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The New Great Leap Forward Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics

Hongying Wang and Xue Ying Hu



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About the Authors

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About the Global Economy Program

Addressing limitations in the ways nations tackle shared economic challenges, the Global Economy Program at CIGI strives to inform and guide policy debates through world-leading research and sustained stakeholder engagement.

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Through its research, collaboration and publications, the Global Economy Program informs decision makers, fosters dialogue and debate on policy-relevant ideas and strengthens multilateral responses to the most pressing international governance issues.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CATTf	China-Africa Think Tanks Forum
CCCWS	China Center for Contemporary World Studies
CCIEE	China Center for International Economic Exchange
CIGI	Centre for International Governance Innovation
CIIS	China Institute of International Studies
CPC	Communist Party of China
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
G20	Group of Twenty
NSSFC	National Social Science Fund of China
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
RDCY	Renda Chongyang
SASS	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
SSAP	Social Sciences Academic Press
T20	Think20

Executive Summary

In the last few years, China has experienced a think-tank boom in response to the government's call for "new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics." What exactly are these Chinese characteristics? How do Chinese think tanks compare with familiar models of think tanks in Western countries such as the United States and Canada? How do these Chinese characteristics affect the ability of Chinese think tanks to fulfill the mission set for them by China's leaders? These are the questions explored in this paper. On balance, the Chinese characteristics of these think tanks — their relationship with the government and the way they carry out their functions — limit their effectiveness in improving policy making and increasing the country's soft power. They may be a useful instrument for the party-state to guide public opinion in China for the time being, but that may not be a sustainable or a particularly valuable role for think tanks in the long run.

Introduction

In the last few years, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has made it a national strategy to build "think tanks with Chinese characteristics." Chinese leaders have been quite vocal in their encouragement for the development and expansion of think tanks in order to improve policy making, guide public opinion and increase China's soft power in the world. A think-tank boom has ensued, with a large number of think tanks being created either from scratch or by renaming and restructuring existing policy research organizations. The latest report on global "go to" think tanks by the University of Pennsylvania lists 435 think tanks in China, ranking China second only to the United States (with 1,835 think tanks) in its number of think tanks (McGann 2017). A study by respected China experts claims there are over 2,500 think tanks in China, with approximately 35,000 researchers (Wang and Fan 2013).

Think tanks are not entirely new to China, even though the use of the term *zhiku* or *sixiang ku* — literally translated from the English phrase "think tank" — is a recent phenomenon. Throughout

history, Chinese rulers kept and used policy advisers known as *moushi*, *junshi* and *menke*. After the establishment of the People's Republic, China adopted the Soviet model: the CPC and various government agencies created research academies and institutes. Closely tied to and controlled by government bureaucracies, these organizations gathered information and provided policy analysis in their respective areas of expertise (see, for example, Shambaugh 2002; Glaser and Saunders 2002; Tanner 2002). During the Cultural Revolution, under a general anti-intellectual atmosphere, most of these research institutes stopped functioning.

With the onset of economic reform in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many old research institutes were revived. New ones were created, including the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) as the successor of the former Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences (Shambaugh 2002). Meanwhile, some informal research groups were set up by reformist leaders in the government to provide innovative ideas in the post-Cultural Revolution economic and political transition (Naughton 2002).¹ However, the political turmoil in 1989 seriously dampened the enthusiasm of the researchers and tightened government control of their intellectual activities (see, for example, Sleeboom-Faulkner 2007).

During the current think-tank boom, the Chinese government has emphasized that think tanks in China should develop distinctive national characteristics. In fact, almost all the official Party and government documents refer to "new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics" (*zhongguo tese xinxing zhiku*). Chinese leaders have repeatedly stressed the importance for Chinese think tanks not to follow traditional or Western models but to develop their own characteristics. This sentiment has been echoed by Chinese researchers. However, just what these characteristics are remains unclear. Indeed, the meaning of "Chinese characteristics" has been a popular topic for discussion among Chinese officials and scholars. For example, it was the main question for a conference organized by the CPC Party School in Pudong, Shanghai, along with *Guangming Daily* and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) in March 2017 (Zha and Li 2017). It was also

¹ Similarly, in the first decade of their post-communist transition, Central and Eastern European countries also saw a dramatic increase in new think tanks working closely with reformist leaders (Krajev 2001).

the main theme of a dialogue organized by the *People's Daily* on April 12, 2017 (Shen et al. 2017).

This paper will tease out some important characteristics of Chinese think tanks. It will focus on comparing Chinese think tanks with familiar Western models on two issues — the relationship of think tanks with the government and the functions of think tanks. The last section of the paper will discuss how these characteristics may affect Chinese think tanks' ability to fulfill the mission set for them by Chinese leaders.

Think Tank–Government Relationship

What should be the relationship between think tanks and the government? In the United States, which is widely viewed as the standard bearer when it comes to think tanks, the dominant paradigm idealizes the independence of think tanks from the government.² Indeed, American efforts to promote think tanks in other countries, including post-communist societies, are based on the belief that they serve the function of democracy building (Krastev 2001). Elsewhere in the developed world, the relationship between think tanks and governments is more varied and is not always at arm's length. For instance, in Europe there are research institutes affiliated with political parties and the European Union Commission, which are funded by and provide advice to those political organizations (Sherrington 2000). In Japan, some think tanks are extensions of government ministries (Nachiappan, Mendizabal and Datta 2010).³

Chinese Discourse

Interestingly, Chinese discourse on think tanks pays much more attention to the American model than other foreign models. The prevailing view is that Chinese think tanks should not conform to the American ideal of autonomy from the government. There is consensus that the main mission of think tanks in China is to serve the Party

and the government, providing information and advice to policy makers. Therefore, Chinese think tanks should maintain close cooperative relations with the government. However, there are different opinions as to the degree of think tank–government convergence. On one side of the subtle debate are those who stress that think tanks must operate under the leadership of the Communist Party (for example, Li Wei 2014, 7; Li Guoqiang 2014, 5).⁴ On the other side are researchers who contend that think tanks need to maintain their intellectual autonomy. They criticize some think tanks for focusing on pleasing policy makers and argue that researchers must base their policy advice on scientific evidence (see report by Shen et al. 2017).⁵

Related to this is the issue of funding. Chinese researchers are well aware of think tanks' dependence on government funding. Scholars affiliated with non-governmental or semi-governmental think tanks are particularly critical of the limited funding outside government budgets. They urge policy and cultural changes that will increase societal funding for think tanks (see, for example, Zhu and Liu 2012; Quan and Hong 2016; and Shen et al. 2017).

Another relevant question is how much the government should regulate think tanks. Some people are concerned that think tanks may lack professionalism and may propagate “wrong opinions.” Thus, they should be disciplined to guard against having a negative impact on society. Others believe that if think tanks base their work on scientific methods and good data, they should not produce extremist opinions. Non-governmental think tanks, in particular, should be allowed to operate more freely and try to connect with foreign counterparts (see, for example, Quan and Hong 2016; Yuan Peng 2016; and Shen et al. 2017).

Chinese discourse show different views on think tank–government relationships. The paper now turns to an examination of the practice of Chinese think tanks in this regard. It will briefly compare Chinese think tanks and their counterparts in the United States and Canada.

2 Despite the principle of independence, the autonomy of think tanks in the United States is relative (Rich 2005).

3 Indeed, in East Asia more broadly, think tanks are rarely independent and are often “state-directed” (Nachiappan, Mendizabal and Datta 2010).

4 Both authors are with the State Council's Development Research Center, a major think tank of the national government.

5 For instance, this view was expressed by Yuan Yue, the founder of Horizon Research Consultancy Group, a pioneering private polling organization in China, and Zhu Xufeng, a leading scholar on Chinese think tanks based at Tsinghua University.

Think-tank affiliations

An obvious feature of think tank development in China has been the prominent role of the government. While research organizations seeking to provide policy advice have existed in China for a long time, the rapid expansion of think tanks in recent years has been a direct result of top-level encouragement and planning. In 2012, at an economic work conference of the CPC Central Committee, Party Secretary General Xi Jinping first proposed establishing high-quality think tanks to serve policy making. In 2013, the third plenary meeting of the 18th CPC Party Congress passed a resolution that stipulated the creation of think tanks with Chinese characteristics. In early 2015, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued an opinion on strengthening think tanks with Chinese characteristics, setting the goal of establishing a group of influential and internationally prestigious high-end think tanks (*gaoduan zhiku*) by 2020. Later the same year, the CPC Central Committee held a working conference on think tanks and announced the first group of 25 high-end think tanks as experiment sites. Since then, more official directives and guidelines have been made by both the national and the local governments.

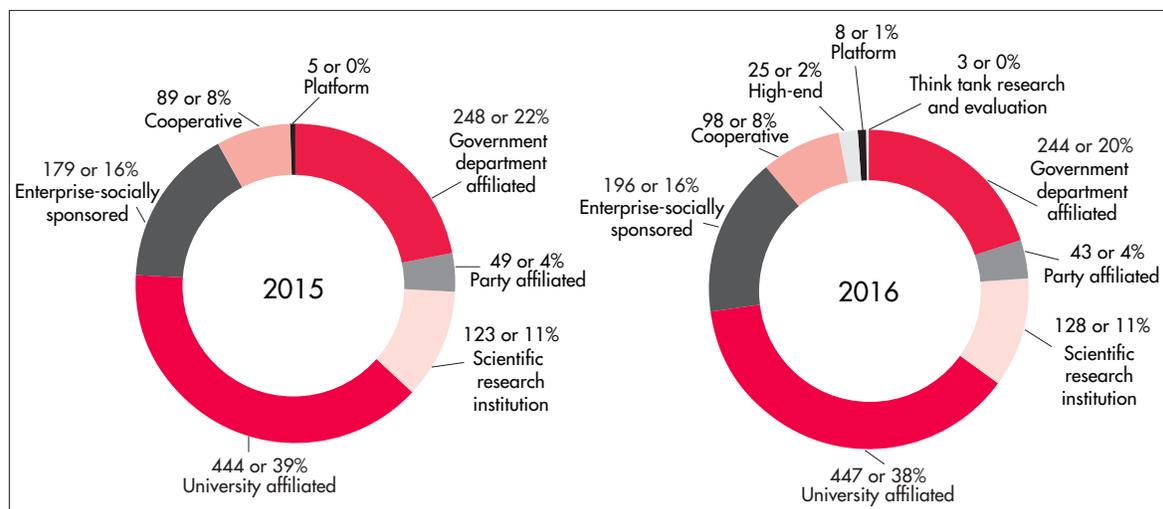
Most Chinese think tanks are either inside the party-state or closely affiliated with various CPC and government agencies. The Social Sciences Academic Press (SSAP) began to publish the China Think Tank Directory in 2015. The directory recorded

1,137 think tanks in 2015 and 1,192 think tanks in 2016 across 31 provinces of China (SSAP 2017). According to this directory, Party- and government-affiliated think tanks account for about 25 percent of the total, whereas enterprise-socially sponsored think tanks make up 16 percent (see Figure 1). It also shows that there was little change in the weight of different types of think tanks from 2015 to 2016.

The dominance of Party and government think tanks is even more salient among the most influential think tanks. In its 2016 report, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences lists the 100 most influential Chinese think tanks. On the list are 10 national-level Party, government and military think tanks, 26 ministerial think tanks, and nine local Party and government think tanks, which together make up more than 45 percent of the list (see Figure 2) (SASS 2017).

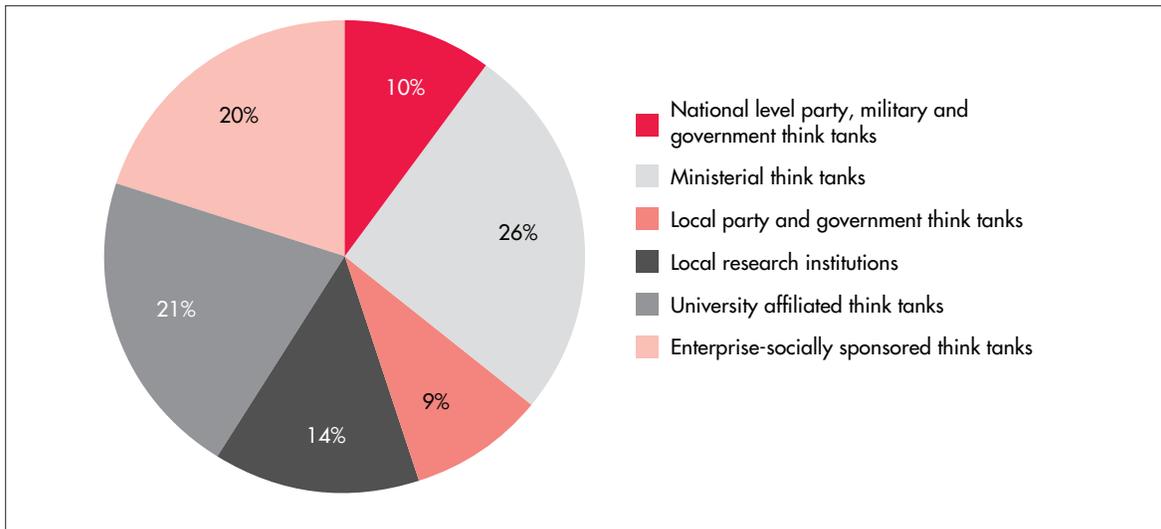
This forms a sharp contrast with the development of think tanks in the United States. The first American think tanks were created in the early 1900s, including the Russell Sage Foundation, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Hoover Institution, the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations. They came into being at the initiative of private philanthropists and academics who sought to bring their knowledge to addressing important public policy questions. The US government had no role in planning and funding these new organizations. Later, more American think tanks appeared. Donald E. Abelson

Figure 1: SSAP Directory of Chinese Think Tanks by Category (2015 and 2016)



Data source: SSAP (2017).

Figure 2: SASS Ranking of Most Influential Chinese Think Tanks by Category (2016)



Data source: SSAP (2017).

and Christine M. Carberry (1998) identify three additional waves of think tanks in the United States. After World War II, the US government decided to tap into intellectual resources outside the government to support the country's new leadership position in the world. It contracted research — in particular on national defence and foreign policy — to organizations such as the Rand Corporation. By providing expertise, these research organizations gained funding and prominence in policy making. In the 1970s, advocacy think tanks — for example, the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Policy Studies — became part of the policy scene. Unlike the first generation of think tanks, which strived to provide broad and non-partisan studies of important issues, they used their research to promote their own ideological and policy positions. They are often funded by corporations, foundations and individual donations. Finally, since the early 1980s, there have been a number of vanity or legacy-based think tanks, such as the Carter Center and the Nixon Center. Their programs focus on the policy issues of interest to the politicians they are named after, or whose ideas they seek to promote or preserve. They are funded by similar sources as the third generation of think tanks.

However, not all Western countries share the same experience as the United States in this regard. Take Canada, for example. While Canadian think tanks resemble US think tanks in many ways,

they differ from the latter in their relationship with the government. In the 1960s, the Canadian government created several government contractors to provide it with policy analysis and advice. As one scholar points out, “[t]hey were the first permanent organizations dedicated to public inquiry in Canada; their respective terms of reference are enshrined in legislation, and council members reflecting different constituencies and elements of society are appointed by the government” (Lindquist 1993). According to Abelson and Carberry (1998), “major initiatives for creating Canadian centres of policy expertise are coming from inside the government.” Many prominent think tanks, such as the Institute for Research on Public Policy, the C. D. Howe Institute, the North-South Institute and the Conference Board of Canada are partially funded by the government. The Canadian Department of National Defence funds a number of security and defence forums. Even the relatively new Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), which strives to follow the US model of think tanks and solicits corporate and individual donations, draws much of its funding from the federal, provincial and local governments.⁶

While think tanks in Canada and China have stronger ties with the government than those in the United States, the effect of those ties differs

⁶ See www.cigionline.org/about/funding.

significantly. In Canada, dependence on the government for funding sets some constraints on think tanks, in particular their sustainability. For instance, in the 1980s, the Canadian government created the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security. Its purpose was to provide advice to policy makers on how to maintain the stability of the international community. Later, the Canadian government abandoned the organization, ostensibly for budgetary reasons, although there was speculation that the government decided to stop funding the think tank because its policy recommendations were contradictory with government policy (Abelson and Carberry 1998).

Compared with their US counterparts, think tanks in Canada may not be quite as at arm's length from the government. But government influence on think tanks in China is significantly more profound than in both Canada and the United States. The party-state wants Chinese think tanks to support government policies and explain them to the public at home and abroad. Within such a framework, the agenda of the think tanks and their policy recommendations are almost always in lockstep with the party-state.

Think-tank Funding

Funding is one mechanism to ensure government influence. Most think tanks in China depend heavily on the government for funding, although the specific composition of funding sources varies across different types of think tanks and lacks transparency. National government-level think tanks typically list three main sources of income: financial budget, service revenues (*shiyè shouru*) and other sources. Service revenues consist of income through professional work, for example, tuition or consultation fees. Other sources are often vague and may be comprised of income ranging from returns on investment to real estate sales. For example, in 2017, CASS lists its income as 67.07 percent from financial budget, 17.15 percent from service revenues and 5.32 percent from other sources (CASS 2017). Ministerial think tanks' budget in large part comes from their ministries. For instance, the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), one of the country's most influential foreign policy think tanks, is under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is largely financed by the Ministry (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2017). University-affiliated think tanks tend not to publicize all their sources of funding, but they typically receive some

funds from the Ministry of Education. Some also benefit from public and private grants, as well as private donors. The latter include domestic and international sources. For instance, the National School of Development at Peking University, a top economic policy think tank, lists alumni donations that vary from a few hundred yuan to two million yuan.⁷ The Center for International and Strategic Studies at Peking University, a leading think tank on international relations, has received US\$2.1 million from the MacArthur Foundation up to 2017.⁸

Beyond institutional funding, researchers in think tanks look for outside resources to support their projects. For policy-related research in China, an important source of funding is the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSF). Created in 1991 and managed by the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science, it funds social science research at universities and research organizations. Each year it calls for research proposals in different categories of study, such as the history of the CPC, applied economics, statistics, demography, sociology and international affairs. Committees evaluate the proposals and allocate the funds.

Think tanks that depend on government funding naturally follow the policy priority of the government. This is not surprising. Indeed, everywhere think tanks' research agenda is heavily influenced by the interest of their financiers. What is unusual about China is that think tanks not only choose their topics according to government priorities, the orientation of their research also follows very detailed guidelines issued by the government. A quick glance at the recent guidelines for NSSF-funded research projects in the category of "international affairs" shows familiar official concepts such as "the China Dream," "peaceful development," "new type of great power relations," "BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa] cooperation," "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," "*taoguang yuanghui*" and "*yousuo zuowei*" ("keeping a low profile" and "trying to accomplish something"); a foreign policy principle set by former paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, "going out strategy," "Western 'soft power' and China's ideological security," and "Internet and color revolution" (NSSF 2013; 2014). As these titles indicate, researchers, including

⁷ See www.nsd.pku.edu.cn/donation/donation_thanks/alumni/index.html.

⁸ See www.macfound.org/grantees/638/.

many in think tanks, are expected to elaborate on and justify these concepts and policies rather than provide critical perspectives on them.

In late 2013, President Xi Jinping announced China's ambitious plan of establishing a Silk Road Economic Belt and a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road — a broad network of economic connectivity between China and countries stretching from Southeast Asia to South Asia, Central Asia, North Africa and much of Europe. Since then, the so-called “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative has been a main focus for many Chinese think tanks. A title search of OBOR among NSSFC-funded projects from 2014 to 2016 shows 139 projects.⁹ Nearly all published research — by think tanks and others — takes for granted the wisdom and importance of the OBOR initiative. A small number of researchers offer a few cautionary notes about the risks involved in the implementation of this ambitious initiative (see, for example, Lu 2015; Mao 2017). But their focus is purely on how best to manage the risks without questioning or critiquing the assumptions and distributive consequences of the government's policy. Chinese think tanks have neither the political nor the economic incentives to challenge the party-state's policy choices.

Some observers inside and outside China have expressed hope that more private funding will be available for think tanks, and with that Chinese think tanks will become more vibrant, providing a wider range of policy input (see, for example, Li 2009; Shen et al. 2017). Part of their expectation — that is, that there will be more Chinese think tanks sponsored and funded by private donors — seems well founded. In its 2013 report on think tanks, SASS points out the weakness of non-governmental think tanks in China. But in its 2016 report, it claims that social think tanks have made great strides, listing 20 such think tanks among the top 100 influential think tanks (SASS 2017).

However, the second part of their expectation — that is, that privately sponsored and funded think tanks will enjoy greater intellectual autonomy — is questionable. Funding is just one mechanism with which the party-state directs Chinese think tanks. Many other aspects of the political system encourage research organizations to promote government policy rather than to challenge or question it. The party-state's domination of the

economy, society and the political system means that private actors depend on the good will of the government in order to survive and thrive.

For example, Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, also known as Renda Chongyang (RDCY) given its affiliation with Renmin University (Renda), is a non-governmental think tank funded by a private entrepreneur. Created in 2013, it has become one of the best-known Chinese think tanks. Despite its private funding, RDCY has been closely connected with the government. Its first executive board was led by the private donor and the president of Renmin University, who later became a deputy governor of the Chinese central bank. With all its activities — policy analysis, media mobilization, outreach overseas — RDCY has enthusiastically promoted government initiatives such as OBOR, BRICS cooperation, green finance and China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. It has been designated by the Chinese government as one of three lead think tanks for China's participation in the Think20 (T20) (a network of think tanks from the members of the Group of Twenty (G20), which meets alongside the official G20 meetings).

In this regard, the situation of think tanks is similar to the media scene in China. Beginning in the early 1980s, the Chinese government gradually reduced its funding of media organizations. More and more newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations began to generate their own funds. The new digital media services are even more self-reliant financially. However, the content of Chinese media has remained strictly in line with the Party's preferences. In other words, media commercialization has not led to media liberalization (Zhao 1998; Stockman 2013). Indeed, as scholars have argued for some time, private entrepreneurs themselves are supporters and allies of the party-state (Pearson 1997; Tsai 2007; Chen and Dickson 2008). There is little reason to believe privately funded think tanks will be different. Like government think tanks, they will likely follow government policies rather than provide independent analysis of those policies for the foreseeable future.¹⁰

⁹ See <http://tz.people.com.cn/skygb/sk/index.php/Index/search>.

¹⁰ Social think tanks can be seen as part of the non-governmental sector in China. As many studies have shown, non-governmental organizations in China typically seek to cooperate with the government. They value close ties with government agencies rather than autonomy from the latter (Ma 2002; Hsu 2010).

Functions of Think Tanks

Official documents indicate that China's leaders see think tanks primarily as consulting organizations at the service of the government. Their main function is to provide information, analysis and forecasts for the government to improve policy-making capacity. The increased role of think tanks in policy discussion is part of a more consultative policy-making process (CPC 2013; CPC News 2015). The Party and the government have also urged think tanks to use the mass media to inform and guide public opinion. This involves explaining the Party's theory and public policy, and "mobilizing society's positive energy" (CPC Central Committee and State Council 2015). In addition, Chinese leaders encourage Chinese think tanks to play a role in the country's foreign policy. For instance, Xi has called for increasing the interactions between Chinese and foreign think tanks, parallel to increasing intergovernmental, interparty and interparliamentary interactions. He urges Chinese think tanks to develop Chinese ideas and increase China's voice on the world stage (see, for example, Xi 2014).

Chinese think tanks have indeed actively performed all three functions. On the surface, these functions are similar to those of Western think tanks, which also make policy recommendations, try to shape public opinion and carry out international exchanges. However, a closer look at the way in which think tanks in China perform these functions will reveal some special Chinese characteristics.

Contributing to Policy Making

Think tanks everywhere seek to play a part in policy making. They can do so directly by having an impact on particular government decisions, or indirectly by shaping the prevailing climate of opinion (Stone 1996). For instance, in the United States, think tanks often seek to influence specific policies by appearing at congressional hearings, providing consultation to the government and publishing opinion pieces in the media. They also attempt to shape policy makers' overall policy orientation by inviting officials to regular policy seminars and publishing reports on major policy issues. Chinese think tanks are also eager to participate in the policy-making process, but the way they do so is shaped by China's circumstances.

Traditionally, Chinese researchers had little opportunity to meet top policy makers in person. But that has changed in recent years. They now have some access to high-level Party and government officials, but their interactions with the latter are somewhat different than in the West. Whereas Western think tanks routinely invite policy makers to their conferences and seminars, in China, such gatherings take place on government turf and strictly on policy makers' terms. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the leaders of the CPC have become more willing to consult outside experts on policy issues. The Party's Political Bureau, which consists of a small number of top leaders, has carried out collective study sessions to which some scholars from Chinese universities and think tanks have been invited.

According to Alice Miller (2015), the 18th Communist Party Politburo, which came into power under the leadership of President Xi in 2012, has been more active than its predecessors in this regard. From 2012 to mid-2015, there were 22 study sessions. Table 1 shows the sessions featuring lectures by Chinese researchers on topics of both long-term and short-term policy relevance. This is a rare channel for researchers to come face-to-face with China's most senior policy makers. However, how much influence researchers exercise is unclear. A study of the earlier sessions argues "Their symbolic value far outweighs their usefulness as a potential policy tool. As a result, their effect tends to be indirect, slow to materialize, and hard to measure" (Lu 2007). A more recent study points out that "rigid procedures that include prior censorship over lecture manuscripts have hindered academics from providing their original viewpoints and in-depth analyses to top decision-makers" (Chen 2012).

Another way in which Chinese think tanks try to influence policy makers is by publishing reports and studies. In recent years, their productivity has apparently increased dramatically. A study of China's foreign policy think tanks illustrates this trend (Abb 2015). It shows the number of publications by major foreign policy think tanks has almost doubled since the turn of the century. While the statistics on internal policy reports are not available, the author of the study speculates that researchers' activities in that regard have also grown rapidly (*ibid.*, 541-44).

Table 1: Selected Study Sessions of the 18th Central Committee Politburo

Date	Topic	Notes
December 31, 2012	Studied reform and opening as a long-term task	Central Party History Research Center researcher Li Xiangqian and National Development and Reform Commission Macroeconomic Research Institute researcher Wang Yiming
April 19, 2013	Studied combatting corruption and upholding government integrity via historical lessons	CASS Institute of History researcher Bu Qianxun and CASS Institute of Political Science researcher Fang Ning
May 24, 2013	Studied conserving resources and protecting the environment	Qinghua University Environmental Science and Engineering Institute Chi Qiming and China Environmental Sciences Institute researcher Meng Wei
July 30, 2013	Studied maritime strategy and building China as a maritime power	China Maritime Petroleum Company Deputy Chief Engineer Zeng Hengyi and National Maritime Administration Maritime Development Strategy Institute researcher Gao Zhiguo
October 29, 2013	Studied issue of providing adequate housing	Qinghua Land, Forest, and Water Science Institute Professor Liu Hongyu and Ministry of Housing and Urbanization Policy Research Center researcher Qin Hong
December 3, 2013	Studied principles and methods of historical materialism	Chinese People's University Professor Guo Zhan and Central Party School Professor Han Qingxiang
December 30, 2013	Studied building China's soft power	Wuhan University Professor Shen Zhuanghai and National Propaganda Cadre Academy Professor Huang Zhijian
February 24, 2014	Studied nourishing core socialist values and China's traditional virtues	CPC Propaganda Department Ideology and Political Work Research Institute Professor Dai Mucai
August 29, 2014	Studied trends in world military development and promoting People's Liberation Army innovation	National Defense University Strategic Education and Research Department Professor Xiao Tianliang
October 13, 2014	Studied the lessons and warnings of China's history	CASS Institute of History researcher Bo Xianqun
December 5, 2014	Studied establishing free trade zones	Ministry of Commerce International Trade and Economic Cooperation Institute researcher Li Guanghui
January 23, 2015	Studied principles and methods of dialectical materialism in advancing reform	Jilin University Professor Sun Zhengyu
March 24, 2015	Studied judicial system reform	Jilin Academy of Social Sciences Professor Huang Wenyi

Source: Miller (2015).

Moreover, Chinese policy makers seem to have become more interested in the policy input from think tanks. In the past, the main task of research organizations attached to various government agencies was to compile information and draft documents for those agencies. With the increasing complexity of governance at home and in foreign relations, the Chinese government has come to appreciate the need for intellectual resources both inside and outside the bureaucracies. In particular, following the global financial crisis, Chinese leaders felt an urgent need to improve the country's ability to navigate a highly complex and uncertain world. Dissatisfied with the existing system of research organizations and their performance, officials were eager to explore new options. As a former vice governor of China Development Bank put it, "as society changes think tanks will have to reform" (Chen 2009).

In 2009, instructed by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, the China Center for International Economic Exchange (CCIEE) was created to study the major and pressing issues of the world economy. With hundreds of researchers and funding from both governmental and non-governmental sources, the CCIEE is a resource-rich organization. Although it is not a research organization inside the government, its ties with the government are strong. Led by a former vice premier, its members include a former vice chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, former vice minister of finance, former director of the research office of the State Council, former governor of the People's Bank of China, and former head of the State Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission.¹¹

The CCIEE claims to provide "central and local Governments with analysis reports and policy proposals on macro economic management, medium and long-term development planning, and important economic policies."¹² Indeed, it is reportedly the intellectual source of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, arguably the most significant foreign policy undertaking of the Chinese government in recent years. According to Chen Wenling, chief economist at CCIEE, Chairman Zeng Peiyan of CCIEE first proposed establishing a financial institution to fund infrastructure development in Asia in January

2013 at the Boao Forum. In April 2013, the CCIEE submitted a report to the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council. The report received high-level attention and was commented on by President Xi and Premier Li Kexiang. It soon became a major government initiative (Chen 2015). This case demonstrates that well-connected and well-endowed think tanks can be an important source of ideas for government policy making.¹³

However, the CCIEE is not a typical Chinese think tank. Its influence on policy making is an exception rather than the norm. Most Chinese think tanks are made up of researchers, even though some retired high officials serve as heads or honorary heads of those think tanks. The CCIEE stands out in the number of high-ranking former government officials on its roster. In fact, it has been dubbed a "super think tank" because of its extraordinary human and financial resources. In this regard, it may be pioneering a more general acceptance of the so-called "revolving door" between think tanks and the government, which is typical of US think tanks (Li 2009). As of now, the Chinese revolving door is quite imbalanced in that the flow has been from the government (of retired officials) to think tanks, but not the other way around. Some commentators in China suggest a more balanced exchange of personnel (Wang 2016). There are signs that this could indeed become a new practice in the near future (Li and Xu 2017).

Informing and Influencing the Public

Chinese think tanks also seek to inform and influence the public. This is a major departure from the past, when policy research institutes carried out their activities within the bureaucratic systems they were situated in. Under the old system, research organizations tried to provide policy input through their access to the ministries. There was little interest or opportunity for them to reach out to the public (Wang 2008; Abb 2015). In recent years, this has changed. Think tanks not only try to provide advice to policy makers, but are also keen to shape public opinion. Almost all of them — even those with close ties to the Party and government agencies — have been eager to build their public profiles through media appearances

¹¹ See <http://english.cciee.org.cn/list.aspx?clmId=55>.

¹² See <http://english.cciee.org.cn/list.aspx?clmId=135>

¹³ Another of the rare examples of think tank policy influence was Zheng Bijian's notion of China's "peaceful rise" (Glaser and Medeiros 2007). Zheng had been an executive vice president of the CPC Party School before becoming the chairman of the think tank China Reform Forum.

and other outreach efforts. This trend has been greatly enhanced by new information technology, in particular the growing social media. Meanwhile, book publishers, newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and internet providers have all been eager to obtain content from think tanks. In the last two years, the cooperation between think tanks and the mass media has been the subject of a number of conferences.¹⁴ As a recent study shows, the expansion of the media presence of Chinese think tanks (measured by mentions in Chinese newspapers) has been even more striking than the growth of their scholarly output (Abb 2015).

However, think tanks vary in how much they invest in their media presence and how successful they are in gaining media attention. A recent report issued by Tsinghua University provides a detailed analysis of the media footprint of China's major think tanks by focusing on two popular media platforms — Weibo and WeChat. Weibo is a social media platform often thought to be China's equivalent to Twitter. It has become the preferred platform for news with 154 million daily active users (BBC News 2017). WeChat is the most popular social networking app in China. It has over 10 million public accounts, mostly created by organizations for their media outreach. By the end of 2015, there were 600 million monthly active users, of whom about 41 percent follow public accounts to acquire news (Chen 2016). The Tsinghua University report ranks the most influential think tanks in China by using data on the production and consumption of think tank papers, think tank researchers' blogs on Weibo and references to think-tank publications on WeChat (see Table 2).

It is interesting to note that some newly established non-governmental think tanks, such as RDCY and the Center for China and Globalization, enjoy high visibility in the media. Indeed, 14 of the 30 think tanks that are most recognized on social media are social think tanks. This is quite remarkable given the overall dominance of governmental think tanks in China. It suggests that for social think tanks, the function of informing the public is more important than the function of influencing policy makers. This apparent distinction between governmental and non-governmental think tanks is not hard to understand. Government think tanks and their researchers have institutional channels to reach policy makers. They are rewarded according to

the amount and the level of official attention they can generate with their research. Social think tanks, on the other hand, do not have reliable access to policy makers (Abb 2015). Gaining a high profile in the media is an important strategy for them to achieve influence, either vis-à-vis the public or — indirectly — with the government.¹⁵

International Outreach

In addition to their attempts to influence policy and the public, Chinese think tanks have been actively engaged in international exchanges. Most of them have academic exchanges or collaboration with foreign institutions. University-affiliated think tanks often work with foreign universities through joint conferences, graduate student exchanges and research cooperation. Government-affiliated think tanks tend to interact more with foreign government officials and international organizations.

In their international outreach, Chinese think tanks actively promote the government's foreign policy priorities. For example, OBOR has been a major policy initiative by President Xi. Not surprisingly, it has been a central theme of many international networks, conferences and dialogues organized by Chinese think tanks. In 2015, the State Council's Development Research Center, CASS and Fudan University jointly launched an OBOR think-tank alliance. The alliance is open to foreign think tanks and aims to "increase people-to-people exchanges by jointly releasing reports by think tanks to promote better understanding of the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative" (*Chinese Social Sciences Today* 2015). In 2016, an International Silk Road Think Tank Association was launched. Its initial conference, sponsored by the China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS), a think tank founded in 2010, the Shenzhen Municipal Government and Fudan University, was attended by more than 60 delegates. The goal of the association is to provide sustained intellectual support for OBOR (He 2016). Both of these associations are backed by the International Department of the CPC.

It is not only governmental think tanks that work hard to promote government policy in the international realm. Social think tanks are just as enthusiastic. For instance, RDCY has been

¹⁴ See, for example, <http://nads.ruc.edu.cn/displaynews.php?id=3535>.

¹⁵ A study of American think tanks shows that media presence should not be confused with policy influence. The think tanks most widely cited in the media are not seen as particularly influential by policy makers (Rich 2005).

Table 2: The Most Media-recognized Think Thanks in China (2016)

Rank	Name	Type
1	China Association for Science and Technology 中国科学技术协会	Scientific research institution
2	Chong Yang Institute of Finance, Renmin University of China 中国人民大学重阳金融研究院	University affiliated
3	Central Party School of the Communist Party of China 中共中央党校	Party School affiliated
4	CASS 中国社会科学院	Academy of Social Sciences
5	Pangoal Institution 盘古智库	Enterprise-socially sponsored
6	Center for China and Globalization 中国与全球化智库	Enterprise-socially sponsored
7	China Finance 40 Forum 中国金融40人论坛	Enterprise-socially sponsored
8	China Business Network Research Institute 第一财经研究院	Enterprise-socially sponsored
9	Liaowang Institute 瞭望智库	Party/government affiliated
10	China Electronics Information Industry Development Academy 中国电子信息产业发展研究院	Party/government affiliated
11	Unirule Institute of Economics 天则经济研究所	Enterprise-socially sponsored
12	China Center for Urban Development 中国城市和小城镇改革发展中心	Party/government affiliated
13	Beijing Academy of Social Sciences 北京市社会科学院	Academy of Social Science
14	21st Century Education Research Institute 21世纪教育研究院	Enterprise-socially sponsored
15	Central Compilation and Translation Bureau 中央编译局	Party/government affiliated
16	Friends of Nature 自然之友环境研究所	Enterprise-socially sponsored
17	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences 上海市社会科学院	Academy of Social Sciences
18	SIFL Institute 上海金融与法律研究院	Enterprise-socially sponsored
19	China Index Academy 中国指数研究院	Enterprise-socially sponsored
20	Forecast Think Tank 福卡智库	Enterprise-socially sponsored
21	Analysys 易观智库	Enterprise-socially sponsored

Rank	Name	Type
22	The Charhar Institute 察哈尔学会	Enterprise-socially sponsored
23	National Academy of Development and Strategy, Renmin University of China 中国人民大学国家发展与战略研究院	University affiliated
24	Chinese Academy of Sciences 中国科学院	Scientific research institution
25	China Academy of Urban Planning and Design 中国城市规划设计研究院	Party/government affiliated
26	China Philanthropy Research Institute, Beijing Normal University 北京师范大学中国公益研究院	University affiliated
27	China Strategic Culture Promotion Association 中国战略文化促进会	Enterprise-socially sponsored
28	China Society of Economic Reform 中国经济体制改革研究会	Enterprise-socially sponsored
29	Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce 商务部国际贸易经济合作研究院	Party/government affiliated
30	Development Research Center of the State Council 国务院发展研究中心	Party/government affiliated

Source: Tsinghua University (2017).

the executive director of the OBOR think-tank alliance. It has actively reached out to countries regarding OBOR, for instance, by organizing dialogues with think tanks in Iran, Turkey, India, Nepal, the United States, Kazakhstan and other countries. Its researchers have visited more than 30 countries “to tell China’s stories...promoting the understanding of OBOR across the world and boosting the development of Chinese public diplomacy.” It was a major contributor to the first authoritative report on OBOR progress released in September 2016 (Yang 2016). In May 2017, the Chinese government hosted a Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, attended by nearly 30 heads of states and high officials of various international organizations, to promote its plan of trade and investment overseas. Many social think tanks held conferences, dialogues and media events in the margins of the main official event. Clearly, both governmental and social think tanks are active participants in the implementation of China’s foreign policy.

Think-tank activities sometimes take place alongside intergovernmental diplomacy. For instance, since 2011, the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum (CATTF) has taken place in conjunction with the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). As part of the sub-forums of FOCAC, CATTF is

viewed as part of China’s soft power campaign to shape the African elite’s perception of China and improve China’s image on that continent (Sun 2015). Similarly, since 2012, the T20 has been held alongside the G20. Chinese think tanks have been quite active in participating in the T20 meetings. In 2016, during China’s presidency of the G20, three designated Chinese think tanks — the Institute of World Economics and Politics at CASS, the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies and RDCY — organized the T20 summit in China. It was a highly visible component of China’s growing profile in global governance.¹⁶ Success in hosting this type of international event is applauded in the Chinese media as a marker of Chinese soft power and influence.

In contrast, most think tanks in Western countries are not involved in the implementation of specific government policies. This is not to say they do not serve the needs of their governments. Since they tend to share the basic assumptions and tenets of their political systems, their international networking activities often help promote Western norms in the world, which can, in turn, create a favourable and receptive environment for

¹⁶ See www.t20china.org/news_list.php?cid=688.

their countries' foreign policy. But they seldom work as agents of the government in conducting diplomacy. In fact, they typically strive to maintain some distance from particular administrations.

Think Tanks and Interest Groups

Some researchers in China note that in Western countries think tanks help channel and balance the preferences of different interest groups regarding government policy. While China has a different political system, they note, the difference between China and Western countries is not so clear-cut; there are different interest groups in China, too. In fact, China has entered an era of intense interest conflicts, and these conflicts are not adequately channelled by the existing system (Zhu and Liu 2012). China can learn from Western experience and allow think tanks to assume the function of collecting the views of different interest groups and conveying them to the policy makers. This would make interest group politics more transparent and easier to regulate (Xu 2016).

Others are more critical of the connection between think tanks and interest groups. One outspoken think tank scholar argues that in China, different government departments have been preoccupied by their own bureaucratic interests, so much so that they routinely influence policy making and policy implementation in ways that undermine the national interest (Jiang 2006). He further argues that some ministry-sponsored think tanks are mainly working to promote special interests. He criticizes researchers in those think tanks for bending their academic opinions to comply with the ministries' needs. He claims that "in addition to their weak academic background, domination by special interest groups also leads Chinese think tanks into errors and misjudgments" (Jiang quoted in Chen 2009). Prominent commentators and government officials have often called for efforts to prevent think tanks from becoming servants of special interests (see, for example, Ren 2013; Yang 2015).

One way to gauge the relationship between think tanks and interest groups is by examining the funding of the think tanks. As noted earlier, a number of US think tanks are advocacy groups, including the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Policy Studies. They use their intellectual capital to promote their ideologically derived policy agendas. Similar think tanks that combine policy research and political advocacy can also be

found in Canada, such as the C. D. Howe Institute, the Fraser Institute and the North-South Institute (Abelson and Carberry 1998). They are known for their ideological orientation, and their funding sources are often quite open to the public.

However, this method is not very useful for revealing which think tanks may be serving which interest groups in China because of the relatively opaque nature of Chinese think tank funding. Transparify is an organization that rates the transparency of think tanks based on the financial information they publicly disclose on their website regarding who funds them and for what. Think tanks get four stars if they are broadly transparent. At the opposite end of the spectrum, zero or one star is given to think tanks that fail to disclose even the names of some or all of their donors (Transparify 2016). Leveraging Transparify's methodology, the authors analyzed the 2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report and found that the top 20 US think tanks had an average funding transparency of 3.45. A similar analysis of the SASS 2016 Think Tank Report showed the average funding transparency of the top 20 Chinese think tanks to be 1.75 (see Table 3). While Chinese think tanks generally lack funding transparency, the problem is especially salient for enterprise and socially sponsored think tanks, university-affiliated think tanks and ministerial think tanks.

Conclusion

The rise of think tanks in China has been largely a government-driven phenomenon. The party-state hopes to create a number of high-end think tanks that will serve three purposes: improve policy making, direct public opinion and increase China's soft power abroad. This conclusion will briefly comment on the effect of Chinese characteristics on Chinese think tanks' ability to fulfill these expectations.

Do think tanks improve policy making in China? Most Chinese think tanks are affiliated with and funded by the government. Such close ties constitute a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they give Chinese researchers access to policy makers, which facilitates their input in policy making. On the other hand, their institutional and financial dependence on the government

Table 3: Funding Transparency of Top 20 Chinese Think Tanks

Type	Number of Think Tanks	Average Funding Transparency (1–5)
Enterprise-socially sponsored think tanks	1	1.00
National-level party, military, government think tanks	11	2.18
University-affiliated think tanks	3	1.00
Ministerial think tanks	4	1.00
Local research institutions	1	3.00
Local party and government think tanks	0	N/A

Source: Authors' calculations.

limits their intellectual autonomy. Rather than questioning government policies, these think tanks primarily provide ideas on how best to execute the policies chosen by the government. Even social think tanks, which are not officially part of the government and receive their funds from non-government sources, tend to refrain from questioning government decisions and their underlying assumptions, perhaps more so than their counterparts with government affiliations, in order to obtain the goodwill of the government. Thus, the policy input of think tanks in China is limited and largely technical. Despite the rapid growth in the number of think tanks in China, they have not been the source of much new thinking on policy issues. They may be able to improve the execution of government policy, but are not likely to play a significant role in providing innovative ideas or preventing major policy blunders.

Do think tanks offer guidance for public opinion? Chinese think tanks of all types have eagerly used the media to influence the public. The publications by the most popular think tanks reach tens of millions of readers on WeChat (Tsinghua University 2017). Compared with traditional Party and government documents, these publications are less sloganeering and have at least the appearance of greater intellectual depth. They seem to be playing an important role in informing the public of major policy issues, explaining government policies, and directing the public in politically correct directions. In this area, Chinese think tanks have done quite well in accomplishing the mission set for them by the Party state. However, in the long run, if Chinese think tanks turn out to be no more than a more sophisticated system of propaganda, their credibility at home and abroad will be undermined.

Do think tanks increase China's soft power abroad? Chinese think tanks have tried to facilitate the implementation of Chinese foreign policy through their interactions with foreign think tanks and their participation in track two diplomacy. Rather than using carrots and sticks, they try to persuade. Key phrases used by Chinese leaders, such as "to tell China's story well" and to "raise China's voice," illustrate their hope for Chinese think tanks in this realm. So far, the result is mixed. Organizations in many countries have been keen to interact with Chinese think tanks. However, they have mostly sought to use such interactions to gain information about Chinese policy making, which remains highly opaque. There is little evidence that the international outreach by Chinese think tanks has improved the perception of China and its policies. Nor have the large number of think tanks in China given it a much louder voice in global governance. For example, many Chinese think tanks specialize in international financial matters, but China remains rather passive on a variety of important issues, such as sovereign debt restructuring and banking regulation (Wang 2014; Walter 2016). An earlier study finds China has been an underperformer in global governance in part due to its lack of a vibrant civil society (Wang and French 2013). The ineffectiveness of Chinese think tanks is part of this larger phenomenon. Without a strong civil society, Chinese think tanks will continue to be limited in their ability to contribute diverse and original ideas to the world. That will limit China's voice on the international stage.

To summarize, think tanks in China have both commonalities and differences with think tanks in Western countries such as the United States and Canada. On balance, the Chinese characteristics of these think tanks — their relationship with

the government and the way they carry out their functions — limit their effectiveness in improving policy making and increasing the country's soft power. They may be a useful instrument for the party-state to inform and guide public opinion in China for the time being, but that may not be a sustainable or a particularly valuable role for think tanks in the long run.

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CIGI PUBLICATIONS

ADVANCING POLICY IDEAS AND DEBATE



Southern Accents: The Voice of Developing Countries in International Financial Governance

CIGI Paper No. 141
James M. Boughton

When the modern international financial system was created during World War II, it was designed largely, but not exclusively, by a few advanced and industrialized economies. This paper examines that process by which the developing countries have come together as a group to try to influence the evolution of the financial system. It then reviews some of the successes of that effort. The effort to regain and preserve influence and the reasons that it became increasingly difficult are then examined. The paper concludes with some reflections on the challenges going forward.



De-risking: Effects, Drivers and Mitigation

CIGI Paper No. 137
James A. Haley

This paper examines the phenomenon of derisking, or the loss of financial services as large international banks close or curtail correspondent banking relationships with banks in smaller jurisdictions. It outlines the effects of de-risking and identifies a range of possible measures to mitigate them. Today, global banks operate across a range of jurisdictions, regardless of the country in which they are licensed; therefore, an effective strategy for addressing the challenge of de-risking requires international cooperation.



European Capital Markets Union Post-Brexit

CIGI Paper No. 140
Miranda Xafa

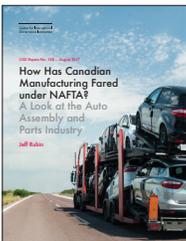
This paper covers four main areas: the motivation for capital markets union (CMU) and the expected benefits for the functioning of the European economy and financial system; the road map for its implementation and the obstacles and challenges the CMU project is facing in view of the Brexit vote; the role of the European Securities and Markets Authority versus national supervisors; and the steps taken so far in implementing the European Commission's action plan aimed at identifying and removing obstacles to cross-border capital markets transactions, as well as the policy priorities and the sequencing of reforms given the complexity of the task ahead.



A G20 Infrastructure Investment Program to Strengthen Global Productivity and Output Growth

CIGI Paper No. 136
Malcolm D. Knight

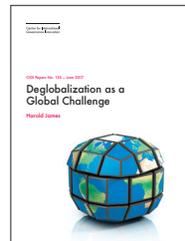
In addition to the weak growth of domestic demand that has persisted in many countries since the onset of the global financial crisis, another crucial macroeconomic policy issue is the need to modernize and expand the international network of basic infrastructure to foster stronger long-term global growth of productivity and output capacity. This paper describes the nature of the supply-side issue and outlines the key policy elements that are needed in each G20 country to design and implement a successful National Infrastructure Investment Program (NIIP) and describes how these NIIPs could be integrated into an internationally coordinated program.



How Has Canadian Manufacturing Fared under NAFTA? A Look at the Auto Assembly and Parts Industry

CIGI Paper No. 138
Jeff Rubin

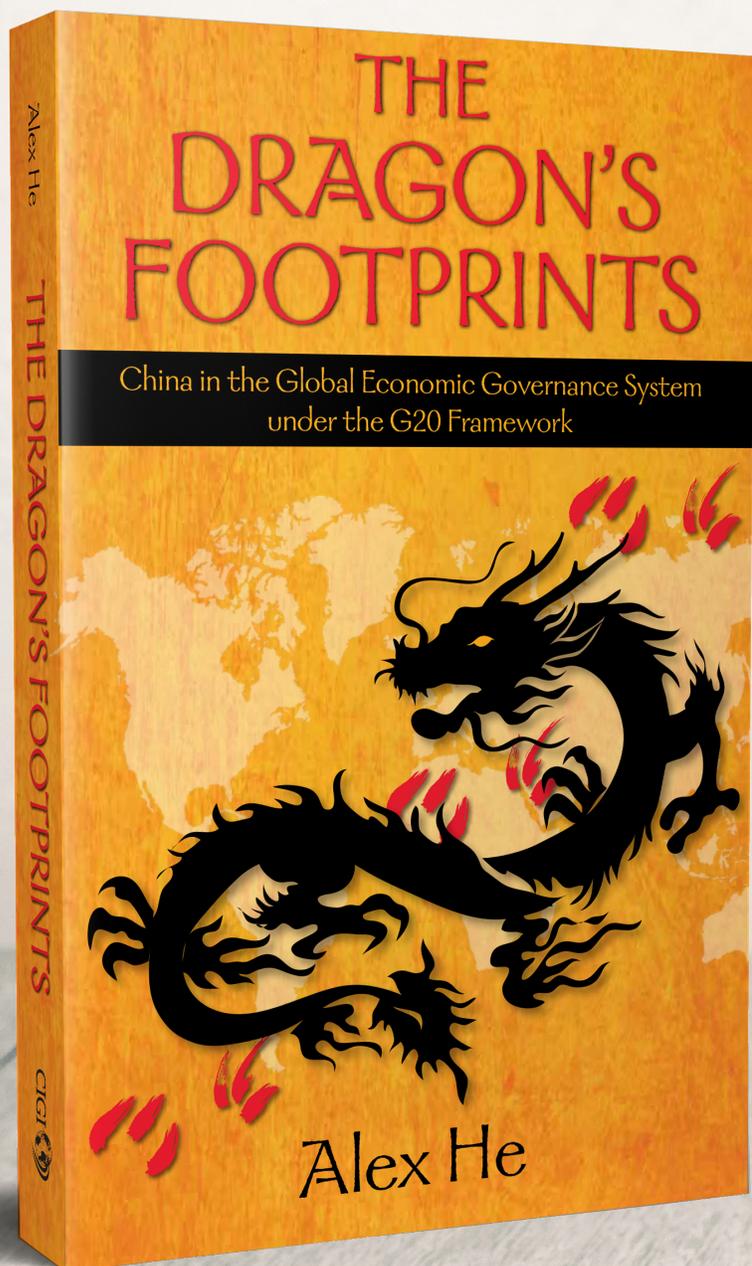
Under duty-free trade provided by NAFTA, local vehicle assembly and parts jobs and production in both the United States and Canada have been traded to Mexico for higher industry profit margins and lower vehicle prices for North American consumers. With the Trump administration pledging to renegotiate NAFTA and specifically target Mexico's burgeoning assembly and parts industries, what are the best trade policy options for Canada's largest manufacturing sector and exporter?



Deglobalization as a Global Challenge

CIGI Paper No. 135
Harold James

The world is threatened by backlashes against globalization, or "deglobalization," and, remarkably, these are particularly pronounced in the countries that drove the construction of an international order in the second half of the twentieth century. There are also attempts to build an alternative new "globalization 2.0." This paper looks at the interrelations between moves toward trade protection, the limitations of movements of people, the regulation of capital flows and the attempts to restrict information access.



The Dragon's Footprints

China in the Global Economic Governance System under the G20 Framework

Alex He

Under the shadow of the global financial crisis, China's participation in the Washington G20 Summit in 2008 marked the country's first substantial involvement in global economic governance. China played a significant role in the global effort to address the financial crisis, emerging onto the world stage of international governance and contributing to global macroeconomic policy coordination in the G20 ever since.

The Dragon's Footprints: China in the Global Economic Governance System under the G20 Framework examines China's participation in the G20; its efforts to increase its prestige in the international monetary system through the internationalization of its currency, the renminbi; its role in the multilateral development banks; and its involvement in global trade governance.

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Our research programs focus on governance of the global economy, global security and politics, and international law in collaboration with a range of strategic partners and support from the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, as well as founder Jim Balsillie.

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Au Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance internationale (CIGI), nous formons un groupe de réflexion indépendant et non partisan qui formule des points de vue objectifs dont la portée est notamment mondiale. Nos recherches, nos avis et l'opinion publique ont des effets réels sur le monde d'aujourd'hui en apportant autant de la clarté qu'une réflexion novatrice dans l'élaboration des politiques à l'échelle internationale. En raison des travaux accomplis en collaboration et en partenariat avec des pairs et des spécialistes interdisciplinaires des plus compétents, nous sommes devenus une référence grâce à l'influence de nos recherches et à la fiabilité de nos analyses.

Nos programmes de recherche ont trait à la gouvernance dans les domaines suivants : l'économie mondiale, la sécurité et les politiques mondiales, et le droit international, et nous les exécutons avec la collaboration de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et le soutien des gouvernements du Canada et de l'Ontario ainsi que du fondateur du CIGI, Jim Balsillie.

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