

## *The Rise of Think Tanks as Institutional Involution in Post-Socialist China*

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### *Abstract*

This analytical essay addresses the rise of Chinese think tanks in recent years. Despite their rapid growth, think tanks in China are generally shown to be becoming less effective in their normal functions and increasingly bureaucratic and dysfunctional. This essay adopts the concept of involution as its organizing framework. It argues that due to political and ideological impediments, Chinese think tanks are encumbered by institutional involution, a process of increasing in number and yet becoming more internally complicated. It asserts that the rise of Chinese think tanks provides minor yet telling evidence of involution within China's current governance system. The essay concludes by highlighting that this phenomenon is not unusual, but rather a pervasive and natural outcome of the Chinese post-socialist regime.

There has been a surge in the number of think tanks in China in recent years, which is more dramatically described as a “fever” by China analysts.<sup>1</sup> This rapid growth was partly sparked by President Xi Jinping's call at the plenary session of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in April 2013 for

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