

# THINK TANKS IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICYMAKING

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In China's complex think tank system for policymaking, foreign policy institutions hold a prominent role in both international reputation and policy formulation. Under Xi Jinping's "greater foreign affairs" initiative, the policy consultation system operates within a party-academia nexus. While many foreign policy think tanks present themselves as non-governmental organisations or academic institutions, this does not alter the fundamental principle of "the Party in command of diplomacy". These think tanks have little political autonomy but operate with "guided autonomy" in policy consultation. They play a crucial role in providing background information on foreign countries or regions and offering specific policy recommendations.

**(Click on the link to read the above in [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#))**

### ***Chinese:***

#### **中国外交政策制定中的智库**

在中国复杂的参与政策制定的智库体系中，外交政策智库在国际声誉和政策制定中都占据着重要地位。在习近平的“大外交”倡议下，政策咨询系统在党政学界的联系中运作。尽管许多外交政策智库自称为非政府组织或学术机构，但这并不改变“党指挥外交”这一基本原则。这些智库政治自主性很少，但在政策咨询中以“指导性自主”来指导运作。它们在提供外国或区域的背景信息以及提出具体政策建议方面起着关键作用。

### ***French:***

#### **LES THINK TANKS DANS L'ÉLABORATION DE LA POLITIQUE ÉTRANGÈRE CHINOISE**

Dans le système complexe des think tanks impliqués dans l'élaboration des politiques en Chine, les institutions de politique étrangère occupent une place importante tant dans la réputation internationale que dans la formulation des politiques. Avec l'initiative de Xi Jinping pour les « grandes affaires étrangères », le système de consultation politique fonctionne à travers le lien unissant parti et université. Bien que de nombreux think tanks de politique étrangère se présentent comme des organisations non gouvernementales ou des institutions académiques, cela ne modifie pas le principe fondamental selon lequel « le Parti commande la diplomatie ». Ces think tanks ont peu d'autonomie politique mais opèrent avec une « autonomie guidée » dans les consultations politiques. Ils jouent un rôle crucial en fournissant des informations de base sur des régions ou des pays étrangers ainsi qu'en proposant des recommandations politiques spécifiques.

### ***Spanish:***

#### **LOS THINK TANKS (CENTROS DE PENSAMIENTO) EN LA FORMULACIÓN DE POLÍTICAS EXTERIORES DE CHINA**

En el complejo sistema de think tanks para la formulación de políticas en China, las instituciones de política exterior tienen un papel destacado tanto en la reputación internacional como en la formulación de políticas. Bajo la iniciativa de “mayores asuntos exteriores” de Xi Jinping, el sistema de consulta de políticas opera dentro de un nexo partido-academia. Aunque muchos think tanks de política exterior se presentan como organizaciones no gubernamentales o instituciones académicas, esto no altera el principio fundamental de “el Partido al mando de la diplomacia”. Estos think tanks tienen poca autonomía política pero operan con “autonomía guiada” en la consulta de políticas. Desempeñan un papel crucial al proporcionar información de fondo sobre países o regiones extranjeras y ofrecer recomendaciones de políticas específicas.

## **Executive Summary**

1. China's current approach to foreign relations is defined by a programme of "greater foreign affairs" initiated by Xi Jinping in 2016 when he overhauled the country's foreign-affairs leadership system. The programme is guided by the principle of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in command of diplomacy.
2. The policy consultation system in China on foreign affairs operates under this programme and thus its principle. Organisationally, it comes under the supervision of the CCP's Central Office of Foreign Affairs, acting on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CCP Central Committee headed by Xi.
3. While many foreign-policy consultation organisations appear as non-governmental organisations or academic institutions, the principle of "the Party in command of diplomacy" must be adhered to. With the establishment of the party-academia nexus, they are front policy organisations or, in a Chinese jargon, "white glove" institutions of the Party-state.
4. Seven policy organisations in China were listed on the "2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report" by the University of Pennsylvania. Five specialise in foreign policy, while two have a broader focus that covers foreign policy. The closer affiliation with the party-state often makes a policy organisation more prominent in both China's foreign policymaking and its international reputation.
5. Institutional channels are significant for think tanks and academics to influence foreign policymaking, but interpersonal networks also play an important role.
6. Think tanks have little political autonomy, only "guided autonomy" in policy consultation, particularly in providing background information of a foreign country/region and proposing specific policy suggestions.