FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

简报特刊

BRIEFING PAPER SHANGHAI
SPECIAL ISSUE
September 2011 / English

Think Tanks
in Policy Making – Do They Matter?

Andrew Rich
James McGann
Kent Weaver
Mark Garnett
Martin Thunert
Rudolf Speth
Rudolf Traub-Merz
Ye Yang (杨烨)

Think Tanks in Policy Making – Do They Matter?

Andrew Rich
James McGann
Kent Weaver
Mark Garnett
Martin Thunert
Rudolf Speth
Rudolf Traub-Merz
Yang Ye

Content

Foreword 3

I. Do We Need More and More Think Tanks?
Rudolf Traub-Merz 4

II. Think Tanks: The Global, Regional and National Dimensions
James McGann 8

III. Think Tanks in the Political System of the United States
Andrew Rich and Kent Weaver 16

IV. Feasible Paths of Development for Think Tanks in China
Yang Ye 25

V. Think Tanks in the United Kingdom: an Honourable Tradition in Troubled Times
Mark Garnett 34

VI. Think Tanks in Germany
Martin Thunert 43

VII. Think Tanks as New Channels of Influence within the Political System of Germany
Rudolf Speth 55

About the Authors 61

Foreword

Rudolf Traub-Merz

The world is becoming more complex and think tanks help us to *»bridge the gap between knowledge and policy«.* This may be a common denominator in any discussion of think tanks. While all think tanks may be characterised by such a general definition – to bring knowledge and expertise to bear on the policymaking process – not all of them do the same things, have the same concept of making their expertise relevant for policy formulation or have the same degree of financial, intellectual and legal independence.

How do think tanks produce knowledge? How influential are they in advising on policy formulation? Do they sell objective expertise or partisan advice and is there a need for a pluralistic and balanced think tank set-up?

These and similar questions were raised and keenly debated during a conference on »The Role of Think Tanks in Society«, held jointly by the Shanghai office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the College of Public Administration, Zhejiang University on 25 and 26 August 2010 in Hangzhou.

A selection of the conference presentations is provided in this brochure. Further information on the Hangzhou Think Tank Conference, including PowerPoint presentations, is available on the website of FES China (see www.fes-china.org).

No bilingual publication is possible without translators. Mrs Wu Xiaozhen translated the Chinese contribution into English, while Professor Zheng Chunrong translated the English-language articles into Chinese. James Patterson copyedited the English texts for publication. We owe them our thanks for their professional work.

We hope that this publication will be of interest.

Shanghai, September 2011

Rudolf Traub-Merz

Resident Director
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Shanghai Office for International Cooperation

I

Do We Need More and More Think Tanks?

Rudolf Traub-Merz

It seems obvious: in times of progressive division of labour and international integration, states and governments find it increasingly difficult to obtain all relevant information and knowledge about systemic contexts that they need for justifying policy decisions in terms of potential consequences thereof. More and more investment has to be set aside for expert advisory bodies that are able to translate the findings of fundamental research into policy options and to enable politicians to foresee the effects of their decisions. This is where so-called think tanks – which one common UN definition describes as a »bridge between knowledge and power« – come in.

Think tanks, in fact, are a growth industry. According to the annual survey by the University of Pennsylvania, in 2010 there were 6,480 think tanks worldwide (see McGann in this volume). For a long time, think tanks were primarily a Western creation and even today the USA and Europe continue to dominate in global surveys. However, Asia now has the highest growth rates in this area. This also applies to China (see McGann): even though global surveys as yet present only an inadequate picture of think tanks there, their growing importance is undisputed.

From the mere fact that demand for advice is growing and more and more of it is being made available, however, we cannot conclude that the market is clearly structured. If we examine the activities of think tanks more closely a great deal remains in the shadows. Apart from anything else, there is still no generally accepted definition of »think tank«. This has three main reasons: on the long path between basic scientific research and policy-relevant expertise there is a wide variety of think tanks. Many conduct empirical research and differ little from research institutes; they are sometimes described as »universities without students« (see Rich and Weaver). Others base their work on existing findings, are not interested in broader societal contexts and primarily endeavour to influence decisions in favour of a certain viewpoint or specific interests. Sometimes there is little to separate them from lobbyists.

Think tanks can also be distinguished in terms of the strategies they use to influence target groups. They may see themselves as service providers for political decision-makers or administrations, or perhaps address a community of experts or the general public. They may do this on commission from target groups – usually with state funding – or on commission from a third party which seeks to obtain influence in this way. Many feel a duty towards pure enlightenment, but attempting to exert influence is an essential feature of think tanks.

Legal foundations and modes of funding are other important distinguishing characteristics. Think tanks can be state, public or private establishments. Many have a non-profit orientation, while others – especially private consulting firms – are profit seeking. Think tanks can be substructures of larger bodies or be organisationally autonomous. The nature of this autonomy is strongly determined by funding. There are three main forms: full or partial state funding; private contract research; and the establishment of a foundation whose field of activity is fixed but whose founder does not interfere in the operational side of things.

Without a clear definition there can be no such thing as a typical think tank. And without a common definition, the statistics vary widely, depending on the survey one consults. In the debate it is even disputed to what extent think tanks really matter. Their activities have certainly increased, but what their effects are is difficult to judge. The main reason for this is the methodological difficulty of measuring their empirical influence. A possible list of quantitative indicators that might be used to assess the significance of a think tank could include the following: [1]

- media exposure;
- publications;
- references to think tanks in scholarly publications and government records;
- testimony before legislative committees;
- staff appointed to positions in government.

The difficulties encountered in measuring effects are the same as those often observed in the social sciences. It is scarcely possible to isolate individual factors of influence because laboratory conditions do not exist in political life. Besides numerous think tanks, many other actors compete for influence, including lobbies and political parties. On top of this there are informal contacts, the grey area of exerting influence, which eludes measurement. Probably the case study model is the most appropriate for assessing the influence of think tank consultancy on political outcomes.[2]

It would be completely wrong to attribute the growth of think tanks solely to the increasing complexity of societies and politics as a result of technological progress. The increasing demand for policy experts to reconnect development to a wider context of societal reproduction is not the result of modernisation, the information revolution or the deepening division of labour per se. There is no such thing as neutral expertise and any policy advice, if implemented, will always affect the status quo with regard to income distribution, property ownership, political power and other means of resource distribution. The UK may reasonably claim to have invented think tanks (see Garnett). Their early representatives, such as the »Philosophic Radicals« and later the Fabian Society were ideologically outspoken in their desire to »promote collectivist (even

[1] The list follows the lecture given by Don Abelson of the University of Western Ontario entitled »Do Think Tanks Matter?« at the Hangzhou Conference.

[2] Don Abelson, see footnote 1.

›socialistic‹) remedies to social problems« (see Garnett).

The 1970s in particular saw a veritable explosion in the establishment of think tanks as part of an ideological onslaught against the dominant Keynesianism (see Garnett; Rich and Weaver). Many of the think tanks founded at that time were committed to establishing the discursive hegemony of neoliberalism. Would-be bureaucratic reformers preached cutting back the administrative machinery and called for the outsourcing of state functions. It was not the scientific underpinning of policy that was on the agenda but a radical economic and social policy change of course. The neoliberal revolution was most pronounced in the USA and the UK where Reagonomics and Thatcherism were the labels given to self-professed »conservative« transformations in society, while in countries such as Germany, with a strong tradition of corporatism and social partnership, private funding for neoliberal thinks tanks was not forthcoming on the same scale.

Given that think tanks tend to have a marked ideological orientation, the public is entitled to know about their relationships to clients and sources of funding.

Organisational independence of clients, no influence over research projects on the part of those providing funding and detachment from political parties are important quality-assurance criteria in the USA with regard to policy advice. However, autonomy can mean many things. In the USA, institutions do not accept state funding in order to maintain their independence (see Rich and Weaver), while in Germany think tanks seek (basic) state funding in order to ensure their independence from private donors. In China, the issue of institutional autonomy is different: instead of financial independence operational independence is what matters (see Yang Ye).

Many representatives of think tanks put forward »think the unthinkable« as their radical and idealised motto. Observers frequently offer a different picture, however. For some, their daily business is contract research under strict conditions and stipulations of neutrality; for others, however, self-censorship and consideration for clients' desired results leave their mark on the advice they give. Unpalatable truths which could perhaps harm the client quickly end up in a drawer so as not to jeopardise the institute.

In the UK another, no less worrying phenomenon can be observed. Receiving little public funding and engaged in a struggle for survival in an economic-liberal milieu political consultancy today is characterised by numerous small and competing groups whose main occupation is »headline hunting« (see Garnett). The influence of the mass media is striking. Think tanks seeking to make a name for themselves pander to the pet issues of journalists instead of playing an advisory role in policy debates. Often the relationship between advice and politics is inverted: politicians purchase »tailored reports« from think tanks in order to underpin their credibility in the media.

The German think tank landscape, by contrast, is much more clearly outlined and more balanced with regard to advice given to different social groups and political parties (see Speth and Thunert). This applies not only to the political foundations[3] and the research institutes close to important interest groups such as employers and trade unions: the parliamentary caucus of politi-

[3] In Germany, political parties represented in parliament have the right to establish a political foundation, ideologically aligned with the party, for political education activities. These foundations' educational work is publicly funded in accordance with the party's parliamentary strength. The state exercises financial and administrative oversight, but does not interfere in actual work. The idea underlying this model is to take account of all currents of opinion in society in accordance with their respective weight and to make educational activities the financial responsibility of the state.

cal parties also have their own expert staff which can deal with much of what otherwise think tanks do. Perhaps the German Parliament's research services come closest to a narrow definition of think tank: a state-funded think tank that works to order but is nonetheless independent, and which does not conduct research of its own but mainly relies on the results of third parties. The German model has particular advantages in respect of transparency. Funding is especially important, however: it is first and foremost the wide variety of funding sources (*Land* and federal governments, private persons, social organisations) that enables German think tanks to work freely.

A pluralistic setup which provides access to expert advice to all groups in society, not just the economic or political elites, is one condition whereby the professionalism of think tanks can be improved. In this respect the state plays a compensatory role, making up for the varying financial capacities of social groups and ensuring fair competition among ideas by means of targeted financing of institutions that deal with the interests of disadvantaged groups. Politicians remain ultimately responsible to the electorate and that entitles the public to know what think tanks are up to. While each society has to find its own line of demarcation between the right of confidentiality and the need for information disclosure in relations between expert advisor and the recipient of advice, rules and standards are important in establishing transparency which in the end does not undermine but strengthens democracy. Only if such conditions are in place can the current think tank boom remain desirable for the future.

II

Think Tanks: The Global, Regional and National Dimensions

James McGann

1. Introduction

Think tanks are research, analysis and engagement institutions that generate policy advice on domestic and international issues, enabling both policymakers and the public at large to make informed decisions. On one end of the spectrum, think tanks can be seen as one of the main policy actors in democratic societies that assure a pluralistic, open and accountable process of policy analysis, research, decision-making and evaluation. On the other end, think tanks can also be considered as a euphemism for special interest groups that have their own political agendas. Within these broad generalisations, there is a diverse group of think tanks worldwide.

Think tanks are beginning to prove their utility in the domestic and international policy sphere as information transfer mechanisms and agents of change by aggregating and creating new knowledge through collaboration with diverse public and private actors. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identifies think tanks as »[the] bridge between knowledge and power.« At their best, think tanks act as filters and synthesizers that facilitate the identification of policy issues, the design of policy solutions, and the implementation of and feedback on policy decisions. The proliferation, global expansion, and networking of think tanks have magnified their potential to research and develop solutions to global public policy issues of today.

While policy-makers may lack the tools to quickly respond to a critical policy problem, they often suffer, not from a lack of information, but from an »avalanche of information« that gets in the way of effective decision-making. Overcoming these obstacles often requires knowing where to turn for rigorous, reliable and accessible information and analysis. The challenge then for policy-makers and think tanks is to harness the vast reservoir of knowledge and associational energy that exists in public policy research organisations in every region of the world for public good.

Think tanks now operate in a variety of political systems, engage in a range of policy-related activities and comprise a diverse set of institutions

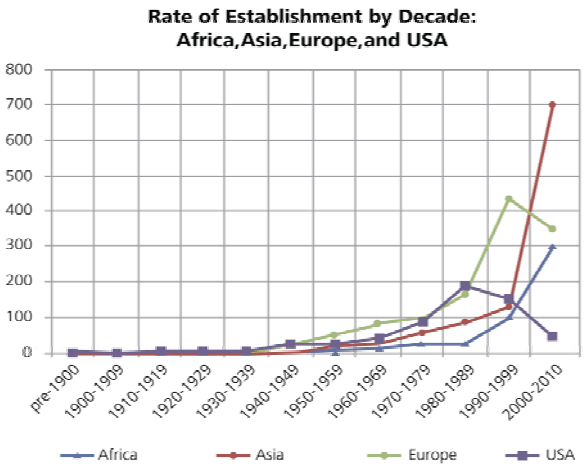
that have varied organisational forms. While their organisational structure, modes of operation, audience or market and means of support may vary from institution to institution and from country to country, most think tanks share a common goal of producing high quality research and analysis. These specific strategic functions help promote rationality and transparency in the policy -making process.

Think tanks are also one of the many civil society actors in a country. They often lead the vanguard of political reform and economic development movements around the world, bridging the gap between the government and the public, as well as knowledge and policy communities. Analogous to a »canary in the coal mine«, the indigenous think tank sector can also function as a key indicator for the state of civil society in a country. If analysts and critics associated with think tanks are allowed to operate freely, they can create an informed citizenry through public education about key policy issues as well as stimulate dialogue among the rest of civil society.

2. The Spread of Think Tanks

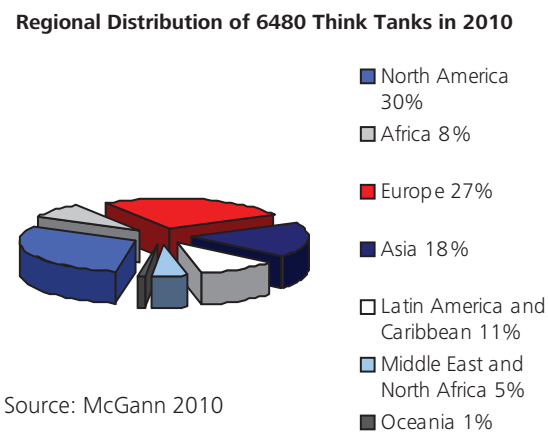
There are currently 6480 think tanks in the world, a great increase from ten years ago. North America and Western Europe still dominate the scene with 57% of think tanks, but other regions are catching up. The Middle East, North Africa and Africa as a whole have seen the least activity, with a current level of 5% and 8% of the world's think tanks.

The growth of public policy research organisations, or think tanks, over the last few decades has been nothing less than explosive. Not only have these organisations increased in number, but the scope and impact of their work has also expanded dramatically. The 1980s and 90s witnessed an exponential growth of think tanks and an increasing specialisation in policy-making.



Source: McGann 2010

Considering the continuing technological advances that increase the complexity and amount of available information, it is perhaps no surprise that good ideas can be lost within a sea of talking heads and endless waves of white papers. As such, developing efficient methods of organising and filtering policy ideas in order to effectively react and respond to the dynamic policymaking environment has been increasingly critical. Yet the reasons for the widespread prolifera-



Source: McGann 2010

tion of think tanks globally goes far beyond a simple desire for improved policy functions.

2.1 Reasons for the Growth of Think Tanks

Democratisation

- Demands for independent information and analysis
- More open debate about government decision-making
- End of state monopoly on information
- Crisis of confidence in government officials

Globalisation

- Growth of international actors
- Internationalisation of NGO funding
- Pressures of globalisation

Modernisation

- Advances in technology and communication
- Complexity and technical nature of policy problems

2.2 Reasons for the Decline in the Rate of Establishment of Think Tanks Worldwide

Institutional Environment

- Hostile political and regulatory environment
- Underdeveloped institutional capacity
- Replacement by advocacy organisations
- Discontinuation of operations because purpose fulfilled

Funding

- Changes in funding priorities by public and private donors
- Prioritisation of short-term projects over long-term institution building
- Global economic crisis

3. »Scan Globally but Reinvent Locally«

The proliferation of think tanks across the globe has exponentially increased the potential for international communication, information-gathering, and new and creative policy analysis. Individual think tanks are executing global expansion strategies, in which a think tank establishes multiple physical operational centres, either in different domestic locations or in countries outside of its headquarters. These organisations have organised nascent think tank networks to help develop and assess policies and programs and to serve as a link to civil society groups at the national, regional, and global level.

Most interestingly, the last decade has witnessed a new phenomenon of global networks and partnerships of think tanks. Some institutions have experimented with cross-border collaboration and strategically placed global think tank networks are now in full bloom. These global partnerships among think tanks have resulted in the creation of networks that can focus on issues of transnational significance and help in the cooperation of policy-oriented research that maximises expertise and minimises redundancy across countries through increased timeliness and relevance. Additionally, models of global partnerships that involve policy-makers and think tanks demonstrate how global networks and partnerships can help improve performance and policy-making.

Categories of Think Tanks:

- For profit: *corporate*
- Autonomous and independent: *non-governmental organisation*
- Quasi independent: *single donor*
- University: *university affiliated*
- Political party: *arm of political party*
- Quasi-governmental: *government funded*
- Governmental: *government entity*

4. Regional Outlooks

	Africa
Structure	More limited in number, experience, and resources.
Focus	Economic development, health, crime prevention. Critical gaps in key policy areas and a dearth of security-related think tanks in the most conflict-prone region of the world.
Global Reach	Resolve issues of independence and sustainability and prevent flight of intellectual capital.
	Asia
Structure	Increased growth of public policy research organisations with close ties to government. More constrained than Western think tanks.
Focus	Economic, strategic, and security issues within the region.
Global Reach	Many of the Southeast Asian think tanks are at the forefront of efforts to build a strong collaborative and cooperative regional network.
	Central and Eastern Europe
Structure	Critical part of Europe's post-Communist transition. More varied and policy-oriented than Western European counterparts. Receive significant funding from public and private donors; however, still face challenges of independence, capacity, and sustainability.
Focus	Political and economic challenges of transition, specifically relations with Europe and Russia.
Global Reach	Working to create significant dialogue with emerging think tanks elsewhere in Eurasia
	Latin America
Structure	Think tanks focused on domestic economic and security issues. Defence think tanks have stronger ties to official government military organisations. Most are funded by national governments.
Focus	Economic development, human rights, environment, violent crime.
Global Reach	Promote a stable and evolving think tank community on regional basis. Brazil expanding its global reach through Think Tanks.
	Middle East and North Africa
Structure	Growth in number of independent think tanks. Still impacted by the centralised political and governing structures in the MENA region.
Focus	Regional security issues, democratisation, economic policy.
Global Reach	Constrained by comparatively little financial or political support and limited degree of democratic freedom.
	Russian Federation
Structure	Well-established think tanks from immediate post-Communist era. Restricted by increased government centralisation to limit role of think tanks and a post-WWII decline in Western financial support.
Focus	Economic reform and modernisation, Russia's place in the world.
Global Reach	Restrained by notable domestic limitations on civil society.

	The United States
Structure	1,777 think tanks; 374 based in Washington, D.C.; all 50 states have at least one think tank.
Defining Characteristics	Larger staffs and budgets, some exceeding $50M, creating greater visibility and influence. Significant financial independence allows for greater policy influence in a democratic political system.
Global Reach and Focus	Research is used extensively by the electronic and print media, and for testimony and briefing at Congress and at the White House.
	Western Europe
Structure	Think tanks are strongly influenced by political culture, relatively small number of truly independent TTs. Government and political party affiliated still dominate. Parliamentary model provides closer ties and more fluid conversation with policy-makers. The major downside is a distinct lack of diversity and public engagement.
Focus	European integration, U.S.-European relations, democratisation and nation-building.
Global Reach	More concentrated on using a state-centric perspective to address issues facing Europe as a whole. Transatlantic and trans-European orientation.

5. Spotlight: China

Provided below are the major milestones in the development of think tanks in China. Two key events interrupted this development. The Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square.

1956-1966: Think tanks exist to justify government policies, not to conduct independent research. Hierarchical structures, dominated by Soviet-style ideologies and bureaucratic structure, housed within government ministries.

1976-1989: Think tanks focus on economic issues, equipping China for rapid development and integration into the global economy. Experience greater autonomy and increased influence on policy, although they still exist within the formal structures of government and communist party.

1989-present: Chinese society experiences the gradual re-emergence of think tanks; specifically civilian and university-affiliated research organisations. Located outside government, yet still controlled by CCP and government.

5.1 Top Think Tanks in China

The Cathay Institute for Public Affairs: Works to create a greater capacity for sustainability and development in China concerning a higher quality of life and increased cultural understanding on a global level.

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS): CASS is made up of 31 research institutes affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Sciences that concentrate on fostering the development of social sciences in China.

China Foundation for International & Strategic Studies (CFISS)

China Institute for International Studies (CIIS): A think tank of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CIIS' emphasis is foreign policy research that is presented directly to policy-makers.

China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR): Deriving directly from the State Council, CICIR's focus includes strategic, political, economic, and security studies.

Development Research Center of the State Council: As the name implies, DRC conducts research on economic and social development as an affiliate of the State Council and is actively involved in

the policy-making affairs of the central government.

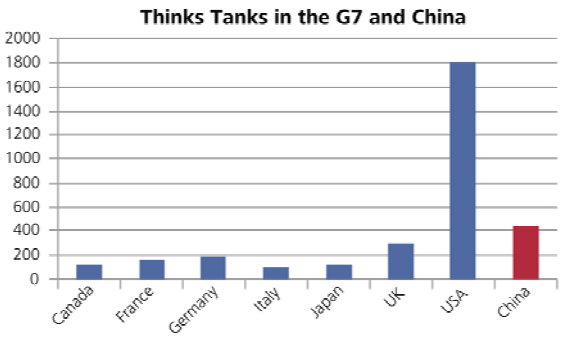
Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS): Founded by Jin Zhonghua, an advisor to the first Premier of the PRC Zhou Enlai, SIIS dedicates research to the modernisation of China regarding politics, economics, and security.

Unirule Institute of Economics: Economic Think Tank that has consciously organised itself as an »independent« organisation with nongovernmental funding. Its research is focused on the »China Market Reform Initiative«.

In addition, many European political foundations have been active in China for several decades, such as Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Recently, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Brookings Institution both opened centres in Beijing. There has been a marked increase in the interest in understanding the role think tanks might play in shaping the country's future by academic and policy elites in China.

5.2 Limitations and Outlook

Although there has been a proliferation of Chinese think tanks in the last few decades due to the economic reforms and a growing international profile, most of them are government-affiliated. Current laws require all think tanks/NGOs to have a government agency sponsor them. This guarantees their survival through government funding, but their research is seriously hindered by the encroachment of the government's political agenda and restrictions on freedom of expression. While Chinese think tanks deal with an increasing number and diversity of issues, they have tended to avoid studying human rights and civil liberties to avoid attracting negative attention from the government.

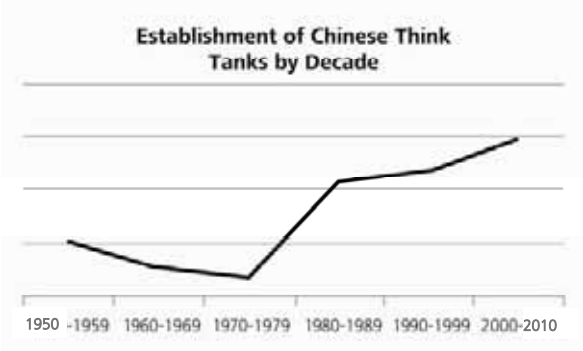


In spite of these obstacles, more think tanks are nevertheless emerging. Moreover, the progress of policy input since the Deng era bodes well for continued progress in the future. As China continues to develop and integrate itself into the international community, policy-makers will continue to rely on think tanks for implementable solutions. Broader international participation requires knowledge of new issues, thus requiring the expertise of think tank specialists. Whether these institutions will become independent or keep their government-orientation is something that needs to be watched over the next few decades as an indicator of China's political development.

6. Emerging Global Issues and Trends

Outputs vs. Impact:

Historically, think tanks have placed a focus on outputs over impact. How do think tanks measure their impact? For many institutions, it is limited to the numbers of books and policy briefs produced rather than to providing the impetus for new legislation or changes in policy. Donors who are increasingly interested in supporting »high-impact« policy research further complicate this issue.



Source: McGann 2009

Influence and Independence:

As independent think tanks become more established, some appear to be losing their voice and independence along the way. The delicate balance between relevance, influence, and independence must be carefully managed if think tanks are to maintain their credibility with policymakers and the public.

NGO Push Back:

There is an insidious global trend that is designed to take back the open and democratic space created by think tanks and civil society organisations in the late 80s and 90s by limiting the number, role and activates of civil society organisations. Some governments have been tightening restrictions on foreign support for NGOs operating in their country, which potentially may extend to limit foreign support for think tanks. In addition, registration laws and other bureaucratic measures have been implemented in order to limit the political space in which these groups operate and limit their numbers and influence.

Hybridisation of Think Tanks:

As think tanks have faced new challenges in the societies in which they operate, they have adapted and created hybrid institutions. More and more think tanks are a blend of organisational types (part academic research centre, consulting firm, advocacy group and policy enterprise) and the roles of key staff have changed. Today the staff of think tanks must be comprised of multifaceted individuals who are part scholar, journalist, marketing executive, and policy entrepreneur.

Sustainability and Institutional Capacity:

The source of much of the funding for think tanks in developing and transitional countries is start-up grants from international public and private donors followed by a series of project specific grants, making it difficult for institutions to develop a strong institutional capacity. In many countries, indigenous, non-governmental sources of funding are limited and underdeveloped. Additionally, the concentrated support of small, specialised think tanks by public and private donors rather than multi-purpose, policy-oriented think tanks may prove unsustainable over time. What impact will this lack of indigenous support and institutional capacity have on these newly created think tanks and their ability to respond to an array of policy problems facing these countries?

Catalysts for Change:

It bears watching to see to what extent think tanks become a prime platform for opposition political players to develop policy alternatives and provide a home for those out of power. How well will the think tanks that were created during the wave of democratisation in the late 1980s and 90s fare when the tide turns in the other direction?

Phantom NGO Think Tanks:

Governments are creating think tanks that are designed to appear to be non-governmental organisations but are in fact arms of the government. These have become known as GONGOS:

Government Organised Nongovernmental Organisations. Corporations, unions and individuals have established think tanks to promote their special interests. This trend raises concerns about a lack of transparency and private interest masquerading as public interest.

Partisan vs. Non-partisan:

Some think tanks attempt to advance the philosophies of an ideological group, while others try to create a space for less partisan explorations of policy alternatives. The public in the U.S. appears to be growing weary of the partisan bickering in Washington and now expect policymakers to move from stalemate to action on key policy issues. Those think tanks that have become caught up in this »war of ideas« may be viewed by the public as part of the problem rather than a credible and constructive force in the policy making process.

General vs. Specific Focus:

Many prominent think tanks have incentives to move away from general, comprehensive research work to focus on more narrow projects that are geared toward the interests of a specific patron or interest group. This trend creates intellectual blinders that often results in narrow and self-serving policy recommendations and runs counter to the policy issues we face today which tend to be transnational, complex and span many disciplines which leaves us unprepared to deal with the policy challenges we face in the short and long term. Clearly, what is called for is a commitment to providing sustained, general operating support for transnational and interdisciplinary research on a range of policy issues.

Global Think Tanks and Networks:

Numerous think tanks are trying to cultivate stronger ties to counterpart organisations within their region and across the world, and it will be interesting to see if these networks coalesce around particular topics, regions, or ideological views.

Relevance vs. Rigor:

All think tanks face the need to balance academic quality research with information that is understandable and accessible to policymakers and the public.

Supply vs. Demand:

Much of the support for think tanks in developing and transitional countries has been for improving the quality and supply of policy research. Policy-makers, the media and the public have not placed enough emphasis or support on how to increase the appreciation and utilisation of policy research.

Impact of the Internet:

The internet is having a profound impact on think tanks and policy advice as it is for all organisations whose mission is centred on ideas and information. The issues provoked by the internet and how it influences the creation, dissemination, and discussion of public policy issues, are areas that require our attention.

References

McGann, James (2009), Think Tanks and Civil Society in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, Foreign Policy Research Institute.

McGann, James (2010), Global Trends in Think Tanks and Policy Advice, Foreign Policy Research Institute.

McGann, James (2011) The Global Go-To Think Tanks 2010, Foreign Policy Research Institute.

III

Think Tanks in The Political System of the United States

Andrew Rich and Kent Weaver

The number and variety of think tanks in the United States has grown dramatically since the late 1960s, reflecting both an expanded demand for expertise in policy-making circles and a growth in the supply of entrepreneurial experts and their patrons, including private foundations, corporations, and individuals.

In the U.S. context, the term think tanks is generally used to refer to organisations that (1) have the provision of research and policy advice as their primary mission, (2) are organisationally - though sometimes not financially - independent of government and universities, and (3) are operated on a not-for-profit basis. But the boundaries between think tanks, advocacy organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have public information as part of their mandate is often ambiguous in practice. Because of these ambiguous boundaries, even the most basic question about think tanks in the United States, how many there are, cannot be answered with certainty. Following a strict version of the definition based on the three criteria above, there are more than 300 think tanks in the United States. James McGann, using a much broader definition, cites a figure of 1,816 U.S. think tanks in the 2010 edition of his global think tank guide.

There are some very large think tanks in the U.S., as Table 1 shows. The RAND Corporation has an annual budget of more than $260 million dollars, and several others (notably the Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation, and Urban Institute) have budgets between $60 and $100 million. Think tanks are heavily concentrated in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., and many of the largest American think tanks are based there. But most think tanks are much smaller, especially those that focus their efforts on state and local policy-making.

Think tanks play several roles in the policy-making process in the United States. First, they can provide basic research on policy problems and policy solutions, for example outlining the causes and consequences of skills deficits or slow economic growth. Second, think tanks can provide advice on immediate policy concerns through many points of entry into the U.S. policy-making process. These include testifying before

congressional committees, writing opinion pieces for newspapers and new media outlets, and writing policy briefs that are increasingly distributed in both printed and web-based formats. Informal consultations and dialogues are another vehicle for advice in immediate policy debates. Third, think tanks can act as evaluators of government programmes, usually on a contractual basis. Fourth, think tank staff can be called upon to provide commentary on current events, both for the national and regional press and through new media outlets such as web commentaries and blogposts. Finally, think tanks can supply personnel for government, given the relatively porous nature of the personnel system and in particular the substantial turnover of high-level policy-making personnel that takes place at the beginning of presidential and gubernatorial terms. Indeed, highly peaked demand for executive policy-making positions at the beginning of presidential administrations may strain some think tanks if they suffer a mass exodus of staff into a new administration.

As might be expected from such a large and diverse set of organisations and organisational roles, there is no such thing as a »typical« U.S. think tank. The boxes in this policy brief give overviews of two U.S. think tanks, the Brookings Institution and the Roosevelt Institute, but they scarcely scratch the surface of diversity in U.S. think tanks. Think tanks differ in systematic ways in how they are funded, the roles that they play including their attitude toward »neutral expertise«, recruitment of staff and their »product lines«. Different types of think tanks to some degree concentrate on particular roles. One frequently used categorisation distinguishes among:

- »universities without students« like the Brookings Institution and the Russell Sage Foundation, which are staffed largely by PhD-trained researchers, financed mostly by private philanthropic foundations, and emphasise publication of studies that meet academic standards of neutrality and rigor;
- »contract researchers« like the Urban Institute and the RAND Corporation that concentrate primarily on evaluation of programmes and other applied research requested and funded by government agencies; and
- »advocacy tanks« or »think and do tanks« like the Heritage Foundation and the Center for American Progress that frequently place more emphasis on a particular ideological perspective and view their role as part of a »war of ideas« among well-defined ideologies rather than a neutral search for policy information.

As will be discussed below, however, these categories are oversimplifications. There has been significant blurring of categories in recent years in terms of roles, recruitment and product lines, as think tanks have sought to respond to a changing strategic environment.

1. The Changing Strategic Environment for American Think Tanks

Both the overall composition of the think tank sector in the United States and the behaviours and output of individual think tanks are shaped by their strategic environment. This environment has both enduring characteristics and some rapidly changing attributes. A critical enduring characteristic of the American think tank scene is a diverse set of potential »customers« for policy information and expertise. The separation of powers system and fragmentation of power within American political institutions means that there are many different venues for influencing policy, at every stage of the policy-making process from problem definition through specification of alternatives through formal policy adoption to policy implementation. Different strategies may

be needed to be heard at each of these stages, and the customers at different stages may be receptive to different types of information packaged in different ways.

Another distinctive feature of the American policy environment is the very large number of competitors for funding and for policy influence, often with blurred dividing lines between them. The number of competitors has grown even larger in recent years. In addition to various types of think tanks, a substantial amount of policy-relevant information and analysis is provided by policy-oriented NGOs (e.g., Transparency International), advocacy organisations and a growing array of policy schools in the United States (e.g., Harvard's Kennedy School of Government). Moreover, the United States offers many sources of policy advice within government, including the Government Accountability Office, Congressional Research Service, and Congressional Budget Office. Policy »shops« within government agencies and policy evaluation firms working on contract for government (e.g., Mathematica Policy Research and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation), also produce information that informs policy debates.

This extremely crowded competitive environment for policy influence has had several consequences. Policy-makers, inundated by policy research and ideas from a variety of sources, are even less likely to read lengthy studies, which leads to an increased emphasis on brevity and accessibility on the part of think tanks. Increased competition has also contributed to specialisation and »niche-seeking« among newer think tanks to increase their prospects of being heard in a very crowded field. Examples include the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the Center for Immigration Studies, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (focused on budget issues affecting low-income Americans).

An increasing polarised political atmosphere in Washington and many state capitals has also had important consequences. Many policy-makers now question the very possibility of »neutral expertise« and seek »ammunition« at least as often as they might seek »enlightenment« from think tanks and other sources that they perceive to be ideologically compatible. Increasing openness about ideological orientation among many think tanks, especially relatively new ones seeking to stand out and gain a specific policy audience in a crowded marketplace of ideas, can further reinforce both political polarisation and widespread suspicion of the idea of neutral expertise.

The important role of private philanthropic foundations in funding think tanks is another important factor shaping the development of the organisational environment. Changes in the orientation of many grant-making foundations have also shaped the strategic environment for think tanks in recent years. Many foundations are now less interested in basic research and want to see »immediate impact« from their funding. Foundation priorities have shifted from general institutional support to more project-specific support, and to a stronger emphasis on outreach to affected constituencies. Think tanks that want or need to attract foundation support have had to shift their priorities, activities and products in response to these shifts by their funders.

2. Changes among the Ranks of U.S. Think Tanks

Between 1970 and 2005, the number of think tanks in the United States quadrupled. During the

past three decades, explicitly ideological and particularly conservative think tanks have exploded in number – in Washington and in state capitals around the country. By 2005, conservative think tanks outnumbered liberal think tanks by almost two to one. Conservative think tanks have helped to lead a resurgence of conservative ideology. They have made ideas about limited government, unfettered free markets, and narrow notions of strong families pervasive and influential in debates over everything from tax policy and business regulation to education reform and civil rights.

In terms of financial resources, the story at the national level is more complex than a simple one of conservative dominance, as shown in Table 1. There are some very large think tanks with a clear conservative or libertarian ideology, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute, and they are in aggregate size much larger than their liberal counterparts, which include the Economic Policy Institute, the Center for American Progress, and the Roosevelt Institute. But many of the largest think tanks focused on national policy-making, such as the Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, the RAND Corporation and the Urban Institute eschew an ideological identity.

3. State-Focused Think Tanks

The number of think tanks based outside Washington, D.C. grew at an even faster pace than the overall national trend between 1970 and 2005, reaching 183 organisations in 2005. Of these 183 non-D.C.-based organisations, 117 had research agendas focused primarily on state policy issues, more than a ten-fold increase over the ten that existed in 1970. Data on a sample of these state-focused think tanks is shown in the third section of Table 1. Several patterns stand out. First, almost all of these organisations are relatively small. Most have annual budgets under $3 million, and many are much smaller. Second, most of them have very small endowment funds, so they are forced to raise almost all of their budgets every year. The Public Policy Institute of California, which self-identifies as »non-partisan, objective, and independent,« and operates primarily based on a large initial endowment provided by William R. Hewlett, is an exception to both of these general patterns.

A third important pattern is that conservative ideology dominates among the 117 state-focused think tanks. By 2005, state think tanks that represented an identifiably conservative ideology (ideologies are coded based on the organisation's mission statements) outnumbered both think tanks that were liberal and think tanks that sought to remain balanced or objective by almost two to one. Figure 1 illustrates the pattern by which state-focused think tanks formed between 1970 and 2005 by ideology. The patterns are even more striking in funding. Table 1 shows, for a representative sample of states, the policy research organisations that are members of the conservative State Policy Network (SPN) and the liberal-oriented State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI). SPN has affiliates in every state, and some states have more than one affiliate organisation. As of 2011, SFAI has affiliates in only 30 states and the District of Columbia, with further affiliates in the planning stages in nine additional states. Institutional members of the conservative SPN generally have substantially more budget resources than their liberal SFAI equivalents - often three or more times the resources. This difference in resources may be particularly impor-

tant at the state level, where there are fewer alternative sources of policy expertise and advice, and legislatures are less likely to have large professional staffs to assist them in developing alternatives.

4. Differences in the Strategic Priorities of U.S. Think Tanks

Differences in budgetary resources between liberal and conservative think tanks are often accompanied by differences in leadership, strategy and how budgetary resources are allocated. In July 2003, Andrew Rich administered a mail survey among leaders of 115 of the 117 state-based think tanks nationally; two of the organisations were formed after the survey was administered. The survey inquired about the histories, missions, and strategies of these organisations, beginning with questions about leader and staff backgrounds.[1] In answer to the question, »What type of job did the first leader of your organisation have immediately before forming or joining your organisation?«, respondents had ten answer choices, plus the option of writing in another description of the founder's background. Among conservative think tanks, a significant plurality – almost forty percent – of those who were the organisations' first leaders came from the private sector; they were either former lobbyists or business executives (38.2%). By contrast, almost two thirds of those who formed liberal think tanks came out of state government or from the non-profit advocacy community (63.1%).

These leadership differences seem to have bearing on decisions about how to organise operations and decision-making. The survey asked think tank leaders about the criteria they use when selecting or promoting full-time staff. Out of nine response options (along with an option to write in a response not listed), leaders of conservative think tanks most often named political or ideological orientation as the most important consideration when hiring staff; for liberals, ideology was far down the list. Almost three quarters of the leaders of conservative think tanks named political or ideological orientation as most or very important in making decisions about who to hire (73.6%). By contrast, less than half of the leaders of liberal think tanks named ideology as most or very important (42.2%). Among the other top priorities for the leaders of conservative think tanks were issue expertise (61.8%), media and public affairs experience (35.3%), and a record of publication (32.3%). By contrast, the leaders of liberal think tanks placed a premium on advanced degrees (either policy degrees, 42.1%, or PhDs, 31.6%) and experience in government (36.9%), along with issue expertise (57.9%). Leaders of conservative think tanks show far less interest in advanced degrees (23.5% for policy degrees and 8.8% for PhDs) and with experience in government (20.5%).

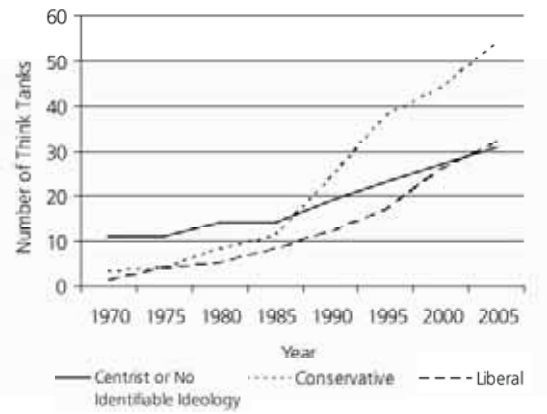
The leaders of conservative think tanks were significantly more likely to name »advising legislators on immediately pending policy issues« and »shaping public opinion on policy issues« as high priorities compared with the leaders of liberal think tanks. Three-quarters of the leaders of conservative think tanks named advising legislators as most or very important (76.5%), whereas just more than half of liberal think tanks named that as important (57.9%). Likewise, three-quarters of the leaders of conservative think tanks named shaping public opinion as important (73.5%), while only half of the leaders of liberal think tanks report that as important (52.6%). The leaders of liberal think tanks, by contrast, named informing non-profit advocacy groups about their research

[1] The survey had seventy-eight responses, a 67.8% response rate, from think tanks that were broadly representative of the larger population of state think tanks with respect to ideology, along with geography and size. There were responses from thirty-four conservative think tanks, nineteen liberal think tanks, and twenty-five think tanks of no identifiable ideology.

as important at much higher rates than those at conservative think tanks.

In general, the survey data suggest that leaders of conservative think tanks are likely to place more importance on finding a receptive audience for their *ideas* – separate from their *research* – than the leaders of many liberal think tanks and think tanks without a strong ideological orientation. They begin from the perspective that ideas and values motivate – rather than result from – research. In this view, all research is ideological insofar as ideas or ideology at least inform the questions that so-called »neutral« researchers ask; there is no such thing as disinterested expertise or the disinterested expert. Ideas inform preferences and behaviour far more than research. And ideas not only are – but *should be* – more powerful than expertise. One engages in (or supports) policy research for the same reasons one supports political advocacy: because both contribute to the larger causes of shifting the terms of debate in American policy-making and to amplifying the power of conservative ideas. For conservatives, the war of ideas provides the rationale for creating think tanks, and think tanks are the engine for conservative ideas. In recent years, a number of liberal »think and do« tanks, such as the Center for American Progress founded by former Clinton administration White House chief of staff John Podesta, have adopted a similar approach. As noted above, however, they remain at a significant funding disadvantage relative to their conservative counterparts.

Figure 1: Emergence of State Think Tanks by Ideology, 1970-2005



5. Final Thoughts

Think tanks are tremendously abundant and frequently important actors in the American policy-making process. Some are more successful at securing visibility and influence than others. But think tanks and other organisations that attempt to influence policymaking confront an important irony: the huge array of organisations attempting to influence policymaking in the United States, especially at the national level, mean that it is increasingly difficult for individual policy organisations to have a major impact on specific policy debates. Indeed, the plethora of voices makes it more likely that policymakers will simply chose to listen to voices that they think will agree with their own, rather than seeking out independent voices. And it is politicians rather than policy experts and advocates who have the final say in policy-making.

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

The Brookings Institution, based in Washington D.C. is perhaps the quintessential »university without students« among U.S. think tanks. Brookings was formed by a merger of three institutions founded by businessman Robert S. Brookings, the earliest of which dates to 1916. With a 2009 budget of over 80 million dollars, Brookings is among the largest American think tanks, and its net assets of around $300 million give it more control over its research agenda than most other think tanks, although the endowment provides a declining share of

revenues (about 15% of the total) as Brookings has grown rapidly over the past decade.

Brookings research was traditionally organised around three broad research programmes, in Economics, Foreign Policy and Government (later Governance). Under its current president, Strobe Talbott, Brookings has created new research programmes, centres and projects with a substantive rather than disciplinary focus, including a »Global Economy and Development Program« and »Metropolitan Studies Program«, and centres focused on China, Children and Families, and Middle East Policy. Research centres offer the opportunity to attract large multi-year and multi-project funding streams while avoiding the institutional »presumed perpetuity« that comes with traditional research programmes. Breaking down programmatic silos within Brookings through the creation of institution-wide research priorities (for example, growth through innovation, advancing opportunity and well-being, promoting sound energy and climate policy, and managing global change) that draw on staff across programmatic lines has also been a priority. Brookings has also entered into collaborative research projects and centres with both the American Enterprise Institute and the Urban Institute.

Accompanying programmatic changes have been a sharpening of the institutional branding from a slogan of »Independent research shaping the future« to »Quality. Independence. Impact.« This re-branding simultaneously reinforces Brookings non-partisan character and image and gives a stronger emphasis to policy impact. Increased attention has also been given to improving the accessibility and »user friendliness« of Brookings research through use of new media such as internet, streaming video of Brookings events and even Twitter.

THE ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE

The Roosevelt Institute, based in New York City, is a relative newcomer to the ranks of liberal think tanks in the United States, although the organisation has been in existence as the not-for-profit partner to the FDR Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park, NY, since that presidential library (the government-operated repository of the papers of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt) was opened in 1941. As is the case for many of the more ideological think tanks, especially those that are liberal, it is relatively small, with a 2009 budget of $5.3 million. Roughly $2.5 million of that amount supported the Roosevelt Institute's think tank, called the »Four Freedoms Center« , with the rest supporting other units of the Institute (the FDR Presidential Library and the Roosevelt Campus Network, a network of more than 100 college campus based student policy organisations with more than 10,000 college student members.

The Institute's Four Freedoms Center think tank was launched at the beginning of 2009 from the Institute's headquarters in New York City and with a focus on the economic downturn in the United States and the collapse of the U.S. financial sector. Nobel-prize winning economist Joe Stiglitz became the Centre's Chief Economist, and the Centre recruited a group of fellows who combined academic training and practical experience. Its work illustrates the blurring of the boundaries between the »advocacy tanks« and »universities without students« models described earlier in connection to U.S. think tanks. Its research is rigorous but is also informed by liberal values about how capitalism and democracy should be balanced, values embodied in the legacies of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Based in New York City, the Institute is still engaged at times in Washington, D.C. policy debates, but it is even more focused on shaping the national dialogue among journalists and opinion leaders, many of whom are based in New York. Its products are typically short and reader-friendly. The Institute puts as much effort into promoting its fellows (its people) as its ideas. It puts a premium on the long-term project of challenging the paradigms around free markets and limited government that have been pushed by conservative think tanks in the United States during the past fifty years.

Table 1: Expenditures and Assets of Selected U.S. Think Tanks

Institution	2009 Expenditures	2009 End of Year Net Assets
1. WASHINGTON, D.C.-BASED INSTITUTIONS		
American Enterprise Institute (2003)	$25,662,670	$134,651,479
Brookings Institution	$87,914,925	$296,024,693
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	$24,391,965	$224,284,273
Cato Institute	$21,766,084	$35,240,110
Center for American Progress	$31,631,306	$32,554,152
Center for Strategic & Internat. Studies	$28,627,725	$46,703,091
Center on Budget & Policy Priorities	$24,367,496	$61,563,001
Economic Policy Institute	$6,556,650	$5,738,896
Heritage Foundation	$69,042,685	$156,194,570
Hudson Institute	$11,852,015	$14,695,263
Institute for Policy Studies	$3,451,200	$2,110,805
Institute for Women's Policy Research	$1,938,691	$2,433,904
Peterson Institute for International Economics	$10,191,119	$66,445,789
Resources for the Future	$15,206,542	$38,611,159
Urban Institute	$67,604,220	$96,927,128
Washington Institute for Near East Policy	$8,002,782	$20,643,315
2. NON-D.C./NATIONAL FOCUS		
Council on Foreign Relations (New York)	$48,295,858	$300,359,700
Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute (New York)	$5,248,135	$23,437,169
Manhattan Institute for Public Policy Research (New York)	$11,807,541	$15,166,254
National Center for Policy. Analysis (Texas)	$7,569,793	$1,596,241
RAND Corporation (California)	$262,755,133	$179,494,785
Reason Foundation (California)	$6,863,788	$3,936,590
Russell Sage Foundation (New York)	$9,998,789	$197,946,799

Institution	2009 Expenditures	2009 End of Year Net Assets
3. STATE-FOCUSED THINK TANKS		
Barry Goldwater Institute (Arizona)	$2,681,328	$4,557,541
Children's Action Alliance (Arizona-SFAI)	$1,048,936	$1,496,681
California Budget Project (SFAI)	$1,181,699	$3,939,874
Pacific Research Institute (California-SPN)	$4,962,507	$4,834,041
Public Policy Institute of California	$13,050,874	$159,346,006
James Madison Institute (Florida-SPN)	$874,987	$411,208
Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (SFAI)	$591,648	$882,844
Georgia Public Policy Foundation (SPN)	$634,818	$87,759
Illinois Policy Institute (SPN)	$1,327,172	$117,757
Voices for Illinos Children (SFAI)	$2,520,217	$1,179,150
Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (SFAI)	$770,436	$735,608
Pioneer Institute (Massachusetts-SPN)	$1,342,630	$1,715,824
Mackinac Center for Public Policy	$3,377,168	$7,345,742
Michigan League for Human Services	$1,164,092	$717,195
Center for Public Policy Priorities (Texas-SFAI)	$1,529,628	$1,104,436
Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute (SPN)	$584,645	$332,115
Texas Public Policy Foundation (SPN)	$3,026,663	$2,143,756
Evergreen Freedom Foundation (Washington State-SPN)	$2,686,930	$1,249,633
Washington Policy Center (Washington state-SPN)	$1,661,953	$2,516,590
Washington State Budget & Policy Center (SFAI)	$556,736	$155,984

Data are from Internal Revenue Service Form 990s for calendar year 2009 or most recent available fiscal year.

IV

Feasible Paths of Development for Think Tanks in China

Yang Ye

1. General Formation of Chinese Think Tanks: Soviet Model with Chinese Characteristics

1.1 Development of Think Tanks in China: Copying the Soviet Model

Think tanks in China before the advent of »Reform and Opening«: following the Soviet model

The Soviet Union created many official and semi-official research institutions in the 20th century to provide direct policy input to the party leadership through internal channels. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China followed suit, setting up many official and semi-official policy research institutions, which were often referred to as the »internal brain« of government agencies.

Chinese think tanks inherited some of the shortcomings of the Soviet think tank model, as well as their manner of operation. For example, for a long time staff working for think tanks dared not express views in opposition to those of the political leadership or make innovative recommendations.

Characteristics of think tanks based on the Soviet model: policy input from within the system

(i) Think tanks affiliated to the State Council. The Research Office of the State Council and the Counselors' Office of the State Council are regarded as the core think tanks of the Chinese government. Both »participate in deliberation on and administration of state affairs, and offer advice and suggestions on important state affairs«. Less biased towards local or departmental interests, their advice and suggestions are heard directly by government leaders.

(ii) Think tanks affiliated to the Party. The Policy Research Office of the Communist Party Central Committee and the Central Party School are the Party's theoretical research arm. Research conducted at the Central Party School has increasingly gone beyond communist theory into policy areas such as the economy and income policy.

(iii) Think *tanks affiliated to government ministries*, such as the Research Institute for Fiscal Sci-

ence under the Ministry of Finance, the Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission, the China Academy of Labor and Social Security under the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the Center for Ethnic Studies under the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. Those institutes are more focused in their research because of their direct involvement in policy research and development for respective ministries.

(iv) Institutions that specialise in policy research and consulting, the most representative of which are the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Development Research Center of the State Council, and the Chinese Academy of Governance. More academic in nature, they are engaged in basic research as well as policy consultancy.

Since China adopted the Reform and Opening policy, some of the abovementioned institutions have been phased out, while others make up the nucleus of the current body of semi-official think tanks.

1.2 After Reform and Opening: Chinese Characteristics Added to the Soviet Model

The Party and the Government attach greater and greater importance to think tanks

As Reform and Opening deepens, the Party and the Government have fully recognised the essential role to be played by think tanks in helping them to deal with practical socio-economic problems.

In January 2004, the *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee on Further Developing Philosophy and Science* were promulgated. It stated that philosophy and social science scholars should serve as »think tanks« and »brain trusts« for the Party and the Government. On 19 May 2005, General Secretary Hu Jintao chaired a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, at which, after listening to a progress report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, he stressed that »the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences must go from good to better«.

Since the Sixteenth Party Congress (January 2002), the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee has been inviting experts from different fields to lecture at their headquarters every 40 days or so. The Report at the Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007 stated for the first time that »we will encourage people working in these fields [philosophy and social sciences] to serve as a think tank in the interests of the Party and the people«. In the formulation of major public policies, such as the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2006-10), the National Medium-to-Long Term Plan for Science and Technology, the reform of the urban health care system and the new rural cooperative health care system, the research findings of think tanks were noted or included.

2. Current Status of Chinese Think Tanks

Three Phases of Chinese Think Tank Development since Reform and Opening

Phase I: The 1980s marked China's awakening to the merits of the modern think tank. During this phase, think tanks focused on policy research. Major driving forces included the strong need for scientific decision-making in the context of Reform and Opening – a number of translated works on modern Western thinking raised awareness of think tanks among Chinese intellectuals. Many intellectuals took up positions in the government to participate in policy-making and consulting, which promoted the formation of modern think tanks at the official level. At the same time, some elite intellectuals created the earliest

independent, non-government think tanks, driven by passion and enthusiasm.

Phase II: In the mid-1990s, the speech made by Mr Deng Xiaoping during his inspection tour of Southern China kicked off a new round of Reform and Opening. The economy grew rapidly and private enterprises thrived. Comprehensive reforms were carried out in state-owned enterprises. The country opened up further as the WTO accession talks went on. During this phase, Chinese think tanks diversified into fields other than policy research. Apart from academic research and policy studies, they offered consultancy services to businesses and helped them to draw up business plans.

Phase III: In the 21st century, as conflicts between rapid economic growth and social development become more serious, senior national leaders are paying more attention to think tanks. The China Forum on Think Tanks, which was held in Beijing in November 2006 and in Shanghai in July 2007, indicated a more proactive role for think tanks in China.

How Many Think Tanks or Research Organisations with Think Tank Characteristics Are There in China?

In early 2009, the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program headed by Professor James G. McGann of the University of Pennsylvania published the first ranking of think tanks in the world, *2008 Global Think Tanks*. The US, with 1,777 think tanks in total, came top of the rankings, followed by the UK, with 283 think tanks, and Germany, with 186 think tanks. India, with 121 think tanks, was ahead of other Asian countries, followed by Japan, with 105 think tanks.

Statistics show that at present there are more than 2,500 research organisations in China, employing 35,000 full-time researchers and 270,000 staff members: 2,000 or 80 per cent focus on policy research and serve directly or indirectly as government »think tanks«, thus exceeding the number in the US.

How Many Chinese Think Tanks Have Been Acknowledged Domestically and Internationally? What Do They Do?

The University of Pennsylvania ranking recognised 74 think tanks in mainland China. On its »50 Most Influential Think Tanks outside the US« list, there were only two from China: the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (No. 25) and Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (No. 34).

The First China Forum on Think Tanks held in Beijing in November 2006 came up with a list of the Ten Most Influential Think Tanks in China. These are: the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Development Research Center of the State Council, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Military Science, the China Institute of International Studies, the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, the China National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation, the China Association for Science and Technology, the China Institution for International Strategic Studies and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies. Without exception, all ten are public institutions affiliated to the Government. It can be concluded that official think tanks are still dominant in terms of both policy impact and size in China.

In February 2009 *Outlook Weekly* (Issue No. 4) featured think tanks, together with a list of over 40 »Major Policy Advisory Research Organisations in China«.

Types of Think Tank in China Based on Funding and Affiliation

The first type are public institutions affiliated to government agencies, such as the Development

Research Center of the State Council, research institutes under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the China Institute of International Studies. They are generally known as »official think tanks«.

The second type is made up of research institutes affiliated to universities, such as the National School of Development at Peking University (formerly the China Center for Economic Research) and the Center for China Studies at Tsinghua University.

The third type are non-government research institutes registered as enterprises, such as the Unirule Institute of Economics, the 21st Century Education Research Institute and Beijing's Sanlue Institute. They are generally known as »non-governmental think tanks«.

The fourth type are think tanks of hybrid form or those which have undergone ownership restructuring.

A typical case in point is the China Center for International Economic Exchanges headed by former Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan, known for recruiting a large number of retired governmental officials who contribute their expertise and contacts. This centre was registered as a members-only mass organisation funded by membership fees.

Think tanks in China have diversified, which is a positive exploratory step by government decision-makers and think tank leaders in an effort to adapt to profound changes occurring in Chinese society.

Specific Ways in which Chinese Think Tanks Influence Decision-Making

(i) Participation in the drafting of Party and Government programme documents: Official and semi-official think tanks usually provide policy input by writing reports and reference materials for restricted circulation. For example, the Development Research Center of the State Council participates in the drafting of and research for the National Government's Work Report; the Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission participates in the drafting of each and every Five-Year Plan; the Central Party School and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences contribute to reports read at the National Party Congress.

(ii) Getting heard through different types of reference materials for restricted circulation: In addition to programmatic documents that come out periodically, official think tanks produce reference materials for restricted circulation. For example, the Central Party School prepares *Internal Reference News on Ideology and Theory* for national leaders, as well as *Theory*, a journal for restricted circulation. Besides, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences publishes *CASS Newsletters* (Information), and the National Academy of Governance publishes *Advice and Research*.

(iii) Undertaking research projects commissioned by the government (National Development and Reform Commission, and so on): An important channel through which official think tanks exert influence is undertaking government-commissioned research projects. The Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission reportedly undertakes between 300 and 400 such projects every year, including some contingent ones in response to emergencies.

(iv) Airing views at academic gatherings, public events and through the media: Another way for think tanks to exert influence is speaking at academic gatherings and public events or to the media. Academic conferences are the most important of all. Experts can also write columns for

mainstream newspapers, appear on TV programmes or participate in online interviews.

(v) Taking opportunities to influence decision-makers face-to-face: This could be a shortcut. Since the Sixteenth Party Congress, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee has been inviting experts from different fields to lecture at their headquarters every 40 days or so (see above). Lecturers are thus heard directly by decision-makers.

3. Comparing Chinese Think Tanks to Those in Europe and the US

Strengths and Weaknesses of Current Think Tanks in China

Over years of development, Chinese think tanks have formed some distinctive characteristics, such as low staff turnover, steady funding, close relationship with the government, access to decision-makers and respect for the authority of think tank management. However, in contrast to other modern think tanks, official think tanks in China have a number of weaknesses that are hardly in keeping with the times.

These weaknesses include the following:

- too close to and dependent on the political regime, little independent research is possible owing to personnel, funding and administrative constraints;
- low level of professionalism, little multidisciplinary collaborative research, prescribed research projects and policy interpretation outnumbering projects in response to realistic challenges;
- underdeveloped management, managed more like a government agency, projects usually headed by administrative leaders instead of experts, no project management, resulting in a lack of insightful research findings.

Comparison and Contrast: How Can Chinese Think Tanks Learn from Their Counterparts in the US and Europe?

When it comes to comparative studies, observers in China often measure themselves against think tanks in the US and their distinctive culture. The US has the best developed think tank industry in the world. The research calibre of US think tanks is impressive. They are also very good at shaping public opinion and government policies.

The distinctive feature of US think tanks is their independence, especially of the government. It is true that the political attachment of many US think tanks has become an open secret, but the majority of US think tanks are non-governmental and the vitality this has encouraged has a lot to do with the strong development of foundations in the US.

In fact, of all Western think tanks, only those in the US thrive without government support. In the UK, large think tanks are affiliated to major political parties while independent ones develop very slowly because governments are reluctant to fund organisations that are constantly critical. In Germany, think tanks are divided into research institutes that undertake government research projects and research-oriented foundations established by political parties. In Japan, the government commissions research to get input from think tanks, while Japanese business consortia have also set up many think tanks. In France, the French Defense Ministry created the earliest think tank after the Rand Corporation of the US, while independent think tanks survive mainly on government commissioned research. China should not simply copy any particular think tank model from abroad.

Government Relations: Two Points to Learn from Think Tanks in the US

(i) Governments are important clients for think tanks. The US government is a key account with large US consulting firms. The latter obtain commissioned research projects either directly from an administration or through a tendering process.

(ii) Governments use policies to stimulate the development of think tanks. First, the Chinese Government stipulates that cities with a population of one million and above must establish comprehensive regional development consulting bodies. It has become a statutory procedure for the government to refer to consultants in the decision-making process. For any new government project, there must be consultation reports to support the proposal, as well as the approval, investment and acceptance of projects. This regulation has resulted in rising demand for think tank products. Second, the government stipulates that consulting fees, as part of costs, are exempt from income tax, which motivates greater resort to think tank research.

4. Doubts and Suggestions: Feasible Paths for the Development of Think Tanks in China within the Existing Institutional Framework

4.1 Urgent Need to Accelerate the Development of Think Tanks in China

First, the lack of scientific decision-making on the part of the Chinese government has led to considerable waste. According to the domestic media, Mr Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, once pointed out at a meeting that mistakes made in strategic decisions are the biggest source of waste in China. The World Bank estimates the monetary waste and economic losses caused by erroneous decisions in China during the period from the Seventh to the Ninth Five-Year Plan at around RMB 400-500 billion. The error rate in China's decision-making stands at 30 percent, while that in Western countries is a mere 5 per cent (Wen Cheng, *Pay Attention to the Development of Chinese Think Tanks in the New Era*, March 12, 2010).

Second, as China's influence in the international community grows, the development of think tanks has become an outstanding symbol of China's soft power. Well-developed think tanks have become an important indicator of a country's soft power. In a sense, they are the country's intellectual reserve, on the strength of which China could establish itself securely. In the long run, this is even more critical than the enhancement of hard power, the reserve of strategic goods and materials such as grain and gold.

The further development of Chinese think tanks has been a topic of heated discussion in recent years. Opinions vary. Issues often discussed include the independence of think tanks and non-governmental think tanks.

4.2 Doubts about Think Tank Development in China: Are Independent Think Tanks and Non-governmental Think Tanks the Best?

Between think tanks and government: is it feasible for Chinese think tanks to be independent?

There are many criteria in terms of which think tanks can be described as »independent«, both in and outside China:

(i) Are the operations of a think tank independent of government decision-making system and processes?

(ii) Are think tank scholars able to think and research independently?

(iii) Are the interests represented by think tanks independent of specific groups?

(iv) Are think-tank type research institutions independent of the government?

(v) Is a think tank financially independent?

Think tanks in China should try their best to realise independence when it comes to issues (i)，(ii) and (iii), but they cannot – and there is no need to – attain independence when it comes to (iv) and (v).

With regard to point (i), research organisations dependent on government decision-making and processes count as government in-house research departments, not think tanks. On point (ii), independence in thinking and research can be ensured in most Chinese think tanks by separating the business arm from the research arm. With regard to point (iii), some think tanks have been taken over by interest groups; they try to package private interests as public or national interests by presenting biased opinions to the Government and the people. Concerning point (iv), firstly, independence does not entail that think tanks keep their distance from the government. The reasons are as follows: (a) governments are end users of think tank products. A good relationship between a think tank and the government smoothes out channels of communication between the two; (b) the government is the most important source of information and data needed in think tank research; and (c) independence does not mean that think tanks cannot openly support government positions. Secondly, at present many official and semi-official think tanks in China are either affiliated to a certain government agency or funded by the government and agencies subordinate to the government. Of the four types of Chinese think tanks described previously, the first two are public institutions funded by the government. Research institutes within universities and the Development Research Center of the State Council are two cases in point. Finally, with regard to point (v): most think tanks in China are not yet financially independent. To be sure, without diversified funding, independence in other senses might be superficial. Think tanks in other countries are funded, in addition to research contracts from the government and other clients, to a large extent by donations. In China, however, foundations are so underdeveloped that think tanks do not usually receive stable funding: sometimes even their survival is threatened.

Are there enough non-government think tanks in China?

Viewpoint 1: The existing framework is not favourable to the development of non-government think tanks.

Practitioners in China are actively exploring ways to develop non-governmental think tanks that can complement official and semi-official think tanks. However, the environment is not friendly enough: (1) government information is not fully disclosed and without reliable information and data non-governmental think tanks can hardly conduct in-depth research; (2) policies recognising think tanks are lacking, for example, if non-governmental think tanks fail to obtain affiliation to a government agency, they have to register as for-profit enterprises; (3) there is no mechanism to allow non-governmental think tanks to participate in government decision-making and policy research on a regular basis; (4) Chinese society has yet to develop non-profit foundations and a culture of giving, which are essential to the independence of non-governmental think tanks.

Viewpoint 2: Non-governmental think tanks must develop as an important supplement to official and semi-official think tanks.

There is huge potential for non-governmental think tanks in the socio-public sphere in the long run. When the interests of government agencies and of the public are not necessarily the same, people tend to ask independent, disinterested non-governmental think tanks for solution proposals. There is an urgent need for non-governmental think tanks to react rapidly to major social conflicts in China, as well as to sensitive issues in international relations; otherwise, the »collective aphasia« of Chinese think tanks may prove embarrassing.

Viewpoint 3：How many think tanks should be non-governmental?

Because of the constraints imposed by the existing institutional framework in China, non-governmental think tanks, which account for only 5 per cent of the total, cannot develop rapidly. Neither is there a need for them to do so. Two criteria could be used to judge whether there are enough non-governmental think tanks: first, can they offer alternative proposals to the government and pose a serious challenge to the other 95 percent of think tanks, official or semi-official? Second, are there a number of non-governmental think tanks in China whose influence can be felt both at home and abroad?

4.3 Exploration of Feasible Paths for Chinese Think Tanks to Speed Up Development within the Existing Framework

Path one: more competition among domestic think tanks

Not only should official think tanks compete with each other, but non-governmental think tanks should be nurtured and encouraged to compete with them. Competition will enhance the overall quality of Chinese think tanks.

Competition against foreign think tanks: Many US think tanks have set up offices in China. Some have even co-founded research institutes with Chinese universities. They also help fund some domestic think tanks. They are new competitors to Chinese think tanks.

How to compete?

(i) Set up channels of communication between demand and supply in the »policy analysis market« so that think tanks can understand policy research needs. At the same time, think tanks should conduct in-depth research and make policy recommendations in the areas of their specialty. The government should encourage fair competition, and solicit and adopt suggestions made by think tanks, including non-governmental ones. It could also set aside some special funding for policy research, for which all think tanks can apply.

(ii) The research findings of think tanks should be made available not only to government agencies, but also to people and social groups who are interested, through the media or other means. Consequently, think tanks can diversify their channels of influence.

(iii) Since it is hard for government decision-makers to judge the soundness of recommendations made by different think tanks, there should be a mechanism of peer review and bidding for government-commissioned research projects. The proposal that is the most effective and feasible and can help the Government and society best should be adopted.

(iv) Think tanks should operate as market players. With the creation of more non-governmental think tanks, market orientation will also strengthen. Strictly speaking, modern think tanks, as entities in the market economy, must respect

the market and adapt to market changes constantly, or they will not be able to compete.

Path two: greater specialisation

This includes building a team of experts, forming a distinctive competitive edge in certain areas, ensuring lawful operation and effective supervision and so on.

Think tanks in the US and Europe have built up distinctive competitive edges. For example, British think tanks are known for engineering project consulting; German think tanks for the use of new technology; French think tanks for practicality and familiarity with Africa; and US think tanks for international market expansion by being comprehensive and talent-rich.

Almost all major think tanks in the US and Europe have their respective focus areas. For example: the Brookings Institution focuses on the Middle East; the Rand Corporation on military strategy; the US Foreign Relations Committee on foreign policy; the US Center for Strategic and International Studies on defence policy; the American Enterprise Institute on trade and economic policy; the Hoover Institution on US–Russian relations; the Carnegie Foundation on nuclear non-proliferation; the Center for European Policy Studies on European integration; the French Institute of International Relations on European affairs; the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute on crisis management; and the Adam Smith Institute on the free market. They are good role models for Chinese think tanks.

Scientific and effective management of think tanks:

Think tanks should be managed in such a way that the best use is made of their expertise. On the premise that think tanks comply with laws and regulations, the government could collaborate with industry associations to set up a reliable database of think tanks, entry qualifications, professional standards, financial supervision and so on. In the policy analysis market, where there is a high level of information asymmetry, effective supervision by the government and public is an important prerequisite for the professionalism and integrity of think tanks.

Improving the professional image of think tanks through publicity:

Good products need marketing. Constant and effective market communication leads to public recognition of professional think tanks, more clients and better conditions for continuous operation.

Path three: making think tanks an emerging industry

This will help Chinese think tanks grow more rapidly. The government could adopt the following preferential policies:

- becoming the largest regular user of think tank products;
- income tax exemption for consulting fees;
- making it a rule to consult before making public decisions;
- develop and promulgate measures to regulate the think tank industry.

V

Think Tanks in the United Kingdom: an Honourable Tradition in Troubled Times

Mark Garnett

In July 2010 Ben Rogers, a former associate director of the progressive British think tank *the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)* wrote an article for the *Guardian* newspaper. Rogers asserted that »we need think tanks. As [UK] politics has become less tribal, so ideas have become more important«. Think tanks provide »a space between government, universities, the third sector and journalism«, offering the potential for a renewal of thinking on the political left, in the wake of the Labour Party's defeat in the British general election of May 2010.

The *Guardian* was the natural place for a newspaper article of this nature, since its readership is generally assumed to be both progressive and receptive to discussions about the role of ideas. As a result, it was interesting to appraise the online discussion generated by Rogers' article. Of the 31 responses by separate individuals which could be categorised, only one shared Rogers' favourable view of think tanks. Of the remainder, 7 were either even-handed or not directly relevant, while 23 expressed varying degrees of hostility. Significantly, the sole supportive contributor admitted to having an interest to defend; he or she was currently working for a think tank. The negative comments included the following: »Get rid of the lot of them as they only appear to be self serving pressure groups that live off the taxpayer«; »tell me what practical purpose they serve to convince me that any of them are worth actually paying attention to?«; »[Think tanks] are Advertising Agencies/Propaganda Organisations promoting the ideas that whoever funds them wants to promote«; and »Abolish, hang, draw and quarter all the useless wasters and shysters who form, involve themselves with and become members of Think tanks« [sic].

1. Reasons for Hostility towards Think Tanks

Obviously this evidence has to be treated with considerable caution. The participants were, of course, self-selecting; and although the majority might have been regular *Guardian* readers it would be a mistake to judge the feelings of that

newspaper's audience as a whole on the basis of such a small sample. As suggested above, some might have assumed that think tanks were no different from »quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations«, or »Quangos«, which were attracting much adverse publicity amid the economic difficulties of 2010 as allegedly unproductive recipients of taxpayers' money. However, several contributions to the thread put forward an argument which, as we see below, could not be dismissed so easily – namely that think tanks and their members formed part of an unrepresentative social elite which exercised too much influence over current policy debates and supplied too many of the country's politicians. Thus, one contributor focussed on the privileged background of think tank personnel by asserting that such institutions produced no tangible benefits »apart from their slightly bringing down the rate of unemployment among Oxbridge graduates with very average degrees«, while another argued that »What we need are fewer professional politicians who believe the world ends at the M25 [the road which runs around the Greater London Area] thinking they know everything«. Against this barrage of criticism, the plea of the single positive participant – the self-confessed think tank employee – that »The idea that all think-tanks are simply full of 'political groupies' is completely wrong« – could make no impression (Rogers, 2010).

Taking into account all the provisos, it is still remarkable that a newspaper like the *Guardian* could find itself hosting such a negative debate, with only one person willing to defend the positive message of the original article. To this audience, at least, British think tanks were now perceived to be at best part of a much larger political problem; some, indeed, went so far as to portray think tanks as a root cause of a general feeling, even among highly-educated newspaper readers, that the UK's politicians were out of touch with the people. How had such a situation come about? In part, the antagonism towards think tanks clearly reflected the profound and continuing economic difficulties in the UK. However, it is possible to trace the hostility to the earlier history of British think tanks, and in particular to their development in the 1990s.

2. Four »Waves« of British Think Tanks

2.1 The First and Second Waves – Invention of Think Tanks and Professional Policy Advice

In previous publications on this subject, the present author (in collaboration with Andrew Denham of Nottingham University) has discussed the development of British think tanks as a series of »waves« (see, for e.g., Denham and Garnett 2004). The first wave originated in the 19th century, allowing the British to claim that they had »invented« think tanks in something like the modern sense of the term. The »Philosophic Radicals«, associated with great thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, attempted on a fairly systematic basis to influence government policy on a wide range of issues. They published a periodical journal *(The Westminster Review)*, and some of them (including Mill himself) secured seats in parliament. Their purpose was not self-advancement, but rather the more effective promotion of their belief in policy ideas which were designed to foster »the greatest happiness of the greatest number«. Several key policy developments of the 19th century can be traced to the pertinacity with which they propounded their creed. Following in their footsteps were the Fa-

bian Society (founded in 1884), a grouping which boasted celebrated literary figures like George Bernard Shaw, and which worked to promote collectivist (even socialistic) remedies to social problems, whether the Conservatives, the Liberals or (later) Labour was the governing party.

The second wave of British think tanks arose in the period between the First and Second World Wars, in response to a perceived lack of governmental expertise in the face of urgent socio-economic problems. Political and Economic Planning (PEP, later the Policy Studies Institute (PSI), founded 1931) and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR, 1938) were seen by their founding members as public-spirited groups who could provide governments with »objective« alternative sources of data with policy-making relevance. The difference between the first and second waves of British think tanks was institutional as well as ideological; the second wave think tanks had policy preferences (for what became known as a Keynesian or interventionist approach to socio-economic difficulties), but they were more open-minded than previous think tanks and they had a more formal institutional structure, whereas the Philosophic Radicals and the Fabians had been volunteer armies of people who usually enjoyed substantial private incomes. One might say that the second wave of British think tanks encouraged people to think of themselves as »professional« policy advisers, independent from government but hoping to build constructive relationships with decision-makers in Westminster or Whitehall. During the 1930s there were few complaints about the political influence of an intellectual elite which had never exposed itself to the typical experiences of British workers; these think tanks reflected the prevailing ethos of public service (Denham and Garnett, 1998).

2.2 The Third and Fourth Waves – Ideological Advocacy and Publicity-Hunting

While second wave think tanks tended to favour governmental intervention to address socio-economic problems on the basis of statistical evidence, the third wave of British think tanks is best seen as an explicit, ideological response to the general growth of governmental activity in socio-economic fields after World War II. The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), founded in 1957, was the first (and arguably the most eminent) of such bodies. It saw itself as a lonely custodian of the flame of economic liberalism, at a time when all the main political parties had broadly accepted the interventionist policy approach advocated by the second wave think tanks. It was joined in 1974 by the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), although this think tank had an explicit political connection with the Conservative Party and with Margaret Thatcher, the party's leader, after 1975. For those prepared to listen to the case for economic liberalism, the IEA and the CPS were effective advocates, capable of conveying their ideas to an influential audience which included the Conservative Party leader and several of her key allies (Cockett, 1994). Yet the IEA retained its commitment to publish pamphlets which met academic standards, and the CPS was always geared towards the production of feasible policy ideas. While the Adam Smith Institute (ASI) should be regarded as a third wave think tank because it was founded (in 1977) to complement the work of the IEA and the CPS, its methods were different. Claiming that it could provide practical ideas as well as philosophical disquisitions, the ASI was quick to claim the credit for

numerous policy initiatives of the Thatcher years. It was probably not the first British think tank to seek media attention by advertising its supposed influence over ministers; but it was certainly the first to do so on a systematic basis.

Whatever the precise nature of their influence – and the IEA in particular was not slow to criticise Conservative policies even after Mrs Thatcher became prime minister in 1979 – the right-wing British think tanks were seen as potent governmental auxiliaries in the 1980s. Even if ministers paid little heed to their proposals, such bodies provided governments with the comforting feeling that they were not alone in thinking that Britain had embarked on the wrong path when it embraced »collectivist« views on socio-economic policy after 1945. The lesson was not lost on supporters of the Labour Party, and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) was duly founded in 1988. Yet, partly because think tanks were now regarded as important participants in the »Battle of Ideas«, the IPPR from the outset was different from the IEA, the ASI and even the CPS. While these bodies retained something of a rebellious ethos even when claiming that senior politicians paid careful attention to their argument, the IPPR was founded at a time when the Labour leadership was hoping to persuade the British public that the party was no longer as radical as it had been in the early 1980s. Thus, if the IPPR caused serious embarrassment to the Labour Party, its sources of funding would rapidly diminish and its existence would become highly precarious. As a result of such tactical considerations, the IPPR can be seen as the inaugurator of a »fourth wave« of British think tanks – a group of organisations which were not licensed by their sponsors to »think the unthinkable«, but rather to float ideas which had already won the broad approval of senior figures within the political parties to which they were (whether formally or informally) linked.

The IPPR is best understood as an early exemplar of a distinctive fourth wave of think tanks, because it operated under far more constraints than the think tanks of the New Right and, as a result, pointed the way towards a period in which the old left-right divisions were less important. In this context, the Social Market Foundation (SMF, 1989), could be seen as a coadjutor of the IPPR. It promulgated the social market ideas which had been advocated by the short-lived Social Democratic Party (SDP) – which had split from Labour because of the alleged ideological extremism of the latter. After the disappearance of the SDP the SMF continued to exist; and because the idea of the »social market economy« had ambiguous connotations in the British context it was possible for senior figures in both of the major political parties to regard it with favour. During the 1990s, the SMF became the regular venue for »thoughtful« speeches by Labour as well as Conservative politicians. Such occasions could be mutually beneficial in terms of media coverage; appearing on a think tank platform could lend extra intellectual credibility to a politician, while the think tank itself would receive welcome publicity. Understandably, the SMF was far from being alone in appreciating the potential impact of such events. As such, the fourth wave think tanks developed further a tendency which had begun to emerge during the third wave. The Adam Smith Institute (ASI) had won publicity in the Thatcher years through its claims to have influenced a considerable number of policies. However, such influence is notoriously difficult to ascertain. By contrast, column inches in national newspapers, or airtime on the elec-

tronic media, can be measured. As a result, the main characteristic of the fourth wave – whatever the original intentions of institutions like the IPPR - was a hunger for publicity, which could easily become an end in itself. The ultimate goal for any new think tank now seemed to be statements in the media acknowledging their influence in government circles – whether or not this reputation really arose from a key role in shaping legislation. Competition between think tanks now seemed remote from the original goals of such bodies – namely not only to influence policy, but to do so in a way which benefited society as a whole.

2.3 New Labour and Think Tanks

When New Labour came to office after its landslide electoral victory of 1997, the think tank which won the greatest media exposure was not the IPPR, which had worked hard, in tandem with the party's leadership, to allay public fears about its »socialistic« leanings. Rather, the attention of serious newspapers like *The Guardian* focussed on Demos (founded 1993). This organisation was identified with the progressive left, and some of its senior figures served as government advisors (as did Ben Rogers, the IPPR staff member who wrote the *Guardian* article cited above). However, far from pursuing any recognisable ideological line, Demos seemed to reflect the breakdown of the post-war political battle-lines. It could even be regarded as Britain's first »postmodern« think tank, playing with ideas which were obviously intended to catch fleeting headlines in what was becoming a 24-hour media, and almost defying Labour to disown their conclusions even if it was becoming difficult to decide whether their ideological nature was left or right. By the time that New Labour lost office in 2010 Demos had realised the direction in which the political wind was blowing, and, in order to convince the media that its publications were still worth reporting, was showing keen interest in »progressive« tendencies within the Conservative Party. In 2010 its director took up a position as adviser to the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg, who had become Deputy Prime Minister in the Conservative-dominated coalition government.

Other think tanks founded in the New Labour years – such as Politieia (1995), Civitas (2000) and Policy Exchange (2001) were clearly sympathetic to a Conservative Party which was as anxious to compete in the »Battle of Ideas« as Margaret Thatcher had been in the mid-1970s. Yet not even they could resist the attention-seeking trend established by Demos. Policy Exchange, in particular, was invariably held to be »highly-influential« by media commentators trying to write interesting articles about »the powers behind the throne« of the new prime minister, David Cameron. Meanwhile the influence of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ, founded 2004) was too obvious to merit media speculation, since its dominant figure, the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith, became a cabinet minister in the coalition with a brief to pursue welfare reforms on lines which had already been investigated by the CSJ.

3. British Think Tanks and the »Political Class«

Reviewing the history of think tanks in the UK at the end of the New Labour period, it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that the tradition was no longer as healthy as it had once been. Indeed, one could go so far as to argue that it had been hollowed out. Think tanks now tended to be discussed not for *what they did*, but rather for *what*

they were – or, rather what the media assumed them to be (i.e. »influential«, in some unspecified way). However, there were exceptions to this pessimistic assessment. The IEA, for example, refused to court easy publicity and continued to hold seminars and publish research papers which, while strongly coloured by economic liberal ideology, retained some connection with academic practice. Another older institution, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS, founded 1969), commanded respect from politicians and media commentators alike for its forensic approach to economic developments and official data.

Even so, it seemed that the more youthful think tanks (and even some older ones, like the Fabian Society) were now essentially concerned to follow fashion rather than to present governments of any colour with well-digested policy ideas. In short, far from »thinking the unthinkable«, or serving a pluralistic liberal democracy by publicising ideas which pointed at least to some refinement of prevailing orthodoxies, most British think tanks now seemed more anxious to win favourable attention from the government of the day by telling them what they wanted to hear. Insofar as such tactics were aimed at winning media exposure, think tanks had adopted the same goals as the politicians they were courting. During the New Labour era, it often seemed that ministers had come to believe that positive media headlines were more career-enhancing (and thus more important) than successful policy initiatives. Politicians were in a hurry, and so were the think tanks; thus any institution which came up with a few arresting thoughts in response to ephemeral newspaper headlines were more likely to be hailed as »influential« than groups which thought long and hard about serious long-term problems.

The similarity between the priorities of the fourth wave think tanks and senior politicians was not altogether surprising. In previous waves, think tank staff had generally been motivated by the desire to influence policy rather than to take a direct role in making it, by winning a seat in parliament with the hope of subsequent promotion to ministerial office. The IEA, indeed, was marked by a strong antipathy towards ministerial life, in which (its senior members believed) initial good intentions would invariably be overborne by the influence of civil servants. By the time of the fourth wave, however, the barrier which think tanks had formerly erected between their own *milieu* and the worlds of Westminster and Whitehall had turned into a revolving door. Several prominent members of think tanks were recruited into government service during the years of Thatcher and John Major, and this trend became more pronounced under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Brown, indeed, enjoyed close links with a fourth wave think tank called the Smith Institute (founded 1996). This body (not to be confused with the *Adam* Smith Institute) had a centre-left agenda which was difficult to distinguish from that of the long-established IPPR; it was staffed by prominent Brown allies, and while Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer the think tank even held seminars at his official residence, 11 Downing Street. The advent of a Conservative prime minister in 2010, in the shape of David Cameron who had himself been a policy adviser and was familiar with the interaction between official party bodies and the »independent« ideas industry, made no discernable difference to the emerging pattern.

To aspiring politicians, the development of a recognised career path between think tanks and either Westminster or Whitehall now seems like a

strong incentive to spend some time as a professional policy researcher. The most obvious alternative – taking a poorly-rewarded position within the entourage of a politician in the hope of working one's way up from the inside – is on balance less attractive, since it is likely to involve a degree of subservience and tied one's fortunes too closely to those of a specific individual. By contrast, those who work within a think tank could expect more congenial conditions of employment, even if the pay was no better; and while service within the office of a politician carries the risk of making enemies within the Westminster »village«, this hazard would be reduced if contact with politicians and their retinues is frequent, but not continual. The final advantage for those who hoped to begin a political career by working within a think tank was that most senior politicians crave an intellectual reputation; and, as we have already noted, association with a think tank (even if this means no more than delivering a speech under the sponsorship of a research organisation) is now seen as a convenient short-cut to a cerebral reputation for ministers on the make.

In short, while members of the first three waves of British think tanks were usually very different creatures from the politicians they hoped to advise, since the advent of the fourth wave those who have applied to work within think tanks have tended to be drawn from the same gene pool. They are deeply unrepresentative of the British public as a whole, almost exclusively graduates of the more prominent universities and unusually obsessed with political infighting. Whether or not their ethnicity or gender reflects the composition of Britain as a whole, they also tend to come from similar (comfortable) socio-economic backgrounds.

The problem for the present generation of think tankers is that they belong to what the journalist Peter Oborne has dubbed »the political class« (Oborne, 2007). As such, they are vulnerable to criticisms which have been levelled at Britain's serving politicians as a whole in the wake of the scandal concerning political expenses, which erupted in 2009 and affected all parties. As subsidiary elements of an unloved elite, they are currently fated to encounter criticisms which (as the response to Ben Rogers' article shows) are occasionally misdirected, but occasionally uncomfortably accurate. It was particularly noteworthy that Rogers' article alluded to think tanks which are becoming more like »do-tanks«, trying to turn their ideas into practical experiments. None of the respondents to his article seemed impressed with this development, presumably because they could only regard any such activities as stunts which were intended primarily to attract media publicity.

4. The Future of British Think Tanks

Despite evidence of scepticism even among those who could be expected to regard think tanks as a major asset within a pluralistic democracy, the survival of such institutions in Britain is guaranteed in the short term. Indeed, the example of the Centre for Social Justice can be hailed as a source of resurgence for British think tanks, since a body which at its inception almost looked like a »vanity tank«, created as a desperate attempt to salvage some credibility from Iain Duncan Smith's disastrous leadership of the Conservative Party (2001-3), has helped to make its creator into a credible (and newly-respected) government minister. Other prominent politicians who encounter serious career setbacks can be expected to emulate this constructive example, rather than setting

Table 1: A Sample of Twenty First Century British Think Tanks

Think Tank	»Wave« (founded)	Income, 2009, £
King's Fund	1st (1897)	13,797,700
National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR)	2nd (1938)	2,825,267
Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)	3rd (1957)	1,437,000
Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)	3rd (1969)	5,138,000
Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)	4th (1988)	3,210,000
Social Market Foundation (SMF)	4th (1989)	703,933
Demos	4th (1993)	1,508,015
Smith Institute	4th (1996)	432,000
Civitas	4th (2000)	765,594
Policy Exchange	4th (2001)	2,695,000

Source: Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2011

up organisations which really do act as »vanity tanks«. Also, in recent years think tanks with a relatively narrow policy brief have earned greater prominence in the media thanks to genuine research rather than back-of-an-envelope speculation. Notable among these is the King's Fund, which was originally founded in 1897 to support London hospitals but now informs public debate about the UK's National Health Service (NHS).

Another potentially favourable development for think tanks has been the creation of devolved political institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland since 1997. These locations of (limited) power offer the scope for new think tanks to develop, with a mission to affect policy and no incentive to bid for empty media accolades. In Wales, a left-leaning think tank, named the Bevan Foundation in honour of the founder of Britain's National Health Service, was established in 2001. In Scotland, the Scottish Council Foundation and the Policy Institute both emerged in 1999, around the time of the first elections to the Scottish Parliament (Pautz, 2007). In the first decade of devolution a trend emerged whereby the UK government would monitor closely any eye-catching policy initiatives (especially) in Scotland and Wales. In this way, although England (which lacks devolved institutions of its own) will continue to dominate the UK, and London-based ministers will be the key decision-makers, a new and healthier channel has opened up through which think tanks can hope to influence policy on a wide range of issues.

However, in the long term the unmistakable deterioration within this tradition as a whole is unlikely to be reversed. Partly, one can attribute this development to the relative poverty of British think tanks, certainly when compared to the im-

pressive resources of US-based bodies (see table 1). This is because of long-term problems affecting the conduct of British politics at the highest level. The first of these is the media. As we have seen, this increases the incentive for politicians and think tanks to engage in a hunt for headlines rather than solid achievements; and, whatever politicians might choose to do, a healthy regime of independent policy advice must be attuned to the latter rather than the former. Also, while it might seem more attractive to begin a political career within a think tank as opposed to volunteering for thankless service as an intern in the office of a politician, the media offers the chance to exercise influence without responsibility. It is no accident that very talented people who could have excelled as either politicians or leaders of think tanks have in recent decades opted for media careers. As a result, as Peter Oborne and others have noted, those who comment on British politics are now broadly similar to the people who advise on policy, and those who take policy decisions.

The second, related difficulty is the decline of ideology. While some might regard an ideal model for a think tank as that of an institution which undertakes research in a spirit of objectivity, the history of British think tanks shows that a strong dose of principled commitment to one belief system or another is usually the best way to ensure the kind of competition (the »Battle of Ideas«) which can enlighten the democratic citizen body as well as the policy elite. With ideological conflict now subdued if not wholly absent, think tanks are merely tending to duplicate each other. As a result, a certain amount of party-political »cross-dressing« has taken place in recent years, with think tanks who were once associated with a particular tradition of thought playing host to prominent speakers belonging to parties which once represented strongly conflicting views. Thus even the ultra-Thatcherite Adam Smith Institute enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Tony Blair's Labour government – an alliance which would have been utterly unthinkable when the ASI was founded in the late 1970s. Although no-one made the explicit point in response to Ben Rogers' article, it seems that when UK politics becomes »less tribal«, ideas also matter less; and if they are not furnishing ideas, think tanks can only continue to win enthusiastic recruits if they are seen as a conduit to political office. With Britain already over-burdened with career politicians, think tanks can only hope to regain respect from well-informed members of the public if they can once again become the haunt of eccentric individuals whose main motivation is the desire to promote constructive policy and inform an inclusive debate.

References

Cockett, Richard (1994), *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution*, 1931-1983, HarperCollins.

Denham, Andrew, and Garnett, Mark (1998), *British think- tanks and the climate of opinion*, UCL Press.

Denham, Andrew, and Garnett, Mark (2004), 'A "hollowed-out" tradition? British think tanks in the twenty-first century', in Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds), *Think Tank Traditions: Policy research and the politics of ideas*, Manchester University Press.

Pautz, Hartwig (2007), 'Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks', *Scottish Affairs*, no. 57, pp. 57-77.

Oborne, Peter (2007), *The Triumph of the Political Class*, Simon & Schuster.

Rogers, Ben (2010), 'Rethinking the role of think tanks', http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2010/jul/05/role-thinktanks-political - theory-left, 5 July.

VI

Think Tanks in Germany

Martin Thunert

1. The German Think Tank Sector: An Organisational Overview

Policy research organisations are not a new phenomenon in Germany. The Kiel Institute for World Economics was founded nearly 100 years ago and counts among the oldest research institutes of its kind in the world. Before the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, there were forerunner organisations of what today are think tanks and foundations, such as the German Council on Foreign Relations and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. However, until the 1990s the term »think tank« was rarely used to characterise these bodies: most of them preferred the characterisations »research institute«, »political foundation« or »operating foundation«. Moreover, the scholarly study of these organisations in Germany did not begin until the 1990s. Today, a think tank is an organisation that claims to serve as a centre for research into and analysis of important public issues. Think tanks in Germany can be non-profit, private or public organisations producing research output in the form of publications, reports, lectures and workshops, in most cases targeted at identifiable audiences with the hope of influencing decision-making and public opinion.[1] There has been a huge increase in the number of German think tanks in recent decades. At the end of April 2011, the online »Think Tank Directory Deutschland« (see http://www.thinktankdirectory.org/index.html) included 155 institutes. A worldwide survey of think tanks conducted annually by James McGann of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Project at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia in 2010 (see McGann 2011) mentions almost 300 think tanks in Germany. Some very old institutes notwithstanding, German think tanks are post-Second World War creations: 30–35 per cent of today's think tanks were founded between 1945 and 1975; nearly 55–60 per cent were founded since 1975. In addition to the creation of new think tanks, many older institutes began to reinvent themselves, starting in the late 1990s, by modernising their modes of operation – often as a consequence of external evaluations, reloca-

[1] One-day strategy sessions of corporations, small firms or associations, for example, for which the term »think tank« is increasingly being used, are excluded from this definition, as well as single-issue temporary commissions or task forces.

Table 1: Types of Think Tanks in Germany (as % of the total of 93 think tanks)

Type of Think Tank	Per Cent
Academic Think Tanks	65%
Advocacy Institutes	30%
Party Think Tanks	5%

tions or a new leadership. Several factors have spurred this growth and modernisation of think tanks: the »information revolution« and the increasing complexity and technical nature of policy issues have spurred the growth of think tanks worldwide. In addition, the relocation of the capital of Germany from tiny Bonn to Berlin after 1999 has created an atmosphere conducive to the flourishing of think tanks.

2. Typology of German Think Tanks: Academic Think Tanks and Advocacy Institutes

The German think tank landscape includes academic and advocacy think tanks, but the sector of private and advocacy-oriented policy research institutes is less developed than in Anglo-American countries. It is also sometimes hard to distinguish between research-oriented academic think tanks, on the one hand, and institutions of basic research touching on policy-relevant questions, on the other. Table 1 provides a breakdown of think tank types in Germany.

2.1 Academic Think Tanks

Academic think tanks are by far the largest category in Germany. They can be divided into the following sub-groups:

- created by government, but working independently within public sector guidelines;
- non-university institutes (mostly Leibniz Society Institutes);
- university-affiliated centres of applied policy-relevant research;
- academic think tanks with considerable private funding.

Government created institutes: The federal government has created departmental research institutes (Ressortforschungseinrichtungen) and a number of quasi-independent institutes, of which the SWP – German Institute for International Affairs and Security (Berlin) and the Institute for Labour Market and Vocational Research (IAB Nürnberg) are among the largest. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, state (Länder) governments became important sponsors of academic think tanks, particularly in the fields of peace and conflict research, environment and technology and economic research.

Leibniz Society Institutes: The largest group of academic think tanks are the Leibniz Society Institutes.[2] Among this diverse group of more than 50 non-university research institutes, most of which receive joint financial assistance from the federal government and the states on a fifty/fifty basis, at least one dozen institutes undertake applied policy research. The most visible institutes among this group are six large economic research institutes with a combined staff of more than 400 economic researchers. The joint funding of these economic think tanks through the national and state governments not only reflects Germany's federal structure, but also expresses the desire to encourage competing views on economic policy and on Germany's economic development. Between 1950 and the spring of 2007 experts of these six economic research institutes twice annually issued a *Common Economic Report* predicting the short- and medium-term performance of the German economy. The six expert

[2] These are independent research institutions of supra-regional importance and national scientific interest, and institutions performing service functions. Together they constitute the Wissenschaftsgemeinschaft Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

institutes were meant to arrive at joint conclusions, but there was also an opportunity to express dissenting views in the form of minority opinions. The Common Report received and will continue to receive the attention of the media, as well as of the government, the *Bundesbank*, interest groups and other actors in the economic policy community. Since 2007, economic research institutes from across Europe have been invited by the Federal Ministry of the Economy to pitch for a three-year contract to write the »Joint Economic Forecast«.

Other Leibniz Society institutes that conduct a significant amount of policy-relevant research include the *Science Centre Berlin for Social Research* (WZB), which was founded in 1969 on the non-partisan initiative of federal members of parliament, inspired by the Brookings Institution in Washington DC, the *German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA*), an umbrella organisation that incorporates a group of Hamburg-based area-studies institutes with expertise in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America and, more recently, the *Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research* and the *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*. Most member-institutes of other scientific associations, such as the *Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science*, are usually devoted to long-term, basic research, but some of them occasionally work as policy-oriented think tanks. Examples of this include individual researchers and research units, for example, at the *Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies* in Cologne, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Research and the *Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research* (ISI) in Karlsruhe.

University-affiliated think tanks: A considerable number of German think tanks are affiliated with universities or operate in a semi-academic environment. Examples are the *Center for Applied Policy Research* (C.A.P.) at the Ludwig-Maximilian University Munich, the *Institute for Development and Peace* at the University of Duisburg (inspired by the *Worldwatch Institute*), the Munich-based *Center for Economic Studies* (CES), which operates as the academic arm of the *ifo-Institute*, the *Center for European Integration Research* (ZEI) and the *Center for Development Research* (ZEF) in Bonn.

Privately-financed academic institutes: One of the oldest private German think tanks is the *German Council on Foreign Relations* (DGAP), modelled as an elite network-cum research institute on the *Council on Foreign Relations* in New York and the *Royal Institute of International Affairs* in London. Arguably the largest private think tank is the *Bertelsmann Foundation* (BF), which was founded in 1977 at the seat of its parent corporation Bertelsmann AG in Gütersloh. Since the 1990s, the Bertelsmann Foundation and some of its spin-offs – such as the *Centre for Higher Education Research* (CHE) – have emerged as heavyweight players in privately-funded policy research with resources matching or exceeding those of the largest government-funded institutes. Another example of a well-funded German think tank is the *Institute for the Future of Work* (IZA) in Bonn, which was created by the privatised German Post Corporation in the 1990s.

Finally, while still having a more limited research capacity than, for example, the Bertelsmann Foundation, a growing number of other corporate foundations are becoming catalysts for policy-relevant ideas by organising and sponsoring dialogue activities that bring together experts and practitioners, or by creating new educational programmes for future policy experts. In 2008, a group of eight foundations – including the *Mer-*

cator Foundation, the *Vodafone Foundation Germany*, the *Volkswagen Foundation,* the *Freudenberg Foundation*, the *Körber Foundation*, the *ZEIT Foundation*, the *Hertie Foundation* and the *Bertelsmann Foundation* – created the non-governmental *Expert Council of German Foundations on Migration and Integration*, with a mandate to monitor, evaluate and advise immigration policy. Other foundations active in policy-relevant issues are the Deutsche Bank Forum Think Tank, the *Alfred Herrhausen Society for International Dialogue Foundation,* the *Schader Foundation* as a promoter of new approaches to housing policy, as well as Protestant and Catholic academies and centres for policy-relevant dialogue. In addition, international think tanks and branches of American think tanks have expanded their activities or set up shop in Berlin: among them are the *Aspen Institute,* the *German Marshall Fund of the United States* and the *American Academy,* and more recently the Berlin office of a pan-European network think tank based in the larger EU member states, the *European Council of Foreign Relations.* It can be argued that some of the privately-funded think tanks have a strong advocacy orientation and therefore belong rather to the think tanks treated in Section 2.2.

Table 2: German Political Foundations

Political Foundation (»Stiftung«)	Year Established	Party Affiliation
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	1925	Social Democratic Party (SPD)
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung	1964	Christian Democratic Party (CDU)
Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung	1967	Christian Social Union (Bavaria) (CSU)
Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung	1958	Free Democratic Party (FDP)
Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung	1996	Bündnis90/The Greens
Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung	1998	Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)

2.2 Advocacy Think Tanks

While the academic think tanks usually emphasise their political neutrality, refrain from taking an institutional position on certain policy issues – partisan positions of individual researchers notwithstanding – and do not exhibit a consistent and identifiable ideology, advocacy think tanks are more explicitly engaged in supporting and promoting specific policy solutions, political causes or interests in society. This type of think tank includes interest group-based think tanks, the research academies of the political foundations associated with the political parties and institutes independent of parties and organised interests.

(a) Interest group-based policy research organisations affiliated with the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, the Protestant and Catholic Churches or certain single-issue interest groups (such as the Taxpayer's Union) are among the oldest think tanks in Germany, dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. The *WSI* (Institute of Social and Economic Research in the *Hans-Böckler Foundation*), think tank to the trade union federation *DGB*, has become an important training pool for future academics and political activists. The *Federation of*

German Industry has expanded its own research unit, *the Institute of German Industry*, Germany's largest privately-funded economic research institute.

(b) The second distinct group of advocacy think tanks are the party-affiliated think tanks or political foundations, as they prefer to be called. These organisations are more prominent and better funded in Germany than nearly anywhere else. The semi-official status of political parties in the Basic Law (Article 21) and the desire not to channel various educational, research-oriented and international activities directly through the party system, but also not to keep them outside the influence of political parties, has resulted in a huge – albeit shrinking – amount of public funds (approximately 400 million euros) flowing into political foundations. Today there are six such foundations (see Table 2), each of which is related to one of the parties represented in the Bundestag.

It is difficult to distinguish potential think tank functions from other activities of party foundations, which include international activities, political training and education, archival work and scholarship programmes. Research and analysis activities may account for up to 15–20 per cent of a party foundation's budget and activities. Most foundations host in-house academies, research and consulting units, or study groups that focus on foreign policy, economic and domestic policy or empirical social research, thereby performing the typical think tank functions.

(c) The past 25 years have seen the emergence of a small number of more independent advocacy-oriented think tanks, often founded by entrepreneurial academics, politicians or social movement actors. Among the oldest and first of their kind are Germany's first environmental think tank, the *Öko (Ecology) Institute,* Freiburg (1977), and the *Foundation for Market Economics* (1982). A small number of market-oriented institutes such as the *Institute of Independent Entrepreneurs* (ASU-UNI *Unternehmerinstitut*) and the *Ludwig Erhard Foundation* have followed.

One of the best examples of a new approach to advocacy research in the form of a think tank is the Initiative for a New Social Market Economy (ISNM). INSM has been funded with nearly 10 million euros per year over a period of five years by Gesamtmetall, the employers' association for the metal and electrical industry in Germany. ISNM is seen by some as the lobbying arm of the Institute of German Industry, Cologne, and by others as an archetypical advocacy think tank working in an advocacy coalition with like-minded scholars, celebrity multipliers (so-called »Ambassadors«) and business-friendly newspapers and media outlets, such as *Wirtschaftswoche*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Financial Times Germany* and *Welt am Sonntag*. INSM's goal is not to target policy-makers or parties directly, but to influence and change the climate of public opinion in Germany. ISNM works with the well-established tools of North American and British advocacy think tanks, such as rankings, essay competitions, debt clocks and so on.

There are also several advocacy think tanks that challenge the policy recommendations of the market-oriented institutes from a neo-Keynesian or a regulation paradigm. The oldest outfit is the *Memorandum Group* around Rudolf Hickel (founded 1975), an economics professor at the University of Bremen; others are the *Oswald-Nell-Breuning-Institute for Business Ethics* at the Jesuit College in Frankfurt, or the network of scientific advisers to the activist group *Attac*.

The newest addition is the neo-Keynesian *Macroeconomic Policy Institute* (IMK) within the Hans Böckler Foundation.

In the past ten years more institutes have been founded, advocating, for example, a common EU foreign policy (*European Council on Foreign Relations*), progressive causes (*Progressive Centre, Institute for Solidarity and Modernity*), a modern family and population policy (*Berlin Institute for Population and Development*), the rights of future generations (*Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations*, Oberursel/Frankfurt, and *Think Tank 30 Germany*, affiliated to the *Club of Rome*) and global issues (the *Global Public Policy Institute*, Potsdam).

These smaller think tanks are tiny in comparison to the state-funded and scholarly-oriented think tanks and university institutes. Some mini think tanks exist as much as network institutes on the Internet than as organizations with office space and staff. Beyond their sometimes shaky financial situation, these new creations have in common a belief that certain societal, economic and political reforms in Germany are moving too slowly and that the interests of a younger, post-baby-boom generation are not well represented in political discourse. There is no agreement, however, about the priorities and desired direction of reforms. Most of these new think tanks are refreshingly non-ideological and pragmatic, but by no means apolitical. Many of these newer and newest think tanks show increased specialisation with regard to research topics and agendas.

3. Main Features of the German Think Tank Sector

3.1 Funding

The most important source of income for German think tanks is still the state – primarily at the national and regional levels, but increasingly at the European Union level as well. More than 50 per cent of German think tanks receive primarily public funding and nearly 25 per cent enjoy mixed public and private funding. Only 25 per cent the think tanks are funded more or less exclusively by private sources. In the past, the availability of generous state funding made up for the relative absence of a strong philanthropic tradition of think tank funding in Germany. Only a small number of family foundations have followed the American tradition of funding specific advocacy institutes or party think tanks which they believe share the funders' values and their ideological persuasion. With the exception of those few think tanks, which can draw on endowment funding or receive full institutional funding from governmental or private sources, third party funding and contract research remain an important financial source for at least two-thirds of German think tanks. Today, more and more think tanks express an interest in increased private funding, but some private think tanks believe that they operate in a climate of general distrust with regard to privately funded policy research. They have expressed concern that some decision-makers approach privately funded think tanks with a higher degree of scepticism and suspicion than government-funded research institutes. As a matter of fact, the opposite concern has been raised by critics of privately funded policy research and policy advice, referring to an alleged preference on the part of some policy-makers and civil servants for ready-made studies

and easily digestible recommendations from private management consultancies or private research giants, such as the Bertelsmann Foundation.

3.2 Types of Research and Research Capacity

The majority of the larger academic institutes, the party think tanks, as well as a significant number of established advocacy think tanks produce their research in-house. Most think tanks in Germany are neither single-issue institutes nor full-service institutions – although the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Social Science Centre Berlin and the larger party foundations are possible exceptions. The majority of think tanks can be classified somewhere in-between. One-third of German think tanks work on economic issues, while more than 20 per cent specialise in the labour market and/or focus on social policy. More surprisingly, 27 per cent of institutes deal with foreign and security policy and 24 per cent devote themselves to issues of European politics. Slightly less than 20 per cent of think tanks deal with issues such as education, the environment, urban politics and globalisation. There are fewer think tanks (a little over 10 per cent) focusing on health care issues, development policy, finance and local politics, and also science, technology and energy.

German think tank officials see more advantages than disadvantages when they compare their capacity to conduct policy-relevant research that reaches the »real world« to research conducted at universities. Many university disciplines that are potentially policy-relevant, such as economics, law or the social sciences, have tried to become more »scientific« and thereby less comprehensible and less receptive to the needs of practitioners. That does not imply, however, that German think tanks see themselves as inferior to universities as far as their adherence to scholarly standards and scientific methods is concerned. International affairs think tanks, for example, mention their highly specialised libraries and documentation centres as a source of strength. A majority of the think tanks that responded to a survey the author conducted in the late 1990s and again in 2006 believe that their staffs have a closer affinity to political, social and economic realities and a better understanding of the decision-making process than most university-based academic researchers. They also mention interdisciplinary research teams, relief from teaching and examination responsibilities, flexibility in setting the institutional agenda, less bureaucratic structures and a full-time research capacity as advantages over universities. Clearly, maintaining a strong »scientific front« (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) is a priority of most German think tanks and a source of pride for many institutes, now as much as in the past.

3.3 Location

At the end of the 1990s, the German Federal Government moved to Berlin and with it went associations and corporate government relations offices, some science organisations and journalists and representatives of all sorts of interest groups. The pace and the tone of policy-making changed with the move. The demand for policy analysis and policy commentary has risen as the media environment has become more competitive and organisations working in public affairs, government relations and lobbying have become numerous and more proactive. In terms of geography, however, Germany's policy research infrastructure is still fairly decentralised. Think tanks, with the exception of foreign and security policy institutes, are by no means exclusively assembled

in the capital Berlin, but are spread across the country with regional concentrations in Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne-Bonn, the Ruhr area, Berlin, Stuttgart and Hamburg-Kiel. This wide scattering of locations is a result of Germany's unique federal structure, the important role played by the *Länder* in the financing and foundation of think tanks, their close attachment to the (equally scattered) academic world, and the structure of the German media landscape. Very few of the think tanks' most important mouthpieces – national newspapers and magazines – are headquartered in the German capital, but in cities such as Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg or Düsseldorf.

3.4 Staff and Internal Decision-making

By European standards, German think tanks are – on average – relatively large organisations. Of 56 think thanks for which staff size is known in detail, 15 employ between 51 and 100 staff and another 13 more than 100; 28 think tanks in this sample employ less than 50 staff. Until recently, recruitment at academic think tanks has almost exclusively followed academic patterns. Many senior staff at academic think tanks hold doctoral degrees, mainly in economics, followed by political science/international relations, and the natural and applied sciences. Senior positions at established think tanks often require qualifications similar to a medium-level or even senior professorship (chair) at a university. In the past, many of the older and larger academic institutes offered a high degree of job security through semi-tenured research positions. In the 1990s, however, job security for new appointments was cut back drastically. This was partly a result of overall budget constraints and the rise of project funding, but also a reflection of the directors' desire for more flexibility in creating new research groups and as a way to avoid the bureaucratisation of think tanks.

Think thank directors are always crucial in setting an institute's research agenda, but most German think tanks are not adequately described as director-driven institutes. In many think tanks, advisory councils participate in institutional decision-making and more than half of the German think tanks responding to my surveys reported that they include individual researchers in decision-making about future research agendas and research priorities.

4. Activities and Strategies of German Think Tanks

German think tanks are active on three levels: within the scientific community, in direct policy consulting and in contacts with the general public via the media. Furthermore, 95 per cent of German think tanks produce books to disseminate their research. The same number are interested in using the media to disseminate their research, but less than 25 per cent actually contribute to newspapers, op-ed pages or publish policy briefs on a regular basis. Nevertheless, analysts from think tanks are sought frequently as commentators, not only on international affairs issues – including climate change – but on domestic social and economic issues as well.

Two-thirds of German think thanks publish articles in scholarly journals, while more than one-third are involved in publishing journals themselves. Half of all think tanks in Germany edit and distribute newsletters.

Traditionally, the most important target groups for German think tanks are other research institutes and universities on both the national and international levels, followed by the members, caucuses and committees of the Bundestag,

then the bureaucracies of government ministries. These are followed by individual political parties and certain segments of the quality press and, though at some distance, by boards of management and company directors, trade union and non-governmental organisations. German think tanks, it has been said, seem to prefer direct channels for influencing policy-makers over indirect means via the public and the media (see, for example, Braml 2004). But direct channels are not always available. Some think tank representatives actually believe that, despite the media buzz created in Berlin, members of parliament are less accessible in Berlin than they were in Bonn.

A closer look reveals that today the intended targets of German think tanks vary significantly. One of the preferred targets undoubtedly is a small group of decision-makers in the senior ranks of government and parliament who receive advice from many quarters and individuals. Although many German institutes judge their communicative proximity to these decision-makers on a national and regional level to be satisfactory, contact with political leadership, especially on the European and the trans-national level, generally leaves much to be desired – the individual exceptions of a small number of well-connected think tanks notwithstanding. Most think tanks do not exclusively and not even primarily target elected politicians and office-holders, but senior members of the higher civil service, as well as planning units, working groups and even crisis management staff. However, the spoken word remains an important consulting tool in advising government officials. Many think tanks try to develop long-term consulting relationships with particular corresponding units within government. They offer to evaluate government programmes or attempt to pitch consecutive research contracts to build lasting consulting relationships. Nevertheless, some think tanks admit that they are still ill equipped to judge what kind of work officials consider relevant and insightful.

While working quietly behind the scenes to influence the course of government policy would be the preferred style of many German think tanks – as well as the one that comes most naturally to many policy-makers – think tank directors realise that they by no means enjoy a consulting monopoly on direct channels of influence and think tanks which are not particularly plugged into government may get very little feedback. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that German institutes service a wide spectrum of audiences.

Think tanks in Germany are very press-oriented, even though their preference might be direct channels of influence. Strategic alliances of think tanks with sympathetic print media have become an important dissemination tool for think tank research results. Some national dailies – in particular *Handelsblatt* or *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – now monitor think tanks and their work more consistently than in the past. In contrast, the majority of think tanks – with the exception of foreign policy think tanks in times of international crisis – have traditionally maintained fairly distant relations with television and cable networks. But with a more competitive television news and business news market this has been changing over the past decade: relations between economic policy experts in think tanks and the editors of TV and radio stations have intensified. In general, aggressive self-promotion of the institute and noisy marketing of its products is a strategy that has been adapted more cautiously in Germany than elsewhere (see Perthes 2007: 188), but some recently appointed think tank directors and most of the founding-directors of

young upstarts have been pushing their institutes in this direction. Some think tanks and individual scholars have attempted to have an impact by »laymanising« academic research findings in fields such as demographic or climate change, as well as social policy or macroeconomics to make them more accessible to busy policy-makers, journalists and the general public; others are colluding with sympathetic ministers and public affairs specialists to stage events for the media.

5. Think Tanks in Germany – Potential and Limitations

While some in the German think tank community see the continuation of generous public funding as a precondition of policy research produced without the influence of private interests, others are or have been forced by slashed subsidies to actively acquire more private funding. However, the readiness of German firms and citizens to give cash to the churning out of ideas instead of donating to cultural and social causes should neither be overestimated nor underestimated. As long as institutional philanthropy remains underdeveloped in Germany, most think tanks will continue to depend on public funding in the foreseeable future. But the situation may gradually change: private sponsorship of think tank outfits, think tank activities and think tank research fellowships is already larger than it used to be, thanks to a number of corporate and family foundations and often to international corporations operating in Germany.

It is reported by most think tank officials that demand for think tank work increased heavily in the early 1990s and has at least remained at that level ever since. The pressure on political and administrative officials to take decisions in various policy areas simultaneously and fairly quickly has triggered demand for outside help. Observers notice a declining or insufficient policy-developing capacity on the part of administrative units and other participants in the policy process as a major push factor for the importance of think tanks. Most think tanks officials are aware that the utilisation of their work by decision-makers and interest groups is mostly beyond their control and that think tank expertise is often used to legitimise decisions after the fact rather than to influence them before they are made. They appreciate, however, that in general decision-makers, the media and the wider public in Germany seem to agree in principle that science and scholarship can make a positive contribution to the development of sound policies. Some institutes report that there is a genuine interest in »best-practice« reports; in comparative studies on how neighbouring countries are coping with similar problems; and in how experts see the potential for policy transfer across nations or regions. Think tanks who work at arms-length from governments report that they are often asked to tackle difficult questions cross-cutting the logic of party or coalition politics or which are off the public agenda, despite their importance; they are also asked to develop strategies for difficult policy issues, to »fly kites« (trial balloons, which elected members and party representatives dare not fly themselves) and to function as sounding boards for policy ideas developed in government or for decision-makers themselves. Despite the doubts about being manipulated by the demand side, a conviction is emerging in the German think tank community that think tanks have important functions in our system of government that no one else can do better. However, in performing this role think thanks are facing increased competition from for-profit consulting firms, and from

public affairs specialists and lobbyists. Generally speaking, think tanks are competing with institutes with which they also frequently cooperate. The competition for attention and a public hearing is less uniform. Size and wealth seem to make a difference. Large resource-rich think tanks and operating foundations with an ability to set their own agenda see serious competition not on a national, but rather on an international or European Union level.

Ideas used in public policy-making are also being developed commercially in Germany, especially on the interfaces between technology, the environment and society, and in the worlds of finance and fiscal policy, as well as in public management. In an age of global information and consultancy markets, large commercial consulting agencies as well as non-profits and think tanks at home and abroad stand ready to take up commissions in Germany. Thus, in the future, more think tanks in Germany will go head to head not only with one another, but also with other players in the field, including university-based research units, government relations and consulting firms, and so forth.

One can sum up the characteristics of the German think tank scene as follows. On a general level, most German think tanks acknowledge and appreciate the readiness of the German public to fund policy-relevant research and to take these efforts seriously. But some members of the think tank community deplore that policy advice is too politicised in the sense that it is accepted only if it fits into preconceived notions or into partisan compartments. Thinking outside the box (of party politics), while officially encouraged, is not really appreciated by the demand side. While some think tank officials acknowledge that civil servants are still capable of developing sound policies and that the mutual relationship between the administration and think tanks has improved over the past decade, complaints about the innate bureaucratic tendency to cut itself off from external influences are still widespread. Senior civil servants and diplomats are said to feel strong pressure to come up with fresh and innovative policy ideas of their own. As a consequence, they either try to restrict the access of external developers of ideas to the level of decision-making or they adopt externally developed policy ideas and sell them as their own ideas to their political superiors. As most senior civil servants owe their administrative careers solely to their ministry, »departmental blindness« leads to an underappreciation or outright rejection of external policy advice that is problem-oriented, cross-cutting departmental boundaries and more holistic.

The »revolving door phenomenon« that allows people to move more freely in and out of government is still extremely rare in Germany. Parliamentary democracies such as Germany are administered by career civil servants even in the upper echelons of the ministerial bureaucracy, not by political appointees. There are few administrative positions available for political appointments from the policy research industry. One strategy to bypass this structural problem is the creation of special advisors and of policy units staffed with external experts in the offices of the head of government as well as of cabinet ministers. Another is the creation of informal and ad hoc consulting arrangements such as temporary commissions, kitchen cabinets or »chimney rounds« outside the formal governmental structures of decision-making. Whereas reform-minded governments in the 1970s and early 1980s tried the former approach – to strengthen their policy capacity by bringing in external policy

experts to work in planning units and internal think tanks – other governments more recently have relied on flexible and less permanent advisory structures, such as task forces and temporary commissions. Think tanks are by no means in a privileged position in these advisory structures. They have to compete and cooperate with experts and representatives from stake-holding groups and other action-oriented leaders from established interest groups.

German think tanks will continue to play a critical role in the processes of agenda-setting and policy-making. Clearly, there is no shortage of policy challenges at the national, regional, European and global levels. Governments and parliaments, as well as the media and civil society and non-governmental organisations have come to rely on think tanks for ideas, evidence, evaluation and advice. Think tanks are by no means alone in providing these services to a diverse group of clients, but they are pivotal actors in the »ideas industry« and the advice-giving business in Germany and beyond.

References

Boucher, Stephen (2004), Europe and its Think Tanks: A Mission to be Fulfilled, Studies No. 35. Paris.

Braml, Josef (2004), Think Tanks versus „Denkfabriken"? U.S. and German Policy Research Institutes Coping With and Influencing Their Environment. Baden-Baden.

Gellner, Winand (1995), Ideenagenturen für Politik und Öffentlichkeit. Think Tanks in den USA und in Deutschland, Wiesbaden.

Leggewie, Claus (1987), Der Geist steht rechts. Ausflüge in die Denkfabriken der Wende. Berlin.

Perthes, Volker (2007), Zwischen Hofnarr und Agenda-Setter. Über wissenschaftliche Politikberatung in der Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik in: Internationale Politik 12/2007, 114-123.

Speth, Rudolf (2004), Die politischen Strategien der Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft, Düsseldorf: Hans-Böckler-Stiftung.

Thunert, Martin (2000), Players Beyond Borders? German Think Tanks as Catalysts of Internationalization" in: Global Society 14 (2), 191-212.

Thunert, Martin (2001), Germany, in: R. Kent Weaver and Paul Stares (eds.). Guidance for Governance. Comparing Alternative Sources of Policy Advice. Tokyo and New York, 157-206.

Thunert, Martin (2003), Think Tanks in Deutschland – Berater der Politik? in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, B51/2003, 30-38.

Thunert, Martin (2004), Think Tanks in Germany," in: Society, 66-69.

VII

Think Tanks as New Channels of Influence within the Political System of Germany

Rudolf Speth

1. Introduction: Think Tanks as Part of the Political System

If we want to understand the role and function of think tanks in Germany, we must look at the political system, of which they have become an important element. We must pay particular attention to key developments.

Think tanks are not new in Germany's political system, but most of the current think tanks were founded after the Second World War. Furthermore, as many as half of existing think tanks were founded after 1975, a period of social and political modernisation. Indeed, they are a constitutive element of this modernisation, particularly with regard to the system of interest representation and the creation of knowledge.

In Germany, there are around 150 institutes which can be classified as think tanks (see Thunert in this volume). They can be divided into academic think tanks (two-thirds) and advocacy think tanks (one-third). Compared to the Anglo-American countries the number of private academic think tanks is very small.

Think tanks can be defined as organisations that produce scientific knowledge to be brought to bear in political discussions. But they do not see themselves as political actors. Think tanks in Germany are mainly academic. For think tanks, acknowledgement by the scientific community is very important. Therefore their operations are oriented towards academic standards. Many members of these think tanks are scientists or scholars themselves or have an academic education.

My thesis is as follows: think tanks are part of elite communication in the political system and a way in which members of the elites represent their interests to the general public and the institutions of the political system. They are new channels for interest intermediation for groups among the elite. Therefore, we have to look at the established form of interest representation and knowledge production. Think tanks are a form of communication of political ideas and scientific knowledge which is different from other

democratic and organisational channels for exerting influence.

In the first part, I want to describe the social and political changes after the Second World War which are connected to the new democratic political order in Germany, especially the process of modernising society after 1975. Here I want to stress changes in political communication and the system of interest intermediation.

In the next section, I deal with the changing role of science and scientific knowledge in society. Here my argument is that think tanks offer a new way for the scientific elite to influence political decision-making.

Following that section, I want to outline the role of think tanks in a media-dominated society. Think tanks have new competitors in the form of public affairs agencies and have to communicate in accordance with the rules of media society.

In the last section, I sum up the arguments and provide an overview of think tanks in the German political system.

2. Changes in the Political System

Think tanks are a new way for the elites and political interest groups to provide the political system, especially the parliament and decision-makers, with valuable knowledge, narratives, political programmes, reasons for taking particular decisions and statistical research results. The founding of think tanks in Germany, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, had to do with the following developments:

- The established milieus of workers, Catholics, Protestants, the old middle class and the rural population had lost their functions in structuring German society. New groups and milieus arose along new cleavages (for example, economy vs. environment). Society was becoming more diverse and pluralistic. From the late 1960s there was an explosion of advocacy organisations. Society was characterised by a growing number of interest groups and new ways of life.
- Since the 1950s we have observed a process of de-alignment. A large part of the electorate has progressively abandoned its previous partisan affiliation without replacing it with a new one. Parallel to this process we can observe a transformation of political parties into catch-all parties. The parties lost their ideological framework and offered political programmes tailored to specific groups in society. As a consequence, the parties lost their partisan profile.
- Especially in the 1980s and 1990s we find growing discontent on the part of members with their associations in the economic sector. Some companies began to found their own foundations and lobbying offices in Berlin and Brussels. Earlier on, in the 1950s, some think tanks had been funded by business associations. Now, big companies were turning away from established channels of business associations and trying to establish new ways to influence politicians and public opinion.
- Part of the advocacy explosion since the 1960s has been due to the rise of social movements, especially the environmental movement. The success of this movement and its political demands depended to a large extent on the availability of a huge amount of precise scientific knowledge and data. In 1986, the Ministry of Environment was established. Its duties and the political debate on industrial production, air pollution and technical indicators of the quality of air and water, as well as the beginning of the anti-nuclear movement increased the demand for specific knowledge. Environmental think tanks were founded around these subjects as a consequence. Examples are: the

Öko (Ecology) Institut Freiburg, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ in Leipzig/Halle.

On the demand side, we can diagnose changes that stimulated the growth of the think tanks industry in Germany. There were shifts in the centre of the political system, especially in the manner of making political decisions and enacting laws.

- The expansion of state functions and, with it, the opening of new policy fields is a key factor. After 1970 the growth of the welfare state demanded new forms of knowledge, in particular in producing new legal regulations. When the Ministry of the Environment was established in 1986, demand for environmental knowledge and techniques to regulate and safeguard environmental concerns increased dramatically. Thus, we find demand for more institutes for scientific policy advice.
- Demand was particularly strong for departmental research institutes (Ressortforschung). These institutes are run und funded by the federal ministries. Their task is to do research, provide policy advice and deliver knowledge (Barlösisus 2010). The main characteristic of departmental research institutes is that the state has direct access to scientific knowledge and can directly instruct these institutes to do research on specific topics.
- After the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) Germany developed new foreign policy and economic concerns. Knowledge on foreign countries was in demand, especially on regions in which the German army was engaged in international missions. The German government and business associations needed scientific knowledge about countries which are important for the Germany economy (for instance, China). Much of this knowledge comes from think tanks.

In recent decades, demand for scientific knowledge has expanded greatly. In comparison to US think tanks and the level of their embeddedness in the political system we find several differences, however. (i) In Germany, the political parties and business associations are strong. They were able to create ideological frameworks of their own. There was therefore less need for think tanks to develop ideologies and produce partisan ideas. (ii) A look at the demand side shows a robust and well-trained administration in the federal ministries. There is a lot of in-house production of knowledge and less resort to external providers. (iii) Civil servants in ministries are not eager to move to jobs in other sectors. There is thus less need to have think tanks as a reservoir for potential civil servants waiting for the next government.

3. The Changing Role of Science in Modern Societies

Think tanks are becoming more important in modern Western societies, especially in Germany, because we are on our way to a knowledge society. Knowledge – and more particularly scientific knowledge – is playing a decisive role. This process is accompanied by a continuous decline in the importance of the structures of industrial society. The increasing preponderance of white-collar workers and the growing relevance of services based on high-quality knowledge is a case in point.

A further consequence of this trend is that traditional modes of living are passing away and new forms and new problems are taking their place. Questions about new technologies in reproductive medicine and new ways of producing

energy are urgent and can be answered only by scientific research. Such questions are not value-neutral and think tanks are well suited to giving advice on both sides.

In recent years, the pressure has increased on science to produce more useful applications and to provide greater benefits to society (see Knie and Simon 2010: 30). The universities and scientific institutes are being urged to conduct research projects in cooperation with companies or organisations in the political sphere. These new demands for applied scientific knowledge are partly a consequence of the predominantly public funding of science. Universities and large research institutes are therefore changing their organisational forms and to some extent they are becoming more like think tanks. They cooperate with companies and state-run agencies, on the one hand, while on the other hand, large institutes such as the Max Planck Society do more basic research without any particular orientation towards direct social benefits. The public funding of academic scientific knowledge-production leads to something of a separation between basic research institutes, on the one hand, and more application-oriented forms of knowledge production. Think tanks are part of this latter trend.

4. Think Tanks in a Media Society

Think tanks produce practically applicable scientific knowledge and policy programmes for governments and associations. One way of disseminating their findings is to use the channels of political consulting: they feed their expert opinions and reports to actors and institutions in the political system. Another way is to use the channels of political communication in the media.

The media society is characterised by the dominance of the public media. The growing number of media outlets, the acceleration of information, new media formats and the growing role of economic considerations in the provision of public information are the main indicators of this tendency (cf. Jarren/Donges 2006: 28). As a result of the ongoing development of a media society the relations between media and society are changing fundamentally: perceptions of the world, society and politics are shaped by media enframing.

Think tanks are adapting to these new challenges and changing their modes of operation. More and more, they are producing knowledge and encapsulating it in bitesize pieces of information which are utilisable by the media. Think tanks are also investing more of their resources (up to 20 per cent) in presentation, public relations and communications.

The Bertelsmann Foundation – a think tank founded by the media company Bertelsmann AG – is a good example. The Bertelsmann Foundation was established by Reinhard Mohn, owner of Bertelsmann AG. It has a broad operational spectrum: among other things, it has launched a project for improving learning in schools, besides being active in civil society. The Foundation employs up to 300 employees and has an annual budget of about 60 million euros. About 10 per cent of its staff works in the department of public relations and communication. The Foundation seeks to identify important issues early, to develop scientific expertise and to introduce the topics into the public debate in good time. In this way, the Foundation aims to influence the direction of reform. Its self-understanding as a »reform workshop« results in numerous initiatives and pilot projects. The goal is to influence political decision-makers by means of high quality expert advice.

One of the main goals of think tanks – besides their character as an instrument of elite communication – is to influence public opinion. They do this by taking advantage of their relationships with journalists and the media. Articles in newspapers and journals are important ways of informing the broader public. Think tanks work up scientific knowledge for public consumption. They do this because they want to influence public opinion. Political decisions are more likely when the ground is prepared.

Often the heads of leading think tanks appear on TV as interviewees and talk show guests. For example Meinhard Miegel from the Institut für Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (IWG, Bonn) is a sought-after guest on TV.

Other think tanks, such as the Konvent für Deutschland or INSM, call on prominent politicians, such as former German President Roman Herzog, Olaf Henckel and Klaus von Dohnanyi as ambassadors and multipliers. More academically oriented think tanks are often asked for brief statements to explain economic affairs and government policy.

The Hans Böckler Foundation, with its close ties to the trade unions, founded the Institute for Macroeconomic and Economic Research in 2005. Its specific aim is to maintain the profile of the trade unions in the media.

5. Summary

Think tanks in Germany are mainly academically oriented. For think tanks, acknowledgement by the scientific community is very important. But there is an increasing tendency to intervene in different ways in the political battle of opinions and to take part in political communication.

Politics and its processes are becoming more dependent on scientific expertise. Think tanks are able to deliver this in useable form. Think tanks also develop strategies on how to influence the political process overall, especially in agenda setting. This is particularly true of think tanks connected to interest groups. For these think tanks new funding options are emerging. With the reform of the law on foundations more private capital can be set aside for them. In addition, the mass media has a voracious demand for expertise. Think tanks are keen to promulgate their ideas through the media. A problem may occur when think tanks communicate mainly the ideas of their sponsors and clients without disclosing the connection.

Thinks tanks are organisations of elite communication. They establish alternative channels of influence alongside the established parties and (business) associations. They are getting stronger while parties and associations are losing members and political power. This gives rise to new questions about the democratic nature and legitimacy of this form of influence.

References

Braml, Josef (2006), Think Tanks versus »Denkfabriken«? US and German Policy Research Institutes Coping with and Influencing their Environments. Nomos Verlag.

Barlösius, Eva (2010), Ressortforschung, in: Dagmar Simon, Andreas Knie and Stefan Hornbostel (eds), Handbuch Wissenschaftspolitik, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 307–389

Gellner, Winand (1995), Ideenagenturen für Politik und Öffentlichkeit. Think Tanks in den USA und in Deutschland, Westdeutscher Verlag.

Jarren, Otfried and Donges, Patrick (2006), Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft. Eine Einführung, 2. Überarb. Aufl., VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Knie, Andreas and Simon, Dagmar (2010), Stabilität und Wandel des deutschen

Wissenschaftssystems, in: Dagmar Simon, Andreas Knie and Stefan Hornbostel (eds), Handbuch Wissenschaftspolitik, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 26–38.

Speth, Rudolf (2006), Die Politisierung des Marktplatzes der Ideen durch advokatorische Think Tanks, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung betrifft: Bürgergesellschaft 24; online at: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/kug/03818.pdf.

Speth, Rudolf (2010), Stiftungen als Think Tanks, in: Dagmar Simon, Andreas Knie and Stefan Hornbostel (eds), Handbuch Wissenschaftspolitik, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 390–405.

Thunert, Martin (2003), Think Tanks in Deutschland – Berater der Politik? In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B 51/2003, pp. 30–38.

About the Authors

Garnett, Mark. Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

McGann, James. Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program and Assistant Director of the International Relations Program, University of Pennsylvania.

Rich, Andrew. President and CEO, The Roosevelt Institute.

Speth, Rudolf. Professor, University Kassel.

Thunert, Martin. Research Lecturer (Political Science), Heidelberg Center for American Studies, University of Heidelberg.

Traub-Merz, Rudolf. Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Shanghai Office for International Cooperation .

Weaver, Kent. Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution.

Yang Ye. Professor, School of Political Science and International Relations; Director, Center for European Studies, Tongji University.

Other Briefing Papers

No. 1
The G-20: A New Global Governance Framework for Sustainable Development?
Thomas Fues, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2010

No. 2
Global Union Federations and the Challenges of Globalisation
Torsten Mueller, Hans-Wolfgang Platzer and Stefan Rueb, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2010

No. 3
Singapore: A Depoliticized Civil Society in a Dominant-Party System?
Kenneth Paul Tan, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2010

No. 4
Housing Policy in Germany - A Best Practice Model?
Bjoern Egner, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2011

No. 5
The Historical Evolution of China's Administrative Compensation System and its Recent Amendments
YANG Yin, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2011

No. 6
The End of Export-led Growth: Implications for Emerging Markets and the Global Economy
Thomas I. Palley, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2011

No. 7
Political Parties, Membership Mobilisation and Power Management - The Example of the Federal Republic of Germany
Gerd Mielke, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2011

No. 8
The End of Nuclear Power? Time to Rethink International Energy Policy
Nina Netzer, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai, 2011 (Chinese version published in Shanghai; the original English version is published by FES Berlin as part of the "Dialogue on Globalization" series)

No. 9
The Earnings Penalty for Motherhood in Urban China during the Economic Transition
by Jia Nan and Dong Xiao-yuan

No. 10
Europe's Emissions Trading System: An Effective and Efficient Instrument for a Low-Carbon Economy
by Hans-Joachim Ziesing

No. 11
At a Snail's Pace: From Female Suffrage to a Policy of Equality in Germany
By Beatrix Bouvier

Briefing Paper Special Issue
Protection for Domestic Workers - Challenges and Prospects
May 2011

Other FES-Publications

China, the EU and Latin America: Current Issues and Future Cooperation
Birte Klemm and Niu Haibin (eds.), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2011

Altenpflege und Pflegeversicherung. Modelle und Beispiele aus China, Deutschland und Japan
Susanne Langsdorf, Rudolf Traub-Merz and Chun Ding (eds.), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2010

Comparative Industrial Relations: China, South-Korea and Germany/Europe
Rudolf Traub-Merz and Junhua Zhang (eds.), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2010

Public Participation in Local Decision-Making: China and Germany
Ping Liu and Rudolf Traub-Merz (eds.), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2009

China-Europe-Africa Cooperation: Chances and Challenges.
Proceedings of the Sixth Shanghai Workshop on Global Governance.
Yan Yu (ed.), Shanghai: FES and Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 2008

Current Situation and Future Prospects of Asia-Europe Security Cooperation.
Proceedings of the Fifth Shanghai Workshop on Global Governance.
Katharina Hofmann, Katja Meyer and Yan Yu (eds.), Shanghai: FES and Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 2007

About Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a private cultural non-profit institution committed to the ideas and basic values of social democracy. It was founded in 1925 and aims to further the political and social education of individuals in the spirit of democracy and pluralism.
Its international cooperation connects the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung with partners in more than 100 countries all over the world. The international cooperation of the FES strives for facilitating participation, pluralism, rule of law, social justice and non-violent conflict resolution in different societies.

Learn more about FES: www.fes.de
Learn more about FES China: www.fes-china.org

Contact

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Beijing), Ta Yuan Diplomatic Compound, Building 5, Entrance 1, 12th Floor, Office 5-1-121, Xin Dong Lu 1/Chao Yang Qu, 100600 Beijing, VR China

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Shanghai), 7A Da An Plaza East Tower, 829 Yan An Zhong Lu, Shanghai 200040, VR China

Briefing Paper
To subscribe the Briefing Papers send an e-mail to:
subscribe@fes-shanghai.org
To unsubscribe send an e-mail to:
unsubscribe@fes-shanghai.org

The opinion voiced in this publication is that of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of FES.

Imprint: Think Tanks in Policy Making – Do They Matter?. Shanghai: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Shanghai Office, 2011
Responsible: Dr. Rudolf Traub-Merz, Resident Director, FES Shanghai Coordination Office for International Cooperation