

The Influence of Think Tanks on China's Mid- to Long-term Strategic Planning: A Case Study of the Institute of Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University

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ABSTRACT

Think tanks have played a significant role in China's development, and as China has developed, they have gone through five separate stages in tandem with the evolution of China's decision-making processes. University-based think tanks are significant and valuable sources of great ideas and thought. The Institute of Contemporary China Studies (ICCS) at Tsinghua University was selected as one of the 25 "pilot high-end think tanks" to provide critical intellectual support for decision making through participating in the design of Five-year Plans, which are China's major public policies in relation to national development. The ICCS has accumulated an abundance of practical experience and theories after being involved in five Five-year Plans. This study argues that think tank development has three aspects: one is to increase research capability, including the capabilities of acquiring, absorbing, and innovating knowledge, the second is to influence decision making by applying the results of research, and the third is to disseminate knowledge and transform it into social productivity. University-based think tanks targets should be based on core Chinese characteristics, university branding, and world-class objectives. They should combine foundational research with policy research, and decision-making consultation with teaching and cultivation to promote cultural construction, team building, platform creation, and mechanism construction. More importantly, think tanks need to promote independence, be forward-thinking, and promote the professionalization of decision-making knowledge research.

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La influencia de los think tanks en la planeación estratégica a largo y medio plazo en China: Un caso de estudio del Instituto de Estudios Chinos Contemporáneos en la Universidad de Tsinghua

RESUMEN

Los think tanks han desempeñado un papel importante en el desarrollo de China y, a medida que China se ha desarrollado, han pasado por cinco etapas separadas junto con la evolución de los procesos de toma de decisiones de China. Los think tanks basados en la universidad son fuentes importantes y valiosas de grandes ideas y pensamientos. El Instituto de Estudios Contemporáneos de China (ICCS) de la Universidad de Tsinghua fue seleccionado como uno de los 25 “grupos de expertos piloto de alta gama” para proporcionar un apoyo intelectual crítico para la toma de decisiones mediante la participación en el diseño de Planes de cinco años, que son los principales de China Políticas públicas en relación con el desarrollo nacional. El ICCS ha acumulado una gran cantidad de experiencia práctica y teorías después de estar involucrado en cinco planes quinquenales. Este estudio argumenta que el desarrollo del think tank tiene tres aspectos: uno es aumentar la capacidad de investigación, incluidas las capacidades de adquirir, absorber e innovar el conocimiento, el segundo es influir en la toma de decisiones mediante la aplicación de los resultados de la investigación, y el tercero es difundir conocimiento y transformarlo en productividad social. Los objetivos de los think tanks basados en la universidad deben basarse en las características centrales de China, la marca universitaria y los objetivos de clase mundial. Deben combinar la investigación fundamental con la investigación de políticas y la consulta de toma de decisiones con la enseñanza y el cultivo para promover la construcción cultural, la formación de equipos, la creación de plataformas y la construcción de mecanismos. Más importante aún, los think tanks deben promover la independencia, tener visión de futuro y promover la profesionalización de la investigación del conocimiento en la toma de decisiones.

Palabras Clave: think tank, plan estratégico, plan de cinco años, toma de decisiones, ICCS

智库对中国中长期战略规划的影响： 清华大学国情研究院案例分析

摘要

智库在中国的发展中发挥了重要作用，并随着中国决策机制的变迁不断发展，经历了5个不同的发展时期。高校智库是一种重要的智库类型，更是思想的重要发源地。清华大学国情研究院作为首批入选国家高端智库建设的试点单位之一，是高校智库的重要代表，它通过参与制定五年规划这一中国政府最重大的公共政策参与国家发展，为决策过程提供重要的智力支撑。清华大学国情研究院先后参与了5个五年规划，有着丰富的实践经验和理论积累。本研究认为，智库的发展一是要提高研究能力，包括获取知识、吸收知识及创新知识的能力；二是要将知识成果转换为决策影响力，能够影响决策；三是要传播知识，要能够促进知识生产力转化为社会生产力。高校智库应从中国特色、高校品牌和世界一流的定位出发，坚持基础研究与政策研究相结合、决策咨询与教书育人相结合，推进文化建设、团队建设、平台建设和机制建设，更要进行独立性、前瞻性、专业化的决策知识研究工作。

关键词：智库，战略规划，“五年计划”，决策，当代中国研究院（ICCS）

1. Introduction

Research on the role of think tanks in the policymaking process in China has become a hot topic in recent years. The emerging literature has acknowledged the importance of think tanks in China and

the roles they play in government decision-making processes, while few studies have demonstrated the process of policymaking in the Chinese political system, or how think tanks have evolved in such a process. This study aims to fill this research gap by explor-

ing the policymaking process in China and how think tanks affect this process.

Since the reform and opening up, China has maintained an annual economic growth rate of 9.8% and has transformed from the world's largest absolute poverty society (i.e., extremely low-income levels and upwards of 800 million people living in extreme poverty) to the world's largest affluent society (i.e., entering mid- to high-income levels and achieving a high level of human development). One of the most influential factors in China's development has been strategic policymaking, which has been successful as a result of democratization, institutionalization, and the use of scientific methods. Intelligence support from outside the government has made strategic policymaking more democratic, more scientific, and more institutionalized, and has also reduced policymaking errors, while enabling any errors that are made quickly be corrected. Thus, think tanks in China have become increasingly important, both practically and theoretically. Specifically, the Chinese leadership has emphasized the establishment of think tanks since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012. The decision of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee further proposed "to strengthen the construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics (NTTTCC) and to build a robust mechanism of decision and consultation" (Xinhuanet 2013). By late 2015, 25 "pilot high-end think tanks" had been selected and awarded substantial government funding to support their research. This study does not aim to ex-

plain the roles Chinese think tanks play in the policymaking process in general, but rather aims to explore how think tanks participate in the government's decision-making process and how they influence the Chinese government.

The process of assisting in the development of a Five-year Plan is an efficient way for think tanks to participate in policymaking. The Five-year Plan is one of the most important public policies in China, as it is considered to be the strategic plan and development blueprint for China's future. It is long-term, all-encompassing, and strategic in nature, with one cycle spanning a five-year period. The formulation and implementation of each Five-year Plan has become a standardized system in practice.

This article uses the Institute of Contemporary China Studies (ICCS) at Tsinghua University as an example to demonstrate how think tanks affect China's mid- to long-term strategic planning. The study also explores the development and expansion of university think tanks and their influence, and objectively examines how Chinese university think tanks form interactive relationships with policymakers.

2. Progress in the Decision-Making Process and the Development of Think Tanks

Over the years, think tanks have become important and active policy actors in contemporary China (Murray 2002). In the early days of the new China, the Chinese leaders

realized the importance of obtaining intelligence from outside the government. However, prior to 1978, external consultation with experts from various fields and research institutions was quite limited as a result of requirements in relation to planning confidentiality. However, since the reform and opening up, experts from various fields have played an increasingly important role in consulting.

Starting with the opening up reform of 1978, China's decision making was literally transformed and has become less based on radical ideology, the personality of the leader has been less dominant, and a more collegial, institutionalized and professionalized process has occurred (Harris 2014). The Chinese leadership has increasingly required high-quality policy studies to support its decision making. Thus, the development of think tank policies aims to meet the demand to establish a scientific decision-making process for the Chinese government, especially at a time when China is facing increasingly complex developmental problems. (Xue, Zhu and Han 2018) The remarkable headway made by Chinese think tanks in advising the decision-making process is a direct result of the fact that China has developed a democratic, scientific, and institutionalized mechanism for decision making. At the end of the Mao era, Mao Zedong was making the majority of major decisions himself, including, for instance, the launch of the Cultural Revolution and the normalization of China–U.S. relations. That period of time can be characterized as a period of individual decision

making. In Deng's era, while Deng Xiaoping was designated the "core" of the Party leadership, other members of the Party's collective leadership played an increasingly prominent role. That period of time can be characterized as a period of collective decision making. Beginning in 1978, with efforts to shift toward the strategic center of economic development, the Chinese government increased its demand for professionals and technocrats (Lee 1991). In response to this growing need, some think tanks affiliated with the State Council were established, including the Economic Research Center, the Technical Economic Research Center, the Price Research Center, and the Rural Development Research Center. In 1985, these four agencies merged to become the Development Research Center of the State Council.

The decision-making mechanism has undergone profound changes since the 1990s, with the central leadership becoming increasingly open to hearing and incorporating suggestions and input from experts in a range of fields. This period of time can be characterized as a period of collective decision making combined with expert consultation. The establishment of the State Development Plan Expert Committee in 2005 has further solidified the institutional and procedural mechanism of the expert consultation process, and Chinese think tanks have become more active and prominent in the policymaking system in recent years. Since 2013, Xi Jinping has relentlessly championed institutional innovation in the development of NTTCC. This initiative has

accelerated the development of Chinese think tanks, especially in January 2015 with the publication of *Opinions concerning Strengthening the Construction of New Types of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics* by the CPC General Office and State Council General Office. This development is just the beginning of a golden era in which a wide variety of Chinese think tanks will voice a diverse set of opinions, all with the aim of strengthening the country's two brains: the internal brain (Party central leadership, State Council) and the external brain (the new type of think tanks).

2.1 1978–1992: Decision Making under Collective Leadership

During the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the majority of institutes in China were closed down. Deng Xiaoping recalled a painful experience based on historical lessons regarding individual decision making learned from the Great Leap Forward and the Great Cultural Revolution, and believed that problems within the leadership system and organizational system were fundamental, overarching, fixed, and long term (Deng 1994, 333). He started to rebuild the collective decision-making mechanism in the central committee of the CPC, which is fully reflected in the Multiple Rules about Inner-Party Political Life, the Chinese Communist Party Constitution, and other institutional plans. The mechanism advocated more open and relaxed decision-making circumstances; people who were involved in the policy circle could exchange their ideas more freely. There were already “internal brain” decision-making think

tanks in China at that time to assist in the reform of China's economic system, the most representative of which included the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. This is the largest academic community in China, and studies the Chinese economy in an organized, professional, and scientific manner. Some of the scholars in this group had worked as senior officials in government agencies, and had the experience necessary to communicate effectively with political leaders. A second prominent think tank was the Economic, Technological and Social Development Research Center of the State Council (later known as the Development Research Center of the State Council). This group was under the control of the State Council, being the largest policy research and consulting institute in China. There were also policy research institutes within each ministry and commission, as well as related research institutions and well-known scholars at Peking University, the People's University of China, the Party School of the CPC Central Committee, and various other colleges and universities. Finally, the development of central think tanks, such as the Central Policy Research Office and the State Council Research Office, was further intensified.

Wan Li, who was the Deputy Prime Minister of the State Council in 1986, first advocated decision making in a democratic and scientific manner. The introduction to *How do Chinese Leaders Make Decisions*, by Hu Qiaomu, stated that the significant functions of experts in terms of decision making in the 1980s included an intensified

consulting function, with experts mainly coming from the internal research institutions, such as the State Council, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and several universities in Beijing, and a policy demonstration function (Hu 1993, 270–77). For example, with the help of think tank experts in foreign affairs, China improved its analysis of the diplomatic policies of various countries (Shambaugh 2002). By 1999, “there were about a hundred institutes of international studies in China with about 10,000 researchers, including several thousand research professors” (Li 2002, 34). Between 1978 and 1992, Chinese intellectuals played an active role in expanding the sphere of new associations, many of which were nongovernmental or only partially affiliated with the government (Menegazzi 2018).

2.2 1992–2012: Decision Making Based on Consulting Experts

China's collective decision making was more scientific, democratized, and institutionalized after 1992. Followed the famous southern tour speeches, China gradually established a market economy system with unique Chinese characteristics. The subsequent global economic integration presented challenges to the Chinese national strategy. Many state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were faced with laying off their workers, which of course resulted in social conflict (Wu and Xie 1999). There were also other sources of pressure challenging the sustainability of China's social and economic development. All the new problems demanded policy research institutions with the necessary expertise to provide

appropriate recommendations to decision makers amidst the rapid economic development (Guan 2000). As previous studies have shown, the actors within the central state that are involved in making policy decisions include not only the core elite of top leaders and their staff but also “small leadership groups,” research centers and commissions, and the line ministries whose activities they coordinate (Duchett 2003). From December 26, 2002 to April 23, 2007, the CCP Politburo held 41 workshops, averaging one every 40 days, and invited philosophers, natural scientists, social scientists, and legal scholars to deliver lectures (Wang 2008).

The progress outlined above is reflected in the report of the 14th National Congress of the CPC, which formally proposed that scientific and democratic decision making was an important link to implementing democratic centralism and also an important task in the construction of socialist democracy. Leading organizations and cadres were advised to listen carefully to public opinions, pay full attention to experts from various fields and research and consulting institutions, and accelerate the establishment of completely democratic and scientific decision-making systems (Jiang 2006, 236). This provided favorable opportunities for experts, scholars, and nonofficial think tanks to participate in the development of major national policies and gradually drive China into an “era of expert consulting and decision-making.”

When formulating the ninth Five-year Plan, experts were invited to participate in preliminary studies and

policy consultation meetings. For example, in February 1995, Hu Angang was invited to participate in the ninth Five-year Plan brainstorming symposium convened by the State Council Research Office. Other participants included experts from research institutions within various government departments.

When formulating the 10th Five-year Plan in 1999, Zeng Peiyan, the Director of the State Development Plan Commission, hosted the 10th Five-year Plan brainstorming symposium, which featured six experts, all of whom were scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, universities, and other nongovernmental institutions. The main departments of the State Development Plan Commission also held expert consultation symposiums. Following this, they also established a council of experts to assist with policy consultation.

When the State Council formulated the Work Rules of the State Council in 2003, it included a chapter called *Implementing Scientific and Democratic Decision-Making*. This chapter states that “each department of the State Council shall make intensive investigation and research and pass validity, necessity, scientific, feasibility and controllability evaluations and demonstrations before submitting major items to the State Council to make decisions.” Based on this guideline, the State Council made a decision in October 2005 to formally establish the State Plan Experts Committee to implement the formulated and planned experts argumentation

system. There were 37 members in total at that time (including Hu Angang), all of whom were from different fields and represented different research institutions or think tanks. Most of them were from nongovernmental departments, including many experts from famous universities. This committee was a consultation and policymaking institution that was focused exclusively on Five-year Plans. During the 12th and 13th Five-year Plans, a dozen new members were added to the expert committee.

Chinese politics has shifted from a strongman, power-centric leadership model to a more collective and, to a certain extent, inclusive, leadership model since the Hu Jintao era. In addition, the Chinese leaders seem to have “lifted the curtain obscuring aspects of leadership policy-making” (Miller 2008, 1). Meanwhile, since think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, and enterprises have been closely involved in national policymaking (Chen and Naughton, 2016), the decision-making system had been fragmented during the Hu Jintao era (Zhu 2013). The Chinese government is always exploring alternative approaches to strengthen the decision-making process (Zhu 2013).

2.3 Post-2012: Think Tanks Involved in Decision Making

Ever since the 18th CPC National Congress, construction of China’s high-end think tanks has accelerated and entered an era of “encouraging blossoming and participation of all.” This is related to the promotion of General Secretary Xi Jinping, who has delivered numerous

important speeches and provided additional comments.

In November 2012, the report of the 18th CPC National Congress stated that “sticking to scientific decision-making, democratic decision-making, decision-making in accordance with the law, and perfecting the decision-making mechanism and procedures is the major role of think tanks.”

In April 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping first proposed the construction of “new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.” As a result, the development of think tanks has since been regarded as an important component of China’s soft power, and thus has been raised to the level of a national strategy.

In November 2013, Article 28 of “*Decisions on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform*” of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC clearly pointed out the importance of “strengthening the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics and perfecting the decision-making and consultation system.”

On October 27, 2014, the sixth meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms reviewed *Opinions on Building New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics* (hereafter referred to as *Opinions*). Firstly, they defined the functions of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics as “policy consultation and suggestions, theoretical innovation, public opinion guidance, social services, public diplomacy and other important functions.” It was clearly stated

that high priority should be given to establishing globally recognized, influential domestic think tanks by 2020. Think tanks were given high profiles in the policy circle, not only to provide policy recommendations, but also to help with the implementation of the policies, in particular with explaining and disseminating the policies.

On January 20, 2015, the General Office of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China issued the *Opinions* above.

In December 2015, a pilot project involving the first group of high-end think tanks from 25 countries (including the ICCS) was officially launched, and China’s high-end think tanks were strategically positioned to primarily “serve the decision-making of the central committee of the CPC and the development of the country.”

Policymakers need the information produced by knowledge regimes insofar as the policy problems they confront often involve ambiguity and uncertainty, and thus, they need to make sense of these problems (Campbell and Pedersen 2014). China basically experienced a period of “decision-making under collective leadership,” during which experts did not participate officially, a period of “expert consulting and decision-making,” during which experts participated officially, and a period of “think-tank consulting and decision-making,” during which several national high-end think tanks were established. Thus, the consulting process has moved from individual expert to

professional institution, and from occasional to institutionalized. The Chinese government and authorities tend to distinguish four different types of think tanks: (1) government-run think tanks; (2) university-hosted think tanks; (3) think tanks affiliated with SOEs; and (4) think tanks that are seen as social organizations (Li 2017). University think tanks in China have played an important role in government consulting, for example, in relation to the 11th Five-year Plan, for which universities “submitted more than 60,000 research and consulting reports to all levels of government departments, enterprises and institutions, providing strong intellectual support for government decision-making and economic and social development” (Li 2014) The following section uses the ICCS at Tsinghua University as an example to illustrate the process of how university think tanks are involved in decision-making research and as decision-making consultants, as well as their influence on decision making. The ICCS has already participated in five Five-year Plans.

3. The ICCS as an Example: Development and Role in Government Decision Making

The ICCS is a professional research institution with more than 30 years’ history, and its development can be roughly divided into three stages.

Stage I: Team of Contemporary China Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences from 1986 to 1999. The team was a rudimentary Chinese think

tank, and played an objective role in decision making. During that time, the team established its ideology as “worrying about what the state worries about, thinking about what the state thinks about.” In the early days, the team concentrated on researching China’s basic national conditions, including population, resources, environment, and agriculture. It then extended this research to other fields. However, at the time, channels for transmitting information to policymakers were limited, and research outcomes were often published in academic journals or newspapers before entering the policymaking circle.

Stage II: The Center for Contemporary China Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences at Tsinghua University was founded by Hu Angang and operated from 2000 to 2011. The idea behind the Center was that “knowledge is for people and for serving the country.” The Center was positioned as a high-end national decision-making think tank, and its main tasks included: researching basic national conditions; carrying out special investigations; collecting and organizing important information about national conditions and establishing decision-making databases about national conditions; researching the major strategic issues in relation to China’s mid- to long-term development in the twenty-first century and relevant important public policies; researching current major issues that attracted the attention of the Central Committee of the CPC; promoting contemporary China studies and education; promoting international cooperation and exchange; and cultivating senior

public policy research personnel and masters students, doctoral students, and post-doctoral personnel. The Center established a series of restricted-access national reports that could be consulted by central and state leaders, as well as provincial chiefs.

Stage III: In 2012, the ICCS was enhanced, with the support of Tsinghua University, to become the Center of Contemporary China Studies under the School of Public Administration, with the goal of building world-class China research think tanks and acting as a base for further exploration of new subjects (e.g., contemporary Chinese studies).

In December 2015, the ICCS was formally selected as a pilot institute with the goal of establishing high-end think tanks (25 think tanks were selected as high-end think tanks, six of which were affiliated with universities) to provide dedicated professional studies on national conditions, national policy, and China's mid- to long-term development plan. The ICCS undertook the following work. First, with regard to urgent and pressing matters in relation to government decision making, the ICCS carried out independent policy research, including, for instance, preliminary research for the 13th Five-year Plan, background research for the report delivered by Xi Jinping at the 19th National Congress of the CPC, research pertinent to the 2050 vision for China, and further research into 2050 China after the 19th National Congress of the CPC. At the behest of relevant ministries and commissions, the ICCS

also undertook policy evaluation and efficacy assessment, including, for example, annual monitoring and evaluation of the Five-year Plan implemented in 2016. Second, the ICCS conducted in-depth theoretical research into China's national conditions, including, for instance, analyses of the Chinese economy, social conditions, ecology, and political conditions, and studies of China's economic strengths, technological strengths, CNP, soft power, and new developmental philosophies. The ICCS engaged in a variety of academic exchanges and public diplomacy events, especially in the area of international academic exchange. In addition, the ICCS published papers in the mainstream media, influencing public and social opinion, and thus evolved to become a truly influential university-based think tank.

The thought and practice of establishing new think tanks for the ICCS can be summarized into "three positions," "two combinations," and "four constructions," they should be based on core Chinese characteristics, university branding, and world-class target positioning. They should combine foundational research with policy research and decision-making consultation with teaching and cultivation to promote cultural construction, team construction, platform construction, and mechanism construction.

Firstly, think tanks should be based on core Chinese characteristics, university branding, and world-class target positioning. "Chinese characteristics" implies the use of "Chinese prac-

tices” as a basis, “Chinese problems” as a guide, and “Chinese style” as a feature to form “Chinese schools” as a mission, “major conflicts and relations” as a theme, “professional research” as an approach, and “comprehensive integration” as a method to expand China’s pathway, improve China’s mechanism, and summarize Chinese theories. “University branding” implies adapting to the unique characteristics of university talent, highlighting specialties of colleges and universities, integrating university research advantages, and creating a “university brand” that think tanks can rely on. “World class” refers to maintaining an intensifying national mission and social obligation of think tanks, increasing the influence of think tanks on major national decisions, improving international competitiveness, mastering international discourse power, and talking with a “Chinese voice” on the international stage.

Secondly, they should combine foundational research with policy research and decision-making consultation with teaching and cultivation. The main feature of university-based think tanks is that they are attached to or affiliated with a university department, and are frequently engaged in policy research (Menegazzi 2018). To combine foundational research with policy research is to “walk with two legs,” taking into account both basic academic research and policy-related applied research, using academic research as the basis and policy research as the guide. Our research is divided into three levels: firstly, basic research, i.e., research on China’s national con-

ditions and pathways, to learn about and explain key points in the success of China’s paths; secondly, major strategy, i.e., designing China’s development targets, participating in the formulation of major national strategies and plans, and building think tanks with professional advantages in relation to national conditions and national policies; and thirdly, major public policy, i.e., conducting research on developmental challenges and countermeasures, studying the properties, background, and reasons for major challenges to China’s development in different periods, and proposing scientific thinking and solutions related to those challenges.

Thirdly, think tanks should promote cultural construction, team construction, platform construction, and mechanism construction. Think tank culture is the soul of think tank construction, and the source of cohesiveness and endurance of think tanks. The ICCS at Tsinghua University has already formed the organizational culture to establish new university think tanks, and seeks to be a “peer of China’s prosperity, and to accompany China’s opening up and keep abreast with China’s reform.” Based on the principle that “knowledge is for people, knowledge is to serve the country,” the ideology of the ICCS is “worrying about what the state worries about, thinking about what the state thinks about, and thinking about what the state has not yet thought about.” It aims to become a “lookout” for the country’s future, a “planner” of national strategy, and an “undertaker” of state think tank projects. One of the distinctive qualities of university think tanks is

teaching and the cultivation of talent. It is necessary for university think tanks to not only record achievements, but also to build talent, for only by developing talent can it achieve high-quality outcomes.

Platform construction is a channel for think tank construction. Utilizing unique university advantages to build a “three-in-one” university think tank, integrating “the teaching platform, research foundation, and policy consultation platform,” the ICCS uses Tsinghua University as a teaching platform, the knowledge structure in multiple fields as a research foundation, and the National Reports as a decision-making consultation platform. It forms channels and brands to support decision making and provides important information, decision-making knowledge, and policy suggestions about world affairs, national conditions, and regional conditions to both central and provincial leaders.

Mechanism construction is a vital source of think tank construction, and consists of assessment mechanisms, reward mechanisms, and team collaboration mechanisms. The ICCS has formed a distinctive “small class system” combining teaching, scientific research, and policy advice, in which academic leaders, key researchers, and students participate. The three types of “small classes” include postgraduate education, project research, and publication writing. These unify the research orientation and subject focus of think tank members, allocate research power scientifically with experienced re-

searchers training new members, and use research projects to promote scientific research as well as to teach.

Fourthly, university think tanks should carry out independent, forward-thinking, and professional decision-making research. Firstly, the research of think tanks should be conducted independently, and not be subject to interference from any government sector or enterprise, nor based on a particular interest group's requirements. Many of the policy research topics were selected by the think tanks themselves rather than by government agencies, and were financed by internal funds rather than through government support. Secondly, university think tanks should carry out forward-thinking research on major issues that are vital to the long-term development of the economy and society instead of being confined to researching existing issues or achievable goals under current conditions. The importance of academic research lies not only in summarizing and explaining existing phenomena, but also in guiding the behavior patterns of the government and the orientation of policy development by making use of existing knowledge, which is particularly important in China during this critical period of transformation. Therefore, think tanks should be adept at discovering problems and able to carry out proactive, strategic, and feasible research. Thirdly, university think tanks should take full advantage of their own professional knowledge and participate in the development of Five-year Plans in a professional manner. The analysis of each issue and piece of advice should

be based on specific theories and empirical analysis of mass data or a thorough investigation of social phenomena, instead of merely jumping to conclusions based on intuition or hearsay.

4. How the ICCS Participates in the Decision-Making Process

Participation in the creation of Five-year Plans is an important way for think tanks to provide intellectual support to the state. The ICCS has continuously provided preliminary background research on a long-term basis, including strategic research, target research, and index research, as well as evaluating the various Five-year Plans and studying major policies.

4.1 *The Ninth Five-year Plan: Active Participation and Positive Influence*

In April 1994, Hu Angang wrote a report titled *Research on the Development of Underdeveloped Regions*, which analyzed trends, basic characteristics, and formulative reasons for regional disparities in relation to economic and social development in China since the reform and opening up, and proposed that “the central government should give priority to solving the problem of development of underdeveloped regions.”

In June of that year, at the invitation of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Party School of the Central Committee of CPC, Hu Angang wrote another report titled *The Central Government Should Give Priority to Solving the Problem of Development of Underdeveloped Regions—Regional Dispari-*

ties in China. This report attracted great interest in more than 30 provinces and prefecture-leading cadres throughout the country, and was highly praised. Soon after the report was published, the Central Policy Research Office extracted the main points and policy suggestions from the report, which was more than 30 pages long. On September 5, the Chief Editor’s Office of the *People’s Daily* also extracted this information for its *Internal Reference* section.

In February 1995, Hu Angang participated in a forum on the ninth Five-year Plan convened by the State Council Research Office and made two suggestions. The first was to study the thought process behind *On the Ten Major Relationships* by Mao Zedong, and to research the 10 relationships of the new period, while the second was to focus on solving the regional development disparities in China in the future. Both suggestions were adopted, and Hu Angang and the State Council Research Office subsequently carried out a cooperative study based on these suggestions.

4.2 *The Tenth Five-year Plan: Continuous and Full Participation*

The importance attached to regional development disparities by the central government caused the ICCS to widen our study on the topic. In total, the ICCS formally published three important works. The first was Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang’s study of the regional development disparities in China from the perspective of political economics, which was formally published as a book titled *China: Political Economics in Un-*

even Development. The book made six suggestions: cancel the preferential policies favoring coastal areas and implement fair and impartial public policy; rebuild the central system of transfer payments and increase financial aid to poor areas; eliminate absolute poverty and guarantee every citizen's basic human rights; ensure that the population of each region can enjoy an equal standard of basic public services and provide aid to poorer regions; improve the infrastructure of underdeveloped regions and create a positive environment for development; and promote the flow of production elements to underdeveloped regions and improve the development capacity of underdeveloped regions. Although these policy suggestions were difficult for China to implement at the time, they were forward-thinking and provided direction, and thus became foundational in terms of policy orientation for several Five-year Plans as China entered the twenty-first century.

The second was a book by Hu Angang and Zou Ping (then deputy director of the Social Development Department of the State Council Research Office) titled *Society and Development: Regional Disparities of Social Development in China* (Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 2000), which analyzed the characteristics and trends in changes in the gap between social development and public services in each region of China since China's reform and opening up. It quantitatively analyzed the correlation between economic development and social development, discussed several basic theoretical is-

ssues related to solving regional disparity in terms of social development, and proposed some basic thinking in terms of public policy to reduce the gaps in social and regional development. The comprehensive development concept of "people-oriented" was first proposed in this book. In July 1999, Hu Angang delivered a speech at the forum on basic thinking for the 10th Five-year Plan chaired by Zeng Peiyan (director of the State Plan Commission) and put forward the notion that people-oriented and people-centered thought would substantially improve people's quality of life, as well as improving the quality of the environment, which is essential for quality of life, and would change the development mode from "high capital investment, high resource consumption, and high pollution emissions" toward using market mechanisms and technological progress to establish a "resource-conserving" and "environmentally friendly" national economic system suitable for the national conditions of China, while at the same time making full use of "two kinds of resources" and "two types of markets" while continuing to pursue trade freedom and investment freedom and implementing this strategy on a much larger scale (Hu 1999, 11–16). The 11th Five-year Plan outline proposed that the guiding ideology should be people-oriented, and for the first time, in the sixth section of the plan, which contained five dedicated chapters, proposed that China should build "a resource-conserving and environmentally friendly society."

The third publication was a book that Hu Angang edited titled *Re-*

gions and Development: New Strategies of Western Development (China Plan Press, 2001), which was written in conjunction with the Center of Contemporary China Studies. In the latter half of the 1990s, the leaders of the central government traveled to investigate the western regions of China. In June 1999, Jiang Zemin formally proposed the western development strategy on behalf of the central government. Consequently, Hu Angang and his team thoroughly explored the new target, new model, new principle, and new strategy for western development in the early years of the twenty-first century based on the theme “western development calls for new thinking” proposed by Jiang Zemin. The team proposed that to speed up the development of the western regions, comprehensive development concepts that took into account things such as materials, manpower, society, culture, and systems should be implemented, and they provided scientific policymaking knowledge and information and suggestions for developing the western regions. During this period, Hu Angang and his team published numerous reports that attracted the attention of the central government leaders.

4.3 The 11th Five-year Plan: Professional Participation and Institutionalized Participation

In 2003, the National Development and Reform Commission began preliminary research for the 11th Five-year Plan, backed a number of research projects, and formally entrusted the Center of Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University to undertake the project

of conducting background research into the Characteristics of National Conditions in the New Century prior to the formulation of the 11th Five-year Plan.

In August 2004, Hu Angang and Wang Yahua reported the findings of their research into the Characteristics of National Conditions in the New Century to the Development Plan Department of the National Development and Reform Commission. A book titled *National Conditions and Development*, which was based on that report, was published by Tsinghua University Press in 2005 containing nearly 180,000 characters and including more than 130 charts. This was the first time the analysis framework of the “five major capitals,” i.e., physical capital, human capital, knowledge capital, natural capital, and international capital had been used to comprehensively evaluate both the success and cost of development of China. It conducted an in-depth analysis, summarized the long-term development model for China, and proposed five major strategies for the promotion of comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development: an economic development strategy, a human resource development strategy, a knowledge development strategy, a green development strategy, and an economic globalization strategy.

On August 31, 2005, when the 10th Five-year Plan was nearing completion and the 11th Five-year Plan was being drafted, the Center of Contemporary China Studies published the *10th Five-year Plan Implementation Evaluation Report*, which was written by Hu

Angang, Wang Yahua, and Yan Yilong. The report used the target conformity evaluation method and conducted the first preliminary post-evaluation by a third party of the five major categories, 27 main indexes and nearly 100 subindexes relating to the national economy and social development outlined in the 10th Five-year Plan. On October 8 that year, the Center of Contemporary China Studies submitted their latest research report to relevant national departments. The report provided comprehensive and objective comments on the primary achievements and important progress during the 10th Five-year Plan (2001–2005) based on historical statistical data and international data of various kinds, and also provided initial conclusions in relation to the successful experiences and lessons learned during this period.

On October 25 in the same year, the 11th Five-year Plan Expert Committee was established after being approved by the State Council. As one of the 37 members of the expert committee, Hu Angang participated in discussions on the Five-year Plan draft on four occasions between October 2005 and February 2006, during which he provided relevant research findings and suggestions for improvement.

In the book *China Reaches a Higher Level* (Zhejiang People's Publishing House) published in September 2006, Hu Angang analyzed both the economic and social development in China during the 10th Five-year Plan and looked at deviations during implementation of the 10th Five-year Plan in an attempt to learn from the mistakes

made. He also analyzed the targets, tasks, characteristics, and innovations of the 11th Five-year Plan. In systematically examining China's past experience and future path, he posed an extremely important question: What is the general trend of China's future development?

4.4 The 12th Five-year Plan: A Deeper Understanding of China

In August 2008, the Center of Contemporary China Studies was entrusted by the National Development and Reform Commission to conduct a mid-term assessment of the implementation of the 11th Five-year Plan, in which they determined that China is currently maintaining a sound level of development. The abstract of their assessment was attached as a reference for the National People's Congress Standing Committee members to use in their mid-term review of progress under the 11th Five-year Plan. The conclusion of the report is reflected in the Report on the Implementation of the 11th Five-year Plan *Outline* presented by Zhang Ping, the director of the National Development and Reform Commission. On January 20, 2009, the Department of Development Planning of the National Development and Reform Commission wrote to Tsinghua University to praise them for the major contributions of the Center of Contemporary China Studies to the mid-term assessment of the 11th Five-year Plan *Outline*.

Analyzing the major conflicts and major relationships in China's development. Based on the results of contemporary China studies over many

years and research on various regions of the country in recent years, Hu Angang published the *Top Ten Relations in the New Period* in September 2009 (Hu Angang 2010, 130–40). This is regarded as an important achievement in terms of providing a comprehensive understanding of China. Moreover, it was considered essential to the overall thought processes of the Center of Contemporary China Studies in developing the 12th Five-year Plan.

Professional research. In August 2005, the Center of Contemporary China Studies, when evaluating the 10th Five-year Plan, decided that the new characteristics of China's stages of development were represented by "five new targets" (new industrialization model, new urbanization model, knowledge information, infrastructure modernization, and global economic integration). In October 2007, a report of the 17th National Congress of the CPC first proposed the new task of comprehensively understanding the further development of industrial information, urbanization, marketization, and internationalization. Hu Angang developed this framework, and proposed that the inner motivation influencing China's economic growth and accumulation of five capitals lies in the "five new targets," expressing the view that using the "five new targets as a growth engine during the 12th Five-year Plan will accelerate development."

Designing a blueprint for construction in China. In the National 12th Five-year Plan Experts Meeting on April 9, 2009, Hu Angang presented a written suggestion that the 12th Five-

year Plan design be converted from a blueprint for national economic and social development to a blueprint for comprehensive construction, including the "top five constructions": economic construction, political construction, social construction, cultural construction, and ecological construction, stating that the main tasks of the Five-year Plan should be arranged in accordance with the "top five constructions." This is consistent with the subsequent outline of the 12th Five-year Plan.

In 2010, Hu Angang and Yan Yilong published a book titled *China Walking Towards 2015* (Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 2010), wherein they analyzed both the international background and China's domestic background in preparation for the 12th Five-year Plan, proposed general thinking and guidelines for the 12th Five-year Plan, studied and designed the main development targets and quantitative indexes to be used during the 12th Five-year Plan, proposed the main task of "Five-in-one" for socialist modernization, namely economic construction, ecological construction, social construction, political construction, and cultural construction, and in particular, proposed the new concept of green development. Thus, this book was an important reference for the formulation of the 12th Five-year Plan.

4.5 13th Five-year Plan: Providing Intellectual Support for New Concepts

The ICCS at Tsinghua University was entrusted by the National Development and Reform Commission to prepare a

report titled *Major Problems and Basic Thinking During the 13th Five-year Plan* (April 2014, 168 pages, 121,000 words), which identified the top 10 problems that the 13th Five-year Plan will face, and suggested that it would be necessary to pay attention to three orientations, problem-oriented, target-oriented, and thinking-oriented, when formulating the 13th Five-year Plan. This provided intellectual support for the thought processes necessary for formulating the 13th Five-year Plan.

Providing Intellectual Support for the “Top Five Developments” concept underlying the 13th Five-year Plan. In August 2010, a national report titled *National 12th Five-year Plan: Background, Thinking and Targets* (*National Reports*, Issue 24 in 2010, August 8, 2010) proposed that when formulating the 12th Five-year Plan, it would be necessary to maintain the top six development principles of the 12th Five-year Plan, namely, green development, innovative development, coordinated development, shared development, safe development, and win-win development.

Prior to drafting the report of the 18th CPC National Congress in April 2012, Hu Angang wrote a book titled *2020 China: To Comprehensively Construct a Moderately Prosperous Society* and submitted it to the central leaders for reference. In the book, Hu Angang proposed the concept of the top five developments, namely, green development, innovative development, coordinated development, shared development, and win-win development. During the period in 2015 when the 13th

Five-year Plan was being formulated, Hu Angang provided copies of the book to relevant comrades for reference, and the General Office of the Central Committee called to express their gratitude on June 2, 2015.

The *Suggestions on Basic Thinking* for the 13th Five-year Plan, which was published by the ICCS in 2013, clearly states that the 13th Five-year Plan needs to consider five aspects of development: green development, innovative development, coordinated development, shared development, and win-win development.

In August of that year, Hu Angang, as a representative of the 18th CPC National Congress, participated in the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CPC's Important Central Documents Advice Meeting. The primary purpose of the meeting was to learn about and discuss *Opinions about the 13th Five-year Plan of the CPC Central Committee* (consultation draft). Thus, once again, the ICCS contributed its intelligence to the state development decision-making process.

As a member of the National 13th Five-year Plan Expert Committee, Hu Angang reviewed and provided advice on the draft of the 13th Five-year Plan on December 13–14, 2015 and January 30–31, 2016, correcting mistakes in the draft and presenting several speeches.

5. Conclusion

The traditional view has focused on the development of think tanks in China and their influ-

ence on the decision-making process. However, in this study, we argue that the development of Chinese think tanks was influenced by the evolution of the Chinese decision-making system, and also contributed to that process.

The ICCS's 30 years of development reflects the development process of China's think tanks, from building a foundation, to the commencement of China's university think tanks, to providing frequent policy consultation. In addition, the ICCS reflects the dynamic process of interaction, mutual support, and mutual demand between China's think tanks and government policymakers. For Chinese think tanks, "independence" is threefold, reflecting the political circumstances and modernization of the governance system. This principle was first proposed by Hu Angang in 1996. Threefold independence includes, first and foremost, independent agenda setting with an eye to addressing China's major relationships and challenges. Second, it includes independent and professional research that takes full account of the country's actual conditions, which connects academic theories and Chinese conditions. Third, it includes independent publishing, which includes the submission of "Reports on the State of China" (Guoqing Baogao) to decision makers for their consideration and the publication of articles and books, which enables it to operate as a third party in evaluating or explaining policies.

University-based think tanks play an important role in the country's development. The major difference

between university-based think tanks and official think tanks is that university-based think tanks are a product of both the practical and the theoretical, which combines a strong foundation of academic research with national realities. Therefore, the most important task for university-based think tanks is to engage in innovation of ideas and thought. For example, the ICCS was the first to propose the concept and theory of green development, the "five major development concepts" (innovation, coordination, green, openness, and sharing), and the "people-centered" development philosophy, all of which have evolved to become mainstream thinking in Chinese society. Another notable example is the ICCS's proposal in 2011 of a goal of common prosperity in China by 2030, and that the global community should move toward a world of Grand Union, which would later come to be known as the vision of a "community of a shared future for mankind."

There have been significant issues and challenges at each stage of China's development. How to analyze and understand these issues and challenges comprehensively and correctly is a precursor for effective policy decision making. Think tanks in China have taken up the issues and challenges facing the country as the focus of their research and have played an influential role in guiding development strategies through participating in preliminary studies and counseling policymakers, both directly and indirectly.

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