Hsu Hsia-k'o (1586-1641) has been generally regarded as the greatest traveller in Chinese history. Yet he is not as well known outside of China as he deserves to be. The only account in English was written fifty years ago by the modern geographer Ting Wen-chiang. This chapter attempts to remedy the situation by relating some known facts about Hsu and his family.

Hsu's remote ancestors may be traced back to the turbulent years of the Sung dynasty when the invading hordes of Khitan Tartars were sweeping down from the north. The capital was moved from Pien (Kaifeng) to the south of the Yangtze and finally settled in Lin-an (Temporary Security), the present city of Hangchou, whose location promised security against invasion. Like untold thousands of other officials and commoners, Hsu Hsia-k'o's remote ancestor Hsu Ku, then prefectural governor of Kaifeng, also went south with his family and settled in Hangchou. His descendants are known to have lived at such places as Ching-ch'i, Yun-chien (Sung-chiang), and Ch'in-ch'uan, all located in the region around Lake T'ai. The next person we hear of was Hsu Ku's great-grandson Shou-ch'eng, who during the reign of Ch'ing-yuan (1195-1200) of the Southern Sung dynasty became prefect of Wu county whose seat was in the present city of Soochow. His son, known as Ch'ien-shih-i but whose proper name has not come down, retired to the village of Wu-ch'eng in Chiang-yin at the beginning of the Yuan dynasty.

The descendants of Ch'ien-shih-i settled in Chiang-yin and
became one of the locally famous gentry families. When the Mongols conquered China and established the Yuan dynasty, members of the Hsu clan abstained from seeking official posts, and there is no record of them during the Yuan period.

During the Ming dynasty, several events served to distinguish the Hsu clan in Chiang-yin and keep its name fresh in the minds of the local people.

The Hsu family had a painting which the celebrated painter Ni Tsan (1301-1374) made for Hsu Ch'i when the latter was only ten years old. Ni Tsan wrote on the painting that he was pleased to find the son of his old friend Chun-p'ing a promising boy. Therefore, he gave him the name Pen-chung and painted the picture of a study room for him to express his hopes for the boy's future. The boy did not disappoint Ni Tsan when he grew up. The renown of his scholarship and exemplary conduct earned him the honor of being recommended to Emperor T'ai-tsung by an admiring man of high position. In recognition of his worth, the emperor appointed Hsu Ch'i to a special post in Szechwan to demonstrate the emperor's "benevolence" to the local inhabitants. The bestowal of an honorary office upon a scholar who was not an official was an unusual mark of distinction and an occasion calling for commemoration in verse and painting. Hsu Ch'i's teacher Sung Lien (1310-1381), statesman and great scholar, and a host of other distinguished men contributed poems and prose pieces. At a convenient moment later on, Hsu Ch'i retired from this office and thereby earned for himself the reputation of being a "high" man.

Hsu Ch'i's two sons, Min and Yu, maintained the family's good name by each donating two thousand piculs of rice for the relief of a famine during the reign of Cheng-t'ung (1436-1449). The emperor acknowledged this "deed of righteousness" by granting them the honorary title Righteous Subjects
along with a statement of merit. To honor and preserve this treasured document, the Hsu brothers erected a building to house it and called it the Chamber of Imperial Script 御書樓. The tributary essay for commemoration was written by the Minister of Rites, Wang Chih 王直 (1379-1462), and the transcript for inscription was done by the noted scholar-official Liu Hsuan (1394-1457).

Min and Yu did not seem to have distinguished themselves in any other way except for Min having a retreat built in a grove of winter plum trees. Min called it the Winter Plum Snow Study 梅雪軒 and many of his friends wrote poems on its completion.

Min's son, Hsu I 徐頤, attained the rank of chung-shu she-jen 中書舍人. After his death, his tomb essay was composed by the premier Li Tung-yang 李東陽 (1447-1516) and the transcript for inscription was done by Wen Cheng-ming 文徵明 (1469-1559), great painter, calligrapher and man of letters whose home was in nearby Soochow. Somehow, this family heirloom was lost and was not retrieved until Hsu Hsia-k'ō traced it and finally succeeded in recovering it by giving in exchange three mou of rice fields.

Hsu I had two sons, Yuan-hsien 元獻 and Yuan-shou 元壽. Yuan-hsien was a precocious boy and was thought to hold great promise, but he died very young, one year after he passed his chü-jen degree examination. A lover of books, Yuan-shou had a library called Ten Thousand Volume Library 萬卷樓. Yuan-hsien passed the chü-jen degree examination by obtaining the third highest score. His kindheartedness in giving a generous sum of money to his teacher's widow was also recorded in his tomb essay.

One strange incident occurred in this unbroken record of a virtuous, wealthy and scholarly family. It would have marred the illustrious name of the Hsu family if it had been true, but it was an unfounded accusation, and no one gave it credit. It
concerned Yuan-hsien's son, Ching. Ching was noted for his literary talent, yet the story was circulated that he had bribed the chief examiner's page to obtain the examination questions for the chu-jen degree. Much affected by this calumny, Ching named the collection of his writings Pen-kan chi (Works of Indignation) and soon thereafter died in the capital.

Soon after Ching's death, two of his sons moved from Wu-ch'eng to neighboring villages. His youngest son Chan moved to Sha-shan, east of Chiang-yin, and his second son Ch'ia, who was Hsu Hsia-k'o's great-grandfather, moved to the village of Yang-ch'il on the northern bank of the Huang. Ch'ia's son Yen-fang moved to the southern bank of the Huang to a village called Nan-yang-ch'i.

Hsu's great-grandfather Ch'ia and his grandfather Yen-fang were both men of some literary talent. Their poems appear more than once in the anthologies of the poetry of Chiang-yin. Hsu's father, Yu-mien (courtesy name Yu-an), was known to be a generous man. When the estate was being divided among the six sons after his father's death, the method of drawing lots was employed. Over and over again Hsu's father drew the main building, but he refused to take it. He made his eldest brother accept it while he took the tract of land to the east of their estate.

At this time, the family fortune was somewhat impaired, but Yu-an and his wife were good managers, and in time they were in very easy circumstances again. Apparently, the tract of land he took already had trees, rocks and other essentials of a Chinese garden, so before long he had put things in order and made it a pleasant abode for himself and his family. Although nothing remains of Hsu's house, records tell us that he was brought up in quiet and lovely surroundings.

Yu-an was somewhat of a prototype of his more famous son.
He sought no official rank as a man of his family's standing was expected to do but enjoyed the freedom and delights of a retired life. Ch'en Chi-ju 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), who wrote a short biographical sketch of Yu-an, said that he loved to take trips to Hu-ch'iu 虎邱 and Lung-ching 龍井 in Hangchou. He would take a small boat or a sedan chair to these places, gather new tea leaves and make tea with the pure water of the famous springs of these places. He was also said to be of a stubborn and frank disposition which was unfortunate for him because a man of wealth but with no official rank had to be reconciled to certain disadvantages. When Hsu Hsia-k'o was nineteen, Yu-an died of a wound he received in his leg when bandits raided a small house he owned a short distance from his estate.

Yu-an had two sons by his wife and one by his concubine. Hsu Hsia-k'o, the second son by his wife, was born in 1586 when both his father and mother were forty-one years old and his elder brother was already twenty. His proper name was Hung-ts'u 宏祖, but his friends and posterity called him Hsia-k'o 嶽 which suited his personality better.

Ch'en Han-hui 陳函輝 who wrote Hsu's tomb essay, reported that Yu-an believed he had detected in Hsu's features his future love for reading and friends. Ch'en also described Hsu's quickness of mind and his affectionate nature: "When he entered school in his childhood, he read fluently as soon as the lesson was taught and wrote his composition as soon as he held the brush in his hand. Towards his parents he was full of an instinctive affectionate concern."

Very soon, Ch'en wrote, he "developed a love for unusual books. Ancient and modern history, books on geography and topography, pictures of mountains and seas, as well as books on Taoism and hermits were his favorite reading. These he would place under the Classics and read surreptitiously, and his face would light up with visible marks of moving response."
Books on ancient and modern history and geography were by no means unusual, but as the intellectual fare of a young student was completely shaped by the examination requirements, a child was not allowed to read any but the prescribed books. Hence, Hsu had to read such forbidden works surreptitiously. It is quite plain that the examinations held no attraction for him, and Ch'en said as much in his tomb essay. However, Hsu was evidently reluctant to oppose his parents' wishes; besides, it was natural that he should begin by taking the routine course of literary discipline.

His growing reputation as a young man of literary talent would normally call for his seeking a public career by way of the examinations. Ch'en Han-hui is disappointingly vague about this crucial period of Hsu's life, and we do not know exactly why Hsu did not follow the normal career of a scholar. Nor does Hsu help us learn more about him. Although he left many diaries, Hsu was peculiarly reticent about his own life and about the happenings of his family and of his friends. The diaries were kept solely for the purpose of recording the places he had visited. They were meant for himself, and there was no need for him to record his life for his own information. Had he written with an eye to posthumous fame, we would be better informed about his personal life. Nevertheless, we have enough information to sketch a reasonably detailed summary of some of the major events in his life.

In 1607, he was married to a girl of a locally prominent family named Hsu and in the same year, instead of taking his examinations, he visited Lake T'ai and climbed all the hills on its islands. His earlier doubts about leading the life of a wanderer seemed to have sprung from his concern for his mother. We know from Ch'en Han-hui that his mother sought to dispel his doubts by making him a cap for distant travels. She apparently succeeded because from that time on, for all we know, Hsu had no other goal in life except to travel.
In 1609, he went north to Shantung and Hopei where he visited T'ai Shan (the Eastern Sacred Mountain) and I Shan as well as the native places of Confucius and Mencius. In 1613, he made a trip to P'u-t'o Shan, an island off Ningpo, and on his return, he visited T'ien-t'ai Shan and Yen-tang Shan. There is reason to believe that Hsu visited Nanking and Yangchou in the next year.

Hsu's eldest son, Ch'i was born in 1615. The next year, 1616, was a busy one for Hsu. In early spring he climbed Po-yueh but this was only a prelude to Huang Shan, the main object of his trip. In the summer of the same year he went to Fukien and visited Wu-i Shan and the Nine Curves stream at its base. He moved on to Chekiang in the fall visiting such historical and scenic sites as Wu-hsieh, Lan-t'ing, and the mausoleum of the legendary Emperor Yu, all located near Shao-hsing. He also stopped by in Hangchou and enjoyed boat rides on the lovely West Lake.

Hsu spent 1617 at home. His wife had died and his travels were limited to the neighboring county of Wu-hsi where he visited some famous caves. In 1618, he went to Chiu-hua Shan and, in the fall, to Lu Shan in Kiangsi. He was accompanied by a cousin, Lei-men, who was Hsu's age and who had been a military warden. He died later in the massacre of 1645. After their trip to Lu Shan, Hsu revisited Huang Shan by way of Po-yueh.

His second marriage, to the daughter of a family named Lo, probably took place in that year. His second son, Hsien, was born the following year which Hsu spent at home. Besides his second wife, he had two concubines. One was named Chin who had a daughter and a son named Kou. The other was named Chou who had one son who was born after she had been thrown out of the house by Hsu's wife during one of his trips in 1628. It is interesting to note that Hsu named all of his sons,
except for the one by Chou whom he had no chance to name, with characters containing the mountain radical.

In 1620, he viewed the famous tidal bore of Ch'ien-t'ang 钱塘 in Chekiang and then continued on to Fukien to visit Chiang-lang Shan 江郎山 and Nine Carp Lake 九鲤湖. Four months after his return, his mother became gravely ill but recovered. Hsü celebrated this happy turn of events by having a hall built which he named Sunny Mountain Hall 晴山堂. In the meantime, he and his cousin Chung-chao 中昭 searched for and recovered some of his family's lost art treasures (see above). Hsü solicited poems from some distinguished men of letters and displayed them and the art treasures in Sunny Mountain Hall.

His mother's advanced age and failing health probably kept Hsü at home in 1621 and 1622. In 1622, his friends Wen Cheng-meng 文震孟, Huang Tao-chou 黄道周, Chen Jen-hsi 陳仁錫, and Huang Ching-fang 黄景昉 passed the imperial examination and obtained the chin-shih degree. In 1623, Hsü spent about two months climbing Sung Shan 蓬山 in Honan, Hua Shan 華山 in Shensi, and T'ai-ho Shan 太和山 in Hopei.

In 1624, he accompanied his mother, now eighty years old, on a trip to Ching-ch'i 荊溪 and Kou-ch'u 勾曲 in nearby I-hsing 宜興. It was on this trip that he was introduced to Ch'en Chi-ju, a renowned literary man with whom he would become friends. Ch'en's impression of Hsü was summarized in these words: "Mr. Wang Ch'i-hai 王琦海 brought with him a visitor. He has a dark complexion and snowy white teeth. At a height of six feet, he looks as spare as a Taoist priest. His outward deportment is that of a mountain recluse, but there resides in him a rich spirit and the essence of courage." In honor of his mother's eightieth birthday, Hsü commissioned a painting entitled "Autumn Garden and Morning Loom." In this year, Hsü also bought at his mother's behest some land as a "sacrificial field" for the maintenance of the ancestral temple. He also repaired the temple of a noted
official on Chun Shan 莊山 and asked Tung Ch'i-ch'ang 董其昌 (1555-1636), the most celebrated calligrapher, painter and art critic of his time, to write an essay for inscription on a stele. Hsü's third son, Kou, was born in that year.29

His mother died in 1625, and he stayed home to observe the mourning period. A woman of good sense and ability, she was deeply loved and admired by Hsü. He did everything possible to honor her memory, by having her portrait painted and by asking men of distinction to write tomb essays or to contribute to the collection of writings in Sunny Mountain Hall.30

In 1628, Hsü once more started on his travels. Leaving home at the end of March, he traveled to Fukien by way of Chekiang. The greater part of the trip was made by boat over rapid streams in western Fukien. On May 8 he reached Nan-ching 南靖 to visit an uncle who was an official there.

Although Hsü's diaries do not mention it, we know that he visited his friends Huang Tao-chou 黃道周 (1585-1646)31 in Chang-p'u 漳浦, Fukien, and Cheng Man 鄭鄕 (1594-1638) on Lo-fou Shan 羅浮山, Kwangtung, on the same trip. Huang was regarded as the greatest scholar during late Ming and one of the most important political figures after the fall of Ming. Of all his friends, Hsü had the greatest respect and affection for him. In 1628, Huang was observing the period of mourning at home in Fukien following his mother's death. Receiving his chin-shih degree in 1622, he had been serving at the Hanlin Academy. In 1630 when Hsü was visiting Cheng Man in Ch'ang-chou 常 常州 and hearing that Huang was near-by on his way back to Peking, he took a boat and caught up with Huang at Tan-yang 丹陽 in Kiangsu. Huang was much impressed by Hsü's friendship and dedicated a poem in the old style to Hsü to mark this unexpected meeting. How Hsü treasured this poem may be seen from the fact that he asked several of his friends to write colophones on it.
The other friend, Cheng Man, was also a good friend of Huang and received his chin-shih degree in the same year as Huang. He was later accused of unfilial conduct and executed in Peking.

Hsu went to Peking and visited P'an Shan in 1629 and Peach Blossom Chasm in Chiang-yin in 1630 on which occasion he wrote some poems. In August of that year, he again went to Chang-p'u in Fukien to visit his uncle. He spent the next year at home.

In 1632, he and his cousin Chung-chao revisited T'ien-t'ai Shan and Yen-tang Shan. On their return, Hsu visited Ch'en Han-hui, his friend and later his tomb essay writer, at Ch'en's abode on Little Cold Mountain and told Ch'en of his travels.

Finally, in 1636, when he was fifty, Hsu set out on his last and most extended journey which lasted until 1640 when he fell ill and had to be carried home in a sedan chair. He died the following year.

For four years, he travelled in hitherto little known parts of Southwest China because, as he said in the first lines of his diary: "I have long wanted to travel to the Southwest, but I have dallied for two years, old age approaches and I cannot wait any longer, so on October 17, I began my long journey." Hsu started out with three companions, two servants and a monk. Servants were indispensable in his time because inns and other lodging places were few and far between. One servant fled before the first month was over. The other, named Ku, stayed with him until the fall of 1639, when, finding the rigors of the journey too much to bear, he, too, deserted Hsu.

Hsu's monk companion was named Ching-wen, of Ying-fu Monastery in Chiang-yin. Ching-wen, who had been a monk there for almost twenty years, had written a copy of the Fa-hua Sutra in his own blood, and it was his long-standing wish to
make a pilgrimage to Chi-tsu Mountain (Mount Kukkutapada) in Yunnan and present his copy of the sutra. He would not see his wish fulfilled; he died on the way. According to his last will, Hsu took his bones and the sutra to Chi-tsu Mountain.

His route first took them into Chekiang where he arrived by boat on October 30, 1636. He did not take the most direct route to Yunnan, but spent two weeks in leisurely travel, exploring mountain ranges and rivers.

From Chekiang, Hsu traversed Kiangsi from Chiang-yu 象 至树 to Su-tzu-shu 芜 子 綠. He spent almost three months, from November 14, 1636 to February 5, 1637, visiting all major mountains in southern Kiangsi and noting in detail the waterways and the direction of mountain ranges. From Kiangsi he entered Hunan where he travelled extensively in the eastern and southern parts. Heng Shan 衡山 (the Southern Sacred Mountain) was the last of the five sacred mountains he visited. His party reached Huang-sha 天 沙 舖, on the border between Hunan and Kwangsi, by boat on May 31.

At Liu-chou 柳州, Kwangsi, he started out alone on a side-trip to Jun county on August 9 and returned on the twentieth. His party resumed its journey by boat on September 5 to Nanning where they arrived sometime in late October. Ching-wen died there while Hsu was away on another sidetrip exploring the sources of several rivers and some caves.

Hsu spent most of 1638 in Kweichow where his most important study was the tracing of the source of the P'an River 盘 江. In the winter of that year he took off for Yunnan and arrived at Chi-tsu Shan on January 25, 1639. Hsu celebrated the lunar New Year there among the hospitable monks and found a suitable burial site for Ching-wen's remains.

Hsu's diary stopped abruptly on October 11, 1639. There was some speculation that between that time and his death in 1641, he
travelled as far west as the Kunlun Mountains, but Ting Wen-chiang and others have convincingly discounted the idea. After leaving Chi-tsu Shan, Hsü probably travelled through Southwestern Szechwan and then eastward along the Yangtze. He returned home in late 1640, suffering from skin and foot diseases, and died there in early 1641.

Hsü's travels are known to us only through his diaries. A portion of them has been lost, and we do not know the size of that portion. The extant corpus contains entries for over one thousand days, stretching over a period of twenty-six years. The diaries kept for about 150 days prior to 1636 contain about 40,000 words, each daily entry averaging 270 words. This prodigious output was to be greatly exceeded during Hsü's four-year long journey into the Southwest when he wrote entries for about 700 days, totaling about 450,000 words or a daily average of 640 words. Bound on a journey into the remote and unfrequented regions of the Southwest, Hsü was more in quest of knowledge than of pleasure. He devoted more attention to geographical investigations in order to resolve certain doubts and to test certain hypotheses which he had been harboring for many years. The spirit of scientific inquiry, hitherto present but subordinated, replaced the quest for natural beauty as the predominant motive for his traveling.

Hsü's diaries are a detailed account of all his experiences, observations and results of investigations. Sometimes there would be only a few lines for a day, but when an exploration was concluded he would describe the whole procedure in great detail and accuracy, and a single day's entry might contain as many as four thousand words. Hsü's literary output is all the more impressive when we remind ourselves of travel conditions in his time. It is not only that day after day he had to endure physical discomforts and face dangerous encounters during daytime but that even in the evenings, when he was already tired, he was never sure where he and his servants could put up or what unfriendly man he would
have to win over for the promise of a filthy hole for a night's lodging.

Whenever possible, Hsu wrote his diaries at night; otherwise he waited until he had a chance to do it. In Kweichow and Yunnan, for example, sometimes for days on end he had no chance to write, but occasionally he was well-accommodated, and he painted delightful little verbal pictures of the hospitality he enjoyed. Here are two examples:

June 7, 1638: ....Five li to Pai-chi Taoist Temple 五禁觀. The altar in front was dedicated to the god Chen-wu 真武, the one in the rear to a "saint of the west" 西方聖人. The place was neat and clean. It was still morning and some camel drivers were letting their camels pasture behind the temple. I brought out my brush and other writing equipment and settled down at a clean desk in the rear hall to write my diary. The pleasing quietness of the place formed a contrast to the noise and bustle of the market. Tan-po 植波 the monk hospitably anticipated my every wish and supplied me with tea, vegetable dishes and rice gruel at short intervals.

In the afternoon, two big elephants and two little ones stopped outside the temple for a while. The elephant boy got off for a drink. When they were leaving, the elephants knelt first on their hind legs and then on their front legs before they stood up. Soon the camel drivers left also, but I was too absorbed in writing my diary to want to stir.

After a while, thunder started to rumble and the sky became overcast. I took leave of Tan-po and presented him with a small gift, but he would not accept it.39

Hsu wrote this entry when he was near Kuan-ling 關嶺, northeast of Pei-p'an chiang 北盤江 in the south western part of Kweichow. He showed no trace of the anguish he must have suffered less than ten days earlier when his money had been stolen by a man whom he had hired to help carry his luggage.40 The following year, on
March 19, 1639, when he was near Hao-ching 鴛鴦 in Yunnan, he spent another pleasant morning writing his diary at an interesting spot. While he was climbing among thick folds of rugged crags, he heard to his surprise the ringing sound of a Buddhist "wooden fish." Wondering where it could come from, he tried to locate it and finally came upon a Buddhist hut halfway up a cliff:

The cliff was sheer all the way except in the middle which was marked off by horizontal ledges, and the hut was perched up there. Moving along the ledges northward, I found a t'ing 聳 which sheltered a gigantic statue of the Buddha standing against the wall of the cliff as there was no room for his lotus throne. Farther north, the ledges broke off abruptly. The sound of the wooden fish I had heard from afar came from a monk in the hut. His master was a man of Nan-tu 南都 who had built the hut at this secluded spot several years ago and has lived there since, leading a life of extreme austerity, with not even salt for his food. He had just gone to Yai-ch'ang 墟場 to conduct a service and only his disciple was there. He asked me to stay and wait for his master. I was fascinated by the secluded and dangerous location, so I stopped there for a while to write my diary. The monk cooked and invited me to a meal.

The following four chapters will bring to the reader several other examples of Hsü's characteristic penchant for detail.

Yet, many readers might find it strange that a man who spent a lifetime writing many volumes about his travels should be saying virtually nothing about his family, his friends, and the times in which he lived.

Earlier in this chapter, we offered one clue to this apparent riddle when we pointed out that Hsü's diaries were essentially memos addressed to himself. He quite naturally saw little need, therefore, to say much about his own family. But it is more difficult to explain Hsü's almost total silence on his friends and on national events. The reader of his diaries who has no
knowledge of Ming history could not be blamed if he assumed that nothing much happened in China during Hsü's life. We hope that the following few paragraphs will help to rectify this wrong impression.

In 1586, the year in which Hsü was born, the able prime minister Chang Chu-cheng (1525-1582) had already been dead for four years. With the prestige that Chang was able to win for the dynasty abroad and his effective administration, he was able to restore China to a brief period of security and prosperity in the late Ming dynasty. Emperor Shen-tsung (1573-1620), who feared rather than appreciated Chang, was freed by Chang's death from the restraint the latter had imposed upon him. He now gave free rein to his love of luxury and sensual pleasures. As a result of his insatiable desire for the acquisition and building of palaces and gardens, the rehabilitation of the country achieved by Chang was rapidly destroyed. Adding to the strain on an economy already on the brink of bankruptcy was the Chinese emperor's obligation to come to Korea's aid when the Japanese attacked that country in 1592.

Faced with the dire need of raising money, Shen-tsung decided to send some of his eunuchs, upon their advice and against the strong opposition of the prime minister Shen Shih-hsing (1535-1614) and other ministers, to various places to seek wealth by opening of mines. This act placed the entire country at the mercy of the self-seeking eunuchs. Armed with the imperial edict, they were agents of the emperor. They not only did not fear the local officials but intimidated them, falsely accused them, and imprisoned those who were in the least uncooperative with the eunuchs' schemes.

Hard on the heels of the opening of mines was the imposition of new taxes. The taxes had by then become so numerous that no one could escape them. Even in sparsely populated and outlying areas, banners of tax stations were seen flying and people were
stopped to pay tax on even the smallest articles they happened to be carrying with them. This was another cause of the bankruptcy of the large middle class and the rise of banditry. Bandits appeared first in Shensi, then spread throughout the country and eventually brought about the overthrow of the Ming dynasty.

The nation was seething with unrest and bandits were already terrorizing many places while in the government the emperor, the ministers and eunuchs were contending for power. In the midst of these forces which were rushing a declining dynasty to its ruin, one class of men staunchly tried to withstand their assault and hold back for a while the inevitable collapse. These were the scholar-officials of integrity whose voices of protest and criticism were silenced only by the tragic deaths which overtook many of them.

Back in 1368 Chu Yüan-chang 朱元璋, the poor uneducated mendicant who became the founder of the Ming dynasty, had taken every precaution to guard his hard-won power from slipping from his hands and those of his heirs. Being a man without education and social standing, his sense of inferiority to most of his officials who enjoyed the cultural prestige so much esteemed in Chinese society engendered in him suspicion and resentment towards them even after he had become absolute ruler. On the other hand, his natural sagacity made him fully cognizant of the worth and value of the scholar-officials. Hence, his policy towards his ministers was highly paradoxical. He adopted unprecedentedly severe and humiliating measures in the rules prescribed for officials. The custom for officials to kneel in audience with the emperor started with Chu. For their punishment, he devised the t'ing-chang 廷杖 (court flogging) and to intimidate all educated people, he started a literary inquisition. Court flogging resulted in the death of many ministers. Those who survived bore a world of humiliation which ended only with death. It is said that in the Ming dynasty high officials were in the habit of bidding a
final farewell to their families when they went to court in the morning in case they should not return alive and, if nothing happened during the day, it was cause for rejoicing. A memorial by Yeh Po-chü 葉伯巨 (d. 1376) to the founder of Ming speaks out frankly on this: "The scholar today regards obscurity or failure in examinations as good fortune. He regards expropriation of land and hard labor as inevitable punishments and court flogging as common humiliation." How the scholar was crushed by the emperor's policy of terror is vividly told in these words.

Yet, Chu Yuan-chang fully realized the wisdom, the loyalty and the selflessness of those ministers who exemplified the best aspects of Confucian teaching, and he decreed that officials and commoners could memorialize the emperor on current affairs. Consequently, throughout the dynasty, scholar-officials came to look upon criticism of government policies as their right and many of them died tragic deaths because they held fast to their principles.

In 1594, during Shen-tsung's reign, Ku Hsien-ch'eng 顧憲成 (1550-1612), director of the bureau of literature in the Ministry of Rites and a man of strong character, incurred imperial wrath by his criticism and was dismissed from office. 46 Ku returned to his home town Wu-hsi in Kiangnan, a neighboring county of Hsu's home, Chiang-yin, and devoted himself to lecturing. In looking for a suitable place, he decided upon the old site of the Tung-lin Academy 東林書院 where the Sung Confucian scholar, Yang Shih 楊時 (1053-1135) had lectured. Ku and his younger brother Yung-ch'eng 永成 (1554-1607) built on this historical site and adopted the old name Tung-lin. There they gathered their friends who shared their views, men like Kao P'an-lung 高攀龍 (1562-1626) and Ch'ien I-pen 錢一本 (1539-1610) who gave lectures.

Fundamentally, they were linked together not so much by their common commitment to pure learning as by their deep interest in
current affairs and their indignation over political corruption and social evils. Much time was spent in bold criticism of government measures and high-ranking officials. In name, they directed a center for learning; in fact, they constituted a party in opposition. The articulation they gave to the suppressed resentment of many attracted supporters from far and wide. They came to be respected and loved as much as the men whom they attacked were hated. High officials who tried to uphold justice and good governance also favored and supported them. Men like Tsou Yuan-piao (1551-1624) and Chao Nan-hsing (1550-1627) who later left their official posts in despair followed the Tung-lin example and lectured to followers in their native places. The influence and fame of Tung-lin spread all over the country. Although they never called themselves a party, the public soon bestowed upon them the name Tung-lin Party.

The corrupt court reacted with terrible vengeance to the audacity of the Tung-lin Party. The powerful eunuch Wei Chung-hsien overruled the weak emperor and ordered the wholesale arrest of its members and, later, of their deaths in Peking. Among them were one of Hsu's relatives and several of his friends. Hsu, however, never referred by even a word or phrase to the disasters of his time. His silence makes one wonder if he was not entirely unconcerned with the country in general and with some of his friends in particular. From the few references to his friends in his diaries and other records which tell of his earnest concern for some of them, it cannot be said that he was indifferent to them. It is true that he never allowed himself to get involved in any of the grave issues that so deeply involved some of his close friends, but his sympathy and loyalty were wholly on their side.

Still, he had chosen a different mode of life which in some ways was bound to alienate him from them. They were loyal officials of Ming who had staked their lives on the destiny of the dynasty. Hsu, a commoner, bore no political responsibilities, and
he was far from the center of political ferment during the last years of his life which were also the last years of the Ming dynasty.

It is difficult to evaluate a man, so laconic about himself and his human environment, in the context of Chinese history. At first sight, it might appear that Hsu loved nature so much that he was indeed like a mountain recluse, as Ch'en Chi-ju saw him, whose life work had no parallels either in the past or during his own time. But this is not true.

We can, for example, compare him with other famous Chinese explorers. In fact, we even have Hsu's thoughts on the subject, or, at any rate, an attribution to him. He is quoted as having said: "There have been only three men who have made their names in remote areas: Chang Ch'ien of Han, Hsuan-tsang of T'ang and Yeh-lü Ch'ü-t'ai of Yüan. If a commoner like me, who had only his stick and sandals, may be counted as the fourth, I may die content."49

Two of the three men mentioned by Hsu are the most noted among Chinese travelers. Chang Ch'ien 張騫 (fl. second century B.C.), a Han general, was sent on a diplomatic mission in 122 B.C. to Bactria, and he brought back information on the places he had visited and on their products. Furthermore, his expedition led to the opening of communication links with the countries in the West and the establishment of the so-called Silk Road. Hsuan-tsang 玄奘 (603-664) was the great T'ang monk who made a pilgrimage to India in 627 to 644 and brought back to China many volumes of Buddhist sutras and initiated under the sponsorship of Emperor T'ai-tsung 太宗 a vast translation project. Yeh-lü Ch'ü-t'ai 耶律楚材 (1190-1244) was a man of versatile gifts and highly esteemed by Genghis Khan who took him along on his expedition to Persia in the years between 1219 to 1224.50

Two other notable travelers should be mentioned. The Buddhist
monk Fa-hsien 法顯 (died before 423) undertook a perilous journey to India in 399 to 414 to bring back Buddhist sutras, and the Taoist Ch'iu Ch'u-chi 邱處機 (1148-1227) visited the court of Genghis Khan in Afghanistan between 1219 and 1224.

In comparison with these travelers, it cannot be said that Hsu suffered greater hardships or that he accomplished more. Fraught as Hsu's travels were with difficulties and dangers, they cannot compare with the spectacular risks and ordeals endured by the pilgrims to India. What distinguishes Hsu from these great travelers was his unique devotion to travel. Unlike them, he travelled with no ulterior motive, either for the glorification of his emperor or for exploration on his behalf or for a religious purpose. Moreover, in seriousness of purpose and perseverance in the face of hardship and danger, he excelled all of them. To him, travel did not mean a task to be accomplished, like to the man bound on a mission, nor was it a form of diversion in the manner that a gentleman of leisure indulges in it. With him it was an unending pursuit, to be terminated only by illness and death. It was the one dominating passion of his life. When he was not on a journey, he was making plans for one; when he was on one, he was eager to move on, to see more and learn more.

Another factor which distinguished Hsu from the other great travelers is the unique character of his diaries. Of the travelers mentioned earlier, Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang left records of their journeys, but Fo-kuo chi 佛國記 (A Record of Buddha's Country), a record of Fa-hsien's travels, was written by him only after his return to China. Ta-T'ang hsi-yü chi 大唐西域記 (A Record of the Western Regions of the Great T'ang), which narrates Hsuan-tsang's travels, was not only not written until he was back in China but was written by his disciple Pien-chi 辛機. By contrast, Hsu's diaries were daily entries made on the spot. The accuracy of his detailed information regarding directions, distances and topographical features has been
confirmed by more than one modern geographer who traveled the routes taken by him. 52

Finally and most importantly, Hsu differed from these other travelers in his scientific bent that he developed in his later years and which finds its fullest expression in the diaries of his final journey to the Southwest. In this respect, Hsu can be compared with some other prominent men of his time who turned their backs on the recognized and esteemed but narrow field of scholarly pursuits and catered to their scientific interests.

Li Shih-ch'en 李時珍 (1518-1593), the greatest pharmacist and biologist in Chinese history, went against his father's wish that he should take the civil service examinations and pursue an official career. 53 His father was a profound scholar and a very good medical doctor with an intense interest in pharmaceutical studies. Family background instilled in Li Shen-chen an abiding interest in medicine and at the age of twenty, after having failed once in the civil service examinations, he gave it his undivided attention. He enjoyed great fame as a medical doctor, but he also devoted himself to old works on medicine and collected specimens for experiments and study. He started work on the Pen-ts'ao kang-mu 本草綱目 (The Great Pharmacopoeia) in 1552 and completed it after twenty-seven years in 1578. He classified 1,892 kinds of products of medicinal value into sixteen categories which he further subdivided into sixty divisions. These he described, discussed and illustrated with drawings. He died in 1593, three years before his great work was published in Nanking. It has since been reprinted many times.

Another contemporary making a major contribution to natural science was Hsu Kuang-ch'i 徐光啟 (1562-1633). 54 He was a native of Shanghai, near Hsu Hsia-k'o's birthplace of Chiang-yin. He rose from modest circumstances to the high position of Grand Secretary. He is best remembered for his pioneering work in
translating European scientific works into Chinese. Besides helping Father Ricci in translating and publishing his works, he recommended other Jesuit missionaries for government offices in order to introduce Western scientific knowledge to China. His own great contribution to Chinese science was his treatise on agriculture, entitled Nung-cheng ch'üan-shu (Complete Treatise on Agriculture), compiled in 1625 to 1628. In the sixty ch'üan of that work, he chronicled the history of Chinese agricultural knowledge up to his time, discussed exhaustively contemporary agricultural conditions and methods and gave his own opinions of them.

A man of outstanding achievement in the field of technology was Sung Ying-hsing 宋應星 (born ca. 1600). Sung came from an official family and he was himself an official, but he had a wide interest in all kinds of production techniques. A man of Kiangsi, he first studied the technique of porcelain making. In 1634 when he was appointed director of studies in Fen-i, Kiangsi, he spent his spare time in writing the most comprehensive technological treatise on every type of Chinese manufacture. He spent over ten years on it and finally in 1637 saw it published under the title of T'ien-kung k'ai-wu 天工開物 (Exploitation of the Works of Nature). Sung wrote many other books but they have all been lost. Even The T'ien-kung k'ai-wu would have been lost had it not been introduced to Japan and reprinted from the Japanese edition by Chinese scholars who discovered it there earlier in this century.\(^5\)

Still another man in this group, usually placed in the Ch'ing dynasty but who was a contemporary of Hsu II and a loyalist of Ming, was Ku Yen-wu 顧炎武 (1613-1682).\(^5\) Bitterly disappointed by the overthrow of the Ming dynasty, he devoted his life to learning. In his study of philology, he sought to prove his theories by marshalling specific pieces of evidence, a procedure akin to modern research methods. Besides his contributions to philology, his T'ien-hsia ch'un-kuo li-ping shu 天下郡國利病書 (Merits
and Drawbacks of All Countries), though unfinished, is a valuable contribution to Chinese geography.

Like Hsü Hsia-k'o, these men had two things in common. First, they were all from South-Central China, mainly from the lower Yangtze valley, a region that was industrially the most advanced and the most productive. It fostered a spirit of inquiry among men with an intellectual curiosity. Second, this curiosity was also awakened by the many different kinds of Western knowledge and techniques brought at that time to China by the Jesuit missionaries. The intellectual infusion from the West opened new vistas of inquiry to those Chinese scholars who had the perspicacity to see its importance.

Hsü made no mention anywhere in his extant works of Western missionaries or Western theories of geography and cartography, but in view of the silence he normally maintained about his life and his friends, it is no proof that he had no contact with or that he was not influenced by Western scientific learning and methods. Indeed, Professor Fang Hao considers it impossible for Hsü not to have been influenced by Western science and thinks that he must have had at least indirect contacts with Western missionaries. He points out that nine of Hsü's friends had some connection with the Catholics and that many of Hsü's friends were from Fukien which was one of the first provinces where the Catholic Church flourished. In 1625, Giulio Aleni, S.J. went to Fukien at the invitation of Yeh Hsiang-kao and befriended many distinguished scholars. As we know, Hsü went to Fukien three times, and some of his friends then wrote several poems in a collection addressed to Giulio Aleni. Fang Hao also points out that among Hsü's friends, men like Ch'en Chi-ju included in his compilation Pao-yen t'ang mi-chi several volumes dealing with foreign countries, while Cheng Man wrote a preface to a translation of a religious work by Wang Cheng. It seems impossible, suggests Fang, that
Hsu's friends did not mention to him the new things of the "Far West" on his visits to Fukien.

Hsu's contribution to the science of geography has been subject to controversy in recent years, but China's greatest modern geographer, Ting Wen-chiang flatly said that Hsu "was essentially a geographical explorer. This spirit of inquiry is so startlingly modern that it alone would have ranked him as the earliest leader of modern geography in China." For Ting, a student strongly influenced by the Western spirit of seeking the truth in the study of facts, Hsu's importance lay chiefly in several major discoveries of geographical features in Southwest China.

While this is true, Ting the modern was nevertheless unfair to Hsu's contemporary admirers by saying that they merely admired his literary accomplishments and marvelled at his travels. It is closer to the mark to say that for them, men living in the oppressive atmosphere of late Ming, his importance lay chiefly in his freedom of spirit. He differed from his admiring friends mainly in the degree to which he had the courage to shape his own life. What had to remain only dreams to his friends were possibilities realized by him, and for this they admired him and cherished his memory. One can detect in their writings on Hsu both envy and gratification of fulfillment. In sum, for them he was the quintessential lover of nature.