

The Rise of China's New-Type Think Tanks and the Internationalization of the State

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ABSTRACT

China's government is promoting new-type think tanks. These are often treated with scepticism by Western observers, due to their lack of independence from government and operation within a controlled intellectual environment. In this article, I heed recent calls by scholars to analyze think tanks, and how they develop, in their particular national political contexts. In China's case, this is a powerful one-party state undergoing internationalization: usually understood as increased foreign exchanges, engagement with international institutions, and rising influence globally. In contrast, I view internationalization as the reorganizing of China's state institutions and social structure in order to integrate with the global capitalist system. Through these processes, China's policymaking community is converging with a powerful transnational class aligned with global capitalist interests. Think tanks are implicated in these processes, and are therefore involved in shaping capitalist class dynamics within China. This is a cause for concern and debate among policy makers, regarding "civil" think tanks in particular, which are non-governmental and privately funded. Drawing on interviews with Chinese think-tank scholars, and examining policy debates on the development of think tanks in Chinese academic and policy journals, I argue that the sphere of think tanks has become an important site of political contestation concerning China's internationalization and the impact of class power on national policy making. Western observers, too often viewing independence as the key criterion for evaluating China's think tanks, miss the significance of these debates. The relations between think tanks and government institutions must be understood in this political context.

KEYWORDS: China, think tanks, policy making, internationalization of the state, globalization, technocracy

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5509/201891127>

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* Many thanks to Mark Laffey, Gao Yuning, Wang Qizhen, the special issue guest editors Patrick Köllner and Zhu Xufeng, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

Introduction

China's think tanks have experienced a boom in recent years. Their number, organizational types, sources of funds, and overall prominence in policy making have increased dramatically. The central government plans to identify and approve fifty to a hundred "new-type" think tanks by 2020, which will receive special recognition by the Party Central Committee. Their role is to serve the government by "promoting scientific and democratic decision making, promoting modernization of the country's governing system and ability, as well as strengthening China's soft power."¹ Many Western observers are sceptical of Chinese think tanks, which are typically criticized for their lack of independence from government and the fact that they operate within a controlled intellectual environment. The assumption underlying such statements is that think tanks which are more "independent"—usually a reference to private funding—will better be able to represent the interests of society against the state. In this article, I advocate that China's think tanks should be taken seriously on their own terms. I address the following questions: Why is the Chinese government promoting new-type think tanks? And how is their development, and the role they play in policy making, being shaped by the social and political context in which they are situated?

This is, in part, a response to the need—now well-recognized by think-tank scholars—to examine the national political cultures within which think tanks operate. This is not simply to address the fact of China being a one-party state, the usual starting point for analysis. Perhaps paradoxically, the national political context is intricately bound up with China's integration into the global capitalist system. Thus, the central government's promotion of think tanks forms part of the process by which China is becoming increasingly globally interconnected. Widely referred to by scholars as China's "internationalization," this is usually understood in terms of increased international exchanges, promoting China's image on the world stage, strengthening China's voice in global policy making, and engagement with foreign and international institutions.² I build on these accounts to examine the class implications of China's internationalization. As China's policy advisors merge with the transnational class of experts and technocrats by which the world capitalist order is governed and managed, powerful groups within China have emerged which are allied to international capital. Chinese academics and policy makers well recognize the impact of this on the development of think tanks, and the issue has become a prominent topic of

¹ Xinhua, "Xi calls for new type of think tanks," *Xinhuanet*, 27 October 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-10/27/c_133746282.htm.

² For example, Silvia Menegazzi, *Rethinking Think Tanks in Contemporary China* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

debate. New-type think tanks have thus become, I argue, sites of political contestation concerning the influence of capital, both domestic and global, on China's state apparatus. Their development, including their relationship to government institutions, is being shaped through these contested processes.

English-language scholarship on Chinese think tanks has burgeoned in recent years. Recent studies research think tanks in particular sectors,³ or the policy communities which emerged around certain prominent issues or debates.⁴ Other studies examine individual think tanks, documenting their development over time, or key moments in their history.⁵ A growing body of English-language scholarship by Chinese scholars largely examines institutional issues, different organizational types and strategies, and the structural and personnel changes taking place as China's think tanks rise in stature and influence.⁶

Scholars of think tanks, sensitive to their Anglo-American origins while cognizant of their burgeoning internationally since the 1990s, recognize the need to analyze their particular national political and cultural contexts.⁷ To this end, recent work has deployed the theoretical perspectives of global assemblages,⁸ and knowledge regimes.⁹ This latter approach uses typologies to identify different types of regime, examining the organizational and institutional machinery by which ideas are produced, their changes over time, and how these relate to the respective national political economies more broadly. The approach has been applied to China to escape the Anglo-American bias that previously affected much of the scholarship.¹⁰ Silvia Menegazzi's account, in particular, combines a knowledge regimes perspective

³ Pascal Abb, "China's Foreign Policy Think Tanks: Institutional Evolution and Changing Roles," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 93 (2015): 531–553.

⁴ Erica S. Downs, "The Chinese Energy Security Debate," *The China Quarterly* 177 (2004): 21–41; Jost Wübbecke, "China's Climate Change Expert Community—Principles, Mechanisms and Influence," *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 82 (2013): 712–731.

⁵ Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, "Regulating Intellectual Life in China: The Case of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences," *The China Quarterly* 189 (2007): 83–99; Ngeow Chow Bing, "From Translation House to Think Tank: The Changing Role of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Compilation and Translation Bureau," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 93 (2015): 554–572.

⁶ Xufeng Zhu and Xue Lan, "Think Tanks in Transitional China," *Public Administration and Development* 27, no. 5 (2007): 452–464; Xufeng Zhu, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013); Cheng Li, *The Power of Ideas: The Rising Influence of Thinkers and Think Tanks in China* (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing, 2017).

⁷ Diane Stone, Andrew Denham, and Mark Garnett, eds., *Think Tanks Across Nations: A Comparative Approach* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

⁸ Angel Aedo, "Cultures of Expertise and Technologies of Government: The Emergence of Think Tanks in Chile," *Critique of Anthropology* 36, no. 2 (2016): 145–167.

⁹ John L. Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Karthik Nachiappan, "Think Tanks and the Knowledge-Policy Nexus in China," *Policy and Society* 32 (2013): 255–265; Menegazzi, *Rethinking Think Tanks*.

with Diane Stone's concept of the *global agora* to analyze how Chinese think tanks function in the sphere of transnational policy making.¹¹

The account presented here builds on existing scholarship in two ways. First, rather than providing an institutional or historical analysis, I heed Diane Stone's call to examine the "sources of power of these organizations, and how they garner and wield societal and policy influence."¹² Second, since I am concerned with the development of think tanks within the context of China's integration with global capitalism, I deploy the theoretical perspective of the internationalization of the state, drawing the analytical focus towards how China's new-type think tanks are implicated within emerging constellations of capitalist class power operating both within and beyond the nation-state.

While researching this article, I spent three years as a postdoctoral researcher at a leading think tank in Beijing, where I gained on-the-ground insights into the world of Chinese policy making. I held numerous discussions with think-tank scholars and policy makers, both within my home institution, and in other prominent Chinese research institutions. These discussions included informal conversations with colleagues, as well as more formal, semi-structured interviews, which I conducted with scholars at university think tanks and government research institutions. Some interviewees' names and institutions are withheld by mutual agreement to maintain confidentiality.

The article is organized into six parts. First, I discuss how China's new-type think tanks are often treated with scepticism in Anglo-American media. This derives from traditional assumptions about think tanks within liberal democracies, and simplified conceptions about policy making in China's "authoritarian" state. Challenging these underlying assumptions opens up space for more nuanced analysis of how Chinese think tanks operate. Second, I discuss how Chinese scholars and policy makers explain the purpose and role of new-type think tanks, and how traditional conceptions of think tanks are being re-evaluated for the Chinese context, in particular the notion of independence. Third, I introduce the theoretical concept of the internationalization of the state, focusing on issues pertaining to the restructuring of society and state institutions, and the transformation of class dynamics, as the nation-state accommodates to the requirements of the world capitalist economy. This provides important insights into the social and political environment in which China's think tanks operate. Fourth, I discuss how the field of Chinese policy making has been internationalized throughout the reform period, aligning with the requirements of global capitalism through both social and discursive transformations. Fifth, rather than

¹¹ Diane Stone, *Knowledge Actors and Transnational Governance: The Private-Public Policy Nexus in the Global Agora* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹² Stone, *Knowledge Actors*, 64.

focusing on how “internationalized” policy makers are promoting China’s interests on the world stage, I instead examine how new-type think tanks are a means for policy makers to further integrate with the transnational technocratic class, the *global technocracy*, which oversees how the world economy is governed and managed. Think tanks are therefore implicated in the strengthening of capitalist class dynamics within China. Sixth, I examine how this issue is being debated within China, regarding civil think tanks in particular, which are privately funded. I argue that the sphere of think tanks is an important site of political contestation concerning China’s internationalization and the impact of class power on national policy making. In a brief conclusion, I raise a number of questions which warrant further study.

China’s Think-Tank Conundrum

It appears paradoxical that China’s central government is promoting think tanks while re-exerting ideological discipline within the Party, and within research institutes.¹³ This contradicts the principle of free and public exchange of ideas generally considered necessary for think tanks to flourish. Unsurprisingly, recent accounts by journalists and pundits are sceptical of Chinese think tanks. A typical example appeared in *The Economist*:

[T]ruly independent think-tanks are not something the Communist Party really wants—they are a feature of civil society as liberal democracies define it, not as the party defines it ... Those “think-tanks” with the most influence in China do not write for the public but for a much smaller audience ... They are trusted instruments of the Communist Party and the state ... The biggest danger of this emperor-advisor relationship is that it rewards advisors who tell the emperor what they already think[.]¹⁴

This account rests on two problematic sets of assumptions. The first is a traditional understanding of what think tanks should be, derived from their Anglo-American origins: independent from government, operating within a free marketplace of ideas, and embedded within civil society.¹⁵ The second is an understanding of the Chinese party-state as a closed, unitary entity from which policy decisions emanate top-down. China’s think tanks are thus

¹³ Shannon Tiezzi, “Top Chinese Think-tank Accused of ‘Collusion’ with ‘Foreign Forces’: Criticisms of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Are Part of Xi Jinping’s New Emphasis on Ideological Purity,” *The Diplomat*, 18 June 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/top-chinese-think-tank-accused-of-collusion-with-foreign-forces/>.

¹⁴ *The Economist*, “The Brains of the Party,” 10 March 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/analects/2014/03/chinese-politics?fsrc=rss>.

¹⁵ For example, R. Kent Weaver, “The Changing World of Think Tanks,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 3 (1989): 563–578; James A. Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

portrayed in somewhat orientalist terms as authoritarian, pseudo *others* against an ideal type represented by liberal democracies. This obviates rigorous analysis of how they actually operate.¹⁶ Once both sets of assumptions are critiqued, a more nuanced account becomes possible.

First, according to Thomas Medvetz in his study of think tanks in the US, think tanks must endeavour to foster political influence, secure funding, garner publicity, and maintain a creditable scholarly reputation. The requirement to cater to all four at once “powerfully limit[s] think tanks capacity to challenge the unspoken premises of the policy debate, to ask original questions, and to offer policy prescriptions that run counter to the interests of financial donors, politicians, or media institutions.”¹⁷ Indeed, some think tanks deliberately perpetuate the discourse of independence while cultivating political connections behind the scenes.¹⁸ RAND, for example, a US government-backed defence think tank, was transformed into a non-profit corporation to disguise its close connections with the Air Force.¹⁹ Ethnographical research on the formation of British healthcare policy shows how think tanks worked backstage to build ties with government ministers and corporate donors not only to get their ideas heard, but to establish what ideas would be palatable to government officials. The healthcare debate thus took place largely behind closed doors without public consultation.²⁰ Such studies demonstrate that the supposed free marketplace of ideas is constrained by the political topography of the day even in Anglo-American democracies, while the notion of think tanks as located within civil society and representing the interests of the public, as opposed to the state, is ambiguous at best.

Second, while this account implies a unitary state with decisions emanating from above, studies of the mechanisms of Chinese policy making demonstrate that, in fact, it involves processes of contestation taking place both inside and outside the state apparatus. The fragmented authoritarianism model, for example, emphasizes the importance of negotiations and bargaining between competing bureaucracies and localities within the government structure. This is to achieve a centralized set of policy guidelines which are then implemented in various ways by different branches and regions.²¹ Zhu

¹⁶ Wang Shaoguang makes a similar point, see “Changing Models of China’s Policy Agenda Setting,” *Modern China* 34, no. 1 (2008): 81–82.

¹⁷ Thomas Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7.

¹⁸ Diane Stone, “Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think Tanks? Three Myths Regarding Policy Analysis Institutes,” *Public Administration* 85, no. 2 (2007): 260–261.

¹⁹ Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The Rand Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2009), 31.

²⁰ Sara E. Shaw et al., “The View From Nowhere? How Think Tanks Work to Shape Health Policy,” *Critical Policy Studies* 9, no. 1 (2015): 58–77.

²¹ Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Andrew Mertha, “Fragmented

Xufeng's work demonstrates how regional government think tanks and private policy entrepreneurs, both of which have limited access to the central institutions of power, have managed to influence national policy making at the highest levels by capturing media attention and mobilizing public support.²² Jessica Teets' model of consultative authoritarianism shows how state institutions strategically collaborate with civil society organizations, often able to deploy their own sources of funding, in order to solve various social problems.²³ These analyses demonstrate that there is scope for think tanks to have a meaningful role in policy making, both inside and outside government institutions. Why, then, are China's leaders promoting think tanks now, and what role will they play?

China's New-Type Think Tanks

Scholars within regular government research institutions are skilled at gathering data and drafting political speeches, but not trained at sophisticated interpretation or proposing new strategies.²⁴ Instead, the bureaucracy was designed with conformity in mind. Government researchers are unwilling to risk losing promotion opportunities by suggesting unconventional ideas, while rigid controls on staff numbers obstruct efforts to bring in new recruits with fresh ideas.²⁵ New ideas are "stovepiped," passed upwards to superiors within institutions, rather than exchanged for debate with scholars outside.²⁶ This insularity is conducive to institutional conflict, with different ministries competing for influence and central budget funds instead of offering disinterested policy advice.²⁷ With China's growing role in world affairs, and the blurring of domestic and international policy boundaries requiring more complex forms of analysis, this system is no longer considered adequate.²⁸ Officials have expressed frustration that in international deliberations, particularly with the US, Chinese negotiators are repeatedly outwitted by their counterparts with better trained advisers.²⁹

Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process," *The China Quarterly* 200 (2009): 995–1012.

²² Xufeng Zhu, "Strategy of Chinese Policy Entrepreneurs in the Third Sector: Challenges of 'Technical Infeasibility,'" *Policy Sciences* 41 (2008): 315–334; "Government Advisors or Public Advocates? Roles of Think Tanks in China from the Perspective of Regional Variations," *The China Quarterly* 207 (2011): 668–686.

²³ Jessica C. Teets, "Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China," *The China Quarterly* 213 (2013): 19–38.

²⁴ Think-tank scholar B, interview by author, Beijing, September 2015.

²⁵ Official in government research institute, interview by author, Beijing, April 2016.

²⁶ Xin Hua, Center for EU Studies at the Shanghai International Studies University, interview by author, 9 May 2016.

²⁷ Think-tank scholar B, interview by author, Beijing, January 2015.

²⁸ Xin, interview by author, Shanghai, 9 May 2016.

²⁹ Think-tank scholar D, interview by author, Beijing, May 2016.

China's new-type think tanks are to consist of full-time, professional, specialized researchers, in order to provide a more sophisticated community of experts. Broadly speaking, there are three main types. Official think tanks are government institutions, semi-official think tanks are set up by government institutions and managed by state-approved personnel, while civil think tanks are non-governmental and mostly privately funded.³⁰ There is no fixed model, however. University think tanks, for example, are sometimes called "civil" despite being housed within larger official institutions, and are funded by a mixture of private endowments, government funds, and contributions from the host university's foundation. The list of the first twenty-five nationally approved new-type think tanks was released in December 2015.³¹ These are to be affiliated to the Central Propaganda Department, through which their uncensored reports will be transmitted directly to the top leadership, receiving special priority within the relevant bureaus. This is designed to diversify and accelerate the channels of expertise into central policy making.

Such think tanks cannot be dismissed due to their institutional connections to government. As James McGann and Kent Weaver acknowledge, "in countries where sponsorship by a government ministry is a legal necessity for a think tank to exist, excluding organizations with an organizational link to government would convey the misleading impression that those regions host no think tanks at all."³² Indeed, the growing importance of Chinese think tanks is internationally recognized, with China listed as having 435 think tanks—the second-highest number in the world—in the reputable Global Go To Think Tank Index.³³ As such, China's think-tank scholars have been making efforts to re-evaluate the term "independence." Zhu Xufeng argues that think tanks should be regarded as independent if they constitute an "independent legal personality" which determines that they work to serve the public interest, rather than a parent company—whether a government institution or a private corporation.³⁴ Hu Angang, head of the Institute for Contemporary China Studies (ICCS) at Tsinghua University, one of the first twenty-five national new-type think tanks, proposes that independence be determined by three criteria: autonomy in selecting topics of research,

³⁰ I include official think tanks since the national new-type think tanks recognized by the Party Central Committee include government research institutions. Zhu Xufeng recognizes only semi-official and non-governmental types, see *The Rise*, 6.

³¹ China Development Institute, "National High-Level Think-Tank Pilot Project," accessed 16 March 2016, <http://en.cdi.org.cn/component/k2/item/143-national-high-level-think-tank-pilot-project>.

³² James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver, "Think Tanks and Civil Societies in a Time of Change," in *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, eds. McGann and Weaver (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 4.

³³ James G. McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," CSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports, 12, (2017), http://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/12, 27.

³⁴ Zhu, *The Rise*, 5, 17–18.

autonomy in conducting research, and the ability to publish independently.³⁵ Under the current system, a list of over one hundred “commissioned topics” (*weituo keti*) is compiled from various government bureaus which think tanks have discretion to choose from. Research on commissioned topics cannot be published openly without permission, but think tanks can pursue their own research separately.³⁶

Hu argues that within Chinese political culture the interests of the government and the public are not considered separate as in liberal democracies, therefore the conceptual problem of think tanks serving the government rather than civil society does not arise.³⁷ A number of think-tank scholars I interviewed stated that the confidentiality of exchanges between scholars and officials enables criticisms to be made freely. According to one interviewee, Chinese leaders have privately urged think tanks to be forthright in their criticisms for the good of the Party—criticisms that could not be made openly.³⁸ Another high-profile scholar told of how he had entreated top leaders to rein in corruption within the Politburo. While subsequent events appear to show these recommendations were heeded, had they been made openly they would have been regarded as a personal attack on the leadership, and publicly discredited.³⁹

The Internationalization of the State

Analyzing think tanks in their national context is therefore necessary. Yet, in today's integrated world it no longer makes sense to analyze policy making as contained within national borders.⁴⁰ Scholars have long examined how policies are transferred, or diffused, between nation-states, through processes of convergence or learning, for example.⁴¹ Many such studies, however, are vulnerable to the critique of “methodological nationalism,” comparing nation-states as bounded, sovereign units.⁴² Other analyses examine how

³⁵ Hu Angang, interview by author, Beijing, 30 April 2016.

³⁶ The ICCS accepted commissioned topics from the National Development and Reform Commission for their work on the Twelfth and Thirteenth Five-Year Plans, see Hu Angang, Jiang Jiaying, and Yan Yilong, “Guojia wunian guihua juece zhong de zhiku juece yanjiu – yi Tsinghua Daxue Guoqing Yanjiuyuan canyu guojia wunian guihua bianzhi weili” [Think tanks and China's five-year plans: a case study of the Institute for Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University], *Jingji shehui tizhi bijiao* 6, no. 188 (2016): 65.

³⁷ Hu, interview by author, Beijing, 30 April 2016.

³⁸ Think-tank scholar B, interview by author, Beijing, September 2015.

³⁹ Think-tank scholar A, interview by author, Beijing, April 2016.

⁴⁰ John Agnew, “The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory,” *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1994): 3–80.

⁴¹ For an overview, see Diane Stone, “Transfer and Translation of Policy,” *Policy Studies* 33, no. 6 (2012): 483–499. On China specifically, see Yanzhe Zhang and David Marsh, “Learning By Doing: The Case of Administrative Policy Transfer in China,” *Policy Studies* 37, no. 1 (2016): 35–52.

⁴² Stone, “Transfer,” 490.

multiple institutions, at both national and international levels, operate across borders to form epistemic communities, or knowledge networks, to influence global policy.⁴³ Think tanks are adept operators in this respect, with “their multiplicity of tailored narratives and capacity to adapt quickly in different argumentative and institutional fields.”⁴⁴ China’s leaders’ promotion of think tanks as part of their international strategy is therefore unsurprising.

The field of transnational policy making is not neutral, however. As institutions ally and compete to determine which kinds of knowledge become hegemonic, “ideas backed with power ... are most likely to be influential.”⁴⁵ In a capitalist world economy, policy ideas which achieve dominance tend to reflect the requirements of global capital.⁴⁶ A body of scholarship of particular insight here highlights how “globalization” is constituted not just at the global, or transnational level, but also by multiple processes “oriented towards global systems and agendas” occurring deep within nation-states themselves.⁴⁷ This includes forms of institutional, social, and spatial restructuring as the state, “at once the subject and the object of the globalization process,” transforms to accommodate to the requirements of international capital.⁴⁸

As recounted by Robert Cox, first, a consensus is formed between nation-states concerning the requirements of the world economy. This takes place “within a common ideological framework (i.e., common criteria of interpretation of economic events and common goals anchored in the idea of an open world economy).”⁴⁹ Participation is hierarchically structured, with the US dominating in recent decades by the successful promotion of an ideology grounded in neoclassical economics.⁵⁰ In the under-represented nations, implementation is made possible “by people who have been socialized to the norms of the consensus”—that is, by local staff who likely graduated from the universities of advanced capitalist countries, or held

⁴³ Peter M. Haas, “Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1–35; Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, “Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (1992): 173–205.

⁴⁴ Stone, *Knowledge Actors*, 63.

⁴⁵ Thomas J. Biersteker, “The ‘Triumph’ of Liberal Economic Ideas in the Developing World,” in *Global Change, Regional Response: The New International Context of Development*, ed. Barbara Stallings (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 186.

⁴⁶ Timothy J. Sinclair, “Reinventing Authority: Embedded Knowledge Networks and the New Global Finance,” *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 18 (2000): 487–502.

⁴⁷ Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

⁴⁸ Neil Brenner, “Global, Fragmented, Hierarchical: Henri Lefebvre’s Geographies of Globalization,” *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1997): 156. See also P.G. Cerny, “Paradoxes of the Competition State: The Dynamics of Political Globalization,” *Government and Opposition* 32 (1997): 251–274.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 260.

⁵⁰ Inderjeet Parmar, “American Foundations and the Development of International Knowledge Networks,” *Global Networks* 2, no. 1 (2002): 13–30.

posts at major international financial institutions.⁵¹ This international cohort, while containing many internal conflicts—not least differing national loyalties—is allied in its commitment to securing the needs of international capital.⁵² This amounts to a *global technocracy*: a powerful class of managers and experts whose role is to negotiate and facilitate the policies of the global ideological consensus. This technocracy, significantly, is not subject to democratic accountability. Rather, these “[l]ocal technocratic elites ... bypass the formal channels of government and other social institutions subject to popular influence.”⁵³

At the national level, the state itself, consisting of an ensemble of institutions, is conceived as a structural apparatus which mediates how social forces within the nation-state interact and compete for control of government institutions. As such, it is “shot through with many class antagonisms and struggles.”⁵⁴ A state which is *internationalizing*, in this perspective, is one where those class forces aligned with the interests of international capital have achieved dominance. The internal structures and institutions of states are then adjusted “so that each can best transform the global consensus into national policy and practice.”⁵⁵ Authority is delegated to both subnational and supranational levels for the purposes of promoting processes of capital accumulation.⁵⁶

The internationalization of the Chinese state thus concerns the transformation of China's institutional, spatial, and social structure to accommodate the needs of the global capitalist economy. This includes regulating finance and taxation, determining property rights, producing a land market and an army of mobile, low-cost workers, and inculcating an ideology conducive to maintaining a stable, compliant population while these social upheavals take place.⁵⁷ These processes, always resisted, are shaped by ongoing contestations within state institutions, and through alliances with—or opposition from—social forces outside the state apparatus. This has been witnessed in China through the many cases of activism and protest around workers' rights and rural land expropriations, for example.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Cox, *Production*, 260.

⁵² Jim Glassman, “State Power Beyond the ‘Territorial Trap’: The Internationalization of the State,” *Political Geography* 18 (1999): 669–696.

⁵³ Sol Picciotto, “International Transformation of the Capitalist State,” *Antipode* 43, no. 1 (2011): 89.

⁵⁴ Bob Jessop, “Globalization and the National State,” in *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered*, eds. Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 193.

⁵⁵ Cox, *Production*, 254.

⁵⁶ Leo Panitch, “Rethinking the Role of the State,” in *Globalization: Critical Reflections*, ed. James H. Mittelman (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 83–113; Paul Cammack, “What the World Bank Means By Poverty Reduction, and Why It Matters,” *New Political Economy* 9, no. 2 (2004): 189–211.

⁵⁷ Robin Murray, “The Internationalization of Capital and the Nation State,” *New Left Review* 67 (1971): 88–92.

⁵⁸ Zhongjin Li, Eli Friedman, and Hao Ren, eds. *China's Workers on Strike: Narratives of Worker Resistance* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016); Kathy Le Mons Walker, “‘Gangster Capitalism’ and Peasant Protest in China: The Last Twenty Years,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006): 1–33.

It is also evident in disagreements over policy making, such as the debates concerning the privatization of rural land, which remains under collective ownership.⁵⁹ This issue is highly controversial in China, where privatization is viewed by many as a licence for corporations to ride roughshod over peasant property rights. Importantly, these contestations are not nationally contained, the designs of global capital on China's rural land being a case in point.⁶⁰ The second half of this article examines how China's internationalization is shaping the development of think tanks.

The Internationalization of Chinese Policy Making

Chinese policy making has been internationalizing throughout the reform period via a set of distinct, mutually reinforcing social and political transformations. These occurred in part due to influence and funding—encouraged by Zhao Ziyang and other reformist leaders—from the IMF and the World Bank, as well as other overseas organizations such as the Ford Foundation and various American universities, which provided training programs, workshops and seminars, joint research projects with foreign economists, and trips overseas, including for the undertaking of PhDs at Western universities.⁶¹

First, the number of scholars studying abroad, particularly in the US, rose dramatically. The Chinese government expended efforts to encourage their return following their studies.⁶² Overseas PhDs were considered preferable by many employers, and scholars were attracted back by the greater prestige and higher salaries. According to the Ministry of Education, from 1978 to 2007, 1.21 million students and scholars studied abroad, of whom 319,700 returned.⁶³ They were posted to top institutions, including leading universities in Beijing, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Rural Policy Research Office, the Ministry of Finance, and the Bank of China. Zhao Ziyang and others drew on these communities of Westernized experts to promote China's opening to the global economy, overcoming voices of opposition within the state bureaucracy.⁶⁴ While the thinking among these returnee academics was

⁵⁹ Jane Hayward, "Beyond the Ownership Question: Who Will Till the Land? The New Debate on China's Agricultural Production," *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 523–545.

⁶⁰ Hayward, "Beyond," 529.

⁶¹ Harold K. Jacobson and Michel Oksenberg, *China's Participation in the IMF, The World Bank, and GATT: Toward A Global Economic Order* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 150–151. On the role of Western economists in China's reforms, see Julian Gewirtz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁶² David Zweig, Chen Changgui, and Stanley Rosen, "Globalization and Transnational Human Capital: Overseas and Returnee Scholars to China," *The China Quarterly* 179 (2004): 735–757.

⁶³ Huiyao Wang, David Zweig, and Xiaohua Lin, "Returnee Entrepreneurs: Impact on China's Globalization Process," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 70 (2011): 414.

⁶⁴ Jacobson and Oksenberg, *China's Participation*, 150–151.

not monolithic, one significant development was an intellectual uncoupling of foreign trade from the concept of exploitation, and a positive reassessment of Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage compatible with the ideologies underpinning globalization.⁶⁵

Second, fundamental changes occurred in official state policy discourse, such that it became compatible with the neoclassical or neoliberal discourses characteristic of the global ideological consensus. This included a rejection since the 1980s not just of the Marxist theories of class struggle, but of the language of "class" itself, in favour of the Weberian discourse of "social strata." This was a strategy to inoculate against fledgling working-class movements just as an army of migrant workers was emerging. Reminiscent of the disappearance of class analysis from academia in 1980s Britain and America, China's working class was rendered "inarticulate," facilitating the political conditions for its subordination to the interests of global capital, which increasingly dominated the landscape.⁶⁶

Third, the Chinese government embraced scientific expertise and sought to recruit technocrats into the bureaucracy at all levels.⁶⁷ This was a deliberate strategy following the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution to produce a politically stable environment of managers and problem solvers conducive to economic development. It was accompanied by a turn towards scientific analysis in policy making, presaged by Deng Xiaoping's emphasis on "seeking truth from facts" and later enshrined in the "scientific development concept" under Hu Jintao. Along with the expulsion of class, this operated to depoliticize—and remove all traces of Marxism from—Chinese policy discourse. The parallels with the turn to scientific expertise in the US from the 1950s are striking.⁶⁸ Those efforts were led by the RAND Corporation, which was established in the US during the Cold War to produce theories and ideas to combat, and undermine, Marxism and socialist politics more generally.⁶⁹

Fourth, a close alliance formed between this new technocratic class and an emerging entrepreneurial class,⁷⁰ forming "a crooked fusion of marketization and bureaucratization" oriented towards capital, particularly international capital.⁷¹ These entrepreneurs, many of whom are also overseas-

⁶⁵ Shu-yun Ma, "Recent Changes in China's Pure Trade Theory," *The China Quarterly* 106 (1986): 291–305.

⁶⁶ Pun Ngai and Chris King-Chi Chan, "The Subsumption of Class Discourse in China," *Boundary* 235, no. 2 (2008): 75–91.

⁶⁷ Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

⁶⁸ Robert E. Lane, "The Decline of Politics and Ideology in a Knowledgeable Society," *American Sociological Review* 31, no. 5 (1966): 649–662.

⁶⁹ Abella, *Soldiers*, 49.

⁷⁰ Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 248–259.

⁷¹ Lin Chun, "The Language of Class in China," *Socialist Register* 51 (2015): 32.

trained returnees,⁷² have been asserting their political interests by funding think tanks, and taking managerial roles within them. The China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE), for example, another of the first twenty-five national new-type think tanks, is a membership organization counting many leading entrepreneurs among its members, including from multinational companies, and has several top CEOs as vice chairs.⁷³ It is funded largely from their membership fees and donations.⁷⁴

China Joins the Global Technocracy

The new-type think tanks which have emerged in this internationalized policymaking field play an important role in transmitting the global ideological consensus into Chinese policy circles, aligning China's internal policy making with its requirements, while adapting it for China's national conditions. The work undertaken by Hu Angang and scholars at the ICCS, for example, contribute to these processes. Hu conducted postdoctoral research at the Department of Economics at Yale in 1991, and at the Centre for International Studies at MIT in 1998. He regularly recruits scholars for the ICCS with graduate training from leading UK or US institutions. These scholars produce reports for China's top leaders summarizing and explaining the publications of major international institutions such as the World Bank and the UNPD, and interpreting their significance for China. As high-level consultants in the drafting of China's national Five-Year Plans, they then seek to incorporate and adapt the principles contained in these international publications into working policies within China.⁷⁵

Hu regards promoting internationally recognized development standards within China as part of his role. In 2009, the ICCS teamed up with Brookings to push for an agreement between US and Chinese leaders on climate change at the Copenhagen summit. The ICCS compiled an internal report attempting to persuade China's leaders that the new Obama administration was sincere in its intentions to cooperate, and calling on them to heed their recent Olympic slogan, "one world, one dream," but the endeavour was not successful.⁷⁶ More recent work has involved transmitting to China's leadership the significance of the core criteria of the Human Development Index. Although the ICCS does not directly seek funding from international

⁷² Wang, Zweig, Lin, "Returnee Entrepreneurs," 413–431.

⁷³ Li, "China's New Think Tanks: Where Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Scholars Interact," in *The Power*, 195–231.

⁷⁴ Zhu, *The Rise*, 72–73.

⁷⁵ Hu, Jiang and Yan, "Guojia," 62–71.

⁷⁶ Hu Angang, "Zhongmei xuyao lüshe fazhan, lüshe hezuo, lüshe geming" [China and the US need green development, green cooperation, green revolution], *Guoqing baogao*, Institute for Contemporary China Studies, 5, no. 825, 5 March 2009.

organizations, Hu believes his institute benefits both through working with them on collaborative projects, and from having access to their databases and reports free of charge, particularly those of the World Bank, the WTO, and the WHO, which the ICCS draws on regularly in producing its own reports. Hu also routinely gives reports and presentations on Chinese policy matters to conferences and high-level meetings at international institutions, and understands his think tank as a two-way “bridge” between China and those involved in global policy making.⁷⁷

Another prominent example of how Chinese policy makers are joining the global technocracy is the career trajectory of economist Justin Yifu Lin. Lin is a professor at Peking University, and one of the vice chairs of the CCIEE. He received his PhD from University of Chicago, renowned for its promotion of neoclassical economics. He played an important role in the WTO debates, persuading more conservative leaders of the benefits of opening China's domestic economy to international market competition.⁷⁸ He was chief economist and senior vice president of the World Bank from 2008 to 2011. He was a founding faculty member in 1994 of the influential think tank China Center for Economic Research (CCER) at Peking University, where he helped to redesign the economics curriculum to be “more in line with the American model, particularly the ‘Chicago model.’”⁷⁹ In 2008 the CCER became the National School of Development (NSD). In 2013 it was listed in the top five think tanks in the category of “highest professional influence” in the national rankings compiled by the Think Tank Research Center of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the first of its kind in China.⁸⁰ In 2015, the NSD was named one of China's national new-type think tanks. According to the NSD's website, it seeks to provide research for “China's national development and [the] new global order.”⁸¹ Within the NSD, Lin heads the Center for New Structural Economics (CNSE). This promotes a new framework for economic development rooted in neoclassical economics and centred on market-led growth.⁸² The center works in cooperation with several major international institutions, including the World Bank and Asian

⁷⁷ Hu, interview by author, Beijing, 30 April 2016.

⁷⁸ Qingxin K. Wang, “The Rise of Neoclassical Economics and China's WTO Agreement with the United States in 1999,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 70 (2011): 456.

⁷⁹ Li, “China's New,” 222.

⁸⁰ National School of Development (NSD), “2013 China Think Tank Ranking: National School of Development at Peking University Ranks in Top Five Think Tanks for Highest Professional Influence (27 February 2014) [news report],” accessed 24 May 2016, <http://en.nsd.edu.cn/article.asp?articleid=7325>.

⁸¹ NSD, “National School of Development at Peking University (NSD) (2 September 2010) [About Us],” accessed 24 May 2016, <http://en.nsd.edu.cn/article.asp?articleid=7004>.

⁸² Justin Yifu Lin, *New Structural Economics: A Framework for Rethinking Development* (Washington: The World Bank, 2012), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/84797-1104785060319/598886-1104951889260/NSE-Book.pdf>.

Infrastructure Investment Bank. Its aims include the formulation of policies for China's Silk Road strategy, and the promotion of China's entrepreneurial activities in Africa.⁸³ When asked why the Chinese government was putting such effort into promoting new-type think tanks, Xu Jiajun, the CNSE's executive deputy director, responded that China "really wants to be perceived on the international stage as a stakeholder in this international system and they want to be a positive force behind the reforming of the current international financial institutions and any other kinds of global governance issues."⁸⁴

Rising Alliances of Capital

Brookings Institute scholar Cheng Li has pointed to an emerging "tripartite elite" of overseas trained scholars, internationally connected entrepreneurs, and technocratic officials which is coalescing within China's think tanks, citing the CCIEE, where Justin Lin is a vice chair, as one key location where this occurs.⁸⁵ This powerful cohort may begin to act in its own interests, argues Li. He mentions a well-known case where officials, property developers, bankers, and public intellectuals cooperated to further their interests in the real estate market. "Only time will tell," he warns, "whether these fascinating changes in the composition of Chinese think tanks will contribute to profound and positive developments in decision-making and elite politics—or whether this new confluence of political, economic, and academic elites will spell trouble for China's near-term future."⁸⁶ What Li is pointing to is an emerging capitalist class—merged with the global technocracy and having policy influence domestically—with a set of interests which, while by no means monolithic, is collectively oriented towards promoting forms of capital accumulation.

This issue has been recognized and debated within China for some time. At stake is the potential role of think tanks in either exacerbating, or ameliorating, class divisions which have emerged during the reforms. With the language of "class" no longer politically acceptable, the debate is usually couched in terms of whether think tanks will be co-opted by "powerful interest groups" (*qiangshi liyi tuanti*), often with reference to the real estate industry, or whether they will, on the contrary, speak for the interests of "weak groups" (*ruoshi qunti*) such as peasants and migrant workers. In 2009, for example, Xue Lan and Zhu Xufeng identified a shift occurring in China's political structure from a monopolization of policy making by administrative

⁸³ Center for New Structural Economics, "Introduction to the Center for NSE [About Us]", accessed 22 April 2017, <http://www.nse.pku.edu.cn/en/about/index.aspx?nodeid=62>.

⁸⁴ Xu, interview by author, Beijing, 24 May 2016.

⁸⁵ Li, "China's New," 195–231.

⁸⁶ Li, "China's New," 227.

elites, to its monopolization by an alliance of political and corporate elites.⁸⁷ If unchecked, they argued, think tanks would be absorbed into this alliance, impeding their purpose of representing marginalized groups.

Of particular concern are China's civil think tanks, over which the government has less control. With no official restrictions on their private funding allowance, a few civil think tanks have attracted large amounts of corporate and foreign funds and, according to one interviewee, are outcompeting official think tanks in attracting the best scholars—particularly those trained overseas—by offering higher salaries.⁸⁸ Generally speaking, however, the development of civil think tanks is restricted, with statistics from 2013 showing that only 5 percent of Chinese think tanks are civil.⁸⁹ This is in part due to a law passed in 2005 that required civil think tanks to register with the Civil Affairs Bureau and find local affiliation with an official institution, a hurdle that many failed to overcome. Many also have difficulty attracting funds, excluded from the government funding afforded to official think tanks in a culture which, in fact, does not commonly practice corporate or social donations. It has been claimed that, for this reason, civil think tanks are more susceptible to being influenced by funders, particularly foreign foundations and transnational corporations.⁹⁰ According to Chen Kaimin, for example, in 2008 the well-known liberal think tank the Unirule Institute of Economics accepted over two million renminbi from overseas sources. This carries the risk, argues Chen, that these think tanks may adopt a “Westernized” (*xihua*) outlook. “Some think tanks in China,” Chen observes, “have even completely adopted Western economic theories for studying China's socialist market economy, this should not be ignored.”⁹¹

The debate over civil think tanks is complex, but falls broadly into two camps. Those in the first camp argue for cultivating a donor culture to diversify think tanks' funding sources. Those adopting this position are more likely to view the US think tanks system as a model worth emulating, pointing, for example, to the established system of regulations and practices in place there to prevent monopolization by a particular funding source.⁹² Ren Yuling, a member of the Counsellor Office of the State Council, argues that the

⁸⁷ Xue Lan and Zhu Xufeng, “Zhongguo sixiangku de shehui zhineng—yi zhengce guocheng wei zhongxin de gaige zhilu” [The social function of China's think tanks—a policy-centred path to reform], *Guanli shijie* 4 (2009): 55–65, 82.

⁸⁸ Think-tank scholar C, interview by author, Beijing, May 2016.

⁸⁹ Liu Qiao, “Tansuo wanshan Zhongguo zhiku jianshe daolu” [Exploring improvements to the construction of China's think tanks], *Shanghaijing* 15 (2015): 68.

⁹⁰ Liu “Tansuo,” 68; Chen Kaimin, “Zhongguo zhiku guojihua zhuanxing de kunjing yu chulu” [Predicaments and prospects of the internationalization of China's think tanks], *Xiandai Guoji Guanli* 3 (2014): 34.

⁹¹ Chen, “Zhongguo zhiku,” 34.

⁹² Miao Lu and Wang Huiyao, “Zhongguo zhiku zijin lai yuan duoyuanhua chushen” [Diversifying the sources of funding for China's think tanks], *Kexue yu guanli* 37, no. 4 (2017): 14.

reliance of most think tanks on government funding stifles their independence, and calls for tax incentives to encourage more corporate donations.⁹³ Indeed, according to one interviewee, as the government makes efforts to stamp out corruption as a channel of policy influence, a formalized corporate lobby system may emerge as the preferred alternative.⁹⁴ Liu Qiao advocates the development of a broad donor culture across the whole of society, including public interest organizations and individuals, to keep in check the influence of government, corporations, and foreign interests, and ensure that less powerful groups will always be represented.⁹⁵

Those in the second camp are more sceptical about the “free marketplace of ideas,” and more likely to be critical of the US think-tank system in particular. For example, an article in the Chinese military journal *Conmilit* warned against the impact of corporate interests on government policy making via the funding of think tanks.⁹⁶ The article draws heavily on an investigative piece in the *New York Times* on the influence of corporations on America’s high-profile think tanks, in particular the connections between Brookings and the real estate industry.⁹⁷ Other scholars argue that China’s think-tanks system should be contained within the state apparatus to prevent an imbalance of power in favour of any particular interest group. Wang Shaoguang and Fan Peng, for example, argue for a model of “centralized ideas and broad interests” (*jisi guangyi*) in which think tanks remain connected to government institutions, while their dispersal across different bureaucracies, regions, and levels of government allows for a plurality of concerns to be transmitted upwards to the centre through multiple internal channels.⁹⁸ This would allow, they argue, for overall coordination and more equal representation between divergent interests. Zheng Yongnian, a Chinese scholar based in Singapore, similarly advocates for a competitive “internal ideas market” (*neibu sixiang shichang*) contained within state institutions to maintain an equal playing field. He regards civil think tanks as a necessary supplement since, distant from political power centres, they are better able to reflect the concerns of society. However, he argues, as long as they lack the institutional and financial advantages of think tanks within the

⁹³ Ren Yuling, “Zhongguo zhiku yao bimian wei jide liyizhe daiyan” [Chinese think tanks must avoid becoming spokespersons for vested interests], *Zhongguo jingji zhoukan* 1 (2013): 49–50.

⁹⁴ Think-tank scholar B, interview by author, Beijing, September 2015.

⁹⁵ Liu, “Tansuo,” 68.

⁹⁶ Wu Wei, “Yi ‘duli’ de mingyi ‘zhuli’—qiye juankuan luanxiang xia de Meiguo zhiku” [“Pursuing profit” in the name of “independence”—American think tanks in the maelstrom of corporate donations], *Xiandai junshi* 11 (2016): 92–99.

⁹⁷ Eric Lipton and Brooke Williams, “How Think Tanks Amplify Corporate America’s Influence,” *The New York Times*, 7 August 2016, <https://nyti.ms/2aLAQ2q>.

⁹⁸ Wang Shaoguang and Fan Peng “Jisi guangyixing’ juece: bijiao shiye xia de Zhongguo zhiku” [The “centralized ideas and broad interests” model of decision making: Chinese think tanks in comparative perspective], *Zhongguo tushu pinglun* 8 (2012): 12–22.

government system, there is no danger of them becoming the instruments of powerful lobby groups, as witnessed in America.⁹⁹

The Chinese government's recent moves to hamper the activities of Unirule are reported in Anglo-American media accounts as censorship of free speech.¹⁰⁰ This is true, yet to understand the issue only in such terms is to miss the broader context and significance of China's evolving class politics as the state internationalizes—in particular, the genuine concerns among progressive scholars and policy makers about the rising power of global corporate interests within China, which major civil think tanks such as Unirule represent. Unirule's close relationship with the Cato Institute, for example, a Washington-based pro-free market think tank well known as a vocal advocate for privatizing China's rural land, is significant in this respect.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In this article, I began by advocating that China's think tanks be taken seriously on their own terms, and analyzed within their particular national political context. This is characterized by China's integration into the global capitalist system, a factor of crucial importance for analyzing think tanks, their development, and their role in policy making. Since the 1980s, through increased exposure to overseas educational establishments, international institutions, and funding sources, particularly those directly engaged with the production and maintenance of the global ideological consensus, China's technocratic policy makers have come to adopt discourses, ideas, and ways of thinking compatible with that consensus. In so doing, and through commensurate reforms to its economic system and institutions, China has been highly successful at integrating into the global capitalist system, manifested by its spectacular economic growth.

Through promoting think tanks, China's leaders are embarking on the next stage in this process. They seek to produce a community of highly trained, internationally oriented, globally competitive experts and technocrats capable of providing timely and sophisticated analysis and advice to relevant government bureaus, and of manoeuvring between the state and

⁹⁹ Zheng Yongnian, "Zhongguo zhiku bu neng wanquan shichanghua" [China's think tanks cannot be completely marketized], *Sike*, 10 August 2016, <http://sike.news.cn/statics/sike/posts/2016/08/219503928.html>.

¹⁰⁰ *The Economist*, "An Illiberal Dose: Officials in China are Stifling Debate about Reform," 18 February 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/china/21717103-why-so-nervous-officials-china-are-stifling-debate-about-reform>.

¹⁰¹ *The Guardian*, "Free Market Thinktank's Website Shut Down in China," 2 May 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/02/free-market-thinktank-website-shut-china>. For Unirule's position on rural land privatization, see the article by its founder, Mao Yushi, "Huifu nongmin dui tudi caichan de suoyouquan" [Recover peasants' private land rights], *Zhongguo xiangcun faxian*, 26 December 2010, accessed 23 November 2017, www.zgxcfx.com/Article/24038.html.

international institutions to impact policy making at the transnational level. They seek a more powerful voice in deliberations about how this global capitalist system is organized, with a view to shaping the global ideological consensus and, indeed, a new global order. Yet, at the same time, they endeavour to transform China's institutions and social structure to become compatible with the requirements of global capital—thus to *internationalize* the Chinese state.

As these processes take place, the cohering of an internationally oriented alliance of wealth, knowledge, and political power constituting a powerful emerging capitalist class raises a number of issues. First, as think tanks, even under government supervision, become accustomed to receiving more of their funding from non-government sources, this will have implications for which interests they serve. Funders may not be able to influence think-tank reports directly, but corporations are unlikely to fund think tanks whose research record contradicts their interests. As is the case elsewhere in the world, it is hard to see how think tanks promoting workers' rights, for example, or the rights of peasants to their land in the face of incoming agribusinesses, are going to receive the same levels of corporate funding as those which promote perspectives considered more compatible with the interests of business and the free market. This issue is widely recognized in China as a cause for concern and is subject to ongoing contestation in policy circles. Scholars and journalists in the West, meanwhile, even despite admirable attempts to escape Anglo-American bias, too often continue to view independence as the key criterion for evaluating China's think tanks, missing the significance of these Chinese debates. At stake is how independence—regarded in the traditional sense as externality from government and privately funded—may lead to the co-optation of think tanks by the forces of capital, both within and outside China, and the resulting social consequences.

That said, think tanks specializing in different areas will reflect different views. Those affiliated to state-owned enterprises will likely advocate differently from those funded by international capital, while many think-tank scholars understand their role specifically as speaking for the weak and underrepresented. Meanwhile, the debate concerning overseas funding, and what conditions are to be attached, is continuing behind the scenes in high-level policy discussions. Some departments, such as the Ministry of Defence, are likely to come out against all foreign funding, while civil and university think tanks are more likely to be in favour; one interviewee suggested that a block on foreign funding would give the misleading impression to outsiders that think tanks were government-controlled.¹⁰² The question has arisen, moreover, as to what counts as foreign funding, with some proposing that

¹⁰² Think-tank scholar C, interview with author, Beijing, May 2016.

donations from foreign corporations owned by overseas Chinese should have less restrictions attached.¹⁰³ Indeed, there is much optimism regarding these organizations as a future source of endowments, since they are considered both culturally Chinese, and familiar with a practice of philanthropy to which mainland enterprises are not yet accustomed.¹⁰⁴

Going forward, a number of questions warrant further study. What will be the social consequences of increased commercial funding into policy making? Are we witnessing the beginnings of a mass corporate lobbying culture in China of the kind that exists in the US? Will the establishment of a system of think tanks under government supervision, on the contrary, succeed in reining in such vested interests? What are the possibilities for political debate within a think-tanks system largely internal to the state apparatus? Or is this system best understood as a form of social and political surveillance, which will help to maintain social stability while deferring more democratic forms of policymaking? We cannot fully understand the development trajectory of China's new-type think tanks without paying attention to these contested issues.

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¹⁰³ Think-tank scholar B, interview by author, Beijing, September 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Think-tank scholar C, interview with author, Beijing, May 2016.