

# Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks' Policy Influence: A Case Study on the Influence Mechanism of CIIS and SIIS over BRI Policymaking\*

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## ABSTRACT

As China is intensifying its policymaking activities on the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), its foreign policy think tanks' contributions become more prominent, and their policy influence deserves a meticulous scrutiny. Starting out from a theoretic paradigm of “field of power” and an analytical framework of “policymaking pendulum between horizontal and vertical fragmentation,” this paper conducts a case study on the central-level China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) and the provincial-level Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), analyzing the mechanism of their influence over China's BRI policymaking through a focus on their relevant meetings, so as to evaluate their connections with four “subfields” (politics, business, academia, and media) of China's “field of power,” particularly their relations with political leadership and policymakers. It reveals that, while CIIS enjoys more advantages and is more closely connected to some parts of the central-level policymakers than SIIS, the links of SIIS with central ministries are still more intimate than its contacts with provincial policymakers. This reveals that China's power and resources for BRI-related policymaking are largely concentrated within central and top leadership, which might be further strengthened by the latest round of adjustment on central party and state institutions initiated in March 2018. Furthermore, the links of CIIS and SIIS with business, academia, and media are varied. The policy influence mechanism of Chinese foreign policy think tanks deserves more scholarly attentions and further detailed case analysis in future.

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\* This article is part of the output of three research projects on think tank studies supported by the Education Commission of the Shanghai Municipal Government, the Shanghai Municipal Office for the Planning of Philosophy and Social Sciences, and China's Education Ministry, respectively. (The registration numbers of these three projects are: 13YJCGJW013, 2012FGJ001, and 13ZS048.)

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**Keywords:** Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks, BRI, Policy Influence Mechanism, CIIS, SIIS, Field of Power, Policymaking Pendulum, Horizontal and Vertical Fragmentation

## **La influencia de los think tanks chinos: Un caso de estudio acerca de los mecanismos de CIIS y SIIS en la creación de políticas de BRIZNA**

### RESUMEN

Mientras China está intensificando sus actividades de creación de políticas en la “Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta” (BRI), sus think tanks de política exterior se hacen más prominentes y su influencia política se merece un escrutinio meticuloso. Partiendo de un paradigma teórico de “campo de poder” y un marco analítico de “péndulo de formulación de políticas entre la fragmentación horizontal y vertical”, este documento realiza un estudio de caso sobre el Instituto de Estudios Internacionales de China (CIIS) de nivel central y el Instituto de Estudios Internacionales de Shanghai (SIIS), analizando el mecanismo de su influencia sobre la formulación de políticas BRI de China a través de un enfoque en sus reuniones relevantes, para evaluar sus conexiones con cuatro “subcampos” (política, negocios, academia y medios) de El “campo de poder” de China, particularmente sus relaciones con el liderazgo político y los responsables políticos. Revela que, si bien CIIS disfruta de más ventajas y está más estrechamente relacionado con algunas partes de los encargados de formular políticas a nivel central que SIIS, los vínculos de SIIS con los ministerios centrales son aún más íntimos que sus contactos con los encargados de formular políticas provinciales. Esto revela que el poder y los recursos de China para la formulación de políticas relacionadas con BRIZNA se concentran en gran medida dentro del liderazgo central y superior, lo que podría fortalecerse aún más con la última ronda de ajustes sobre el partido central y las instituciones estatales iniciadas en marzo de 2018. Además, los vínculos de CIIS y SIIS con empresas, academia y medios son variados. El mecanismo de influencia política de los think tanks de política exterior de China merece más atención académica y análisis de casos más detallados en el futuro.

**Palabras Clave:** Think tanks de política exterior china, BRIZNA, mecanismo de influencia política, CIIS, SIIS, campo de poder, péndulo de formulación de políticas, fragmentación horizontal y vertical

# 中国外交政策智库的政策影响：一项关于CIIS和SIIS对BRI决策影响机制的案例分析

## 摘要

随着中国关于“一带一路倡议”（BRI）的决策活动日益频繁，国内智库在外交政策方面的贡献日益突出，智库的政策影响值得仔细研究。本文从“权力场”的理论范式和“决策在水平与垂直划分之间摇摆”的分析框架出发，对中国国际问题研究院(CIIS)（中央级）和上海国际问题研究院(SIIS)（省级）进行了案例分析。本文通过聚焦研究院的相关会议，分析了研究院对中国BRI决策的影响机制，从而评估了其与中国“权力场”四大“子领域”(政治、商业、学术、媒体)之间的关系，尤其是其与政治领导人和政策制定者之间的关系。本文表明，虽然与SIIS相比，CIIS具有更多的优势，并且与部分中央决策者的联系更为紧密，但SIIS与中央各部门的联系比起其与省级决策者的联系仍然更为密切。这说明，中国在BRI决策方面的权力和资源大部分集中在中央和高层领导，而2018年3月启动的中央党政机关最新一轮调整可能会进一步加强这一局面。此外，CIIS和SIIS与商业、学术界、媒体之间的联系也各有不同。中国外交政策智库的政策影响机制值得今后更多学者的关注和进一步详细的案例分析。

关键词：中国外交政策智库，一带一路倡议（BRI），政策影响机制，中国国际问题研究院(CIIS)，上海国际问题研究院(SIIS)，权力场，决策摇摆，水平与垂直划分

## 1. Introduction

The world around China is becoming ever more complex and fluid. On the one hand, the United States and Europe are increasingly defensive in trade and more negative toward the current system of globalization and global governance, taking tougher measures to impede the inflow of China's products and investment; on the other hand, China's peripheral areas turn out to be ever more destabilized, continuously disrupted by unpredictable contingencies ranging from North Korea issues to maritime skirmishes for territorial claims. Overwhelmed by these unprecedented challenges, Chinese policymakers and political elites increasingly depend on foreign policy think tanks for more information and advice. This may help to explain the "fever" to "construct new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics" that has been emerging since early 2015.

China's foreign policy think tanks form a community of many foreign policy research institutions belonging to different components of China's overall political regime and policymaking system. Among them, two of the most elite ones deserve the most attention and intensive research. Both of them belong to China's "foreign affairs system," the government section within China's executive system mandated for and specialized in handling foreign policy-related issues, but they are affiliated to central and provincial-level government, respectively. One is the China Institute of

International Studies (CIIS), a direct subsidiary of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOF), while the other one is the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), a think tank fully financed by Shanghai Municipal Government, a provincial-level government in China. Therefore, these two think tanks constitute a relatively complete picture of China's elite foreign policy think tanks within China's foreign policymaking system.

From late 2014 to March 2015, the "Belt and Road initiative" (BRI) was formally established by China's central government as a long-term strategic framework guiding China's policy for foreign relations and global governance over the next decade. Naturally, both the CIIS and SIIS play an active and important role in the process of formulating this initiative. Their interactions with political leadership and other components of China's foreign policymaking regime on the BRI issues may offer an interesting window to observe some of the most revealing features of think tanks' influence over China's foreign policymaking. Therefore, this paper conducts a case study on the CIIS and SIIS, observing the mechanism in which they interact with and pose influence on China's political system and policymaking regime over BRI issues, with a purpose to clarify some characteristics. It is intended that, by publishing this paper, a more detailed picture can be drawn on Chinese foreign policy think tanks' role in policymaking, with improved theoretic depth and empirical precision.

## **2. A Review of Literature on Chinese Think Tanks and China's Policymaking**

### **2.1 The Literature on Chinese Think Tank Studies**

#### *The Chinese-Western Differentiation on Chinese Think Tank Studies*

The current literature on Chinese think tanks reveals several differences between Chinese domestic scholars and western scholars (including overseas Chinese scholars): **(1) A Differentiation of Research Fields and Domains.** Domestic scholars aim at displaying a panoramic picture of various types of Chinese think tanks embedded in China's complex public administration system, whereas western scholars mainly concentrate on Chinese foreign policy think tanks, hoping to precisely define their relevance in foreign policymaking. **(2) A Divergence of Paradigms and Perspectives.** Domestic scholars analyze Chinese think tanks' inherent characteristics, interpreting their social nature as government advisors or public advocates. In other words, they are more focused on ontological issues. On the other hand, western scholars approach this field through an epistemological lens of Chinese foreign policy. They highlight Chinese foreign policy think tanks' interactions with China's top leadership, painstakingly tracing their imprints in top-level politics, with a particular interest on their channels and means to exert influence. **(3) A Disparity of Methodology.** Domestic scholars adopt more quantitative-oriented methodologies of sociology and

public administration to carry out their analyses, while most western scholars prefer to employ qualitative-oriented skills of foreign policy analysis and political science.

#### *Domestic Scholars' Research on Chinese Think Tanks*

Domestic scholars' research of Chinese think tanks has several characteristics. **First**, they often take the paradigms of elitism and technocracy theories as their starting point for describing think tanks' social status in China, emphasizing their special social status and explaining the significance of their development in China's strive for scientific transformation of its policymaking (Wang and Zhang 2003; Zhu 2008, 2013a, 2013b). **Second**, the sociological and philosophical paradigms and perspectives, such as "social capital," "social space," and "public sphere," are frequently employed to explain the advantages that Chinese think tanks enjoy when they are participating in China's policy process and bringing their policy influence (Xu 2012; Xin 2017;). **Third**, well-structured and rigorously-designed surveys are constantly employed as a means to collect vast quantities of data and establish statistical models. Based on these models, their pictures of Chinese think tanks become more distinctive ( Xu 2012; Zhu 2008).

#### *Western and Overseas Chinese Scholars' Research on Chinese Think Tanks*

The observations by western and overseas Chinese scholars on Chinese think tanks form a three-stage process in pace with China's social and political transi-

tion. **(1) In 1980s**, when China began to push forward reform and opening, western scholars already noticed Chinese think tanks, particularly foreign policy think tanks (Halpern 1988; Ok- senberg 1982; Shambaugh 1987; Weaver 1989). **(2) During the 1990s and 2000s**, as China became increasingly integrated into globalization through its dramatic acceleration of market-oriented reform since 1992 and its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, think tanks began to emerge as a unique force shaping China's policymaking process. Western scholars intensified their research in this field substantially. Their enormous interests and efforts were exemplified by the No. 171 issue of the *China Quarterly* in 2002, which was completely occupied by western scholars' articles of Chinese think tank studies (Glaser et al. 2002; Faulkner 2007). **(3) Since the 2008 world financial crisis**, as China's external environment became unprecedentedly complex and fluid, China's political leadership inevitably created an even more urgent demand for high-quality policy advice. Therefore, think tanks' role appears more crucial, and western scholars, especially experts of elite think tanks, come to be more absorbed to this field (Jakobson and Knox 2010;

Li 2017; Menegazzi 2018; Paltiel 2010; Abb 2012, 2013).

While Chinese scholars are more skillful at technical analysis, western scholars mostly embed their research into macro-level analytical frameworks on China's political regime. Based on this distinctiveness, western scholars proposed several acute and enlightening perspectives, which are seldom mentioned by Chinese scholars. **(1)** They emphasized the outstanding significance of a "small leading group" in China's foreign policymaking and took an attempt to clarify its connections with think tanks (Glaser 2012; Glaser and Saunders 2002; Jeremy 2010; Shambaugh 2002). **(2)** They regard "stove-piping"<sup>2</sup> as a permanent feature of Chinese policymaking system and use this concept to sketch the contours of the mechanism within which think tanks may bring influence (Glaser 2012; Glaser and Saunders 2002; Shambaugh 2002; Tanner 2002; Gill and Mulvenon, 2002). **(3)** They give high credit to personal connections (*guanxi*) in assessments of Chinese think tanks' foreign policy relevance. Some scholars analyzed think tanks' channels of patronage from Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang and Zhu Rongji in 1980s and 1990s (Halpern 1988; Lampton 2002; Naughton

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2 "Stove-Piping" is a special term referring to the strong vertical control in China's executive system. Usually, China's ministries in the State Council possess enormous resources. They take direct control and have assertive commands over provincial-level ministries of the same field, while the provincial ministries can directly command the city-level functional government institutions of the same field. This kind of vertical top-to-bottom command chain is an outstanding feature of Chinese policymaking system, just like the pipes of stove that extend from top to bottom in vertical lines. U.S. experts of Chinese studies already noticed this feature as early as late 1960s and early 1970s. They lent the term "stove-piping" from the discipline of intelligence analysis to mention this feature. The earliest description of this vertical control can be found in Barnett (1967, 72).

2002). Some of them summarized these connections into five major types: family links, common school ties, teacher–student relations, common geographic origins and working relations (Glaser and Saunders 2002; Glaser 2012; Liao 2006; Zhao 2012). Also, some of them conduct their analyses within more general frameworks of elite and informal politics (Dittmer 1995; Jakobson 2010; Nathan 2003; Paltiel 2010; Fewsmith, 1996; Shambaugh 2001). There were also some descriptions of a Chinese style “revolving door” mechanism (Li 2002).

## ***2.2 The Literature on China's Policymaking and Related Political Regime***

It should be pointed out that research of Chinese think tanks can never be alienated from more macroscopic research of China's overall policymaking system within its political regime; otherwise, it may be very difficult to clarify the mechanism as well as the effectiveness of their policy influence. Already there is a large body of literature, mostly written by western and overseas Chinese scholars, on China's overall policymaking system and political regime. This literature can be divided into four categories through the lens of their analytical frameworks.

**(1) The Power Centralization versus Decentralization Dichotomy.** On the one hand, some scholars approach their topics through **the perspective of theories of authoritarianism**, underlining the elements of

power centralization in China's political regime. The most influential idea proposed by them may be the concept of **“fragmented authoritarianism,”** which elaborates the complexity of internal bargaining and deals that make the overall system appear to be authoritarian but fragmented (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Mertha 2009). In addition, some of them raised the ideas of **“consultative authoritarianism”** (Harding 1986), or **“consultative Leninism”** (Tsang 2009). On the other hand, other scholars deal with their issues from **the perspective of theories of federalism**, more assertively stressing the collaborative aspects of China's political regime. They coined the terms of **“de facto federalism”** (Zheng 2007), **“informal federalism”** (Segal 1994), or **“Federalism, Chinese style”** (Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1995).

**(2) The Central–Local Gaming in China's National Policy Process.** The central–local relationship is particularly complex and fluid in such a huge polity as China. It is embedded in a vertical–horizontal gridlock of command and control chains over below-central-level government institutions, with the command chains originating from central ministerial leadership termed as “vertical line” and the directives flowing from below-central-level party committee or government leadership to specific institutions of the same level defined as “horizontal line.” Particularly, there is a “dual leadership” over Chinese governmental institutions, including most foreign policy think tanks.<sup>3</sup> This fea-

3 “Dual Leadership” refers to the crossing of both vertical and horizontal commanding lines on be-

ture attracts both Chinese and western scholars. Since late 1960s, U.S. experts of Chinese studies already noticed the vertical–horizontal crossing of executive command chains, and interpreted this feature as “dual rule” (Schurmann 1973) or “honeycomb model” (Shue 1988).

**(3) The Elitist versus Pluralist Participation in Policy Process.** As China’s reform and opening is pushing forward step by step, a variety of social groups and interests are entering the arena of China’s overall policy process to present their requests and promote their interests. Think tanks are one of the diversity of emerging voices. This pluralizing trend is captured by scholars in their works (Fewsmith 1996; Lampton 2002; Glaser 2010; Mertha 2009; Shue 1988;).

**(4) The Impact from China’s Nomenklatura System on Policymaking.** China may not have a mature “revolving door” mechanism as institutionalized as that in the United States, but there does exist a system of human

resource exchanges that plays a role in shaping China’s policymaking. That is the “nomenklatura” system of Chinese style. Scholars’ analyses of this system reveal some structural features of bureaucratic ways of information gathering and resource exchanges in China’s policymaking system (Fewsmith 1996; Glaser 2010; Harding 1981; Huang 1996; Lu 1997;).

### **3. Guiding Theoretical Paradigm and Analytical Framework**

#### **3.1 The Guiding Theoretical Paradigm**

The conceptual frameworks of current literature on think tanks are largely based on the idea of “social space” and “field of power” proposed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He argued that highly interactive social actors of a political system create a kind of “social space,” within which these actors exchange social capital with each other and form many networks. These net-

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low-central-level governmental institutions (including government-affiliated think tanks) in policymaking and executive operations. For a provincial-level government institution (including provincial government-affiliated think tank), vertical commanding lines extend from the central-level ministries of the State Council or central party apparatus to this institution, transmitting central-level guidance on how to operate its professional work, while horizontal commanding lines extend from provincial party committee and government leadership to that institution and mostly transfer administrative directives on funding, personnel affairs, and some part of professional work. For example, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) is under both a direct control from the Shanghai Municipal Government and a strong guidance from China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOF). (The Shanghai Municipality is a provincial-level unit.) The Shanghai Municipal Government appropriates funds to SIIS annually, determines its personnel appointment affairs, and occasionally gives directives on specific issues related to its research work (termed as “horizontal leadership” in Chinese bureaucratic jargon), while the MOF issues most of the guidance on its research work (termed as “vertical leadership” in Chinese bureaucratic jargon). In the bureaucratic organizational chart, the SIIS is both a subsidiary of the Shanghai Municipal Government with an administrative bureaucratic rank of “bureau” and a knot on a line extending from the top-level pivotal juncture of the MOF in Beijing.



works will gradually become integrated and generate a “field of power.” This “field” covers the whole society and shapes the behavioral models of social actors (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). On the basis of this viewpoint, U.S. sociologist Medvetz defined think tanks as a “central space of the field of power.” In his opinion, the “field of power” consists of four major subfields: politics and bureaucracy, economy, cultural production, and media, and think tanks just form a “central space” between all these subfields. He argued that the boundary of this “central space” is always fluid in synchronization with the changes of the overall “field of power” (Medvetz 2012).

This paper reinterprets Medvetz’s points and establishes a synthesized theoretic paradigm that may work as a guiding paradigm to frame the whole analysis of this paper. Figure 1 gives a panoramic view of this paradigm. As Figure 1 reveals, the whole political regime of China can be interpreted as a three-layered “field of power.” The outer layer is composed of four “sub-fields”: politics, business, academia, and media. The middle layer is made of interactive forces between think tanks and the four subfields of outer layer, which continu-

ously push the exchanges of information and resources between them. This is a dynamic layer largely driven by China’s knowledge regime.<sup>4</sup> The inner layer is the entire system of Chinese think tanks, which has developed into a complex structure containing a variety of institutions,<sup>5</sup> forming a “central space” in the center of the “field of power.”

Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that, within China’s regime, think tanks’ connections with the two “sub-fields” of politics and academia are much closer and tighter than their links to the business and media. In order to build a more accurate perceptual framework to analyze CIIS and SIIS’s policy relevance, it is necessary to take a more focused anatomy on China’s foreign policymaking system.

### ***3.2 China’s Foreign Policymaking System inside “Political Sub-Field”: The Regime Defining the Positions of CIIS and SIIS***

Figure 2 shows China’s overall policymaking system on foreign policy-related issues. In this system, the supreme level of the whole chains of commanding includes the general secretary of Chinese

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4 The author of this paper defines the knowledge regime as an institutionalized mechanism that continuously generates multiple streams of processed policy-related information and data and that heavily influences the perceptions and cognitions of members of policy community. John. L. Campbell made a detailed comparative research on knowledge regime in his work and regarded it as a parallel to production regime and policymaking regime. Details can be found in: Campbell and Pedersen (2014).

5 There are already many categorizations on the types of Chinese think tanks. The author of this paper argues that Chinese think tanks can be divided into five major systems that cover three executive levels. The five major systems are: (1) in-house research organs of party and government; (2) specialized foreign policy think tanks; (3) party school system; (4) academy of social sciences system; and (5) research institutes affiliated to universities. Each of these five think tank systems is distributed across three levels: central, provincial, and below-provincial levels. The details of this categorization can be found in: Xin (2017).

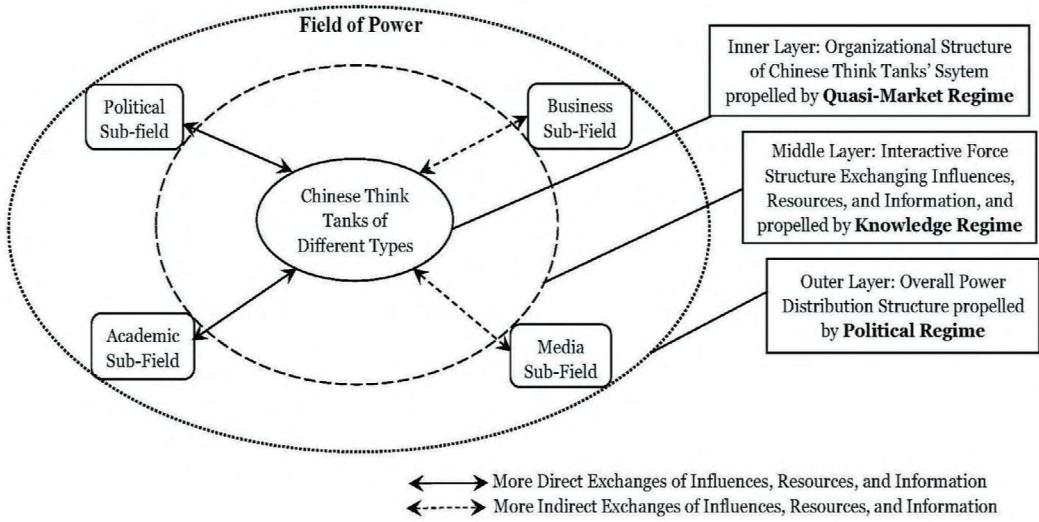


Figure 1: Chinese Think Tanks within China's Field of Power and Multiple Policy Streams

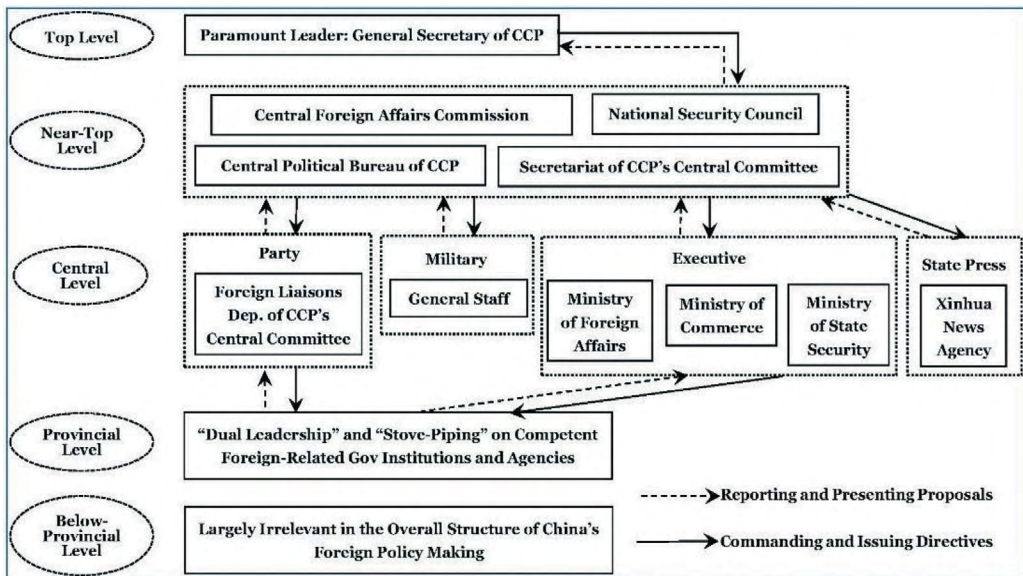


Figure 2: The Overall Foreign Policymaking Regime of China

Communist Party (CCP), the “Central Foreign Affairs Commission”<sup>6</sup> and the “Central Political Bureau” of CCP, which is the concentrated core for final decision making. The central level consists of several structures in parallel for managing specific areas. On this level, the executive structure deals with the bulk of foreign policy-related issues, with MOF operating normal foreign policy and Ministry of Commerce (MOC) responsible for foreign economic issues. Provincial governments have their own institutions that play a function similar to those of MOF and MOC, which are usually named “Provincial Foreign Affairs Office” and “Provincial Commission of Commerce.” Those institutions under the provincial level are largely irrelevant to China’s foreign policymaking.

To a large degree, Chinese foreign policy think tanks get tightly embedded in this highly centralized and hierarchic system. The CIIS is a “central-level” think tank directly affiliated to the MOF and acts as an analyzing hub that disseminates processed information and new policy ideas to MOF leaders, whereas the SIIS is a “provincial-level” think tank affiliated to the Shanghai Municipal Government and under nominal leadership of its foreign affairs office. Their capacities of academic research and policy advice

are deeply shaped by the entrenched “reversed pyramid” pattern of information and resource distribution. To be specific, the lower the level that a foreign policy think tank is located on and the more junior executive status it is granted, the less academic resources and policymaking information it is able to obtain from this system, and the less capacity it may develop to conduct cutting-edge researches on international studies and offer high-quality policy advice that may meet policymakers’ demands. At the same time, unlike some nonofficial think tanks specialized in economic and social policy research, Chinese foreign policy think tanks usually find it very difficult to get substantial nonofficial support from the underdeveloped and immature civil society, because foreign policy issues belong to the “high politics” that is rarely concerned by nongovernmental actors. In other words, the CIIS as a central-level think tank occupies a more advantageous position than the SIIS as a provincial-level think tank.

### ***3.3. “Policymaking Pendulum between Horizontal and Vertical Fragmentations”: Analytical Framework explaining the Dynamic driving CIIS and SIIS’s Interactions with Policymakers***

6 Before March 2018, the “Central Small Leading Group for Foreign Affairs” had been operating as the top-level institution of decision making in the field of China’s foreign policy, which had been controlled by the standing committee of CCP’s central politburo and jointly operated by top leaders of the party and the state. The third plenary meeting of CCP’s 19th central committee issued the “Plan for Deepening the Reform on the Institutions of the Party and the State” during February 26–28, 2018, which stipulates that the “Central Small Leading Group for Foreign Affairs” shall be reorganized and expanded into the “Central Foreign Affairs Commission,” which will still be largely controlled by CCP’s central politburo. This plan was passed by the 1st plenary meeting of 13th National People’s Congress (NPC) of China on March 17, 2018, and put into implementation since then.

China's system is never a monolithic one, because its vast territory is endowed with diverse geographical conditions and imbalanced economic development levels in different provinces as well as sectors. The norm of "fragmented authoritarianism" invented by Lieberthal captures this diversity and imbalance (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988). However, insightful as it is, it may not fully reveal the operational dynamic of this system. This paper argues that, inside China's political system and policymaking regime, there is a "policymaking pendulum" permanent-

ly swaying between the structures and momentums of vertical and horizontal fragmentations. China's foreign policy think tanks, such as the CIIS and SIIS, are embedded in this fluctuating system with their operational activities largely shaped by somewhat cyclical shifts of top leadership's perceptions, preferences, and practices between horizontal and vertical fragmentations. This dynamic process drives both the "dual leadership" and the "stove-piping," two major mechanisms outlining CIIS and SIIS's interactions with political power and their relevant policy influence.

**Table 1:** The Executive Network of China's Foreign Policymaking

Functional divisions Executive hierarchy	The foreign affairs system (System 1)	The foreign economic affairs system (System 2)	The state security system (System 3)
Central level (Level A)	A1	A2	A3
Provincial level (Level B)	B1	B2	B3
Below-provincial level (Level C)	C1	C2	C3

As Table 1 and Figure 3 show, the foreign policy-related executive structure of China includes three competence modules: the foreign affairs system, the foreign economic affairs system, and the state security system. It also contains three hierarchized territorial executive level: the central level, the provincial level, and the below-provincial level. The crisscrossing between these competence modules and executive levels creates a network of information and resource flows that shapes the activities of foreign policymaking

and implementation. In this paper, the gathering of information, resources, and power along the lines of competence modules is defined as "vertical fragmentation," which derives from Chinese bureaucratic jargon of "tiao-tiao," while the convergence along the territorial executive level is defined as "horizontal fragmentation," which derives from Chinese bureaucratic jargon of "kuaikuai."

Records in the past show this dynamic: Whenever the top political lead-

ership felt overly pressed by excessively chaotic and complex internal and external situations that developed beyond its capacity to maintain an efficient control for extracting resources from below, it delegated decision-making power, including the power to take decisions on specific foreign policy-related issues of technical nature, to provincial and even below-provincial level. (Cao, 2011; Chung, 2000; Landry 2008) Then the horizontal fragmentation became more prominent along the executive levels, as the black-lined boxes indicated in Figure 3. In this way, “stove-piping” mechanism would be substantially weakened. More information, resources, and power would flow downward to provincial actors, and the leadership of provincial party and government’s apparatus over provincial think tanks would

be strengthened. Under such circumstances, provincial think tanks might obtain more resources and information horizontally from provincial leadership and consequently, their policy influence would be strengthened in comparison to central-level think tanks. On the other hand, whenever the top leaders felt confident enough to establish a strong domination, or feared a potential unraveling of its control over provinces, it might retrieve the previously delegated power and shifted to recentralization, building up a momentum for vertical fragmentation, as is shown in the dotted-lined boxes in Figure 3. Under such circumstances, “stove-piping” would be strengthened, and the differentiated positions of central and provincial think tanks would get more and more aggravated.

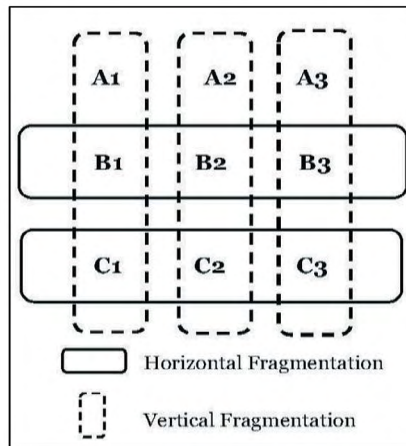


Figure 3: The Horizontal and Vertical Fragmentation of China’s Policymaking

In general, both vertical and horizontal fragmentation coexist at any specific time spot and form a criss-crossed complex “labyrinth” of policymaking and policy influence. The dy-

namic of vertical fragmentation shapes the “stove-piping” because it drives the division of power and resources along functional competence of ministerial system. Meanwhile, the dynamic of

horizontal fragmentation checks the inherent balance of “dual leadership” because it helps to concentrate more power and resources along the provincial and below-provincial lines of governing apparatus. Moreover, for most of the time, central-level ministries and institutions are not directly connected to “horizontal fragmentation” structure because they perch on the highest level of territorial executive administration and are directly controlled by the party’s top-level apparatus. CIIS and SIIS’s interactions with policymakers are largely structured by this oscillating dynamic, and their positions and policy influences evolve forward in pace with this cyclic sway. This crisscrossed pattern largely builds the macro “field of power” within which the CIIS and SIIS operate.

#### **4. The Influence of the CIIS and SIIS on BRI Policymaking: An Empirical Study with a Focus on Their Meetings**

The “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) originated from President Xi Jinping’s speech in Kazakhstan in September 2013. During late 2013 and the whole year of 2014, this idea of constructing a China-led multi-lateral cooperative network connecting East Asia littoral with European coasts became constantly amplified, specified and substantiated, with China’s top leadership coming to view it as a grand blueprint that may guide China’s foreign economic relations in the future. On March 28, 2015, MOF, MOC, and the National Development and Reform

Commission (NDRC) jointly issued a document named “*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*,” which was the first comprehensive policy document for the BRI. During the most part of 2015 and the whole year of 2016, Chinese government engaged in negotiating with foreign countries for feasible frameworks of bilateral BRI cooperation, such as the “16+1” mechanism for infrastructure-building collaborations between China and Central and Eastern Europe, and establishing new institutions in support of BRI, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in May 2017 signals a peak in Chinese authority’s policymaking activities on BRI issues.

Because of the BRI’s special significance, the influence of CIIS and SIIS on China’s BRI policymaking can offer a typical case depicting the structural features of China’s policymaking system and Chinese foreign policy think tanks’ role and position in it. Nevertheless, due to the difficulty of gathering accurate data, it is not quite possible to draw a panoramic picture that portrays all the means and channels employed by CIIS and SIIS to influence BRI policymaking, nor is it practicable to take precise calculations on the effectiveness of these two think tanks’ policy influence. This paper aims at analyzing a single form regularly used by CIIS and SIIS to interact with and deal an impact on policymaking system: think tank meeting. This is because every Chinese think tank tends to keep a record of its

meetings as a straightforward certification of its research capacity and influence, so the data of meeting is easy to be observed.

#### ***4.1 The Significance of CIIS and SIIS Meetings in Their Policy Influence***

Among many ways and means employed by CIIS and SIIS to push their policy influences, meeting may be the most special one because it can reveal the structural characteristics and operating dynamic of China's "field of power" in a most concise way through its functions. Specifically speaking, it has three major functions:

(1) Platforms for Exchanges of Policy-Related Information and Resources. As Figure 1 indicates, Chinese think tanks, including CIIS and SIIS, form a "central space" between four subfields of China's "field of power." The participants of CIIS and SIIS meetings are elites of China's foreign policy community within the four subfields, and particularly from politics and academia. So, CIIS and SIIS meetings can act as a regular and concentrated platform facilitating and propelling the direct or indirect exchanges of resources and information between these actors.

(2) Channels for Transmitting Concerns and Requests of Domestic Social Groups to Policymakers. As China is deeply integrated to the world, the vital interests of various domestic social groups are increasingly impacted or even shaped by foreign policy, so they become more and more concerned with foreign policy issues. So far China has not established an open and institution-

alized system of political lobbying and interest group politics, but think tank meetings on some important occasions may offer channels for some social groups to let their voices be heard by high-level policymakers and their interest requests and concerns communicated to political leaders. As Tables 3–5 reveal, Chinese business interests have become more actively involved in CIIS and SIIS meetings than previously, because they can directly talk to high-level officials or even top leaders about their concerns, requests, and opinions on these meetings.

(3) Hub of Networking. Many meetings of CIIS and SIIS have become institutionalized as a kind of mechanism to regularly connect different sectors of China's foreign policy community. Large-scaled annual forums and workshop programs operate as networks and platforms to connect actors of the whole foreign policy community, particularly those from important business interests, academic institutions, and even nongovernmental advocacy groups, while small-scaled lecture meetings and bilateral meetings may help to drive the more exclusive networks between CIIS, SIIS, and government leaderships.

Therefore, through an observation and calculation of the frequencies of various forms of meetings, and the composition of the types of participants of these meetings, not only is it probable to distinguish the closeness of CIIS and SIIS's connections to each subfield of China's "field of power," and therefore clarify their differentiated positions within China's foreign policymaking

system, but also it is likely to assess the degree of influence of these two think tanks on certain issues.

Of course, there are some limitations when meetings are analyzed for describing think tank's policy influence. Some meetings, particularly some large-scaled forums or seminars funded by the state, are functioning as platform for "track 2" or "track 1.5" diplomacy. They are organized partly for the purpose of publicizing official policy or public relations. CIIS and SIIS may use these meetings to send out policy messages in line with official instructions to certain groups of audiences. However, meetings offer an incomparable convenience of making face-to-face contact with policymakers. No other form of think tank activities can offer occasions or chances of interpersonal communication that are as direct and immediate as meetings. As long as policymakers appear at the meetings, they will inevitably get in touch with experts of think tanks and representatives of social groups, hear these people's voices, and become more or less influenced by their fresh information, ideas, or opinions. Since it is difficult to definitely or precisely pinpoint or calculate a think tank's policy influence, meetings can be regarded as a convenient and vivid mirror from which a think tank's influence may be outlined and analyzed more meticulously.

#### ***4.2 The Pace and Rhythm of CIIS and SIIS Meetings and Their Relevance on BRI Policymaking***

It might be difficult to directly cal-

culate the influence of CIIS and SIIS meetings over BRI policy. However, as time passes by, CIIS and SIIS are sponsoring and organizing an uninterrupted stream of meetings on BRI issues, month by month and quarter by quarter. Meanwhile, the Chinese authority, particularly its executive institutions, are producing a stream of policy documents recording and declaring its BRI policies, in accordance with new ideas and perceptual changes of China's top leaders. Therefore, some kind of influence of these two think tanks might be verified if some relevance might be found between the quarterly change of numbers of CIIS and SIIS meetings, and the quarterly fluctuations of numbers of documents issued by China's central policymaking institutions of the party and state that declared new points and directives of BRI policy during the same period. Figure 4 is made from this idea.

As is indicated in Figure 4, numbers of CIIS and SIIS meetings are exactly following the same direction of rises and falls, revealing their largely synchronized pace and rhythm of research and associated communicative activities. Quarterly numbers of central-level documents declaring BRI policy did not fluctuate at the exact same pace and rhythm as those of CIIS and SIIS meetings, but there is an interlock between them. From a broader perspective, the quarterly numerical changes of both the BRI policy documents and the meetings of CIIS and SIIS are shaped by and interconnected to the development of the perceptions and ideas of China's top leadership.



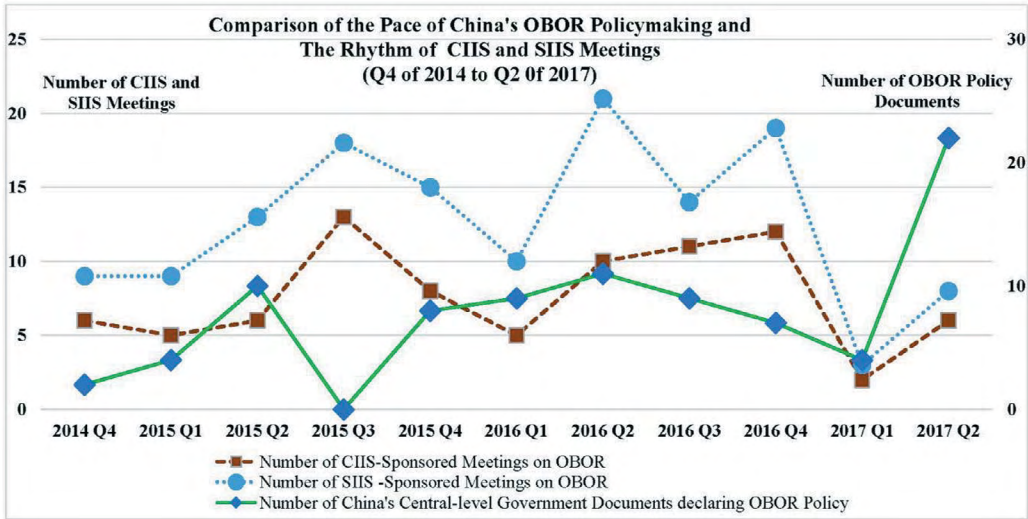


Figure 4: Quarterly Changes of Numbers of CIIS and SIIS Meetings and Numbers of Central-Level Government Documents Declaring BRI Policy

From March to June 2015, Chinese President XI Jinping presented a set of refined principles about BRI on various international occasions, such as the Boao Forum for Asia, the Bandung Asia–Africa Conference, and the ceremony for signing the AIIB Agreement, indicating that his BRI ideas had already developed into a coherent scheme. Urged by and in pace with President XI Jinping’s ideas, the BRI policymaking activities of central ministries were dramatically accelerated and the number of policy documents reached its first peak in the second quarter of 2015, while CIIS and SIIS meetings reached its first peak on the third quarter of 2015 because they had to spend some time on research before they could organize meetings to discuss and propose their policy advice. From January to June 2016, President XI Jinping took intensive visits to Middle East and Central and Eastern Europe, promoting

BRI blueprints and signing documents of intent for joint BRI projects. Against this background, both the number of central-level BRI policy documents and the number of CIIS and SIIS meetings reached their second peak in the second quarter of 2016. In the first and second quarter of 2017, China’s top leadership built up expectations on the first “Belt and Road Summit” held on May 14, 2017; therefore, the numbers of policy documents and CIIS and SIIS meetings simultaneously reached a new peak in the second quarter of 2017.

In brief, the above review of the approximate 3-year of numerical fluctuations displays a general relevance and consistency between the overall long-term trend of these two think tanks’ meetings and the trend of central-level policy documents. Furthermore, the records of the past 3 years also indicate that top leaders’ perceptions and ideas largely shape the pace, rhythm, and fre-

quency of these fluctuations. Actually the “policymaking pendulum” is driven by the mentality of China’s top leaders.

#### ***4.3 Detailed Analysis on CIIS and SIIS Meetings’ BRI Policy Influence within China’s “Field of Power”***

Since the emerging of BRI policy in early 2014, CIIS and SIIS have organized numerous meetings to discuss BRI policy issues with elites from the four subfields of China’s overall “field of power.” Acting as exchange platforms and network hubs, these meetings disclose the closeness and frequencies of CIIS and SIIS’s connections with different subfields, and particularly with the core of political power. To some extent, they also reveal the exact position of the long-term pendulum between vertical and horizontal fragmentation in the fields related to BRI policymaking. Therefore, a detailed analysis of their meetings is meaningful.

##### ***A General Picture of Differentiated Positions of CIIS and SIIS within the System of BRI Policymaking***

After a calculation of the institutional backgrounds of participants who took part in CIIS and SIIS’s BRI meetings and who were from the “political subfield” of China’s “field of power,” a general picture of these two think tanks’ differentiated positions within China’s BRI-related foreign policymaking system is established. Table 2 clearly describes this differentiation driven by the mechanisms of “dual leadership” and “stove-piping.”

As is shown in Table 2, the contacts of CIIS to central-level foreign

policymaking authorities mainly depend on its channels to the MOF, and it has much fewer channels to contact the central executive institutions of foreign economic policymaking, such as MOC, the Ministry of Treasury (MOT, sometimes also translated as “Ministry of Finance”), or the NDRC. This is a typical sign of “stove-piping.” MOF, MOC, MOT, and NDRC are separate “stove-pipes” with differentiated competences, so it is not easy for MOF-affiliated CIIS to cross inter-ministry boundary and contact MOC, MOT, or NDRC. On the other hand, Table 2 also demonstrates that SIIS has to maintain substantial relations with both the MOF and the provincial-level Shanghai leadership concurrently, a distinct sign of inextricable “dual leadership.”

Table 2 highlights another interesting feature: the very weak ties of CIIS with provincial policymaking institutions. As a subsidiary of a central ministry, CIIS is not able to contact provincial policymakers directly and intensively due to the vertical hierarchic compartmentalization of China’s bureaucratic structure. This may restrain CIIS’s interactions with provincial-level institutions to some degree. On the other hand, this low frequency also means that provincial-level policymakers are far less crucial or relevant than central ministries and institutions of party’s central committee in the field of foreign policy. More precisely, resources, information, and power on foreign policymaking are largely concentrated within the central-level policymaking institutions, particularly the political core of the party. In March 2018, CCP’s central

**Table 2:** The General Structural Characteristics of CIIS and SIIS-Sponsored Meetings on BRI Issues (Third Quarter of 2014 to Third Quarter of 2017)<sup>a</sup>

Statistical categories		CIIS		SIIS	
		No.	% to its total	No.	% to its total
Meetings sponsored by CIIS or SIIS and joined by central and provincial-level policymakers as keynote speakers	From departments of CCP's Central Committee	3	3.4%	4	2.8%
	From MOF system	<b>39</b>	<b>45.3%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12.5%</b>
	From MOC, or MOT, or NDRC or Other Central Executive Institutions handling foreign economic policy	<b>10</b>	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7.6%</b>
	From other central executive institutions	6	7%	5	3.8%
	From China's nonexecutive central-level policymaking institutions (such as the NPC, or CPPCC)	3	3.5%	2	1.4%
Meetings sponsored by CIIS or SIIS and joined by provincial-level policymakers as keynote speakers		<b>6</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13.9%</b>
Meetings sponsored by CIIS or SIIS and joined by foreign officials as keynote speakers	From foreign embassies and consulates stationed in China	25	29.1%	26	18%
	From foreign policymaking institutions, who visited China	30	34.9%	25	17.4%
Total number of meeting on BRI issues		86		144	

<sup>a</sup> Every meeting might have many participants from each category of those social and political groups identified on the left column of this table, so it is inevitable to make repeated or overlapped calculation on the numbers of meetings on different lines. Therefore, it is of no meaning to vertically or horizontally sum up any numbers in this table.

committee issued the “*Plan for Deepening the Reform on the Institutions of the Party and the State*” with a design of a “Central Foreign Affairs Commission” that aims at making foreign policy decision-making competences further centralized into CCP’s central

party apparatus. As this plan took into effect on March 17, 2018, the previous central-level concentration of foreign policy-related information, power, and resources may be further strengthened.

Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that CIIS enjoys a relatively more ad-

vantageous position than SIIS in terms of its connections with the core of political power and the direct sources of foreign information. Particularly, it has more frequent contacts with foreign diplomats and policymakers than SIIS has, a crucial advantage for a foreign policy think tank. In general, CIIS may possess more plentiful resources, information, links and thus influence in China's "field of power" than SIIS during the BRI policymaking. Nevertheless, SIIS has its own unique resources and links, particularly unique personal connections. Mr. YANG Jiemian, the former head of SIIS, is the younger brother of Mr. YANG Jiechi, who is now member of CCP's central politburo and director of the office of "Central Foreign Affairs Commission," the inner core of China's foreign policy decision making. This personal link surely helps SIIS to maintain an elevated position among China's foreign policy think tanks. Furthermore, SIIS's close personnel connections to the government of Shanghai,<sup>7</sup> the financial and trade center of mainland China, may facilitate SIIS to obtain more financial support and actual economic information below the central level whenever there is some momentum in "horizontal fragmentation."

### *A More Nuanced Picture of CIIS and SIIS's Connections with Four Subfields of China's "Field of Power"*

Table 2 outlines a general picture of CIIS and SIIS's positions within the political regime for BRI policymaking

and sketches their connections with the political subfield of China's "field of power." In order to more precisely explain the mechanism of their influence toward BRI policy through all the direct and indirect channels, it is necessary to draw a more nuanced picture of their connections and interactions with all the four subfields of the overall "field of power." Nevertheless, as CIIS and SIIS organize a huge diversity of meetings every month, a more specific classification should be made on the types of their meetings before a clear-cut analysis is feasible. Table 3 does this work. All the meetings of CIIS and SIIS are divided into six types.

Table 3 gives a detailed comparison over six major types of meetings that CIIS and SIIS frequently hold. From left to right, a roughly descending sequence can be found in the degree of formalness, the extensiveness of representation, and the scale of these six types. As for the directness and effectiveness of these meetings' policy influence, it is difficult to generalize. High-level forum is the most formal and most extensively represented form of meeting. Usually, its participants are elites from all the four subfields of "field of power." However, it usually does not concentrate on a specific and narrow issue, so it may be less direct and effective to transmit crucial and professional information to top-level leadership. On the other hand, when a political dignitary with a very high status takes part in a high-level forum as a keynote speak-

<sup>7</sup> There is a "revolving door" mechanism between SIIS and Shanghai Municipal Government. Researchers and executives of SIIS have opportunities to take on-the-job posts in foreign affairs-related institutions of Shanghai Municipal Government for 1 or 2 years.

er, he may hear some idea from an expert and agree with it. In this way, policy influence is immediately achieved. Sometimes, important political dignitaries may leave a high-level forum or other form of meeting after they present keynote speeches, because they are very busy, but afterwards they may spend some time to read the briefings or records of that meeting, particularly those records of policy discussions. So,

case studies are needed for analyzing specific circumstances on specific policy issues.

After a clarification of all these types, it is practicable to make a more detailed calculation on the participatory rates of various groups of political actors in each type of CIIS and SIIS meetings. Tables 4 and 5 list the results of this calculation on CIIS and SIIS, respectively.

Table 3: Characteristics of Six Major Types of Meetings Frequently Held by CIIS and SIIS

Types of meetings Characteristics of meetings	I. High-level forum	II. Workshop program	III. Regular dialogue	IV. Symposium on specific issues	V. Lecture meeting	VI. Bilateral meeting
<b>Total number of participants</b>	Large (50–200)	Middle (20–50)	Uncertain	Middle–small (10–50)	Small (10–30)	Small (10–30)
<b>Degree of formalness</b>	Highly formal	Very formal	Very formal	Formal	Less formal	Less formal
<b>Level of institutionalization</b>	Uncertain	High	Very high	Uncertain	Low	Uncertain
<b>Extensiveness of representation</b>	High	High to medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
<b>Concentration of issues</b>	Low	Medium	High	High	Very high	Uncertain
<b>Time span</b>	1–2 days	3–10 days	1–2 days	1–2 days	0.5–1 days	0.5–1 days

Table 4 shows the details of the CIIS's connections with the four "subfields" of politics, academia (including other think tanks), business, and media within China's "field of power" through BRI meetings. It displays the varied closeness of CIIS's links with each of these

four subfields and indicates the different importance of each subfield as a channel for CIIS to exert its BRI policy influence. Also, this table tells the frequencies of each type of meeting held by CIIS, depicting the significance of each type in CIIS's effort to influence BRI policy.

**Table 4:** The Structural Characteristics of CIIS-sponsored Meetings on “BRI” Issues (The Number of Each Type of Meetings joined by Each Type of Political Actor Groups and The Participatory Rate (This Number’s Percentage to the Total of This Type of Meetings))

(Third Quarter of 2014 to Third Quarter of 2017)<sup>a</sup>

Statistical categories	Meeting types					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
From departments of CCP’s Central Committee	Number	1	2	2	1	
	Participatory rate	8.3%	14.3%	11.1%	9%	
From MOF system	Number	11	4	11	14	3
	Participatory rate	91.7%	100%	73.3%	77.8%	72.7%
From MOC, or MOT, or NDRC or other central executive agencies handling foreign economic policy	Number	4	1	4	4	1
	Participatory rate	33.3%	25%	26.7%	22.2%	9%
From other central executive institutions	Number	3		3	2	1
	Participatory rate	25%		20%	11.1%	9%
From central-level legislative institutions (NPC, or CPPCC)	Number				1	2
	Participatory rate				5.6%	18.2%
CIIS-sponsored meetings joined by provincial-level policymakers as keynote speakers	Number	1	3	1	1	
	Participatory rate	8.3%	75%	7.1%	5.6%	
CIIS-sponsored meetings joined by business interests (including industries, commerce, finance, and banking) as keynote speakers	Number	5	2	4	1	1
	Participatory rate	41.7%	50%	26.7%	5.6%	9%

CIIS-sponsored meetings joined by scholars of other Chinese think tanks and universities as keynote speakers	Number	12	2	12	14	5	
	Participatory rate	100%	50%	80%	77.8%	45.5%	
CIIS-sponsored meetings joined by media and press professionals as discussants	Number	7	1	6	3	1	3
	Participatory rate	58.3%	25%	40%	16.7%	9%	7.3%
CIIS-sponsored meetings joined by foreigners as keynote speakers	Number	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
	Participatory rate	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>45.5%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
	Number	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>
	Participatory rate	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>48.8%</b>
From foreign embassies and consulates stationed in China	Number	8		10	9		16
	Participatory rate	66.7%		66.7%	50%		39%
From foreign policymaking institutions, who visited China	Total number of each type	12	4	15	18	11	41
	% of this type to the total 86 CIIS meetings on BRI issues	14%	4.7%	17.4%	20.9%	12.8%	47.7%

<sup>a</sup>Every meeting may have many participants from each category of those social and political groups identified on the left column of this table. Besides, some meetings may indicate features of both the type of regular dialogue and some other type outlined in Table 3, so they may be categorized into two types concurrently. This means that it is inevitable to make overlapped calculation on the numbers of meetings along different lines of this table. Therefore, it makes no sense to vertically or horizontally total the numbers in this table. The numbers in bold in Table 4 and 5 indicate how closely CIIS and SIIS are connected to China's central-level leaderships of foreign policy and foreign economic policy making, and with China's provincial policymakers handling foreign-related affairs, through their self-sponsored meetings.

**Table 5: The Structural Characteristics of SIIS-sponsored Meetings on “BRI” Issues (The Number of Each Type of Meetings joined by Each Type of Political Actor Groups and the Participatory Rate (This Number’s Percentage to the Total of This Type of Meetings)) (Third Quarter of 2014 to Third Quarter of 2017)<sup>a</sup>**

Statistical categories	Meeting types						
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by central-level policymakers as keynote Speakers	From departments of CCP’s Central Committee	Number 1	1		3		1
		Participatory rate 8.3%	33.3%		10.3%		1.1%
	From MOF system	Number 8		5	7	4	2
		Participatory rate 66.7%		100%	24.1%	36.4%	2.2%
	From MOC, or MOT, or NDRC or other central executive agencies handling foreign economic policy	Number 7	2		2	3	
		Participatory rate 58.3%	66.7%		6.9%	27.3%	
	From other central executive institutions	Number 3			2		1
		Participatory rate 25%			6.9%		1.1%
	From central legislative institutions (NPC, or CPPCC)	Number 1			1		1
		Participatory rate 7%			3.4%		1.1%
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by Shanghai-level policymakers as keynote speakers	From Shanghai Municipal Gov’s executive institutions handling foreign-related affairs	Number 7		1	4		5
		Participatory rate 58.3%		20%	13.8%		5.6%
	From Shanghai-level nonexecutive policymaking institutions (such as Shanghai-level NPC and CPPCC)	Number 3			2		2
		Participatory rate 25%			6.9%		2.2%



SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by business interests (including industries, commerce, finance and banking) as keynote speakers	Number	9		2	3	1
	Participatory rate	75%		40%	10.3%	1.1%
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by scholars from other Chinese think tanks and universities as keynote speakers	Number	12	2	4	20	3
	Participatory rate	100%	66.7%	80%	69%	3.3%
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by (Chinese or Foreign) Media and Press Professionals as Discussants	Number	4			1	
	Participatory rate	2.7%			3.4%	
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by foreigners as keynote speakers	Number	4	2	1	3	2
	Participatory rate	33.3%	66.7%	20%	10.3%	18.2%
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by foreigners as keynote speakers	Number	7	2	1	4	1
	Participatory rate	58.3%	66.7%	20%	13.8%	9.1%
SIIS-sponsored meetings joined by foreigners as keynote speakers	Number	7		5	8	1
	Participatory rate	58.3%		100%	27.6%	9.1%
Total	Total number of each type	12	3	5	29	90
	% of this type to the total 144 SIIS meetings on BRI issues	8.3%	2%	3.47%	20.1%	7.6%
						<b>62.5%</b>

<sup>a</sup> Every meeting may have many participants from each category of those social and political groups identified on the left column of this table. Besides, some meetings may indicate features of both the type of regular dialogue and some other type outlined in Table 3, so it may be categorized into two types concurrently. This means that it is inevitable to make overlapped calculation on the numbers of meetings along different lines of this table. Therefore, it makes no sense to vertically or horizontally total the numbers in this table.

The more nuanced data of Tables 4 and 5 confirms the basic pattern already sketched by Table 3, which may be clarified and elaborated into the following three points:

**First**, both CIIS and SIIS are closely linked to central-level policymakers, but CIIS is far less connected to provincial policymakers than SIIS. The participatory rates of provincial officials in CIIS meetings are much lower than the participatory rates of Shanghai policymakers in SIIS meetings generally,<sup>8</sup> but the overall participatory rates of central ministerial officials in both CIIS and SIIS meetings are on similarly high levels. CIIS appears to be relatively closer to MOF than SIIS, which is natural because CIIS is directly affiliated to MOF, but it is no closer than SIIS to the central ministries of foreign economic policymaking, such as MOC, MOT, and NDRC, a sign of “stove-piping.” Furthermore, SIIS’s connections with MOF system and central foreign economic policymaking ministries are also similarly close. More specifically speaking, SIIS’s intimate links to MOC, MOT, and NDRC are completely concentrated on BRI-related meetings of type I (high-level forum), type II (workshop program), and type V (lec-

ture meeting). All in all, CIIS is very intensively connected to the MOF system, less closely linked to foreign economic policy-related central ministries and very distant from provincial-level institutions, while SIIS has to divide its resources to concurrently maintain substantial connections with both central-level policymaking institutions and Shanghai municipal authority, at least on BRI issues.

**Second**, SIIS itself is much closer to central policymakers than it is to Shanghai policymakers.<sup>9</sup> Of all the six types of meetings held by SIIS, Shanghai municipal officials were almost completely absent from three types of these meetings: type II (workshop programs), type III (regular dialogues with stakeholders of BRI-related policy areas), and type V (lecture meetings), while central-level policymakers from both MOF and central foreign economic policymaking ministries actively participated in these three types of meeting. As a matter of fact, BRI-related meetings of types II, III, and V act as important platforms for face-to-face contacts of the relatively exclusive inner circles of interpersonal networks, on which crucial information for policymaking is transferred to relevant

8 In China’s territorial executive administration system, Shanghai Municipality is one of the four provincial-level municipalities under direct control of China’s central government. Therefore, Shanghai municipal leaders are usually provincial-level officials.

9 Several SIIS experts interviewed by the author of this paper denied that SIIS is a provincial-level think tank. They argued that although it is located in Shanghai, not Beijing, “SIIS still represents top level research capacity of the whole nation and possesses ‘very direct channels’ of interactions with top leadership in Beijing.” They thought that the term of “provincial level think tank” downgrades the outstanding position of SIIS and underestimates its policy influence. Later, they admitted that SIIS is financially dependent on the Shanghai Municipal Government, not the central government, as a “Fully-Appropriated Non-Profit Institution.” Their dislike of the term of “provincial level” reveals the special importance of maintaining close links to central policymakers and the relative peripheral position of provincial policymakers in foreign policy decision making.

policymakers, or requests of certain social interest groups are heard by key officials. Shanghai officials' absence on these platforms implies that they are largely outside the inner circle that has real power of BRI policymaking. In other words, crucial resources, information, and personal links related to BRI policy issues are concentrated in central-level government institutions, so SIIS is compelled to operate more intimate ties with central authority.

Actually, this centralized pattern may be further strengthened in future because of the situational changes highlighted by two signs: (1) since CCP's 18<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2012, domestic and foreign analysts have already observed more traces of recentralization in economy and government's executive administration, along the lines of "vertical fragmentation"; (2) on March 17, 2018, the decision to expand and upgrade the "Central Small Leading Group for Foreign Affairs" into "Central Foreign Affairs Commission" took into effect as the "Plan for Deepening the Reform on the Institutions of the Party and the State" was passed by China's National People's Congress. Four previous "central small leading groups" will be upgraded and expanded into special "central commissions" that will usually be controlled by CCP's central politburo and jointly operated by top leaders of the party and state. Also, several new central ministries will be established, which will absorb and gather competences of some existing ministries, a situation similar to the time of reform for "big ministry system" in 2007. This latest round of adjustment on central-level party

and state institutions may amass and concentrate more resources and power upward into the central party apparatus and a few central ministries, therefore intensifying "vertical fragmentation" to some degree.

**Third,** CIIS indeed enjoys more advantages than SIIS. The highly distinctive percentage of each type of meeting to the total numbers of meetings disclose the differentiated positions of CIIS and SIIS in BRI policymaking. The percentages of the meetings of type IV (symposium on specific issues) and type VI (bilateral meeting) to the total numbers of BRI-related meetings organized by CIIS and SIIS are not vastly different, showing the significance of these two types as key channels and platforms for CIIS and SIIS to push forward their influences on BRI policy. However, there is a vast difference between CIIS and SIIS in the percentages of meetings of type I (high-level forum), type III (regular dialogue), and type V (lecture meeting) to the total numbers of meetings. The weights of these three types to the total number of meetings held by CIIS are much larger than those of SIIS. As a matter of fact, the meetings of type I (high-level forum) consume tremendous quantity of resources, including funds and expertise. And it is not probable to organize the meetings of type III (regular dialogue) and type V (lecture meeting) without intensive long-term and stable personal links to the top-level policymakers and political power. Therefore, much larger weights of these three types in CIIS meetings certify its large advantages compared to SIIS in terms of resources and priv-

ileged personal connections. The obviously higher participatory rates of foreign diplomats and officials in CIIS meetings in comparison to SIIS meetings also reveal the relatively more advantageous position enjoyed by CIIS.

These two tables also expose other interesting points: **First**, these two think tanks' connections with other three "subfields" of China's "field of power" in the form of meeting are varied. Through meetings, their relations with the academia are similarly close, but CIIS obviously maintains much tighter relations with the media than SIIS. On the other hand, SIIS operates much closer formal links or institutionalized ties with business interests than CIIS through formal or professional meetings of type I (high-level forum), type III (regular dialogue), and type IV (symposium on specific issue), while CIIS may have more intimate interpersonal ties with business people through more exclusive meetings of type II (workshop programs) and type IV (lecture meetings). The weaker institutionalized contacts of CIIS with China's business community may be attributed to the heavier restrictions it has to undergo as MOF's in-house research institution. Leaders and executives of CIIS are usually from MOF with experiences of working as high-ranking officials in the past. As former central-level high-ranking officials, they are inevitably restricted by more disciplines. Generally speaking, Chinese business interests become increasingly active in think tank events of BRI discussions. **Second**, it might be concluded that the central executive institutions in charge

of foreign economic policy take an increasingly outstanding role in China's overall foreign policymaking regime and become a part of important targets of think tanks' policy influence, at least on BRI issues. Tables 3 and 4 show that both CIIS and SIIS invited these foreign economic policymakers to take part in a large number of their meetings and undertook a substantial expense to contact and host them. These two points will add new complexity to Chinese think tanks' role in policymaking.

## 5. Conclusion

Generally speaking, there is a scarcity of literature on China's foreign policymaking, which constrains the analytical depth of the existing literature of China's foreign policy think tanks. Lieberthal's concept of "fragmented authoritarianism" and Mertha's idea of "fragmented authoritarianism 2.0" may capture some dynamic characteristics within China's political and policymaking structure, but they derive these two terms from observations in the domains of economic and social policymaking, without much specification on the structural pattern of the relations between different actors and the channels of exchange and influence. On the other side, western and overseas Chinese scholars have paid much more attention to China's foreign policy think tanks than native Chinese scholars, but they seldom conduct individualized case studies on specific policy issues, perhaps because of the lack of detailed information, which may lead to some degree of insufficiency and

imprecision. As China's foreign policy-making is far less open and regularized and its relevant power, resources, and information are much more centralized than the economic and social policy-making, more caution is required for the analysis of think tanks' role within this complex "black box."

CIIS and SIIS are two of the most elite foreign policy think tanks in China. This case study on their influences in the BRI policymaking has revealed some structural characteristics of the positions and roles of think tanks in China's foreign policymaking structure. This paper establishes a synchronized theoretic paradigm that interprets think tanks as a "central space" in "three-layered field of power" and builds an analytical framework of "policymaking pendulum between horizontal and vertical fragmentation," so as to elaborate the roles and influences of CIIS and SIIS on BRI policy issues. Based on this guiding theoretic paradigm and analytical framework, this paper focuses on the meetings held by CIIS and SIIS for BRI policy discussions. To be specific, this paper calculates the participatory rates of different social and political groups of the four "sub-fields" (politics, business, academia, and media) of China's "field of power," and then analyzes the exact structural characteristics of CIIS and SIIS's connections with these "sub-fields," particularly with policymakers in the political circle.

The analysis of this paper reveals that both CIIS and SIIS are closely connected to central ministerial systems through BRI meetings. Especially, the

links of SIIS as a provincial-level think tank to central policymakers are still more intimate than its relations with Shanghai Municipal Government. Also, the connections of CIIS through meetings with central ministries outside the MOF, such as foreign economic policy-related MOC, MOT, and NDRC, are substantially weaker than its links with MOF. On the other hand, CIIS as a central ministry-affiliated think tank is very distant from provincial policymakers due to the limitations brought by China's vertical executive compartmentalization. These facts reveal the typical features of "stove-piping" driven by the structure and momentum of "vertical fragmentation." On the other hand, SIIS has to maintain intimate relations with central policymakers and top leadership, and at the same time keep substantial ties with Shanghai government, demonstrating the mechanism of "dual leadership" shaped by "horizontal fragmentation" structure. In general, the behaviors and influence of CIIS as a central ministry's subsidiary are only subject to "vertical fragmentation," whereas SIIS as a think tank financially dependent on a provincial-level government has to maneuver between "vertical" and "horizontal fragmentation." It is also revealed that there are discrepancies in CIIS and SIIS's connections with and influence on academia, business, and media over BRI policy issues.

In brief, faced with an increasingly unpredictable external world plagued by surging tides of populism and de-globalization, China has to manage new challenges that may dis-

rupt or even damage the established structures of world economy and global governance. It is under this fluid situation that China has developed the grand plan of the “Belt and Road,” and its policymaking activities to substantialize this grand plan are by no means an easy task. Consequently, it is inevitable that Chinese foreign policy think tanks as professional policy advisers will play a more important role in China’s foreign policymaking system. Nevertheless, the exact mechanisms and effectiveness of their influences on foreign policy remain insufficiently researched and deserve greater attention of both domestic and western scholars.

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