PART IV

REFORMS AT CASS: SYMBOLIC KNOWLEDGE, PARTY GUIDANCE, AND ACADEMIC STREAMLINING
In Part Four I ask how it was possible for the leadership of CASS to devise academic programmes, define research tasks, and keep a measure of coherence in the great diversity of academic perspectives and approaches that also serve as sources of state policy-making. I argue that political views in academic research are expressed through characterizations and images of the nation.

Chapter 11 shows how political views in academic research in China were expressed by way of various symbolic conceptualizations of the nation, which serve as a framework for research. Conflicting schools of thought use this framework, which defines the nation in both a cognitive and symbolical manner, for defining their own academic research agendas. Without such a shared symbolic framework, the discussion would be too diffuse, since a minimal number of concepts are necessary for a meaningful argument between different schools to continue. Politically, such a framework cannot be directed centrally, but its dissenting fringes can be monitored.

I illustrate the application of symbols in academic work with examples that show how symbols, official ceremony, politics, and administrative organization are intertwined with the planning and practice of academic research. By taking into account both the symbolic and cognitive functions of ceremonies, speeches, political and organizational meetings and celebrations, it becomes clear that ‘freedom of academic debate’ is not self-evident. And the nationalism espoused by many Chinese intellectuals can hardly be regarded as a sign of unity. Finally, I elaborate on the functions of national symbols in the production of academic knowledge. In this context, I discuss the speeches President Jiang Zemin delivered in 1990 and at his visit to CASS in 1991. In both, he emphasized the role of intellectuals as patriotic educators and their mission of national self-strengthening. He encouraged intellectuals to integrate ‘Marxist universal truths’ with ‘Chinese reality’. Paradoxically, the symbolism in the speeches shows how ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ would confine debate on the basis of theoretical pluralism.

Chapter 12 elaborates on the question of how during the reform period