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

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Conclusion

The relationship of Confucianism to the oft-posited inherent Chinese bias against war has been obscured by an inexact understanding of Confucianism itself, and an oft-assumed, but hard to prove dominance of this ideology throughout Chinese history. In fact, Confucianism was open to myriad influences and often coexisted with other philosophical traditions. This had an impact on Chinese thought about the significance of war and peace, civil and military governance, and civil and martial ethics and identities as well, thought that shaped, and was in turn shaped by, institutional arrangements and the socio-cultural background of identity formation. For example, the *Five Classics* contained ideas about the proper place of civil governance and military action that tended to give both an equal footing in the Chinese moral universe. Institutionally speaking, the creation of a civil service examination system geared much of the literate and wealthy elite towards civil pursuits to the neglect of martial affairs. This led to a more permanent socio-cultural rift between the civil and military elites of succeeding empires. Yet, the contents of the examination curriculum would not solely elevate a Confucianism averse to war until the early fourteenth century. In the course of the 13th century, the Chinese made a choice what Confucianism was to entail, and the result was the rise to hegemony of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. Ironically, this choice would then be institutionalized under Mongol rule. Two core features of this Confucianism that concern us here were a focus on moral concerns and an elevation of the *Four Books* over the *Five Classics* as the core curriculum. This necessitated the mastery, by the prospective elite, of those works within the Confucian mainstream that marginalized the place of the military and the martial to the biggest degree hitherto.

Civil-military relations up to the Song did not see a permanent socio-cultural separation of the two branches and neither was this separation a permanent fixture of the identities, value patterns and lifestyles of the ruling elites of the succeeding polities up to 960. Thereafter, the founding of the Song saw a permanent separation in those two senses, which was institutionalized by the implementation of the aforementioned civil service examination system. This system also provides us for the first time in Chinese history with a reliable way to gauge the spread and content of the civil ethos among the Song empire's elites. Before this time, the influence of Confucian ideas about warfare and martial praxis, and even the contents of Confucian learning itself, cannot be accurately judged and any statement about the significance of a Confucian anti-war bias prior

to the Song dynasty has to be treated with scepticism. The examination system did institutionalize a division between a literate civil elite, which was inculcated with a limited, if still changeable, set of texts, from which the empire's dominant civil bureaucracy was recruited. At the same time, the military branch consisted of mostly illiterate *de facto* hereditary military officials, who presumably benefitted from oral circulating knowledge. The implementation of the military examination system did not remedy this division, and separated the study of military texts from the mainstream of literati learning. The eventual victory of the Neo-Confucian program saw a further narrowing of literati learning and identity, to the detriment of military interests and practices. The strict moral imperatives of this program also further marginalized the moral *Salonfähigkeit* (social acceptability) of military knowledge and identities. This was accompanied by general elite antipathy towards literature celebrating martial accomplishments, most notably in the form of the knight-errantry literature, an antipathy that probably found its basis in the chaotic war-ridden centuries preceding the establishment of the Song. This can, furthermore, assumed to have been strengthened by the moral biases of Neo-Confucianism.

The Yuan period saw an interregnum by non-Chinese elites and the side-tracking of the indigenous scholarly elites until late in the dynasty. The Ming saw the eventual return to power of these scholarly elites, which coincided with the decline of the hereditary military of the dynasty. The partial power vacuum in the empire's southern interior, which had been mostly absent during the Southern Song, in combination with socio-economic changes probably necessitated the engagement of these elites with military affairs. In the empire's south therefore, censorial officials had taken over a large section of the sphere of military activity previously under control of the hereditary officers. According to Filipiak this followed similar patterns that had earlier emerged at the northern frontier, where personnel belonging to the provincial censorate took care of logistical matters like weapon maintenance and repair, maintenance and repair of walls and other defensive installations and the construction of beacons and guard towers. In addition, their intrusion into the *wu*-domain eventually went so far as training soldiers and even leading them into battle. Concerning the southeast, Filipiak speculates that they were also instrumental in taking care of judicial matters within the army and surveying and inspecting military activities. The simultaneous dissatisfaction with the examination system gave rise to a more activist interpretation of Neo-Confucianism, which was more suitable for those disenfranchised by the limited opportunities for self-realization offered by the system. The "democratization" of Neo-Confucian ideals of self-

realization are probably a sign that this ethic was now born by larger segments of the population. A great variety of social groups sought to reconcile their identities with the moral system of Neo-Confucianism, and Wang Yangming's redefinition facilitated this process. The close association of this redefinition with military activism drew in some members of the hereditary military, and its moral subjectivity paved the way for Confucian identities which were more inclusive of martial practices, values and lifestyles. It also emancipated the status of military writings from the rigid moral code of Neo-Confucianism. At the same time the increasing importance of friendship within the redefinition, and its compatibility with knight-errantry ideals, facilitated the formation of social bonds between military men and civil bureaucrats and *ex officio* scholars. Against the backdrop of *weisuo* decline, marginalization and official corruption, the exemplar of Wang Yangming's career comes into focus as an attractive model for bureaucrats serving during the vicissitudes of the later Ming dynasty. Wang's example furnished one with a toolkit of solutions to governance problems, incorporating both civil and military approaches to coping with societal disruptions.

In contrast to the apparent tendency within Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian movement of the Southern Song to eschew military affairs for ethical and metaphysical pursuits, Wang Yangming's immediate generations of prominent followers bridged the gap between both concerns. What seems to have made them different from Song literati in general and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians in particular was their willingness to mix military affairs with the adoption of martial identities and lifestyles. Literati like Tang Shunzhi and Tan Lun practiced martial arts; Xu Wei, Wang Daokun, and Luo Rufang embraced knight-errantry. This ethos, formerly associated with northern China, was now flourishing in southern China, in contrast to the Song dynasty.

The network formation enabled by this ideological reorientation also created a positive environment for the sharing of (military) statecraft knowledge, which was facilitated by an increase in publishing activities. A quantitative analysis of late Ming military knowledge production reveals the continuing primacy of the *Seven Military Classics* canonized during the Song dynasty, and the importance of the contribution of knowledge sharing network that came into being during the south-eastern piracy crisis, which saw a heavy involvement by officials and scholars associated with Wang Yangming, Zhan Ruoshui, and (to a lesser degree) Chen Xianzhang. Their philosophical redefinitions and their followers were shaped to a large degree amidst military uprisings and engagement with various groups of aboriginals at the Ming empire's southern internal frontiers. Perhaps these conditions stimulated an internalization of civilization's values in

the relative absence of its material presence. Military service at the south-eastern maritime frontier and the various southern internal frontiers thus went hand-in-hand with the emergence of a particular activist strain of *xinxue* Neo-Confucianism with fertile crossover opportunities with martial identities and military traditions of thought, just like it briefly had in the twelfth century in Jiangxi with the brothers Lu Jiuyuan and Lu Jiuling.

The campaigns Wang undertook in southern provinces of the empire to quell uprisings by aboriginal and Han Chinese in the early sixteenth century would become a significant influence on the anti-piracy campaign waged in the mid-sixteenth century, an affair spanning multiple provinces that would bring Qi Jiguang to prominence as a successful military commander. The *magnum opus* of the *xinxue*-network was the *Chou hai tu bian*, which gave a prominent place to the military activities of Wang Yangming, and makes it possible for us to identify the members of the network and their access to older military knowledge. The accessibility of this knowledge can be further analysed by viewing the military statecraft production of the network, which shows that the new military knowledge was based on a relatively narrow range of military writings from across Chinese history, whilst any horizontal access to contemporary military writings was mostly contained within the production of the network itself. Qi Jiguang's military manuals were a product of this military knowledge circulation, and featured a program of moral inculcation which was heavily indebted to Wang Yangming's reading of the *Great Learning* and are an example of the infiltration of Neo-Confucian ethics into the tradition of Chinese military writing. Furthermore, the manuals were an attempt to synthesize oral and written traditions of knowledge circulation. Finally, the key innovation of Qi Jiguang's method, its highly-elaborated system of collective responsibility through collective punishments, is highly likely to be derived from Wang Yangming's implementation of ideas from the *Weiliaozi* and his revival of the *baojia*-system of mutual civilian surveillance, coupled with moral exhortation derived from Confucian moral precepts. We should take these Neo-Confucian elements seriously, because Qi Jiguang chose to include them in his manuals during the height of the persecution of the Wang Yangming-movement by Zhang Juzheng. Furthermore, these manuals were the result of years of practical experience and geared towards maintaining this praxis, so it would be unwise to regard the *xinxue*-stylings in Qi's manuals as a mere exercise in self-fashioning.

Considering the influence of Qi Jiguang's ideas on Chinese military developments in both theory and practice, the importance of his Neo-Confucian ideology on military revitalization of

the later Ming dynasty should be re-evaluated as highly significant. At the same time, the relationship between Confucianism and the military of the late Ming dynasty needs to be examined in greater detail after the sixteenth century in order to ascertain the development of the relationship between moral ideology and the identity of civil and military officials alike. This will then shed further light on civil-military relations of the seventeenth century, and the course of knowledge formation and circulation. Until this research is done, we will lack an important facet in our understanding of the development of civil-military relations during the late Ming dynasty.

The history of the militarization of the literati elites of sixteenth-century can only be understood with reference to the philosophy of Wang Yangming in particular, and *xinxue* in general. Its innate moral subjectivism and downplaying of the absolute moral value of external phenomena like canonized Confucian writings, meant that whole generations of mainly southern literati and military men were able to reconcile their identities and ethics with each other. Wang Yangming's teaching allowed for building a bridge between *wen* and *wu*, a bridge Qi eagerly crossed. It also allowed for a syncretism applied to both traditions of thought and socio-cultural identity. Buddhism and Daoism could to a certain extent be reconciled with Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucianism, and be integrated in the moral inculcation method of the military under aegis of the latter. Civil and military officials could aspire to combine the identities of the Neo-Confucian *junzi* and sage, the sagely general, and the knight errant in one individual.

Qi Jiguang enjoys a good standing among modern military historians, and is often held up as an example of Chinese military innovative thinking to counteract persistent perceptions of lacklustre Chinese martial proclivities. In the final analysis, the unlikely irony is that Qi's accomplishments cannot be seen apart from his engagement with that oft-maligned origin of a posited Chinese a-military culture, Neo-Confucianism.