This memoir by Professor Yen Ching-hwang of his academic career and social activism is, in various ways, a journey through many lives, in and beyond Overseas Chinese studies, over the last 50 years.

From his birth in Yongchun County in Fujian in 1937, through his early years in rural Pahang (Malaya) from 1947, the author chronicles the trials and tribulations of those harsh years and the difficulties of schooling, but also some of the joys of childhood including his love of Chinese romance and *wuxia* novels. With the onset of the Malayan Emergency, the memories of a young boy of this period also make for an unusual perspective on the period.

Yen’s relations with key figures in Malayan Chinese education began with his being taught in middle school by Lim Lian Geok 林连玉 in Kuala Lumpur. But his real political education was to begin in 1957 — coincidentally the year of Malayan independence — when he entered Nanyang University in Singapore, initially also having to wrestle with the English and Malay languages. It was also there that he came into contact with Hsu Yun-tsiao 许云樵, doyen of Southeast Asian history studies at the time, and at the University of Malaya with K.C. Tregonning, Wong Lin Ken and Eunice Thio. Yen’s account suggests little involvement or sympathy with the Leftist student politics of Nanyang University, with the author claiming not to be a “political animal.” It was, however, at Nand 大南 that many of the author’s lifelong friendships were formed.

The early 1960s saw Yen Ching-hwang teaching in Batu Pahat and, following his marriage, returning to a history post at Nanyang University. This was a time when the University members were in fear of Nanda’s dissolution following the presentation of the Prescott Report. There are however few details of the other political events which shook Singapore at this time or comments on the global context in which these events were taking place.

It was then to Canberra that Yen traveled in 1965 on a Commonwealth Scholarship, and it was in the Department of Far Eastern History — a department presided over by C.P. Fitzgerald — that he worked on a thesis relating to the Chinese of Singapore and Malaya and their relations with Sun Yat-sen. The resulting thesis was subsequently published by Oxford University Press in 1976 as *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution, with Special Reference to Singapore and Malaya*.

The period 1968-88 was spent in teaching at the University of Adelaide, the early years of which overlapping with the Cultural Revolution in China and the Vietnam War, both events inducing much soul-searching and responses among Australian academics. The author’s own thoughts on and reactions to these events are, however, muted. Two further major books were produced during this period — *Coolies and Mandarins: China’s Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch’ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore University Press 1985), and *A Social History of the Chinese in
Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911 (Oxford University Press, 1986). These works were to make the name of Yen Ching-hwang one of the more prominent among scholars working on the history of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Concurrently, the author was engaged in efforts at Adelaide University — efforts which were subsequently to succeed — to promote Chinese language study at the University.

The subsequent two years (1988-90) which Yen spent as head of history at the University of Hong Kong are related in quite some detail, revealing with almost clinical precision the process in which he was appointed, the difficulties and rivalries which characterized the History Department of the University at that time, his relations with the administration and the eventual (possibly almost inevitable) denouement. Anyone who experienced the events of that period at HKU will certainly find something to react to within these pages. With the June 4th killings in Tiananmen occurring in 1989, an even more complex situation emerged to further unsettle the people of Hong Kong and the students and staff of the University. The events at the HKU History Department in 1990 were obviously some of the most traumatic in Yen's career given the amount of attention he assigns to the recounting and the defense of his actions. In May 1990 under immense pressure he submitted his letter of resignation. This would otherwise have been an unwritten story and the author obviously feels that at least his account of the events should be heard. Returning to Adelaide, Yen took up his teaching post again, extending his gamut to the teaching of contemporary Asia.

The second half of the book details the author's social activism, a facet mentioned in the book's title. The Chinese Association of South Australia, of which Professor Yen assumed the chairmanship, provided an avenue for agitation against Australian immigration policies deemed to be unjust, as well as a mechanism for the promotion of Chinese culture, an effort in which the then Premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan, was an active supporter. The minute detail provided of the Association, its membership, its external links and its activities make this account a valuable legacy for historians of such organizations in Australia. The year 1987 saw a “coup” in the Association and in the following year Yen Ching-hwang's connections with the Association were severed.

Other diverse social activities involved with Australia's Chinese community are detailed in the book, including Yen’s efforts at convening the first national meeting of the Australian Chinese Associations in 1986, and his membership of the federal Immigration Review Panel. There are also accounts of a range of academic promotional activities in Singapore and Malaysia including conferences and lectures in which the author was engaged.

The author concludes his book with some essentialist musings on cultural clashes between East and West, details of his conversion to Christianity, and again a meticulous account of how he responded to efforts to force his retirement from the University of Adelaide in 2002, involving his correspondences and discussions with the highest institutions of the land. The subsequently negotiated arrangements with the University are the results of his unusual tenacity. Today, Professor Yen continues to research, write and travel.

As an account of the personal journey of a scholar of Overseas Chinese over the second half of the 20th century, this is a valuable work. It is made particularly so because of the desire of the author to ensure that readers are fully cognizant of his feel-