

Regulating Intellectual Life in China: The Case of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*

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ABSTRACT This article explores why and how the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), a PRC state research-institute, survived after its involvement with the June Fourth demonstrations in 1989 through research regulation. I show how the explicit ascription of an advisory role to CASS required an increase in freedom of research and an increase in political steering through regulation. I do this by comparing the institutional setting of CASS in the early 1990s with that during Li Tieying's leadership (1998 to 2003). The article traces a general trend in which organizational reforms at institutions of higher education increasingly entail giving political direction to the development of the social science debate. Radical political views are discouraged through regulation, guidelines, meetings, academic activities and financial, material and social encouragement. This institutional approach aims to yield insight into the functioning of CASS as a producer of knowledge and as a think-tank to the government.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) is a high-level research institute organized directly under the State Council. It was set up in 1977 to fulfil an advisory function to the government and the Chinese Communist Party and it served as a think-tank for various political factions in the 1980s.¹ But in the late 1980s, from the point of view of the political leadership, CASS showed itself politically unreliable, as a majority of its personnel in some way or another had been linked to the June Fourth demonstrations in 1989.² Why, then, did the PRC government continue to pour money into a disloyal think-tank, and how did CASS manage to get academics to follow official policies? This study tries to provide an answer to this question by showing how regulatory steering to a large extent replaced ideological education. Apart from enabling the state to maintain CASS as an academic think-tank, this change led to a situation in which leaders could only select academics that accepted and complied with the rules, thereby excluding radical (and possibly creative) views.

* I am grateful to Alex Faulkner for comments and advice.

1 Deng Xiaoping, "Speech at opening ceremony of National Science Conference," *Peking Review*, 24 March 1978.

2 Cf. David Kelly and Anthony Reid, "Weathering a political winter: the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 24 (1990).

This article starts with an outline of the financial, organizational and academic problems that occurred in the 1990s and contrasts them with employment opportunities outside CASS. Working conditions, such as salary, academic freedom, status and power, will affect an academic's decision whether to stay on at CASS. Next, it discusses how the maintenance of CASS as an advisory state organ required both an increase in freedom of research and an increase in political steering through regulation. A comparison between the institutional setting of CASS in the 1990s with that under the leadership of Li Tieying (李铁映) (1998 to 2003) shows that organizational rigidity and financial shortages made CASS ineffective as a think-tank and de-motivated intellectuals during the early 1990s. Under the reign of Li Tieying, however, CASS re-organized and steered research effectively through research regulations and guidelines with additional state support. This increase in academic steering capacity in combination with the decrease in the availability of welfare and other facilities to academics influenced the availability of academics willing to stay on at CASS, and also affected the work produced by CASS.

Although the role of ideological education has diminished, external intervention with the social sciences has not. The social sciences are increasingly shaped through a dense net of regulations and guidelines in close co-ordination with official policies. This article indicates a general trend in which organizational reforms at institutions of higher education increasingly entail giving political direction to the development of the social science debate. This involves discouraging radical political views, a form of political manipulation that does not take place in secret but occurs in the open. It takes the shape of formal rules, regulations and guidelines, and financial, material and social encouragement.

Though many articles have been written about the ideological steering of academic research in the PRC,³ some of the regulatory means by which it is accomplished have been underexposed.⁴ Whereas ideological steering in the academic world takes place via ideological manipulation, propaganda, brainwashing and political education, the steering of debate through regulation makes use of financial incentives, the provision of facilities and status on the basis of accomplishment, and rules for reward and punishment. The regulatory means of organizing academic life, I believe, are crucial to explaining developments in CASS after 1989. This article concentrates on the question of

3 Timothy Cheek, "From priests to professionals: intellectuals and the state under the CCP," in Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Elizabeth Perry (eds.), *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China* (Boulder: Westview Press); Wang Jisi, "International relations theory and the study of Chinese foreign policy: a Chinese perspective," in T. Robinson and D. Shambaugh (eds.) *Chinese Foreign Policy. Theory and Practice* (Oxford & New York: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1995); Suisheng Zhao, "Greatness and nationalistic writing in the 1990s" *The China Quarterly*, No. 152 (1997); Merle Goldman, "Politically-engaged intellectuals in the 1990s," *The China Quarterly*, No. 159 (1999), pp. 700–11; Min Lin and Maria Galikowski, *The Search for Modernity. Chinese Intellectuals and Cultural Discourse in the Post-Mao Era* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).

4 Perhaps with the exception of Shaozhi Su's, "The structure of the CASS and two decisions to abolish its Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought Institute," in Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao (eds.), *Decision-Making in Deng's China* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995) pp. 111–17.

how the regulation of welfare facilities (including housing and medicine), professional facilities (such as salary, status, libraries) and research funding (provision of research topics, rewarding) influences the academic make-up of this high-level research institute *cum* think-tank to the government.

In understanding the position of intellectuals in China, several articles on Chinese academic think-tanks have referred to the increased possibilities for publishing articles, the growing mobility of labour and increased freedom of speech.⁵ Here I argue that these factors are meaningful only in their specific institutional context, where they actually may have unexpected effects. Discussions on intellectuals and academic freedom give an impression of how controversial, outstanding and suppressed academics fare in Chinese society,⁶ leaving aside the conditions that actually shape the academic body as a whole, including academic change and its political implications. As a consequence of thinking in contrastive terms of academic censorship and freedom of research, it is tempting to think of academic positions as based on either personal connection or merit.⁷ Focusing on the historical changes in a particular institute, however, shows that other factors are also important in shaping a scholar's academic position, such as ideological dedication, material and political ambition, and the extent to which a scholar is prepared to comply with guidelines and to co-operate in officially recommended research projects.

Research and Political Requirements

In 1980 the prestigious State Council Academic Degree Committee (*Guowuyuan xuewei weiyuanhui* 国务院学位委员会) was established to design and lead the regulations on graduation in China.⁸ From 1981 to 1985, it was decided that to improve the quality of research students, before their entrance examination the students had to deliver a report on their work experience.⁹ The State Education Commission (*Guojia jiaowei* 国家教委) and the State Council Academic Degree Committee insisted upon the moral training of research students. To achieve an upright character, students were to rely on their tutor, as the most influential person, and on the Party. Students were minimally required to follow classes, to discuss the subject matter studied, to apply self-examination and to take exams. As a general requirement, the research of graduate students was to be related to

5 Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutes: evolving roles and increasing influence," *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (2002), pp. 597–624. Also see Murray Scot Tanner, "Changing windows on a changing China: the evolving "think tank" system and the case of the public security sector," *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (2002), pp. 559–74; David Shambaugh, "China's international relations think tanks: evolving structure and process," *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (2002), pp. 575–96.

6 See n. 2.

7 Glaser and Saunders, "Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutes," p. 610.

8 Wu Benxia, *Lüelun Zhongguo xuewei yu yanjiusheng jiaoyu* (*Discussing China's Academic Graduation and the Education of Research Students*) (Xi'an: Jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 1993), p. 8.

9 *Baokao*: to give a lecture and take an exam.

the state's scientific research items, though at the same time "independence of research" and "creativity" were to be stressed.¹⁰

In 1979 some scholars still believed that it was unnecessary to adopt a grade system, but as its absence tended to form an obstruction to the smooth regulation of foreign exchange programmes, the three-grade system (bachelor, master, doctor) was adopted in the 1980s. A debate ensued as to whether this system should be linked to politics. Those in favour argued that in Western countries graduation is attached, implicitly, to politics, for in some countries people with a serious criminal record could not obtain a degree. As a socialist country, however, China had clearly to stipulate the political conditions for graduation. In this way, "we can encourage them to be both red and expert, protect socialism, the Party and the Four Cardinal Principles."¹¹

The relationship between politics and academic research was problematic from the start. Rather than leaving this link undefined, the State Council insisted on making morality and political attitude part of the graduation system. Formal grading was important, but did not imply great differences in income. This situation would continue to be relevant to CASS as a state organization directly under the State Council, though not to other institutions of higher education and research. But after 1989, reforms and reorganization would make regulatory means, rather than political education and propaganda, crucial in academic political steering.

Recruitment requirements at CASS

CASS, a comprehensive social science institute, grew out of the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences (*Zhexue shehui kexuebu* 哲学社会科学部, *xuebu* for short), which was set up in 1955 as a research division of the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS). CASS was set up in 1977 to serve the reforms of Deng Xiaoping and to separate the social from the natural sciences. CASS has 31 research institutes, in which more than 300 secondary and tertiary branch disciplines are accommodated; the majority of them were set up after 1977.¹² Enormous efforts have been put into its establishment and eminent intellectuals were made its leaders. From 1978 onwards, it grew rapidly until it was considered too recalcitrant in the latter half of the 1980s, and too bulky in the 1990s.

In the first half of the 1980s, CASS had no problem finding what it regarded as good researchers. At the time, tertiary education was regarded as a means of enhancing one's career opportunities, as university graduates were assigned jobs

10 Wu Benxia, *Discussing China's Academic Graduation*, pp. 22–23.

11 *Ibid.* pp. 5–6. The Four Cardinal Principles were announced by Deng Xiaoping in his 30 March 1979 speech "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles," written under the direction of Hu Qiaomu. The Four Cardinal Principles represent the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat (changed to the People's Democratic Dictatorship), the leadership of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

12 Ru Xin, cited in *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan nianjian bianji weiyuanhui* (CASS Yearbook Editorial Committee) *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan nianjian* (*Yearbook of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (1995) (abbreviated as CASSYB) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 14–19.

with favourable career prospects by the state. Once assigned, job security was virtually guaranteed until retirement. By the mid-1980s, however, the link between higher education and state jobs started to erode.¹³ On the one hand, the emerging market economy and the “smashing of the iron bowl” threatened the normality of providing students with job security with the state. On the other hand, the lack of choice in the process of job assignment, and the emergence of better paid jobs and challenges in the “free” sector of the economy suppressed the number of students willing to take state jobs.

In the 1990s, the graduate school of CASS had problems recruiting good MA students. From 1990 until 1992, it took on no MA students, with only two in 1989, compared to a yearly average of 175 recruits during the preceding decade. However, during the two years mentioned, permission for the recruitment of students was not even given to CASS because of the involvement of many CASS researchers in the demonstrations of 4 June 1989.¹⁴ Nevertheless, even from 1993 to 1998, an average of only 50 MA students was taken on yearly. By contrast, the number of new PhD students grew steadily from a total of 12 in 1983 to 140 in 1998.¹⁵ The reason for the rise in PhD students, however, was that many of them were introduced to CASS indirectly, through other educational and government institutes whose personnel is expected to acquire certification matching the status of their post. Not surprisingly, therefore, the average age of PhD students was over 35. Generally, one reason for CASS’s recruitment difficulties in the 1990s was that there were few work prospects for graduate students at CASS. Furthermore, salaries at CASS are comparatively low. The monthly basic income of staff members in 1998 averaged about 1,000 RMB, with variations according to ranking.

Obtaining a position at CASS had become easier for academics in the sense that most informal rules for applying disappeared and requirements were lowered. More so than before, it is emphasized that candidates are accepted on the basis of their qualifications, argumentation skills and acumen in interviews. However, the leadership also considered the applicant’s political attitude. Those who had participated in the June Fourth movement, for example, or engaged in activities that run counter to academic research policies are not to be taken on. Regulations stipulate that “incorrect appointments” contested by the masses can be reversed after consultation with a vice-president and, if a decision violates regulations related to the state or the academy, a motion of appeal can be submitted with the Appeal Commission of Academic Affairs.¹⁶ In short,

13 Cf. Ruth Cherrington, *Deng’s Generation. Young Intellectuals in 1980s China* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 61–62; Ka-ho Mok, *Intellectuals and the State in Post-Mao China* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998).

14 CASSYB, 1993, p. 327.

15 Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiushengyuan yuanqing bangongshi (CASS Graduate School Celebration Office), *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiushengyuan (1978–1998) (Graduate School, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (1978–1998))* (Beijing: CASS, Graduate School, 1998), p. 151.

16 Chapter 6, “Supervision and Inspection” (*jiandu jiancha*) of the CASS Work Regulations of the Evaluation Committee of Expert and Technical Professions, Art. 2 and 3 (CASSYB, 1993, p. 278).

recruitment problems at CASS partly resulted from the limited prospects for a good career, low income, inadequate working conditions, and new academic and political requirements.

Working conditions at CASS (1989–98)

Conditions of living and teaching, and career opportunities in CASS did not improve as fast as they have in universities such as Beijing or Qinghua. Because of problems regarding housing, quality of staff, salaries and uncertainties about its future role, CASS had become comparatively unattractive to ambitious career-makers. CASS, and therefore the state too, was burdened with state-managed enterprises, state medical provision (*guofei yiliao* 国费医疗) and housing.¹⁷ As rent was very low, it did not substantially increase CASS's revenue. Health-care expenses exceeded the budget, and the number of pensions paid out was growing fast. The majority of research fellows were in their 50s, some in their 40s, and only a few in their 30s. In 1993, for example, the number of staff employed by CASS was 4,683, but it had to look after 1,654 retired academics as well. The total number of wage and pension drawers, therefore, came to 6,337 (excluding the entitlements of families of the pensioners). In 1995, the total number of staff over the age of 60 was 189, while over 500 staff members turned 60 in 2000. Vice-president Long Yongshu (龙永枢) feared, therefore, that CASS would have a total of 7,000 personnel by 2000, as the number of pensioners kept on increasing by 120 or 130 persons a year, while on average only about 20 members died.¹⁸ In addition, replacements had to be appointed for retired staff (see Table 1).

Medical expenses also grew at great speed (see Table 2). The medical expenses of the Institute of Philosophy, for instance, totalled approximately 70,000 RMB per year but some individuals, especially elderly scholars, needed four times that amount. Moreover, the unit looked after the families of around 150 of its elderly personnel. Additionally, a number of staff members were driven around in expensive cars, lived in big houses, went to high-level hospitals and received high-level medical treatment. Thus the state institute's budget was being financially drained by the increasing costs of facilities such as education, health-care and housing.

The housing situation formed a severe problem, arising from both a lack of housing and bad housing. There was a reported need for 17,000 m², valued at an estimate of 66,580,000 RMB. Additionally, there was a waiting list of 100 people annually in need of housing (the equivalent of 2,500 m²), requiring an investment of approximately 10 million RMB (see Table 3).¹⁹

17 Capital investment into housing in 1996 was 38,420,000 RMB, against 3,080,000 RMB into scientific research. From 1987 until 1996, capital investment in scientific research was roughly one-eighth of that in housing (Long Yongshu (main ed.), *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan ershi nian (20 Years of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1998), p. 97).

18 Comrade Long Yongshu's speech at the Work Conference of CASS, 22 February 1994 (CASSYB, 1995), pp. 30–35.

19 Long Yongshu, cited in CASSYB 1995, p. 31.

Table 1: Numbers of Personnel and Professional Staff (1977–99)

Year	1977	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Total number of personnel	2,277	4,865	4,820	4,683	4,384	4,119	3,919	3,811	3,767
Professional staff	c1,700	3,907	3,822	3,674	3,471	3,210	3,083	3,022	2,975

Source:

CASSYB, 1992, p. 99.

Table 2: Increase in Medical Costs (1991–93)

Expenses in RMB	1991	1992	1993
Medical expenses	2,252,000	3,176,000	4,500,000

Source:

Comrade Guo Yongcai's Speech at the Work Conference of CASS, 22 February CASSYB, 1995, p. 36.

Table 3: Housing Shortage (1993–94)

	M ²	RMB
General need for housing at present	17,000	66,580,000
Added need for housing (each year c. 100 newcomers)	2,500	10,000,000
Need for bigger housing (as a result of promotion)	4,500	18,000,000
Total need for housing investment	24,000	94,580,000

Source:

CASSYB, 1995, p. 31.

In comparison, the campus of Beijing University (*Beida* 北大) opened up to competition as early as in the latter half of the 1980s. Enterprises thrive, factories mushroom and lucrative shops are crowding for space. Beijing University has a proud claim of a century of having produced many eminent leaders. Some Chinese scholars like to compare “Beida” to “Oxbridge.” In the 1990s, however, most of the higher leaders of the CCP are from Qinghua University and Shanghai Communications University (*Shanghai jiaotong daxue* 上海交通大学). Beijing University in the 1980s acquired a reputation of being rather liberal and strongly represented in the social sciences. Not many leading cadres (*gaogan* 高干) have graduated from there, although some, such as Hu Qili (胡启立), reached the top of the Party.²⁰ It has become increasingly expensive to enter Beijing University as a student. In 1998, students had to pay at least 2,500 RMB for following one main course and 4,000 RMB for multi-course studies. At the same time, the salaries of professors at Beida increased rapidly.

20 Hu Qili (b. 1929) was designated Hu Yaobang's successor, but he fell together with Zhao Ziyang after June Fourth.

In the 1990s working conditions at CASS were comparatively poor. The number of CASS personnel shrank by nearly 30 per cent. CASS has only a tiny campus so it is not able to rent out much space.²¹ Nevertheless, some of its top-floor offices engaged in commercial activities. The giant advertisement for DAEWOO on top of the main CASS building, instead of the logo of the academy, seemed to symbolize the lack of financial resources for China's most prestigious social science research institute. Furthermore, research institutes had to acquire official permission and exert many efforts to forge special deals about the conditions under which "foreign friends" are allowed to acquire knowledge at CASS. Efforts to make CASS more attractive to newcomers (students, Chinese and foreign scholars) only gradually took effect.

Rewards and benefits

Within CASS salary differences are so small, compared to salary differences in society at large, that they seem to be symbolic. There are seven grades. Starters in 1997 began at scale seven and have a salary of about 700 RMB. Satisfactory work is awarded promotion once every two years, and status rises together with salary and privileges. Salary rises progressively, but only in small steps. If the costs of housing and medical facilities are added to the lowest salary, wages in 1998 amounted to about 1,000 RMB (approximately US\$140). A graduate student starting work at a Chinese company would receive a considerably higher salary of at least 1,500 RMB. Those who worked for a foreign company often received starter salaries of 10,000 RMB a month. The attitude of these students is quite different from that of students in the beginning of the 1980s, who were (jokingly) said to have the team spirit of "First class Whampoa" (*huangpu yiji* 黄埔一级).²² The majority of students in the late 1990s want to earn money most of all. Graduate students give the following employment priorities: first, going abroad; second, working for a foreign company or a joint venture; third, working for the Party or in political organs; and fourth, staying on at CASS. Most students do not even want to stay on at CASS after graduation. Often even the bad students who enter the state bureaucracy obtain higher ranks than scholars employed at CASS. The state bureaucracy's growing economic clout, its practice of receiving bribes, and the housing, medical and transport facilities attached to the ranks of cadres have made it increasingly attractive to degree holders. Additionally, cadres and bureaucrats can deploy their connection (*guanxi* 关系) networks for finding good jobs for their friends and family.

In state-led CASS, in the late 1990s the iron rice bowl had not yet been smashed completely. In principle, all of its employees were provided for until death. Medical care and housing were almost free. In 1998 the price of a

21 The grounds of the graduate school only cover 3.14 ha (47 *mu*).

22 First class Whampoa (*huangpu yiji*) refers to loyalty and a team spirit, invoking the image of prominent communist graduates, such as Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao, in the barracks of the military academy near Canton in the 1920s. In the 1980s, it was the power base of Deng Xiaoping that was at stake, and the phrase of *huangpu yiji* was used as an omen for a strong and loyal future leadership.

three-room apartment in Beijing was approximately 300–400,000 RMB; a four-room house 500–600,000 RMB; and a flat of 30 square metres around 200,000 RMB. Changing jobs therefore required buying an expensive house or renting a room, and staying at CASS saved many housing problems.

Gradually cracks began to show in the state-supported system of medical facilities, housing and salary. The number of medicines that could be obtained for nothing was limited. Foreign medicine could no longer be reimbursed, even when it was more effective. The renting system showed signs of breaking down too. In the Central Unit (*zhongyang danwei* 中央单位) no rent is paid, but in other regional units rent is around 100 RMB a month. Some money was deducted from salaries and after 20 years employees had paid around 20,000 RMB in advance.²³

Both individuals and institutes were asked to exert themselves in the quest of CASS becoming financially sound. For example, CASS vice-president Guo Yongcai (郭永才) recommended that the allocation of scarce resources, such as apartments, should take place on the basis of talent.²⁴ If a scholar does not qualify for promotion one year, then promotion is put off until the next year. If there is still no progress, promotion is halted and status removed.²⁵ The State Personnel Department issued Document No. 4 in 1990, under which appraisals are made in terms of “merit,” “suspension,” “lower grading” and “dismissal” (*huanpin, dipin, jiepin* 缓聘、低聘、解聘). Incompetent academics (*buchenzhi* 不称职) were to be found other work, for which purpose a Personnel Exchange Centre was set up. Euphemistically, the centre was presented not as a way of getting rid of superfluous personnel but as an opportunity for the unemployed to gain work experience. According to the “Regulations concerning the labour exchange centre” of 11 March 1994, the centre had been established by all units belonging to CASS to encourage the rationalized movement of labour in CASS.²⁶ Guo Yongcai’s ideas were to be carried out under the leadership of the new CASS president Li Tieying (1998–2003).

Reform under Li Tieying (1998–2003)²⁷

Under the reign of Li Tieying bureaucracy at CASS spread. After his 1998 reforms, not only did much funding go to research projects for political applied research, but the actual system of funding and research organization also became tightly integrated with the larger system of political decision-making by

23 In 1997–98, the central government started to stimulate the economy by loosening up money stuck in banks. One of its policies is to sell collective housing to private persons; a temporary reduction is added to make buying attractive. Another change that is already affecting the mobility of personnel since the late 1990s, and relieving the State expense budget, is contracting personnel.

24 Guo Yongcai (CASSYB, 1995, p. 38).

25 CASSYB, 1995, p. 33.

26 Regulations concerning the labour exchange centre, 11 March 1994 (CASSYB, 1995, pp. 354–55).

27 In 2003, after five years, Li Tieying’s term was up. He resigned from his post as president of CASS and became a vice-president of the National People’s Congress (*Quanguo renmin daibiao de fuwuyuanzhang*).

the PRC political leadership. In practice, CASS's re-established function as think-tank to the political leadership required more organizational streamlining, an increase in controlled competition and a growth in institutional flexibility.

Under Li Tieying CASS explicitly became an advisory organ to the state and was largely reorganized around this function. In March 1998, President Jiang Zemin (江泽民) and Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) advised Li Tieying to "make sure that he would manage CASS well."²⁸ And according to Li's pun, CASS should be "promising" (*youwei* 有为) in the service of the reforms and not covet "status" (*youwei* 有位).²⁹ He summarized the basic tasks of CASS as the development of Marxism so as to explore the developmental rules of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," to strengthen China's knowledge of the world and create the capacity to change it. So as to groom talented researchers that could fulfil these tasks, President Jiang Zemin's instruction was to turn the CASS graduate school into an incubator for first-class researchers.³⁰ These assignments, according to Li, would stress the importance of CASS as an advisory organ, mending its reputation, which had suffered in the 1990s. As if symbolizing the era of Li Tieying, the large DAEWOO advertisement was taken down from the roof, expressing the will to refurbish CASS's academic reputation.³¹

Compared to CASS, the position of universities such as Beijing had changed radically since the 1990s. In the 1980s, Beida, Qinghua, CAS and CASS had equally high status, and all were public academic institutions. In the 1990s, however, academic institutes of higher education had become increasingly independent, partly because the state allowed higher tuition fees for Beijing and Qinghua Universities on a variable level. Furthermore, these universities use science and engineering to run profitable companies. The Central Committee sought to increase investment into Beijing and Qinghua Universities, partly because they were at the top of the educational pyramid. Investment into these universities was also aimed at giving direction to and reorganizing the academic curriculum.

Investment into CASS has been considerable for a "mere" research institute, but the calibre of its leadership was felt to be no longer competitive. In its first decade, the political leadership had been keen on maintaining CASS's high reputation. It had Party historian Hu Qiaomu (胡乔木) as its first president; and the well-known philosopher Ru Xin, international relations specialist Li Shenzhi (李慎之), China's famous literary scholar Qian Zongshu (钱锺书) and the internationally renowned religion specialist Zhao Fusan (赵复三) became vice-presidents or heads of department. Another famous Party historian, Hu Sheng (湖生), followed Hu Qiaomu as president. But after June Fourth, the high status

28 CASSYB, 2000, p. 7.

29 CASSYB, 2001, p. 10.

30 CASSYB, 2000, pp.13–14.

31 In 1999, in lieu of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the PRC, it was decided to change the face of the city. In the centre many advertisements were taken down. Some residential area and companies, however, continued to carry them. But state/government buildings are not allowed to continue the practice.

of CASS leaders dropped and scholars of high repute started to leave or were removed. Zhao Fusan and Li Shenzhi were both removed from their office for political reasons, and (vice-)presidents of CASS tend to be picked from Party cadres.³² Even Li Tieying was a Party cadre managing CASS for the political leadership.

Institutional and academic changes under Li Tieying

When Li Tieying became president of CASS in February 1998, he spoke to Jiang Zemin about CASS's financial difficulties, including the low pay of its researchers. The state wage system for civil servants, including those of CASS, is egalitarian. Therefore a substantial increase in the salaries of CASS academics was out of the question, though an award system could be introduced and research-task fees (*ketifei* 课题费) could be increased.

In 1999 it was decided to radically increase research funding and investment into CASS.³³ Not only has state investment into operational expenses continued to increase each year by 10 to 20 per cent since 1998, investment into research has gone up substantially since 2000. CASS-level research expenses paid for by the ministry of finance have increased from 10 million to 35 million *yuan* in 2001; and research institute-level focus research item expenses have increased from 12 million to 15 million *yuan*.³⁴

As a former minister of the State Commission for the Restructuring of the Economic System, minister of the State Education Commission and member of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, CASS president Li Tieying was in a position to understand and arrange various financial matters for CASS. According to the popular version of the story of how CASS experienced the turn of the millennium, one of his first undertakings as president was a visit to Premier Zhu Rongji (朱熔基). At that meeting he asked for 50 million *yuan* from the premier's fund to renovate the CASS building and graduate school campus.³⁵ The second matter that attracted attention was the several hundred million *yuan* that he managed to obtain for the purchase and renovation of housing, and his obtaining the financial means for building a new 16-storey modern library.³⁶ Moreover, in 2000, over 100 new medium and large research tasks (*zhongda keti* 重大课题) were added to the research spectrum of CASS. And finally, under Li Tieying's leadership, the new CASS newsletter, the *Yuanbao* (院报), was set up. Formerly, there was just a thin bi-monthly

32 Under Li Tieying most vice-presidents are Party cadres or bureaucrats, with the exceptions of Wang Luolin who is an economist and Jiang Lansheng from the Institute of Linguistics. Vice-president Li Shenming used to be the secretary of Wang Zhen; Zhu Jiamu, who was recently promoted to vice-president, used to be Hu Qiaomu's secretary; and the current head of the secretariat, vice-president Zhu Jinchang, used to be a Party cadre as well (interview, 22 January 2004).

33 CASSYB, 2001, p. 31.

34 CASSYB, 2001, p. 31; CASSYB, 2002, p. 45.

35 Additionally, the building at the back of CASS, the six-storey building where the history and agricultural development used to be housed, was renovated and rented out in the late 1990s.

36 The State Commission of Science and Technology invested a total of 114,490 million *yuan* (CASSYB, 2001, p. 31).

newsletter called *Tongxun* (通讯), which seemed to contain mainly retrospective news and especially lacked a forward-looking agenda.³⁷ The *Yuanbao*, which is distributed nationally, contains social science discussions, news about academic activities at CASS and announcements. The *Yuanbao* considerably facilitated the communication of research results and academic activity and exchange.

Strengthening communication between CASS and the Central Committee of the CCP

Though the state did not give the same financial support to CASS as it did to the universities, much effort and investment went into its re-organization and maintenance. Further alterations pointed at the strengthening of the ties between CASS and the Party Central Committee (CC) and the government. To strengthen the relationship between CASS and the CC, instructions for “reporting the outline” (*huibao-tigang* 汇报提纲) of social science research explained the position and tasks of social science in China.³⁸ In various ways CASS’s reporting to the CC was rationalized, most importantly through the internal *Yaobao* (要报), which carries information on the research and academic activities of the various research institutes of CASS. A second method of assisting the CC and the government was the re-organization of research tasks via the CC *Zhongyang jiaoban keti* (中央交办课题). The research tasks are devised jointly by the leadership, the CC and its propaganda department. In one year there are approximately ten to 20 large *Zhongyang jiaoban keti*. For example, research tasks were developed on the disintegration of the Soviet system, the Asian model of development, and, after the 11 September terrorist attack, on international terrorism and anti-terrorism. Scholars from many departments come to meetings organized on the topics of these research tasks. Individuals can also apply, but they only receive small sums of research support, ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 *yuan*.³⁹ Finally, CASS also provides the Party and the government with information through the *Yuan zhong keti* (CASS key research tasks), mentioned above. The *Yuanbao*, the institute journals, and a journal called *Xueshu dongtai* 学术动态 (*Academic Forum*) fulfil similar functions, and aim to reflect the research achievements of CASS.

Additionally, Li Tiejing responded to societal problems indicated by the leadership by establishing research centres and two new research institutes. The latter are the Institute for China’s Contemporary Problems (*Dangdai Zhongguo yanjiusuo* 当代中国研究所), headed by Zhu Jiamu (朱佳木), a former secretary of Hu Qiaomu, and the new economics institute, the Institute for Financing/Banking (*Jinrong yanjiusuo* 金融研究所). The new research centres focus on

37 CASS members were informed personally by the office secretaries or had to check all announcement boards to find out if what was going on (personal experience in 1997–98). Cf. CASSYB, 2002, p. 43.

38 CASSYB, 2000, p. 44.

39 CASSYB, 2002, p. 474.

40 For a list of the academy-level research centres and institute-level research centres in 1998, see CASSYB, 1999, pp. 426–28, 429.

specific problem areas.⁴⁰ Although by the time that Li Tieying came to CASS, 53 academy-level research centres and 33 institute-level research centres had already been set up, the research centres were now to be fitted in with the Ninth Five-Year Plan and the reorganized research item systems.⁴¹

Research centres set up in 2000 include the CASS Research Centre for Democracy Issues led by Li Tieying (from the Research Institute of Law), the CASS Research Centre for World Socialism, led by Li Shenming (李慎明) (from the Research Institute for Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought), and the CASS Research Centre for the Science of Old People, led by Guo Yongcai (Bureau for Old Cadres).⁴² In 2001 the numbers of academy-level and institute-level research centres had already risen to 76 and 39 respectively.⁴³ The establishment of these research centres was also intended to facilitate interdisciplinary research and attract researchers from other departments and offices, so their themes would draw external sources and outside attention as well. Research centres are also given tasks or may propose tasks for which they have permission to recruit people externally and from various departments across disciplines in CASS.⁴⁴

Major research items (zhongda keti 重大课题) and streamlining CASS research

Instead of raising salaries, CASS would spend approximately 50 million *yuan* annually on 100 focus research items and major research tasks (*zhongda ketifei*). The major research task system, first implemented in 2000, was meant to improve the distribution of resources and advance research through competition between research subjects linked to major issues in state policy-making and the establishment of academic disciplines. Thus in the first year 69 major subjects were initiated, including “Theoretic research on the socialist market economy,” “Research on issues of democracy,” “Economic globalization and China,” “The 21st-century exploitation strategy of western China and policy-making” and “Theory and practice of establishing a socialist legal state.”⁴⁵

The *zhongda keti* system was also expected to help to improve the subject selection strategy of CASS, hence improving the focus subject plan of CASS’s Tenth Five-Year Plan. In practice, it would mean a great reduction of academy-level focus subjects, as the major research tasks would cover large issues.⁴⁶ In 2001 major research tasks were divided into academy-level (A) and institute-level (B) tasks, set up by the research institute. Both their research scope and funding are limited, the latter not exceeding 100,000 *yuan*.⁴⁷ This system was meant to strengthen the autonomy of research institutes and give them more responsibility, as part of a broader trend of rewarding academy-level and research

41 Ru Xin, CASSYB, 1999, p. 18.

42 CASSYB, 2001, pp. 474–77.

43 Cf. CASSYB, 1999–02.

44 For the regulatory statutes for research centres, see CASSYB, 2002, pp. 471–73.

45 CASSYB, 2002, p. 42.

46 CASSYB, 2001, pp. 27, 33.

47 CASSYB, 2002, pp. 57, 475.

institute-level research subjects separately.⁴⁸ However, according to the “Regulations of the CASS major research task supervision,” the academic committee of CASS votes about whether B-task projects are awarded or not. It also makes progress reports on academic value and theoretical significance, the definition of the problem and the argument, the research train of thought and planning, and the capacity and achievement of the project initiator.⁴⁹ To a certain extent, this clause works as a safety valve against stray thinking.

Min Jiayin (闵家胤), a concerned Party member and systems philosopher at CASS, provides a picture of some actual research practices through his advice against:

Always using the same conceptual framework and repeating studies such as is the case with many projects based on Marxist philosophy; investing money into big projects that are defined vaguely, such as discussion on the nature of the universe; writing tedious descriptions lacking any theoretical basis; publishing long monologues and edited books and series, which usually are a means for researchers to become well-known quickly; plagiarism (there is too much copying and stealing of other people’s work – the easiest form is that of copying work from foreign scholars); translating without thorough experience of the English language (some scholar translated the Milky Way literally as *niunai lu* (牛奶路), instead of *yinhe* (银河)).⁵⁰

Min also criticises the plan-economy mode of managing academic research funding (*keyan jingfei* 科研经费) through:

- “Metaphysical management” (*xianyan guanli* 先验管理): it proceeds from just the evidence of the problem for study, position and status, paying people with the expectation of certain research results;
- “Writing articles on assigned topics” (*mingti zuowen* 命题作文) from an annually compiled “subject compass” is like elementary school students writing on assigned subjects. The topics proposed by scholars only constitute 5 per cent;
- “Collective production” (*jiti jingji* 集体经济): the great majority of the funds go to collective topics, ignoring the fact that academic collectives achieve little;
- “The three-year deadline” (*sannian weiqi* 三年为期), a rigid limit to which topics must comply, disregards their value or complexity.⁵¹

Responding to such criticism, the evaluation system was reinforced: evaluation committees for the focus research items and the major research subjects (*zhongda keti*) were installed.⁵² In every odd year, the CASS academic committee of about 50 members evaluates the work of scholars. It eliminates those with low assessments and confers awards to those with high assessments.⁵³

48 CASSYB, 2001, pp. 34–35.

49 CASSYB, 2002, p. 475.

50 Min Jiayin’s “Reflections and suggestions on the reform of the administrative system of research funds of CASS” is a proposal written to Li Tieying, also printed in his *Jinhua de duoyuanlun. Xitong zhexue de xin tizi (Evolutionary Pluralism. The New System of Systems Philosophy)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 536–38.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 539–40.

52 CASSYB, 1999, p. 17.

53 CASSYB, 2001, p. 6. An alternative for funding applicants is the State Social Science Fund (*Guojia sheke jijin*), which allocates more modest funding to the social sciences at a national level.

Though the amount of funding has increased, the method by which money is allocated over research items is criticized. Some academics feel that the system has become a means for the leadership to steer the thought and work of scholars. Scholars in the lower levels of the academic hierarchy worry that those higher up could take advantage of the work of others or obtain funding by unfair means. All that leaders have to do, and this is also thought to be true for recipients of state social science funding, is to find a small group willing to nestle their research question within the context of the research item system, receive higher support and get the small group to do the work for them. For example, all the vice-presidents currently have research tasks worth 500,000 *yuan*. As inferiors do the bulk of the research work and writing, this situation has led to conflicts over authorship rights. The vice-presidents of the Institute of Philosophy (over the last four years it has not had a proper head) have taken on projects of 300–400,000 *yuan*. Frequent sighs are heaved about the distribution of the actual work.

Conclusion

In this article, rather than discussing issues of censorship, ideological pressurizing and political education, I focused on regulatory issues of salary, housing, funding and re-organization to illuminate factors also crucial to understanding what kind of work is produced by academic institutes, in particular at CASS. A central question was why the government keeps investing in an institute that was clearly regarded as disloyal in 1989. I argued that CASS's educational and advisory functions were regarded as valuable enough for the state to maintain it, and showed how CASS was explicitly redefined as a think-tank to the leadership, assigned a grooming function of top-notch researchers, and given financial injections. CASS was assigned tasks, research item plans were re-organized and the communication between research "small groups" and the Party leadership was improved. The redefinition of CASS took place with an eye on the re-organization of departments and the streamlining of research resources. In a broader context, this development followed a trend of reforms in institutes of higher education and research. At CASS the rationalization and modernization of the management of personnel and the use of material and informational resources accelerated under Li Tieying, when methods of reporting to the state and internal and public communications improved substantially and CASS's work on propaganda and policy-making received an increased emphasis.

Although under Li Tieying the potential income of those who successfully applied for research money rose, basic salaries did not improve if the increase in costs of living and demands of raising children are taken into account. Moreover, compared to other institutes of higher learning, salaries decreased substantially.⁵⁴ Despite the reforms and re-emphasis on its academic status and

54 At Beijing and Qinghua Universities the basic income of a professor in 2003 was at least 5,000 *yuan* a month; at CASS, professors only get paid half of that: about 2,300 *yuan* per month.

advisory function, its low wages and the breakdown of collective facilities reinforced a brain-drain to China's top universities, such as Qinghua University, Beijing University and Beijing Normal University. Thus Hu Xinghe (胡新和), the philosophy institute's head of the Office for the Philosophy of Science and Technology, in 2001 left for the graduate school of CAS; the well-known literary scholar Chen Xiaoming (陈晓明) moved to Beijing University; and a well-known researcher from the Institute of World Religions, He Guanghu (何光沪), departed for Renmin University. The brain-drain and the difficulties in recruiting staff have spread the impression that CASS can no longer compete with Beijing and Fudan Universities.⁵⁵

Although modernization and rationalization theories became popular in the 1980s with the associates of Zhao Ziyang (赵紫阳) and Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦) in charge, the systematic introduction of the jargon of modernity (streamlining, re-organization, flexibility, freedom of research, knowledge society, communication systems) and its application became part and parcel of running CASS under Li Tieying. I introduced a methodological distinction between academic steering through ideological contents and through regulation and argued that concepts such as "freedom of research" and "labour mobility" should be viewed in their institutional context. I conclude that these concepts have to be understood against the background of increased research regulation and organizational steering and a decrease in ideological pressure. CASS, as a state organ, clearly illustrates how such a development can combine academic competition with political guidance from above; and the relative short period of Li Tieying's reign shows how such transformation was implemented with financial support from above. Thus, when PRC president Jiang Zemin announced that "Democracy is important," Li set up the "Centre for Democracy," and put together a writing group that wrote a book on democracy under which he put his name.⁵⁶ In the process, various institutes had to conduct general debate on the meaning of "democracy," and "human rights."

I question the meaning of generalizing statements about "competition between schools," "freedom of research," "freedom of publication," "free movement of labour" and "labour exchange" outside a particular institutional context. When Li Tieying came to CASS, he announced the stimulation of competition between schools of thought. But these schools never really came about. Some were established by individuals and continued to consist of one individual. Out of the over 3,000 projects completed by CASS most were "collective" projects in name, though actually the result of individual efforts. Thus, one research task of 300,000 *yuan* on "Scientific problems in contemporary development" (*xiandai fazhan de kexue wenti* 现代发展的科学问题) was carried out by a research fellow, and the project leader spent the money on an international symposium and publication of the procedures. Furthermore,

55 CASSYB, 1999, p. 16.

56 Li Tieying, *Lun Minzhu* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe/Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2002).

the research item system cannot improve the quality of research, if it is tied to political guidelines. Rather, the system is conservative in that it augments current schools allied with established organizational networks. Nevertheless, a majority of scholars may actually accept and endorse a system consisting of research choices that are congruent with current policies of reform and opening up.

Though at CASS funding systems are not designed to turn academics into *nouveau riche* and though collective welfare facilities, such as those for housing and medicine, are eroding, CASS does provide average researchers with extra financial means of conducting research on top of their basic salary. “Freedom of research” seems to be limited to a freedom of choice between research subjects to be elaborated on for political purposes, and not to think freely about a field of expertise. Although officially condoned research subjects can be critical, many scholars are expected to apply a measure of self-censorship, or give up thinking outside the political academic menu, considering the complex relations between government, CASS leadership and researchers. Many of the lists for *zhongda keti* are not *directly* defined by the government but by scholars who are expected to stimulate policy-relevant research and apply to the Propaganda Department for approval. Academy-level research subjects are proposed by leaders of institutes and research offices. Individual scholars can also propose “individual subjects,” but these receive little pay.

The concepts of “freedom of publication,” “free movement of labour” and “labour exchange” also have to be seen in a concrete context. Although there are ample outlets for academic materials, the infamous blacklist and the continued criticism of academic work for political reasons cause scholars to think twice about publishing on certain topics. If you work at CASS, you know that you should not bite the hand that feeds you.⁵⁷ If you do, you may end up at the Personnel Exchange Centre, where you may be found “more suitable” work. Furthermore, if instead of a fat saving account, your work has mainly earned you a guaranteed pension, housing and health care tied to your job, we can hardly speak of free labour movement.

Though it is clear that thorough comparative research would shed more light on abstract concepts such as “freedom of research” and “freedom of labour movement,” it is clear that relatively poor material working conditions lead to a decrease in the number of well-reputed scholars at CASS, while the intensified use of regulatory instruments tends to streamline academic competition into mainstream politically acceptable thought. It remains to be seen if CASS can maintain its academic status under socialist state organization and party-state guidance.

57 CASS president Li Tiewing argued that CASS as a state organ cannot be seen to violate the state’s basic guidelines and propaganda. For, “at CASS, behaviour that damages the CCP, socialist China, the world of social science or CASS itself is absolutely intolerable” (Li Tiewing in CASSYB, 2001, p. 11).

58 CASSYB, 1995, p. 31.