

## Development Experience of Japanese Think Tank and Its Enlightenment to China for Building High-End New-Type Think Tank

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### Abstract

Think tank, as one of the effective carriers of humanities and social sciences knowledge services, plays an important theoretical support, intelligence support and decision-making reference in national political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, military and other fields. Since the World War II, along with the national recovery and reconstruction, economic restructuring, transformation and upgrading of industries, expansion of the international market, and the enhancing of the international influence power, etc, Japanese think tank industry has rapidly developed, ranking among the world top ten, and has accumulated rich valuable experiences. This article gains some enlightenment for China by analyzing the current situation characteristics of Japanese think tank development and concluding the experience, which will undoubtedly have certain reference effect on strengthening the construction of think tank industry with the Chinese characteristics, and better serving the national economic and social development.

**Key words:** Japanese think tank; Development experience; New-type; Construction enlightenment

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### INTRODUCTION

Think tank comes from the English word "Think Tank", whose first appearance was in a series of articles introducing the Rand corporation in the New York times in June, 1967. In terms of its definition, Think Tank refers to highly organized research institutions formed by experts in various fields in the humanities and social sciences, its main function is to do status analysis, future prediction and technology research and development according to the delegation of government agencies or enterprises, and providing policy and information related to government decision-making and management strategy. They put people and the society as research object, reveal the law of social development through multidisciplinary means and methods, put forward thinking and countermeasures for solving the major theoretical and practical problem, provide theory, strategy and method support for government decision-making in the society, economy, science and technology, military, diplomatic and other fields.

As we all know, Japan's natural resources is deficient with narrow domestic market. After the war, Japan took the opportunity of reconstruction and transfer of the world economy, constantly absorbing and innovating, speeding up economic restructuring, carrying out national construction relying on foreign trade, energetically developed the overseas trade, became one of the most competitive economy in the world today.

### 1. THE MAIN TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF JAPANESE THINK TANK

The development of Japanese think tank emerged after the Second World War. Japan currently has 108 think tanks with strong power and far-reaching influence, which are active in Japan's political, economic, cultural, social

and other fields. According to the 2012 *Global Think Tank Report* released by the university of Pennsylvania, Japanese think tank comprehensively ranks ninth in the world, there are four Japanese think-tank (Japan Institute of International Affairs, Asia Forum, Japanese Defense Research Institute, Japan Policy Research Institute) in the top 30 in Asia, their overall strength is self-evident. On its distribution, the Japanese think tank focuses on the Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, the three major cities, where 54 percent of the think tank, 79 percent of think tank practitioners and 86 percent of think tank revenues are concentrated in Tokyo.

## **1.1 The Main Types of Japanese Think Tank**

### **1.1.1 Government-Led or Government-Backed Think Tank**

This kind of think tank is actually a comprehensive management and development quasi-governmental agencies with strong public welfare, and its main function is to provide research services for the community to carry out public utilities and public policy formulation, generally has no independence. They mainly undertake the research project commissioned by the governments of all levels in accordance with the law, mainly focus on basic information resource construction and the cause of information coordination, their scope of its activities, business areas and service network cover all regions and various industries of Japan. For example, “Asian Economic Research Institute”, governed by the MITI which is in charge of Japanese economy running, mainly discusses economic development trends and economic policy; Governed by the Ministry of Health which is responsible for social welfare work, “National Social Security Institute of Population Problems” mainly researches the issues of Social Security and population policy. For another example, “Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI)”, formerly known as the Japanese central “ministries” directly under the government-run research institutions, in April 2001, ruled over by the government to operate independently, that is, “non-civil service-type independent administrative agency.” Despite major changes in form, its purpose servicing for the government has not changed, mainly based on the Japanese long-term development strategy, carry out international economic survey analysis, policy research and provide policy advice for the government.

### **1.1.2 Enterprise Consortium Attached Think Tank**

Think tank attached to enterprise consortium occupies an important position in Japanese think tank institutions. With the backing of large Enterprise Consortium, they are large, strong, and mostly giant in think tank industry. This is because, on the one hand, it has been natural that big Enterprises in Japan found think tank, so their number is more than that of the other types of think tank; on the other hand, while meeting their own business needs,

this kind of think tank also by providing advice for the community expand its influence, improve the role of corporate image and expand market coverage and business areas. The operation mechanism of such think tank is similar with an enterprise, mostly for profit, they generally have specific service groups, starting from the interests of customers to provide highly targeted consulting services. In such kind of think tank, Nomura Research Institute (NRI) is the most representative one, and it is now one of Japan’s most powerful think tank research institution attached to business group. Since the establishment of this agency, in addition to businesses based in Japan, it still has a number of branches in the world’s major economic centers or global cities.

### **1.1.3 Independent Nongovernmental Legal Person Community-Based Think Tank**

Japan’s independent non-governmental legal person think tank has a great quantity, strength and high-impact. This kind of think tank include consulting firms and various social organizations with legal personality set up by independent individuals, as well as the founder of the enterprise or separated from consulting companies. Most of their research funding comes from committing the government’s research projects, big corporate sponsors, and incomes from foreign consulting business. Such kind of think tank has flexible operation, and usually carries out the research with social hot topic at home and abroad as the guiding, launch results quickly, and it is also very active in international academic exchanges. Its business research scope mainly involves within the industry or related areas of expertise, to provide comprehensive, multi-level consulting services to clients. For example, the folk comprehensive think tank Institute (Peace and Happiness through Prosperity, PHP) founded by the Konosuke Matsushita in 1946, had published “PHP” and “Voice” two magazines and “PHP library”, the main business area is not only engaged in politics policy, economic policy research, but also concerned about the results of their research finally getting applications; Another example is Kimura Management Institute in Osaka, which mainly provides full range of management consulting services for middle and small-sized enterprises, and also provides policy recommendations for the foreign and local governments.

### **1.1.4 Famous Universities’ Own Think Tank**

Japanese higher education is well developed, with 87 National University, 89 public universities, 580 private universities, and a total of 756. A large group of university create conditions for the development of Japanese think tank industry, and it is also the main force in Japan to carry out academic researches and provide services for the community. Such as Tokyo University is very strong in the field of the political and economic discipline and Kyoto University’s main strength is in the field of Science and Technology. In addition to personnel training,

these universities run think tank to provide services to the community mainly through engaging in research projects commissioned by the Government, establishing professional journals, publishing influential academic works, consulting experts participating in government decision-making and other ways to. In addition, the Japanese subsidiary of the Institute of universities, research institutions and independent comprehensive research department which is not belonging to a particular university, such as the Asia-Pacific Institute of Waseda University, Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University, Institute of security, "International Research Center for Japanese Culture," "national Museum of Ethnology, "and so on, their relationship with interest groups generally is less closely, they aim at providing more equitable policy recommendations to clients. As the university think tank has deep discipline foundations, the theoretical and academic value of its policy research is relatively high and the theoretical influence on national policy generated is different from other think tanks, so it has drawn more attention by the state.

## **1.2 The Characteristics of Japanese Think Tank**

### **1.2.1 Comprehensiveness is Strong, and Internationalization Degree is High**

The integration and internationalization of think tank are mainly reflected in comprehensive research institutions set up by some big zaibatsu in Japan. The first is its large institutions and wide involving fields. For example, Nomura Research Institute has 3 department, 21 researches and survey department, with more than 40 research laboratory; Mitsubishi Research Institute sets up economy, society, science and technology, intelligence the four research department. The second is pay attention to Arts and Science combining, multidisciplinary crossing in the structure of personnel, forming comprehensive advantages. Such as social science and natural science personnel of Nomura Research Institute are approximately half and half. The third is the vast research space. Although think tank has the research emphasis, the research scope almost involves every country and area of the world related to Japan's national strategy.

### **1.2.2 Research is Based on the Major Reality Problem**

The research of Japanese think tank is not only based on the reality, but also pays more attention to the future development trend, "explore the future, predict the future, and design the future" is one of the main research tasks and main features of their think tank. For example, NIRA has hired more than 500 experts and scholars carrying on comprehensive analysis and research in the 21th century by dividing multiple special projects, and has offered a lot results with important influence, most of them are about international environment Japan will be faced in the future, problems Japanese industry will encounter, the blueprint of Japan's economic and social

development in the 21th century, as well as the overall strategy and so on, which have been paid attention by the government, and many have been converted into policy text and national laws. Although the research of Japanese think tank involves broad field, the research emphasis is given priority to economy and politics. Such as "Japan Center for Economic Research (JERC)", which is one of Japan's authoritative think-tank, was clear positioned for providing economic development strategy research and policy advice for the Japanese government in the early 1960s, helped the government vigorously promote the "national income doubling plan", pursued rapid economic development.

### **1.2.3 Team is Huge, and the Specialization Level is High**

No matter what kind of think tank, practitioners of today's Japanese think tank are gradually growing large; specialization level is higher and higher. For example, Nomura Research Institute after decades of development has become the most outstanding in the think tank industry, this agency has 5739 employees, and the sales reached 335.5 billion yen by 2012. For 30 years, Nomura Research Institute has provided more than 12000 specialized achievements, for instance, the *actual survey about hiring elder* proposed in 1994 and the *function transfer and resources relocation of the capital survey* proposed in 1995 had provided an important basis for government making policy to solve the Japan's economy and society problem. After entering the 21st century, Japan's economic structure accelerate reform, in order to provide customers with more accurate and valuable information, Nomura Research Institute makes full use of own global network and all kinds of available resources, quickly captures the economy development trend and cutting-edge technical information of the world especially in Asia, through comprehensive analysis, provides efficient services to the government and society, not only win a high reputation in Japan, but also enhance its own core competitiveness.

## **2. THE MAIN METHODS OF JAPANESE THINK TANK IN SERVICING NATIONAL ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING**

### **2.1 Focusing on Economic Development Frontier, Adjusting the Core of Research Timely**

As previously mentioned, economic development problem is the important field which Japanese think tank focused on. In order to focus on reality and aim at frontier, Japanese think tank attaches great importance to adjusting research direction according to the market needs and industry demand. After the war, the industry reconstruction, structural adjustment and industrial upgrading of the Japanese economy development were

the urgent needed solving major issue, therefore, Japanese think tank adjusted research core timely, regarding the land resources development and utilization, economic and social development, industry cultivation and transformation as the major research fields, organizing strength, concentrating on system special research, providing countermeasures for government decision-making, to ensure the national economy developing healthily and orderly. After entering the 1990s and 1980s, as the wave of globalization, informatization and economic downturn, Japanese think tank adjusted research emphasis on financial problems, resources and environment problem, energy security brought by industrial upgrading, launched a number of important clients administration report which were attached great importance by the government.

For example, after the 1990s, Nomura Research Institute adjusted the research and management emphasis according to the change of financial and economic environment at home and abroad, from general survey research to knowledge creation, from the use of traditional research methods to introducing modern research methods and technology, had done a lot of adjustments on the research content and scope and business organization and management. For another example, RIETI has always focused on Japan and world economic development, especially with the advancement of economic globalization, East Asia as the “world manufacturing base” continue to grow stronger, the institution proposes that if Japan wants to realize sustainable development, it must accelerate the change from the “world manufacturing base” to the “world creating base”. In order to help the government achieve this goal, RIETI has launched a series of research results. Many of those are adopted by the government, and converted into policies and regulations. At present, this institution has been carrying out the investigation on the inventor of the US and Europe, the Japanese outsourcing industry research, etc, all of these has close relation with the Japan economic development in the future.

## **2.2 Actively Using Foreign Platform, Spreading Japanese Management Culture to Outside**

Japanese think tank attaches great importance to the aid of foreign intelligence and platform while dose clients administration service in domestic, and actively spreads Japanese management culture outward, constantly improves the proportion and competitiveness of Japanese products in the international market, and improves management cultural of soft power .

For example, the non-profit economic aid agency—Japan’s overseas trade development association (JODC) attached to the Ministry of Economy, was founded in 1970, whose main business is to send experts in the industrial and services field to developing countries, to

help developing countries improve the level of industrial technology. This seemingly aid projects, is actually derived from the advice of think tank, which aimed at enhancing the Japanese influence in the developing world. Japanese think tank not only pays attention to the overseas propagation of the specific technology and project, but also aims at soft power competition under the background of economic globalization, focuses on the output of the cultural industry. Such as Cultural Development Institute (CDI), the only think tank in the field of Japanese cultural field, first proposed the “culture orientated national development” or “output culture” countermeasures in the research of outlook for the Japanese culture in 21st century in 1977, which has been playing a very good guide role for Japanese government to carry out the strategy of overseas culture. Now, Japan’s creative products are famous in the field of cultural industry throughout the world, the animation industry and advanced game industry are dominating the world. Politics analysis scholar of American Douglas McGregor referred Japanese cartoon industry, game industry spreading widely in overseas as “Japan’s Gross National Cool”, GNC). Only this policy suggestion greatly promoted overseas influence of Japanese cultural soft power.

## **2.3 Giving Full Play to the Advantages of University Think Tank, to Service Government Making Important Decisions**

University is an important force of think tank with concentrated subject, wealth of talents, strong research power, and irreplaceable advantages. It actively serves Japanese government make important decisions in various forms. For example, Asia Pacific Institute of Waseda University is the world’s biggest independent research institution which specially studies the Asia-pacific region problem. There are 14 research group led by full-time teachers, hosting different research topics, such as “international development cooperation and the global sustainable development” hosted by the international development cooperation study group; “international environment in the Asia-pacific region” and “Japan’s relations with neighboring countries” hosted by Japan’s relations with Asia team; “east Asian regional integration: international interests and nationalism” hosted by the East Asia team, and so on, these are the important theoretical and practical problems which Japanese government focuses on, directly concerning Japan’s national interest. Their research results are directly sent to the senior government and congress through reports, presentations and proposals, as the important reference of decision making and legislation. At the same time, the administration and congress also often invite team members to directly consult, and answer questions from lawmakers, directly participate in the development of policy text and legal provisions.

### 3. EXPERIENCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF JAPANESE THINK TANK INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

#### 3.1 Attaching Great Importance to the Think Tank Construction in Economic and Social Development

Postwar Japanese government pays high attention to the construction and development of think tank from the height of strategic, both the central government and local governments and corporations, through lawmaking and financial support, to realize think tank industry promoting the national economy development. The specific measures mainly reflects in: The first is to pay attention to overall layout, supporting think tank to develop healthily and orderly. On the funding, Japanese think tank generally can get some funding from the government, the funds government every year use for think-tank accounted for about 1% of Japan's research funds. The second is to strengthen the laws and regulations for the development of think tank. In the early 1950s, Japan has successively formulated the *enterprise rationalization promotion law*, the *diagnosis and implement outline of the small and medium-sized enterprises* and the *small and medium-sized enterprises guidance law*, which have provided legal protection for think tank orderly and harmonious development. The third is to build think tank service platform. In order to make think tank service economy development, the government especially attaches importance to advance develop in consulting, let the enterprise itself establish close contact with think tank, and merging the think tank of enterprise industry into the scope of government management. Government also creates conditions to play the role of think tank in folk and universities serving national economic and social development, to make them gain development funds in contributing more policy recommendations depend on subject intellectual resources advantages, to ensure sustainability of research.

Compared with Japan, China's total practitioners of think tank from central to local agencies are also many, but many problems exist. The first is lacking of overall layout, comprehensiveness is not enough, foud and intelligence is more dispersed, it is difficult to form resultant force, especially in the aspect of understanding and support efforts still has a big gap. As report showed, although funding for policy research projects in China is increased year by year, but compared to Japan, total investment is seriously insufficient, many consultant institutions euphemistically called think tank only can barely keep, it is difficult to make a difference. The second is that it is not fully institutionalized in aspects of policy consultation and supervision, lacking of system guarantee of the laws and regulations, the channel is not smooth, many research results can't conveniently access

to policymakers. The third is that problem consciousness is not strong. The survey suggests that the government leading's think tanks are mainly busy in drafting leadership speech, report and such daily work, few aim at cutting edge to carry out the countermeasure research; the primary research academy of social sciences and some research institutes of government department, as the central and provincial think tanks are well instituted, but most of the time, or a large number of researchers are also engaged in the temporary tasks assigned by the superiors, deep and prospective studies are insufficient, many achievements are in explanatory, interpretative study. Therefore, only attaching great importance from ideology, strengthening the legislation construction, improving the governance institution of think tank, straightening out relations, integrating strength, standardizing system, perfecting evaluation criterion and mechanism, carrying relatively independent professional operation, can think tank development in China step into a new starting point.

#### 3.2 Focusing on Building High-End Think Tank Personnel

Human is the carrier of knowledge, and the main body of knowledge, the research is the core of think tank, so people are the most key factors of think tank for the survival and development. The talent team construction of Japanese think tank has a very good experience: The first is the talent selection mechanism. In the development of think tank, Japan tightly grasps the talent, through qualification examination to select high quality talent of think tank, inspection for personnel mainly focuses on the analysis and judgment ability, problem solving ability, practical ability, cooperation ability, creative ability and professional shift ability, etc. Second, paying attention to the think tank resources integration of multi-disciplinary, cross-industry, cross-regional, not only value Master, Doctor graduated from famous university, well-known experts and scholars of institutions of university, but also attaches great importance to business elite with strong practicality and hands-on ability and the "revolving door" type of former government officials to enrich think-tank team, to build up high-end think tank team. Third, paying attention to think tank talent cultivation mode. In terms of talent training, Japan introduced "2.4 million science and technology talent development advancement plan", "the 21st century outstanding research base project", "science and technology talent training comprehensive plan" and so on. In addition, Japanese think tank regularly organizes academic conference, invites foreign elite visit to give lectures, makes short-term academic exchanges; setting up overseas research institutions, netting talent, introducing technology, enriching think tank strength, promoting internationalization degree, for example, there is normalized personnel exchanges and research cooperation between Nomura Research Institute and the Stanford research institute

China has developed more than 400000 personnel engaged in research on humanities and social science, objectively speaking, this team can be regarded as think tank workers, but from the point of objective reality, the personnel specialized in national strategy top design and research is few. In addition to the scattered intellectual resources, overall quality cannot meet the objective requirement of economic and social development in China. Therefore, to build China's high-end new-type think tank talent team, the first is to arrange some young and middle-aged scholars with cultivating potential put on field practice to the grass-roots units and government departments, organically combining management and research work, constantly enhancing the consciousness of the problem, improving the ability of analysis and solve problems. The second is to encourage and support more famous celebrities go to the world famous universities, research institutes, think tank institutes to carry out the cooperation study, spread Chinese philosophy, show the academic point of view, steadily improve China international discourse power. The third is to carry out purposeful, planned, flexible overseas academic visits, academic exchanges, sabbatical leave, and academic visit short-term funding scheme, to enhance China's academic mainstream value penetration. The fourth is to actively participate in and host important influential international academic conference so as to improve think tank researchers' communication ability and exchange level.

### 3.3 Accelerating Think Tank Conversion Speed

The ultimate goal of think tank is to directly serve government's major decisions by achievements conversion, promote economic and social development, and enhance core competitiveness and the hard and soft power of the country. Research achievements conversion rate of Japanese think tank is higher, this is because: First, most of its research subjects are from the directivity subject of government and enterprises, which are problems urgent needed to solve, the pertinence of research is high, it's easy to convert; Second, even if the topic is selected by think tank itself, because of the strong timeliness and forward-looking, commercial value is high, the results are often sold as special "commodity" to government or enterprise; Third, transformation mechanisms are perfect, the platform network are all ready, evaluation system and evaluation mechanism are completed. Fourth, attaching great importance to the propaganda and promotion of achievements. Japanese think tank usually publishes periodicals, holds seminar, participates in communication, goes in radio, television and network, etc, to achieve the effective docking between think tank and social.

Although China's humanities and social science research achievements conversion has had a good start, few results are really converted into policy text and advice. The reasons laid in both institutional arrangement and research institute, researchers themselves. To make

good think tank products of China convert into country much-needed countermeasures in time, in addition to referring the experiences of Japan, we can set about from the following aspects: The first is to actively support think tank research institutions and local government cooperate to form consulting research institutes, devoted to major theoretical and practical problem studies. Encouraging specialists and scholars directly to participate in government decision-making through social investigation, policy-making consulting, legislative research, public opinion research, future prediction, submit proposals of National People's Congress and the Chinese people's political consultative conference (CPPCC). The second is to publish one or two influential continuity minister internal publication and policy brief, timely submitting point-to-point countermeasures and social dynamics analysis to the central and local governments, giving full play to "think tank" and "talent pool", realizing different professional disciplines in the internal humanities and social sciences and social integration development and cooperation, converting the latest research achievements into policy text and solutions to problems for national and local formulating new measures and coming up with new ways. The third is to use the integration of academic and business model innovation as the carrier, team up with local governments and social organizations, cooperatively research important practical issue in the development of cultural industry, actively explore effective ways to accelerate the reform of cultural system mechanism innovation, speed up the construction of public cultural service system, accelerate the development of cultural industry, strengthen the guide to the cultural products creative production, promote the overall prosperity of cultural undertakings and rapid development of cultural industries.

### 3.4 Actively Exploring Think Tank Service Market

Whether service role of think tank can be efficient, it must rely on the market demand. In conclusion, Japanese think tank has a strong sense of market, degree of marketization is high. The first is that Japanese think tank always takes the government as important service object, often thinks for the government, and the proposed research project and topic keep coordination and consistency with the government's working. Second, the Japanese government also makes full use of the "extended mind", pays attention to transferring those social, mass, service work to the relevant think tank to do, government decision-making consultation truly realizes socialization and industrialization. The third is that think tank has always been on the market need, through the provision of targeted social services, confirming new direction, strengthening self-development and market competition ability, constantly improving the consulting level, actively widening the scope of business, actively participating in market competition at home and abroad. The forth is to

constantly improve think tank's reputation and influence by providing high quality social service, and it is good at changing the subject going out for market into the customer going in the door for service.

Currently, China is in the period of economic and social transformation, some governance is being fumbled in the field of market economy. Due to the particularity of think tank services fields and objects, and the defect of the system innovation, think tank market has not been truly formed in China, many of them are passive, mandatory and entrusted services, and have few important influence results. To reverse the situation, what can be done in the following, first, to formulate think tank product evaluation system, to set up market operation rules, truly realizing the commercialization of the think tank products. Second, to create a good social environment, to help workers set up the problem consciousness and quality consciousness, fully understand from the thought and theory height that do project is actually engaged in a "special" commodity production, quality is the lifeline of a think tank. Third, to reform the evaluation methods of how social service level function on administered construction, personnel training, project investment, not only attach great importance to the academic value of achievement, but also notice the market value of the transformation, adoption and popularity of results. Fourth, to set up evaluation mechanism of social service level joint by the licenser, the service object, intermediary institutions and experts group, perfecting publicity system of social service level evaluation results.

## CONCLUSION

In today's world, think tank has become not only important force to affect government decision-making, promote economic and social development, and improve the international influence, but also an important part of the country's "soft power". The reason why postwar Japan has become a world economic power in a few decades' development, is undoubtedly that the Japanese government always depends on intelligence support of think tank, which is also one of the main reasons for the rapid development of the Japanese think tank. At present, China is in the important opportunity when many things can be well worth doing, also in the critical period of social transformation, unexpected events of foreign and domestic is frequent, contradiction is unusually sharp complex, it needs large think tank workers with international vision and forward-looking thinking to

contribute scholar wisdoms, provide theoretical support, policy advice and decision-making reference for the party and the government decision-making. As long as we shoulder the historical responsibility, adhere to the "problem oriented", closely watch at the international and domestic development trend, widely use the experience of think tank development including Japanese, high-end new-type think tank development in our China will enter a "sound and rapid" development phase, it will make new greater contributions for having built a well-off society in an all-round way and realizing the Chinese dream of great Renaissance of the Chinese nation.

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