

## Comparison of Operation Mechanism of Think Tank between Chinese and American Universities

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**Keywords:** China; United States; University Think Tank; Operating Mechanism

**Abstract:** As an important part of the new think tank with Chinese characteristics, university think tanks play an important role in policy analysis, consultation and social services. However, compared with the college think tanks in United States, the construction of China's college think tanks is still in the initial stage, and there are still many problems that need to be improved, especially its organizational operation mechanism. Therefore, this paper compares the development of think tanks in China and the United States from the three aspects of talents, funds and operation management, and then comes up with some countermeasures and suggestions for the development of think tanks of Chinese university.

The university think tank is an academic research organization established in universities that is independent of traditional departments and specializes in policy research. It produces policy knowledge and policy ideas, cultivates policy research talents, and influences the process of policy formulation and implementation through knowledge transformation <sup>[1]</sup>. The operation mechanism of think tanks is the internal function and operation mode of the existence and development of think tanks, as well as the basic criterion and corresponding institution to guide and restrict the operation behavior of people, finance and materials of think tanks. Lack of efficient operation mechanism, no matter how high-quality factor resources cannot be converted into the competence of think tanks <sup>[2]</sup>. The enlarged meeting of the National Council of High-End Think Tanks held on February 24, 2017 further emphasized "deepening the innovation of institutional mechanisms and seeking to form a management operation mechanism that conforms to the law of decision-making consultation and reflects the characteristics of think tanks." Compared with developed countries, the think tanks in Chinese universities are still in the initial stage, and there are still many aspects for the operation of think tanks that need to be improved. Policy research is not closely related to reality, and the quantity and quality of results are unbalanced. The modernization of think tank operation mechanism in universities has become a top priority for the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. We should absorb the advantages of the construction of the operation mechanism of university think tanks in developed countries to improve and develop the operation mechanism of university think tanks in China, and build the operation mechanism framework of the modernization of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, the following article will compare the construction of think tanks in China and the United States from the three aspects of scientific researchers, funds and operation management of the operation mechanism of think tanks in universities, and then make forward-looking suggestions for the construction of domestic university think tanks to promote the construction and development of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

### Comparison of the Operation Mechanism of Think Tanks between China and the United States

According to the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (2017) compiled by the University of Pennsylvania Think Tank Research Project (TTCSP), which is the most authoritative global think tank ranking report in the world. There are 1872 think tanks in the United States, ranking first in the number of think tanks in the world, among which think tanks linked to universities account for

about 75%. In terms of quantity and quality, the development of think tanks in American universities is the top in the world. This paper selects the think tanks in American universities to compare with the operation mechanism of think tanks in domestic universities, and proposes suggestions for the development of Chinese think tanks.

**Talent Management Mechanism for Think Tanks.** Man is both the carrier and the subject of knowledge. The knowledge background, knowledge accumulation and ability of talent are very important for the development of university think tanks<sup>[3]</sup>. The selection criteria for think tanks in U.S. universities is "selecting talents by talents" and adopt open recruitment to recruit people from different academic, political, and religious backgrounds. Such different academic backgrounds and different ideas are the important guarantee for the vitality of think tanks. The composition of its personnel is a Matrix Structure. On the one hand, all researchers are grouped according to the subject category of their knowledge. On the other hand, research groups are established according to research subject.

Most of the staff in the think tanks of Chinese universities are part-time researchers from the scientific research and teaching units of traditional schools and departments. Most of them have their own academic interests and research directions, and take the research and teaching of the original units as the main business. Take the International Strategy Institute of Peking University as an example. Most of the experts in the Institute are professors from the school of international relations of Peking University, with similar academic background and political background. In this way, although it can come up with a profound conclusion of a certain specialty, it cannot be discussed from multiple perspectives, and the practicality of the conclusion is worth verifying. Moreover, in the talent pool of think tanks in universities, most of them are theoretical researchers, while few of them are countermeasure researchers, which deviates from the purpose of the construction of think tanks in universities to provide countermeasures and suggestions for the government.

**Fund-Raising Mechanism for Think Tanks.** Capital is the foundation of think tanks and the core of their development. The adequacy of funds determines the quality and quantity of research in a think tank<sup>[4]</sup>. At present, think tanks in American universities have opened up multiple fund-raising mechanisms, including foundation support, individual donation, government support, company sponsorship and obtaining funds through publication sales, meetings, course training and consulting services, and sometimes through credit to carry out research on some core projects. Such a diversified fund-raising mechanism not only ensures the normal operation of think tanks, but also ensures the independence of think tanks, without having to rely on a certain source of funds alone, thereby ensuring the independence of university think tanks.

In our country, university think tanks are mostly official or semi-official, because of their nature, the funding sources of China's university think tanks are mainly government support. Government support has its advantages, the stability of funding sources will not be as volatile as social sponsorship and individual donations, and it will have its advantages in terms of long-term development stability. However, the single source of funds will cause universities think tanks to lose their independence, which is mainly reflected in the selection of staff and the choice of subjects. In the selection and recruitment of staff, they will pay more attention to its political background, and ensure the consistency of political background. Talents with "dissenting" political background but high academic attainment will not be adopted, which is a blow to the talent team of University think tanks to some extent. In terms of options, they would be guided by the government's policies. The government's most important concern at this stage must also be the research center of university think tanks. To a certain extent, issues that are of research value but that the government does not care about will be ignored.

**Think Tank Operation Management Mechanism.** To provide high-quality decision-making knowledge, think tanks must respect science and choose scientific and standardized consulting and research methods and procedures. This requires the management of the production and creation process of knowledge (i.e. decision-making and analysis process)<sup>[5]</sup>.

Well-known American think tanks have established a set of strict project and research

procedures in project management. From the perspective of business processes, the research topics of think tanks are basically commissioned consulting, which can be divided into six phases: signing phase, consulting preparation phase, research analysis phase, report completion phase, results review phase, and results submission phase. At each stage, the client and the consultant always maintain the exchange of ideas and cooperation, ensuring the smooth flow of information exchange between the two parties, timely ensuring the needs of the consultant, and making targeted recommendations.

In China, the relationship between universities and the government is not very close. In the meantime, it is "a loose relationship, lacking the tightness of the connection, the channels of information exchange and communication are not smooth, and the phenomenon of information asymmetry exists<sup>[6]</sup>." The result of this situation is that university think tanks cannot understand the consultation information of government departments in a timely manner, therefore they cannot provide targeted policy recommendations, and government cannot obtain the excellent research achievements of university think tanks for their own use.

### **Enlightenment of the Operation Mechanism of American University Think Tanks**

**Optimizing Talent Management Mechanism.** The governments at all levels should take the building of talent teams as the main goal of think tank construction, and make a thorough plan selecting and training talents. We will build talent pool of decision-making consultants, policy communicators and think tank management experts by supporting various forms of capacity-building, such as on-the-job training, project training, exchange at home and abroad, interdisciplinary training and text writing training. We should actively build and expand think tank revolving doors, recommend more think tank experts and scholars to join and serve in government departments, and arrange more government staff to join and serve in think tanks, so as to effectively improve the capacity of think tanks. It is necessary to deepen the reform of the employment system of think tank talent, such as set up think tank research positions in university think tanks, and attract some resigned officials, enterprise executives and foreign experts to participate in think tank research projects in the form of special appointment and flexible talent introduction. Enrich the academic and political backgrounds of the staff in the research team of university think tanks, and form a diversified exchange situation.

**Diversified Fund-Raising Mechanism.** Based on the official and semi-official nature of Chinese university think tanks, we can establish a diversified fund-raising mechanism which is mainly supported by government funding, supplemented by social sponsorship and individual donations. First of all, governments at all levels should further increase the supply of funds to think tanks, and formulate fiscal and financial policies that support the development of think tanks, and improve the investment mechanism of coordinating competitive funds and stable support funds. According to the nature and characteristics of different types of think tanks, research and formulate different support methods. Secondly, we will explore the establishment of think tank development funds, implement the public welfare donation system, and encourage enterprises, social organizations and individuals to donate to fund think tank construction. By constructing a scientific funding mechanism, high-quality achievements and high-end talents can obtain intellectual returns with market competitiveness, and attract the best researchers to serve for the country.

**Establish Long-Term Communication Channels between Universities and Governments.** We should establish a communication channel between the university and the government to maintain the relationship between universities and the government. The decision-making departments of the government can regularly release information on consultation needs and establish institutionalized conference and negotiation procedures, and use regular meetings to communicate with universities on specific policy issues and attract university think tanks to participate in the process of public policy formulation. At the same time, we can also establish a data sharing platform between the government and universities. The government regularly uploads relevant data in the procedures, then university think tanks apply to the government for shared data on the scope of research topics in accordance with a certain procedure. So that the university think

tank can extract and improve the scientific city and research quality of the consultation report. In addition, college think tanks with higher abilities can try to establish specialized institutions for external communication, publicize their research achievements externally, strengthen communication with governments, enterprises and other organizations and obtain external information.

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