

## Research on Capacity Building of University Think Tanks: Postprint

**Authors:** Zhang Chunhua, Sun Yuling, Chi Yuzhuo, Zhang Chunhua

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### Abstract

**Purpose/Significance:** The construction of university think tanks fundamentally concerns their capacity building. This study systematically constructs a capacity system for university think tanks, providing a reference and benchmark for enhancing their capabilities and accelerating the development process of university think tanks in China. **Method/Process:** Based on decision-making theory, policy process theory, and the operational characteristics of university think tanks themselves, this paper constructs an operational framework for university think tanks, builds a capacity system based on this framework, and summarizes the current state of capacity among university think tanks in China. **Results/Conclusion:** The elements of the university think tank capacity system are divided into foundational capacity, intelligence capacity, output and innovation capacity, political capacity, and service capacity. While university think tanks possess strong foundational capacity, there are deficiencies in intelligence capacity, output and innovation capacity, political capacity, and service capacity. University think tanks should prioritize intelligence; adhere to academic orientation with equal emphasis on academic research and policy research; focus on policy consultation as the main direction while strengthening international exchanges; and establish a service philosophy to enhance service capacity at multiple levels.

### Full Text

## Research on the Capability Building of University-Affiliated Think Tanks

Zhang Chunhua<sup>1,2</sup>, Sun Yuling<sup>1,2</sup>, Chi Yuzhuo<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Science Library, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100190

<sup>2</sup> Department of Library, Information and Archives Management, School of Economics and Management, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing

100190

<sup>3</sup> Information Management College of Heilongjiang University, Harbin 150080<sup>4</sup> Postdoctoral Programme of Chinese Language and Literature, Heilongjiang University, Harbin 150080

**Abstract:** [Purpose/significance] Fundamentally, the core of university-affiliated think tank construction is capability building. This study systematically constructs a capability system for university-affiliated think tanks, providing reference for enhancing their capabilities and accelerating the development of China's university-affiliated think tanks. [Method/process] Based on decision-making theory, policy process theory, and the operational characteristics of university-affiliated think tanks, this paper constructs an operational framework for these institutions, builds a corresponding capability system upon this framework, and summarizes the current state of their capabilities. [Result/conclusion] The elements of the university-affiliated think tank capability system include basic capability, intelligence capability, output and innovation capability, political capability, and service capability. While basic capabilities are robust, intelligence capability, output and innovation capability, political capability, and service capability all exhibit deficiencies. University-affiliated think tanks should prioritize intelligence work, maintain academic orientation while conducting both academic and policy research, focus on policy consultation as their primary mission while strengthening international exchange, and establish service concepts to enhance service capabilities at multiple levels.

**Keywords:** think tank; university-affiliated think tank; think tank capability; capability building

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## 1 Introduction

A robust think tank ecosystem symbolizes national soft power and constitutes an essential condition for achieving China's national rejuvenation. Following World War II, the number of American think tanks grew significantly and matured steadily, profoundly influencing government and societal decision-making while serving as a soft instrument for projecting U.S. global influence. These institutions have played a vital role in American development and maintaining its world hegemony. In think tank development, university-affiliated think tanks occupy a critical position. According to the *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, university-affiliated think tanks account for 75% of American think tanks [1], with renowned institutions such as the Hoover Institution and Brookings Institution belonging to this category. In China, over 60% of think tanks are university-based [2], making university-affiliated think tank construction a crucial component of building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

Currently, China's think tank service system is at a critical "tough battle" stage, with university-affiliated think tanks serving as key members and primary targets of this effort [3]. Ultimately, university-affiliated think tank construction

revolves around capability building. Enhancing these capabilities is significant for improving decision-making quality and serving national development. However, substantial gaps remain between Chinese university-affiliated think tanks and their developed-country counterparts in both capability and influence on decision-making consultation. How to advance capability building in university-affiliated think tanks has become an urgent issue requiring resolution.

## 2 Related Research

In 2014, China's Ministry of Education issued the *Plan for Promoting the Construction of New-Type University-Affiliated Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics*. Under this plan's guidance, research on university-affiliated think tanks has attracted considerable attention, with output increasing rapidly before tapering off after 2016 as studies became more rational and enthusiasm cooled. Over the past five years, research has concentrated primarily on influence building. Due to vague understanding of think tank capabilities in China, studies specifically addressing capability building remain relatively scarce.

Only one study directly addresses university-affiliated think tank capability: Zhang Jing [4] established an evaluation index system for Inner Mongolia university-affiliated think tank capabilities using the analytic hierarchy process, evaluated these think tanks through fuzzy mathematics, analyzed their capability deficiencies, and examined causes from internal and external management perspectives. Current research on university-affiliated think tank capabilities mainly manifests as influence enhancement. For instance, Chen Yan et al. [5] quantitatively analyzed 134 Chinese university-affiliated think tank samples, identified the moderating effect of cooperation scale on influence, and proposed strategies for enhancing influence through different cooperation modes. Jin Chen [6] examined Chinese first-class university-affiliated think tanks from four dimensions, identified three connotations of influence, and proposed pathways for maximizing influence. Zhou Gang [7] analyzed the current state of influence and proposed enhancement paths from three dimensions: development concepts, network guarantees, and mechanism improvement.

Research on specific capabilities includes studies on policy consultation capability [8] and knowledge management capability [9]. Other research is scattered across micro-level analyses focusing on particular aspects, including evaluation mechanisms [10-11], revolving door systems [12-13], personnel assessment and talent development [14-15], and pathways and institutional design for serving government decision-making [16-17]. These essentially constitute micro-level explorations of capability enhancement. Some studies are embedded in theoretical and applied research on university-affiliated think tanks, including investigations of foreign think tanks [18-21] and analyses of problems, future pathways, and operational mechanisms in Chinese think tank construction [22-23], as well as interpretations of connotations, characteristics, functions, and construction logic [24-25]. Although not directly mentioning capability building, these studies examine how Chinese university-affiliated think tanks should develop through

learning and problem identification to enhance capabilities and accelerate development.

In summary, research on university-affiliated think tank capability building is scattered across micro-level analyses, primarily addressing external capability manifestations such as influence and government service capacity, without systematic studies on capability building itself. Understanding of think tank capabilities remains vague. Therefore, this paper systematically investigates university-affiliated think tank capabilities.

### **3 Analysis of University-Affiliated Think Tank Capability Composition**

**3.1 Connotation of Think Tank Capability** “Capability” refers to the subjective conditions required to perform certain tasks or handle affairs, representing the qualities demonstrated in achieving objectives. Think tank capability constitutes the conditions for think tanks to realize their functions. Currently, domestic research directly addressing think tank capabilities remains limited and preliminary, lacking clear definitions. Zhang Jianian studied China’s think tank capability system, proposing that it represents the internal qualities accumulated during think tank development, with capabilities manifested through influence—the two being complementary [26]. Meng Wenqin defined think tank capability as the capacity to produce high-quality research outputs through internal institutional mechanisms based on resource support, thereby influencing public policy by affecting decision-makers and stakeholders [27].

Based on these perspectives, this study conceptualizes think tank capability as the conditions and qualities accumulated and demonstrated by think tanks in fulfilling their functions of generating ideas, strategies, and voices for strategic and public policy, with influence as its external manifestation. Capability forms the foundation for healthy, sustainable think tank development and continuously expanding influence [28]. The core and key of think tank construction lies in continuously enhancing capabilities to expand influence.

**3.2 Construction of the University-Affiliated Think Tank Operating Framework** Building a capability system requires a theoretical framework with internal logical consistency. Constructing a capability system according to a specific framework can effectively avoid sub-capability duplication and ensure comprehensiveness. Based on this study’s definition of think tank capability and the emphasis on process management in American first-class think tanks [29], capability exists throughout the entire operational management process. Therefore, this study constructs the capability system based on the operating framework of university-affiliated think tanks.

According to policy process theory, as a type of think tank, policy influence generation is closely related to each policy process stage. According to decision-making theory, think tanks function by providing intelligence and strategies

needed for decision-making during both deliberation and determination processes, making decisions more scientific. The operating framework of university-affiliated think tanks is similar to other think tanks but maintains distinct characteristics. Compared with government think tanks, university-affiliated think tanks possess greater independence; compared with private think tanks, they enjoy abundant funding and robust research foundations. Capability building must capitalize on these irreplaceable advantages and characteristics.

Therefore, this study integrates intelligence processes, policy processes, and decision-making systems based on the characteristics and operational processes of university-affiliated think tanks, constructing an operating framework shown in Figure 1. University-affiliated think tanks embed intelligence processes into their work, providing powerful intelligence data support while serving decision-making deliberation and determination. Through observing and evaluating previous policy implementation effects and intelligence data provided by intelligence work, think tanks generate expert theories and ideas to influence public policy. Through input of basic resources and support from intelligence investigation and research, think tanks conduct research to fulfill their mission of participating in, serving, and influencing public policy research, realizing their functions of generating ideas, strategies, and voices.

[Figure 1: see original paper]

**3.3 Composition of the University-Affiliated Think Tank Capability System** Based on the operating framework in Figure 1, this study identifies a series of sub-capabilities: basic capability, intelligence capability, output and innovation capability, political capability, and service capability (see Table 1).

**3.3.1 Basic Capability** The prerequisite for any think tank's operation is a certain resource foundation. As shown in the operating framework, basic capability constitutes the prerequisite and foundation for other capabilities and think tank operations, encompassing three aspects: basic disciplines, talent, and information resources. Sound basic disciplines represent important advantages and the foundation for knowledge innovation. As typical knowledge-intensive organizations, talent constitutes the most valuable resource and core competitiveness [30], forming the basis for think tanks' thought innovation functions. Information resources guarantee scientific decision-making and serve as the most basic raw material for producing think tank outputs. Leveraging information resources' important functions in decision-making and policy evaluation can significantly enhance expert consultation effectiveness and ensure think tank recommendations are implemented [31].

**3.3.2 Intelligence Capability** Intelligence work plays an important role in think tank construction. As shown in the operating framework, intelligence work performs an irreplaceable function, particularly at the front end of think tank operations. According to the intelligence process, intelligence capability can be di-

vided into topic prediction capability, intelligence collection capability, and intelligence analysis capability. Topic prediction capability reflects situational awareness, macro environmental control, and forward-looking problem prediction. It requires think tanks to demonstrate foresight on major social issues and accurately identify government needs. Strong intelligence collection capability forms the prerequisite for resource construction. In the big data era, decision-making faces increasingly complex problems requiring large-scale, multi-temporal, diverse, and structurally complex information. University-affiliated think tanks must strengthen web data collection, multi-source intelligent storage, and dynamic data updating to provide real-time, dynamic information resources for decision support [32].

Moreover, in the big data environment, we often lack not information but intelligence derived from objective, authentic information analysis. Think tank work cannot proceed without intelligence support, making intelligence analysis capability crucial, especially under big data conditions that demand attention to various intelligence analysis methods and technologies.

**3.3.3 Output and Innovation Capability** Think tanks emphasize “intelligence,” which means innovative thought outputs. Output and innovation constitute the core of university-affiliated think tank work. Innovative thought outputs include not only research conclusions and strategic results but also research methods, tools, and theories created during problem investigation. Think tank outputs result from academic and policy research, making output and innovation capability divisible into academic research capability and policy research capability. First, renowned domestic and international think tanks are authoritative institutions for basic theoretical research, typically leading in foundational and cutting-edge theoretical levels [33]. All research requires academic foundational theory support. Located within universities, university-affiliated think tanks possess superior academic spirit, disciplinary knowledge systems, and technical systems, making their academic research capability advantages evident. Second, think tanks’ primary work involves policy research. As bridges between academia and policy circles, university-affiliated think tanks play an increasingly important role, with comprehensive disciplines and strong talent reserves laying foundations for cross-boundary collaborative and interdisciplinary research.

**3.3.4 Political Capability** Think tank influence essentially represents knowledge diffusion effects on decision-makers and stakeholders. As shown in the operating framework, political and service capabilities directly reflect think tank influence. University-affiliated think tanks possess distinct political characteristics. James G. McGann noted that world leaders need think tank scholars to provide independent analysis, help set policy agendas, and build bridges between knowledge and action [34]. Some U.S. NGOs (including foundations and think tanks) even serve as government extensions, directly interfering in other countries’ internal affairs. Political capability includes policy consultation capability and international diplomacy capability.

Throughout the entire policy cycle—from agenda setting to policy evaluation and feedback—think tanks must intervene and function. Policy consultation capability manifests in proposing attention-worthy policy issues during agenda setting, injecting vitality into policy games during consultation, providing intellectual products and information support during formulation and promotion, offering forward-looking guidance during implementation, and providing supportive information for further policy directions during evaluation. International diplomacy capability represents the “second-track diplomacy” function as China’s international status rises. During his visit to Germany, President Xi Jinping proposed “think tank diplomacy” as a second track for international exchange and cooperation. In think tank evaluation, international influence is key to generating impact and occupying high ground in international discourse. Facing current international situations, Chinese think tanks shoulder responsibilities and missions for external communication. Located within universities with more international academic exchange opportunities, university-affiliated think tanks should leverage advantages to bring research results and perspectives into international media 视野 and exert greater international influence.

**3.3.5 Service Capability** Service capability refers to the capacity of university-affiliated think tanks, as university research institutions, to leverage professional advantages in serving national decision-making, domestic enterprises, and university education systems. As important components of China’s think tank ecosystem, they should serve major national decisions and actively integrate into the national governance system. As market economies mature, enterprise competition increasingly shifts from “capital” and “production capacity” hard power to “ideas” and “thought” soft power, making corporate decision-making increasingly complex. University-affiliated think tank services can provide more internationalized suggestions and business strategies for Chinese enterprises’ operations and management while enhancing enterprises’ soft power competitiveness [35]. Finally, as university components, think tanks inevitably serve their institutions and education systems, representing important indicators for disciplinary construction. Their multidisciplinary research and cross-boundary integration facilitate emerging disciplines and enable researchers to combine theory with practice to solve real social problems.

**3.4 Analysis of the University-Affiliated Think Tank Capability System** The capability system is illustrated in Figure 2.

[Figure 2: see original paper]

**3.4.1 Basic Capability as the Prerequisite and Foundation** The operating framework demonstrates that basic capability constitutes the prerequisite and foundation for capability building, with every operational link requiring basic resource input and support. Basic capability also influences intelligence capability, output and innovation capability, political capability, and service

capability. All research requires basic theoretical support; clarifying basic theoretical issues prevents pseudo-problems from gaining traction [36]. Moreover, talent and information resources are sources of high-level innovative outputs—without these basic resources, think tanks cannot operate.

**3.4.2 Intelligence Capability as the Guarantee for Enhancement** Intelligence capability includes topic prediction, intelligence collection, and intelligence analysis. Intelligence solves information incompleteness problems in management decision-making, with every decision-making process requiring intelligence support. Embedding intelligence capability into think tank work to serve both deliberation and determination processes ensures output quality and enhances political and service capabilities.

**3.4.3 Output and Innovation Capability as the Core** Think tanks influence government decision-making through high-quality research outputs, with influence deriving from these outputs. Output and innovation capability occupies the core position in the capability system. With basic capability support and intelligence capability guarantees, stronger academic and policy research capabilities produce higher-level academic results and more adoptable policy research outcomes. To leverage unique advantages, university-affiliated think tanks should conduct academic and policy research simultaneously.

**3.4.4 Political and Service Capabilities as Keys to Influence** Think tank influence refers to the process of affecting government, organizations, and others. Enhanced political and service capabilities directly drive influence improvement. Located at the periphery of the capability system, political and service capabilities are promoted by improvements in basic, intelligence, and output capabilities, thereby indirectly enhancing overall influence.

## 4 Current Status of Capability Building in Chinese University-Affiliated Think Tanks

**4.1 Robust Basic Capabilities** Chinese university-affiliated think tanks possess robust basic capabilities in basic disciplines, talent, information resources, and funding—advantages generally unmatched by private think tanks. As university-based research institutions, they enjoy strong disciplinary foundations and natural interdisciplinary advantages that can be transformed into specialized research strengths. For example, the National Academy of Development and Strategy at Renmin University of China leverages its first-class disciplinary advantages, focusing on four core research areas: economic governance and development, political governance and rule of law, social governance and innovation, and public diplomacy and international relations [37], ranking first in the *China University Think Tank Development Report (2017)* published by Zhejiang University of Technology's Global Think Tank Research Center [38]. The Institute for Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University leverages

Tsinghua's public management disciplinary strengths, focusing on national conditions and policy research, ranking 53rd among university-affiliated think tanks globally and 2nd in China according to the University of Pennsylvania's *2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index* [1].

Talent is crucial for think tank construction, with university-affiliated think tank researchers possessing solid academic foundations and including discipline leaders and cross-domain experts—the source of creativity and influence. These think tanks enjoy abundant project resources, sufficient funding, superior research environments, and rich university library collections, enabling resource integration for capability building.

**4.2 Weak Intelligence Awareness and Capability** Intelligence capability is a basic guarantee for think tank capability, yet Chinese university-affiliated think tank construction rarely prioritizes it. The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University—the world's top university-affiliated think tank according to the *2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index*—attaches great importance to intelligence, addressing the U.S. intelligence agenda in its policy briefs and arguing that intelligence must support contemporary national challenges [39]. The Center operates an Intelligence Project to cultivate a new generation of intelligence practitioners [40] and maintains an Intelligence Study Group [41]. In contrast, Chinese university-affiliated think tanks rarely demonstrate such intelligence awareness.

Weak cognition and insufficient attention to intelligence and information lead to inadequate topic prediction, collection, and analysis capabilities. Most Chinese university-affiliated think tanks lack tracking of relevant intelligence. Deficient topic prediction capability results in failure to grasp hot issues, weak public policy influence, and inability to shape public opinion or promote their ideas. Additionally, Chinese university-affiliated think tanks lack specialized intelligence service institutions for collection and analysis, whereas renowned international think tanks like the Stanford Research Institute maintain branch offices in domestic cities and foreign locations like Tokyo and Paris, forming extensive intelligence networks. Currently, Chinese think tanks emphasize introducing high-level professionals while neglecting intelligence talent attraction and development, with insufficient understanding of intelligence collection and analysis methods.

**4.3 Imbalance Between Academic and Policy Research, Weak Policy Research Capability** Think tanks aim to influence policy formulation and government decision-making, making problem orientation the core of their work. Due to their characteristics, academic research is a unique attribute of university-affiliated think tanks, yet they remain academically oriented without properly handling the relationship between academic and policy research. As think tanks, they cannot merely conduct academic research. Chinese university-affiliated think tanks currently face the dilemma of “highbrow art for the few.”

Unclear positioning leads to research divorced from reality and weak operational capability, producing primarily theoretical academic research rather than problem-oriented policy research [16]. Research shows that university research outputs have historically consisted mainly of academic papers and monographs, with extremely low proportions of applied research reports [42]. Taking 2019's top two universities as examples: Peking University's humanities and social sciences research produced 2,644 papers but only 31 research and consultation reports; Renmin University of China produced 3,435 papers but only 81 research and consultation reports [43].

**4.4 Insufficient Policy Consultation Capability and Low International Influence** Policy consultation capability refers to the capacity to embed within policy processes to influence policy formulation and implementation. Chinese university-affiliated think tank outputs generally remain on shelves, with low decision-making impact and limited contributions. Statistics show that Chinese university-affiliated think tanks' influence on and participation in government decision-making remains at a low level overall [44]. Weak policy consultation capability stems from both inadequate policy research capability and poor communication with government, preventing timely participation in policy formulation processes. Notably, to enhance policy consultation capability, China's high-end think tank—the National Academy of Development and Strategy at Renmin University of China—has built a background-diverse hybrid research team, with 10 of 51 think tank personnel having government work experience and others possessing relevant commercial or media organization backgrounds [5].

International diplomacy capability directly determines international influence. Compared with internationally renowned think tanks, Chinese university-affiliated think tanks lag significantly in 知名度 and brand international influence. Although Chinese university-affiliated think tanks have made great progress in the *2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index*, among the world's top university-affiliated think tanks (94 total), China has only 4 while the U.S. has 29 (30.9%) [1]. Chinese university-affiliated think tanks hold weak discourse power in international society, with insufficient think tank diplomatic function in anti-China public opinion struggles by the U.S. and Western worlds.

**4.5 Insufficient Multi-Level Service Capabilities** Influenced by the “five-only” phenomenon (emphasis only on papers, titles, professional ranks, educational credentials, and awards), Chinese university-affiliated think tanks' capacity to serve national decision-making does not match their status, generally suffering from poor mechanisms, weak capabilities, and low contribution rates [45], failing to actively integrate into the national governance system. Meanwhile, developed market economies like the U.S. possess complete think tank idea markets that promote vigorous development, whereas China has yet to form such supply-demand markets. This prevents university-affiliated think tanks from understanding enterprise needs while enterprises rarely pay attention to think

tank intellectual outputs. The absence of an idea market also results in weak service concepts, with think tanks rarely investigating actual enterprise needs, maintaining limited exchanges and cooperation with enterprises, and allowing many excellent innovative ideas to remain on shelves rather than serving enterprises or transforming into productive forces.

## 5 Recommendations for Capability Building in Chinese University-Affiliated Think Tanks

In the capability composition system, internal capabilities include basic capability (basic disciplines, talent, information resources), intelligence capability (topic prediction, collection, analysis), and output and innovation capability (academic research, policy research). These capabilities are crucial and fundamental. Chinese university-affiliated think tanks possess relatively robust basic capabilities but insufficient intelligence capability, strong academic output capability but weak policy output capability, and have failed to properly handle the relationship between academic and policy research. Deficiencies in internal foundational guarantee capabilities also hinder further enhancement of political and service capabilities. University-affiliated think tanks should recognize these problems to identify their positioning, address deficiencies, and enhance their influence.

**5.1 Prioritize Intelligence Work** Enhancing intelligence capability begins with establishing intelligence awareness. The current vigorous think tank research has not reached consensus on intelligence determining think tank standards. Only by prioritizing intelligence rather than treating it as optional can university-affiliated think tanks enhance intelligence capability. Additionally, they should appropriately recruit and cultivate intelligence talent to guide intelligence network and platform construction, establish specialized institutional knowledge repositories and databases for orderly deposit, management, and use of all members' research outputs (including think tank products), and build extensive, well-managed, digitally powerful intelligence networks for multi-source dynamic real-time collection. Intelligence personnel should also explore new ideas for institutional intelligence construction based on their characteristics and complete foundational intelligence work to support think tank operations.

After establishing hardware foundations, think tanks must conduct dynamic intelligence collection and strategic environmental sensing to achieve foresight and play the role of "eyes and ears." In collection, they should emphasize new intelligence and smart technologies for dynamic real-time gathering while strengthening cooperation with university libraries and other think tanks for intelligence sharing, paying attention to various information sources to track the most timely intelligence. In analysis, they should emphasize bibliometrics, webometrics, SWOT analysis, benchmarking, scenario analysis, and other methods and technologies.

**5.2 Conduct Academic and Policy Research Simultaneously** Regarding debates between academic and policy research, university-affiliated think tanks must first clarify their positioning. With strong basic disciplinary and talent advantages, they should maintain academic orientation. However, think tank research' s essential characteristic is serving scientific decision-making by providing policy recommendations, requiring research to focus on social development problems. Academic and policy research are not opposites; high-level policy research is part of academic research [46], and good theoretical research must also address reality. The correct positioning should involve leveraging irreplaceable basic disciplinary and long-term research advantages, playing to disciplinary strengths, eliminating pseudo-problems, and focusing on real issues. While conducting long-term reserve research, think tanks should actively adapt to developmental needs, continuously conducting countermeasure and applied research, carrying out academic and policy research simultaneously to continuously improve output quality and quantity, truly playing the role of “external brain” and “advisor,” and striving to become new-type university-affiliated think tanks with Chinese characteristics possessing important academic and policy influence.

**5.3 Focus on Policy Consultation as the Primary Mission While Strengthening International Exchange** Think tanks are considered increasingly important participants in public policy, though their exact contributions remain debated [47]. Currently, Chinese university-affiliated think tanks have limited communication channels and policy participation [48], resulting in low consultation capacity. Enhancing consultation capability requires innovating consultation mechanisms, starting from micro-level improvements, defining mechanisms for think tank participation in policy processes, considering how to embed think tank work within China' s unique political architecture, and clarifying specific roles in each policy process stage.

Additionally, think tanks should smooth consultation channels, appropriately learning from Western practices such as hiring former government personnel to strengthen connections with decision-makers, but avoiding blind copying. Many studies propose learning the Western revolving door system without considering China' s institutional factors. Research shows different institutions provide think tanks with varying opportunities to shape public opinion and influence policy—for example, Canada' s parliamentary system provides fewer opportunities than the U.S. [49]. Therefore, the key to smoothing channels lies in innovation.

Enhancing external political capability requires strengthening international exchange and innovating brand value. University-affiliated think tanks can hire foreign administrative staff and intellectual elites, recruit international graduate students, and host large international forums. They should strengthen brand promotion, synergize influence from various institutions and individuals to demonstrate brand value, conduct public opinion struggles to enhance international diplomacy capability, truly serve China' s socialist system and cultural

export, absorb global wisdom for China' s development, and enhance China' s soft power.

**5.4 Establish Service Concepts and Enhance Multi-Level Service Capabilities** Implementing service orientation is the power source for think tank development. University-affiliated think tanks should actively integrate into China' s national governance system, break the influence of "five-only" factors, improve evaluation standards, orient research toward major economic and social development issues and practical needs, and serve national decision-making and development. Additionally, think tank services require profitability [50]; university-affiliated think tanks should establish service concepts and market competition awareness, actively identify and characterize enterprises' intellectual needs, disseminate policy concepts, development strategies, and future plans through multiple channels to demonstrate their capabilities. Simultaneously, they should strengthen exchanges and cooperation with enterprises through industry-university-research institutions, collaborative talent development, field surveys, and lectures, deeply 挖掘 local enterprises' needed industry information sources and provide competitive intelligence. Implementing service capabilities also contributes to forming China' s idea market.

## 6 Conclusion

Think tank construction ultimately revolves around capability building. This study attempts to comprehensively construct and analyze the university-affiliated think tank capability system by building an operational framework. However, enumerating capabilities carries certain risks, and unreasonable framework construction may cause omissions, requiring further in-depth research on think tank operations and capability building. As international situations evolve, think tank and intelligence systems constitute important components of national collective intelligence, representing unparalleled American soft power and crucial support for China' s industrial revitalization and security. As important components of new-type think tank construction, university-affiliated think tank capability building is vital. This study hopes to serve as a modest spur to induce more valuable research.

Based on the operational framework, this study divides the capability system into basic capability, intelligence capability, output and innovation capability, political capability, and service capability, and provides problem analysis and recommendations for capability building. Capability building is a gradual process; Western think tanks took a century to reach their current prosperity. Although Chinese university-affiliated think tank capability building faces numerous problems, it should not blindly follow or copy Western models but must fully consider its own problems and institutional-cultural factors, base itself on national conditions, identify correct positioning, maximize advantages, and build new-type university-affiliated think tanks with Chinese characteristics as soon as possible to serve China' s socialist construction and scientific democratic

decision-making.

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