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The soldier as a sage: Qi Jiguang (1528-1588) and the neo-confucianization of the military in sixteenth-century China
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Introduction

Wen and *wu* are a unified Way, [but] nowadays it has been lost for a long time. The ancient archery rites still preserve this implication. Compare two men going up and down the steps, going forward in the sequence of geese according to military ranks. They do not step more than five or six paces on the way. When all the arrows miss the bull's-eye, one seeks the cause within oneself and on account of the loss one contemplates. The victorious one, who does not brag about his achievements and does not condemn [the other], has achieved virtue. Archery is indeed the skill of military men, but when it is practiced by the scholar it will for this reason combine the Way of *wen* and *wu*. As for the archery of later generations, the error of the impractical Confucians has only then divided *wen* and *wu*.

文武一道，今亡久矣。其古射禮中尚存此意。比耦登降，鴈行之次，部曲之制，不愆於五步、六步之道也。失諸正鵠，反求諸己，因敗而思也。勝者不矜其功而不伐，至德也。射則武人之技耳，而爲士者習之，所以合文武之道也。若夫後世之射，乃迂儒之謬，文武分矣。¹

This reflection on the relation of *wen*, which can mean “civil”, “culture”, or “literature”, to *wu*, “martial” or “military”, was written by Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528-1588), a military officer who had a successful career serving the Chinese Ming dynasty. He appears to lament the loss of the unified practice of both *wen* and *wu* in his time, a situation he seems to blame on the “error of the impractical Confucians”. The text is part of a larger commentary he wrote on the *Daxue* 大學, or *Great Learning*,² one of the most important texts that had to be mastered by civil service examination candidates in order to enter civil officialdom. It was also one of the *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書) together with the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), purporting to document the sayings of Confucius, the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), containing the ideas of the most important later follower of Confucius, and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), which like the *Great Learning* was a chapter culled from the Confucian classic the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記). Together they constituted the core canon of Neo-Confucianism as consolidated by the Song dynasty thinker Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200). During the Ming, this Neo-Confucianism had become the orthodoxy upheld by the empire, and it held on to this exalted position during the succeeding Qing dynasty. For a military officer during the Ming, this canon was not required reading. Officers succeeded their fathers as part of a

¹ Qi Jiguang 戚繼光, *Zhizhitang ji* 止止堂集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 265.

² Idem, 239-271.

hereditary system of succession, and although a military examination system existed, the majority of officers did not owe their positions to a successful navigation of this route.³ Why did Qi Jiguang in the sixteenth century choose to argue for a unification *wen* and *wu* by way of a commentary on a quintessential Neo-Confucian text? Why does he criticize the “unpractical Confucians” by using Neo-Confucian canon and implicitly argue for a merging of the civil and the martial by the *shi* 士, a group often termed “scholars” or “literati”, who by this time denoted a social elite of literate men with knowledge of Confucian writings who constituted the main source of civil service examination recruits?⁴

Qi Jiguang, son of a military officer serving the Ming dynasty, was born in the first half of the sixteenth century and would spend most of his youth in Shandong province. His father was assigned to the coastal garrison of Dengzhou, a coastal town in the north of the province and before long Qi Jiguang was to step in his father’s footsteps. Qi and his father stood in a long family tradition of military service to the empire. A remote ancestor had voluntarily joined the founding emperor Zhu Yuanzhang as he conquered his realm in the fourteenth century, and he had been rewarded with a hereditary officer’s rank. Like most of the army, Qi’s ancestor was then absorbed in a self-perpetuating military recruitment pool conceptualized by Zhu Yuanzhang; henceforth every designated army man would have his household registered under the “military” rubric and it would be expected to furnish the military labour demands of the empire in perpetuity. Although this system probably never fully worked as intended, it seems that far into the fifteenth century the main body of manpower for military campaigns was still drawn from this labour pool.⁵ However, in 1449 an offensive against Mongols ended in disaster near a place called Tumu. There, a large imperial army - said to have numbered 500,000 men – was defeated by a Mongol force and failed to protect the emperor against being captured.⁶ The empire survived, the dynasty continued, but the hereditary army had been dealt a heavy blow and it would never again recover to be the main fighting force of the polity. Instead, the empire would rely more and more on mercenaries,

³ Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 27.

⁴ Anne Gerritsen, *Ji’an Literati and the Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 48.

⁵ James Ferguson Millinger, “Ch’i Chi-kuang, Chinese Military Official: A Study of Civil-Military Roles and Relations in the Career of a Sixteenth Century Warrior, Reformer, and Hero” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1968), 16, 19-22.

⁶ Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90.

aboriginal armies and local militia to keep the peace, and often these forces would be led by civilian bureaucrats, not military officers.⁷ It was these conditions of institutional marginalization and profound socio-cultural gap between Qi Jiguang and his civil peers that made his successful military career and acculturation to the civilian elite an unlikely success story.

Geopolitically, the century after 1449 saw the retreat of the empire into a defensive posture, aptly symbolized by the construction of the present-day Great Wall. Qi Jiguang grew up at the end of this relatively tranquil century, which would end with a new double military crisis: a renewed Mongol threat in the north and the depredations of a coalition of pirate raiders at the south-eastern coastal littoral. Although the hereditary military had been marginalized, Qi Jiguang's successful military exploits proved that it could still produce capable leaders. Qi's career was forged in the fires of active military service in different theatres, and the lessons he learned were written down in various training manuals penned by him in the course of the sixteenth century. Without a doubt, these manuals belong to the most influential military writings produced in Chinese military history and they retained practical value for several centuries afterward.⁸

Qi Jiguang success was unlikely for several reasons. He was a product of a military system that had partially broken down and which had been partially replaced as a source for manpower and effective military leadership by other parts of society. The Ming was also an unlikely dynasty to foster such a military talent. By the Ming dynasty, the status of the military seemed to have reached its nadir, a situation that seemed to have been continuation of a trend started during the Song dynasty. What both Song and Ming had in common was a native Han Chinese origin of the ruling elite and a spotty record of military excellence. Traditionally, the Chinese Ming dynasty has been seen as militarily weak empire, sandwiched in time between the much larger Mongol Yuan and Manchu Qing dynasties. For much of late imperial Chinese history, which I define as the period starting with the Song and ending with the Qing (i.e. 960-1912), it therefore seems successful military expansion was only possible when its ruling elite and dynasty had imported itself from outside the realm. Much of the blame for this state of affairs has been placed on the aforementioned weak state of the hereditary Ming army (and that of the Song before it), whose

⁷ David M. Robinson, "Military Labor in China, circa 1500," in *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative History of Military Labour in Europe and Asia, 1500-2000*, edited by Erik-Jan Zürcher (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 47-48.

⁸ For example, in the late nineteenth century against internal uprisings, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 122-124.

quality has been thought to precipitously decline after the beginning of the fifteenth century. Another factor connected to this decline was the socio-cultural distancing between civil and military elites, and concomitant lack of positive appreciation for the martial in civil literati discourse.⁹ This reached an extent quite comparable to the situation as it existed during the Song dynasty, where military commanders were often recruited from non-literati families with a tradition of martial service to the empire and whose social-cultural difference from the civil official elite was notable.¹⁰ It was exactly within this unlikely setting that Qi Jiguang rose to the top of the military hierarchy.

Another factor which made Qi Jiguang unusual was his engagement with Confucianism. Ever since Europeans first came into sustained contact with China from the sixteenth century onwards, the country and its inhabitants have been portrayed as militarily weak and unwarlike. This started with the Portuguese, and it was perpetuated by the Jesuits who both inherited the civilian anti-military bias of the Chinese literati they interacted with, and who also wished to positively portray China as a peaceful civilized country to their audience back home. The Chinese themselves also “bought” this stereotyping later on, when in the late nineteenth century intellectuals like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were looking for the reasons of their country’s disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the West. The diagnosis - by late imperial Chinese and Westerners alike - of this “problem” often boiled down to the perceived lack of a warrior spirit, which was then often linked to the dominance of the civil bureaucracy over the military and the simultaneous ideological hegemony of the civilian ethic. No doubt, the comparatively unimpressive military record of the Song and Ming dynasties, eras in which a civil bureaucratic dominance indeed took shape and which saw an absence of “alien” conquest elites to balance the *wen-wu* divide, contributed to this impression. Two studies of Chinese grand strategic thought and praxis during the Song and Ming, written by Alistair Johnston and Yuan-kang Wang respectively, have nuanced this image by arguing that both dynasties were mostly driven by either cultural or structural realist assumptions. In short, when the ruling elite perceived themselves to be strong militarily vis-à-vis external enemies, military solutions were more often than not preferred. Yet, what both studies reify is the nominal anti-war ethos of the civilian elite. Johnston, for example, distinguishes a

⁹ For example, as part of court activities, see David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 220.

¹⁰ Yang Li, “The Emperor’s Generals, a Study of the Sanya Commanders in the Northern Song (960-1126)” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2004), 216-219, 230.

cultural realist *para bellum* attitude to grand strategy from a Confucian-Mencian paradigm, which “[...] sees warfare as aberrant and usually avoidable through good government, and prefers, when conflict is unavoidable, accommodationist and defensive strategies.”¹¹ Nevertheless, it is exactly this civilian anti-war ethos which Qi Jiguang probably initially embraced via his father, who emphasized values like filial piety, frugality, and faithfulness in his initial education towards literacy.¹² Thus, perhaps the most famous professional military man of late imperial China was an unlikely adherent of an ideology highly critical of the pursuit of war.

Finally, Qi Jiguang was an unlikely hereditary military officer, because he was literate. In fact, Qi Jiguang seems to have been a very different kind of military man than many of his other well-known colleagues from both the Song and Ming dynasties. In contrast to the Song dynasty’s Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142) and Lü Wende 呂文德 (d. 1269), and his contemporary Li Rusong 李如松 (1549-1598), he left a significant written legacy including a collection of belles-lettres. In it, we can see his commentaries on quintessential Confucian classics and his poetry. Qi Jiguang at an early age already had an ambition to learn reading and writing. His teacher, a local scholar and philanthropist, probably found this unlikely. He exclaimed: “You are a hereditary official and now you will have the good fortune to serve as an official. You wish to become a military man, but you do not discontinue your schooling; this child I can teach. Why should I not accomplish your ambition? 汝世官，今幸仕矣，不廢學而願師人，孺子可教也。吾盍成汝志?”¹³ Unlike Yue Fei, Lü Wende, and Li Rusong, Qi Jiguang did seem to have completely acculturated to the civil bureaucrat class and their ethos. Yue Fei only appeared so in order to cultivate a good image for posterity, but never gained a high standing among the civil elite. Lü Wende feigned civil sensibilities in order to hide his contempt, and Li Rusong openly flaunted disrespect for his civil bureaucrat colleagues.¹⁴ There is no evidence that Qi Jiguang merely applied a shallow veneer of self-fashioning and he was never disloyal to the dynasty. The only full-length scholarly work in a

¹¹ Hans van de Ven, “Introduction,” in *Warfare in Chinese History*, edited by Hans van de Ven. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 4-5.

¹² Fan Zhongyi 范中义, *Qi Jiguang pingzhuan* 戚继光评传 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2003), 45-46.

¹³ Qi Jiguang 戚繼光, *Zhizhitang ji* 止止堂集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 127.

¹⁴ Fang Cheng-hua, “Military Families and the Southern Song Court – The Lü Case,” *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 33 (2003): 57; James T.C. Liu, “Yueh Fei (1103-41) and China’s Heritage of Loyalty,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31.2 (1972): 292-293; Kenneth M. Swope, “A Few Good Men: The Li Family and China’s Northern Frontier in the Late Ming,” *Ming Studies* 49 (2004): 47-48; Hellmut Wilhelm, “From Myth to Myth: The Case of Yüeh Fei’s Biography,” in *Confucian Personalities*, edited by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962), 154.

western language solely devoted to Qi, a dissertation dating to the late sixties of last century, highlights his generally cordial relations with his civil superiors and offers evidence that the respect was mutual.¹⁵ In addition, Chinese historian Fan Zhongyi claims that Qi Jiguang was a genuine Confucian general, because he made the unprecedented move of including Confucian ethics in his military training methods.¹⁶ An unlikely move perhaps?

Recent scholarly treatments of the military history of the Ming dynasty have argued for a rehabilitation of the dynasty's strength during the late sixteenth century. Foremost among the scholars advocating this is Kenneth Swope, who in a spate of articles and books has argued that Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng deliberately extended his patronage to both talented hereditary military officers and military-minded civil officials in order to bolster the empire's armies, a policy which was continued during the reign of his student, the Wanli emperor. Swope, in my view, convincingly showed how this policy gave the dynasty a new lease of military life, allowing it to weather many successful crises around the turn of the century.¹⁷ However, Swope's argument begs the question of how this talented group of military and civil officials – Qi Jiguang, his civil colleagues, and his subordinates foremost among them – found its genesis in the first place?

To answer this question, we have to go back to the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Ming empire was plagued by a simultaneous wave of piracy attacks in the southeast, and steppe nomad incursions from the north. Qi Jiguang built his initial career successes on fighting the pirates, before being transferred to the north to bolster the Great Wall there against the Mongols. An important part of the group of civil and military officials later coming under patronage of Zhang Juzheng was forged in the fire of these campaigns. In my view, a crucial characteristic of this group was its mixed civil and military pedigree. What sets it apart from civil-military cooperation during the Song dynasty was the mutual acculturation of its members. Officers like Qi Jiguang not only engaged in practices normally associated with the literati, but civil bureaucrats and scholars serving *ex officio* also showed a keen appreciation of martial skills and values, as shown by recent research done by Kai Filipiak, Kathleen Ryor, and Wang Hung-tai.¹⁸ In addition, this group

¹⁵ Millinger, "Ch'i Chi-kuang."

¹⁶ Fan, *Qi Jiguang pingzhuan*, 368.

¹⁷ Kenneth M. Swope, "The Three Great Campaigns of the Wanli Emperor, 1592-1600: Court, Military, and Society in Late Sixteenth-Century China" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2001).

¹⁸ Kai Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times," *Ming Studies* 66 (2012): 1-15; Kathleen Ryor, "Wen and Wu in Elite Cultural Practices during the Late Ming," in *Military Culture in Imperial China*, edited by Nicola Di Cosmo (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 219-242; Wang Hung-tai 王鴻泰, "Wugong, wuxue, wuyi, wuxia: Mingdai de shiren de xiwu fengshang yu yilei jiaoyou" 武

produced an impressive amount of statecraft writing pertaining to military organization and tactics, geography, and governance practices. The civil-military rapprochement thus had a significant cultural component, indicating a change of attitude of civil bureaucrats towards military pursuits and lifestyles in general. As Wang Hung-tai has shown, this became a relatively widespread elite phenomenon especially in the populous south, where sword fighting among other martial practices reached new heights of popularity.¹⁹ In addition, the literary genre dealing with the Robin Hood-esque knights-errant attained a prominent place in the elite imaginaries of the Ming, judging by the publication boom of the sixteenth century.²⁰ This state of affairs was no doubt stimulated by the existence of a security crisis in the mid-sixteenth century as the empire was beset by the synchronous trepidations of piracy and nomad incursions in both north and south. A sense of crisis permeated the writings of the civil elites, who started advocating a new kind of leadership which was well-endowed both civil and military talents and abilities.²¹ Clearly, the civil ethos had opened up to more martial leanings during the sixteenth century.

In this reappraisal of the importance of the martial ethos, the question how it was able to coexist with civil ethoi, or more specifically, (Neo-)Confucianism, has been sidestepped in modern scholarship. Reviewing the military strategic preferences of the Ming dynasty, both Alastair Iain Johnston and Yuan-kang Wang arrive at the conclusion that it was shaped by more pragmatic realist considerations with the Confucian civil ethos serving as a rhetorical flourish to legitimate more peaceful accommodationist policies when the dynasty was in a militarily weak position. Similarly, Kenneth Swope considers Qi Jiguang's Confucian leanings as an exception rather than indicative of a general trend during the later Ming dynasty. On the other hand, Chinese historians like Fan Zhongyi take seriously the Confucian content of Qi Jiguang's military thought, but do not consider why it manifested itself during the sixteenth century.²² To be sure, there were famous Confucian scholars who did manifest martial leanings in the course of their lives. In the late

功、武學、武藝、武俠：明代士人的習武風尚與異類交游, *Zhongyang lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 85.2 (2014): 209-267.

¹⁹ Wang Hung-tai 王鴻泰, "Wodao yu xiashi – Mingdai Woluan chongji xia Jiangnan shiren de wuxia fengshang" 委刀與俠士—明代矮亂衝擊下江南士人的武俠風尚, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 30.3 (2012): 63-98.

²⁰ Roland Altenburger, "Jianxia zhuan (Tales of Knights at Arms): On the Formation and Tradition of the Classical Anthology of Knight-Errantry Stories," *Asiatische Studien* 54 (2000): 314.

²¹ Ryor, "Wen and Wu in Elite Cultural Practices," 221-225.

²² Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995); Wang, *Harmony and War*; Swope, "The Three Great Campaigns," 66.

sixteenth century, the Korean king who found his state invaded by the Japanese under Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣 秀吉 (1536-1598), expressed a desire that his own countrymen would follow their example:

I think if sons of second wives are allowed to proceed [to government posts], and state and private-owned slaves and the base become commoners, then the common people will all practice martial affairs. If you test it during the examinations, then the *yangban* will all practice martial affairs. Even if Hideyoshi dies, between Japan and our country is an enmity as inexhaustible as heaven and earth. How can I be restricted by the previous regulations even more at this time? I have heard of the local customs of Kyōngsang province. People who have two sons, if one son can read and write, then he will attend the local Confucian academy; if the other son engages in martial affairs, then he will be at the training courtyard and be regarded as a slave. In the present the country is mistaken like Kyōngsang province. In the past Lu Xiangshan taught his children to practice martial affairs, Wang Yangming was good at horsemanship and archery, our country only grasps books in order to teach the children and we divide civil and martial into two Ways, this really serves no purpose.

予意庶孽許通公私賤爲良，則常人皆習武矣；試於生進，則兩班皆習武矣。假使秀吉死，日本乃我國，與天地無窮之讎，此時豈可更拘前規乎？聞慶尚道風俗，人有子兄弟，一子能文，則坐於堂上；一子業武，則坐於庭中，如視奴隸。國家之有今日，慶尚道誤之也。昔陸象山教子弟習武，王陽明善騎射，我國只持冊子，以教子弟，岐文武爲二道，甚無謂也。²³

The king decries the practice of Kyōngsang, the province most affected by the Japanese invasions, which encouraged a division between civil and military roles. Instead, he wanted to liberate the social mores (which did not allow the children other than those of the first wife of the aristocrat *yangban* class to hold official posts) and institutional restrictions to stimulate the spread of military expertise. As foils, he points to two famous Confucian scholars, Song-era Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139-1192) and Ming-era Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), who combined both Confucian learning and military expertise in one person. Like Qi Jiguang in the opening quote above, he felt the need to engage within the Confucian field in order to have examples to legitimate this combination. To both Qi Jiguang and the Korean king, (Neo-)Confucianism had to be engaged in

²³ Various, *Chosŏn wangjo shillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄, Volume 25, 43:15. Quote via: Chang K'un-chiang 張崑將, *Yangmingxue zai Dongya: Quanshi, jiaoliu yu xingdong* 陽明學在東亞：詮釋、交流與行動 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2011), 123.

the sixteenth century in order to build a bridge between *wen* and *wu*. This further begs the question to what extent Confucianism had an impact on civil-military relations and identities, and whether something had changed within this ethos that permitted the building of this bridge.

In order to answer these questions, exemplified by the, perhaps unlikely, career of Qi Jiguang, I will look at the development of civil-military relations and identities in Chinese history up to and including the advent of the Ming dynasty in the first and second chapters. The first chapter will look at the different layers of meaning and the values associated with the Chinese terms *wen* 文 (civil) and *wu* 武 (military, martial). The chapter will further trace the development of socio-cultural identities that embodied these terms and their values. In the second chapter, special focus will be on the transition from the Tang to the Song dynasties, when a martial-dominated empire gave way to one considered to be dominated by a civil elite. The question what role Confucianism played in this development of civil-military relations will be central to this chapter. This role will be further highlighted by weighing the influence of the civil and military socio-cultural identities on the civil elites of the Song empire. In the third chapter I will consider the “crisis” of the mid-Ming dynasty (ca. 1450-1550), which manifested itself in a progressive deterioration of military institutions. During this time the military branch of the government failed to ensure peace and stability in the southern regions of the empire, and it was left to civil bureaucrats to conceptualize a new system to deal with this shortfall.

In chapters four and five I will turn to question of how the civil bureaucrats, presumably inculcated with Neo-Confucianism, applied their civilian orientation to military problems and how this affected Neo-Confucian thought itself. I will focus on the attempts of certain members of the civil elite, primarily Wang Yangming, to find a solution to this predicament. In chapter six I will follow the spread of these solutions and their accompanying Neo-Confucian reorientation among important members of mid-sixteenth century civil bureaucrat elite, especially those tasked with military duties. This included Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1511-1565), who would lead the effort to suppress the piratical disturbances during the mid-sixteenth century, an effort Qi Jiguang was part of.

In the seventh chapter I will turn to Qi Jiguang as he found himself in the midst of this renewed military effort to pacify southern parts of imperial realm against disruptive incursions by pirates. In this chapter I will show how Qi engaged himself with Wang Yangming’s ideas and followers among the civil elite engaged in the suppression of the disturbances along China’s

southeastern coast. In chapter eight I will consider the development of personal ties between Qi Jiguang and members of the civil and military elites in the south. In the course of his tour of duty, he cultivated personal relationships with civil bureaucrats and members of the literati elite. What role did Neo-Confucian thought play in his formation of these relationships, and, related to this, how did Qi Jiguang reconcile civil and military identities in the course of this formative stage of his career? I will address this question by drawing a connection between the solutions conceived by some of the civil bureaucrats within the context of Neo-Confucian thought as highlighted in chapter three and the campaigns Qi Jiguang himself was a part of.

In the ninth and tenth chapters I will look at the military thought of Qi Jiguang and analyze to what extent it built upon the Neo-Confucian solutions proposed earlier in the sixteenth century. I will first consider to what extent Qi's military ideas can be considered part of broader Neo-Confucian discourse on statecraft, and second, in what way this ideology came into play in the military manuals he wrote to improve the military of the empire at both the southeastern maritime and northern steppe frontiers. This is an important connection to be made, I will argue, because the creation of the lasting artificial and a-historical *bingjia* 兵家 category of military writings during the Han dynasty's drive to classify all knowledge has tended to obscure the connections between military thought and other intellectual currents on the one hand, and the social connections between the authors of military works, civilian statecraft and political-moral writings on the other. Furthermore, I will address the question of how this knowledge circulated amongst the civil and military elites of the empire. Was there a dialogue between the Neo-Confucian civilian ethos and his own military ideas, or did these two realms of thought remain unbridged in his thought, if not in his life?

Together these chapters show that, primarily under influence of Wang Yangming's ideas, the military and the civil elite were able to bridge the socio-cultural divide between the two. It will also show how Qi Jiguang's military ideas and praxis entailed the Neo-Confucianization of the military profession.

A Note on the Sources

Besides the official dynastic histories and legal codes, this study mainly relies on two types of sources: military writings in the shape of manuals and encyclopedias, and the collected works of literary writings of literati, military men, and civil officials. The latter collected works, referred to

as *bieji* 別集, *wenji* 文集, or *quanji* 全集, compiled the prose and poetry of individual authors and these could span the genres of “[...] (1) prefaces to the collection; (2) memorials and other official writings; (3) congratulatory poetry for public occasions; (4) prefaces; (5) commentary on events and diaries; (6) letters; (7) commemorative biographies for tombstones, tomb tablets, encomia, and accounts of conduct; (8) poems; (9) family instructions; and (10) miscellaneous.”²⁴ Almost all of these genres have the potential shed light on the personal connections between officials and literati, and on the nature of their relationship. Correspondence with letters, for example, was one of the key methods with which friendships were maintained and scholarship was conducted.²⁵ These collected works could either be collected by the author himself and published during his life, or could be collected and published posthumously by family or friends. The main drawback of these sources is the fact that they were the result of an opaque selection process by the compiler, and thus we cannot see which interpersonal relations were highlighted or repressed by the very act of selecting the material for the collection. Another drawback is the fact that we do not know the exact circulation of these collected writings, which makes it hard to estimate their contemporary impact. It can be assumed with some caution, however, that the collected writings of some of the famous Neo-Confucian thinkers and their prominent disciples circulated relatively widely. Despite these drawbacks, collected writings still remain the richest sources for tracing interpersonal networks in premodern Chinese history.

Military writings comprise the other main category of sources used in this study. The drawback of these writings is their prescriptive nature. The actual practice of Chinese warfare in the premodern period is hard to ascertain, because we lack descriptive sources and eyewitness accounts, like diaries of soldiers. As Herbert Franke has posited, much of this has to do with the nature of literacy and the use of classical Chinese. Military officers and their soldiers by and large tended to be illiterate and did not leave a large literary record behind. Most writing on war was thus done by literati and civil officials, who tended to use “[...] detached and stylized accounts in the official sources.” Furthermore, classical Chinese, according to Franke, lacked the vividness of a colloquial language and the writers tended to rely on literary clichés to the detriment of realistic

²⁴ Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual. Revised and Enlarged* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 597-598.

²⁵ Yan Ke, “Scholars and Communications Networks: Social and Intellectual Change in 17th-Century North China” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1998), 291-292.

detail.²⁶ Unfortunately, even a military man like Qi Jiguang did not leave vivid accounts of military praxis in his collected writings. In his memorials to the emperor and reports to colleague officials he does include lists of logistical requirements, marching orders, and numbers of enemies slain. These give us some insight in daily military practice, but for the most part I had to rely on prescriptive manuals. In defense of using these as representative sources for studying the practical side of the military it must be said that the manuals used in this study belonged to the most widely circulating military manuals of the sixteenth century, if we look at the numbers of surviving examples today. Furthermore, they were written by authors who had practical experience with military matters and often led military forces in combat personally. With some caution, therefore, it can be assumed that the prescriptions written down in these manuals were to a large extent shaped by the practical experiences of the authors concerning what was realistically feasible.

²⁶ Herbert Franke, "Warfare in Medieval China: Some Research Problems," in *Proceedings on the Second International Conference on Sinology, Vol. 5* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), 807.