Inspirations on Constructing Central Enterprise Think Tanks from Global Think Tanks Development

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Abstract. In order to promote state-owned capital to become stronger and bigger, and to cultivate world-class enterprises with global competitiveness, the importance of the construction of central enterprise think tanks has become increasingly prominent. In recent years, the overall development of global think tanks has shown a trend of rapid increase in the number of think tanks and a gradual expansion of research scope. The way in which think tanks participate in decision-making and build influence has undergone profound changes. Through analyzing successful experience of core competence construction and operation management modes of global advanced think tanks, it is found that central enterprises have raised new demands for think tanks in winning global competitiveness, improving modern management level and enhancing social communication ability. This paper mainly puts forward three recommendations for developing central enterprise think tanks: 1) Strengthen the core capacity building and enhance the theoretical research and decision support level; 2) Strengthen the international exchange activities and enhance the international discourse power and influence; 3) Strengthen the innovation of think tank communication mechanism and improve the communication level between central enterprises and the public.

Introduction

With the deep adjustment of the world economy, the turbulent and changeable international situation, the transformation and development of China’s economy, and the entry of socialism with Chinese characteristics into a new era, China’s development has become a new historical orientation. As a microcosm of China’s economy, central enterprises must develop into a world-class enterprise with global influence in the new era. It is urgent to deal with the profoundly changing business environment and adapt to system reform, model innovation, and capacity building. The practical significance of the construction of high-end think tanks in central enterprises is highlighted. In the field of global think tank research, the “Think Tank and Civil Society Project” led by McGann of the University of Pennsylvania has important influence. The project team has published the “Global Think Tank Report” every year since 2008. On this basis, this paper sorts out the overall characteristics and development trends of global think tanks, summarizes the development experience of advanced typical think tanks, analyzes the construction needs of high-end think tanks of China’s central enterprises, and puts forward relevant suggestions.

The Overall Characteristics and Development Trends of Global Think Tanks

The Number of Global Think Tanks Has Increased Rapidly and the Scope of Research Has Gradually Expanded

In the past few decades, the number of global think tanks has increased rapidly. According to the statistical analysis of the Global Think Tank Report (2016), from the 1940s to the 1990s, the number of new think tanks worldwide increased from 12 to 142 per year. The changes in the number of global think tanks since 2007 are shown in Table 1. In general, the development of typical think tanks is still dominated by developed countries and regions such as Europe and the United States. At the same time, in the emerging technology field, a number of professional think
tanks arising from new major issues in human society, such as climate change think tanks, energy think tanks, and technology Innovative think tanks, etc., can often gain influence quickly.

Table 1. Changes in the number of global think tanks.

| Year | Global | North America | Europe | Asia | Sub-Saharan Africa | Central and South America | Middle East and North Africa | Oceania |
|------|--------|---------------|--------|------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| 2007 | 5080   | 1924          | 1681   | 601  | 274                | 408                      | 192                         | -       |
| 2008 | 6465   | 1872          | 1722   | 653  | 424                | 538                      | 218                         | 38      |
| 2009 | 6305   | 1912          | 1750   | 1183 | 503                | 645                      | 273                         | 39      |
| 2010 | 6480   | 1913          | 1757   | 1200 | 548                | 690                      | 333                         | 39      |
| 2011 | 6545   | 1912          | 1795   | 1198 | 550                | 722                      | 329                         | 39      |
| 2012 | 6603   | 1919          | 1836   | 1194 | 554                | 721                      | 554                         | 40      |
| 2013 | 6826   | 1984          | 1818   | 1201 | 612                | 662                      | 511                         | 38      |
| 2014 | 6618   | 1989          | 1822   | 1106 | 476                | 674                      | 521                         | 39      |
| 2015 | 6846   | 1931          | 1770   | 1262 | 615                | 774                      | 398                         | 96      |
| 2016 | 7815   | 1972          | 2045   | 1676 | 664                | 979                      | 479                         | -       |

The Way Think Tanks Participate in Decision-Making and Build influence Has Undergone Profound Changes

With the development of network informationization, information dissemination channels and mechanisms are more diversified, information barriers are gradually disappearing, and the research, communication and communication links that constitute the think tank value chain are highly Internet-oriented. Firstly, the means of value dissemination of think tanks are further enhanced, the opportunities and space for voices are greater, and there is possibility of providing more services. Using the Internet platform, think tanks can serve not only as government advisory bodies, but also as advisory functions for society and enterprises. Secondly, the potential audience of think tanks is huge and diverse, requiring think tanks to change their expressions, and to express embarrassing and profound problems in accurate and popular language. Thirdly, the media platform integrates social interaction and decision-making consultation, and the think tank faces a smart game in focusing on public opinion, reflecting social consensus and interpreting social issues.

Think Tanks Become a Key Capability for Corporate Sustainability

Enterprise think tank is a strong support for enterprise decision-making, a platform for communication and exchange between enterprises and the government, and a promoter of corporate philosophy and value communication. The relative independence of think tanks can contribute unique value to companies in dealing with conflicts and enhancing brand image. Enterprise think tanks often rely on their major industries to provide intellectual support for the government’s scientific management industry development. In addition, with the complexity of the international economic and trade situation and political and economic structure, think tanks have increasingly become an important ability for companies to participate in global market competition.

Advanced Typical Think Tank Development Experience

After many years of operation, a series of advanced and typical international first-class think tanks in the fields of international energy and power policies, environment and public issues, have explored and formed a growth path suitable for their development. The successful mode of construction, management and operation of think tanks has provided a lot of experience for the construction of central enterprises’ high-end think tanks.

Emphasize the Professionalism and Rigor of the Think Tank Research System

The world’s leading think tanks select research fields according to their professional advantages, improve the pertinence and practicality of research results, enhance the professional characteristics of think tanks, and enhance the right to speak in this field. The advanced think tanks have
accumulated the top experts and scholars, conducted scientific analysis of important research questions, and made scientific prediction of future policy recommendations based on the most advanced research tools, methods and theories. Meanwhile, they also pay attention to the rigor of the evaluation of research results, and select the evaluation experts to ensure the quality and authority of the evaluation.

**Emphasize the Independence and Non-profit Nature of the Think Tank Management Mode**

The reason why many international leading think tanks have significant influence is that they emphasize their own independent operating mechanism, emphasize non-government, non-profit and voice for the vulnerable groups. For example, the non-profit organization CA emphasizes helping disadvantaged countries (small islands and least developed countries) to use the best science and analysis to ensure that global climate agreements are reached, limiting global warming to a level that won’t threaten survival. Independent, non-profit and voice for the vulnerable groups make it easier for CA to win the support of the United Nations and governments of different levels of development in the field of climate negotiations. It is also more likely to reach a consensus and gradually establish important influences around the world.

**Focus on the Diversification of Funding Sources for Think Tank Construction**

The world’s leading think tanks focus on accessing multiple sources of funding. Diversification of funding sources to ensure the continued survival of think tanks has created conditions for the formation and development of official and folk think tanks. At the same time, the more sources of think tank funding, the greater the degree of diversity which reflects its independence, thus leading to a better reputation and more cooperation institutions. In terms of funding sources for international leading think tanks, the operating funds of European and American think tanks mainly come from financial appropriations, self-employment income, and donations from various sectors of society. The operating funds of the US and UK think tanks mostly come from foundations, corporate and individual donations, membership fees and publications. The funds of Russian and German think tanks are mainly from the government.

**Focus on the Scientific and Complex Nature of Think Tank Researchers**

Researchers are the core resources for think tanks to run and exert their influence. The world-class think tanks are highly specialized and diverse in the structure of the research team. Most of them are professionals with important academic influence in their respective fields, and they focus on interdisciplinary optimization. In research projects that are oriented to major realities and strategic issues, researchers from different professional backgrounds, career experiences, and even different countries are often gathered together, including well-known scholars, business elites, former government officials, etc.

**Focus on the Transformation and Dissemination Mechanism of Think Tank Research Results**

Advanced model think tanks have a complete transformation mechanism for research results. They realize the rapid transformation of the research results of think tanks by providing research results directly to decision makers through various channels and methods, or by publishing academic papers, research reports, works in international top journals in professional fields, or by speaking in well-known universities and other research institutions through think tank experts and scholars or by expanding the influence of the academic field, public opinion and even the general public. At the same time, the world’s leading think tanks also focus on improving the communication capacity building of results. They increase social participation and media exposure by holding high-end academic salons, organizing high-level meetings, and actively participating in world-class forums. For example, IIED organized the “Barbara Ward Lecture” and invited famous politicians and scholars from around the world as speakers. In addition, the world’s advanced model think tanks also use the new media means such as Twitter, facebook, Weibo, WeChat, etc. to operate the communication platform to enhance the communication ability of think tank research results.
The Demand for the Support of Think Tanks in the Development of Central Enterprises in China

In order to implement the important subordinates of the country to strengthen the construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics, and continuously improve their competitiveness and influence, the central enterprises have attached more importance to the construction of think tanks. In 2016, a new type of think tank alliance of central enterprises was established. In order to promote the sustainable and healthy development of central enterprises and better play the role of think tanks and staff in the reform of state-owned enterprises, think tank construction faces many new demands.

Strengthening the Construction of International First-class Think Tanks is an Urgent Need to Promote the Participation of Chinese Central Enterprises in the Construction of the “One Belt One Road” and to Win Global Competitiveness

The “going out” policy of central enterprises faces the complicated international situation, such as the rise of “reverse globalization”, which requires high-end think tanks to exert influence and provide decision support at multiple levels. At the macro-environment level, central enterprises shoulder important social responsibilities and the historical mission of sustainable development. They need to actively participate in discussions on global hot topics such as the “Community of Human Destiny” relying on think tanks. At the specific project selection and planning level, a think tank organization with global planning capabilities and sufficient data information resources is needed to contribute wisdom and provide a feasible implementation path. At the project level, central enterprises want to win the right to speak in the dialogue with relevant decision-making departments of the countries concerned, and also need to build think tanks with influence and credibility on a global scale to provide essential support.

Strengthening the Construction of International First-class Think Tanks is an Important Support for Ensuring the Implementation of Central Enterprises’ Innovation Strategy, Deepening Sustainable Development, and Upgrading Modern Management

In order to adapt to the changes in the external development environment of central enterprises, it is necessary to strengthen research on major issues, continuously optimize and improve the strategic system, and achieve comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of “macro-industry-core ecology”. High-end think tanks play an important role in key operational aspects such as strategy formulation and implementation and layout optimization. Especially in the critical period of China’s economic transformation, structural upgrading, and comprehensive deepening reform, it is necessary to bring together internal and external first-class intellectual resources, form international leading strategic research and decision support capabilities, exert influence of think tanks, and provide strong support for the steady development of central enterprises.

Strengthening the Construction of International First-class Think Tanks is an Effective Way for Central Enterprises to Enhance Their Social Communication Capabilities

In the past, traditional and low-transparency social communication methods have led to public unilateral views and even misunderstandings on central enterprises. The social contribution rate of central enterprises is far from proportional to social reputation. It is necessary for think tanks play a bridge role in communicating with the people, conforming public opinion and improving people’s livelihood. In the process of management of central enterprises, it is crucial to strengthen the construction of think tanks to diagnose the problems that the public pay close attention to, which may have potential impact on the stakeholders, use new ideas and new theories to make convincing analysis, and propose operational solutions. Think tanks then disseminate the thoughts and ideas to the public through various channels of communication, guide the social ideological trend, strengthen the mass base, and reflect the corporate appeal reasonably and effectively.
Suggestions on Strengthening the Construction of High-end Think Tanks of Central Enterprises

Strengthen the Core Capacity Building of Think Tanks and Enhance the Level of Theoretical Research and Decision Support

Introduce influential experts and scholars at home and abroad in the professional field, strengthen the scientific and complex nature of think tank researchers, improve the professionalism and rigor of the research system based on advanced tools, methods and theories, and build the core competence of central enterprise think tanks.

Strengthen the International Exchange Activities of Think Tanks and Enhance the International Voice and Influence

In the international high-end conferences and academic salons such as the World Economic Forum, the voice of central enterprises will be launched, and the international think tanks such as the T20 Think Tank Conference (T20) and the “One Belt One Road” think tank cooperation alliance will be promoted to enhance participation and media in global hot issues. The exposure rate actively shapes the international discourse power and influence of central enterprise think tanks.

Strengthen the Innovation of the Think Tank Communication Mechanism and Improve the Communication Level between Central Enterprises and the Public

Creatively exert social influence and actively use new media communication means such as Weibo and Subscription to study social and people’s livelihood issues. Experts, scholars and relatively independent institutions can publicize corporate responsibility performance and build a bridge between enterprises and the public to promote central enterprise social reputation.

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