The Approaches from University Think Tank to Public Think Tank

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Abstract. Since university think tank has become a main part in Chinese think tank system, expanding its research field to serve public become more and more important. Therefore, this paper analyzes the drawbacks of present university think tank and explores the approaches of transforming university think tank to public think tank, consisting of strengthening social responsibility, improving the quality of research, strengthening achievements conversion channel construction, and focusing on publicity.

Introduction

As an important support for government scientific and democratic decision-making, think tank has become an important of national soft power. Moreover, strengthening the construction of think tanks has also become an important content to promote the modernization of national governance system and governance ability.\cite{1} \cite{2} Since China’s economy has entered the new normal, it is urgent to adopt a high level of new think tank system to actively participate in the formulation of public policy and decision-making in the face of the historic task of realizing a well-off society by 2020. According to “\textit{New Think Tank Construction Promotion Plan with Chinese Characteristics}” published by Chinese Ministry of Education, university think tank is considered as an important part of this new think tank system, the functions of which can be clarified as strategic research, policy suggestions, talent training, public opinion guidance, and public diplomacy.\cite{3} Therefore, the mission of Chinese university think tank can be revealed as providing high-level decision-making advisory services for the government and public.

Drawbacks of Present University Think Tank

Although the construction of university think tank has made great progress in recent years, there are still many difficulties and obstacles to achieve a development from university think tank to public think tank that needed and serviced by government and public.

First of all, the lack of attention to the social reality issues becomes an important drawback, which procrastinates the transition from university think tank to public think tank. At present, university think tanks mainly focus on academic theoretical research. However, the practicability and timeliness of the research are neglected.\cite{4} There exists the problem of disconnection between scientific research and practical application. Moreover, some university think tanks reveal the problems such as blind following the trend, lacking of research focus, and repeating research, resulting in their ambiguous value orientation. Therefore, it is difficult for university think tank to become public think tank, as it hardly plays the role of strategic thinking and policy suggestion.

Secondly, university think tanks are mainly lack of high-quality research results, and the mechanism of management systems are needed to improve. Since most university think tanks operate in a relatively closed environment, the internal entities of the think tank merely have tunnels to communicate with each other.\cite{5} Thus, it is difficult for researchers to study the multi subjects and cross departments’ practical problems. Furthermore, as the organizational structure and resource allocation is not scientific, and the talent training and evaluation mechanism should be specifically developed, the comprehensive plan for the university think tank becoming public think is needed to design.
Thirdly, since the communication channel between university think tank and government has been constrained, the discourse power of the university think tank is weak. Compared with government think tank, most university think tanks are far away from government practice. In specific, on the one hand, since the short of institutional arrangements and procedures for university think tanks to participate in decision-making consultation, there exist issue for university think tank to promptly respond advice for government practical problems. On the other hand, the specific project cooperation, project-bidding commission, rolling support, information sharing mechanism and platform are inadequate, which lead to relatively low application conversion rate.

Finally, the university think tanks have single channel of publicity, so that their public influence are weak. Specifically, since the results publishing methods among university think tank are relatively homogeneous, the impact on consensus become much less powerful. In addition, because of the lack of brand building awareness and interaction with overseas think tanks, it is difficult for university think tank to play the important role of public opinion and public diplomacy.

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In order to solve the problems, university think tank should accurately locate its role in public management at the strategic height of the all-round development from the national cause. Systematic exploration and planning are required to achieve the transformation from university think tank to public think tank. Therefore, the reposition of university think tank from providing wisdom to support governance can be achieved.

The first approach is to strengthen social responsibility of university think tank, so that its function can be fully used by government and society. On the one hand, university think tank should change its notion of development, and accurately position its research object. In specific, the notion of development may gradually transform to internal coordination, docking open, and content sharing, which may also establish of academic research as the basis for assisting public affairs decision-making and serving the society. It is necessary to give full play to the professional advantages and the human capital advantages of universities, orientate the strategic needs of the country and the region, focus on the hot spots of public opinion, current affairs, and major issues concerning the people's livelihood, improve the accuracy and social benefits of policy advice, and actively provide strong support for the regional construction and development. To achieve this target, university think tank could combine academia, management and practice together to strengthen social investigation and provide suggestions for the formulation of government public policies, so that the research will not only have the depth of theoretical thought, but also have practical operability. For example, providing targeted policy recommendations in the industry development orientation, transformation and upgrading in the formulation of regional planning can be actively participated in order to generate social benefits. Moreover, promoting the improvement for all micro-entities in regional development through establishing training platform or signing cooperation agreements with local governments and enterprises may also help realizing the attachment among interdisciplinary talents. Thus, a standardized, institutionalized and scientific study of public policy and think tank system for social consultation services can be formed.

On the other hand, identifying path of development, and deepening the reform of management system could also help university think tank transforming to public think tank. Since the promotion of the modernization of think tanks has been proposed by central government, university think tank need to design the reform of the transformation from resource allocation, talent management, coordination mechanism, and cultural construction, so as to form a complete set of think tank system that conforms to the law of decision-making consultation, mutual connection, mutual support and effective coupling. In the specific process of the transformation, through fully gathering information and data, scientific collation and prospective analysis, universities should take the initiative to combine its discipline advantages and characteristics to deliver targeted and innovative policy advice for decision-makers. Meanwhile, constant tracking policy implementation and effectiveness, so that university think tank could become a useful public think tank for the society.

The second approach is to improve the quality of research, so that university think tank can be
trusted by the government and public. Enhancing research capabilities and expending service boundaries are two main approaches to achieve the transformation. University think tank could establish “revolving door” mechanism to create a quotation of inline and outward operation mode, which not only promoting the free flow of researchers, civil servants, social workers, and other community, but also strengthening the coordination among universities, local government, enterprises, research institutions and social organizations to establish a central university knowledge economy. Through hiring well-known scientific researchers, government experts or social talents as visiting researchers of university think tank, sending think tank researchers to administrative department for post exchanges, inviting civil servants to conduct lectures on major principles and policies, research results could achieve more maneuverability and vitality. Establishing multidisciplinary think tank to explore a “virtual-reality combination” and “project research+ simulation experiment” research system could become another important approach to achieve the transformation. For example, it is possible to set up research teams that intersect the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences through projects related to serve social development, so that university think tank could establish, cultivate complex talent database and expand research group to achieve social influence can be achieved. Moreover, university think tank may explore the establishment of a comprehensive research laboratory for social science. This kind of laboratory not only strengthen interdisciplinary of arts and science, and pay attention to the application of modern experimental technology, information technology and network technology for the application of countermeasures to quantitative and experimental expansion to provide think tank technical support, but also is able to conduct stimulation of targeted results. Therefore, the scientific and operability can be improved, so that university think tank can truly “trustworthy” by government and society.

The third approach is to strengthen achievements conversion channel construction, so that university think tank will not be separated from the government and public. Three processes could be done to achieve this target (shown as Fig.1). The first process is that university think tank may unimpeded multi-agent interaction and feedback channels with different organizations in order to form a pattern of "central promotion, local paving and multi-factor coordination". The central government should attach great importance to the role of think tanks in colleges and universities, which promote the government decision-making process into procedural orbit, stipulate the decision-making consultation mechanism in the form of law, and provide legal guarantee for university think tanks to participate in decision-making consulting. Meanwhile, local government should actively construct a multi-dimensional social network model with university think tank, in which attaching importance to the timeliness, practicability, innovation and stability, and promoting the effective connection between the university think tank and the demand-side. Thus, collaboration, openness and sharing among institutions and individuals within and outside university think tank can be gained, and the trust and sense of identity from various subjects can be enhanced. In addition, an office of think tank development and management can be established to measure the subjective and objective of research results, as well as conduct a comprehensive consideration of the areas with strategic importance, actively discuss with the demand-side, and comprehensively measure the current benefits and future performance of the research contents.

The second process is to strengthen the construction of the application channel for the results of the think tank and create an interactive platform for the transformation of results. The timely application and transformation of the research results is a more important link in the transformation of the think tank to the public think tank. Therefore, in the process of the construction of university think tank, we should pay attention to communicate with all the requirements proposed by demand-side, create an interactive achievement transformation platform to open up barriers among research and practice, and achieve multi-level output and improve efficiency of transformation. In specific, it can be suggested that with the target of building an open and collaborative exchange platform for sharing, interaction and feedback, and with integration of ecological policies, scientific computing, data and the Internet and other modern technologies and elements, different objects that related to university think tank could conduct interactive communication and cooperation, which
not only share data and data to promote the integration of all resources, but also support the greater social value for university think tank.

The third process is to provide policy support and improve policy system guarantee. Central government and local government should step up the democratization of public decision-making, and take the initiative to seek the opinions, suggestions and proposals from university think tank. Meanwhile, governments could explore an award mechanism for decision-making consultation results, so as to effectively guarantee the public participation of think tanks and arouse the enthusiasm of university think tank in participating in policy research. In addition, a mechanism for supervising university think tank could also be established. Several facets, such as setting up basic access threshold, evaluation system, professional standards for members, and financial supervision system, are required in order to promote university think tank truly transforming to the think tank that trusted and used by public and government.

Figure 1. Processes to Strengthen Achievements Conversion Channel Construction.

The final approach is to focus on publicity, so that university think tank will be reminded by public and government. On the one hand, it is critical to lead the social ideological trend to create a brand image. As the vitality and value of think tank lies on their influence, the influence is mainly produced through the dissemination and promotion of their achievements. Therefore, to form an influential public think tank, university think tank should influence social ideological trend through multiple channels so as to play an important role in leading public opinion and form an ideological carrier and academic quality combining with public needs. The brand image can be achieved, so as to strengthened the core competitiveness and policy influence.

On the other hand, it is vital to broaden the publicity channels to enhance its influence. Through public communication, organizational communication, and interpersonal communication, university think tank could spread their research results and public opinion with new media, new technologies and new formats. For instance, regular high-level forums should be held with the results-receiving departments, and special interviews with news media should be conducted to promote the publicity of public policy research results, so as to make rational use of and effectively absorb social resources, expand social influence and enhance publicity. Additionally, university think tank could promote the development of "think tank diplomacy", such as actively participate in and actively organize international conferences and international exchange activities, take the initiative to exchange and docking with foreign think tanks, jointly hold international public policy lectures and forums with other countries, and vigorously carry out long-term or short-term international cooperation projects. By holding these international activities, information and advanced experience from different countries and cultures will be gained, and eventually achieve the goal of public diplomacy and promotion international reputation.

Summary
This paper explores the approaches to achieve the transformation from university think tank to
public think tank on the basis of analyzing the drawbacks of present university think tank. For approaches have been clarified, including strengthening social responsibility, improving the quality of research, strengthening achievements conversion channel construction, and focusing on publicity. Advices and countermeasures have also been proposed. Therefore, the transformation can be achieved and contributed to Chinese new think tank system.

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References