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Research on the Theory of Think Tank Information Resource Allocation in an Open Knowledge Environment (Postprint)

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Abstract

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Full Text

Preamble

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Research on Think Tank Information Resource Allocation Theory in Open Knowledge Environment*
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Abstract

[**Purpose/Significance**] In the current open knowledge environment, effective allocation of information resources can positively influence the production and supply of think tank knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce information resource allocation—an explanatory and analytical tool—into think tank research to address practical problems arising in the construction of new-type think tanks in China. [**Method/Process**] This study analyzes the theoretical components and foundations of think tank information resource allocation, constructs a theoretical framework for think tank information resource allocation, and identifies key issues to be addressed within this framework. [**Result/Conclusion**] The open knowledge environment provides the objects for information resource allocation, while think tanks provide the direction. The essence of think tank information resource allocation is the matching between information resources and information needs. Future research should conduct in-depth investigations into think tank information content, information needs, and information behaviors, and establish a connection between think tank information resource allocation efficiency and think tank influence.

Keywords: think tank, open knowledge, information resource allocation, think tank information resource

Classification Number: G251

Against the backdrop of strengthening the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, optimizing think tank information resource allocation holds practical significance. The 2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report released by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania shows that the number of Chinese think tanks reached 435, continuing to rank second globally. However, alongside this rapid development, the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics"specifically points out that Chinese think tank construction still faces problems such as "unscientific resource allocation."Resources supporting new-type think tank construction include financial resources, human resources, equipment resources, and information resources. Among these, information resources are closely connected to the information attributes of think tanks and serve as an important guarantee for think tanks to produce high-level policy recommendations and knowledge products.

Many problems currently emerging in China' s think tank construction can also find their root causes and solutions from the perspective of information resource allocation. Information resource allocation constitutes an important research branch of information resource management theory, which has long been a significant perspective in think tank research. Researchers from information management and library science fields represent an important force in think tank studies. However, traditional information resource management perspectives on think tanks have primarily focused on specific intelligence analysis service methods or documentary information support measures, lacking the ap-

plication of information resource allocation as an effective theoretical tool to analyze think tank practices.

Therefore, as an exploratory theoretical study, this paper attempts to adopt the perspective of information resource allocation theory, focus on improving think tank construction levels, and introduce information resource allocation —an explanatory and analytical tool from information resource management— into think tank research to address practical problems in the construction of new-type think tanks in China.

2. The Necessity of Introducing an Information Resource Allocation Perspective to Think Tank Construction

Information resource allocation refers to the process of adjusting the distribution and allocation expectations of information resources based on information resource needs and guided by allocation efficiency and effectiveness [1]. Its objectives are to promote information resource sharing, meet information user needs, and maximize social welfare.

Due to their special information attributes, think tank institutions are both "experiencers of information resource utility" and "subjects of information resource allocation." Based on this understanding, think tank information resource allocation can be divided into two categories: allocation *for* think tanks and allocation *by* think tanks. Problems in allocation for think tanks include: dispersed information resources supporting think tank research with low openness; uneven distribution of information resources among think tanks in different regions (eastern, central, and western), at different levels (central and local), and of different types (party and government department think tanks, university think tanks, social think tanks, etc.); lack of effective information sharing mechanisms and industry knowledge alliance forms among individual think tank institutions, leading to inefficient and redundant construction of information resources; incomplete information security systems between think tanks and other allocation subjects (such as governments and information service institutions); and the need to improve and standardize the knowledge-ideology market where think tanks operate. Problems in allocation by think tanks include low conversion rates of think tank information products, insufficient effective information supply to society, and ineffective alignment with government users' information needs.

These issues fall precisely within the scope that information resource allocation theory should address and represent areas where information resource allocation practice can contribute. As an important branch of information resource management, existing research has examined government information resource allocation, enterprise information resource allocation, and library information resource allocation, but has paid less attention to think tank information resource allocation. Moreover, both the upstream environment (open knowledge environment) and downstream application direction (new-type think tank con-

struction) of China' s current information resource allocation activities have undergone new changes, posing new requirements for information resource allocation theory and practice.

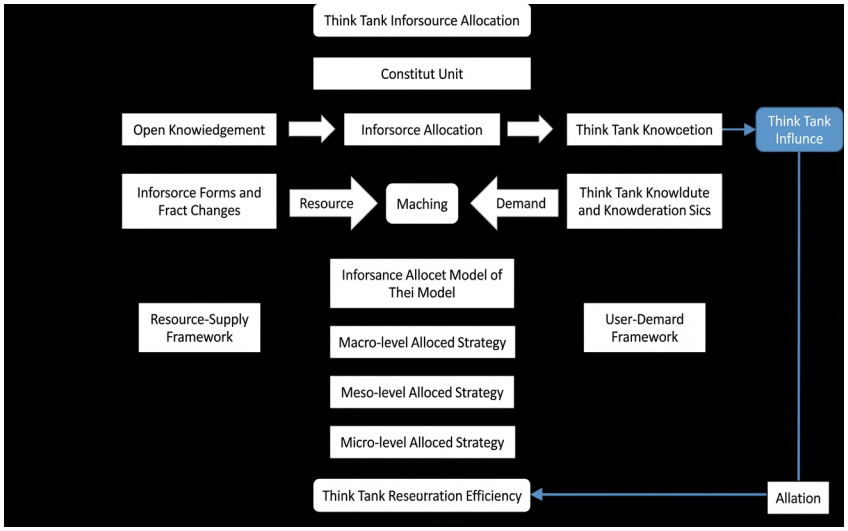

Figure 1: Figure 1

reveals the theoretical positioning of think tank information resource allocation. Information resource allocation serves as a regulatory link between the open knowledge environment and think tank knowledge production. As advanced knowledge institutions in the social knowledge environment, think tanks' high-quality knowledge output depends on effective information resource input. In an increasingly open knowledge environment, with the expansion of open knowledge resources, the broadening of knowledge audiences, the enrichment of knowledge types, and the diversification of knowledge production channels, various think tank institutions seeking comprehensive information resource guarantees must rely not only on their individual capabilities in information collection, acquisition, absorption, and organization, but also on the formation of information resource allocation mechanisms at the meso industry level and macro national level that facilitate think tank knowledge production, thereby enhancing think tanks' efficiency and effectiveness in utilizing information resources.

Therefore, theoretically, it is necessary to explore how to optimize allocation to enable various information resources to serve think tanks in an open knowledge environment and unleash think tanks' aggregation and driving effects on relevant information resources. By linking information resource allocation levels with think tank knowledge influence, we can use think tank information resource allocation efficiency as an important indicator to measure and evaluate think tank construction levels, facilitating societal's grasp of the development status of various think tanks. Practically, effective information resource allocation helps

regulate the situation of domestic think tanks' "redundant construction, rash advancement, and disorderly development," "think tanks without wisdom," "insufficient effective supply and excess inefficient supply," and "data rich but knowledge poor." It also provides action guidance for diverse allocation subjects in the open knowledge environment (such as think tanks, documentation and intelligence institutions, relevant management agencies, and guidance departments), enhancing the role of various information resources in supporting think tank decision-making. Think tank construction has also accelerated the shaping of China's "policy/idea market," and optimizing information resource allocation around think tanks will bring value to improving China's knowledge market governance mechanisms.

Since the late 20th century, under the impact of globalization, the market in the knowledge economy era has exhibited various characteristics: technological complexity and uncertainty, diversity of business models, limited internal knowledge within enterprises, ubiquity and dispersion of knowledge in the market, and high mobility of knowledge workers. No organization, regardless of its technological strength, can possess all the resources and technologies needed for innovation [2], nor can it bring the entire innovation process under its internal control mechanism. Organizations' past innovation model of working in isolation behind closed doors has become unsustainable. In the early 21st century, Chesbrough proposed the concept of "open innovation," whose core is that organizations should simultaneously utilize both internal and external knowledge to achieve innovation. This period's innovation form has also been termed "Innovation 2.0," a name that profoundly reveals its origins and connections with the Web 2.0 era. If early open innovation was limited to "openness" among enterprises, the biggest characteristic of "Innovation 2.0" is that innovation subjects have expanded from enterprises, research institutions, and universities to various roles in the whole society, and innovation behavior locations have expanded from laboratories and research institutes to all corners of society.

Entering the second decade of the 21st century, after years of operation by various open infrastructures, open institutions, and open architectures, a large amount of open content has emerged, represented by open government information, open access resources, open educational resources, open data, and open patents. Under the convergence of various trends such as the arrival of the big data era, improved computing technology, transformation of scientific research paradigms, and changes in business models, open content can be rapidly transformed into open knowledge [3].

The formation of an open knowledge environment has created late-mover advantages for the development of China's new-type think tanks. When conducting comparative studies between the development history of advanced think tanks in the US and UK and Chinese think tanks, we must not only focus on differences in institutional attributes and governance systems but also consider the different knowledge environments they inhabit. Different knowledge environments may also shape different knowledge management strategies and knowledge produc-

tion methods for think tanks. In the early 20th century, during the founding period of modern think tanks in the UK and US, information types, information management methods, information transmission rates, and information richness were incomparable to today, and they influenced and shaped the operation methods of think tanks at that time. Today, Chinese think tanks are on a fast development track. If they can fully utilize various information resources in the open knowledge environment and thereby form advanced knowledge operation methods that meet the requirements of the times, they may rapidly accumulate knowledge and core competitiveness, and enhance the influence of Chinese think tanks at the national level.

3.2 Information Resource Allocation Under the Influence of Open Knowledge Environment

Over the past two decades, theoretical research on information resource allocation has achieved some important results. Relevant studies have integrated the welfare economics perspective based on traditional resource allocation and the information science perspective based on information resource characteristics, clarified allocation models such as market, government, and property rights, identified allocation dimensions including time, space, and information type, focused on allocation levels at the macro (national), meso (regional, industry, etc.), and micro (enterprise, library, etc.) scales, introduced analytical modeling methods such as DEA, system dynamics, and game theory, and formed a theoretical foundation covering allocation policy, models, measurement, evaluation, and quality assurance. Zha Xianjin pointed out that information resource allocation research is shifting from focusing on allocation subjects to information users, from an economic perspective to a balanced management and economic perspective, from normative research to empirical research, and from narrow to broad information resources [4].

In the new environment, research paths for information resource allocation include allocation for national or regional innovation, allocation for the information gap in big data environments, and ecological allocation of information resources [5]. Scholars such as Hu Changping earlier focused on the adaptation and support of information resource allocation for innovation systems [6], Zhao Yang pointed out that information resource allocation mechanisms need comprehensive transformation in open innovation environments [7], and in recent years, different scholars have examined the optimal allocation of personal information resources [8], scientific and technological information resources [9], and enterprise information resources [10] in innovation environments, as well as regional disparities in information resource allocation [11].

However, facing the open knowledge environment, existing information resource allocation research shows some limitations. First, insufficient attention has been paid to emerging allocation objects in the upstream environment: while existing research has examined the allocation of documentary information resources, network information resources, and digital information resources, there is a need for

in-depth examination of massive open content and big data resources generated in recent open environments. Second, there is a need to engage with emerging allocation directions downstream: while existing research has focused on information resource allocation for enterprises, governments, and public sectors, new-type think tanks that have emerged in recent years—as social knowledge institutions and institutional arrangements—have new characteristics in their information needs and behaviors, structures and functions, and roles and values, but there has been scarce attention to think tank information resource allocation.

3.3 Think Tank Knowledge Production Under the Influence of Information Resource Allocation

Many scholars have elaborated on the unique knowledge attributes of think tanks, arguing that think tanks are typical representatives of knowledge production in applied contexts [12], that think tank products are professional knowledge and ideas [13], that expert knowledge plays an important role in think tanks [14], that the essence of think tanks is information processing and knowledge organization [15], and that think tanks are bridges between knowledge and policy [16].

High-quality knowledge supply in think tanks depends on high-quality information resources as a foundation. Sun Zhiru and Zhang Zhiqiang analyzed the process of think tank participation in policy formation based on information flow [17]; Xu Xiaohu argued that the fundamental role of think tanks lies in processing existing data and information to produce public knowledge and policies according to needs [15]; Zhu Xufeng believes that information is the foundation for ensuring the quality of think tank intellectual products [18]; Li Gang points out that think tanks need to support scientific decision-making based on data and facts, which is the fundamental difference between modern think tanks and ancient advisors [19]. Both Wang Lili [20] and Li Gang [21] have noted that much current domestic data resources remain in the hands of some authoritative institutions, special departments, and commercial organizations, or are scattered among various levels of government departments, greatly restricting the effectiveness of data resources in think tank knowledge production.

This also provides the basis for think tank information resource allocation at the macro (national) and meso (industry/regional/departmental) levels. Campbell and Pederson [22] pointed out that the development of think tanks in a region is associated with the knowledge structure of that region, and Zhu Xufeng [18] noted that the uneven distribution of knowledge resources in different regions of China leads to differences in the quantity, structure, types, and policy participation models of think tanks in various regions. These all reflect the importance of rational information resource allocation for think tank development.

From a micro perspective, viewing think tank knowledge operation and production processes, think tanks can be regarded as a knowledge conversion device

whose main functions contain three allocation steps [23]. (1) **Knowledge input allocation step**: This mainly involves configuring data and information resources, expert resources, and methodological tools according to task needs at the front end of the think tank knowledge production process. In this step, both information content resources and expert human resources are not limited to within the think tank but may come from the public domain, government departments, or commercial organizations, and are combined according to the think tank's research tasks and project objectives to form a project-based knowledge production platform. (2) **Knowledge processing allocation step**: This step' s work is mainly carried out within the think tank institution and is the stage where the think tank' s existing knowledge base and knowledge increments are integrated to generate new knowledge. (3) **Knowledge dissemination allocation step**: This stage involves effectively promoting and disseminating think tank knowledge products and conducting social deployment, representing a social knowledge allocation behavior based on think tanks (Figure 2

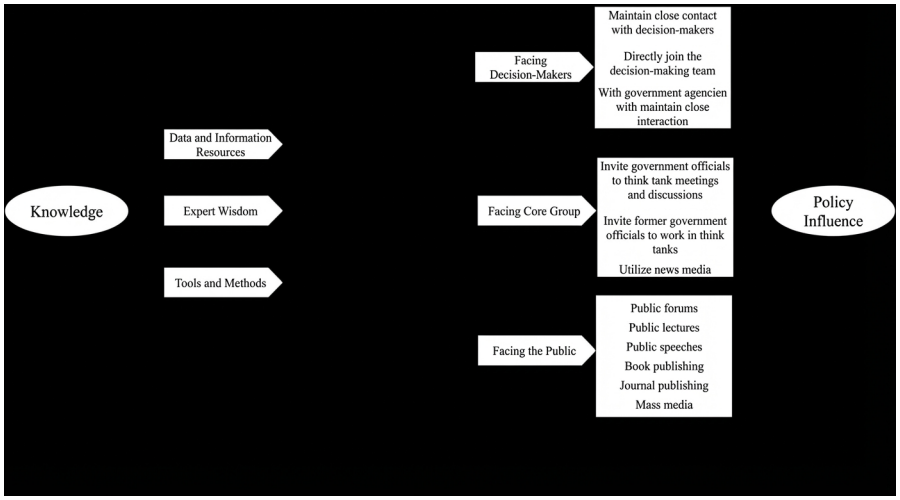

Figure 2: Figure 2

) [22].

Thus, think tank knowledge work itself can be regarded as information resource allocation activities at the micro level, which drives overall allocation at the meso and macro levels from the micro level, making think tank institutions an emerging and important allocation subject in the knowledge market of the entire society.

In summary, the three major elements of open knowledge environment, information resource allocation, and think tank knowledge production constitute an interrelated ecological structure. Think tanks can be viewed as institutions that input various information resources, integrate various technical methods

and expert wisdom, and output knowledge to exert policy influence, with information work processes running throughout. Existing research has examined the impact of think tank knowledge supply on the macro knowledge environment; many think tank evaluation studies have also been based on think tank output indicators [24-25]; scholars have begun to pay attention to the impact of open environments on information resource allocation, but less attention has been paid to the impact of information resource allocation activities on think tanks in innovation environments. Subsequently, with think tanks as intermediaries, how information resource allocation can release information resource efficiency, particularly digital resource dividends, by serving think tanks, thereby helping improve governance capabilities in the macro environment, represents a research direction that merits in-depth exploration.

4.1 Overall Framework for Think Tank Information Resource Allocation

When discussing the theoretical framework of think tank information resource allocation, we view information resource allocation activities as control links for think tank knowledge production. The external knowledge environment is the leading condition for information resource allocation, providing knowledge resource supply and allocation objects. Think tank knowledge operation and production are the backward results of information resource allocation, providing allocation needs and directions for information resources. This paper argues that the essence of think tank information resource allocation lies in matching resources with needs around think tanks. Accordingly, we propose an overall framework for think tank information resource allocation (Figure 3

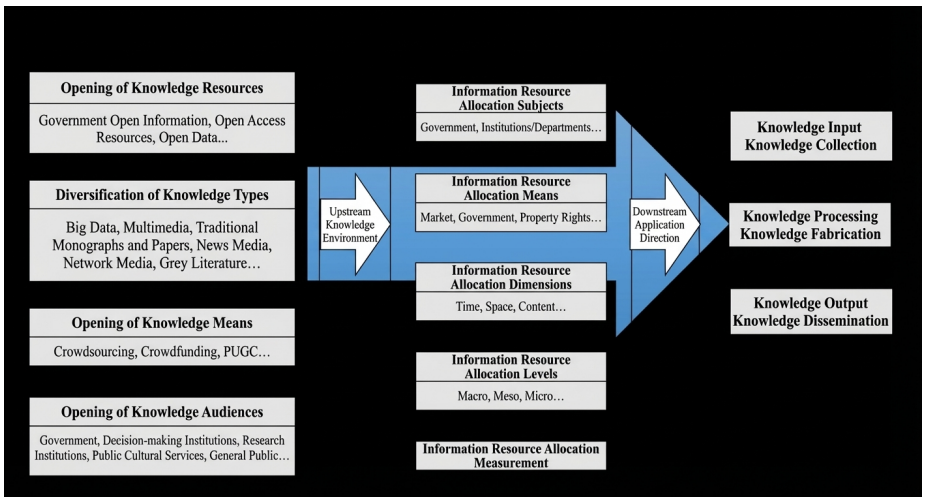

Figure 3: Figure 3

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This framework echoes two economic theoretical fulcrums: (1) **N-R Relationship Theory**: which holds that the relationship between needs and resources determines resource flows and innovation behaviors; (2) **Supply-Side Economics Perspective**: which holds that supply creates its own demand, and the diversification of knowledge supply in an open knowledge environment also shapes new knowledge demands. Accordingly, this framework can be divided into two sub-frameworks: the "resource-supply" framework and the "user-need" framework.

4.2 The "Resource-Supply" Framework for Think Tank Information Resource Allocation

Under the resource-supply framework, we introduce knowledge governance theory, whose basic idea is that different characteristics of knowledge require corresponding governance methods, and organizational rules affect knowledge forms and knowledge activity performance. This idea is applied to information forms to establish a unified framework for describing various information forms in open environments (Figure 4 [FIGURE:4]). The foundation of this framework is a four-quadrant matrix composed of information codification degree and openness degree: different quadrants are used to describe information resources with different characteristics and have corresponding governance mechanisms (for example, Quadrant I represents forms such as government open information, Quadrant II represents forms such as internal reports, Quadrant III represents forms such as expert experience, and Quadrant IV represents forms such as unprocessed open data). This model also has strong adaptability to the information attributes of think tanks (such as considering the experiential knowledge attributes of experts). Additionally, the model introduces a third dimension—the time vector, which can be called the user process vector—to examine the dynamic allocation of various information resources by think tanks at different stages of information work.

4.3 The "User-Need" Framework for Think Tank Information Resource Allocation

From the user-need perspective, we propose the framework shown in Figure 5 [FIGURE:5] based on the characteristics of think tank information. The foundation of this framework is a nine-grid matrix composed of the think tank knowledge operation timeline and information resource allocation levels: the X-axis is divided into dynamic allocation steps *for* think tanks, *in* think tanks, and *by* think tanks according to the timeline, thereby reflecting the full process of information resource allocation; the Y-axis is divided into macro-institutional, meso-model, and micro-strategy levels according to allocation levels; the Z-axis is the information resource category dimension, which integrates the resource-supply perspective from the previous stage, thereby examining think tanks' allocation of specific information resources within a systematic framework.

5. Key Theoretical Issues and Research Paths for Think Tank Information Resource Allocation

The theoretical framework constructed above provides tools and metrics for examining think tank construction and development practices from the perspective of information resource allocation. Using this framework, the key theoretical issues that need to be addressed in future research are as follows. (1) **Theoretical research on the attributes of information resources in open knowledge environments**: First, focus on new changes in information resource forms and allocation subjects in the new environment; conduct institutional and policy analysis of various information resource forms based on institutional economics and knowledge governance perspectives; then integrate various information forms into a unified explanatory/operational framework to describe the macro knowledge environment and information resource system where think tanks operate. (2) **Theoretical research on the characteristics of think tank work and its information resources**: Based on investigations of various think tank materials and research literature, comprehensively review domestic and international research on the information characteristics of think tanks and best practices in think tank information work; thereby establish theoretical understanding of the information characteristics of different types of think tanks and different stages of think tank work, clarify the content of think tank information resources and their flow and transformation mechanisms; simultaneously, combine with China' s actual conditions to properly grasp the requirements, directions, and principles of think tank information resource allocation in China. (3) **Investigation and analysis of think tank information resource allocation needs and experiences, and think tank participation or leadership in information resource allocation behaviors**: At this stage, examine the participation and role positioning of various stakeholders in China' s think tank information resource allocation process; focus on the think tank perspective to understand their special needs and utility experiences in information resource allocation, as well as the behavioral patterns of think tanks participating in or leading information resource allocation under the influence of these needs. (4) **Analysis of influencing factors in China' s think tank information resource allocation**: Synthesize the above investigation results to identify and analyze the influencing factors and key elements of China' s think tank information resource allocation. (5) **Empirical analysis of the relationship between think tank information resource allocation and think tank influence**: Based on the above influencing factors, introduce relevant think tank influence evaluation data to conduct empirical analysis of the relationship between the two, thereby forming an evaluation system for think tank information resource allocation efficiency oriented toward think tank influence. This will be the focus of the next research phase. (6) **Research on countermeasures and strategies for think tank information resource allocation**: Based on the above research, provide multi-level reference suggestions oriented toward policy-model-strategy for various practice, research, and management institutions centered on think tanks.

Introducing information resource allocation theory into think tank research is still in the exploratory stage. As a preliminary research result, this paper organically integrates theories such as open innovation, information resource allocation, and think tank knowledge production from the perspective of information resource management. In information resource management theory, the basic value chain and processing chain of "data-information-knowledge-wisdom" has long been followed, while think tank research emphasizes the relationship of "knowledge-policy/power/influence." This research uses information resource allocation as an intermediary to open up the chain of "data-information-knowledge-policy-influence." In future research, it will be necessary to truly connect the two indicators of information resource allocation efficiency and think tank influence, aligning the "advantages" of information resource management research with the "trends" of national think tank development and governance capability enhancement.

Of course, as theoretical research moves toward depth and practice, future research also faces some difficulties and challenges. (1) The current large number and diverse types of domestic think tanks pose difficulties for researching and summarizing think tank information allocation patterns. In future research, we can refer to mainstream domestic and international think tank evaluation index products, particularly the criteria for defining think tanks in the 2015 Opinions on Constructing New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, and the list of 25 pilot institutions designated in the National High-End Think Tank Construction Pilot Program, to first study some representative sample think tanks. (2) When examining information resource needs, it is necessary to accurately grasp user demand behavior characteristics from the perspective of information users. Therefore, field investigations need to be conducted at the front line of think tank knowledge work. (3) In the data analysis and allocation model construction phase, there may be issues regarding the applicability of existing information resource allocation models and methods to think tanks, because think tanks are different from both public information service institutions and governments or enterprises. Therefore, future research will need to appropriately adapt and innovate economic models and methods of information resource allocation for think tanks, thereby developing specialized analytical methods for think tanks.

Effective allocation of information resources can positively influence the effective production and supply of think tank knowledge, while think tanks promote the modernization of national governance systems and capabilities by exerting policy influence. Therefore, if think tanks are the bridge between "knowledge" and "policy," then optimizing information resource allocation is the consolidation of the bridge' s "foundation."

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