

Wenzhao Tao *Editor*

# The US Policy Making Process for Post Cold War China

The Role of US Think Tanks and  
Diplomacy

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The Role of US Think Tanks and Diplomacy



*Editor*  
Wenzhao Tao  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences  
Beijing  
China

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# Preface

Among many factors influencing American public policy, think tanks are undoubtedly an important one. Numerous think tanks exist in the United States, accounting for almost 30% of the total in the world. U.S. think tanks have comprehensive and deep influence on governmental policies in political, economic, social and diplomatic spheres. Because the United State practices two-party system, Democrats and Republicans change political appointees alternatively once coming to power, and think tanks serve as the “Revolving Door” for off-post officials. This mechanism is normal in the world politics, making think tanks more likely to play a unique and direct function in policymaking. Therefore, think tanks are even called a “shadow government” or “the fourth branch” of the government. Studies on think tanks start with their appearance at the very beginning in the United States as well as their development thereafter, with a rich literature. In China, studies on U.S. think tanks have become a hot issue over the past decade or so, as China needs to understand the United States and its policymaking, and learn from foreign experience, including American one, in order to develop our own think tanks and facilitate democratic and scientific policymaking. Some books and more papers are published.<sup>1</sup> These academic products have provided a good basis for this research project.

How to advance studies on American think tanks based on the abovementioned accomplishment is an issue this author considered earnestly while starting the research project. Most Chinese academia and the general public pay attention to what have happened in the United States: from the Tea Party to the occupation of Wall Street, from the subprime mortgage crisis to financial crisis, and from the Iraq War to the Afghanistan War. We have heatedly discussed whether the United States will decline, and have debated about the shift of American strategic focus from the West toward the East. Even an American movie could become a spotlight of the media for some period, such as “2012” and “*Wall Street Money Never*

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<sup>1</sup>Important works include: China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, *meiguo sixiangku jiqi duihua zhengce* [*American Think Tanks and Their Tendencies in China Policy*] (Current Affairs Press, 2003); Wang Lili, *xuanzhuannmen—meiguo sixiangku yanjiu* [*The Revolving Door: A Study on American Think Tanks*] (National School of Administration Press, 2010).

*Sleeps*”.<sup>2</sup> In the end, what concerns the academia and public mostly is American policy toward China. This is quite natural, as the United States and its China policy is the most important external factor influencing China’s modernization process, and U.S. China policy is so complicated that one can always find evidences to support whatever description or argument he or she wants to make about it. Indeed, China-U.S. relations have experienced such a great and circuitous development since 1979 that it is appropriate to compare the changing relations with the Lushan Mountains that demonstrates a quite different picture from the different angle. Therefore, we decided to combine studies on American think tanks and U.S. China policy. This could be a cutting point to advance studies in these two areas.

This book divides U.S. China policy into several dimensions, including its policies on Taiwan, economic and trade, human rights, and environmental and energy. In addition, as U.S. China policy have been under debates over the past two decades and will continue be so in the years to come, this volume reserves a chapter to discuss China policy debates among U.S. think tanks.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive introduction of American think tanks, including the concept, origin, development, and basic features of think tanks recognized by the general public, such as independence, non-profit, nonpartisan (some think tanks do carry clear political inclinations, e.g., conservatives and liberals, though), devoting to studies on public policy and serving the government. This chapter also covers relations between think tanks and American social movements (such as the movements of human rights and anti-Vietnam War) and social thoughts, as well as the main means of think tanks in influencing governmental policymaking—offering new ideas, preparing experts (mainly through the “Revolve Door”), providing public forum for discussing foreign policy, serving as interpreters, wind vane and feeler of current policies, educating the public, bridging between the government and the public, serving as “track two” to advance international and intergovernmental relations through dialogue and discussion, etc. In addition, this chapter introduces 34 think tanks that have considerable influences on U.S. China policy. Scholars have different definitions of think tanks. Some of them are inclined to limit them to special research institutions on public policy. However, many important and influential China experts in the United States actually are affiliated with universities, studying U.S. China policy while engaging in teaching work. To exclude this group of people is inappropriate for conducting research on U.S. China policy. This book therefore understands think tanks more broadly and includes some important teaching institutions as research objects.

Chapter 2 concentrates on U.S. Taiwan policy and the influence of think tanks in this regard. The Taiwan issue is an important subject in China-U.S. relations. The core issues in the three communiqués between the two countries all involve Taiwan. “One China” policy is the political foundation of U.S. China policy. However, American one-China policy is different from one-China principle of the Chinese

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<sup>2</sup>*Wall Street Money Never Sleeps* is a movie about Wall Street under the subprime mortgage crisis as well as financial crisis.

government. What are the common points and differences between one-China policy and one-China principle? A clear answer to this question is surely important in studying U.S. Taiwan policy and understanding its double-side nature. This chapter leaves one special section to discuss U.S. one-China policy and analyzes the challenge to it posted by American conservative think tanks. While U.S. Taiwan policy over the past three decades has not experienced a fundamental change in general, some adjustments under the different administrations did occur. Even with the same administration, Taiwan policy has shown different tendencies in its early and late periods. For example, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush both upgraded U.S.-Taiwan relations through policy adjustments in their early terms, but shifted to the direction of stabilizing one-China policy and opposing Taiwanese independence. This chapter elaborates the relations between U.S. policy adjustment and think tanks, which provide intellectual support for it. In particular, this chapter discusses in details the proposed “interim agreement” initiated by U.S. think tanks from the 1990s to this century and the reaction of think tanks against Chen Shui-bian scheme of *de jure* independence. In recent years, following the rise of China and the new development in China-U.S. relations, a voice appeared among American scholars demanding another round of review of U.S. Taiwan policy. This chapter will examine the new debate on Taiwan policy within think tanks.

Chapter 3 studies U.S. think tanks and their influences on American economic and trade policy to China, including main think tanks and important scholars that have policy influences, and the principal ways to exercise policy influence. In particular, this chapter examines the impact of think tanks on China’s most favorite nations (MFN) treatment, legislature on permanent normal trade relations (PNTR), and contemporary trade relations between the two countries. Back in the 1990s, the issue of the MFN treatment is one of the most controversial debates around American China policy. Different think tanks and scholars consecutively joined the debate and expressed various opinions. Their general inclination, though, is to support such a treatment. The legislature of PNTR at the turn of this century was a great breakthrough in the post-Cold War China-US relations with substantial significance. It was also the most important legislature in the second term of the Clinton administration. The administration supported this legislature with full mobilization, and the mainstream of the Republicans also supported it, even though different opinions did exist in Congress and the society. Think tanks played their functions in the legislative process. The success of this legislature demonstrates clearly that the consensus in improving US relations with China and developing bilateral trade ties has reached in the American society. This legislature is very important to China-U.S. relations in the new century. It does not mean, however, that the legislature can resolve all problems. In fact, many new problems have appeared after the swift development of the bilateral economic relations in recent years, including the issues of trade unbalance, the exchange rate of the RMB, protection of intellectual property rights and independent innovation. This chapter discusses various positions of think tanks on these issues.

Chapter 4 focuses on think tanks and the human rights issue between the United States and China. This issue has existed ever since the end of the Cold War, with

great changes over years. In the early 1990s, American policymakers put the human rights issue on the top position in the bilateral relations, considering it a policy option forcing China to change its policies and leadership style. Today, the human rights issue is only one dimension in China-U.S. relations, and not the most important one. Although the two countries still have disputes on it, both have realized that they should not allow this issue to bother their cooperation; the dispute should be handled based on the spirit of equality and mutual respect, even though the American side sometimes maintains a high profile. In the early 1990s, Washington understood human rights in a narrow sense. Later, more and more people from the political and academic circles in the United States agree to understand human rights in a broad sense. For them, the United States should not care about the minority of “political dissents” only, but pay attention to more comprehensive progress in democracy and the rule of law in China. This chapter also understands and elaborates the human rights issue from a broad sense. It introduces programs on China’s human rights, democracy and the rule of law conducted by American think tanks, discusses their impact on U.S. human rights policy to China, explores the role of think tanks in the Clinton administration’s final decision to adopt the policy of delinking the MFN from the human rights issue, and elaborate the debate on China’s human rights related to PNTR legislation. In the new century, the human rights issue is still a debatable one among American think tanks. Some consider it more as a cooperative area of the two countries, while others advocate a tough means against China. This chapter covers these various opinions.

Chapter 5 mainly deals with think tanks and American policy to China on environment and energy. Compared with issues discussed in the above chapters, this issue is relatively new. It just appeared in the late 1990s, but has become more and more important thereafter. It is the new growing point in China-U.S. cooperation, particularly since this century, with a strong momentum and broad future. However, the two countries do have disputes on the issue, and some are even fundamental, revealing different positions held by developed countries and new economic entities. This chapter elaborates China-U.S. cooperation and conflicts, and explores the impact of think tanks, which are divided on American environmental and energy policy to China. Generally speaking, they can be classified as “cooperators”, “worriers”, and “pushers”. Cooperators think common interests of the United States and China are more significant than disputes in responding to the challenge of climate to the mankind, and the two countries therefore should enhance cooperation. Worriers complain about the nontransparent energy policy and lack of enforcement in China as well as conceptual disparities between the two countries in energy and environmental security, advocating a two-hands policy. Pushers approach the issue from a strong Cold War mindset, believing China’s policy will necessarily harm American interest and therefore supporting a tough attitude toward China. This chapter comprehensively explores a series of legislative and executive measures of the U.S. government and various views of think tanks during the period from the Kyoto Protocol to the Post-Kyoto Protocol. It also discusses the impact of think tanks on U.S.-China strategic and economic dialogue

as well as their functions in promoting the Obama administration's "new green governance".

Chapter 6 is slightly different from the first five chapters. It does not devote to a specific dimension or issue in American China policy, but offers an overall review of China policy debate in the United States over the past two decades. The debate has never stopped since the end of the Cold War. In the early 1990s, an outstanding view in American political and academic circles was the argument of "China collapse", assuming China would follow the step of the Soviet Union. This of course did not occur. However, this tune has never disappeared. As China is facing some difficulties in economic development, with a declining tendency, the argument of China collapse has resurrected. However, the so-called China threat has become the main theme in the debate since the mid-1990s, including economic threat, military threat and the threat of China's developmental model. Although Chinese themselves have not enthusiastically advocated China's developmental model and even taken a reserved attitude toward it, American scholars are heatedly debating about it. Since the appearance of the theme of "responsible stakeholder", American think tanks again have evolved in the debate about whether China is a *responsible* stakeholder. It can be expected that American debates on the issue of China and the bilateral relations will continue throughout the long period of China's rise. Over years, scholars in the principal think tanks have elaborated their views and positions in a lot of discourses, with some institutions being very active. To understand this kind of debate can help us understand better how American people in different circles think about China's rise as well as U.S.-China relations.

The five areas covered above are not the complete picture of U.S. China policy, but they are considerably important ones, and intensively highlight the functions of think tanks, easier for us to make a relatively systemic and complete discussion. As far as American studies are concerned, the problem does not lie in that we have insufficient materials, but instead too much information in an "explosive" way. Despite our great efforts, the materials we have collected are not complete. We hope we can minimize the bias, however. Both think tanks and American China policy are changing. New circumstances appear when the book is published. It is our hope the publication of this book can provide one more step in approaching the dynamic studies of American think tanks.

After completing this research project, we have a further understanding of the complexity of China-U.S. relations. Sometimes we are inclined to stigmatize certain people or institutions in a simplified way, such as pro-China or anti-China. The reality is often more complicated, however. Some institutions or scholars could be inclined to enhance U.S.-China relations on some specific issues, while taking different positions on others. For example, the Heritage Foundation and American Enterprises Institute are famous conservative think tanks, and some scholars there have argued about China threat without any reservation, while advocating the advancement of U.S.-Taiwan ties and arms sales to the island and even challenging the one-China policy. Their position has not been changed. Nevertheless, during the debate on China's MFN trade status in the 1990s, scholars in these two think tanks principally supported its extension to China without any preconditions. This, of

course, is related to the free trade idea promoted by the Republicans, even though this is not the case for all Republicans.

As a Chinese saying going on, “people advertise what they are selling” (mai shenme yaohe shenme), this book of course emphasizes the importance of think tanks as it is aimed at studying their relations with U.S. China policy. This is not to say that think tanks are the most important factor or only think tanks are important. In fact, foreign policymaking in general and China policymaking in particular in the United States involve a very complicated process, which is an outcome of the relative equilibrium in a game played by various interest groups through mutual struggles, bargains, and compromises. We need to pay attention to the new ideas and views advanced by think tanks scholars on China policy, while understanding it is another issue whether these ideas and views will become policy and, if so, when. For example, in recent years, some scholars argued for a review of U.S. Taiwan policy. Should it really become a governmental policy, a long time would have been needed before the point.

A hot issue in contemporary Chinese academic circle is whether China and the United States can establish a new type of great power relations. Some scholars in both countries argue that China and the United States, as a *status quo* power and a rising power respectively, would unavoidably involve military conflict and strategic face off if they cannot unravel the logic of “political tragedy of great powers.” More scholars are not so pessimistic. For example, Henry Kissinger wrote an article titled “Conflict Is a Choice, Not a Necessity” in *Foreign Affairs* (March/April, 2012), arguing that U.S.-China relations are not a zero-sum game, and that a prosperous and strong China *per se* should not be presumed as a strategic failure of the United States. According to him, the history of U.S.-China relations over the past three decades is an unprecedented practice in the two countries’ foreign relations. Historically, the United States has never dealt with such a successfully rising power with different political system and culture background. Nor does China have the experience in dealing with a global power with a totally different outlook of the world. What Kissinger has mentioned is exactly the fact. Since 1979, China has developed within the existed international system without seeking to break or overthrow it. Meanwhile, the United States has also gained a great deal of benefits from China’s integration into the system. Although the bilateral relationship is not always smooth, but with occasional conflicts, contradictions and even struggles, the peaceful coexistence, interdependence and interest sharing of an existing super-power and swiftly rising power cannot be explained by any traditional international relations theories.

It is true that China and the United States lack strategically mutual trust on their disputes. As Kissinger argues, the simplest tactics are to defeat the potential adversary with more financial and material resources. However, he thinks it is unfeasible in the world today. It is unavoidable that both China and the United States will continue to present in the world. Each will pursue their own interest and cannot relegate their security to the other side. According to Kissinger, both parties need to consider the other party’s nightmare and realize that its own words as well as policies may increase the other party’s suspicion. In our words, both parties

should respect the other party's core interests and concern, considering the other party's feelings and possible reaction to its own policies and positions. This author believes that over years China and the United States have become a community with common interests and deep interdependence, and therefore cannot separate from each other, particularly in the economic sphere. Naturally, a new type of great power relations is a choice, just like mutual confrontation. If we can follow the first option, it will be the wellbeing for China, the United States, and the rest of the world. Otherwise, there will be a disaster for all of them. The history of mankind has entered the 21st century. China and the United States now have political wisdom to avoid disasters and realize equality, mutual trust, compromise, and cooperation.

Observers and the general public did not pay special attention to American elections in 2012. This indicates maturity of political attitude of Chinese people regarding American politics. U.S. elections are its domestic affairs, which are not the business of China. We cannot take care of it. During the elections, candidates may talk about China as an issue, "playing the China card." However, fundamentally speaking, the two American parties' China policies are about the same, and their differences are less significant. Just take the situation since the end of the Cold War as an example. China dealt with both Republican president and Democratic president, doing business with both moderates and conservatives/liberals. China-U.S. relations tend to have some problems immediately following power turnover between the two parties after elections, and the two countries need some time to smooth over and work out solutions. Nevertheless, Washington's China policy always swings back to the main track and the bilateral relations are destined to develop continuously. During the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, China-U.S. relations have both experienced "start low and go high" trends in their development. This is a good example. Washington's China policy cannot be dictated by personal delight or displeasure on the part of American politicians, but fundamentally decided by the common interests of the two countries. Any damage to China-U.S. relations will bring loss not only to Chinese interests, but also to American national interests. This has fully been approved by the past experiences.

This book is the final product of a principal project of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, contributed by Hongxia Wei, Wenzhao Tao, Zheng Yuan, Xingqiang He, Hao Qian and Shengqi Wu for the six chapters, respectively, and compiled and edited by Tao in the final stage. During the completing stage of the project, Yuan Peng, Liu Xuecheng and Zhou Qi have provided valuable comments. Cao Hongju and Feng Bin of China Social Sciences Press have provided a lot of assistances in the publication process. This author is in debt to all of them. However, it is his own responsibilities for errors if any in the book.

Beijing, China  
March 2013

Wenzhao Tao

Upon accomplishment of translation of this book, the dust of U.S. 2016 elections had settled town, with the victory of Donald Trump. This has resulted in uncertainty to both the United States and its relations with China. President Trump is not only a shrewd businessman driven by profit, but also a person with ideas of conservative populism. In addition to his various remarks—which should not be taken at their face value—during electoral campaigns, his appointments of forthcoming cabinet members over the past months has demonstrated his personalities. He intentionally recruited people with the same idea of him into the government, including the appointment of a famous populist on the trade issue, Peter Navarro, as the head of the newly-created National Trade Council, and make people smell out the flavor of trade war. Some senior policy advisers from conservative think tanks of the Republicans have crouched for more than ten years and now begun to stand up. It is indeed worrisome to allow these people to dominate Washington’s Taiwan policy. Recent events related to Taiwan, including the telephone talks between President-elect Trump and Ms. Tsia Ing-wen from Taiwan, and Trump’s remarks in the twitter that the United States does not necessarily need to be bound by the one-China policy, have revealed some persons behind the curtain to actively provide policy recommendation and service to Trump. One-China policy is the political foundation of China-U.S. relations. Any change to such a policy will not only harm the bilateral relations, but also carry very negative implications for cross-Taiwan Strait relations as well as domestic politics on the island. China-U.S. relations as well as the tendencies of American think tanks therefore deserve our close attention.

Beijing, China  
January 2017

Wenzhao Tao

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# Contributors

**Xingqiang He** Center for International Governance Innovation, Waterloo, ON, Canada

**Hao Qian** Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China

**Wenzhao Tao** Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China

**Hongxia Wei** Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China

**Shengqi Wu** Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China

**Zheng Yuan** Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China

## About the Translators

Gang Lin (林岡) is distinguished professor of political science and chairman of academic committee at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's School of International and Public Affairs, director of Center for Taiwan Studies, and member of the University's Academic Committee (2008–). He is also a vice president of Shanghai Society for Taiwan Studies and senior research associate of Collaborative Innovation Center for Peaceful Development of Across-Strait Relations. He served as Program Associate at the Woodrow Wilson Center (1999–2005) and President of the Association of Chinese Political Studies (1998–1999). He has authored *China's Long Quest for Democracy* (Palgrave, March 2016), *The U.S. Policy toward Taiwan and Its Evolution in the New Era* (Jiuzhou Press, forthcoming in 2015), *A Study on Party Politics in Taiwan* (Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2014), *Taiwan's Political Transition and the Evolution of Cross-Strait Relations* (Jiuzhou Press, 2010), and co-edited *China after Jiang* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press & Stanford University Press, 2003). He received his Ph.D. in political science from Pennsylvania State University (1997). His research interests include comparative politics, Chinese politics, democratic theory, Sino-U.S. relations, and the Taiwan issue.

Wenxing Zhou (周文星) is a Ph.D. student studying political science and public administration with a special emphasis in Taiwan studies at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China. He received his Master's degree in International Relations and Bachelor's degree in English. With the financial support from the China Scholarship Council of the Ministry of Education of P. R. China, Mr. Zhou was once a Joint-Master student at the French-speaking Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels when he was studying at Wuhan University. His academic interests include Taiwan studies and International Relations. He has published several English articles in journals and edited volumes.

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