

Research on the Exploration and Development of the Construction of New Think Tanks in Universities

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Abstract: As the storage of knowledge, think tanks have gradually become key resources to support various management decisions. For think tanks relying on the construction of universities, they bring together top academic strength, provide decision-making programs for solving real social problems, and also provide intellectual support for cracking the major national strategic issues. Based on this, the paper analyzes the realistic dilemma of the construction of think tanks in universities, and further explores the constructive measures of new think tanks, in order to provide feasible reference for the construction of new think tanks in universities.

Keywords: think tanks in universities; the construction of think tanks; educational development

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the function of universities has long been not only limited to basic education and scientific research. In the context of the era of big data and the Internet, many universities have developed a knowledge network attribute in this new period. In the face of new changes, the role assumed by think tanks in universities is changing, from a mere storage method of knowledge to a knowledge sharing station and connection station. The development of new think tanks in universities is no longer limited to scientific research in the academic area, but it is also able to serve in the development of social industries. As a bridge between academic research and society, it helps the implementation of scientific research achievements, and provides solutions to real social problems.^[1] At present, the depth and breadth of the development of think tanks in universities do not fully match the rapidly changing environment and the internal demand caused by the environment, the top-level design of think tanks is not rational enough, the allocation of resources is not scientific enough, and the organizational form and management need to be innovated and there also exist many other prominent problems in the think tank development. In order to solve these problems, think tanks in universities need to clarify their own positioning, make good top-level design while giving full play to their original advantages, and strengthen their organizational management, so as to achieve sustainable and high-quality development.

The paper discusses about the problems which think tanks in universities face nowadays and provides modern solutions to these difficulties. First is the realistic plight of the construction of new think tanks in universities, which shows on three difficulties: insufficiently flexible top-level design, relative lack of data and information and insufficiently scientific talent training mechanism. Second is the importance of strengthening the construction of think tanks in universities. The paper states that the mainly issues that university think tanks face are fulfilling the mission of the times, playing social functions and enhancing the comprehensive strength. Third, the paper claims suggestions and measures to promote the construction of new think tanks in universities, which are doing a good job of top-level design and planning the layout of think tanks in universities, building a digital think tank and improving the operation and management of think tanks in universities, building a cloud platform to provide diversified data support, multi-dimensional construction to create a think tank service matrix in universities and focusing on the introduction of talents to strengthen the internal power of think tank development.

2. The realistic plight of the construction of new think tanks in universities

2.1. Insufficiently flexible top-level design

Top-level design in engineering refers to the traceability of all levels and elements of affairs, integrated operation, planning and distribution of all resources and elements at the top level, and optimization of arrangements at all levels of affairs. The top-level design in the construction of think tanks in universities is to design and arrange the management structure and operation mechanism of think tanks. A all-round plan is carried out from the construction goals, tasks, security, assessment and other aspects of think tanks in universities, and what we should ensure is that academic research is profound, that the scope of academic involvement is extensive, that social influence is positive and widely spread, that abundant academic and social resources can be integrated, that the linkage with the community can be strengthened to give a rapid response to social needs, and that social needs - think tank tasks - solution strategies - program landing - social reputation of the closed loop operation can be formed. However, think tanks in universities in China are mainly concentrated in key institutions of higher education at present, and the number of them is relatively small and they are far less influential than government think tanks, the top-level design and management structure of think tanks in universities are relatively conservative, the construction of the think tanks mainly relies on the universities' scientific research departments and secondary colleges, and the allocation of resources, staffing and funding sources of the think tanks are highly dependent on the universities themselves, and the communication and connection with the society is relatively low, and the proper staff exchange mechanism and the evaluation mechanism of the results is lacking. [2] The backward top-level design hinders the effectiveness of applied research and the knowledge innovation of think tanks in universities, and it is also difficult to deeply comprehend the government's decision-making requirements, so it could hardly provide high-quality decision-making advice for the public and the government, which is a serious obstacle to the fulfillment of its functions. For example, solidified research staffing may lead to solidified research thinking, and the decision-making solutions formed by the research deviate from the real needs, resulting in a waste of intellectual resources. Another example is the old-fashioned, one-dimensional evaluation mechanism, which inadvertently prompts researchers to ignore cutting-edge, innovative academic research, which is not conducive to the expansion of the social impact of think tanks.

2.2. Relative lack of data and information

Accurate and comprehensive data is the cornerstone of scientific research, and the policy recommendations, academic research or strategic analysis made by think tanks cannot be separated from the support of a large amount of real and immediate data. However, recently, there are obvious shortcomings in the collection, integration and use of data by think tanks in universities. The key data of macro policy, industry dynamics and other special areas are held by the government or specific institutions, which is not released in public. This asymmetry of information resources makes it difficult to match the supply and demand among universities' think tanks, society and government, thus affecting the conversion rate of research results, and also leading to a lower contribution of think tank research results to policy. In addition, the acquisition of external data is also limited by technical means and financial investment, and the acquisition of cutting-edge scientific and technological information such as large databases and AI technology requires the support of corresponding technology and equipment, and compared with social think tanks, think tanks in universities do not have an advantage in this field.

2.3. Insufficiently scientific talent training mechanism

The construction of think tanks' talent team has had a pivotal impact on the comprehensive research capability of think tanks. Zhu Min (2016) stated that "The quality structure of think tank talents consists of three major factors: intelligence, experience and social influence. Intelligence means that the disciplinary background, research methods, abilities, and insights of think tank talents; Experience means that the work experience, information channels, and international perspective of think tank talents; Social influence means that the media exposure and positions of think tank talents' articles."^[3] These three major factors point out that the quality structure of talent in new think tanks is totally different from the traditional university research professionals, and its cultivation mechanism is also different from the traditional talent cultivation. From the current point of view, most of the existing think tanks in universities are research centers and institutes in universities, which have inherited the administrative management system and personnel composition of universities, the low mobility among personnel, the less cross research between multiple disciplines and fields, so the effective communication mechanism

of "industry-academia-research" or "government-academia-research" has not yet been established, and it is difficult for the talents of think tanks in universities to realize benign exchanges with the government and society. At the same time, the talent evaluation mechanism of think tanks in universities often follows the traditional title evaluation system, focusing on thesis publication and project acquisition, with lower recognition of the transformation of results and social services, which cannot really motivate teachers in universities and other personnel to engage in decision-making consulting research, so the influence of decision-making in think tanks in universities is hindered.^[4]

3. The importance of strengthening the construction of think tanks in universities

3.1. Fulfilling the mission of the times

As an important carrier of knowledge innovation and strategic thinking, think tanks in universities bear a special mission given by the times, which is an important support for promoting scientific, democratic and lawful decision-making, modernizing the national governance system and governance capacity, promoting high-quality economic and social development, and upgrading the soft power of the country. In the context of rapidly evolving globalization, the country and the society are increasingly in need of scientific research, policy advice and cutting-edge technology, and the new think tanks in universities are no longer satisfied with the basic academic research work, but are also the core force to fulfill the national duties and solve complex social problems. Nowadays, the new type of think tanks in universities should focus on national strategic needs, set research goals, and gather high-level research power to provide scientific decision-making support for solving real problems, and ensure the scientific character and foresight of policy making.^[5] In addition, think tanks in universities should establish flexible cooperation mechanisms with various industries, further integrate research results and practical experience, give full play to the social application value of research results, and continuously improve the ideological weight and countermeasure quality of think tank results.

In order to respond to the mission of the times, new think tanks in universities must be innovative, introduce interdisciplinary research methods, integrate decision-making research with academic research, give full play to the advantages of resources in universities, establish interdisciplinary, cross-field and inter-university research teams, and jointly explore China's practices and problems, so as to become a solid intellectual backing for the development of the country and society.

3.2. Playing social functions

As the wisdom center role of think tanks become more and more clear in the country, think tanks in universities are gradually becoming an important force for social development. It is necessary to give full play to the disciplinary advantages, academic advantages and talent advantages possessed by think tanks in universities, combine with the characteristics of the university's own development, and transform the basic theoretical research work into practical and feasible practical initiatives.

Think tanks in universities are responsible for providing high-quality strategic advice to the government, enterprises and the public. Based on their profound academic research accumulation, think tanks in universities could not only provide forward-looking and strategic decision-making references for national and local governments, but also provide training and education services for enterprises and the public, as well as guidance for enterprise development. In addition, think tanks in universities could be able to generate extensive connections and exchanges with the government, enterprises and third-party departments through forums, seminars, reports and other forms, to build an exchange platform for multiple parties, which helps to gather the wisdom of multiple parties and ensures that the research results are widely recognized and effectively implemented.

3.3. Enhancing the comprehensive strength

As an effective form of intellectual resources' integration, university think tanks have increasingly become an important carrier for universities to fulfill their social service functions in terms of strategic research, policy advice, social governance, public opinion and cultural heritage. Think tanks in universities are not only the core component of academic research, but also a key factor in enhancing the comprehensive strength of universities.

Taking think tanks as a bond, the advantages of various disciplines is combined, new mode of interdisciplinary researches is being constructed, and new cross-research perspectives are explored, in

hence, while further broadening the academic boundaries, universities can help think tanks' results to be effective and enhance the discourse power of university think tanks in related fields. In addition, the construction of think tanks can bring additional financial investments and social resources to universities. Through the establishment of in-depth cooperation with local governments, enterprises and research institutions, a system for transforming think tank results could be set up, forming a chain of production of think tank results, and providing sustainable resource support for the subsequent academic research work.

4. Suggestions on measures to promote the construction of new think tanks in universities

4.1. Doing a good job of top-level design and planning the layout of think tanks in universities

Clear top-level design and precise layout planning are the key factors to ensure the healthy development of university think tanks. Effective top-level design can provide clear directions and goals for think tanks, and reasonable layout planning can provide strong support for the realization of these goals.

Firstly, the existing think tank structure of universities should be re-examined and evaluated. A comprehensive assessment of the existing think tank resources should be conducted to find out their shortcomings in academics, policies and practices. Specifically, SWOT analysis could be used to conduct an in-depth study on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of think tanks for establishing the positioning of new think tanks. In addition, differentiated layouts are implemented according to the professional specialties and research directions of universities. For example, technology-oriented universities can focus on the development of think tanks related to Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence and other areas; while arts and sciences schools can emphasize the construction of think tanks for social sciences and humanities research. Secondly, interdisciplinary cooperation should be encouraged. Universities could encourage researchers to conduct cross-research by designing incentive mechanisms, such as setting up an interdisciplinary research fund to reward cross-field think tank cooperation projects. Thirdly, long-term partnerships with think tank users are eager to be established. Through such cooperation, the influence of think tanks can be enhanced, which lays the foundation for better understanding of actual problems and provides targeted solutions. ^[6]

4.2. Building a digital think tank and improving the operation and management of think tanks in universities

Presently, big data set off a far-reaching change in thinking, profoundly affecting the way of human production and life. The construction of "digital university think tanks" could effectively improve the operation and management efficiency of the think tank. Through the building of big data analysis platform, information database, achievement database, expert database and think tank sharing platform, it could help share academic resources, strengthening the research depth and width of think tanks, optimizing the arrangement of think tank resources, and improving the operational efficiency of think tanks.

First, the usage of big data technology could provide wide-ranging and in-depth information analysis for think tanks in universities. Over the collection, integration and analysis of various data resources, it helps researchers fully grasp the cutting-edge trends of academic research and even predict important topics that may emerge in the future. For example, through data mining of academic articles, reports and news in recent years, think tanks can accurately identify and pre-study issues of growing public concern, such as climate change and artificial intelligence ethics. Second, big data can help think tanks in universities improve their internal management mechanisms. By analyzing information on the implementation of think tank projects, achievement outputs, partnerships, etc., universities can more accurately assign resources and avoid duplicating projects, thus improving research efficiency. Third, think tanks can use big data analysis to supervise the progress of each research project in real time to ensure that it is carried out as planned. In addition, in order to guarantee the effective use of big data in think tanks in universities, it is recommended that think tanks establish specialized data analysis teams and conduct relevant technical training on a regular basis. At the same time, communication and cooperation with information technology departments should be strengthened to certify the safe and efficient transmission and storage of data.

4.3. Building a cloud platform to provide diversified data support

Contemporary academic research work is becoming more and more complex, and the diverse needs for data are becoming more and more prominent. For this reason, the cloud platform has become an essential tool for the construction of new think tanks, which can simultaneously meet the diversified needs of data storage, analysis and sharing.

With the construction of cloud platform, think tanks in universities can further realize the intelligent management of data.^[7] First, the cloud platform has an inherent advantage in the real-time updating and synchronization of various types of data, which could raise the accuracy of the information obtained and arrange those data into right timeline. Second, the cloud platform can provide powerful arithmetic support for large-scale data analysis, such as machine learning and deep learning, helping researchers extract valuable information from complex data quickly and accurately.

Simply storing and analyzing data is not enough to meet the construction needs of new think tanks. The cloud platform also needs to expand and integrate public data sources, such as government work reports and social media data, to provide richer data support for research. In addition, think tanks can share and cooperate data with other academic institutions, enterprises and government departments through the cloud platform to further enrich their research perspectives and data sources.

4.4. Multi-dimensional construction to create a think tank service matrix in universities

As an important intersection of academics and practice, new think tanks in universities should follow the needs of the government and society to realize multi-dimensional and highly efficient service output. For this reason, it is especially crucial to build a perfect "think tank service matrix".

First, it is necessary to set up specialized service nodes for different research levels in the vertical dimension. Field research comprises basic social issues and requires numerous fieldwork, while high-level research focuses more on theoretical exploration and model construction. In this regard, think tanks can set up integrated research platforms to closely connect the various levels of research and promote resource sharing and cross-research; Second, think tanks can be organized around different disciplinary fields in the horizontal dimension. Considering the increasing emphasis on multidisciplinary cross-research, think tanks should strengthen the construction of bridges between natural sciences, social sciences and other fields. For example, forming multidisciplinary research groups and adopting advanced technological means such as big data analysis and simulation to carry out multi-faceted and in-depth analysis on the same issue; Third, the operability of the think tank service matrix should be polished from the technological dimension. By introducing modern technologies such as cloud computing and artificial intelligence, the efficiency and accuracy of data processing can be improved. Through regular technical training and technical upgrading, the advancement and effectiveness of the think tank service matrix can be well guaranteed.

4.5. Focusing on the introduction of talents to strengthen the internal power of think tank development

As the core carrier of academics, policies and practices, think tanks in universities have strong research capabilities and high-quality talent resources as their core competitiveness. Research personal is not only the main body of think tank research, but also the biggest internal power to support its sustainable development. Hu Wusheng and Gong Wenxia (2019) stated that it was an important foundation for building a first-class think tank in universities to have a high-quality think tank talent team. The construction of think tanks in universities should timely adjust the personnel structure and establish a scientific talent team for think tanks.^[8] For the introduction and cultivation of talents, think tanks in universities can start from the following points. First, it adopts a multi-channel and multi-method strategy. For example, it could establish cooperative relationships with internationally renowned academic institutions to realize the exchange and sharing of researchers; Second, it can organize special research activities to attract and gather the best in academia; Third, it can provide complete training programs and extensive development platforms to attract young qualified individuals and guarantee the sustainable development of the research team; Fourth, it could build an open and flexible research environment to inspire interdisciplinary and cross-field collaborative research; Fifth, it can create a clear incentive mechanism to further stimulate the enthusiasm of researchers.

To sum up, focusing on the introduction of talents and strengthening internal motivation are the keys to guarantee the long-term and healthy development of think tanks in universities. Only with first-class talents and abundant research thrust could think tanks in universities play a more crucial role in academics,

policies and practices.

5. Conclusion and prospect

Since the concept of construction of think tanks with Chinese characteristics was brought up in 2013 and the *National Philosophy and Social Science Development Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan Period* was issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2022, the construction and development of new think tanks in universities have always been an important area of national concern. After an in-depth study of the construction of new think tanks in universities, the multiple responsibilities assumed by think tanks in universities have been excavated one by one, from building innovative research platforms for the academic community to providing scientific, systematic and advanced policy references for social decision-making, the functional boundaries of think tanks in universities are being gradually broadened.

Facing the future, the construction of new think tanks in universities is still a long way to go. First of all, under the environment of rapid development of digitization and artificial intelligence technology, think tanks in universities should integrate big data, AI analysis and other advanced technologies into specific construction programs, expand access to information, and promote data-driven intelligent research to ensure the precision and depth of research results. Then, new think tanks in universities should take the initiative to break the traditional academic boundaries, set up a multidisciplinary and cross-field research team from the perspective of solving real problems, expand the resource exchange and communication channels, actively build a broader research network, and produce more practical decision-making suggestions. In addition, think tanks in universities should also pay more attention to the interaction with society, enterprises and the government. Apart from the traditional academic research, more energy should be projected to practical problems, for providing practical, cutting-edge decision support for society.

To summarize, there's no royal road to construct new think tanks in universities, and the only way to better respond to the needs of the times and contribute to the national construction and human progress is to continue to innovate and explore of the construction of new think tanks in universities.

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