Tu Wei-ming, editor. *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. xvi, 295 pp. Hardcover $45.00, ISBN 0–8047–2191–2. Paperback $14.95.

In October 1990, little more than a year following the slaughter of the innocents at Tiananmen, a contingent of Chinese intellectuals and China scholars met at the East-West Center at the University of Hawai'i and convened the "Conference on the Meaning of Being Chinese." The conference was carried out under the joint aegis of the Center's Dialogue of Civilizations Project and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the scholarly deliberations of those several days yielded a collection of essays first published in the spring of 1991 as volume 120, number 2 of *Daedalus* and called *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today.* The identically titled volume under review here represents a second incarnation of this initial collection with the addition of two new essays, the revision of several of the original pieces, and a new preface prepared by the editor, "the Confucian scholar" Tu Wei-ming.

Ranging over a great variety of topics—the construction of identity, the Chinese diaspora, sexual scapegoating in Chinese fiction, memory and cultural identity, "Cultural China," *guanxi xue* (the study of networks) as an index of Chineseness, the constitution and consciousness of *huaqiao* and *huayi* (overseas Chinese), and the "premodern" forms of Chinese thought and feeling—and drawing on a host of perceptions and positions, the essays stand as a "first take" on representing the multiple, shifting forms of late twentieth-century Chinese identity. The portrait of Chineseness that results is complex and contradictory. Indeed, there is so much at work here in defining China, Chineseness, ethnicity, nationhood, and culture that the collection defies description, though the reader can track the divagating contours of its multiple arguments by relying on the preface and on the orchestral introduction by Professor Tu with which the book opens.

Besides Tu's introduction, "Cultural China: The Periphery as Center," there are ten other essays: Mark Elvin, "The Inner World of 1830"; Vera Schwarcz, "No Solace from Lethe: History, Memory, and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century China"; Myron L. Cohen, "Being Chinese: The Peripheralization of Traditional Identity"; Ambrose Yeo-chi King, "Kuan-hsi and Network Building: A Sociological Interpretation"; Wang Gungwu, "Among Non-Chinese"; David Yen-ho Wu, "The Construction of Chinese and Non-Chinese Identities"; Zhu Hong, "The 'Evil Wife' in Contemporary Chinese Fiction"; L. Ling-chi Wang, "Roots and the Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States"; Victor Hao Li, "From Qiao (僑) to Qiao (橋)"; and Leo Ou-fan Lee, "On the Margins of the Chinese Discourse: Some Personal Thoughts on the Cultural Meaning of the Periphery."

It is an eclectic sampling combining literary, anthropological, historical, and sociological perspectives, and this heterogeneous quality may be taken to reflect the plural manifestations of the contemporary Chinese community.

Beginning from Professor Tu's self-conscious advocacy that the essays are intended to frame the discourse of Chineseness, the interpretative inclination of the following review is to treat the work as a living document of late twentieth-century intellectual history, the value of which may prove greater in retrospect in years to come than it is now.[1] As it would require a great expanse of text to accord each essay the specificity of analysis appropriate to it, I will offer a summary of some of the arguments while training the glare of my critique upon the conceptual apparatus supporting the volume and evaluating in greater detail some of the more provocative contributions.

With a work of such wide scope, diverse persuasion, and weighty consideration, the challenge for editor and reader alike is finding a frame appropriate to contextualizing it. The challenge is met in Professor Tu's novel assertion that contemporary Chinese identity is best understood as discourse, discourse that transpires within an emergent cultural space that "encompasses and transcends the ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and religious boundaries that normally define Chineseness" (p. v). To describe more concretely what is meant by this unconventional definition, he advances the neologism *wenhua Zhongguo*, "Cultural China." Upon this complex foundation the volume's essays, more or less comfortably, rest. "Cultural China" is a rather ecumenical nomination and is intended to "invite the participation of all those trying to understand and bring understanding to Chinese culture—thus the idea of a community defined by participation in an intellectual discourse" (p. 264 n. 37). What Tu has explained in an earlier essay that appeared in *Jiushi niandai*,[2] he reiterates here; *wenhua Zhongguo* subsumes three distinct, roughly geopolitical "symbolic universes": (1) mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, (2) overseas Chinese communities throughout the world, and (3) the international communities of scholars, students, officials, journalists, and traders "who provide a global forum for China related matters" (p. viii).

In this global light, to speak of Chinese today requires, at the very least, the jettisoning of that familiar interpretative baggage wherein China is monolithically exotic and provincial, the perennial cultural exception to the great international flows of capital and humanity in the last two centuries. The space of "Cultural China," as Tu envisions it, is the world, and so Chinese ethnic identity must not be seen as "inseparable from race, land, language, and faith." Biology, mother tongue, natal place, and religion—the atavistic determinants of nationalism—are inadequate for the task of contemporary cultural definition, and *The Living Tree*, it turns out, is but one textual moment of a larger, very ambitious project designed to articulate the diverse features of a nation, a people, and a culture in transformation.[3] Giving voice to this global culture of Chineseness and inviting

interested others to participate in this kind of expression, the editor contends, is meant as a challenge to the Procrustean paraphrase of Chinese identity by state-enhancing nationalism:

> Our joint venture has been to explore the fluidity of Chineseness as a layered and contested discourse, to open new possibilities and avenues of inquiry, and to challenge the claims of political leadership (in Beijing, Taipei, Hong Kong, or Singapore) to be the ultimate authority in a matter as significant as Chineseness. . . . We believe that such an immensely complex subject requires the collaboration of concerned intellectuals worldwide, as well as reflective minds in peripheral Chinese communities throughout the globe. (p. viii)

From this vantage, the work is morally serious and avowedly political.

In its commitment to reach beyond the exclusivist national imaginings of the Party-state, the volume may be read quite profitably as an anthology of working papers for an alternative cultural narration of Chineseness prepared by a creative minority living on the margins. The political value of such a counter-narrative is inestimable within the context of recent efforts by the government of the People's Republic to educate all citizens in patriotism.[4] Also, given the significant and rapid growth in native allegiance among Chinese of the diaspora, *The Living Tree* provides a meaningful conceptual mechanism for organizing the diverse impulses of these peoples in favor of an "imagined community" of plural groups. This is an especially worthy enterprise when one considers the corrosive social effects of the unbridled economic growth that sustains modernization and, as well, breeds the expansion of expatriate Chinese. More than tempering the tendency of diaspora Chinese to "cherish the hope of returning to and being recognized by the homeland," the alternative narration of Chineseness additionally serves the Chinese intelligentsia in exile for it "may create a public sphere for Chinese intellectuals to reconstitute themselves as a cultural force, imagining the future by reanimating the past" (p. x).

The first three essays address the matter of the past, specifically how to counteract the "collective amnesia" lamented by Tu that "is so pervasive in China that the national memory has difficulty extending back even to the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), let alone to the disaster of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) or the brutality of the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–1958)" (p. 29). This state-sponsored forgetting has left Chinese bereft of indigenous models for community and without a fund of symbols from which they could draw the conceptual tools for a different, nativist re-imagining of China. Herein lies the opportunity for émigré intellectuals and China scholars on the margins of the third symbolic universe to come to the service of those living in the other worlds of Cultural China.

With an interpretative gesture reminiscent of Peter Laslett's *The World We Have Lost: England before the Industrial Age*,[5] Mark Elvin begins the volume's *re-*

cherche du temps perdu by offering a tour of "The Inner World of 1830" through a selective investigation of Li Ruzhen's *Jinghua yuan* (The destinies of the flowers in the mirror). This literary inquiry is intended to reveal something of Chinese identity for, as he admits, "if we are to understand what it means to be 'Chinese' today, we need some conception of what it meant to be Chinese around 1830, before the Western invasion of Chinese culture" (p. 35). Presuming that Li's magical realist work is a "microcosm of the educated Chinese mind," Elvin recreates the "psychological reality" of the era with generous excerpts from the novel and commentary on several categories of his own choosing: "causality," "the Confucian inspiration," "the individual," "society," "the discipline system," "technology and economics," "scholarship," and "intellectual recreations." He is aware of the difficulties of taking the literary confection of a fantasy world as a window on nineteenth-century psychology, but he believes that the "patterns of social action, of politics, and of social discipline sketched from Lii Rurzhen's [Li Ruzhen's] pages are still vigorous." (p. 62). The overwhelming virtue of this vigor is its corroboration of Elvin's defensive claims against an essentialist portrait of China as culturally backward, intellectually turbid, and one-dimensional:

> *The Destinies of the Flowers in the Mirror* provides evidence of a considerable capacity for self-awareness, self-criticism, and even self-mockery that the Chinese in late imperial times are not always credited with having possessed. It belies the notion that China on the eve of the Western cultural invasion was completely caught in a sealed psychological world of unalterable stereotypes. (p. 62)

The author seems surprised by Chinese complexity at the juncture of Western expansionism and reveals that reconstructing a lost world in the spirit of critique can result in the reproduction of the very stereotypes one is criticizing. The texture of memory, in this case Elvin's textual reconstruction of it, is always made of the mediative fibers of the writer's or the rememberer's historical context. What the reconstruction of the criss-crossing plot outlines of Li's novel offers is evidence of one kind of memory, that of the educated urban elite, and one that does not subsume the collective memory of popular associations such as the Hongwanzi Hui (Red Swastika Society), Yiguan Dao (Way of Unity), or the Zaili Jiao (Residing in Principle Teaching), whose followers were Chinese, numerous, and whose redemptive vision was anti-state and proto-democratic.

Inspired by both the heady days of ecumenical optimism of the spring of 1989 and the tragic execution of popular hope at Tiananmen, Vera Schwarcz' "No Solace for Lethe: History, Memory, and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century China" provides a very thoughtful meditation on the power of historical memory to reconstitute a properly democratic community in contemporary China. With great poignancy, indeed power, she tells a tale of the insufferable ambivalence of the twentieth-century Chinese intellectual, showing how the love of country, the visceral yearning for one's home, requires remembrance of the outrages that the

natal place has visited upon the natives. In Greek mythology, a drink from the waters of Lethe, the rivulet that rolls along the edge of Hades on the limens of the world of the living, provided relief through a forgetting of the vexation of remembrance. Some, like the expatriate poet Yu Guangzhong, crave a merciful forgetting of the holocaust of the Cultural Revolution, yet desire no less intensely a reconciliation with *zuguo* (the ancestral country), which inevitably compels them to confront their homeland's grisly history of coerced apostasy and canceled lives and, thus, to remember, to suffer:

> And whether I go East or West,
> Back against or gaze upon, it is always the River of Forgetting,
> Always China on the other side of the barbed wire—
> A legend, a time-worn rumor
> On some page, what page of my childhood? . . .
> And whether I go East or West
> A great veil accosts me twenty years later
> What face of mercy hides behind the barbed wire?
> What grief is the grief that cannot be rent? . . . (pp. 64, 67)

Yet Schwarcz' concern with recollection is not limited to exploring the angst of deracinated poets; she is interested as well in telling the story of the repossession of history and identity through anamnestic recovery by Chinese on the mainland. When the Party-state is actively engaged in administered forgetting, or rather disremembering, to be "defaced," as Yu says he is by the "shameful disgrace" of China, is to bear the mark of redemption. It is the "triumph of unofficial remembrance over politically forced amnesia" (p. 77) that completes Schwarcz' complex portrait of Chinese historical memory at century's end and also raises questions about her definition of memory and her understanding of the events of the Beijing Spring as "the unfinished legacy of May Fourth" (p. 82).

The fortuitous quality of May Fourth endeavor, the indeterminacy of the ideology of this self-styled "enlightenment" (*qimeng*), was the definitive feature of an intellectual movement that was the "outcome of unpredictable events, old friendships, and the accidental confluence of certain readings with a rapidly changing world" (p. 77). These aleatory beginnings of a pluralist democratic imagining were forgotten as the events of this time were interpretatively remade in the myth of May Fourth as historical necessity and rapidly appropriated by the Nationalist and Communist parties and appended to their respective nationalistic narratives. Both parties advanced themselves as representatives of the New Culture ideals of "Sai Xiansheng" (Mr. Science) and "De Xiansheng" (Mr. Democracy) while the more substantive issues of twentieth-century Chinese identity and of the kind of culture that could be made in the wake of the destruction of the old and the studied imitation of the foreign were never resolved. That is, until the spring of 1989, when Chinese recollection overcame the mind-numbing teleology of revolutionary inevitability within which the "fruitful ambiguities" of May Fourth were en-

cased—"Historical memory came alive in China as so often before. . . . The past was literally being born anew in 1989 as a million students chanted the slogans mouthed so tremulously by hundreds in 1919" (p. 76).

Even if one confesses an instinctual sympathy with such a reading, particularly when recalling the visible evidence of slogans and placards in the spring of 1989 stating student and worker demands for "democracy" and "science," one must not honor the urge to interpret such statements as a recovery of the repressed memory of May Fourth. The events of 1919 and 1989 are incommensurable moments, and the appearance of similar integers in their calculus of protest such as the call for trade unions and the rule of law is not sufficient condition to tether one to the other. There is probably no better cautionary note that could be appended to such a logic of association than that offered by Wu'er Kaixi, one of the best known of the student activists, who claimed that the genuine inspiration for their challenge to the Communist Party on the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth movement was the music of the Beijing rocker Cui Jian, specifically his anthem of alienation "Yiwu suoyou" (I have nothing).[6]

What strikes one about Schwarcz' interpretation of June Fourth as the politically unencumbered repossession of historical memory—and it is an interpretation shared by a number of the other contributors—is that the language of her explication, that of recovery, survival, legacy, inheritance, repossession, endurance, and recuperation, does not seem to fit the specifics of the Tiananmen protests and, moreover, draws too close to the abiding linearity of historical view common to the ideology of the Party-state. As well, this interpretation repeats the error of historical necessity essential to the mythification of May Fourth by the Communists and Nationalists. If we aim to articulate an "alternative" view of being Chinese, then we must move beyond the archaeological tropes that dominate the analyses of many of the essays. It is also necessary for us to reconceive intellectual history through a paradigm of dispersion rather than recollection, in which the "accidental confluence" of the practical reference of contemporary experience and the conceptual tools of cultural inheritance is paramount.

Why should the actions of the protesters of 1989 be constrained to "reinherit May Fourth," so that the coalescence of meaning around such an event is predetermined to validate an earlier, neglected historical moment? In other words, one must not readily assent to the assertion that the antigovernment demonstrations of 1989 were the legacy of May Fourth; instead, one must question the association. By uncoupling June Fourth and May Fourth, one is free to consider the dialogical emergence of historical significance in the interplay of structure and agency and to recognize that while we might presume the visceral, instinctual quality of memory, it is nonetheless always mediated. Without this recognition, interpretative errors can be made even by the actors themselves—like the May Fourth survivors Zhang Shenfu and Mao Zishui, upon whose 1979 recollection of their par-

ticipation in the 1919 protest Schwarcz depends in order to restore the movement's ideological confusion and political accident.

Indeed Victor Hao Li's refreshingly ingenuous contribution on the mentalities of the diaspora, "From Qiao (僑) to Qiao (橋)," offers compelling evidence for the unreliability of memory in the context of ethnic identity. Having been born in China but raised in the United States, Li returned to China as an adult in response to a "yearning . . . for a historically, culturally, and racially more complete home" (p. 219). The outcome of his search startled him and provides an object lesson for those who presume the historical authenticity of memory in its contest against a forgetting state. Li recalls:

> I had a different kind of experience in 1972, my first trip to China. There I felt even more out of place. I knew China could not be home. Something else also happened. In Guangzhou I went to find my family's old house, where we lived when I was four or five. Looking at it, I recalled playing on that porch and those stairs with the neighbor's children. It was a very satisfying moment emotionally and intellectually. . . . When I returned to New York and told my father, he replied that not only did I have the wrong house, I had even been in the wrong part of town. The next year, I went to the correct house. And again, I recalled that garden and those rooms. But I wondered, What do I really know and remember, and what am I constructing? (p. 219)

Recollection is a construction; indeed, it is by a reiterative process of construction that memory is preserved in the ongoing dialogue between the practical reference of experience and the collective inventory of interpretative categories.

It is just this sense of the emergence of historical meaning from the delicate interplay of present context and inherited text that is lacking in Myron Cohen's effort to ground a national culture of Chineseness in the village quotidian. He, too, depends on the archaeological tropes of recovery and persistence to explain the existence of a prerevolutionary "unified culture" on the local margins of the Communist metropole. The net effect of this argument, based loosely on fieldwork in four different Chinese communities over a number of decades, is to dismiss the history of the last forty years and to contradict the conclusions of other anthropologists, such as Helen Siu, who find that state intervention in rural life has significantly rearranged cultural memory.[7] Taking into consideration Cohen's claim that "if considered as they were before the changes they have undergone in the past fifty years or so, they provide evidence in the form of near-total identity that key features of family organization were common to Han society throughout China" (p. 90), one cannot help but see the danger in scholarly work that, in what can only be termed a theological spirit, overlooks the last fifty years of Chinese history.

With Cohen's essay, the pluralist trajectory characteristic of the volume turns against itself, as linguistic heterogeneity (so profound, argues Robert Ramsey in his *The Languages of China*, that the nation's "dialects" [*fangyan*] are better understood as *languages*[8]), ethnic diversity, religious differences, and localism are re-

solved in favor of a common culture made common through etiquette and the existence of an administrative vernacular (*guanhua*) that reached, without period or comma, from Liaoning to Lhasa and from Xian to Xiamen by the end of the late traditional period. It is obvious that the objective of this argument for a "natural" common culture is a critique of a centrally sponsored "artificial" nationalism, yet Cohen unwittingly abets the very totalistic conception of Chinese identity presently administered by the state, in which to be Chinese is to be Han and the measure of a people's civility is their degree of assimilation of the dominant cultural traits. Given China's mind-boggling diversity, to identify a common culture with "Hanness"—wherein "those who because of poverty or for other reasons were unable to live or to succeed in accordance with local standards could be attracted to various 'heterodox' beliefs, and that many of these beliefs implied rejection not only of locally dominant sentiments, but of the larger cultural design that made proper people Chinese" (p. 100)—is to risk category mistake.

After Cohen's piece, the concerns of the collection turn away from history and memory to "concrete social facts" in the essays by Ambrose Yeo-chi King, Wang Gungwu, David Yen-ho Wu, and Zhu Hong: King proffering an analysis of *guanxi* as an essential expression of being Chinese, Wang considering the many manifestations of Chinese community on non-Chinese ground, Wu exploring the politics of indigenous identity demonstrating the constructivist quality of Han/Chinese ethnicity, and Zhu pinpointing the disabling ideological contradictions of recent fiction. King, relying on the work of Weber and Mead, provides a sociological analysis of *guanxi* in which "network building" is presented as a native social form peculiar to China. However, in the course of his analysis, sociological language appears to get the better of him so that the reader is left with the impression that Chineseness is the province of everyone. Unfortunately conflating "Confucian" and Chinese, as he does throughout the essay, King offers the following gloss of the self:

> To use Meadian terminology, the Confucian individual consists of a self (*chi*) that is both an active and a reflexive entity. In relation construction it is the individual who is capable of defining roles for himself and others, and is always at the center. Precisely because of the voluntaristic nature of the self, the Confucian individual is . . . the architect in relation construction. (p. 113)

What such an explanation establishes is merely the commonness of all selves, Confucian, Chinese, and otherwise. Consequently, if there is something truly distinctive about *guanxi*, which undoubtedly there is, as Mayfair Yang has pointed out,[9] then it must be demonstrated here, not by the abstract application of terminology, but by an empirical analysis of Chinese daily life.

David Wu's piece on Chinese and non-Chinese identities and Zhu Hong's essay on the "evil wife" in contemporary Chinese fiction do restore the reader's footing in the empirical and also serve to increase the complexity of Chinese

identity and its representation. Wu addresses one of the principal deficiencies of the volume by discussing what he terms the "construction of Chinese and non-Chinese identities in frontier China." Other than his brief discussion of Bai ethnogenesis (pp. 155–160), the entire book provides no serious discussion of polyethnicity in China. Several of the authors do come around to admitting, like Leo Lee, that the significance of a single center has been "relativized" and recent "roots" (*xungen*) fiction has "paved the way for cultural pluralism" (p. 237), or speak of the cultural diversity of diaspora Chinese; however, the ethnic pluralism of mainland China and what such pluralism means for a new imagined community of Chineseness is never considered.

Officially 8 percent of China's 1.2 billion people belong to one of fifty-six sanctioned *shaoshu minzu* (minority peoples), each of varying degrees of linguistic, cultural, and geographic distance from the essential "Hanness" that dominates the China of the first symbolic universe. From what root of the living tree do Tibet or the Dai Autonomous Region grow? How do such spaces of ethnic and political contention figure into the first symbolic sphere of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore? If they are Chinese, in the sense of being culturally Chinese, then the definition of Chineseness must be further expanded or qualified and, moreover, must not be delimited by the considerations of race implicit in the notion of Zhongguo, "the central country."

Wu's essay does much to broaden the criteria of Chinese identity beyond the limitations of cultural chauvinism. His study of *huaqiao* in Papua New Guinea—talk about liminal!—vividly depicts the different ways in which Chinese imagine and represent themselves abroad and also shows how far was the reach of Guomindang nationalist indoctrination. His analysis of the Bai people of southwestern China, whose ethnicity he distrusts, believing them to be Han, is arresting in its demonstration of the plasticity of ethnicity in China.[10] But, above all, it is Wu's dispassionate disbelief in a uniform Chinese culture that offers the greatest single critique of the essentialism of many of his fellow contributors, as he contends that a uniform, Han-exclusive Chineseness is a fiction:

> [T]he existence of a superior Chinese culture is, at best, a myth. The Chinese people and Chinese culture have been constantly amalgamating, restructuring, reinventing, and reinterpreting themselves; the seemingly static Chinese culture has been in a continuous process of assigning important new meanings about being Chinese. (p. 151)

At the geopolitical margins, Chinese identity is fluid, its claimants inventive and resourceful. This is no less true in China proper, near the center, but, the "processes of identity construction," writes Wu, "have been seldom documented by Chinese scholars in China" (p 151). Representation falls short of reality.

On another look at the problematic space between reality and representation, Zhu Hong broaches a topic all too often neglected in conventional discussions of

Chinese identity—women—and her sophisticated treatment of the subject provides insight into "society's pervasive sexism" and into the inadequacy of fiction as a liberating political force. Her essay is one of the most intriguing contributions, for it teases out the tensions implicit in current efforts to advance political criticism in fiction. What is remarkable about the analysis of the "evil wife" trope is Zhu's demonstration that Chinese writers are complicit in their own domination and, by way of reliance on the scapegoating of women, are unaware of this complicity. The unflattering depiction of strong women as evil in the writing of authors critical of the state, Zhu claims, works to maintain the operation of state power, as it reveals misogyny to be an unconscious but pronounced characteristic of Chinese identity.

What this means, of course, is that the status of women in Chinese literature has not come far from that represented by Yan Poxi in *Shuihu zhuan.* For example, in Wang Meng's *The Butterfly*, a municipal Party secretary, Zhang Siyuan takes, like many of his liberation fellow-travelers, a nubile second wife, who enriches herself at his expense. From the moment of their marriage, Zhang's misfortune is sealed. He is labeled a rightist in the Cultural Revolution, and Meilan, the siren, divorces him, absconding with their accumulated wealth. Zhang is later vindicated, and, with predictable cravenness, Meilan, alternately described as "a slimy fish" and "a pair of pincers," tries to return to him.

To be sure, women have acquired agency in the reform-era stories of Bai Hua, Dai Qing, and Wang Meng, not so much as people, but as various set pieces symbolizing the destructiveness of female sexuality. According to Zhu:

> Thus from the slave wanting to be delivered, the female character has evolved into an active agent, but an agent of evil. These images of women come from writers of both sexes, of different styles and affiliations, but all avowedly committed to reform. Yet when they approach the sensitive area of Party misrule, they invariably take refuge in the image of the "evil wife." With the best of intentions, they are overtaken by the myth and contribute to it by erecting more variations on the "evil wife" image. (p. 175)

There is politics in all this sex, for the use of women as scapegoats thinly veils a direct attack on the Party. However, what strikes one in the frequent recurrence of this one-dimensional theme is the poverty of literary imagination in the face of the opportunity to invent new narratives. The contemporary, critical writer, in this light, is not an intellectual, but a technician of knowledge enmeshed within the language of a ruling ideology to which she or he is opposed. Zhu Hong's analysis makes clear just how difficult it is for a writer to find genuinely creative ground on the margins. The Party-state, symbol of the Chinese center, continues to exert subtle influence among writers on the periphery.

The controlling metaphor of *The Living Tree* is the dyad "center and periphery," and many of the participants have employed it to frame their own observa-

tions of contemporary China. The metaphor does heroic duty throughout the book, serving to define (1) the historic tension between state and local society on the mainland, (2) the relationship between diaspora Chinese and their natal home (often synechdochally imagined as the state itself), (3) the situation of émigré intellectuals—contemporary *shidafu* such as Professor Tu and his cohort—vis-à-vis the Chinese state, and (4) the conscious pursuit of authentic native identity by mainland artists whose spiritual core is to be found in the periphery of a rural life remote from the political center. The conference participants clearly define themselves (the third symbolic universe) as liminal in relation to greater China: the China of the mainland (Tu's first symbolic universe) and that of the dispersed commercial and professional seeds of the diaspora (Tu's second symbolic universe), and so it is that they believe in the explanatory power of center and periphery. Yet, given that this dyad has organized the representation of the revolutionary state, and most explicitly in Mao Zedong's idiosyncratic formulation of democratic centralism, I wonder if its use here does not undermine the avowed commitment of the authors to re-imagine China. Moreover, given the multiple, global manifestations of Chinese identity, this organizational trope simply lacks explanatory efficacy, as Leo Lee concludes when he admits that in "this transnational and cosmopolitan framework, the old spatial matrix of center and periphery no longer has much validity" (p. 238).

There is a conscious revisionism at work here as the center-periphery concept is refunctioned by the authors in the same way that it has been by a recent generation of Chinese writers who, in the name of *xungen* (searching for roots), have turned away from the political center to the ethnically rich environment of local society, working it to an anti-state conclusion. The world of local knowledge, experience, and, above all, memory is now the center; politics and the metropole migrate to the margins. This volume resonates with the *xungen* culturalist movement of the 1980s, the literary and cinematic epiphenomena of which are found in the writing of Mo Yan (*Hong gaoliang jiazu*, "Red Sorghum") and the films of Chen Kaige (*Huang tudi*, "Yellow Earth"). As a generation of Chinese writers and artists looked to local culture and mythology for answers to *jingshen weiji* (spiritual crisis), so too did émigré Chinese intellectuals and expatriate professionals turn, from their place on the periphery, to the center of the *zuguo* in search of identity. Partners in the search for identity, the native writers of the first symbolic universe and the "creative minority" of concerned expatriated intellectuals of the third symbolic universe are joined across the waters.

This is the presumption of Leo Ou-fan Lee, who cautiously invokes the center-periphery dyad in the volume's final essay, "On the Margins of Chinese Discourse: Some Personal Thoughts on the Cultural Meaning of the Periphery." Lee relies on Edward Shils' definition of the center as a "central zone of symbols, values, and beliefs" (p. 236), and attempts to link the reflections by diaspora intellec-

tuals like himself on the meaning of their identity with those of the *xungen* writers of the late 1980s like Han Shaogong. Lee and Han find themselves on what the state would deem the margins and from there discover that what China is is a vast cultural hybrid. Thus, in the end, not unlike what one finds at the conclusion of most of Plato's *Dialogues*, we are left with *aporia*, an uncertainty valuable for its lesson that we are knowledgeable of our own ignorance.

A very interesting and recurring feature of *The Living Tree* is the qualification of definitive criteria of Chinese identity. As quickly as a definition is advanced it is modified or even avoided as in the claim that China, Zhongguo, has always represented a cultural core geographically centered just north of the alluvial intersection of the Huai, Wei, and Huang Rivers in present-day Shaanxi and Henan:

> The archaeological finds of recent decades have significantly challenged the thesis that China grew from the Wei River Valley like a light source radiating from the center. Even in neolithic periods, there were several centers spreading across present-day China. The Central Country came into being as a confederation of several equally-developed cultural areas rather than growing out of an expanding core. Yet regardless of this persuasive scholarly explanation of the origins of Chinese civilization, the impression that geopolitical China evolved through a long process centering around a definable core remains deeply rooted. (p. 3)

One need look no further than Hsu Cho-yun's "A Reflection on Marginality," an epigraph that closes the volume, to find evidence of the depth of this essentialist impression: "Chinese culture began its development in a small area in North China. . . . [P]eripheral cultures were one after another merged into and absorbed by the continuously expanding Chinese cultural sphere" (pp. 240–241).

Here is evidence of ideas contending against themselves and intellect striving to square the facts of historical authority with the prophecy of the heart. Such interpretative divergence is one of the hallmarks of the volume and is accentuated by the epigraphs interlacing the text. These snippets of observation or contention made by conference participants are very revealing for, in certain instances, they mark places where an oppositional perspective on the living-tree project is articulated. Indeed I find the internal tensions and strain of the essay collection, made evident when the epigraphs act as counter-text, to be its strongest feature, an ingenuous statement of the give and take of intellectual engagement with matters of moment. A fine example of such strain deserving of comment here is that between a universalist and particularist definition of Chineseness. Tu, in the conclusion of his sonata of three movements on Cultural China, favors the former: "the meaning of being Chinese is basically not a political question; it is a human concern pregnant with ethico-religious implications" (p. 34). Hsu Cho-yun, in his afterword/epigraph, works against the grain of Tu's ethical transcendence in favor of the truth of the subjective: "After two and one-half days of discussion, those who had gathered at the East-West Center to discuss the meaning of being Chi-

nese realized that the only relevant criterion of identity is the self-identity perceived by a person" (p. 239). And in this summary gesture, Hsu returns us to the indistinguishability of Chinese and others encountered in Ambrose King's essay.

What these intertextual tensions show is that there are great difficulties involved in achieving consensus on a non-essentialist meaning of "Chineseness." Moreover, as the authors appear to sense, it is difficult to imagine how inclusive is any definition of a people so obviously in transformation and so large in number. A certain degree of reification is unavoidable when one is speaking of so large and diverse a population as the Chinese, and it is clear from the tentative and often inconsistent wording of some of the essays that the book's principal challenge is its claim to representative authority. If a mere thirty-six million Chinese are living in the condition of diaspora in the periphery, what have they to say that would be compelling for the remaining 1.2 billion Chinese residing in the center? Several of the authors are aware of this disjunction, and some even acknowledge the space yawning between themselves as marginal voices of identity and the silent majority of *in situ* Chinese. No one articulates this space between signifier and signified better than Hsu Cho-yun, who recognizes the disparity, albeit apocalyptically, as an enabling condition:

> Especially in the world to come, we will have a Chinese culture in the making, emerging, not necessarily as the descendent [sic] of traditional Chinese culture. . . . The Chinese culture will not be the culture we understand, the Chinese culture we identify with. We are overseas Chinese and there are many in China, equally marginal. We have a responsibility to interpret the objects we wish to identify with, to justify this identification as legitimate and comfortable. (p. 147)

Hsu's comments are echoed by a number of the essayists, yet explicitly rejected by others like David Wu, who sees nothing natural or necessary about Chineseness other than a cultural construction of identity that is especially salient in the context of peripheral situation or of government policy on ethnicity. Leo Lee, and some others, appears to recognize the provincial quality of these scholarly imaginings of Chineseness when he admits:

> I am searching for reconfigurations. I am not interested in whether the twenty-first century is to be a Pacific one, or a European one, but I am certain that the world is going to be very different. We are remapping the world, and here I see provincialism in Chinese studies as they are pursued in the world today that I find unacceptable, needlessly parochial. (p. 167)

However, this urge for centeredness, as it were, that compels the deracinated to look to the "central country," the "civilization-state," and which is supremely evident in much of the discussion in the book, offers evidence of the difficulty in overcoming an exhausted but enduring worldview. The Chinese world order, with the imperium as its unwobbling pivot, is no more and may never have been, and yet the conceptual dependence on such a notion remains strong. From the

diverse testimony of *The Living Tree* one thing is certain: There is no cultural center of Chineseness, only plural nodes of ethnic invention, at best inspired by a mythic or racial presumption of unity in descent from the Yellow Emperor, in being the product of the "Dragon Seed," or in bearing the shared culture of sinographs.

Even the image of the living tree, defined by Hsu Cho-yun at the close of the book, conjuring as it does the progressive elaboration of branches from a still-growing trunk, which one assumes would accommodate the dual moments of center (trunk) and periphery (branches), offers no encouragement for such an assumption. According to Professor Hsu:

> The entire process can be envisioned as a tree-like pattern radiating from the center; adding to itself direct linkages between and among the branches, thereby increasing the density and intricacy of its network. Niches and gaps, places containing foreign elements, are gradually filled by the system, although these new components may still be alien to the original center. The final product is a solid body, a new and stronger center, which begins its own tree pattern by creating new peripheries and subsequently incorporating them into the system. (p. 240)

The mixing of metaphors here, cybernetic vocabulary from systems analysis conflated with arboreal images, conveys the difficulty of getting at the question of Chinese identity in a new way. Yet revolutions in understanding are often made from such indeterminacy, as in the case of J. B. Priestley's determination that the oxygen he had discovered was "phlogisticized air."

There is a recurrent problem of, for lack of a better term, lexical laxity. Much of what should be proven through argument is far too often presumed, or assertions that require greater evidentiary indulgence are neglected. Such carelessness is especially unfortunate in a work that demands to be taken seriously as a diagnosis and treatment of the identity problems of a global China. In numerous points throughout the work, for example, "Confucianism" is equated with Chineseness, and it is such lexical laxity and interpretative imprecision that makes it more, not less, difficult to understand what are the definitive traits of Chinese at the close of the twentieth century. Though this equation has been instinctual for centuries, in recent years sinology has problematized it by demonstrating that "Confucianism" is not something that exists out there in indigenous experience, but is an interpretative confection of the outside observer.[11] Thus, one is left to wonder what this equation means here, particularly when uttered by Chinese in the course of establishing a working definition of themselves that overcomes essentialism. Representative authority, again, becomes an issue, in the same way that it is when Tu asserts:

> The so-called "Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism" may have been the wishful thinking of a small coterie of academics, but the emergence of a new, inclusive humanism with profound ethical-religious implications for the spiritual

> self-definition of humanity, the sanctity of the earth, and a form of religiousness based on immanent transcendence has already been placed on the agenda in Cultural China. (p. 32)

But has it been placed on the agenda in the real China? And the answer, at this juncture of the nation's pell-mell pursuit of profit, is no.

With a work of such global conception it might seem petty to call attention to a few details, yet I do so only because they are unusually salient. The first has to do with romanization, a problem common in our era of hybrid transcription apparatuses—Wade-Giles, Pinyin, GR, Yale, and so forth. Most of the volume was prepared in pinyin; however, one of the essays, Ambrose King's, relies on a strict use of Wade-Giles with appropriate diacritics, while Mark Elvin's piece uses a tonalized pinyin transcription system in which the second and fourth tones are represented by the postvocalic insertion of a silent "r" and "h" and the third tone indicated by the doubling of the main vowel. Of course, the informed reader makes instinctual switches between such devices, but should she? However, the same cannot be said for the romanization-ignorant reader, the undergraduate student, for example, who may well find the predominance of irregular convention confusing.

Given these discrepant transcriptions, the glossary is a beast of many heads with entries for most all the Chinese terms in their respective romanizations, "in part out of respect for the preferences of individual authors," according to the editor. Such respect, however, serves neither coherence nor convenience (the latter being the principal reason for an index of relevant terms). Thus, if the reader wishes to look up "Tarng" she will be directed to the appropriate pinyin form (Tang), where a definition is found. Indexing of this kind is not consistent, as the Wade-Giles entries are not cross-referenced, which means that the transcription is founded in both pinyin and Wade-Giles. Furthermore, certain names and terms—such as "Liang Tee Tue," another rendering of the name of the celebrated publicist, Liang Qichao—are listed in the glossary but do not appear in the book (p. 251). It is also unfortunate that the glossary has but a very few entries for Japanese terms and neglects to include such significant ones as *kyodoai* and *minzoku* that figure in several of the articles.

There are, mercifully, very few typographical errors—the book has been rigorously copyedited—but there is an occasional miscue such as an incorrect or incomplete citation. A frequent variation in the use of personal pronouns with respect to China is distracting. The nation is known to some authors as "it" and to others as "she," while still others use both: "by virtue of her size, history, power, and culture, China will continue to play an enormous and dynamic role in the formation of Chinese identity abroad. . . . Its influence on the Chinese in diaspora can be either positive or negative" (p. 212). It is not uncommon for contributors to vacillate between scholarly objectivity and personal identification in their treat-

ment of the subject so that the problems of Chinese identity, for example, are addressed as "our." For a conference volume, *The Living Tree* is a deeply personal book, and this is supremely evident in such vacillation between third-person and first-person reference.

"Tu Fu," the Tang poet, is misromanized and should be Du Fu (p. 4). The lower-case "*zhonghua minzu*" (p. 150) must be placed in the uppercase, *Zhonghua minzu.* The full, correct title of the celebrated work by Robert N. Bellah et al. should read *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* and not *The Habits of the Heart* (p. 262). There are numerous instances in which only the last name of an author or the partial title of a work is given. For example, "Barme and Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire,*" should read Geremie Barmé and John Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (p. 270), and "Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*" should be Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (p. 269). "Chuban she" must be "Chubanshe" throughout (p. 270). These are small matters, but considering that this is the second incarnation of a previously published collection of invited papers, even the slightest stylistic trifles should not be in evidence.

Certainly greater editorial intervention would also have eliminated the technical problems resulting from the fact that most of the essays were not revised before publication. There are very few blatant inaccuracies, but considering how rapidly the situations of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the rest of the world have changed since 1990, the book already seems dated. For a work devoted to giving an account of the meaning of being Chinese today, such neglect of the history of the last five years is unfortunate. Thus, according to a few of the essays, Salman Rushdie is still in hiding, George Bush has recently decided to protect thirty-thousand Chinese graduate students from coerced repatriation, and "overseas Chinese nationalism, long cultivated by successive Chinese governments, is not likely to surface anew without a massive reversal of current policies in both Taiwan and China" (p. 212).

The revolutionary events in 1989 in Eastern Europe as well as those of the Tiananmen protests are spoken of in the present tense. Consequently, there is no sense of, for example, (1) how grandly China recovered from the political debacle, recording record economic growth in 1992, 1993, and 1994 to generate an uneasy national consensus on modernization; (2) the new wave of postmodern surrealist fiction of writers like Yu Hua and Su Tong; (3) the critical reevaluation, at home and abroad, of the 1989 protests; (4) the progressive elimination of the *danwei* (work unit) system of urban registration; (5) the democratic developments in Taiwan; (6) the exponential growth of Taiwanese and *huaqiao* investment in the mainland; and (7) the changing policy orientation of the Clinton administration toward the PRC with respect to "most favored nation" status.

As significant as this work is as a status report on the contemporary condition of Chinese, the collective effect of its essays is the impression that we are hearing the plaintive phrasings of Third World sympathies uttered in a First World key. If this reading is accurate, then we are again faced with the problematic space between representation and what is represented, and reminded that the global displacement of Chinese and their yearning for home is a universal, not a particular condition. Indeed, we are, almost all of us, refugees from a natal place, and it is this homelessness and wandering that are definitive of our modernity. This may be the most valuable lesson one may derive from this very personal book, that *tianxia wei gong*—the universe is equal. Until we recognize the intima tions of the universal in our particular modern predicament, we will be unprepared to embrace a contemporary world where nations and nationalisms are increasingly irrelevant.

The Living Tree, then, raises far more, and more disturbing, questions than it answers, yet the great value of these questions is perhaps the best evidence of the work's significance as a project. It stands as a statement of intellectual self-definition intended for a wider audience—a Chinese audience in need of imagination and direction and a Western one only beginning to realize the significance of greater China for the history of the coming century. Perhaps in the end the changing meaning of being Chinese today is that China's ancient and enduring cultural diversity is now represented on a world stage. No longer falsified by the monolithic exoticism of *Chinoiserie* or the eternal esoteric exception to the rule of Western rationalism, China and its plural streams of Chineseness have been loosed upon the world. The chief consequence of this global immersion in China's diversity will undoubtedly be the end of much of what we, even in a spirit of contemporary redefinition, still hold very dear.

Lionel M. Jensen
University of Colorado, Denver

Lionel M. Jensen, an intellectual historian, is Director of the Program in Chinese Studies. He has just completed Manufacturing "Confucianism": Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization *(Duke University Press, 1997).*

NOTES

1. Taken in this way, *The Living Tree* resembles the earlier postwar proclamation on Chinese culture by Zhang Junmai (Chang Chün-mai, Carsun Chang), Tang Junyi (T'ang Chün-i), Mou Zongsan (Mou Tsung-san), and Xu Fuguan (Hsü Fu-kuan) published in 1958 as "A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture," which many believe marked the inception of today's *Xinrujia*, "The New *Ru* School." See "A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture," in Carsun Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), pp. 456–483.

2. Tu Wei-ming, "Wenhua Zhongguo chutan," *Jiushi niandai*, no. 245 (June 1990).

3. A second *Daedalus* issue (vol. 122, no. 2 [September 1993]) of collected essays on contemporary China has been produced under Tu Wei-ming's direction and is called *China In Transformation.*

4. See the article "Education in Patriotism," in the 26 September–6 October 1994 issue of *Beijing Review.* The national reeducational program was an obvious official rejoinder to the distinction, increasingly common among Chinese, between nationalism and patriotism, according to which the latter alone was valued as a genuine expression of native, politically unencumbered, feeling.

5. Peter C. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age,* 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984).

6. On the role of *yaogun yinyue* (rock music) as inspiration for the language and action of protest in 1989, see Andrew F. Jones, *Like A Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music,* Cornell East Asia Series, no. 57 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1992), chaps. 4 and 5.

7. Helen F. Siu, *Agents and Victims: Accomplices in Rural Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See esp. pp. 291–301 for her startling discussion of the contemporary restoration of village rites wherein the form and the content of the practice is out of keeping with the prerevolutionary rite while perfectly consonant with the choreography of political campaigns.

8. Robert S. Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

9. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Relationships in China* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 1994.

10. The argument for Bai ethnogenesis is more elaborately set out in David Y. H. Wu, "Chinese Minority Policy and the Meaning of Minority Culture: The Example of the Bai in Yunnan, China," *Human Organization* 49, no. 1 (March 1990): 1–13.

11. Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 1–16; Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "A New Direction in Confucian Scholarship: Approaches to Examining Differences between Neo-Confucianism and *Tao-hsüeh,*" *Philosophy East and West* 42, no. 3 (July 1992): 445–472; idem, "A Reply to Professor de Bary," *Philosophy East and West* 44 no. 1 (January 1994): 135–142; and Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing "Confucianism"* (forthcoming, Duke University Press).