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by
James M. Hargett

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

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Xu Xiake (1587–1641) and His Unfortunate Son’s “Lasting Achievements”

James M. Hargett

The University at Albany, State University of New York

ABSTRACT

Rarely do modern readers have a chance to look closely into the personal lives of historical figures. One exception is the Ming dynasty travel writer Xu Xiake 徐霞客, whose family was rocked by a scandal in 1620, when he impregnated a servant girl. In a case of historical irony, the illegitimate son of this union, who denied the surname Xu and instead was known as Li Ji 李寄, alone recovered and saved most of the original manuscript of his father’s travel diaries, destroyed in 1645 during the mayhem that accompanied the fall of the Ming dynasty. The purpose of this essay is to tell the story behind this and Li Ji’s other “lasting achievements,” which, until now, have not received the attention they deserve.

摘要：現代讀者很少有機會仔細了解歷史人物的私生活。罕見的例外是晚明旅行作家徐霞客，他的家庭在1620年因他懷了一名女僕而受到風波。在一個歷史諷刺的情況下，這個姨母後來出生的私生子，被拒絕使用徐姓，而以李寄的名字獨自挽救了他父親的旅行日記原稿的大部分，這些原稿在1645年明朝滅亡時的混亂中被毀壞。本文旨在講述李寄「持久成就」背後的故事，這個故事直到現在還沒有得到應有的關注。

Keywords: Xu Xiake 徐霞客 (1587–1641); *The Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake* (*Xu Xiake youji* 徐霞客游記);
Li Ji 李寄 (*zī*: Jieli 介立, 1620/1621–1691/1692); Late Ming dynasty (ca. 1570–1644); Southern Ming (1644–
1661); The Catastrophe in Jiangyin (Jiangyin zhi bian 江陰之變)

INTRODUCTION

According to Chen Hanhui 陳函輝 (1589–1646), Xu Xiake’s long-time friend and the author of his commemorative tomb biography, on his deathbed, Xu remarked: “I hope my sons have the means to make some lasting achievements” (願吾子有以不朽之).¹ Of course, it is common for parents to express the hope that their children will achieve success in life. Xu Xiake could not have imagined, however, that in just four short years, his oldest son, Xu Qi 徐屺 (1615–1645), would be dead, the victim of a slave rebellion in the Xu household.² His second son, Xu Xian 徐峴 (1619–?), and his fourth son, Xu Gou 徐岫[峴] (1624–1678), apparently managed to survive the tumultuous Ming–Qing dynastic shift, but the details of their biographies are unknown. It appears both lived in obscurity after the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 and, judging from the sources available, have no notable achievements to their credit. That leaves the third of Xu Xiake’s sons, Li Ji (sometimes called Li Jie 李介; *zì*: Jieli 介立; 1620/21–

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¹ Chen Hanhui, “Xu Xiake muzhi ming” 徐霞客墓誌銘 (Commemorative tomb biography of Xu Xiake), rpt. in *Xu Xiake youji jiaozhu* 徐霞客游記校注 (Travel diaries of Xu Xiake, with collations and commentary), Zhu Huirong 朱惠榮 (1936–2018), ed. (1985; rev. ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), 2:1437. Hereafter, references to Zhu Huirong’s modern edition of Xu Xiake’s diaries will be abbreviated as “YJZ.”

² The term “slave rebellion” (*nubian* 奴變) refers to sometimes violent and bloody conflicts in the late Ming (c. 1370–1644) and early Qing (1644–1911) dynasties across Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, and even reaching Guangdong, in which slaves and tenant farmers rebelled with the intention of seizing the landholdings of their masters or taking opportunities for personal gain. The modern scholars Wu Qiulong 鄔秋龍 and Gu Xinyan 顧新燕 have convincingly demonstrated that the catastrophic events that befell the Xu family in the summer of 1645 were not the result of an attack by Manchu troops or roving bandits, as many scholars have claimed, but a rebellion by slaves and tenant farmers in the Xu household. See their “Xushi jia bian yu Jiangnan diqu nubian fengchao” 徐氏家變與江南地區奴變風潮 (The Xu Family catastrophe and slave rebellion unrest in the Jiangnan), *Suzhou gongxueyuan xuebao* 蘇州工學院學報 21.6 (December 2001): 88–91. As noted by Wu and Gu (88), in addition to Xu Qi, the insurrection also claimed the life of one of Xu Xiake’s nephews and twenty members of the household. The Xu family estate in Jiangyin 江陰 (Jiangsu) was destroyed in the process.

1691/92).³ Note that his surname is Li 李, not Xu 徐. I shall have more to say about this matter below. By any measure or standard, among Xu Xiake's quartet of sons, Li Ji's "achievements" were the most "lasting" or consequential. This is because, during the bloody slave rebellion against the Xu family in 1645, the original hand-written manuscript of Xu Xiake's travel diaries was lost, presumably a casualty of the destruction of the family residence. During the next several decades, Li Ji, on his own initiative and without assistance from the Xu family, managed to retrieve much—though not all—of the lost manuscript. Without these efforts, posterity would likely never have known anything about his father, Xu Xiake, China's greatest traveler, regarded by many as China's most outstanding travel writer. This essay aims to outline and explain the details surrounding this and Li Ji's other "lasting achievements," which previously have not received the attention they deserve.

BACKGROUND

Xu Xiake was the scion of an elite family known for having produced generations of government officials since the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127).⁴ After the fall of the Northern Song capital at

³ On dating Li Ji's birth year, I follow Zhou Ningxia 周寧霞, who, based on convincing and reliable primary sources, dates his birth to the twelfth lunar month of the first year of the Taichang 泰昌 reign. On the Western calendar, this month extended from December 24, 1620, until January 21, 1621. See Zhou's "Xu Xiake jiating beiju ji Li Ji shengnian zai tantao — jian da Lü Xisheng Xiansheng de zhiyi" 徐霞客家庭悲劇及李寄生年再探討 — 兼答呂錫生先生的質疑 (Further inquiry into Xu Xiake's family tragedy and Li Ji's birth year, along with responses to Mr. Lü Xisheng's challenge questions), paper published in the proceedings of the conference Xu Xiake yu Yue wenhua ji Zhongguo Shaoxing liuyou wenhua yantaohui lunwen huibian 徐霞客與越文化暨中國紹興旅遊文化研討會論文彙編 (Collected papers from the symposium on Xu Xiake, Yue Culture, and Chinese Shaoxing Tourism Culture) (Jiangyin: Zhejiangsheng Xu Xiake yanjiuhui 浙江省徐霞客研究會, 2003): 224–225. As for the year of his death, the brief biography of Li Ji in Lu Sicheng 盧思誠 (fl. late nineteenth century) et al., eds., *Jiangyinxian zhi* 江陰縣志 (Jiangyin County gazetteer) 1878 ed.; (rpt., Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983), 18.21a, says Li Ji lived until seventy-two *sui*. Assuming the 1620/1621 birth period is correct, he died sometime in 1691 or 1692.

⁴ The most important primary source on Xu Xiake's life is Chen Hanhui's commemorative tomb biography. As for modern secondary sources, Zhu Junkan 朱鈞侃 and Ni Shaoxiang 倪紹祥, eds., *Xuxue gailun—Xu Xiake ji qi Youji yanjiu* 徐學概論—徐霞客及其《游記》研究 (A general discussion of Xu-ology—Studies of Xu Xiake and his *Travel Diaries*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 54–76, is especially informative and thorough, although there are numerous other modern

Kaifeng 開封 and the subsequent Jurchen (Jin 金) occupation of north China, some of Xu Xiake’s ancestors had fled south to escape the chaos and destruction caused by the invasion. Xu’s biographers all remark that after resettling in Jiangnan 江南, his family became known for producing “Eminent Scholars of the Southern Region” (Nanzhou gaoshi 南州高士). During his great-grandfather Xu Xia’s 徐洽 (1497–1564) lifetime, the Xu family owned 12,597 *mu* 畝 of land in what is now Jiangsu,⁵ making it one of the region’s wealthiest and most prestigious families. Although the family’s fortunes had declined by Xu Xiake’s lifetime, it still had the resources to afford and support a large household with concubines, slaves, and tenant farmers.

By all accounts, Xu’s marriage in 1607 to his first wife, née Xu 許, niece of the prominent Jiangyin poet Xu Xueyi 許學夷 (1563–1633), was a happy one. However, she failed to bear children during the first eight years of their marriage. Xu Xiake then took a concubine (*ceshi* 側室), née Jin 金. She gave birth to a girl after joining the household.⁶ Around the same time, and quite unexpectedly, Xu’s wife became pregnant and gave birth to a son, Xu Qi, born in 1615. Unfortunately, the wife died two years later of an unknown illness. Not long afterward, Xu took a second wife: the daughter of a well-to-do family in Jiangyin surnamed Luo 羅. Xu Xiake’s mother was still alive, and her relationship with the new second wife seems to have been harmonious.⁷ Wife Luo gave birth to a son (Xu Xian) in 1619, a year

sources in modern Chinese on Xu’s biography and family background. Liu Yufeng’s 劉喻楓 unpublished 2022 master’s thesis “Li Ji yanjiu” (Shaoxing Wenli xueyuan 紹興文理學院) is also quite useful, especially the chronological biography (*nianpu* 年譜) on 110–125. The best sources in English on Xu Xiake’s life are both written by Julian Ward: *Xu Xiake (1587–1641): The Art of Travel Writing* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), esp. 38–61, and his entry on “Xu Xiake” in the *Berkshire Dictionary of Chinese Biography*, Kerry Brown, ed. (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2016): 21042–1054.

⁵ Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (also known in English as V. K. Ting, 1887–1936), *Xu Xiake xiansheng nianpu* 徐霞客先生年譜 (Chronological biography of the Honorable Xu Xiake), rpt. in *Xu Xiake youji* 徐霞客游記 (The travel diaries of Xu Xiake), Chu Shaotang 褚紹唐 (1912–2004) and Wu Yingshou 吳應壽, eds. (1980; rev. ed., Shanghai: Shanghai Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 2007): following 21304 in separate pagination.

⁶ Xu’s only daughter is usually referred to as Xu Jiefu 徐節婦, or “Xu, the Chaste Widow,” because her husband died young and she never remarried.

⁷ This statement is based on a line in Chen Renxi’s 陳仁錫 (*hao*: Zhitai 芝臺, 1581–1636) “Wang Ruren muzhiming” 王儒人墓誌銘 (Commemorative tomb biography of Wang, the Confucian Dame; note: Xu Xiake’s mother is referred to in the

after joining the household. According to Chen Hanhui: “Within the family, there was strong marital harmony and shared affection; the children were proper in their appearance and treated equally in their ranks. After the three sons took their place in the family, even though each of them had a different mother, they received the same education and lived together under the same roof ...” (諸若琴瑟再調無異情、子姓衣冠分列無異視、三子次第成立、出異乳、無異育、與從旅舍 ……).⁸ Chen Hanhui excluded Li Ji from his roster of Xu Xiake’s sons because, contrary to what he in this passage purports to claim, all was not “harmonious” in the Xu household after Wife Luo gave birth to Xu Xiake’s second son, Xu Xian. Moreover, the source of the disharmony—“scandal” is probably a more appropriate word—was Xu Xiake himself.

DOMESTIC UPHEAVAL

In the late spring of 1620, after Xu Xiake left home to undertake a sightseeing trip to Fujian, the Xu household was in disarray: earlier and for reasons unknown, a (probably younger) woman of child-bearing age, née Zhou (d. 1751), had joined the household.⁹ Most sources identify her position or rank as a *shiqie* 侍妾 (lit., “attendant-concubine”). Although usually translated into English as “concubine,” the status of a *shiqie* in the household pecking order was lower than a *ceshi*, Concubine Jin’s position. Miss Zhou was a servant girl (*binü* 婢女; also called *biqie* 婢妾) who was probably purchased from a local family of low social position. Young women like Miss Zhou, who served as servants in elite households, were sometimes also called *peishui yatou* 陪睡丫頭 because they served their master in different ways, including—as indicated by the name—“accompanying him to sleep.” We know Miss Zhou assumed this role because she became pregnant some time (probably soon) after joining the

sources as Wang Ruren, or “Wang, the Confucian Dame”: “Second Wife Luo served her mother-in-law faithfully, and once proposed to plant something in her honor” (繼羅事姑孝，嘗先意為姑種植). Wang Ruren’s commemorative tomb biography is rpt. in *YJZ*, 2:1497–1499 (the line quoted here is on 1498); Xu’s father, Xu Youmian 徐有勉 (1545–1604), had died many years earlier from wounds sustained during a home invasion.

⁸ *YJZ*, 2:1438.

⁹ Miss Zhou may have joined the Xu household as a maidservant to Xu Xiake’s first wife, but the sources are unclear about her history and prior relationship to the Xu family, if any. My source for Miss Zhou’s death year is Liu Yufeng, “Li Ji yanjiu,”

household and before Xu Xiake left for Fujian in the spring of 1620. When Wife Luo learned about the pregnancy, her actions (described below) left no doubt she suspected Xu was the father. Decisions would need to be made because children born to servant girls like Miss Zhou were usually considered illegitimate. But more importantly, the scandal brought considerable embarrassment and shame to the Xu family, so the matter needed to be defused and eliminated immediately. We will turn our attention to those decisions and actions presently, but first, we need to confirm that Miss Zhou’s pregnancy was, in fact, the result of a romantic liaison with Xu Xiake.

Biographies and family genealogies rarely, if ever, mention scandalous events like those just described. The same is true about the contents of an author’s individual collected works (*bieji* 別集). Xu Xiake did not leave an individual collection of his writings to posterity. Still, he did leave a massive bulk of travel writing, which in modern editions constitutes more than six hundred thousand Chinese characters. Unsurprisingly, aside from comments concerning filial obligations to his mother, who lived into her eighties, Xu Xiake rarely speaks about personal or family matters in his travel diaries and other extant writings. However, an exception that relates to this essay’s topic and thus deserves scrutiny occurs in his Yunnan travel diaries. On January 10, 1639, while traveling through a village in Yunnan where a prominent local family surnamed Li 李 had once resided, Xu came to Lone Plank Bridge (Dumu qiao 獨木橋). Here is his diary entry concerning his observations at that bridge. “Provincial capital” refers to the city of Kunming:

Next, I proceeded south through a gorge for over one *li*, where a stone bridge stretches east to west over a stream. This is Lone Plank Bridge. From the west of the bridge, the trail heads due south and ascends a slope. As it turns out, past the bridge and off to the east is the main road taken by those heading to the provincial capital. Long ago, this bridge was just a single plank. Now, the plank has been replaced with stone. It has a stele with a name inscription that reads: “Treading on Clouds” (Nieyun), but people still call it by its old name. Beside the bridge was a plum blossom tree with numerous branches and an ancient trunk. Its petals were delicate, its flowers dense, with green sepals and crimson stamens—a seemingly icy soul with adorned eyes. *Suddenly, I caught sight of my old friend back home* (italics added for emphasis). These plum

blossoms were quite unlike other plum blossoms I have seen in Yunnan Province, which bear leaves and red blossoms but are devoid of all sense of “Snow fills the interior of the mountains; / Moonlight shines down upon the forest.” I plucked a twig of plum blossoms and briefly rested at the end of the bridge

(又行南峽一里餘，則有石梁一鞏，東西跨溪上，是為獨木橋。路從橋西直南上坡；其逾橋而東者，乃往省大道。是橋昔以獨木為之，今易以石，有碑名之曰“躡雲”，而人呼猶仍其舊焉。橋側有梅一株，枝叢而幹甚古，瓣細而花甚密，綠蒂朱蕾，冰魂粉眼，恍見吾鄉故人，不若滇省所見，皆帶葉紅花，盡失其“雪滿山中，月明林下”之意也。乃折梅一枝，少憩橋端。).¹⁰

I agree with the modern scholar Lü Xisheng that the “old friend back home” (*xiang guren* 鄉故人) mentioned in this passage alludes to Miss Zhou, the former servant girl.¹¹ Likening his “old friend” to a plum blossom leaves no doubt that Xu’s reference is to a woman (in Chinese literature, plum blossoms are a common trope for beautiful women). But what led Xu Xiake to suddenly “catch sight” of his “old friend back home”? The beautiful plum blossoms by the bridge certainly attracted his attention. Still, it was probably the surname of the family (Li) who formerly resided near the bridge that sparked a connection between his third son’s adopted family name (Li) and his mother. Perhaps the best clue concerning the “old friend” in Jiangyin comes from Xu’s comparison of the plum blossoms in Yunnan with those back home in Jiangyin. Those in Yunnan, he says, “are devoid of all sense of ‘Snow fills the interior of the mountains; / Moonlight shines down upon the forest.’” The verse quoted in this line is drawn from a verse by the Ming dynasty poet Gao Qi 高啟 (1336–1374), the second couplet of which reads: “Snow fills the interior of the mountains as the eminent scholar takes his repose, / Moonlight shines on the forest below as the beautiful one makes her approach” (雪滿山中高士臥，月明林下

¹⁰ *YJZ*, 2:995.

¹¹ Lü Xisheng 呂錫生, “Xu Xiake de hunyi beiju” 徐霞客的婚姻悲劇 (The tragedy of Xu Xiake’s marriage), *Jiangnan luntan* 江南論壇 93 (Nov. 15, 1988): 43.

美人來。)¹² It should also be noted that the plum blossom that caught Xu's eye at Lone Plank Bridge seemed to have an "icy soul with adorned eyes," which could be glossed to mean "a pure heart and beautiful eyes." If the reference to the "beautiful one" is to Miss Zhou—and this seems to be the case—this suggests Xu Xiake's fondness for her still lingered after almost two decades. But what exactly happened to Miss Zhou and her unborn child while Xu was on the road in Fujian?

EXPULSION

Based on Li Ji's birth date (late 1620 or early 1621), he was conceived sometime in early spring (March or April) 1620. As already mentioned, in early summer (June 6, to be exact), Xu Xiake left home for Fujian and did not return to Jiangyin until August 8. Whether Xu or his family members were aware of the pregnancy before he headed south is unknown. Miss Zhou would have been about two or three months pregnant. We are reasonably sure, however, that the events about to be described occurred during the sixty-three days Xu was traveling away from home and took place without his knowledge.

The sources are consistent about what transpired after the pregnancy became known to the family. Li Ji's biography in the *Jiangyinxian zhi* reports: "When Miss Zhou became pregnant, the legal wife (Luo) married her off to someone else. Since a family surnamed Li raised her son, he bore the name Li Ji" (方孕而嫡嫁之, 以育於李氏, 故名李寄).¹³ Wife Luo, identified as the 'legal wife' (*di* 嫡), was the driving force behind this move. According to one source, the pretext for the expulsion was based on Miss Zhou's violation of the mourning rites: she became pregnant while the family was still mourning the death of Xu Xiake's first wife.¹⁴ Although the role of Xu's mother in the expulsion is never mentioned in the sources, she was undoubtedly involved in the discharge of Miss Zhou, either actively or tacitly. In any case, the expulsion would never have happened without the mother's consent. A fascinating, related question is this: how did Xu Xiake react after returning home and hearing about the

¹² This couplet comes from the first verse in Gao Qi's "Nine Odes to the Plum Blossom" (Yongmei jiushou 咏梅九首), in *Gao Qi da quanji* 高啟大全集 (Gao Qi's great, complete collection), at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=706945>, 15.122.

¹³ *Jiangyinxian zhi*, 18.21a.

¹⁴ This matter is discussed in 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 landscape culture) (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua chubanshe, 1994), 21.

events that took place in his absence? Zhou Ningxia and Lü Xisheng speculate that, given his affection for Miss Zhou, Xu's relationship with Wife Luo likely ended when he found out what had transpired while he was away.¹⁵ This suggestion seems plausible, but it cannot be confirmed. We can be sure, however, that, given Xu Xiake's fondness for Miss Zhou, if she were to remain in the household and later produce a son, this could conceivably challenge the wife's power and position within the family. But whatever her motivation, as the legal wife, she had the power to sell off Miss Zhou, whose status was the same as a slave. Servants could be bought, sold, and expelled from a family anytime and for any reason. In extreme cases, they could even be punished by death. Wife Luo certainly knew that one way to rid the Xu household of Miss Zhou and her unborn child was to marry her off to someone else.

It seems almost certain that by the time Xu Xiake returned home from Fujian in early August 1620, Miss Zhou (about five months pregnant) was already gone. As a legal member of the Li family, Miss Zhou could never return to the Xu household because of her new status as a married woman. The expulsion also applied to unborn children. Like his mother, Li Ji was excommunicated from the Xu family. Wife Zhou further stipulated that he could never use the surname "Xu."¹⁶ After the child was born, presumably, the stepfather selected the given name (*ming*) Ji 寄 for his adopted son. This name was likely chosen because, in some contexts, *ji* can mean "to leave a child in the care of someone else" (cf. *jiyang* 寄養 in modern Chinese).¹⁷ When young men came of age in traditional China, they selected a courtesy name (*zi*). Li Ji chose the courtesy name Jieli 介立. As most of his biographers have noted, courtesy names were often chosen for specific reasons related to the young man's life experiences. This is undoubtedly the case with Jieli, which means "bestride two boundaries." In other words, the young man identified himself as in the precarious position of being "lodged" or "stuck" between two families

¹⁵ See Zhou Ningxia, "Xu Xiake jiating beiju," 227, and Lü Xisheng, "Xu Xiake de hunyin beiju," 43.

¹⁶ The famous early Qing dynasty poet and friend of Li Ji, Sha Zhangbai 沙張白 (1626–1691), wrote a letter to Li Ji urging him to reclaim "Xu" as his rightful family name. See his "Quanyou Xu Jieli fuxing shu" 勸友徐介立復姓書 (Letter urging my friend Xu Jieli to reclaim his surname). The letter is rpt. in *Congshi jicheng xubian* 叢書及程續編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1988), 117:183. Li Ji did not follow Sha's suggestion.

¹⁷ The Chinese character *ji* has several other meanings related to Li Ji's family circumstances. Here are just four: "to entrust to," "to leave with," "to convey or transfer," and "to foster" (a son and so on). These glosses are taken from Paul W. Kroll et al., comps., *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (3rd ed., Leiden: Brill, 2022), 195 (entry for *ji* 寄).

and two dynasties. One wonders how, in light of the scandal involving his parents and given his status as an "outcast" from his own family, Li Ji could ever accomplish any "lasting achievement." The painful psychological effects of abandonment indeed remained with him throughout his life. This brings us to the great irony in the story of Li Ji: despite his experience as an "unfortunate" son, he still managed to accomplish not one but multiple "lasting achievements." These successes would not have been possible without the support provided to him by his adoptive family.

A GIFTED STUDENT

The sources provide few details about the Li family. They lived on or near Constant Mountain (Dingshan 定山), southeast of Jiangyin. Unfortunately, no details are known about Li Ji's stepfather or how the marriage match between the Xu and Li families was arranged. Although some modern biographers claim that the Lis were a local peasant family,¹⁸ this is inaccurate. We know this because the Li family had the resources to provide Li Ji with a traditional Confucian education to prepare him for the civil service examinations. According to his biographer Xu Zhen 徐鎮 (fl. 1776–1806), Xu Xiake's grandson: "Li desired to return home (to the Xu family) from his youth to adulthood, but the Xu family was unable to accept him" (少長, 欲旋里, 族弗能收).¹⁹ However, not everyone in the Xu household was opposed to Li Ji. Xu Xiake's daughter supposedly insisted that her son refer to him as "maternal uncle."²⁰ One can only imagine the degree of Li Ji's emotional pain, especially in his early years, along with the scandalous local gossip, for it was general knowledge in Jiangyin that he was Xu Xiake's son. As far as we know, he never again had any contact with his father or any member of the Xu family.

As it turns out, Li Ji was an exceptionally gifted student who achieved a notable distinction early in his life. Among students who took the apprentice examination (*tongzi kaoshi* 童子考試) at the

¹⁸ As Lü Xisheng has noted in his "Xu Xiake de hunyin beiju," 43, the Lis were likely a local land-owning family.

¹⁹ *YJZ*, 2:1445.

²⁰ Lü Xisheng, "Xu Xiake de hunyin beiju," 43. This suggests there was some social contact or at least reference between Xu Xiake's daughter's family (why else would form of address be an issue?) and Li Ji, but the sources are silent on how and when this contact may have occurred.

prefectural seat in Changzhou 常州, Li Ji was selected as the top candidate.²¹ It would seem at this point in his life that Li Ji had a bright future in front of him, and one might be tempted to assume that he assimilated into the Li family and all connection(s) to the Xu Family had been severed. Not so. Li Ji never married and never pursued a career as a government official. He lived with his mother on Constant Mountain and supported her by tutoring local students. Xu Zhen describes Li Ji in this way:

By nature, he was clever and exceptional; his learning was extensive, and he was skilled in composition.... Whenever there was a fine day in spring or autumn, he would wade through the rivers of the southern mountains, covering almost all of them. All the locals remarked that he had his father's demeanor

(性穎異, 博學能文……每於春秋佳日, 涉歷南山水殆遍, 鄉之人咸稱其有父風).²²

Praise like this is standard fare in Chinese biographical writing, but Xu Zhen also provides a brief resume of Li Ji's scholarly works:

²¹ Xu Zhen, "Li Jieli Xiansheng xiaozhuan" 李介立先生小傳 ("Brief biography of the Honorable Li Jieli"). The biography is rpt. in *YJZ*, 2:1445. Zhou Ningxia, "Xu Xiake jiating beiji," 230, contends that Li Ji took the exam around 1650, when he was about thirty years old. This dating is based on the identification of Zu Chongguang 祖重光 (*zú* Xingyue 星越) as Administrator (Zhi 知) of Changzhou when Li Ji took the exam. Zu Chongguang served in Changzhou between 1650 and 1652. Given Li Ji's strong loyalist support of the Ming dynasty, it seems ironic that he would sit for the Qing exams just five years after the Manchu obliteration of his hometown and the slaughter of thousands of its citizens. The only person I can think of who may have encouraged him to sit for the exam was his mother, who died a year later in 1751.

It might also be mentioned here that it seems almost certain that his father took and failed the same apprentice exam when he was a young man. According to Wu Guohua 吳國華 (*Jinshi* 1616), Xu Xiake's brother-in-law: "When Xu was young, he took the examinations and failed to pass" (少應試不得志). *YJZ*, 2:1430. Chu Shaotang claims Xu took and failed the exams in 1602. See his *Xu Xiake xiangsheng nianpu*, in Zheng Zu'an and Jiang Minghong, *Xu Xiake yu shanshui wenhua*, 524. No other primary source corroborates either of these claims, but since Wu Guohua was Xu Xiake's brother-in-law, he would certainly have known about this matter.

²² *YJZ*, 2:1445.

His writings include the *Celestial Fragrance Belvedere Collection* (*Tianxiang ge ji*), *Collected Essentials of Cartography* (*Yutu jiyao*), *Manuscripts Stored in the Garden of the Arts* (*Yipu cunghao*), and a pile of over two hundred chapters of *shi*-poems in the ancient and modern style. Although they have not been formally published, the manuscript versions often leave a lasting impression on readers

(所著有《天香閣集》，《輿圖集要》，《藝圃存稿》及古今體詩，累二百餘卷，雖未梓行，其錄本亦往往膾炙人口)。²³

There is little other biographical information available about Li Ji’s youth. Although his scholarly interests emerged early, the bulk of his productivity—including his efforts to recover his father’s lost diaries—came in his middle and later years. These matters will be addressed later in this essay. One aspect of Li Ji’s biography that has not received adequate attention from scholars is his role in events in Jiangyin after Qing military forces besieged the city in the summer of 1645.

MING LOYALIST, MILITARY STRATEGIST, AND THE CATASTROPHE AT JIANGYIN

The violence and destruction that accompanied the conquest of China in the middle decades of the seventeenth century by a coalition of “barbarians” from the northeast led by the Manchus, thousands of traitorous (formerly) Ming soldiers, and bands of roving indigenous bandits and rebel armies, is well documented.²⁴ Few parts of China, if any, were able to escape the trauma and violence of the Ming–

²³ *YJZ*, 2:1445–1446. The best available summary and critique of Li Ji’s writings, especially his poetry, is found in Liu Yufeng, “Li Ji yanjiu.”

²⁴ There is a large body of scholarship in English on the Ming–Qing transition. Those works I have found to be the most informative are the following: Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr., eds., *From Ming to Qing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise, Volume 1: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1986), Lynn A. Struve, *Voices from the Ming–Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers’ Jaws* (New Haven:

Qing transition. In mid-March 1645, Qing forces launched a carefully calculated military campaign into the prosperous and highly populated Jiangnan region. The plan was to subjugate, either peacefully or by force, the region's cities, especially Nanjing, where the rump Ming imperial court was still active but not functioning well.

The precise circumstances and degree of capitulation to the Manchus varied. Unlike most other population centers in Jiangnan, which offered little or no resistance to the Qing forces, some cities, like Yangzhou 揚州 and Jiading 嘉定, offered initial opposition.²⁵ Ming commanders in these and other cities adhered to the principle of non-surrender, which only encouraged the Qing military to punish civilians who fell under their rule more harshly. After Yangzhou fell on May 20, the next objective of the Manchu forces was to cross the Changjiang and reach Nanjing, where what was left of the exiled Ming court still survived. Their route there would take them directly past Jiangyin.

Chinese reaction in Jiangnan to the invading Manchu forces was initially docile. However, this changed in July 1645 when the Qing regent Dorgon (Chinese: Duoergun 多爾袞, 1612–1650) commanded the Board of Rites (Libu 禮部) to issue a new directive: within ten days of each province's receiving this order, all Chinese men, as a physical pledge of submission to Qing rule over China, were to shave the front portion of their heads and grow a queue or pigtail. The consequences of non-compliance were made clear in a slogan that circulated widely: "Lose your hair, and you will keep your head; keep your hair, and you will lose your head" (留頭不留髮, 留髮不留頭). On July 17, the new Qing sympathizer prefect of Jiangyin, Fang Heng 方亨 (d. 1645), along with four Manchu bannermen,

Yale University Press, 1993), Lynn A. Struve, *The Ming-Qing Conflict, 1619–1683: A Historiography and Source Guide* (1998), and Lynn A. Struve, ed., *Time, Temporality, and Imperial Transition: East Asia from Ming to Qing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

²⁵ The two standard contemporary accounts of these events are Wang Xiuchu 王秀楚 (seventeenth century), *Yangzhou shiri ji* 揚州十日記 (Account of ten days at Yangzhou), and Zhu Zisuo 珠子索 (active 1645), *Jiading tucheng jilue* 嘉定屠城紀略 (Brief chronicle of the massacre in the city of Jiading). Both works are anthologized in Wang Xiuchu et al., *Yangzhou shiri ji* (3rd ed., Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 2012), 229–243 and 249–268, respectively. The most useful English sources on these events are Antonia Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), and Jerry Dennerline, *The Chia-ting Loyalists: Confucian Leadership and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), respectively. Also see Struve, *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm*, esp. 28–48.

arrived in the city to enforce the hair-cutting order. Four days later, all men in Jiangyin were commanded to "lose their hair." This directive, as Frederick Wakeman, Jr., has shown, "more than any other act, engendered the Jiangnan resistance of 1645."²⁶ Jiangyin's refusal to comply led Fang Heng to request that Qing troops from nearby Changzhou be sent to Jiangyin to suppress the local resistance. When the city's citizens found out about the secret request, they put Fang Heng under house arrest. The four bannermen were then savagely beaten to death by a mob. The lies and subversion Fang Heng had perpetrated against Jiangyin and its citizens led to his being executed on July 30.

Following the deaths of Fang Heng and the four Qing bannermen, everyone in Jiangyin knew that a Manchu siege of the city was imminent. It came on August 12, when Qing forces commanded by Liu Liangzuo 劉良佐 (d. 1667)—a renegade former Ming general—besieged the city. A week later, Liu and his troops launched an all-out assault upon Jiangyin's city walls but found them much better defended than expected. Messages sent out from Jiangyin seeking aid from loyalist groups throughout Jiangnan went unanswered. A second, all-out attack on the city came on September 5, but the Ming loyalist defenders held off the armored Qing soldiers by pouring hot oil down on them as the invaders tried to scale the city's wall. By September 18 and 19, however, the city's supplies were exhausted. A few days later, news arrived that Songjiang 松江 Prefecture, now a suburban district of modern Shanghai, had fallen. Jiangyin now stood as the last bastion of resistance in Jiangnan. The city fell on October 10, eighty-one days after the siege began.

Figures vary considerably regarding the number of Jiangyin's defenders who died inside and outside the city and the troop strength of the Qing forces involved in the fighting. The military historian Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) argues that the likely number of loyalist deaths was around seventy-four thousand, while the number of Qing troops involved in the siege and local fighting numbered around ten thousand soldiers.²⁷ These numbers seem more sober and realistic than the exorbitant figures

²⁶ The full text of the directive is translated in Wakeman, "Localism and Loyalism During the Ch'ing Conquest of Kiangnan: The Tragedy of Chiang-yin," in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, ed. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Carolyn Grant (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: The University of California Press, 1974), 56.

²⁷ *Shengwu ji* 聖武記 (Accounts of peerless military exploits) (1842; rpt., Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), 13.6.

claimed by others.²⁸ Regardless of the number, however, the fighting that took place during the siege of Jiangyin may have been the bloodiest in all of Jiangnan, while the gallantry and bravery of those who defended Jiangyin are perhaps the most notable among all centers of resistance during the Ming–Qing transition.

Qing censorship ensured that details related to the Manchu conquest of Jiangnan, especially the obliteration of cities like Yangzhou, Jiading, Songjiang, and Jiangyin, did not appear in official histories such as the *Veritable Records of the Qing* (*Qing shilu* 清實錄). But contemporary and later anti-Manchu sentiments led to the compilation of unofficial historical accounts (*yeshi* 野史) of the fall of some of Jiangnan’s cities to the Manchus. Wang Xiuchu’s *Yangzhou shiri ji* and Zhu Zisuo’s *Jiading tucheng jilue*, cited earlier, are two examples of these unofficial accounts. There is also a description of events before, during, and after the Manchu siege of Jiangyin, titled *Chronicle of the Defense of Jiangyin* (*Jiangyin shoucheng ji* 江陰守城紀; preface dated 1715), written by Han Tan 韓蒔 (1637–1704), a high-ranking government official in the Hanlin Academy.²⁹ In his account, Han Tan mentions Li Ji (or Li Jieli) by name:

The Prince of Fu assumed the throne. The “White-Eyed Young Eccentric” of Jiangyin, Li Jieli, given name Ji, desired to submit three strategies to restore the dynasty. After he climbed Zhouli Hill and observed sidereal phenomena in the heavens, he wept bitterly on his return home, realizing that the will of Heaven had already become difficult to overturn

(福王之立也。江陰白眼狂生李介立名寄者，欲進中興三策。時登妯娌山，觀星象，痛哭而返，知天意已難回矣。).³⁰

28 Cited in Wakeman, “Localism and Loyalism,” 83, ns. 116 and 117.

29 Since the preface to the *Chronicle of the Defense of Jiangyin* is dated eleven years after Han Tan’s death, it seems certain that others were involved in its compilation and distribution.

30 <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=879870> (entry no. 15).

“Prince of Fu” (Fuwang 福王) refers to Zhu Yousong 朱由崧 (d. 1645), also known as the Hongguang 弘光 emperor (r. 1644–1645), the first sovereign of the Southern Ming. After the fall of Beijing in April 1644, he fled south to Nanjing, where he was proclaimed emperor of the Southern Ming on June 19. Li Ji would have been about twenty-four years old when this event occurred. Almost all of the biographical sources on Li Ji’s life portray him as a recluse who lived with his mother outside Jiangyin and only rarely visited the city. The only activity that took him away from home was local sightseeing excursions. Li Ji even selected the nickname “the Mountain Woodcutter on Kunlun” (Kunlun shanqiao 崑崙山樵), which suggests his desire to one day travel far and wide until he reached remote Mount Kunlun. So why would Han Dan decide to include an entry in his unofficial history on Li Ji, whom he refers to as the “White-Eyed Young Eccentric” (Baiyan kuangsheng 白眼狂生),³¹ and what, if anything, does it tell us about his role in the defense of Jiangyin and his “three strategies to restore the dynasty” (*zhongxing sance* 中興三策)? Finally, is any of this related to some “lasting achievement” on Li Ji’s part?

The only sources we have for possible answers to these questions are a twentieth-century unofficial history of the siege of Jiangyin and Li Ji’s writings. The unofficial history in question is Hu Shanyuan’s 胡山源 (1897–1988) *Jiangyin yimin biezhuàn* 江陰義民別傳 (Biographies of the righteous people of Jiangyin).³² Hu’s anthology includes a biography of Li Ji. Although Li Ji preferred a private lifestyle and thus rarely ventured into the city, Hu Shanyuan says, when news about the fall of Beijing reached Jiangyin, Li Ji “had to make a trip to the city” to get more news about the precarious state of national affairs. This seems reasonable, mainly because Li Ji was a devoted Ming loyalist throughout his early life. Hu Shanyuan says that on the day Li Ji went into the city, he proceeded directly to the home

³¹ This is just one of many different nicknames Li Ji chose for himself.

³² Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1938 (rpt., Beijing: Zhongguo tushuguan Xuehui gaoxiao fenhui weituo zhongxian Tuofang dianzi zhiyin gongsi, 2009), 110–119 (wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/eg/SSID-11346306_江陰義民別傳.pdf). As Professor Wakeman has noted, there are reasons to suspect the reliability of Hu Shanyuan’s biographies. See his “Localism and Loyalism,” 56–57, esp. n. 46. The main reason for suspicion is that Hu does not cite any of the “earlier sources” he supposedly consulted when writing his biographies. Still, the Li Ji biography in Hu Shanyuan’s unofficial history is worthy of a close read if for no other reason than to determine if the events he describes seem reasonable and if Li Ji’s actions seem plausible, especially when compared with comments in Li’s own writings. However, we must always keep in mind that hyperbole and embellishment are hallmark qualities of “unofficial history” writing.

of his friend Xu Yong 許用. When he saw Xu, he broke down and cried without saying a word. Xu consoled him, saying the Ming dynasty would recover and survive. When he heard the news that the Prince of Fu had assumed the throne in Nanjing on June 19, 1644, Li Ji probably thought there was some hope the Ming dynasty might recover after all. This led him to travel to Nanjing to present his “three strategies” memorial to the Southern Ming Court. This effort failed, as Li Ji mentions in the following lines from his “Dawn at Maple Tree Bridge: A Prose Rhapsody” (Fengqiao chen fu 楓橋晨賦): “Unable to offer my strategies, I depart by boat; / Alone, I raise my long sword, singing loudly as I return” (獻策不成辭棹去，獨提長劍浩歌回).³³ In this context, “singing loudly” probably refers to attempts to “console oneself with song.” The reason Li Ji was “unable to offer” his strategies” is explained in a comment: “Earlier, when the Hongguang Emperor first assumed the throne, I drafted my five strategies to restore the dynasty.³⁴ Just before I presented them to the imperial court, I heard rumors about favoritism and illicit affairs and so decided, in the end, not to present them. Instead, I decided to retire from the world to express my convictions” (先是弘光初立，余草中興五策將上諸朝，聞其嬖奸漁色，遂不果上。因著避世論以見志).³⁵ Li Ji’s resolve “to retire from the world” resonates closely with the closing line of the passage from the *Chronicle of the Defense of Jiangyin*, where he concludes that dynastic change from Ming to Qing was the “will of Heaven” (Tianyi 天意).

When Qing troops attacked Jiangyin on July 23, Li Ji was outside the city but returned to fetch his mother. Together, they managed to escape and reach Cloud Pavilion Village (Yunting cun 雲亭村), where the mother was able to flee further with the help of some friends. Li Ji stayed behind to gather some provisions. While on the road, he had a close encounter with some Manchu troops (or, as he calls them, “caitiffs”):

At dawn on the thirteenth day of the sixth month [July 6], the caitiffs pressed in on

33 This poem is included in Li Ji’s *Halting Cart Collection* (*Tingche ji* 停車集), in Gu Jici 顧季慈 (active 1858), ed., *Jiangshang shichao* 江上詩鈔 (Drafts of poems on the River) (rpt., Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 2003), 53.499.

34 How and why the original “three strategies” have now become “five strategies” is unclear.

35 These remarks come from the preface to Li Ji’s *Accompanying the Recluse Collection* (*Xieyin ji xu* 偕隱集序), quoted in Liu Yufeng, “Li Ji yanjiu,” 115.

Cloud Pavilion Village. Unaware of their presence, I suddenly encountered soldiers demanding valuables at swordpoint. I removed my jacket and threw it before their horses, standing bare-chested, declaring I had nothing. The caitiffs raised their swords, intending to cut me down, but seeing what appeared to be bindings around my arms, preventing a clean strike with their swords, they left

(六月十三日，虜晨壓雲亭鎮。余不知，猝遇騎兵，橫刀索寶。余解小褂擲向馬前，裸身當之，告以無有。虜舉刀斫下，見其臂若有所纏縛者，刀不能下，遂去。).³⁶

Hu Shanyuan also reports that Xu Yong invited Li Ji to remain in Jiangyin and join the local forces to resist the Manchu attack, but Li Ji rejected the offer: “You have your place to die, and I have mine.”³⁷ Instead, Li Ji joined others to organize a defense force outside the city to protect the area around Yushan wan 敵山灣, a village (*xiang* 鄉) near where he lived. Hu also says Li Ji organized and commanded the defense force in Yushan wan, but this is not corroborated in any source I have seen. It seems inevitable, though, that Li Ji was involved in the fighting, either directly or indirectly.

Now, although we do not know the precise nature of Li Ji’s “three (or five) plans to restore the Ming dynasty,” it is certain that he was keenly interested in and, even in his younger years, had some knowledge about military history and strategy. Among the many scholarly works he produced during his lifetime are two related titles: the first is *Guide to Military Matters through the Successive Eras* (*Lidai bingjian* 歷代兵鑿), in 120 *juan*; the second is *Casual Notes on a Guide to Military Matters through the Successive Eras* (*Lidai bingjian suibi* 歷代兵鑿隨筆) in 16 *juan*. We do not know when these texts may have been compiled, but it seems almost sure that they date from Li’s middle or later years (that is, after the siege of Jiangyin). Neither text is extant, but the preface to the first title has survived.³⁸ How Li Ji’s

³⁶ This quotation comes from *Drafts of the Honorable Li Jieli’s Poetry* (Li Jieli Xiansheng shigao 李介立先生詩稿), quoted in Liu Yufeng, “Li Ji yanjiu,” 105.

³⁷ *Jiangyin yimin biezhuàn*, 115.

³⁸ Li Ji, *Bingjian zixu* 兵鑿自序, in *Congshu jicheng xubian*, 117-178.

strategies and military knowledge may have helped in the defense of Jiangyin will probably never be known. However, it cannot be denied that he took action and made a genuine effort to remain loyal to the Ming dynasty, which is commendable. The remaining decades of his life were devoted mainly to scholarship while living in seclusion. Despite poverty and illness, he never ceased in his writing endeavors, favoring historical, literary (prose and poetry), military, and geographical works. Perhaps most importantly, he set to work to reconstitute his father's lost travel journals.

LI JI AND XU XIAKE YOUJI

Xu Xiake was seriously ill when he returned home in the summer of 1640 from his extended, almost four-year grand expedition through Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hu'nan, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan. Bedridden because of painful foot ailments, he was also probably still suffering from the effects of an earlier bout of dysentery. In twenty-six separate journeys throughout his life, Xu had spent more than eighteen years traveling around China, visiting sites known for their scenic beauty and exploring places notable for their geographical, historical, and literary importance. His extensive travels took him to nineteen of modern China's thirty-one provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. But the vast extent of these travels and the many difficulties and hardships Xu had experienced on the road now took their toll. After returning home, he knew death was near, and two critical matters still needed resolution before his passing: Xu had neither edited the travel diaries from his last extended journey nor planned to have his complete collection of diaries printed. On his deathbed, he turned for help to Ji Mengliang 季夢良 (n.d.), a nephew and family tutor (*shushi* 塾師). In the preface to his later hand-copied version of the diaries, dated February 3, 1643, Ji Mengliang reported that during the deathbed meeting, "Xu took out the drafts of his diaries from a chest (*qie* 篋), showed them to me, and said: 'I was compelled to keep my diary daily, but they are in disorder and disarray. You can put them in proper order and edit them for me (余日必有記，但散亂無緒，子為我理而輯之。)'³⁹ The date of the

39 *YJZ*, 2:1500. A fascinating question and one for which we do not have a definite answer concerns the precise contents of the batch of drafts from the "chest" that were handed over to Ji Mengliang before Xu Xiake's death. Presumably, it included drafts (edited versions?) of Xu's earlier travel diaries, written between 1613 and 1633, and his travel writings composed during the "grand expedition" of 1636 to 1640. In other words, it was a complete collection. But there is no way to confirm this.

deathbed meeting is not recorded. We only know it occurred sometime before Xu Xiake died on March 8, 1641.

Ji Mengliang took possession of the diaries, but in his preface, he remarks: “As for the matter of tending to Xiake’s diaries, I still had not completed my work. Later, all of the travel chronicles were taken away by the Honorable Wang Shouren (1595–1654)” (余事霞客之事，猶未畢也。迨其後，紀盡為王忠紉先生攜去).⁴⁰ The sources are not clear why the responsibility for editing the diaries shifted to Xu’s brother-in-law, Wang Shouren, a Ming dynasty government official who was married to Xu Xiake’s older sister. I suspect that Ji Mengliang sought his help in editing the diaries. In any case, Ji mentions in his preface that he was grateful for Wang’s help. But before Wang Shouren could complete his editorial duties, he was appointed to an official post in Fujian, so he had Xu Xiake’s oldest son Xu Qi return the diary drafts to Ji Mengliang. As it turned out, however, although Wang had gone through some of the diaries and put them in proper order, there were still problems with the manuscript, as noted by Ji Mengliang:

I read through the manuscript one more time. There were still lots of gaps and omissions. I searched through various collections and supplemented what Mr. Wang Zhongren had not included. I apportioned the contents according to geographical location and compiled them into one volume. I will await the revisions of a great scholar before submitting the manuscript for printing so the diaries may endure forever

(余復閱一過，其間猶多殘闕焉。遍搜遺帙，補忠紉之所未補，因地分集，錄成一編，俟名公刪定，付之梓人，以不朽).⁴¹

The “manuscript” referenced here is the one with the southwest diaries, which were compiled into “one volume” (*yibian* 一編).⁴² These texts were presumably joined with the manuscript of Xu’s diaries

⁴⁰ *YJZ*, 2:1500.

⁴¹ *YJZ*, 2:1500.

⁴² In the 1970s, lost portions of Xu Xiake’s diaries—hand-copied by Ji Mengliang and dating from his extended journey to

written between 1613 and 1633. Ji Mengliang then added his preface (again, dated February 4, 1643). If we regard his comment about “waiting for the revisions of a great scholar before submitting the manuscript for printing” as deprecatory hyperbole—which seems to be the case—the manuscript was ready to be published. Ji Mengliang’s preface reveals it bore the title *Travel Diaries of Xiake* (*Xiake youji* 霞客游記). In a note added to the first Yunnan diary, Ji Mengliang reveals that the manuscript of the diaries was stored in the school at the Xu residence, where Ji served as a tutor:

In the seventh month of the *yiyou* year (July and early August 1645), one of my clan members, Ji Yangzhi 季楊之, stayed at his uncle Xu Yuqing’s 徐虞卿 (d. 1645; he was Xu Xiake’s nephew) place to escape the mayhem. Ji once called on me at the family school, where he saw a copy of the *Travel Diaries of Xiake*. He took the section “Travels in Yunnan” (Dianyou 滇游) with him when he left. Less than two days later, Yuqing was murdered by brigands. When they burned his house, the section “Travels in Yunnan” was reduced to ashes and lost forever

(乙酉七月，余宗人季楊之避難於舅氏徐虞卿處，顧余於館，見《霞客遊記》，攜《滇游》一冊去。不兩日虞卿為盜所殺，火其廬，記付祖龍。)⁴³

This passage reveals that the original diaries’ manuscript was stored at the Xu residence in the Nanyangshi 南陽峙 section of Jiangyin, specifically, in the school building (*guan* 館) where Ji

the southwest in the late 1630s—came to light and were included in the new modern editions of the diaries edited by Chu Shaotang and Wu Yingshou, and Zhu Huirong. For the details surrounding these discoveries, see Zhou Ningxia, *Xu Xiake lungao—Xu Xiake ji qi Youji yanjiu* 徐霞客論稿—徐霞客及其《游記》研究 (Draft essays of studies on Xu Xiake and his *Travel Diaries*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 2004), 22–25, and her “*Xu Xiake youjiyuanshi chaoben faxian ji zhengli chuban jingguo shuyao* 《徐霞客游記》原始抄本發現及整理出版經過述要 (Summary of the discovery of an original hand-written copy of the *Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake* and the process of collation and publication),” *Xu Xiake Yanjiu* 徐霞客研究 No. 2 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1998): 151–152.

43 *YJZ*, 1:818.

Mengliang served as a family tutor. As mentioned earlier, the manuscript was lost during a slave insurrection on the Xu Family estate, not because of actions by “brigands.”

Details of what happened next are complicated and lacking in detail. Here is what we know: After the siege ended and conditions in Jiangnan began to settle down, several people tried to recover the lost diaries. The primary sources for the reconstruction of the text were partial copies of the original Ji-Wang version that had been copied and circulated among scholars and book collectors. Quite often, these “copies” were, in fact, “copies of copies,” many of which still had significant “gaps and omissions.” Our primary interest here is Li Ji’s role in retrieving the missing diaries.⁴⁴

In his effort to recover the diaries, Ji Mengliang managed to locate some portions of the original manuscript, but—as we have seen—the Yunnan section of the diaries was destroyed in a fire after a relative of Ji Mengliang had borrowed it. Other copies he recovered bore the imprints of famous private libraries, such as that of the book collector and publisher Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659). However, Ji Mengliang never restored the diaries to their original form (that is, the first or 1643 version of the Ji-Wang text).⁴⁵ Some bibliophiles who obtained sections or portions of the diary made great efforts to restore the text’s readability. Unfortunately, subsequent alterations by collector-transcribers, each adding his own interpretations and modifications, led to further distortions. At some point after that, Li Ji saw the restored or *second* Ji-Wang version of the diaries, which he transcribed.⁴⁶ Noticing many deficiencies in the text, especially omissions and errors, he realized that the entire manuscript of his father’s diaries needed a complete editorial overhaul.

As it turns out, a partial copy of the original 1643 (or first) version of the Ji-Wang text had fallen into the hands of a man from Yixing 宜興 (in modern Jiangsu) named Shi Xialong 史夏隆 (1612–1696). Over many years, Shi had made great efforts to transcribe the text of the diaries and make the entries readable. Although the Shi version of Xu Xiake’s travel diaries (originally in four *ce* 冊, or booklets) is

44 For a more detailed account of Li Ji’s recovery of the diaries, see Zhou Ningxia, *Xu Xiake lungao*, esp. 169–181.

45 Ji’s second transcript of the diaries contained just five volumes of Xu’s journey to southwest China, ending with his visit to Guangxi.

46 The exact circumstances of how and when Li Ji saw the second version of the Ji-Wang manuscript are unknown.

lost, Shi's preface to the collection survives and offers insight into how Li Ji became involved in recovering and reconstructing his father's diaries. The relevant portion of Shi's preface reads:

The four surviving booklets of the *Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake* were purchased by and served as a prized possession of the Honorable Cao Xueyou, a native of my village.⁴⁷ I had long wished to buy it but could not. It was not until the *bingwu* year (1666) that I finally obtained it. However, upon hastily perusing the manuscript, I found it messy, disorderly, and especially difficult to read. It required transcription and revision to become a readable text. I copied one-fourth of it but then unexpectedly paused for twenty years. Every time I revisited the book, my heart was filled with joy and sorrow. As I aimed to perfect the transcription, my eyesight grew weaker and, as I got older, my hands became increasingly lazier. Now I am seventy-one years old! By chance, while chatting with a friend, he mentioned that he had not seen the book, so I took the diaries and showed them to him. Given his enthusiasm for refined pursuits, he offered to transcribe the diaries for me. Excited, I laid out the diaries for him to read but still found it difficult to entrust the matter to a second party,⁴⁸ so I summoned my courage and resolved to finish the transcription myself. I limited myself to transcribing one section daily, completing it in nine months. As I reflect further on Xiake's lifelong efforts and the completion of this book, now, fifty years later, I part with the manuscript. If this task were left to others, they would regard the manuscript as worthless; if preserved by the Xu family, it would be considered a treasure. When my son went to Chengjiang⁴⁹ to take the civil service examination, I instructed him to pay a courtesy call on Xu Xiake's son

47 Ji Mengliang identifies Cao Xueyou (*zì*: Junfu 駿甫) as the native of Yixing who borrowed the initial Ji-Wang version of the diaries so he could transcribe them. See *YJZ*, 2:818.

48 In other words, Shi was unwilling to hand over the diaries to someone else for transcription, preferring to do the job himself.

49 Chengjiang is a place name, but I have not been able to identify its location. I suspect this name should instead read "Jiangyin 江陰." It seems likely that Shi's son would have traveled through Jiangyin on his way to take the provincial civil service exam (*yuanshi* 院試) in Changzhou Prefecture.

and grandson to turn over the diaries. But alas, the Xu family had fallen into tough times, and queries could not be answered.⁵⁰ I could only sigh deeply, feeling that all my efforts had been in vain. Unexpectedly, it was just then that the Honorable Wu Tianyu had been traveling throughout the four quarters to practice his skills in green sack medicine (*qingnang* 青囊).⁵¹ He stopped to see me on his way home and asked about the manuscript I was transcribing on my table. I showed him the book and explained why I was working on it. Joyfully, he remarked: "My visit today is precisely about this book! Xu Xiake has a son. In his youth, he suffered through the chaos of the dynastic upheaval, assumed the Li surname, and inherited his father's demeanor. I have always been on good terms with him. When I happened to run into him in Jianggan,⁵² I urged him to visit the Cao family residence and search for this book. However, since Mr. Cao had passed away, the Cao family was at a loss concerning the book's whereabouts. Now, I have come to Mr. Shi and found the book. This is Heaven's way of helping Mr. Shi complete Xu Xiake's legacy." So, in the *qinghe* month of the *jiazi* year (February–March 1684), accompanied by his son, Wu Tianyu respectfully bowed and handed over the original text

(今所存《徐霞客游記》四冊，同里曹生學游購為枕祕，余累所不得。至丙午而得之，方快披閱，而草塗蕪冗，殊難為觀，須經抄訂，方可成書。即錄其四之一，偶爾闕[攔]筆，忽忽二十年，每一檢書，心為快悵。計圖完繕而眼愈昏，手愈懶，年愈邁。今且七十二矣。偶友人談及未見書，因出記以示。友人雅興，願代抄之。余心動展閱，終難託兩手，遂鼓腕拭目，日限一篇，凡九閱月而告竣。更念霞客一生心血，走筆成書，五十年後，予為脫稿。人置之，則廢紙也；家存之，則世珍也。適兒輩赴試澄江，命訪其子若孫而

50 In other words, Shi Xialong's son could not find Xu Xiake's son or grandson.

51 In Daoist medical practice, the green sack is a concept associated with manipulating *qi* 氣 (vital energy) within the body. It is believed to be a vessel or reservoir where *qi* is stored and circulated.

52 Jianggan 江乾 is an old name for the city of Hangzhou.

畀之，奈淪亡凋落，不可問。余方浩嘆，一片苦心，未完勝果。忽吳子天玉以善青囊術游四方，歸而過我，問案頭何抄？余示以書，且告書故。吳子躍然曰：“今日之來，正爲此書。霞客尚有子也。幼遇亂出亡，冒李姓，有父風，素與相善。方遇江干，囑往曹室訪此書。曹已亡，曹家兒惘然不知所答。今過先生而得其書，是天假先生以成霞客之畸也。”遂於甲子年清和月，率其子拜授原書。).⁵³

Although the Shi preface raises many questions, such as how Wu Tianyu became good friends with Li Ji, several vital pieces of information emerge concerning how Li Ji became involved in recovering his father's diaries. In 1666, Shi Xialong acquired a manuscript of the diaries from Cao Xueyou (or Cao Junfu), a native of the same village as Shi. Cao's role in the history and transmission of the manuscript is important because he was a "schoolmate" (*xiangyou* 庠友) of Ji Mengliang. After Xu Xiake died in 1641, Cao Yunfu visited Xu's gravesite. While in Jiangyin, he borrowed the first or original Ji-Wang manuscript, transcribed a copy, and returned the original to the Xu family a year later. In a note appended to the diaries, Ji mentioned that after the mayhem of 1645, "The only complete collection today is found in the home of my schoolmate, Cao Junfu from Yixing."⁵⁴ This, presumably, is the same version of the diaries that eventually came into Shi Xialong's possession in 1666, which he later transcribed and returned to Li Ji.

Details about how the manuscript passed from Shi Xialong to Li Ji are sketchy. Some sources say that Li Ji walked to Yixing to get the Cao manuscript from Shi Xialong. However, the ultimate line in his preface suggests that Wu Tianyu conveyed the manuscript to Li Ji. Wu was a frequent sightseer around Jiangyin and somehow became acquainted with Li Ji. Because of Shi Xialong's largesse and Wu Tianyu's help, the manuscript of the Cao version came into Li Ji's hands in 1684, when Li was about sixty-four years old. By this time, Li Ji would already have had a copy of Ji Mengliang's second draft. We know this because Ji Mengliang's comment about Cao Junfa's having the only "complete version" of the diaries set Li Ji on the trail to find him. Since it comprised only four booklets, it was not a "complete

⁵³ *YJZ*, 2:1501–1502.

⁵⁴ *YJZ*, 2:818.

version.”⁵⁵ However, it was the only original surviving version against which other versions or copies could be compared and checked.

Over the next several years, Li Ji devoted his time to recovering the batch of original “trunk diaries” handed over to Ji Mengliang more than four decades earlier. Much of the text was still missing, especially the section on the Yunnan diaries. Li Ji managed to locate several other texts related to Yunnan from his father’s prose writings, which he added to the first section of the Yunnan diaries. These include “Account of a Sightseeing Trip to Grand Flower Mountain” (You Taihua shan ji 游太華山記), “Account of a Sightseeing Trip to the Yan Caverns” (You Yandong ji 游顏洞記), “Account of Flowering and Woody Plants in Dian (Yunnan)” (Dianzhong huamu ji 滇中花木記), *Investigation of the Pan River* (*Panjiang kao* 盤江攷[考]), *Tracing the Jiang Upstream to Unravel Its Source* (*Su Jiang jiyuan* 溯江紀源), and “Two Casual Jottings” (Suibi erze 隨筆二則).⁵⁶ These titles were not part of the original version of Xu Xiake’s diaries but were separate prose texts that Li Ji added.

Numerous sources confirm the importance and subsequent influence of Li Ji’s edition of the text, for instance, Fig. 1, which includes the title page and first page of the 1808 printed edition of the *Travel Diaries of Xiake*. Note that on the first page of Xu Xiake’s Mount Tiantai (Tiantai shan 天臺山) diary (left pane), Li Ji’s name appears first and is identified as the “editor” (*ji* 輯). Others, including Ji Mengliang, are also credited for their editorial contributions, but it is noteworthy that Li Ji’s name is listed first.⁵⁷ “Noteworthy” means the Li Ji version of the diaries, which he worked on for years to edit, correcting as many errors and mistakes as possible, was the best version of the diaries available then.⁵⁸ Given the textual resources available, he had made it as “complete” as possible. This is precisely why Chen Hong 陳泓 (*zi*: Tijing 體靜; fl. 1776), in his “Overview of the Similarities and Differences in Various

55 The precise contents of the “four booklets” are unknown, but they were most certainly selective. A complete collection of Xu Xiake’s “mountain diaries” and “grand tour” would have required more space than “four booklets.”

56 These texts were retrieved from the Cao version of the diaries.

57 Li Ji’s name is similarly listed first among the editors who contributed to the 1776 “Qianlong” printed edition of the diaries. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a high-quality digital copy of the title page for the 1776 edition because the Ancient Books Section of the National Library of China, which holds this edition, is closed indefinitely as of April 24, 2024.

58 “At the time” means when the 1776 and 1808 editions were printed.

Editions [of the *Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake*]” (*Zhuben yitong kaolie* 諸本異同靠略), called the Li Ji version “the progenitor of all other versions” (諸本之祖).⁵⁹

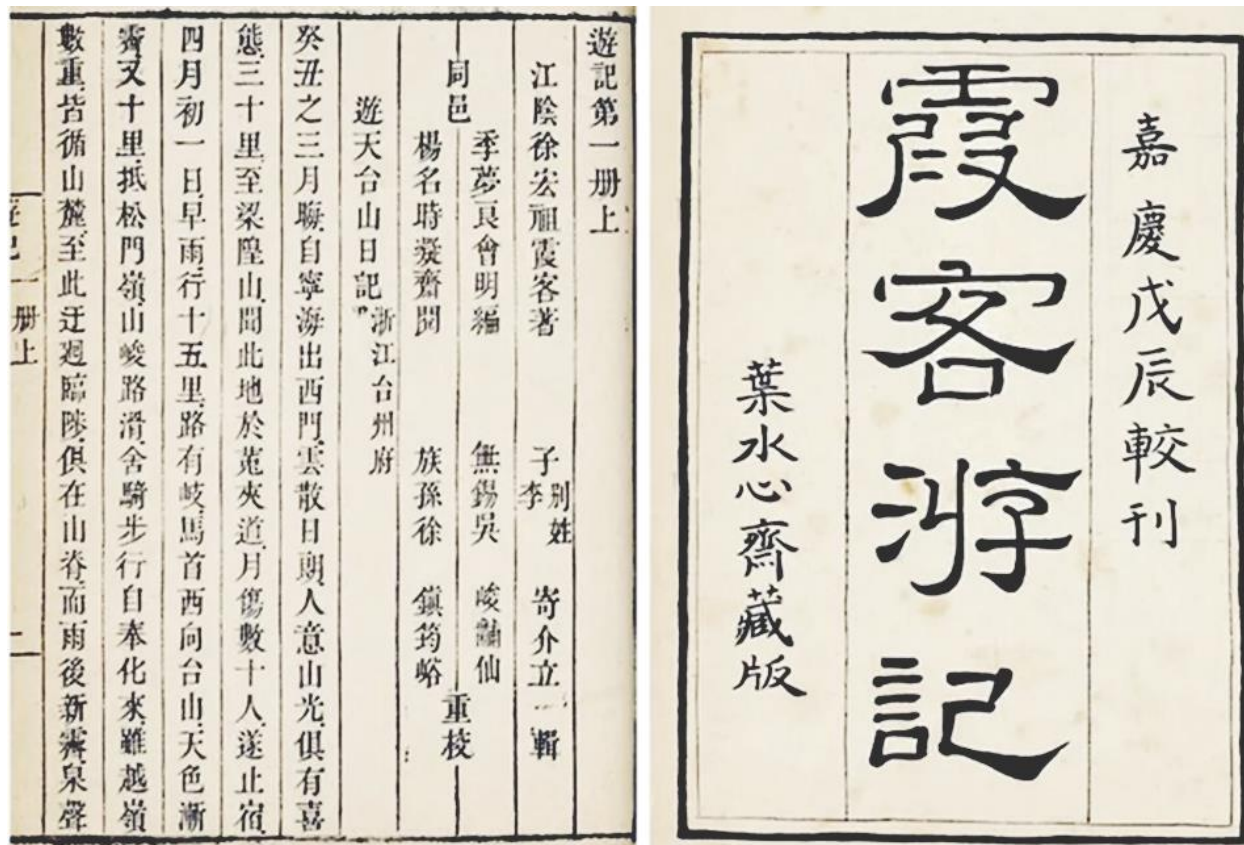


Fig. 1. Title page and first page of the 1808 edition of Xu Xiake's travel diaries, preserved in the Watery Heart Studio (Shuixin zhai 水心齋) of the Qing dynasty bibliophile Ye Tingjia 葉廷甲 (1754–1832). Public domain, <http://yn.people.com.cn/BIG5/n2/2023/0303/c372453-40322841.html>

CODA: NICKNAMES AND LIFE EXPERIENCES

Xu Xiake's original given name was Hongzu 弘祖, but it was posthumously changed to 宏祖 because the character *hong* 弘 was part of Emperor Qianlong's (r. 1735–1796) given name (Hongli 弘歷) and thus retroactively became a taboo character. But posterity knows Xu mainly by his *hao* or nickname,

⁵⁹ Chen Hong's "Overview" is rpt. in *YJZ*, 2:1516.

Xiake 霞客, which means "traveler in sunglow clouds" or, alternately, in a wordier version, "traveler in the roseate clouds of sunset." His friend Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639), a Ming dynasty cultural icon, gave him this moniker. The nickname "Xiake" suggests travel over great distances characterized by diverse and exciting experiences amid extraordinary landscapes.

Perhaps partly inspired by his father's nickname, Li Ji chose a *hao* that appears, at first glance, to be similar: Pingke 萍客. The character *ping* 萍 refers to duckweed, a floating plant that moves in whatever direction the current or wind takes it. *Pingke* thus suggests the idea of a traveler uncertain about his future road and destiny, whose fate seems linked to loneliness and solitude. In several ways, then, Li Ji's nickname appears to sum up much of his experience in life, just as "Xiake" does for his father.

As for Li Ji's legacy, despite the many extraordinary difficulties he experienced, Xu Xiake's third son still managed to accomplish several "lasting achievements." In addition to rescuing his father's travel diaries from almost certain oblivion, he was a devoted filial son who faithfully looked after his mother, just as his father had dutifully cared for his mother. Li Ji probably saved his mother's life by getting her out of Jiangyin when he did, after which he played a role in the resistance to save his dynasty and hometown. A gifted student, he achieved the distinction of coming out first in the prefectural civil service examination, the same exam his father had failed decades earlier. It is indeed lamentable that most of Li Ji's written scholarship has been lost, for his surviving works indicate that he was a gifted poet, skilled prose writer, and an accomplished historian. Still, we know enough about his various "lasting achievements" to conclude with a substantial measure of confidence that Xu Xiake would have been proud of his "unfortunate son's" many "lasting achievements."

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