in the social governance domain to improve and develop people's livelihood has become a new topic for the era. **[Method/Process]** This paper examines the current development status and trends of think tanks in the social governance field to better serve the needs of social construction. Specifically, it analyzes the geographical distribution, research type distribution, establishment year, and the proportion of social governance think tanks within various categories to understand the present situation and future trajectory of China's social governance think tanks. **[Results/Conclusions]** The findings indicate that social governance think tanks are predominantly concentrated in the Beijing area, with different types of think tanks emphasizing distinct aspects of social governance research. There is a direct relationship between think tank type and establishment time, with cultural research and social development research accounting for relatively high proportions. For the foreseeable future, think tanks within the system will remain the backbone of social governance think tanks.

**Keywords:** social governance; think tank; society

**Classification Number:** C931

## 1 Definition of the Social Governance Concept

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China closely links the improvement of people's livelihood with social governance, systematically discussing them as an integrated whole. According to the report, the social governance pattern China aims to build primarily includes: strengthening the construction of social governance institutions; improving the social governance system led by Party committees, responsible for the government, coordinated by society, participated in by the public, and safeguarded by the rule of law; enhancing the socialization, rule-of-law, intelligence, and specialization of social governance; strengthening the construction of mechanisms for preventing and resolving social conflicts, and correctly handling contradictions among the people; establishing a concept of safety development that promotes life supremacy and safety-first thinking; improving the public safety system and the safety production responsibility system; resolutely curbing major and serious safety accidents; enhancing disaster prevention, mitigation, and relief capabilities; accelerating the construction of a social security prevention and control system; legally cracking down on and punishing illegal and criminal activities such as pornography, gambling, drugs, organized crime, and fraud; protecting

people's personal rights, property rights, and personality rights; strengthening the construction of a social psychological service system; and cultivating self-esteem, self-confidence, rationality, peace, and positive social mentality. Additionally, it involves strengthening community governance system construction, shifting the focus of social governance to the grassroots level, leveraging the role of social organizations, and achieving positive interaction between government governance, social regulation, and resident self-governance [1].

In essence, social governance in China refers to governance activities of social public affairs led by the ruling party, dominated by government organizations, and involving multiple governance subjects including social organizations, with the core of "realizing and safeguarding the rights of the masses." It is a process that leverages the role of multiple governance subjects, addresses social issues in national governance, improves social welfare, safeguards and enhances people's livelihood, resolves social conflicts, promotes social equity, and fosters orderly and harmonious social development [2]. As an organic component of national governance, social governance primarily involves social relations in the social domain, such as social welfare relations, social security relations, social public services, population and kinship relations, and social relations arising from government department management. In terms of content, social governance encompasses multiple dimensions including livelihood security, public safety, and social governance mechanisms [3][4].

In the West, due to the strength of sociocentrism and civil society-based principles, social autonomy founded on rational individuals constitutes the core content of social governance. In China, due to long-term interference and destruction by foreign capitalist forces since modern times, the modernization process has been arduous, requiring a strong political party to unite and guide the broad masses. For historical reasons, China has chosen Marxist state theory and is accustomed to scientifically, democratically, and effectively governing the country according to the political practices and experiences of the ruling party on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Consequently, China's social governance presents a different model from Western social governance theories.

Regarding the subjects, objects, goals, and content of social governance, there is still no unified consensus in academia. Compared with government agencies' understanding of social governance, academic circles place more emphasis on appeals for the power of social governance subjects and the tendency toward self-management through consultation. Tang Jun [5] argues that social governance refers to the process in which various pluralistic subjects, from individuals to public or private institutions, take concerted action on social affairs of their concern through interaction and coordination in the social domain, with the goal of maintaining the normal operation of society and meeting the basic needs of individuals and society. Scholar Gerry Stoker [6] believes that the connotation of social governance should include five aspects: (1) governance subjects are not limited to the government—social institutions and other organizations can

become power centers at different levels; (2) the state cedes some of its rights to social organizations and mass institutions; (3) various social institutions are interconnected and interdependent; (4) social governance forms systematic networks; and (5) various governance techniques can be employed to manage public affairs in the social governance process.

In summary, we believe that social governance is a governance technique that, under the premise of maintaining harmonious and orderly social operation, involves government-led coordination and consultation among markets and social organizations to jointly address various social affairs and conflicts, using rational and institutionalized means to solve problems and achieve benign social operation. Compared with political governance, social governance emphasizes more on negotiation at the social group level rather than directive governance by officials and political institutions and one-size-fits-all administrative solutions at the macro level. Compared with economic governance, social governance significantly weakens the use of market forces to solve problems, instead emphasizing the joint consultation efforts of social organizations, markets, and other subjects to address issues.

## 2.1 Data Sources

The data collected in this paper comes from the *China Think Tank Directory*, a phased achievement of the National Social Science Fund key project “Investigation, Evaluation, and Construction Strategy Research on New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics” (15AZZ009), researched and published by the Social Sciences Academic Press. The directory defines “think tanks” as public affairs decision-making consulting institutions that are independent of decision-making departments, providing constructive decision-making basis and options for decision-making institutions to estimate situations, determine goals, and formulate policies, while conducting decision-making evaluation and policy interpretation. The directory includes a total of 1,192 domestic think tanks, categorized according to their nature into government department think tanks, party system think tanks, scientific research institute think tanks, university think tanks, social think tanks, cooperative think tanks, high-end think tanks, and platform think tanks. The information collection deadline was September 30, 2016. The directory’s coverage includes: think tanks affiliated with party and government systems at the provincial and ministerial level and above; think tanks of research centers directly under national scientific research institutions, research institutes, or academies; university think tanks at the school level and above, as well as other university think tanks; social organization, private non-enterprise, and enterprise think tanks; cooperative think tanks; high-end think tanks; platform think tanks; think tank research and evaluation institutions; and other influential think tank research teams creating annual reports. The collected information primarily includes: think tank category, supervising unit, establishment time, primary responsible person, office address, contact information, and main research fields [7]. This information mainly derives from think

tank official websites, public online channels, and institutional survey data. Additionally, due to the complex status quo of Chinese think tanks, the collection and identification work has been extremely challenging: some institutions are difficult to judge as having think tank functions based solely on their names; some institutions appear to be think tanks by name but are actually unrelated; particularly noteworthy is that some social think tanks have broad business scopes and distinct characteristics, making their situations even more complex. Due to limited conditions, the directory may contain errors or omissions regarding some think tanks and their information.

## 2.2 Research Methods

This paper employs text analysis to understand the specific concerns of think tanks through examining the distribution of research types in the social governance field, and classifies and ranks the specific content of social governance areas these think tanks focus on to discover inherent connections. It examines regional distribution to understand developmental level differences among social governance think tanks across regions. By linking regional distribution with think tank type and nature and conducting comparisons, it identifies structural reasons constraining the development of social governance think tanks. By examining the proportion of social governance think tanks within different types of think tanks, it investigates which departments attach greater importance to social governance and are more willing to invest in social governance research, using horizontal comparison to study differences and reasons among research directions of social governance think tanks across different types.

This paper adopts the following criteria to screen social governance think tanks: (1) **Research Content**: primarily including basic livelihood security such as labor and employment, medical and health care, basic education and reform, poverty alleviation, housing and elderly care, income distribution, and social security—these research directions are the valves of social fairness and justice and the basic requirements for maintaining social harmony and stability. (2) **Thematic Categories**: population research, rural society, cultural development, social structure and stratification, family research, enterprise organization reform and development, institutional analysis, social mentality, vulnerable group research, community research, and public welfare. (3) **Social Governance Mechanisms**: including the functional positioning and interrelationships among government, market, and society during the social governance process; how to handle the relationship between national interests and individual interests of social members; the rights and obligations among social members; the boundaries and scope of market functions; what methods to use for regulating social resource redistribution; and how to coordinate stakeholders—a series of institutional arrangements. Whether mechanism issues can be resolved directly relates to whether various subjects of social governance can effectively participate in the social governance process and whether interactions between subjects and objects can operate smoothly on a normal legal track. The benign

operation of social governance mechanisms is paramount to social governance, directly concerning both the personal well-being of social members and the long-term interests of the nation.

Considering that the concept of “social governance” emerged relatively recently, in the specific screening process, all institutions conducting research in the social governance domain were included in the analysis regardless of their scale or overall research strength. Most party school system think tanks were excluded because party schools primarily undertake training tasks for party members and cadres, with researchers’ attention mostly focused on studying the party’s latest spirit and other party affairs. Consequently, their social governance research mainly emphasizes party affairs, making their functions more aligned with “party governance.” Regarding the scientific research system, national-level think tanks are listed as individual research institutes or centers, while provincial scientific research institutions are included as a whole rather than listing individual research institutes separately.

### 3.1 Proportion Analysis

The type distribution of social governance think tanks includes the distribution proportion of this type of think tank within different categories and the distribution characteristics of different research fields within this type. As of September 30, 2016, there were 252 social governance think tanks nationwide. In terms of the proportion of social governance think tanks within different types: among 248 government department think tanks, 27 are social governance think tanks; among 48 party system think tanks, 2 are social governance think tanks; among 123 scientific research institute think tanks, 45 are social governance think tanks; among 444 university think tanks, 118 are social governance think tanks; among 177 social think tanks, 38 are social governance think tanks; among 89 cooperative think tanks, 20 are social governance think tanks; and among 8 platform think tanks, 2 are social governance think tanks.

Although platform think tanks are few in number and comparisons among them are less meaningful, they are included for the sake of research completeness. Social governance think tanks account for 10.8% of government institutions, 4.1% of party systems, 36.6% of scientific research institutes, 26.5% of university systems, and 21.4% of social think tanks. The proportion is highest within university system think tanks, which also far outnumber other think tanks in absolute terms (as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]).

#### **Figure 1 The proportion of think tanks in the field of social governance in different nature think tanks**

Generally speaking, government institution think tanks primarily serve government departments, with most being public institutions and some having been reformed into enterprise units. Their funding sources are mostly vertical, derived from government finances or other natural and social science funds. Research tasks mainly depend on the institution’s nature and its leadership. Research

fields typically focus on short-term policies, investigations, and strategic design in certain macro areas, such as education, population, and social security.

Social governance research in scientific research institutes is relatively more dispersed, with less focused research topics compared to government think tanks. Their function is positioned as engaging in medium- and long-term social development strategy research, and unlike government think tanks, they do not prioritize studying short-term social reality issues. In addition to vertical projects, scientific research institutes also have many horizontal projects. In terms of research task space, social governance think tanks in scientific research institutes have greater scope than those in government think tanks.

The university system has numerous think tanks, with a relatively large number focusing on social governance compared to other types. Functionally positioned to cultivate talent for society, universities have become contract-based institutions with recent reforms, though this has not significantly impacted think tank research. Compared with government and scientific research institute think tanks, universities have more diverse funding sources. Beyond vertical project funding, many alumni and social individuals, as well as foundations, can support their research plans. In terms of talent pools, universities have far more researchers than government agencies and scientific research institutes, including both research personnel and faculty.

Cooperative and platform think tanks have relatively loose organizational structures and unstable talent teams. Therefore, at the current stage, university think tanks hold the greatest advantage in the social governance domain, though their influence on social governance policies is lower than that of government institution think tanks and even scientific research institute think tanks. Conversely, this weaker influence on high-level policies leads university systems to seek research concerns from their own positioning and external funding.

In the short term, the composition proportions of social governance think tanks across various types will not change significantly, except for social think tanks and platform think tanks. The reason is that social and platform think tanks operate outside the system, with potential and unpredictable factors in their organizational structure, project tasks and objectives, and personnel structure. Of course, the types and numbers of social governance think tanks themselves are also constrained by issues such as the boundaries of the connotation and extension of social governance in actual research and theoretical discussions.

Research fields vary across different think tank institutions. This paper merges and categorizes them according to thematic categories, searching, screening, and consolidating related items. For example, social security encompasses social insurance and medical care, all merged under social security. Some research institutions contain multiple research directions under a theme and are merged into a single thematic item—for instance, a population research center including gender population and population mobility research is consolidated under population research, with item counts not duplicated, calculated by research

institution. Meanwhile, due to overlapping intersections in research fields—for example, spiritual culture and cultural industries—this paper follows the principles of social governance research (multiple subjects, collaborative participation, and mutual coordination) to exclude purely economic or political research.

**Table 1 The number ranking of the research fields of the think tanks in social governance**

Statistical findings (as shown in Table 1) reveal that among social governance think tanks, 89 focus on cultural and development research (excluding cultural industries), 86 on social transformation and development, 56 on ethnic studies, 49 on rural development, 35 on education reform, 33 on social security, 32 on population research, 21 on enterprises and social organizations, 12 on labor and employment, 10 on income distribution, 10 on community research, 3 on housing policy, 2 on women's studies, 2 on social psychology, and 1 on elderly care.

Within government think tanks, the top areas of focus are social development (10), education (5), population (5), and culture (2). Scientific research institute think tanks focus on social transformation and development (12), rural research (3), cultural research (1), and social security (2). University think tanks concentrate on social governance and development (34), rural society (19), and education reform (17). Social think tanks focus on social development strategies and social surveys, while cooperative think tanks concentrate on development policies and development.

Compared with scientific research institute think tanks, government think tanks place greater emphasis on education and population research, perhaps because these areas closely align with macro policies and sustainable development goals, making them particularly important for government agencies. This characteristic becomes even more pronounced when considering that these are primarily central government think tank institutions. Conversely, observing government agency think tanks from their social governance research directions reveals that education departments, planning commissions, and human resources and social security departments remain the main think tank departments. This suggests that these departments did not emerge because of social governance research; rather, social governance research emerged because of these pre-existing departments. To avoid falling into conceptual games, it becomes necessary to clarify how these departments reposition themselves during their transformation into think tanks—though this belongs to another research topic. From the perspective of government-affiliated think tanks, few if any new social governance think tanks have been established recently; instead, the emergence of social think tanks and platform think tanks is more closely related to the research boom in social governance.

Since scientific research institutions do not engage in education, their focus on educational aspects is relatively weak. Similar to government think tanks, most of these institutions have long existed, with research directions and fields constrained by both the specific research requirements of existing researchers and

research offices and the demands of social governance-related research. In contrast, the high proportion of education and rural research in university think tanks may be due to universities' functional positioning as educational institutions. The emergence of rural research in university think tanks appears primarily driven by practical constraints, as the ability to access and enter research objects and fields is the most important issue for any researcher or institution. Rural society represents the bottom layer of society with minimal barriers. Compared with the convenience of government think tanks in obtaining macro data and accessing various fields, university systems are considerably disadvantaged. Second, rural society is a space where various humanistic concerns can be fully expressed, with both subjective and objective, complex and simple research methods finding application. For grassroots rural areas, the experimental fields of social reform and transformation have left the deepest and most brilliant marks, where the massive faculty and researcher teams can most easily bear fruit.

Social think tanks differ from government agencies, scientific research institutes, and university think tanks. They primarily undertake projects not from the state and government but mostly from commercial profit-making structures, so research topics follow project availability, often involving large-scale social surveys, policy consulting, and advisory services.

Currently, the total number of university system think tanks will remain relatively high, though the relative proportion is difficult to guarantee. As social development becomes more diversified and policies such as educational tracking make the number of university student sources uncertain, this poses new challenges for most ordinary universities with already insufficient funding. In terms of the sequence of public institution restructuring, university think tanks were clearly reformed earlier than many government and scientific research institute think tanks, making them among the first to be released. Expecting such think tank institutions to achieve long-term sustainable development obviously aligns with actual circumstances. Except for a few key universities and universities in affluent regions with relatively sufficient financial and various funding support, most ordinary institutions of higher education do not yet possess the qualifications to develop social governance think tanks in terms of talent, material resources, and finances. This provides the possibility for the concentration of social governance think tanks, yet how this possibility can enable complete presentation of rich local social knowledge and allow government, society, and market to play appropriate roles remains a question to be tested.

### 3.2 Establishment Time Distribution

Statistical findings (as shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]) show that 5 university think tanks were established in the 1980s, 17 in the 1990s, and the remaining university think tanks were all born in the dozen or so years after 2000. Except for a few think tanks such as the Guangzhou Academy of Social Sciences and the Henan Academy of Social Sciences that were established earlier,

most scientific research institute think tanks emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Social think tanks and cooperative think tanks were basically established in the 1990s, with uneven development to date. Government think tanks have relatively dispersed establishment times, appearing in the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, and from the 1990s to the present. Cooperative think tanks have also been concentrated in the most recent decade. Government counselor offices in various regions were not included in the statistics due to lack of public information and materials.

**Figure 2 The change trend of think tanks in the field of social governance in different think tanks**

Analysis of think tanks in the Beijing area reveals that the mid-to-late 1990s to the present has been a period of concentrated establishment of social governance think tanks. Setting aside differences in think tank base numbers, the establishment times of university think tanks in regions such as Jiangsu and Shaanxi were concentrated in the 1990s or the first few years of the 21st century. However, after the emergence of these think tanks in these two regions, no new think tanks have appeared since. In the chronological distribution, think tanks established in Beijing from the 20th century to the present have obviously been temporally closer, with think tanks emerging every year.

The time span for the emergence of social governance think tanks in government departments is larger than that for universities and scientific research systems. Scientific research system think tanks were concentrated in the 1970s and 1980s, university think tanks in the first dozen or so years of the 21st century, while government think tanks show no obvious distribution trend, with this situation occurring from Beijing to various localities. New government think tanks were established in the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, and from the 1990s to the present, though the 1960s seem to have seen no government think tanks emerge, with no obvious distribution pattern. Compared with university and scientific research think tanks, this changing constancy of government institution think tanks precisely demonstrates that they themselves are direct initiators or controllers of policies, while university think tanks, local scientific research think tanks, and social think tanks show more obvious characteristics of regularity in their changes—though statistical bias due to small sample sizes cannot be ruled out for social think tanks. Central institution scientific research think tanks differ slightly from local ones; due to statistical reasons, central scientific research think tank academies and institutes are listed separately, and their establishment time sequence also shows no regularity, with their degree of looseness far lower than that of local academies of social sciences.

When distributing think tank establishment time sequences across provinces and cities, it becomes apparent that local university think tanks have not emerged as densely as those in Beijing. Beyond the reason of scarce university numbers, the original intention of local universities to establish think tanks under the influence of local government agencies, schools, and other social institutions still exists. Once these think tanks are established and their influence eliminated,

there seems to be no other greater policy-driven motivation.

### 3.3 Geographical Distribution

As shown in Table 2, Beijing's agglomeration effect of social governance think tanks is extremely obvious, with a total of 110—5.5 times that of Shanghai (ranked second) and 11 times that of Hubei (ranked third). The number of social governance think tanks in Beijing far exceeds the 93 in all other regions combined. From one perspective, this indicates that the scale of social governance research in Beijing is very large and the research level may be relatively high; from another level, however, the development gap with other regions cannot be described simply as unbalanced—comparisons between Beijing and any other region show almost cliff-like declines. The large number of social governance think tanks in Beijing is due not only to the overall large number of think tanks but also to the concentration of national-level government and party system research units and numerous high-quality universities in Beijing under the established screening criteria. The issue is clearly more than this. From the functional positioning of social governance, first, it must address government functions and efficiency. Beijing's government institutions face this issue, and so do other local government institutions. Except for variations in governance capacity, how to improve government governance efficiency is a universal problem across regions. Geographic location is a crucial reason. If we disregard the agglomeration of think tanks in Beijing, purely from a governance perspective, strengthening connections between Beijing-area think tanks and local government departments is also a path worth considering to address local government governance level and efficiency issues. However, no data shows fixed, frequent, and effective cooperation and exchange between Beijing-area think tanks and local governments.

Second, from the perspective of social governance mechanisms, the original intention of proposing social governance was to expand the power of social organizations and markets in coordinating social interests and resolving conflicts, broadening the scope of participants. However, experience shows that the scope of various participants has not expanded as anticipated.

#### **Table 2 The distribution of think tanks in the field of social governance in different regions**

As seen in Table 2, in some border regions such as Tibet, Ningxia, and Inner Mongolia—vast territories with sparse populations—there are almost no social governance think tanks. However, in central regions such as Henan, Shanxi, and Hebei, whose geographic importance, population size, and density far exceed those of border regions, there are also very few social governance think tanks. Particularly in Henan, a populous province, its research strength does not match its geographic location and human resource advantages. Currently lacking external driving forces, without policy support, the construction of social governance think tanks in this region will remain very slow.

From the official websites of various think tank institutions, research priorities differ significantly across regions. Jiangsu tends to focus on immigration, water conservancy, and community research; Guizhou primarily conducts population and anthropological research; Gansu and Yunnan mainly engage in ethnic studies; Shanghai emphasizes social management and urban-rural integrated development; Guangdong focuses on population and urban-rural research; Hubei emphasizes rural areas and their social development and management; Sichuan focuses on rural areas, population, and social development; Zhejiang emphasizes modern social development; and Beijing focuses on overall social development, enterprise reform, population, education, and urban-rural issues. Regions typically determine their social governance research directions according to local actual conditions, making it difficult to identify common themes. From local development reports, regional differences are substantial. Some regions have special water conservancy and hydrological conditions, with a series of social governance measures focusing solely on water environments and related supporting human, material, and institutional resources. Some regions have obvious industrial advantages, making population migration and mobility and associated children's education and medical issues prominent. Some regions suffer from drought and lack of rain, with social governance primarily revolving around desertification control as the core resource transportation and supporting services. In short, social governance is a set of macro policies but also local experience. How to coordinate and handle various relationships based on different local experiences will be an urgent problem for all regions to solve.

#### 4 Development Prospects of Social Governance Think Tanks

Social governance think tanks possess both general characteristics of think tanks and particularities distinct from other think tanks. Their development prospects are constrained by both aspects.

Compared with think tanks in the United States and other Western countries, Chinese think tanks have inherent particularities. While American researchers and government officials flow interchangeably through the revolving door mechanism, most Chinese scientific research institutions have only recently restructured. Despite varying motivations among individual think tanks, they are fundamentally similar in responding to the times and contributing to national development. Compared with Chinese think tanks, the American think tank system operates with greater flexibility. This does not mean Chinese think tanks are not institutionalized or lack flexibility, but rather that Chinese think tanks are tightly linked with the administrative system. Under administrative jurisdiction, enterprise, public, and social think tanks each have different characteristics—this difference constitutes the flexibility of China's think tank system.

It must be acknowledged that China's think tank construction and research on think tanks themselves are not yet mature. This immaturity manifests in both government research institutions and academic and civil society circles.

Whether the overall trend of think tank construction and research can continue will mainly depend on the policy continuity and stability of government institutions. Since the think tank research boom is primarily driven by government agencies, what are their main objectives? Why are existing research institutions rebranded as think tanks? Official announcements reveal that serving government decision-making is the primary responsibility of think tank institutions. Scientific research institutions already had the function of serving government decision-making before the think tank boom emerged. Why re-establish them under the think tank name to serve government decision-making? A plausible explanation is that the previous responsibility to serve government decision-making was not clearly defined. This lack of clarity first appeared in the consciousness of think tank institutions, and consciousness flows through concepts. Therefore, it became necessary to re-establish a new name for their service attribute, making the think tank name logical and natural.

This raises several new questions. First, how can think tanks serve government decision-making more clearly? Second, serving government decision-making is one issue; how to serve government decision-making better and more efficiently is another. Among current think tank institutions, due to various limitations, the think tanks that can and are willing to serve are usually those closest to government agencies. This becomes clear simply by examining the list of the first batch of 25 think tanks—almost all are central-level think tank institutions. Regarding the scope of the second and third batches of designated think tank lists, if any, they will still be evaluated based on their distance from central institutions. This distance refers to both the level of the think tank institution and its research capacity—naturally, these two criteria are usually combined. Third, there is the question of the sustainability of research institutions not designated as think tanks.

On the other hand, after clarifying the attribute of think tank institutions serving government decision-making, how to ensure correct opinions and decision-making information can be accepted becomes an even more important issue following the service to government decision-making. Whether to pool collective wisdom or to enforce orders unimpeded, and how to coordinate the relationship between the two, will be a common problem facing all think tank institutions in the future, and social governance think tanks are no exception.

Beyond common points shared by all think tanks—such as being driven by policies or serving major guidelines for government decision-making—social governance think tanks also have their particularities. Their uniqueness lies in that this field differs from other fields, and their survival and development will be influenced by different factors.

First, research on society will continue to exist, but society's boundaries and scope will constantly expand and contract, with social governance operating within these floating boundaries. Beyond definitional disputes and debates, whether social governance think tanks can develop better will mainly depend on the following aspects: the strength of social subjectivity forces, government

policy support, the willingness of various think tank institutions, and research funding sources and talent numbers. Currently, due to the vague definition of the social governance domain, a considerable portion of previous social or sociological research fields has been incorporated into the social governance domain, with extremely few think tanks purely researching social governance. Society's differentiation or solidification has no clear trend. At this stage, social subjectivity—such as citizens and social self-organized groups—remains relatively weak, and whether they can be incorporated as subjects of social governance remains to be confirmed. Under these circumstances, there will not be significant conflict (conceptual conflict) between government and social self-organization. However, if social self-organized forces become strong enough to potentially change the government's subject status, the direction of social governance think tank research will become a test that must be faced, regardless of how large or small this possibility may be.

Under existing circumstances, if social self-organization does not expand, government policy support becomes obvious: support leads to development, while lack of support may lead to decline. This depends on where official attention lies. The development willingness of each think tank institution itself also changes with official will, with the difference being whether different institutions' willingness is more distant or closer. From the perspective of each think tank itself, human and financial resources are always the most important forces. Currently, the financial resources of each think tank institution are influenced by both central and local finances, as well as by donations from domestic and foreign sources and other private enterprises. The most stable financial support generally targets central institution think tanks and think tanks in affluent regions or key prestigious universities. These three types of think tanks will maintain their advantages in the future, especially key university think tanks. In addition to government appropriations and various funding, they also receive donations, making their funding quite substantial. Some researchers from key scientific research institutes even show signs of flowing toward university think tanks, which may also affect the future geographical distribution of think tanks.

However, donations to universities have a certain contingency, closely related to the leadership of the relevant university departments, alumni capabilities, interests, and other factors. Although a normalized funding support mechanism has not been established, if a university receives a one-time donation of tens of millions, its think tank can basically operate without financial worries for the next decade.

In short, within the social governance domain, government think tanks, scientific research institute think tanks, and key university think tanks will still maintain their respective development characteristics and advantages in the foreseeable future. Most ordinary university think tanks, platform think tanks, and social think tanks will experience greater variability due to various uncertain factors, and their think tank attributes will face significant tests.

## 5 Recommendations for the Development of Social Governance Think Tanks

Currently, the main think tank institutions remain some system-internal research institutions, such as government think tanks, university think tanks, and scientific research system think tanks. Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes some specific recommendations for think tank development.

First, regarding the main purpose and objectives of think tank institutions, different types of think tank institutions (system-internal think tanks) can be somewhat reduced to each other in some sense. Therefore, to better leverage the role of different think tank institutions in straightening out social relations and resolving social conflicts, it is necessary to integrate think tank institutions in some way. Implement a group responsibility system led by government institution think tanks to leverage the respective advantages of different think tanks. Specifically, establish an expert committee composed of personnel from government think tanks and other think tanks. For specific projects, the expert committee selects project teams, with the team leader held by government think tank personnel and deputy leaders rotated among other think tank personnel. The team leader convenes project team members irregularly, the team disbands upon project completion, and new team members are convened when projects emerge, with team members recommended and elected by the expert committee. The reason for this approach is that social surveys led by government think tanks more easily gain access to various fields. Second, China's social development has always been government-led, and coordination led by government think tanks more easily gains recognition from all parties and reduces various frictions in team cooperation. Third, research organized and implemented by government think tank personnel indirectly eliminates some barriers between government and ordinary scholars in both the research process and the presentation of research results.

Second, regarding think tank funding and personnel support. Due to the scarcity of researchers and insufficient funding in most local scientific research and university think tanks, which is unfavorable for local social governance development, it is recommended that, where conditions permit, a series of "linkage assistance" measures be implemented for local social governance think tanks through multiple means. Specifically, through policy inclination and voluntary participation principles, establish a personnel circulation mechanism between renowned think tank experts and local think tanks, with expert fees jointly borne by the state, local governments, and local think tanks, specifying minimum service time, while actively attracting a group of promising young researchers from home and abroad. Strive to form a stable talent reserve team and a good talent echelon pattern.

To ensure adequate funding supply, some university think tanks need to fully leverage the role of alumni associations, contacting a group of capable and willing social individuals to fund or cooperate with local think tanks, broadening

funding acquisition channels. Simultaneously, strive to increase the transformation and output of their scientific research achievements, registering and establishing a batch of companies responsible for market development and operation downstream, or having university publishing institutions and logistics departments responsible for operation and promotion, striving to generate certain social and economic benefits. Ultimately achieve self-reliance and sustainable development.

Third, establish a complete evaluation system. The operation of think tanks and their achievement output require a new evaluation system distinct from academia, comprehensively evaluating from aspects such as think tank achievement output, influence, and talent numbers, refining and quantifying specific standards, and establishing a new model that can be mutually learned from similar or 相近 think tank institutions. Meanwhile, this evaluation system should have some elastic space to make necessary adjustments according to the actual development of think tanks.

## References

- [1] Xi Jinping. Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China[J]. Beauty & Times, 2017(10): 4-19.
- [2] Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform[N]. People's Daily, 2013-11-16(001).
- [3] Jiang Xiaoping. Social Governance System Innovation in the Process of Modernizing National Governance[J]. Chinese Public Administration, 2014(1): 24.
- [4] Wang Puqu. The Meanings and Interrelationships of National Governance, Government Governance, and Social Governance[J]. Journal of China National School of Administration, 2014(3): 11-17.
- [5] Tang Jun. Four Characteristics of Social Governance[N]. Beijing Daily, 2015-3-2(001).
- [6] Gerry Stoker. Governance as Theory: Five Propositions[J]. Translated by Hua Xiaofeng. International Social Science Journal, 1999(1): 19-30.
- [7] Xie Shuguang, Cai Jihui, Shi Xiaolin. China Think Tank Directory (2016)[M]. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2016: 1-2.

## Appendix: List of 252 Social Governance Think Tanks

Peking University Center for Civil Society Studies  
 Peking University International Higher Education Research Center  
 Peking University Institute of Economic and Human Development  
 Peking University-Lincoln Institute Center for Urban Development and Land Policy  
 Peking University Poverty Area Development Research Institute

Peking University Institute of Population Research  
 Peking University Digital China Research Institute  
 Peking University China Insurance and Social Security Research Center  
 Peking University China National Conditions Research Center  
 Peking University China Social Science Survey Center  
 Peking University China Society and Development Research Center  
 Peking University China and the World Research Center  
 Beijing Enjiu Non-Profit Organization Development Research Center  
 Beijing University of Technology Institute of Higher Education  
 Beijing Dajun Think Tank Economic Consulting Co., Ltd.  
 Beihang University Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences  
 Beijing Jiaotong University Research Center for Mergers and Acquisitions of Chinese Enterprises  
 Beijing Institute of Social Psychology  
 Beijing Normal University Development Research Institute  
 Beijing Normal University Institute of Higher Education  
 Beijing Normal University Research Center for Migrant Children' s Education Issues  
 Beijing Normal University Institute of Government Management  
 Beijing Normal University China Philanthropy Research Institute  
 Beijing Normal University China Institute of Social Management  
 Beijing Normal University China Institute of Income Distribution  
 Beijing Normal University China Institute of Medical and Health Policy  
 Beijing Economic and Social Development Policy Research Base  
 Beijing Municipal People' s Government Counselors' Office  
 Beijing Academy of Social Sciences  
 Beijing Siyuan Social Science Research Center  
 Chongqing University Development Research Center  
 Chongqing Academy of Social Sciences  
 Northeast Agricultural University New Rural Development Research Institute  
 Anhui University Institute of Higher Education  
 Anhui University Research Center for Rural Social Development  
 Anhui Provincial People' s Government Counselors' Office  
 Anhui Academy of Social Sciences  
 Anhui University Yangtze River Delta Economic and Social Development Research Center  
 Northeast Normal University Institute of Rural Education  
 Northeast Normal University Women' s Research Center  
 21st Century Education Research Institute  
 Fujian Academy of Social Sciences  
 Fujian Institute of Administration  
 Fudan University Oriental Management Research Institute  
 Fudan University Institute for Advanced Study in Social Sciences  
 Fudan University China Research Institute  
 Gansu Provincial People' s Government Counselors' Office

Gansu Academy of Social Sciences  
 Guangdong Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences  
 Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences  
 Guizhou University Research Center for Population, Society, and Law  
 Guizhou University Institute of Anthropology  
 Guizhou Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Guizhou Academy of Social Sciences  
 China Institute for Innovation and Development Strategy  
 National Center for Education Development Research  
 National Health and Family Planning Commission Population Culture Development Center  
 National Health and Family Planning Commission Health Development Research Center  
 National Academy of Governance  
 National Academy of Governance Department of Social and Cultural Teaching and Research  
 National Academy of Governance Emergency Management Training Center (China-EU School of Emergency Management)  
 State Council Counselors' Office  
 Development Research Center of the State Council  
 Development Research Center of the State Council Institute of Ethnic Development  
 Development Research Center of the State Council Department of Social Development Research  
 Hainan Academy of Scientific Development  
 Hangzhou Academy of Social Sciences  
 Hebei Provincial People's Government Research Office  
 Hebei Institute of Administration  
 Hohai University Community Research Center  
 Hohai University China Migration Research Center (Ministry of Water Resources Reservoir Resettlement Economic Research Center)  
 Henan Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Heilongjiang Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences  
 Heilongjiang Institute of Administration  
 Hubei University Institute of Advanced Humanities  
 Hubei Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Hubei Provincial Federation of Social Sciences  
 Hunan Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Hunan Academy of Social Sciences  
 East China Normal University Institute of Population Research  
 East China Normal University Institute of Sociology  
 East China Normal University Center for Modern Chinese City Studies  
 Huakun Women's Life Survey Center  
 Huazhong Agricultural University Hubei Rural Development Research Center

Central China Normal University China Rural Research Institute  
 Jilin University Rural Development Research Center  
 Jilin University Center for Social Justice and Government Governance  
 Jilin University China Local Government Innovation Research Center  
 Jilin Academy of Social Sciences  
 Jilin Institute of Administration  
 Jiangsu Provincial People' s Government Counselors' Office  
 Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences  
 Jiangsu Provincial Federation of Philosophy and Social Sciences  
 Jiangxi Academy of Social Sciences  
 Ministry of Education Research Center for Social Science Development in Higher Education  
 Ministry of Education Center for Ethnic Education Development  
 Ministry of Education Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education  
 Jiuding Institute of Public Affairs  
 Lanzhou University Center for Social and Economic Development Research and Evaluation  
 Lanzhou University Northwest Minority Research Center (Lanzhou University Institute of Ethnology)  
 Liaoning University Institute of Population Research  
 Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences  
 Liaoning Provincial People' s Government Counselors' Office  
 Horizon Research Consultancy Group  
 Ministry of Civil Affairs National Disaster Reduction Center (Ministry of Civil Affairs Satellite Disaster Reduction Application Center)  
 Ministry of Civil Affairs Policy Research Center  
 Nanjing University Yangtze River Delta Economic and Social Development Research Center  
 Nanjing University Center for Public Affairs and Local Governance  
 Nanjing University Research Center for Social Risk and Public Crisis Management  
 Nanjing University China Think Tank Research and Evaluation Center  
 Nanjing Normal University Institute of Moral Education  
 Nankai University Women' s Studies and Development Research Center  
 Hubei Academy of Social Sciences  
 Nankai University China Philosophy and Social Sciences Management Innovation Research Center  
 Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region People' s Government Counselors' Office  
 Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Sciences  
 Inner Mongolia Institute of Administration  
 Ningxia Academy of Social Sciences  
 Qinghai Academy of Social Sciences  
 Henan Provincial People' s Government Development Research Center  
 Tsinghua University Higher Education Moral Education Research Center  
 Tsinghua University Institute of National Conditions  
 Tsinghua University Institute of Network Behavior

Tsinghua University China Institute of Philanthropy  
 Tsinghua University China Economic and Social Data Center  
 Shaanxi Academy of Social Sciences  
 Tsinghua University China Rural Research Institute  
 All-China Women's Federation Women's Research Institute  
 Shanghai Jiao Tong University Public Opinion Research Laboratory  
 Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security International Labor and Social Security Research Institute  
 Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security Labor and Wage Research Institute  
 Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security Social Security Research Institute  
 Shandong University Shandong Development Research Institute  
 Wuhan University Population, Resources, and Environmental Economics Research Center  
 Shandong University Quality of Life and Public Policy Research Center  
 Shandong Academy of Social Sciences  
 Shandong Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences  
 Shanxi Institute of Administration  
 Shaanxi Provincial People's Government Research Office (Provincial Development Research Center)  
 Shaanxi Provincial Federation of Social Sciences  
 Shaanxi Normal University Sports Humanities and Social Sciences Research Center  
 Shaanxi Normal University Northwest Historical Environment and Economic and Social Development Research Institute  
 Shaanxi Normal University China Western Frontier Research Institute  
 Shanghai Chunqiu Development Strategy Research Institute  
 Shanghai University China Social Transformation and Social Organization Research Center  
 Shanghai Huaxia Social Development Research Institute  
 Shanghai Jiao Tong University Third Sector Research Center  
 Shanghai Jiao Tong University New Rural Development Research Institute  
 Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences  
 Shanghai Municipal People's Government Counselors' Office  
 Shanghai Federation of Social Sciences  
 Shanghai Institute of Administration  
 Shanghai Academy  
 Shenzhen Academy of Social Sciences  
 Capital Institute of Learning Society  
 Yunnan University Institute of Ethnology  
 Sichuan University Institute of Population Research  
 Sichuan Provincial Rural Development Research Center  
 Zhejiang Provincial Development Planning Research Institute  
 Sichuan Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office

Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences  
Soochow University Southern Jiangsu Development Research Institute  
Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences  
Tianjin Municipal People's Government Counselors' Office  
Unirule Institute of Economics  
Sun Yat-sen University China Center for Public Management  
Tongji University New Rural Development Research Institute  
Wuhan University Development Research Institute  
Wuhan University Hubei Development Issues Research Center  
Wuhan University Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Wuhan University Social Security Research Center  
Wuhan University of Technology China Emergency Management Research Center  
Northwest A&F University Western Rural Development Research Center  
Tibet Autonomous Region Academy of Social Sciences  
Southwest University Coordinated Urban-Rural Development Research Institute  
Henan Academy of Social Sciences  
Xinjiang University, Lanzhou University Northwest Minority Research Center  
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Academy of Social Sciences  
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Institute of Administration  
Yunnan University Development Research Institute  
Yunnan University Institute of Higher Education  
Yunnan Provincial People's Government Counselors' Office  
Zhongyi Elderly Care Development Center  
Minzu University of China China Minority Research Center  
Central University of Finance and Economics China Reform and Development Research Institute  
Sun Yat-sen University Center for Historical Anthropology  
Sun Yat-sen University South China Rural Research Center  
Sun Yat-sen University National Governance Research Institute  
China University of Political Science and Law China Government Reform and Development Research Center  
China Strategic Thought Bank  
China Public Opinion Think Tank  
Sichuan Agricultural University New Rural Development Research Institute  
China Petition and Social Stability Research Center  
China Characteristic Urbanization Research Center  
Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development Policy Research Center  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Western Development Research Center  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Cultural Research Center  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Social Policy Research Center  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Sociology  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Social Development Strategy  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Population and Labor Economics  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Poverty Research Center

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Rural Development  
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology  
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Labor and Social Security Research Center  
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Economics Department Corporate Social  
 Responsibility Research Center  
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences National Conditions Survey and Research  
 Center  
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences National Governance Research Think Tank  
 China Social Development Research Center  
 China Social Development Research Institute  
 Yunnan University Southwest Frontier Minority Research Center  
 China Social Security Association  
 Renmin University of China China Cooperative Research Institute  
 Renmin University of China Journalism and Social Development Research Cen-  
 ter  
 Renmin University of China Population and Development Research Center  
 Renmin University of China National Academy of Development and Strategy  
 Renmin University of China Beijing Social Construction Research Institute  
 China Population and Development Research Center  
 China Enterprise Reform and Development Association  
 China Agricultural University New Rural Development Research Institute  
 China Agricultural University Institute of Peasant Issues  
 China Rural Policy Research Center  
 China Ethnic Policy Research Association  
 China Aging Science Research Center  
 China Academy of Labor and Social Security Science  
 China Sustainable Development Society  
 Chinese Academy of Sciences Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Nature  
 and Society  
 Chinese Academy of Sciences China Modernization Research Center  
 Chinese Academy of Sciences Agricultural Policy Research Center  
 China Employment Promotion Association  
 China Household Finance Survey and Research Center  
 China Women' s Studies Association  
 China Development Strategy Society  
 China Center for Urban and Small Town Reform and Development  
 China (Hainan) Institute for Reform and Development  
 Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China  
 Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences  
 Party School of Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of  
 China  
 Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences  
 Zhejiang Provincial People' s Government Counselors' Office  
 Zhejiang University Basic Platform for Social Science Research  
 Zhejiang University Agricultural Modernization and Rural Development Re-  
 search Center (Zhejiang University China Rural Development Research Insti-

tute)

Zhejiang University Labor Security and Social Policy Research Center

Zhejiang University Center for Civil Society Studies

China Income Distribution Research Center

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

*Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.*