

China's New Think Tanks: Where Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Scholars Interact

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As Chinese think tanks begin to acquire the “revolving door” quality that has long described their peer institutions in other countries, business leaders from major state-owned companies and domestic (or Hong Kong-based) private companies now play a crucial role in the management of think tanks, gained through the financial contributions these companies make to the think tanks in reaction to government policies that strongly affect their businesses. Meanwhile, an increasing number of foreign-educated “returnees” find think tanks to be ideal institutional springboards from which to reintegrate into the Chinese political establishment and play a role in shaping the public discourse. A close look at the formation of three prominent think tanks in the country—the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, the Chinese Economists 50 Forum, and the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University—adds a new analytical wrinkle to the long-standing and complicated relationship between power, wealth, and knowledge.

Never in the 60-year history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) have Chinese political, economic, and cultural elites paid as much attention to think tanks as they have this year.¹ In March the State Council approved the founding of a new think tank in Beijing, the China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE), and it immediately attained the moniker “super think tank” (*chaoji zhiku*).² Former Vice-Premier Zeng Peiyan, a political heavyweight, took up the role of chairman, and several current or former ministerial-level officials, prominent business leaders, and internationally renowned scholars were appointed vice-chairmen.

Four months later, the CCIEE organized an international conference on the global financial crisis and the role of think tanks in promoting international cooperation on issues of global importance. This so-called “Global Think Tank Summit” attracted approximately 900 attendees. Among them were 150 former or current government leaders (Chinese and foreign), officials from such international organizations as the World Bank and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, about 450 scholars and think tank representatives from the world over, roughly 200 businesspeople, and 150 journalists.³ China's top leaders were among those who made their presence felt at the conference, with Premier Wen Jiabao on hand to meet with distinguished guests and Executive Vice-Premier Li Keqiang delivering a keynote address. For almost a week, Chinese media outlets covered this event widely as part of the headline news.⁴

The CCIEE is not the only think tank in China that has engaged in high-profile policy discussions or facilitated broad international exchanges in recent years. The

academic association known as the Chinese Economists 50 Forum (*Zhongguo jingji wushiren luntan*), which includes the country's 50 most prominent economists and government technocrats, is scheduled to conduct an intensive dialogue in late August with leading American economists on measures to promote economic recovery on the global scale. Similarly, the China Institute of Strategy and Management (*Zhongguo zhanlue yu guanli yanjiuhui*), headed by one of China's leading strategic thinkers, Zheng Bijian, will host a conference called the "Strategic Forum for a U.S.-China Clean Energy Partnership" in the fall. Both events are co-sponsored by a leading American think tank, the Brookings Institution, and both will be held in the Diaoyutai State House in Beijing. As was the case at the CCIEE summit, top Chinese leaders are expected to attend and speak at these engagements.

In contrast to many of their counterparts in the West, where independence from the government is usually seen as a mark of credibility, Chinese think tanks often strive for strong ties to the government, and especially value a close connection with the upper stratum of the Chinese leadership. According to its charter, the CCIEE is to operate "under the guidance and supervision of the National Development and Reform Commission [NDRC] in terms of its business scope."⁵ The NDRC, whose purview is the macroeconomic management of the Chinese economy, is widely considered to be the most important ministry in the Chinese government. Another indicator of the CCIEE's close ties to the Chinese leadership is its physical proximity to the levers of power—its current office is located only a few hundred meters from Zhongnanhai, the headquarters of both the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council.⁶

The growing importance of think tanks in China and the frequency with which they are able to facilitate international exchanges is understandable within the context of China's rise on the world stage. Many Chinese people are now conscious that their country is not only in the midst of profound socioeconomic transformations, but is also rapidly emerging as a major player in global affairs. They wish to understand the complex and internationally intertwined challenges that China faces in order to take intelligent positions on the issues involved.

Tripartite Elites in Think Tanks

Detailed analysis of the composition of Chinese think tanks, with a special focus on the newly established CCIEE, reveals several important developments. The most notable is that three distinct groups of elites—current or retired government officials, business leaders, and public intellectuals—have become increasingly active in promoting their personal influence, institutional interests, and policy initiatives through these semi-governmental organizations. In present-day China, think tanks have become not only an important venue for retired government officials to pursue a new phase in their careers, but also a crucial institutional meeting ground where officials, entrepreneurs, and scholars can interact.

This new phenomenon suggests that the relationship between these three elite

groups, and their relative importance vis-à-vis policy planning, may start to change. Three trends deserve our attention. First, a growing number of government and Party leaders now seek positions in prominent think tanks and universities both during and after their tenure in office. Second, business leaders from both major state-owned companies and domestic (or Hong Kong-based) private companies now play a crucial role in China's think tanks, gained through the financial contributions these companies make to the think tanks in a natural reaction to government policies that strongly affect their businesses. Third, public intellectuals, especially well-known economists who received Ph.D. degrees in the West, have now become almost equal partners in this tripartite group of think tank elites. Indeed, to a certain extent the once-clear distinction between officials and scholars is now blurring as foreign-educated returnees become government leaders. An examination of new think tanks such as the CCIEE can help to explicate these three trends, and thus provide a better understanding of important dynamics in the Chinese political system and policymaking process.

The Evolution of Think Tanks in China: A Review

Think tanks (*zhiku* or *sixiangku*) are by no means new to China. In fact, one could argue that they played an important role in the country as early as the time of Confucius. However, since the establishment of the PRC, and especially during its first three decades, the role and influence of think tanks was largely dependent on the preferences and characteristics of the top leader. Mao Zedong did not value modern science and technology, disregarded rationality in government policy, and held intellectuals in rather low esteem. Major decisions during the Mao era, such as the launch of the Cultural Revolution, the movement of China's national defense industry to the so-called interior "third front," and reconciliation with the United States in the early 1970s, were largely made by Mao and by Mao alone.⁷

While Deng Xiaoping greatly improved the economic and sociopolitical status of intellectuals during his reign, he felt no need to consult think tanks when making decisions. Indeed, his most significant decisions, for example, to establish special economic zones in south China and then in Shanghai's Pudong District, have been attributed in large part to Deng's visionary thinking and political courage. In his final years Deng preferred to listen to his daughters' gossip rather than read expert reports.

When Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were in charge of political and economic affairs in the Party and the government in the 1980s, they were the "patron saints" of a group of liberal intellectuals who were usually affiliated with think tanks in the government and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Some of these scholars later lent support to the 1987 liberal movement and the 1989 Tiananmen uprising. As a consequence of these two events, which brought about the fall of both Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, many of these intellectuals sought amnesty in the West.

Although some think tanks were closed as a result of the Tiananmen incident, the think tank system survived and even became more institutionalized over the ensuing two

decades. This has largely been attributed to the fact that China's growing integration with the world economy required more scholars with professional expertise, especially in the area of international economics and finance. Without a doubt, Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, and their generation of technocratic leaders paid more attention to the role of think tanks than did their predecessors.

It has been widely noted that in the early 1990s Jiang Zemin often received advice from scholars at Shanghai-based institutions such as Fudan University, East China University of Political Science and Law, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and the Shanghai Institute of International Studies. Indeed, over the course of the 1990s several prominent young scholars with experience in the field of foreign studies moved from Shanghai to Beijing, where they worked closely with Jiang in areas such as policy planning, propaganda, Taiwan affairs, and foreign relations. For example, Wang Huning, former dean of the law school at Fudan, later served as a personal assistant to Jiang and is now director of the Policy Research Office of the CCP's Central Committee. In the same vein, Li Junru, a scholar who spent much of his career at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, later served as vice president of the Central Party School (CPS). Both men, Wang and Li, are believed to have been principal players in the development of Jiang's so-called "theory of the three represents."⁸

Former premier Zhu Rongji also relied heavily on the advice of several scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s. They included Wu Jinglian, who has been a research fellow at the Development Research Center of the State Council, and Lou Jiwei, who served for a time as Zhu's personal assistant, later became executive vice minister of Finance, and is now chairman of the China Investment Corporation.

Following in Jiang's footsteps, Hu Jintao turned the CPS into a prominent think tank in the late 1990s when he served as the president of the school. For over a decade now, the CPS has functioned as a leading research center for the study of China's domestic political reform and international relations. China's two most distinguished strategic thinkers—Zheng Bijian (former vice president of the CPS) and Wang Jisi (director of the Institute of International Strategic Studies of the CPS and dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University)—both played a crucial role in the development of Hu's theory of "China's peaceful rise."⁹

Wang Huning, Li Junru, Zheng Bijian, and Wang Jisi have dual identities as both officials and scholars. In fact, they are in many ways more like government officials than members of the scholarly establishment. Yet, their close contact with top leaders and their considerable influence on China's decision-making process also has the effect of enhancing the role of think tanks in present-day China. Of course, most members of think tanks are not as close to the center of power as these intellectual celebrities. Many think tank members choose to exert influence on China's decision-making process by adopting a more independent stance and by offering more critical views of current policies.

In their 1999 book *Voices (huan)*, two senior reporters from the official newspaper *People's Daily*, Ling Zhijun and Ma Licheng, observed that five distinct

voices existed in post-Deng China: (1) the voice of mainstream society that follows Deng's reform policies; (2) the voice of dogmatism that advocates a return to a planned, socialist economy; (3) the voice of nationalism; (4) the voice of feudalism influenced by neo-Confucianism and Asian values; and (5) the voice of democracy. The authors unambiguously argued for a pluralistic outlook and portrayed category five, the "voice of democracy," in a remarkably positive light.¹⁰

Although members of think tanks are more often interested in pursuing "reform from within" rather than "revolution from without," they often differ in their particular views, values, and visions. Some may be "at once within the system and at odds with it," as a *Washington Post* correspondent in Beijing observed.¹¹ Others, especially those in universities or in the private sector, may be interested both in working cooperatively with policymakers and in exposing flaws in China's political system and socioeconomic policies. These intellectuals do not consider such seemingly contradictory endeavors inappropriate, but instead see them as an effective way to exert influence on China's decision-making process.

While the intellectual pluralism that Ling Zhijun and Ma Licheng classified a decade ago has only increased in recent years, today's Chinese think tanks tend to concentrate on several key issues: China's economic rise in the world, domestic political stability, social justice, energy security, and the country's international image.¹² The mainstream official think tanks have utilized their abundant human and financial resources to dominate the policy discourse. A group of emerging privately owned and operated think tanks, such as the Unirule Institute of Economics (*tianze jingji yanjiusuo*) and the Friends of the Nature (*ziran zhiyou*), have remained marginal players in the broader landscape of policymaking and public opinion formation.¹³ In 2006, at the "First Forum on China's Think Tanks," held in Beijing, the Chinese authorities, for the first time in the PRC's history, designated the top 10 think tanks in the country, further enhancing the status and influence of the older, more established institutions (see table 1, next page).

These "top 10" think tanks are all considered state-sponsored institutions. They were established in a variety of different periods of the PRC, although none of China's newest think tanks made the list. Among the top 10, the youngest is the China National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation, which was founded 23 years ago. Some of these think tanks are gigantic government institutions with a large number of employees. For example, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) currently consists of 31 research institutions, 45 research centers, and 4,200 employees, of which 3,200 are members of the research staff (and these numbers do not include provincial branches of CASS).¹⁴ The China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), which is operated by the Ministry of State Security, is much smaller. Yet even it has 380 employees, including 150 senior researchers.¹⁵ At least half of these top 10 think tanks concentrate on China's foreign relations and international affairs. None of them is headed by an economist or a leader with a strong background in economic affairs, although some, including the Development Research Center of the State Council and the China

National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation, are focused primarily on economic issues.

Table 1

Top 10 Think Tanks in China, Compiled by Chinese Authorities at the “First Forum on China’s Think Tanks” Held in Beijing, in 2006

| <i>Rank</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Current Head</i> | <i>Year Founded</i> | <i>Location</i> |
|-------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Chinese Academy of Social Sciences | Chen Kuiyuan | 1977 | Beijing |
| 2 | Development Research Center of the State Council | Zhang Yutai | 1981 | Beijing |
| 3 | Chinese Academy of Sciences | Lu Yongxiang | 1949 | Beijing |
| 4 | Academy of Military Sciences | Liu Chengjun | 1958 | Beijing |
| 5 | China Institute of International Study | Ma Zhengang | 1956 | Beijing |
| 6 | China Institute of Contemporary International Relations | Cui Liru | 1980 | Beijing |
| 7 | China National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation | Mei Ping | 1986 | Beijing |
| 8 | China Association for Science and Technology | Han Qide | 1958 | Beijing |
| 9 | China International Institute of Strategic Society | Xiong Guangkai | 1979 | Beijing |
| 10 | Shanghai Institute for International Studies | Yang Jiemian | 1960 | Shanghai |

To a certain extent, these “established” think tanks and their recent descendents, such as CCIEE, are similar in terms of their close ties to the Chinese government. Yet, the former find it increasingly difficult to keep abreast of changes in the domestic and international environment and to ensure that their research agendas, personnel, financial resources, and international exchanges keep pace. At least three factors have contributed to the need to establish the new kind of think tanks and to make them more forward-looking and innovative in thinking about China’s future. First, the end of strongman politics and the emergence of a collective system of leadership have pushed officials to seek increased legitimacy for their policies through the support of think tanks. Second, China’s growing integration with the world economy requires input from scholars with professional expertise, especially those who specialize in international investment and finance. Third, the rapid development of China’s market economy has not only made the Chinese economic and sociopolitical structures more pluralistic, but has also created many new interest groups. These interest groups, especially those in the business sector, now work carefully to influence government policy and shape public opinion. All three of these factors are evident in the initial formation and subsequent composition of the CCIEE. Looking closely at the dynamic interactions that take place between the Chinese leadership and the country’s prominent think tanks, on the one hand, and among the tripartite players in the Chinese think tank communities themselves, on the other hand, can help to elucidate important trends in Chinese politics.

The “Revolving Door” for Officials

An important indicator of China’s political institutionalization over the past two decades has been the degree to which government and party officials have been subject to retirement age rules.¹⁶ Remarkably, at the 17th National Congress of the CCP, held in 2007, all leaders who were born before 1940 were, without exception, forced to retire from the Central Committee. This retirement age requirement has created an increased sense of regularity and fairness in the circulation of elites and has contributed to the end of the possibility of lifelong tenure for Chinese political leaders. Several senior leaders who had previously served on the Politburo, including then Vice President Zeng Qinghong (born in 1939), Vice Premier Wu Yi (b. in 1938), and Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan (b. in 1938), all retired. Wu Yi, former minister of commerce and one of the most respected female leaders in the country, said to the media that she was determined to “retire completely from all leadership positions” (*luotui*).¹⁷ She is not alone. In fact, almost all other top leaders—Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, Zeng Qinghong, Li Ruihuan, and Qiao Shi—have largely disappeared from the public scene since their retirement. None of them now holds any important leadership position in the country.

This political norm seemed to start to change with the recent appointment of former vice premier Zeng Peiyan as chairman of the CCIEE. Zeng is the highest ranking former leader to now hold a non-honorary chairmanship in a major institution. Previously, Vice President of the CPS Zheng Bijian and Deputy Chief-of-Staff of the PLA Xiong Guangkai also moved from their state leadership positions to head think tanks (the China Reform Forum and the China International Institute of Strategic Society, respectively), but they were only ministerial-level leaders. Qian Qichen, another former vice premier, holds the only honorary deanship of the School of International Studies at Peking University, and he has hardly spent any time at the school since his appointment a few years ago.

The appointments of former high-ranking officials as leaders of the CCIEE and the subsequent media coverage thereof may have paved the way for other retired high-ranking Chinese officials to pursue careers in the leadership of think tanks, universities, and other important institutions. Similar to their counterparts in other countries, Chinese think tanks have increasingly become a “revolving door” for past and future government officials.

Table 2 (next page) exhibits the leadership composition of the CCIEE, including the chairman, advisors, and vice chairmen. While those with government or Party backgrounds constitute a majority of the leadership, a number of prominent scholars and business leaders are also noticeably on board. In addition to Zeng Peiyan, a number of former high-ranking leaders (ministers or provincial governors) serve on the leadership of the CCIEE, including Tang Jiaxuan (former minister of Foreign Affairs), Wang Chuncheng (former director of the Office of the Economic and Financial Leading Group of CCP Central Committee), Liu Huaqiu (former director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the CCP Central Committee), Teng Wensheng (former director of the Policy Research

(text continues on p. 9)

Table 2*The Leadership of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE)*

| <i>CCIEE position</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Other current/former position</i> | <i>Born</i> | <i>Main identity</i> | <i>Educational Background</i> | <i>Education lvl.</i> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------|----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Chair | Zeng Peiyan | Former vice premier | 1938 | Official | Tsinghua University | Undergrad |
| Advisor | Chee Hwa Tung | Vice chair, CPPCC; fmr. chief exec., HK | 1937 | Entrepreneur | University of Liverpool | Undergrad |
| Advisor | Jiang Zhenghua | Former vice chair of NPC | 1937 | Scholar | Xi'an Jiaotong University, Bombay Int'l. Inst. of Demography | Master's |
| Advisor | Tang Jiaxuan | Former Minister of Foreign Affairs | 1938 | Official | Peking University, Fudan University | Undergrad |
| Advisor | Xu Kuangdi | President, Acad. of Sciences/Shanghai Mayor | 1937 | Official | Beijing Inst. of Iron & Steel | Undergrad |
| Exec. vice chair | Wang Chunzheng | Fmr. dir., Off. of Economic & Financial Leading Group, CCP Central Comm. | 1938 | Official | Renmin University | Master's |
| Exec. vice chair | Li Yining | Professor at Peking University | 1930 | Scholar | Peking University | Undergrad |
| Exec. vice chair | Liu Zunyi | President, Chinese University of Hong Kong | 1944 | Scholar | Stanford, UC Berkeley | Ph.D. |
| Exec. vice chair | Zhang Xiaoqiang | Vice chair of NDRC | 1952 | Official | Peking University | Undergrad |
| Exec. vice chair | Chen Yuan | Chair of China Development Bank | 1945 | Entrepreneur | Tsinghua University, CASS | Master's |
| Exec. vice chair | Qian Yingyi | Dean, School of Econ. & Mgmt., Tsinghua U. | 1961 | Scholar | Tsinghua U., Columbia, Yale, Harvard | Ph.D. |
| Exec. vice chair | Jiang Jiemin | GM, China National Petroleum Corp. | 1956 | Entrepreneur | Shandong University | Undergrad |
| Exec. vice chair | Wei Liqun | Exec. Vice-President, China National School of Administration | 1944 | Official | Beijing Normal University | Undergrad |
| Permanent vice chair | Zheng Xinli | Former Dep. Director of Policy Research Office, CCP Central Committee | 1945 | Official | Beijing Inst. of Iron & Steel, CASS | Master's |
| Vice chair | Feng Guojing (Victor Fung) | Chairman, Int'l Chamber of Commerce | 1945 | Entrepreneur | MIT, Harvard | Ph.D. |
| Vice chair | Lu Ruihua | Former Governor of Guangdong | 1938 | Official | Zhongshan University | Master's |
| Vice chair | Liu Huaqiu | Former Director of the Foreign Affairs Office | 1939 | Official | Inst. of Foreign Affairs | Undergrad |
| Vice chair | Zhang Yutai | Dir., Development Research Ctr., State Council | 1945 | Official | Beijing Aviation Inst. | Undergrad |
| Vice chair | Zhang Guobao | Vice chair, NDRC | 1944 | Official | Xi'an Jiaotong University | Master's |
| Vice chair | Li Rongrong | Minister of SASAC | 1944 | Official | Tianjin University | Undergrad |
| Vice chair | Xu Rongkai | Former Governor, Yunnan | 1942 | Official | Tsinghua University | Undergrad |
| Vice chair | Lou Jiwei | Chair of China Investment Corp. | 1950 | Entrepreneur | Tsinghua University, CASS | Master's |
| Vice chair | Teng Wensheng | Former Dir., Policy Research Office | 1940 | Official | Renmin University | Undergrad |
| Vice chair | Dai Xianglong | Chair, Natl. Council for Social Security Fund | 1944 | Official | China Central Inst. of Econ. and Finance | Undergrad |
| Secretary Genl. | Wei Jianguo | Former Vice Minister of Commerce | 1947 | Official | Shanghai Inst. of Foreign Languages | Undergrad |

Notes: CASS = Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CIC = China Investment Corporation; Comm. = Committee; CPPCC = Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; Ctr. = Center; Dir. = Director; Econ. = Economics; Exec. = Executive; Fmr. = Former; GM = General manager; HK = Hong Kong; Inst. = Institute; Int'l = International; Lvl. = Level; NDRC = National Development and Reform Commission; NPC = National People's Congress; Off. = Office; SASAC = State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission; U. = University.

Office of the CCP Central Committee), Lu Ruihua (former governor of Guangdong), and Xu Rongkai (former governor of Yunnan). All of these retired leaders are in their late 60s or early 70s.

The state-run Xinhua News Agency reported that the formation and composition of the CCIEE leadership reflects an important effort to extend the “sustainable utility” (*yure*) of retired high-ranking officials.¹⁸ In the past decade or so, the Chinese authorities have usually transferred high-ranking Party or government leaders who reached retirement age to less important leadership bodies, such as the People’s Congress or the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at the national, provincial, or municipal levels before their full retirement. It now seems that some of these retired or semi-retired leaders will begin to find their way into the leadership of major think tanks and educational institutions that focus on policy research and world affairs.¹⁹

Table 3 (next page) catalogues former or current high-ranking government officials who serve as deans or honorary deans of colleges that concentrate on international affairs, journalism, and economic management. Former minister of Foreign Affairs Li Zhaoxing currently serves as dean in both the Zhou Enlai School of Government at Nankai University in Tianjin and the School of Diplomacy and International Relations at the Institute of Foreign Affairs. Former vice minister of Foreign Trade and China’s chief negotiator during the World Trade Organization accession talks Long Yongtu now serves as dean of the School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University. The deanships of the schools of journalism and communication in Beijing’s top three universities—Peking, Tsinghua, and Renmin—are now all held by retired senior government and Party leaders who were formally in charge of propaganda. Table 3 also shows that two current ministers who are in charge of financial and economic affairs in the country, governor of the People’s Bank Zhou Xiaochuan and minister of the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) Li Rongrong, serve as the honorary deans of the School of Management at China University of Science & Technology and the School of Management at Tianjin University, respectively.

Li Rongrong also serves as vice chairman of the CCIEE, along with several other current ministerial-level leaders, including the director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, Zhang Yutai, and two vice ministers of the NDRC, Zhang Xiaoqiang and Zhang Guobao. In addition, executive vice-president of China’s National School of Administration Wei Liqun and chairman of the National Council for Social Security Fund Dai Xianglong are also full minister-rank leaders in the State Council. The strong presence of current government officials in the leadership of CCIEE seems to suggest that think tanks are not necessarily the “final stops” for politicians’ careers. Quite the contrary, the “revolving door” of China’s top think tanks may help current affiliates advance to higher posts in the years to come. Within the leadership of the CCIEE, 56-year-old official Zhang Xiaoqiang, 48-year-old scholar Qian Yingyi, and 52-year-old entrepreneur Jiang Jiemin are all widely seen as rising stars in the Chinese political and economic establishments.

Table 3*Current or Former Government Officers Who Serve as Deans/Honorary Deans of Schools*

| <i>Field</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Current/Previous Official Position</i> | <i>Current Position in Educational Institution</i> |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--|---|
| <i>International Relations</i> | Qian Qichen | Former vice premier | Honorary dean, School of International Studies, Peking University |
| | Li Zhaoxing | Former minister of Foreign Affairs | Dean, Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University; Dean, School of Diplomacy & International Relations, Institute of Foreign Affairs |
| | Long Yongtu | Former vice minister of Foreign Trade | Dean, School of International Relations & Public Affairs, Fudan University |
| | Chen Jian | Former deputy secretary general, United Nations | Dean, School of International Relations, Renmin University |
| | Xiong Guangkai | Former deputy chief of staff, PLA | Honorary dean, School of International & Public Affairs, Jiaotong University |
| <i>Journalism</i> | Zhao Qizheng | Fmr. director, Information Office, State Council | Dean, School of Journalism & Communication, Renmin University |
| | Shao Huaze | Former president, <i>People's Daily</i> | Dean, School of Journalism & Communication, Peking University |
| | Fan Jingyi | Former editor in chief, <i>People's Daily</i> | Dean, School of Journalism & Communication, Tsinghua University |
| | Gong Xueping | Former deputy Party secretary, Shanghai | Honorary Dean, School of Journalism & Communications, Fudan University |
| | Song Zhao | Vice minister, Shanghai Propaganda Department | Dean, School of Journalism & Communication, Fudan University |
| <i>Management</i> | Zhou Xiaochuan | Governor, People's Bank | Honorary Dean, School of Management, China University of Science & Technology |
| | Li Rongrong | Minister of State-Owned Assets Supervision & Administration Commission | Honorary Dean, School of Management, Tianjin University |
| | Lu Ruihua | Former governor of Guangdong | Honorary Dean, School of Management, Zhongshan University |
| | Jiang Yiren | Former vice mayor of Shanghai | Honorary dean, Antai School of Economic Management, Shanghai Jiaotong University |
| | Liu Ji | Fmr. vice president, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences | Honorary Dean, China Europe International Business School |
| | Li Jinhua | Former general director of Audit | Honorary dean, School of Management, Central China University of Science & Technology |
| | Cheng Siwei | Former chair, National People's Congress | Dean, Graduate School of Management, Chinese Academy of Sciences |

The “revolving door” function of the Chinese think tanks, especially in terms of elite upward mobility, is perhaps most evident in the case of the Chinese Economists 50 Forum. The forum was founded in 1998 and claims to include the most accomplished academic economists in Beijing. The mission of the forum is to provide policy recommendations for the government on major economic issues. Over the past decade,

the forum has organized annual conferences, economic policy lecture series, internal roundtable discussions, academic seminars, foreign exchanges, and policy briefings for the national leadership.²⁰

The forum is led by a seven-member academic committee, including the country's most influential economists and government technocrats: Wu Jinglian (fellow of the Development Research Center of the State Council), Fan Gang (member of the Currency Policy Committee of the People's Bank), Liu He (deputy director of the Office of the Economic and Financial Leading Group of CCP Central Committee), Justin Lin (senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank), Yi Gang (vice governor of the People's Bank and director of the State Administration of Foreign Exchanges), Xu Shanda (deputy director of the State Taxation Administration Bureau), and Wu Xiaoling (former vice governor of the People's Bank and current vice chairman of the NPC's Financial Committee). It has been widely noted that Wu Jinglian once served as a key advisor to Premier Zhu Rongji. Liu He now serves President Hu Jintao in the same capacity. The forum has a permanent staff team that handles daily operations and the abovementioned activities. The forum also has a council of entrepreneurs, which is headed by two famous business leaders, chairman of the Stone Group Corporation Duan Yongji and chairman of Legend Holdings Liu Chuanzhi.

Table 4 (next page) presents all 50 members of the forum, most of whom have the dual identity of scholar and official. Based on their main professional work at present, 25 (50 percent) are government officials and many hold ministerial-level positions, including some of the most important positions in China's economic and financial leadership. In 1998, when the forum was founded, 14 of these 25 current officials worked as research fellows in think tanks and/or were university professors. Justin Lin, for example, was at that time a professor at Peking University. Ten years later, he and many others are substantively involved in China's economic decision-making process.

The group's most prominent leaders are the governor of People's Bank, Zhou Xiaochuan; the director of the State Taxation Bureau, Xiao Jie; director of the Research Office of the State Council, Xie Fuzhan; director of the State Statistic Bureau, Ma Jiantang; deputy director of the Office of the Leading Group on Agriculture, Chen Xiwen; deputy director of the Office of the Leading Group on Finance Liu He and vice governor of People's Bank, Yi Gang. Several members of the forum currently serve on the powerful Central Committee of the CCP (Zhou Xiaochuan, Xiao Jie, Guo Shuqing, and Lou Jiwei) or the Central Discipline Inspection Commission of the CCP (Xie Fuzhan). Both the large number of retired officials taking positions in the leadership of the CCIEE and the many cases of scholar-turned-official in the China Economists 50 Forum suggests that the doors of China's prominent think tanks are already revolving.

A New Kind of Boss and New Sources of Funding

For most of the PRC's history think tanks have been fully funded by the Chinese government. Political officials have been the only "bosses" in the Chinese think tanks.

Table 4
Members of the Chinese Economists 50 Forum

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Born</i> | <i>Current Academic Position</i> | <i>Current Official Position</i> | <i>Main identity</i> | <i>Degree</i> |
|----------------|-------------|---|---|----------------------|---------------|
| Cai Fang | 1956 | Dir., Institute of Population & Labor, CASS | Advisor, Minister of Human Resources & Social Welfare | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Cao Yuanzheng | 1954 | Guest Professor of Fudan Univ. | Deputy CEO, Bank of China International Holdings Ltd. | Entrepreneur | Ph.D. |
| Chen Dongqi | 1956 | Researcher, CASS | Vice president, Institute of Macro Economics, NDRC | Official | Ph.D. |
| Chen Xiwen | 1950 | Professor, Renmin Univ. | Deputy director, Office of Leading Group on Agriculture | Official | BA |
| Fan Gang | 1953 | Director, Natl. Institute of Economics | Member, Currency Policy Comm. of People's Bank | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Fan Hengshan | 1957 | Guest Prof., Wuhan Univ, Renmin Univ. | Director, Regional Economy Department, NDRC | Official | Ph.D. |
| Guo Shuqing | 1956 | Guest Prof., Wuhan U.; Renmin U.; CASS | CEO, China Construction Bank | Entrepreneur | Ph.D. |
| Hai Wen | 1958 | Vice President, Peking Univ. | Director, China International Trade Promotion Committee | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| He Liping | 1958 | Chair, Dept. of Finance, Beijing Normal U. | Advisor, China Economic Reform Fund | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Hu Angang | 1953 | Dir., China Studies Center of CAS; Prof., Tsinghua U. | Member, China's Land Resources Committee | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Jiang Xiaojuan | 1957 | Professor, CASS | Deputy director, Research Office of the State Council | Official | Ph.D. |
| Li Jiange | 1949 | Professor, CASS; Shanghai U. of Econ. & Finance | Chair, China International Capital Cooperation Ltd. | Entrepreneur | MA |
| Li Xiaoxi | 1949 | Dir., Inst. of Econ. & Resources, Beijing Normal U. | Advisor, Shanxi, Shaanxi, & Qinghai governments | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Li Yang | 1951 | Professor, CASS | Vice president, CASS | Official | Ph.D. |
| Liang Youcai | 1943 | Chief economist, China National Information Comm. | | Scholar | BS |
| Lin Yifu | 1952 | Professor, Peking Univ. | Senior vice president, chief economist, World Bank | Official | Ph.D. |
| Liu He | 1952 | Guest Professor, Peking Univ.; Renmin Univ. | Dep. director, Office of the Leading Group on Finance | Official | MPA |
| Liu Shijin | 1955 | Guest Professor, CASS | Dep. dir., Development Research Center, State Council | Official | Ph.D. |
| Liu Wei | 1957 | Dean, School of Economics, Peking Univ. | Advisor, Beijing government | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Lou Jiwei | 1950 | Guest Professor, CASS | Chair, China Investment Corp. | Entrepreneur | MA |
| Long Yongtu | 1943 | Dean, School of International Affairs, Fudan U. | Secretary general, Boao Asia Forum | Official | BA |
| Ma Jiantang | 1958 | Guest Prof., Beijing Normal U. Renmin, U. | Director, State Statistic Bureau | Official | Ph.D. |
| Mao Yushi | 1929 | Chair, Unirule Institute of Economics | | Scholar | BS |
| Qian Yingyi | 1961 | Dean, School of Econ. & Management, Tsinghua U. | | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Sheng Hong | 1954 | Professor, Shandong Univ. | | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Shi Xiaomin | 1950 | | Deputy head, China Economic Reform Association | Official | BA |
| Song Guoqing | 1954 | Dir. of Population and Economics, CASS | Chief economist, China Stock Exchange Commission | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Song Xiaowu | 1947 | Guest Prof., Renmin U. & CASS | Dep. Dir., Northeastern Development Office, State Council | Official | MA |
| Tang Min | 1953 | | Deputy secretary general, China Development Fund | Official | Ph.D. |

(table continues next page)

Table 4 (continued)

| | | | | | |
|----------------|------|---|--|--------------|----------|
| Wang Tongshan | 1948 | Dir., Inst. of Quantitative & Technical Economics, CASS | | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Wang Jian | 1954 | Professor, CASS | Dep. secretary general, China Macroeconomic Assoc. | Official | BA |
| Wei Jie | 1952 | Dep. dir., Economic Research Center, Tsinghua U. | | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Wen Tiejun | 1951 | Dean, School of Rural Development, Renmin U. | Dep. secretary general, China Macroeconomic Research Fund | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Wu Jinglian | 1930 | Fellow, Development Research Center, State Council | | Scholar | BS |
| Wu Xiaoling | 1947 | Guest Professor, Tsinghua U. | Deputy chair, NPC's Financial Committee | Official | MA |
| Xia Bin | 1951 | Guest Professor, Renmin U. | Dir., Inst. of Finance, Dvlpmt. Research Ctr., State Council | Official | MA |
| Xiao Jie | 1957 | Guest Professor, CASS | Director, State Taxation Bureau | Official | Ph.D. |
| Xie Duo | 1960 | | CEO, China Foreign Exchange Center | Official | MA |
| Xie Fuzhan | 1954 | Prof., Central China University of S & T | Director, Research Office, State Council | Official | Master's |
| Xie Ping | 1955 | Guest Prof., Renmin U., Nankai U., CASS | Central Huijin Investment Co., Ltd. | Entrepreneur | Ph.D. |
| Xu Shanda | 1947 | Guest Professor, Tsinghua U., Peking U. | Deputy director, State Taxation Administration Bureau | Official | Master's |
| Yang Weimin | 1956 | Guest Professor, Tsinghua University | Director, Development Planning Department of NDRC | Official | Ph.D. |
| Yi Gang | 1958 | Professor, Peking University | Vice Governor of People's Bank | Official | Ph.D. |
| Yu Yongding | 1948 | Dir., Institute of World Economics and Politics, CASS | | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Zhang Shuguang | 1939 | Director, Unirule Institute of Economics | | Scholar | Master |
| Zhang Weiying | 1959 | Dean, School of Economic Management, Peking U. | Member of Economic Reform Fund | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Zhang Xiang | 1941 | Dean, School of Management, Shanghai Jiaotong U. | Secretary General, Boao Asia Forum | Official | Ph.D. |
| Zheng Xinli | 1945 | Guest Professor, Renmin U. and CASS | Deputy Director, Office of Policy Planning | Official | Master's |
| Zhou Qiren | 1950 | Dir., China Economic Research Center, Peking U. | | Scholar | Ph.D. |
| Zhou Xiaochuan | 1948 | Guest prof., Tsinghua U., China U. of S & T | Governor of People's Bank | Official | Ph.D. |

Source: http://www.50forum.org.cn/index_expert.asp

Notes: CAS = Chinese Academy of Sciences; CASS = Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Comm. = Committee; Dep. = Deputy; Dvlpmt. = Development; CEO = Chief Executive Officer; Dir. = Director; Econ. = Economics; Inst. = Institute; NDRC = National Development & Reform Commission; NPC = National People's Congress; Prof. = Professor; S & T = Science and Technology; U. = University.

Recently, however, economic globalization and China's market reforms have both profoundly changed the way Chinese think tanks operate. As with their counterparts in other countries, the tasks of paying salaries and securing funding for research has become a central concern for the Chinese think tanks. Not surprisingly, a new kind of boss (*laoban*)—the entrepreneur—now has a strong presence in the leadership of China's new think tanks. This trend is particularly noticeable in the case of the CCIEE.

It has been reported in the Chinese media that the CCIEE aims to raise a total of 500 million yuan, of which only 1 percent (5 million yuan) will come from the Chinese government.²¹ According to Wei Jianguo, secretary-general of the CCIEE, the research expenses and salary for a proposed total of 96 research staffers will largely depend on the institution's fundraising campaign.²² This explains why several business leaders currently serve in the leadership of the CCIEE as either advisors or vice chairmen. Chee-hwa Tung, former chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, is currently a vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Politics Consultative Conference. He also serves as chairman of the Hong Kong-based China-United States Exchange Foundation. The governing board of the foundation includes several world-class business tycoons such as the chairman of the Hang Lung Group, Ronnie Chan, chairman of Wheelock and Company, Peter Woo, and chairman of Hopewell Holdings, Gordon Wu. The foundation aims to support research in areas of importance to US-China relations, including the environment and climate change, energy security, anti-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, food security, multilateral trade issues, the international financial order, controlling the spread of pandemics, drug trafficking, and financial crimes.²³

Feng Guojing (Victor Kwok King Fung), chairman of the Li & Fung group of companies, not only serves as vice chairman of C. H. Tung's China-United States Exchange Foundation, but also serves as vice chairman of the CCIEE. Feng is also chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce, a prestigious international business organization. Feng's company is often considered one of the world's most influential trading companies. As a U.S. citizen, Feng was ranked by *Forbes* magazine as one of the 400 richest people in the United States in 2005.²⁴ Presumably, both C. H. Tung's foundation and Feng's company have provided substantial financial support to the CCIEE.

Several CEOs of China's major banks and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) also serve on the leadership body of the CCIEE. In China, these leaders of state-owned business often have dual identities. They are government officials whose appointments are usually made by the CCP Organization Department rather than their own companies, but they are also widely identified as entrepreneurs (*qiyejia*) because they take business risks domestically and internationally and are responsible to stockholders, if their companies are listed on the stock exchange. In the Chinese context, "entrepreneur" refers both to an owner of private property and a manager of state-owned or joint ventures. Thus, an entrepreneur is defined as a person who possesses property either through the capitalization of personal income or through the operation of a collective, public, or joint-venture enterprise.²⁵ This Chinese definition of entrepreneur differs significantly from the

definition that prevails in the West, where entrepreneurs are seen as businesspeople who assume the “risks of bringing together the means of production, including capital, labor, and materials, and receive reward in profit from the market value of the product.”²⁶

China’s heads of state banks and large firms were very minimally involved in the activities of Chinese think tanks for most of the PRC’s history, but this appears to have changed in recent years. Now Chinese entrepreneurs have become one of the three major players in this new era of Chinese think tank activity.

Board members of the CCIEE include Jiang Jiemin, general manager of the China National Petroleum Corporation; Chen Yuan, president of China Development Bank; and Lou Jowei, chairman of the China Investment Corporation (see Table 2). Most importantly, Li Rongrong, minister of the SASAC, also serves as vice chairman of the CCIEE. The SASAC supervises the 140 largest SOEs in the country, including the gigantic companies that monopolize such key industries as electricity, telecommunications, railways, aviation, shipping, and oil. The 122-member council of the CCIEE includes many CEOs of China’s largest banks and companies,²⁷ among them the president of the Sinosteel Corporation, Huang Tianwen; the CEO of the China Shipping Group Company, Li Shaode; and the CEO of the State Development & Investment Corporation, Wang Huisheng. Without a doubt, these high-powered and well-endowed companies provide much-needed funding for the CCIEE.

The Growing Importance of the “Sea Turtles”

One of the most important new players in reform-era life is the elite group of foreign-educated Chinese returnees known as the “sea turtles” (*haigui*). In Chinese, the words for “returnee” and “sea turtle” have the same pronunciation. Beginning with Deng Xiaoping’s landmark decision to send a large number of students and scholars to study abroad in 1978, a total of 1,360,000 Chinese nationals have pursued foreign studies over the past three decades, with a large number (approximately 37 percent) going to the United States.²⁸ In the past few years China has witnessed a tidal wave of returnees coming back to their native country. By the end of 2008, some 370,000 foreign-educated Chinese students and scholars had returned to the PRC.²⁹ The area most strongly influenced by returnees is, not surprisingly, higher education, especially research institutions.³⁰ According to an official Chinese source, in 2004 roughly 81 percent of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, 54 percent of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and 72 percent of team leaders of the national technological research projects were returnees.³¹

Returnees have also come to dominate prominent research centers in the field of China studies. This trend is most strikingly on display at the China Center for Economic Research (CCER) at Peking University, as demonstrated in table 5’s list of the educational backgrounds of the center’s entire 24 faculty members in 2005. All of them studied abroad and all received doctoral degrees, mainly from universities in the United States. These U.S.-educated economists have largely redesigned the curricula and

research methods of the fields of economics and management at Peking University to be more in line with the American model, particularly the “Chicago model.” It is also significant that the CCER has been a key resource for China’s economic decision-makers in the last decade. In addition to publishing academic journals, the CCER is also known for its regular internal reports and policy briefs submitted to various agencies in the Chinese government.³² Five faculty members—Justin Lin, Yi Gang, Hai Wen, Zhou Qiren, and Song Guoqing—are also members of the prestigious Chinese Economist 50 Forum. The NCER seems to have assembled “dream teams” both in the field of Chinese economic studies and in the management of the financial sector of the PRC.

Table 5

Educational Backgrounds of the Faculty of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University (2005; all hold Ph.D.’s from foreign universities)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Professional Title</i> | <i>Field</i> | <i>Graduate School</i> | <i>Degree obtained</i> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Chen Ping | Professor | Physics | University of Texas at Austin | 1987 |
| Gong Qiang | Assistant professor | Economics | Northwestern University | 2004 |
| Hai Wen | Deputy director & prof. | Economics | University of California at Davis | 1991 |
| He Yin | Assistant professor | Economics | University of Colorado at Boulder | 2004 |
| Hu Dayuan | Associate professor | Economics | University of Kentucky | 1995 |
| Li Ling | Professor | Economics | University of Pittsburgh | 1994 |
| Liang Neng | Dean & professor | Economics | Indiana U., U. of Pennsylvania | 1990 |
| Lin Yifu (Justin) | Director & professor | Economics | University of Chicago | 1986 |
| Lu Feng | Associate professor | Economics | University of Leeds, UK | 1994 |
| Ma Hao | Professor | Economics | University of Texas at Austin | 1994 |
| Ping Xinqiao | Associate professor | Economics | Cornell University | 1998 |
| Shen Minggao | Associate professor | Economics | Stanford University | 2001 |
| Song Guoqing | Professor | Economics | University of Chicago | 1995 |
| Shi Jianhuai | Associate professor | Economics | Osaka University | 1999 |
| Wang Dingding | Associate professor | Economics | University of Hawaii | 1990 |
| Wang Hao | Assistant professor | Economics | Ohio State University | 2002 |
| Yao Yang | Assoc. prof., dep. dir. | Economics | University of Wisconsin at Madison | 1996 |
| Yi Gang | Professor | Economics | University of Illinois | 1986 |
| Zeng Yi | Professor | Economics | Brussels Free University | 1986 |
| Zhang Fan | Associate professor | Economics | Wayne State University, Michigan | 1994 |
| Zhang Lee | Associate professor | Economics | Ohio State University | 1999 |
| Zhao Yaohui | Professor | Economics | University of Chicago | 1995 |
| Zhao Zhong | Assistant professor | Economics | Johns Hopkins University | 2001 |
| Zhou Qiren | Professor | Economics | UC Los Angeles | 1995 |

Source: Cheng Li, “Foreign-Educated Returnees in the PRC: Increasing Political Influence with Limited Official Power.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Fall 2006): 500. For the original data, see <http://www.ccer.edu.cn/en/faculty.asp?BigClassName=EN&SecondClassName=Faculty>, 1 June 2005.

Notes: Assoc. = Associate, Dep. = Deputy, Dir.-Director, Penn. = Pennsylvania, Prof. = Professor, U. = University, UC = University of California.

The CCER has received significant financial support from such foreign foundations and international organizations as the Ford Foundation and the World Bank, and this is not an isolated case. Many other research institutes and think tanks in China

have received funding from American and other foreign foundations. For example, the Center of China Studies at Peking University has received grants from the Ford Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Asia Foundation, among others. Most of these foundations began providing support to social science and legal research in China in the mid-1980s. A two-decade-long effort to promote China's social science research and the diffusion of international norms now seems to have come to fruition.

Lin Yifu (Justin Lin), founder and director of the CCER, is himself a legendary figure. Born in Taiwan in 1952, he attended both National Taiwan University and National Chengchi University. In 1979, when he was in military service at Jinmen, Lin decided to defect to the Mainland. It was reported that Lin swam to Xiamen using two basketballs for flotation.³³ From 1979 to 1982, he studied political economy at Peking University, receiving an M.A. in economics. He then went to the University of Chicago to continue his doctoral studies in economics. Lin returned to the PRC in 1987 and worked at the State Council's Research Institute of Rural Development for seven years. As a deputy director of the institute, Lin led several important research projects, and his scholarly work contributed significantly to China's market liberalization process. In 1994 Lin founded the CCER with five other instructors at Peking University and served as director of the center until 2008, when he was appointed senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank.

Another original member of this think tank who later became an influential figure in China's economic leadership is Yi Gang. He began his studies in the United States in 1980 as an MBA student at Hamlin University and then pursued his Ph.D. in economics at the University of Illinois. After graduating in 1986 he began to teach at Indiana University, where he received tenure, becoming an associate professor in 1992. In 1994, after studying and teaching in the United States for 14 years, he returned to China to teach at CCER. Only three years later he was appointed deputy secretary general of the Currency Policy Commission of People's Bank, and after serving as division head of currency policy he was promoted to assistant governor in 2004 and vice governor in 2007.³⁴ Most recently, in July 2009, Yi was appointed to what is arguably the most important position in the People's Bank: director of the State Administration of Foreign Exchanges (SAFE).

The career experiences of Justin Lin and Yi Gang, especially their very prominent roles in economic leadership, suggest the growing power and influence of returnees in present-day China. It is interesting to note that four other distinguished returnee scholars—Jiang Zhenghua, Li Yining, Liu Zunyin (Lawrence J. Lau), and Qian Yingyi—have made it to top leadership posts in the CCIEE (see table 2). Jiang Zhenghua is a scholar turned political leader and recently served as vice chairman of the National People's Congress. He studied at the Bombay International Institute of Demography in India in the early 1980s and was a visiting professor at the University of Paris and Stanford University. As one of the most accomplished experts on demographic issues in China, he has played an important role in China's population policy over the past two decades.

Professor Li Yining, who has taught at Peking University for 54 years, was the chief architect of China's adoption of stock markets, one of the most far-reaching economic reforms in the country. The author of 50 books and over 100 academic articles, he has challenged several theoretical propositions in Western economic literature and is an expert on the nature and dynamics of China's reform-era transitional economy. Also of note, Li was the academic mentor of two of the rising stars in the fifth generation of Chinese leaders, Executive Vice Premier Li Keqiang and Director of the CCP Organization Department Li Yuanchao. In fact, Professor Li Yining co-authored a book in 1991 on strategies for China's economic prosperity with three of his graduate students, including Li Keqiang and Li Yuanchao.³⁵

Professor Lawrence Lau is currently president of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He received his undergraduate degree in physics and economics from Stanford University and his Ph.D. in economics from the University of California at Berkeley. After teaching at Stanford for four decades he took his current position in Hong Kong. In addition, he is a personal friend of C. H. Tung and Victor Fung, as well as many senior Chinese leaders.

Professor Qian Yingyi also has remarkable professional credentials. Born in 1961 in Zhejiang Province, Qian passed the first national college entrance examination after the Cultural Revolution at the age of 16 and enrolled at Tsinghua University. He moved to the United States for graduate studies in 1982 and spent the next 20 years there. He received a master's degree in statistics from Columbia University, an MBA from Yale University, and a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University. He has taught at Stanford, the University of Maryland, and UC Berkeley. Qian's presence in the leadership body of the CCIEE is highly symbolic: a scholar and a foreign-educated returnee can be on equal footing with ministers of the State Council and CEOs of China's flagship companies.

These new think tanks that have strong representation by "sea turtles," as exemplified by the Chinese Economists 50, the CCER, and the CCIEE, constitute an important development that merits further attention. Returnees now regularly help to shape the research agendas and research methods in the fields of economics, management, sociology, international relations, demography, and other fields in their institutions, and are leaders in China's intellectual and policy discourses. Many of these think tank members concurrently hold academic positions in research institutions in China and abroad, thereby very closely linking these Chinese institutions with their peers overseas. International academic exchanges and collaborative projects can greatly improve the quality of think tank work in China and broaden Chinese perspectives on issues of global significance.

Final Thought

China is still in the early stages of developing a network of think tanks that can engage in systematic and well-grounded research and provide balanced and independent policy

analysis for policymakers and the Chinese public. As illustrated in the newly established CCIEE, the growing presence of tripartite elites in think tanks—retired or current government officials, entrepreneurs representing major business companies, and distinguished scholars who are often foreign educated—suggests that these semi-governmental institutions will play an increasingly important role in the years to come.

The establishment of the CCIEE has raised some concerns, especially among other think tanks, about the possibility that “super think tanks” might come to monopolize financial and human resources. Members of more independent think tanks, such as the Unirule Institute of Economics, fear that they will be further marginalized. Indeed, some Chinese critics argue that the CCIEE is primarily for show, and is in actuality little more than an “image project” (*mianzi gongcheng*) that aims to enhance China’s international image.³⁶ These detractors claim that the CCIEE has more vice chairmen on its board than the institution’s total number of researchers. Others believe that the real function of the CCIEE is to serve as a club for retired officials (*yanglaoyuan*), an argument that evokes the Imperial Academy (*Hanlinyuan*) of traditional China.³⁷ According to these critics, one should not expect this “old men’s club” to generate many innovative ideas or bold policy recommendations.

Perhaps the most important reservation concerning the CCIEE is the concern that such a close association of prominent officials, business leaders and well-known scholars might cohere into a “wicked coalition” that represents none other than China’s most powerful interest groups (*jide liyi jituan*).³⁸ For example, some Chinese critics point to the property development industry as one of contemporary China’s most powerful special-interest groups.³⁹ According to Sun Liping, a sociology professor at Tsinghua University, the real estate interest group has accumulated tremendous economic and social capital during the last decade.⁴⁰ Ever since the 1990s real estate bubble in Hainan, this interest group has consistently sought to influence government policy and public opinion.⁴¹ The group includes not only property developers, real estate agents, bankers, and housing market speculators, but also a significant number of local and national leaders and public intellectuals (economists and journalists) who promote the interests of that group.⁴²

It is at least encouraging that these criticisms—valid or not—have been allowed to surface in the Chinese media. In the larger scheme of things, this development adds a new analytical wrinkle to the long-standing and complicated relationship between power, wealth, and knowledge. Only time will tell whether these dramatic changes in the composition of Chinese think tanks will contribute to profound and positive developments in elite politics—or whether this new confluence of political, economic, and academic elites will spell trouble for China’s near-term future.

Notes

¹ The author is indebted to Yinsheng Li for research assistance. The author also thanks Sally Carman, Jordan Lee, and Robert O’Brien for suggesting ways in which to clarify the article.

² <http://business.sohu.com/20090403/n263180355.shtml>, 3 April 2009.

³ For the website of the CCIEE and the “Global Think Tanks Summit,” see

<http://www.cciee.org.cn/temp/index.asp>.

⁴ China's leading news magazines made the conference their cover story. See, for example, *Huanqiu* (Globe), No. 13 (2009), 1 July.

⁵ See <http://www.cciee.org.cn/temp/index.asp>.

⁶ See <http://news.backchina.com/2009/6/29/46808.html>, 29 June 2009.

⁷ Hu Angang uses these three examples to characterize the Mao era as the era of individual decision-making. See <http://www.people.com.cn>, 9 January 2003.

⁸ In contrast to the Marxist notion that the Communist Party should be the “vanguard of the working class,” Jiang’s theory claims that the CCP should represent the “developmental need of advanced forces of production,” the “forward direction of advanced culture,” and the “fundamental interests of the majority of the Chinese people.”

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the theory of the peaceful rise of China, see Zheng Bijian, *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997–2004*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2005.

¹⁰ Ling Zhijun and Ma Licheng, *Huhan: Dangjin Zhongguo de wuzhong shengyin* (Voices: Five voices in present China). Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 1999.

¹¹ Steven Mufson, “The Next Generation,” *Washington Post*, 18 June 1998, p. A1.

¹² For more discussion of Chinese think tanks in the past decade, see Murray Scot Tanner, “Changing Windows on a Changing China: The Evolving ‘Think Tank’ System and the Case of the Public Security Sector.” *China Quarterly*, No. 171 (September 2002): 559–74. This issue also includes other excellent articles on a variety of issues relating to Chinese think tanks written by Bates Gill, Bonnie Glaser, James Mulvenon, Barry Naughton, Phillip Saunders, and David Shambaugh, among others. For studies conducted by PRC scholars, see Zhu Xufeng, “The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process: Different Ways and Mechanisms,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (March/April 2009): 333–357; and Xufeng Zhu and Lan Xue, “Think Tanks in Transitional China,” *Public Administration and Development*, (December 2007): 452–464.

¹³ For more information about the Unirule Institute of Economics, see

<http://www.unirule.org.cn/Secondweb/TianZeJianJie.asp>.

¹⁴ <http://www.cass.net.cn/about/wygz.htm>. Among the 3,200 research staff, 1,676 are senior researchers.

¹⁵ <http://www.cicir.ac.cn/tbscms/html/byjj.asp>.

¹⁶ For more discussion of this topic, see Melanie Manion, *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

¹⁷ *Guangzhou ribao* (Guangzhou Daily), 18 March 2008, p. 1. Also see

http://news.dayoo.com/china/news/2008-03/18/content_3335387.htm.

¹⁸ See http://news.dayoo.com/china/200904/16/53868_5726098.htm. Xinhua News Agency, 16 April 2009.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ For the details of the work of the forum, see its website,

http://www.50forum.org.cn/%5Cindex_about.asp.

²¹ *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), 19 June 2009. Also see <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2009-06-19/012218047932.shtml>.

²² *Dongfang zaobao* (Oriental Morning News), 3 June 2009. Also see

<http://finance.qq.com/a/20090603/004913.htm>.

²³ For more information about the foundation, see http://www.cusef.org.hk/eng/about_statement.asp.

²⁴ <http://www.cnceo.com/webcontent/cnceo/person/fangtan/20051114/044320051114121358.shtml>.

²⁵ Zhang Houyi, “The Position of the Private Entrepreneur Stratum in China’s Social Structure.” *Social Sciences in China*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1995): 33.

²⁶ *Encyclopedia Americana* (International edition), (Danbury, Connecticut: Grolier Inc. 1992), Vol. 10, p. 477.

²⁷ <http://cq.takungpao.com/content.asp?id=17060>.

²⁸ See http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2009-01/03/content_10596719.htm, 3 January 2009. The total number of Chinese students and scholars who have studied in the United States is based on the speech delivered by China’s ambassador to the United States, Zhou Wenzhong, in Seattle on 1 June 2005. See <http://www.chinesenewsnet.com>. June 6, 2005.

²⁹ See http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2009-01/03/content_10596719.htm, 3 January 2009.

³⁰ For further discussion of this topic, see Cheng Li, ed. *Bridging Minds across the Pacific: U.S.-China Educational Exchanges 1978–2003*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005.

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- ³¹ See <http://www.xinhuanet.com>, 16 February 2004; and *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 2 March 2004, p. 11.
- ³² For more information about the center, see <http://www.ccer.edu.cn/cn/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=4276>.
- ³³ *Shijie ribao* (World Journal), 28 May 2005, p. A4.
- ³⁴ Cheng Li, "The Status and Characteristics of Foreign-Educated Returnees in the Chinese Leadership," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 16, (Fall 2005).
- ³⁵ The third student was Meng Xiaosu, then personal secretary to Vice Premier Wan Li and currently chairman of the China State Housing & Real Estate Development Group Corporation. Li Yining, Meng Xiaosu, Li Yuanchao, and Li Keqiang, *Zouxiang fanrong de zhanlue xuanze* (Strategic Choices on the Path to Prosperity). Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1991.
- ³⁶ See, for example, <http://www.ckxxw.com/html/c3/2009-07/4732.htm>.
- ³⁷ Xiao Feng, "Zhongguo xuyao zhiku, buxuyao yulinyuan" (China needs think tanks, but not Imperial Academy), *Xinzhoukan* (New weekly), 17 July 2009.
- ³⁸ *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* (China Newsweek), 13 January 2006; *Liaowang* (Outlook), December 5, 2005, and also see <http://www.chinesenewsnet.com>, 12 December 2005.
- ³⁹ The other powerful interest groups include the monopoly industries such as telecommunications, oil, electricity, and automotive. They have a huge stake in government policies. See Sun Liping, "Zhongguo jinru liyi boyi de shidai" (China is entering the era of the conflict of interests), <http://chinesenewsnet.com>, 6 February 2006.
- ⁴⁰ Sun Liping, "Zhongguo jinru liyi boyi de shidai" (China is entering the era of the conflict of interests), <http://chinesenewsnet.com>, 6 February 2006. Also see Sun Liping, *Duanlie: 20 shiji 90 niandai yilai de Zhongguo shehui* (Cleavage: Chinese society since 1990s), Beijing: Shehui kexuewenxian chubanshe, 2003.
- ⁴¹ China's Reform Institute (Hainan) conducted this survey. See <http://chinanews.com>, 19 January 2006.
- ⁴² Jin Sanyong, "Zhongyang difang cunzai mingxian boyi" (The open game that the central and local governments play). See <http://www.zisi.net>, 10 February 2006.