
THE INFLUENCE OF THINK TANKS IN THE CHINESE POLICY PROCESS

Different Ways and Mechanisms

_____ Zhu Xufeng

Abstract

This article argues that expert knowledge, governmental linkage, and personal ties are the factors that determine think tanks' influence in the Chinese policy process. Moreover, different types of think tanks exert influence through different mechanisms. Empirical data are from a 2004 nationwide survey of 301 of China's think tanks.

Keywords: think tanks, policy research institutes, influence, policy process, contemporary China

Introduction

Systematic research on think tanks in China has not progressed much, not only because of their convoluted policy processes but also because they exist in a constantly changing and specific political environment. During the Mao era in China, policy research institutes were tightly bound to particular ministries and their institutional missions.¹

_____ Zhu Xufeng is Associate Professor at the Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, Tianjin, China, and Yenching Visiting Scholar at the Harvard-Yenching Institute, Harvard University. He wishes to thank Xue Lan, Zhang Jing'an, Luo Hui, Zhao Gang, and anonymous reviewers for their help in preparing this article. Grant sponsors are the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Foundation of the Ministry of Education of China (07JC840005) and The New Century Excellent Talents Support Program of the Ministry of Education of China (NCET-08-0303). Email: <zhuxufeng@nankai.edu.cn>.

1. Murray S. Tanner, "Changing Windows on a Changing China: The Evolving 'Think Tank' System and the Case of the Public Security Sector," *China Quarterly* 171 (September 2002), pp. 559–74.

Asian Survey, Vol. 49, Issue 2, pp. 333–357, ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X. © 2009 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: AS.2009.49.2.333.

After the 1978 reform and opening-up policy was initiated, Chinese leaders founded a number of think tanks; however, their independence was not recognized by Western scholars, who saw them only as tools for enhancing the legitimacy of political authority.² A contrary and relatively optimistic attitude toward the roles of China's think tanks is that there is a possibility of growing autonomy in Chinese intellectual life.³ However, despite the fact that China's top leaders have repeatedly emphasized the promotion of rationality and democratization in the policy process and encouraged expert consultation since 1986,⁴ there has been no mature market for consultancy services in policy making until now.⁵ Consequently, researchers have had to construct unique theoretical explanations regarding think tanks that are suitable for a Chinese-type political system rather than for a free intellectual market. In a free intellectual market, the competition for dollars, media, and ideas is important for the success of think tanks.⁶ In the Chinese context, however, researchers should focus more on the administrative linkage between think tanks and government.

Scholars' efforts have focused on exploring unique theoretical explanations regarding China's think tanks but have not been very successful. There are essentially two separate categories of research produced in the literature. One includes discussions on the Chinese political system by experts in China studies. These discussions mainly regard China's think tanks as political actors. For example, *China Quarterly* published a special issue on China's think tanks in 2002.⁷ Given the increasing interest in the Chinese

2. Michel Bonnin and Yves Chevrier, "The Intellectual and the State: Social Dynamics of Intellectual Autonomy during the Post-Mao Era," *ibid.* 127 (September 1991), pp. 569–93.

3. Merle Goldman, "Politically-engaged Intellectuals in the Deng-Jiang Era: A Changing Relationship with the Party-State," *ibid.* 145 (March 1996), pp. 35–52; Merle Goldman, "The Emergence of Politically Independent Intellectuals," in *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, ed. Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 283–307.

4. Wan Li, "Juece Keixuehua, Minzhuhua shi Zhengzhi Tizhi Gaige de Yige Zhongyao Ketu" [Rationality and democratization of decision-making are one of the important tasks in the reform of the political system], 1986; Jiang Zemin, "Zai 'Lingdao Kexue Xilie Jiangzuo' Kaixue Dianli Shang de Jianghua" [Speech on the beginning ceremony of 'Lectures of Leadership Science'], 1986; Jiang Zemin, "Aiguo Zhuyi he Woguo Zhishi Fenzi de Shiming" [Patriotism and the mission of intellectuals in China], 1990.

5. Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

6. James A. Smith, *Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (New York: Free Press, 1991); David M. Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); James G. McGann, *The Competition for Dollars, Scholars, and Influence in the Public Policy Research Industry* (New York: University Press of America, 1995).

policy process within and outside China, there have been some relatively systematic case studies.⁸ However, because there is a lack of original data, quantitative analyses based on large numbers of samples are left blank.

Meanwhile, articles on think tanks in China and northeast Asian countries have been published by scholars whose specific research field involves think tanks. These articles are generally edited in the proceedings of international comparative works.⁹ Still, few studies have theoretically identified and explained why influence varies among think tanks in China. This raises several questions. How do we measure the influence of China's think tanks? How do they work and build their influence? Are there any specific mechanisms used by different think tanks to influence policy? This article hopes to make a contribution by answering these questions through an empirical study of China's think tanks.

Picturing the Influence of Think Tanks

The influence of think tanks has been a debatable topic in this field since scholars began talking about them. This is because prevailing approaches that attempt to explain their influence or relevance, such as elite theory and pluralist theory, are plagued with many problems.¹⁰ Therefore, here we try to adopt a social structural approach. Following Galtung, we divide the structure of the policy system into three parts: a "decision-making nucleus" surrounded by the "center" of the structure, which in turn is surrounded

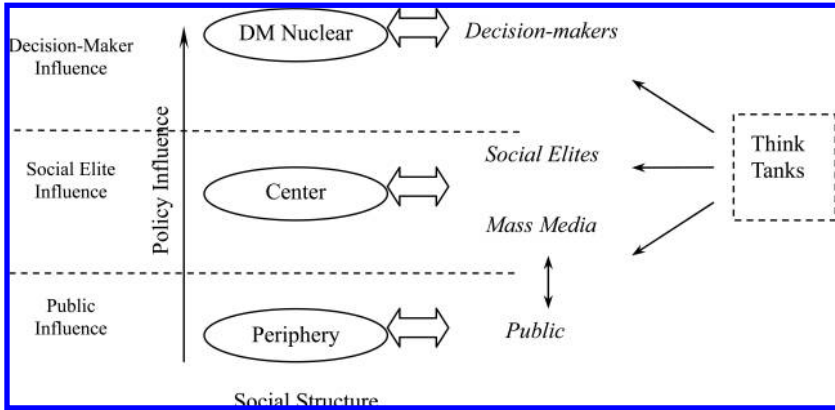
7. Tanner, "Changing Windows on a Changing China"; David Shambaugh, "China's International Relations Think Tanks: Evolving Structure and Process," *China Quarterly* 171 (September 2002), pp. 575–96; Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence," in *ibid.*, pp. 597–616; Bates Gill and James Mulvenon, "Chinese Military-Related Think Tanks and Research Institutions," in *ibid.*, pp. 617–24; Barry Naughton, "China's Economic Think Tanks: Their Changing Role in the 1990s," in *ibid.*, pp. 625–35.

8. Such as Catherine H. Keyser, *Professionalizing Research in Post-Mao China: The System Reform Institute and Policy Making* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2003); Liao Xuanli, *Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks and China's Policy toward Japan* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006).

9. Makiko Ueno, "Northeast Asian Think Tanks: Toward Building Capacity for More Democratic Societies," in *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, ed. James McGann and Kent R. Weaver (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000), pp. 221–43; Shai Ming-Chen and Diane Stone, "The Chinese Tradition of Policy Research Institutes," in *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*, ed. Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 141–62.

10. Related criticism includes Diane Stone, Andrew Denham, and Mark Garnett, eds., *Think Tanks across Nations: A Comparative Approach* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

FIGURE 1 *The Influence of Think Tanks with a Social Structural Approach*



SOURCE: By author.

by the “periphery.”¹¹ Actors in diverse social roles wield different scales of influence upon policies. The decision-making nucleus, which involves official decision makers, is the most influential element in the policy process, while the periphery, which involves the ordinary public, has the least influence. Like other members of the social elite, think tank experts are in the nucleus and try to influence not only the decision makers but also other members of the social elite and the public, because influencing prevailing attitudes in these two classes can indirectly influence policies. Accordingly, we may classify all influential behaviors of think tanks into three levels: “decision-maker influence,” “social elite influence,” and “public influence.” It is noteworthy that think tanks exert influence on the periphery mainly through the mass media, lacking direct platforms to advocate their ideas in public. Figure 1 illustrates the mechanism behind the process of think tanks’ building influence on policies.

China’s Think Tanks: Definition and Classification

Organizations serving as policy advisors to the Chinese government have existed for decades. However, China cannot simply copy Western concepts

11. Johan Galtung, “Foreign Policy Opinion as a Function of Social Position,” *Journal of Peace Research* 1:3-4 (1964), pp. 206-30.

regarding think tanks. Western scholars have emphasized independence from government, political parties, and interest groups, as well as non-profitability, as the defining organizational features of think tanks.¹² Strictly speaking, there are no such organizations in China because of the existing one party-dominated system, and almost all Chinese think tanks are government-funded or have a degree of government connection.¹³

One distinct ongoing debate has been whether or not official research institutes can be considered a kind of Chinese think tank. China's official policy research institutes are founded within government agencies whose responsibilities are to draft important policies, release information, and initiate studies on policy issues. These institutes include the Research Office of the State Council and the research offices of local governments, ministries, and commissions.¹⁴ From our viewpoint, China should adopt the basic defining feature of think tanks emphasized by Western scholars: think tanks should be an "external brain" independent of the government in some distinct and relevant sense. However, China's official policy research institutes function as immediate actors of the governmental policy process, and not as "external brains." Thus, although they also conduct research on policy issues, official policy research institutes cannot be called "think tanks."

When defining China's think tanks, "autonomy" is a good criterion to use. The West's ambiguous definition of "independence" is very much open to debate. For example, if "independence" refers to financial independence (which would permit a think tank to decline or accept work on its own terms), many think tanks in the West could not be included because they depend heavily, often primarily, on government funding. One characteristic of *official* research institutes is their lack of autonomy—they cannot decide what research mission to undertake and when. Therefore, official policy research institutes in China cannot be called think tanks. As such, excluding official policy research institutes from the general domain of think tanks, China's think tanks could be defined as stable and autonomous organizations that research and consult on policy issues to influence the policy process.

12. Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 16; Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 11.

13. Shai and Stone, "The Chinese Tradition of Policy Research Institutes"; Zhu Xufeng and Xue Lan, "Think Tanks in Transitional China," *Public Administration and Development* 27:5 (December 2007), pp. 452–64.

14. As an example, the Office of Policy Studies (OPS) of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the biggest ministry in the State Council of China, was established at the same time as the NDRC was reorganized from the State Development Planning Commission (SDPC) in 2003. Almost all speech manuscripts of NDRC leaders were prepared and drafted by the OPS.

One classifying method applicable to the Chinese context is the use of formal and legal organizational identities. The *General Principles of the Civil Law of the People's Republic of China* and related laws stipulate organizing structures for *danwei* (work units) that consist of *jiguan* (government agencies), *shiye danwei* (public institutions), *qiye* (enterprises), *shehui tuanti* (social groups), and *minban fei qiye danwei* (civilian nonprofit institutions, CNPIs). Bearing in mind that the definition of China's think tanks has been narrowed down to exclude research organizations that are within the structure of a government agency or registered as government agencies, China's think tanks can be classified into two categories. One is public institutions (semi-official) think tanks. The other is think tanks centered on CNPIs, enterprises, and university-run research institutes (civilian think tanks). This taxonomy of organizations in terms of legal organizational identities further clarifies the types of think tank.

Semi-official think tanks are the most important components in the policy research and consultation system outside the Chinese government, the most important ones being the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Development Research Center of the State Council (DRC). Some renowned semi-official think tanks outside Beijing include the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) and the China Development Institute (CDI, located in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province). They are not completely independent from the government but are run in a more autonomous manner than official policy research institutes. Semi-official think tanks are independent legal entities founded by the government as a *yewu zhuguan danwei* (supervising unit) or a *guakao danwei* (affiliated unit). They are headed by government-nominated personnel and accept start-up capital from their supervising government agencies. They also receive a steady flow of administratively appropriated funds as fees for regular research tasks assigned by their supervisor; as such, their policy output is somewhat shaped by government directives. Nevertheless, semi-official think tanks have more freedom than other varieties because they can accept research tasks and funds from other government departments or organizations, or even international organizations. Recently, with diminishing sponsor funds, semi-official think tanks have become increasingly market-oriented. Nowadays, these entities are able to publicly criticize government policies. One significant recent example is the 2005 report on China's health policy reform released by the DRC, which highlighted the reform's many problems.¹⁵

15. Wang Junxiu, "Guowuyuan Yanjiu Jigou Cheng Woguo Yigai Gongzuo Jiben Bu Chenggong" [Research Institute of State Council announces that China's health policy reform is almost a failure] [electronic version], *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* [China Youth Daily], July 29, 2005, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-07/29/content_3281414.htm>.

In contrast, civilian think tanks have less government affiliation. Although some civilian organizations have supervising units, some of which are also government departments, the relationship between supervising unit and civilian organization is generally very loose. Moreover, civilian think tanks have diverse sources of seed capital: from enterprises (such as the Unirule Institute of Economics founded by Mao Yushi, among others); overseas funds (such as the China Center for Economic Research [CCER], led by Justin Yifu Lin); domestic funds (such as the National Economic Research Institute [NERI], led by Fan Gang); and from partnerships brought about by private capital (such as Dajun Center for Economic Watch & Studies, Beijing, led by Zhong Dajun). These civilian research institutes may not be large, but they often engage renowned scholars who are socially active and maintain good relationships with government officials while nonetheless being critical of the government.

The Mechanisms of Influence of China's Think Tanks

Since we only consider think tanks in one political system at a given time, we may exclude other factors affecting the development of think tanks in diverse political and social systems, such as legal, political/institutional, and ideological conditions, culture of philanthropy, attitude of political leaders, and so on.¹⁶

Expert Knowledge

Expert knowledge is a basic resource for think tanks to build their influence, both in the West and in China. Public policy scholars have been concerned with the micromechanism for transferring their expert knowledge to policy outcomes for decades, ever since Carol H. Weiss's "Enlightenment Model."¹⁷ Many scholars developed models to describe experts' mechanisms of and strategies for building policy influence in Western political systems by using knowledge as a tool.¹⁸ To build influence, China's think tanks

16. James G. McGann and Kent R. Weaver, eds., *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000); Diane Stone and Andrew Denham, eds., *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004); James G. McGann and Erik C. Johnson, eds., *Comparative Think Tanks, Politics, and Public Policy* (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2005).

17. Carol H. Weiss, "The Many Meanings of Research Utilization," *Public Administration Review* 29 (September/October 1979), pp. 426–31.

18. Stephen J. Kline and Nathan Rosenberg, "An Overview of Innovation," in *The Positive Sum Strategy: Harnessing Technology for Economic Growth*, ed. Ralph Landau and Nathan Rosenberg (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986), pp. 275–306; Robert K. Yin and Gwendolyn B. Moore, "Lessons on the Utilization of Research from Nine Case Experiences

also need to utilize their expert knowledge to create an impact, directly or indirectly, on other policy actors in different social sectors. In terms of direct influence on decision makers, after cumulated years of education, training, and researching in particular policy fields, many of China's think tanks are able to attract the attention of officials and prompt them to adopt policy suggestions. The Chinese government not only seeks and sponsors think tank consultants to conduct long-term research projects but also invites them to government meetings and seminars on more immediate policy issues.¹⁹ Moreover, expert consultation initiated by the Chinese government has been institutionalized. One of the most remarkable examples is the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, which held 44 "Collective Study Meetings" between the sixteenth (2002) and seventeenth (2007) Party Congresses, inviting experts on different subjects. Meanwhile, many think tank scholars were assimilated or seconded into government departments as immediate policy decision makers.²⁰ Su Ge, for example, was a vice president at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), a top think tank, before moving to the Chinese Embassy in Washington.²¹ Another example is Wang Qishan, who served successively as a rural economist in the CASS, the State Council's Rural Development Research Center (RDRC), and the DRC itself before becoming party secretary of Hainan Province, Beijing mayor, and later, vice premier of China.

On the other hand, China's government has many mechanisms to collect public opinion and policy ideas, which allows think tank experts to transfer their knowledge indirectly to policy outcomes. Almost all official news agencies in central or local governments have filter mechanisms that monitor, collect, and digest information and policy ideas from the mass media, the Internet, and academic or general publications. Such information is periodically compiled into official internal publications, collectively called *neican* ("internal reference").²² The People's Daily Press distributes

in the Natural Hazards Field," *Knowledge in Society: The International Journal of Knowledge Transfer* 1:3 (September 1988), pp. 25–44; Rejean Landry, "Barriers to Efficient Monitoring of Science, Technology, and Innovation through Public Policy," *Journal of Science and Public Policy* 16:5 (December 1989), pp. 345–52; Rejean Landry, Nabil Amara, and Moktar Lamari, "Utilization of Social Science Research Knowledge in Canada," *Research Policy* 30:2 (February 2001), pp. 333–49; Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*.

19. Tanner, "Changing Windows on a Changing China"; Keyser, *Professionalizing Research in Post-Mao China*.

20. Zhu and Xue, "Think Tanks in Transitional China."

21. Evan S. Medeiros, "Agents of Influence: Assessing the Role of Chinese Foreign Policy Research Organizations after the 16th Party Congress," in *Civil-Military Change in China: Elites, Institutes, and Ideas after the 16th Party Congress*, ed. Andrew Scobell and Larry Mortzel (Carlisle, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004), pp. 279–307.

22. Chen Yanhui, "Neican Jiemi" [Discovery of internal references], in *Fenghuang Zhoukan* [Phoenix Weekly] (Hong Kong, China), July 23, 2005.

“Internal Reference of *People’s Daily*,” Xinhua News Agency has *Dongtai Qingyang* (“Status Proofs”), and the Tianjin Daily Press compiles “Internal Reference of *Tianjin Daily*.” Different publications are distributed to certain high-level leaders.²³ “Status Proofs” is a special internal reference restricted to leaders above the level of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee. Think tank experts could thus advocate their policy ideas in academic publications, mass media, or even Internet blogs to influence policies indirectly. These activities not only help analysts build their public reputation but also provide them with supplementary income.

Administrative Linkages

It could be said that administrative linkages are very important for any think tank in China.²⁴ In many cases, a think tank is able to influence policies not only because of its expertise but also mainly because its experts can submit their research reports and ideas to decision makers through administrative linkages; their ideas become part of a small set of policy alternatives. Except for enterprise think tanks, each think tank, either semi-official or civilian, has its supervising unit. The supervising units of semi-official think tanks are government agencies that are usually their founders and main sponsors. In terms of civilian think tanks, university-run research institutes have their affiliated universities or schools. The supervising units of think tanks centered on CNPIs, meanwhile, are organizations authorized by the government including government agencies, public institutions, or enterprises. The connections between think tanks and their supervising units shape a specific form of administrative linkage in the Chinese context. As a supervising unit, each government agency has its *xingzheng jibie* (administrative rank),²⁵ which can be used to define the administrative linkage of a think tank. The higher the supervising unit’s rank, the better the administrative linkage a think tank can develop.

23. Ching-Chen Hsiao and Timothy Cheek, “Open and Closed Media: External and Internal Newspapers in the Propaganda System,” in *Decision-Making in Deng’s China: Perspectives from Insiders (Studies on Contemporary China)*, ed. Carol Lee Hamrin, Suisheng Zhao, and Barnett A. Doak (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 76–90.

24. Tanner, “Changing Windows on a Changing China”; Glaser and Saunders, “Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes”; Shai and Stone, “The Chinese Tradition of Policy Research Institutes”; Liao, *Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks and China’s Policy toward Japan*.

25. There are five main levels in the administrative rank system of Chinese government agencies. From top to down, they are as follows: (1) the State Council; (2) *bu* (ministry) or *sheng* (province) level; (3) bureau level including *ju* or *si* (ministry bureau or functional department), *ting* or *ju* (provincial department), and *diqu* (prefecture); (4) *chu* (division) in ministries and *xian* (county) in local governments; and (5) *ke* (branch) in all government agencies.

Generally speaking, as long as a supervising unit has an administrative rank, its subordinate think tank would have a corresponding rank, usually one grade lower. For example, the supervising unit of the DRC is the State Council, which means that the DRC is at the administrative rank of a *bu*. The supervising unit of the China Center for Information Industry Development (CCID) is the Ministry of Information Industry (MOII), which means that the CCID has the administrative rank of a *ju* or *si*. Civilian think tanks also hold the corresponding administrative rank if their supervising units are government agencies or public institutions. The administrative rank of civilian think tanks embodies the rank of the leaders of their institutions, some of whom are heads of university schools or departments or are former high-level government officials. The executive director of the China (Hainan) Reform and Development Research Institute (founded in 1991) is Chi Fulin, a former government official at the bureau rank.

Personal Ties

Personal ties (*guanxi*) with other policy actors in the policy process are also significant for the influence of China's think tanks. Personal ties in Chinese society are based on a variety of relationships that include kinship, common socialization experiences, long-term cooperation, or school ties. Personal relationships with policy makers, which we might define as "decision-maker networks," are an important source of policy influence in the Chinese system.²⁶ Similarly, *guanxi* with policy actors in the "center" or the "periphery" helps think tank experts build both social-elite influence and public influence (discussed below; also see Table 6, later in this article). Consequently, the more think tank experts have *guanxi* with other policy actors, the greater their own and their institute's influence on different groups in the policy process.

Organizational Identities

Organizational identities play an important role in the way think tanks build their influence through policy networks. Semi-official think tanks have better-defined superior-subordinate relationships and long-time administrative association with the government. Compared to the administrative linkages between civilian think tanks and their supervising units, the ties between semi-official think tanks and their supervising units are much closer and stronger. Semi-official think tanks are consequently more able to influence policies through administrative linkages, while civilian think

26. David Shambaugh, "China's National Security Research Bureaucracy," *China Quarterly* 110 (June 1987), pp. 276-304; Glaser and Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes"; Liao, *Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks and China's Policy toward Japan*.

tanks demonstrate their influence through the efforts of individual researchers, owing to the absence of a close organizational relationship in the administrative setup. Overall, civilian organizations influence government policies indirectly by utilizing expert knowledge to advocate their opinions within academia or in the public realm. Therefore, personal ties and expertise are crucial for a civilian think tank, while administrative linkages are most important for semi-official think tanks.

Research Design and Variables

The author surveyed China's think tanks by mailing questionnaires to their respective heads throughout China from September to November 2004, based on all the registered official information in 2003 from the Division of Soft Science at the Ministry of Science and Technology of China (MOST). We mailed the questionnaires to 1,124 qualified institutes in various policy fields and received 301 valid responses from 25 provinces (including municipalities and autonomous regions), a response rate of 26.78%.²⁷ Furthermore, almost all of the respondents answered the questionnaires carefully, such that only a small amount of data was missing. Since this questionnaire survey was not a random sample, the representativeness of the sample is the key to its validity. Compared with the official 2003 data from the MOST, representativeness can be considered high.²⁸

Measuring Influence

Governments of different nations deal with policy issues and experts' advice in different ways; therefore, specific indices should be designed to measure the influence of China's think tanks. We designed an index system in which there are three levels of index of subinfluence, e.g., "decision-maker influence," "social elite influence," and "public influence," and selected two indices of influential activities at each level of subinfluence, such as "literal" and "non-literal" activities (discussed below). Table 1 provides the 3×2 indicator matrices for the influence of China's think tanks.

In Table 1, we need to qualify two indices. First, the *number* of research reports submitted to the government by a think tank does not indicate its

27. The so-called "soft-science" (*ruan kexue*) in Chinese means that the research works serve as decision advice and consultancy for policy makers. The Division of Soft Science at the MOST is the sector that is in charge of overseeing registration and management of all China's "soft-science" research institutes no matter which field they may belong to. Therefore, our think tank samples cover various policy fields not limited in science and technology policy.

28. For details of the test of representativeness, please see "Appendix A" of Zhu Xufeng, "Zhongguo Zhengce Jingying de Shehui Ziben: Jiyu Jiegou Zhuyi Shijiao de Fenxi" [Social capital of Chinese policy elites: An analysis in the view of structuralism], *Shehuixue Yanjiu* [Sociological Studies] 4 (August 2006), pp. 86–116.

TABLE 1 *The Indicator Matrices for the Influence of China's Think Tanks*

The Decision Maker Influence (I_1)	Literal ($I_{1[1]}$)	Government leaders' commentaries of the think tank in 2003
	Non-Literal ($I_{1[2]}$)	Leaders' invitations to attend government seminars in 2003
The Social Elite Influence (I_2)	Literal ($I_{2[1]}$)	The <i>Chinese Core Journal</i> papers of the think tank in 2002–03
	Non-Literal ($I_{2[2]}$)	Leaders' invitations to national academic conferences in 2003
The Public Influence (I_3)	Literal ($I_{3[1]}$)	Press reports that cite attitude of the think tank in 2003
	Non-Literal ($I_{3[2]}$)	Leaders' press interviews in 2003

SOURCE: By author.

“literal” decision-maker influence: we need to look for evidence that the report has been noticed by decision makers. The *pishi* (commentary), or comments written by government leaders on a report, is a marker that officials believe a report is important and deserves to be read, circulated, adopted, and so on. Therefore, the number of comments on a research report submitted by a think tank can be considered the indicator of that institution’s “literal” influence on decision makers. Furthermore, if a research document or media report contributed by a think tank scholar is given a *pishi*, the relevant government or news agency informs the author with congratulations. Considering that it is very rare to receive a *pishi* (our survey shows that nearly all think tanks rate such a response less than five times annually), and the *pishi* notification is therefore a big event for the scholar’s institute, think tank leaders remember this total clearly. Consequently, we are able to measure the number of comments accurately if we ask the head of a think tank in a questionnaire.

Moreover, *Zhongwen Hexin Qikan* (Chinese Core Journal) is an authoritative academic journal index widely used in China. The journals listed in *Zhongwen Hexin Qikan* must meet a comprehensive indexed standard based on seven indicators, namely, the overall indexes count, overall digests count, overall citations, overall citations by other authors, digested frequency, impact factor, and national awards or inclusion in large search engines in China or abroad.²⁹ Therefore, the number of published papers listed in *Zhongwen Hexin Qikan* can be regarded as a “literal” indicator

29. For detailed information of the indexes of the *Chinese Core Journal* edition 2004, see *Zhongwen Hexin Qikan Yaomu Zonglan (2004 Nian Ban)* [Overview of indexes of *Chinese Core Journal* (edition 2004)] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004).

of the social-elite influence of a think tank. I coded the number of articles each think tank published in the journal in 2002–03 by searching the database named “China National Knowledge Infrastructure” (CNKI).³⁰ Other non-literal indices are think tank leaders’ activities at the three levels of subinfluence in 2003.

*Networks (Administrative Linkages and
Personal Ties)*

Our study simplified the survey of networks of China’s think tanks in two ways. First, we investigated only the heads of think tanks, rather than individual researchers, because we were then able to well define the objects of the questionnaires. Another reason is that the heads of think tanks always play the most important role in establishing the networks of think tanks. The second measure of simplification is that we only investigated the size of personal ties because network size is the basic index that can represent the characteristic of a network.³¹

Because administrative rank shapes the specific form of linkage, in order to measure administrative linkages, we assigned four dispersed ranks for China’s think tanks in our questionnaire: ministry or above, bureau, division, and other lower administrative level than division or none. Because only one think tank leader in the survey holds a ministry-level rank, we merged all the ranks into three category variables, namely, “bureau level or above” and “division level,” which are equal to one, while regarding “other lower administrative level” as zero.

In terms of the size of personal ties of China’s think tanks, we further divided the experts’ personal networks into three subnetworks according to social structure. First, we surveyed the size of the “decision-maker network” of each head of a think tank. We further divided this into three subnetworks: the policymaker subnetworks at the ministerial level or above, at the bureau level, and the subnetworks of ordinary officials. We then designed three questions on the size of these subnetworks: (1) “How many officials at or above the provincial/ministerial level are you acquainted with?”; (2) “How many officials at the bureau level are you acquainted with?”; and (3) “How many other ordinary officials and leaders of other sectors are you acquainted with?” The lowest requirement we defined, the phrase “be acquainted with,” was that the official can talk with these acquaintances when meeting them a second time. Considering that it is difficult for think tank leaders to count exactly how many officials at each level they are acquainted

30. <<http://www.cnki.net>>.

31. Ronald S. Burt, “The Network Structure of Social Capital,” in *Research in Organizational Behavior* (22), ed. Barry Staw and Robert Sutton (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 2000), pp. 345–423.

with, we simplified the question. We divided the size of networks according to the number of persons within them into five grades: fewer than 10 persons, 20–50, 50–100, 100–200, and more than 200 persons. This was designed to ease the way for interviewees. We then selected the median values from the feedback data and coded them as 5, 30, 75, 150, and 200, respectively.

Second, the social elite networks of China's think tanks include entrepreneurs or experts and scholars in other research institutes. Think tank experts are not only researchers but also social activists. These experts often hold several part-time jobs in other social organizations; they may be part-time professors, honorary members of the directorate of enterprises, members of the editorial board of academic journals, members of social intellectual organizations, and so on. In the social elite networks, we measured two kinds of member identities that think tank leaders take part in as off-hours social activities. Thus, we designed two indicators: "How many social or academic part-time positions do you hold aside from your present job?" and "How many social organizations are you a member of, aside from your present institute?"

Third, the method used to measure media networks was similar to that of decision-maker networks. We designed one question on the size of these media networks: "How many persons from the press and media units are you acquainted with?" We also divided the size of the media networks into five grades based on the number of persons in each network.

Expert Knowledge Ability

As a micro-level independent variable, expert knowledge ability of policy experts contributes directly to bridging research and policy. We designed three categories based on education experience: Ph.D., M.A., and below M.A. The first two were changed into dummy variables, regarding "below M.A." as zero. Considering that some experts studied overseas, we additionally asked the interviewees whether they have a degree from a foreign university. This is also a dummy variable. Because work experience acquired after joining the think tank also gives its leaders cumulated expertise on certain policy issues, we designed an index of "How many years have you been working in this think tank?" for the interviewees.

Control Variables

In earlier literature, both the successful raising of funds and financial security were key factors for the development and influence of think tanks in the West.³² Within the larger Chinese world, money from the business

32. Smith, *Idea Brokers*; Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics*; McGann, *The Competition for Dollars, Scholars, and Influence in the Public Policy Research Industry*.

sector is fundamental to the rise and eventual success of Hong Kong's and Taiwan's think tanks.³³ Therefore, we also investigated the scale of funds and the size of staff of the institutes. The scale of funds refers to the expenditure in 2003 related to think tanks' policy research; this was given in units of RMB 10,000 (\$1,333). The scale of the staff referred to the researcher population, divided into full-time and part-time staff. We might simply assume part-time researchers as half labor, so the author creates an index named "integrated personnel size" by simply combining full-time researchers with part-time with the following formula: (integrated personnel size) = (number of full-time researchers) + 0.5 × (number of part-time researchers).

Generally speaking, the longer the history of an institute, the greater its influence. Considering that it is doubtful whether this relationship is linear between the history of a think tank and its influence, we took a more conservative measure of control variables using stages. The development of China's think tanks can be divided into three stages: from 1949 (China's national liberation) to the late 1970s, there were almost no think tanks in existence; from the late 1970s (the beginning of reform and opening-up) to the late 1980s; and from the early 1990s (after Deng Xiaoping's speeches on his seminal South China tour) until the present.³⁴ We took the youngest think tanks, founded during the third stage, as dummy variables.

The organizational nature of think tanks in China affects their behavior and influence. There is a prevalent opinion in society that civilian think tanks are at a disadvantage when they try to influence the government.³⁵ We coded organizational types as a dummy variable: public institution = 1, civilian think tanks = 0.

In addition, the location of a think tank is important to its influence. In the U.S., many think tanks may be found in Washington D.C., where it is easier to influence policy. Considering the differences between the Chinese capital city, Beijing, and other locations, as far as think tanks are concerned, we set all think tanks located in Beijing as a dummy control variable.

33. Ray Yep and Ngok Ma, "Money, Power, and Ideas: Think Tank Development and State-Business Relations in Taiwan and Hong Kong," *Policy & Politics* 34:3 (July 2006), pp. 535–55.

34. Zhu and Xue, "Think Tanks in Transitional China."

35. Sun Yafei, "Minjian Naoku de Ruoshi Shengcun" [Civilian think tanks' weak survival], in *Nanfang Zhoumo* [Southern Weekly], January 15, 2004; Sun Yafei, "Minjian Naoku de Zhangmenren" [Helmsmen of civilian think tanks], in *ibid.*, January 16, 2004; Zhang Shuguang, "Minjian Feiyingli Yanjiu Jigou de Chengzhang yu 21 Shiji de Zhongguo" [Development of civilian and non-profit research institutes and China in the 21st century], 2000, <<http://www.unirule.org.cn>>, accessed August 10, 2003; Zhong Dajun, "Zhongguo Feizhengfu Yanjiu Jigou (Minjian Zhiku) de Fazhan Zhuangkuang" [The state of non-government research institutions (think tanks) in China], 2006, <<http://www.dajun.com.cn/non-gov.htm>>, accessed December 10, 2006.

Empirical Results

Tables 2 and 3 provide the descriptive statistics of all variables of the three groups of samples, including “overall samples,” “semi-official think tanks,” and “civilian think tanks.”

Table 2 not only shows descriptive statistics of dependent variables of *influence* of China’s think tanks but also reports the results of the principal component analysis we employed. First, it can be found that leaders’ commentaries are much more infrequent than other kinds of indices of influence. Second, it has been shown that semi-official think tanks have advantages in decision maker influence, while civilian think tanks have advantages in social-elite influence. Third, civilian think tanks are about as influential as semi-official think tanks in public influence and total influence.

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of all independent variables and reports the results of the principal component analysis we employed of the independent variable of *decision-maker networks* and *social-elite networks*. It is expected that administrative linkages of semi-official think tanks are stronger than those of civilian think tanks. In terms of expert knowledge, reported evidence shows that a semi-official think tank leader is likely to have longer work experience in the think tank, while formal education is the more important criterion for a researcher to be a civilian think tank leader. In terms of control variables, civilian think tanks are disadvantaged, both in organizational size (research financial expenditure and integrated personnel size) and in organizational history. There are 51 think tanks in Beijing in all the surveyed samples.

The results from estimating the overall model, the organizational model, and the stratified model are presented in Tables 4, 5, and 6, respectively. The overall model estimates the mechanism of influence of China’s think tanks in all samples. The organizational model compares different mechanisms of policy influence between the two kinds of Chinese think tanks. The stratified model demonstrates Chinese think tanks’ influential behavior toward different policy actors in the stratified policy process. There are three separate models for estimating sub-influence.

First of all, the regression results show that the contributions of networks and expert knowledge to the influence of China’s think tanks are very significant, as expected. Initially in the overall model (see Table 4), we only entered the control variables of think tanks in models (1) and (2), where the magnitudes of R^2 and adjusted R^2 are very small. Then, we entered the variables of administrative linkage, personal ties, and expert knowledge in models (3) and (4). R^2 and adjusted R^2 in models (3) and (4) are higher than 0.3, which means regression models have had much more accuracy in estimating than before. Similar results also exist in Tables 5 and 6.

TABLE 2 *Descriptive Statistics of Influence of China's Think Tanks and Factor Analyses*

	All Samples (n = 301)		Semi-official Think Tank (n = 161)		Civilian Think Tank (n = 140)	
	Mean	Std. D.	Mean	Std. D.	Mean	Std. D.
I = Influence of China's Think Tanks						
<i>I₁</i> = The Decision Maker Influence						
<i>I_{1[1]}</i> : Government leaders' commentaries of the think tank	1.11	3.71	1.56	4.92	0.59	1.24
<i>I_{1[2]}</i> : Invitations to attend government seminars	6.21	7.17	6.61	7.36	5.76	6.96
<i>I₂</i> = The Social Elite Influence						
<i>I_{2[1]}</i> : The <i>China Core Journal</i> papers of the think tank	5.90	20.94	3.07	10.15	9.22	28.57
<i>I_{2[2]}</i> : Invitations to national academic conferences	5.28	5.42	5.11	5.82	5.46	4.94
<i>I₃</i> = The Public Influence						
<i>I_{3[1]}</i> : Press reports that cite attitude of the think tank	6.52	15.90	7.71	20.43	5.17	8.00
<i>I_{3[2]}</i> : Press interviews	6.02	10.16	6.36	10.30	5.64	10.02
Factor Analyses of Influence^a						
<i>I₁</i> : Standardized factor of the Decision Maker Influence	0.00	1.00	0.11	1.18	-0.13	0.72
<i>I₂</i> : Standardized factor of the Social Elite Influence	0.00	1.00	-0.11	0.79	0.13	1.20
<i>I₃</i> : Standardized factor of the Public Influence	0.00	1.00	0.08	1.15	-0.07	0.82
<i>I</i> : Standardized factor of total Influence	0.00	1.00	0.02	1.03	-0.04	0.95

SOURCE: By author.

^aWe employ the principal component analysis of the dependent variable of *Influence*. The total *Influence* is calculated with the three standardized factors of subinfluences by employing the principal component analysis for the second time.

There are also some variations regarding the contributions of networks and expert knowledge to think tanks' influence. On the one hand, compared with the decision-maker influence and public influence in Table 6, decision-maker networks of experts are much more useful in building decision-maker influence, while the media networks of experts are much more useful in building public influence. This is an obviously reasonable

TABLE 3 Descriptive Statistics of Independent and Control Variables

	All Samples (n = 301)		Semi-official Think Tank (n = 161)		Civilian Think Tank (n = 140)	
	Mean (Std. D.) or Frequency	%	Mean (Std. D.) or Frequency	%	Mean (Std. D.) or Frequency	%
DMN = Decision-Maker Networks						
<i>DMN_[1]</i> = Size of subnetworks at ministry level or above						
1. Fewer than 10 persons	201	66.8	108	67.1	93	66.4
2. 10–50 persons	86	28.6	44	27.3	42	30.0
3. 50–100 persons	10	3.3	6	3.7	4	2.9
4. 100–200 persons	2	.7	2	1.2	0	0
5. More than 200 persons	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. Missing value	2	.7	1	.6	1	.7
<i>DMN_[2]</i> = Size of subnetworks at bureau level						
1. Fewer than 10 persons	56	18.6	32	19.9	24	17.1
2. 10–50 persons	160	53.2	84	52.2	76	54.3
3. 50–100 persons	60	19.9	30	18.6	30	21.4
4. 100–200 persons	15	5.0	9	5.6	6	4.3
5. More than 200 persons	8	2.7	6	3.7	2	1.4
6. Missing value	2	.7	0	0	2	1.4
<i>DMN_[3]</i> = Size of subnetworks of ordinary officials						
1. Fewer than 10 persons	26	8.6	17	10.6	9	6.4
2. 10–50 persons	92	30.6	48	29.8	44	31.4
3. 50–100 persons	80	26.6	46	28.6	34	24.3
4. 100–200 persons	48	15.9	24	14.9	24	17.1
5. More than 200 persons	51	16.9	24	14.9	27	19.3
6. Missing value	4	1.3	2	1.2	2	1.4
Factor Analyses of Decision-Maker Networks (std. DMN) ^a						
	0.00 (1.00)		-0.05 (1.01)		0.05 (0.99)	

SEN = Social Elite Networks						
$SEN_{[1]}$ = No. of social or academic part-time jobs						
$SEN_{[2]}$ = No. of member of other social groups						
Factor Analyses of Social Elite Networks (std. SEN) ^b						
MN = Media Networks						
1. Fewer than 10 persons	94	31.2	47	29.2	47	33.6
2. 10–50 persons	135	44.9	76	47.2	59	42.1
3. 50–100 persons	43	14.3	21	13.0	22	15.7
4. 100–200 persons	17	5.6	11	6.8	6	4.3
5. More than 200 persons	6	2.0	3	1.9	3	2.1
6. Missing value	6	2	3	1.9	3	2.1
AL = Administrative Linkages						
At or above bureau level	56	18.6	41	25.5	15	10.7
At division level	191	63.5	100	62.1	91	65.0
EK = Ability of Expert Knowledge						
Ph.D.	94	31.2	34	21.1	60	42.8
M.A.	78	25.9	35	21.7	43	30.7
Study overseas	38	12.6	15	9.3	23	16.4
Work experiences (years of work)	9.56	(7.06)	11.0	(7.52)	7.74	(5.98)
Funds						
Research financial expenditure (RMB 10,000 = \$1,333)	192.45	(700.39)	283.83	(922.73)	85.60	(225.09)
Size						
Integrated personnel size	36.537	(65.807)	42.38	(74.42)	29.90	(53.88)
Organizational history						
Established after 1990	149	49.6	46	28.5	103	73.6
Location						
Beijing	51	16.9	31	19.3	20	14.3

SOURCE: By author.

^aWe employ the principal component analysis of the independent variable of *Decision-Maker Networks*.

^bWe employ the principal component analysis of the independent variable of *Social Elite Networks*.

TABLE 4 *The Influence of China's Think Tanks (OLS): The Overall Model*

	(1)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
	CE	SC	VIF	CE	SC	VIF	CE	SC	VIF	CE	SC	VIF
Control variables												
Expenditure related to policy research	.000	.074	1.501	.000	.072	1.584	.000	.002	1.606	.000	.007	1.658
Integrated personnel size	.002+	.136	1.501	.001	.132	1.559	.000	-.016	1.677	.000	-.025	1.722
Beijing				.716***	.271	1.164	.524***	.198	1.284	.475**	.180	1.354
Semi-official				-.026	-.013	1.267	-.028	-.014	1.346	.051	.026	1.408
Organizational histories (1990-)				-.067	-.034	1.293	-.147	-.074	1.304	-.114	-.057	1.577
Independent variables												
Networks												
AL (bureau level or above)							.616**	.242	2.229	.660***	.259	2.259
AL (division level)												
(below division level)							.146	.071	1.780	.148	.072	1.787
DMN (standardized)							.160**	.161	1.388	.131*	.131	1.421
SEN (standardized)							.322***	.325	1.139	.310***	.313	1.186
MN							.002	.106	1.333	.003*	.116	1.350
Expert knowledge										.502***	.235	1.547
Ph.D.										.209	.093	1.308
M.A.										-.020	-.007	1.202
Study overseas										.016	.113	1.360
Work experiences (years of work)												
Other values												
Constant	-.104			-.132			-.307			-.732***		
R ²	.036			.100			.352			.392		
Adjusted R ²	.028			.082			.325			.357		
N	301			301			301			301		

SOURCE: By author.

NOTE: The dependent variable is the standardized factor of total *Influence* after employment of the principal component analysis. The two indexes of independent variables of personal ties, ON and SEN, are standardized factors after employment of the principal component analysis. CE = non-standardized regression coefficients. SC = standardized regression coefficients. VIF = variance inflation factor values.

*, **, *** indicate significance at 5, 1, and 0.1% levels, respectively (one-tailed).

TABLE 5 *The Influence of China's Think Tanks (OLS): The Organizational Model*

	<i>Semi-official Think Tanks</i>			<i>Civilian Think Tanks</i>		
	<i>CE</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>VIF</i>	<i>CE</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Control variables						
Expenditure related to policy research	.000	.032	1.904	-.001	-.168	1.882
Integrated personnel size	-.001	-.057	2.020	.003	.145	1.374
Beijing	.309	.119	1.522	.807**	.299	1.450
Organizational histories (1990-)	-.076	-.033	1.122	.075	.036	2.023
Independent variables						
Networks						
AL (bureau level or above)	.866**	.367	2.947	.434	.142	1.944
AL (division level) (below division level)	.292	.138	2.395	.018	.009	1.506
DMN (standardized)	.089	.087	1.535	.216*	.226	1.404
SEN (standardized)	.287***	.289	1.139	.319***	.316	1.337
MN	.003	.128	1.455	.002	.082	1.302
Expert knowledge						
Ph.D.	.421*	.167	1.485	.562**	.294	1.711
M.A.	.221	.089	1.146	.270	.132	1.664
Study overseas	.236	.067	1.281	-.204	-.080	1.237
Work experiences						
(years of work)	.006	.047	1.232	.040*	.252	2.006
Other values						
Constant	-.713**			-1.005**		
R ²	.403			.452		
Adjusted R ²	.341			.382		
N	161			140		

SOURCE: By author.

NOTE: The dependent variable is the standardized factor of total *Influence* of the two types of think tanks after employment of the principal component analysis. The two indexes of independent variables of personal ties, ON and SEN, are standardized factors after employment of the principal component analysis.

*, **, *** indicate significance at 5, 1, and 0.1% levels, respectively (one-tailed).

TABLE 6 *The Influence of China's Think Tanks (OLS): The Stratified Model*

	<i>The Decision Maker Influence (I₁)</i>		<i>The Social Elite Influence (I₂)</i>		<i>The Public Influence (I₃)</i>	
	<i>CE</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>CE</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>CE</i>	<i>SC</i>
Control variables						
Expenditure related to policy research	.000	.105	.000	.041	.000	-.100
Integrated personnel size	.000	-.025	.000	.019	-.001	-.096
Beijing	.136	.051	.325	.121	.610***	.228
Semi-official	.276*	.138	-.392**	-.195	.289*	.143
Organizational histories (1990-)	-.122	-.061	-.271	-.134	.159	.079
Independent variables						
Networks						
AL (bureau level or above)	.535**	.209	.443*	.171	.334	.130
AL (division level) (below division level)	.072	.035	.108	.052	-.007	-.003
DMN (std.)	.195**	.196	.107	.106	-.041	-.041
SEN (std.)	.217***	.218	.121	.120	.356***	.353
MN	.001	.053	.001	.058	.004**	.183
Expert knowledge						
Ph.D.	.506***	.236	.449**	.207	.287*	.132
M.A.	.289*	.127	.028	.012	.168	.073
Study overseas	.133	.044	-.222	-.073	-.012	-.004
Work experiences (years of work)	.007	.050	.017	.120	.015	.107
Other values						
Constant	-.644**		-.227		-.747***	
R ²	.310		.204		.295	
Adjusted R ²	.271		.158		.255	
N	301		301		301	

SOURCE: By author.

NOTE: The dependent variables are I_1 , I_2 , and I_3 , which are the standardized factors of sub-influence of all samples after employment of the principal component analysis. The two indexes of independent variables of personal ties, ON and SEN, are standardized factors after employment of the principal component analysis.

*, **, *** indicate significance at 5, 1, and 0.1% levels, respectively (one-tailed).

finding. On the other hand, the contributions of the variables of leaders' expert knowledge are complex. Only the dummy Ph.D. has a positive function in each model, which is to say that the leaders' educational background has an effect on the influence of China's think tanks. In terms of the two other dummy variables (i.e., an M.A. degree and the experience of studying overseas), it seems that they have nothing to do with the think tanks' influence. We have conducted a previous empirical study that shows that each variable of expert knowledge makes a contribution to the personal ties of think tank experts.³⁶ Therefore, considering there are few collinearity issues in the models used in this paper (because the VIF values in each regression model are small), we may conclude that the dummy variables (i.e., an M.A. and overseas study) have an indirect contribution to think tanks' influence by enlarging the experts' social networks.

The most important finding from the empirical evidence is that semi-official and civilian think tanks exert influence through different mechanisms. First, the organizational model (see Table 5) shows that personal decision-maker networks and expert knowledge, either via academic degrees or work experience, of civilian think tank leaders contribute more significantly than do those of the semi-official think tank leaders, while administrative linkages of the latter make a bigger difference. Second, regression models in Table 6 indicate that semi-official think tanks have advantages in decision-maker influence and in public influence, while civilian think tanks have advantages in social elite influence, which is consistent with the descriptive statistics shown in Table 2. Third, the contribution of the location of Beijing is interesting. In the overall model, the dummy variable, Beijing, is expected to positively influence think tanks, but in the organizational model and the stratified model, only the public influence of the civilian think tanks benefited from being located in the capital city. The most straightforward explanation for these findings is that semi-official think tanks are able to use formal channels to get their important research findings to policy makers (especially from their sponsoring institutions); these formal connections mean that geography is less important. Civilian think tanks lack these channels, and therefore have to rely more on media to get their views out. These means are more difficult to use in less-developed media areas farther from Beijing.

The variables of money and size do not seem to impact Chinese think tanks' policy influence as much as for think tanks abroad. The data in each model show that the size of the think tank does not matter. We can give two explanations. In the literature, money and personnel are only *directly* related to the influence of think tanks in the so-called liberal polities. Money

36. Zhu, "Zhongguo Zhengce Jingying de Shehui Ziben."

is indeed important to the operation of China's think tanks and obviously determines how many researchers they can employ. But in contemporary mainland China, where there is no mature market for consultancy services on policy making and no sufficiently free environment for policy idea discussions, the relationship between money and influence might not be close. On the other hand, the survey focused solely on think tank leaders to index the whole think tank's "non-literal" influence, and used only the leader's network to account for the policy network of the think tank as a whole. These methodological simplifications may somewhat understate both the influence and the networks of larger think tanks because their other senior members may also be influential and socially active. Deputy or executive directors of large think tanks are sometimes deliberately chosen to expand the organization's expertise and policy networks as a whole.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the growing literature on policy process theory and research on think tanks through a systematic quantitative empirical study of China's think tanks. These institutions are usually regarded as windows through which foreign scholars can take a peek at the closed policy process of Chinese politics, although few such observers have actually looked inside the mechanism at their behavior and function. The article presents an initial discussion on the decisive factors for the influence of China's think tanks, and original data on China's think tanks from a 2004 survey conducted by the author and his colleagues.

Many observations have been explored as a result of the empirical study delineated in this article. First of all, as expected, almost every index of the network has a significant positive contribution to the think tanks' influence in each regression model, and the ability to carry out expert knowledge directly contributes to the influence of the think tank.

Second, the paper provides persuasive evidence to show different ways that various types of Chinese think tanks influence policy. On the one hand, semi-official and civilian think tanks exert influence through different channels. Because of well-defined superior-subordinate relationships and long-time administrative associations with the government, semi-official think tanks rely more on administrative linkages to influence policy. Contrarily, in civilian think tanks personal ties and the expert knowledge of experts have more impact. Different types of think tanks also diverge in their influence on policy actors in different social classes. After controlling for other factors, semi-official think tanks have advantages in decision maker influence and public influence, while civilian think tanks have advantages in social elite influence. On the basis of these observations, although civil-

ian think tank experts always complain that they face discrimination, they may also strategically develop their competence through several measures. For example, experts can try to enlarge their personal networks and enhance their research abilities. Moreover, civilian scholars may also enhance their reputation in the social elite class and the “periphery” first, and then subsequently try to extend their influence to the “decision-making nucleus” class.

Finally, since this study is just one initial step toward a fuller explanation of the influence of China’s think tanks, many theoretical problems remain to be answered. For example, this study shows that the location of think tanks has an effect upon their ability to wield influence. The dummy variable, Beijing, represents a dynamic contribution in different models. But China has become a transitional country where varying, partial reforms are conducted in different areas. Therefore, the mechanisms and influence of think tanks—and how these differ across regions—need to be explored through further studies.