Rethinking Think Tanks *in* Contemporary China

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To Bianca

Acknowledgments

Writing a book about Chinese think tanks was not an easy task. The project came out of my PhD dissertation, which I wrote while I was a Fellow at LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome. Since 2011, when I first started to research this challenging topic, many events have occurred, some of which, more than others, have changed the course of my writing, as well as my ideas about the subject. One, in particular, was the reform proposal for the think tank sector in China, announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping and the new administration in 2013. While it is true that before that date, China watchers and scholars of Chinese politics had already dealt—albeit marginally—with the topic, never before the biennium 2012–13 had Chinese think tanks attracted so much attention worldwide, as well as in China. In this sense, I hope this book will be able to contribute further to knowledge about Chinese think tanks, in particular for future research.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The research conducted for this book is derived from the dissertation I wrote as a PhD Fellow at the Department of Political Science at LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome. It is the result of several years of research dedicated to the study of think tanks in China. As a PhD Fellow, I spent several months in China between 2012 and 2014. On one particular occasion, while a Visiting Fellow at China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), I interviewed Chinese professors and academics, former diplomats and think-tank experts. Curiously, during the course of my visit, I discovered that even well-established European think tanks, such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), had opened branch offices in China. However, my incredulity was not because SIPRI—among the most respected think tanks worldwide in the field of security studies—had an office in Beijing, but because the location was far more modest than those of other Chinese think tanks. My astonishment reflects how difficult it can be for Western scholars to fully comprehend the workings of the political and institutional environment in China. More precisely, we tend to take for granted the fact that some of the definitions, conditions and explanations used to understand specific political, cultural and social phenomena in the West can be directly transposed to explain how they work in China.

Today, among China Watchers and specialists on Chinese politics, the think-tank sector in the People's Republic of China (PRC) is often described according to a "false dilemma," that is, based upon a simple and

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straightforward, yet also black-and-white thinking: Chinese think tanks are either directly incorporated into the state's bureaucratic machine or indirectly state controlled. While such an idea seems to be profoundly justified, given China's authoritarian context, the picture is still not complete. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to demonstrate that the blurred, complex and often understudied identity of think tanks in contemporary China, together with the struggle to accurately describe the different functions these actors are allowed to perform, warrants further investigation. In the following chapters, I thus investigate the conundrum raised by this sector in the PRC. Specifically, I am interested in answering some important questions: How can think tanks exert any influence in China if they lack independence from the government? What are the political and social conditions that allow them to play a role? How can the purpose and effectiveness of think tanks in contemporary China be measured? Can they retain credibility and still bring about change in the policymaking process? How do they infiltrate the echelons of supreme power while working within the state apparatus, and not autonomously? Through these questions, I will contribute to the existing debate about the role of think tanks within illiberal, non-Western democratic countries, tackling, in particular, the role of think tanks in the Chinese political system. The motivations driving the book's research are therefore manifold.

First, the book is intended to contribute to the existing literature on the role of think tanks outside Western democratic contexts. In the traditional use of the term, think tanks are often described as non-state actors independent from states, political parties and private interests. However, this definition is becoming less and less popular among scholars and political scientists, especially those investigating the role of think tanks outside liberal domains, and has already attracted a lot of criticism. For the most part, the general tendency has been for the functions of think tanks to be analyzed from a Western perspective, that is, in the United States (US) or Europe. However, this has resulted in studies that do not furnish us with credible information about policy research organizations working within undemocratic and non-Western contexts.

Second, the book specifically focuses on the study of Chinese think tanks. Think tanks and policy research institutes in the PRC have become an essential resource filling a knowledge gap between Chinese political elites and China's changing society. In this regard, the political opportunities "offered" by the various and numerous "characteristics" of the Chinese context in the field of Chinese studies represent an essential

condition for fully understanding the diversity of their role. This is not to suggest that think tanks, research organizations and expert communities in China have generated (or are willing to generate) further pluralism and autonomy from the state, as argued by the liberal theories of civil society and the literature describing think tanks in Western democracies. Rather, think tanks and China's ascent-community of experts represent today an essential resource through which to analyze and understand Chinese politics and its decision-making dynamics in the light of its authoritarian governing system and practices.

Third, this book updates previous research published on Chinese think tanks. Specifically, it acknowledges that the existing literature published about think tanks in China in the 1980s, 1990s and up to the end of the 2000s has largely omitted evidence about their role regarding China's actions and diplomatic activities at the international level. The ascent role the PRC is now playing in world affairs has resulted in more opportunities for Chinese think tanks to play a growing and different role compared with the past, which, in parallel with an increased interaction they maintain with their Western counterparts, highlights the need to make particular reference to how they perform at regional and global levels. This has happened because there has been a change in the place of China in the world and its role in global governance. If predictions are confirmed, China will be the largest economic power within the next two years and by 2019 will overtake the US economy (*The Economist* 2014). While some believe that China will only reach and maintain the position of No. 2 power in the world (Breslin and Zeng 2016), the real challenge lies not just in economic terms, whether the country attains the No. 1 or No. 2 position—for many, the worst-case scenario is that, in the very short term, there will be political predominance by a non-Western, authoritarian and, even worse, Communist-ruled, country.

Not surprisingly, a lot of criticism about Chinese think tanks is often linked with the scarce prospects of regime change in the country. The idea is rooted in the fact that the less democratic a certain political context appears to be, the more restricted the political space will be for certain actors to become influential in decision- and policymaking processes, with the consequence that the opportunities think tanks will have to affect or influence political elites will be restricted. As a result, given the resilience of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to collapse, the tendency is to assume that think tanks play only a marginal, and perhaps inconsequential, role in the vast and complicated scenario of the Chinese political

system. Furthermore, in past decades, empirical efforts to understand the working mechanisms of the Chinese decision-making system, both at the national and international level, have encountered numerous obstacles, given China's authoritarian context. The result has been that for a long time the PRC has been considered as a monolithic country governed by a homogeneous ruling elite. This has led to theories that other sectors and actors in Chinese politics and society are indeed essential components of China's policymaking dynamics.

Fortunately, this tendency has now changed, and today there is a vigorous debate among China Watchers, political scientists and specialists about the many facets of the Chinese political system, its decision-making processes and the CCP. As for studies about the CCP, scholars are divided into two schools of thought (Dickson 2016). Some believe that the fate of the Communist Party is marked by imminent collapse, with the regime at a crossroads. When compared with previous political generations, weak leaders, a weak government and a weak Party have already undermined China's long-standing political tradition (Li 2012). The Party's actions have contributed to the growing number of complaints from the Chinese middle classes about government policies; and interest groups have never been so powerful as in recent years. Indeed, China is still far from presenting the main characteristics that would allow an ordered regime transition, that is, the acceptance of dissent and competition between different political forces, and inclusiveness, with large segments of the population entitled to oppose the government's conduct (see Dahl 1971; Morlino 2012).

In fact, to others, quite the opposite seems to be true: the CCP has proved capable in the last decade of staying in power, notwithstanding the several internal and external crises it has faced. Andrew Nathan coined the expression "authoritarian resilience" in order to explain the PRC political system, which assumes the eternal survival of the Chinese political regime (Nathan 2003). In such a context, although China remains a one-party rule, authoritarian regime, provincial and local governments, as well as state-owned enterprises (SOEs), have been able to gain greater autonomy to pursue their own agendas (Perry 2013). Both visions highlight the necessity of increasing our knowledge of the complicated puzzles related to China's political context and its decision-making system. As this research will demonstrate, think tanks are essential actors in the study of Chinese politics precisely because they are able to perform different functions, even though they operate within an authoritarian context.

Understanding Chinese Politics Through the Study of Chinese Think Tanks

Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the CCP on November 15, 2012 and President of the PRC on March 14, 2013. Since then, the authority of the CCP has rarely been under discussion, although skeptics of the Party's resilience believe it is now a stagnant reality and internally divided. Two days later, the dismissal of the Chongqing Party Secretary, Bo Xilai, on March 16, 2013, was undoubtedly one among the many recorded major scandals that had hit the Chinese political scene in decades. The son of Bo Yibo, a veteran very close to Deng Xiaoping's political circle, Bo Xilai distinguished himself as one of the greatest free-thinking regional leaders, but may have proved to be too independent for the leaders in Beijing. Expelled from the Party on September 28, 2013, he is now detained in the Qincheng Prison in Beijing. This prison belongs to the Ministry of Public Security and, ironically, is the same detention site in which Bo Xilai's father was detained during the years of the Cultural Revolution.

While the Bo Xilai scandal demonstrated the immediacy through which the Xi Jinping administration was able to solve political difficulties by the removal of leaders against the will of the people, in the eyes of the international community the sacking of Bo was seen as a clear sign that the Party was suffering from internal tensions and a lack of cohesiveness among its members. However, this tendency should not be regarded as the capacity of the CCP to resist political and institutional change—authoritarian resilience as it was defined previously—but rather as the result of "collective leadership" based upon "new mechanisms, institutional regulations, policy measures, and political norms to resolve its inherent deficiencies and inadequacies" (Li 2016, 8). Rather than operating within a zero-sum dynamic, indeed a bipartisan logic, factions inside the CCP are oriented towards a more collaborative approach (Lai and Kang 2014).

Yet, in this light, it seems hard to believe that policymaking decisions in China are a result exclusively of the discretion of Party officials and cadres sitting in the CCP Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). Without doubt, the majority of both domestic and foreign policies are still determined—and will be for a long time—by the PSC, which includes the President, the Premier and other high-level officials. At the same time, it is now recognized that the perception of China's foreign policy being decided by a very centralized elite in Beijing "is no longer as valid as it used to be"

(Lanteigne 2013, 18). On this point, Jakobson and Knox have noted that one of the most difficult tasks in analyzing foreign and security policy is to understand precisely who the actors are, how influences are generated, and how policy outcomes are determined (2010). Having said this, in the case of China, they believe it is necessary to distinguish between two broad types of actors: official foreign policy actors, that is, the CCP, the State Council and the various ministries and the People's Liberation Army (PLA); and new actors operating on the margins, that is, Chinese SOEs, financial institutions and energy companies, local governments, research institutions and media and citizens (Jakobson and Knox 2010).

Against this background, this volume also builds upon and contributes to the literature in the field of Chinese politics, drawing from the necessity to investigate the PRC's foreign policy and diplomacy through new lenses of analysis, alternative explanations and with the inclusion of new actors. While recognizing China's authoritarian system and the strong authority the Party retains in the process of policy formulation and implementation, the book questions the importance of distinguishing how think tank activities influence or play a role in terms of policy formulation, acknowledging the differences that exist among different authoritarian environments. For instance, considering authoritarianism's different typologies, the PRC is defined as a "single-party" regime (Geddes 1999, 4). According to Davenport, it is exactly within such realities that, on account of the heavy role played by the bureaucratic sector, single-party governments are unable to totally restrict certain liberties and at some point, the state is obliged to "allow citizens to enjoy diverse rights," though "within the constraints fixed by the dominant political actor" (Davenport 2007, 490). Given the lack of transparency characterizing China's political environments, scholarship relating to the PRC has focused for a long time mostly on explanations about Chinese politics, based on an analysis of the leader's behavior, that is, Mao Zedong (1949–1976) rather than Deng Xiaoping (1977–1992) (Baum 1994; Vogel 2011; Breslin 2014). While it remains highly complicated—if not impossible—to individualize specifically who and what actors are responsible for Chinese domestic and foreign policy, the perception that only a small centralized elite in Beijing is accountable for policy implementation sounds today like an old-fashion explanation, which definitely appears to have less validity than it once had.

The emphasis on change does not entirely dismiss the continuities characterizing China's decision-making setting. For instance, the author clearly recognizes how few opportunities were left for pluralism concerning the

political sphere and, especially, its public space at least until the end of the 1990s. For sure, at that time, Chinese society was still recovering from two shocking episodes: first, the lost decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and second, the Tiananmen massacre (1989). Similarly, it is acknowledged within the study that since Xi Jinping took office in 2012, the Party leadership has imposed a severe constraint on intellectual freedom. Today, in order to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive picture of Chinese politics and its society, investigations should consider both changes and continuities. Since Hu Jintao became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 2003, Chinese politics have shifted from strongman, power-centric politics to a more collective and, to a certain extent, *inclusive*, leadership. For instance, even though the CCP's Central Committee's Leading Small Groups (LSG) has advised the Party Politburo on policy decisions for several decades, in recent years leaders in Beijing seem to have "lifted the curtains obscuring aspects of leadership policymaking" (Miller 2008, 1).

At the same time, the world we live in today is one in which the role played by China appears totally different compared to just ten years ago. During the Chinese government of Jiang Zemin in the 1990s, the majority of foreign policy initiatives concentrated on state-to-state relations, that is, with a focus on great powers, or on China's periphery, that is, with neighboring countries in Asia such as South Korea, Vietnam or Singapore. Since Hu Jintao took office in 2003, there has been a shift of priorities in relation to Chinese foreign policy, with a focus on efforts "to build a policy of cross-regional diplomacy, seeking to expand Chinese diplomatic ties with regions beyond the Asia-Pacific, including Europe, but also in the developing states of Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the South Pacific" (Lanteigne 2013, 12). Even though the majority of foreign policy and diplomatic activities are still the prerogative of government, and of the CCP, new actors are making significant progress in the global arena, among which are think tanks and policy experts. As China is more open to the outside world, and far more globalized than it was in the past, the need for political leaders to rely on expertise vis-à-vis topics and issues once marginal to China's foreign policy and diplomacy has increased, in non-traditional forms such as cyber security, to environmental threats such as secure food supplies.

It is precisely because of such a framework that the philosophy adopted by this book delves deeply into China's current changes with regard to its decision-making system. By taking this "change-level" view, the book

acknowledges that in the last two decades, two inevitable transitions have occurred in terms of Chinese politics and, in particular, with regard to its policy-process formulation: the shift from being simply politically and ideologically oriented to a focus on strong efficiency in policymaking; and the shift from Party-elite exclusive monopoly to the inclusion of a wide range of diverse actors in the process of policy formulation (Zang 2006). In parallel with changes affecting China's decision-making dimension is the necessity to also consider international challenges relating to the future of diplomacy and foreign policy. The international environment in which the majority of policy research organizations operate, that is, transnational forums and Track II (T2) activities, has become the crowdsourcing of ideas and knowledge provided and shared by numerous well-established academics, young researchers and foreign policy experts. For this reason, at this stage key developments in the study of Chinese international politics should be focused on the margins of the decision-making "nucleus," and in particular the multi-layered channels existing among the Party, the state, and Chinese society.

In the last two decades, think tanks (智库 *zhiku* or 思想库 *sixiangku*) and a growing community of experts, among others, have been given more leeway in China. They have attracted the attention of scholars both from the so-called "area studies" field and political scientists, although in general, these two categories tend to disagree about how to theoretically frame the role of think tanks within China's decision-making system. The debate among China Watchers reached a "tipping point" in 2002, when *The China Quarterly*, a leading journal in the field of Chinese studies, issued a special edition entirely dedicated to the think-tank sector in China. In parallel, some scholars familiar with the study of think tanks decided to enlarge their research agenda to include the Chinese context, acknowledging the growing participation of Chinese think tanks at the international level. Among these is James McGann, Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania, USA. He began to investigate the roles played by think tanks in the East Asian context, including China's mushrooming phenomena. In 2010, he started to include research institutes in China within a ranking of the best-known think tanks, that is, the Global Go To Think Tanks Index.

In the following chapters, this volume further unravels this puzzle, and intends to pinpoint the real factors at work in China, as well as discussing the need to improve think-tank studies concerning contemporary China.

It includes a partial empirical investigation and case-study analysis devoted to the sector. The Chinese case has been largely marginalized, compared with the Western tradition, that is, in the US or in the European Union (EU), and as a consequence China has often been absent and sometimes even irrelevant within debates on research organizations. In China, think tanks—or policy research institutes—perform a wide range of functions and have been established as information gathering businesses, government consultants, academic research organizations, and policy advisors. In the traditional literature, they are often portrayed as one type of civil society organization, that is, they count as major contributors to the strengthening of a country's democratic development (United Nations 2003). However, such an understanding is problematic when even the typical Western definition of "civil society" can have different connotations to the term as used in a Chinese context.

Over time, the assumption that think tanks serve primarily as "catalysts" for democratic ideas has left unexplained the hows and whys that this growing sector developed outside Western contexts, particular under an authoritarian regime. The characteristics of these institutes and the roles they currently perform vary profoundly when compared with think tanks operating in liberal democracies. In fact, think tanks across the developing world have often been created as "instruments to legitimize and consolidate existing regimes or leaders" (Nachiappan et al. 2010, 3). Therefore, the existence of think tanks where strong leaders dominate a country's political culture has presumed that they "tend to filter and exclude voices and ideas from the policy process and to contain public debate" (Shai and Stone 2004, 142). Against this framework, Chinese think tanks and policy research organizations are positioned exactly in the middle of this controversy: they are neither wholly "independent" nor completely bounded by government's restrictions or control. Similarly, their activities are not very different when compared with their Western counterparts. Specifically, to some researchers employed at major research institutes in China, think tanks carry out a wide range of activities:

> Among the main duties for think tanks are research activities, consultancy for the Chinese government and International Organizations as well as academic activities (teaching, international exchanges, public and international meetings and conferences). (CASS researcher, informal meeting with the author, Rome 2015)

Nevertheless, it is believed that official research organizations providing consultancy services to the government in China are those that are able to exert more influence when compared with independent, non-governmental organizations because:

> We make better achievements compared with other non-governmental research organizations due to our proximity to Party cadres and officials. (CASS researcher, informal meeting with the author, Rome 2014)

Jessica C. Teets has explained that in China there is a concept we should be aware of when dealing with state–society relations, which she refers to as "consultative authoritarianism" (CA). Explicitly, it is a model where the development of an autonomous civil society is not precluded, yet nor is it state controlled. This is because, on the one hand, civil society actors generate reliable information for the authorities, by which the state is able to improve governance and monitor citizens' dissatisfaction; and on the other hand, civil society advocates are still able to push for citizen participation in policymaking while asking for more accountability (Teets 2014). To summarize: the political and social environment in China, even if similar to those of other authoritarian regimes, still presents certain peculiarities that require further attention.

Over time, because of a lack of political pluralism, think tanks were intended as marginal actors regarding China's policymaking. While China's authoritarian nature is still in place, there now exists a consistent body of literature about Chinese civil society which argues that authoritarianism in China does not exclude civil society and non-governmental organizations a priori. Rather, for the most part, the Chinese social and political system includes sectors and actors that operate beyond the state. The argument challenges orthodox beliefs according to which non-state actors and civil society organizations have usually tended to grow and operate in the West. Perhaps the analysis disagrees with that part of the literature on civil society depicted by Western neoliberal assumptions, which assumed that the relationship between the non-state sector and the state was just a zero-sum game, but which "did not offer particularly appropriate or useful analytic frameworks for examining Chinese society" (Hsu 2014, 264). Too often, studies about civil society–government interaction avoid focusing on cooperation rather than competition. However, it is precisely the reciprocal synergy between these two that generates the enhancement of the political capabilities of both governmental

and non-governmental actors (Marchetti 2013). In a similar vein, the existing literature dealing with think tanks in China has tended to portray their role and the synergies they maintain with the state only as the result of restricted control by the government sector and its bureaucratic management. However, they have missed the point that, in recent years, China's research and expert-community–government interaction has provided new possibilities for addressing essential dynamics in order to expand investigations about the Chinese policymaking system.

Book Outline and Methodology

The book is divided into six chapters. Following this introduction, Chap. 2 presents the analytical framework informing the research for this book. The chapter studies think tanks by conceiving of them as "knowledge agents" capable of influencing policymaking beyond the working mechanisms of official actors, formal structures and the traditional processes of policymaking. In doing so, it introduces the framework of knowledge regimes as the overarching theoretical narrative which explains the role Chinese think tanks play in relation to the state's external action and behavior (i.e. foreign policy strategies and interests, and diplomatic narratives and practices). According to Pedersen, a knowledge regime is the way a government or a regime has organized the production of policy research over which it will eventually make a political decision (ANU TV 2012). In 2012, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for think tanks with Chinese characteristics to be established and to make the development of a think-tank industry a national strategic priority. In his opinion, Chinese think tanks had failed in the previous decade to grow in parallel with China's steady development. As a consequence, Chinese think tanks today lack strong international influence and reputation. At the same time, the plan stressed the intention of the Xi Jinping administration to develop a think-tank industry functioning in line with the state apparatus and not autonomously.

How then can we understand and contextualize such a growing industry in contemporary China? There are numerous reasons of primary interest as to why knowledge regimes represent a convincing framework for analyzing Chinese think tanks and their roles in the process of foreign policymaking and diplomatic practices. First, knowledge regimes are concerned with understanding where certain ideas come from and how they affect policymaking and public debate. The second reason, which is strictly

related to, and to some extent even more important than the first one, is that the theoretical and analytical agenda of the knowledge regimes' framework is not just concentrated on why and how policymakers decide to opt for a certain (policy) idea over another one, but specifically, on the organizational and institutional machinery, that is, think tanks, by which ideas are generated. A fundamental feature is that the overall machinery of policy research organizations as intended by the approach includes both non-governmental policy research organizations, and parties and state research units (Campbell and Pedersen 2014). This allows us to highlight a third reason why the approach is particularly useful when applied to the Chinese context: that is, the belief that "policy ideas have national origins and the way they are produced is largely determined by national specific institutions" (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 4). Last but not least, at the heart of the knowledge regimes approach lies the belief that

> Knowledge regimes [have become] more important for advanced capitalist countries as policymakers and others [grapple] with the challenges of globalization. Put differently, this is an age when policymakers strive to recognize and improve their country's institutional competitive strength and rely increasingly on the production of policy-relevant knowledge to do so. (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 5)

Although the definition of China as an "advanced capitalist country" sounds somehow exaggerated, as far as China is concerned the concept of knowledge regimes is essential in order to understand how knowledge-producing organizations, that is, think tanks and policy research organizations, are influenced by China's political and institutional context, how they are categorized and how they have evolved since the first institutes were founded in the 1950s, as well as how they are coping with the many challenges brought about by China's growing exposure to globalization, and the extent to which this latter process has affected the development of such organizations. For instance, public diplomacy and T2 activities have become a fundamental feature of Chinese diplomacy in the last decade. With China's growing commitment to more and more policy areas of global governance, from sustainable development to security, from economic to environmental activities, a large number of non-state actors involved in different activities (including think tanks, or as experts and academics) play a leading role, multiplied in the light of China's changing behavior in international affairs.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a historical, social and political itinerary of think tanks in China. It focuses on their first appearance in the 1950s, when official research institutes were modeled after the influence of the former Soviet Union, up to a more recent "fourth generation" of Chinese think tanks. In the literature, in formulating a comprehensive analysis of China's community of experts, policy research institutes are divided into "three generations" (Tanner 2002; Shai and Stone 2004). The first traces its roots back to the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, policy institutes were based on Soviet-style research organizations, mostly embedded within governmental departments and institutional missions. The "second generation" of Chinese think tanks emerged in the 1980s. In this period, China's political environment was going through an important transition following the years of the Cultural Revolution. The post-Tiananmen period saw, in fact, the emergence of a "third generation" (Tanner 2002; Shai and Stone 2004). Since the end of the 2010s, a new phase for think tanks and policy research institutes in China has begun. The turning point occurred with Hu Jintao's speech at the seventeenth CCP National Congress in 2007. Hu's intention was to stress the role played by China's scientific community, where the actions of think tanks should now be directed towards "promoting China's excellent mean and talent into the world" (Yu 2013, 19). A second turning point occurred in November 2012, when the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced a new development plan for the think-tank industry in China.

Among the many official documents produced, the one published by the Ministry of Education explains that think tanks in China should have "Chinese characteristics." The idea has been widely used in the past to reinforce the Communist Party's authority and legitimacy over scientific and academic production, as well as having been taken as the example of the slowdown of democratic practices in China. Nevertheless, the document exemplified in a clear manner the intent of the leadership to engage systematically and publicly with such organizations. For the very first time, the government provided a set of guidelines with regard to think tanks' scope of research, which included eight main areas: economic development (经济建设 *jingji jianshe*); political development (政治建设 *zhengzhi jianshe*); cultural development (文化建设 *wenhua jianshi*); society development (社会建设 *shihui jianshe*); ecological civilization development (生态文明建设 *shengtai wenming jianshe*); Party building (党的建设 *dang de jianshe*); Diplomacy and International Affairs (外交与国际问题 *waijiao yu guoji wenti*); and the practice and promotion of the "One Country

Two System" policy ("一国两制"实践与推进祖国统一 *'Yiguo liangzhi' shijian yu tuijin zuguo tongyi*) (Ministry of Education 2014). Xi Jinping's call allowed for discussion among Chinese academics, policy analysts and national media, though in the West, the discussion went unnoticed at least until 2014. A vast "market of ideas" suddenly materialized concerning the role and function of think tanks, in which Chinese scholars and officials became active "ideational" actors. The debate about the role think tanks should play began to be widely discussed in China as never before, and in order to provide an in-depth understanding about China's expert community, the chapter pays particular attention to this.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on case studies. They are organized along two different policy areas: economic diplomacy and environmental diplomacy. Chap. 4 illustrates economic diplomacy as a fundamental concern of China's foreign policy, and contextualizes the role played by think tanks within it. A significant aim of the chapter is not only to illustrate the major state actors involved or major issues at stake, but to identify China's expert community and think tanks within it. In the PRC, the CCP is still the main actor managing key principles, guidelines and policies concerning China's economic issues and strategies. Yet, this study recognizes how the reorientation of the Chinese government in global contemporary affairs has been accompanied by changes in the make-up of the state (Chin 2007, 158). In 1982, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade (MOFERT) was created through the merger of four existing governmental agencies: the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Economic Relations with Foreign Countries, the Foreign Investment Reform Commission and the State Import–Export Commission. Together with MOFERT, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Finance are the other most important institutions in charge of China's foreign economic relations.

Today, there are many other actors playing an important role within China's economic decision-making system; for example, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), essential to China's economic diplomacy and in charge of the drafting key strategies and the planning of policies for climate change. Similarly, the National People's Congress Foreign Affairs Committee (NPCFAC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) are now very strong and active actors in the realm of China's economic diplomacy. While this book does not underestimate the role played by the above-mentioned government agencies, it insists on the fact that they are not the only actors taking

part in the policymaking process. Existing literature on foreign policy decision-making suggests that, on closer examination, how governments and ruling parties around the world make foreign policy decisions depends on an extensive array of different policymaking entities, and that the pertinent, ultimate decision unit often changes according to the time and the issues (Hermann, Hermann and Hagan 1987, 309). In this respect, how China shapes its foreign economic policies toward Africa or East Asia is, for instance, often the result of a complex process resulting from bilateral and multilateral dialogues, international academic exchanges, and people-to-people diplomacy, in which the role played by China's community of experts within T2 diplomatic activities should not be minimized. For instance, the China–Africa Think Tank Forum (CATTF) played a consistent role in framing the narrative of Sino-African economic relations, "expanding public opinion consensus of both sides and offering suggestions on Chinese's enterprises investments in Africa and African enterprises to enter the Chinese market" (Zhang, Wang, et al. 2012, 65). The Forum stands as an important supporter of FOCAC (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation), which is conducted at Ministerial level. CATTF played an outstanding role in generating insightful analyses and policy recommendations in order to strengthen Sino-African economic and political relations.

A second example is the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT) established in Beijing in 2003. Within the network, China's role has been essential in drafting major policy guidelines relating to financial and economic cooperation among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries—China, Japan and South Korea. Yet, for some authors, the majority of policy recommendations has arrived thanks to the intense commitment of the Institute of Asian Studies (formerly known as the East Asia Study Center), a university-based think tank affiliated with the China Foreign Affairs University.

Chapter 5 focuses on China's environmental diplomacy. Since the end of the 1990s, this has been analyzed by examining the country's growing participatory role in international organizations. Although the literature has largely concentrated on looking at the PRC's role from a state-centric perspective, scholarship acknowledges that Chinese experts have now become welcome actors in the policymaking process of climate change. Lately, the contribution of experts has been remarkable for the major shift in the elite view of climate vulnerability, as well as for important policy goals concerning carbon intensity targets (Wubbeke 2013, 738). At the

same time, China's evolution from a 'norm-taker' to a proactive approach as a "norm-maker" represents an important perspective in understanding China's position regarding global environmental governance. Hence, China's interests with regard to norm implementation often reflects a growing consensus by the scholarship and policymaking communities precisely because the PRC is now in a position to engage more proactively in the international environmental system.

Therefore, when investigating China's environmental diplomacy, analyses should be directed not only at examining China's role as an active participant in already existing international organizations, the United Nations for example, but also by looking at the growing role China is playing at the international level within T2 activities. Specifically, such analyses should consider the fact that China functions as a key strategic partner to many industrialized economies, sometimes as a straightforward norm-making actor pushing for its own position concerning environmental challenges and possible solutions. In this respect, Chap. 5 tackles China's stance toward environmental diplomacy, devoting particular attention to think tanks and their involvement in T2 activities. As China is a developing country, Chinese leaders regard economic development and social welfare as major priorities for tackling environmental problems and climate change. Yet, does China's environmental behavior outside its own borders only rely on ideas produced by and discussed within state-led governmental agencies? What role do think tanks and environmental experts perform within T2 diplomatic activities? Once the government has to draft and implement environmental policy guidelines at the national, regional or global levels, is the decision-making process totally state-led or rather, do other actors also play a role? To answer these questions, the chapter investigates think tanks and China's expert community, looking at the numerous environmental think tanks established in the last few years in China, and their role, if any, within T2 environmental diplomatic activities. Case studies are drawn from different contexts and issues, including the China–US partnership on the water–energy–food nexus, where, since 2009, the US–China Clean Energy Research Center (CERC) has become the main channel in implementing T2 activities and diplomatic discussions between China and the US, and the US–China T2 Energy Dialogue. The empirical chapters investigate the predominant role these new actors, that is, think tanks, are assuming in China's environmental diplomacy activities across different geographical regions, from Africa to the country's growing interaction with the US.

Research Design

In an effort to improve our understanding of think tanks in contemporary China, and in particular, the growing role they play at national, international and transnational levels, this research includes a case-study approach as part of its analysis. Within the literature, it is often taken for granted that think tanks provide policymakers with ideas and policy proposals which, if considered or acknowledged by them, will somehow be translated into "concrete" policy proposals. Yet, by making think tanks the dependent variable, this study characterizes itself as different from previous analyses, which have focused on the influence that think tanks play on policymakers' ideas and within the policymaking system, as the *in*dependent variable (McGann and Weaver 2000; Pamar 2013; Stone 1996, 2000, 2005).

The criteria and particularly the reasoning behind the choice to analyze two particular policy areas within this study, that is, economic and environmental diplomacy, are manifold. But, in establishing an element of caution about the ability of think tanks to generate certain policies or ideas, is it viable to rely on such an approach? The answer to this question lies in the necessity of discovering the criteria driving the study in terms of case-study selection.

First, the selection of case studies must be theory-informative (Liao 2006), which means that the case(s) selected have to be the right one(s) for the hypothesis. The reason why the book focuses on Chinese think tanks and research institutes operating in the field of economic and environmental politics and diplomacy is dependent on three main factors. First, in the past, general discussions concerning think tanks have been centered around the fact that no independent think tanks existed in China, and for this reason, most scholars concentrated their efforts mainly on the strictly governmental or semi-governmental organizations, thus treating think tanks, government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) and hybrid institutes as "least likely" cases. Second, analyses of Chinese think tanks in world affairs have rarely, if ever, dealt empirically with the role assumed by think tanks in the foreign policy process (Liao 2006). This means that observations have not concentrated enough on expert policy-production, document analysis and so on. Essentially, where think tanks have been analyzed, this has been done mainly in terms of organizational analysis, which has involved assessing whether or not an organization is attached to a certain ministry or governmental agency. Rarely have scholars discussed their research themes around specific issues

and concrete policymaking. As this study shows, the development of a new generation of Chinese think tanks, in parallel with the attention devoted to them by political elites in the last decade, has contributed strongly to the rise of a new generation of think tanks in China. Their focus of research has expanded to include themes such as economic and environmental governance, and has contributed to think tanks' specializing in different policy fields concerning international affairs and global governance.

Third, despite the growing scholarly interest in Chinese policy research institutes, the link between think tanks and specific "policy areas" is often understudied. Attention so far has been directed mainly towards policy research organizations working in the field of International Relations, and much less in other areas (although there are some exceptions). The truth is that within the Chinese context, plenty of think tanks exist, but apart from some of the most famous organizations, such as the CASS (Chinese Academy of Social Science) or the CICIR (Contemporary Institute of China International Relations), information about and contact with them is largely informal, with documents and reports inaccessible and/or unpublished.

Methodology and Limitations

The book attempts to provide significant, empirical research. Nevertheless, to be realistic, it recognizes the impossibility of isolating think tanks' impact and influence on a specific policy, as well as tracing exactly the process by which certain ideas appear at different stages of the policy process. Rather than recording the number of publications downloaded from a think-tank website, or the number of times a think tank appears in the media, think-tank studies and investigations must also be directed towards the construction of case studies based on qualitative terms, such as interviews or archival research (Abelson 2014). Whereas numerous previous studies about think tanks in China have focused mainly on historical analyses (Stone 2004) and surveys (Zhu 2013), this book relies on an in-depth study of specific think tanks in the Chinese context.

The analysis is qualitative in nature and combines a collection of primary sources composed of official documents, publications released from policy research organizations and T2 networks. The use of secondary sources relies on published academic articles and books about think tanks and their role in international affairs, global governance and T2 diplomacy. Although the author has noted that one of the main goals of

this study is the intention to provide an alternative framework upon which to think, perceive and especially understand Chinese think tanks, she recognizes that no argument or statement could have been provided without the contribution of all the authors cited within the book, the majority of whom have offered essential analyses on the study of think tanks and how they work in the Chinese context.

Furthermore, in the course of my periods of study abroad as a PhD Fellow, between 2012 and 2014, interviews were conducted to enlarge the available material and different channels of information were used to collect primary and secondary sources. Efforts were made to contact Chinese experts working at different institutions and think tanks in China. Interviews were semi-structured and varied according to the person interviewed and the institution involved, but all involved open-ended questioning and concentrated on the following topics:

- the think tank's objective and historical development;
- the relationship between the think tank/organization with the Chinese government;
- the perception of the interviewee about the opportunity think tank experts have in China to take part in the decision-making process;
- practical examples, if any, in which the think tank/organization contributed to the development of a certain policy or issue.

As a reading of the chapters will show, there are some limitations regarding the use of sources and case studies chosen within the book. As for the former, primary sources directly taken from governmental websites as well as semi-structured interviews with Chinese think tank experts cannot provide information that is 100 percent objective about their working mechanisms. Similarly, when in China, I was unable to interview governmental actors and policymakers, which meant it was impossible for me to double-check the role of think tanks regarding decision-making processes. The economic and environmental diplomacy case studies are just a few of many policy domains in which contemporary Chinese think tanks have acquired growing relevance. To address these biases, the study has tried to trace the detailed history of Chinese think tanks since their initial foundation in the 1950s up to the recent plan proposed by the Xi Jinping administration. Furthermore, in order to enlarge the analysis under study relative to Chinese think tanks, the book includes the perspective of different typologies of think tanks, as well as different sources from various policy fields.

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CHAPTER 2

Think Tanks, Knowledge Regimes and the Global Agora

Introduction

The role of "knowledge" and "expertise" in the policymaking process is often understudied. More specifically, within the vast array of global politics, what is often omitted or underestimated is the role played by agents of knowledge: "actors who rely on their expertise (or often their claim to expertise) as the major source of the legitimacy of their role in the policy making process" (Levi-Faur 2005, 955). This chapter introduces the existing literature about specific types of actors that can effectively be classified as agents of knowledge, namely, think tanks and policy research organizations. It starts by introducing the concept of knowledge regimes as a theoretical framework as a means of explaining the intricate dynamic at play between think tanks and the context—policy and production regimes—within which they develop and conduct their activities. Consequently, the chapter revises the existing literature and debates about think tanks. A brief review of the think-tank literature demonstrates that scholars have been concerned more with defining what think tanks are or do than with investigating their roles and functionality arising from the growing political, economic and even social intricacies at national, regional and global levels. Policymaking dynamics in international and transnational spaces require more and more often experts and academic communities to discuss, frame and provide policy solutions, advice and consultancy services to political leaders regarding the "higher degree of pluralization of actors as well as the multiple and contested mode of

S. Menegazzi, *Rethinking Think Tanks in Contemporary China*,
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authority than is usually the case at national levels of policy making" (Stone 2015, 15). Limitations in the study of think tanks are often due to an emphasis on the policymaking process. In particular, there is often a tendency to demonstrate at all costs the causal link between the numerous ideas generated by experts and policy research organizations and policy outputs. However, the crux to understanding the functions of knowledge-producing organizations lies in the unraveling of the policymaking process itself, that is, the different phases of the process, and in acknowledging that policy research organizations have greater opportunities to be involved in "some" of these stages, such as policy research.

Pundits and researchers in the social sciences have long debated whether think tanks are able to affect foreign policymaking. Many now agree that their role in generating ideas and influence clearly matters. The purpose of this study is to analyze think tanks in contemporary China, and this chapter establishes theoretical insights into, and knowledge of, actors and regimes, to generate the analytical framework appropriate to contextualizing both the national and global levels at which Chinese think tanks currently operate. In recent years, the growing development of the think-tank sector in China has attracted speculation about their role in the policymaking system. The majority of investigations into policy research organizations have so far presented the differences as well as the similarities of Chinese think tanks with their Western counterparts. Likewise, previous studies have focused on the relationship between Chinese policy research organizations and elite groups and policymakers, as the definition of think tanks established in Western liberal contexts cannot be applied specifically to the Chinese political system. Some studies have been enlightening in providing detailed and systematic analyses about how such actors conduct their activities in China. Nevertheless, the impact and role of think tanks on China's regional and global modes of governance and external behavior has to be investigated further. For instance, what normative roles do think tanks play in the context of China's political and economic transformations at the international level? The first section of this chapter introduces the notion of knowledge regimes to discuss the delicate but essential balance between think tanks' organizational structures, functions and developments, and the national contexts within which they operate. The second section illustrates think tanks' definitional approaches in the literature. The third section contextualizes the notion of knowledge-producing organizations in relation to their functionality at the regional and global level. Specifically, it conceptually stretches their role in the light

of regionalization and globalization processes, including their role in T2 diplomatic practices.

Think Tanks and Knowledge Regimes

Studies on the role of ideas and their influence in international politics have attracted considerable attention from scholars in recent years. This book, however, focuses more concretely on the role of non-state actors and the circumstances under which this process might occur. More specifically, it focuses on one particular type of actor, namely, policy research organizations, that is, think tanks, government research units, and more generally, organizations that generate and disseminate policy ideas. During the course of the book, this attention will proceed by examining their role in China. The reason for this, prima facie, is because the "market of ideas" has undergone a steady development in China over the last decade, in order to guarantee the ruling Party's legitimacy:

> The legitimacy of the Party is mainly based on its economic and social efficiency (economic development and growth, improved living conditions, stability and so on); so much so that consulting experts has become a crucial element of the current regime's legitimacy building. As a result, between the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth PCC Congresses (from 2002 to 2007) the Political Bureau of the Central Committee organized 44 official meetings dedicated to collective study, at which experts and researchers were invited to give conferences to leaders. Economists, sociologists and political scientists have taken part and have competed to attract and keep the attention of leaders. Some have thereafter proudly claimed to have had an effect on the political decision-making process. (Frenkiel 2015, 84)

One of the most recent and notable contributions to the role of think tanks in the policymaking process is Erin Zimmerman's book *Think Tanks and Non-traditional Security: Governance Entrepreneurs in Asia*. The volume is particularly useful as a point of reference, as it is probably one of the few books that provides an exhaustive framework to deal with the link between ideas and politics outside Western contexts, analyzing think tanks and their networks in Asia. Zimmerman believes think tanks to be "creators, developers and advocates of specific policy agendas" (Zimmerman 2016, 175). Her theoretical approach deals with Discursive Institutionalism (DI) to describe the interconnectivity at play among ideas, think tanks (and their networks) and institutional change.

The choice to focus specifically on DI rather than on other types of institutionalisms, such as Rational Choice Institutionalism (RI), Historical Institutionalism (HI) or Sociological Institutionalism (SI), is given prima facie because "think tanks are discursive actors that exercise power as political agents" (Zimmerman 2016, 177). The concept of DI has been developed by Vivien Schmidt, who explains that it should be seen as "an umbrella concept for the many disparate approaches that concern themselves with the substantive content of ideas and the interactive process of discourse in institutional contexts" (Schmidt 2013, 118). The emphasis, according to such a perspective, is to enlarge on the role played by ideas within institutions, which have, in previous studies, tended to focus on the rationality and efficiency of institutions (RI or HI), or on the cultural and historical contingencies within institutions (SI), but not enough on discourses, narratives or philosophical ideas.

The relationship between ideas and policy, and more broadly between knowledge and power in international politics, has enjoyed renewed attention by scholars after the so-called "ideational turn" in International Relations (IR) theory, which occurred in the late 1990s (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Among the several authors dealing with the subject, some, rather than focusing exclusively on the role of institutions within such processes, have preferred to analyze the role of ideas, and especially, the role assumed by knowledge, the if and how it can affect political governance. In their contribution to the book *Power in Global Governance*, Emanuel Adler and Steven Bernstein maintain that it is precisely a kind of "background knowledge" that explains how people share and select the material and ideational interests they attach to reality. The role of knowledge thus became essential, as it turns individuals into experts while helping them to achieve their interests, goals and objectives (Adler and Bernstein 2005, 295). A problem is located specifically at the intersection between knowledge and power, although the theoretical challenge should not select an ultimate answer between the two, but "develop an analytical framework treatment of such questions, as when and how knowledge matters in the policy process" (Radaelli 1995, 160).

The approach within this book is similar to that taken by Zimmerman, that is, focusing on how certain organizations or institutions—think tanks—play a role in the policy process. It does so by adding to this perspective at least other two analytical arguments which, when considering the specific context of our study, China, cannot be underestimated. First, it considers as a fundamental issue the need to acknowledge that policy ideas do indeed have a national context in which they are generated.

Consequently, the second argument provides enough evidence to demonstrate which (if any) roles relate to China's external relationships and diplomatic activities; how they are generated and how this happens within an institutional environment that has eschewed political pluralism for decades.

In their book, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany and Europe*, Campbell and Pedersen define knowledge regimes as "the organizational and institutional machinery that generates data, research, policy recommendations, and other ideas that influence public debate" (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 3). Their major innovation to the think tanks study-field provides two major considerations. First, the fact that the concept of knowledge regimes applies specifically to policy organizations like "think tanks, government research units, political party foundations and others that produce and disseminate policy ideas, how they are organized and operate and how they have changed" (2014, 3). As such, for the purpose of the present book, the terms knowledge regimes and think tanks will be used interchangeably. Even though the analysis is focused on think tanks within advanced capitalist countries, that is, the US, the UK, France, Germany and Denmark, all Western democracies, the concept proves to be suitable and highly useful when applied to China.

Any scholar willing to approach the study-field of think tanks first has to take into consideration how they are categorized within the literature. In this regard, the first classification made by Kent Weaver at the end of the 1980s still remains "the" categorization within the field. Weaver, professor at Georgetown University and Senior Fellow at Brookings, wrote in 1989 that although no definition of what a think tank does or should do exists, it is possible to distinguish three different types: universities without students, contract research organizations, and advocacy tanks (Weaver 1989). Today, the spectrum of categorization has expanded widely in parallel with the necessity to include think tanks working outside Western liberal democracies. For instance, the latest Global Go To Think Tank Index report acknowledges the necessity of enlarging think tanks' categories beyond the independence vs. non-independence (from government) divide. It lists seven groups: autonomous and independent, quasi-independent, government affiliated, quasi-governmental, university affiliated, political party affiliated, and corporate (for profit) organizations (McGann 2017, 8).

In the existing literature, think tanks are recognized as essential actors in the policy process, providing ideas to policymakers and the government. For a long time, the literature on how ideas affect policymaking has tended to concentrate mostly on how the structure of different types of ideas constrains policymaking. Nevertheless, missing from the discourse has been the role of the actors, organizations and institutions in shaping the generation, framing and transmission of these ideas (Campbell and Pedersen 2011). At the same time, what is missing from the think tanks literature is certainly the virtual lack of attention to "the structure and functioning of knowledge regimes to the production and policymaking regimes in which they are embedded" (2011, 170). This view emphasizes the correlation at play between a certain organization and the environment in which it develops. Limitations in understanding were caused not only because of the marginal knowledge concerning the organizations per se, but because the economic and political context in which they grew or developed was not part of the analyses.

Second, knowledge regimes help in understanding how knowledge shapes the policy process. As Campbell and Pedersen observed, the approach combines an analysis focused on knowledge-production, with insights from the Comparative Political Economy field analyzing its role in relation to production and policy regimes. Production regimes are divided into *liberal market economies* (characterized by the total role of the market as structuring economic activities) and *coordinated market economies* (characterized by non-market oriented and consensus oriented institutions). Policy regimes are divided into *centralized and closed states* (where the policy process is far from being constrained by social pressures) and *decentralized and open states* (where the policy process is instead more inclusive and subject to the influence of public opinion). Therefore, four ideal types of knowledge regimes exist: (1) *market oriented knowledge regimes*, characterized by an intensive competitive space for the market of ideas (liberal market economies within decentralized open states); (2) *politically tempered knowledge regimes*, characterized by a marketplace for ideas where the state plays a consistent role (liberal market economies within centralized and closed states); (3) *consensus oriented knowledge regimes*, characterized by strong consensus oriented behavior and where the role of policy research organizations is very important (coordinated market economies within decentralized and open states); and (4) *statist technocratic knowledge regimes*, characterized by the role of think tanks as being simply the extension of government

ministries and agencies (coordinated market economies within centralized and closed states) (Campbell and Pedersen 2011).

In relation to the type of organization, the two authors list the four types of what they call "knowledge-producing organizations" existing in knowledge regimes. First, there are *academic-style scholarly research units.* These are organizations in which academics, professors and young researchers hold, at the same time, a university appointment plus an affiliation inside the institution. Second, there are what they call *advocacy research units.* These are organizations that are privately funded, and politically and ideologically partisan. Their main research activity is to disseminate policy briefs and papers through media in order to influence public opinion through the proliferation of ideas and debates. The third type of organization are *party research units.* These are closed to political parties and provide expertise with regard to advice and analysis to party members. Finally there are *state research units*, which are directly affiliated to state departments and ministries.

The concept of knowledge regimes is doubly valuable for the purpose of this study, because it provides a real alternative to how think tanks can be categorized depending on their functionality and their national context. These types of think tanks are believed to be at work in capitalist and democratic countries, such as the member states of the EU, or the US. In the case of China, the concept of bipartisanship would sound absolutely nonsensical, given China's authoritarian context. However, while listing state research units or party research units among knowledge-producing organizations, Campbell and Pedersen generate theoretical opportunities to include certain types of organization often discarded by scholars because of their links with the government, and yet which play essential roles in China in terms of policy formulation, such as the Central Party School, directly affiliated with the CCP, or the Development Research Center (DRC), the latter representing a think tank par excellence in China concerned with economic governance and directly affiliated with the State Council. At the same time, their contribution remains impressive if applied to China, because the approach makes clear how a certain knowledge regime reflects essentially the political and economic institutions that are typical of a specific country. In this sense, the approach allows us not only to draw further conclusions about the social and political implications for China's development, but specifically to know more about the normative role of think tanks in the context of China's political and economic

transition. Given the political and socio-economic environment in China, the book cannot avoid comprehending the impact the State Party has on the policymaking process.

The perspective here is to focus on how and why different actors are allowed to play a role within that process, designating particular attention to think tanks. Furthermore, because the process of how think tanks interact with the state is often far from being transparent, and occurs at different levels, that is, central, provincial, and so on, this study does not envision an image of the state in China as a unitary actor. Within such a framework, two related purposes guide the investigation of the book. First, think tanks and research institutions are allowed to play a role in the Chinese policymaking system to the extent that they provide knowledge, that is, information services and know-how, to the leadership in office. Yet, this process has to be based on the interests of the state, and especially, without undermining the Party's authority.

Second, to pursue their respective interests, think tanks display a sort of self-censorship behavior, focusing research agendas on leadership guidelines. At the same time, they are able to adopt a much more international stance today compared to the past, although they still avoid any action that might threaten the state, or propose strategies that are more typically suited to bipartisan political systems. In this regard, the research for this book is designed to explain the role played by think tanks and research organizations in China through an all-encompassing perspective: analyzing the functions they perform, the different nature of the institutes involved, as well as China's political, economic and social context and opportunities.

The role of knowledge regimes is directly linked to the needs and requirements of a certain political elite. For instance, "policymakers need the information produced by knowledge regimes insofar as the policy problems they confront often involve ambiguity and uncertainty. They need to make sense of these problems" (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 3). For this reason, a knowledge regime should be intended as a sense-making space, "a process involving a set of organizations and institutions that help people to interpret the problems they face and determine how to tackle them" (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 3). Such a sense-making space is intensely affected by the surrounding environment. More clearly, "the institutional configuration of a country's knowledge regime reflects and is largely determined by its surrounding political economic institutions" (Campbell and Pedersen 2011, 171).

Taking into consideration the different knowledge regimes in the US and the UK, established organizations are the result of different institutional arrangements. In the liberal market economy of the US, with its decentralized open state, a considerable number of scholarly research think tanks and advocacy tanks exist. Party and state research units operated by their counterparts are few and far between, and they play a limited role in the decision-making process. In the UK, still a liberal market economy but with a centralized and closed state, think tanks or knowledge regimes are organized in a different way. The field of scholarly research units is smaller than the one existing in the US. There are few advocacy tanks and, for the most part, they comprise those established at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the Fabian Society. By comparison, there are many diverse state research units which are present in most government departments. Similarly, there are many party research units working closely with political parties in the UK. Major differences between the UK and the US are due to the different opportunities given to think tanks in the two countries: specifically, there are limited funding opportunities and restricted access to advocacy activities for think tanks in the UK compared to those in the US (Campbell and Pedersen 2011).

That a certain political and economic environment determines a different knowledge regime in a given country explains the numerous differences at stake between think tanks in developed and developing countries. Consider India for instance, a country in which both the national public policy landscape and its governance opportunities appear to be different from those at play in the developed world. In India, "there is no denial of high level centralization as far as policy making is concerned, and more importantly is that of the role of prime minister which usually supersedes the role of all institutions and functionaries." As a consequence, "in a typical scenario in India, the policy landscape offers an opportunity for think tanks' intervention but the engagement is not practiced by the system" (Singh et al. 2015, 294).

As such, in the Indian context, five types of think tanks can be listed: first are organizations with a legal autonomous status but funded by the state; for example, the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG); second are organizations supported by or affiliated with political parties like the Gandhi Research Foundation (GRF); third are think tanks supported by national or international corporations like the Observer Research Foundation (ORF); fourth are institutions funded by international agencies and governments, an example being RAND opening branch offices

in India; fifth are organizations financed by strong leaders and external institutions like Development Alternatives (DA) (Singh et al. 2015, 294). Major operational constraints are evident because of the political and economic settings of the Indian environment, among which are the fact that many think tanks are still dependent on funding from governments and international agents; the reluctance of the Indian private sector to invest in policy research; and a high degree of skepticism within the civil service sector, which tends to look at the idea of think tanks as suspicious (Katz 2016). The result is that Indian think tanks are still far from exercising a strong influence on the policymaking process. Having a policy regime typical of a highly centralized, closed state, the number of Party-funded and state-controlled research organizations have risen in recent years. Private policy research institutes have also grown, but mostly with government engagement in their activities, such as the Observer Research Foundation or the Ananta Aspen Centre (Jha 2015). Applying the knowledge regimes framework to India, we can see that knowledge-producing organizations are in their infant phase, with a centralized policy machinery still strongly influenced by the government apparatus.

As far as the Chinese context is concerned, Nachiappan's contribution is valuable in order to understand how the concept of knowledge regimes can be applied to China. According to Nachiappan, China has a politically tempered knowledge regime "that consists of several think tanks whose efficacy is contingent on a tightly structured and centralized policy apparatus that determines the efficacy of policy actors seeking to influence it" (Nachiappan 2013, 260). Nachiappan notes that this type of regime exists for several reasons. First, is the fortification of the policy process in Beijing. The centralization of political leadership through two main segments, the Politburo on the one hand and several thousands of bureaucratic officials on the other, makes the Chinese political system highly closed and centralized. Second, are the affiliation and administrative linkages that some think tanks maintain with administrative divisions and ministries, which remain of paramount importance, and that often privilege think tanks usually defined as official or semi-official (Nachiappan 2013, 261). While it is certainly true that China in part has a politically tempered knowledge regime, characterized by a marketplace for ideas where the state plays a consistent role, it nevertheless seems pertinent to acknowledge the changes that the Chinese political system has undergone since 1949.

In China, the policy agenda setting is shaped along two dimensions: the initiator of the policy agenda and the degree of public participation in the

agenda-setting process (Wang 2008). In the *closed-door model*, decision-makers exclude the participation of any other actor and disregard public opinion. The model prevailed in imperial China, although it has not completely disappeared in contemporary China. In the *mobilization model*, policymakers are still the initiators of the agenda but they are interested in gaining public interest and support. This model was largely employed during Mao's era, and applied to almost all agendas with regard to policymaking in China. Since the reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the model has lost its appeal, even though it has not been completely abandoned. The third type is the *inside-access model*. This model is substantially innovative, as the agenda is not proposed by policymakers, but "*by the official brain trust that is close to the core of power*" (Wang 2008, 63, emphasis added). These actors offer advice to policymakers that could even be included directly in final agendas. Furthermore, Wang notices how, since the beginning of the 1990s, China's economic structure grew highly complex and increasing numbers of think tanks and research institutes, like the China Economic Reform Research Institute (CERRI) and the CITIC International Research Institute contributed to research that diversified into more specialized fields. With the fourth-generation leadership taking office in 2002, the model became fundamental for agenda setting and "from December 26, 2002 to April 23, 2007, the CCP Politburo held forty-one workshops, averaging one every forty days, inviting philosophers, natural scientists, social scientists, and legal scholars to give them lectures" (Wang 2008, 67). It was precisely at that moment that leaders started to emphasize how think tanks offered knowledge and strategic research to the central leadership, providing policymakers with insightful policy advice at all levels of government (Li 2003).

The fourth model is the *reach-out model*, in which policy advisers still try to influence policymakers, but use the pressure of public opinion if their ideas are not accepted by decision-makers. The model is not common in China, but there are some issues concerning domestic policies in which the model can be applied. The fifth model is the *outside-access model*, which is similar to the inside-access model, but the agenda is not proposed by policy advisers close to decision-makers but directly by citizens submitting suggestions on public affairs. Wang truly believes this model will become the most used in China in the future, because, "as Chinese society becomes increasingly pluralized and open, people from all walks of life and with different political stances have become more willing to express their views and more forceful in doing so" (Wang 2008, 70). The final model is

the *popular-pressure model*. Here, the agenda is set outside government departments, but agenda initiators monitor public opinion to encourage leaders to abandon their ideas on certain policy issues and/or adopt new ones, basically under popular pressure. More generally, Wang's perspective allows us to rethink knowledge regimes in China as not merely being categorized under the caption of politically tempered knowledge regimes. While it is certainly true that the policy process in China remains highly centralized and managed by a tight structure of powerful individuals, often occurring through nontransparent policymaking dynamics, "the influence of researchers, experts, media, stakeholders, and ordinary citizens on agenda settings increases, the closed-door model and the mobilization model have become largely obsolete, the inside access model a normal practice, the outside access model and the reach-out model occasionally observed and the popular-pressure model frequently used" (Wang 2008, 81).

The logic of Chinese politics has been going through fundamental changes, and researchers should be careful about randomly defining the Chinese political system simply as authoritarian, as the concept has been fundamentally imported from the West, but it does provide a limited logical argument for deep academic analyses in the Chinese context (Wang 2008). Similarly, in terms of production regimes, to define China entirely as a liberal market economy sounds misleading. De facto, "the Chinese economic model is dual-structured and compatible with both liberal market economies and coordinated market economies" (Liao 2009, 146). Indeed, the context of the Chinese economy is described on the one hand as characterized by state-owned enterprises, stock-market fluctuations and incremental productivity innovation typical of common market economies like Germany or Japan. On the other hand, private business firms are marked out by private ownership, profit maximization and risky radical innovation, like companies and firms in the UK or the US (Liao 2009). For this reason, once having defined the context in which knowledge-producing organizations are embedded in China, the analysis of policy and production regimes highlights a more hybrid model in which think tanks and policy research organizations are contextualized. Let us conceive of the space of Chinese think tanks as being in between politically tempered knowledge regimes and statist-technocratic knowledge regimes, with many organizations directly administered by or affiliated to government ministries and departments, but no less active in the policymaking process for that (Fig. 2.1).

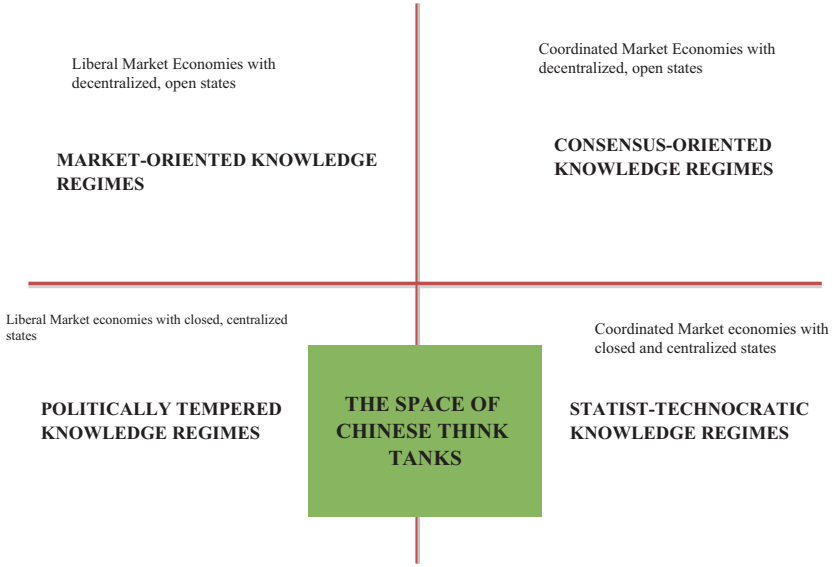

Fig. 2.1 The space of Chinese think tanks

Think Tanks as "Agents of Knowledge"

Up to this point, we have looked at knowledge regimes as a framework that offers an in- depth analysis of how policy research organizations are arranged based on different policy and production regimes: that is, how think tanks are assumed to produce knowledge on certain policy areas and how they operate on the basis of the different institutional settings in which they are embedded. It should be clarified, however, how the knowledge regime approach so far is interested only in analyzing how ideas are generated and disseminated in order to influence policymakers "even if intentions are not necessarily fulfilled" (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 3). Specifically, the approach gives little or no attention to the influence or impact generated by policy ideas produced by such organizations. The next sections examine a set of different studies from the existing think tanks and policy analysis literature, in order to fill this gap. They focus on how think tanks and policy research organizations act as "agents of knowledge" and function as essential actors in the policy process and how they succeed in producing, disseminating and affecting states' behavior at international and transnational levels.

Theorizing About Think Tanks

Among scholars, it is generally accepted that no fixed definition exists of what a think tank is or does. The United Nations (UN), actually one of the first institutions to search for a clear and universal meaning of the term, defined think tanks, as "organizations bridging knowledge and power *within democratic contexts*" (UN 2003, emphasis added). However, as for the argument presented here, it seems that after more than a decade since this definition was provided, think tanks and policy research institutes' functions and roles cannot be framed exclusively within the context of so-called "modern democracies." In times of world progressive globalization, former frameworks of analysis have to be reworked, theoretically and empirically, within and outside the boundaries of so-called modern democratic contexts. As outlined above, think tanks defy exact definition. Since the early twentieth century, they have played a major role framing policy issues and informing policymakers. In the last twenty years, because of their proliferation, scholars and politicians have felt encouraged to develop a growing interest concerning their roles and functions.

The first subset of studies dealing with think tanks can be defined as *category-driven*, that is, it concerns the different categorizations used by scholars to classify think tanks. This approach can be divided into two broad schools or debates: one has tended to focus on the organizational form of think tanks—with authors such as Kent Weaver, James McGann or Andrew Smith. They have analyzed how think tanks emerge and why they have become so influential within the policymaking process, often with specific reference to the independent category of some of the institutes developed in the US. In particular, these authors were interested in the "business" side developed around these institutes, paying attention, for instance, to how and by whom they were managed and who funded them. The second has focused instead on categories on the basis of the relationship policy research organizations entertain with the state. Here, scholarship has looked directly at the political context of the policy process, as well as at the role of the experts, researchers and academics (Stone 2004). Within this book, both schools will be referenced. While the first approach is useful in understanding the genesis of policy research organizations, that is, *how* and *why* they emerged, for example, as within the Anglo-American tradition, the second approach focuses on their influence and impact. Still, both approaches have been concerned almost exclusively in analyzing think tanks in liberal, democratic contexts. While they represent

an essential "theoretical map" to expand knowledge about think tanks and policymaking, further explanations have to be provided once the investigation moves out of such contexts, and into the frame of developing countries or authoritarian regimes.

When moving the debate dealing with the role of think tanks in international politics, different categorizations often reflect the different theoretical approaches in the IR debate. For instance, in line with the realist argument, the think tanks phenomenon in the US or the UK emerged because of governments' willingness to allow them a certain degree of authority, in line with the need to advance and support governmental policies, interests and ideas, domestically as well as internationally. Diversely, from a more neoliberal perspective, societal actors and individuals are considered as essential resources in the process of foreign policymaking: "they define their material and ideational interests independently of politics and they advance those interests through political exchange and collective actions" (Moravsick 1997, 515). Nevertheless, with reference to such debates, this study particularly endorses constructivist claims, taking into account the necessity of looking beyond rationalist and positivist-inspired understandings of world politics, considering particularly the added value of the ideational turn that has occurred in world politics (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). The approach within this book emphasizes an *agent perspective*, that is, it focuses on the actors involved within the policymaking process—non-traditional actors such as civilian organizations, think tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and more generally, civil society (Tarrow and della Porta 2005).

A second subset of think tank studies is *definition-driven*, that is, it deals with theorizing by authors over the problem of an exact definition of think tanks, based on what a policy research institute is or does. However, because considerable disagreement exists among scholars, the vagueness of the term is still open to interpretation. Diane Stone defined the term as "slippery" (2004, 2). Difficulties in the search for an exact definition are based mostly on differences represented by how policy research organizations emerged and how they perform in different contexts, and whether they are or can be *autonomous* and *independent* (both politically and financially).

James McGann defined think tanks as "public policy research, analysis and engagement organizations … a diverse set of institutions that vary in size, financing, structure and scope of activity" (2007, 5–6). Andrew Rich believes think tanks are "independent, non-interest based, non-profit

organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policy-making process" (2005, 11). But, according to Rich, a clear and definitive definition of the term is neither possible nor desirable. To understand how we can differentiate think tanks from any other organizations and institutions requires, in fact, a focus on their products and objectives (Rich 2004). Abelson defines think tanks as "non-profit-making, tax-exempt, non-partisan (not to be confused with non-ideological) institution[s] engaged in research and analysis on one or more issues related to public policies, whether foreign or domestic." He recognizes, however, that, "as think tanks have grown in number and become more diverse, scholars have been unable to reach a consensus on how to describe them" (Abelson 2014, 127).

Both category-driven and definition-driven think tank studies highlight the importance attributable to think tanks' organizational structure within the literature. In a similar vein, sociological inquiries are useful, providing insights to the study of think tanks in the policymaking process. Thomas Medvetz, through a different perspective, points out that it is precisely the problem of what he calls the "semantic ambiguity" of the term that contributes to the inconsistencies of the historical narratives about think tanks (Medvetz 2012). To avoid such problems, he proposes instead to focus on the social relations entertained by these organizations with other actors, thus dealing with the formation of the think tank category as the *outcome* necessitating explanation, paying attention to contexts, or what he defines as the *space of think tanks* and, where it becomes noteworthy, the notion of "field" (Medvetz 2012, 116). With think tanks developing a certain level of power, they become part of different fields: (1) think tanks as members of a single field, that is, the political field or the bureaucratic field; (2) think tanks as organizations overlapping multiple fields; and (3) think tanks in a field of their own.

The first categorization is misleading: think tanks need to necessarily "turn down" certain forms of political access with institutions and political parties, so seeing them as part of a single field is not possible. In the second case, think tanks are gathering resources from multiple fields, such as the academic environment, political and economic spaces, and media capital. However, this field-type lacks explanations as to whether the power of think tanks' influence is more evident within one field or another. The third approach—think tanks as an autonomous field—risks trivializing the importance of think tanks themselves, because, according to Medvetz it is extremely difficult to establish which field is the right one for such

organizations. The solution is to see think tanks as *boundary organizations*: "as certain individuals derive their power and influence from their opportune locations within or among the organizations, so there are organizations that acquire influence from their locations within larger systems of organizations" (Medvetz 2012, 126). The advantage is twofold: (1) to put aside the previously mentioned theoretical (and traditional) split within the literature while (2) reinterpreting the debate in order to understand whether think tanks can be part of different sectors, that is, the state, the market, or civil society. However, to Medvetz, the organization itself *is* the boundary: "the power of a *boundary organization*, then lies precisely in its ability to determine where one activity 'officially' ends and another begins—in this case, where political, market, and media production end and the production of 'expertise' begins" (Medvetz 2012, 128).

Here, Medvetz draws upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "social space" and "field power." The former entails the entire social structure as represented by a multidimensional system of positions ordered by the volume and the composition of authority organizing relations among individuals, groups and classes. The latter refers to the highest position in the social space, where holders of authority in a certain field *contend their power*: the field of power usually presents the opposition between economic power and structural power (Medvetz 2008). Think tanks can thus be understood as "organizational devices for gathering and assembling forms of authority conferred by the more established institutions of academics, politics, business, and the media. They have to form an *institutional niche*, with its own intelligible structure and history" (Medvetz 2008, 9). Think tanks must discover a special space in which they can exercise their functions and influence others, which demands innovative strategies in order to interact with a plurality of different actors. The focus, therefore, is on the policy process allowing think tanks to generate knowledge, which, once produced, will affect the external behavior of states, as much as the numerous actors with which think tanks interact both globally and transnationally.

The Policy Research Process

The most striking assumption discussed so far is that when considering a distinct definition of think tanks, scholarly debates are surrounded by vagueness. This is because it appears to be extremely rare to find a "one-to-one" correspondence between think tank advice which, once advocated, will be immediately or subsequently adopted by the government as

a new policy; and "it is thus very unlikely to argue for a direct think tanks impact on politics" (Stone 2004, 11).

However, measuring the influence of think tanks is not an impossible task. In order to do so, it is desirable to break down the policymaking process into several stages: (1) problem perception; (2) agenda-setting; (3) policy selection and enactment; and (4) implementation. Think tanks' influence is particularly relevant during the first two phases: where some organizations work behind the scenes without any publicity, others attempt to influence public opinion with their comments with a more open approach (McGann 2004, 40). A good way to trace their performance is to track the overall process since the time at which institution X has followed policy issue Y; in a nutshell: *issue articulation* (engagement with the public, intermediaries, coalition formation); *policy formulation* (studies, evaluations, formulations, briefings, demonstration effects); and *policy implementation* (contractors, media, supply of officials). While these processes help us to understand the "internal" factor measuring think tanks' influence, "external factors" also remain unavoidable, that is, contacts with policymakers, extent of circulation of research products, public references, or utilization by other influential elites outside the political environment: editorial boards and media commentators, utilization by political pressure groups, and references made to research and analysis in scholarly journals and new media (McGann 2007, 41).

Likewise, the policy research process remains essential for an understanding of how the results of the knowledge produced by think tanks enters the policy background and affects policy decisions. As Weiss notes, "that social scientists shape the world they study by the way they define the problem has come to be accepted not only by social scientists, but by sophisticated political actors as well" (1991, 44). While it is not possible to claim that they always produce unquestionable truths about the reality around us, we can still try to understand what their role in the policymaking process appears to be: more specifically, the unique role of research and how it produces knowledge that helps us to understand the role of think tanks as knowledge-producing organizations, influenced by the type of research, the intentions of policy researchers and the variety of locations in which knowledge is produced.

First of all, the influence of policy research has to be divided into different forms: data production, ideas and arguments. According to Weiss, research as data is more influential in situations of consensus on values and goals and in rapidly changing situations, where new data are required in

order to choose among different alternatives available. Research as ideas, is, instead, more likely to be influential if policy discussion takes place at the early stage of the process and different facets are still under evaluation. Furthermore, in a moment of uncertainty, and when nobody knows how to act, ideas can become highly productive. By contrast, research in the form of arguments becomes particularly influential when decisions have been already made, but there is a need to legitimize them in order to implement or exercise impact on a certain policy (Weiss 1991). Similarly, it is essential to understand what policy researchers intend to achieve. Whereas some are interested in maintaining a high degree of reputability with regard to the quality of both conceptual and methodological research, others may be interested in the production of a type of knowledge research that "makes a difference." Others aim directly to be part of the political environment, either by advocating their argument via policy research activities or by advancing directly through the decision-making arena (Weiss 1991). There is, then, according to Weiss, the need to distinguish the locations in which policy research is produced, that is, between advocacy organizations and governmental bodies, or between for-profit or not-for-profit organizations (1991).

As this book intends to provide a detailed picture about how think tanks work in China, it attempts to describe how the policy research process differs in this context. Specifically, in relation to China's policy research process, it is fundamental to understand how is it possible for think tanks to enter the policy and decision-making process so as garner influence on certain domestic and foreign policies. According to He Fan, the explanation lies once again in the specificity of the Chinese domestic decision-making system, which he has defined as being shaped by "democratic centralism." The system is thus fundamental to understanding how decision-making works in China. He notes, for instance, that "when the final decision has to be made, the minority submits to the majority, and the lower level submits to the upper level. The focus is on quick and decisive implementation … China's policymaking process has become more and more decentralized and is relying more and more on consensus building" (Fan 2015, 210). Fan believes that although political advisors cannot participate "full-time" in policymaking, Chinese policy research institutes provide essential insights at different phases, among which is the policy discussion phase. As a consequence, implicit in this argument is the fact that ideas provided by experts in China are able to affect how leaders think about individual issues and policies.

In analyzing the performances and effects of a specific Chinese think tank, the Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP) within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Fan distinguishes three different stages: policy discussion, policymaking and policy negotiation (Fan 2015). Accordingly, IWEP has provided important but different services during each part of the process: focusing on academic research and proposing policy suggestions during the first phase; providing specific knowledge in reports passed to the government and informing the public debate during the second phase; and becoming increasingly active in the international arena and disseminating ideas about specific topics during the third phase (Fan 2015). Subdividing the policy process and think tanks' policy research activities into different phases is fundamental to demonstrating the growing role played by Chinese institutions. By emphasizing the importance, as well as the differences between their performances, Fan describes think tanks in China as autonomous actors that are free to choose their own research agenda and able to undertake independent research.

Within authoritarian states academic freedom and scholarly research are totally restricted. Nevertheless, not all authoritarian states behave in the same way when applying restrictions to intellectuals. No doubt, the rigorous grip exerted by the Xi Jinping administration against some personalities is considered "inconvenient" to the government, that is, party officials, journalists and academics. Nevertheless, in authoritarian contexts, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of discourse: one representing the official line of the state in power and rooted in the decisions of the political leaders alone; and, "intellectual-critical discourses," which instead go beyond the official markers set by the party and the state (Heberer 2006). The two are not separate entities, but constantly interact, influencing each other. According to Heberer, it is precisely within such a framework that the state is unable to conduct a homogeneous discourse concerning society: being constantly connected to it, it is impossible to act exclusively through assertiveness and coercion. Far from being liberal or allowing pluralism to grow, this perspective asserts that it is specifically in such contexts that "participants of intellectual-critical discourses are in a better position to influence policy output directly rather than marginalized dissidents" (Heberer 2006, 26), because of their proximity to the state and circles of power.

Knowledge-Producing Organizations in the Global Agora

For a long time, the nature of think tanks' culture and expertise production has been conceived as the direct product of a policy community grown and developed for the most part in the US. The end of the Cold War marked the divide between two eras: the world was no longer bipolar and the post-World War II order had just vanished. It was in these years that the government began to rely on a specific community of experts, able to define policy options and priorities, to understand the future role of the US in the world (Roberts et al. 1993). Not surprisingly, Kent Weaver said that, "think tanks are more numerous and probably play a more influential role in the United States than in most other Western democracies" (1989, 570). Due to the fast development of the think tank industry in the US, and their influence on US foreign policy, scholars worldwide have concentrated their investigations in that area. Howard J. Wierda, in *Think Tanks and Foreign Policy: The Foreign Policy Research Institutes and Presidential Politics*, argued that think tanks have assumed an essential role in US foreign policymaking, as they have become a constant presence within policy debates. In the US, the institutional niche occupied by think tanks, small or big, in Washington DC as in New York, has become such a distinctive feature of the American political system that their role has become essential with regard to policymaking. It is worth citing Wiarda to demonstrate this:

> They are new actors on the stage, influential in providing ideas, and justifications for decisions often made elsewhere, but in agencies and offices what the leading think tanks recommend on the issue matters a great deal. The think tanks feed options, information, policy positions and not least, their own people into governmental decision-making. They alter perspectives, affect policy decisions, and sometimes exercise direct influence over policy. (Wiarda 2010, 48–9)

This quote highlights once again the assumption that "the American think tank environment is unique, and cannot be transferred without adaptation to the cultures and contexts of other countries" (Nicander 2015, 489). This is particularly true in the case of the Chinese system, as American and more generally Western think tanks have grown and developed in completely different political, economic and social scenarios. Nevertheless, the

quote also points out that think tanks are new actors very unlikely to be thought of as disconnected or straying away from decision-making environments. As such, they are expected to be more influential today than they were in the past. An additional factor that represents a key element in the understanding of the functions and impacts of think tanks is thus to describe how they fit with discourses dealing with policy formulation, implementation and states' foreign policies at international levels.

At present, it is still the Western world that has the largest number of think tanks—there are 1823 units in the US alone. A Western think tank ranked in first place as the "Top Think Tank of the year 2016" (Chatham House). Whilst the Global Go To Think Tank Index report is a survey established by an American scholar based at the University of Philadelphia in America, think tanks globally define their origins within the long-standing tradition of the American and British experiences. Not only do think tanks have a strong American tradition, but, in influencing and shaping policy worldwide, American institutions have still achieved the most success. According to Parmar, three well-known American foundations—Rockefeller Center, Carnegie and Ford—demonstrate the strongest policy impact, achieved through transnational networks, building the effective intellectual hegemony of "liberal institutionalism," and constituting a key factor in America's rise to globalism (Parmar 2004).

The American think-tank tradition has always been different when compared with its Asian counterpart. According to Akami, during the years 1925–1945, the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) was so embedded within state corporatism practices that grass roots activities and civil society organizations were almost absent, if not oppressed: "the network and knowledge it produced were shaped by the notion of 'national interest' and two major wars in the region reinforced this trend. The close relationship between this expert network and the state was largely unproblematized. They tended not only to analyze but also to justify their government's policies" (Baba 1969, 107 cited in Akami 2002, 78).

Today, think tanks have become a "growing industry" worldwide. The importance of ideational factors and ideas in communicating and disseminating knowledge globally and transnationally is expanding. Stone clearly notes that, "at the global level, the 'ownership' of public problems is often characterized by a policy vacuum. Which countries or what institutions have responsibilities for dealing with issues is not automatically apparent, and if public goods are insufficient, those who take responsibilities for their financing and provisions are not self-evident"

(2013, 25). Furthermore, "agenda-setting is characterized by cacophonic sets of debates and demands where it is unclear who, or what institution, has the authority or legitimacy to mediate" (2013, 25). Whilst it is essential for think tanks to forge the political process of states' behavior at the international level, giving particular attention to the actors and the processes involved, it is necessary to understand the role they play as *transnational actors*, which is becoming day by day more relevant to the expression of states' foreign politics. The transnationalization of think tanks is defined as "the extension of their activities within the domestic politics of more than one state as well as their participation in global and regional fora, inaugurated in fact their third wave of development" (Stone 2004, 35).

The first wave was characterized by state-based entities catering to elite national audiences in response to growing levels of pressure for public debate. The second wave from 1945 onwards was characterized by a more extensive think-tank development, with few institutes pursuing personal research agendas. Three main factors contributed to the think-tank transnational dimension. The first is the transnationalization of academia, where a great amount of research staff drawn from an internationally mobile community of academics began to work within think-tank institutes. The second is regionalization. In regional fora, think tanks have the opportunity to convene and debate general themes or targets of regional groupings or international institutions that are usually bound to a specific zone, such as Mercosur, or a specific institution such as APEC. The third factor expanding think-tank research agendas with a worldwide impact has been globalization. Think-tank publications on globalization have increased and their focus on global affairs has expanded as a direct consequence of globalization. Moreover, their organizational structure during the third wave began to be organized via transnational networks and as a by-product of globalization (Stone 2004).

Think Tank Networks

According to Struyk, the transnational dimension of think tanks has been assimilated with the roles performed by policy networks. While policy networks are created precisely to mediate among members with different interests, think tank networks are composed by organizations with a shared perspective, and for this reason they are often compared with epistemic communities (Struyk 2002). Think-tank networks can have

numerous advantages. First, they create an overlapping and personal communications infrastructure for fast and effective transfer of new ideas and policy approaches. Second, they allow policy research organizations to become aware of innovative policies adopted elsewhere, giving the opportunity to provide analysis and commentaries on the relevance of policies in their own context. Third, networks help to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of implemented projects by incorporating a wider range of knowledge and expertise (Stone 2000, 36).

It is possible to pinpoint specific criteria to identify networks. First is the objective. Most of the time, visible networks tend to give primacy to the efficient transfer of knowledge among members influencing specific policies. Second are incentives for participation. Membership can occur through websites, or with consistent attendance at conferences, leading to real participation within the policy process. Third is membership. This consists of two main types: members who have a particular institutional role in their country or members selected as valid partners. Last but not least is network coherence, which is how the network channels the activities that build working relations and a sense of community among its members (Struyk 2002, 84). Based on this, Struyk divided think-tank networks into different types: *open assembly* (with a core objective of knowledge-sharing among think tanks and sometimes other audiences); *associations under donor leadership*, or official patronage (core objectives: capacity-building through a series of topic-defined roundtable discussions and possibly technical assistance; convening high-level policy discussion meetings on foreign policy and security topics; and convening policy dialogue meetings of elite think tanks and politicians); and *association under single organization leadership* (core objectives: members compete to provide policy research and technical assistance; knowledge sharing; and assistance to members in competing for research with possible assistance in project execution) (Struyk 2002, 86).

According to Stone, there are three fundamental lessons that can be drawn following think-tank transnationalization processes. The first aspect is related to the diversification and consolidation of civil society organizations in global and regional fora, or what Diane Stone called the "global agora." In this sense, specifically, think tanks have a double function: on the one hand, they are becoming the interpreters and editors of civil society, but on the other they also become the very source of knowledge for civil society itself. The second aspect is related to policy-making at global and regional levels. Non-state actors (think tanks in our case) in the

absence of a sovereign authority at the global level acquire a certain importance within the policy-making process even as agenda-setting players, or through transnational policy communities. The third factor concerns representative democracy in the global agora. In fact, these organizations started to play an increasingly representative role because, "in the absence of political parties generating policy ideas and visions at this level of governance, it is arguable that think tanks, NGOs and other civil society organizations are adopting this function" (Stone 2004, 49). However, she notes that such a statement deserves different treatment, given a country's political environment: "think tanks and many NGOs are administered and staffed by professional elites who are often unrepresentative of the communities for which they seek to speak and to which they are largely unconnected" (Stone 2004, 49).

Regionalization

In parallel with their counterparts worldwide, both regionalization and globalization stand as two processes that have affected most of the Chinese think tanks. As knowledge becomes an increasingly important part of the decision-making process at the national, regional and global level, the role of think tanks has come to the fore as being core knowledge-producing organizations that can drive agenda-setting and policy formulation in world politics. In terms of regionalization processes, think tanks are seen as key actors in different activities: policy and academic research, consultancy and lobbying activities. In the Asian region, think tanks have been able to "create region-spanning and non-governmental political spaces (forums and dialogues) … neutral venues where new and innovative ideas can be introduced into the policy process and where states and non-state actors can meet to communicate, and workshop ideas" (Zimmerman 2016, 6). As a consequence, "regional policymakers have shown a growing preference for these venues as they offer sources of novel policy solutions" (Zimmerman 2016, 6).

The role of think tanks as political actors shaping regionalization dynamics in Asia has been widely discussed by scholars. However, one crucial challenge remains to overcome the disparity concerning think-tank relations with the government. According to McGann, "the government's hand is often an inevitable presence in the structuring as well as operation of policy actors and epistemic communities" (McGann 2017, 4). Nevertheless, as the debate about knowledge regimes previously pointed

out: "in examining the relationship Asian think tanks have with their respective government, one must pay particular attention to *the particular political culture* that surrounds such a context" (McGann 2017, 4, emphasis added). More specifically, outside liberal democratic contexts, strong linkages with the government rather than making the communities of experts less influential, will give them the opportunity to have greater access to the decision process (Cross 2013).

Amitav Acharya has explored how local actors are able to create new rules with regard to norms dynamics in international politics in order to preserve their authority and autonomy from powerful actors. He describes this process as "norm subsidiarity." a term which indicates "a process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors" (Acharya 2011, 97). The process, he notes, is very different when compared with norm localization. While the latter focuses on foreign ideas that have to be consistent with local cognitive priors in order to be accountable and practicable, subsidiarity focuses only on relations between local actors and the powerful, where foreign ideas are often rejected, trying instead to export local norms as valuable universal alternatives. As a result, "in localization, local actors are norm-takers. In subsidiary, local actors can be norms rejecters and/or norm makers" (Acharya 2011, 98). Knowledge-producing organizations can be seen as a "nuanced" type of local actor playing a role in both processes.

For instance, as an example of norm localization, it has been persuasively demonstrated by Zimmerman that think tanks and the networks they create have been essential actors in the construction of the discursive space relative to the non-traditional security (NTS) agenda and policy implementation in Asia. Through the transformation of regional governance, non-state actors, and particularly policy research organizations, have found opportunities to shape and reconfigure the perceptions states maintain about security issues in Asia, with the result that increasing interstate cooperation regarding NTS threats has grown among states in the Asian region (2016). Regarding norm subsidiarity and regionalization, China is no doubt ready to develop its own understanding of a regional world order. China's leaders are well aware that in order to maintain their country's place in the world (exercising power and influence), they have to change the world to suits its interests (Breslin and Menegazzi 2017). Such behavior is a sign of the willingness to reform the existing order rather than completely replace it. Yet, this is a situation with a country prepared

to create its own institutions at the international level, further highlighting the essential roles played by knowledge regimes and policy research organizations, regionally and transnationally.

As an example, leaders in Beijing have been extremely active promoting think-tank initiatives in multilateral activities, and particularly regarding inter-regional policy debates. For instance, it occurred with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) cooperation in economic governance, where the opinions of think tanks were given high consideration. At the BRICS Think Tanks Symposium, hosted in Beijing March 24–25, 2012, Sun Jiazheng, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, urged think tanks from BRICS countries to enhance exchanges and promote cooperation between their countries before the political leaders' meeting scheduled in China the following month (FOCAC 2011). As clearly stated in the *Recommendations made at the BRICS Think-Tanks Symposium to the Third BRICS Leaders' Meeting*:

> These think tanks meetings are expected to help build confidence and dispel misunderstanding and come up with recommendations for BRICS countries. We will explore opportunities for setting up a coordination body of Think Tanks' joint activities in BRICS research. (BRICS Think tanks Symposium 2012)

The declaration suggests some insights about the role think tanks play at transnational level, and more importantly, how they contribute to the shaping of ideas and policies on global governance within a narrative/discourse often typical of developing countries. The swift rise of think tanks in advancing realities is enjoying a golden era in forging policy decision-making on international topics, contributing to framing and shaping strategies on governance, information technologies, poverty reduction and environmental issues. The establishment of the BRICS Development Bank is an example. The opinion of the *Financial Times* was that the proposal of the new multilateral initiative would represent a fundamental shift in global governance following BRICS countries' frustration about their marginal role with regard to decision-making processes within the IMF (International Monetary Fund) or WB (World Bank): "if it becomes a reality, the institution will be the first multilateral lender to emerge since the European Bank for Construction and Development" (Financial Times 2012). A few months later, the final decision to create a BRICS Development Bank was unanimously taken, following the 2012 BRICS Think Tanks Forum, held in Southwest China, Chongqing municipality, between September 26 and 27, 2012. Liu Youfa, Vice-President of the

China Institute for International Studies, declared that think tanks functioned as the preliminary step in government policy-making, where the influence of their ideas depended on feasibility and thoroughness.According to interviewed experts taking part, much of the content of the reports produced at the BRICS Forum eventually appeared in the Summit Declaration (Xinhua 2012). Policymakers in BRICS countries have begun to recognize the role played by experts concerning the policy process. Among them, China is playing a leading role, giving policy research organizations more and more visibility in multilateral initiatives. On an institutional level, think-tank cooperation has grown and become more institutionalized than ever before. In parallel with China's presidency of BRICS, in January 2017, the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party (IDCPC) inaugurated the establishment of the China Council for the BRICS Think Tanks Cooperation (CCBTTC). The basic goal of the network is to facilitate communications among BRICS countries' policies, promoting new ideas, guiding public opinion and deepening friendly relations between countries. Think-tank cooperation among BRICS began in 2008 and it was officially set up in 2013, with the establishment of the BRICS Think Tanks Council (Chen 2017). The Council is responsible for sharing and disseminating information, research and policy analysis. The organizations involved are the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IAER), the National Committee for BRICS Research, the Observer Research Foundation, the China Center for Contemporary World Studies, and the Human Sciences Research Council.

Globalization

Scholars agree that globalization dynamics have contributed to boosting the role of policy research organizations regarding policy knowledge in the global arena. Specifically, globalization "has transformed their research agenda" (Stone 2005, 10). Furthermore, "institutes have been pushed to look beyond primarily national matters to address global issues and transborder policy problems concerning the environment, security, trade, refugees, and human rights. In tandem with the globalization research agenda there has been the global dissemination of think tank research via the Internet. Many think tanks researchers have become important commentators on globalization" (2005, 10). According to McGann, globalization, together with democratization and modernization, stands as one of the main reason for the growth of think tanks, more clearly intended as the

growth of international actors, the internationalization of NGOs funding and pressure on globalization (2011, 11).

Diane Stone's notion of a "global agora" is particularly useful in order to understand the global dimension in which knowledge-producing organizations perform a wide range of policy-oriented activities. This is a "social and political space—an imaginary created by globalization—rather than a physical space … the global agora is also a domain of relative disorder and uncertainty where institutions are underdeveloped and political authority unclear, and dispersed through multiplying institutions and networks. It is a challenge to the 'myth of 1648,' that is, a world of mutually recognizing, non-interfering sovereign states emerging with the peace of Westphalia" (Stone 2013, 17; Armitage 2013, cited in Stone 2013).

The effects of globalization are in line with the spread and growing influence experienced by numerous civil society organizations worldwide. It is no longer possible to discard the enormous potential exercised by knowledge-production organizations during the course of policy deliberation vis-à-vis global decision-making. According to Campbell and Pedersen, the rise and proliferation of knowledge regimes has resulted precisely because of the need to search for new ideas about how to handle globalization challenges (2014, 5). The transnational dimension of think tank symposiums and meetings has become essential not only in advanced capitalist countries but also in developing contexts, as policymakers struggle to recognize and formulate policy solutions to the numerous challenges they face both domestically, and particularly outside national boundaries.

Think tanks facilitate networking activities and the dissemination of knowledge with regard to specific policy domains within global and transnational forums. For the most part, they are responsible for bringing new ideas into discussions, collecting information and generating policy advice which is then taken into consideration by policymakers during official meetings and symposiums. Think tanks and academic organizations have made an important contribution to the G20 dialogue through the Think20 (T20) initiative. Initially inaugurated during the Mexican presidency in 2012, the initiative has now acquired growing success regarding the G20 agenda. As specified on the G20 Turkey 2015:

> T20 has a different character than other engagement groups. It is not an advocacy platform that campaigns around specific issues, nor does it seek to negotiate an agreed set of recommendations on the issues to be progressed. Instead, the Think 20 serves as an "ideas bank" for G20. For this

> purpose, T20 organizes the analysis of global think tanks and high-level experts in order to provide analytical depth to ongoing G20 discussions and produce ideas to help the G20 on delivering concrete and sustainable policy measures. T20 conclusions are presented to G20 working groups, minister committees and leaders' summit as policy options not recommendations. (G20 Website)

Track II Diplomacy

Track II, or T2, diplomatic dialogues are political spaces created by think tanks to construct specific political contexts sympathetic to the ideas and agendas they wish to promote (Zimmerman 2016, 26). Functioning as showcases for think tanks and experts to demonstrate their accountability and effectiveness, T2 diplomacy in recent years has resulted in a fundamental space in which experts provide policy measures and advice to policymakers and governments.

The influence of T2 policy networks is not, however, without bias. The literature dealing with Asian regionalism, in particular, investigated minutely the influence which T2 diplomacy has over Track I (T1). The term T2 describes "methods of diplomacy that were outside the formal government system. It refers to non-governmental, informal and unofficial contacts, and activities between private citizens and or groups of individuals, sometimes called citizens, diplomats or non-state actors" (Montville 1991, 262; Capie 2010, 294). According to Capie, T2 diplomacy plays two major roles. First, it functions as a process of idea generation, or, as Capie describes it, it performs the function of an "ideas factory." Specifically, policy networks and think tanks generate ideas on potential issues and international problems, to the point that sometimes they are even able to generate policies without consultation with the government (Caballero-Anthony 2008, 185). A second function is that T2 is able to solve controversial issues which policymakers cannot face or discuss by themselves during T1, because of the sensitivity of a certain issue or topic (Capie 2010, 296). To Capie, although its impact is widely appreciated, missing from the literature are analyses about "*how* track II influences official policy" (Capie 2010, 297). The main challenge is substantially related to methodology: "establishing the causal influence of ideas and linking those ideas to specific agents is complicated, some say impossible." Furthermore, "there is little incentive for policy makers to share credit for ideas with outsiders. Also, advice most always comes from

multiple sources. Singling out just one influence often distorts a complicated process of diffusion" (Capie 2010, 299).

While it is certainly true that it is difficult to demonstrate how causal mechanisms between ideas generation and policy implementation function, the existing literature about theoretical reasoning, and investigations in relation to the role of ideas in the policymaking process and actors involved, do provide essential evidence to argue the opposite. One answer is, for instance, to unravel the policy process into different phases, that is, problem framing/agenda-setting, policy formulation, and policy implementation. It seems, therefore, a great restriction to believe that think tanks and policy networks are playing only a marginal role in T2 diplomacy, and subsequently official policies. Rather, "think tanks are often at the forefront of problem identification (framing), agenda setting and policy development because they are more agile than governmental bureaucracies in responding to emerging policy challenges" (Zimmerman 2016, 28). The part that think tanks play in Track II diplomacy is discussed further in Chap. 3.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed major theories to explain why think tanks deserve growing attention among researchers in the field of social sciences. While some concerns are related to think tanks' "theory building" perspectives, and the roles they play in the policymaking process, others relate to the role think tanks have acquired as agents of knowledge in the vast arena of global politics.

In terms of theory building, this chapter has introduced the audience to the concept of knowledge regimes. In contrast with the existing literature dealing with think tanks and policy research organizations, the concept is innovative and particularly appropriate when applied to the think-tanks sector in China for various reasons. First, the concept of knowledge regimes, and specifically, that of knowledge-producing organizations, eschews the overrated, often hyper-discussed contention categorizing think tanks as independent, non-state actors. Contrary to arguments and analysis by some scholars, who define think tanks as independent research organizations, knowledge-producing organizations focus on "the organizational and institutional machinery that generates data, research, policy recommendations, and other ideas that influence public debate and policymaking" (Campbell and Pedersen 2014, 3), but without excluding

organizations that maintain strong links with the government and its departments.

Likewise, a second significant concern is the importance of the notion of knowledge regimes to national contexts. Globally, knowledge-producing organizations are indeed the result of specific political, economic and social institutional settings, which contribute strongly to generating a different type of policy knowledge advocated by think tanks and their experts in their own countries. In line with previous analyses dealing with the study of think tanks in the Chinese context, this book supports the idea that China's institutional context profoundly affects China's policymaking processes and policy research activities. Nevertheless, it does not believe that Chinese think tanks only play marginal roles, as they have become essential actors in light of China's transformations and its growing role in international affairs and global governance. Even more importantly, this chapter has pointed out the growing relevance of think tanks at the regional and global level, through networking activities and within T2 diplomatic forums. Due to China's essential role and growing relevance in the "global agora," the functionality of Chinese think tanks in such contexts will be further investigated in the course of the following chapters.

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CHAPTER 3

Think Tanks in China

> China still has one of the most obscure decision-making processes in the world. But I am certain that misunderstandings about it are common in the West and I believe studying think tanks might help to avoid that. In China, and different from Europe or America, every single think tank has a scope, or a function. In China, it will never happen that if a think tank or a policy research institute writes a report, or a policy recommendation, it will be lost or unread by the government. For this reason, further analyses about their roles and practices may help us to reinforce explanations about how policy-making really works in China. (Francesco Sisci, interview with author, Beijing 2013)

Introduction

In order to avoid general pitfalls related to fixed definitions about think tanks and policy research organizations, it is necessary to be careful when discussing them in the context of China. Undoubtedly, definitions of civil society and, more generally, public participation in the Chinese context require interpretations that go beyond those that have emerged from Western-led and traditional ways of thinking. Civilian and public organizations are, in most cases, heavily affected by government control. At the same time, the hybrid, and often multi-dimensional context in which think tanks, research organizations and NGOs perform essential roles in relation to agenda setting, problem framing and policy discussion in China necessitate further attention.

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So far, I have discussed how a think tank is able to establish a "semi-distinct social universe with its own logic, history and interior structures, not to mention its own agents" (Medvetz 2012, 38). More simply, I have underscored the idea that "think tanks exist as such only insofar as they have formed their own relatively stable institutional niche" (Medvetz 2012, 38). Likewise, because think tank performances have expanded through and within the global agora, and taking account of the role they play today in states' transnational activities, such as international forums and T2, their diplomacy is widely recognized by pundits and policymakers. What benefits does this framework offer to the study of think tanks in China? The first advantage is to reinterpret Chinese think tanks as proactive actors involved in both governmental and public engagement nationally and transnationally. Secondly, it allows a break from the traditional literature on Chinese think tanks which, in the past, was profoundly affected by the "dependence dilemma," but failed to investigate the normative dimension of a knowledge-producing organization conducted within and outside China's borders. Last but not least, the approach has implications for the study of China's domestic and social politics. Analyzing how Chinese think tanks perform their activities at the national, regional and global level is essential in order to further strengthen the idea that while limitations on political pluralism in China are here to stay, new lights on the different actors involved in the policymaking process help us to understand the complex process as well as potential tensions between knowledge and power in contemporary China.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides a brief, but "compulsory" overview, of the existing literature about think tanks. While it should not be regarded as a "literature review" of Western think tanks, it is nevertheless an essential summary of this topic. It describes how different think-tank traditions have developed from the 1950s onwards in different national contexts, and discusses the characteristics and activities Chinese think tanks perform vis-à-vis their international counterparts. The second section introduces the Chinese tradition of think tanks since their first establishment in the 1950s, analyzing their organizational structures and activities in the Chinese political system. The third section focuses on current Chinese think tanks, and particular attention is paid to the reforms presented by the Xi Jinping administration since the beginning of its mandate in October 2012.

A Think Tank World

The Anglo-American Tradition

As noted earlier, we should regard the material drawn from the knowledge regimes literature as an innovative and significant framework contributing to the debate about think tanks and policy formulation. The major idea behind it is to show how national contexts affect the performance and activities of think tanks. Similarly, organizational and definitional analyses remain fundamental when discussing think tanks. In the West, since these institutes were first established, the Anglo-American tradition has represented the key to understanding the world and history of think tanks. In this regard, scholars generally distinguish between two traditions: a think-tank industry in the US and a think-tank tradition in the UK. Conversely, within authoritarian societies, the development of think tanks has suffered countless difficulties, particularly the lack of opportunity to play a leading role in policy formulation processes.

Policy research institutions in the US are divided into four generations. The first started during the first two decades of the twentieth century, already influencing policy implementation and formulation strategies prior to, and in the aftermath of, World War I. Amongst the first institutes were the Russell Sage Foundation (1907), the Brookings Institution (1916), the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace (1919) and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) (1921). In common with the Chinese context, the first think tanks in the US were established mainly to provide government officials with policy advice rather than to pursue lobbying activities, as the majority of institutes do today. The initial concept was to avoid ideological battlefields and improve the decision-making process (Stone 2005, 217). The second generation was established following World War II, as a direct consequence of the growing international role of the US. Institutes such as RAND (1948), or the domestic-policy-oriented Urban Institute (1968), were tapped for the experience of engineers, physicists, biologists, statisticians and social scientists, assuming far greater importance within the policy-making process. The third generation marked a fundamental shift in think tanks' work: day by day, from traditional policy research institutions, think tanks became more involved in "advocacy" activities. Their primary motivation was to engage in political advocacy, since they were deeply committed to influencing public policy-making. The fourth generation is typical of the US tradition, and includes

the so-called "vanity think tanks." They are usually set up by politicians with the intent of sustaining new candidates during elections or reinforcing political programs during elections. Their main focus is *not* scholarly research and they usually compete in political environments to obtain recognition in the policy-making community. Examples of such institutes are: United We Stand (UWS), the Progress of Freedom Foundation, candidate-based think tank Ross Perot's organization, and the former President Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom (1994) (Stone 2005).

James McGann traced the origins of think tanks in the US as a necessity that emerged to link the private sector with the government, or as he puts it, "to help the government think" (McGann 2009, 8). Furthermore, based on scholarly research, he identified the principle factors contributing to their expansion: the division of power between legislative, executive and judicial systems; weak political parties and strong philanthropic culture; distrust of public officials; citizen's proclivity to join and support interests groups; a political system with many point of access; and the tendency to trust independent experts over politicians and bureaucrats. For some, think tanks are not simply new actors on the foreign policy scene, but in America's scenario, "on many issues are influential as political parties, interest groups and other major institutions" (Wiarda 2010, 29). Nevertheless, a factor in enhancing the influence of think tanks in this period was the new elites surrounding American foreign policy debates. While, during the 1950s, discussions about foreign policy were monopolized by the Council on Foreign Relations, whose membership was by election only, during the 1960s and 1970s, criticism towards CFR became widespread. At the same time, in Washington DC, think tanks boomed. According to Wierda, it is possible to list the main features that contributed to this growing phenomenon: (1) a power shift from New York to Washington; (2) from one think tank (CFR) to a plurality of think tanks (Washington-based); (3) from the Wall Street bankers, lawyers and financiers to the public policy specialists in the think tanks; (4) foreign policy becoming more democratized; (5) new and younger personalities effectively influencing foreign policy debates; (6) foreign policy becoming more partisan, reflecting the view of different think tanks; and (7) foreign policy evolving into a more divisive, more fragmented and less long-term phenomenon (Wiarda 2010, 37). Once again, the author agrees about the difficulties of measuring the influence of think tanks, which is defined as "subtle, quiet, cumulative, unseen" (Wiarda 2010, 41).

In this light, a good way of measuring how think tanks influence foreign policy is to analyze "what comes out of the political system in terms of policy versus what went in, from think tanks and others in terms of policy recommendations" (Wiarda 2010, 41). Think tanks searching for influence can operate different strategies, such as organizing breakfasts, lunches, dinners and seminars with those involved in the political environment; contacts with television and media; public appearances; the presumption of expertise; access to policy-makers; congressional testimony; advisory panels and boards; personal contacts and revolving doors to studies and publications (Wiarda 2010). As with McGann, Wierda provides us with an account of how think tanks work in the American context, which seems unlikely to be applied in other parts of the globe. However, having served for many years in think-tank environments, and therefore being a *policy worker*, his analysis clearly offers an "insider" perspective. Two main points, in particular, emerge from his book: the differences between prestigious and less well-known think tanks; and the difference between those working in think tanks and those working in academia. As for the former issue, he believes that smaller think tanks, often operating outside foreign policy environments, also have an "influence strategy": while they do not have direct access to policy-makers, they have to "influence those who influence the policy-makers," for example writing op-eds, writing for influential magazines and publishing major books on important themes. As for the latter, the main difference between think tanks and jobs in academia are: the temporary tenure of the think-tank world; fund-raising activities; policy-oriented research differing from academic research in terms of style, organization and audience; ideological conformity of think tanks that usually present a clear and transparent ideological position; and contract research (Wiarda 2010).

The British environment presents both differences from and similarities with the American tradition. Policy research organizations in Britain, as their American counterparts, are proud of their long-standing tradition, given that institutes such as the Fabian Society or the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) were already established in 1884 and 1931, respectively. Initially, British think tanks developed as a consequence of what has been defined as the "Westminster model": a permanent civil service that has not relied heavily on external sources of policy advice; strong and relatively cohesive political parties; executive dominance in relation to the legislature; the absence—until very recently—of devolved national and regional

assemblies; and the relatively weak British tradition of individual and corporate private philanthropy, in respect of independent policy research (Stone 2005). The second wave of British think tanks emerged in the interwar period, even if essentially the main difference between the first and second generation was that, given the fact that Britain became a mass democracy, their work was no longer value-free, advocating a move towards a "Keynesian consensus" (Stone 2005). The third wave presents few differences from its predecessors. As noted by Stone, "the pursuit of influence was very important both for the first and second wave organizations, but for the third it became an obsession" (Stone 2000, 236).

Institutes established during the third wave are still well known, such as the Centre for Policy Studies (1974) or the Institute of Economic Affairs (1957). While third-wave think tanks were less well-regarded in terms of policy influence, they succeeded in what has been defined as the "ideological fellowship," which provided an institutional setting for like-minded individuals who, one way or another, were heard by the "Iron Lady," Margaret Thatcher. The fourth wave, which essentially continues to the present day, seems to show weak ideological advocacy. The fact that Britain operates its institutions democratically has contributed to the fact that British political life has become a complex field where advocacy is often obscured by an over-reliance on think-tank advisors recruited by the government. If we conceive of think tanks differently, and if we want to analyze them as an alternative to non-state actors operating in a given social/public space, paying particular attention to the role played by individuals, categorization simply becomes a tool of the analysis. Think tanks, for instance, are not all the same. Rich notes that, "as the number of think tanks has grown, they have become notably diverse with regard to their size, scope of research, and intended policy-making audiences" (Rich 2004, 30).

The Russian Tradition

The literature about think tanks within the American and British traditions analyzes the organizational structure and the genesis of different generations, demonstrating how they have contributed to shaping and influencing the political setting and the intellectual dimension of American and British life. The analysis of think tanks and research institutions within authoritarian societies requires a significant awareness of the national contexts in which think tanks perform their activities, that is, the political

regime; but it also requires an awareness of the consequences and impacts, if any, of the political regime on the political and intellectual life of the context under analysis. The Russian tradition of think tanks, for instance, provides many examples in relation to the PRC for two main reasons: first, it is the authoritarian context within which Russian think tanks have developed; second, it is the role played by the Communist Party in affecting the origins of the institutes, where the influence particularly of the Soviet Marxism–Leninism ideology functioned as a solid base when the first think tanks were founded in China.

In the past, the Soviet model of communist intellectual life was expressed exclusively under the guidance of the Marxist–Leninist ideology, with a significant number of departments, agencies and institutions organizing the production and dissemination of ideas, controlled by the authoritarian rule of the Communist Party. While there were few differences between the various research institutions, institutes in the USSR presented a core of common features: all researchers were employed by the state, with large organizations employing up to 700 staff. The fields of specialization were numerous, designed to cover every aspects of any topic and applicable region, and there was little competition between them as they were all part of the monopoly of information led by the Party-state. For instance, policymaking dynamics between institutions were tightly controlled by the CPSU, the Central Committee and the Politburo: "knowledge, power and policy-making were fused within one massive hierarchy" (Sandle 2004, 122). Such characteristics, as we will see below, were typical also of the first generation of Chinese think tanks.

Following Stalin's death in 1953, there was a gradual loosening of the control exercised by the CPSU over research organizations. From 1956 up to 1968, a period of relative freedom emerged where institutions began to exert a certain degree of influence within the policymaking process, developing for instance, an even higher degree of autonomy. A fundamental shift occurred when Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Thanks to a new intellectual climate characterized by *glasnost* (openness), new organizations were created and research institutes were drawn directly into the policymaking process. The following reformist period, *perestroika* (restructuring), is considered the golden era for Russian think tanks owing to increased intellectual freedom and unrestricted funding (Sandle 2004, 125). It is, in fact, widely acknowledged that: "the Gorbachev revolution in foreign and security affairs represented a triumph of knowledge and reason over dogmatic Leninist ideology," and that "ideas and new knowledge

played a key role in bringing about the monumental changes in Soviet international behavior during the Gorbachev era" (Checkel 1993, 271).

At present, the former freedom attained by Russian think tanks, their role in the policymaking process and the course of their progressive autonomy from the Party-state, have perished. Accordingly, there are three factors that have contributed most to denying an independent development of Russian think tanks in the foreign policymaking process. First, is the overall political situation in the Soviet Federation. The decision-making process, especially in the foreign policy field, remains a closed and limited environment, sometimes even a secret sphere. The second is related to the relationship between think tanks and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At present, there is no form of cooperation between the two, and there is a total lack of trust between the state and these independent communities. The third point of friction is related to the organizational structure and operations of independent think tanks, which have been clearly marginalized in recent years (Okunev 2011).

The lack of professional experts is slightly different when it comes to Russian economic think tanks, even though, at present, they struggle to survive in Russia. The current witch-hunt against non-governmental organizations in Russia is a widespread phenomenon that has profoundly harmed Russia's intellectual life and policymaking. During the 2000s, economic research institutions had their heyday. At present, however, because of the Kremlin's strict control, important think tanks such as the New Economic School or the Center for Economic and Financial Research have been excluded from external funding and international donors, such as those provided by the EU and the World Bank. Neither domestic nor foreign financing has been permitted following Putin's law banning financial support to non-governmental organizations and the law on foreign agents (Ryzkhov 2015).

Within such a framework, Sandle maintains that the best way to analyze the tradition of think tanks in Russia, and to some extent, Eastern Europe, is through systems dealing with democratization processes and pluralist theory. Pluralist theory refers its analysis to a system based on multiple centers of power, which often includes interest groups or citizens' associations. In Russia, "the growth of activities of think tanks contributed to the gradual erosion of political and ideological monism, through the extension of participation outside of the party-state bureaucracy" (Sandle 2004, 136). Conversely, according to Krastev, "the rise of think tanks can be interpreted as a new strategy for the institutionalization of the liberal political agenda

following the electoral failures of liberal parties in the region … in this context think tanks emerged only as attempts by liberal intellectuals and liberal politicians to preserve the liberal agenda (privatizing, anti-Keynesian, supply-side economics)" (Krastev 2000, 276; see also Sandle 2004).

In some ways similar to the Russian case, Chunrong Liu noticed that essentially until the 1990s almost every analysis dealing with political experts in China relied upon three theoretical frameworks to understand policymaking processes: the *pluralist model*, in which policy outputs are the outcome of competition, negotiation, and bargaining among political leaders and interest groups within the governing hierarchy; the *elitist model*, which stresses the decisive role played by China's top leaders, and the *institutional model*, which explains China's policymaking patterns in terms of institutionalized elements and interests (Liu 2006). All the approaches rightly point out the role of the state on the one hand and the importance of the ruling elite in shaping policy dynamics on the other (Zang 2006). Despite the necessity of looking at the interaction between leaders and interest groups with regard to bargaining processes in China, there remains an interesting perspective for all those wishing to work on Chinese politics, namely, that serious limits persist. For example, it is often unclear who the specific actors involved in the process of policymaking are, and how they interact among themselves or with their leaders. It is therefore necessary, where possible, to trace the development of the process and demonstrate how these actors are allowed to play a role within it.

Chinese Think Tanks

> The Chinese government and media rely on think tanks for insight and expertise on international events. (He Li 2002)

When, in 2002 Professor He Li wrote the article "The role of think tanks in Chinese Foreign Policy," he affirmed that until that moment, the role they played had largely been ignored: "some studies briefly mention these research organizations, but their activities are much more widespread and far deeper than previously realized" (Li 2002, 33). Fifteen years later, the existing literature on Chinese think tanks has expanded greatly, with numerous articles appearing in academic journals in China and in the West about the Chinese academic community and policy research organizations. Furthermore, in parallel with efforts by scholars to investigate the numerous complexities of this ascent field of studies in China, interest in

Chinese think tanks has increased among policymakers, pundits and the media sector. Although both Chinese and Western scholars have dedicated growing attention to think tanks in the Chinese context, one of the major tendencies has been to compare their organizational structure, functions and activities with their Western counterparts, with little or no attention being given the role they play in China's performance at the international level, and in particular, regarding China's stance within the vast array of global governance. This study fills this gap by first analyzing Chinese think tanks and their functionality as a direct product of the national context in which they are embedded; and second focusing specifically on the role they play in T2 diplomatic activities and transnational networking.

One of the most notable contributions to the study of Chinese think tanks is Zhu Xufeng's book, *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*. Zhu divides think tanks in China into two major categories: semi-official and non-governmental. In Zhu's analysis, official policy research institutes, that is, research organizations incorporated within governmental departments, are excluded a priori because an institute or an organization, in order to be "truly" considered as a think tank, needs to present at least a certain degree of autonomy from the government. The approach, though clearly balanced and justifiable, is thus very similar to definitions adopted by other scholars to define Western think tanks. In parallel with Western scholars' ideas, Zhu defines Chinese think tanks as "stable and autonomous organizations that research and consult on policy issues to influence the policy process" (2013, 6). More clearly, he divides think tanks into two main categories according to their organizational identity: government-sponsored semi-official think tanks (事业单位 *shiyedanwei*), which are public institutions founded and sponsored by the government; and non-governmental think tanks, which include policy research institutes registered as enterprises (企业 *qiye*) and civilian non-profit institutions (民办非企业单位 *minban fei qiye danwei*). Zhu excludes a priori government-run agencies because of his thesis that think tanks need to be autonomous, although he does recognize how, in fact, many semi-official think tanks are still sponsored by the ruling regime. He does, however, acknowledge the limits of applying Western definitions for think tanks to the Chinese context (Zhu 2013, 17).

Talking about independence from the government, according to Zhu and Xue there are at least two different concepts that can be applied to the work of Chinese think tanks. The first includes a narrow definition of the term and is related to the significance of the designation "independent," that is, the extent to which an institute can operate autonomously from

the government, such as Brooking in the US. A second understanding includes a broader view of the think-tank world, typical of the Chinese situation, which is linked with the use of formal legal identities when analyzing Chinese think tanks. To this extent, semi-official think tanks are considered to be "the most important component in the policy research and consultation system outside the government in China" yet they are "not completely independent because they are independent legal persons founded by the government" (Zhu and Lan 2007, 454). However, these are not fully detached from the government sector. Therefore, to what extent can the autonomy of policy research be guaranteed within a non-democratic context such as China? The discourse is, according to the authors, once again related to the *independence dilemma*. However, in China, independent research analysis is not an issue under the Party-state system and the CCP regime. In China, the traditional division between interests groups and the objective analysis of a policy proposal itself exert no influence on each other because political leadership is aware of the necessity of having "substantive knowledge," which could come only from policy research institutions operating independently from the ruling Party.

In this book, I do not classify Chinese think tanks according to their formal and organizational identities, or to be more precise, to the legal status of think tanks. Although useful, the approach is influenced strongly by distinctions or categorizations based on a major typology devised in the past to classify Western think tanks. Instead, I prefer to classify think tanks as has traditionally been done by other Chinese sources and scholars, that is, distinguishing between Party-state and military think tanks, the institutes affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Science, academic research institutes and civilian think tanks. Furthermore, as this book adopts the concept of knowledge regimes as a fundamental theoretical tool in understanding the link between policy research organizations, the national context and the knowledge produced, the Chinese classification appears to be in symbiosis with the classification adopted to describe knowledge-producing organizations, that is, state research units, party-state research units and academic research units. In the following sections, this chapter will provide the reader with a historical background of think tanks in China and how they developed, their major characteristics today and the reform that occurred under the Xi Jinping administration.

In order to overcome theoretical and analytical uncertainties with regard to the relationship of Chinese think tanks with the government, it is worth noting that the classification proposed above includes not only

policy research organizations defined according to Western academic discussions and definitions, but also official organizations maintaining links or affiliations with the Chinese government. The motivation for my organizational proposal is not solely rooted in the uncertainties surrounding the issue of (not) having an exact definition, as previously discussed. Rather, it considers the unavoidable "critical juncture" that occurred with the leadership transition in late 2012. Since Xi Jinping took office in 2012, think tanks have acquired a growing and recognized relevance to the new administration. It is evident that previous efforts have been made to ascertain how the government apparatus intends to construct the idea of having "a new type of Chinese think tank," in order to increase their role within the Party decision-making mechanisms, as well as China's soft power abroad. For instance, in 2013, the Xinhua press agency announced that think-tank experts were to be consulted publicly to discuss how to contribute ideas about the concept of a "China dream": "Liu Qibao, head of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, encouraged the CASS to promote the international influence of Chinese academics with theories and discourse systems that are understandable and convincing for the world" (Xinhua 2013). Later, in October 2014, the new leadership proposed a new plan to deal with such organizations in China. In the words of Xi Jinping:

> Building a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics is an important and pressing mission. It should be targeted on promoting scientific and democratic decision making, promoting modernization of the country's governing system and ability, as well as strengthening China's soft power … think tanks affiliated to all departments, including the Party, the government, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Army, enterprises, as well as non-governmental think tanks, should be developed in a coordinated way, so that to form a think tank system with clear definitions, features and appropriate scales. (Xi Jinping, Xinhua website 2013)

What are the Chinese characteristics Xi is talking about? As this book demonstrates, increasing attention devoted to this growing industry by the Xi administration exists in parallel with the role these actors now play at the international and transnational levels. There has been a great deal of debate about think tanks in China as the publication of a blue book on the topic demonstrates. Blue Books (蓝聘书 *lanpinshu*) are special reports, usually published by the Chinese Academy of Social Science, which discuss and analyze topics relevant to Chinese leadership and society. *The Blue*

Book of Think Tanks: A System Construction of the Think Tank Industry examines Chinese think tanks. Published first in 2011 and then updated in 2012, it offers a detailed overview of the think-tank situation in China. The report defines three different categories of institution: (1) official think tanks (官方智库 *guanfang zhiku*), further divided into institutes attached to central government (中英政府系统 *zhong ying zhengfu xitong*) or local departments (地方系统 difang xitong); (2) research institutes (科研机构 *keyan jigou*), social organizations (社会组织 *shehui zuzhi*), semi-official think tanks (半官方智库 *ban guanfang zhiku*) and civilian think tanks (民间智库 *minjian zhiku*); and (3) higher education think tanks (高教智库 *gaojiao zhiku*) (Yu 2013, 28–50).

The Historical Development of Think Tanks in China

According to Jia Xijin, China's think-tank tradition dates back to ancient times, during the period of the "Three Kingdoms," when advisors attached to different governments were selected by the emperor from among high-level officials, in order to provide advice and recommendations (2011, 53). The English term "think tank" is today widely accepted to define policy research organizations in China, but it entered into the Chinese lexicon only recently and because of Western influence. As Xuanli Liao exemplified, there are in fact two terms used in China to indicate these organizations. The first is 智囊团 *zhinang tuan*. This describes "a small group of people who work as a policy advisory body to the top decision-makers in the capacity of governmental officials, and its meaning is close to the term 'brain trust.'" The second term is 思想库 *sixiang ku* or 智库 *zhiku*. This is a direct translation from the English phrase and refers to "research institutions conducting policy research" (Liao 2006, 54). As with Xuanli Liao's approach, the second type are those used in this book, as they represent Chinese think tanks today.

Scholars of Chinese think tanks prefer to divide their historical development into different periods or generations. According to Li, two periods exemplify the rise of think tanks in China: from 1956 to 1976 and from 1977 to the present (2002). The first period covers Mao's era until the end of the Cultural Revolution. At that time, Chinese domestic politics were strongly influenced by China's relationship with Russia, and Beijing was not in a position to play a particularly significant role at the international level. It was during this period that important think tanks were

established, such as the Institute of International Relations (1956) and the Institute of World Economy (1963). At that point in Chinese history, the Soviet influence not only related to the organizational structure of think tanks, but to China's ideational perspectives, that is, what David Shambaugh has defined as the "Sovietization" of Chinese international relations: "until the 1990s Chinese IR [international relations] analysts still subscribed largely to categories of analysis and paradigms they had learned and adapted from the Soviet Union" (Shambaugh 2002, 578). During the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the majority of institutes were closed down. From 1976 onwards, there has been a sort of "renaissance" of policy research organizations due to the growing number of international issues that China has had to deal with. By 1999, "there were about a hundred institutes of international studies in China with about 10,000 researchers, including several thousand research professors" (Li 2002, 34).

To Tanner, think-tank history can be divided instead into three generations (2002). The first has its roots in the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, policy research institutes were based on Soviet-style research organizations, mostly incorporated into ministerial departments and institutional missions. A second generation emerged in the 1980s. In this period, China's political environment was going through a profound transformation because of the need to forget the terrible years of the Cultural Revolution. In parallel with this, the period of reforms and opening up (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) of society had just been inaugurated, and a positive structural renewal was needed affecting all sections of Chinese politics. In particular, starting with Deng's reforms in 1978, China's decision-making literally transformed and it became "less based on radical ideology, the personality of the leader has been less dominant, and a more collegial, institutionalized and professionalized process has occurred" (Harris 2014, 25). During this period, key leaders—Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang, Hu Qiaomu, Zhao Ziyang and Deng Liqun—recognizing the limits of Party departments and state ministries as being too centralized, began to attach increasing value to alternative sources of information requiring policy options that were empirically based and less ideologically and bureaucratically hidebound. It is thus within such a context that think tanks in China started to grow. Yet, leaders still maintained a strong ambivalent behavior towards think tanks, as many institutes emerged from informal group consultations within the Party, and they were, instead "ad hoc think tanks personally patronized by individual leaders" (Tanner 2002, 560).

In these years, the rise of Public Security research institutes also became common phenomena. Following dramatic changes in the social space, which occurred in post-Mao society, the government needed innovative policy proposals, in particular to work out how China could create "a new and more modern policy force" (Tanner 2002, 564). As with the structure of think tanks in contemporary China, in the 1990s government and official think tanks had to be affiliated with a certain ministry or policy department of the Chinese government. In the case of public security, the department in charge was the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), which in 1996 already controlled 11 research institutes, 10 affiliated factories and 44 others under provincial-level Public Security Bureaus, plus 48 others at the prefectural and provincial levels. The four major think tanks under MPS were the Number One, Two, Three and Four Public Security Research Institutes (Tanner 2002, 565).

After 1989, a third generation of Chinese think tanks developed. In line with China's reforms and political and economic remodeling, think tanks' organizational structure, personnel and missions underwent numerous changes, reshaping the context within which think tanks had been operating in China since their initial establishment in the 1950s. The distinction in terms of "generations" is therefore useful to describe different think tanks working in the economic field. Here, scholars tend to distinguish between think tanks active prior and up to the 1980s and those established from the 1990s onwards. For instance, during the 1980s, think tanks were "able to define the policy agenda to a certain extent, and served as policy entrepreneurs, pushing for approaches to transition and packages of reform-related measures" (Naughton 2002, 626). The distinct possibility of influencing and shaping policy processes during the economic transition of Deng reforms was available both to government institutions, such as the State DRC, and to those believed to be more autonomous, such as the China Centre for Economic Research (CCER), affiliated with Peking University.

From Intellectuals to Policy Experts

> If intellectuals do not participate and we do not bring their activism into full play, it will be impossible to accomplish the construction of socialist modernization. (Jiang Zemin 1990, cited in Marinelli 2013)

When dealing with the role and functions of think-tank staff and policy experts, it is very difficult to avoid, in a brief overview, a consideration of the status of intellectuals in China. However, it is also very difficult to

trace the actual limits of freedom of thought and expression and to what extent they are de facto respected in contemporary China. At present, but in particular since Xi Jinping took office in 2012, the general tendency is to believe that academic and intellectual freedom, but more simply, freedom of expression in general, is far more restricted than it was during the mandates of Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao. The law passed by the government in 2013, known as the "500 re-post rule," is just one example of how current censorship dynamics are at play in China. According to a judicial interpretation issued by China's top court and prosecutor, people can now be charged with defamation, with up to three years in jail, if rumors they create online are viewed 5000 times by internet users or reposted more than 500 times (Kaiman 2013). The resolution was in line with Xi's efforts to conduct, at any costs, a successful anti-corruption campaign. However, the legislation increased discontent and anger among bloggers and internet users, who saw their freedom of speech seriously impaired.

In order to understand the political culture and the role of think tanks in contemporary China, it is first essential to understand the role assumed by so-called "established intellectuals." This is because, "within these institutes, established intellectuals have come to occupy influential position in the policy process, thereby highlighting the increasing regularization of that process in China" (Shai and Stone 2004, 141; see also Barnett 1985, 143). Nevertheless, restrictions and political oppression suffered by established intellectuals in China exist in parallel with the needs of the government to utilize their advice and ideas, which reflects the ambivalent role they have played as both servants and critics of the political regime. This ambivalent role or functionality is therefore indicative of experts affiliated with think tanks. The fundamental difference in the Anglo-American context is that, notwithstanding their growing role in contributing to public debate and policy formulation, Chinese think tanks still do not play a recognized role as civil society actors in educating the community. Rather, they "maintain close patron–client relations with certain political leaders and operate within a closed policy context that is distant from civil society" (Shai and Stone 2004, 142).

Since the Mao era, intellectuals have been essential to China's changing institutional environment, as demonstrated by tremendous transformations made to the state–society relationship. During Mao's times, in order to mobilize billions of people to implement public policies, the Communist regime created so-called "mass organizations" (群众组织 *qunzhong zuzhi*). Politicians and government officials used these to deal with the ordering

of social workers, women, youth and other members of the social sector (Goldman and Gu 2004). From 1988 onwards, the name "social organizations" (社会团体 *shehui tuanti*)—a term often used by scholars to indicate NGOs in China—began to be used in official documents to indicate business associations, professional associations, guilds, non-profit associations (charities, foundations) and non-governmental associations (e.g. environmental associations) (Goldman and Gu 2004, 28). Between 1978 and 1992, Chinese intellectuals played an active role in expanding the sphere of new associations, many of which were non-governmental or only partially government-affiliated. For this reason, Goldman and Gu explains, "the structural transformation of the intellectual public sphere towards the expansion of non-governmental organizations is a consequence of the pursuit of symbolic power by intellectuals" (2004, 35). More simply for Goldman and Gu, the development of civil society in China is the end and not the means of the efforts made by intellectuals since the beginning of economic and political reforms.

Within such a framework, who can be considered as a "real" intellectual in China today? To Suzanne Ogden, the same notion of intellectual is nothing more than a social construct and thus has to be contextualized from a historical and a cultural perspective. During Mao's era, "intellectuals" (知识分子 *zhishi fenzi*) were those occupying the highest institutional positions, from teachers to professors, from managers to journalists. "They were called 'experts' (专家 *zhuanjia*) in contrast with those who were 'red'" (Ogden 2004, 111). In the years of the Cultural Revolution, they were all re-educated and today, only a small heterogeneous group of experts, scholars, advisors, propagandists and technocrats remains. Nevertheless, but interestingly, to Ogden, Chinese intellectuals' role vis-à-vis Chinese society and their influence in shaping the country's history, values and ideas has always been stronger when compared with French or American intellectuals, so what they say *does* indeed matter. It is for this reason that they are often perceived as a threat to the Party-state system, which explains why leaders so often try to control them. In China, there are different types of intellectuals, based on the relationship they entertain with the government: some of them serve directly as mouthpieces for the Party (比杆子 *bi gan zi*), and have no ideas of their own; others work in think tanks and undertake their research independently of the government's agenda (知蓝团 *zhi lan tuan*); others are academics (纯须知 *chun xuzhe*), who engage almost exclusively in scholarly research; others are, to all intents and purposes, public intellectuals (剀共知识分子 *gonggong zhishi fenzi*), who debate topics of public concern, even though most of the time

they work in symbiosis with the Party-state, and are employed by major Chinese universities or CASS institutes. The last category includes so-called "dissidents" (意义分子 *yiyi fenzi*), obviously independent from, and largely against, the Party-state system (Ogden 2004, 113).

Differentiating between various types of intellectuals is essential in order to analyze research, policy and ideas production processes by think tanks and research institutes in China. In the course of the interviews I conducted with policy experts and academics in Beijing, many interviewees shared the idea that in the Chinese context, in order to understand the real functions and duties of experts, it is necessary to consider the role played by individuals, rather than considering only the research production of the institute for which they work. Although the absence of so-called "independent institutes"—as intended in the West—generates the impression that ideas and policy-reform proposals emerging from policy research institutes are, in the majority of cases, dictated only by the Party and its leaders, this is in fact, a more "nuanced" dynamic, which necessitates also taking into consideration the individual personality of the expert/intellectual involved. At the same time, to understand the work of intellectuals in Chinese history an acknowledgment of the variety of relations that this category has been able to develop within the state's departments and institutions must be understood. Furthermore, it helps to contextualize the controversial relations policy experts maintain with the government apparatus in China. For instance, while recognizing the numerous limitations that think-tank experts have to face because of China's political environment, Zhu believes they also function as "policy entrepreneurs": "Chinese experts include scientists, engineers, social sciences researchers, lawyers, and other practitioners who possess professional and specialized knowledge but without the power of decision" (Zhu 2013, 283). Whether or not the primary mission of what he calls "politically engaged intellectuals" in the 1960s was "to support the Communist Party of China and the government's policies," from the end of the 1970s, "experts have become much more deeply involved in China's policy changes" (Zhu 2013, 284).

Think Tank Categories

It is essential to analyze Chinese think tanks from a historical perspective. The political, economic and social contexts within which policy research organizations developed in the course of the last decades represent the

primary determinants when analyzing how they work and conduct their activities today. Although the focus of this book is not the categorization of think tanks, it acknowledges the need to differentiate between different types of think tanks in order to provide an exhaustive analysis of the sector in China. The categorization derives from how they are often portrayed by Chinese sources and the official media, rather than from the legal classification previously utilized to classify think tanks in China defined by the statutory basis of the organization. On October 29, 2014, an article published by the *People's Daily* online announced the decision taken by the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms to build "a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics." The article highlights Xi Jinping's vision about the future of think tanks in light of China's ascent role at the international level, while providing a general overview about think-tank categories in China (*People's Daily* 2014). Similarly, in January 2015, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) published an exhaustive report about the current situation of the think-tank sector in China. The report classifies think tanks according to two main criteria: influence and area of specialization. Based on the first criteria, the report distinguishes four types of think tanks in China: Party-state and military think tanks, CASS and its institutes, university-based policy research organizations and civilian or non-governmental think tanks (Table 3.1). According to the second criteria, the specialization field, think tanks are divided into six major policy areas: economics, politics, culture and society, comprehensive reforms and international relations (SASS 2015; Menegazzi 2016). More recently, Cheng Li has noticed how the government and authorities in China tend very often to distinguish four different types of think tanks: (1) government-run think tanks; (2) university-hosted think tanks; (3) think tanks affiliated with state-owned enterprises (SOEs); (4) think tanks that are seen as social organizations (Li 2017, 23).

Party-State and Military Think Tanks

Party-state and military think tanks (党政军智库 *dangzheng jun zhiku*) exist as a key component of authority. These organizations are in charge of enacting laws and implementing regulations, advising the government and policymakers within administrative departments, the government and the military sector. They are considered to be strategic actors regarding the decision-making environment in China and their influence can vary depending on their proximity to the political system. Think tanks affiliated with the

Table 3.1 Think tanks in China

Think tank	*Typology*	*Policy focus, research interests*	*Year established and location*
China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)	Party-state think tank	International affairs (security studies)	1965, Beijing
China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)	Party-state think tank	International affairs	1956, Beijing
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	CASS	Social sciences	1977, Beijing
Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	CASS	Social sciences	1958, Shanghai
Shanghai Institute for International Studies	Party-state think tank	International affairs	1960, Shanghai
Development Research Center of the State Council	Party-state think tank	National and International economic policies	1980, Beijing
Brookings Center, Tsinghua University	University-based	International affairs	2006, Beijing
Carnegie China Center, Tsinghua University	University-based	International affairs	2010, Beijing
Center for China and Globalization	Civilian	International affairs and global governance	2008, Beijing
Unirule Institute of Economics	Civilian	Economic policies	1993, Beijing
Charhar Institute	Civilian	Diplomacy and international relations	2009, Beijing
Civic Exchange	Civilian	Environment	2000, Hong Kong
Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies (RDCY)	University-based	World economics and politics	2013, Beijing
Pangoal	Party-state	Domestic reforms, international affairs	2013, Beijing
Central Party School	Party-state	Comprehensive reforms	1933, Beijing
China Finance Forum C40	Party-state	Economics and finance, international affairs	2008, Beijing
China Research Academy for Environmental Science	Party-state	Environment, public policies	1978, Beijing

Global Environmental Institute	Civilian	Environment	2004, Beijing
China Center for International Economic Exchange	Party-state	World economics and politics	2011, Beijing
China Institute for Reform and Development	Civilian	Reform and development policy	1991, Hainan
Chinese Academy for Environmental Planning	Party-state	Environment	2001, Beijing
Hong Policy Research Institute (PRI)	Civilian	Hong Kong–PRC relations, public policies	1995, Hong Kong
China Development Institute	Civilian	Comprehensive reform, institutional development	1989, Shenzhen
Wuhan University Center for Economic Development	University-based	International affairs	2013, Wuhan
Institute of Asian Studies, CFAU	University-based	International relations	1993, Beijing

State Council, such as the Research Office of the State Council and the Counselors' Office of the State Office, are seen as core think tanks by the government. They "participate in deliberation and administration of state affairs, and offer advice and suggestions on important state affairs" (Ye 2011, 25). They include think tanks such as the prestigious DRC, a policy research and consulting institution with major functions in policy research and consultation, specifically in connection with social and economic planning. Another policy research organization directly affiliated with the Party is the Central Party School (CPS, the Central Committee of the CCP).

Established in 1933, with the initial name of Marxist-Communist School, it is considered today to be one of the most prestigious institutions vis-à-vis policymaking in contemporary China. Its main research themes have always been related to the examination of theories in Marxist, Socialist and Communist studies, although in recent years the focus on international politics has particularly expanded. Furthermore, CPS trains senior- and middle-ranking officials of the Party. The CPS is a first-generation think tank: senior leaders during the 1930s were all trained in Moscow. The Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) was founded in 1953, and its main tasks have always included compiling, translating and undertaking research on classical Marxist works, while preparing foreign translations of the Party's public announcements, as well as translating into foreign languages the main documents of the National Party Congresses, the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the People's Consultative Conference (NCPCC), a political advisory body which consists of delegates from different political parties. Bing examined the recent institutional development of the CCTB, in particular the contradictory role it plays in being both a Marxist translation house and a pro-reform think tank (2015). According to Bing, notwithstanding that influence is always hard to measure, in recent years the CCTB "has been at the forefront in introducing many ideas, and some of these ideas have permeated the thinking of the officials in formulating and planning policy, which can be seen in the official documents of the Party, with its discourse increasingly infused with academic terms and concepts. In this sense, the CCTB is not just confined to direct policy input; it is also shaping the general currents of thought as well" (Bing 2015, 18–19). Another think tank that can be considered part of this category is the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR).

A different scenario is the one dealing with Chinese think tanks in the field of military affairs. The availability of access and examination of resources is very limited to scholars compared with other policy areas such as international relations or economic policy. These restrictions have been circumvented somehow by Bates Gill and James Mulvenon, who conducted an exhaustive study about military think tanks and mapped a general overview of these institutes in China. The core of defense-related research study, they argue, is substantially in the hands of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which maintains "its own set of internal and affiliated research institutions, performing a variety of intelligence, exchange and research functions" (Gill and Mulvenon 2002, 617). Research institutes related to military affairs are not all the same. They can differ according to the institutions with which they are affiliated, as in fact they are responsible for guiding think tanks' research priorities—as with the Academy of Military Sciences, which focuses on warfare matters (Gill and Mulvenon 2002, 618). The two authors divided military-related research institutes into intelligence analysis think tanks, weapons research and arms control institutions, exchange-related think tanks and research-related institutions. Despite the role that the PLA and military studies play in China's foreign policy, little research has been done on military think tanks in China, and the article by Gill and Mulvenon remains almost an isolated case. More simply, we can say that the limits surrounding military think tanks in China still persist for two main reasons. First is the scarcity of primary sources relating to the working mechanisms of the military apparatus with the decision-making process. Second is the sensitivity of the topics discussed by military-related research institutes, which prevents Chinese scholars and analysts from engaging in open discussions, as happens with the majority of their Western counterparts (Menegazzi 2015).

The Chinese Academy of Social Science

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (中国社会科学院 *zhongguo shehui kexueyuan*) remains one of the most typical examples of a policy research organization with Chinese characteristics. CASS is defined as a non-governmental institution with an important role in the policymaking process, and at the same time, is the governmental think tank for excellence. CASS benefits from a special status (representing a category of its own) and has a very high academic and political reputation domestically,

as well as abroad. Serving as an official government-based organization, it consists of more than 32 research institutes, three research centers and a graduate school, employing thousands of research staff and personnel. Affiliated institutes are established throughout China and under the same "mother-organization." They are independent of each other, particularly with regard to research agendas, but also differ in terms of funding possibilities: while basic financial appropriation and contract research provided by the government is usually the same for all institutes, research sponsorship opportunities can vary, and include international donors.

Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner studied the history and evolution of the organizational structure of CASS, its main role relative to research guidelines and policy implementation, and how it has changed over the course of several decades. The organizational structure of CASS is highly complicated, especially in its "dual organizational structure": the CASS Party Group, which belongs to the realm of the CASS academic leadership and the CASS Party Committee, is part of the Party administration (Sleeboom-Faulkner 2007, 20). Such duality however, also relates to possibilities concerning intellectual freedom and policy advice. While CASS is supervised ideologically by the Central Department of Propaganda, "it is important to point out that intellectuals follow Party guidelines and prescribed research formulation only to various degrees. Intellectuals directly involved in the research of formulating political documents form only a small, though important minority of leading scholars" (Sleeboom-Faulkner 2007, 28). He Fan maintains a similar stance on CASS' unique role in policy consultation: "unlike government department research institutes, they do not represent any sectoral interest and can provide unbiased judgments. Unlike non-official think tanks, they maintain a close relationship with major government departments and better understand how the demands of government affect research" (He 2015, 203).

Academic Research Institutes

The third group of think tanks comprises institutes affiliated with university departments or research centers directly under the control of the educational sector, so-called university-based think tanks (高教智库 *gaojiao zhiku*). Their main feature is that they are attached to or affiliated with a university department and they engage frequently in policy research

activities. They can provide a high level of expertise because of the qualified personnel (professors, researchers, PhD students) available within the higher education environment. Pascal Abb has noticed that at least since the beginning of the 2000s, university-based research organizations—although often considered as a distinct form of organization, compared with other governmental think tanks—started to play an essential role vis-à-vis policymaking at the government's instigation. Specifically, he notes that, although the general tendency is for academic think tanks to lack the institutional and administrative channels to directly affect policymaking (as the majority of them are affiliated with the Ministry of Education), the individual status of some of the leading personalities presiding over some university departments, for example, Qin Yaqing at China Foreign Affairs University or Yan Xuetong at Tsinghua University, strongly increased the possibility "of their views [being] heard" (Abb 2015, 543).

In the twenty-first century, with China's ascending role at the international level, leaders in Beijing are paying more attention to think tanks, but even more to the quality of research and policy advice which such organizations are able to provide. Within such a framework, new windows of opportunity have opened for university-based research organizations, with policy consulting services and the academic activities of this sector acquiring increased levels of status and esteem in the eyes of policymakers. Because of this, renowned global think tanks such as Carnegie and Brookings have opened branch offices in China, next to those institutes long considered noteworthy in the Chinese context, for example, the Institute of International Strategic Studies at Peking University. However, despite having contributed greatly to the internationalization process of think tanks based in China, it still seems questionable to what extent these institutes are really able to influence Chinese politics or the minds of the leaders (Wang Tao, interview with author, Beijing 2013).

Civilian or Non-Governmental Think Tanks

In contrast with university-based or government-sponsored think tanks, civilian or non-governmental organizations (民间智库 *minjian zhiku*) are, or at least should be, independent and privately funded. Furthermore, their major priority is to reveal public opinion and public policy research needs, rather than adhere to government guidelines. At most, they are registered as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or enterprises, as is

the case with the 21st Century Education Research Institute or the Unirule Institute of Economics (Tianze). In recent years, and particularly since the 2000s, numerous new think tanks founded in China have defined themselves as "civilian," among which are the Center for China & Globalization (2008) and the Charhar Institute (2009), as well as think tanks working in the field of environmental governance, for example, Civic Exchange Hong Kong (2000) and the Global Environmental Institute in Beijing (2004).

In the Western literature, a widely held assumption is that think tanks, being independent research organizations, offer a strong contribution to enhancing democratic development. More clearly, as independent and autonomous organizations, they are seen as "eschewing formal ties to government, political parties, universities and other organizations" (Higgott and Stone 1994). Furthermore, here the undisputed narrative is that think tanks are able to "[build] and [maintain] a consistent mixture of network wherein the ultimate goal is the notion and promotion of liberal democracy" (Scott 1999, 163). Within weak, often authoritarian, institutional environments, the role of think tanks is expected to assist the civilian and governmental sector in improving specific policies, while helping young or partial democracies to succeed in fundamental systemic reforms conducive to deepening democracy (NED 2013).

However, in China the potential of think tanks to act as "democratic entrepreneurs" is still inadequate. For the most part, civilian or non-governmental think tanks operate and conduct their activities in cooperation with the Party-state and its government departments, rather than using a confrontational approach, although this has resulted in Chinese think tanks being perceived as totally distant from civil society. Shai and Stone, for instance, believe that "the place of China's think tanks in the policymaking represents more an organizational mean for the Party-state either to maintain ideological hegemony or to consolidate the vested interests and strengthen the political positions of political leaders during internal power struggles" (2004, 142). Nevertheless, it is essential to differentiate between those who employ these arguments to criticize Chinese think tanks for their inability to provide meaningful policy advice and promising intellectual arguments in order to explain and justify authoritarian practices in China, and those who, aware of the consistent marginalization in the literature about their functions within developing or illiberal settings, argue that a liberal democratic context is not the most important precondition for think tanks to perform vital roles. As

such, the following section reveals and discusses the numerous activities Chinese think tanks perform today in relation to China's policymaking process.

Functions and Major Activities

The conundrum between think tanks' typologies and their functionality is not present in the Chinese tradition alone. To some extent, a major tendency within the existing literature has been to conflate think-tanks' functionality with their organizational structure, "thus limiting the ability to appreciate the pluralization of the organizational manifestation of think tanks" (Pautz 2011, 420). In China, the functions and activities of think tanks depend on the type of institute, as well as the relationship it has with the government sector in which it operates. In this regard, what exactly are their major functions? How do they retain credibility with the government, while providing the public with insights and issues deemed fundamental in order to understand the policymaking process? There are a number of services provided by think tanks in China.

Information Gathering

Bonnie S. Glaser, famous China Watcher, believes that the "stovepiping" mechanism—a system within which think tanks have limited horizontal interaction but are nested firmly vertically within the extremely hierarchical bureaucratic system (*xitong*)—remains predominant in China (Glaser 2012, 96). In her view, Chinese think tanks can produce competing analyses and recommendations considered valuable by political elites, but progress for such institutes has been limited (Glaser 2012). In 1989, Kent Weaver explained that what he defined as "contract research organizations" in the US were essentially policy research organizations producing reports for government agencies, where "the research agenda for contract researchers is set primarily by what the agency is willing to pay for" (Weaver 1989, 566). In 2011, a report in the *New York Times* revealed that more than a dozen think tanks and research institutions based in Washington received large amounts of money from foreign governments in order to drive the American administration to adopt policies reflecting donors' priorities. Specifically, "since 2011, at least 64 foreign governments, state-controlled entities or government officials have contributed to a group of

28 major United States-based research organizations … The money is increasingly transforming the once-said think tank world into a muscular arm of foreign governments' lobbying in Washington. And it has set off troubling questions about intellectual freedom: some scholars say they have been pressured to reach conclusions friendly to the government financing the research" (New York Times 2014).

Think tanks' proximity to the government is a typical feature in China. Functioning as information gatherers, Chinese think tanks exist as a "golden" resource for data collection. When providing information to the government, their major purpose is to become experts on key issues, to gather whatever evidence they can, and to inform the Party on sensitive issues and topics. Accordingly, to Zhang Weiwei, Professor of International Relations at Fudan University in Shanghai, among one of the major requirements for think tanks in China is to have new and more ideas, that is, what in China is called "innovative thinking" (创新思维 *chuangxin siwei*) (CCTV 2016). Wang Yi, Director of the Institute of European Studies at the Chinese Institute of International Studies (CIIS), affirms that a semi-governmental think tank (as the CIIS is usually defined) is largely directed by the government, which asks analysts to research and collect information about specific themes. In this sense, the research becomes less academic and more policy-oriented. Nevertheless, he stresses that, although the primary task of researchers is to propose new ideas and policy analyses to the government, think tanks have to perform other tasks, for instance those concerning China's public diplomacy and media engagement (Wang Yi, interview with author, Beijing 2013).

Policy Consultants

A second function of think tanks in China (policy consultancy) is to act in the role of mentor or advisor to the state, or to non-state actors. In recent years, certain policy research organizations have become sophisticated institutions working in international climates and responding to the global market of ideas. An example is the Institute of West Africa and African Studies (IWAAS), an organization that is part of CASS. IWASS provides government departments and their foreign offices, as well as corporations, with policy advice, new ideas and recommendations about long-term development projects. It also assists financial backers in relation to long-term strategic investments abroad. Yang Guang, Director of IWASS, believes that think tanks such as his are capable of serving several markets:

> We have three markets: number one, the government. We advise the government. That is why the Institute has been labeled as a "government associated think tank," for instance by the Pennsylvania University. We write policy papers for them and we assume projects assigned by the Central government. We serve directly the State Council, which is the "umbrella" for different Ministries. We write policy papers for some specific ministries, like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, the International Department of the Ruling Party, and some others, sometimes, like the Ministry of Finance. Our number two market is the business circle. We often advise large business firms. Why large? Because the large business firms have strategic concerns, as they need long-term projects and investments and their return will also take time, like SinoPec, Sinosteel. They often come to us and ask to write reports to advise them. Something similar happens with financial institutions, like Exim Bank or the China Development Bank. All these are financial institutions that play a very critical role in implementing the so-called "zou chuqu" going global strategy. Our third market is the academic environment. We train PhD and Master students, we provide teaching service for the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Science. But the first two markets are very important, because those are exactly the way, the channels, through which we influence the policymaking of the business circle and the related ministries. (Yang Guang, interview with author, Beijing 2013)

When dealing with the Chinese context and the relationship between think tanks and government, a further clarification should be made with regard to funding. Specifically, three different sources of funding for think tanks exist in China: financial appropriation, contract research and research sponsorship. Whereas the first two concern the function think tanks play as policy advisors—where finance represents the amount the government earmarks to research organizations (excluding non-governmental think tanks) and contract research is the amount of money allowed to research organizations usually through a public tender—the third type includes the option that commissioners of research also exist outside the Party (and therefore the government). Within such a context, it might be restrictive to consider the CCP as the only actor to have a say within the ideational process of a certain policy issue. Rather, different stakeholders could also be involved from other sectors, for instance, the business sector or international donors. Furthermore, many think tanks working in different fields, for instance economics or the environment, can have their research commissioned by SOEs and private companies, or international donors.

Opinion-Maker Actors

In the West, so-called advocacy tanks combine policy advice with "aggressive salesmanship" to influence the policy debate (Weaver 1989, 567). However, the Chinese term for advocacy (倡导 *changdao*) is controversial, given the fact that the concept is open to interpretation among scholars and individuals, as the complex dynamics existing between the state and society have led to the development of an understanding of the latter, which mostly emphasizes service provision over advocacy (China Development Brief 2013). Furthermore, the term "advocacy" de facto entered the Chinese vocabulary only recently, when it was originally coined by grassroots organizations following the work of their international predecessors, particularly in the US. The term has been adopted from its original source, the NPA, the Network of People's Action, an American-based network dealing with national, economic and racial justice.

Generally speaking, advocacy in China does not generally imply criticism but instead, a way to organize a "positive and constructive behavior" with the government. This is because advocacy has to be contextualized in the light of other activities, such as popularize (推广 tuiguang), societal mobilization and public education (鼓众动员或鼓众教育 gongzhong dongyuan huo gongzhong jiaoyu), publicity and public relations (宣传或鼓关 xuanchuan huo gongguan) (China Development Brief 2013). In 2006, the report published by the China Development Brief, *Advocacy in China*, listed different categories of advocacy activities in China: legal, human rights, policy research, constituency-based, campaigning, social movements, and lobbying/direct communication. The central point for think tanks' analysis is thus related to policy research advocacy, defined as "experts' advocacy in a particular field who will assemble evidence and often recommendation to influence policy decisions" (China Development Brief 2013). In this respect, such activities take advantage of political experts and researchers working in think tanks and policy research organizations, yet often without confrontation with the government. Think-tank staff and personnel have the opportunity to advance new ideas to policymakers. Very often, the stronger the relationship with the government, the better their ideas will be received. If they don't meet with success initially, staff can go through less informal channels, such as mass media—experts value profoundly the opportunity to exercise a direct impact on government policies. In this sense, they will try to influence the government first and, if they fail, they will attempt to do so through indirect

channels, such as the media or academia (Zhu Xufeng, interview with author, Beijing 2013).

China is often considered as an authoritarian country, where advocacy activities are constantly constrained by the political elites if they fail to satisfy the interests of the Party. Nevertheless, Asian contexts are systems in which "the pluralistic market for policy ideas is still relatively underdeveloped," but where "forms of policy advocacy do take place" (Scott 2012, 4–5). This is because in China, on the one hand, "the state itself may inadvertently create the conditions for the expression of views on policy that are permitted within a remit of specific state parameters on how policy should be implemented" (Scott 2012, 6). On the other hand, "before discussing policy-making as such, we need to understand the predecisional processes, namely which problems become salient as political issues meriting the attention of policy makers and which do not, who participate in agenda setting, and which institutions and group appear to enjoy the greatest access to agenda setting" (Wang 2008, 57). More specifically, Wang concludes that in contrast with the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping eras, today the public and society at large are strongly involved within the agenda-setting process. Think-tank experts can use a variety of methods to enter the debate, from official (internal) reports to academic conferences and symposiums to media coverage. The definition of policy research advocacy is therefore important, because it clarifies the primary actors, the target groups and goals of such activity.

Informal Communication Channels

In a more recent trend, think tanks today act as unofficial or unceremonious sources of debate, such as informal communication channels, through participation in international forums and T2 activities. Very often, they operate to promote the Party-state line, yet provide a level of expertise that would not have been accessible to the Party if they had depended only on its internal research structure. The One Belt One Road initiative demonstrated, for instance, the growing role played by Chinese think tanks at the international and transnational level. Curiously, the literature on Chinese think tanks has long ignored the numerous activities such actors carry out at the global level. The idea that think tanks affect the policy input and output of China's decision-making activities is nothing new. Indeed, some have already argued that in the process of change in which the formulation of Chinese foreign policy went from vertical authoritarianism—intended as

a policymaking process totally led by a paramount leader based on a vertical system of power—to horizontal authoritarianism—a process that remains authoritarian and centralized but where several power centers coordinate the interests and opinions of different groups—think tanks had expanded remarkably in terms of scope and participation (Zhao 1992).

Nevertheless, serious gaps exist in the literature, with the result that enquirers generally consider that most research institutions in China engage in only two types of activities: (1) the collection of background information and basic research in international affairs; and (2) their ability to sketch out proposals on foreign affairs (Zhao 1992). This is similar to the situation in the 1990s, when it seemed unthinkable that think tanks would be able to play a role at the international level, as there were "no international forum[s] for international relations experts to discuss foreign policy issues" (Zhao 1992, 171). In this sense, the emergence of a new dimension for Chinese think tanks, with many institutes becoming more and more internationalized, has been marginalized by the previous literature on this topic.

Following Xi Jinping's call to have think tanks with Chinese characteristics, international symposiums including the participation of Chinese think tanks have literally boomed in all regions and continents, from Africa to the EU, and from Latin America to Australia. For the most part, international forums among think tanks serve as a sort of "ideational anteroom" for political leaders, as in the case of the China–Africa cooperation framework with the China–Africa Think Tank Forum, which is used by political leaders to obtain policy analysis and advice regarding economic and political cooperation between the two countries. In analyzing China's role in two regional forums, the Forum for China–Africa Cooperation and the Macau Forum, Chris Alden and Ana Christina Alves (2017) have concluded that the way China is utilizing regional forums, in what they call "Regional Forum Diplomacy," is only partially reinforcing a "Sino-centric" form of multilateralism. Even though it is advancing its own interests and norms, China is becoming increasingly compliant with other developing members' interests and expectations (2017). Such a process also applies to think tanks involved in T2 activities and international forums. Although policy research organizations retain primarily Chinese values and perspectives when advancing China's international image and interests abroad, the possibility of sharing ideas and activities with their Western counterparts has reshaped the behavior of think tanks in contributing to the internationalization of activities and functions that they perform.

Educational Channels

Last but not least, when attached to a place of learning, think tanks fulfill a vital educational role. At universities, there are numerous opportunities for think tanks to conduct networking activities through various interactive forms and to debate subjects of importance to government policies, even though the majority of advice and ideas discussed within academic environments are not expected to directly affect policymaking processes. Recently, new academic think tanks and research centers have been established throughout China. Among their major activities are: the training of Master and PhD students, the organization of international exchange programs with foreign universities and research centers abroad; and strong support to propel academic exchanges between Chinese and international scholars. This trend reflects the idea that colleges and universities should fulfill a vital educational role within the remit proposed by the new administration, since 2012, to build think tanks with Chinese characteristics. University think tanks in China have always maintained a good reputation, as, for example, with the Eleventh Five Year Plan, for which universities "submitted more than 60,000 research and consulting reports to all levels of government departments, enterprises and institutions, providing strong intellectual support for government decision-making and economic and social development" (Li 2014).

Nevertheless, according to the Vice-Minister of Education, Li Weihong, many major problems persist in the activities of think tanks. The first limit "lies in the small, loose and week existence of the think tanks. There are many research institutions serving as think tanks but their power is scattered, their position inaccurate, and the level of research mixed" (Li 2014). Secondly, Li believes that academic research centers produce low-quality research results. Thirdly, very little innovation is produced by colleges and universities. Last but not least, is the lack of continuity between the mechanism of the scientific research evaluation and the limited training concerning policy consultation study, which has restricted the potential of Chinese university-based think tanks and colleges. In line with the Party's guidelines, Li's background idea about think tanks is that:

> The fundamental function of the think tanks is to offer ideas and strategies and to provide countermeasures. The building of university think tanks must focus on serving the national strategy and combin[ing] the advantages and characteristics of colleges and universities in order to clear the main direction. (Li 2014)

Li's perception of the functions that university-based research organizations must perform in China is often widely shared among academics, policy experts and journalists. In May 2015, the Center for Chinese Think Tanks Studies and Evaluation (CCTTSE) was established at the Nanjing University. The major goals of the center are the collection and processing of think-tank data, think-tank management and an evaluation of consulting services. The Center has developed the first information system for data management of Chinese think tanks, called the Chinese Think Tanks Index (CTTI) and it signed a cooperation agreement with the Center for Think Tanks Studies & Release of *Guangming Daily* (CCTTSE website). An article published by *ChinaDaily Europe* clearly stated that the close relationship which think tanks maintain with the government stands among the most positive features of how such a system works in China, compared with other global contexts:

> Fortunately, there are many advantages to supporting Chinese think tanks compared to those in other countries. First, the central and local governments support the founding of think tanks. Second, the communication channel between Chinese think tanks and the government is more direct and smooth. Third, China as a major world power has diverse talents of philosophy and social science. (Chen 2017)

As previously argued, the policy relationship which research organizations entertain with the government in China is often based on cooperative activities and positive perceptions, rather than on confrontation. At the same time, there is a conundrum that lies specifically in the most recent developments following Xi Jinping's campaign to establish think tanks with Chinese characteristics. Chinese think tanks operate under tight political constraints, which often make it impossible to challenge government policies and strategies. Nevertheless, they have generated in China a vast market of ideas. One crucial element is thus to understand how the new administration has implemented strategies resulting from their roles and activities.

Reforming Think Tanks Under the Xi Jinping Administration

Today, as Chinese think tanks transform their roles and activities in the new millennium, the development is primarily characterized by the growth of their international relevance. Particularly significant is the impact and

the increased attention paid by the Party to utilizing think tanks to promote China's national interest and soft power abroad. The belief started with Hu Jintao's speech at the seventeenth CCP National Congress in 2007, acknowledging the significance of the think-tank community, and making reference to the role think tanks play in "promoting China's excellent means and talent *into the world*" (Yu 2013, 19). As a matter of fact, the internationalization process of Chinese think tanks—referred to in Chinese as 中国思想库的国家建设 *zhongguo sixiangku de guojihua jianshe*—is, according to many, an inevitable option, given the fact that they can contribute significantly to further strengthening China's competitive image in world affairs (Zhu and Li 2012).

A significant step in the recognition of the effectiveness of think tanks was backed up by further acknowledgment made by Xi Jinping's administration in 2014. Xi Jinping stressed the view that think tanks had a central part to play in China's economic progress, political reform and place on the world stage. He asserted his support for the benefits they would bring to a new and progressive China (*People's Daily* 2014). In this regard, Chinese think tanks function as "soft power agents," given the fact that the knowledge regime they want to "export" abroad about China encompasses all but a positive image about China and its leadership.

Nevertheless, it has become evident that the growth of a think-tank industry in China has emerged directly out of an increased understanding of their significance internationally, and a realization that the progress of think tanks is lagging behind their international counterparts (Huang 2015). The first announcement that China was about to set up a new program for the growth of think tanks came in 2013; soon after, Xi made his meaningful announcement of new guidelines for think tanks. The Minister for Education, taking up the mantle of Xi's leadership, confirmed that Chinese think tanks would indeed be developed with "Chinese Characteristics" (Zhang 2014). To begin with the response was one of mistrust and a concern that this plan would instigate a return to greater state control and the removal of the ability for think tanks to operate and grow unrestrained. The policy, however, highlighted the importance of recognizing the role of think tanks and the need for the state to embrace the system laid out within the policy document, where plans for an expanded range of area of influence and an official government endorsement were set up. As previously mentioned, the eight areas to be covered would be "economic development (经济建设 *jingji jianshe*); political development (政治建设 zhengzhi jianshe); cultural development (文化建设 *wenhua jianshi*);

society development (社会建设 *shehui jianshe*); ecological civilization development (生态文明建设 *shengtai wenming jianshe*); Party building (党的建设 *dang de jianshe*); Diplomacy and International Affairs (外交与国际问题 *waijiao yu guoji wenti*); and the practice and promotion of the "One Country Two System" policy (一国两制 *Yiguo liangzhi*) (Chinese Ministry of Education 2014).

With the start of a new year in 2015, the CCP General Office and the State Council General Office issued a new document entitled "Opinion Concerning Strengthening the Construction of New Types of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics" (State Council 2015). This provided all the necessary information, including philosophy, values and purpose, to map out the road ahead. As a plus, it mentioned a number of key directives, including commitment to long-term impact projects, guidance on behavior, the need to incorporate qualified experts to ensure sufficient economic backing, to develop academic facilities and resource, to guarantee robust organization and to sponsor interchange internationally. However, some open questions remain, and there are still a number of ambiguous areas including whether too great a dependence on the state apparatus and the influence of politicians will guide their future research agenda.

The transformation of think-tank activities and roles in China has occurred as a direct response to the opening up of the marketization of expertise that has happened over some considerable time. The difference now is that there is an organized approach that will allow systematic growth within a structured framework. Since Xi Jinping took office in 2012, there has been a clear change, a greater confidence and decisiveness exhibited by the Party, which is manifesting itself "by an iron-first leadership that seems even more determined than its predecessor to suppress public debates and expression of dissent" (He 2015, 152). Despite Xi Jinping's recent announcement that the state should endure disagreement over its policies from the intelligentsia (Huang 2016), it has been evident for some years that there is no tolerance for China's academia, and more generally, public intellectuals from the ruling elite. Some university professors have been named and shamed, and other academics refused posts because they lacked hard-line political views, or appeared to show sympathy for Western ideologies or laissez-faire approaches, the latter accounting for a considerable number of scholars who have been removed from office.

Furthermore, recent trends towards tighter centralization, ideological supervision and anti-corruption campaigns have all had an impact on Chinese think tanks. The pronouncement of a prominent think-tank head

in China is well known: "As a liberal I no longer feel I have a future in China." This followed Xi's move to purge the tigers (corrupt officials) and flies (businessmen) from the Chinese Communist Party during what has been defined as one of the most strict and powerful nationwide anti-corruption campaigns launched in China since the 1970s (Schell 2016, *The New York Review of Books* online). The extensive censorship has already compromised several professional groups. According to a report published by PEN, an American non-governmental organization working on human rights and freedom of expression, the Chinese government's campaign to stifle dissent is broad, and is directed towards lawyers, journalists, bloggers, feminists, labor activists and ethnic minorities. Strategies adopted by the government include vetting measures on information for stories regarded as controversial, or restrictions on stories reaching the Chinese audience in a Chinese language (PEN Report 2016).

Against this political background, concerns have been raised about think tanks and NGOs adopting self-censorship practices. Importantly, some think tanks must be seen as part of a key battleground to construct and reinforce Chinese ideology at home and abroad. In the Thirteenth Five Year Plan, for instance, China announced a decision to establish between "50 and 100 high-end think tanks devoted to innovation, in the humanities and social sciences with Chinese characteristics" (Ohlberg 2016, 4). Chinese think tanks are often seen as a fundamental instrument in the hands of the Party, but more specifically, in the hands of the CCP's propaganda apparatus, that is, the Central Propaganda Department and the State Council Information Office, to sustain and implement the promotion of a "Chinese ideology," "which includes creating new think tanks, promoting research to provide a theoretical foundation for China's political and economic system, expanding China's medias global presence and generally slicker propaganda using cartoons and videoclip" (Ohlberg 2016, 6).

The Internationalization of Chinese Think Tanks

Track II Diplomacy

Over the last decade, there has been a transformation in the activities and roles of policy research institutes in the PRC. While think tanks are coming under more profound scrutiny by the new leadership, they have nonetheless grown in number. Now China, according to the Global Go To Think Tanks Index report, has the greatest number of agencies on the

planet (429) after the US (1830) (McGann 2017). It is still important, though, to consider some of the reasons for this change. Primarily, it is necessary to draw on a fixed mode of analysis and to consider how think tanks are classified and the major functions they perform. Equally valid is the need to pay attention to the specific national conditions that have contributed to Chinese think-tank development in the last decade, not least of all the Party's determination to ameliorate the conditions of Chinese think tanks and utilize them as a means of further enhancing the strength of the CCP's ideology and its channels of propaganda.

At this stage, it is fundamental to also deal with the roles and activities they perform at the international level, such as their contribution to Track 2 diplomacy (T2). The relevance of T2 diplomacy in recent years has experienced a positive revival, because of a substantial umbrella literature that has mushroomed about epistemic and policy communities (Haas 1992; Cross 2013). Furthermore, T2's scope of operations enlarged, as did its influence in different geographical regions (Kraft 2000; Ball et al. 2006). Scholarship dealing with T2 diplomacy avoids treating foreign policy and decision-making as explicable exclusively through the lens of systemic, state-centric levels of analysis. During T1, the state relied on governmental expertise to support and encourage mediation and the development of international agreements. Where T1 involvement was totally represented by the state, the actors in T2 were drawn from a more diverse group and the content led more towards a free dialogue. As Stone pointed out, this is "an arena for non-governmental public action," characterized by "the breakdown of traditional distinction between foreign policy making and domestic actors" (Stone 2013, 132). Because of the existence of particular channels such as T1.5 (T1½) or T3 diplomatic activities, Stone prefers the term *informal diplomacy*, that is, a type of non-state-centric diplomacy, open to a wider range of actors other than bureaucrats and politicians (Stone 2013).

Zimmerman considered the role of T2 actors to be that of "ideational entrepreneurs," that is, actors "able to design *political narratives* for new administrations" (Zimmerman 2016, emphasis added). In parallel with the phenomenon occurring in different parts of Asia, think tanks in China have successfully negotiated their way to manage key positions, allowing them to exert substantial influence on the functioning of the state and in different dimensions. One of the most successful examples is the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD), a forum for discussing defense diplomacy in the Asia–Pacific region. Although the SLD is formally a T1 process, it also includes a wide range of participants associated with T2 diplomacy (scholars,

analysts, journalists and civil society organizations). Since it was established in 2007, China has managed not only to become an active participant in the forum, but also to demonstrate evidence of its role to shape the dialogue with various degrees of success, such as Taiwan's attendance at the SLD or concerning maritime disputes between Japan and China (Bisley and Taylor 2015).

Think Tanks' Forums and Global Governance

In China, think tanks have grown particularly because of the different opportunities already listed (political, economic and individual), but yet another factor to be considered in order to understand their growing relevance at the international level is the role of T2 diplomacy and international forums. Becoming established on an international platform involves participation in meetings, discussion groups, summits and debates. These are the foundations for developing and exerting persuasion and gaining (global) authority (Abelson 2006, 148). International forums are the cornerstones of influence and "knowledge exchange," and what is more, they offer "a neutral territory where people feel more comfortable and have an opportunity to mingle" (Stone 1996, 126). As Perez points out, forums in the EU offer a unique opportunity and have resulted in the coming together of different interests to lower costs and to establish a basis for cooperation and discussion. Without this, there would have been considerably higher costs (Perez 2014).

Wei Ling, Head of the Asian Studies Institutes at the China Foreign Affairs University, considers T2 integration, and particularly think-tank international fora, to be of primary importance in East Asia, as "relational networks" (关系网络化的地区 *guanxi wangluohua de diqu*) prevail in diplomatic exchanges (Wei 2010). In the last few years, China and Chinese think tanks have become central players on these platforms, with Chinese leaders inviting ever larger numbers of think-tank experts to join conferences. A representative example is the event co-organized by the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program (TTCSP) of the University of Pennsylvania and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) in 2014, which saw the attendance of experts and scholars of 42 think tanks from fifteen countries. The intention of the event was to "socialize" Chinese think tanks into the contemporary world of Western organizations, although it also represented an essential moment to advance the idea of what it means to have think tanks with "Chinese characteristics."

The head of the TTCSP, James McGann, advocated that the main purpose and measure of success of the conference would be its ability to influence China to agree to less central government control, to change its ambassadorial advice and to alter its position on strategy invention (Chang 2014). Yet, Wang Ronghua, Director of the SASS Think Tanks Research Center, stressed that the functionality of think tanks is heavily connected to government decision-making processes, and key tasks are related to CPC and state governance in China (SASS Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences 2015). Chinese think-tank representation has become a major strategy in establishing domestic and foreign policy networks and in representing Chinese interests on the world stage. At a different level, the cooperation between specific countries with China has been profound through the work of the policy research institutes.

Consider, for example, the CATTF, which has already met four times. The think tanks representing these countries have established a relationship which allows them to exchange opinions ahead of strategically important discussions that are conducted on these matters (political, economic and cultural cooperation) by the leaders of the individual countries. FOCAC, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, exists as one such platform and as a state-to-state program. Other success stories include think-tank cooperation between the countries of Central America and the establishment of a cooperation platform with policy research organizations in the West Indies (The China–LAC [Latin America and the Caribbean] Think Tanks Forum). Through its involvement with these international meetings and their associated forums, China has improved diplomatic activities as well as its international image.

Yet, one of the most successful and recent examples of this is the G20, both the Summit held in 2015 in Antalya, Turkey, and the Summit held in 2016 in Hangzhou, China. With regard to the former, China had more think tanks represented at the "Ideas Bank" (T20) (an ideational platform where think tanks meet and discuss policy-oriented issues about global governance and international affairs) than any other Asian country. Among them, the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China (RDCY) played a fundamental role in terms of China's G20 involvement. This is because, "as a new type of Chinese think tank RDCY has come to play an irreplaceable role in the deeper relationship China is constructing with the G20" (Wang 2015, G20 Research Group online). RDCY has defined itself as a "new style think tank with Chinese characteristics" (RDCY website). Qiu Guocheng, alumnus of Renmin University of

China and Chairman of the Shanghai Chongyang Investment Co. Ltd., a private funding company based in Shanghai, finances the institute, established in 2013. All China's efforts to gain a substantial presence vis-à-vis global governance were even more evident during the latest G20 summit in Hangzhou. The T20 platform established by China comprised more than 500 experts from different countries. Chen Dongxiao, President of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, and Chair of the T20 initiative at the closing ceremony on 30 July 2016, affirmed:

> As one of the major engagements group of the G20, the Think Tanks 20 (T20) has been functioning as an important pool of ideas for the G20 Summit. Since its inception, the T20 has taken a proactive role in providing advices and policy recommendations to the Leaders and made great contributions to the successful and fruitful G20 Summits.

Through the T20, China has initiated ideas where it is anticipated that states will ratify and endorse the agreements made at such summits. In fact, in the realm of global governance, the PRC now perceives itself as a proactive participant vis-à-vis new initiatives and multilateral practices (both governmental and non-governmental activities), as exemplified by the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) or the BRICS New Development Bank. This is in stark contrast to the situation only ten or twenty years ago, when Western organizations led most of the decision-making at international meetings and forums engaging China. These included initiatives such as the role of German "*stiftungs*," foundations led by Germany but looking at the need for (Western) development considered necessary in China. Their remit was to consider an abundance of Chinese issues, covering legal reform, social transformation, economic reform, and regional development, as well as media development and foreign and security policy, as a priority on their agenda (Mohr 2010). As the previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated, today the scenario looks entirely different, and China's international role has become increasingly important in terms of global governance (Table 3.2).

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the state and evolution of the debate about the think-tank sector in China. Notwithstanding ongoing reforms regarding the decision-making process, political space in China still remains limited.

Table 3.2 Chinese-led think-tank networks and Track II dialogues

Network	*Year established*	*Policy/research area*
China–Africa Think Tanks Forum	2012	China–Africa relations
China–LAC Think Tanks Forum	2010	China–Latin America and Caribbean relations
Silk Road Think Tanks Alliance (SiLKS)	2015	One Belt One Road (OBOR) project
T20	2016	Global governance
China Council for BRICS Think Tanks Cooperation (CCBTTC)	2016	BRICS cooperation
US–China Clean Energy Research Center	2009	Environment (renewable energy)
US–China Track II Energy Dialogue	2013	Environment (renewable energy)

The role of think tanks within the country is organized around heavy constraints, as the system still remains highly centralized and to some extent, subject to vertical authoritarian practices. The controversial figure of its "core leader," Xi Jinping, is evidence of a Communist Party daily becoming stronger and powerful. Through the new administration, and with the support of his closer political elites, Xi Jinping has established a rigid top-down management, in contrast with the space for experimentation tested by local and government officials in the previous decades. Within such a framework, the role of think tanks is destined to suffer the consequences of the ideological and anti-corruption campaigns, which clearly indicates that the environment is subject to a "politics in control" dynamic. Nevertheless, if politics under Xi Jinping looks full of limitations, and lacks pluralism of any sort, on an international level the image of China is both growing and changing into that of a country ready to take on board new responsibilities acting in line with the norms and ideas shared by a large majority of the international community.

China is ready to find solutions to problems affecting the global population, that is, environmental issues and climate change. China is willing to take the lead vis-à-vis security issues, for instance, promoting peace in the Middle East. Within such a complex and fully globalized arena, the role of experts (and think tanks) has become more important than ever. Xi Jinping and his administration noticed it immediately. Since 2012, the CCP have devoted much time and effort to the discussion of what it means for China to have think tanks with Chinese characteristics. The debate was initiated

in 2012, during the eighteenth National Congress of the CCP, which culminated in 2015 with the publication of the document "Opinions concerning strengthening the construction of New Type of Think Tanks with Chinese characteristics" issued by the CCP General Office and the State Council General Office. In parallel with the discussion carried on at the political level, journalists, academics and public intellectuals in China, as well as abroad, have discussed what the role of experts and think tanks in the Chinese decision-making system should be.

The result of this is an increased reinterpretation of standard and more classical ways to organize think tanks in China, such as focusing on their role and actual activities, rather than concentrating exclusively on their legal affiliations. The focus on think-tanks' functions in relation to T2 diplomacy and global governance fits the idea already shared, some years ago, by Glaser and Medeiros (2007) about the constant and regular interaction between experts, academics, policymakers and government officials in contemporary China. However, it goes one step further: rather than showing how policy ideas or advice are generated within think-tank environments, it highlights the indispensability of Chinese think-tanks' presence within international forums and T2 initiatives, specifically in light of China's growing relevance in global governance and international affairs. The glass might be still "half-full and half-empty" (Zhao 2012) as doubts persist about the real success achieved by think tanks and policy experts in China when it comes to policy input and influence. However, think tanks as significant actors in the knowledge regime framework of contemporary China have started to play a fundamental role as "soft power agents," that is, as actors able to strengthen China's soft power abroad.

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CHAPTER 4

Chinese Think Tanks and Economic Diplomacy

Introduction

In Chap. 3, I endeavored to explain how think tanks in China act today as knowledge-producing organizations that generate new ideas for leaders and policymakers while performing different activities, depending on the type of institute involved (Party-state and military think tanks, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, university research institutes, and civilian think tanks). Furthermore, the chapter distinguished between the different types of functions Chinese think tanks perform today, such as information-gathering, policy consulting, opinion-making, and it also discussed their role as educational channels. In a similar vein, earlier chapters introduced the notion of knowledge regimes, and specifically the reasons why the concept is useful once applied to the study of think tanks in China. From a theoretical perspective, the idea of knowledge regimes helps us to formulate an alternative explanation in order to understand how this sector works, considering think tanks as knowledge-producing organizations but without the limitations imposed by previous approaches, that is, regarding the so-called "independence dilemma" issue. Specifically, the concept emphasizes the impact national contexts play in the establishment and development of knowledge-producing organizations. In the case of China, the approach is particularly useful, overcoming previous classifications and analyses which, if simply transposed from a Western to a Chinese context, only partially explain Chinese think tanks.

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It is now time to provide specific cases from which to understand the role and functions of Chinese think tanks in a more practical way. As previously mentioned, in the course of the last decade, policy research organizations have been able to provide the political and economic elite in China with new policy inputs, ideas and advice that are essential for an understanding of how they consider and engage with a "rejuvenated" China in international affairs and global governance. Bearing that framework in mind, this chapter focuses on a specific field, one of great strategic importance for contemporary Chinese affairs: Economic Diplomacy (ED). First the chapter examines the meaning and origin of the term, with a focus on the Chinese perspective. Second, it relates the importance of such a concept to China's global economic role. Third, it analyzes aspects of economic diplomacy, addressing the role of Chinese think tanks. More specifically, it revises some of the major narratives, discourses and strategies that Chinese think tanks have contributed in the field of economic diplomacy.

Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy has become essential because of the expansion of international economic interdependence and globalization processes over the last two decades. Broadly speaking, economic diplomacy is defined as "both the economic dimension of foreign policy and the strategic dimension of economic policy" (Heath 2016, 160). More specifically, economic diplomacy is "decision-making and negotiation in core issues affecting international economic relations … [E]conomic diplomacy is therefore concerned with the process of decision-making and negotiation on policy or questions relating to international economic relations in these core topics" (Woolcock and Bayne 2013, 385). Although it is largely acknowledged that states are still the primary actors, the increase as well as the importance of non-state actors within the policy process cannot be underestimated. Specifically, Woolcock and Byrne have noticed two major determinants defining economic diplomacy. On the one hand is the core of decision-makers going beyond the executive and legislative branches of the states, including quasi-governmental bodies, national regulatory agencies as well as private and non-state actors. On the other, is the process of decision-making and negotiation, rather than just the substance of policy issues that become a major dimension of enquiry (2013).

In the Chinese context, Zheng Bixi, a researcher working at the China Institute of International Studies, provided a detailed definition of what economic diplomacy means for China:

> Economic diplomacy with Chinese characteristics is the full utilization of external economic measures within the framework of the state's overall diplomacy to protect and further national interests, conduct measures such as guiding the economy with policy, using the economy to promote politics, and combining politics and economics in order to gain, on behalf of the nation, the resources, market, capital, technologies, and talented people needed for national development and to effectively defend against and respond to a variety of risks coming from the arena of international economics. (Zheng 2009, cited in Heath 2016)

By analyzing scholarship debates, it is apparent that the term has two different meanings to Chinese scholars. The Chinese term for economic diplomacy is 经济外交 *jingji waijiao*. The first meaning links economic diplomacy with the use of diplomacy to achieve economic goals and benefits; the second defines the use of economic means in terms of political objectives (Wong 2016). Indeed, today it appears very difficult to think about China's behavior at the international level while considering its political and economic interests and strategies as two different and separate fields. As economic and political goals have today become increasingly intertwined, China has had to abandon its conservative approach in light of changing international circumstances. Regionally, China is perceived by its neighbors as the leading country economically and politically. Internationally, numerous individuals skeptical about the validity of China's rapid rise changed their minds following the election of Donald J. Trump as the forty-fifth President of the United States of America. China's readiness to take a leading role as a responsible international actor vis-à-vis global economic governance was one area of concern, which in fact became evident through the words of the Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Davos Forum in 2017:

> There was a time when China also had doubts about economic globalization, and was not sure whether it should join the World Trade Organization. But we came to the conclusion that integration into the global economy is a historical trend. To grow its economy, China must have the courage to swim in the vast ocean of the global market. If one is always afraid of bracing the storm and exploring the new world, he will sooner or later get drowned in the ocean. Therefore, China took a brave step to embrace the global market. We have had our fair share of choking in the water and encountered whirlpools and choppy waves, but we have learned how to swim in this process. It has proved to be a right strategic choice. Whether you like it or not, the global economy is the big ocean that you cannot escape from. Any attempt

> to cut off the flow of capital, technologies, products, industries and people between economies, and channel the waters in the ocean back into isolated lakes and creeks is simply not possible. Indeed, it runs counter to the historical trend. (The State Council Information Office 2017)

Xi's Davos speech persuaded the international community to believe that China was ready to become the new champion for a liberal international order. Indeed, the economic interests and strategies China put forward at the Davos Forum did not ignore political implications. In the last decade, China has been one of those countries benefiting the most from globalization and economic interdependence. It would therefore be naïve not to recognize its willingness and readiness to fill a political gap which, sooner or later, might be available.

What, specifically, are the numerous initiatives launched by China in the domain of global economic governance and diplomacy? In order to understand how they fit with China's international agenda, we should first acknowledge the different levels at which they were promoted: the domestic–national level, the international level and the transnational–multilateral level. Domestically, the new spirit for free-trade liberalization was inaugurated in 2013, with the opening of a pilot program for a Free-Trade Zone (FTZ) in Shanghai. In 2014 similar FTZ projects were approved in Guangdong, Fujian and Tianjin. The change in China's new economic policy lies not in the significant realization that it is a developing nation, but rather in the fact that it abandoned foreign direct investments (FDI), as all major, mature economies did in the last decade (Zha 2015). The second level of policy innovation in economic diplomacy concerns the international dimension. To Beijing's leaders, this is essentially related to the growing number of Free-Trade Agreements (FTAs) inaugurated and signed in the course of the last decade. China has already signed eleven FTAs with many different partner countries around the world, and specifically with: ASEAN, Pakistan, Singapore, Chile, New Zealand, Iceland, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Peru, Australia and Korea.

The third level is in the field of economic diplomacy, which concerns multilateral practices and institutions, that is, the transnational–multilateral dimension. Here, the distinguishing characteristic is not just related to the newness of certain initiatives, but to the fact that they were all, to some extent, strongly promoted by China to advocate a different understanding of the liberal world order. Specifically, these are: the Regional Comprehensive and Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Asia–Pacific

Trade Agreement (APTA), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. Whereas the first two are mostly related to China's intention to expand its interests and to boost economic development at the regional level, the latter two imply that there are stronger geopolitical interests at stake in a global dimension. What they all have in common is that they are representative of a new world order promoted by China vis-à-vis economic diplomacy and its practices in the twenty-first century, that is, combining foreign policy strategies with economic interests.

China and the World Economic Order

China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 changed the assets of the multilateral trade system. Just a few years earlier, no-one would have imagined that China, a country with millions of poor and a per capita net income far behind the average standard of a medium-sized developed economy, could have become the country that would one day "rule the world" (Jacques 2009). Yet, today China remains a developing country. In 2014, according to World Bank estimates, there were 70.17 million poor in Chinese rural areas. Market reforms are far from being complete. Inequality levels among the population have steadily increased. The idea behind the double performance played by China, both as a developing and developed country, is that while shifting from a centrally planned to a market-based economy, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to move simultaneously from a low- to a medium-level country status.

To avoid the threat posed by the economic impasse, Chinese leaders undertook some fundamental policy measures. Domestically, two major economic restructuring maneuvers, the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2011–2015) and the Thirteenth Five Year Plan (2016–2020) focused on the implementation of consumption growth, with the objective of stimulating internal demand and doubling the country's GDP by 2020, in order to build a harmonious and sustainable society. Internationally, China launched a serious of initiatives aimed at reinforcing its economic stance in world affairs. In Asia, from the start, China supported the RCEP as an alternative to a US/Western-led economic project, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), proposed obsessively by the Obama administration—which was then cancelled in a heartbeat by the new Trump administration. The RCEP negotiations include trade in goods, services, economic and technical cooperation, investment, intellectual

property rights, and regulations for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and many other businesses. Initially, the ASEAN launched the negotiations in 2013. Today, the initiative is generally seen as a de facto China-led initiative. Although remaining an ASEAN-centered proposal, RCEP is expected to boost China's trade particularly at a time when a US leadership vacuum exists in Asia. RCEP's potential, that is, sixteen participating countries representing almost half the world's population, almost 30 percent of global GDP and over a quarter of world exports, guarantees China the possibility of playing a key economic role in the region due to the enormous potential disparity in terms of China's trade and economic power compared with the other fifteen members.

Together with the RCEP, the AIIB and the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) are two other initiatives standing at the forefront of China's economic diplomacy strategy. In contrast with the RCEP, the two were launched autonomously by China in 2013 and 2014, respectively. For a long time, Western countries tried to integrate China into the liberal international order, pushing for participation within multilateral institutions, that is, with the WTO, the World Bank or the IMF. With the new administration, and since Xi Jinping took office at the end of 2012, the story has changed, with leaders in Beijing encouraging their country to go far beyond simple participation, willing to take the lead in multilateral financial and economic cooperation in the field of global governance. Nevertheless, although economic issues remain a major concern, China's geopolitical goals are also retained among the primary objectives explaining the economic leverage used by China through the establishment of the new financial institutions, trade and economic activities (Huotari and Heep 2016).

As with the AIIB or the NDB, the new initiative launched by Xi Jinping in 2013, the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, stands as another example of China mixing its economic and geopolitical interests. Not surprisingly, the OBOR has been called China's new "geoeconomic strategy" (Pu 2016). Following analyses tailored to understand the real political motivations behind it, many are now wondering about the possible economic implications of such a new project in the years ahead. OBOR is expected to contribute strongly to developing economic ties and infrastructure along the Silk Road, through a series of land-based economic corridors between China and European countries. At the same time, the Maritime Silk Road is expected to bring prosperity to Asian countries, while at the same time connecting China through infrastructure projects in South East Asia, with many African states (Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, etc.).

With China undertaking a strong commitment to reshape Eurasia's, Africa's and Asia's economic futures, it is not a valuable option today to consider its economic interests and strategies as independent from political implications. Similarly, the need to understand China's economic diplomacy represents a major issue at stake in order to deal with the country's strategy. Overall, this is the result of China's immersion in globalization, a phenomenon that has modified and affected the economic, political and social interaction of countries worldwide.

It is precisely within such a globalized framework that we need to contextualize the role and activities undertaken by Chinese think tanks today. Non-state actors are gaining new and improved influence in economic diplomacy as a result of complex patterns of global interaction and interdependency. In this respect, "the civil society non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are adding their voice to the economic policy debates by organizing and lobbying across national boundaries in order to have a greater influence on international policymaking" (Saner and Liu 2003, 2).

This brings us directly to the role of think tanks in the domain of economic diplomacy. Think tanks and their networks can indeed shape the policy process in innovative and meaningful ways, as, for example, at the Economic Policy Forum (EPF), a global network of think tanks devoted to result-oriented research on economic planning and sustainable development in emerging economies. EPF's goal is to shape economic policies thanks to think tank experts, that is, through informed, evidence-based recommendations. Policy initiatives are generated thanks to a detailed policy process, which includes: (a) the proposal stage of the policy initiative, that is, the proposal and decision to create a policy initiative; (b) the redaction of the concept note or policy paper for the initiative, that is, research planning by experts (research questions and methodology for research); (c) workshops and meetings on draft policy papers, that is, with members discussing and commenting on new policy initiatives; (d) the presentation of pre-final policy papers, that is, research results and recommendations are presented to a wider (often governmental) audience; and (e) publications intended for discussion at international forums, but more practically to be directly included within national and international reform processes (EPF website). Since its establishment, EPF has managed to bring together think tanks and experts from different developing countries, including China, as part of the China Institute for Reform and Development (CIRD).

In the course of the last decade, dozens of Chinese think tanks have become part of international networks, forums and meetings, as

never before. This phenomenon, defined by scholars in China as the "internationalization of Chinese think tanks," has expanded gradually but widely. The idea is that, through international learning, Chinese think tanks can broaden their academic community base, enhance professionalism and develop diversity. International experience, in particular, can strengthen the current development of think tanks, as many in China believe this sector will increase international competitiveness (Huang and Fu 2015). It should be noted, however, that while generating a vast market of ideas about China and the world, Chinese think tanks still operate under tight political constraints that often make it impossible for them to directly challenge government policy. The interest in think tanks' (future) functions, and how Chinese scholars and think-tank experts frame ideas and shape decision-making dynamics, is nevertheless symptomatic of a greater paradigm shift about how they should work in China, and what their roles could be in the future. At the same time, it is indicative of a growing recognition of the role that think tanks play in the decision-making process: they should provide not only policy-oriented research and constructive policy advice and suggestions, but they should open international branch offices and combine Chinese modes and practices of research with theories and strategies learned from the West (Zhang 2017). The benefit of self-evaluation conducted by think-tank experts is useful, but it is often in line with the directives dictated by the CCP and the Xi Jinping administration. Functioning as "soft power agents," think tanks are gaining growing international recognition, where the number of institutes attending international events has literally mushroomed in the last two or three years. Yet, it is rare that the views on policy proposed by think-tank experts openly criticize guidelines set by the ruling Party.

One lone voice is Zheng Yongnian, Professor and Director at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. A fine US-educated academic, Zheng has been one of many Chinese professors to discuss the role of think tanks in China in light of the reform proposal advanced by the Xi Jinping administration in 2013. In contrast to his colleagues working at major policy research organizations in China, he has appeared extremely critical of the proximity of research institutions to government and party apparatus. To Zheng, the majority of think tanks in China have no independence and are not objective. China's intelligentsia still remains, in his view, underdeveloped. Although agreeing with the need for China to set up more think tanks, he is pessimistic about the existence of what could be defined as a real policy research organization in China,

as Chinese intellectuals are still too subjugated by the government's ideology and policy implementation (Zheng 2016a, b).

Chinese Economic Diplomacy Think Tanks

The number of Chinese think tanks working in the field of economic diplomacy has expanded incredibly in the last decade (2007–2017). Among the best-known think tanks is the Unirule Institute of Economics (Tianze), often regarded as *the* think tank in the field of economic policy in China. One of the main factors explaining why Unirule has gained such a high and respectable reputation as a policy research organization is that it was one of the first civilian or non-governmental think tanks to be established in China back in 1993. In a similar vein, its establishment should be contextualized regarding the political and production regimes in which China was embedded during those years. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping had just retired following his famous China southern turn. Economic openness and reforms in those years were at the forefront of the Communist Party. New policy research organizations working in the economic policy field were, de facto, needed and welcomed by the political elite in China.

Another policy research organization with a considerable reputation, and established in the same period, is the previously mentioned China Institute for Reform and Development. As with the Unirule Institute, CIRD is registered as a civilian think tank. Established in 1991, and based in Hainan, its major research and policy-related activities concern China's economic reform and development. CIRD has taken part in numerous international projects, collaborating with many global partners and organizations. Currently, it is working with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the German organization GIZ and the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIRB).

The development of the internationalization of think tanks, together with the specific attention devoted by Chinese leaders to this sector in the last five or ten years, has led to the establishment of a new generation of think tanks in China, with the objective of providing policy recommendations about national economic policies and foreign economic strategies. These organizations differ from previous think tanks in terms of organizational structure, activities and personnel. Xi Jinping started to appreciate the experience of think tanks and their contribution to many different fields, especially the economic sector. New think tanks established from 2007 onwards are an essential feature of the Chinese economic diplomacy

landscape. Institutions such as Pangoal, the China Center for International Economic Exchange (CCIEE), and the Chonyang Institute for Financial Studies, affiliated with the Renmin University, are policy research organizations all considered representative of this new wave of renewal.

Pangoal

The case of Pangoal (盘古智库 *pangu zhiku*) is a clear example of how a new wave—or to some extent, generation—of Chinese think tanks has recently emerged in China. The institute was founded in 2013 in Beijing. In just three years, the organization has rapidly developed its numerous activities in line with major international competitors. First, it has participated in international forums and networks. Since 2016, Pangoal has been a member of the BRICS Think Tanks Council and a major contributor to the Global Governance Think Tanks Network (GTT). The latter is an open platform working in the field of global governance and promotes many activities such as joint research, lectures, workshops and conferences. Second, it is organizational in structure. The composition of experts at Pangoal is configured along the lines of Western think tanks, and comprises senior advisers, academics, committee members, senior fellows and researchers. In order to combine Chinese and non-Chinese research activities and perspectives, Pangoal has welcomed many foreign experts from both developed and developing nations, many of whom are world renowned, for example, Amitav Acharya, former President of the International Studies Association (ISA) and Jonathan Pollack, former Director of the John L. Torton China Center in Washington DC.

According to its website, Pangoal's major activities include: "provid[ing] the central government, local governments, and various companies with numerous forward-looking decision-making consultations in the fields of macro-economy, finance, innovation and entrepreneurship." At an international level, Pangoal, "through strong and professional expert teams and good relations with the diplomatic decision makers of China, provides research and consultation services and exerts influence in such fields as diplomatic policies of One Belt One Road, regions and countries." Pangoal's efforts to catch up with Western think-tank activities have become clear in just three years. Li Shouen, China Network Television (CCTV) commentator, affirmed that because China's soft power remains very limited, "there is a growing need for more high-quality think tanks, which can offer solutions, generate new ideas and enhance China's soft power by mining the wisdom in broader society" (http://www.cctv.com/ 2016).

As the CCTV website states, it is imperative that Chinese think tanks learn from their Western counterparts, "to creatively develop a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics, the country should combine Western experiences and contemporary theories with its present national conditions and historical traditions" (http://www.cctv.com/2016). Pangoal learned from the modern Western think-tank system, combining foreign experts with Chinese Western returnees. At the same time, and again following their Western counterparts, a feature of Pangoal's operation is the so-called "revolving door" mechanism, involving an exchange of ideas and expertise between (former) government officials and personnel and the non-governmental sector. An example of this is Bai Jinfu, former Deputy Director and Doctor Advisor of Economic Bureau at the Policy Research Center of the CPC Central Committee. However, the mechanism of the "revolving door" in China is still incomplete. Specifically, although in the past decade numerous retired government officials and politicians of the CCP have moved to prominent policy research organizations, the opposite mechanism—think-tank staff moving to work for the Chinese government—remains a circumscribed scenario. There are a few examples, such as Wang Huining, raised through academia and now Director of the CCP Central Committee Policy Research Office and Liu He, the present Director of the CCP Central Committee Office of the Central Economic Leading Group, but the process is still in its infancy (Li and Xu 2017). Furthermore, although this process does occur, albeit on a limited basis, policy research organizations are only affiliated to, or administrated through, governmental departments and institutions, where it is extremely rare for staff serving as chairmen or directors in major civilian or independent think tanks to transfer to senior positions in the party leadership. Nevertheless, there has been some initial progress, as well as clear recognition of the importance of policy research organizations in China, as demonstrated by the Xi Jinping administration.

The Chonyang Institute for Financial Studies

The Chonyang Institute for Financial Studies (RDCY) (中国人民大学重阳金融研究院 zhongguo renmin daxue chongyang jinrong yan jiu yuan) was established in 2013. The institute is affiliated with the Renmin University in Beijing, but financed through an external education fund generously supported by a 200 million Yuan donation by Mr. Qiu Guogen, former Renmin University alumnus. The research center has defined itself as a new style think tank with Chinese characteristics: "We have hired 96 former politicians, bankers and preeminent scholars as senior fellows.

We maintain cooperation with think tanks from over 30 countries" (RDCY website). The RDCY has quickly become one of the leading think tanks in China.

As with Pangoal, RDCY can be considered an example of this new generation of Chinese think tanks. First, the most striking characteristic of the institution is RDCY's organizational structure, which comprises not only Chinese scholars, but a combination of academics from different Chinese universities and foreign experts. More specifically, the Executive Board and the Executive Team work alongside a Resident and Senior Fellow running two Fellow Programs together with a Visiting Fellow and Visiting Scholar Program that guarantees the international presence of foreign academics from the EU and the US. The second characteristic specific to the new generation of think tanks is the engagement of the institute with international networking and forums. The RDCY was the coordinator for the T20 2016 Summit, the Secretariat of the Green Finance Committee (GFC) of China Society for Finance and Banking, and served as the Executive Director of the Chinese Think Tanks Cooperation Alliance of the One Belt One Road initiative.

Major research themes are also very similar among the new generation of think tanks. In the case of RDCY, they are related to four themes/topics of research: global governance, OBOR, eco-finance and major power relations. The first has a significant interest in global governance and the role China plays within it. Specifically, major themes are the China–BRICS cooperation activities, the development of the G20 agenda, and China's role vis-à-vis global economic governance. The OBOR program is very much focused on the role of experts. The RDCY stands as one of the major practitioners regarding think-tank activity in the OBOR initiative and it is among one of the most important organizers of the 2017 edition of the OBOR Forum for International Cooperation (BRF). The eco-finance agenda combines research activities in the field of finance and economy, which are the main focus of research for the organization, together with environmental and go-green implementation policies, including environmental sustainability and ecological progress. The major power relations program concerns China's role in international affairs and is specifically tailored to analyzing China's foreign relations with its East Asian neighbors, that is, North and South Korea and Japan, as well as with the EU, the US and other major powers reputed to be of essential importance to China's ascent role in global affairs.

Center for China and Globalization

The Center for China and Globalization (CCG) (中国与全球化智库 zhongguo yu quanqiuhua zhiku) was established in 2008 in Beijing. It is a think tank that epitomizes the new wave of fourth-generation think tanks. Founded by a number of returned scholars from the West, the think tank has strong connections with the China Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA) and the South China Global Talent Institute, a sort of sister-in-law think tank based in Guangzhou, focusing on the study of international talent. CCG's major research themes deal with globalization issues and global governance. CCG runs five research programs: global talent, enterprise going global, international affairs, urban studies and education. The five research areas comprise a wide range of activities from enterprise internationalization (focusing on China's "going global" strategy), regional integration and public diplomacy. Despite CCG defining itself as a non-governmental, civilian think tank, strong links are maintained with the government sector. Wang Huiyao, Founder and President of CCG, was appointed Counselor for the China State Council in September 2015 by Premier Li Keqiang. Among other political duties, he serves as Deputy Director of the Central Economic Committee of China Jiu San Society, one of the eight recognized political parties in the PRC, and as an adviser to the Chinese People Political Consultative Conference (PCC), the official political advisory body of the CCP.

CCG attracted great attention from national and local media, presenting itself as the perfect prototype of the new "think tanks with Chinese characteristics." In June 2016, CCG hosted the China Innovation Summit with the TTCSP (Think Tanks and Civil Society Program) of the University of Pennsylvania, which brought together Chinese and international experts. In line with the Xi Jinping administration's guidance on developing new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, the aim of the international meeting was to take advantage of international expertise, while including the official perspectives of think tanks and experts close to the CCP's decision-making circles. According to Wang Huiyao, "including more think tanks in the decision-making process can be a viable solution to make the most of intellectuals' resources, which are plentiful in both public universities and independent institutions. And if their voices are heard, they could play an important part in improving the country's policymaking" (http://en.ccg.org.cn/ 2017).

Transnational Networking in Economic Diplomacy: The OBOR Narrative and China's T20 Experience

In today's world, think tanks have acquired a growing political and social relevance because of their role as agenda-setters in the policy-making process (McGann 2012). Particularly in the last decade, the aims and strategies of Chinese think tanks have changed in parallel with China's growing role at the international level. Hence, at present, one of the major goals for new policy research organizations in China is related to achieving a high level of internationalization regarding global policymaking. Think tanks function today as actors profoundly entrenched within the vast, stratified and globalized array of international politics. They are willing to make alliances and build coalitions with other global actors at different levels. The net result is the belief that "command and influence results are magnified through networks interaction" (Stone 2013, 8).

Specifically because international institutions generally remain underdeveloped in the realm of global policymaking, think tanks are able to provide a wide arrange of ideas, arguments and justifications, "to construct meaning and shared understanding behind the perceived need for widened mandates or regulatory power" (Stone 2015, 795). Furthermore, for those who believe that the influence of think tanks is never enough in the policy process and in decision-making formulations, it is important to stress that even within the ecology of transnational policymaking, "the governance impact of knowledge organizations and networks may well be more pervasive in terms of problem formulation and agenda-setting" (Stone 2015, 797) rather than during the policy-implementation phase.

Think Tanks and the OBOR Project

Without doubt, the One Belt One Road narrative represents one of the major policy areas within which Chinese think tanks have played an essential role in discussing China's strategies and providing ideas in the field of economic diplomacy. Two initiatives serve as examples of the internationalization of Chinese think tanks vis-à-vis global policymaking and OBOR strategies, namely, the Silk Road Think Tanks Alliance (SiLKS) and the Silk Road Think Tanks Association.

SiLKS was launched at the Silk Road Economic Forum in Madrid in 2015. It functions as an open and diversified communication platform, designed to engage in cooperation and offer strategic suggestions for the OBOR initiative. The new project is not only an international network

established to enhance cooperation and policy activities between Chinese and foreign think tanks, but a recent feature reflecting the will of the current leadership to improve the role of Chinese think tanks, and therefore China's soft power at the international level.

SiLKS is part of a much larger project, with China engaged in a number of key initiatives along the Silk Road: economic and financial cooperation with the AIIB; South–South cooperation through the BRICS NDB; and infrastructure-building and sustainable development in Asia and Europe through OBOR. More than 43 partners belong to the network, but membership is expected to further expand in the years ahead. The working mechanisms of the network are organized along four major strategic lines: policy implementation for new projects and policies concerning OBOR; closed-door seminars to facilitate the exchange of ideas among members; open international forums to win the support of public opinion about OBOR and maintain the improvement of conditions for Chinese companies investing overseas; and the establishment of T2 diplomatic platforms among the many stakeholders involved (Ho 2015).

It was as a direct result of the SiLKS initiative that in 2016 the Silk Road Think Tanks Association was officially launched in Shenzhen. The conference was jointly organized by the China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS), the Shenzhen municipality and Fudan University. In January 2017, the third conference of the Silk Road Think Tanks Association was held in Beijing. It was announced that the new think-tank network would collaborate on the implementation of strategies and policies relative to the six economic corridors so far established along the Silk Road (the China–Mongolia–Russia corridor; the new Asia–Europe land bridge; the China–Asia–South West Asia corridor; the China–Indochina corridor; the China–Pakistan corridor; and the China–India–Myanmar corridor), plus the Lancang River and the Mekong River, with the intent of strengthening think-tank cooperation around the twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road.

The development of Chinese think tanks—and particularly their interest regarding the OBOR initiative—acts in tandem with the need, emphasized by the Xi Jinping administration, to further institutionalize policy consultation to enable the reinforcement and promotion of China's soft power. As Fu Ying explains, think tanks focusing on strategic issues should not merely provide improved recommendations concerning policymaking, but should "also play a key role in articulating and explaining these policies to the general public and the society at large" (Fu 2015). According to this view, the functions policy research organizations must

perform in order to improve China's image at the international level are in line with the guidelines proposed by political elites in Beijing. The setting within which think tanks are growing in the global policymaking arena is thus top-down rather than bottom-up, as exemplified by the words of Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum in 2015:

> China proposes that a conference of dialogue among Asian civilizations be held to provide a platform upon which to enhance interactions among the youth, people's groups, local communities and the media, and to form a network of think-tank cooperation, so as to add to Asian people's rich cultural life and contribute to more vibrant regional cooperation and development. (Xinhua 2015)

China's T20 Experience

Think20 (T20) was launched during the Mexico presidency at the G20 in 2012. During the Chinese G20 Presidency inaugurated on December 1, 2015, the Chinese think tanks associated with the initiative were the IWEP, affiliated with CASS, the Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS), a policy research organization based in Shanghai, and the RDCY at Renmin University. China's G20 Presidency represented a cathartic moment for Chinese think tanks to display their growing involvement in global policymaking and internationalization strategies. Furthermore, China's economic policy think tank RDCY was involved in the development project of the T20 initiative from the start. The RDCY in Beijing, together with the Brussels-based Bruegel, the Institute of Global Economics in Korea, provided "critical mass" analyses and recommendations even before the emergence of the initiative (Stone 2015).

However, although innovative, the T20 has also attracted much criticism because of a lack of transparency and credibility. For instance, little information was provided on how policy research organizations are selected to become members of the forum, the majority of which represent developed economies. Yet, the influence of T20, although not easy to measure, should not be underestimated. More specifically, "its major achievement has been to cultivate a consensus within national policy research communities of the contemporary need for global coordination on economic and financial management" (Stone 2015, 803). In the case of Chinese think tanks, this was precisely the moment when they could have implemented more visible procedures and gained credibility, both

nationally and internationally. Furthermore, during the G20 Presidency, Chinese think tanks tried hard to advocate the necessity for developing nations to construct an international world order that was more inclusive and to some extent, less Westernized. The Director of IWEP at CASS, Zhang Yuyan, affirmed that experts at the T20 Summit focused on a variety of themes, including, "how the G20 can play a leading role in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, increase South–South and South–North cooperation under the G20 framework, and strengthen coordination between the G20 and other international mechanisms, in a bid to make G20 a real platform for global governance and sustainable development of the world economy" (China Daily website 2016).

In a similar vein, the Chinese G20 perspective on the future of world economic order should not be overlooked. The important role played by Chinese think tanks in framing, shaping and discussing ideas and policy advice about the future of global governance also provides a clear picture, as knowledge organizations are able to achieve ideational influence in transnational activities. While communicating ideas during the T20 meetings, Chinese think tanks allowed experts and policymakers to interact, promoting and advancing new ideas mostly rooted in a Chinese vision of world order. On the T20 website, policy experts at the T20 have been defined as "gurus" who get together to achieve "world solutions." China has thus cultivated particular attention on the intellectual role such actors play regarding global governance. As reported in the G20 Think Tanks Statement, published on August 1, 2016, the T20 has been functioning as "an important pool of ideas for the G20 Summit." Since its inception, "the T20 has taken a proactive role in providing advice and policy recommendations to the leaders and made a great contribution to the successful and fruitful G20 Summit" (T20 Chair Statement Declaration 2016b). Major policy recommendations provided by the T20 platform focused on four major themes: enhancing global economic growth potential; improving global financial governance; facilitating global financial trade and investment cooperation; and promoting inclusive and sustainable development (T20 website).

T2 Activities

In recent years, the role of Second Track Diplomacy (T2) has enjoyed considerable attention. According to Stone and Nesadurai, in East Asia a number of think tanks have played a proactive role in regional debates on

economic integration, partly because "in global and regional politics think tanks can act as agents of second track diplomacy" (1999, 2). Second Track Diplomacy is a political space in which policy research organizations can act as "ideas brokers," especially because it entails "activities or discussions involving academics and intellectuals, journalists, business elites … suggesting that *the demarcation between official and unofficial involvement is unclear*" (1999, 15 emphasis added).

We might consider think tanks as political actors, but there are some, particularly within undemocratic societies, who believe that policy research organizations can often simply be an extension of government bureaucracies (Ruland 2002). On the one hand, authors such as Kraft maintain that think tanks' proximity to governments and official sectors undermines the legitimacy institutes de facto achieve in the policymaking process (2000). Others, such as Zimmerman, believe, instead, that the tendency by politicians to seek out policy and political advice outside official channels of communication, that is, through T2 in parallel with policy experts and think tanks providing ideas and discursive spaces which are crucial to the political debates, has changed the way in which states think about their interests and priorities at the international level (2016). In response to those arguing that the approach overstates the importance of T2 mechanisms, and the influence which think tanks can wield within them, that is, T2 meetings being mere "talking-shop," the response is that "the value of these forums lies in their provision of a discursive space and their ability to link formal and informal political arenas" (Zimmerman 2016, 179).

Returning to Chinese think tanks, the relationship between policy research organizations and the government is today more balanced and mutually beneficial than ever before. However, this does not imply that there is a complete disconnection between an individual organization and the state apparatus and its policy guidelines. Subordination to the Chinese government, in the past as it is today, occurs through different channels, that is, bureaucratic organization, personal connection or funding. While it is still true that think tanks remain heavily dependent on the Party's will, the internationalization process and their role as "soft power agents" demonstrate their recent transformation and more proactive role in the policymaking arena of contemporary China. As for networking activities, conceptualizing the role of Chinese think tanks in T2 dynamics necessitates practical examples of how they function as knowledge organizations that change policy perceptions, provide new policy ideas and construct (political) discourses by supplying information and expertise to political elites.

One area of T2 diplomacy that has been only partially analyzed is the role of Chinese think tanks in regional economic governance. For example, the Institute of Asian Studies (IAS, formerly known as the East Asia Study Center) at the CFAU functioned as the "core" organization in the area of T2 activities regarding the Network of East Asia Think Tanks (NEAT). The NEAT is a T2 platform, comprising 13 think tanks from ASEAN+3 countries. Formally established in 2003, it was initially proposed by the East Asia Study Group (EASG) and then approved at the ASEAN+3 Ministerial Meeting. The IAS was established with the intent of gathering together a group of policy experts to allow Chinese political elites to "catch up" with major issues concerning regional economic integration in East Asia. Wu Jianmin, the then President of CFAU and a renewed diplomat in China, inaugurated the institute in 2003. Since its establishment, IAS' main functions have been to collect information and conduct research on economic integration in East Asia; to inform the media and public opinion about China and regional economy; and to advise politicians and Chinese business enterprises about the opportunities of economic cooperation among ASEAN+3 countries (Wu 2004, 22–4).

The hybrid status maintained by IAS in relation to other university-based think tanks—because of CFAU being affiliated directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rather than the Ministry of Education—is expected to allow the institute greater political influence. To some extent, the institute can be considered more as an "arm" of the government, even though it exists within academia. The general consensus is that university-based organizations are expected to exert little or no impact over policy processes because they are outside the "decision-making nucleus," but IAS successfully bucks this trend (Zhao 2012; Glaser 2012). The institute provides special policy reports (政策研究报告 *zhengce yanjiu baogao*) through internal channels (内部 *neibu*) that are addressed on a weekly or a monthly basis to two government departments: the Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部政策规划司 *waijiaobu zhengce guihuasi*) and the Division of Asian Affairs, under the same Ministry (外交部亚洲司 *waijiaobu yazhou si*) (Su Hao, interview with the author, Beijing 2013). This "double-track" channel allows researchers at IAS to provide policy recommendations directly to governmental departments, offering more opportunities to exert influence when compared with other university-tanks in China.

Wei Ling, Director of IAS and a Professor at CFAU, has affirmed that the coordinated group of researchers working on the role of China's financial interdependence among East Asian countries within NEAT has

had a significant impact on the enactment and implementation of policies about fiscal collaboration among ASEAN+3. She maintains, for instance, that recommendations on fiscal cooperation contained in the "ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan 2007–17," that is, the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization, the development of the Asian Bond Market Initiative and the strengthening of the surveillance market mechanism, originated entirely from the work of IAS researchers within the NEAT framework (Wei 2010, 22).

It is always difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate a direct link between ideas formulated within policy research environments, think tanks and academia. It is even more problematic within the authoritarian context, in which it is expected that the political space is heavily constrained by the government apparatus. Nevertheless, in the course of the last decade, IAS has successfully provided leaders and political elites with recommendations and advice, and for some, there is enough evidence to suggest that the institute has played an essential role not just within the information-gathering phase of the policy process, but also during policy formulation and implementation. The role of experts working at IAS was a significant factor during the ideational process of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilaterization (CMIM) because of the suggestions they provided during meetings and NEAT forums. This is because IAS acted as a vehicle "with a clear impact on policies standing as a good example of how experts can exercise a certain degree of influence in the political structure" (Han Zhili, interview with author, Beijing 2013).

Conclusion

Among the most important ideational forces at work in economic diplomacy, the new think tanks established in China in the last decade differ significantly from the institutes founded in the 1980s and 1990s. The role exercised by think tanks in China's economic diplomacy has grown in parallel with China's changing perception and activities within the policy domain. Likewise, the same evolution of the Chinese understanding of the concept of economic diplomacy has grown in parallel with China's economic development. When considered from a state-centric perspective, economic diplomacy has to guarantee China's international interests and strategy. According to Zhang, today "Chinese leaders believe economic diplomacy provides countries [with] the capacity to cooperate economically, despite political differences, which is necessary in order to assure economic development" (Zhang 2016, 17).

At the same time, as China's economic power grew at the international level, the country "began to use economic diplomacy—primarily through foreign trade—as a means to accumulate soft power" (2016, 17). While the considerations presented within this chapter do not deny the idea of China's economic diplomacy being conducted largely within and by the institutional framework of the state and its departments and ministries, the perspective adopted here supports the idea that actors and activities involved in economic diplomacy have been transformed as a consequence of globalization and its ongoing dynamics. In contrast with the 1950s, when the domain of economic diplomacy was dominated exclusively by government officials and a limited number of countries, today far more non-governmental players and new emerging powers, among which the author believes China stands as a prime example, are involved in numerous activities relating to economic diplomacy (Bayne and Woolcock 2017, 1).

This chapter has presented a general but detailed overview of some of the most recently established policy research organizations involved in China's economic diplomacy activities today. In contrast with the traditional economic think tanks founded in the early years of the 1990s, these institutes tend to maintain a clear balance between the Chinese think-tank tradition and Western models. For example, although some of these institutes have been founded only recently, such as Pangoal or the RDCY in 2013, their structure and ethos is representative of the Xi Jinping administration's development plan to create think tanks with Chinese characteristics, which naturally involves maintaining a certain degree of convergence with Party ideals and interests. However, it is also very evident that they have experienced an internationalization process and foreign academics, pundits and China Watchers are now established on the advisory boards of new institutes.

In terms of activities, this new generation of think tanks is far more involved in international exchange activities, forums and symposia. The analysis within the chapter has presented the case of Chinese think tanks' involvement in regional T2 diplomacy (the NEAT case), as well as their growing involvement in global and transnational activities, such as their participation in the T20 and the establishment of the Silk Road Think Tanks Alliance in 2015. As already mentioned, NEAT represents one of the most successful cases in which the participatory role of Chinese experts, particularly regarding problem-identification and agenda-setting processes, was of great significance and influenced the way in which Chinese leaders reacted to regional economic integration within the multilateral intergovernmental framework of ASEAN+3 countries. The role of

Chinese think tanks in the T20 and the establishment of SiLKS is further evidence of the invaluable role played today by experts in the realm of Chinese economic diplomacy.

The consideration given by China's ruling elite to think tanks has been almost without precedent: "the T20 is considered to be the intellectual backbone of the premier forum for economic cooperation, the G20 summits that will be held this September in Hangzhou" (T20 Website 2016a). Within this context, the role think tanks should play according to Chinese leaders is that of essential actors accumulating, shaping and disseminating knowledge related to major economic issues discussed at the G20: "the T20 is a significant platform for global think tank researchers to provide policymakers with thoughts and suggestions for the G20" (Wang 2016). In a similar vein, SiLKS was launched with the intention of building an improved knowledge base and policy-sharing activities among the actors involved, in terms of infrastructure development along the Silk Road (Wang 2016). Most importantly, all the above-mentioned activities demonstrate the growing and unprecedented involvement of Chinese think tanks at both regional and global levels.

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CHAPTER 5

Chinese Think Tanks and Environmental Diplomacy

Introduction

Over the last decade, China has been chiefly involved in the practice of environmental diplomacy, with the intent of pushing forward the building of an international climate change regime that satisfies its own standards and interests. However, in comparison with other diplomatic and foreign policy fields, that is, security or economic issues, global environmental governance still represents a policy domain within which the international community does not consider China a responsible actor. China remains the largest emitter of greenhouse gases and the largest consumer of commodities worldwide, and is therefore considered the greatest polluter in the world (Sun 2016).

Nonetheless, Chinese efforts to tackle environmental challenges domestically and at the international level should not be underestimated. China is today increasingly active in proposing global solutions to common environmental problems, as demonstrated by its engagement and support during the Paris Agreement COP21. But, even though highly industrialized, and a growing participant within global environmental governance, China remains a developing country. As a result, it is a latecomer in tackling climate change and environmental problems. In the past decade, however, China's environmental diplomacy has undergone tremendous changes, as in, for example, its commitment, affirmed by President Ju Liqun, to maintain the AIIB as "clean, lean and green." The new initiative, which is led and largely funded by China, is often criticized, as its environmental

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standards are perceived to be subjugated to investment priorities and demonstrate little interest in renewable energy technologies. Despite China's firm intention to respect current standardized environmental rules and norms at the international level, Calvin Quek, from Green Peace East Asia, has suggested that the AIIB has nothing to do with climate change and renewable energy, as the approved projects have demonstrated, and that few, if any, "real" investments are being made by the bank in modern energy (Liu and Damin 2017).

Before pointing out the specific role played by think tanks in China's environmental diplomacy, it is fundamental to understand the context within which policy research organizations operate on a domestic and global scale in the environmental field. Global environmental governance is, indeed, multi-level (the global nature of environmental problems and local impacts); multi-actor (states, experts, environmental NGOs and individuals); and multi-sector (energy, water and trade) (Depuits 2016).

In the case of China, the increasing number of policy research institutes working on environmental issues is often underestimated, yet a growing body of expertise in the PRC, focusing on environmental challenges, has emerged over the last two decades, particularly since China's involvement in the United Nation Forum on Climate Change (UNFCC), held in 1997. As a direct consequence, today we find numerous think tanks active in the field of environment and climate change. Accordingly, their role is strictly related to the needs China has manifested in following the country's development model pursued since the inauguration of economic reforms and trade development at the end of the 1970s, giving the country the "dirtiest air in the world, polluting more and more of the water resources and is possibly changing the climate pattern within China" (Woo 2009, 81). According to *Economy*, the impact of Chinese green expertise and its environmental policy community on global climate change has been substantial, from the way researchers have increased access to cutting-edge technologies (such as advanced computer Global Circulation Models and monitoring techniques and equipment) to how information from experts has led to a new understanding of the possibilities of tackling and resolving environmental problems (*Economy* 1997, 38). Since climate change discussions began at the UNFCC in 1997, experts have embraced the potential for the Chinese policy scientific community to engage in new policy fields and issues, trying to influence decision-making processes in this area.

As with those institutes working in the field of foreign policy, environmental think tanks in China are many and diverse. Nevertheless,

there has been little analysis on today's China green expert community. Among the rare exceptions is Wubbeke's study of the role of China's climate change expert community and how it interacts with political elites. Wubbeke argues that, in contrast with the past, the country's expert community today has not only been warmly welcomed within the decision-making process, but

> Experts can exert significant impact through government-led research, administrative access to decision-makers, advisory bodies, internal reports, and collaboration for official documents; but participation and significance do not necessarily translate into political action. (Wubbeke 2013, 728)

Unlike previous analyses, Wubbeke places emphasis on one specific policy field in which policy research organizations have grown in recent years, that is, environment and climate change think tanks. Furthermore, he considers particular categories of policy research organizations, that is, state-research organizations and university-affiliated institutes. Specifically, among the research organizations he mentions are: the Energy Research Institute (ERI) under the National Research Development Council (NDRC); the National Center for Climate Change Strategy and International Cooperation (NCSC) again under the NDRC; the Research Center for Sustainable Development (RCSD) of the CASS; and, albeit not directly concerned with climate change, the Development Research Center of the State Council. Similarly, worthy of mention, are university-affiliated institutes such as the Tsinghua Low Carbon Laboratory and the Policy Research Center for Environment and Economy (PRCEE) (Wubbeke 2013). Within such a framework, little or no attention has been directed towards non-governmental environmental think tanks in China.

Moving away from previous theoretical frameworks that have focused specifically on environmental issues and epistemic communities, such as that of Haas (1992), the arguments articulated throughout this book have stressed the need to further enlarge theoretical analysis and implications for research when considering think tanks in China, in particular the need to establish a direct correlation between the political–institutional environment and think tanks' functionality. More clearly, the approach involves the idea that "the institutional configuration of a country's knowledge regime reflects and is largely determined by its surrounding political-economic institutions" (Campbell and Pedersen 2010, 171).

Against this background, this chapter discusses how political narratives, policy strategies and the growing accountability of Chinese knowledge regimes within the field of global environmental governance and diplomacy reflect—and are largely determined by—the political, socio-economic environment in China.

A general belief is held that organizations lack political autonomy and thus legitimacy and accountability regarding policy research, because of think-tanks' relationship with the political regime. The same seems to be true of those think tanks working in the domain of environment and climate change. For instance, analyses of environmental governance in China are often discussed under the framework of "authoritarian environmentalism." According to Beeson, two main dimensions define this framework: first, a decrease in personal liberty that prevents individuals from engaging in unsustainable behavior and compels them to act in line with more sustainable policies. Second, it is a policy process regulated by an autonomous central state, affording little or no role for social actors and their representatives (Beeson 2010, 276, 289). For this reason, authoritarian environmentalism—as opposed to democratic environmentalism—is defined as "a public policy model that concentrates authority in a few executive agencies manned by capable and uncorrupted elites seeking to improve environmental outcomes. Public participation is limited to a narrow cadre of scientific and technocratic elites while others are expected to participate only in state-led mobilisation for the purposes of implementation" (Gilley 2012, 288). In the case of China, Gilley has no doubt that given its long-standing authoritarian tradition the PRC represents a clear non-participatory case when dealing with environmental policy implementation.

In contrast with Gilley's approach, this chapter proposes an image of environmental think tanks as knowledge actors capable of framing, shaping and affecting how political elites perceive and debate major concerns relating to China's environmental diplomacy. The chapter is structured as follows: the next section introduces the topic of China's participation in the global climate governance scenario, and discusses some of the main features concerning China's environmental diplomacy. The third section presents a general overview of some of the most important environmental think tanks in China. The chapter concludes with an analysis of China's environmental diplomacy in South East Asia, as well as its networking and T2 activities in the global climate governance domain.

China's Participation in Global Climate Governance: State-Led or Bottom-Up?

From the second half of the 1990s, the Chinese government began publishing white papers on environmental governance and its challenges. The first was published in 1996, *Environmental Protection in China*. The document is considered to be particularly innovative, as China recognized the need to make environmental protection one of its "basic national policies." The publication was followed by a second white paper on environment and sustainable development, this time related to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), *Ecological Improvement and Environmental Protection in Tibet*, released in 2003. A third white paper, *Environmental Protection in China (1996–2005)*, was published in 2006. The latter document states that: "since the PRC was founded in 1949, the National People's Congress (NPC) and its Standing Committees have formulated nine laws on environmental protection and 15 laws on the protection of natural resources" (*Environmental Protection in China (1996–2005)*, White Paper 2006). From 2011 onwards, all white papers published by the government on environmental issues have focused on the international dimension and, in particular, the role played by China within global environmental governance, as well as the contribution offered by Chinese society.

In 2011, the document *China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change* emphasized for the very first time two fundamental issues: the support of proactive actions by non-governmental organizations and participation in international negotiations within the UN framework. This document revealed, as never before, the active participation of the PRC within certain fundamental international dialogues, most notably the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (2009) and the Cancun Conference (2010), as well as multi-lateral diplomatic events with BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) and European countries. The following year (2011), through an update of the previous white paper, the government stressed the role played by civil society in environmental issues, this time praising certain Chinese civilian organizations, including the China Renewable Energy Industry Association (CREIA), the China Environmental Protection Association, the China Green Carbon Foundation and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Accordingly, participation should now be "proactive" in the international organizations' framework, in which China strongly supports the view that developed countries should take the lead in solving climate change problems, while supporting the inclusion of developing countries in the environmental governance regime.

The latest white paper concerning climate change and the environment was published in 2013. While China should now play "a constructive role in international organizations" within the UN framework, the discourse stresses China's participation within high-level diplomatic meetings and T2 events such as the G20 Leaders' Summit, the APEC Leaders' Summit and the China–US Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED). Notwithstanding the numerous efforts to implement participation within the framework of international environmental governance, China's potential is often constrained by its economic performances at home and abroad. More specifically, although, in the last two decades, environmental gains have been impressive, the means by which China achieved a certain level of success regarding environmental problems has been heavily dependent on the expectations the government has had to maintain in order to be green and competitive, that is, the combination of a green industrialization path with social stability. As the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, "actively tackling climate change is vital for China's sustainable development and economic growth." For instance, since the 1990s, China has suffered annual average economic losses of over 200 billion Yuan (US$32 billion) as a direct result of extreme weather events (Wang 2014). This is why solving the damage caused by climate change and building China's hope for an "ecological civilization" are one and the same.

Hu Jintao first announced the concept of ecological civilization at the opening of a study session for provincial and ministerial-level cadres in 2007. To some, the concept was nothing new, considered simply as Party rhetoric on environmental matters. Wen Jiabao followed suit when he launched the idea of China's green GDP (绿色 luse GDP), a concept in line with a proposal of his predecessor, Jiang Zemin's 小康 *xiaokang* (well-off) society, in which major environmental targets were "the continual strengthening of sustainable development activities, the improvement of the environment, clear increases of resources efficiency, the promotion of harmony between humanity and nature and putting society as a whole onto a development path of production, wealth and environmental-friendliness" (Meng 2012). Nevertheless, to some Chinese media, the concept goes beyond mere propaganda:

> It is not a term that the Party has coined just to fill a theoretical vacancy in its socialism with Chinese characteristics, but rather a future-oriented guided principle based on the perception of the extremely high price we have paid for our economic miracle. This concept reflects an important change in the

> Party's understanding of development. Rather than emphasizing economic construction as the core of development as it did in the past, the Party authorities have come to realize that development, if sustainable, must entail a list of elements including the right relationship between man and nature. (China Daily Online 2007)

Civil Society and Environmental Governance

A significant part of the literature dealing with environmental civil society and political regimes treats non-state actors as a characteristic of democratic societies. Nevertheless, it has been recently and extensively demonstrated that environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs), in particular, not only exist within autocracies, but that their roles and strategies differ across single-party regimes, monarchies, militaristic regimes and individual dictatorships (Bohmelt 2014). With the start of the new millennium, environmental civil society became particularly active and successful in China. Today, many scholars agree that the sector has already achieved a high level of success in terms of impact in the environmental governance field, compared with civil society organizations (CSOs) working within different policy domains, such as human rights.

Against this background, we might consider, for instance, the case of CCGVU, the China Chongqing Green Volunteers Union. CCGVU is an environmental NGO dedicated to environmental protection and sustainable development in the upper reaches of the Yangzte River in central China, Sichuan province. CCGVU became famous as the first NGO to launch an administrative review of environmental protection for public interest. The case erupted in 2010 when the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) suspended the construction of two hydroelectric power stations (Ludyla and Longkaikou) because of the illegal status of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures. CCGVU staff, not satisfied with the official documents released by the NDRC, held numerous meetings with government officials and MEP departments from late July to early August 2009 (Yang 2011, 100). In 2009, CCGVU Chairman, Wu Dengming, submitted an official case to the Wuhan Maritime Court. Appealing to the law of EIA, which does not authorize any administrative departments to make exceptional regulations concerning EIA management of hydroelectric power construction, the NGO demonstrated that all on-site activities (including water and power supplies) should go hand-in-hand with the working progress of the main construction site. This forces

companies to deliver additional fundamental supply services only after EIA is concluded (Yang 2011). Chinese laws on Environmental Impact Assessment represent a fundamental part of a broader system concerning environmental legislation, of which the Environmental Protection Law (EPL) remains a fundamental pillar.

In the last decade, the role of civil society has become fundamental to the environmental law-making process. For instance, during EPL revisions, two different factions were involved: the government sector, that is, MEP and the provincial and local environmental protection bureaus (EPBs), and environmental NGOs and legal experts advocating a radical revision of the EPL (Zhang et al. 2013). Diverse actors engage in environmental governance issues in China. However, very often they do not share the same interests, that is: "while national leaders in Beijing have committed to addressing China's environmental crisis, local leaders, who bear responsibility for interpreting and carrying out environmental policies, typically have very short time horizons and are not strongly incentivized to take on the difficult business of changing lanes from a growth-at-any-costs model to a resource-efficient and sustainable path" (Eaton and Kostka 2014, 360).

To sum up, the context within which environmental policy research organizations perform their activities is: (a) non-homogenous; (b) multi-level and; (c) multi-sector. It is entangled within a corporatist continuum exemplified by ENGOs, government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), university-based research institutes and Party-state research units, resulting in a fragmented governance with local cadres and national leaders having different ideas about law-making and policy implementation, and with different stakeholders involved, from NGOs to ministries, and from local government to international firms or SOEs.

According to Yiyi Lu, environmental groups in China can rely on key allies such as the media sector (many well-known environmental activists in China are journalists), as well as people in the government who share a strong commitment to solving environmental problems (Lu 2007). More specifically, it is possible to categorize ENGOs in China in two different ways: either by making a distinction between groups cooperating with the government and those behaving in a confrontational manner; or, between environmental organizations that either have or do not have the appropriate skills for technical environmental analysis or rigorous research concerning environmental related issues (Lu 2007, 62). The latter distinction is particularly useful for our understanding of the growing role of

environmental think tanks in contemporary China. The new think-tank generation, established from the second half of the 2000s onwards, has contributed to shaping and reframing how research activities and political discourses are conducted regarding China's position in the field of global environmental politics and T2 diplomatic activities. Within this scenario, policy organizations producing knowledge in the field of (global) environmental governance and diplomacy often assume similar characteristics and perform similar activities to those of environmental CSOs and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs).

Environmental Think Tanks in China

Since a detailed index with an exact number of think tanks and CSOs in contemporary China is not available (Zhu Xufeng, interview with author, October 2013), to present an exhaustive list of all the organizations working in the field of environmental governance and diplomacy is beyond the scope of this book. Starting in 2007, China developed a national policy framework to deal with climate change and environmental challenges, and today this system is in continuous and rapid evolution (Li 2013). As a result, the need for experts and academics to provide political elites with advice and policy knowledge on environmental challenges has grown in parallel. This is due partly to the limited knowledge of Chinese officials and politicians regarding environmental problems, many of whom have invariably ignored the terrible consequences of climate change, which in turn has obliged the government to draw on external expertise (Wubbeke 2013). At the same time, environment and climate change is a field within which civil society has been particularly active in China.

The study of environmental governance in China is undertaken with a dual approach. The first is the so-called "environmentalist–societal" path, whereby scholars conceive environmental civil society as a fundamental actor in generating pressure on the government with regard to environmental problems. The actors involved in these analyses are usually grassroots NGOs and the approach is bottom-up. The second approach is the "institutional" path, whereby scholars maintain a top-down perspective, analyzing China's ascent role within international organizations or highly institutionalized international forums, yet the contribution of the experts is generally conceived as minimal, or at most, in its infancy. For the purpose of this book, the intention is to go beyond traditional frameworks usually employed to deal with expertise and institutions and/or organizations

involved within the field of environmental governance, therefore building a dialogue between the two. On the one hand, some policy research organizations cannot be defined as mere civil society organizations, nor simply as think tanks. On the other hand, policy research organizations, or knowledge-producing organizations as I describe them in this book, can disseminate knowledge about environmental problems and climate change resulting specifically from China's behavior within international, multilateral frameworks, that is, transnational forums and T2 activities.

Green think tanks in China take diverse forms. Some are entirely state-led, thus officially established as part of the government (such as the International Energy Agency). Others define themselves as non-profit, non-governmental organizations, such as the Global Environmental Institute (GEI), but their role and research activities are essentially the same as those conducted by think tanks. Yet others are essentially positioned between the two, defining themselves as NGOs but functioning essentially as governmental think tanks because of the numerous links they maintain with government departments, such as the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE) in Beijing. More simply, what they all have in common, apart sharing certain fundamental research topics, is the fact that how they perform their activities is influenced by the institutional, political and social context in which they are embedded.

According to Schroeder, there are two major differences between CSOs and think tanks working in the field of environmental governance. The first relates to the fact that CSOs for the most part do not have sufficient technical expertise to contribute to policy innovation via expert consultation; the second concerns legitimation and representation. CSOs are less representative of civil society in China, as is the case with Chinese think tanks, "the members of which often belong to social elite and political circles" (2015, 107). Nevertheless, Schroeder remains particularly skeptical about environmental think tanks in China: "no significant domestically grown civil society think tanks working specifically on climate change have emerged in China as in other fields such as economics (Unirule Institute of Economics), and International Relations (the World and China Institute), both founded in 1993" (2015, 107).

The approach questions the role of policy research organizations working in the field of environment and climate change, but more generally, non-governmental think tanks. While it is true that think tanks working on climate change represent a new and probably less well-developed sector compared with other policy fields, in recent years many environmental

think tanks have been established in China. Some of them, for example Civic Exchange in Hong Kong and the Global Environmental Institute in Beijing, have already become an essential source of reference in their field. The conundrum lies, once again, in the characteristics of the development of Chinese non-governmental think tanks, and particularly their institutional surroundings. More specifically, five major attributes of non-governmental think tanks can be listed, some of which may be considered positive in some aspects but negative in others.

On the positive side, compared with the past, non-governmental think tanks today are more reliable and independent, in the sense that they do not rely on the sponsorship of prominent individual personalities, as was the case with IPE and Ma Jun, but have become more aligned with "real" think tanks. Secondly, although still marginalized, their numbers have significantly increased from a handful to more than one hundred. Third, their functionality is transforming from service-oriented to research policy advocacy. As a fourth point, but on a more negative basis, there is absolutely no guarantee that the voices of think tanks will be heard during the decision-making process, as consultative processes between state and non-state actors are not institutionally guaranteed. Fifth, they face continuous problems in relation to their legal status, that is, some organizations are registered as enterprises but are actually non-governmental organizations, a fact that highlights the serious crisis of the non-governmental sector in China (Jia 2011). Since the 2000s, environmental think tanks have grown in number and have become more diverse and influential than in the past. For these reasons, their operations require further attention and time for analysis, as has been undertaken already with other policy research organizations working in different fields, such as international affairs or economics.

The Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE)

The Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (*duan zhong huanjing yanjiu zhongxin*) was established in Beijing. IPE is registered as a non-profit organization, that is, with a legal status of an NGO. When founded in 2006, its mission was to expand information concerning environmental issues, to allow the Chinese community to fully understand the hazards and risks of climate change, while promoting widespread public participation in environmental governance. It is a member of the Green Choice Alliance, a coalition of NGOs promoting a global green supply chain, pushing large corporations to concentrate on procurement and the environmental performance of their suppliers.

Over the years, IPE has become well known because of its efforts in raising awareness among citizens about the government's environmental performance and its policies on climate change, with a focus on air pollution, and specifically with the development of the China Pollution Map Database.

In 2010, IPE published a report entitled *Air Quality Information Transparency Index*, actually the first evaluation of air quality, analyzing 20 cities in China. Since its publication, up to 50 international and national companies violating China's air and water laws have been forced to take corrective measures in order to respect environmental standards based on IPE's requirements. Yet, apart from its research policy activities, many consider that the great success of IPE is owed to its founder, Ma Jun. Ma Jun is a Chinese journalist and a renowned environmentalist in China and abroad. Official contributor to a variety of foreign media, such as chinadialogue.net and *South China Morning Post* (http://www.scmp.com), in 2006 he was named in *Time* magazine as one of the hundred most influential persons in the world. In an interview he released to International Innovation, he sustained the idea that one of the main reasons driving his decision to set up the institute was the lack of specific knowledge and data concerning environmental issues, specifically water and air pollution in China. Functioning as a real environmental knowledge-producing organization, IPE has contributed strongly to raising awareness in China about environmental degradation, while also gaining public recognition as a non-state actor capable of providing scientific knowledge about the environment. In doing so, its major functionality has been in line with that of other think tanks, that is, to provide sufficient technical evidence to gain legitimacy in its policy field, while at the same time working closely with the state sector, such as with the MEP. IPE regularly collaborates with international research partners such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), through which it set up the Pollution Transparency Development Index (2014–2015).

China National Renewable Energy Center (CNREC)

The China National Renewable Energy Center (国家可再生能源中心 *guojia ke zaisheng nengyuan zhongxin*) is a think tank functioning as a knowledge-producing organization in the renewable energy (RE) industry. Founded in 2012 in Beijing, it is part of the Sino-Danish Renewable Energy Development Program. Notwithstanding its international funding partner, CNREC remains affiliated with the ERI under the National

Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). CNREC has a total of six departments and a staff of around forty. It conducts comprehensive policy, strategy and planning research in support of national and regional governmental decision-making. It manages and implements national energy demonstration projects, taking responsibility for program design and calls for proposals, supervision and assessment of implementation. It publishes an internal magazine (*China Renewable Energy*), which depends on analyses from both Chinese and international scholars and analysts on the topics of wind, solar, and bio energy and other relevant issues on renewable energies.

In the complicated world of Chinese think tanks, CNREC represents a different case from the previously analyzed think tanks, as it was established as a "spin-off" project of the Renewable Energy Development (RED) Program of the Danish government (2009–2014), in light of Denmark–China environmental cooperation. The RED Program had two main components: "to establish the China National Renewable Energy Centre to help address the whys and hows of the green transition of China's energy system through undertaking policy research; and to establish the Danish–Chinese institutional and business partnerships to pursue further development of RE technologies in China" (http://www.thinkchina.ku.dk report 2014, 6).

As influential and internationalized as it was, CNREC was not averse to being part of the intricate policy process represented by the Chinese political system. Nevertheless, as the report on CNREC activities maintains, because "within RE, public and private stakeholders/actors as well as hybrid actors operate in competition with each other or through various types of alliances or commercial relationships" (http://www.thinkchina.ku.dk report 2014, 20), the Chinese government needs growing knowledge, as well as technical instruments, in order to face and deal with new issues concerning RE that were somehow unknown in the past. Numerous activities and functions have been successfully carried out by CNREC since its establishment two years ago, including: stocktaking of assignments requested by the National Energy Administration and funded by RED; strong participatory activities vis-à-vis policy planning, such as providing policy suggestions during the Thirteenth Five Year Plan; legal work through proposals on new legislation, regulations and elaboration of detailed legal guidelines; and other policy instruments like research activities and demonstration projects (http://www.thinkchina.ku.dk report 2014, 21).

Civic Exchange HK

Civic Exchange (CE) (思匯政策研究所於 *si hui zhengce yanjiu suo yu*) was established in 2000 in Hong Kong. The institute defines itself as an independent, public policy think tank. CE has a long list of publications available both in English and Chinese: newsletters, articles, books, events and internal reports. The institute conducts research on sustainable development within the environment, and about economic, social and political issues, as a means of advancing civic education through engaging with civil society, and with the primary aim of shaping public policy. The "our work" section of the organization's website describes how it performs its role in relation to policy processes.

The planning of major activities is based on five major criteria: first is issue identification, specifically, whether there are any substantial gaps in terms of policy implementation; second is the conducting of evidence-based research, that is, both expanding and providing knowledge through independent, evidence-based and multi-disciplinary research activities; third is the attempt to reframe the policy debate by qualifying and illustrating the issues before reaching out to the community; fourth is generating engagement, that is, implementing networking activities with the academic community, NGOs, and the public. Last but not least, is the potential for the organization to practically affect policy change, working in direct partnership with the many and different stakeholders involved (Civic Exchange website).

The Walk 21 Hong Kong (HK) initiative, launched by the environmental institute, is a good example of how the think tank directly conducts its public policy activities. In 2016, CE organized Asia's first ever conference on Walking and Liveable Communities in Hong Kong with the intention of inviting stakeholders, such as planners, academics, and developers to enforce the walking activities of the local population in order to strengthen Hong Kong's air quality (Kao 2016a). According to Yip Yan-Yan, Chief Executive Officer of Civic Exchange, the strength of the organization lies in the vital role it plays in examining long-term issues. She believes that think tanks in HK are still young and less developed than their Western counterparts in the US or the UK. However, in terms of functionality, she maintains that many of them have already been able to conduct evidence-based research and have produced important information not just for policymakers but also for stakeholders and the public at large (Kao 2016b). With regard to CE, and more generally, the role of policy

research organizations vis-à-vis policymaking in HK, think tanks "are not like a political party, trying to look at the pressing issue of the moment of the last week, this week, or maybe next week. We tend to take a more long-term view of things" (South China Morning Post online 2016b). Interestingly, implicit in Yip's words is the concept of thinking about think tanks not only as actors involved in the first stage of the policy process, that is, problem-identification, but also as knowledge-producing organizations capable of shaping and affecting future policy directions, educating everyone about awareness of environment and climate change.

Energy Foundation China

Energy Foundation China (previously known as the China Sustainable Energy Program (中国可持续能源项目 *zhongguo ke chixu nengyuan xiangmu*) has a budget that has grown from 5 million Yuan in 1999 to 200 million Yuan in 2014. In 2009, the Energy Foundation of the US launched the China Sustainable Energy Program with funding from the Packard Foundation, to support China's efforts to increase energy efficiency and renewable industries. Other key funders included the ClimateWorks Foundation, the Oak Foundation and the Stiftung Mercator Foundation.

Energy Foundation China was established in 1999 and registered under the Ministry of Civil Affairs as the Energy Foundation Beijing Representative office, supervised by the National Development and Reform Commission. It assists Chinese agencies, experts, and entrepreneurs in solving energy challenges. Among its major funders are government departments and agencies of the Chinese government, such as the Development Research Center of the State Council and the National Research Institute of NDRC, as well as universities, such as the Tsinghua University and Beijing University, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The institute runs diversified programs all related to renewable energies, such as an electronic utilities program and an environmental management program. Energy Foundation China combines foreign advisors (well-known scholars from famous American universities and research institutions) with Chinese experts labeled as dialogue partners, who come from the government, such as Feng Fei, Director General of the Department of Industrial and Economic Research Center of the State Council, and other institutes, such as Li Xun, Secretary General of the Chinese Society for Urban Studies.

Workshops are organized constantly and reports are composed on low carbon development paths, transportation, renewable energy, electric utilities, buildings, industry, environmental management and sustainable cities. Among its most recent output is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design (CAUPD) and the Energy Foundation on establishing China's Urbanization Think Tanks Forum to promote sustainable development in the country's urban environments.

The Global Environmental Institute

The Global Environmental Institute (GEI) (全球环境研究所 *quanqiu huanjing yanjiu suo*) defines itself as a non-profit, non-governmental organization and was established in Beijing in 2004. Its mission is to design and implement market-based models for solving environmental problems to achieve development that is economically, ecologically and socially sustainable. GEI's objectives can be divided into four main categories: (1) energy and climate change, that is, developing policy tools and market mechanisms suitable for China's national conditions or advancing China's low-carbon economic development; (2) investment, trade and environment, that is, facilitating government implementation of environmentally friendly policies and guidelines for investment and trade; (3) biodiversity conservation, that is, resolving conflicts between resource extraction, ecological conservation and community development in the buffer zones of natural reserves; and (4) capacity building, that is, promoting training, improving the teaching and research capacity of the Party, establishing national and provincial academies of governance to improve the understanding of sustainable development, and ensuring the capacity to devise and implement environmentally friendly policies among high-level government policymakers and civil servants. GEI's project sites are located mainly in China and South East Asia (Sri Lanka, Lao PDR and Myanmar), with the sole exception of Washington DC where the Energy and Climate Change Program between China and the US was established in 2009.

Wang Tao, a climate change expert working at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center in Beijing, firmly believes that the GEI plays a totally unique role within the environmental governance scenario in terms of "policy influence." According to the analyst, the main explanation lies in the fact that GEI's founder, Jia Jinman, as well as its current Director, Ms. Li, are two outstanding figures within the Chinese policymaking circle in terms of environment and climate change (Wang Tao, interview with author, Beijing 2013).

GEI cannot simply be defined as an NGO: "with an operating budget of half of million dollars, a board comprised of internationally prominent environmental professionals and impressive portfolio projects, and even a spin-off organization … given all this it is hard to believe that GEI is a Chinese NGO, or that it's only two years old" (Wang Tao, interview with author, Beijing 2013). Jia Jinman founded GEI in 2003. At that time, Ms. Jia was already the Director of the Chinese Research Academy of Environmental Science, and had long-term working experience with Green Hearth Volunteers. Together with other foundations, such as the US-based Blue Moon Fond, they established GEI. One of the main challenges GEI faces in terms of policymaking is related to the future identity of the organization:

> This is a real challenge. If you want to influence policy, what you say needs to be very well researched to be convincing. In China, most of the country's experts work for government research institutions. As an NGO, we do not have the ability to keep up with the government. (GEI Program Officer, interview with author, Beijing 2013)

Such a hybrid identity is not negatively considered, nor are its activists hiding the truth about the fact that as a main activity, policy research advocacy counts as the key strategy for their work, a strategy that somehow draws the boundary between a think tank and an NGO:

> Our work is not just mass advocacy. We don't do campaign advocacy such as Greenpeace or others. We act on a very small scale and we are a smaller group. We have policy suggestions and we just find the target person, we then illustrate our research findings. I think that NGOs such as Greenpeace are more operating in terms of public awareness whereas for us it is just more to find the right person within the government, who makes the policy, who can do the change and then we influence him/her. (GEI Program Officer, interview with author, Beijing 2013)

Furthermore, its non-government funding position is another characteristic determining the organization's status:

> For the government we are considered as a think tank, but we define ourselves, on paper at least, as an NGO because we don't receive any funding from the government, and we are not doing any contracts for the government, we are just totally independent and besides policy we are doing also some "on the ground projects" and that's why I think we function more as a think tank, even if we define ourselves as an NGO. (GEI Program Officer, interview with author, Beijing 2013)

GEI's hybrid identity is a common phenomenon applicable to a majority of policy research organizations working in China in the environment and climate change fields. They are, indeed, part of a broader scenario, defined as China's Environmental State. This is characterized on the one hand by the economic, political and social changes the country has witnessed during the last two decades, in terms of environmental governance and, on the other, by the institutionally embedded national regulatory framework that in China is implemented through a four-tier management system, that is, at national, provincial, municipal and county levels. According to Mol and Carter, "domestic economic actors hardly articulate environmental interests" (2006, 152). However, "there are three major exceptions to the absence of economic actors in the ecological modernization of the Chinese economy: large Chinese firms that operate in the international market, the environmental industry and R&D [research and development] institutions" (Mol and Carter 2006, 159). In particular, "research and development institutions, from the ones linked to universities to those related to the line ministries and bureaus, are increasingly focusing their attention on *environmental externalities*, and articulate environmental interests among decision-making institutions within both the economic and the political domains" (Mol and Carter 2006, 159, emphasis added). While believing that China's authoritarian nature leaves few pluralist spaces in which environmental non-state actors can act and interact, environmental policy research organizations are still able to exercise some influence and play a role in China's environmental decision-making processes.

A book recently published by Judith Shapiro, *China's Environmental Challenges*, illustrates the ongoing dilemma of public participation and civil society in relation to China's environmental governance (Shapiro 2012). Shapiro affirms that in China, "citizen's groups (non-governmental organizations) are classic illustrations of the Gramscian argument that civil society is often penetrated by the state as a way of manipulating culture to gain consent for government rule" (Shapiro 2012, 105). At the same time, "environment is a perfect area to explore greater democracy, because it does not undermine the political system and it is relatively easy to reach consensus on the desirability of environmental protection" (Shapiro 2012, 118). As with ENGOs, environmental think tanks in China are becoming an important part of the country's environmental governance *third realm*: they constantly interact with grassroots organizations but at the same time are essential resources for the government and its bureaucratic machine. In addition, some policy research organizations

face the problem of registration, with many often being registered as non-governmental organizations. In contrast with NGOs, however, environmental think tanks in China conceive of research, and for the most part, policy research advocacy, as their main, if not their only strategy for generating influence and shaping knowledge within the policymaking process. Furthermore, they have begun to emerge as influential actors in the ecological modernization of the Chinese economy.

The Participation of Chinese Think Tanks in Environmental Diplomacy

The Chinese approach to environmental diplomacy has, at times, faced different challenges. The issue of how to tackle environmental diplomacy in China has always been related to the country's double identity: on the one hand, it shares serious environmental problems with other developing nations; on the other, being the second greatest economic global power and a growing actor in international affairs, the country's environmental responsibilities have increased significantly (Cai and Voigts 1993). Nevertheless, in recent years political elites in Beijing have begun to recognize the need for China to move away from its traditional behavior as a developing country and for policy to be more in line with that of a country which is now part of the international community and the developed world.

The evolution of China's position on the environment first became evident at the Copenhagen Conference in 2009 (COP15), when China openly stated its support for the principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities. In this case, however, China's position was still ambivalent and, in the view of many, aligned to that of developing countries. Less than ten years later, in 2016, following the COP21 Paris Agreement, China, together with the US, decided to ratify the climate change agreement. That moment, perceived by the international community as a path-breaking event due to a previous reluctance on the part of both countries to ratify the agreement, represents a fundamental juncture in understanding China's proactive behavior vis-à-vis international environmental challenges. It is also a direct response to those believing that China is still anchored to the identity of a developing country willing to avoid international responsibilities.

Why, then, is it necessary to pay attention to the activities of Chinese think tanks in environmental and T2 diplomacy? In recent years, the classic image of diplomacy has been replaced by a different version. There are good

reasons to believe that the transformation of traditional diplomacy into "hybrid" diplomacy, with multiple actors and issues involved, is an ongoing and unstoppable process. Similarly, as argued in this chapter, because the role of environmental think tanks in China has grown considerably, it is precisely their involvement in the area of environmental global governance that allows us to understand how China has responded to the global transformation that has occurred in the field of environmental diplomacy. This book has focused on the performance of think tanks within T2 activities and international forums, and now presents examples of some of the most important initiatives undertaken by China in recent years.

The US–China Track II Energy Dialogue

The US–China Track II Energy Dialogue was launched in 2013 as a T2 diplomatic platform between the two countries. The platform hosts Chinese and American experts from academia, think tanks and industry to discuss how significant climate change and energy development are influencing each nation's energy outlook (National Committee on United States–China Relations [NCUSCR] website). So far, three editions of the dialogue have been conducted, the first in 2013, the second in 2014 and the latest in 2016. The first edition was held in Washington, September 17–18, 2013. The focus of the dialogue was based on the implications of the shale oil and gas boom in North America for US–China relations. Institutes involved in the dialogue from the Chinese side included the Energy Economic Institute; the research institute of the China National Offshore Corporation (CNOOC), one of the major national oil companies in China; the China Center for National Economic Research from Xiamen University; the International Energy Research Center from Shanghai Jiaotong University; and the World Energy Division from the Institute of World Economics and Politics affiliated with CASS. Four major issues were analyzed during the meeting: the nature of the American "shale revolution" and how its success could be reproduced in China; China's rapid growth in energy consumption and the consequences for the US; and the geopolitical and security implications for which the two governments should be prepared. The consensus document (CD), published immediately after the meeting, advised both countries "to move beyond the politicized debate of whether the United States should export energy to China" (CD 2013, 5). Rather, both countries should strengthen bilateral cooperation in the field of new technologies and pressure domestic reform and policy thinking in the energy field.

The second edition of T2 dialogue was held in 2014, this time in New York, September 11–12, 2014. As China and US interests had aligned more in the areas of energy and climate change, there were new issues to be discussed, including the 30-year $400 billion gas deal signed by China and Russia in May 2014; rising public pressure in China regarding environmental degradation and pollution; and the issue concerning the fact that China had surpassed the US as the top world energy consumer, with China de facto becoming the world's largest energy producer and consumer, as well as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases (NCUSCR Website 2014).

The latest edition of the US–China Track II Energy Dialogue was held in New York April 6–7, 2016. Among the major topics discussed were the global energy transition and China's energy revolution, specifically China's energy goals in the Thirteenth Five Year Plan; bilateral cooperation concerning economic, energy and emissions data standardization; and the roles of China and the US in the framework of environmental multilateral organizations, from Chinese-led initiatives, such as the AIIB or the Silk Road Fund to global ones, for example, the G20. The official organizations on the Chinese side involved in the initiative were the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC) and the International Research Center at Shanghai Jiaotong University. The former is a university-based research center. The latter defines itself as "a non-governmental, non-profit civil society research organization. It also serves as a high-strategic think tank engaged in energy strategic research, energy and public diplomacy, as well as global energy cooperation and cultural exchanges" (CEFC website). CEFC is registered in Hong Kong as a non-governmental organization and is privately funded by China Energy Fund Co. Ltd, a private Chinese energy company ranked among the ten largest private businesses in China.

The US–China Clean Energy Research Center

The US–China Clean Energy Research Center (CERC) was established in 2009, following more than 30 years of cooperation between the US and China in the field of science and technology. The CERC initiative is different from the US–China Track II Energy Dialogue, involving both state and non-state actors. For this reason, the initiative could be considered as a sort of "Track 1½" dialogue, or as a typical case of hybrid diplomacy. More specifically, the official governance structure of CERC is headed by

a steering committee composed of ministries from the US and China. The US and Chinese Secretariats of CERC are thus headed by government officials. Next to the Secretariat there are, however, five consortia from both sides working in five different fields: coal and technology, energy, clean vehicles, water and energy technologies, and medium- and heavy-duty trucks. The Chinese consortia are headed by researchers and academics working at different universities, such as Tsinghua, and also experts affiliated with research centers such as the China Institute for Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWRHR), a think tank established in 1958 in Beijing. Notwithstanding the fact that the initiative was established by the US and Chinese governments in order to advance innovative solutions in the field of clean energy, CERC has been extremely proactive in implementing strategies with the goal of enhancing research and knowledge production:

> Unlike most other bilateral R&D partnerships that focus mostly on workshops and personnel exchanges, CERC facilitates true collaboration among researchers by requiring them to develop joint plans and conduct research in close consultation with one another. By deepening relationships between leading researchers, CERC is gradually building trust at multiple levels, strengthening bilateral engagement between the two countries, and influencing the broader realms of diplomacy—as reflected in several high-level announcements by both countries in recent years. (CERC *Annual Report 2014–2015*)

In effect, the outcomes following CERC initiatives have been numerous, in which both China and the US have recognized the added value of the program. These include the joint announcement in 2014 to renew their commitment to the initiative until 2020, as well as both nations' willingness to submit their action plans to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (CERC *Annual Report 2014–2015*). More generally, since its establishment in 2009, CERC has contributed to seven significant bilateral outcomes in the diplomatic domain, and in terms of scientific and technological programs it has contributed to 44 significant research outcomes. In the US, there are 54 partners (research centers, universities, and think tanks) involved in the project, compared with a total of 110 partners in China.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed environmental think tanks in contemporary China, presenting a general, but timely overview of the major institutions working in this field, how they were established and their current principle activities. The aim was to argue that as a consequence of the growing importance China has attached to environmental diplomacy in recent years, think tanks have also become vital, if not essential, actors for the Chinese government in dealing with ongoing transformations vis-à-vis the changing dynamics occurring in the global agora. In contrast with the past, environmental diplomacy has become a representative example of a passage from traditional to hybrid diplomacy, in which multiple actors, practices and issues are involved. Within such a framework, according to some, "it is worth noting too, that many networks assume the form of partnership, which suggest that we should also focus on partnership in practice as a central element in new narratives of global environmental governance" (Blaxekjær 2016, 155).

As a result, the chapter has presented two major initiatives in the field of environmental diplomacy within which China has been particularly proactive in recent years: the US–China Track II Energy Dialogue and the US–China Clean Energy Research Center. The two initiatives have permitted the US, and particularly China, to increase their participation in the field of global economic governance by building trust and implementing R&D activities within a domain in which the PRC is considered as a "late comer" nation. China has changed its identity to a responsible actor in tackling environmental problems and climate change degradation. Numerous Chinese think tanks and research organizations have been involved in the two initiatives. To understand and better contextualize the role played by policy research organizations regarding China's environmental diplomacy it is fundamental to acknowledge the institutional environment in which such organizations have developed and exist in China today.

Environmental think tanks have been an invaluable resource in shaping the ideational discourses surrounding the environmental issue in China. Furthermore, and in contrast with think tanks operating in different domains, they have developed within a tradition in which even the role of environmental non-governmental organizations has been perceived, over the course of the last decade, as a fundamental instrument for solving many problems relating to environmental degradation. Chinese ENGOs have been particularly involved in, and have contributed to, solving climate

change issues at the domestic level. Also, environmental think tanks, policy research organizations and university-based research centers are becoming highly active in the field of global environmental governance and diplomacy. Ultimately, environmental think tanks constitute a further evolution in the field of China's environmental diplomacy. They are representative of the challenges faced by environmental diplomacy as a typical example of the ongoing processes regarding multilevel governance, and at the same time emphasizing China's transforming identity in the field of global environmental governance.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusions: Rethinking Think Tanks in Contemporary China

The final chapter summarizes emerging issues which have been raised in this volume through an accurate, but brief, comparative evaluation of the two cases previously presented, while assessing some of the main innovations, challenges and limitations vis-à-vis the knowledge regime scenario in contemporary China. The primary aim of this volume is to enlarge the scope of future research on Chinese think tanks.

The Chinese state and its institutional development have been central to the study of Chinese think tanks. Traditional or orthodox views about think tanks in China have been skeptical about their role in the decision-making process and more generally, political change. From the orthodox perspective, think tanks in China are expected to perform a partial, perhaps limited, role within China's governing system. This is true not because they are incapable of entering and understanding the complex institutional mechanism of the state in China, but because essentially, think tanks "have become the mouthpieces of government policies; they rarely criticize any government decision, or offer effective alternative solutions—something that anyone attending international symposiums and listening to presentations by Chinese researchers can attest to" (SCMP 2016a). The situation reached a tipping point in January 2017, when the website of the Unirule Institute of Economics, one of the few organizations accredited in China and worldwide as a genuine non-governmental, liberal think tank, was shut down by Beijing's municipal internet censor, on the charge of disseminating news without proper authorization (SCMP 2016b).

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The case reopened discussions about the, mostly political, limits faced by think tanks in China, in which critical thinking and academic freedom are constantly undermined and which explain why think tanks struggle to make a mark on the international stage, notwithstanding China's ascent in the role of international affairs and global governance.

The way in which Chinese think tanks are portrayed and often criticized by international media, however, differs from the way they are perceived by scholars and academics in China. Within such a framework, we should distinguish between investigations and analyses generally available only in the Chinese language, and which largely support the reform plan proposed by the Xi Jinping administration, and those which openly express their political support of the Party and still believe that policy research organizations in China face numerous challenges, such as the issue or struggle to obtain growing participation and independence vis-à-vis the research and academic activities conducted by Chinese think tanks. For instance, Sun Wei maintains that think tanks have a special role to play in China, that is, the strengthening and modeling of ideological and political constructions, as "ideological security is national security" (意识形态安全是国家安全的灵魂 *yishi xingtai anquan shi guojia anquan de linghun*) for the country (Sun 2011, 120). To others, however, different institutional constraints explain the changing dynamics of the growing involvement of think tanks in China's policymaking system. According to Chen and Fu, one of the major drivers is the fact that traditional decision-making internal mechanisms have been unable to deal with the increasing complexities of the policy process in China; or because multiple stakeholders are now involved within the policymaking process; yet, the authors are still skeptical of the idea that these features really provide an overall explanation of the growing role of think tanks, and whether the analysis should concentrate more clearly on their functions (Chen and Fu 2017, 51).

Accordingly, the policymaking process in China has been the central subject of an intense debate in the last two to three decades. This is because China has moved on from a political context characterized by a *centralized elitism* during Mao Zedong's era to a more nuanced version of it, that is, *pluralistic elitism* under Jiang Zemin. The term "elitism" refers to the fact that China's decision making is controlled by a small group of elite leaders, and this has remained the central characteristic of the foreign policy process through the different political generations since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 (Liao 2006). However, the term "pluralism" does not denote the existence of multi-power stakeholders participating in

the policy process: rather, it is the idea that pluralization dynamics involve government departments, foreign policy think tanks and other relevant groups and organizations co-existing within the decision-making apparatus in China (Liao 2006, 239). Accordingly, a breaking point from the totalitarian guidelines of the 1950s and 1960s occurred in the second half of the 1980s and 1990s, during which certain characteristics developed within the Chinese political context, that is, "fragmented authoritarianism." There are six key propositions used to explain the major characteristics of this regime:

1. The Chinese system is a complex grid. From the top to the bottom of society there are three vertical bureaucratic systems: the party, the state and the military. These three vertical systems are called *tiao* (legs) and they intersect with the multitude of horizontal territorial administrations, called *kuai* (lumps), which are provinces, special districts or municipalities at various ranks. The result is a complex grid in which territorial and functional systems interact.
2. Governance, policymaking, and implementation problems stem from so many nodes operating in a diverse, populous and far-flung country.
3. Numerous officials in the territorial system hold ranks equivalent to those of officials in the vertical systems. These bureaucratic systems cooperate, but they do not command each other.
4. Most disputes concern an environment in which financial resources are insufficient and consequently *the politics of the budgetary process* prevails.
5. Politicians and bureaucrats in China have just three means by which to make decisions and coordinate behavior (a hierarchical system guided by authority; bargaining through mutual accommodation; and a counting/voting system).
6. In case neither bargaining nor command is sufficient to produce an agreement at lower levels, disputes are moved up the hierarchy to cross-system integrators. (Lampton 2014, 85–6)

After more than 20 years since the fragmented authoritarian framework was proposed, specialists and political scientists working on China believe that the Chinese political system is today far more complex and multilayered than it was in the past. This feature, coupled with the fact that China stands today as the Number Two great power after the US in global affairs,

has contributed to the idea that in order to describe the policymaking process and its actors in China, there is a need for broad, theoretical discussions of new models, actors and paradigms. For instance, among those sharing the idea of fragmented authoritarianism is Andrew Mertha, who believes that when explaining the ongoing pluralization of the policy process in China today, we cannot exclude the netizens, public opinion and so on (Mertha 2009).

Focusing on think tanks as the main theme of research, this book has tried to answer a series of questions: How are think tanks able to exert any influence in China if they lack independence from the government? What are the political and social conditions allowing them to play a role? How one can measure the purpose and the effectiveness of think tanks in China today? Can they really retain credibility and still bring about change in the policymaking process? How can they infiltrate the echelons of supreme power, while working within the state apparatus and not autonomously? Answers to these questions involve tackling some of the most thorny issues concerning Chinese think tanks, for instance, the question of influence versus the lack of independence they struggle to deal with every day; the many difficulties of the political and institutional context within which they have developed; how this has evolved in recent decades; and the real effectiveness they exercise in the Chinese policymaking process. These issues have led the discussion to the question of whether or not think tanks are able to shape institutional change within a country which still remains far from a state of political liberalism and pluralism.

To embark on a constructive discussion, as well as to enlarge on theoretical and analytical perspectives previously utilized by the existing literature, I have presented the concept of knowledge regimes for studying the development of Chinese think tanks. The intention of this book was to analyze how policy research organizations in China are evolving, changing and transforming in parallel with and, as a consequence of, China's "rejuvenation" at the international level. Some have analyzed Chinese think tanks through elitist theory (Zhu 2013). Here, the main assumption is that in order to establish a causal mechanism between think tanks, and the influence they generate in the policy process, one should see China's think tanks

> As knowledge elites organizations (rather than members of interests groups, as assumed by pluralist theory). Think tanks' ultimate goal is to maximize their influence on policy; thus their strategies and behaviors can be assumed to be reasonable choices used to mobilize their limited policymaking resources in the most efficient manner possible. (Zhu 2013, 8)

The knowledge regime perspective is a different approach, "one of the few approaches to combine comparative analysis of the nation-state level with institutional mechanisms of change" (Kelstrup 2016, 21). As already mentioned, Campbell and Pedersen analyzed think tanks in relation to the concept of the market and the state only within democratic, advanced economies, that is, the US, France, the UK, Denmark and Germany (Campbell and Pedersen 2010, 2014). The use of such a perspective, when applied to authoritarian China, has allowed the discussion of analysis to be enlarged beyond the theoretical dichotomy of "think tanks vs. independence/influence," while helping us to know more about the normative role of think tanks in the context of China's political and economic transition.

As explained in Chap. 2, the People's Republic of China stands exactly in between the ideal type of politically tempered knowledge regime and static-technocratic knowledge regimes. This assumption has encouraged an ambitious research agenda for the future of policy research organizations in contemporary China. First, it represents a new dimension for regarding think tanks as important agents in policymaking, either including organizations directly administered by or affiliated with the Party and government and subject to their influence, as well as those working and researching on sensitive issues; or policy research organizations more similar to other non-governmental organizations often working on less sensitive issues on which the Party is somehow less inclined to exercise strict governmental control—environmental issues and climate change for example.

Second, the knowledge regime perspective relates the role of think tanks and knowledge-producing organizations precisely to the national origins of policy ideas (Campbell and Pedersen 2014). As the book has outlined, yet with no intention to treat China as a "unique case," Chinese think tanks maintain specific or national characteristics within which the policy ideas formulated are also the result of a specific, national, view of the reality which surrounds them, as well as of the ideas that China and the Chinese have about the world. Finally, the book has explored the activities performed by think tanks in the last decade, with a focus on the country's external relations, diplomacy, networking and T2 activities.

The knowledge regime perspective suggests that one of the reasons for studying knowledge-producing organizations like think tanks, government research units and other institutions disseminating policy ideas is precisely because they represent a fundamental resource to assist in coping with globalization and its challenges (Campbell and Pedersen 2014). The two cases examined have highlighted how China's traditional diplomatic

practices, and particularly its main actors, are evolving from a state-centric to a multi-actor and multi-level approach. Within such a perspective, Chinese think tanks are still able to introduce new ideas and policy change, notwithstanding the "politics of control" played by the new administration: either way, they are able to interact with the upper echelons of the ruling Party, even though they operate or perform their activities with political restrictions and academic control.

It was not the purpose of this book to retell the history of Chinese think tanks, and whether or not they have the potential to influence the decision-making process in contemporary China. However, a brief overview of the sector, including major categorizations and functions, has been presented, in order to better contextualize the phenomenon under analysis. Worldwide, an increasing number of Chinese think tanks are taking part in numerous international activities. This growth can be explained by a number of factors, not least China's unprecedented growth and participation in the framework of global governance. The two cases presented within this volume—economic and environmental diplomacy, respectively—are thus two sides of the same coin, that is, China's growing engagement with the rule-based scenario of international affairs, within which its position has changed from that of being a "norm-taker" to one of behaving as a "norm-maker" actor. China's growth and expansion has only been achievable with a reliance on technical, academic and scientific knowledge, and thus, on think tanks and their experts. At the same time, new practices, new rules and, as a consequence, new conducts of behavior towards the outside world have had to be learnt. For the future it is imperative to enlarge and push forward the internationalization of Chinese think tanks—a need also recognized by Xi Jinping and the new administration.

Internal and External Factors Shaping the Development of Chinese Think Tanks

Despite the increasing attention devoted to the study of Chinese think tanks in the last two or three decades, as with the context of think tanks in the West, those dealing with Chinese policy research organizations promptly realized that an official definition of what a think tank is and does in China was difficult to assess. Whereas in the past, Chinese think tanks remained at the margins of the media sector, and were often hidden from public opinion, today they constantly interact with netizens, citizens,

and journalists both domestically and abroad. Here lies one of the main reasons for considering Chinese think tanks as a central object of analysis: far from being fixed or given agents, today more than ever they need to be redefined and recontextualized within a Chinese political and civilian environment that looks very different when compared with the past.

While it is always a significant challenge to use a concept originating in the West and apply it to the Chinese context, as its starting point this volume included definitional approaches provided previously by scholars, including James McGann, Diane Stone, Andrew Rich and Thomas Medvetz. Their analyses and contributions to the field stand as fundamental resources and they remain pioneering researchers within this area of study. However, the vision proposed here has also questioned how far such approaches can be directly transposed to the Chinese context, arguing that investigations should be further enlarged and contextualized, in particular paying attention to the context within which such institutes are now representative of an integral and vital transformative process. As previously discussed, I argue that it is necessary to apply the concept of knowledge regimes to Chinese think tanks.

This book has shown that at least two components explain the domestic environment within which think tanks in China have developed: a *corporatist continuum* and China's *fragmented governance*. On the one hand, some powerful Chinese think tanks are still sandwiched between civil society organizations and state-led organizations, retaining traditions inherited from the Maoist so-called "mass line." On the other hand, there exists also a fragmented authoritarian approach embedded in everyday aspects of Chinese socio-political dynamics that functions differently, and is far from being highly institutionalized. This leaves an institutional gap—indeed, a window of opportunity—within which think tanks have grown in number and functions. Such a situation might explain why, following more than 20 years of studies dealing with the conflicting binary of "corporatism versus civil society" theorizing, it is time to strongly support a theory backed by empirical analysis when dealing with Chinese think tanks. Indeed, "China's regulatory framework may be corporatist, but civil society organizations in China can wield influence via personalized relations with state officials, a process that is not addressed in corporatist theory" (Howell 2012, 276).

In recent years, international affairs and globalization dynamics have profoundly altered the roles and functions of Chinese think tanks. An article published by 国际关系 *Guoji Guanxi*, the scientific journal released by CICIR, pinpointed, for instance, the idea that globalization processes

are irreversible and unavoidable, especially the spread of internet and technological devices, exchange programs, international forums, and T2 dialogues. In this sense, they are slowly affecting and transforming the functions of such institutes. The text that follows is in part the result of a comprehensive translation of an article appearing in the second issue of the above-mentioned journal, "The dilemma of Chinese think tanks' internationalization" (Chan 2014).

Although the latest think tanks index published by the University of Pennsylvania included 426 Chinese organizations in its rankings, only five were mentioned as top, leading research institutions worldwide. Both the article and the survey dealt exclusively with Chinese International Relations (IR) policy research institutes. This means that, although China's role in world affairs has grown, Chinese think tanks are still far from achieving a recognized international-level status. According to the author, there is a need to enhance the global reach of Chinese think tanks. In April 2013, the first secretary general, Xi Jinping, advanced the goal of building new think tanks with *Chinese characteristics* (中国特色新型智库 *zhongguo tese xinxing zhiku*). These new guidelines were considered as the most important instructions proposed by a top leader about policy research institutes since their establishment in the 1950s. In November 2013, during the third plenary session of the eighteenth Party Congress, the CPC Central Committee once again stressed the need to construct think tanks with Chinese characteristics, in order to improve the decision-making consultation regime.

Albeit still far from their US counterparts, contemporary Chinese think tanks have undergone tremendous changes. Due to irreversible globalization processes, different factors have contributed to the internationalization of Chinese think tanks: the growing number of international projects, the development of network technologies, the increasing number of NGOs, the surge of Chinese (citizens) overseas expansion and the growing international interest about the PRC in world affairs. Going hand-in-hand with China's political and economic transformation, many think tanks in China have begun to acquire growing attention. Four main factors, in particular, have contributed to the rapid internationalization process of think tanks:

1. *The increasing number of problematic issues in world affairs involving the People's Republic of China*. Since the initial establishment of policy research institutes in China, research on think tanks has been related to traditional topics of international affairs, such as economy,

diplomacy, security, and so on. After the 1960s, research interests begin to expand, and today the focus of think-tank research includes the environment, terrorism (恐怖主义 *kongbu zhuyi*), refugees (难民 *nanmin*), cyberspace (网络空间 *wangluo kongjian*) and many other less traditional issues. For instance, in recent years, the global financial crisis, the Arab Spring and WikiLeaks events have provided new opportunities for Chinese think tanks and for government internationalized think tanks, which can now provide further authoritative scientific decision-making advice about both domestic and international issues.

2. *The rapid development of the Internet and social networks.* This factor relates especially to the building of a knowledge management platform (知识管理平台 *zhishi guanli pingtai*) for the establishment of a knowledge database, with regard to all types of information and research reports, and video conferences, through which all individuals can share information and contribute to improving the international influence of Chinese think tanks. Moreover, the emergence of a new dimension of Chinese media and applications for mobile phones (BBQ, Facebook, Weibo, etc.) has allowed think tanks to use these new tools to spread new ideas and policy activities to global internet users.
3. *The dramatic change to a "Chinese way" of doing research.* The third factor is strictly related to the second one. In contemporary China, think tanks have begun to use modern technology to replace traditional research methods. They have started to set up collaborative research projects and workshops, rather than individual research, whereby the focus of research is now directed more towards long-term strategic plans. Moreover, such a new way of research has also increased the cross-border cooperation of think tanks, whereby certain policy research institutes actively seek cooperation with foreign agencies, thus improving their internationalization processes.
4. *China's Going Global Strategy.* The foreign policy strategy of China going global has pushed many Chinese firms and enterprises to enter the international market. In the past, China already had a tradition of companies operating abroad. However, many Chinese companies now consider think tanks as fundamental tools to initially approach the international market, for instance, providing help to Chinese enterprises when first embarking on difficult missions, and providing research in order to solve firms' problems when dealing with urgent tasks in foreign countries. Moreover, they can also help to disseminate China's international image abroad and enhance its soft power.

Table 6.1 Internal and external factors shaping the development of Chinese think tanks

Internal factors	*External factors*
Corporatist continuum	PRC's growing role as a significant actor in world affairs
Fragmented governance	Internet and social networks' influence from abroad
Xi jinping's plan to develop new think tanks with Chinese characteristics	Internationalization of research China's going global strategy

The internationalization of Chinese think tanks is an irreversible process. With China's opening up into the international economic market, as well as its growing place in world affairs, the role and functions of Chinese think tanks have also changed rapidly in the last decade (Table 6.1).

Review of Case Studies

By considering think tanks as knowledge-producing organizations, rather than merely independent organizations, the essential understanding of Chinese think tanks has stressed the ongoing dynamics between policy research organizations and the production of knowledge within the policy process in China. The definitions and typologies previously provided in the existing literature did not satisfactorily explain the context in China, where many think tanks are either controlled or incorporated within the state or Party departments. This point is important to stress, because by simply avoiding critiques and dominant theoretical paradigms arguing the opposite, that is, a Western-based understanding of think tanks, it is possible to fully comprehend how the policy advisory system works in China.

Although the domain of Chinese policy research organizations has undergone enormous upheaval following Xi Jinping's proposal to reform the think-tank sector in China, the two cases analyzed in this book, economic diplomacy and environmental diplomacy, have both emphasized the growing and more important functions performed by such actors regarding China's diplomatic activities and foreign policy practices. The intention was by no means driven by the possibility that think tanks will, in the future, have to implement or strengthen future trends towards democratic developments. Rather, the two cases represent an evidence-based analysis of a clearly visible growing role played by Chinese think tanks at the global level, and especially, within T2 activities and international forums. Such a

changing dynamic, as the research has demonstrated, is partly the result of internal factors within the Chinese national context. However, it is largely the result of changing dynamics that have also occurred at the international level, a context within which the PRC today stands as a key actor in many fields of global governance.

In the same way, it seems appropriate to point out some of the major differences relative to the two areas that have been analyzed. Indeed, Chinese think tanks working respectively in the field of economic governance and environmental diplomacy present certain differences in terms of functions, activities and even organizational dynamics. First, however, it is necessary to clarify a fundamental characteristic, typical of the Chinese context, concerning the majority of think tanks in contemporary China. While distinguishing between the different policy fields within which think tanks exercise their activities is becoming increasingly important—that is, for instance, to distinguish between international relations, economics, military affairs, and environment and climate change in China—policy research organizations are also often addressed as "comprehensive think tanks" (综合智库 *zonghe zhiku*). The majority of institutes and policy research organizations defined as such are governmental, Party-state think tanks, including the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, the China National School of Administration, the Development Research Center of the State Council and the PLA Academy of Military Science. These are involved in numerous activities, from information gathering to public-opinion making, but research is often conducted without a specific "field" or "area" of research. This accounts for the relative lack of global or international influence exhibited by these think tanks as they try to operate within a very broad base and do not specialize in any one area (typical of the Chinese sector up until recently). Those institutions established during the latter part of the 2000s, the latest generation of think tanks, now tend to operate with a clear specialization in a particular field or policy area.

By providing an analysis of think tanks working in different policy areas, the conclusions to be drawn are, therefore, manifold, and include both similarities as well as differences. First, think tanks working in the field of world economics and international affairs as well as environmental think tanks have become increasingly involved in T2 activities, and this can be considered as a growing trend for China. With China now at the center of global governance, the leaders in Beijing need to further enhance their knowledge of international affairs. Nevertheless, a major issue at stake for China and the CCP is also how to guarantee the expansion of China's soft power at the international level, in order to increase its global interests

and influence. As a consequence, just recently the Chinese government allocated substantial funds to think tanks. More specifically, on November 9, 2015, the eighteenth meeting of the Central Committee for Deepening Reorganization adopted the National Pilot Program for Building Senior Think Tanks, according to which there are 25 institutions under development (Chen and Fu 2017).

As demonstrated by the argument developed in Chap. 4, think tanks are today essential organizations for allowing China to become increasingly involved in international economic forums and platforms, such as the T20 experience. China's G20 Presidency represented a "tipping point" to propel the image and role played by Chinese think tanks at the international level. A dedicated webpage for think tanks was created in parallel with that of the G20 (http://www.t20china.org). Ahead of the G20 meeting in Hangzhou, numerous conferences were held in China, all coordinated by some of the most influential think tanks in the country, such as CASS, IWEP, SIIS and the RDCY. This was done with the clear intention of providing policy recommendations *before* the initial meeting took place.

The involvement of think tanks in Chinese politics relative to economic governance has also been evident through the case of NEAT. The network is particularly significant for our understanding of the dynamics between think tanks, knowledge production and the policy process. At the latest fourteenth Annual Conference of NEAT, held in Bangkok July 27–9, 2016, China's working group presented a report, *The Road towards the East Asia Economic Community (EAEC) 2020*. The report is in line with China's narrative to promote regional economic integration in East Asia through multilateral initiatives, as has been evident with many projects already launched by the PRC, of which the AIIB and the RCEP are two good examples. It should be noted, however, that within the framework there is no sense of measuring the influence of think tanks exclusively, regarding whether a specific proposal initially drafted during the international meeting and symposium is then officially implemented or translated into official government policy. Rather, it is fundamental to stress the potential role played by think tanks as knowledge actors able to *frame* particular aspects of an issue. This function is essential, as "through framing, policy actors can play a crucial independent role in public policy debates and impact and their outcomes" (Eising et al. 2015, 516).

Specifically, in the case of Chinese think tanks, the contribution remains fundamental during some of the initial stages of the policy process, that is, problem definition, policy formulation and suggestions for policy adoption,

and much less concerning the final stages, that is, policy implementation or policy evaluation. This is another characteristic which think tanks working in the field of economic diplomacy share with environmental think tanks. These latter, as demonstrated in Chap. 5, have become particularly important organizations in the last decade for our understanding of China's behavior and major policy ideas towards environmental diplomacy. The number of policy research organizations representing China during T2 activities, together with Western counterparts, has also grown in parallel, as demonstrated by the two cases of China–US cooperation in the field of renewable energy. At the same time, the national-institutional context within which environmental think tanks are developing should be noted—environmental think tanks have been affected differently compared to those working in the field of economic governance and international affairs, primarily because of their organizational structure.

Many organizations, if not the majority, are registered as non-governmental organizations—such as GEI—and their major activities are more often than not oriented towards policy research advocacy. Although this type of organization does not act directly in a confrontational manner vis-à-vis the government, the synergies they entertain with governmental institutions and departments are often less supportive than the way state- and Party-led think tanks or university-based research organizations operate concerning policy guidelines and ideas about China's foreign and economic politics. At the same time, policy research organizations working in the environmental field and close to the government have grown in parallel with China's need to develop soft power and international presence, even in the field of environment and climate change. As a consequence, today bilateral and multilateral initiatives involving environmental think tanks are strongly supported by leaders in Beijing, even though this entails a certain degree of "interference" from the West, as demonstrated by the case of the China National Renewable Energy Center (CNREC).

Conclusion: Chinese Think Tanks and Their Context—Lessons to be Learnt

Chinese think tanks represent one of the most challenging issues to the international community for our understanding of contemporary China in the twenty-first century. Chinese think tanks today are often the major representatives of a changing China, together with official decision-makers and Party officials at the international level. We might, to a certain extent,

still believe that think tanks in China lack the essential components to be the representative of a vibrant "policy community," due to the continuous restraints exercised by the political-institutional environment of the country. For instance, there is no doubt that at least since Xi Jinping took office in late 2012, the Party has become less tolerant and more assertive in controlling political and academic environments, which has resulted in growing restrictions regarding the extent to which Chinese intellectual elites can freely influence politics in China. At the same time, the research undertaken within this book has reached several conclusions. First, the study of think tanks needs to be further enlarged outside and beyond Western-led and US-centric perspectives. Think tanks and policy research organizations today represent an essential resource for understanding how the framework for research and the development of political ideas change and evolve. Nevertheless, the direct relation between think tanks, the policy process and context should be investigated further. As this study has shown, the national context is precisely one of the major determinants for understanding how knowledge-producing organizations (think tanks and policy research organizations) operate and perform their activities in different contexts, on the basis of their political and production regimes. It should be remembered that, although studies about think tanks outside Western and democratic contexts are expanding, scholarship and analyses remain limited.

Secondly, this study has tried to generate an update on existing research and knowledge regarding Chinese think tanks. In this way, the main intention was not to discard previous analyses, definitions and categorizations provided previously by scholars, in order to describe how policy research organizations work in contemporary China. Rather, it has tried to offer a different, albeit probably limited contribution to how we can think about this growing trend. As such, the author believes that one of the major points of discussion is to go beyond traditional and orthodox approaches that have defined think tanks as "non-governmental, not-for profit research organizations with substantial organizational autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties" (McGann and Weaver 2000, 4). Indeed, in China, quite the opposite seems to be true. Hence, at the initial stage of every analysis dealing with think tanks in the Chinese context, one should bear in mind that the relationship such actors have with the government must be framed and understood in a different manner from the way it is usually expressed within Western and democratic societies.

Thirdly, along with the special "characteristics" often attached to the Chinese context, this study has focused on a particular dimension or "level of analysis," within which think tanks have become particularly active in recent years—in other words, the international dimension. The majority of previous investigations concerning think tanks in China explain the complex and often blurred relationship they have with the state, as well as the realistic possibilities they have to influence political space at the domestic level. While this remains a fundamental issue to be investigated, the time has come to further enhance our understanding of how China is reacting to some of the major challenges resulting from its growing role on the world stage, particularly in its new involvement in global governance and international affairs.

New approaches and particularly new ideas are needed by leaders in Beijing to tackle global challenges. Within such a scenario, it might be discovered that the role given to think tanks, as well as the respect and trust the CCP maintains towards Chinese intellectuals, is evolving together with, and as a result of, China's changing role and confidence at the international level. Within such a framework, the CCP "is transforming from a revolutionary party (*gemingdang*) to a governing party (*zhizhengdang*)" (He 2015, 158). As a result, the major challenge ahead for China and the CCP is how to balance internal and external challenges while searching for the best approach, guaranteeing legitimacy at both levels. The advice, ideas and, particularly, the knowledge provided by the think-tank sector is expected to become even more important in the years to come.

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Appendix A: List of Chinese Think Tanks and Their Websites

This appendix is a list of think tanks and policy research organizations cited in the preceding chapters. The entries are listed alphabetically by the English name. In the past, when dealing with Chinese think tanks, one of the major difficulties concerned the fact that, for the most part, they did not have a website address. This has changed in recent years, as is evident from the list below.

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清华—布鲁金斯公共政策研究中心 *Qinghua — bu lu jin si gonggong zhengce yanjiu zhongxin*	Brookings Center, Tsinghua University	https://www.brookings.edu/center/brookings-tsinghua-center
清华—卡内基全球政策中心 *Qinghua — Keneiji quanqiu zhengce zhongxin*	Carnegie China Center, Tsinghua University	http://carnegietsinghua.org
中国与全球化智库 *zhongguo yu quanqiuhua zhiku*	Center for China and Globalization	http://en.ccg.org.cn
中共中央编译局 *zhonggong zhongyang bianyiju*	Central Compilation and Translation Bureau	http://www.cctb.net
中共中央党校 *zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao*	Central Party School	http://www.ccps.gov.cn
察哈尔学会 *cha ha er xuehui*	Charhar Institute	http://charhar.china.org.cn
中国国际经济交流中心 *zhongguo guoji jingji jiaoliu zhongxin*	China Center for International Economic Exchange	http://cciee.org.cn
综合开发研究院 *zonghe kaifa yanjiuyuan*	China Development Institute	http://en.cdi.org.cn
中国改革发展研究院 *zhongguo gaige fazhan yanjiuyuan*	China Institute for Reform and Development	http://www.chinareform.org/
中国现代国际关系研究院 *zhongguo xiandai guoji guanxi yanjiuyuan*	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations	http://www.cicir.ac.cn/chinese
中国国际问题研究院 *zhongguo guoji wenti yanjiuyuan*	China Institute of International Studies	http://www.ciis.org.cn
国家可再生能源中心 *guojiake zaisheng nengyuan zhongxin*	China National Renewable Energy Center	http://www.cnrec.org.cn
环境保护部环境规划院 *huanjing baohubu huanjing guihuayuan*	Chinese Academy for Environmental Planning	http://www.caep.org.cn
中国社会科学院 *zhongguo shehui kexueyuan*	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	http://cass.cssn.cn
思匯 *si hui*	Civic Exchange	http://www.civic-exchange.org
中国人民大学重阳金融研究院 *zhongguo renmin daxue chongyang jinrong yanjiuyuan*	Chonyang Institute for Financial Studies	http://rdcy.org
国务院发展研究中心 *guowuyuan fazhan yanjiu zhongxin*	Development Research Center of the State Council	http://www.drc.gov.cn
能源基金会 *nengyuan jijinhui*	Energy Foundation China	http://www.efchina.org
全球环境研究所 *quanqiu huanjing yanjiusuo*	Global Environmental Institute	http://www.geichina.org

香港政策研究所 *xianggang zhengce yanjiusuo*	Hong Kong Policy Research Institute	http://www.hkpri.org.hk
亚洲研究所 *yazhou yanjiusuo*	Institute of Asian Studies	http://ias.cfau.edu.cn
公众环境研究中心 *gongzhong huanjing yanjiu zhongxin*	Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs	http://www.ipe.org.cn
上海社会科学院 *shanghai shehui kexue yuan*	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	http://www.sass.org.cn
天择经济研究所 *tianze jingji yanjiusuo*	Unirule Institute of Economics	website closed by Beijing's government in January 2017
武汉大学经济外交研究中心 *wuhan daxue jingji yanjiu zhongxin*	Wuhan University Center for Economic Diplomacy	http://ced.whu.edu.cn

Appendix B: List of Interviews

11/12/2013, Beijing	Dr. Yang Fuchang	Former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President, China Friendship Arab Association
9/10/2012, Shanghai	Mr. Liu Xin Yu	Department of Environment and Sustainable Development, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
9/11/2012, Shanghai	Ms. Liu Aming	Asia-Pacific Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
9/12/2012, Shanghai	Mr. Zhu Ming	Center for West Asia and Africa Studies, Shanghai Institute for International Studies
10/11/2013, Beijing	Ms. Qi Linlin	China National Renewable Energy Center (CNREC)
10/17/2013, Beijing	Dr. Wang Yi	Director, Centre for Global Governance Research, China Institute of International Studies
10/21/2013, Beijing	Dr. Han Zhili	Institute of Asian Studies, China Foreign Affairs University
10/25/2013, Beijing	Dr. Wang Tao	Carnegie Tsinghua Center
10/28/2013, Beijing	GEI Program Officer	Global Environmental Institute
11/5/2013, Beijing	Prof. Lu Jing	China Foreign Affairs University
11/8/2013, Beijing	Prof. Su Hao	China Foreign Affairs University
11/8/2013, Beijing	Dr. Francesco Sisci	Journalist, consultant, IlSole24ore, *AsianTimes*

(*continued*)

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(continued)

11/18/2013, Beijing	Prof. Zhu Xufeng	Tsinghua University
11/19/2013, Beijing	Mr. Yang Guang	Director General, Institute of West Asia and Africa Studies, CASS
11/24/2013, Beijing	Dr. Mathieu Duchatel	SIPRI, Beijing Office
11/25/2013, Beijing	Mr. Li Shufang	Director, Soon Chin Ling Foundation
11/26/2013, Beijing	Prof. Ran Ran	Renmin University of China
11/27/2013, Beijing	Prof. Li Fen	Director, Institute for the Asia-Pacific (IAP), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
1/9/2015, Singapore	Liang Fook Lye	East Asia Institute
6/27/2016, Hong Kong	Stanley Ng	CEO, Mapking International Ltd.

Appendix C: Think Tanks Terminology: List of Key Terms and Concepts

Academics	*xuezhe*	学者
Advocacy	*changdao*	倡导
Building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics	*jianshe zhongguo tese de xin zhiku*	建设中国特色的新智库
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	*zhongguo kexueyuan*	中国科学院
Civilian or private think tanks	*shehui zuzhi*	社会组织
	minjian zhiku	民间智库
Cultural development	*wenhua jianshe*	文化建设
Ecologic civilization	*shengtai wenming*	生态文明
Economic development	*jingji jianshe*	经济建设
Experts	*zhuanjia*	专家
Intellectuals	*zhishi fenzi*	知识分子
Mass organizations	*qunzhong zuzhi*	群众组织
Official think tanks	*guanfang zhiku*	官方智库
Party-state think tanks	*dangzheng jun zhiku*	党政军智库
Policy research advocacy	*zhengce yanjiu changdao*	政策研究倡导
Political development	*zhengzhi jianshe*	政治建设
Public intellectuals	*gonggong zhishi fenzi*	剒共知识分子
Reform and opening	*gaige kaifang*	改革开放
Research institutes	*keyan jigou*	科研机构
Semi-official think tanks	*ban guanfang zhiku*	半官方智库
Social organizations	*shehui tuanti*	社会团体
Soft power	*ruan shili*	软实力
The internationalization of Chinese think tanks	*zhongguo sixiangku de guojihua jianshe*	中国思想库的国家建设
Think tank	*zhiku*	智库
University-based think tanks	*gaojiao zhiku*	高教智库

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