CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHANGING THE SYSTEM FROM WITHIN?

In Parts Two-Four I discussed three forms of power that have been crucial in shaping academic discourse in CASS. One form of power is expressed in the ways in which symbolic concepts, often initially used in formal ceremonies and rites, are mobilized in academic policy-making and Party guidelines, but are variously interpreted and used both in support of and in opposition to the political and Party leadership (Chapter 11). Symbols of the nation especially seem to be treated as vessels of meaning, whose various interpretations are used in debate between academic factions. They were influential and persuasive as triggers of mental links between patriotism and the policies of various academic and political factions. A second form of power was the vertical, top-down leadership of the Party (Chapter 12), which in CASS was instrumental in stipulating research topics, ideological education, and the generation of a whole vocabulary based on Party ideology, including certain formulations, phrases and slogans. A third form of power is exerted through organizational devices, such as the bi-directional elections, the responsibility system, the topic research system, and various modes of rewarding academicians (Chapter 13). This form of power informs the discussion on how leaders at various levels of the hierarchy, deal with the conflicts between the duties/forms of their own administrative cum ideological position and the political views/factions they support themselves (discussed in Part Two-Three).

Chinese intellectuals, both outside and inside the educational system, have been credited with the capacity to change themselves at will, and power changes have been regarded as the logical outcome of political clashes of thought. But such views are one-sided, as they ignore the relatively independent structural dynamics of academic institutes and the pressures exerted by the decisions made about the organization of academic institutions. In the case of CASS, these have played a crucial role in the research planning and the lasting coherency of the institute. Nevertheless, the power base of the institutional structure in CASS has changed over time, and the development of its research curriculum could hardly have been predicted by its creators, be it leaders or led.
In the previous chapter I discussed how working conditions, the new research-item systems, and means of academic organization impact the limits of what can or cannot be researched. On the basis of recent developments under the Presidency of Li Tieying and on the basis of the changing forms of power mentioned above and discussed in former chapters of this book, I argue in this final chapter that:

- CASS leaders have used the status of CASS as a state institution to co-opt CASS academics into refraining from openly violating state policies;
- Since the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century, major changes in academic policies and ideology have come about mainly through the gradual ideological change of the Party organization in CASS, and require internal efforts;
- Changes in political ideology at CASS occur slowly, and they happen by means of changes in academic and ideological symbolism, which are tied to Party propaganda and government policy-making; and,
- Cases of dissidence at CASS occur mainly as a by-product of this mode of change: among well-reputed, established scholars who change their course mid-career or inadvertently become entangled in sensitive political issues.

I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the various ways in which academics are grouped into categories by themselves and others, and with an elaboration of the meaning of research freedom in the context of developments in CASS over the last decade.

As argued in Chapters 8 to 10, progressively accumulated financial advantages and limited career opportunities motivated researchers to stay at CASS. Though since the 1980s a process of liberalization has broadened the freedom of publication, financial and administrative restraints led them to research certain subjects rather than others, and to take into account political guidelines for academic work. The latter requires academics to keep up with what is regarded as violating state policy, for state ideology is subject to change. For instance, in the second millennium even officials express the view that they are in favour of democracy; in the 1980s and in part of the 1990s, intellectuals were sooner locked up for demonstrating for democracy. Of course, the political context in which the concept of democracy is used was also important, then. In the 1980s, patronizing ‘socialist democracy’ was no problem, but since