

## PREFACE

Very early in my study of the influence of Buddhism upon the literati of early medieval China I became aware of the frequency with which the name Shen Yüeh 沈約 (441–513) appeared among the authors of essays in two important collections of documents: the *Collection on the Propagation of the Light* (*Hung-ming chi* 弘明集) by Seng-yu 僧祐 (435–518) and the *Expanded Collection on the Propagation of the Light* (*Kuang hung-ming chi* 廣弘明集) by Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596–667).<sup>1</sup> At the time I made a mental note that some day I must look into what Shen Yüeh had to say. But it took many years to reach a point where I felt ready to tackle what would obviously become a long-term project. First, it seemed prudent to find out more about the third-through early fifth-century Buddhist literati to whose tradition Shen Yüeh belonged. My attention was thus drawn to the colorful array of characters in Liu I-ch'ing's 劉義慶 (403–444) *New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世說新語),<sup>2</sup> especially Sun Ch'o 孫綽 (active 330–365)<sup>3</sup> and Hsieh Ling-yün 謝靈運 (385–433),<sup>4</sup> who, in their acceptance of Buddhism, represented advancing levels of comprehension of that doctrine. Another subject, Wang Chin 王巾 (d. 505), author of the "Dhūta Temple Stele Inscription" ("T'ou-t'o ssu pei-wen" 頭陀寺碑文),<sup>5</sup> was

<sup>1</sup> J. Takakusu 高楠順次郎 and K. Watanabe 渡邊海旭, editors, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (*The Chinese Buddhist Tripitaka of the Taishō Era*), Tokyo, 1922–1936, Vol. 52: 1–361.

<sup>2</sup> Yang Yung 楊勇, editor, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü chiao-chien* 世說新語校箋, Hong Kong, 1969; translated, R. Mather, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World*, Minneapolis, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> R. Mather, "The Mystical Ascent of the T'ien-t'ai Mountains: Sun Ch'o's *Yu T'ien-t'ai-shan fu*," *Monumenta Serica* 20 (1961), 226–245.

<sup>4</sup> R. Mather, "The Landscape Buddhism of the Fifth Century Poet Hsieh Ling-yün," *Journal of Asian Studies* 18 (1958–59), 67–79.

<sup>5</sup> Hsiao T'ung 蕭統 (501–531), editor, *Wen-hsüan* 文選 (*Selections of Refined Literature*) 59.1a–14a (Chung-hua shu-chü edition, Peking, 1977); translated, R. Mather, "Wang Chin's Dhūta Temple Stele Inscription," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83.3 (1963), 338–359.

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a contemporary of Shen Yüeh. When I finally turned my attention to Shen Yüeh himself around 1967 I was somewhat dismayed to discover that his poems were not easy to read and managed to postpone serious engagement with them until the autumn of 1972, when a single-quarter leave from the University of Minnesota gave me three months of uninterrupted study at the Research Institute of Humanistic Sciences of Kyoto University. The draft translations I had begun at that time were continued in a desultory way until I could once more devote full attention to them during another quarter leave in the fall of 1978 at the University of California in Berkeley. The following spring, in a seminar I was conducting as guest professor in the Department of Oriental Languages, I was at last able to begin organizing the materials that make up the bulk of the present volume. Of considerable assistance in the process were the reports and papers submitted by students in the seminar, in particular, those by Marilyn Saunders, Wendy Larson, and Judith Boltz. Back at the University of Minnesota I received further stimulation from students in another Shen Yüeh seminar. I should particularly mention the contribution of Richard Jackson, who a few years earlier had also written his master's thesis on Shen Yüeh's "Poetic Essay on Living in the Suburbs" ("Chiao-chü fu" 郊居賦).

I also owe a debt of gratitude to two research assistants in different aspects of this study: To Sharyn Wang (Wang T'ai 王臺) of the University's Wilson Library, who assisted in the transcription of many poems into Middle Chinese reconstructions and gathered a useful body of secondary studies on the Yung-ming writers from Chinese and Japanese scholarly journals, and to Ha Longwen 哈龍文, lately of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Peking, now completing a degree at the University of Minnesota, who over the past three years has shed a great deal of light on some of Shen Yüeh's more obscure religious poems. In both cases I am grateful for research grants from the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota which made the assistance possible.

After the first draft of the manuscript had been completed I profited greatly from very helpful editorial improvements suggested by Professor Michael True of Assumption College in Worcester, who was teaching American literature at the University of Nanking in the fall of 1984 while I was there working on Six Dynasties local

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history on a grant from the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China. Very painstaking and constructive criticism was also offered by Alan Berkowitz, a graduate student from the University of Washington in Seattle who was in Nanking doing research on Six Dynasties recluses. I am particularly grateful to three members of the Nanjing University faculty: Professor Jiang Zanchu 蔣贊初 of the Department of Archaeology, Professor Sun Shuqi 孫述圻 of the Department of History, and Professor Zhong Chongxin 仲崇信 of the Department of Biology, all three of whom showed a lively interest in Shen Yüeh and went far out of their way in helping to locate appropriate landmarks in the Nanking area, to say nothing of books and periodicals in the University library. Professor Zhong, famous in China for introducing spartina grass to stabilize the saline tidelands of the northeast seacoast, took great pains in helping to identify plants and trees mentioned in Shen Yüeh's poems.

I should like to acknowledge here my appreciation for a generous grant from the Translations Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities to pursue a parallel project; my work on that anthology of four Yung-ming poets has naturally benefited this study as well. I am especially grateful for the personal encouragement of the Program's former director, Dr. Susan Mango.

Closing this very incomplete catalogue of benefactors, I wish to thank my wife, Virginia Temple Mather, whose informed and sensitive understanding of the subject and loyal support over the past forty-eight years have been an unfailing source of strength. It is to her that this book is affectionately dedicated.

St. Paul  
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