The Construction of Policy Discourse Power of American Think Tanks from the Perspective of Field Theory: Taking the Technological Containment of China as an Example

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Abstract: As a vital component of a country's cultural soft power, American think play a significant role in shaping policy through various mechanisms and channels, and their discourse power plays a significant role in policy - making. Since the 21st century, technological competition has emerged as a crucial factor affecting the global economic and social development pattern and competition pattern. American think tanks have increasingly targeted China and significantly influenced the US government's policies on technological containment of China by providing policy recommendations, spreading anti - China views, and connecting with decision - makers. Based on the field theory and taking 6 representative American think tanks as examples, this paper analyzes the ways in which American think tanks construct their discourse power in technological containment of China from multiple dimensions, providing references for Chinese think tanks to enhance their policy discourse power.

Keywords: American Think Tanks, Field Theory, Technological Containment of China, Construction of Policy Discourse Power

1. Introduction

In recent years, the US's technological containment of China has been high on the US government's agenda. Some American think tanks, through discourse construction and dissemination, actively influence US policy - making and keep intensifying technological containment of China. In 2021, the US "China Strategy Group" think tank released *Asymmetric Competition: A Strategy for China & Technology* [1]. It defined Sino - US tech competition as a "technological cold war" and proposed stricter export controls and investment restrictions. This report aligns well with later US policies like the *CHIPS and Science Act*. Studying think tanks' discourse - power construction in national policies helps us understand their roles in US national - discourse formation and offers valuable experience for Chinese think - tank development.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies mainly centered on anti - China discourses in US think - tanks, often interpreting their literature from a text - based view.

Yu Xiaoyu summarized four features of US tech - competition strategy against China: "pursuing US leadership, returning to multilateralism, emphasizing ideology, and focusing on limited goals", along with three policy trends like "small yard, high fence" - based tech protection, "controlled dependence" - aimed supply - chain decoupling, and "multilateralism" - driven containment. This was from analyzing 12 US think - tank reports [2]. Hou Guanhua analyzed 11 reports from 8 US think - tanks, exploring the motives behind their negative views on Sino - US tech competition from aspects like author backgrounds and government policies. He pointed out the US government's tough stance on China spurs such views [3]. These studies delved into think - tank discourses, highlighting their influence via narrative and policy - influencing means. However, they mainly focused on explicit discourses, with a single - dimension analysis, more descriptive than statistical, thus lacking clear causal links and theoretical support for connecting discourses to power building.

Field theory offers a new angle for understanding international - relation interactions [4]. Fligstein, N studied its innovation - field application, analyzing how it helps understand innovation's social dynamics [5]. In think - tanks' policy - influencing process through knowledge and recommendations, field theory tracks multiple agents, aiding in analyzing US think - tanks' decision - entry logic [6].

This paper uses Bourdieu's field theory to address the gap in explaining how think - tanks affect national decision - making. It explores the transformation from think - tank academic research to policy - making application, supplements quantitative and structural discourse research, and bridges think - tank ideas with government decisions. It also does a case - study on "China's tech containment". The small - scale study enhances empirical research's operability and credibility. Finally, it suggests ways for China to optimize think - tank construction and strengthen their academic achievements' role in national policy – making.

3.   The Application of Field Theory

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu introduced field theory into sociology for the first time to explain social practice. The concept of "field" proposed by him refers to the power relations and interactions in different fields of social life. American think tanks rely on dynamic "power fields" [7] that span and connect diverse fields such as academia, politics, business, and journalism. By setting standards and dissemination rules, think tanks give legitimacy to certain ideas and knowledge. Therefore, think tanks are not only knowledge producers, but also play the role of public policy influencer by making certain views and policy suggestions widely accepted through their authority and professionalism.

Academic field is the main front of American think tank. Research reports and policy recommendations issued by think tanks provide cultural capital for decision-making. Think tanks gather top scholars and senior researchers, publish a large number of academic papers, in-depth analysis of international political patterns and economic trends and other issues, provide theoretical basis for the government's foreign policy adjustment and economic policy formulation, and exert influence on the agenda setting and priorities of government decision-making. In addition, think tanks build a multi-dimensional influence network through the field of communication. For example, they cooperate with well-known TV stations such as CNN and Fox News, invite experts to participate in current affairs programs and thematic discussions, and use the visual and high communication rate of TV media to spread the policy ideas of think tanks to the broad audience and form hot spots of social opinion. Draw the government's attention to relevant issues and incorporate public input into the decision-making process.

This paper uses the field theory model to explain how think tanks position themselves in different social fields, guide the practice in the field of technological containment of China through

the strategic conversion and application of capital, and further enhance their influence and discourse power in decision-making through cross-field actions [8].

4.   Case Analysis

In recent years, China's rapid advancement in technological capabilities has raised concerns in the U.S. about challenges to its global dominance, leading to intensified efforts to contain China's technological rise. Since 2019, U.S. think tanks have released numerous reports highlighting China's progress in key areas and recommending measures such as export controls [9]. During the Trump administration, the U.S. initiated a trade war, added Huawei to the Entity List, and imposed restrictions on TikTok. The Biden administration further restricted exports of high-performance computers and semiconductor technologies to China and passed the *CHIPS and Science Act* [10]to subsidize domestic semiconductor production. In 2023, Biden signed an executive order limiting U.S. high-tech investments in China [11], particularly in semiconductors and artificial intelligence. In 2024, the U.S. moved to block access to sensitive data, fully implementing its strategy to compete with China.

Currently, the U.S. views technological competition as the core of its strategic rivalry with China, focusing on cutting-edge fields like chips and artificial intelligence. Its policy approach has expanded from sanctions to include technology, communication, and talent restrictions, with increasingly precise designs [12].

4.1.   Field Construction Measurement Indicators

4.1.1. Selection of Typical Think Tanks

As illustrated in Figure 1 - Distribution of Think Tanks on China-Related Research Topics, in the fields of high - tech and technology security, the research of six representative U.S. think tanks stands out: the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Brookings Institution, the RAND Corporation, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), the Center for Security and Emerging Technology (CSET), and the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF). According to the "Global Think Tank Influence Evaluation Report 2021", the above - mentioned six think tanks are among the top in the U.S. think tank rankings and have a significant influence on U.S. foreign policy decision - making. Therefore, this paper specifically focuses on analyzing the explicit attitudes and implicit emotional orientations of these six think tanks in their content related to China's science and technology, as well as their impact on decision - making.
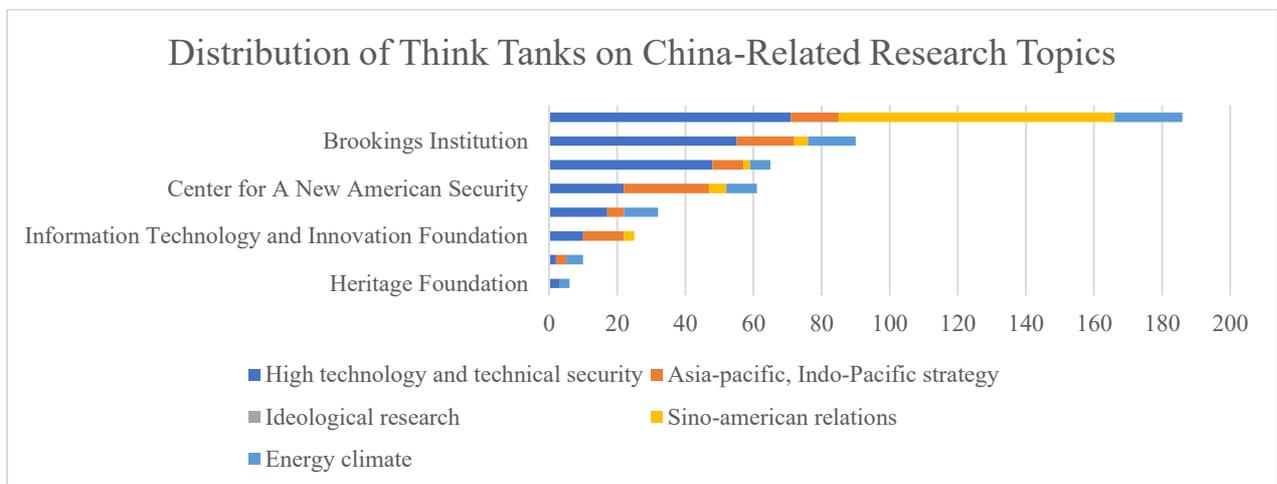

Figure 1: Distribution of Think Tanks on China-Related Research Topics [13]

4.1.2. Information Source Analysis

The "technology - containment - of - China" strategy is a continuous formation process, which is reflected in the policies implemented by the Trump and Biden administrations. Therefore, this paper focuses on selecting articles related to the development of China's scientific and technological innovation from six top - tier U.S. think tanks - the Brookings Institution(BI), the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the RAND Corporation, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), the Center for Security and Emerging Technology (CSET), and the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF) - during the period from 2019 to 2023 as research samples (Table 1).

Table 1: Representative Articles of Typical U.S. Think Tanks on the Development of China's Scientific and Technological Innovation [14-28]

Serial number	Research report	Issuing authority	Release time (year)
1	(Is China Catching Up to the United States in Innovation?)	ITIF	2019
2	(China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition)	RAND	2020
3	(China's Uneven High-Tech Drive Implications for the United States)	CSIS	2020
4	(The Future of US Policy Toward China)	BI	2021
5	(From Plan to Action: Operationalizing a U.S. National Technology Strategy)	CNAS	2021
6	(U.S. Strategic Competition with China)	RAND	2021
7	(Wake Up, America: China Is Overtaking the United States in Innovation Output)	ITIF	2022
8	(Securing 5G: A Way Forward in the U.S. and China Security Competition)	RAND	2022
9	(China's State Key Laboratory System: A View into China's Innovation System)	CSET	2022
10	(Scientific and Technological Flows Between the United States and China)	RAND	2023
11	(The Effectiveness of U.S. Economic Policies Regarding China Pursued from 2017 to 2023)	RAND	2023
12	(How Innovative Is China in AI?)	ITIF	2023
13	(How Innovative Is China in the Display Industry?)	ITIF	2023
14	(China is Rapidly Becoming a Leading Innovator in Advanced Industries)	ITIF	2023
15	(How Innovative Is China in the Robotics Industry?)	ITIF	2023

4.2. Empirical Research

This part of the research will be conducted by integrating typical data with specific cases. First, a quantitative analysis of the academic field will be conducted. Fifteen representative research reports from prominent U.S. think tanks, which contain citations related to assessments of China's scientific and technological innovation, will be pre-processed using Python for tasks such as word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging. According to the research purpose and theoretical framework, the text content will be encoded and classified, and with the help of the Antconc text analysis software, data such as the frequency of keywords and co - occurrence words will be counted to visually present the hot words and topic correlations in the text.

Table 2: High - frequency Content Words (Top 30) in the Discourse of U.S. Think Tanks on Sino - US Science and Technology Issues from 2019 – 2023

Serial number	Word	Frequency	Serial number	Word	Frequency
1	China	3304	16	Huawei	355
2	U.S.	1656	17	foreign	329
3	Chinese	1430	18	countries	309
4	technology	592	19	policy	303
5	government	563	20	Beijing	297
6	companies	525	21	development	297
7	security	477	22	technologies	267
8	economic	448	23	R&D	265
9	innovation	441	24	international	260
10	military	411	25	PRC	257
11	data	406	26	researchers	257
12	global	389	27	infrastructure	249
13	market	384	28	strategy	249
14	national	377	29	growth	247
15	AI	359	30	PLA	247

The frequent appearance of words such as "China", "Chinese", "United States", "global", and "market" indicates that when U.S. think tanks discuss China's scientific and technological innovation, they focus on Sino - U.S. relations, the global market, and international competition. The high - frequency appearance of words such as "technology", "innovation", "AI", and "data" shows that scientific and technological innovation is the core content of the discussion. The appearance of words such as "military" and "security" reflects the concern of U.S. think tanks about China's military technology and national security. Words such as "economic", "development", and "growth" reflect the discussion on China's economic and social development.

Table 3: Keywords (Top 10) in the Discourse of U.S. Think Tanks on Sino - US Science and Technology Issues from 2019 - 2023

Key Word	Frequency	MI	MI3	T-SCORE	Z-SCORE
American	179	0.580738918	15.54837047	4.433545698	5.422019887
patent	167	0.580163107	15.34757169	4.278908094	5.231861121
IP	160	0.579787454	15.22364364	4.186067073	5.117677211
United States	1379	0.576276274	21.43508976	12.22879147	14.93212997

Table 3: (continued).

patents	216	0.575479414	16.08525442	4.834363658	5.901434609
relative	165	0.571394159	15.30403859	4.200825885	5.120803038
threats	81	0.571074235	13.25077424	2.941961418	3.585850757
robots	80	0.570854329	13.21471052	2.922827001	3.562257001
software	77	0.570160559	13.10373364	2.864658858	3.490523981
Japan	115	0.563901568	14.25488167	3.469469854	4.218312614

The high rankings and statistical indicators of "American" and "United States" show that when U.S. think tanks discuss China's scientific and technological innovation, they frequently use the United States as a reference point. The high frequency and statistical indicators of "patent" and "patents" indicate that intellectual property and patents are an important aspect of U.S. think tanks' attention to China's scientific and technological innovation. The mention of "IP" (intellectual property) also reflects this. Moreover, the recurring appearance of the term "threats" suggests that when U.S. think tanks discuss China's scientific and technological innovation, they consider potential security threats and regard the development of China's scientific and technological innovation as a threat to the United States.

Table 4: High - frequency Collocation Words of "China" (Top 10) in the Discourse of U.S. Think Tanks on Sino - US Science and Technology Issues from 2019 - 2023

Collocation word	Co-occurrence frequency	Total frequency	MI	MI3	T-SCORE	Z-SCORE
United States	194	1332	3.806792702	19.00661839	12.93311562	48.38185942
South	100	168	5.837796993	19.12550937	9.825157102	74.30456656
progress	84	171	5.560723134	18.34535798	8.970975555	61.63280077
China	82	3304	1.25381226	13.96891627	5.258112087	8.11983846
economic	68	448	3.866366146	16.04129183	7.68080283	29.33274513
growth	66	247	4.682285114	16.77107335	7.807618569	39.56149748
innovation	59	441	3.68426643	15.44955253	7.083627328	25.39762219
military	56	411	3.710618565	15.32532841	6.911722272	25.00863708
strategy	50	249	4.270112484	15.55782486	6.704585465	29.45017654
decade	43	179	4.528707204	15.38123671	6.273347497	30.13961496

The high co - occurrence frequencies of "United States" and "South" indicate that when U.S. think tanks discuss China, they often compare or associate it with the United States and countries in the Global South. The high - frequency collocations of "progress", "growth", and "innovation" show the focus of U.S. think tanks on China's development, especially in scientific and technological progress and economic growth. Meanwhile, the collocations of "military" and "strategy" reflect the concern about China's military capabilities and strategic intentions.

Table 5: Concordance Line Analysis of "China" in the Discourse of U.S. Think Tanks on Sino - US Science and Technology Issues from 2019 - 2023

KWIC(LEFT)	Key Word	KWIC(RIGHT)
America needed to prevail over	China	, not talk with China.
Most China observers would agree that, by now,		is innovative.
status quote in ways favorable to		without exacerbating perceptions of a "China threat."
China - based researchers more often returned to		after a period in the United States.
Washington must pursue a global strategy that includes		, not a China strategy for Asia.
While the most plausible scenarios are ascending		and stagnant China, the following paragraphs will focus on triumphant China...
Focusing on China's growth will not impede		's progress in the long run.

U.S. think tanks exhibit a complex and multi - dimensional perspective when discussing China. On the one hand, they recognize China's innovation ability and at the same time emphasize that the United States should maintain its advantage in the competition with China. On the other hand, they discussed how to balance the status quo in a way that benefits the United States without exacerbating the perception of the "China threat." In addition, it is noted that Chinese researchers are increasingly inclined to return to China after studying overseas. American think tanks also advocate pursuing a global strategy that includes China, rather than just a China - specific strategy for Asia. They have considered two scenarios: a rising China and a stagnant China. Some views hold that paying attention to China's growth will not hinder the long - term progress of the United States.

Table 6: High - frequency Collocation Words of "technology" (Top 10) in the Discourse of U.S. Think Tanks on Sino - US Science and Technology Issues from 2019 - 2023

Collocation word	Co-occurrence frequency	Total frequency	MI	MI3	T-SCORE	Z-SCORE
science	107	204	8.446234045	21.92916802	10.31442378	192.6326371
Chinese	44	1774	4.043833725	14.96269696	6.231078267	25.30584425
China	38	3966	2.671650952	13.16750598	5.196927926	13.11807867
information	35	260	6.484107605	16.74267364	5.849991703	55.34911641
innovation	29	654	4.882026571	14.59798856	5.202538826	28.25098202
advanced	28	253	6.201553748	15.81626359	5.219603214	44.77796359
transfer	28	72	8.014622322	17.62933217	5.27104113	84.76513664
military	27	511	5.134900422	14.64467543	5.048267864	29.92415645
national	27	574	4.967172977	14.47694798	5.030035521	28.13228975
competition	24	265	5.912306352	15.08223135	4.817635759	37.38735481

The high-frequency collocations of "science", "Chinese", and "information" indicate that when U.S. think tanks discuss technology, they focus on scientific development, China's technological progress, and technology in the information field. The collocations of "advanced", "military", and "national" reflect their concern about advanced technology, military technology, and national competitiveness. The occurrence of "transfer" is likely associated with issues of technology transfer and intellectual property protection.

Table 7: Concordance Line Analysis of "technology" in the Discourse of U.S. Think Tanks on Sino - US Science and Technology Issues from 2019 - 2023

KWIC(LEFT)	Key Word	KWIC(RIGHT)
The technologies cited were biotechnology, IT, advanced materials, advanced manufacturing, advanced energy	technology	, marine technology, laser technology, and space technology.
technology or know - how, but China's		transfer efforts are unmatched in scale and effectiveness.
Chinese military technology — like all		— builds on ideas, techniques, and technologies from the past.
The categories are bolstering the Department of Commerce, mitigating supply chain and		transfer risk, streamlining technology policy coordination and implementation, and increasing capacity to pursue international technology partnerships.
The barriers put on the use of foreign		will slow the country's development of AV technology.
But Chinese policies now work against		transfer.
5G microchip supply chain and ensure the		leadership of trusted network infrastructure providers without putting at risk the technology leadership of U.S.

In the 2019-2023 discussion on Sino-US science and technology issues, the US think tank focused on China's development in biotechnology, information technology, advanced manufacturing and other fields, especially the challenge of technology transfer to the United States. China's advances in military technology are also seen as a potential threat to global security. The United States emphasizes strengthening supply chain security, reducing technology transfer risks, and limiting China's development in key fields such as autonomous driving and 5G microchips through export controls to maintain its technological advantages. In general, the US science and technology policy towards China focuses on prevention and containment, and technology competition has become the core of the Sino-US strategic game.

5. Conclusion

Bourdieu's field theory provides a multi - dimensional explanatory framework for the construction of think tanks' discourse power, breaking the single - layer analysis framework of traditional research. Based on the field theory, this paper uses an explanatory framework that transcends the text structure, combined with the quantification of words and sentences and the selection of typical cases, to comprehensively and deeply analyze the ways in which American think tanks construct their discourse power in the issue of technological containment of China. As global technological

competition intensifies, the role of think tanks in policy - making will become more and more important. Chinese think tanks should improve the quality of their research, focus on national strategic needs, cultivate interdisciplinary talents, maintain their independence, and provide support for decision - making. At the same time, it is necessary to build communication channels, strengthen the transformation of research results, promote collaborative cooperation, give play to the institutional advantages, and enhance decision - making influence. In terms of communication, it is necessary to shape the brand image, innovate communication methods, enhance influence, and win decision - making discourse power.

However, this study acknowledges several limitations inherent in its methodology and scope. First, there are a large number of American think tanks with complex types. The number of cases selected in this paper is relatively small, and the universality needs to be further verified. Second, the typical cases selected in this paper are all publicly verifiable information. Due to the "black box" in the decision - making process of the U.S. government, there may be more key factors affecting policies that are difficult to obtain, which affects the accuracy of the research. Therefore, all policy - generation process deductions in this paper adopt correlation analysis, and the specific causal relationships cannot be proven. In addition, considering the complexity of the interpersonal relationships of think - tank personnel and the partisan interests of the funding groups behind think tanks, this paper does not elaborate on the network of American think - tank personnel as "social capital". Future research could address this gap by expanding the scope of database sample collection and employing more comprehensive analytical tools to enhance the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

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