With the greater freedom of discussion in academic circles in China since Deng’s Southern Inspection Tour, the role of intellectuals in China has become increasingly diversified. The idealist intellectuals of the 1980s, such as Liu Binyan and Wang Ruowang, have been accused of not taking off their socialist glasses. Thinkers such as Wang Ruoshui had stuck to Enlightenment thinking and rationalism. However, the quests pursued by reformers of the 1980s made it possible for the sixth generation of intellectuals to step outside the establishment and become extremely critical of officially sanctioned ideas, of one another, and also of their idealist predecessors. These intellectuals were more advantaged and better educated than earlier ones.

Chinese traditional thought, critics argued, was based on optimism, on reason as a universal cognitive and moral expedient for political judgment, and it regarded history as a globally teleological process based on ‘reason’. Radicals such as Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, and liberals like Hu Shi had criticized the Confucian legacy through Western Marxism and scientism. But now, the premises of Western Enlightenment thought, i.e., scientific reason, historical necessity, modernization toward an ideal society, seemed to overlap with traditional ways of thinking. By not radically opposing the autocratic elements in the political system, intellectuals were criticized for selling out their ideals of democracy and liberalism.

Nevertheless, during the late 1980s, awareness grew that too much confidence had been placed in the intellectual’s role in reforming society, and that there was too little awareness among intellectuals about the lopsided interdependence between state and intellectuals. Some intellectuals, such as Wang Meng and Gan Yang, started to stress self-doubt and cynicism about the ability of humans to alter society. Critical scepticism and reflection on the role of the subject in intellectual inquiry challenged the principles of Enlightenment modernity. The privatization of belief also was essential to the formation of a reflexive ‘self-awareness’, which was no longer defined by the state or the Party. Though many intellectuals still attempted to construct an ideal realm in order to reconcile dichotomous oppositions, others rejected the utopian legacy associ-
ated with historical materialism, and rejected the wholesale approach of social revolution in favour of gradual evolution. Traditional antagonistic opposites have tended to make place for synthesis, not as mutually exclusive but as inclusive, complementary, and supportive. These syntheses included private versus public, market versus state (planning), Western versus Chinese, revolution versus evolution, and socialism versus capitalism. As a result, academic approaches to society no longer contrasted radically in their interpretation of the world, but rather are distinct in highlighting different aspects of it. This trend, as will become clear in the next chapters, was much easier to accommodate than the former radical intellectual approaches to the reforms.

This chapter shows how under the newly implemented ‘responsibility system’, described in Chapter 8, an increasingly mild Party Committee leadership adopted state policies in the organization of research. The policies of ‘Deepening the Reforms’, ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’, and ‘Party Construction’ are examples of such state policies that CASS scholars worked on under the supervision of Party Committees but under their own initiative in the areas of economics, law, political stability and ideology.

*Shaping the ‘Deepening of the Reforms’ and ‘Earning Money’ at CASS*

The change of political winds brought a change of academic policies at CASS. After a significant drop of new student recruits at the Graduate School, the school was expected to firmly apply itself to recruitment work in 1993. Even though, especially in the latter half of the 1980s, the link between graduate research and the reforms had been stressed, in practice, research students were found to stray from the political spirit of assigned topics. According to a decision made by the Central Committee on the reform of the educational system, in 1987, the State Education Committee (guojia jiaowei 国家教委) published ‘Temporary Regulations Concerning the Evaluation and Selection of Key Item Academic Disciplines’.

1 Doc No. 2 of the State Education Commission (May 13, 1992) agreed to the resumption of recruitment. About sixty research students would be allowed to start studying in 1993 (YB 1993, 327).

2 ‘Temporary Regulation Concerning the Evaluation and Selection of Key Item Academic Disciplines’ (Guanyu pingxuan gaodeng zhongdian xueke de zhanxing guiding 关于评选高等重点学科的暂行规定) (Wu Benxia 1993, 31).