

Comparative Study on the Policy Advocacy of Think Tanks in Chinese Universities from the Perspective of Resource Dependence

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ABSTRACT

University think tank is an important part of the think tank system in China. Based on the theory of resource dependence, this paper constructs the framework of resource dependence in the policy advocacy of university think tank. The comparative case study of university think tanks with remarkable achievements in Beijing and Shanghai is selected. Through field investigation and data collection, this paper compares the differences between the two places in the construction of university think tanks, and analyzes the influence of region on the acquisition of resources by university think tanks from four dimensions: organization management, supply chain relationship, propaganda and promotion, and strategic alliance. Because of the distance between Shanghai and the physical space of the capital, it is more difficult to obtain the required resources than Beijing. **Keywords:** *University Think Tanks; Resource Dependence Theory; Strategic Alliances*

1. INTRODUCTION

The word "think tank" comes from the West. In 2018, the work report of the national government put forward "building a new type of think tank", "supporting scientific research institutes, universities and enterprises to integrate innovation and accelerate the transformation and application of innovation achievements". China's think-tank development has formed a multi-complementary Chinese think-tank system [1] in which institutions think-tank, university think-tank, folk think-tank and the party, government and army system coexist and develop. Colleges and universities have incomparable advantages in personnel training, scientific research, social services, international exchanges and cooperation. The most important function of think-tank is consulting and politics. Relying on its unique professional basic discipline platform, university think-tank actively exerts its function of serving the society, cultivating and educating people, and actively participates in the process of policy advocacy. At present, the development of university think tank in China has a unique "Shanghai model". This study focuses on the policy advocacy path of university think tanks in China. Based on the cases of Beijing and Shanghai, this paper explores the influence of region on the resource acquisition in the process of policy advocacy of university think tanks through comparative case analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Research Status

Policy advocacy is an important function of college think tanks, so college think tanks should focus on knowledge management and obtain government support. (L. Chen)[2]The collaboration of the government, the media, and universities are different dimensions of think tank development. By building a community of interests, the development of university think tanks can obtain the source of power. (H. Li ; X. Zhang) [3] The government guides the construction of a social environment suitable for the development of university think tanks and the importance of fully coordinating the relationship between the government and universities.(H. Qin; S. Xie[4]) University think tanks should establish research results promotion mechanisms, using the Internet, Weibo and other emerging social media to spread. (S. Wen[5]). University think tanks should establish an institutionalized work platform in policy advocacy And establish a feedback mechanism for think tank research results. (C. Tu; W. Wei[6]) X. Zhu[7] constructed the theoretical framework of think tank research from the three levels of macro-medium-micro level, and believed that "the study of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics must be extended to the spatial category of'regional comparison' and found that think tanks in different regions of China "Development distribution pattern and the characteristics of the differences in participation modes", "Exploring the differences in the

policy participation modes of think tanks in different regions and the internal connections between regional attributes has become an important topic in the research of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

There are many related studies on the construction of think tanks. Most of them focus on the experience summary and thinking, most of them use the way of discussion to elaborate the conclusion, lack the corresponding theoretical support and data support and the empirical research of the case of the think tank. It is difficult to ensure the application effect of the research. Based on this, this paper selects the university think tank in Beijing and Shanghai as the research object, carries on the empirical research through the comparative case analysis method, compares the analysis two places university think tank policy advocacy channel, Explore the impact of regional factors on the policy advocacy of university think tanks in China.

2.2. Theoretical Construction

2.2.1. Resource dependency theory

According to the theory of resource dependence, organization is an open system, no resources on which any organization depends for survival and development can be self-sufficient and organizational development must rely on the support of resources provided by the external environment. On the one hand, non-governmental organizations will respond to the external organizations of resource exchange, on the other hand, organizations should balance external resource dependence and their own independence, and under appropriate conditions, they can obtain certain autonomy and freedom from external constraints. (W. Yu[8]) X. Wu and S. Yang[9]) carries on the bibliometric analysis, divides the literature which applies the resource dependence theory into six topics: inter-organizational resource sharing, senior management, inter-organizational governance, supply chain relationship, strategic alliance and others. To sum up, organizations can not develop in isolation, need to interact with the external environment, obtain the resources needed for development, and sometimes need to form strategic alliances to maintain independence. The development of university think tank needs system, fund, data, media and other resources. University think tanks and government cooperation, both sides can access resources to meet development needs.

The geographical difference of the organization affects the external factors of the organization and the access to resources. Therefore, based on the theory of resource dependence, this study explores the relationship between policy advocacy differences and regional attributes in colleges and universities in different regions.

2.2.2. Analytical framework

As a policy advisory body, university think tanks can not be self-sufficient in resources, and must obtain resources through other organizations in order to survive and develop. The demand for resources constitutes the dependence of university think tanks on the outside, including the government, society and so on. The scarcity and importance of resources determine the degree of dependence of university think tanks on the external environment.

Therefore, university think tanks can not operate in isolation and must interact with the external environment and other organizations that control resources. Faced with the uncertainty of external resource acquisition and organizational dependence, university think tanks need to make continuous adjustments to obtain and maintain external resources, and maintain independence to minimize dependence. Therefore, university think tanks take measures to deal with dependence, such as university think tanks seeking cooperation to form alliances to form inter-organizational dependencies.

Based on the theory of resource dependence, this study combines the resources needed for the policy advocacy of university think tanks and the path of regional influence, constructs the framework of resource dependence analysis for the policy advocacy of university think tanks, and explores the causal mechanism of the influence of regional factors on the policy advocacy of university think tanks.

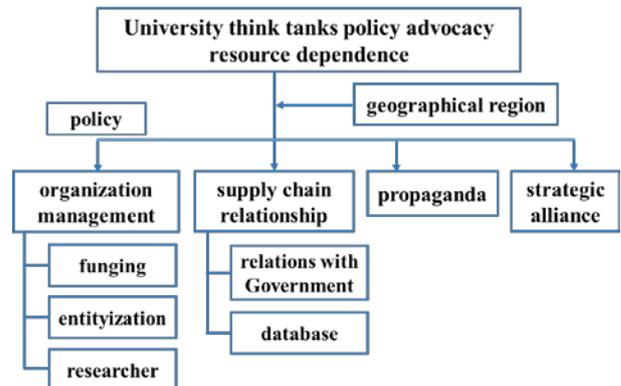


Figure 1. Analytical Framework

3. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES

3.1. Case Selection

The research method of this study is comparative case analysis, selecting university think tanks in Beijing and Shanghai as the research object, analyzing the differences of policy advocacy path. Based on the analysis framework, this paper explores the influence of regional factors on the difference of obtaining resources in policy advocacy of university think tanks, and reveals its causal mechanism.

Beijing and Shanghai have unique location factors, regional economy and university construction are developing rapidly, and the development of university think tanks is relatively mature, which is among the best in the country, representative and comparable. At the same time, other control variables are also considered, and as far as possible, the university think tanks with similar environmental conditions, similar scale and similar establishment time are selected to study.

On the basis of the field investigation in Shanghai, the author, referring to the "Global Think Tank Report" of the University of Pennsylvania, the "China Think Tank Report" of the Research Center of the Think Tank of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the "China Think Tank Influence Report" jointly released by the Zero Point International Development Research Institute and the China Network, and the list of the first national high-end think tanks in China, conducted communication and research with the leaders, researchers and administrators of 10 university think tanks and obtained a large number of primary data. After sample screening, the study selected eight think tanks of similar size as the research object: the political economy Research Center of Tsinghua University, Population and Development Research Center of Renmin University of China, China Institute of Social Management, Beijing normal University, Institute of Education Policy, Beijing normal University, Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation and Governance Research Center, Fudan University political Party Construction and National Development Research Center, Fudan University population and Development Policy Research Center, Fudan University Shanghai University think tank management and research center.

3.2. Policy Advocacy Path

3.2.1. Beijing: independent development

The main ways to advocate the policy of think-tank in Beijing are to communicate directly with government departments, to deliver special reports, to issue publications, to train government staff, and to communicate with representatives of democratic parties. Through the construction of cooperation base with university think tank, the government directly entrusts the policy advocacy topic, and sets up the revolving door mechanism to provide the talent flow channel and so on. At present, Beijing does not have a regional alliance similar to the Shanghai University think tank Research and Management Center, mainly because Beijing has a superior geographical location and does not need to rely on the alliance to obtain external resources.

3.2.2. Shanghai: group development

Shanghai pays attention to the strategic alliance and obtains more resources by establishing the research and management center of Shanghai university think tank. This organization is the responsible organization of the alliance, studies university think tanks, provides guidance and services for the development of university think tanks, promotes the relationship between university think tanks and governments, uses the media to promote university think tanks in Shanghai products, and trains think tank talents..

3.3. Comparative Analysis on the Path of Policy Advocacy of University Think Tanks

Due to regional factors, university think tanks in Shanghai and local government cooperation, university think tanks in Beijing has a superior geographical location, in-depth cooperation with the local government, and convenient cooperation with national departments.

Combined with official websites, media reports, open data, academic reports, research interviews and other materials, the resource dependence framework advocated by the policy of university think tanks is constructed based on literature. Regional differences have four dimensions of influence on the development of university think tanks: organization management, supply chain relationship, propaganda and promotion, strategic alliance. It is found that the resources needed for policy advocacy of think tanks in colleges and universities are mainly: policy system, researchers, operating funds, office space, government relations, database, propaganda and promotion, cooperation platform.

University think tanks are located in different provinces and face different policy systems and propaganda conditions, which affect the organization management and policy advocacy of university think tanks. Regional impact policy system, government support, publicity channels, cooperation platform. The closer the university think tank is to the central government, the faster the access to resources is, the weaker the dependence on the outside world and the stronger the independence. In contrast, university think tanks in Shanghai is at a disadvantage, in order to get rid of regional influence and access to resources, the establishment of strategic alliances.

3.3.1. Organization management

The development focus of Beijing and Shanghai is different, which affects the human and financial system of university think tank development. The difference of university think-tank management system directly affects the policy advocacy of university think-tank.

The state issued documents to manage the development of think tanks, and then provinces issued think tank management system. In particular, Shanghai issued more

than ten documents, such as "University think tanks in Shanghai connotation construction plan implementation plan" to the university think tank funds, venues, personnel have made detailed instructions and requirements. Beijing has not issued similar documents, requiring colleges and universities to develop in combination with their own situation.

3.3.1.1. Funding

Many researchers in university think tanks mentioned "independence" in interviews, that is, whether university think tanks can maintain their independence in the process of policy advocacy. "Governments introduce new policies that sometimes require scholars to argue rationality to convince the public." Such topics may affect the output of think tanks and the academic beliefs of individual scholars. "The source of funding has a great impact on the independence of the government," and the lack of government funding helps to maintain independence to some extent. "The independence of think tanks is important. The sources of funding should be diverse." The independence of the think tank has a certain relationship with its source of funds. The "first batch of 18 university think tanks in Shanghai" set up by the Shanghai Education Commission in conjunction with colleges and universities are jointly funded by colleges and universities and the government, and do not involve social donations-financing by think tanks. Some university think tanks in Beijing are very diversified, state and university allocations are part of it, and think tanks raise funds to seek corporate and social support. This will also affect the channel and independence of the think tank to some extent.

3.3.1.2. Entityization

The broad substantiveization refers to whether the think tank has a special site, researchers, administration. University think tanks in Shanghai pay attention to materialization and think that setting up special venues and personnel can arouse the attention of superiors. University think tanks in Beijing tend to build virtual bodies, arguing that "there is no administrative binding force, but no establishment restrictions, interested scholars can participate." At this stage, the narrow sense of materialization refers to the establishment. Colleges and universities attach importance to think tanks directly affect the establishment, under different circumstances, university think tanks and researchers also favor different systems.

3.3.1.3. Researchers

China is a unitary state. The scope of the central and local authority is different from that of the West. "Universities in different provinces greatly need the support of local governments, so we should pay attention to local economic and social development and put forward suggestions."

Beijing is the capital, affecting local think-tank scholars more familiar with the national perspective. In the political center environment, more attention can be paid to the theoretical problems at the national level and put forward policy suggestions, which is more easily noticed by the state. At the same time, the capital is a higher platform to help scholars change their identities, especially the views of influential university experts are more easily recognized by the public, and can be interviewed by the media as representatives of the capital.

3.3.2. Supply chain relationship

The development of think tank is the process of government outsourcing some functions and marketization of policy consultation. The resources needed by university think tank mainly depend on the supply chain relationship provided by the government, that is, the supply chain relationship in policy advocacy. The relationship between university think tank and government affects database construction.

3.3.2.1. Relations with Government

The university think tanks carries on the policy consultation service for the government department, the university think tanks is the supply side, the government is the demand side, the market with the demand side is more developed, the regional factor affects the supply chain relationship of the university think tank in different regions. "The central government and the government in the capital are more inclined to work with university think tanks in Beijing for academic workshops." Regional influence pattern, university think tanks in Shanghai because of the distance, and the central government is not closely linked, the corresponding special newspaper delivery, face-to-face meeting exchange, revolving door mechanism and other channels are not smooth. University think tanks in Beijing have a superior geographical location, relying on supply chain relations to create more cooperation and innovation platform.

3.3.2.2. Database

Database is an important index to evaluate think tanks. A university think tank in Shanghai continues to invest a lot of money to buy services, using the market to seek technical and experienced organization and construction database. Think tanks produce data at the same time. University think tanks in Beijing are close to the central government, easy to communicate and cooperate, and more secure, so it is easier to get national primary data for research. "University think tanks in Beijing are easier to collect data in other provinces."

3.3.3. Propaganda

Publicity and promotion play an important role in the development of university think tanks, not only to communicate with the public, but also to enhance social influence. Publicity and promotion become an important factor in the evaluation of think tanks, which can help think tanks to obtain candidates in the limited competition model advocated by the policy. As a cultural center of the capital gathered a variety of newspapers, radio and television media base. University think tanks in Beijing are more dominant in media publicity. "In the face of hot issues, the media, due to deadlines and other requirements, prefer to use geographical advantages to interview local scholars ." More and more university think tanks use media platform to promote themselves.

3.3.4. Strategic alliance

Beijing as the capital, the most superior geographical location. As one of the four municipalities directly under the Central Government in China, Shanghai has unique geographical advantages such as international financial centers. Because of the open and inclusive cultural environment, university think tanks in Shanghai often focus on issues from a national perspective, with a high level and great influence. For better development, based on its own advantages, decentralization and integration of resources, Shanghai has established a "research and management center of university think tank ". The development of university think tanks needs external resources. These government departments can help solve them to a certain extent, but university think tanks themselves hope to weaken their dependence on external resources as much as possible and do not affect the independence of research. So rely on strategic alliances to obtain inferior resources to maintain organizational independence. The existence of the alliance and screening listing, selection, government funding support related, but also a wave of good publicity and promotion, conducive to the establishment of databases and the holding of forums, for the local university think tank to provide a more powerful platform for cooperation and innovation.

3.3.5. Summary

Based on the first-class academic level and unique and superior geographical location, university think tanks in Beijing and Shanghai have developed well among many university think tanks in China. University think tanks in Beijing have achieved "autonomous" development because of its superior geographical location and more convenient access to resources. Because Shanghai is far from the physical space of the capital, it is more difficult to obtain the required resources than Beijing, so in the form of strategic alliance, Shanghai adopts the "group" development model.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the different policy advocacy methods of university think tanks in Beijing and Shanghai, it can be concluded that university think tanks in the capital and other provinces have different access to resources because of different regions. Thus affecting the development model of think-tank," independent "development and" group "development reflect different policy advocacy channels. However, whether the Shanghai practice of selecting functions and decentralizing power to establish "strategic alliance" is suitable for the development of university think tanks in other parts of China is still a question worth discussing.

This study has made some progress in theory and practice, but there are still shortcomings: first, the observation object fails to achieve full coverage and does not rule out the possibility of different policy advocacy paths of university think tanks; secondly, data collection has limitations. Due to the difficulty of interview invitation, the actual number of interviews is limited.

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