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Xu Xiake (1587–1641)

The Art of Travel Writing

JULIAN WARD

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The Art of Travel Writing

Julian Ward

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To my family,
Dee, David and Greg
for constant love and support.

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Contents

List of Illustrations x
Introduction xi
Acknowledgements xv
Explanatory note xvi
List of Abbreviations xvii

Chapter I The History of Chinese Travel Writing 1

The Early History of Chinese Geographical Works 2
The Tang Dynasty: Liu Zongyuan 9
The Song Dynasty: Poets and Officials 11
The Ming Dynasty: Literati and Geographers 14
Wang Shixing 16
Ming Gazetteers and Route Books 18
Travellers and Artists 19
The Growth of Tourism 21
Social Changes in the Late Ming 22
Private Academies and Philosophies 23
Yuan Hongdao 25
The Obsession of the Travel Writer 26

Chapter II Traveller in the Sunset Clouds 38

Xu Xiake's Ancestors 38
The Life of Xu Xiake 41
Xu Xiake's Personality and Character 46
Bravery 47
Xu's Independence 48
Xu's Relationships 50
Gu Xing 52
Huang Daozhou and Tang Dalai 54
Xu Xiake the Explorer 56

Chapter III Old Certainties and New Discoveries 69
Publication 70
New Edition 73
Start of the Journey West 76
The River Xiang Robbery 76
Jingwen 80
Divinations 82
Style 82
Allusions 84
Methodology/Structure 86
Summary Passages 87
The Importance of the New Discoveries 90

Chapter IV Coveting Strangeness 97
You and *lüxing* 98
Sensuality in Xu Xiake's Language 101
Xu Xiake's Use of Movement and the Language of Dynamism 104
With each Step 105
Eyes and Feet 106
Investigation 107
Verbs of Vision 108
Active Verbs 110
Adjectives 113
The Use of Parallel Groups of Characters 116
Xu's Description of Scenery and the Fusion of Scene and Feelings 118
Aesthetic Resonance and Descriptive Precision 123

Chapter V The Exotic Southwest 131
Centre/Periphery 132
Peripheral Peoples 132
The Geography and History of Yunnan 134
Mu Zeng and the Moxie People 138
Xu Xiake's Visit to Lijiang 139
Elsewhere in Southwest China 140
The Exotic Nature of Peripheral Peoples 144
The Familiar and the Strange 147
Arrival and Departure 149

Chapter VI Mountains and Caves 157
Sacred Mountains 159
Climbing on High 161
Fengshui and the Dynamism of the Landscape 163
Caves 167

The Revival of Buddhism in the Late Ming 171
Xu Xiake's Interest in Buddhism 172
Mount Chickenfoot 174
The Mountain in Xu Xiake's Poetry 177
The *fengshui* of Mount Chickenfoot 181
Shanzhong Yiqu Ba: Xu Xiake's Epitaph 182
The Creation of Sacred Space 187

Conclusion Xu Xiake as Wandering Recluse 199
Xu Xiake's Obsession with Spiritual Texture (*shenli*) 202

Appendix 1 206
Appendix 2 209
Appendix 3 211
Bibliography 214
Index 227

Illustrations

Between pages 78 and 79

1. The Jietuolin Monastery outside the town of Lijiang. Photographed by Joseph Rock. Reprinted with permission from Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of Southwest China*. 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947.

2. Mu Zeng as a Buddhist monk. Reprinted with permission from Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of Southwest China*. 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947.

3. Portrait of Xu Xiake 1852.

4. Map of China taken from Li Xian 李賢 et al., comp., *Da Ming Yitong Zhi* 大明一統志 (Comprehensive Gazetteer of the Great Ming). (Taibei: Wenhai, 1965.) Vol. 1, pp. 57 8.

5. Drawing of Mount Chickenfoot taken from Chen Menglei et al., eds. 陳夢雷 *Gujin Tushu Jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Complete Collection of Books and Illustrations Past and Present) (Taibei: Wenxing Shudian, 1965.) Vol. 24, p. 901.

6. Map of Xu Xiake's Travels

Introduction

I first encountered Xu Xiake's (1587–1641) writings in March 1988. On returning to North West University in Xi'an after spending Chinese New year in Yunnan, I saw a copy of his travel diaries on a barrow in the campus from which students were selling books. A cursory glance revealed that I had just visited several of the places written about in the book. I bought the two volumes, but it was only after graduating from Edinburgh University in 1990, that I began reading them seriously and undertook researching a PhD on the subject.

From the early days of my research, it was clear that Xu Xiake was a figure acknowledged by his contemporaries to be not simply the greatest of all Ming dynasty travel writers but an outstanding literary figure in his own right. Furthermore, when I attended a conference in Guilin in 1991 held to mark the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Xu's death, I could see that he was still revered by Chinese academics. Two years later, I visited Xu's memorial hall and tomb close to his home town of Jiangyin, which in its tourist and business publicity was making much play of its most famous son. To this day, interest continues to grow; there is an active Xu Xiake Research Society, an eponymous feature film based on his life has been released and he has been adopted as a quasi-patron saint of China's ever-expanding travel industry.[1]

However, from the start, much of what I read about Xu Xiake seemed half-hearted and lukewarm, as if praise had been awarded solely on the basis of the huge distances he covered. Indeed, many criticised Xu's methods and literary style. The Qing writer, Li Ciming (1830–1894), for example, wrote:

> In writing about Nature, the material should be fit for engraving, for the joy of travel is most valuable in inspiring emotion. In his desire to experience in person the unfathomable, [Xu] Xiake scaled the precipitous and clambered up into the void, merely in order to satiate his taste for the strange and certainly not out of a desire to convey either

> a profound aesthetic appreciation or the true love of the ancients for clouds and mists. Moreover, his intentions are muddled, his narrative a mess, to the extent that the mystique of marvellous sites is lost, and the allure of beautiful regions obscured, with the result that compilers of travellers' guides cannot find the true path within his writing, and those interested in famous sites are left dissatisfied. Furthermore, his interests lie in the orientations of ridges, theories akin to those of the geomancer, which are quite without foundation. He has certainly not carried out his investigations on the basis of either ancient or modern geography, totally ignoring the names and places of past glories. Accordingly since the end of the Ming dynasty, scholars have not read his work. I cannot imagine why it should be studied.[2]

Among recent critics, there has also been a muted response. The general view of his extensive travel diaries is that he brought a new sober, analytical approach to a genre previously the domain of the dilettante. Although his status as a pioneer of active field research resulting from his exploration of the rivers, mountains and karst caves of southwest China remains unchallenged, scant praise has been given to his literary achievements. Liang Xiuhong, for example, felt that large parts of Xu's diaries were dull and trivial, writing, 'Almost nowhere do we get a real impression of him being influenced by contemporary literary trends', while Chou Chih-ping described Xu's motivation as 'more utilitarian than sensual or aesthetic.'[3]

Yet from the very first line of his first extant travelogue, where he wrote that, 'human intentions and the light in the mountains had an appearance of delight' (XXKYJ 1), Xu's diaries resound with a love of, and empathy for, the landscape. After many years of visiting the mountains of eastern China, Xu embarked, at the age of almost fifty, on a three year journey to the southwest of the country, an area, inhabited largely by minority peoples, which had only recently come back under Chinese imperial control. This book will demonstrate the exuberance and literary merit of his account of this journey. The emphasis will be on Xu's later diaries, partly because much attention has already been paid to his early journeys and also because the discovery in the 1970s of an edition of his journey, has revealed substantial amounts of new information. I will thus refute the charge that Xu's account of his journey to southwest China has much less value than those of his visits to the mountains of eastern China.[4] In fact the sensuality of Xu's early diaries, far from being absent in his later works, remains powerfully present.

The first chapter of this work will cover the early history of the Chinese travel diary, from its origins in the fantastic exploits of China's mythological kings and emperors to its emergence as an independent literary genre in the Tang dynasty. Although a wealth of secondary material already exists on this early period, the Ming dynasty has received comparatively less attention. In order to provide an understanding of the way in which Xu Xiake's

thought and methods evolved, innovations in the writing of a variety of texts relating to geographical matters will be discussed alongside broader social and political developments. By the end of the Ming dynasty, travel diaries were no longer a mere sideline, but an important form of literature, a vehicle for the expression of the quest for personal enlightenment and of a growing desire for accurate geographical information.

After a brief account of the main events in Xu Xiake's life and a consideration of certain aspects of his personality, the main body of the book is then taken up with a close examination Xu's diary of his expedition to southwest China. Particular attention will be given to the attitudes contained within Xu's diaries, firstly towards the non-Han peoples of southwest China and secondly to the region's startling mountainous scenery. The newly discovered edition of Xu's diaries shows that Xu's reputation as a mere pen-pusher, and in particular the criticism levelled at him by Li Ciming of producing a 'muddled' diary, is unwarranted. Xu's language of aesthetic appraisal is firmly rooted in the works of the great Nature-loving aesthetes of ancient China, while also reflecting the concerns of the literati of the late Ming period. Xu's visit to Mu Zeng, the powerful leader of an ethnic group in northwest Yunnan, reveals much about Xu's ideology and his stay with Mu in many ways serves as the climax of his travels.

Xu Xiake's obsession with investigating the furthest, most extreme parts of the landscape and the search for and description of the sublime lie at the centre of his work. The last chapter of the book examines Xu Xiake's visits to China's mountains and caves, concluding with the translation of a recently discovered essay about mountains written by Xu in which he revealed the true motivation for his travels.

In spite of his zealous exploratory endeavour, Xu's scientific methods were primitive and many of his supposed discoveries have since been shown to be either erroneous or not original. Xu's diaries and miscellanea, however, reveal a remarkable individual, perfectly in tune with the tastes of his age, his concerns matching those of the late Ming literatus. His writing, full of references to the great lyrical writers of earlier generations, is sparkling and worthy of a place in the tradition of the classical Chinese travel diary. Imbued with a deep love of Nature and a desire to find freedom from worldly concerns, Xu was a man obsessed with seeing and describing the landscape. At the core of Xu Xiake's writing is a balance between the accurate recording of observations and his application of traditional and contemporary Chinese poetic language to express an emotional response to the landscape through which he passed. The two sides of the argument are encapsulated in an early foreword to Xu's diaries, written by Shi Xialong, which underlines Xu Xiake's interest in both subjective and objective concerns:

> When he arrived at a famous spot, he had to unravel the remarkable and pluck out the mysterious: when he arrived at a river he had to find

its source, when he arrived at a mountain he had to seek out its vein. (XXKYJ 1266)

It is the aim of this book to shed new light on the importance of the subjective in Xu Xiake's works.

Notes

1 'Xu Xiake zoushang yinmo' (Xu Xiake hits the silver screen), *Renmin ribao*, p. 12, 15th August 1996.
2 Li Ciming, *Yuemantang du shu ji.* (A Reading of History from Yueman's Hall) 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 472–3. For Li Ciming see Arthur Hummel, ed. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912).* 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: 1943), vol. 1, p. 493. (Hereafter, ECCP)
3 Liang Xiuhong, *Xu Xiake Ji Qi Youji zhi Wenxue Yanjiu* (A Literary Study of Xu Xiake and his Travel Diaries) PhD thesis. (Taibei: Zhengzhi Daxue, 1986), pp. 157 and 2. Chou Chih-ping, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 112. For two other typical comments in recent western scholarly works, see Kenneth Ganza who wrote: 'One searches in vain through the pages of his many travel diaries for the type of thoughtful reveries or brooding allusions that characterise the travel writing of earlier authors.' Kenneth Stanley Ganza, *The Artist as Traveller: The Origin and Development of Travel in China as a Theme in Chinese Landscape Painting of the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries.* Ph.D. thesis. (Ann Arbor: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 159 and Leo Ou-fan Lee, who also stressed Xu's 'objective' style, before going on to say that his ambition, 'was merely to traverse the geographical landscape of China and to surpass his predecessors in the detail and accuracy of his findings.' in 'The Solitary Traveller: Images of Self in Modern Chinese Literature' in Robert Hegel, ed. *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 282–307. On the other hand, some scholars, such as Joseph Needham, have perhaps over-exaggerated Xu's claims to greatness in the field of geographical investigation.
4 See, for example, the comments of Jacques Dars in Xu Xiake *Randonnées aux Sites Sublimes.* Translated by Jacques Dars. (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) 'The texts of the second period, are a long way short of having the high literary value of the other texts.' Introduction, pp. XXIV–XXV.

Acknowledgements

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Explanatory note

The romanisation of Chinese characters is according to the Pinyin system.

For references to the text of Xu's travel diaries, I have, unless otherwise indicated, used the first edition to incorporate the version of Xu's diaries discovered in the 1970s. This was first published by Shanghai Guji in 1983. Further editions in 1987 and 1993 included several additional pieces. For this reason, there are slight variations in pagination in the latter part of the 1987 edition, on which this book is based. For the earlier edition of the diaries I used *Guoji Jiben Congshu Sibaizhong* series, vol. 350, edited by Wang Yunwu. In chapter three the newly discovered text of the diaries will be referred to as JML while the earlier text will be referred to as TXB.

Abbreviations

DMB	L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds. *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644.* 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
DMYTZ	Li Xian 李賢 et al., comp., *Da Ming Yitong Zhi* 大明一統志 (Comprehensive Gazetteer of the Great Ming). Taibei: Wenhai, 1965. Ten vols.
ECCP	Arthur Hummel, ed. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912).* 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: 1943.
GDYJX	Ni Qixin 倪其心 et al., eds. *Zhongguo Gudai Youji Xuan.* 中國古代游記選 (Anthology of Classical Chinese Travel Diaries). Beijing: Zhongguo Lüyou, 1985.
JYWXS	Li Boqi 李伯齊 ed., *Zhongguo Gudai Jiyou Wenxue Shi* 中國古代紀游文學史 (A History of Ancient Chinese Travel Literature) Jinan: Shandong Youyi Shushe, 1989.
QTS	*Quan Tang Shi* 全唐詩 (Complete Poems of the Tang Dynasty) 3 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1989.
SBBY	*Sibu beiyaoo* 四部備要 Taibei: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965.
SHJ	*Shanhai Jing* 山海經 (The Mountain and Seas Classic) SBBY. Taibei: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965.
SKQS	*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 Shanghai: Guji, 1987.
SSWH	Zheng Zu'an 鄭祖安 and Jiang Minghong 蔣明宏, eds., *Xu Xiake yu Shanshui Wenhua* 徐霞客與山水文化 (Xu Xiake and Nature Literature), Shanghai: Wenhua, 1994.
TXB	*Xu Xiake Youji* 徐霞客游記 (The Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake) Guoji Jiben Congshu vol. 350 ed. Wang Yunwu. Shanghai: Shangwu Shangwu, 1933.

XXKYJ	*Xu Xiake Youji* 徐霞客游記 (The Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake), edited by Chu Shaotang 褚紹唐 and Wu Yingshou 吳應壽. Two vols. Shanghai: Guji, 1987.
ZHR	*Xu Xiake Youji Jiaozhu* 徐霞客游記校注 (Annotated Edition of The Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake) edited and annotated by Zhu Huirong 褚惠榮. Kunming: Yunnan Renmin, 1985.

Chapter I

The History of Chinese Travel Writing

From ancient times, nature in China has been the basis of countless myths and legends: these mythologies coalesced to create what has been called 'a vast spatiotemporal edifice, imbued with moral/aesthetic overtones.'[1] While the *youji* 遊記 (Travel Account or travel diary) arose as a genre in its own right during the Tang dynasty (618–907 AD), its origins can be traced back several hundred years earlier. The strong fantastical elements contained in early geographical and pseudo-geographical works provided a wealth of source material for travel writers who could switch from sober analysis of a scene to the recital of a litany of fantastic figures and landscapes. Travel writing also drew on and fed off developments in Chinese poetry, especially the notion of climbing on high in order to achieve a view into a distance imbued with both temporal and spatial significance. By the start of the Tang dynasty, there was already a well-established tradition of poetry relating specifically to landscape, the best exponents of which were Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) and Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427).

By far the greatest part of the extant body of traditional Chinese travel diaries deal with journeys undertaken within China. There were exceptions to this pattern, such as the long accounts of perilous journeys to India by monks searching for the genuine Buddhist sutras. However, China's vastness and the variety of its landscape, coupled with regularly changing national boundaries ensured that the lure of the other, different exotic peoples and beautiful scenery, afforded a beguiling constant. In concentrating on western colonial and post-colonial attitudes, recent western scholarship on travel diaries, is thus, for the most part, of little relevance.

For some writers, the journey itself was everything: Xu Xiake's account of his journey to southwest China focuses on the minutiae of his progress through the landscape, with such matters as food, accommodation and human encounters given considerably less attention. Xu's diaries, the journeys of the Buddhist pilgrims and the diaries of the Song writers Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) and Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–1193) are all similar in

this respect. Some of the best known travel diaries, however, have a minimal element of travel and are concerned instead with place. Liu Zongyuan's 柳宗元 (773–819) celebrated essays *Yongzhou baji* 永州八記 (Eight Records of Yongzhou) do not involve a journey but are concerned with the description of scenery and the suggestion of an intense nostalgia for the writer's home town. In this category can also be placed Yang Xuanzhi's 楊衒之 (fl. ca. 528–547) *Luoyang Qielan Ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (The Temples of Luoyang), which combined factual and fictional sources to present a comprehensive picture of a large imperial city. The difference between these two kinds of travel writing has been described by Kenneth Ganza as the difference between the expression of place consciousness and travel consciousness.[2]

Other critics have looked at the genre from a different angle. James Hargett considered matters of linguistic style, and also outlined different categories of travel diaries, ranging from short pieces dealing generally with day-long excursions to well-known beauty spots, in which the author usually travelled in the company of a select group of friends, to longer pieces dealing with diplomatic missions or internal journeys by officials, while yet others have looked at the combination of fact and authorial opinion.[3] Yu Guangzhong described the relative balance in different travel diaries accorded to opinion and fact, contrasting the accurate recording of geographical changes and historical development with the feelings and impressions engendered by the journey. Yu suggests that, in order to be distinguished from a gazetteer, the travel diary must go beyond the mere reporting of accurate information to contain the opinions and emotions of the writer.[4] Elsewhere, this has been described as the distinction between subjective and objective writing, Chou Chih-ping stating that Xu's essays 'are objective-descriptive while Yuan's (ie Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 [1568–1610]) are subjective-personal.'[5] This is too clear-cut a distinction to be applicable to the work of Xu Xiake, who succeeded in utilising the two qualities to create a form of travel diary that contained both subjective and objective elements.

In contrast with the overwhelmingly anthropocentric style of most western travel writing, the Chinese *youji* is concerned with place or movement in Nature. Individuals journeyed not in search of amusing encounters with exotic locals, but rather for a chance to retreat into Nature, an idea popular in China from very early times. While Confucius held that an honourable citizen should serve an enlightened ruler, he nevertheless allowed that it was shameful to serve a bad ruler and accordingly did not consider withdrawal from the world of men necessarily to be reprehensible behaviour. Indeed, he praised the early recluses Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊 as 'excellent men of old.'[6]

The Early History of Chinese Geographical Works

A recent work on cartography in East Asia shows how, since the time of the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Zhou Book of Rites), thought to have been written during the

Warring States period (475–221 BC), geography has been of paramount importance in China. Furthermore, from the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) on, China's rulers have striven to collect precise geographical information on the territories under, or adjacent to, their control.[7] Jiang Shaoyuan, tracing the earliest days of Chinese travel, claimed that Chinese people, fearful of encountering anything unusual, were wary of travelling to remote parts of the country.[8] Between 500 BC and 500 AD, Chinese geographical writing shows a marked progression from the earliest fear-laden works to the later period when fear had been replaced by a respectful awe. During the pre-imperial period, there were a number of works of proto-geography, of which the most important are the 'Yu Gong' 禹貢 (Tribute of Yu), part of the *Shu Jing* 書經 (Book of Documents) and the *Shanhai Jing* 山海經 (The Mountains and Seas Classic, hereafter SHJ).

The 'Yu Gong', written some time between 475 and 221 BC, divided China into nine regions, on the basis of different geographical characteristics. The 'Yu Gong' was also of great ideological importance, establishing the idea of China as a series of concentric squares extending outwards, passing from the central domain through the domain of the nobles to the lands of the barbarians. These latter were variously designated as *man* 蠻 (used specifically to refer to those dwelling in the south), *fan* 番, *rong* 戎 and *yi* 夷, their degree of primitiveness defined by their distance from the centre. Michael Harbsmeier, commenting on this text, has noted that it was common for ancient societies to view outsiders as primitive.[9] The same point is made by Eric Leed, who notes that, historically, the ancient Greeks and Romans were indifferent or hostile to peripheries. However, and this is a crucial difference to the Chinese model, they considered civilisation had begun outside their own centre, in Egypt.[10]

The geographic content of the 'Yu Gong' is concerned with a description of the regulation of the nation's waterways by the semi-mythological emperor, Yu. In spite of this mythological framework, much of the information found within the work is accurate; it soon assumed canonical status and was faithfully cited by later geographical works.[11] An unfortunate consequence was that, alongside the accurate information, the mistakes contained in the 'Yu Gong' were also transmitted for a long time afterwards, and were accorded an unwarranted degree of inviolability. These mistakes included the idea that the Yellow River flowed underground in its upper reaches, and that the Yangtse River originated in the Min mountains 民山 of northern Sichuan 四川.[12]

SHJ, the earliest parts of which are now considered to have been written around 300 BC, again combines facts and myth. SHJ goes a stage further than the 'Yu Gong', in describing the directions in which the mountains face and the distances between them. The mountains were divided into five groups representing the four points of the compass plus a central group, bounded on all sides by oceans. For each grouping, the major mountains

and streams are listed from the beginning of the range to the end. At the end of the description of the range, it then lists the presiding deities and the sacrifices offered to them. While the geographical descriptions for the known parts of China are reasonably accurate, they become increasingly fictional in the far west of the country. The overall impression is of a civilised world, that is China, surrounded by seas and wildernesses populated by fantastical creatures. SHJ contains more of the fantastic than the 'Yu Gong', including material on *Xiwangmu* 西王母 (The Queen Mother of the West), a mythological figure who is described as having a human face and the body of a leopard, as well as other creatures combining human and animal forms.[13]

The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Master of Huainan), attributed to Liu An 劉安 (180–122 BC), also divides China into nine regions, an island of civilisation surrounded firstly by lands populated by barbarians, then by various magical realms, such as the Kunlun mountains, located in the far west of China, which acted as an *axis mundi*, the pillar separating heaven and earth.[14] In all of these works, the boundaries between the mundane and the mystical, the concrete and the fantastic are blurred. The mythical Kunlun mountains, in particular, were to assume huge importance as a destination for spiritual travellers.[15]

Similar attributes apply to an earlier work, the *Mu Tianzi Zhuan* 穆天子傳 (The Chronicle of Emperor Mu), the earliest parts of which are thought to have been written around 400 BC. It is uncertain whether this work, considered by some to be the earliest substantial travel narrative, was intended as an historical chronicle or a fictional adventure.[16] An account in the *Shiji* 史記 (Historical Records) describes a journey made by King Mu, fifth ruler of the Zhou dynasty (ruled 1023–983 BC), who was said to have travelled around one hundred *li* a day on his journey west from the city of Luoyang.[17] The *Mu Tianzi Zhuan* tells how King Mu visited the Queen Mother of the West who resided in the Western mountains. Miraculous powers are ascribed to both King Mu, who is reported as ascending the slopes of the Kunlun mountains in order to see the palace of the Yellow Emperor, and his entourage, his horse, for example, being capable of covering one thousand *li* per day. The work provided a basis for later travel diaries, in its combination of the real and the fantastic and the introduction of the idea of pilgrimage, while the Kunlun mountains, a magical and beautiful mythical land distinct from the real Mount Kunlun, were now firmly established as a destination for the spiritual traveller seeking enlightenment and immortality.[18]

From the time of the Former (or Western) Han (206–24 BC), there was a great increase in geographical records. During the reign of Emperor Wu, Zhang Qian 張騫 (?–114 BC) was sent on two diplomatic missions beyond the western edges of the empire, during which he was held captive for ten years by the Xiongnu 匈奴, one of the tribal peoples existing outside China's boundaries. Cheng Kuei-sheng suggests that the true importance of Zhang's

missions lay in revealing for the first time the existence of civilised peoples beyond the rings of barbarians which surrounded the Chinese empire.[19] In the course of his research for the *Shiji*, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86? BC) visited large areas of China and chronicled several historical expeditions, including the national tour of inspection of the first Qin emperor in 219 BC. The *Houhan Shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty) contains the 'Dili Zhi' 地理志 (Geographical Records) organised into administrative areas, covering the geography, history and demography of various parts of the country and also, in the section dealing with sacrifices, Ma Dibo's 馬第伯 (n.d.) account of the visit of Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–57) to Mount Tai 泰山 in 56 AD. The Qing dynasty scholar Yu Yue 俞越 (1821–1907) considered this to be the first account of a real journey written by the traveller himself, and thus to constitute the first extant travel account.[20]

From around the last years of the Later (or Eastern) Han Dynasty (25–220), which ended in 220 AD, China entered a period of chaotic disunity, during which many people fled southwards. The failure of the centralised state and the perceived failure of Confucian ideology led to the rise of various heterodox groups, including many espousing Daoist views of Nature as a place of recreation and honourable retreat. The period of division between 220 and 589 AD (known as the Six Dynasties or the Northern and Southern Dynasties) was crucial in many ways for the development of the travel diary. The lush scenery encountered in southern China, very different from the harsh, dry terrain of the north, sparked off an outpouring of poetry and prose about nature. The first great nature poet of this period was Ji Kang 嵇康 (224–263) who wrote poems rejoicing in nature and was a member of a sybaritic group known as the 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.'[21]

Fear of the perils of wilderness, apparent in the earliest literary works and geographical texts, began to change into a love of remote landscapes. Moreover, the increasing popularity of Buddhism led to the growth of retreats, both Buddhist and Daoist, located in mountainous settings, while the act of withdrawing from active participation in life acquired an added allure.[22] Such notions were assisted by the art critic and Buddhist layman Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), who helped to establish the idea of mountains not as fearful zones inhabited by spirits, but as scenes of enlightenment. He considered painted landscapes to be aids to meditation, which, at their best, should be capable of allowing the viewer to engage in a vicarious journey through the landscape in question. He wrote, 'Landscapes display the beauty of the Tao in their forms and humane men delight in this.'[23]

Withdrawal into nature became an end in itself, with the goal being to seek a transcendent experience, in order to gain peace and freedom.[24] Yi-fu Tuan wrote, 'the change was from a religious attitude in which awe was combined with aversion, to an aesthetic attitude that shifted from a sense of the sublime to a feeling for the picturesque.'[25] Tuan's insight here is to point out that the new dimension ushered in by the spread of Daoism and

Buddhism brought development in the aesthetic sphere rather than any great sense of religious devotion.

Daoist ideas were reflected in a wide range of poems in this period, notably Sun Chuo's 孫綽 (314–371) 'You Tiantai Shan Fu' 遊天台山賦 (Rhyme-prose poem of a journey to Mount Tiantai), in which the poet's physical ascent of the mountain is matched by his increasing spiritual union with nature.[26] The notion of the poet who immersed himself in remote nature was exemplified at this time by Xie Lingyun, one of the first great Chinese writers to be influenced by Buddhism. Kang-i Sun Chang writes of a progression in Xie Lingyun's poems from narrative through description to expression, with an emphasis on visual perception and the strong emotions of the poet.[27] Xie Lingyun also wrote a collection, of brief geographical descriptions of mountains he had visited, most of which is now lost.[28]

Both Daoist and Buddhist myths contained further tales of journeys to remote paradises, similar to the various accounts of the legend of the Queen Mother of The West, involving increasingly fantastic distances. The influence of Daoism, for example, can be seen in a later account of another visit to the Kunlun Mountains. *Han Wudi Neizhuan* 漢武帝內傳 (The Inner History of Emperor Wu of the Han). Probably written during the sixth century AD, it tells how, after a fantastic journey, the immortality-seeking Emperor was given peaches of longevity and assorted Daoist revelations and talismans by the Queen Mother of the West. However, after proving himself to be incapable of following the precepts, these were taken away from him.[29]

The most famous poet of Six Dynasties, Tao Yuanming, wrote many poems about nature including a series of thirteen *shi* poems about *Shanhai Jing*, while his 'Taohuayuan Ji' 桃花源記 (Peach Blossom Source) created a potent myth of the discovery by a fisherman of an idyllic lost world. This poem and its prose introduction draw on both Daoist and Buddhist legends of justified retreat from society, while its own resonances have themselves endured, like the vocabulary used by Xie Lingyun, in creating a string of allusions used repeatedly by later writers of travel diaries. These poets of a divided country established nature as a setting for highly vivid personal experiences, using it as the subject of their poems rather than simply as background material. Although Kang-i Sun Chang's claim that Xie Lingyun was the 'originator of "travel literature"', and the 'first and most distinguished landscape poet' in China is perhaps something of an exaggeration, the contribution of Xie and Tao Yuanming towards formulating an approach to writing about landscape was immense.[30] Certainly, the manner of describing Nature as well as the particular vocabulary found in the work of both Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun exerted a strong influence on the writing of Xu Xiake as will be shown in chapter four below.

In *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 520) articulated this new way of looking at nature. In the opening passage of the work, he wrote: 'Mountains and rivers in their beauty display the pattern of earth.'

Later in the work, Liu sought to explain the changes which he saw as taking place during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (420–581 AD):

> At the beginning of the Song 宋 (420–478 AD), some development in the literary trend was evident. Chuang and Lao (Zhuangzi 莊子 and Laozi 老子) had receded into the background and the theme of mountains and rivers began to flourish.[31]

The new landscape poetry did not, however, supersede the trend established by the *Shiji* and the *Dili Zhi* for factual geographic texts. By introducing the authorial voice, Li Daoyuan's 酈道元 (d. 527) *Shuijing Zhu* 水經注 (Guide to Waterways with Commentaries) is one of the most important of the early geographical works, and a precursor to the Tang dynasty travel diary. The original *Shuijing*, thought to have been written by Sang Qin 桑欽 (n.d.) in either the Later Han or Three Kingdoms period (220–265 AD), has not survived. However, Li drew heavily on it for his own work, while also adding both his own observations and material from a wide variety of factual and fictional sources. Li's work was important not just for its great accuracy, but also for the inclusion of more subjective material via his descriptions of beautiful scenery. Like Xu Xiake more than one thousand years later, Li Daoyuan was motivated by a desire to fill in gaps and correct mistakes in classic texts, including the *Yu Gong*, the *Dili Zhi*, which he said was simple and incomplete, and the *Shuijing* itself. The essential importance of the *Shuijing Zhu* is underlined by the fact that it includes more than four hundred references, many of them to works which have not survived.[32]

The Six Dynasties saw the development of travel writing in a number of different forms: as Hargett notes, there was as yet no dominant tradition.[33] Poems and their prose introductions, letters and commentaries were all inspired by a new appreciation of Nature. This interest in Nature was based on personal observation and, while the earlier fantastic wanderings found in Daoist texts continued to provide a literary foundation, the new writings contained strong elements of realism. Further developments were to take place in the Tang dynasty, when the first great travel diaries were written. A bridge between the two historical periods can be traced in the writings of the Buddhist pilgrims.

It was during the Six Dynasties that the first Buddhist pilgrims travelled to India in search of the true sutras. Faxian 法顯 (337–422) left Chang'an in 399, when he was already sixty years old, passing through Kucha, Kashgar, Kashmir, Kabul and cities on the Ganges. He returned on a ship from the Bay of Bengal stopping off at Ceylon and Sumatra before he landed in Shandong 山東 in 414. He brought back many manuscripts which he translated with an Indian monk in the city of Nanjing 南京. The appeal of Faxian's account of his journeys, *Foguo Ji* 佛國記 (Report on the Buddhist Kingdoms), lies partly in its many passages of accurate description, verified by