

**CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY THINK-TANKS
AND VARIOUS CHANNELS OF POLICY INPUT**

ZHAO Quansheng

EAI Background Brief No. 499

Date of Publication: 8 January 2010

Executive Summary

1. As in western societies, think-tanks in China have also exerted increasing influence over Chinese foreign policy directions, albeit with noticeable limitations.
2. The policymaking process in China has primarily involved three governing actors: the party, the government, and the military. The most well-known foreign policy think-tanks are research institutes under various government agencies.
3. There are still limitations in terms of policy inputs, such as the degree to which official lines of foreign policy can be openly criticized, and limited personnel exchanges between think-tanks and governmental agencies.
4. Major decision-making process of Chinese foreign policy can be divided into internal circles (the center) and external circles (the periphery). A key development under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao is the increasingly active and multi-layered channels between the center and the periphery including think-tanks.
5. Channel 1: Lectures by think-tank scholars invited by the Communist Party Politburo. The Foreign Ministry also has its own mini-circles of think-tank members for consultation.
6. Channel 2: Research papers, policy analyses, and recommendations by foreign policy think-tanks, are submitted to various levels of policy makers, including from time to time the top leaders.
7. Channel 3: Conferences and public policy debates, which may carry weight in influencing public opinion.

8. Channel 4: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), still a new concept in China, are quickly being utilized by the Chinese government to conduct foreign policy activities.
9. Channel 5: *Tizhiwai* (体制外 -- outside-system) discussions. Many of these opinions are meeting with the popular mood reflecting a strong nationalistic tendency.
10. Channel 6: Overseas scholars who have organized themselves into academic exchange and professional networking organizations. A few have begun to play a consultative role on foreign policy issues.
11. Channel 7: Professional policy communities. The first type concentrates on specific policy areas. The second is made up of regional or country oriented institutes. The third is having connections with external research institutes.
12. Reasons behind the changes include the development of civil society in China, greater demand for policy input, and growing professionalism.