

NATPA Think-tank Committee
Annual Report to NATPA Board

August 5, 2014

This annual report by the NATPA Think-Tank Committee is being submitted to the NATPA Board prior to NATPA's annual meeting, as stipulated in the *NATPA Think-Tank Policy*.

The appointment of the Think Tank Committee for 2014 was approved by the Board in late January. As this is the first operating year for the NATPA Think-tank Committee, this report will address the following items:

1. Understanding the function of a think-tank
2. Conceptualizing a think tank with NATPA's missions
3. Establishing a strategy for the NATPA think-tank
4. Outlining research topics/projects for action
5. Outlining action items

I. Understanding the function of a think-tank

We should fully understand the function of a think-tank, so that we can relate it to our mission and our capacity.

A think-tank (or policy institute, research institute, etc.) is an organization that performs research and advocacy concerning topics related to social policy, political strategy, economics, military, technology, and culture. Most policy institutes are non-profit organizations, which some countries, such as the United States and Canada, provide with tax exempt status. Other think-tanks are funded by governments, advocacy groups, or businesses, or derive revenue from consulting or research work related to their projects.¹

Merriam-Webster provides the following definition for a think-tank: "Institute, corporation, or group organized for interdisciplinary research, usually conducted for governmental and commercial clients. Projects for government clients often involve social policy planning and national defense. Commercial projects include developing and testing new technologies and new products. Funding sources include endowments, contracts, private donations, and sales of reports."

The oldest American think tank, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1910 by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie charged trustees to use the fund to "hasten the abolition of international war, the foulest blot upon our civilization." The Brookings Institution was founded shortly thereafter in 1916 by Robert S. Brookings and was conceived as a bipartisan "research center modeled on academic institutions and focused on addressing the questions of the federal government." Presently, there are more than 4,500 of these institutions around the world. Many of the more established think tanks, having been created during the Cold War, are focused on international affairs, security studies, and foreign policy.^{2, 3} There are different methods of describing think-tanks in a way that takes into account regional and national variations:⁴

- Independent civil society think tanks established as non-profit organizations –ideologically identifiable or not
- Policy research institutes affiliated with a university.
- Governmentally created or state sponsored think tanks.
- Corporate created or business affiliated think tanks.
- Political party think tanks and legacy or personal think tanks.
- Global (or regional) think tanks (with some of the above)

II. Conceptualizing a think tank with NATPA’s mission

In 2011, a think-tank was conceptualized by the NATPA Board to help revitalize the organization. Two documents, “NATPA Think Tank Policy”⁵ and “NATPA Foundation Fund Policy,”⁶ were developed and approved by the Board at its annual conference on July 2, 2011.

The purpose of the first document, “NATPA Think Tank Policy,” was to establish procedures for the governance, operation, and funding of the NATPA Think Tank. The purpose of the NATPA Think Tank is to leverage the expertise of NATPA members to enhance and elevate “scholarly research and education on subjects related to Taiwan,” which is one of the four purposes of NATPA. The NATPA Board believes that serving as a think tank for issues related to Taiwan is a natural direction for NATPA organizational development, consistent with the mission and purpose of NATPA.

The purpose of the second document, “NATPA Foundation Fund Policy,” was to establish procedures for the receipt, management, and disposition of funds that are received by NATPA. To maximize the value and impact of each gift, this policy was also set to ensure that each gift complies with donor intent, applicable laws, regulations and standards of gift acceptance, management, and stewardship.

With these two documents, NATPA has established an organizational structure that should be able to guide and to support the think-tank activity.

III. Establishing a strategy for the NATPA think-tank

In February 2014, the newly formed Think-tank Committee started to work on establishing our strategy and developing possible projects, as described in this and the next section.

Below are the “Research Directions” suggested by the Think-tank Committee for the near future:

1. Introduce new/important ideas, concepts, technologies, etc. to Taiwan;
2. Critique Taiwan’s political, social, economic, educational systems, etc. that run against the development of Taiwan-centric consciousness;
3. Introduce Taiwan’s strengths, such as their health insurance policy, to the world;
4. Analyze Taiwan’s current situation and their impact and importance to the world, such as the Sunflower Student Movement;
5. Promote Taiwan’s visibility to the international community;
6. Stimulate and awaken Taiwanese living overseas to a vigilant attention on Taiwan’s future.

Items 1 & 2 addresses Taiwan’s domestic issues; items 3, 4, & 5 gives voice to Taiwan; item 6 mobilizes support. This list is not inclusive. NATPA members have diversified research interests; however, due to

NATPA's mission and the finite resources, we, the Committee, need to limit our concerns to a manageable scope as outlined above.

After outlining the Research Directions, the Committee also reviewed whether there was a need to prioritize the Research Directions. Considering there are factors beyond the Committee's control, such as the availability of personnel, financial support, etc. a prioritized list would be impractical to follow.

IV. Outlining research topics/projects for action

Below is a list of research topics that were developed based on the research directions recommended by the Committee; nevertheless, the list is not all inclusive.

Short term: (defined as within the next 3 years)

- 1) What are the possible impacts of the Sunflower Student Movement on domestic and regional affairs? A critical study on the political spectrum of the Sunflower Movement and its probable role in the political process is needed.
- 2) How to build a Taiwan-centric educational and cultural policy to reverse the flow of China-centric policies. How to nurture human capital in the age of globalization?
- 3) How to correct the malaise of the Taiwan economy: high unemployment, low wages, unequal income distribution.Does Taiwan need to have an industrial policy?
- 4) To what extent should Taiwan liberalize its financial sector to China? Would liberalizing the deposit and lending of Renminbi in Taiwan lead to more capital outflow from Taiwan to China, less capital available for domestic business loans, and resulting in low investment, low economic growth rate, low labor employment, low wage rate, and more inequitable income distribution between labor and capitalist class?

Long Term: (defined as in the next 3 to 5 years)

- 1) How to correct the dysfunction of the democratic system in Taiwan: the disarray of the political parties, no checks and balances, no politically neutral judicial system, no judicial justice, weak opposition parties at the legislative branch, no equal representation in the legislature, and no reasonable/fair way for constitutional amendments.
- 2) How to reach a consensus on how to deal with the rise of China: should the DPP reiterate its party platform on Taiwan independence? Its resolution of the future of Taiwan? Its resolution on normalizing Taiwan as a country? On the content of "Taiwan Consensus"?
- 3) How to alert citizens about China's political penetration through economics, trade leverage, culture, and immigration.
- 4) Commission a project to develop a book on the political history of Taiwan from the Taiwanese point of view.

V. Outlining action items

We have now established the organizational structure, strategy, and research directions for our Think-tank activity. Just as important, the Committee has the following suggestions and comments on the elements of human resources and organizational support.

For NATPA members:

- We should nurture the interest and develop the knowledge about issues related to Taiwan so that we can promote and defend Taiwan in the international community.
- We should introduce new/important ideas, concepts, technologies, etc. to Taiwan and critique Taiwan's political, social, economic, educational systems, etc. that run against the development of Taiwan-centric consciousness to enlighten Taiwanese.

For the Think-tank Committee:

- The Committee should serve as a facilitator to pull individual, even non-NATPA members, to collaborate on the same subject areas together by offering small discussion sessions at the annual conference or providing other means for discussion. This probably is the most important task for the Think-tank to perform in the next few years.
- The Think-Tank Committee should organize and provide an opportunity for NATPA members to enhance their knowledge to conduct the research activities encouraged by the Committee.
- The Committee should propose rules for NATPA Board approval that would encourage research activities. For example, waive the registration fees for the annual conferences if a member publishes X number of articles in Taipei Times or other media outlet within a XX month period. Both monetary and non-monetary incentives should be evaluated.

For the Board:

- The Board should provide time slots, of no less than two hours, at the annual conference for members to discuss issues related to the think-tank activity.
- The Board should conceptualize the think-tank activity as an important means for NATPA's organizational development and a strategic way to provide reciprocal support to our home land.

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Prepared by the NATPA Think-tank Committee

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¹ Think tank (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank)

² Think tank-- History (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank#History)

³ Think tanks in the United States (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank#Think_tanks_in_the_United_States)

⁴ Think tank--Types (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank#Types)

⁵ <http://www.natpa.org/index.php/growers>, 2011-08-29

⁶ <http://www.natpa.org/index.php/growers>, 2011-03-10