Review Essay

The History of the History of the Yi, Part II

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MINORITY ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is, according to its constitution, "a unified country of diverse nationalities" (*tongyide duominzu guojia*; see Wang Guodong, 1982: 9). The degree to which this admirable political ideal has actually been respected has varied throughout the history of the PRC: taken seriously in the early and mid-1950s, it was systematically ignored during the twenty years of High Socialism from the late 1950s to the early 1980s and then revived again with the Opening and Reform policies of the past two decades (Heberer, 1989: 23-29). The presence of minority "autonomous" territories, preferential policies in school admissions, and birth quotas (Sautman, 1998) and the extraordinary emphasis on developing "socialist" versions of minority visual and performing arts (Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000; Oakes, 1998) all testify to serious attention to multinationalism in the cultural and administrative realms, even if minority culture is promoted in a homogenized socialist version and even if everybody knows that "autonomous" territories are far less autonomous, for example, than an American state or a Swiss canton.

But although the party state now preaches multinationalism and allows limited expression of ethnonational autonomy, it also preaches and promotes progress—and thus runs straight into a paradox: progress is defined in objectivist, modernist terms, which relegate minority cultures to a more

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"primitive" level than the increasingly cosmopolitan culture of China's cities and developing coastal areas. In the times of High Socialism, this meant that minorities ranked lower on the scale of five stages of history: they were all primitive or slave or early feudal, while Han culture, even in the bad days before Liberation, had already advanced to the landlord economy almost everywhere and to early stages of capitalism in some of the coastal cities. Since the recent reforms, the ideology of historical stages has been pushed into the background (though by no means repudiated), replaced in the spotlight by a more generic idea of modernization and the development of a wealthy consumerist society (Davis, 2000; Jing, 2000). But both paradigms of progress (and the past two decades of Chinese history have shown that they are not mutually exclusive) view minority societies and cultures as backward. They may be colorful and exotic, suitable for display on the great Spring Festival TV extravaganza or in innumerable minority culture shows (Schein, 2000); they may be close to nature and suitable as sign vehicles for Han Chinese nostalgia (Harrell, 2001: chap. 12; Yao, 1989; Blum, 2001); or they may be part of the great treasure-house of Chinese nationalities. But they are backward; this is seen as an objective fact of history, whether Stalinist or more generically modernist.

The general assumption of minority backwardness, manifested in policy and popular culture, has been reinforced by scholarship. Until very recently, all ethnological scholarship in the PRC was based on the five stages of history; the actual process of scholarship consisted of Han or very acculturated minority scholars gathering massive fieldwork and documentary data and placing them in the predetermined framework of the progress from a primitive to slave to feudal to capitalist and finally to a socialist society (see Guldin, 1994: pt. 3). Recent scholarship has begun to question these a priori assumptions (or, in many cases, has simply put them aside in favor of other considerations),[1] but it has not really examined the assumption that minorities are backward—if their cultures are now to be respected rather than demeaned, they are still not thought of in the scholarly mainstream as having contributed much to the national heritage.

In the new climate of multinationalism, however, the scholarly mainstream is not the only stream, and the idea of minority backwardness does not go unchallenged, precisely because elite, educated members of minority groups are now able to challenge it. Beginning in the early 1950s, there was a concerted effort to bring members of minority nationalities into the work of nation building. More than anything else, this consisted of recruiting bright young minority boys to study in the *minzu ganbu xuexiao*, or "nationalities cadre academies," established in every autonomous region and prefecture and of recruiting bright and pliable young minority leaders to serve in middle- and lower-ranking cadre positions.[2] Both these processes fed, at their higher levels, into the nationalities colleges (*minzu xueyuan*), which were both the tertiary component of the education that began in the schools and places for mid-career continuing education (*jinxiu*) for cadres and scholars of minority background. As a result, the work of state building and of administration in minority areas has been, especially since the 1980s, largely in the hands of cadres and administrators who themselves were members of minorities.[3] Even more than political and economic administration, cultural administration and scholarship in these areas has been taken over by minority administrators and scholars, in part perhaps because they are "safe" areas for minority participation, but certainly also because more minority students are trained in these than in the more technical areas of economics and technology (Harrell, 2001: 48).

Therefore, over the past 50 years, there has developed an educated, sophisticated, bicultural minority elite (Litzinger, 2000) involved in administration of all sorts, particularly in cultural affairs and in cultural scholarship, and positioned to carry out that part of the nation-building project that involves its multicultural nature. We suppose that the originators of the plan to educate a minority elite, steeped as they were in Marxist and universalist ideas of modernity and progress, would have envisioned that minority elites so trained would simply carry on and deepen the projects of nation building that were founded on those modernist and progressive ideas, happily contributing their cultural diversity to the narrative of the nation's progress. But a reaction has set in, not unlike the reactions of colonial elites elsewhere in the world. Minority elites have developed contrarian versions of the national narrative, versions in which their own ethnic groups do not necessarily just bring up the rear or contribute local color. Their versions of the national narrative actively question the centrality of what they see as Han culture in the development of the Chinese nation.[4] They are, in a very political sense, writing culture against culture (Abu-Lughod, 1991), constructing a new version of China in which they are no longer just the bit players or the afterthoughts.

The ability of minority cultural elites to construct such an alternative history is rooted not just in their aforementioned training and the general freeing of discourse in reform China. This alternative discourse also grows out of the consolidation of group identity at the level of the *minzu*, a process detailed by many scholars in recent years (Cheung, forthcoming; Schein, 2000; Gladney, 1990; Harrell, 2001: chap. 9; Kaup, 2000). Insofar as minority elites are rewriting Chinese history with themselves front and center, they are doing so as representatives of the minzu units that emerged from the ethnic identification (*minzu shibie*) process of the 1950s, reinforced by the development of the "autonomous" territories and by the writing of the minzu level of analysis into school curricula. In other words, the minority elites, in rewriting their history and with it the history of China, have done so as representatives of the minzu units that were created as part of the earlier, socialist-modernist, Han-hegemonic model of the nation.

Enter the history of the Yi. Research on Yi culture and history has been going on for a long time. But as one of us has detailed in an earlier article (Harrell, 1995), this earlier research was not conducted primarily by Yi people and thus not presented from any kind of insider perspective. Instead, Western explorers and missionaries formulated Yi history primarily in racial terms, while Chinese scholars working before the 1949 revolution fit Yi history rather neatly into the categories of traditional, Han-centric Chinese historiography. After the revolution and the forced adoption of Marxist-Leninist analytic categories in the 1950s, Chinese scholars used another set of largely predetermined categories: those of the five stages of history worked out on the basis of research by Lewis Henry Morgan, as reinterpreted by Engels and other Marxist scholars. Yi people participated as minor players in all three of these historiographical discourses, but they never set the rules or determined the parameters.

There were, at the same time, native Yi discourses about the past. Nuosu in Liangshan saw their past more in genealogical than in historical terms, but they traced their genealogies back 80 generations to the founding ancestors Gguho and Qoni; in Yunnan, there were works whose approach was closer to that of history, including the *Xinan Yi Zhi*, *Chamu*, *Meige*, and others. But none of these native conceptions or writings about the past engaged with the larger and more hegemonic, Han-centric discourse of Chinese historiography, much less with the largely Eurocentric, racialist discourse of early twentieth-century Euro-American "world history." Nor were they concerned with the Yi minzu, as no such category yet existed in their own minds.[5] Insofar as there was Yi history, Yi did not control it, and insofar as the Yi wrote about the past, historically or genealogically, they did not write about the Yi as a category, and their works had no influence outside their own societies.

But all this changed dramatically in the early 1980s, when three processes flowed together: scholarly discourses opened up, Yi scholars trained in the 1950s came to maturity, and minority scholars began to assert new minzu identities. Professor Liu Yaohan, then at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, published *Zhongguo wenming yuantou xintan: Daojia yu Yizu hu yuzhou guan* (*A New Discussion of the Origins of Chinese Civilization: Daoism and Yi Tiger Cosmology*), which was the kickoff volume for what we here call the Yi Culture School (Liu Yaohan, 1985b). Radically questioning the Yi history practiced by mainstream scholars, the scholars of this school have leaped entirely out of the old categories and Han-centrism, rewriting several areas of history in revisionist terms. They have placed the origins of Daoism, the Supreme Ultimate, and the conceptions of yin and yang squarely into the domain of Yi cultural history, relegating Han civilization far to the rear.

Of course, there are plenty of Yi scholars who disagree with many of these findings: two examples are Luo Jiaxiu (1993) and Yi Mouyuan (2000). But whether they support or oppose the findings of the Yi Culture School, scholars engaged in the debate have spurred the development of Yi studies in general, and many Yi scholars have attempted to reach further back in time to demonstrate the length of Yi history and its importance for Chinese and even world history. Scholars have linked the origin of Yi writing with the symbols on the Neolithic pottery at Banpo in Xi'an and have therefore placed the origin of Yi writing at 6,000 years before the present, 3,000 years before the earliest Han writing. They have also written that the Yi are the direct descendants of the Yuanmou Man fossils of 1.7 million years ago, thereby tying the origin of Yi history with the origins of Asian people—and especially with that dubious nationalistic prehistory that claims a separate *erectus-sapiens* descent tree for the Chinese, thus avoiding any connection between the noble Yellow Race (descendants of the Dragon) and the vile black and white foreigners who emerged from Africa (Sautman, 2001). Yi studies, then, has become in many ways an arm of a wider Yi elite effort to build and consolidate the position of Yi in China and in Chinese history.

This scholarly or intellectual arm of the Yi ethnic identity movement has not remained exclusively the property of those researchers who formulated it. The ideas have spread to much of the Yi public with a moderate level of education: to cadres, schoolteachers, entrepreneurs, and other people who are not college educated or familiar with the sources or the scholarly debates about the importance of one or another kind of evidence, but rather who see these formulations in popular media or discuss them with friends and disseminate them further by word of mouth. These revisionist ideas about history have become, at least as much as festivals, rituals, and other cultural activities, a sign and a vehicle of the transformed ethnic identity and ethnic pride that have grown in the wake of economic and policy reforms. Liu Yaohan, the first and most prolific disseminator of these new views, has become a respected and beloved figure among educated Yi.

Our purpose in this article is not to evaluate the accuracy or scholarly validity of the claims of what we have dubbed the Yi Culture School. We have not examined the sources they have used or made a detailed study of any of the phenomena of ancient history with which their researches deal. Leaving the evaluation of these findings to others, we analyze instead three aspects of their scholarship. First, we detail several specific findings of this historical revisionism, pointing out the relationships of scholarly institutions and individuals that have made these formulations possible. Second, we place the findings and their links to the reformulation of ethnic identity in the context of economic reform and the development of ethnic tourism in the 1990s. Third, we present the results of a simple questionnaire to suggest the degree to which these new formulations of history have spread among the general educated population. On the basis of these observations, we examine some of the reasons why we think this kind of revisionist history has flourished in China in the past two decades.

REWRITING YI HISTORY

The new Yi revisionist scholarship has concentrated on several points: the origins of Chinese civilization, the historical importance of the Yuanmou Man fossils, the origins of the Yi, and the history of Yi writing. For the followers of this school, these historical findings demonstrate to the world that Yi history not only is central to a new and less Han-centric, more multicultural view of China but also has broad implications for the history of Asia and America as well. Many Yi scholars thus feel a sense of mission: as Liu Yaohan has said,

> We Yi scholars have the responsibility to carry out investigation and research into the history of our own minzu, and to connect it with all kinds of Yi and Han language historical sources, to pursue the origins of Chinese civilization and the wellsprings of the thought of Lao Zi and Qu Yuan. [Liu Yaohan, 1985a: 28]

Let us look in more detail at some of the specific content of the New Yi History.

THE ORIGINS OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

> In order to research the history of Chinese civilization, to research the formation of the Chinese nation, the formation and ancient culture of the Han people, to research the ancient writing systems and languages of the Chinese people, to research ancient Chinese astronomy and calendrics, or to research the detailed history of world civilization, one cannot avoid researching the Yi people and their ancient culture, ancient Yi writing, ancient Yi language, the ancient calendrical system, and other aspects of our ancient civilization, and from this core seek the traces of the development of Chinese and world civilization. [Liu Zhiyi, 1995]

According to Liu Yaohan, he and his school have solved the mystery of where Chinese civilization came from: it

> emerged from the primitive Daoist cosmological ideas about the tiger held by the Yi people in the Ailao, Wumeng, and Liangshan ranges on the two sides of the Jinsha River which forms the upper courses of the Yangzi, a kind of primitive philosophy expressed in the ten-month solar calendar of the Yi people. [Liu Yaohan, 1985a: 4]

Furthermore, "The Yi conception that all things have a male and female nature is the fount of the Chinese idea that all things have a yin and yang nature, and is also part of the origin of Chinese civilization" (Liu Yaohan, 1985b: preface). He states that he not only has discovered the source but has pushed its date back from 5,000 to 10,000 years. Of course, this means that the antiquity of Chinese civilization surpasses that of the world's three other great ancient civilizations (Liu Yaohan, 1985a, 1987).

The core of Liu's ideas about Yi culture and the origins of Chinese civilization lies in his analysis of the Yi ten-month calendar and of tiger cosmology. This solar calendar has ten months, each with 36 days, to which are added 5 or 6 New Year days to reach a correct total (a year has 365.24 days). The solar calendar year is divided into five seasons of two months each (72 days). It uses five elements—earth, copper, water, wood, and fire—to represent the five seasons and assigns each of the elements alternately a male or female nature to make the ten months: the first month is earth-male, the second earth-female, the third copper-male, and so on. Liu describes this kind of ten-month calendrical reckoning as "a string of 'bright pearls' in the history of world calendrical systems, with a history of over 10,000 years, and the means by which we have proven that Chinese civilization is older than the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India" (Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 158). According to Liu Zhiyi, "In its oldest, crudest, and most primitive form, its earliest use was probably over 10,000 years ago; it began to be used as an official calendar about 7,300 years ago at the time of Emperor Yan" (Liu Zhiyi, 1995: 143).

The basic content of the Yi tiger cosmology is that heaven, earth, and the ten thousand creatures (*tian di wanwu*) have their origins in the tiger. The head of the tiger is the head of heaven, the tail of the tiger is the tail of the earth, the fat of the tiger is the clouds, the breath of the tiger is the fog, the tiger's left eye is the sun and right eye the moon, the blood of the tiger is the water of the oceans, the skin of the tiger is the crust of the earth, and so on. Not only are heaven, the earth, and its myriad creatures all transformations of the tiger, but the earth was set in motion by the tiger (Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 36).

> Yi people call themselves *luoluo*; Yi men call themselves *luoluopo* and Yi women call themselves *luoluomo*; and *luoluo* is a doubling of the syllable *luo*, so that men also call themselves *luopo* and women *luomo*; *luo* means tiger, so that the Yi name for themselves is Tiger People. [Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 40].[6]

The tiger is the original totem of the Yi people,[7] and after they die and are cremated, each soul will turn into a tiger. Liu Yaohan maintains that the tiger totem comes from the original Qiang-Di Fuxi tribe and

> includes seven basic kinds of primitive religious, philosophical, and scientific content: (1) the origins of humanity in water; (2) worship of gourds; (3) worship of the tigress; (4) respect for black and for the left; (5) calendar systems based on the human body; (6) the ten-month calendar system; and (7) yin-yang and the five elements. [Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 36]

All the elements that make up the origins of Chinese civilization in Daoist philosophy and religion, the yin-yang school, binary mathematics, and many kinds of hybrid sciences stem from this root.

According to Liu, Daoist religion and philosophy stem from the Yi cosmological ideas: "Laozi's family name was Lao or Li; both of these mean 'tiger' " (Liu Yaohan, 1985a: 36). And his names Li Dan and Li Er mean *tiger's head* and *female tiger* in Yi, respectively.[8] Moreover, the concept of Dao, which emerged from tiger cosmology through the words of Laozi and Zhuangzi into the realm of high philosophical thought, influenced all of Chinese culture and even the naming system of Japan's emperors. In addition, "all the writers who have been influenced by Daoism, including Qu Yuan, Li Bai, and Shi Nai'en, can trace the origins of their thought to the influence of Yi primitive Daoism and tiger cosmology" (Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 137). Moreover, the eight trigrams of Fuxi and the ideas of one dividing into two (*yi fen wei er*), which come from the original Yi cosmology, inspired Leibniz to invent binary mathematics and are thus at the root of today's computer technology. Gelong Ahong has pointed out that "in today's society, computers are ever-more ubiquitous, and this owes a part of its existence to the contribution of the ancestors of the Yi" (Gelong Ahong, 1996: 144).

The origins of not only Daoism and yin-yang theory but also other aspects of Asian philosophy and symbology have come under the scrutiny of the Yi Culture School. Pu Zhen (2000), for example, maintains that she has discovered the origins of the swastika sign (now used in China, of course, almost exclusively as a Buddhist symbol) in ancient Yi documents. In other words, scholars of the Yi Culture School are claiming that the Yi have made important contributions to the main philosophical and mathematical ideas not only of Chinese but also of world civilization.

YUANMOU MAN

> There is a large amount of historical evidence that demonstrates that the Yi are the oldest minzu in China, who have lived for 10 million years on the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau and on the two banks of the Jinsha River, the descendants of "Eastern Man" (2.5 million years ago) and Yuanmou Man. [Gelong Ahong, 1995: 228]

The Yuanmou Ape-Man was discovered in archaeological excavations in Yuanmou county in Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture in North-Central Yunnan in 1965; the fossil's estimated age is 1.7 million years B.P. According to Liu Yaohan,

> Yuanmou Man is the ancestor of today's Asian people, and is also clearly the ancestor of the Yi people of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi; it's quite obvious that the Yi people are the indigenous people of the Wumeng Mountain region and the Jinsha River Basin. [Liu Yaohan, 1985a: 30]

In Liu's original formulation, the Yi people were the descendants of Yuanmou Man, who moved north and then moved south again, returning to the Southwest. In 1985, he stated,

> Ever since Yuanmou Man was discovered, there is a new way of thinking about the conventional formulation that the Yi, Bai, Hani, Naxi, Lisu, and other descendants of the ancient Qiang migrated from the northwest. On the contrary, the ancient Qiang of the northwest are the descendants of the Yi, Bai, and other groups who migrated to the northwest from the area of the Jinsha River and the Wumeng Mountains. [Liu Yaohan, 1985a: 30]

But Liu has since become more direct in his Yi-centrism:

> It is not difficult to conceive that this Yuanmou Man's descendants migrated everywhere in all directions, and that those of his descendants who remained in the original area became the indigenous Yi people of the two sides of the Jinsha River, in Yunnan on the south, and Guizhou and Sichuan on the north. [Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 2]

Here he is positing that the Yi are the direct descendants of Yuanmou Man, dropping the migration to the Northwest, which made his earlier theories more congruent with those of previous historiography.

Yuanmou Man is seen by the Yi Culture School not only as the ancestor of the Yi but as the ancestor of all the peoples of Asia and the Americas. Liu has expressed this view:

> The descendants of Yuanmou Man have spread throughout Asia, and those who reached the Northeast of China migrated on across the Bering Strait to the American continent and become the American Indians; those who migrated to Gansu and Qinghai became the original Di and Qiang, who continued migrating to the Tarim Basin to the northwest, later crossing the Congling; those who migrated to the east reached the Shandong peninsula and became the descendants of Emperor Yan or the Divine Husbandman, who were later enfeoffed as the Qiqiang or Qiang by the Zhou dynasty. This all follows very naturally. [Liu Yaohan, 1985b: preface]

Many scholars have agreed with Liu; one of the most prominent is Gelong Ahong of Honghe prefecture in southeastern Yunnan. In his recent *Yizu gudai shi yanjiu* (*Research into the Ancient History of the Yi*), he says that

> the Yi minzu (including all the minzu of the Yi language branch)[9] are a minzu who have flourished for ages on the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau. They are a branch of the descendants of Yuanmou Man who have remained in their original territory and developed there; they are the direct descendants of Yuanmou Man. [Gelong Ahong, 1996: 43]

For him the adjective *direct* is important:

> The writer's own addition here of the two characters *zhixi* (direct) is because the entire Chinese Nation (*Zhonghua minzu*), along with Japanese, American Indians, and the entire worldwide Yellow Race, are all descendants of Yuanmou Man, but they have migrated and developed over the course of several tens or hundreds of thousands of years, whereas the Yi and the other minzu of the Yi language branch are different, having lived and developed over the millennia in the original territory of Yuanmou Man, so that it is appropriate to add the two characters "direct" here. [Gelong Ahong, 1996: 41]

Gelong also provides arguments to counter those who have opposed the idea of a direct line of descent between the Yuanmou Man and the Yi:

> It is manifestly impossible to use the two arguments of "the time interval is too long" or "the racial testing has not yet been done" to deny the consanguineal relationship between the Yi (including the other minzu of the Yi language branch) and Yuanmou Man, since we have already demonstrated that the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau is a site of origins for the Chinese nation, that from ancient times to the present Chinese people have flourished here . . . so that what they should recognize as natural is that they are the direct descendants of Yuanmou Man. [Gelong Ahong, 1996: 42]

In addition, we interviewed several relatively well-known Yi scholars about their views on Yuanmou Man. One scholar in Beijing said,

> You can say that the Yi are the descendants of Yuanmou Man, or you can say that they aren't, because that's too long ago. But I am very much in agreement with Professor Liu Yaohan's idea that the ancient non-Han peoples of the Southwest (*gu Xinan Yi*) developed first in Yunnan and then migrated north. The Qiang are not far from the north, in and around Sichuan.

Another scholar, in Chengdu, declared, "You can be brave and venture the opinion that the Yi are the direct descendants of Yuanmou Man, but it's still pushing it." We can see that some Yi scholars not directly connected with this kind of research still consider its results interesting or credible.

One should note that in their historiographical ideas, Liu, Gelong, and others advocating Yi descent from Yuanmou Man explicitly or implicitly align themselves with such Han Chinese scholars as Jia Lanpo (1992) and Zhang Xingyong (1991), who have taken up the hypothesis, largely discredited in the rest of the world, of "multiple origins" or "polygenic descent." Although almost all students of human origins believe that the transition from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens* took place as a result of a second migration of hominids from East Africa to the rest of the Old World between 120,000 and 60,000 years ago, they hypothesize instead that the transition occurred separately (if perhaps contemporaneously) in different parts of the Old World (Sautman, 2001). For the Yi to be direct descendants of Yuanmou Man, they must have undergone the *erectus*-to-*sapiens* transition in situ. And furthermore: If the entire Chinese nation, not to mention the Japanese and the American Indians—the whole "Yellow Race," as Gelong and others put it—derive from Yuanmou Man, then Yuanmou Man was the original ancestor of a kind of human being separate from (and perhaps superior to or, at the very least, longer civilized than) the Johnny-come-lately peoples of Europe and Africa. But in separating the Chinese from these other races, these scholars are careful to note that the first Chinese came from Yunnan and that the Yi and only the Yi (including, of course, other minzu such as the Naxi, Lisu, Lahu, Jinuo, and Hani) still remain in place as the direct descendants of the earliest Yuanmou ancestor.[10]

THE ORIGINS OF THE YI

There are many schools of thought about the origin of the Yi, but most involve either descent from the Di and Qiang of the Northwest and subsequent migration or the idea of indigenous origin. One who espouses the theory of northwest migration is the Naxi scholar Fang Guoyu, whose *Yizu shi gao* (*Draft History of the Yi*), published in 1984, sets out the relationships between the Yi and the ancient Qiang of the Northwest. It has gained support from many scholars, not only because of Fang's strong reputation among historiographers but also because his argument brings to bear persuasive evidence from many kinds of historical documents. His work led to general agreement among scholars on the hypothesis of northwestern origins. Even Liu Yaohan made use of Fang's arguments in his earlier work (Liu Yaohan, 1985b). The northwestern hypothesis was thus long the received wisdom in the field.

But after a period of reflection, many Yi scholars began to attack Fang's ideas. Luoxi Wugu (also known as Wu Gu) began this countermovement with his 1984 essay "Shilun Yizu yuanyuan" ("An Experimental Essay on the Origins of the Yi"), which first raised the possibility of an indigenous origin for the Yi in Yunnan. Drawing on popular sayings, classical Yi texts, and archaeological findings, he asserted that the early humans who had existed in Yunnan were of the same origin as today's Yi and that the people of the ancient Dian kingdom were part of the same independent ethnic group as today's Yi people. In 1996, Gelong Ahong continued the attack on what he called the "hypothesis of descent from the ancient Qiang and Rong," calling it "a pure misunderstanding" that "has no great basis in fact" (Gelong Ahong, 1996: 29, 33):

> This writer does not deny that when the Qiang migrated southward, it is quite possible that some of them gradually flowed into Yunnan, but as their fate pushed them into Yunnan, they had no choice but to "change their clothing and follow the local customs," melting into the population of the local Yi. We can only count them as having been absorbed into the many kinds of people of the Yi language branch, and there is no way that the ethnic affiliation of any of the local groups would be changed in any way by the absorption of a few Qiang people. . . . The works of those who hold the idea that the peoples of the Yi

> language branch are "descendants of the Di and Qiang" are mostly just simple classifications that do not produce any evidence. [Gelong Ahong, 1996: 30, 31]

In addition, "those who force unrelated evidence together have a hard time maintaining their stance" (*qianqiang fuhui*, *nan yi zhanzhu jiao*). Gelong's final conclusion is that "the Yi are the aboriginal inhabitants of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau on both sides of the Jinsha River" (Gelong Ahong, 1996: 39).

Long Xianjun, in his *Zhongguo Yizu tongshi gangyao* (*Outline of a Comprehensive History of the Yi in China*), says,

> Since ancient times, the Yi have been the indigenous people of the Southwest. . . . The Paleolithic and Neolithic cultural remains discovered at many places in the Southwest fully prove that there have been people living in the Southwest from very ancient times, and that the Yi are the minzu that has inhabited this area for the longest time. [Long Xianjun, 1993: 2]

Long well expresses the viewpoint of those who hold the indigenous hypothesis.

One of us interviewed a series of fairly well-known Yi scholars about this question, and we present some of their opinions here:

> Fang Guoyu thinks that the origin of the Yi is in the Di-Qiang of the Northwest because there are relatively many mentions of the Di-Qiang in Han language sources, and relatively few of the Yi of the Southwest. Pursuing this in various directions has led to the hypothesis of Di-Qiang origins. Fang Guoyu wrote in his Draft History of the Yi that the Di-Qiang were in the North and came south. But Ma Changshou's materials for his writings on Yi history came mostly from Yi language sources, and he came up with the idea that the origin of the Yi was in Yunnan and they later spread out in the four directions. Some people say that with the different viewpoints of Ma and Fang, Ma was driven away by Fang, after which the scholarly community has consistently taken Fang as authoritative. But all kinds of research have demonstrated that it is impossible that the Yi could have come down from the north. [Scholar in Beijing]

> The idea that the Yi are indigenous to Yunnan has already received support from many people. And the idea that the Yi moved from the Northwest to the Southwest is only the opinion of a [small] portion of people. [Scholar in Chengdu]

> The Yi did not migrate from the Northwest to the Southwest. Han people support the northern (*sic*) migration hypothesis, but actually [the Yi] are a multi-origin indigenous people. The northwestern migration hypothesis has distorted research into Yi culture. [Scholar in Guizhou]

> With regard to the origins of the Yi, the indigenous hypothesis is held by the majority; but there are people who support the northwestern hypothesis and others. [Scholar in Guizhou]

> Yi people don't eat horse, cow, or sheep or goat milk products, whereas the herding peoples of the north eat these products. Furthermore, there is no mention of horse, cow, or sheep or goat milk products in Yi-language documents. And there is no horse, cow, or sheep or goat milk products among the materials that Yi use in rituals. If the Yi were a herding people, then these things would certainly show up in documents or among ritual offerings, since the deepest stratum of [our] ethnic language is quite old. All this reflects the fact that the Yi are indigenous to the Southwest. Still, the indigenous hypothesis has not yet overthrown the northern migration hypothesis; Han and scholars of other minzu (*wai minzu de xuezhe*) still support the hypothesis of migration from the North. [Scholar in Beijing]

> As soon as the hypothesis that the Yi are indigenous was raised, then people started to think; even Ma Yao [a distinguished Bai scholar] and Fang Guoyu said, "Yeah, where did the indigenous people of Yunnan go? If there were people in Yunnan 1.7 million years ago, where did they go? Where did the creators of the Bronze Age culture go?" [Scholar in Yunnan]

As far as we know, there has been no serious or systematic attempt to make a linguistic case for the indigenous origins of the Yi in Yunnan. The case for a northwestern origin has generally been made in terms of the obvious affiliation of the Yi branch (what Bradley has called first Lolo-Burmish and then, using a more politically correct term, Yipho-Burmish; see Bradley, 1979, 2001) with the rest of the Tibeto-Burman languages (what the Chinese linguists would call the Qiang, Zang, and Jingpo branches of Tibeto-Burman), whose point of origin has usually been assumed to be to the northwest of both Han and present-day Yi territory. In fact, the only argument among those given above that presents any specific evidence is that pointing to the lack of milk products in Yi culture. The rest simply argue that because there have been "people" (or hominids at least) in Yunnan for a very long time (an uncontrovertible fact), the Yi must be descended from those earlier inhabitants.

Nevertheless, both written sources and interviews make clear that a large portion of Yi scholars support the hypothesis of indigenous origins. They believe that the hypothesis of northern origins was something forced on them by Han scholars[11] and that it has led research on Yi culture astray. We can be sure that there will be many more books and articles supporting the indigenous hypothesis published in the near future.

YI WRITING AND THE SYMBOLS ON POTTERY AT BANPO

There are also several different schools of thought about the origins of Yi writing. For example, those who believe in Ming origins emphasize the earliest extant Yi writing, dated to the twelfth year of Jiajing, or 1533, which was found in a stone inscription in Luquan county, Yunnan. The Tang origins hypothesis comes from Han-language historical sources, which say that Yi writing was invented by Ake during the Tang dynasty (Chen Shilin, 1985: 217). The hypothesis of Han dynasty origins comes from a mention of the Bailang language in the *Hou Han shu* (*History of the Latter Han*); some scholars believe that this language already was written then and that it was a form of Yi language (Ma Changshou, 1984).[12] But all these hypotheses originated with Han or other non-Yi scholars.

Many Yi scholars, however, do not accept any of these hypotheses and instead have attempted to link Yi writing with the symbols carved on pottery vessels found in the 6000 B.P. Neolithic site at Banpo in Xi'an, trying to demonstrate that the symbols from Banpo were early Yi writing. Professor Yu Hongmo, a Yi scholar from Guizhou, has asserted, on the basis of his comparisons of Yi writing with these symbols, that

> the beginnings of the development of Yi writing are extremely old. The symbols incised into the multicolored ware of the Yangshao culture are not only the beginnings of Han writing [Chinese characters] but also have a connection with the origins of Yi writing. . . . Even though a very long time has elapsed, there are still many characters in the Yi writing system preserved from the symbols carved on the multicolored pottery that have remained in the Yi script to the present day. [Yu Hongmo, 1988]

Such research led Yu to conclude, "In order to explore the question of the origins of Yi writing, one must link the question together with that of the ancient writing systems of our country" (Yu Hongmo, 1988).

When the Yi poet Li Qiao showed reproductions of the Banpo symbols to the ritual specialist (*bimo*) Liba Yikun, who recognized more than 50% of them, he was so excited that he wrote three articles telling the story of how the origin of Yi writing was related to the symbols (Li Qiao, 1991, 1993, 2000). Shen Wuyi and Wu Jingzhong (1997) later found that 88% of the 44 or the 50 symbols in the Banpo writing are comparable to Yi characters, raising Li Qiao's percentage.[13] Shen and Wu ask, "Are these [pottery designs at Banpo] the earliest embodiment of Yi writing? We think we can say this" (Shen Wuji and Wu Jingzhong, 1997). Chen Ying also pointed out that "the Yi writing that has spread to the southwest today has a direct relationship of transmission with the symbols carved on the pottery of Banpo" (Chen Ying, 1987: 254).

Why is it that Yi writing can be used to decipher the Banpo inscriptions, while Han writing cannot? Gelong explains,

> Han writing was originally derived from old Yi writing, but the Han kingdoms on the North China plains were wealthy and their economy developed fast, bringing with it cultural development. Through the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Qin dynasties the characters evolved from shell-and-bone writing to bronze vessel inscriptions through the great seal and small seal characters to the fully developed square characters of today. In contrast, the Yi always lived in the Southwest, and particularly after their withdrawal from the Sichuan Basin the high plateau topography limited their economic and cultural development. In particular the spirit beliefs of the ancient Yi were very strong, to the point where they made writing into a "sacred thing" that was only understood by bimo priests and inherited in their lineages, not spread among the common people. This limited the development of writing, so the shape and construction of the characters preserve to this day their original natures. This is why it can help us today to decipher the inscriptions on those ancient pottery wares. [Gelong Ahong, 1996: 101]

The discourse about Yi writing tends to push its origins ever farther back in history. Chen Shixue has proposed that "today's Yi writing and the early embodiment of Han writing in shell-and-bone characters share a common origin between 7,000 and 8,000 years ago" (Chen Shixue, 1998). Zhu Juyuan, a member of Liu Yaohan's Yi Culture School, believes that "Yi and Han writing have the same source but different courses of development" (Zhu Juyuan, 2000: 1) and similarly dates the origins of Yi writing to the carved symbols on artifacts excavated at the Jiahu site (7500-8000 B.P.) and the Pengtou Shan site (7800-8200 B.P.). All these scholars thus participate in the project that uses Yi history to put Chinese civilization in the vanguard of world civilization, with the Yi leading China; the slogan *Shijie wenming*, *Zhongguo wei xian*; *Zhongguo wenming*, *Yizu wei xian* (In world civilization, China was first; in Chinese civilization, the Yi were first) was much advocated at the Third International Conference on Yi Studies at Shilin in 2000.

Liu Zhiyi's (2000) recent work not only puts the earliest Yi writing even earlier, at about 9000 B.P., but systematizes its place in world epigraphy. According to Liu, all the scripts of the world (with the possible exception of the ancient American ones, which he does not discuss) originate in two kinds of ideas: (1) ideographic writing (*biaoyi wenzi*), which began with the Yue script of present-day Zhejiang, devised about 8,000 years ago and subsequently developed into Chinese characters, and (2) phonetic writing (*biaoyin wenzi*), which originated with the 9,000-year-old Yi writing and spread westward to Mesopotamia (6000 B.P.), Egypt (5500), India (5000), and the ancient Mediterranean (4500).[14] These ideas have very radical implications. Almost all previous conjectures about Yi writing have taken place within the context of Chinese nationalism, using its antiquity as a kind of Chinese writing, connected at least in its origins with Han writing, to help rescue China from the national shame of having invented writing later than certain other ancient civilizations. But Liu Zhiyi's work, while it places the origins of all writing systems (except those of the Americas) safely within China, gives Yi writing a much larger role. While the Han may have invented writing on their own, it is the Yi and only the Yi who are responsible for the literacy of the rest of the world.

And the stories of the ancientness of Yi writing are not confined to the scholarly world; they have spread widely among the educated general populace. One of us recalls vividly a friendly conversation with a local militia captain in Liangshan in 1993. The man was a published poet (in the Han language) and an amateur student of Yi history, and he expounded the ancientness of Yi writing. He averred that the Banpo symbols, with a proven antiquity of "at least 20,000 years (*sic*)," had puzzled even modern China's greatest scholar of ancient Han writing, Guo Moruo, who had been unable to recognize a single one of them. At the same time, said the captain, a very ordinary Nuosu *bimo* ritual specialist was able to recognize 54 of the 56 symbols found on the Banpo pottery. In 1993, the minority culture industry in Yi areas was just getting started. But observations such as the captain's presaged the general public's much wider exposure to Yi history.

BEYOND THE SCHOLARLY WORLD

Since about 1996, many findings of research into Yi history and culture have been incorporated into popular or mass cultural activities, not only fulfilling the ambitions of officials and intellectuals to display the ancient history and culture of the Yi but also making money. They have led to popular pride in the Yi cultural heritage and to considerable support among government agencies and cadres for further research. As Ashuo Keha, vice chair of the Zhengxie of Zhaojue county in Liangshan, put it,

> We people of Liangshan, particularly those who understand both Yi and Han written languages, should be just like Professor Liu and excavate and research our precious Yi culture, emphasizing that only in this way will our Chinese

> culture (*Zhonghua wenhua*) be able to face its ancestors and hold up its head before its children and grandchildren. [Ashuo Keha et al., 1995]

In fact, many cadres also participate in such research, but their biggest contribution is in their use of the results of Yi studies in organizing cultural activities and thus disseminating Yi history among the ordinary people.

Most of this activity is accomplished by government administrative and tourism agencies, especially the latter. These agencies are not particularly concerned with historical accuracy or even whether what they promote is really part of Yi culture. In their view, development cannot wait for the outcome of slow and formal scholarly debates. What they do not consider, perhaps, is that the public will of course take whatever is presented in touristic displays for genuine "Yi culture."

Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture has been especially effective in converting the results of scholarly research into touristic moneymaking activities. The western suburbs of Chuxiong City now house the Solar Calendar Square Park, a 36-hectare attraction with an initial investment cost of 104 million RMB. The park is an orderly grouping of buildings—areas devoted to an Yi cultural exhibition, folklore activity, religious rituals, and ancient technology—in which are displayed many features of ancient Yi culture as delineated in recent years by the Yi Culture School: the tiger totem, the worship of gourds, and the ten-month calendar. The most imposing part of the park is the Solar Calendar Square, built in a style somewhat resembling that of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. It has layers of marble terraces, the top one crowned by two totem poles, immediately below which is a performance hall where visitors can observe and join in Yi ethnic dances.

As one enters the park, one must first go through an entry ritual: at the door one hears an Yi-language welcome, and then young female tourist guides offer a toast and sing a drinking song of welcome (in Chinese), meaning roughly, "If you like to drink, drink; if you don't like to drink, drink anyway; whether you like to drink or not, drink."[15] In the park itself, the guides, with a false air of knowledge, explain Yi history and culture. Quite naturally, they will tell how the Yi worship tigers, how the Yi ten-month solar calendar is different from the Han calendar, what is inside the Yi's gourds, and so on. It is quite obvious that these women have had some training in the version of Yi history and culture propounded by the Yi Culture School. This version of Yi culture has begun to have a broader influence among Yi people, not just those in Chuxiong.[16] When one goes to the Solar Calendar Performance Hall, even the carefully choreographed ethnic dances seem to have a folk character consonant with the young guides' explanations of Yi culture.

Tickets to the Solar Calendar Square in Chuxiong are 15 yuan in the daytime and 30 at night. Attendance is highest around the time of the summer Fire Festival, but there are many guests at traditional Han holidays as well. Since this is one of the area's very few tourist attractions and the only formal ethnic tourist park, it is an important money earner for the local government.

The Solar Calendar Square at the Ethnic Village tourist attraction in the western suburbs of Kunming is much smaller than that in Chuxiong, but it is the first place where the ten-month calendar and the worship of tigers have been packaged and presented to tourists. The Yi section of the Ethnic Village is not very large, but the Solar Calendar Square is stunning, with a totem pole in the middle and statues of the twelve animals. At the east end of the square is a 5-meter-high growling tiger, showing the connection between the ten-month Yi solar calendar and the worship of the tiger totem. Visitors thus not only can enjoy Yi songs and dances but also can see that the Yi have a ten-month calendar and worship tigers. Since the park is close to Kunming, the Yi Studies Association of Yunnan has often held meetings and celebrations of the Fire Festival there.

The motifs of the ten-month solar calendar and the worship of tigers have been widely adopted. For example, the tiger totem pole in the ethnological museum of Chuxiong portrays the story of the tiger setting the earth in motion, and the tiger dance of Shuangbai county is another kind of performance of the idea of tiger worship. The celebration of Yi New Year festivals in different places during the tenth or eleventh month of the lunar year provides a good opportunity to explain the culture since people from other ethnic groups are inclined to ask, "Why do you Yi have your New Year in the tenth month?" A common answer is, "Because the Yi calendar has only ten months." One of us has also seen business cards and introductory brochures for the Yunnan Yi Studies Association that incorporate brief explanations of the ten-month calendar.

It is very clear that local government agencies have been able to use Yi culture to bring in considerable tourist money; for them, quite understandably, scholarly debates are not important. What matters is demonstrating the unique characteristics of the ancient history of the Yi, particularly how the Yi are different from other ethnic groups. So even though the tiger is not especially prominent in the culture or religion of every Yi group—neither the Nisu that one of us belongs to nor the Nuosu that the other has spent years researching gives the tiger particular priority over other animals, though the tiger certainly does play a role in these traditions—it is an ideal vehicle for forming a binary opposition with the implied other: the dragon. According to Liu Yaohan, two groups participated in the origin of Chinese civilization: one tiger, the other dragon. The tiger group consisted of the Yi, Bai, Zang, Qiang, Naxi, Hani, Lisu, Tujia, and so on—members of what is known to modern linguistics as the Tibeto-Burman language family. The dragon group consisted of just about everyone else: Miao, Yao, Buyi, Wa, Li, Zhuang, Shui, She, Menggu, Man, and so on. The Han, in this view, formed later (during the Han dynasty), when the tiger group and the dragon group merged, and had no part in the beginnings of Chinese civilization (Liu Yaohan, 1985b: 222-77).

In more orthodox and better known discourses, the tiger still fits well with the Yi culturalist agenda. The dragon originally represented nothing much more than the emperor, Han or Manchu, but in recent national mythology, particularly that created since the dual turning points in cultural history of the late 1980s—the He Shang TV documentary and the aborted student movement of 1989—it has come increasingly to represent China, a China dominated by Han people and Han culture. At the same time, we know from the Yi Culture School that the Han are something of usurpers in Chinese history, with the Yi having invented the calendar, writing, Daoism, the yin-yang cosmology, and the other foundational icons of the Chinese nation. So what better symbol to balance the dragon than the tiger? It is equally fierce, equally proud, and in the fengshui tradition even provides the cosmological and spatial balance to the dragon in the binary opposition of *qinglong* and *baihu* (green-blue dragon and white tiger). At the same time, as the qinglong and baihu demonstrate, it is part of a greater unity. Members of the Yi Culture School, after all, are not separatists, claiming that the Yi are apart from China, but rather assert that the Yi are fundamental to China. For this purpose, the tiger works perfectly, whether or not it is central to most Yi cultures today.

QUANTITATIVE CONFIRMATION

In summer 2001, we designed a simple questionnaire to judge the prevalence of the ideas of the Yi Culture School and other aspects of the new history of the Yi among Yi professors, university students, and cadres from a variety of locations. Li administered the questions to 202 people, 121 male and 81 female, consisting of 48 professors, 19 cadres, 132 students, and 3 others; 94 were from Yunnan, 91 from Sichuan, 15 from Guizhou, and 1 from Guangxi. They were interviewed in Beijing, Chengdu, Guiyang, and Kunming. Respondents were presented with several of the ideas of the new history of the Yi (in one instance, an idea that the new history has tried to displace) and asked whether they believed those ideas to be true, false, or difficult to verify. Some of the results are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Belief in the Tenets of the New Yi History

Tenet	*True* n	*True* (%)	*False* n	*False* (%)	*Difficult to Determine* n	*Difficult to Determine* (%)
The origins of Yi civilization are the origins of Chinese civilization.	90	(45)	36	(18)	72	(36)
The Yi are the direct descendants of Yuanmou Man.	67	(33)	47	(23)	87	(43)
The Yi came from the Northwest.	75	(37)	68	(34)	55	(27)
The Yi are the aboriginal inhabitants of Yunnan and the Southwest.	107	(53)	46	(23)	43	(21)
The Yi ten-month solar calendar is the oldest calendar on earth.	148	(73)	23	(11)	29	(14)
The Yi ten-month solar calendar is the most accurate calendar on earth.	91	(45)	53	(26)	57	(28)

TABLE 2: Beliefs about the Age of Yi Writing

	Age (thouands of years)					
	8-9	*6-7*	*4-5*	*At least 2*	*Less than 2*	*Difficult to Determine*
Respondents (*n*)	24	26	46	69	8	27

The general pattern is clear; the New Yi History by no means has unanimous support among Yi elites, and the least provable idea, that the Yi are the direct descendants of Yuanmou Man, is held by only one-third of the respondents. At the same time, no one tenet is rejected by more than a quarter of the respondents, and the most popular idea, that the ten-month solar calendar is the world's oldest, gains support from almost three-quarters and is dismissed by less than one-eighth.

In addition, we asked people about the age of Yi writing (see Table 2). Members of the Yi elite seem to agree that Yi writing is at least 2,000 years old, and slightly under half think that it has a history of 4,000 years or more, making it at least very close to the antiquity of the oldest writing systems of the Near East. Again, we should note that the earliest extant examples of Yi writing are from the Jiajing period, a mere 500 years ago.

What this simple survey points out is that the views of the specific Yi scholars we have cited in detail here are neither unknown nor unusual among the wider Yi elite. Just about everyone interviewed knew of the tenets of the Yi Culture School, and a plurality (in several cases, a majority) agreed with the more extreme positions. That only 8 of 200 respondents thought Yi writing was less than 2,000 years old, despite the well-known fact that the oldest actual examples are less than 500 years old, speaks to the persuasiveness of the New Yi History in general and of the Yi Culture School in particular. In other words, its writers are not just a few cranks with theories that nobody pays any attention to. Their ideas have become the standard beliefs among a large portion of educated Yi. And since these beliefs were not expressed at all in public writings before the 1980s, the speed and scope of their spread are testimony to the effective dissemination of the New Yi History.

THE NEW YI HISTORY IN THE NEW NEW CHINA

What accounts for the rise and popularity of the new history of the Yi? A simple explanation is that Yi people were allowed very little role in the writing of their official history before the 1990s; the few Yi historians were, like everyone else, subjected to a state orthodoxy that required them to write in a certain Marxist-Leninist paradigm. In the 1990s, the numbers of educated Yi had grown, and there was somewhat more freedom to write in less orthodox ways, so the Yi started telling the truth about themselves.

This view certainly has some validity, but obviously there are other, more complex causes. We see the phenomenon of the New Yi History as part of a new political economy of information that has overtaken China in general since the collapse of central state legitimacy after 1989. After the hopeful and then tragic events of that year, China entered into another of those phases so well described in the opening lines of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*: *Tianxia da shi, fen jiu bi he, he jiu bi fen* (In geopolitical terms, when the empire has been fragmented for a long time, it will unite; when it has been united for a long time, it will fragment). China is coming loose. It is doubtful that central power, unlike central legitimacy, will totally collapse in the next few years, but the political economy and, with it, China's cultural economy are becoming ever less centralized and more regionalized. Edward Friedman (1995) has documented the cultural side of this change in *National Identity and Democratic Prospects in Socialist China*, viewing political and cultural regionalism as perhaps driven fundamentally by a shift in the economy from central planning to local private and quasi-private enterprise, as well as by a consequent shift in economic power from the capital of the planners in Beijing to the plans of the capitalists in Shanghai, Guangdong, and other local centers of development.

At the same time as China is regionalizing, however, it is also nationalizing, in the sense that appeals to nationalism and xenophobia have partially replaced appeals to socialism and class struggle as one pillar of whatever legitimacy remains to the Communist Party.[17] There is an enormous effort to show the antiquity of Chinese civilization to the rest of the world, particularly to demonstrate that Chinese civilization is older than others. The dubious paleoanthropology mentioned above (Sautman, 2001) is one aspect of this attempt, but just as important is the popular promotion of such things as the Sanxingdui archaeological site in Sichuan as evidence of Chinese antiquity, whether through journalism[18] or through the little blurb that comes with a Sanxingdui souvenir letter opener: "The human head with gold leaf is one of the most typical cultural relics unearthed at Sanxingdui. Vividly figured, it reflects the profound and long history of Chinese culture." The official pressure to emphasize the antiquity of Chinese civilization gives the Yi scholars another opportunity to play their part in an important nationalistic discourse. Again, their slogan from the 2000 Shilin conference is relevant: "In world civilization, China was first; in Chinese civilization, the Yi were first."

Taken together, the loss of central legitimacy and the rise of local economic power and consequent appearance of a limited degree of local political maneuvering room (we hesitate to go so far as to use the word *autonomy* in what remains in many ways a one-party dictatorship), along with increased incomes and rising standards of living for a growing educated middle class, have all led to a kind of cultural blooming. The "level" of this flowering is not as high as many lofty-minded idealists of democracy and human rights would hope; to date, it consists mainly of pop music, pulp fiction, fashion trends, and an explosion of recreational and travel opportunities. We cannot here go into the complex dynamics of reciprocal interaction among all these factors as the constraints of ideological China have relaxed, but the consequences for minority scholarship, one of the tinier fields in which the loosening has taken place, have been earthshaking.

Not only are minority elites writing inside a much looser ideological straitjacket (the jacket is still there, of course, since one cannot advocate independence or even meaningful autonomy for any minority people or region), not only do they have less reason to subordinate their own perceived local interests to some sort of collective goal (since the great collective goals of socialism now seem like shams), but they also universally perceive that the former centralized regimes of ideology and political economy have given them the short end of the stick. In the political economy, many minority regions are still in effect internal colonies, exploited for their primary resources and used as markets for goods manufactured in the metropole,[19] and in the cultural or ideological economy, they have been insulted—there is really no nicer word for it—by the ideology of a ladder of human progress, which allots them the lower rungs. In the goods economy, the colonial system is difficult to correct, and strong economic forces cannot be counteracted or reversed easily. But in the cultural economy, opportunities for change are more plentiful. It is time to speak back to the Han-centric story of Chinese history, which was after all invented, or at least refined, by the high modernizers of the Guomindang and Communist Party propaganda departments.

The question is how to speak back. The easiest way is to counter Han-centrism with Yi-centrism, just as Afrocentrism in the United States responded explicitly and deliberately to the Eurocentrism of the state and popular orthodoxy (Asante, 1987).[20] And we believe that much of the New Yi History is just that—they say they were first; we say we were first. Any time they make a comparison that makes us look bad, we are going to come back with a comparison that makes us look good—and if it makes them look bad, too bad. Careful factual research is not unimportant in such an enterprise, but it takes a backseat to pride. Certainly, Yi scholars, no less than Han or foreign scholars, argue about the facticity of many of the claims of the New Yi History, but that is not their main point. Any discovery, be it Yuanmou Man or the antiquity of the Bronze Age artistic and ritual traditions from Sanxingdui to Kunming or the existence of monumental cliff art in Yi areas (Wu Gu, 2001), is important evidence against assuming that the current hegemonic power is central in the historical narrative. And once the omniscience of the Han-centric narrative is questioned, once it is no longer inevitable that the Han did everything first, then all sorts of assertions are possible. Some of them probably will hold up to careful future inquiry; others probably will not. But their presence in books and articles, in casual conversations, and even in the theme parks of Kunming and Chuxiong at least brings to the larger public, including the Han tourists in the parks and a few Han scholars who pick up the books and articles, the idea that the Yi might have contributed something, that their viewpoint deserves an airing, that there are other ways of looking at Yi history besides the orthodox one.

Certainly, economic and institutional factors underlie the blooming of the New Yi History—a new thesis may create opportunities to make money from tourists as well as opportunities to get published and promoted since the field is open to new interpretations. But we believe that the greatest motivator is cultural and ethnic pride. Enough of insults, enough of relegation to the sidelines and the footnotes; for themselves at least and for anyone else who will listen, the Yi will assert their worth. And since one of the main ways of asserting worth in contemporary China is by demonstrating historical precedence, the Yi will assert their historical precedence.

EPILOGUE

In the conclusion to the original "History of the History of the Yi," one of us asked a series of questions and made a series of observations (Harrell, 1995: 91), which we now attempt to comment on in light of the new developments of Yi historiography in the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium.

Q: Is a relatively ideologically neutral History of the Yi possible? Could one write such a history with an agenda that was neither racialist [like that of the Western explorers of the early twentieth century] nor nominalist [like that of prerevolutionary Chinese ethnologists] nor orthodox Marxian [like that of revolutionary Chinese ethnologists]? (Harrell, 1995: 91)

A: Well, no and yes. We have seen an utterly new type of Yi history emerge since the mid-1980s. Its point of view is not primarily racialist, though some of the ideas about Yuanmou Man can be read this way, especially when Yuanmou Man is seen as the progenitor of all things Yellow. Nor is it predominantly nominalist, though the category Yi, which Harrell (1990), Pan Jiao (1998), and others have shown was created through the nationalities identification project of the 1950s, is in a way central to the effort. And of course, it has left the orthodoxies of Marxism and the Five Modes of Production far behind. But it is in no way ideologically neutral. It is part of a political movement of ethnic solidarity led and promoted by scholars, entrepreneurs, and cadres, and just as history serves the nation when writ large (Duara, 1995), it serves the minzu or the idea of an enlarged minzu, including linguistically related peoples, when writ on a somewhat smaller scale.

Q: What would an observer who studied Yi society anew from an ethnographic perspective, visiting communities and interviewing local people in Liangshan, Guizhou, and many parts of Yunnan, and then reading the classical sources and the Yi traditional manuscripts, come up with? Would such an observer find a unified group, an Yi category that was internally consistent? A series of related peoples with different, though perhaps related, histories and only remotely similar societies? A native history and a history created by outsiders, or several histories created by outsiders? (Harrell, 1995: 91)

A: Such an observer, we suggest, would be engaging in an almost irrelevant project. It is clear from some ethnography, such as Erik Mueggler's (2001) magnificent *The Age of Wild Ghosts*, that many members of local communities are still not particularly interested in Yi as a category, and Mueggler's associates in Zhizuo refer to themselves and their neighbors almost exclusively in the oppositional categories of Lolopo and Han. Harrell's experience in many communities in Liangshan seems to confirm this, and in Li's experience of his own local matrix in Xinping county, there are many local ethnic groups, some of which, such as the small, remote Sansu and Shesu, resent the implicit usurpation or monopolization of the category Yi by the numerically dominant and somewhat more prosperous Nisu. So at one level, there is indeed a series of related peoples. But these are not the peoples with the histories. They have accounts of their own past, genealogical, mythical, and proto-historical by turns, but anyone who tries to write history at a larger scale finds that the field is monopolized by the Yi Culture School and kindred approaches. We see no reason, at present, to try to write a competing history, wishing only to place the Yi Culture School in its own historic and intellectual context.

Observation: [The Yi] too have come to be Chinese, and as such their history has become part of Chinese history. And Chinese history, now as in the Imperial era, belongs to and is defined by the ruling orthodoxy. (Harrell, 1995: 91)

Hindsight: Whoops! A scholar writing in 1990-1991 could not conceive of the degree to which there is now a space to write history outside the orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism. The very little Marxism-Leninism that exists in the Yi Culture School is not central to its argument. At the same time, the minzu categories are part of the orthodoxy and have become part of the matrix in which the Yi Culture School writes its history. Still, in a further twist, the Yi Culture School has turned the orthodox ideas on their heads within the matrix that the national orthodoxy originally defined. "Yi" is in fact the salient category, even more for the Yi Culture School than for the original Marxist ethnologists who helped define Yi as a minzu in the 1950s. And it is a category within Chinese history and, to an extent, world history. But instead of being mired at the slave stage of society, a backward people eager to learn from the Big Brother Han and leap over ages of history, the Yi have become the ancient leaders, the direct descendants of the progenitors of everyone Yellow, the people who taught the world to write. Who would have thought it?

NOTES

1. See Tong Enzheng (1989) for the article that opened up this anthropological discourse.

2. We know of no systematic research on the recruitment of minority cadres and students during the early 1950s. It is a prime topic for investigation in oral and documentary histories.

3. Such recruitment of minority leaders was clearly less common in the Tibet and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions than in the various autonomous prefectures of the Southwest. See the articles in Rossabi (forthcoming).

4. We see the notion of "Han culture" as problematic in its own right; certainly, the Chinese mainstream has, over the centuries, absorbed elements from and been disseminated to members of many non-Han peoples, most notably of course the Hui and Manchu. But to minority elites, *Han culture* is a shorthand for the whole hegemonic narrative.

5. For a contrary view, see Li Shaoming's (2002) criticism of this position, as well as a rejoinder (Harrell, 2002).

6. Only a small number of Yi people at the present day refer to themselves as *luo*, *luoluo*, or close cognates of these terms; these are primarily the Lolopo people of north-central Yunnan (Mueggler, 2001). It may or may not be a coincidence that Liu Yaohan's own origins are in this particular group. It is difficult to tell linguistically whether other self-appellations such as *nuo*, *na*, *ni*, and *nyi* are cognate to this word for tiger or whether indeed the ethnic term itself means *tiger* or derives from a phonetically similar word for *black* or some other word. We are not qualified to help resolve this etymological puzzle.

7. The term *totem* (*tuteng*) has a prominent place in the Chinese ethnological grid of social and cultural evolution, inherited from the works of Lewis Henry Morgan, who first formulated the notion of totemism. Thus, Liu is here dealing with a concept that is quite familiar to his readers and one that fits with the purportedly ancient nature of the phenomena he is trying to explain.

8. In the New Yi History, as in the prerevolutionary Chinese history of the Yi (Harrell, 1995: 75-79), a kind of phonological matching game is played: participants look for phonetic similarities between words or names in current or former Chinese use and words or names in Yi languages. Any two terms that are phonetically similar are assumed to be related, and in the New Yi History, the Yi term is inevitably given historical priority.

9. Gelong here is casting his lot with the many Yi intellectuals who see the *minzu shibie* process of the 1950s, criticized by Western ethnicity specialists for grouping together related but separate peoples into artificial categories (Harrell, 1990; Kaup, 2000; Diamond, 1995; McKhann, 1995), as instead a deliberate attempt at splitting the Yi (who include those peoples now classified as Lisu, Lahu, Hani, Jinuo, and Naxi) for political purposes, so that no provincial-level autonomous region would be created and so that the Yi would be fragmented and not present a threat to Han hegemony in the Southwest.

10. We are informed by a dear friend that Yi scholars are not the only ones who claim some sort of direct descent from Yuanmou Man and who downplay any direct role of migratory origins. Charles McKhann summarizes the findings of the Naxi scholars Guo Dalie and He Zhiwu (1994):

> The authors' desire to carve out a Naxi space that is relatively independent of the nation is clear in the following section, when they attempt to link Naxi directly to the rise of *Homo sapiens*. In two pages, they cover the origin of the earth, of animals, hominid evolution through Yuanmouren (*Homo erectus*, dated at 1.7 million years, from north central Yunnan), and on to Lijiang Man (50,000-100,000 years old), and Lugu Lake Man (2,000-3,000 years old). While they count Lijiang Man as "ancestor of human kind" (*renlei xianmin*), Lugu Lake Man is considered an ancestor of the Naxi nationality (*Naxizu xianmin*). A discussion of Chinese historical sources relating to the Maoniu Qiang follows only later. [McKhann, 2001]

11. As mentioned above, Fang Guoyu was a Naxi. But as a representative of mainstream Chinese scholarship, he is reflexively identified with the Han.

12. We should point out here that there is a considerable scramble among ethnic groups of the Southwest to claim the Bailang language for their own. Several sources lay out the case for the Prmi (see Chen Zongxiang and Deng Wenfeng, 1991); the Zhuang (Huang Yilu, 2001) and the Naxi have also laid claims.

13. We present here, for the reader's information, an incomplete set of Banpo pottery symbols as reproduced in Chang (1977: 74). A Eurocentric scholar might find the letters *I*, *T*, *U*, *Y*, *X*, *Z*, *N*, *E*, *K*, *L*, and *A* among these symbols, and thus conclude that the Romans built Banpo. But they did not.

14. All present-day and known historical Yi scripts are true writing systems: each graph represents a syllable, and particular passages can be read and pronounced by someone who has not read them before. In these regards, they are unlike such proto-writing as the Naxi pictographs and the ancient Mayan and Mexican systems. According to the most reliable researchers, many Yi systems contain both phonetic and semantic elements; that is, like Chinese characters, every syllabic sign has a definite pronunciation, but in some versions, phonetically identical syllables used to represent different meanings are written differently (Wasilewska, 1999).

15. This song seems to be a manifestation of the popularizing "alcoholization" of Yi cultures. In village Yi societies, generally those who can drink slowly and moderately are admired, while those who get drunk are ridiculed. A Nuosu proverb, for example, says, "He who drinks one bowl is a good fellow; he who drinks two bowls is a hero; he who drinks three bowls is a worthless piece of dog skin." But as Yi have moved first into the cadre world and now into the world of tourism, they have participated in the characterization of theirs as a "liquor culture," sometimes in contrast to the "tea culture" of the Han, and will try to trick outsiders into drinking contests by saying that getting drunk is *Yizu guiju* (Yi custom), or a sign of friendship. It is not clear to either of us why this has happened.

16. Most of the impetus for the New Yi History seems to come from scholars originally from Yunnan and Guizhou, rather than Liangshan. This may reflect Liu Yaohan's Chuxiong origins, but it likely also has something to do with what Daniel (1996) has called the different epistemes of observing the past. Yi peoples of Yunnan and Guizhou, for the most part, participate in a historical episteme, but the Nuosu of Liangshan are still much more concerned with genealogy.

17. The other remaining pillar is the people's livelihood, to resurrect an old term—shifted from socialist construction to consumerist spending but still firmly in place.

18. Peng Wenbin has collected more than 30 articles that appeared in the Chinese press in 1999-2001 concerning the implications of the findings at Sanxingdui for the antiquity of Chinese civilization in the Southwest and for the *E pluribus unum* nature (*duoyuan yiti xing*) of Chinese civilization. See, for example, Xinhua (2001).

19. In Yi areas specifically, a large proportion of the tax revenues for Meigu, Yanyuan, and Muli counties of Liangshan came from logging taxes before the general logging ban at the end of 1998, and Ganluo county depends almost exclusively on taxes generated by its lead, tin, and zinc mines. For details on economic dependency in Liangshan, see Heberer (2001).

20. We are indebted to Devon Peña for suggesting this parallel to us.

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