In the spring of 1989, we came to New York to care for the children, without my books and thus in a difficult situation for doing any research. Recalling a number of episodes from my volume *Wei-Jin Nanbeichao shi lunji* (see Chapter 4 above) published by Zhonghua shuju in 1963, I wrote up a short essay. This collection of essays was comprised of pieces all written before 1949 when I was thirty-six years old. Although some of these essays were published fairly late, they all belonged to work done previously. Thus, after the book appeared in print, I came up with the title of the autobiography of Pu-yi, [China’s last emperor,] and dubbed this essay collection “The First Half of My Life” (*Wo de qianbansheng* 我的前半生, the same as Pu-yi’s) in jest, which is my meaning here. Over the past few decades, for a variety of reasons I “had nowhere to return to” and thus could not devote myself wholeheartedly to research work in the history of the Six Dynasties period. As I am now getting older, my mental and physical strength are both far from what they used to be, and it is increasingly difficult to expect future work to remain at a high level. I had to be satisfied with decorative writing and thus decided to pull up the rear by composing some reading notes in the textual critical style of the Qianlong and Jiaqing eras of the Qing.

*Understanding Professor Chen*

In the autumn of 1936, I entered the Institute of History and Philology located at the North Pole Pavilion in Nanjing. I was assigned to pursue research on the history of the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties (or Six Dynasties, 220–589) period. There were, however, no strings attached, as each individual had the liberty to read and study as he wished, and there was no prescribed topic of research, nor was there a time by which the work had to be completed. I spent about one-half year in a comparatively unhurried and cautious manner to read the four standard histories of the Liu-Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen eras from the Southern Dynasties, and I wrote up an essay entitled “Nanchao jingnei de gezhong ren ji zhengfu duidai zhi zhengce” [*Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 7.4 (1937)]. As I recall from
that time, reading accumulated like water flowing into a canal and almost involuntarily an essay was written. There was no pressure exerted, and there were no distracting thoughts about promotions or rising to the next level nor any academic wrangling to be caught up in. There was just the delight of being engaged in research, and thus the determination to devote one’s life to this undertaking. During the period of time, I had occasion to seek the advice of Professor Chen Yinque in Beijing about the Xi people (an ethnic minority living on Southern Dynasties terrain). Professor Chen was only too happy to enthusiastically offer his views on the matter. He liked to use postcards. He would often say of himself that “I didn’t have a view on that at first,” “how strange!” This was a reflection of the vigor-ness of his thinking and the acuity of his knowledge and experience. He later wrote an essay entitled: “Wei shu Sima Rui zhuan Jiangdong minzu tiao shizheng ji tuilun” [Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyansuo jikan 11.1 (1943)] which dealt with related issues. I read this essay and was deeply moved. When it appeared in print, I was still in the United States. Dr. Hu Shi saw it before me and told me about it for which I am grateful.

Later, Jiang Tianshu 蔣天樞 (1903–1988) compiled Professor Chen’s complete works, and excised this section on the Jiangdong people that had interested me. This, of course, cannot have been the result of Professor Jiang’s own initiative, but must have been Professor Chen’s own desire. After reading this in the collected works, I immediately saw Chen’s purpose for doing so. His use of language in writing was always done exquisitely and with great care. The depth of his emotions found in his prose and poetry in his last years was extremely stringent. As for the revisions—additions and deletions—to his earlier writings, he must surely have found places to attend to. Cutting out this section of his essay seemed to me to be “twisting scholarship to appease the world” (quxue ashi 曲学阿世, a phrase in this instance taken from Chen’s 1964 letter to Jiang Bingnan 蔣秉南 [Jiang Tianshu]). I could not help but regret that this betokened his wish for there to be no trace of our former closeness.

I always believed that Wu Yuseng’s 吳雨僧 (Wu Mi) assessment of Professor Chen was thoroughly correct—namely, that Chen was a “cultural relic” (wenhua yimin 文化遺民) in the new society. In the fall of 1964, I accompanied a foreign visitor on a flight to Guangzhou. I was staying for only a short while, but I decided to make the most of this opportunity, and I went one evening to pay a call on Professor Chen. At the time he had broken his leg and was laid up in bed. He was quite pleased that I was visiting him, that an old friend from the north had made a point of visiting