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## New Type of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics: Emergence Logic, Operational Mechanism, and Basic Paradigm Postprint

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The academic community has rarely examined meta-theoretical issues such as the emergence logic, operational mechanisms, and basic paradigms of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics; thus, this research possesses strong originality and knowledge contribution.

[Method/Process] This study comprehensively integrates perspectives from the sociology of knowledge, politics of knowledge, management science, and Marxist principles to elucidate the theoretical logic, logic of the times, and value logic underlying the emergence of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, as well as their related operational mechanisms and paradigm characteristics.

[Results/Conclusions] New-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics emerge within a specific context characterized by the transformation of knowledge production modes, the updating of the era context, and value expressions centered on “people-centered” and “community with a shared future for mankind”; their actual operation takes knowledge as its essence and core driving force, accomplished through the dynamic complementarity between knowledge and power and the coupled drive of knowledge and capital. New-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics enrich and expand the connotation of contemporary think tanks from the perspectives of spatiotemporal dual context, bidirectional dimensions of universality and particularity, and the interactive relationship with governance modernization, thereby forming a preliminary outline and basic paradigm for Chinese think tanks in the new era.

## Full Text

### New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics: Appearance Logic, Operation Mechanism, and Basic Paradigm

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#### Abstract:

[**Purpose/Significance**] Academic circles have rarely examined meta-theoretical issues such as the appearance logic, operation mechanism, and basic paradigm of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. This research thus possesses strong originality and contributes valuable knowledge. [**Method/Process**] This study comprehensively applies theories from the sociology of knowledge, knowledge politics, management science, and Marxist principles to explicate the theoretical logic, era logic, and value logic underlying the emergence of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, along with their related operational mechanisms and paradigmatic features. [**Result/Conclusion**] New think tanks with Chinese characteristics have emerged against the specific backdrop of transformed knowledge production modes, renewed era contexts, and value expressions centered on “people-centeredness” and “a community with a shared future for mankind.” Their practical operation takes knowledge as its essence and core driving force, accomplished through the dynamic complementarity of knowledge and power and the coupling drive of knowledge and capital. These think tanks enrich and expand the connotation of contemporary think tanks from the dual perspectives of spatiotemporal context, the bidirectional dimensions of universality and individuality, and their interactive relationship with governance modernization, thereby forming a preliminary outline and basic paradigm for Chinese think tanks in the new era.

**Keywords:** new think tanks with Chinese characteristics; knowledge; power; capital

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Think tanks are repositories of wisdom, intellect, and expertise—knowledge communities composed of multidisciplinary experts and scholars that provide policy consulting services to decision-makers through collaborative research. Regarding think tanks, following their first mention at the central level during the 2012 Central Economic Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping issued important instructions in April 2013 on strengthening the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing that think tanks constitute an important component of national soft power and that their role will become increasingly significant as circumstances evolve. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee further stated that China must strengthen the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and establish

a sound decision-making consultation system. Subsequently, General Secretary Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized the importance of building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and conducted comprehensive social mobilization at the strategic level. On January 20, 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics,” formally establishing new think tank construction as a national institutional arrangement and an important support for scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making by the Party and government, as well as a crucial component of modernizing the national governance system and governance capabilities and building national soft power. The 19th Party Congress report further emphasized the need to “accelerate the development of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics and strengthen the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” [1]. On March 2, 2020, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee issued the “Opinions on Deepening the Pilot Work of National High-End Think Tank Construction (2020-2022).” However, in academic research on think tanks, scholars often take the existence of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics as a given, rarely explaining the logic of their emergence and development or why they have become an important part of the national governance system. This has somewhat limited the systematic construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, answering questions about the appearance logic and operation mechanism of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics becomes an important prerequisite for further leveraging their positive role.

## 1. The Appearance Logic of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics

As relatively stable and independently operating policy research and consulting institutions, think tanks play the roles of “idea banks,” “brainstorming pools,” and “communication platforms.” Think tank research essentially belongs to knowledge politics, and think tank effectiveness is realized through the interaction between knowledge and politics. The role of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics must also emerge from the interweaving of knowledge and politics. Knowledge and politics thus constitute the fundamental dimensions for exploring the appearance of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

### 1.1 Theoretical Logic: Transformation of Knowledge Production Modes

Modern think tanks center their work on knowledge innovation and application, as well as policy research and consultation, with knowledge production being their core. British scholar Michael Gibbons noted in *The New Production of Knowledge* that a new mode of knowledge production is emerging, distinct from the familiar Mode 1 based on a single discipline, homogeneity, and hierarchy. Mode 2 knowledge production demonstrates characteristics of interdisciplinar-

ity, heterogeneity, variability, and non-hierarchical organization. In this mode, the discovery, application, and use of knowledge are tightly integrated, with knowledge production becoming part of a larger process. This transformation is mainly attributed to an important mechanism: the expansion of knowledge markets and the deepening marketization of science (not just technology) [2]. Problem-oriented and interdisciplinary knowledge production are notable features of this mode. Undoubtedly, in today's knowledge society, comprehensive knowledge produced through Mode 2 has become an indispensable productive factor in many fields. No knowledge production or organization can now ignore society's knowledge demands or remain aloof, nor can they reverse the trend of knowledge production shifting from Mode 1 to Mode 2. The emergence of modern think tanks is precisely an institutional arrangement adapted to this transformation in knowledge production modes and the achievements of interdisciplinary knowledge.

Although think tanks arose from the process of empowering power with knowledge, they remain grounded in their commercial value. Think tanks are endogenous to market economies, reflecting certain modes of production. Regarding the transformation of knowledge production modes, especially the shift toward application and marketization, Marx had already captured the essence and preliminarily clarified the original mechanism of think tank emergence. He pointed out that when science and technology become primary productive forces, market entities generally develop the following consciousness regarding scientific and technological knowledge: "to explore the whole of nature in order to discover new useful properties of things; to exchange products from different climatic conditions and different countries universally; to adopt new methods (artificial) for processing natural objects to endow them with new use values... to explore the earth in every respect to discover new useful objects and new use properties of original objects, such as new properties of original objects as raw materials, etc.; therefore, to develop natural science to its highest point" [3]. Supported by this philosophy, the Industrial Revolution inevitably incorporated scientific and technological knowledge as a capital element into reproduction. Thus, scientific and technological knowledge gradually "became subordinate to capital... all naturally formed relations became monetary relations" [4]. The same applies to humanities and social science knowledge. In this way, knowledge acquired economic significance, participating in market exchange like ordinary commodities and accumulating as a capital element. Thereafter, a system based on large-scale machine production of the Industrial Revolution, supported by rational knowledge application, and transformed through market mechanisms became the prototype of modern think tanks.

When knowledge is incorporated into the production process as a capital element, it becomes subject to the laws of capital accumulation. Under specific conditions, the potential of knowledge to transform into productive forces depends on whether it obtains capital support. Under market economy conditions, capital embeds itself in knowledge activities, thereby controlling the initiative of knowledge owners. Marx incisively pointed out: "If I have the ability to

conduct research but lack the money to do so, then I do not have the ability to conduct research, that is, I lack the effective, real ability to conduct research. Conversely, if I actually lack the ability to conduct research but have the desire and money, then I have the effective ability to conduct research” [4]. The actual effectiveness of knowledge depends to a large extent on the amount of money mastered by knowledge owners. Marx’s analysis of the interaction between knowledge production and capital operation reveals the essence of the relationship between knowledge production and market economy, showing us the capital-based approach to knowledge production. His classic judgments represent the original expression of think tank concepts and actions and are crucial for analyzing the appearance of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

## 1.2 Era Logic: Elucidation of the New Era Context

The 19th Party Congress report states: “Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era” [1], marking an era when Chinese socialism has achieved the great leap from standing up and becoming prosperous to growing strong. In June 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “currently, China is in the best period of development since modern times, while the world is undergoing major changes unseen in a century. The two processes are synchronized, intertwined, and mutually reinforcing” [5]. Globalization, the knowledge economy, and information technology have incorporated societies with diverse historical, cultural, and developmental levels into a synchronic system of interaction, collision, mixing, and change. Under the combined effects of various factors, China faces both the problems of developing countries and the confusions of developed countries, greatly increasing the complexity of the national development environment. As management expert Bill noted: “The characteristic of the old world is managing affairs, while the new world requires dealing with complexity” [6]. The “era of strength,” “era of change,” and “era of complexity” constitute the era background for constructing new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and form the historical premise for their construction and development. Solving era problems cannot be accomplished by a single force alone but requires the convergence of interdisciplinary and cross-professional wisdom.

First, economic development in the new era requires the support of new think tank construction. As comprehensive reform deepens, China’s social structure has undergone tremendous changes, with the economy and society entering a critical period of innovation-driven development and economic transformation and upgrading. Currently, uncertainties affecting economic and social stability frequently emerge, and social risk points increase. Public decision-making has become increasingly complex and diverse, with growing demands for proactivity, timeliness, and scientific rigor in public decision-making. As an “external brain” for public decision-making institutions, think tanks’ professional capabilities and service levels are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of modern economic governance. Whether ensuring macro, meso, and microeconomic environment grasp under the “new normal” or solving economic challenges, high-capacity

think tanks are needed for support. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that “under the complex and changing domestic and international political and economic situation, to achieve better development, we must better analyze the situation and environment, better grasp changes in the connotation and conditions of strategic opportunities, better understand macroeconomic trends, and better respond to challenges. Party committees and governments at all levels must respect knowledge and talent, develop the habit of consulting experts and scholars, mobilize their enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity, and make good use of intellectual resources” [7].

Second, the exponential development of science and technology in the new era has accelerated the transformation of new think tanks. Technology in contemporary times is not only a core factor driving productivity development but also an important driver of think tank transformation. Through information technology, biotechnology, engineering technology, and big data, technology development has, on the one hand, quickly and efficiently brought new research methods and tools to think tanks; on the other hand, by changing human production, lifestyle, and thinking patterns, it has broadened research fields and exploration perspectives for think tank research. Since entering the 21st century, China’s exploration of new phenomena and new laws in various fields has increased dramatically, forming more in-depth and complete knowledge of nature and society. In the process of applying this knowledge to practice, the work patterns and development mechanisms of think tank organizations themselves have become increasingly prominent, gradually forming new organizational management norms, systems, and mechanisms. Simultaneously, the application of computer and network technology has also assisted in improving think tank work effectiveness, research capabilities, and service levels. In a sense, new think tanks are an inevitable result of modern technological development, while further technological development also cannot be separated from professional think tank guidance. New think tanks and technological development are coupled, mutually promoting, and integrated.

Third, the modernization of national governance in the new era has put forward urgent demands for new think tanks. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee proposed the strategic task of “modernizing the national governance system and governance capabilities,” demonstrating our government’s concept of transforming functions and building a service-oriented government. In the process of comprehensive deepening reform, how to bridge interest differences, strengthen public opinion guidance, clarify government functions, solve reform, development, and stability challenges, and achieve “good governance” has become increasingly complex. Meanwhile, world multipolarization, economic globalization and anti-globalization, social informatization, technological intelligence, and cultural diversification are developing in depth. Issues such as nuclear threats, ecological environment deterioration, and the prevalence of emergent diseases challenge the bottom line of human survival and society, all reflecting the arduousness of contemporary governance problems. Professional research institutions, social forces, and folk wisdom urgently

need to be concentrated, and building a modern national governance system requires the deep involvement of new think tanks.

Finally, national ideological security construction has endowed new think tanks with an important mission. Ideological security is an important component of national security. Currently, China's ideological security faces severe challenges despite overall stability. Western democratic export, cultural hegemony, online public opinion, and religious infiltration still pose considerable crises to China's ideological security. However, domestic ideological research generally lags behind practical development and struggles to fully explain new contradictions and problems in the ideological field. Ideological construction suffers from a "dual detachment" phenomenon of being divorced from both "thought" and "reality" [8]. Therefore, clarifying and developing effective bridges between thought and reality becomes crucial, with think tanks playing a central role in this process. National ideological construction aims to unify diversified and discrete social consciousness with mainstream ideology, making it the dominant ideology that maximally reflects and expresses the wishes and demands of all members of society. Mainstream ideology integrates diverse ideologies mainly through two approaches: political authority and rational authority. The former relies on the coerciveness of power, while the latter emphasizes rational guidance. In fact, as peace and development become the themes of the era, people's awareness of autonomous participation and rational judgment has improved. The rational authority approach can often more effectively integrate, regulate, and express the interest demands of different interest groups. In the process of political socialization, think tanks can better serve as public platforms for fully expressing various interest demands and important channels for balancing differences among conflicting interest groups, creating a favorable social atmosphere for national ideological construction. Whether from the perspective of connecting ideological thought with reality or enhancing the appeal and recognition of mainstream ideology, the power of new think tanks cannot be ignored.

### **1.3 Value Logic: Expression of "People-Centeredness" and "A Community with a Shared Future for Mankind"**

New think tanks with Chinese characteristics represent an important expression of "people-centeredness." The Communist Party of China and the Chinese government always take serving the people as their fundamental purpose, and the scientific, democratic, and law-based nature of the decision-making process has become an important measure of this purpose. First, scientific decision-making is a major prerequisite. As the saying goes, forewarned is forearmed. Marx saw that the biggest difference between human labor and animal instinct is that the results of labor can be preconceived in conceptual form to guide the labor process. Humans have foresight and planning. The function of think tanks is largely to concentrate people's foresight and planning to make scientific and reasonable decisions. The existence of think tanks is a necessity of human nature. Since "the larger the spatiotemporal scale of forward prediction, the higher the

degree of foresight and planning” [9], the existence of complex social variables and risks in modern society continuously demands forward-looking scientific analysis and planning, making the importance of building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics self-evident. Second, in the differential society formed after reform and opening up, the people have differences in interests at various stages of social development, which has also formed differential interest expressions. These rights to express interests may be fragmented and non-professional, or they may be centralized and professional. In this regard, how to guarantee political and legal equality of public discourse power, how to further align the interests of the people with those of the Party, and how to gather national strength to accomplish the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation have become important considerations for think tank development. Sherry R. Arnstein, a pioneer of public participation theory, believed that “public participation is an exercise of citizen power, a redistribution of power that enables citizens who currently cannot master power in political, economic, and other activities to have their opinions considered in a planned manner in the future” [10]. Contemporary citizens can fully exercise this power, consciously participate in and express opinions on policies, deconstructing the role of passive policy-makers. Thus, promoting differential interest groups to express reasonable demands through pluralistic consultation and to reach consensus through democratic decision-making has become an important issue in contemporary Chinese political development. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics demonstrate a mechanism for widely accepting advice and pluralistic consultation, possessing the important function of scientifically collecting and rationally reflecting public opinion, inevitably becoming an indispensable link in democratic decision-making. Third, besides democratic decision-making, the state also needs law-based decision-making. The Constitution guarantees the people’s right to free and full discourse and to make suggestions. Therefore, in addition to the main channels for reflecting social conditions and public opinion such as people’s congresses, political consultative conferences, media, and society, specialized institutions should also be organized to consult with the Party and government on specific topics. Of course, think tanks entering the law-based decision-making process means that decision-making needs to accept public supervision and scientifically and legally adopt opinions. When the Party and government continuously draw on the wisdom of the masses to complete decision-making in a law-based and democratic environment, the use of power for the people and the pursuit of benefits for the people are guaranteed, and people’s value is embodied through new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

New think tanks with Chinese characteristics also manifest the concept of “a community with a shared future for mankind.” The 18th Party Congress report defined “a community with a shared future for mankind” as “pursuing national interests while taking into account the legitimate concerns of other countries, and promoting common development of all countries while seeking national development.” In the new era, China not only cares about the interests of its own

people but also concerns itself with the interests of humanity as a whole. As China continues to move toward the center of the world stage, think tanks must not only provide good policy consulting services domestically but also demonstrate responsibility for international issues. Faced with the complex and changing international situation and numerous global problems, “the Chinese people will continue to work with the world and make greater contributions to humanity, unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, actively develop global partnerships, firmly support multilateralism, actively participate in promoting the transformation of the global governance system, build a new type of international relations, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind” [11]. Among these, think tanks’ research on forward-looking issues helps prevent problems before they occur, becoming an important aspect of building a community with a shared future for mankind. At the same time, the platform of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics can strengthen international exchanges and communication. Through cooperation with international think tank counterparts, they jointly provide wisdom and solutions for global governance, jointly voice rational and balanced messages, demonstrate China’s responsibility as a major country to the world, establish a true image of China, and convey goodwill as a major power. They promote harmonious yet different and beautifully diverse development. It can be said that new think tanks with Chinese characteristics are an important bridge for major-country diplomacy and a necessary pathway for advancing public diplomacy.

## 2. The Operation Mechanism of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics

As institutions that create theoretical and policy knowledge, think tanks must first follow the logic of knowledge, meeting the conditions for knowledge production and reflecting the characteristics of knowledge itself. As decision-making consultation institutions, the knowledge production process of think tanks is influenced by the logic of power, thus forming an interactive structure of “knowledge-power.” As platforms for knowledge dissemination, the knowledge dissemination process of think tanks is influenced by the logic of capital, presenting an interactive structure of “capital-knowledge.” The full 演绎 and interweaving of these three logics reveal the internal mechanism of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. As shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]:

### 2.1 Knowledge as Essence and Core

For any institution providing decision-making consultation and thought services, the production, innovation, and dissemination of information, knowledge, and ideas constitute the basis of their legitimate existence and the most core content. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics are no exception. In actual policy formulation processes, think tanks are first and foremost knowledge communities whose task is to analyze and design policies with specialized knowledge.

“Knowledge is power”—the inherent truth power, discourse power, autonomy, logical power, willpower, and moral power of knowledge combine with specific matters through think tank practice, exerting productivity, creativity, insight, judgment, persuasion, and shaping power in use, dissemination, and circulation.

First, relying on the truth power and discourse power of knowledge, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics directly address hot, difficult, and key issues in economic and social development, directly affecting the material production process through specific knowledge to promote social productivity and creativity. The process of think tanks playing their role is essentially a process of acquiring and utilizing knowledge resources. Second, based on the autonomy and logical power of knowledge, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics invent, design, and provide different solutions and means to assist in maintaining social stability, economic development, political participation, and other social management purposes. Knowledge not only provides sufficient knowledge support and logical argumentation for formulating strategic decisions that conform to objective laws but also provides information support and technical guarantees for efficient and effective measure implementation. Third, through the willpower and moral power of knowledge, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics permeate the governance philosophy, value standards, and action methods of the Communist Party of China into people’s daily lives during public opinion dissemination, helping people better understand, identify with, and support Party leadership, thereby achieving the function of ideological integration. Finally, the ultimate purpose of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is to serve people, more precisely, to serve the comprehensive development of people. Through training intellect, cultivating wisdom, and nurturing intelligence, the three power attributes of knowledge jointly point to the shaping of social subjects. Engels once said, “Social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, and destructively, so long as we do not understand them and reckon with them. But when once we understand them, when once we grasp their action, their direction, and their effects, it depends entirely upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our will and to attain our ends by means of them” [12]. Here, the premise of “depending entirely upon ourselves” lies precisely in people’s mastery of knowledge. We must acknowledge that knowledge, especially profound and specialized knowledge, lies at the core of the purpose and essence of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and indeed any think tank.

## 2.2 Dynamic Complementarity of Knowledge and Power

The rise of modern think tanks is rooted in the national political ecology and is directly influenced and intervened by political power in practical operation. If think tanks lose the guardianship of political power, they lose the influence brought by political guardianship. The natural knowledge nature of think tanks themselves loses its basic field for application and transformation, and the knowledge created by think tanks lacks its most important objectivity and purpose.

From this perspective, the value realization of knowledge created by think tanks depends on the support and guardianship of political power. From the perspective of power, highly technologized, professionalized, and rationalized political power must still find the basis for its legitimacy from constantly updated knowledge. As political institutions that are carriers of power, their ruling strategies and methods also need to use knowledge to confirm their scientific nature. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics embody the interactive relationship between knowledge and power, with knowledge and power constructing the actual effectiveness of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics in dynamic practice.

Power and knowledge build the basic framework of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics through mutual legitimacy verification. On the one hand, think tanks confirm their own legitimacy through political power. Political power influences the scientific nature of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics by penetrating knowledge, determining the production and dissemination of think tank knowledge, main forms and scales, and evaluation systems. First, political power strengthens the scientific status of think tanks. According to philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend, the demarcation of science is an artificially manufactured pseudo-problem, but in reality, this boundary is very clear. The reason lies largely in that “power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” [13]. Political power continuously strengthens the boundary between science and non-science through think tanks, an influential modern approach, enhancing the dominant position of knowledge forms within think tanks in the process of confirming, constructing, and unifying knowledge, thereby further elevating and consolidating the scientific status of think tanks. Second, political power determines the production and dissemination of knowledge within think tanks. Alvin Toffler observed that any information or knowledge used for communication needs to include four elements: source or sender; channel or medium; receiver; message [14]. In the modern think tank system, political power makes itself a legitimate subject of knowledge production through legislation and policy documents, influencing the content, categories, processes, and dissemination methods of knowledge production. It also regulates the specific content, timing, and spatial scope of knowledge dissemination through intellectual property systems. Through educational institutions, production institutions, and coercive institutions, political power determines the audience of knowledge and guides social needs, regulating people’s layout and flow in different knowledge fields. Third, political power directly influences the forms and scales of knowledge production by think tanks. Political power can make unified deployments and plans for think tank research based on social needs, replacing decentralized, individualized, and randomized research with organized and managed orderliness, and supporting large-scale research with strong human, material, and financial re-

sources, fully solving organizational management, resource supply, and technical support problems in think tank research modernization. This changes the early scientific research form based on individual interest and makes modern think tank research gradually present as problem-oriented and collaborative research. Fourth, political power establishes the internal evaluation system of think tanks, prompting healthy competition among think tank researchers. Whether think tank achievements can meet the practical requirements of public governance and adapt to the needs of public policy development is an important criterion for judging the quality of think tank results. In this regard, political power has absolute discourse power. Political power has formulated corresponding intellectual property protection systems and performance incentive mechanisms through laws and policy documents, encouraging think tank researchers to compete around “priority rights.” This property rights system not only motivates think tank researchers to produce knowledge products but also encourages them to pay attention to the dissemination effects of knowledge, maximizing service to government decision-making.

On the other hand, think tanks provide legitimacy arguments for political power and improve the quality of political power exercise. To assemble the most effective methods to advance political goals, political power needs to absorb professionals in relevant fields into national administrative institutions or other forms of state institutions. The main role of these personnel is to provide advice for policy formulation and decision-makers. In this system, policy-makers and decision-makers have access to a large amount of professional knowledge and can use this knowledge to form decision-making arrangements. In fact, it is precisely because of the “relative monopoly” of professional knowledge that political elites can possess power. Think tanks play the role of both knowledge providers for decision-making and, more importantly, legitimacy demonstrators for decision-making. Think tanks’ demonstration of the legitimacy of political power is reflected at three levels: the argumentation of the power foundation, the explanation of power operation, and the regulation of power exercise. Looking at Western society’s knowledge-based arguments for political power legitimacy—whether divine right of kings, social contract theory, or democratic constitutionalism—all contain rich knowledge resources and sufficient strategic arguments. It is precisely through a series of knowledge-based negotiation, communication, and lobbying techniques that political power obtains the legitimacy of being reasonable, rational, and legal, achieves balance among subjects with different interest demands, and ensures social order stability. As Toffler pointed out, violence, wealth, and knowledge can all serve as sources and cores of power, but only knowledge is the most profound and fundamental because it can serve as a substitute for violence and wealth to avoid the same risks or achieve the same goals. Moreover, knowledge, unlike violence and wealth, does not exclusively belong to the powerful class. It is “the most democratic source of power” [14] and can “multiply the effects of physical power and wealth, so power constituted by knowledge is the highest quality power” [15].

The differential tension between power and knowledge activates the innovative

possibilities of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Although there is a close relationship between knowledge and power, the natural tension between them cannot be ignored. Whether it is the idealism of the “philosopher-king” in ancient Greece or the inconsistency between “Dao tradition” and “political tradition” in ancient China, both reflect the traditional opposition between knowledge and power. Foucault also compared intellectuals to the “eyes” of political power, existing as the critical face of political power. Essentially, knowledge and power are incommensurable: first, knowledge pursues truth and freedom, while power pursues domination and obedience; second, knowledge aims for universality and is open, while power aims for particularity and is closed; third, knowledge manifests as doctrines and ideas, while power is directly linked to action; fourth, knowledge creation can be individual, but power action focuses on groups. Under the domination of two different logics, knowledge and power inevitably encroach upon each other. This may lead to the consequences of either knowledge alienation or power alienation—that is, either forming a knowledge empire and discourse hegemony or moving toward knowledge aphasia and power monopoly. Essentially, modern think tanks are an important mechanism for sublating knowledge alienation and power alienation. Think tanks should overcome both types of alienation with their necessary professionalism, relative independence, and knowledge pluralism. Therefore, think tank construction should not only achieve appropriate separation between knowledge and power but also better promote the “growth of knowledge public spheres” [16] and assist knowledge in constructing pluralistic landscapes. Looking at the current state of existing think tank systems, the task of sublating knowledge alienation and power alienation remains arduous, providing development direction and innovative impetus for the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

### 2.3 Coupling Drive of Knowledge and Capital

In today’s era of the knowledge economy, the operation of Chinese think tanks is not only directly influenced by knowledge, power, and their interactions but is also directly regulated by capital logic and market rules. Knowledge can never be withdrawn in unlimited quantities. Although there is the possibility of unlimited increments, for individuals or groups, knowledge is scarce. As the role of scientific and technological knowledge and its enormous effect in promoting economic and social development become increasingly prominent, human society is undergoing a “knowledge value revolution” and gradually entering a “knowledge value society” [17]. Marx discovered that the fact that science and technology (knowledge) have gradually become primary productive forces fundamentally endows science and technology (knowledge) production with economic significance and 孕育 s the possibility of scaling up knowledge production. The trend of contemporary social production development has confirmed Marx’s inference back then. Relying on knowledge-based transformation such as technological revolutions, social production continuously breaks through the constraints of resources, environment, time and space, and existing conditions, continuously developing the realms of material and spiritual, cognitive and practical. Thus,

while presenting truth, knowledge continuously demonstrates its economic value and develops into an idea market, with think tanks originating from modern consulting industries being the main actors in the idea market. Marx once revealed that capital, to achieve self-multiplication, has the attribute of incorporating all usefulness in nature and human society into its own logic. The marketization of knowledge is the result of capital logic intervening in the knowledge production process, and new think tanks with Chinese characteristics are inevitably subject to the domination of capital logic.

From a phenomenological perspective, the intervention of capital logic in think tank operation is “a ‘three-in-one’ logical whole of socio-economic-cultural movement that takes the market economy as the platform, scientific and technological development and its economic operation as the condition, and the equipment of information technology for spiritual and cultural production as the accelerator” [18]. Essentially, the reason capital logic can influence think tank operation lies in the certain compatibility between capital and knowledge. Specifically, knowledge production and capital coexist in time—knowledge production is born with humans and is the product of human interaction with nature, society, and themselves based on material practice, running throughout human development history; capital is the product of industrialized production and market economy, existing in certain stages of human society. However, the two accompany each other during specific historical periods of human society. Knowledge production and capital differ in value orientation—knowledge production takes truth and social benefits as value pursuits, while capital pursues value multiplication and maximization of economic benefits. However, social benefits and economic value are not entirely opposed; they often depend on and even transform into each other. It is precisely the differences and inherent mutual accommodation between knowledge production and capital that generate their coupling drive mechanism.

On the one hand, capital drives the innovation of knowledge production and promotes the advancement of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Capital’s emphasis on the practical utility of economic production helps strengthen the reality of think tanks, making them pay more attention to real life in knowledge production to serve decision-making practice and the people. The inherent expansiveness and immediacy of capital effectively promote the timeliness of think tanks, continuously enhancing the kinetic energy of think tank development and innovation through spatial expansion and time compression. The precise measurement and meticulous calculation characteristics of capital logic replace the romantic and vague thinking patterns of traditional knowledge production. From a positive perspective, this can help improve the logical rigor of think tanks and provide quantitative thinking methods. The efficient, symmetrical, and powerful allocation of resources entering the market by capital logic enhances the sensitivity and objectivity of think tanks in reflecting reality, enabling them to serve practical needs well and quickly. The rules of equivalent exchange between capital and commodities and the mutual transformation between value and currency clarify that the intangible value of knowledge can

be converted into the tangible value of money, providing sufficient material prerequisites and resource guarantees for knowledge reproduction and necessary guarantees for the sustainable development of think tanks.

On the other hand, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics also improve the biases of capital. First, the pursuit of social benefits by new think tanks with Chinese characteristics partially dissolves the one-sidedness of capital's demand for maximizing economic benefits, helping achieve the unity of economic and social benefits. Second, the ultimate purpose of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is to serve people, thus concerning themselves with human destiny, social development, and individual values. The humanistic rationality of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics helps overcome the materialization logic of capital. Finally, the use value inherent in the knowledge produced by new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, when endowed to material products, inevitably enhances their exchange value, thereby strengthening the power of capital logic.

### **3. New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics: A New Paradigm for Modern Think Tanks**

Since the 19th Party Congress, as Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era has continuously enriched, the theoretical foundation of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics has become increasingly complete. The conditions of the new era have also put forward more requirements for practical innovation in the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, requiring us to grasp their connotation and features according to new situations and tasks. The “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” have achieved dual development dimensions in spatiotemporal context, a bidirectional construction relationship between universality and individuality, and an organic connection with governance modernization.

#### **3.1 Dual Development Dimensions in Spatiotemporal Context**

From a static perspective, “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” refers to the institutional form formed by think tanks under the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in the new era. From a dynamic perspective, it refers to the process of formation and development of think tanks under the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in the new era, indicating the future trend and development state of this institutional form. Meanwhile, “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” has achieved a perspective shift from national to global, emphasizing more attention to and grasp of world issues. Thus, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics have achieved dual development in spatiotemporal dimensions.

In the temporal dimension, modern Chinese think tanks that developed alongside the founding of the People's Republic of China have entered a strategic development opportunity period after experiencing initial development, tortu-

ous development, and diversified rapid development periods. In the first three stages, think tank research focused more on historical development and current processes, with less attention to the future development dimension. With the proposal to “strengthen the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics,” taking “Chinese characteristics” as the basic background and “new” as the development direction, questions about the realistic foundation and future prospects of public decision-making in the new era have been raised. It can be seen that “new” distinguishes itself from the deficiencies of existing think tanks, and the drawbacks of traditional think tanks precisely point to the “new” in “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.” This is mainly manifested in: New positioning. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics play an important role in state governance. Writing think tanks into central documents indicates that the state has elevated think tank construction to the height of national strategy. Under the leadership of the Party and government, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics will inevitably contribute unique wisdom and strength to China’s economic and social development. New mechanisms. Different from traditional think tanks whose operational resources all come from government appropriations, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics appropriately introduce market competition mechanisms. On the basis of fiscal appropriations as the main source, they moderately expand competition, allocate think tank development resources such as research projects through free and open competition, stimulate the enhancement of think tank influence through dynamic adjustment of key funding targets, cultivate society’s consumption habits for knowledge products by developing the idea market, and continuously promote the development and growth of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. New models. Different from previous operation models, new think tanks shift from being “problem-point” oriented to “problem-network” oriented, grasping problems in a pluralistic, systematic, and organic manner. They actively apply the latest achievements of social development, integrate research methods, focus on theoretical interaction and practical operation of results to enhance scientificity and feasibility, and explore and broaden communication channels with the outside world to enhance visibility and promote the benign operation of think tanks. New functions. In addition to playing the core function of decision-making consultation, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics also possess functions such as theoretical innovation, public opinion guidance, public diplomacy, social services, talent reserve, enlightening the people, and class service. Overall, entering the strategic development opportunity period, the complexity and intensity of problems faced by modern Chinese think tanks, as well as the depth and breadth of their impact, are unprecedented. Building “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” must not only focus on reality but also look to the future. This future-oriented thinking expands the temporal logic of think tank development.

In the spatial dimension, the research perspective and discourse power scope of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics extend from China to the world. On the one hand, as the trend of globalization deepens, countries have increased

the frequency of cooperation and exchange in many fields such as politics, economy, culture, science and technology, and environment. The demand for professional knowledge worldwide, coordination of interest relations, and resolution of conflicts and contradictions have put forward urgent requirements for broadening the functional space of think tanks. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics need to “actively participate in global governance. They should actively participate in international academic organizations and international scientific plans, deeply engage in global governance research and policy dialogue, propose Chinese initiatives and Chinese solutions, and enhance their ability and level to participate in setting major international agendas, formulating international rules, and conducting international negotiations” [19]. The “going global” strategy of think tank development not only expands researchers’ international horizons but also enhances the business capabilities and competitiveness of think tanks themselves through cooperative exchanges. On the other hand, under the era theme of peace and development, unjust international political orders remain unchanged. Hegemonism, power politics, economic imbalance, local wars, regional conflicts, ethnic contradictions, terrorism, and other real problems still threaten the survival and development of humanity as a whole. These are also issues that contemporary China cannot avoid and urgently needs to address. The platform of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is increasingly engaged in direct services in areas such as actively serving major diplomatic activities, strengthening research on international strategic issues, carefully building brands for external exchanges, and strengthening international communication and cooperation. They dare to and are good at speaking to the outside world, can fully “use various media and international occasions to actively speak, proactively speak, and effectively speak, publicize concepts and propositions such as jointly building the ‘Belt and Road,’ promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, tell good Chinese stories, and spread China’s voice” [19]. In response to various distorted and slanderous arguments about China and various hot and sensitive issues, they respond scientifically, rationally, and objectively, explain, guide, and deal with them with reason, benefit, and restraint, effectively safeguarding national core interests. In this sense, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics in the new era are also increasingly moving toward the center of the world think tank stage.

### 3.2 Bidirectional Construction of Universality and Individuality

“New think tanks with Chinese characteristics” must both reflect the general laws and era characteristics of modern think tank development and demonstrate the actual needs of the socialist development stage with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Thus, the context of “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” contains two dimensions: the individual “Chinese characteristics” and the universal modern think tank. In other words, strengthening the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics has a dual task: serving government public decision-making and reflecting the characteristics of China’s institu-

tional construction system. Serving decision-making is the basic responsibility and core function of think tanks. Think tank research must take government difficulties as research topics, specific development issues as research themes, and reflecting interest demands as research orientation, using theoretical research to discover laws and knowledge to provide policy advice and solve problems, meeting the needs of scientific and democratic policy-making. The “characteristics” of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics reflect the essential differences between Chinese think tanks and Western think tanks. The nature of China as a socialist country under the leadership of the Communist Party of China determines the uniqueness of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics in nature, goals, and values. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics must always hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, adhere to the guidance of classic Marxist theory and the Party’s innovative theory, take the practical missions and public policies of the new era as research objects, serve Party and government decision-making as their purpose, and always maintain public welfare. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics emphasize the leadership of the Communist Party of China, emphasize speaking with China’s voice, injecting Chinese elements, and providing Chinese solutions, contributing wisdom to modernizing the national governance system and governance capabilities and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It should be clear that the development of modern Chinese think tanks should take “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” as the carrier, while “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics” also expand the extension of modern think tanks in the world sense. From this perspective, the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics has four characteristics:

- (1) Unity of independence and dependence. Independence means that think tanks, as institutions composed of professional talents, are independently established and operated, possessing relative autonomy in research objects, research methods, and development goals. Independence ensures the objectivity and scientificity of think tank construction. Since their inception, modern think tanks have always maintained relatively independent value character and free and conscious scientific spirit, enabling action strategies to have a deep and solid theoretical foundation, original theories proposed to withstand practical tests, and launched achievements to show the height of era development. Dependence means that modern think tanks have direct connections with government departments and are led and managed by government departments in terms of funding, topics, and achievement transformation. Independence does not mean opposition. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics cannot be unconstrained and maverick either. The foundation of China’s political, economic, cultural, and management systems in the new era determines that new think tanks with Chinese characteristics are a unity of independence and dependence. They show independence in research concepts, methods, and operational approaches, while showing non-independence in political direction, research topics, achievement use, and funding support.

- (2) Unity of academic and policy-oriented nature. Academic nature refers to the systematic, theoretical, and professional qualities formed by think tank experts in exploring profound knowledge and pursuing truth, reflected in the knowledge structure, research methods, and research values of think tank experts. Only with academic nature as the premise can think tank research ensure the knowledge-based, scientific, and guiding nature of decision-making. Policy-oriented nature means, on the one hand, that think tank experts must fully understand the operation mechanisms and governance mechanisms of Party and government organs, understand the full cycle and full process of decision-making, and understand the policy background and policy foundation of research topics. On the other hand, it means that think tanks take public policy research and formulation as the paradigm in project establishment, performance evaluation, and achievement publication, making think tank results closer to policy needs and often customizing research projects to meet actual policy demands. In short, policy-oriented nature is what Daniel Lerner (1927-1980) called “policy relevance,” or in Confucian terms, “statecraft.” It can be seen that both attributes are indispensable for think tank development. Academic nature ensures the objectivity and regularity of think tanks, while policy-oriented nature ensures the feasibility and purposefulness of think tank research. “New think tanks must not only conduct applied counter-measure research but also provide new ideas, new knowledge, and new strategies, promoting academic research to be practical and benefit the people” [20].
- (3) Unity of market and planning nature. Market nature indicates that think tank resource allocation should follow the law of value and operate more according to quasi-market methods. For example, think tanks need to grasp and meet client needs; achievement output is required to be proportional to funding; competition mechanisms are introduced among think tanks; certain affairs can be outsourced through purchase of services. Planning nature means that in the early stages of think tank construction, when they are not highly developed, planning mechanisms and means are still needed in fund allocation, topic setting, and achievement application. In the initial stage of new think tank construction, the use of planning methods can better promote the realization of think tank functions. In fact, the vast majority of existing think tanks in China belong to public institutions or are transformed from universities and other research institutions. They lack competition among each other and institutional vitality. To improve the policy research level of think tanks, it is necessary to make full use of planning means to improve the precise governance mechanism of think tanks and, more importantly, to build a quasi-market platform, activate and strengthen competition mechanisms, and improve resource allocation efficiency. Thus, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics must adhere to the socialist path with Chinese characteristics in direction, obey and serve Party leadership organizationally, “actively adapt to the exter-

nal business environment in operation, cross-border develop some think tank market businesses, and reflect the market tension and market choice of think tank products” [21], take publication income, conference activity funds, and think tank product benefits as important sources of income, and simultaneously improve modernization, standardization, and legalization in management, gradually moving toward healthy market competition.

- (4) Unity of public welfare and profitability. Public welfare means that think tanks provide knowledge and wisdom achievements free of charge for the public interest. Profitability means that think tanks obtain certain material returns through the supply of knowledge and intellectual achievements. Theoretically, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics must “be non-profit research and consulting institutions that take strategic issues and public policies as the main research objects and serve the scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making of the Party and government” [22]. However, under market competition, resource contention, and information noise, think tanks that are completely detached from material interests find it difficult to ensure the smooth progress of their research work. Profitability largely belongs to the byproduct of the public welfare nature of think tanks. First, it is to maintain the normal operation and sustainable development of the institution and continuously strengthen it, requiring certain funds to supplement fiscal appropriations, especially for some social think tanks (civil think tanks). Second, it is to mobilize employee enthusiasm and reflect the value of knowledge and profession. Therefore, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics must achieve a balance between serving as their purpose and obtaining benefits. They should take profitability as an important driving force and evaluation index for improving research quality and level, promoting the rapid and healthy development of think tanks, while adhering to public welfare, not forgetting the original intention of service, and avoiding moving toward “profit-only” and blindly pursuing “quick, flat, and fast” development.

### 3.3 Organic Connection with Governance Modernization

In addition to understanding the connotation of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics from the perspective of their internal forms and specific patterns, we should also understand them with external systems, mechanisms, and policies as reference frames. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee proposed the major strategic task of modernizing the national governance system and governance capabilities. As an important strategic deployment, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics directly or indirectly affect the development process of this major strategic task. Governance modernization also promotes and facilitates the formation and improvement of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. The organic integration and internal 契合 of “wisdom” and “governance” are mainly reflected in:

- (1) New think tanks with Chinese characteristics meet the demands of gover-

nance modernization for authoritative and pluralistic knowledge through specialization and diversification. The arrival of the globalization era has made public governance issues show a trend of pluralistic differentiation. The goal of “pluralistic co-governance” in governance modernization and the limitations of knowledge structure and thinking patterns of subjects such as government, market, or society may make it difficult to effectively address these issues, even leading to decision-making errors or governance failures. This makes specialized knowledge and authoritative information extremely necessary, and think tanks, as gathering places for these two elements, become an inevitable direction. With diversified and stable professional research, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics actively respond to the complex and pluralistic decision-making consultation needs in governance modernization, becoming one of the important subjects in governance modernization.

- (2) New think tanks with Chinese characteristics meet the demands of governance modernization for integrated and systematic governance through systematization and comprehensiveness. Public governance issues not only show pluralistic characteristics but also show a trend of complexity. In the process of public governance, a problem situation often involves multiple causes, and each cause has countless connections with others. Therefore, problems often appear in the form of “sets” in public governance, presenting a chaotic state of intricate complexity. Thus, comprehensively applying various disciplinary knowledge and analyzing research with systematic thinking is crucial. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics, which gather multidisciplinary knowledge, information, and talent, have the advantages of comprehensiveness and systematization in addressing public governance issues, laying a solid talent foundation and knowledge foundation for governance modernization.
- (3) New think tanks with Chinese characteristics meet the demands of governance modernization for innovative and dynamic governance through dynamism and innovation. The pluralistic and complex development of public governance issues not only makes new governance problems emerge frequently but also causes old problems to undergo heterogeneous changes, causing empirical governance methods to face functional disorders. Due to factors such as concepts, ideas, status, and thinking inertia, traditional governance subjects find it difficult to update governance habits, making governance actions less effective. As “idea banks” and “brainstorming pools,” think tanks have strong innovation advantages. New think tanks with Chinese characteristics further advocate enriching knowledge, information, and talent reserves, having more stable, professional, scientific, and objective research conditions. As specialized governance research institutions, they can continuously and accurately track relevant issues and make timely and effective responses. These characteristics of think tanks, with new thinking, new technologies, and new methods, actively respond to the dynamic changes in governance issues, endowing governance mod-

ernization with sustained and powerful intellectual momentum.

A strong system of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics is a direct and important indicator of governance modernization. The development and transformation of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics promote the pace of governance modernization. Similarly, governance modernization also forces the internal innovation of Chinese think tanks, continuously pushing them toward the “new” direction. The two influence and support each other, jointly forming a pluralistic governance and collaborative governance system.

In summary, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics inherit and develop the fine attributes of traditional think tanks, combining the characteristics, contradictions, and problems of the new era to form a brand-new policy consulting institution and system. New think tanks are problem-oriented, take producing achievements as the primary goal, effectively enhance the ability to serve decision-making, and actively explore the path of high-quality development. They conduct in-depth research on a series of major domestic and international issues, strive to promote research results into decision-making and practice, and transform them into development achievements and people’s welfare. We have reason to believe that facing the unprecedented domestic and international situation in a century and the complex and sophisticated modern social system in contemporary China, new think tanks with Chinese characteristics will certainly demonstrate more innovative development concepts and more scientific governance mechanisms, fully displaying the “latecomer advantage” [23] of China’s think tank construction.

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## **New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics: Appearance Logic, Operation Mechanism and Basic Paradigm**

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### **Abstract:**

**[Purpose/Significance]** There are few researches on meta-theoretical issues such as the appearance logic, operation mechanism and basic paradigm of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics in academic circles, so this research has strong originality and knowledge contribution. **[Method/Process]** This paper comprehensively applies the knowledge of knowledge sociology, knowledge politics, management science and Marxist principles to explain the theoretical logic, era logic, value logic and related operation mechanism and paradigm characteristics of the appearance of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. **[Result/Conclusion]** The new think tanks with Chinese characteristics appear in the specific background of the transformation of knowledge production mode, the renewal of era context and the value expression of “people-centered” and “community with a shared future for mankind”. Its practical operation takes knowledge as its essence and core power, and is driven by the dynamic complementarity of knowledge and power and the coupling of knowledge and capital. The new think tanks with Chinese characteristics enrich and expand the connotation of contemporary think tanks from the perspectives of the dual context of time and space, the two-way dimension of universality and individuality, and the interactive relationship with the modernization of governance, forming a preliminary outline and basic paradigm of Chinese think tanks in the new era.

**Keywords:** new think tanks with Chinese characteristics; knowledge; power; capital

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

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