

Research on the Path to Promote the Construction of Applied Universities Think Tanks

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Abstract

Think tank construction is an important opportunity for applied universities to respond to national policies, cultivate applied talents, and improve social service capabilities. At present, there are many problems in the construction of applied university think tanks, such as unclear function positioning, insufficient human resources, and irrational personnel evaluation systems, which limit the ability of think tanks to serve regional economic and social development. Based on the development experience of top university think tanks in the United States, this paper proposes that applied universities should clear positioning, based on the local area, actively meet industry needs, and build a talent team of think tanks to promote the high-quality development of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords

Think tanks; Applied universities; Regional development; Talent.

1. Introduction

University think tanks are an important part of the think tank. They are responsible for providing policy consultation and intellectual support for governments, as well as the functions of personnel training and academic research. Applied universities are an important component of higher education in China. The construction of think tank is intrinsically consistent with the orientation of application-oriented universities. Both emphasize realistic economic and social life, and focus on application, practicality and service. Promoting the construction of application-oriented university think tanks will help promote local regional development, revitalize local industries, and cultivate practical talent teams for local development. Therefore, this article analyzes the problems in the construction of application-oriented university think tanks in China, and proposes countermeasures for the construction of application-oriented university think tanks by referring to the case experience of top American university think tanks.

2. The Concept of Applied University Think Tanks

The term Think Tank originated in the United States in the 1950s and refers to a relatively stable and independent policy research and consulting organization composed of experts in various fields. According to the different leading subjects, think tanks can be divided into three categories: official think tanks, private think tanks and university think tanks. In recent years, China's university think tanks have developed rapidly. The number of university think tanks is close to 60% of the total number of think tanks in the country, and it has 14 seats in the top 50 list of comprehensive influence of domestic think tanks. Applied university think tanks are a special type of think tank which combines the characteristics of applied universities and think tanks.

It relies on local applied universities and make full use of the advantages of university talents and disciplines to provide decision-making consulting services for local governments, business

groups, etc. The think tank of applied universities is application-oriented, based on the needs of local regional development and paying attention to the docking of industrial chain, which is the performance of applied universities serving the society.

3. The Significance of Constructing Applied University Think Tank

Since the 21st century, China has attached great importance to the development of university think tanks. Through a series of documents and policies, universities have been guided to build think tank platforms to promote the practice and transformation of scientific research achievements. Promoting the construction of think tanks is a positive response and practical exploration of applied universities to national policies, which will help them improve their social service ability and better serve regional economic and social development.

In addition, the influence of think tanks is an important embodiment of national soft power and international discourse power [1]. University think tanks with discipline and talent advantages have gradually become an important force to promote the construction of new think tanks with Chinese characteristics [2]. As applied universities should take the construction of think tanks as their responsibility and mission and rely on the intellectual resources of colleges and universities to provide advisory services for public decision-making, and improve the country's soft power and international discourse power.

4. The Problem in the Construction of Applied University Think Tanks

4.1. Function Positioning Is Not Clear

Since 2013, there has been a wave of building think tanks in universities, and they have sprung up like mushrooms. According to the data released by China Think Tank Index (CTTI), by the end of 2020, the total number of university think tanks included has reached 471, including 306 research-oriented and 165 application-oriented. But at present, among the 165 applied university think tanks, a large part of the think tanks have problems such as unclear function positioning, unclear main direction, blindly following the trend, competing for the label of think tanks, and insufficient attention to regional economic and social problems and applied research [3].

4.2. Lack of Talent Resources

Compared with research-oriented universities, application-oriented universities are relatively short of human resources, which is manifested by the shortage of high-end talents in think tanks, the shortage of full-time researchers. In addition, the flow of talents is not smooth, and the university think tank lacks effective communication with government departments and enterprise departments, especially the flow of talents from the think tank to the government department. The lack of practical opportunities for think tank personnel leads to a disconnect between the intellectual achievements created and the practical problems.

4.3. The Personnel Appraisal System Is Not Reasonable

University think tanks have not formed a scientific and effective assessment and evaluation system, and academic indicators such as journal papers and topics are still taken as key measurement standards for the assessment and evaluation of scientific researchers. The value of think tank research results such as media articles, consulting reports and network cultural achievements is weakened, and the phenomenon of emphasizing theory over application is serious. According to the data, A total of 142,943 CTTI achievements were included, including 69,469 papers and 25,484 projects, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the total results. Researchers' outputs are mainly academic theoretical achievements, but few practical

application achievements, which is difficult to meet the consulting needs of government departments and enterprise departments.

5. The Experience of Top American University Think Tanks

5.1. Precise Target Positioning

The commonality of American university think tanks lies in their distinct characteristics. Each university think tank can combine its own advantages, find precise service positioning, focus on the field of expertise or specific objects, and have clear research direction and objectives. For example, The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University focuses on national economy and people's livelihood and national strategic policy issues. Starting from major strategic and policy issues concerned by the state, government and society, its research fields cover four major directions: international security, science and technology and public policy, environment and natural resources, and diplomacy and international affairs.

5.2. The Revolving Door Mechanism

The revolving door mechanism is one of the most characteristic systems of American think tanks. Through the revolving door system, think tanks and government personnel can implement identity swaps, former officials can enter the university to work, good think-tank researchers can also through formal channels into the government. Every us administration has its think tank staff. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and more than a dozen policy experts in the Obama administration are members of the Center for a New American Security.

5.3. Scientific and Reasonable Evaluation Mechanism

American university think tanks have established a complete and effective personnel assessment mechanism, and the assessment criteria emphasize the quality of output and the influence of policy. The Stanford International Consulting Institute developed the "Professional Development and Compensation Plan for Researchers and Experts" evaluation system in the 1970s, including five functional projects including professional performance, promotion, commission relationship, plan leadership, and system management. Each project subdivided into 6 levels, the evaluation criteria are policy-oriented, and the application value of research results is emphasized.

6. Countermeasures for the Construction of Applied University Think Tanks

6.1. Clarify Regional Positioning and Build A Local University Think Tank Alliance

Applicated college think tanks should serve the regional economic and social development as their purpose, base themselves on the region, and take root in the locality. The provincial government can take the lead in organizing the establishment of a local college think tank alliance, which is guided by local economic and social development issues, and each college think tank member determines the main attack direction based on their own characteristic disciplines, and realizes data sharing, results sharing, technology joint research, and risk sharing.

6.2. Facing the Industry, Improve the Topic Selection System of Think Tanks

Applicated university think tanks should actively connect the main industries and characteristic industries in the region, integrate their own advantages and specialties with local characteristic industries. Think tanks should actively build a supply-demand information

docking platform and establish an effective school-enterprise linkage pattern. Through regular think tank topic selection planning meetings and industry problem analysis meetings, relevant experts and local business representatives should be invited to join the special seminars to discuss and analyze what needs to be resolved in the development of the industry.

6.3. Improve the Talent Management System

On the one hand, improve the talent introduction system. Through employment methods such as career establishment and labor contract system, attract professionals to join the full-time team, and through flexible employment models such as project cooperation, guest professors, visiting scholars, etc., attract well-known experts in various fields to join the part-time research team. On the other hand, improve the talent assessment and evaluation system. Strengthen the value of research results such as media articles, consulting reports, and network cultural results, improve the identification and classification standards of these three types of research results, formulate methodological rules to determine the reasonable evaluation weight of research results, and use them as professional title evaluation, job appointment, performance distribution, Scientific research awards, etc.

6.4. Establish A Revolving Door System

Specifically, college think tanks should provide a working platform for retired local government officials and corporate executives, hire them as think tank consultants or research members, make full use of the rich practical experience of government and corporate personnel. In addition, it is necessary to support and encourage think tank researchers to enter the government and enterprise departments for temporary training or secondment work, and allow think tank experts to enter the government and enterprises for in-depth observation and even practical operations, to understand the actual needs of government and enterprises.

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