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

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Chapter 4 – Bridging the *Wen-Wu* Divide: Wang Yangming

As the mid-Ming progressed and the crisis outlined in the previous chapter became more pertinent in the south until reaching a crescendo twice during the first half of the sixteenth century, two men saw the need to cross the *wen-wu* divide from opposite starting points in order to battle their respective crises. What I will argue is that these two men are linked in terms of Neo-Confucian philosophy, military thought, and personal connections, even though they never met each other in person. Wang Yangming came closest to formulating a comprehensive approach to all the problems outlined in the previous chapter, and Qi Jiguang would be a beneficiary of these solutions and develop them further in some ways. What I will argue from this chapter onwards, thus, is that Wang Yangming's military campaigns and the Wokou-crisis were intimately linked in terms of a shared Neo-Confucian philosophical activist approach *cum* civil-military governance solutions, which provided the cement and substance of personal relationships and knowledge circulation networks enabling this continuity. A core contention of my research is that the socio-cultural, intellectual, and military aspects of the anti-Wokou campaign therefore cannot be understood without reference to the preceding campaigns by Wang Yangming, which in many ways provided a multi-facetted blueprint for the solutions to the conflict in the empire's south several decades later. I will argue that the anti-Wokou campaign's policy solutions mirrored Wang Yangming's in many of the areas I singled out in the previous chapter as suffering from a mid-Ming crisis of imperial governance. A second contention is that Qi Jiguang's military solutions were part of this same tradition. Previous scholars have asserted that Wang Yangming's personal example would become an important model for succeeding generations of aspiring officials wishing to bridge the *wen-wu* divide.[319] I, however, will demonstrate in the following chapters that Wang Yangming's philosophy itself - in addition to the involvement of his direct (and indirect) followers in military crisis and his practical civil-military policies - characterizes Wang Yangming's influence on later sixteenth-century military developments at both the southern and northern frontiers as exceeding that of a mere personal exemplar.

[319] Chen Baoliang 陈宝良, "Mingdai de wenwu guanxi jiqi yanbian – jiyu zhidu, shehui ji sixiangshi cengmian de kaocha" 明代的文武关系及其演变 - 基于制度、社会及思想史层面的考察, *Anhui shixue* 安徽史学 2 (2014): 16; Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials," 11-12; Wang, "Wugong, wuxue, wuyi, wuxia," 222.

In this chapter, I will start tracing this link Wang Yangming and the mid-sixteenth century anti-Wokou campaigns by considering the life and thought of Wang Yangming and its consequences for the *wen-wu* divide. In the following chapters I will continue with an appraisal of Wang's concrete military praxis and a demonstration of how this fusion of Neo-Confucianism and military activism was eventually appropriated by Qi Jiguang and his *Umfeld* (social surroundings). Furthermore, I will dwell on the concrete practical approach to military problems applied by both Wang and Qi, and analyse in which ways they might be diachronically connected. In this chapter, it is not my intention to give a grand exposition of Wang Yangming's thought, but I will turn briefly to the consequences of his thoughts on the heart-mind in the realm of moral self-cultivation, especially those who would have an impact on the development of military thought later on in the sixteenth century. These will be treated in detail in the last chapter.

Wang Yangming's Mad Ardour

In most modern scholarship, the contribution of Wang Yangming to the development of Neo-Confucian thought has taken centre stage.[320] But he was more than a scholar with an ideological reform-agenda. One of the main reasons he rose to prominence was his successful career as both a civil administrator and military commander, successes that cannot be disentangled from the spread of his philosophical reinterpretation, as I will argue below.

Wang Yangming, or Wang Shouren 王守仁 as he was known by birth, was a southerner born in Yuyao 餘姚 County in the province of Zhejiang. He came from a family which had produced examination degree holders in the past, including his father.[321] A striking aspect of the early life of this man, who would, as I will argue later, provide a pathway towards a philosophical

[320] The most recent exception to the rule, which, importantly, integrates and connects Wang's moral philosophy with his concrete civil-military policies as an official is George Lawrence Israel, *Doing Good and Ridding Evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Earlier works in western languages are Chang Yü-chüan, *Wang Shou-jen as a Statesman* (Peking: The Chinese Social & Political Science Association, 1940), and Tu Wei-ming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1976). A comprehensive Chinese article on Wang Yangming's practical civil-military governance solutions is Fan Zhongyi 范中义, "Wang Shouren de junshi sixiang" 王守仁的军事思想, *Mingshi yanjiu* 明史研究 9 (2005): 220-230. A recent Taiwanese doctoral dissertation dwells extensively on the practical aspects of Wang's philosophy: Wang Chi-hua 王繼華, "Wang Yangming shijian zhexue yanjiu" 王陽明實踐哲學研究 (PhD diss., Chinese Culture University, 2009).

[321] Chang Yü-chüan, *Wang Shou-jen as a Statesman* (Peking: The Chinese Social & Political Science Association, 1940), 2-4.

reconciliation of Neo-Confucianism with martial identities for many participants of the anti-Wokou campaign, was his initial lack of interest in Neo-Confucian learning. Instead, his early life testified to his interest in almost all other major philosophical traditions and associated identities the mid-Ming empire had on offer. These included the Strategists, certain martial arts, and, although Wang himself never referred to the knights-errant in his own extant writings, a contemporary would consider his early behaviour indicative of knight-errantry as well. In addition to his martial pursuits, Wang Yangming also engaged with Daoism, Buddhism, and *belles-lettres* writing as routes to self-realization, before eventually returning to Neo-Confucianism in the early sixteenth century.

Before Wang acquired the highest civil service examination degree, and therefore the entrance ticket to an official career, in 1499, he had spent much time studying the Strategists, and mastering the arts of horse-riding and archery, mostly against his father's wishes. He rather saw his son studying and preparing for the civil examinations. However, as a youth Wang Yangming was already known to have imagined himself a great general, and he practiced this by letting his playmates assume various military formations. This interest would intensify in 1485, when he started studying archery, horsemanship, and military strategy. The following year he would even spend some time at the northern frontier amongst the nomads north of Beijing, amongst whom he would continue building his martial expertise. Perhaps not surprisingly, Wang Yangming idolized a scholar-general who served the Han dynasty, Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 BCE – 49 CE), known for his desire to serve away from the court at different northern and southern frontier areas, and also known for his creative use of military stratagem to suit changing circumstances. Finally, Wang's military inclinations came to the forefront in his first assignment as a civil official. This entailed the construction of a tomb for Wang Yue 王越 (1423-1498), a civil official recruited through the civil service examination system with significant military accomplishments, who played an important role in stabilizing the northern frontier against the Mongols in the half-century after the Tumu disaster. Like Ma Yuan, Wang Yue was known for his creative application of military stratagem. It is not unlikely that Wang Yangming was inspired by Wang Yue's credentials as a civil official with military accomplishments. Whilst constructing this tomb, Wang again organized his workforce according to military principles. Moreover, as a result of this activity, Wang might have gained access to Wang Yue's military writings through his family members. As a result of his experience at the northern frontier, Wang also compiled a memorial to the emperor with

suggestions on how to improve the military security in the area, the contents of which I will briefly touch upon in the section following below.[322]

Military and martial concerns were thus an important early part of Wang Yangming's life. His unconventional interests did not end there, however. He engaged in Daoist and Buddhist studies as well: the former might have been prompted by his fragile health in order to find a solution in the pursuit for immortality, the latter might have been to cultivate detachment from the world.[323] A third pursuit was literature. Wang did this in the context of the Archaist movement, which advocated a return to the ancient prose of the Han dynasty and before, and the poetry of the Tang. An underlying assumption of this movement was that the literature of these periods represented an ideal *wen* based on unchanging laws, or *fa* 法, which reflected the proper natural principles of the world. Internalizing these was a process of immersion in-, and self-realization through mastering the proper cultural forms drawn from this circumscribed cultural tradition. These *fa* were initially something existing external to the individual, which then had to be internalized. Thereafter, a person properly cultivated in this way, would be able to express himself spontaneously in the ideal language of the sages.[324] According to Bol, the logic worked as follows:

> […] the way a person wrote inevitably revealed the values that guided him; thus one could infer the qualities of the person and how he would act from the style of his writing. So studying the "ancient wen" in functional terms we might say to study the "ideal culture" was really about learning the values of the sages and making them one's own.[325]

This movement, which did not restrict itself to purely Confucian writings, had its origin during the late Tang and Song dynasties, but had lost out to Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism by the end of that dynasty. During the mid-Ming disenchantment with the official orthodoxy it regained ground, however.

All these pursuits did not occur in a chronological fashion, but he would eventually abandon all of them in favour of returning to Neo-Confucianism. His disenchantment with *belles-lettres* would follow his realization that it boiled down to a competition between literati about

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[322] Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action*, 31-41; Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 98-104.
[323] Kandice Kandice., ""Goodness Unbound" – Wang Yang-ming and the Redrawing of the Boundary of Confucianism," in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, edited by Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 124.
[324] Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 52-55; Bryant, *The Great Recreation*, 415-425; Kenneth James Hammond, "History and Literati Culture: Towards an Intellectual Biography of Wang Shizhen (1526-1590)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1994), 136-160.
[325] Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 53.

stylish writing, and his eventual abandonment of Daoism and Buddhism followed his disappointment with their lack of concern for this-worldly affairs. His criticism of his martial and military preoccupations would only come later in life, when he thought of them as frivolous pursuits.[326] Yet, all these preoccupations would leave their mark on his developing Neo-Confucian philosophy and the inspiration his future followers would take from his personal example. Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水 (1466-1560), a Guangdong-born Neo-Confucian philosopher, who would become a friend and mentor of Wang during his "conversion" to Neo-Confucianism, saw the latter's martial and military pursuits as indicative of a spirit of knight-errantry. Furthermore, Wang's father recognized his son's ambition to memorialize the emperor early in his life on military frontier affairs as a manifestation of a kind of "mad ardour", or *kuang* 狂. Wang Yangming would later consider *kuang* to be a desirable quality in men pursuing the road to Neo-Confucian sagehood. According to Miaw-fen Lu, the *kuang* (in Confucian discourse) stood in opposition to the *xiangyuan* 鄉愿, who were the "good careful people from the villages."[327] According to both Confucius and Mencius, the latter were bad moral exemplars, because their outward moral excellence was only a show put on for the outside world to conform to other people's notions of virtue, and one that was not backed up by a sincerity of will. *Kuang* behaviour showed that one was unconcerned by the judgment of society and this was a necessary step towards achieving sagehood. As I will argue later, it would also be one of the aspects of Wang's philosophy and personal example that would provide his later followers with a means to build a bridge between *wen* and *wu* whilst still claiming a Neo-Confucian identity for themselves. Furthermore, while Wang turned away from Daoism and Buddhism, he did claim that in their original form the two held some claims to moral truth, but were incomplete because they were only concerned with the self and not society at large. On this basis, some accommodation could be reached between the different religions-*cum*-philosophies, as we shall see later.[328] Wang Yangming's early life thus bore witness to a desire to expand the constricted Neo-Confucian identity.

However, Wang in the end returned to Neo-Confucianism, because it validated and encouraged the this-worldly commitment he apparently sought. Earlier in his life, Wang had been

[326] Julia Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 37-38; Israel, "On the Margins of the Grand Unity," 49; Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action*, 28-31.
[327] Lu, "Practice as Knowledge," 296.
[328] Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom*, 48-51 Hauf, ""Goodness Unbound"," 124-129; Lu, "Practice as Knowledge," 296; Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action*, 38-39, 74.

inspired by the Neo-Confucian quest to become a sage, but he had become discouraged after he failed to discover the *li*, or principle, of bamboo by investigating it according to Zhu Xi's *gewu*. To him, it confirmed the notion that only a select few could become a sage, and that he himself simply was not one of them. His return to Neo-Confucianism, then, was went hand-in-hand with an intellectual process in which he redefined the conditions under which one was able to become a sage within the ideology. This started in 1505 or 1506, when he met the abovementioned Zhan Ruoshui, who himself was a student of the Guangdong-born Neo-Confucian philosopher Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428-1500). Chen and Zhan were the two most important Neo-Confucian innovators of the mid-Ming before Wang Yangming's rise to fame, especially in relation to the trend of steering the path of moral self-cultivation away from the investigation of external phenomena towards a stress on internal cultivation. Wang never met Chen Xianzhang personally,[329] but it would not be unreasonable to assume that he partook of Chen's life and thought via his friend and mentor Zhan Ruoshui.

The discontent with Neo-Confucianism had not at first sprung from its philosophical content *per se*, but rather the unfortunate consequences of turning its mastery in writing into a formal requirement to enter the bureaucracy. Probably for many literati sincerely learning to become a sage became pragmatic learning to make a career, and the philosophy became ossified and immune to change. As a response to the imposed stifling ideological orthodoxy of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, in the course of the fifteenth century a renewed quest for personal sagehood was undertaken by some literati. As posited by Bol and others, frustrations with the reality of the civil service examination system and its attendant ideological inflexibility and intellectual barrenness thus led to a number of literati to find sagehood for themselves as a way to implement their moral imperatives. Amongst the early ones to attempt this were literati like Wu Yubi 吳與弼 (1392-1469) and Hu Juren, the latter channelling his sagely imperatives into the building of local institutions in the shape of private academies, foreshadowing a greater turn to the local level by literati during the sixteenth century.[330] Sagehood, also for more conservative Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians like Hu, could have a performative social activist component. And this latter

[329] Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom*, 40-43, 84-86.
[330] Bol, "The "Localist Turn"," 1-4; John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368-1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 88-89.

component was more and more in demand as the mid-Ming and its attendant crises in civil and military governance unfolded.

If Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism could still inspire a quest for sagehood, as indeed it also did for Wang Yangming, how do we explain the turn towards inner moral self-cultivation? I think the answer is twofold. On the one hand, this inward turn made sagehood achievable (at least in theory) for everyone, regardless of occupation. On the other hand, this inner turn facilitated social activism to a much greater extent. It attained both of these by marginalizing bookish learning, an outcome of the search for principle posited by Cheng-Zhu learning as also existing external to the self, as a path to moral self-cultivation. The problem with the investigation of external affairs through book learning was that it could degenerate into "vulgar learning", i.e. the acquisition of knowledge divorced from the objective of moral self-cultivation and the acquisition of knowledge for the selfish and pragmatic reason of examination success. Instead, the intent of Zhu Xi and his predecessors was that the study of the inside and the outside world proceed simultaneously and the efforts should be linked, because the goals were linked. Reflecting on the external helped cultivate the internal, and would point the way on how to be a virtuous person in the midst of society. "Vulgar learning" threatened to destroy this link between self and society. [331] This link was essential for the Neo-Confucian, because the whole premise of the philosophy was that human and nature, individual and universe, self and society, formed a unity.

This mystical [332] slant was a key feature of a metaphysical superstructure that Neo-Confucianism added to the original Confucianism of the Warring States period, which tended to be uninterested in metaphysics to the point of seeming secular. Probably under influence of Daoist and Buddhist thought, but also motivated by a need to be competitive with both of these religions-*cum*-philosophies, the emerging Neo-Confucian movement developed its own metaphysics, borrowing its vocabulary mostly from the *Classic of Changes*. This included the duality between *li* and *qi*, which I briefly touched upon in the second chapter. In short, all the possible principles, or *li*, of the world, including moral ones, were already present in the smallest speck of dust and in the mind of the most enlightened human being, but it was *qi* - matter, energy, or vitality – and its

[331] Youngmin Kim, "Rethinking the Self's Relation to the World in the Mid-Ming: Four Responses to Cheng-Zhu Learning," *Ming Studies* 44 (2001): 13-16.
[332] I agree with Wm. Theodore de Bary, who states that "[…] the possibility of a distinctive Confucian mysticism can by no means be ruled out." See: Wm. Theodore de Bary, "Introduction," in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 13.

quality – from clear to turbid - which determined how much of this *li* was allowed to shine through and determine the final shape of something or someone. To translate this into Platonist terms: *li* contained all the principles behind all possible shapes and forms, but the quality of the *qi* determined which form or shape would be the outcome. This included morality and a given individual's ability to perceive it and thus behave according to it. If an individual's *qi* was murky, or turbid, it would hinder his ability to perceive the *li* of morality within himself and outside of himself and act according to it. The quality of the *qi* of different people could vary, and so did their potential to become a virtuous person, *junzi*, or even a sage. Moral self-cultivation thus boiled down to an effort to "clear up" one's *qi* in order to reflect the Principle of Heaven, or Principle of Nature (*tianli*) like a mirror. This duality between *li* and *qi* was necessary to explain why humans, who according to Mencius were innately good, were capable of evil. This could then be explained by positing that their *li* was good, but the quality of their *qi* could obscure this goodness and induce them to engage in evil behaviour. This evil behaviour was usually seen in terms of selfish desire, or *yu* 欲. Thus, self-cultivation was directed towards eliminating any kind of selfish desire, after which one would become aware of forming a unity with the everyone and everything around oneself. In this aspect, the influence of Buddhism could be seen to a great extent, except that the elimination of desire was not meant to lead one to a detachment from this world in a quest for the otherworldly extinction of the self, but rather to the creation of a morally superior human who could and should take the lead in ordering this world.[333]

The techniques for moral self-cultivation to enable one to become such a morally superior human that Zhu Xi eventually consolidated in his Neo-Confucian learning included a number of different exercises with intellectual and spiritual components. One of these, "mastering quietude", or *zhujing* 主静, was a mental exercise enabling one to concentrate and unify one's effort as prerequisite of all other steps. Other exercises focussed on recognizing good and evil psychic phenomena and banishing the latter. Meditation, or "quiet sitting" (*jingzuo* 静坐) was a necessary period of quietude in a daily cycle alternating with activity, meant to nourish one's energies for a new period of activity. The already mentioned *gewu*, "investigation of things", was a group of exercises meant to make one discover principle inside and outside the self, in the end achieving

[333] Ch'eng I-fan, "Development and Frustrations of Statecraft in Mid-Ming China: As Reflected in the Experiences of the Gu Family of Jiangnan during the Sixteenth Century" (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1988), 58-88; Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 46-49.

enlightenment as a sage by realizing a kind of mystic unity between oneself and the rest of the universe. A final step included putting one's self-cultivated moral knowledge in practice, both a validation of, and moral imperative resulting from this self-cultivation. These exercises all contributed towards clearing up one's *qi*.[334] Meditation, in particular, was meant to calm the heart-mind by marginalizing the impact of aroused emotions and desires. This settled one's *qi*, making it easier to perceive principle.[335] Meditation probably became part of the Neo-Confucian movement through the influence of Daoism and Buddhism, although Neo-Confucians themselves traced it back to Confucius and Mencius, who discussed mental quietude and nourishing the heart-mind.[336] Recently, Chinese scholar Chen Lihua has argued that Zhu Xi might have integrated meditation within his consolidation of Neo-Confucianism under the influence of his teacher Li Tong 李侗 (1093-1163). He advocated a method of meditation called *mozuo chengxin* 默坐澄心, or "sitting quietly and calming the heart-mind".[337] But Zhu Xi recognized that merely meditation entailed the danger of a slide into quietism, and it therefore had to be supplemented by inquiry and study of external phenomena, including the principles behind phenomena one encountered within one's daily life. *Gewu* was a primary component of this external side of self-cultivation, which entailed studying (in sequence of declining importance) the *Four Books*, *Five Classics*, and the official dynastic histories. Zhu Xi believed these books had one correct interpretation and that arriving at it yourself would be an enlightening experience. Furthermore, these books were meant as an anchor against dangerous excessive subjectivism through personal intuition, which was Zhu Xi's main caveat with Lu Jiuyuan's philosophy. However, bookish learning was but one aspect of *gewu* and Neo-Confucianism still necessitated an engagement with society, the outside world. Yet, despite Zhu Xi's best intentions, by mid-Ming times Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism had mostly degenerated to book learning, rote memorization, and intellectualism divorced from societal engagement. Part of the problem, as per Wang Yangming's diagnosis, was perhaps to be sought amongst the assumptions underlying Zhu Xi's philosophy itself. *Gewu* as an external search had the tendency to make one gather and compile facts related to a given principle whilst losing the

[334] Smith et al, *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*, 171-173.
[335] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 49.
[336] Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 218.
[337] Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 201; Chen Lihua 陈利华, "Lun Li Tong zai Zhuzi lixue chuangli Zhong de zuoyong yu yingxiang" 论李侗在朱子理学创立中的作用与影响. *Hefei xueyuan xuebao* 合肥学院学报 30.1 (2013): 16.

sense of the essential unity of things.[338] Moreover, as already touched upon earlier in this chapter, enshrining Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism as state orthodoxy meant that it was vulnerable to infiltration by people studying it with insincere intentions.

Chen Xianzhang, Zhan Ruoshui, and Lu Jiuyuan

Because of unintended consequences of philosophical doctrine and particular historical circumstance, the mid-Ming interpretation of Zhu Xi's *gewu*, primarily the bookish search of principles external to self, had to be dispensed with. At least this was the conclusion of three men who would become the greatest Neo-Confucian thinkers of the mid-Ming period. Chen Xianzhang, Zhan Ruoshui, and Wang Yangming would each play their part in tilting the focus of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation further away from bookish external study towards the inner world. Chen adjusted Cheng-Zhu thought by stating that, although principle still existed in external phenomena as well, there was no point in studying separately. The Cheng-Zhu assumption that *li* existed in a network of relationships with one another in different external phenomena and the self, and that these could be studied separately to arrive at a realization of the unity of all after accumulation of knowledge in this way, was refuted by Chen. He did this by redefining the function of *dao* 道, or "the Way", within Neo-Confucianism. During the Warring States, *dao* had often been referred to a virtuous way of governance, however defined, in the various philosophical traditions. This virtuous rule would line up with the *dao* of Heaven, further manifested on earth by the correct enactment of etiquette, decorum, propriety, and ritual by humans on earth. By extension it thus also referred to the idealized virtuous way of life of people. Within in the developing Cheng-Zhu tradition, *dao* eventually came to mean a kind of universal principle, prior even to the universe, that lay behind the functioning of all. It had become the way of the universe as a whole, the principle of the working of principle in the universe. It determined the way *qi* functioned in the universe, and thus also in our world. Zhu Xi even seemed to go further than that, because some of his writings hint that for him the *dao* was the universal principle that determined how *li* and *qi* would work together to embody the way of the world and the universe.[339] What Chen contended,

[338] De Bary, "Introduction," 7; Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 49-52.
[339] Deborah Sommer, "Dao 道 (The way, a path)," in *The Encyclopedia of Confucianism, 2-Volume Set, Volume I*, edited by Xinzhong Yao (London: Routledge, 2003), 177-179; Zhang Dainian, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, Translated by Edmund Ryden (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2005), 391-409.

in contrast to the Cheng-Zhu tradition, was that this all-encompassing principle of the *dao* could not be inferred by studying principle external to the self. The *dao* was not to be likened to a network of *li*, but should rather be conceived of as an "unbounded whole". In the words of Youngmin Kim:

> Chen, however, believed that according to such a conception, *li* simply became the objective of perceptual knowledge and verbalization but did not capture its essence. According to Chen, the Dao is more like an unbounded, inclusive whole rather than a systematized network of multitudes. Unconditioned by coarse materiality *(cuji),* the Dao transcends the realm of bounded things. Thus, if we confine our attention to particular things in order to understand the Dao, or try to conceptualize it in a specific manner, we lose the most important feature of the Dao: its unity. In other words, our intellectual attempt to understand the Dao is doomed to fail since the attempt itself is against the essential nature of the Dao.[340]

To grasp this unity, one would have to move away from relying on the senses and perceptual knowledge, which would lead to a fragmented understanding of the world. Instead, this unity had to be perceived by a turn to one's inner self. *Gewu* thus played no role in Chen's study of the external world, instead he would mostly come to rely on meditation, "quiet-sitting" in its Neo-Confucian guise, as his approach in this regard.[341]

Zhan Ruoshui and Wang Yangming would move even further away from Chen's position and either deny the existence of *li* outside of the self, or posit their irrelevancy to moral self-cultivation. Instead, both would contend that principle could be only found in the *xin*, in one's heart-mind. Therefore, modern scholarship often categorizes them as belonging to the *xinxue* 心學, or "learning of the heart-mind/school of the heart-mind"-branch of Neo-Confucianism, continuing a trend begun by Lu Jiuyuan during the Southern Song. When I use the term *xinxue* throughout this dissertation I use it to refer to this tendency in thinking within Neo-Confucianism started by Lu Jiuyuan and continued by Chen Xianzhang, Zhan Ruoshui, and Wang Yangming during the Ming dynasty. As we have seen in the second chapter, Lu Jiuyuan's position came with a certain scepticism towards book learning. Zhan's solution to the often misguided and fragmentary bookish quest for external principle was redefining the sum of one's experiences with the outside world, as well as one's inner, as being the same *xin*. The heart-mind was thus not an

[340] Kim, "Rethinking the Self's Relation," 22-23.
[341] Ibidem; Paul Yun-Ming Jiang, *The Search for Mind: Ch'en Pai-sha, Philosopher-Poet* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1980), 60-61.

organ of perception, cognition, and emotion within the self, but was one's whole experienced world. By expanding the concept of *xin* to encompass one's whole experienced world, the distinction between inner and outer simply ceased to exist. The outside world was not a repository of external *li* anymore, it just functioned as a trigger to activate the *li* in one's mind as it came into contact with-, and experienced the outside world.[342] Of the trio Chen, Zhan, and Wang, Zhan Ruoshui valued book learning the most. Study of the classics, for example, would also - as an experienced part of the world - be encompassed within one's *xin* and thus serve to trigger *li* in one's mind.[343] Zhan would also hold fast to the term *gewu*, but he no longer saw it as one part of moral self-cultivation. Instead, he redefined it as the totality of inner self-rectification *and* external moral engagement with the world,[344] uniting inner and outer commitments to moral self-cultivation.

For Wang, on the other hand, the *xin* remained within one's body. However, the outside world only existed to the extent the *xin* was engaged with it. The world as we experience it is the only world that can be said to exist, and it is entirely a function of your *xin*'s operation. All the *li* were already present in the self, otherwise one's sense of filial piety, an important virtue within Confucianism as a whole, would cease to exist with the death of one's parents.[345] Therefore you did not have to look for particularized *li* embedded in the *qi* of external phenomena to gain an understanding of the world. Like Chen, he was sceptical about the value of book learning for the process of moral self-cultivation. *Li* were all already present in the individual's mind, and did need to be sought in the *Four Books, Five Classics*, and the official dynastic histories. At best, they were descriptions and/or testimonies of the lives of previous sages, but the unicity of their experiences could not always be easily transplanted from their lives to the present. In fact, Wang cautioned that in case the Neo-Confucian canon contradicted the moral impulses of the *xin*, the former should be ignored. In this respect, he stood in the tradition of his Southern Song predecessor, Lu Jiuyuan.

Like in the case of Chen Xianzhang, the exact influence of Lu Jiuyuan on Wang Yangming is hard to gauge, although contemporaries of Wang already associated both men and their ideas

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[342] Kim, "Rethinking the Self's Relation," 30-34.
[343] Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom*, 86.
[344] Julia Ching, "A Contribution on Chan's Thought," in *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644*, *Part 1*, edited by L.C. Goodrich and Chao-ying Fang (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 41-42; Chaoying Fang, "CHAN Jo-shui," in *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644*, *Part 1*, edited by L.C. Goodrich and Chao-ying Fang (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 40.
[345] Monica Uebelhör, "Die Auflösung des konfuzianischen Bildungsbegriffs bei Wang Yang-ming," *Asiatische Studien* 34.1 (1980): 9.

with each other. In Wang's chronological biography, *nianpu* 年譜, Lu is not mentioned until 1509 in the context of Wang's life. Nevertheless, Wang would later in his life often defend Lu's ideas during debates, although he did find them "unrefined". Moreover, he wrote a preface to Lu Jiuyuan's collected works. What we can say at most, modern scholar Tu Wei-ming concludes, is that Wang ideas developed in opposition to Zhu Xi's and eventually came to resemble those of Lu Jiuyuan.[346] Yet, the similarity between both men ran deeper than their respective philosophies. Both were active in military pursuits, not just armchair theorizing, but engaging in martial arts as well. As we have seen in the introduction, the reputation of Lu and Wang as Neo-Confucians successfully reconciling their identities with military activities would reverberate in late sixteenth-century Korea, showing that this association between *xinxue*-philosophical tendencies and martiality was also made outside of the borders of the Ming empire. Although probably unprovable, I would suggest not automatically dismissing Wang taking Lu Jiuyuan as a personal example in this respect.

Wang Yangming's Unity of Knowledge and Action

Lu and Wang's quite similar conceptions of the *xin*, I argue, pushed (or justified the tendency of) both men towards activism and a reconciliation with military pursuits, especially when compared with Zhu Xi's ideas on this matter. In the core, this boils down to the way Zhu Xi, Lu Jiuyuan, and later Wang Yangming conceptualized the ontology of the heart-mind. For all of them it did not refer to a physical organ in the body, like the heart. Nevertheless, according to at least Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming it consisted of *qi*. According to David Tien, many have misunderstood Zhu and Wang in this regard. Zhu's focus on the obscuration of *li* by desires excited on account of *qi*, has led to the misconceived idea that he construed *xin* as to be entirely constituted by *qi*. On the other hand, Wang Yangming's ideas have often been misrepresented to mean that *xin* is entirely constituted by *li*. Lu Jiuyuan, in contrast, is himself unclear on the matter. For him *xin* is universal *li*, and he does not make clear what causes humans to be led astray by selfish desires.[347]

In fact, both Zhu and Wang agreed that all phenomena in the world were a result of the interaction between *li* and *qi*, including the *xin*. Zhu Xi, whilst vehemently confirming the

[346] Lu, "Practice as Knowledge," 181-184; Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action*, 153-157.
[347] Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom*, 12-13; Tien, "Metaphysics and the Basis of Morality," 296.

fundamental unity of *xin*, distinguishes it into two parts: *daoxin* 道心 ("heart-mind of the way") and *renxin* 人心 ("heart-mind of humanity"). According to Kirill Thompson, *daoxin* "expresses the awareness associated with the moral-intellectual side, that is, one's discernment and cognition", whereas *renxin* is the affective side of "one's moods, feelings, desires, senses, and so on."[348] In other words, *daoxin* has spiritual concerns, whereas *renxin* has material ones. By way of an example of their functioning, *renxin* would be conscious of hunger and give rise to a desire to eat, but *daoxin* would be conscious about the propriety of quenching this desire at a certain moment.[349] Confusion arises in modern scholarship to what extent these two aspects of *xin* can be approached as two distinct phenomena, despite Zhu Xi's claim of unity, a confusion that already arose during Zhu's own lifetime. For example, Philip Ivanhoe contends that the *daoxin*, according to Zhu Xi, is universal *li* (or *tianli*) and exist separately from-, and prior to reality and its phenomena. *Renxin* is then *daoxin*'s manifestation in reality of *li* embedded in *qi*, with the latter's obscuration of the former giving rise to selfish desires and other undesirable notions which would lead us astray from moral behaviour and the realization we are one with the rest of humanity and the universe as a whole. Because *qi* obscures some of the *li* of our *renxin* then, we cannot rely on it completely and as a result we have to engage in the study of principle external to ourselves.[350] Other scholars have interpreted Zhu Xi's ideas differently from Ivanhoe, for example interpreting *daoxin* to simply be the *li* and the *renxin* the *qi* of the heart-mind. However one interprets Zhu Xi's ideas about the ontological basis of the heart-mind, his recipe for moral improvement remained the same: the *renxin* should be made to be guided by the *daoxin*, because without this guidance the former's interaction with the material world would submit it to the corruption of selfish desires. Moreover, the *renxin* should be improved in order to increase its ability to manifest the *daoxin* in the world.[351]

Both Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming came to disagree with this apparent bifurcation between *daoxin* and *renxin*. In their view, there was only one *xin* which contained the universal *li*. Although in the case of Lu it is not known whether he considered the *xin* to consist of *qi* as well, Wang did hold on to this ontological scheme and agreed with Zhu Xi whilst blaming later followers

[348] Kirill O. Thompson, "Opposition and Complementarity in Zhu Xi's Thought," in *Returning to Zhu Xi: Emerging Patterns within the Supreme Polarity* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 160-161.
[349] Zhang, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, 451.
[350] Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Lu Xiangshan's Ethical Philosophy," in *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, edited by John Makeham (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 256-257.
[351] Taylor and Choy, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 314-315, 590; Zhang, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, 449-451.

of Zhu for distorting his views and regarding *xin* and *li* to be separate. Wang, however, did posit that the *daoxin* was simply corrected *renxin*. In other words, in contrast to Zhu, Wang held that the *renxin* could not only be made to manifest *daoxin*, it could do it to the extent that it would become *daoxin*.[352] Moreover, it could become this without resorting to the ineffectual study of particularized *li* external to the self. Instead, Wang Yangming was entirely confident in the ability of the heart-mind to rectify itself and removing the corrupting influences of selfish desires arising from its *qi*. This confidence in the potential of the heart-mind to rectify itself, and not a fundamental ontological discrepancy between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming's posited *xin*, was the main difference between the two philosophies. According to David Tien, Wang Yangming had this confidence because he thought the heart-mind possessed "clear intellect" (*lingming* 靈明), which consisted of the purest and clearest *qi*. The possession of this *lingming* made it possible for the heart-mind to rectify itself, allowing the universal *li* to manifest itself and illuminate the world around oneself. Thus, the key to moral self-cultivation is first getting rid of selfish desires clearing up one's *qi*, instead of engaging first in study of the external world as Zhu Xi had recommended. With clear *qi* a person would act in line with their innately moral mind and become sincere (誠 *cheng*).[353] External *gewu*, needed to gain an understanding of *li* according to Zhu Xi, preceded "making one's thoughts sincere" (*chengyi* 誠意). According to Ivanhoe this meant in practice embodying "the *li* in every thought, feeling, and action." Wang Yangming thus turned this on its head: all the *li* were already present in the heart-mind and accessible by self-rectification (i.e. get rid of selfish desires). By declaring external *li* irrelevant for moral self-cultivation, in Wang Yangming's scheme *gewu* became null and void and one immediately proceeded with making one's thoughts sincere.[354] Since this entailed manifesting *li* in one's mental and physical behaviour, moral self-cultivation tended to flow together with activism much more readily than within Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. That is not to say that practices like meditation lost their relevance. Instead of studying the Zhu Xi-subscribed canon of writings, Wang thought meditation was a good method to start one's moral self-cultivation with. Presumably agreeing with Zhu Xi's idea that after calming the heart and settling down the *qi*, the *li* would more easily shine through, Wang advocated meditation to make selfish desires manifest themselves more clearly, thus simplifying

[352] Taylor and Choy, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 590; Tien, "Metaphysics and the Basis of Morality," 300.
[353] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 64; Tien, "Metaphysics and the Basis of Morality," 299, 304-307.
[354] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 50-51.

the task of weeding them out. Yet, Wang was wary that meditation would become an end in itself, instead of a means to an end. For him, meditation was merely a means to get rid of selfish desires and as a result acquire a calm nature. By this he meant a state wherein the heart-mind would not be misled by distractions during both states of activity (*dong* 動) and stillness (*jing* 靜). After all, the business of a sage was to translate his inner sageliness into a manifestation of virtue in the outside world, i.e. taking responsibility for managing the affairs of the family, state, and world.[355] Meditation was but a technique to acquire this calm nature, which then had to be maintained during engagement with the outside world. This calm nature thus depended on moral intention, if those had been rectified and were sincere, the heart-mind would remain in peace, even when either meditating, or responding to external stimuli. In a properly rectified heart-mind, then, no distinction would exist between "stillness" and "activity", regardless of the activity the person was engaging in.[356]

This ultimate concern with sincerely manifesting virtue in the world led Wang posit his doctrine of the "unity of knowledge and action" (*zhixing heyi* 知行合一). Wang's reasons for positing this theory show why he was so concerned with the acquisition of a calm nature. In the words of David Nivison:

> Wang feared that if a man's moral acts do not spring directly from the response of his character to the needs of the situation, he will act for calculated, ulterior, and morally corrupting motives; or he will be morally paralyzed (like King Hsüan of Ch'i in *Mencius*) and not act at all; or still worse he will take pride in this knowledge unrealized in action as a thing in itself.[357]

Therefore, in order for moral acts to spring directly from the response of the character to the needs of the situation, the calm nature had to be acquired after calming the heart-mind and weeding out selfish desires.

The doctrine of *zhixing heyi* was also an integral part of Wang Yangming's pedagogical vision. The underlying assumption was that true moral knowledge could only be acquired through

[355] Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom*, 69-74.
[356] Idem, 112.
[357] David S. Nivison, *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng (1738-1801)* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966), 68.

experience. To learn to be a sage thus involved manifesting virtuous principles in real life in concrete everyday situations. In the words of Ivanhoe:

> One will never attain real knowledge of morality unless one works on real problems. And the only real problems – those that engage one's heart and challenge one to become aware of and work to eliminate the selfishness that stand in the way of moral imporvement [sic] – are those that one confronts (or avoids) in every day, in one's own life.[358]

A corollary of the doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action is a basic bifurcation between "real knowledge" – knowledge of something -, and "ordinary knowledge", or knowledge about something. The former is knowledge that has arisen out of personal experience and, according to Ivanhoe, "brings together both cognitive and affective types of knowing."[359] The latter is knowledge that is not acquired through concrete experiences, but instead mediated through, for example, a book. What makes "real knowledge" so relevant in the context of Wang Yangming's ideas about moral self-cultivation? Again, quoting Ivanhoe: "In cases requiring moral action, one not only knows what to do but finds oneself properly motivated to do so. In genuine cases of real knowledge, an agent simply spontaneously moves toward the proper end."[360] This knowledge cannot be mediated through book learning, for a consequence of Wang's philosophy was that knowledge of the proper way to engage the outside world could be entirely found in oneself, in the *xin*. By relying on the rectified *xin*, one would know how to act as a sage in any given situation.

Wang's philosophy would eventually become most famous for his later doctrine following *zhixing heyi*, namely "extending the innate knowledge of the good" (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知). *Liangzhi* was a term originally conceived by Mencius, and it referred to his idea that human nature is originally disposed towards the good. A person with a properly rectified mind would always, in any given situation, spontaneously extend this innate knowledge of the good, as "real" moral knowledge would always automatically go together with action. Real *liangzhi* should occur as a reflex, spontaneous and pre-reflective. However, Wang admitted that the program of action it should go together with would still often need deliberation and reflection. The more one engaged in this, though, the clearer and better discerning one's *liangzhi* became. This extension of *liangzhi*,

[358] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 66.
[359] Idem, 62.
[360] Idem, 63.

following this innate knowledge of the good in one's thoughts and in the world, was the effort one had to make in order to become a sage, and the more you did it, the better you became at it and external stimuli would cease to disturb you.[361] In this sense, Wang again turned Zhu Xi's ideas on their heads. For Zhu Xi, the external world was initially a place to harvest knowledge of *li* external to the self, after which once could proceed to make oneself sincere on the basis of that knowledge. The direction was thus from outer to inner. For Wang Yangming the direction was from inner to outer: once the heart-mind was rectified and the intentions made sincere, moral action would spontaneously follow engagement with the outside world, and this would in turn contribute to the quality of one's *liangzhi*. Inherent in extending the innate knowledge of the good was the social responsibility of the sage, which had mystic overtones: "For the gentleman who extends *liang-chih* naturally comes to regard others as he does himself, to look upon the country as his family, and Heaven and Earth and all things as one."[362] Wang still maintained that people had different endowments from birth, and that therefore these differences would translate into different levels of effort needed to achieve sagehood. Nevertheless, it was achievable for all, and I posit, the relative irrelevance of book learning in the effort made it *de facto* more attainable for all.

This redirection of the quest for *li* from external authority to internal authority augured the exaltation of moral subjectivity, although Wang would not have seen it in this way. After all, every *xin* contained the same universal *li*. However, the shift of moral authority away from written sources allowed Wang to build a bridge between his Neo-Confucian identity and his functioning as a military commander, in which he relied on Strategist writings. George Israel has recently brought to light how Wang built this bridge in light of his wider philosophy, especially when using military stratagems as advocated by Sunzi's *Art of War.* According to Israel, essential for the sagely application of the military arts as demonstrated by Wang Yangming was his possession, first, of the "unmoved mind" *bu dong xin* 不動心 which, as we have seen above, was to be achieved through forms of meditation. This state was characterized by a detachment from ego and considerations of personal interest and would allow one to act effortlessly according to the (moral) demands of unfolding situations. These actions would then be guided by the *liangzhi*, or innate knowing of the good, which would be enabled after reaching this mental state.[363] According to

[361] Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom*, 104-119.
[362] Idem, 119.
[363] The Chinese scholar Guan Minyi already pointed out this use of the "unmoved mind" by Wang Yangming in a military context in an earlier article, but Guan did not point out how it allowed Wang to use Sunzi. See: Guan Minyi

Israel, because Wang Yangming was able to achieve this mental state, "[…] he was able not only to see clearly where things ought to go, but also had the wherewithal to marshal the authority necessary take things in that direction, in concrete terms by achieving a Sunzian mastery of the factors confronting the country, seeking out its true nature, and formulating an effective response."[364] Thus a sage in Wang Yangming's thought could engage in military praxis without endangering his moral integrity, because they were guided by *liangzhi*. Key here was thus this shift of the source of moral authority and judgement to the subjective self, a shift that would have important repercussions for the status of the Strategists within Neo-Confucian discourse, as I will argue in chapter seven. Furthermore, Guan Minyi pointed out that Wang Yangming desired all his ranks in the army to have a similar "unmoved mind" divorced from considerations of selfish desire or self-preservation. The ideal soldier was not to think of rewards when advancing against the enemy, and not to worry about punishments when retreating.[365] I could find no evidence how, or even if, Wang Yangming attempted to inculcate this mindset in his troops, but as I will show in chapter ten, Qi Jiguang would articulate a set of moral instructions for exactly this purpose several decades later.

The development of Wang Yangming's thought was not a sudden occurrence, but unfolded simultaneously during his career as a civil bureaucrat and military commander. In this context George Israel has made an important contribution to the debate by pointing out Wang's bridging of Neo-Confucian philosophy and military praxis. In the next chapter I will turn to Wang Yangming's military campaigns themselves, and put them in the context of evolving Ming practise during the crisis of the mid-Ming as detailed in the previous chapter. I will also highlight where Wang Yangming's philosophical renewal intersected with his solutions for military crises, and argue that Wang stood in a tradition of Neo-Confucian evangelization of areas affected by military crises. This evangelization was what distinguished his campaigns from other efforts in the empire's south, and might possible have taken its inspiration from his spiritual forebear Chen Xianzhang. While agreeing with Israel's thesis, I will therefore also advance my own position that Wang Yangming's bridging of *wen* and *wu* in theory and praxis not only had a strong influence on later sixteenth-century military activities in the empire's south, but also that Wang was not an

管敏义, "Cong Ping Ning fan zhi yi kan Wang Shouren de junshi sixiang" 从平宁藩之役看王守仁的军事思想, *Ningbo daxue xuebao* 宁波大学学报 11.2 (1998): 5-7; Israel, "On the Margins of the Grand Unity," 195-202.
[364] Idem, 202.
[365] Guan, "Cong Ping Ning fan zhi yi kan Wang Shouren de junshi sixiang," 5.

unprecedented phenomenon. The connection between *xinxue*-inclined philosophy tendencies and military activities could also be seen in the lives and careers of Liu Jiuyuan, Chen Xianzhang, and to a lesser extent, Zhan Ruoshui. Furthermore, in chapters seven and eight I will posit other aspects of Wang's philosophy which allowed a bridge to be built between *wen* and *wu*, which Israel did not touch upon in his study.