

Scholars interested in studying think tanks often focus on articulating a typology for think tanks, developing a theoretical framework for analysis, and evaluating think tanks' impact on policy development and implementation within the complex environment of public diplomacy. Think tanks play a role in public diplomacy¹, however, the vast number of think tanks, models, and their relationship to specific contextual conditions dictate the degree of influence and how these institutions impact policy both globally and within their respective states.² Thus, the literature on Chinese think tanks has grappled with defining and categorizing think tanks to identify the characteristics of impactful and influential policy research institutes within China. Think tanks are understood as knowledge brokering institutions that act as gateway to, or gatekeepers which bridge the gap between knowledge and policy or power.³ Within this knowledge regime framework, think tanks are one of many actors, organizations, and institutions involved in disseminating ideas that shape public policy.⁴ To fully understand country specific think tanks, one must understand the historical context with which think tanks evolved as a guide to defining, categorizing, and evaluating the impact of think tanks in China.

The development of Chinese think tanks have been broken into three different generations. The initial period, characterized as having a substantial Marxist and Leninist ideological focus due to China's ties to the Soviet Union, began around 1946 and ended around 1966.⁵ While these initial think tanks were closely tied to ministries within the government, the cultural revolution saw a widespread closing of think tanks that were empirically-based, less ideologically and bureaucratically hidebound, and more-innovative think tanks from 1966 to 1976.⁶ Finally, the third generation saw the liberalization of Chinese markets to the world due to Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up policies and the value given to think tanks in 1978.⁷

¹ Zhao, Kejin. "The Motivation Behind China's Public Diplomacy." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 167-96.

² Weaver, R. K. "The Changing World of Think Tanks." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 3 (1989): 563-79; Zhu, Xufeng. *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013, p.55; Stone, D. "The Group of 20 Transnational Policy Community: Governance Networks, Policy Analysis, and Think Tanks." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 81, no. 4 (2015): 793-811; Teets, Jessica C. "Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China." *The China Quarterly* 213 (March 2013): 19-38.

³ Stone, "The Group of 20 Transnational Policy Community," pp. 793-811.; Weaver, "The Changing World of Think Tanks," pp. 563-79.

⁴ Teets, Jessica C. "Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China." *The China Quarterly* 213 (March 2013): 19-38.

⁵ McCaffree, Kevin. "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime." *East Asia* 35, no. 1 (March 2018): 43-58.; Abb, Pascal, and Patrick Koellner. "Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China and Japan: Characteristics, Current Profile, and the Case of Collective Self-Defence." *International Journal* 70, no. 4 (June 26, 2015): 593-612.; Li, Hak Yin, and Seanon Wong. "The Evolution of Chinese Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Think Tanks." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 14, no. 1 (February 2018): 36-46.; Xuefeng Zhu, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process: Different Ways and Mechanisms," *Asian Survey* 49 (2009), pp. 333-57; Tanner, Murray Scot. "Changing Windows on a Changing China: The Evolving 'Think Tank' System and the Case of the Public Security Sector." *The China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 563

⁶ Abb and Koellner, "Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China and Japan," pp. 593-612.

⁷ David Shambaugh, "China's International Relations Think Tanks: Evolving Structure and Process," *The China Quarterly* 171 (2002), p. 577.; Zhu, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process," pp. 333-57; McCaffree, "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime," pp. 43-58.; Abb and Koellner, "Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China and Japan," pp. 593-612.; Hongying Wang and Xue Ting Hu, "The New Great Leap Forward: Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics." CIGI Paper 142 (2017).

Deng placed more value on institutional procedures in policy making, allowing think tanks to become less dependent on ministry or leadership sponsorship, however, Chinese think tanks still remained “compartmentalized, redundant and steeped in the biases of individual bureaucracies”.⁸ Some scholars in the literature have referred to this time as the Mao and post-Mao era,⁹ the post-Tiananmen generation¹⁰, or the rise of market-oriented think tanks.¹¹ Finally, McCaffree¹² describes a fourth generation under the reign of Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping has shown a commitment to further opening China, giving more and taking less, and developing think tanks with Chinese characteristics. In accordance with Xi’s political shift, China has experienced unprecedented growth, resources, influence, and decentralization.¹³

Despite the state of opening up and the policy reforms that gave rise to market-oriented think tanks, contemporary scholars have faced extensive dilemmas when trying to operationalize a working definition and understanding of Chinese think tanks in comparison to traditional models. Li and Wong, and Zhu use case study analyses to question the use of a western model to assess and conceptualize Chinese think tanks. Li and Wong¹⁴ note that western classifications do not work for Chinese think tanks, going as far as saying that Chinese think tanks cannot be considered apart of civil society due to their proximity to the government. The issue of proximity to government ministries among Chinese think tanks is an issue cited among many scholars who attempt to assess the independence and autonomy, arguing that these are essential characteristics to effective think tanks.¹⁵ Shambaugh criticizes the lack of independence with Chinese think tanks because of the lack of horizontal institutional communication when think tanks serve as branches of the government; an issue called stovepiping which “structurally enforces extreme compartmentalization and redundancy of research and analysis.”¹⁶ Zhu argues that Chinese think tanks could be considered stable, autonomous institutions that act as consultants to the government.¹⁷ Other scholars have followed suit and called for new frameworks of analysis and a new typology to articulate the vast differences that Chinese think tanks face in comparison to the traditionally western held think tank model.¹⁸ Zhu outlines China’s policy making process into

⁸ Tanner, "Changing Windows on a Changing China"; Zhu, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process," pp. 333–57.; McCaffree, "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime," pp. 43-58.; Ahmad, Mahmood, and Raees Ahmad Mughal. "The Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China: Input, Access, and Opportunity." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 38, no. 3 (September 7, 2011): 143-55.

⁹ Ahmad and Mughal, "The Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China," pp. 143-55.

¹⁰ Naughton, Barry. "China's Economic Think Tanks: Their Changing Role in the 1990s." *The China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 625-35.

¹¹ Powell, Benjamin, and Matt E. Ryan. "The Global Spread of Think Tanks and Economic Freedom." *The Journal of Private Enterprise* 32, no. 3 (2017): 17-31.

¹² McCaffree, Kevin. "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime." *East Asia* 35, no. 1 (March 2018): 43-58.

¹³ McCaffree, "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime," pp. 43-58.; Ng, Teddy. "7 Things You Need to Know About Xi Jinping's Vision of a 'New Era' for China." *South China Morning Post*, October 18, 2017.; Chen, K. "Three Perspectives on Chinese Diplomacy: Government, Think Tanks, and Academia." *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 987-92.

¹⁴ Li and Wong, "The Evolution of Chinese Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Think Tanks," pp. 36-46.

¹⁵ Zhu, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*, p.55.; Shambaugh, "China’s International Relations Think Tanks" p. 577.; Chen, "Three Perspectives on Chinese Diplomacy," pp. 987-92.

¹⁶ Shambaugh, "China’s International Relations Think Tanks" p. 577.

¹⁷ Zhu, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process," pp. 333–57.

¹⁸ Weaver, "The Changing World of Think Tanks," pp. 563-79.; Stone, "The Group of 20 Transnational Policy Community," pp. 793-811.; Andrew Mertha, "Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the

three main theoretical models: fragmented authoritarianism, political pluralization, and think tanks as social actors in the policy process.

Within these frameworks others have been articulated. The literature has often approached think tanks as a part of a larger knowledge regime framework which shapes public policy. Nachiappan describes China as a tempered knowledge regime, where the state attempts to produce knowledge, but also manage its production. The state aims to restrict think tanks but has simultaneously experienced the blossoming of think tanks across China. Nachiappan highlights these mechanisms of state control over think tanks and their influence by determining their consultative capacity where official and semi-official think tanks benefit.¹⁹ Teets sees think tanks as a fairly autonomous, corporatist extension of the state apparatus in her consultative authoritarianism model. This model is derived from the intersection between the regulatory state model of traditional China and the latest decentralization of the current Chinese government. In the consultative authoritarianism model, the government uses think tanks as a way to indirectly control and guide interest groups.²⁰ Finally, Stone²¹ articulates a discursive institutionalism model, which aligns with Zhu's assessment of think tanks as actors in the policy process, by analyzing a collective of think tanks on the international scene called Think20 (T20). Stone identifies think tanks as institutional cores that interpret and inform governments and leaders within the larger knowledge networks and transnational communities for policy development. The literature has begun to generate a consensus that think tanks are actors within a domain of public policy and diplomacy that generate knowledge and play a role in shaping policy outcomes. However, still in question is the categorization of Chinese think tanks within these theoretical models and the degree to which these think tanks influence public policy.

Today, there are 435 think tanks in China, making China the leading global actor in terms of think tanks behind the U.S. Some of the most prominent think tanks studied in the literature are discussed below:

- CASS - The Chinese Academy of Social Science the premier academic organization and comprehensive research center of philosophy and social sciences in China²². It was established in 1977, and has since then maintained a close relationship with the government. It has also actively engaged in international academic exchange and maintains constructive relationship with over 200 research organizations, academic communities, institutions of higher learning, foundations and related government departments, covering more than 80 countries and regions.²³ The CCP has direct control over CASS via the Academy's party branch and defines CASS's three important roles as: the strong battlefield for Marxism, the highest academy for China's philosophy and social

Chinese Policy Process," *The China Quarterly* 200 (2009), pp. 995–1012.; Nachiappan, Karthik. "Think Tanks and the Knowledge-policy Nexus in China." *Policy and Society* 32, no. 3 (September 2013): 255-65.; Teets, "Let Many Civil Societies Bloom," pp. 19-38.

¹⁹ Nachiappan, "Think Tanks and the Knowledge-policy Nexus in China," pp. 255-65.

²⁰ Teets, "Let Many Civil Societies Bloom," pp. 19-38.

²¹ Stone, "The Group of 20 Transnational Policy Community," pp. 793-811.

²² http://casseng.cssn.cn/about/about_cass/

²³ http://casseng.cssn.cn/about/about_cass/

science research, and the most important think tank for the government.²⁴ In the 2015 CCP and the central government's Notice on strengthening the establishment of think tanks with Chinese characteristics, CASS is phrased as "the national comprehensive high-level think tank" in China, and expected to be "constructed to be an internationally influential and well-known think tank."²⁵

- CICIR - The China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations is one of the oldest and most influential civilian think tanks in China. It was officially formed in 1980, but its history could be traced back to 1965. It is affiliated with China's Ministry of State Security and overseen by the CCP. Its research outcomes are directly provided to the government officials and has a direct influence on foreign policy making. In the 2015 CCP campaign to build high-level national think tanks in China, the CICIR is listed as one of the first experimental institutes for national high-level think tank building.²⁶ Although its major client is the Chinese government, it also collaborates with foreign think tanks and organizations to conduct research.
- SIIS - The Shanghai Institute for International Studies was founded in 1960s and is a high-caliber think tank directly related to Shanghai municipal government dedicated to informing government decision-making by conducting policy-oriented studies in world politics, economics, foreign policy, and international security.²⁷ It has a direct connection with the policy makers by "conducting comprehensive research on significant issues in contemporary international politics, economy and security, providing relevant governmental departments and institutions with research reports and other research findings for reference, and presenting journals and magazines to the public for popularizing knowledge of international affairs."²⁸
- CFISS - The China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies was established in 1989 as an independent national non-profit organization and is the only national foundation in the realm of international strategic studies. It aims at promoting the study of international strategy, international collaboration and exchange, and international peace development. It collaborates with the government and foreign entities to organize international information exchange events. Many of the honorary chairman at the CFISS have served important positions at the central government, including the National People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and the People's Liberation Army.²⁹

²⁴ <http://www.cssn.cn/qt/zgskygk/>

²⁵ http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/20/content_2807126.htm

²⁶ <http://www.cicir.ac.cn/chinese/infoView.aspx?cid=77>

²⁷ <http://www.siis.org.cn/Content/List/4TY1RYSCTR1C>

²⁸ <https://libguides.gwu.edu/c.php?g=258831&p=1729873>

²⁹ <https://baike.baidu.com/item/中国国际战略研究基金会>

The literature tends to organize Chinese think tanks into four categories: Official/government linked, semi-official/academic, civilian/university affiliated, and independent.³⁰ Official think tanks, otherwise called government research institutes, are closely tied to government ministries and active in policy-oriented research that mainly serves the interests of the government.³¹ Due to the close link to the government, official think tanks tend to have more access to policy making, more expertise, receive more funding from the government, and play an advisory role to the government by developing and disseminating policy advice to decision makers.³² Semi-official think tanks used to be less significant due to the aftermath of Tiananmen square, having researchers that are considered too academic for politics, and the distance that these think tanks had from politics in general. Ahmad and Mughal note that today, semi-official think tanks are more influential due to their ability to hold events, connect and exchange ideas with international organizations and actors. McCaffree holds that academic think tanks primarily focus on developing scientific theory that is somewhat policy-related along with teaching-oriented seminars and training. As a result, semi-official think tanks have been able to exert greater influence over decision makers due to their administrative networks. In contrast, Ahmad and Mughal explain that civilian think tanks are the least influential because the research is inherently more academic; there are fewer channels for the research to reach a larger audience, have limited access to materials, and are distrusted by policy makers.³³ McCaffree and Zhu, however, argue for the importance in civilian think tanks criticizing existing policies, providing alternative theories, and advocacy efforts in altering public discourse.³⁴ Civilian think tank influence is exercised directly through academia or the public and often relies on social networks. Finally, while independence is a form of categorizing think tanks, it is more of western think tank quality, and there is a general consensus within the literature that no Chinese think tanks are considered truly independent. Instead, most Chinese think tanks operate within bureaucratic hierarchies.³⁵ The categorical methods used in the literature to assess Chinese think tanks fit well into McGann's think tank affiliation model. McGann's model categorizes think tanks into autonomous and independent, quasi-independent, government affiliated, quasi-governmental, university affiliated, political party affiliated, and corporate.³⁶ This categorization of think tanks is diverse enough to encompass all types of think tanks and should be used to understand China's think tank environment going forward.

³⁰ Ahmad and Mughal, "The Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China," pp. 143-55.; McCaffree, "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime," pp. 43-58.; Li, He. "The Role of Think Tanks in Chinese Foreign Policy." *Problems of Post-Communism* 32, no. 3 (September 2013): 255-65.; Zhu, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*, p.55.

³¹ Ahmad and Mughal, "The Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China," pp. 143-55; Li, "The Role of Think Tanks in Chinese Foreign Policy," pp. 255-65.

³² Ahmad and Mughal, "The Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China," pp. 143-55; Li, "The Role of Think Tanks in Chinese Foreign Policy," pp. 255-65.; Naughton, "China's Economic Think Tanks," pp. 625-35.; McCaffree, "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime," pp. 43-58.

³³ Ahmad and Mughal, "The Foreign Policy Think Tanks in China," pp. 143-55; Li, "The Role of Think Tanks in Chinese Foreign Policy," pp. 255-65.

³⁴ McCaffree, "The Growth of Chinese Think Tanks and the Question of Crime," pp. 43-58.; Zhu, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*, p.55.

³⁵ Casarini, Nichola. "The Role of Think Tanks in China." In *The EU-China Relationship: European Perspectives*, edited by Kerry Brown, 88. London: World Scientific, 2015.

³⁶ McGann, *2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* (2016).

With a proper typology and categorization of think tanks, scholars will be able to draw upon more informative assessments and provide more insightful analyses for which think tanks can increase their influence on public policy. Thus far, the literature has studied the ways Chinese think tanks influence policy and the degree to which they are successful. Glass and Saunders note the key features that allow think tanks to influence policy, namely positional influence, expertise influence, personal influence, and experiential influence.³⁷ These different qualities allow think tanks to impact decision makers within the Chinese government, the academia, and the public through both indirect and direct channels.³⁸ Positional influence, when think tanks are tied to government entities, allows think tanks to advise diplomats, provide information to leadership, and shape the policy-making environment.³⁹ Expertise is crucial to think tank influence as many policy makers rely on experts to educate them on issue areas they know little about. As Casirini notes, Chinese think tanks have become an important mechanism through which foreigners can understand China and the Chinese policy making process.⁴⁰ Next, personal influence allows think tanks to develop personal ties to decision makers and deliberately shape policy through these connections. Lastly, experiential influence surfaced in the literature as scholars attempt to grapple with the influence of foreign educated returnees.⁴¹ Foreign educated returnees are valued for their expertise and credentials, however, not entirely trusted by the Chinese government.⁴² With understanding how think tanks influence policy, scholars have determined how influence should be assessed and the whether Chinese think tanks are impacting policy. Zhu asserts that a think tank's influence is determined by the frequency of political leaders' commentaries on think tank reports and the number of invitations that think tanks receive to attend a government event. In terms of academia, Zhu argues that influence is based on the number of publications in academic journals and think tank leaders' attendance of national conferences. Finally, public influence can be measured by press reports and interviews.⁴³ Shambaugh and Li and Wong point to the development of track II diplomacy as an indicator and way in which think tanks have influenced Chinese policy makers through unofficial and informal non-state actors engaging in the spreading and sharing of ideas.⁴⁴ That said, the literature is not entirely in agreement about the effectiveness of Chinese think tanks. Wang and Hu⁴⁵ assert that Chinese think tanks will likely have little impact on China's soft power,

³⁷ Glaser, Bonnie S., and Phillip C. Saunders. "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence." *The China Quarterly* 171 (September 2002): 597-616.

³⁸ Zhu, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*, p.55.; Stone, "The Group of 20 Transnational Policy Community," pp. 793-811.

³⁹ Li, "The Role of Think Tanks in Chinese Foreign Policy," pp. 255-65.; Glaser and Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes," pp. 597-616.; Casarini, "The Role of Think Tanks in China," in *The EU-China Relationship: European Perspectives*, p. 88.

⁴⁰ Casarini, "The Role of Think Tanks in China," in *The EU-China Relationship: European Perspectives*, p. 88.

⁴¹ Cheng Li, "China's New Think Tanks: Where Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Scholars Interact," Brookings Institution (2006), p. 7.; Zhu, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process," pp. 333-57; Glaser and Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes," pp. 597-616.

⁴² Cheng, "China's New Think Tanks".

⁴³ Zhu, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*, p.55.

⁴⁴ Shambaugh, "China's international relations think tanks," p. 576.; Li and Wong, "The Evolution of Chinese Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Think Tanks," pp. 36-46.

⁴⁵ Hongying Wang and Xue Ying Hu, "The New Great Leap Forward: Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics," September 2017, 1, CIGI Paper NO. 142.

policy-making, or public opinion due to their limited intellectual sovereignty. On the other hand, other scholars have found that think tank influence has waxed and waned depending on the specific institution, and since China has opened up, think tanks have become more sophisticated, variegated, theoretical, and overall more influential.⁴⁶

The literature has shown us that Chinese think tanks today are shaped by a number of historical and contemporary contextual conditions. The rise of Chinese think tanks out of the soviet model reflected the necessity for knowledge development in China and a hostile environment for the free flow and exchange of ideas. While the think tank environment in China is still far different from the traditional western model, scholars have grappled with how to manage these various dilemmas. The literature has worked to articulate an accurate definition of a think tank, determine an all-encompassing, cohesive typology for think tanks as they have diversified around the world, and assess their level of impact on the policy making process. This work aims to bridge some of these gaps by building off previous scholarly works to operationalize McGann's typology and provide advice to think tanks attempting to harness, produce, and broker knowledge to influence policy makers within the institutional network of transnational public diplomacy.

⁴⁶ Shambaugh, "China's international relations think tanks," p. 576.; Glaser and Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes," pp. 597-616.