New Military Culture of the Mid-Ming Literati: Its Origins, Development, and Legacy



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A thesis submitted for the degree of
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Emperors of Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)

Hongwu 洪武 emperor

Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368–1398, temple name Taizu 太祖)

Jianwen 建文 emperor

Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆 (r. 1399–1402, temple name Huidi 惠帝)

Yongle 永樂 emperor

Zhu Di 朱棣 (r. 1403–1424, temple name Taizong 太宗)

Hongxi 洪熙 emperor

Zhu Gaochi 朱高熾 (r. 1425, temple name Renzong 仁宗)

Xuande 宣德 emperor

Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基 (r. 1426–1435, temple name Xuanzong 宣宗)

Zhengtong 正統 emperor (also reigned as Tianshun 天順 emperor)

Zhu Qizhen 朱祁鎮 (r. 1436–1449, 1457–1464, temple name Yingzong 英宗)

Jingtai 景泰 emperor

Zhu Qiyu 朱祁鈺 (r. 1450–1456, temple name Daizong 代宗 and Jingdi 景帝)

Chenghua 成化 emperor

Zhu Jianshen 朱見深 (r. 1465–1487, temple name Xianzong 憲宗)

Hongzhi 弘治 emperor

Zhu Youtang 朱祐樘 (r. 1488–1505, temple name Xiaozong 孝宗)

Zhengde 正德 emperor

Zhu Houzhao 朱厚照 (r. 1506–1521, temple name Wuzong 武宗)

Jiajing 嘉靖 emperor

Zhu Houcong 朱厚熜 (r. 1522–1566, temple name Shizong 世宗)

Longqing 隆慶 emperor

Zhu Zaihou 朱載垕 (r. 1567–1572, temple name Muzong 穆宗)

Wanli 萬曆 emperor

Zhu Yijun 朱翊君 (r. 1573–1620, temple name Shenzong 神宗)

Taichang 泰昌 emperor

Zhu Changluo 朱常洛 (r. 1620, temple name Guangzong 光宗)

Tianqi 天啟 emperor

Zhu Youjiao 朱由校 (r. 1621–1627, temple name Xizong 熹宗)

Chongzhen 崇禎 emperor

Zhu Youjian 朱由檢 (r. 1628–1644, temple name Sizong 思宗)

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Abstract

Recent research has shed light on imperial military culture of the early Ming, where the emperors actively engaged in martial activities such as military reviews and royal hunts when they were not leading armies in the field. The production of this culture was aided by the court officials who wrote celebratory paeans in praise of these activities, recorded and interpreted these events. However by the mid-Ming, a new military culture emerged and replaced the state-directed one. Spearheaded by the literati, this new military culture was a result of the increasing militarisation of the civil officials vis-à-vis the demilitarisation of the Ming emperors after the Tumu incident when the emperor-led Ming army was routed and the commander in chief was abducted by the Mongols. This thesis deals with this new military culture by examining it from three angles. First, I will examine the life and career of the celebrated literatus Tang Shunzhi who managed to successfully express his martial ideals in his literary output and also his service to the state. Next, at the the other end of the spectrum, we have He Liangchen whose life and career that we know little about and his only claim to fame was a military text he wrote. With this juxtaposition, I hope to cast a wider light on how literati from different social backgrounds actually engaged with the military culture. Finally, my examination concludes with a collective of literati who belonged to the institution of the private secretariat or *mufu*, which I believe, provided an official platform for these literati to take part in the production and consumption of this military culture. This new military culture spearheaded by literati elites was to leave a lasting legacy till the end of the dynasty.

(Thesis Word Count: 82,270 Words)

Acknowledgements

This work started with the chance purchase of a volume *Military Culture of in Imperial China* (Nicola di Cosmo, editor) sometime in 2009. I was living in Hong Kong with my wife, Yvonne, and my three year old son, Kai, because of my wife job posting. I became a student again with the encouragement from Yvonne and enrolled in a taught Master program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong earlier in 2008. After the completion of my program, I was at a loss with regards to my career and future. My stint at CUHK reignite my passion for history, and education in general. My desire to continue my education was equally matched by my fear of failure as a mature student. Acquiring and reading Nicola di Cosmo's edited work at that point in my life gave me the inspiration to commit myself in the serious study of military culture. I arranged to meet with a professor who taught a module on the Imjin War during my time at CUHK and we talked about how I might go forward. Through him, I was introduced to my prospective thesis supervisor in the National University of Singapore. I returned to Singapore the following year, enrolled myself in the Master of Chinese Studies program and as they say, the rest is history.

There are many people whom I want to acknowledge in my academic journey. And if I go by a chronological order, I will have to thank Professor Puk Wing-kin (Department of History, CUHK) for his course on the Imjin War and his sound advice on continuing my study back in Singapore. Also from the history department at CUHK, Professor Ian Morley's enthusiasm in his teaching and his research gave me the added motivation to embark on my journey as an academic.

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with his encouragement that I decided to apply to Oxford. After finding out that he could no longer be my DPhil thesis supervisor, Dr Ditmanson was kind enough introduce me to other prospective supervisors in the Faculty of Oriental Studies. And now, a big 'thank you' to my DPhil supervisor, Prof. Barend J. Ter Haar, for taking me under his wing and putting up with my rather erratic schedule (because I was working two jobs). But most importantly, he had given me the freedom to explore, to make mistakes, and to have the confidence of a scholar. Thank you, Prof. Anne Gerritsen and Prof. Tan Tian Yuan for being my thesis examiners. Thank you for your expertise, the critical reading and assessment of my work, and for your kind advice that made the last leg of my doctoral journey that much more enriching and enjoyable. I will not forget the people that made my time in Oxford so memorable— my school mates, my friends at St Andrew's Church, my neighbours who invited me into their homes, the wonderful students that I've had the privilege to teach, and everyone from St. Cross College.

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Dominus illuminatio mea

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1. Introduction

1.1 Opening Remarks

In the course of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), more precisely during the sixteenth century, a new military culture was produced. Contrary to what one might expect, it was not professional soldiers, but members of the social elite who played the central role in cultivating and propagating this new culture. The core of this social elite was made up of the literati who subscribed to Confucian philosophy, which by mid-Ming times was firmly rooted in the classical learning of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song masters Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) which became the de facto Ming state ideology. They could be scholar-officials working in the civil bureaucracy of the Ming government. They could also be the numerous scholars who were united by the common goal of studying and passing (or failing) the civil service examination— which by the mid-Ming had evolved into a ruthless machine that crushed the dreams of officialdom of thousands of scholars, while allowing only a handful to join the civil service. Literati frustrations and anxiety went hand in hand and led to what is known as 'male anxiety' in late imperial China.[1] Nevertheless, the literati class with their accumulated cultural capital dominated Ming society as the chief producers of culture and the final arbiters of taste.[2] Just as a member of the literati was a 'licensed practitioner of classical

[1] Tian Rukang, *Male anxiety and female chastity: a comparative study of Chinese ethical values in Ming-Ch'ing times* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988). See also Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 150.
[2] Wu Jen-shu's works on literati culture and material consumption provides us a comprehensive look into how the late-Ming literati associate their cultural production and consumption with their individual identity and social status. Wu Jen-shu 巫仁恕, *Pinwei shehua: Wan Ming de xiaofei wenhua yu shidafu* 品味奢華：晚明的消費文化與士大夫.

(learning who possessed interpretative power to reproduce and alter the [Confucian] canon', as a social class they also shaped and defined what exactly was high culture in the Ming society.[3]

Literati produced a distinct culture since Song times which included writing, calligraphy, painting, poetry, and music, which together were generally considered as high art. The pursuit of high art defined the social identity of the literati, and their excellence in any of those activities would elevate their social standing among the literati class. Literati culture or *shiren wenhua* 士人文化 was thus dominated by *wen* 文 or 'civil'. To become a *junzi* 君子 Confucian gentleman in the Ming, was to study and possess *wen*. 'Civil' values were valued in the Ming at the expense of other values.

So, what of *wu* 武 then? The traditional 'martial' half of the *wen-wu* concept in Chinese thought, I will argue, is still very much relevant in the Ming. As recent scholarship by David Robinson has shown, military culture in the early to mid-Ming was very much an imperial initiative.[4] Early Ming emperors were 'martial-conscious' as they engaged in military activities such as hunting, horse-riding, archery, and frequently drilling their troops in the Forbidden City. Civil officials wrote poetry and prose to celebrate their masters' martial ethos, and in return, the literati elites became collaborators in the production of the imperial military culture. Paeans were composed in praise of the emperors' military victories. Early Ming emperors were militant as they continued to pursue an aggressive foreign policy against the Mongols and to project their power and prestige via overseas diplomatic missions with lots of

[3] Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of the Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 421-423.
[4] David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013).

'firepower'— as seen in Admiral Zheng He's naval fleet. Policy debates in the Ming court exhibited a high level of offensive motivations. As observed by Wang Yuan-Kang, the "benevolent and antimilitarist ideas embedded in Confucianism appeared to have little or no effect on Ming strategic choice".[5] Such a view is not incongruent when applied to the Ming foreign policy in its entirety. However, things did took a turn after the Tumu Crisis in 1449 with the defeat and near total annihilation of the elite Ming troops, and the humiliating capture of the Zhengtong 正統 emperor (r.1435–1449, 1457–1467) himself by the Oirat Mongols. The official rhetoric after that crisis became much more anti-martial, especially when it concerned the emperors and their activities. But this anti-martial sentiments that originated from the scholar-officials was directed more at the throne, and less on foreign policy. Emperors were no longer praised for their martial ethos and the officials took a more conservative and cautionary view of the emperor's military ambitions.

Even as imperial martial ethos was diminished, Ming military culture continued to grow as it was now produced, cultivated, and disseminated by none other than the literati. Even though the emperor held the ultimate decision power, as historian Charles O. Hucker observes, "the civil service dominated government to an unprecedented degree."[6] The founding Hongwu 洪武 "Vastly Martial" emperor (r.1368–1398) had already devised a series of measures to limit and control the power of the military leaders and institutions, centralising authority in the state bureaucracy. Kai Filipiak has illustrated that the transfer of military authority from the military class (professionals) to the civil officials (non-professionals)— was largely completed

[5] Wang Yuan-Kang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 122-123.
[6] Charles O. Hucker, "Ming Government," in *The Cambridge History of China: The Ming Dynasty / Volume 8*, Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

by the Xuande 宣德 emperor's reign (r.1425–1435) as civil officials began to consider border affairs (civilian and military) to be part of the broader responsibilities of the civil bureaucracy.[7] *Yushi* 御史 or censors were sent from the Censorate to inspect military garrisons but gradually overrode the authority of the military officers as military administration became too complex for the largely illiterate officer class to deal with. And during military emergencies, the post of Grand Coordinator or *xunfu* 巡撫 (and later Supreme Commanders or *Zongdu* 總督) was created to handle all strategic and tactical matters— jobs that belonged to the military generals traditionally. It was a culmination of the imperial policy of 'civilising' the government for peaceful rule with the secondary aim of curbing the power of the military which the throne considered a destabilising factor in the long term. Although military elites enjoyed a prominent status in the early Ming, after the first few decades of the dynasty, the military establishment "came under the almost complete dominance and control of the civil service."[8]

All these were important factors leading to the birth of a literati military culture from the Zhengde emperor's reign (1505–1521) onwards. As the practice of having civil officials handling military matters became normalised, more and more literati (regardless of whether they were government officials or not) began to pay attention to military matters and serious study of military knowledge became acceptable and was even encouraged. Eventually, such interests in military matters developed into fashionable pursuits for many members of the literati class, as noted by a contemporary observer.[9] The challenges brought along by the social changes and

[7] Kai Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times," in *Ming Studies*, issue 66 (Sep 2012), 7.
[8] Hucker, "Ming Government," 29, 54-55.
[9] Shen Defu in his *biji* 筆記 'brush notes' collection *Wanli yehuo bian* recorded a fair number of Ming literati who engaged in military studies and practiced martial arts because of the military challenges the

foreign threats in the mid-Ming forced many social elites to re-examine their identities and responsibilities. It is my aim to examine closely the nature of this military culture— the various factors that contributed to its birth in the first place, the people who were involved in its production, promotion, its dissemination and consumption.

Ming regime faced from the mid-Ming onwards. Shen Defu 沈德符, *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編, *juan* 17 (Beijing: Zhonghu shuju 中華書局, 2007), 435.

1.2 Periodisation

This thesis focuses on the emergence of a new military culture in the mid-Ming period, as opposed to an earlier military culture that was in place throughout the early Ming. David Robinson's work on martial spectacles of the Ming court noted that the period (the first six decades of the 15th century) under the first six Ming emperors after the founding Hongwu emperor— Jianwen, Yongle, Hongxi, Xuande, Zhengtong, and Jingtai, witnessed a flourishing of martial activities that were intended to bolster the imperial image of warrior emperors and (in Robinson's words) "as both grand entertainment and a reminder that military force remained a central pillar of the dynasty."[10] In a broader context, the early Ming martial spectacles were part of a deep engagement with the Northern Yuan court and other Mongol polities in the steppes.[11] In other words, an important function of the military culture of the early Ming was to challenge the departed Mongols for political legitimacy— all in a manner that could be understood and even appreciated by contemporary Eurasian rulers. Military prowess was common political language that could be easily understood by the Ming emperor's Mongol enemies and allies.[12] The 15th century East Eurasia was after all, a Chinggisid world.[13] And so, the first century of the Ming regime was a period where imperial martial ethos was purposefully cultivated and martial prowess was in full display.

However, as also noted by Robinson, the military disaster at Tumu when the Zhengtong emperor led his first military campaign sent a shockwave throughout the

[10] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 5.
[11] Ibid.
[12] David Robinson noted that the early Ming emperors from 14th to 15th century committed vast military, economic, and political capital to attract Mongol allies in their bid to become the 'lord of lords' of Eurasia. It was not the emperors' superior virtues nor the civilisation wonders of the Chinese in the dynastic rhetoric that did the job. David M. Robinson, *Ming China and its Allies: Imperial Rule in Eurasia*, 1-13.
[13] Ibid., 15.

Ming empire, fundamentally changing court rhetoric surrounding military matters and altering the martial ethos of the succeeding emperors after Zhengtong. There was a changing understanding and representation of the martial ethos at the beginning of the second century of the Ming dynasty during the reigns of the Chenghua (r. 1465–1487) and Hongzhi (r. 1488–1505).[14] Court officials were increasingly critical of emperors who displayed martial ambitions when at the same time, military matters in the government gradually fell within the purview of these civil officials. The demonstrably militant Zhengde emperor (r. 1506–1521) had to face complaints and criticisms from his officials from the moment he took the throne and continued until his death in a boating accident. His successor Jiajing (r. 1522–1566), whose long reign saw the end the of the second century of the dynasty and the beginning of the third and last century, was only interested in martial spectacles as rituals to legitimise his rule. The Jiajng emperor was eager to distance himself from the 'follies' of his predecessor and so being a militant ruler was never high on his 'to-do list'.

It was specifically during the reigns of Zhengde and Jiajing, in the last half of the second century of the Ming, that a new military culture, spearheaded by the literati, came into existence. It was markedly different from the one that was initiated and cultivated by the early Ming emperors in the first century of the dynasty. This new military culture was to have a lasting impact on the military fortunes of Ming when the reigns of the Longqing (r. 1567–1572) and Wanli (r. 1573–1620) emperors ushered in the last century of the dynasty. Although my periodisation do coincide with the conventional way in which the 300 years of Ming dynasty is divided to three periods of roughly 100 years, my decision was also informed by the significant events

[14] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 205.

that range from political upheavals to cultural changes to shifts in intellectual trends.[15] This is very much my rationale for situating my narrative in the 'mid-Ming' period.

[15] Interestingly, such a method of periodization can also be found in the study of Ming literature. For example, Sun-Chang Kang-i distinguished the early and mid-Ming by further dividing them into three periods (1375 to 1450, 1450 to 1520, and 1520 to 1572). Her rationale for this division was also based on significant events (such as the Tumu incident) that led to an intellectual shift (weakness of the central government after Tumu gave rise to intellectual freedom). Sun-Chang, Kang-i, "Literature of the early Ming to mid-Ming (1375–1572)", in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, 1-3.

1.3 Military Culture from the Early Ming to the Mid-Ming

1.3.1 Military Culture in the Early Ming

In order to understand the military culture of the literati in the mid-Ming, we need to start by examining the development of military culture in the early Ming to mid-Ming. This is especially important because Ming military culture was very much a state-directed initiative in the early days of the dynasty. The emperors were the chief architects of this grand project of projecting the martial prowess of the dynasty to its people and the nations surrounding the Ming empire. The civil officials became important collaborators in creating an imperial martial image.

The Ming dynasty was founded on horseback and by gunpowder. Its empire was expanded, secured, and maintained on the back of military strength. No other contemporary power devoted more resources to the military than the Ming.[16] The Ming state was both expansive and intrusive— requiring enormous standing armies to deal with enemies from many fronts, and to extend imperial control over her subjects— all these to fit the Ming founder's vision of an ideal empire. Despite the Qing dynasty's rhetoric of the weakness of the Ming military (as a result of the presumed laissez-faire decadence of the late-Ming society) vis-à-vis the genius of the Qing military, the Ming had on many occasions dealt with many foreign aggressions successfully.[17] The early Ming witnessed overwhelmingly successful military campaigns which many scholars attributed to the effective employment of firearms and this sparked off the argument of a global 'military revolution' that began in Ming

[16] David M. Robinson, "Why Military Institutions Matters for Ming History.", in *Journal of Chinese History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2017): 297.
[17] The early Qing imperial rhetoric tend to contrast martial values of the Manchus against the literary emphasis of Chinese culture and the extravagant culture of consumption that characterized the late-Ming. Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty*, International Library of War Studies 7 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 1-3.

China.[18] There were disastrous military setbacks of course. In the early Ming, the Tumu Crisis of 1449 saw the near total destruction of Ming arm forces and the capture of the Zhengtong emperor by the Oirat Mongols.[19] In the late-Ming, the military was decimated by a smaller, but much more superior Manchu army of the Nurhaci at the Battle of Sarhu in 1619.[20]

But things were not that different for the Qing dynasty. The Qing state, especially under the Qianlong emperor (r.1736–1795), focused intensely on their "military values" and led to, what Joanna Waley-Cohen termed, the "militarization of culture".[21] Wars of imperial expansion and the transformation of culture all played a part in the creation of a uniquely Qing form of national ideology.[22] Despite the efforts of early Qing rulers to promote a distinctive Manchu military culture where its foundation rested firmly in the Eight Banners, this martial elitism of the Manchus already began to erode away after the last great victory of emperor Kangxi's Second Tibetan campaign in 1720, according to Hirano Satoshi.[23] The military achievements such as the two Jinchuan campaigns 大小金川之役 (1747 and 1771) and the Burma campaign (1765–1769) that supposedly marked the brilliant reign of Qianlong were, in reality, evidence of the beginning of the decline of the Qing military.[24] Yet, the Qing regime continued to uphold their martial image and military traditions right up

[18] Sun Laichen, "Military Technology Transfers from Ming China and the Emergence of Northern Mainland Southeast Asia (c. 1390-1527)." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, No. 3 (2003): 499. Tonio Andrade saw the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang's use of firearms as a critical factor in the establishment of the Ming dynasty. Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 55-72.
[19] Arthur Waldron, The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90.
[20] Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–44* (London: Routledge, 2014), 19-33.
[21] Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty*, 1.
[22] Idem. 26.
[23] Hirano Satoshi 平野 聰, *Da Qing diguo yu zhonghua de hun mi* 大清帝國與中華的混迷, trans. Lin Qizhen 林琪禎 (Taipei: Gūsa Publishing 八旗文化, 2018), 192.
[24] Idem. 193-194.

till the Opium War vis-à-vis the weakness of the Ming military, at least according to the official narrative.

The early Qing emperors were certainly behind the elaborate militarization of culture. The early Ming emperors, who were influenced by their Mongol predecessors, also tried their hands creating a martial ethos that was uniquely Ming, no less. Rulers like the Hongwu emperor, the Yongle emperor, Tamerlane (who gained control of the Chagatai Khanate by 1370 and saw himself as heir to Chinggis Khan), and Toqtamïsh (Tokhtamish) of the Blue Horde (1342–1406) tried their best to turn the Mongol legacy to their advantage after the Mongol empire collapsed and a new world emerged in the mid-14th century.[25] David Robinson's work already cast light on how the early Ming emperors, starting with the Hongwu emperor and right down to the Zhengtong emperor, attempted to emulate their Mongol predecessors and the Eurasian military traditions.[26] The early Ming emperors took part in royal hunts and grand military reviews (*dayue* 大閱).[27] Just as the emperors Kangxi and Qianlong enjoyed their autumn hunts at Mulan hunting reserve (木蘭圍場, in present day Chengde, Hebei) as part of an inner Asia tradition and Qing military ritual, the Ming emperors Yongle and Xuande took their hunts at the Southern Lakes (*Nanyuan* 南苑) hunting reserve (Nanhaizi Park 南海子 in modern Beijing) very seriously.[28] Recent Ming historical scholarship has brought to light a thriving military culture throughout the dynasty, not just in her early years.[29] From the beginning of the Ming till its fall, there was a martial side of the dynasty on an equal foot with its civilian one.

[25] David M. Robinson, *In the Shadow of the Mongol Empire: Ming China and Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 29.
[26] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*.
[27] Idem, 181-182.
[28] Idem. 342-343.
[29] Besides the works of David Robinson. Here are some other examples— Kai Filipiak's research on Ming civil-military relations. Wang Hong Tai's 王鴻泰 research on Ming socio-cultural history

But the grandeur of these Ming martial spectacles alone, even with the inclusion of the material culture associated with the military, could not create a military culture. I would argue that the Ming military culture was promoted and transmitted mainly through texts. Peter Perdue remarked that the Chinese possessed the "hegemony of inscriptions."[30] Just as the Qing under Qianlong devoted much effort and resources in creating documentary records, large-scale memorial stelae, commemorative illustrations and other paintings of Qing military conquests, the Ming likewise pursued a similar program of militarisation of culture in her early years, and to a certain extent, right up till the end of the dynasty. For the Ming, this "hegemony of inscriptions" rested firmly in the hands of the literati. Ming military campaigns, the martial spectacles in the form of military reviews, polo matches, archery contests, and royal hunts— all these events were recorded and interpreted by many members of the literati and their accounts were filtered through the perspectives of gender, socioeconomic status, intellectual orientation and political interest.[31] As David Robinson's research has shown, the Ming scholar officials and other literati elites witnessed, recorded, analysed and commented on the military events throughout the duration of the dynasty. They frequently sought to give meaning to these events- whether these meanings were meant for the glorification of the throne or to serve the interests of the literati themselves. During the reigns of Yongle and Xuande, Hanlin 翰林 scholars and court officials very much treasured the prestige of accompanying the emperor on military campaign and various martial activities. When scholar-officials such as Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1365–1444) wrote about these martial activities,

frequently touches on the literati and their military culture while Kathleen Ryor also examined *wen* & *wu* cultural practices among the social elites from an art historian's point of view.

[30] Peter C. Perdue, "Military Mobilization in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century China. Russia, and Mongolia" in *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 30, no. 4 (1996): 782.

[31] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 20.

they were in effect also reminding the readers of their privileged access to the throne.[32]

Ultimately, these narratives helped to advance the political interest of the Ming emperors— articulating and shaping the emperors' visions of rulership and identity- not merely as sage kings but also as military leaders. Most of the early Ming emperors understood that rulership does not exist in the abstract but must be demonstrated. And it is through these demonstrations and the meanings that they carried that we can understand the nature of the Ming emperors' military ethos. But make no mistake, the military culture and ethos of the Ming emperors and the Ming dynasty was first filtered through the minds of these members of the literati before being recorded in writing.

The early Ming emperors were the main driving force behind the creation and promotion of the Ming military culture. The Ming founder pursued an aggressive military policy against the remnants of the Yuan Mongols until the Ming army suffered a major defeat in 1372.[33] As a result, Edward Dreyer believed that after 1372, military affairs ceased to be the primary concern of the Hongwu emperor as he turned his attention to the recruitment and growth of the civil bureaucracy. A good example was the Hongwu emperor's warning to his descendants not to give in to the temptation of military achievements by starting wars of expansion.[34] However, the Ming founder did continue to pay attention to his vast military machine— worrying about its maintenance, the morale and discipline of the soldiers, and most importantly, their readiness for war. The new empire maintained a large army and devised a

[32] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 81.
[33] Edward L. Dreyer, "Military Origins of Ming China," in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 103.
[34] Edward L. Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation: The Reordering of Chinese Society following the End of Mongol Rule* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 119.

complex administration to manage the troops and their generals.[35] The Hongwu emperor directed one of his four Grand Pronouncements (*dagao* 大誥) of 1385-87 to address disciplinary issues of military personnel. In one of the 44 placards (*bangwen* 榜文- extra-legal documents for public communication) that were published during Hongwu's reign, he addressed specifically the failure of (hereditary) military officers in coaching their children in the art of horse riding and archery.[36] Hongwu's concerns about his soldiers' military skills extended from the children of hereditary military families to his own sons. His *Ancestral Instructions* (*Zuxun* 祖訓) dictate that "hunting expeditions and military manoeuvres by the princes may be undertaken starting in the tenth month and ending in the third month".[37] The princes were also required to patrol the borderlands where they were to hunt in each fall and winter. A more balanced view would be that there were a civil, and a military dimension to the Hongwu emperor's governing apparatus and both were of equal importance in the foundation years of the Ming.[38] Peter Lorge states that "war was paramount in building both Zhu Yuanzhang's own power and that of his empire" and that the emperor attended to the civil administration because of the need to support his armed forces.[39] The Prince of Qi 齊王 (Zhu Fu 朱榑) was instructed by his father to lead his princely guard in an encirclement hunt near Kaiping 開平, an important garrison along the northern border. As late as 1392, six years before his death, Zhu Yuanzhang

[35] It is recorded that there were 493 guard stations (*wei* 衛) in the empire in the early 15th century. There were theoretically 5,600 soldiers in each *wei,* thus making the total number troops of Ming army at 2.7 million. This number was likely inflated but even with a discount of half, a million-men army required great deal of management. *MS*, *juan* 76, 1873-1875.
[36] Chan Hok-lam 陳學霖, *Ming Taizu (r. 1368-98) and the Foundation of the Ming Dynasty in China* (Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate, 2011)*,* 24.
[37] Translation found in Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation: The Reordering of Chinese Society following the End of Mongol Rule,* appendix 1, 144.
[38] John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368-1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire* (Lanham, etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 29.
[39] Peter Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795* (London: Routledge, 2005), 98.

was still mindful of the military skills of men serving under him that he gave the following order to princely Escort Guards:

> Whenever hunting, a few dozen men from the guards must be selected to fully arm themselves and to undergo training, so that they will get used to the hardship, and will remain fearless in action.
> 護衛士卒，每遇出獵，必選數十騎，披堅執銳以訓練之，使之常習勞苦，則臨陣不怯。[40]

The Ming founder's military ethos was inherited by the Yongle emperor, who aimed to surpass his father in all things military. In order to claim his place in history as a great ruler, Yongle saw military conquests as an important means to this end. He sought to expand his empire's political, cultural and economic influence on the border regions in the north, northwest and northeast; deep into Inner Asia; and through maritime Asia to the lands beyond the Persian Gulf. Even though Yongle's foreign policy was largely peaceful in its outlook, the emperor was not hesitant in the use of force if circumstances warranted it.[41] In 1406, a political coup in Annam had given the Ming the perfect excuse to take military action. Annam was then formally incorporated into the Ming Empire on 5 July 1407, although this would only last until 1427.[42] After Annam, the emperor turned his attention to the Western Mongols, made up of the Oirat tribes, who were frequently at war with the Ming and the Eastern Mongols. He personally led a total of five major campaigns against the Mongols. In one of the campaigns, close to half a million men was mobilized allegedly and this attested to the military might of the early Ming.

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[40] *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄*, juan 208* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962-1968), 3097.
[41] Chan, *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 222.
[42] Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795*, 117.

The Yongle emperor also sought to extend his influence over the states and kingdoms of the South Seas, in the Indian Ocean, and in the lands farther east. He launched a total of seven maritime expeditions in 1405, 1407, 1409, 1413, 1417, 1421, and 1430 commanded by the eunuch Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433). Timothy Brook argued that Zheng He's purpose was diplomatic: a mission to declare to all tributary states known to China that Yongle was now the emperor. There was no intention for conquest. New tributary states were also added to the roster of states that acknowledged Ming suzerainty.[43] John E. Wills also saw the expeditions as fundamentally limited and defensive in purpose.[44] But with a sizeable military force attached to the enormous Chinese armada, Zheng He was literally making offers that these native rulers could not refuse. It was diplomacy that was not at all peaceful as the Ming admiral was not above using force.

While engaging in his aggressive foreign policies, the Yongle emperor was also busy moving the imperial capital from Nanjing to Beiping (now renamed Beijing, the "northern capital"), implicitly aligning the Ming with the warrior traditions of the Jurchen Jin and the Mongol Yuan, rather than the literati traditions of the Song.[45] This also meant a distancing from the Confucian influence of the short-lived Jianwen court- an influence that was championed by none other than Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 (1357–1402), who was troubled by the survival of Mongol cultural contamination into the early Ming.[46] Yongle looked to Khubilai Khan for his models despite his efforts to present himself as a follower of the Sage emperors of antiquity to appease the literati

[43] Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 94.
[44] Wills, Jr, John E., John Cranmer-Byng, Willard J. Peterson, Jr, and John W. Witek, *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.
[45] Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*, 93.
[46] John Dardess, "Did the Mongols Matter?" in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds. (MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 115.

and, hopefully, clear his rule from the stench of illegitimacy. The scholar officials, especially those who were close to the throne, were certainly sensitive to the change in the tone of rulership. As a result, they sympathised with the military ethos of the Yongle emperor by deliberately crafting a political rhetoric that was largely pro-military as one of the early Ming's 'campaigns of persuasion', as mentioned by David Robinson.[47] These pro-military writings by the scholar-officials often came in the form of poetry and paeans. For example, Xia Yuanji 夏元吉 (1366–1430) who served under Yongle as the minister of revenue and helped funded Yongle's ambitious plans for war and construction, wrote a short poem about a grand review which he had attended before a campaign against the Mongols led by the emperor in 1411.[48] Senior minister and later Grand Secretary Hu Guang 胡廣 (1369–1418), who was also present during the northern campaigns, composed poems to commemorate the emperor's frequent hunts between battles.[49] During the campaign in 1414, Hu Guang combined descriptions of the war with the Mongols with hunting animals in a poem.[50] The Grand Secretaries Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1365–1444) and Yang Rong 楊榮 (1371–1440) also wrote similarly martial-themed poetry for the emperor.[51]

The Yongle emperor was well aware of the Mongol custom of the imperial hunt and its symbolic value. Like his Mongolian counterparts (including the preceding

[47] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 2.
[48] Xia Yuanji 夏元吉, "Yongle xingmao jiang yong bing yu shamo er yue dayue yu Beijing cheng dong shi Hanlin Jin shijiang you shi yin ci qi yun" 永樂辛卯將用兵於沙漠二月大閱於北京城東時翰林金侍講有詩因次其韻 in *Xia Zhongjing gong ji* 夏忠靖公集*, juan* 4, collected in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊, vol. 100, 690.
[49] Hu Guang 胡廣, "Sui lie Longqing zhou" 隨獵隆慶州 and "Sui lie Huailai yu da feng han shen" 隨獵懷來遇大風寒甚, in *Hu Wenmu gong wen ji* 胡文穆公文集, *juan* 8, collected in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji 28,* 582.
[50] Hu, "Chu sai ouran zuo 出塞偶然作" in *Hu Wenmu gong wen ji* 胡文穆公文集, *juan* 20, collected in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji* 28, 189.
[51] Yang Rong 楊榮, "Ganlu shi 甘露詩" in *Yang Wenmin gong ji* 楊文敏公集, *juan* 1, 6. Also see Yang Shiqi 楊士奇, "Ganlu fu 甘露賦" in *Dong li wen ji* 東里文集, *juan* 24, 358.

Yuan dynasty rulers), he planned his imperial hunts in advance and maintained a court that held martial spectacles such as military reviews and archery contests even when he was out campaigning in the steppes. These martial spectacles were meant to impress those who were present (the court officials, foreign dignitaries, etc.). The senior officials were quick to recognise this and were instrumental in providing the interpretative narratives that helped to give more significance to the emperor's martial leanings.

When Yongle died on campaign in August 1424, his son Zhu Gaochi 朱高熾 took the throne as the Hongxi 洪熙 emperor. However, Hongxi's reign was cut short by his premature death less than a year later and his son, Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基, ascended the throne as the Xuande emperor. Hongxi was lauded as "a ruler who ruled in an exemplary Confucian manner and exhorting his officials to do the same."[52] It is not difficult to imagine the relief felt by civil officials with Hongxi's ascension and their collective despair when the emperor died so soon, since Hongxi's reign had been likely to become a departure from the militant and draconian style of Hongwu and Yongle. It was fortunate then, that Hongxi's successor, the Xuande emperor, was also a "Confucian monarch excelling in the arts and literature and dedicated to benevolent government."[53] It seemed that all would be well for the civil bureaucracy after all. The reality, however, was not quite as expected (or hoped for). The Xuande emperor turned out to be a worthy successor of Yongle as he was in essence every bit as martial as his grandfather despite paying attention to his civil governance. Xuande was a keen huntsman who hunted regularly, just like his grandfather, who saw the royal hunt as a way to conduct diplomacy, to demonstrate his qualifications to rule

[52] Dreyer, *Early Ming China*, 223.
[53] Chan, *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 303.

and to strengthen his ties with his military commanders.[54] As a result, the young "imperial grandson" had spent a lot of time with his grandfather.[55] As a teenager, the future Xuande emperor accompanied his grandfather Yongle on three of his campaigns against the Mongols.[56] He was an enthusiastic hunter who tried to hunt whenever the opportunity arose, whether it was a military tour of the borders or a trip to venerate his ancestors at the imperial tombs. Like Yongle, Xuande saw that hunting and border defense were linked.[57] In a court painting titled *Amusements in the Xuande emperor's palace*, the emperor was depicted as an active participant in recreational sports such as archery, football, golf and an arrow-throwing game called *touhu* 投壺 — palace sports that were based on military training exercises for the infantry and cavalry.[58] The painting suggests how much did the Xuande emperor valued military training.[59] In paintings such as 'Hunting by a lake' and 'Emperor Xuanzong on horseback', we have representations of the emperor engaged in activities that glorify their martial ethos— something that could again be seen in later Qing paintings of the Qianlong emperor by the Jesuits.[60]

Because of the short reign of Hongxi, the Xuande emperor was able to inherit the civil officials who had served so brilliantly under Yongle. As a result, these officials who worked to create the duo image of Yongle as a sage emperor and a military leader could continue to do the same for the Xuande emperor. Grand Secretary Yang Pu 楊溥 (1375-1446) wrote a series of ten poems to mark the occasion when the emperor patrolled the northern border defenses in 1426, the second

[54] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming* Court, 54.
[55] *MS*, *juan* 9, 115.
[56] *Ming Taizong shilu* 明太宗實錄, *juan* 149, 1739-1740.
[57] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming* Court, 59.
[58] Unknown artist, *Amusements in the Xuande emperor's palace* 明宣宗宮中行樂圖, in *Court Painting and Calligraphy of the Ming Dynasty* 明代宮廷書畫珍賞, 130-133.
[59] David M. Robinson, "*Wu*— The Arts of War", in *Ming: 50 Years that changed the* World, 145.
[60] Both paintings can be found in in *Ming: 50 Years that changed the* World, 141-142.

year of his reign.[61] In the second poem of this series, Yang Pu mentioned how the Shang and Zhou dynasties of antiquity had been wise to use "virtue as defense 以德為保障", in contrast with the "Qin and Sui dynasties which overexerted themselves with their foreign policies 秦隋勤遠略" and "succumbed to internal rebellions 禍亂起蕭牆". Instead of adopting the usual laudatory tone for such poems, Yang Pu inserted cautionary themes. Both the Qin and Sui dynasties were short lived because their over-ambitious foreign policies backfired. The Qin dynasty's conquests and the building and maintenance of its vast military complex led to its downfall in the hands of the rebels. Sui's attempted conquests of the Korean kingdom of Koryō ended in failure contributed to the disintegration of the Sui authority. It is interesting to note the departure of Yang Pu's poems in terms of the glorification of the martial, from those of his esteemed colleagues. However, we must remember that this was the time of 'granting rest with the people 與民休息' for the regime- where the Xuande emperor was consciously undoing some of the more aggressive policies of Yongle. Although his views on the border defense against the Mongols remained firm, the emperor was nevertheless much more peace-oriented when it came to his approach in dealing with China's northern neighbours.

The early Ming emperors were vigorous in their martial pursuits and their senior officials (especially those from the Hanlin Academy) supported their masters' military ethos expressed through actual military engagements or martial spectacles. Esteemed members of the Grand Secretariat and other important of the emperor's personal entourage wrote prose and composed poetry— in praise of the martial spirit

[61] Yang Pu 楊溥, "Xuande bingwu hujia xunbian tuzhong ganxing shishou" 宣德丙午扈駕巡邊途中感興十首, in *Yang Wending gong shi ji* 楊文定公詩集, *juan* 2, collected in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, vol. 1326, 469.

demonstrated by the emperors and painting an overall picture of an era peace and prosperity.[62] Their combined poetic output included many 'by imperial command poems' (*yingzhi shi* 應制詩) and 'dedication poems' (*tizeng shi* 題贈詩), which are generally associated with the 'cabinet style' (*Taige ti* 台閣體) and encompasses a large body of literature composed by Hanlin scholars for official purposes.[63] These poems were largely composed under direct orders from the emperors, especially when they wanted their martial image to be highlighted and glorified along with their civil achievements. Although some officials might warn of the danger of too much focus being placed on the martial, very few challenged the idea that hunting, archery, horseback riding, polo matches, military review and even the emperor personally leading his troops in the field were natural activities for imperial rulers. Given the highly martial overall tone set by the early Ming emperors, officials certainly had no reservations about promoting the martial image of their emperor as their own careers and prestige in the court depended on it. Clearly, the production, promotion, and dissemination of Ming military culture in its early days was very much an imperial-directed, and officials-supported endeavour.

1.3.2 The Erosion of the Imperial Martial Ethos

The Xuande emperor passed away in January 1435 and a child-emperor was placed on the throne for the first time in Ming history. Zhu Qizhen 朱祁鎮 (1427–1464) was seven when he ascended the throne with the reign title Zhengtong 正統

[62] Xie Guian 謝貴安, "Ming Xuanzong gongting shenhuo tezheng yu yingxiang shulun 明宣宗宮廷娛樂生活特徵與影響述論"in *Ming Yongle Xuande wenwu tezhan* 明永樂宣德文物特展, vol. 2, 401.
[63] Fu Hongzhan 傅紅展, "Chenhan yu shutan liufeng— dui Mingdai gongting shufa de guancha" 宸翰與書壇流風−對明代宮廷書法的觀察 in *Court Painting and Calligraphy of the Ming Dynasty* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe 故宮出版社, 2009), 19.

and there was no way that the young emperor would know the tumultuous life that lay ahead of him or that he would be the only Ming emperor to enjoy two different reign titles.[64] Yingzong was to play a major role in the Tumu Incident of 1449, which saw the unnecessary annihilation of the elite 500,000 strong Ming forces by the Oirat Mongols. Dennis Twitchett called it the "greatest military fiasco in Ming times".[65] Frederick Mote unreservedly called Zhu Qizhen a "foolish and incompetent" emperor who allowed his elite army to perish and himself to be captured by the Oirat Mongols to be held as a hostage.[66] As a result, the near total destruction of the Ming army at Tumu and the capture of Yingzong became the symbols of the Ming's military and political decline. This no doubt contributed to the scholars' assessment of Yingzong's reign as one whereby the "activist emperors and prominent military ethos of the early Ming yielded to the growing dominance of the civil bureaucracy".[67] The Tumu debacle came to be seen as evidence of the character flaws of Yingzong.

When Yingzong was still young, there is no mention in the *Veritable Records* of any activities associated with the martial such as riding and hunting. However, a few years before the Tumu Incident of 1449, Yingzong started to participate in the martial culture of his family. For example in November 1445, the 18 year-old Yingzong hunted in the Southern Lakes.[68] A few days later, the Duke of Chengguo 成國公, Zhu Yong 朱勇 submitted a list of more than a dozen imperial sons-in-law and members of the merit aristocracy who were "lazy and did not obey the imperial

[64] Yingzong's capture by the Oirat Mongols and his subsequent reinstatement produced two different reign titles, Zhengtong 正統 and Tianshun 天順.For the sake of clarity and continuity, the temple name of Yingzong will be used throughout the paper.
[65] Denis Twitchett and Tileman Grimm, "The Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun Reigns, 1436-1464" in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty, Part. 1*, 305-342.
[66] Frederick Mote, "The Tu-mu Incident of 1449," in *Chinese Ways in Warfare,* ed. Frank Kierman and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 243-272.
[67] Robinson, *Martial Spectacle of the Ming* Court, 85.
[68] *Ming Yingzong shi lu* 明英宗實錄, *juan* 134, 2663.

rescript to practice mounted archery" but the throne pardoned their transgression.[69] During a trip to the imperial mausoleums in 1448, Yingzong inspected his troops and hunted just like his father, the Xuande emperor, who did the same on several occasions. Although not mentioned in the *Veritable Records*, Yingzong's martial activities were celebrated in two poems by the Hanlin scholar Ni Qian 倪謙 (1415–1479) who accompanied the emperor.[70]

Many officials saw the emperor's personal interest in his warriors as laudable and effective. However, the emperor's defeat and capture by the Mongols was highly symbolic. It forced the Ming court to reconceptualise the military and civil roles of the emperor. The Tumu incident sent a shockwave throughout the fabric of the Ming polity. The temporary removal of the Yingzong as the head of state led to the increase in authority of the civil bureaucracy— something that was unheard of since the abolition of the appointment of prime minister in 1380 by the Ming founder.[71] The military disaster and the political crisis that followed "worked as a stimulant on Ming China's institution and on political morale".[72] The subsequent rise of the civil bureaucracy under the leadership of Yu Qian 于謙 (1398–1457) was the closest thing to a "literati-run dynasty", never to be seen again for the rest of the Ming dynasty.

Mao Peiqi suggests that the institution of the Grand Secretariat started to crystallise into its mature form during that time and that the transformation was completed by the time Zhu Qizheng returned to power.[73] Zhu Qizheng knew that his

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[69] "…俱偷懶不奉詔習騎射" *Ming Yingzong shi lu*, *juan* 134, 2665.
[70] Ni Qian 倪謙, "Shi yue jun rong" 侍閱軍容 and "Yinshan cong lie" 銀山從獵 in *Ni Wenxi ji* 倪文喜集, *juan* 7, collected in *SKQS*, vol. 1245, 295.
[71] *Ming Taizu shilu*, *juan* 129, 550.
[72] Twitchett and Grimm, "The Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun reigns, 1436–1464" in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 331.
[73] Mao Peiqi 毛佩琦, "Ming Taizu de zhengzhi yi chan he jianwen, yongle de dui ce" 明太祖的政治遺產和建文，永樂的對策, in Ming Yongle Xuande wenwu tezhan 明永樂宣德文物特展, Vol. 2 (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe 故宮出版社, 2013), 351.

return to power was largely an initiative of officials in the court. As a result, the civil bureaucracy likely felt that they deserved to have a greater voice and believed that they had greater freedom to reconsider the proper role of the ruler and the workings of his government. Institutionally, the appointment of Grand Coordinators and other non-professionals to handle military affairs that began in Xuande's time limited the power of the Regional Commanders and other military officers. Civil officials increasingly 'considered the borderland to be a part of the civil administration rather than simply a military basis from which to launch attacks against the northern tribes.'[74] During the Zhengtong reign, Regional Commanders lost control over key military domains such as armament, weapons, fortifications, colonies, and supplies.[75] The fact is, after the near-total decimation of the Ming military at Tumu (literally and symbolically), the civil bureaucracy under the leadership of Yu Qian reached the peak of its power. As the military leadership weakened, civil officials gained influence in almost all military matters. As the prestige of the military was eroded, the civil officials began to question the necessity and relevance of continuing an ostentatious form of imperial military ethos.

Chu Hung-lam argues that after the Tumu incident, influential scholars and intellectuals of the day such as Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–95) and Zhou Hongmo 周洪謨 (1420–1492) began their challenge of the Song Confucian masters teachings.[76] Qiu Jun also offered his revisionist views on the military and imperial martial activities. There were more occurrences of mass demonstrations by court officials (especially those from the Six Offices of Scrutiny 六科 and the Censorate 都察院) to influence

[74] Kai Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times," 7.
[75] Fan Zhongyi 范中義, ''Lun Mingchao junzhi de yanbian'' 論明朝軍制的演變, in *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究, 2 (1998), 134.
[76] Chu Hung-lam 朱鴻林, "Intellectual Trends in the Fifteenth Century" in *Ming Studies*, 27 (1989), 6.

the decisions of the emperors than ever before— mainly because they felt that it was their moral obligation to do so and partly because there was an environment of increasing freedom to question and criticize.[77] The Jingtai emperor who was hastily put on the throne after his half-brother's abduction by the Oirat Mongols was advised by the Vice-Minister of War Li Xian 李賢 (1408–1466) to "rectify the roots" of the dynasty and "seek to eliminate all distractions from the important matters of moral cultivation and rulership."[78] One of these many distractions was engaging in the imperial hunt. The Minister of Rites Hu Ying 胡濙 (1375–1463) urged the emperor to heed the wise admonition of Li Xian "to pursue the teachings of the sages" and not to "lose oneself in the desires of the senses."[79] It is important to note that Li Xian was not against the military (especially since he was a firm supporter of Yu Qian's military reforms in the wake of the Tumu debacle). Rather, Li saw Zhengtong's overzealous military aspirations as the reason for Ming's defeat in the hands of the Mongols. Activities like the imperial hunts would only encourage the same unhealthy military zeal for the Jingtai emperor. It was important for the Jingtai emperor to learn from the mistakes of his predecessor. After the surprising turn of events that restored Yingzong to the throne in 1457, he was committed to a series of martial activities to bolster his claim to the throne as the rightful successor of Yongle and Xuande while hoping to recapture the martial glory of an earlier time (i.e. before the Tumu debacle). The restored Tianshun 天順 emperor became even more enthusiastic about the hunt and other associated martial activities like inspection of the troops than ever before.

[77] For a comprehensive account of the *yan guan* 言官 (another name for the officials from the Six Offices of Scrutiny) please see Cai Minglun 蔡明倫, *Mingdai yan guan qun ti yan jiu* 明代言官群體研究.
[78] Li Xian 李賢, "Shang zhong xing zheng ben ce 上中興正本策" in *Gu rang ji* 古穰集, 490.
[79] Hu Ying 胡濙, "Tai zi tai fu li bu shang shu Hu Ying deng fu zou" 太子太傅禮部尚書胡濙等復奏, in *Gu rang ji,* 494.

Robinson believes that if previously the Tianshun emperor had not fully appreciated the hunt's myriad ties to political prestige, military prowess, and kingly power, his time as a captive of the Mongols opened his eyes.[80] In December 1460, the emperor held another review of mounted archery in the Western Gardens. This time, it was the emperor's imperial bodyguards and reserves for the imperial guards who were inspected. Accompanying the emperor were Li Xian and Sun Jizhong 孫繼宗, commander of the Three Garrisons 三營總兵官.[81] Three weeks later, the emperor went on to inspect warhorses outside the capital.[82] Despite his effort, the tide of the literati's opinion with regards to the military ethos of the emperor was slowly but surely turning.

The successors of the Zhengtong/Yingzong Emperor were no longer actively seeking military glory as they were encouraged by the increasingly powerful civil officials to conform to Confucian ideals. Zhu Jianshen 朱見深 (Xianzong 憲宗) came to the throne in 1464 when his father Yingzong passed away. His new reign (Chenghua 成化, r. 1465–87), would usher in a new period in Ming history that saw an extended diminishing of imperial military ethos. Together with his successor the emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (Hongzhi 弘治, r.1488–1505), Chenghua seemed to demonstrate little interest in martial spectacles compared to their predecessors. However, I would like to argue that much as this low point was a reflection of the reality of Chenghua's reduced interests in martial spectacles, it was also very much a result of deliberate attempts by civil officials to recast their master in a non-militant light. Nevertheless, the twenty-three years of Chenghua reign that were followed by

[80] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 90.
[81] *Ming Yingzong shi lu, juan* 321, 6672-6673.
[82] Idem. *juan* 322, 6681.

eighteen years of Hongzhi were both confronted by military problems, both domestic and foreign, that the emperors did their best to resolve. The Chenghua emperor in fact identified with his military-minded grandfather (Xuanzong) and father (Yingzong) and was attracted to their aggressive and vigorous military postures.[83]

In May 1473, the Chenghua emperor conducted the first documented military review in the Western Gardens in more than a decade by the compiler of the *veritable records*:

> His Majesty was aware of the neglect in military preparedness and reviewed his officers' mounted archery skills in the Western Gardens. The emperor said to the commanding officer, the Marquis of Funing, Zhu Yong, " We reviewed the mounted archery skills of the dukes, marquis, and earls [merit aristocracy], and various commissioners-in-chief, commanders, commanders on-duty, company commanders and other military officers in the Western Gardens. Only four officers hit the target a perfect three out of three times; twenty-three men scored two out of three and ninety-nine men hit the target once. The rest failed to hit any target. There were those who failed to control their mounts and others who failed to draw their bow or even dropped their bows while on horseback!"
>
> 上以武備懈弛乃御西苑，命將官騎射。 敕諭總兵官撫寧侯朱永等曰，「朕親閱公，侯，伯，都督，指揮，指揮坐營，把總等官騎射於西苑。期間中三矢者僅四人，中二矢者二十三人， 中一矢者九十九人。余皆全不能中。間又有止發一二矢者。甚至馳驟失節，不能開弓發矢及墮弓於地者！」[84]

In this review, the emperor tested the mounted archery skills of the senior military officers from the capital garrisons. The emperor was disappointed with the poor

[83] Mote, "The Cheng-hua, and Hung-chih reigns, 1465-1505" in *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 371.
[84] *Ming Xianzong shi lu* 明憲宗實錄, *juan* 115, 2243-2244.

performance of his officers and held Zhu Yong responsible. Officers with potential for improvement were ordered to receive intensive training while others were dismissed. Seven months later, the emperor again held another review at the Western Gardens. This time round, newly commissioned officers and those who failed in the last review were tested for their mounted archery skills. The Earl of Dingxiang 定襄伯 Guo Song 郭嵩, the Earl of Anxiang 安鄉伯 Zhang Ning 張寧, The Earl Fuyang 富陽伯 Li Xing 李興, the Earl of Cheng'an 成安伯 Guo Huang 郭鎲 were stripped of their titles for failing the test.[85] The Chenghua emperor displayed his personal interest in these reviews— promoting and dismissing military personnel as he deemed fit and demonstrating his authority as the military commander-in-chief. Like Yongle and Xuande, Chenghua was generous with his rewards to military officials who performed successfully. During his reign, the emperor awarded nine earldoms, and one marquisate was created as rewards for military achievements.[86] The emperor also witnessed several major military campaigns of the fifteenth century such as the Datengxia 大藤峽 campaign (1465–66) and the Jingxiang 荊襄 campaign (1465–76). The emperor took a personal interest in both campaigns and had a hand in the selection and assignment of officials to resolve the crisis. Han Yong 韓雍 (1422–78), recommended by the Minister of War Wang Hong 王竑 , was promoted to Assistant Censor-in-chief by the emperor to lead an expeditionary force of 160,000 troops to crush the Yao rebellion in Datengxia. In the northern borders Ming China continued to be threatened by their most persistent enemies, this time with the rise of the 'Minor Princes' (Xiao Wangzi 小王子—lineal descendants of Genghis Khan who could claim legitimate leadership over the Mongol tribes). The Chenghua emperor

[85] *Ming Xianzong shi lu*, *juan* 122, 2250.
[86] Mote, *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 371.

was able to carry out effective military response by appointing the suitable civil officials for the jobs as the northern border wars carried on from 1468-82.[87] For example, the brilliant civilian commander Wang Yue 王越, then left censor-in-chief, led the famous victory over the Mongols at Red Salt Lake in 1473, the first in half a century after the Tumu incident. He continued to direct military operations in the Ordos region until 1475. Wang's success helped to buy time for the right censor-in-chief and governor of Yansui 延綏, Yu Zijun 余子俊 to complete his 600 miles of fortifications that ran from Shaanxi to Ningxia.[88]

Like his father the Chenghua emperor, the young Hongzhi emperor was also attracted to military matters. However, many court officials were determined to curb the emperor's martial interest. In 1488, the first year of Hongzhi's reign, the young emperor was given gyrfalcons (*hai dong qing* 海東青) by his uncle, the Prince of Dai 代王. It was deep into autumn and the gift was considered appropriate for the coming hunting season. The Grand Secretary Liu Ji 劉吉 and others saw the gift as inappropriate and suggested that it might even hurt the emperor's virtue.[89] The young emperor then rejected the gift and in his letter to the prince and stressed that "he would devote his free time to the pursuit of studies and governance, instead of hunting and going on excursions."[90] The emperor would reject also exotic animals from Samarkand that were sent as tributes in the second year of his reign.[91] Hongzhi seemed to be determined in following his officials' advice on resisting the temptation of exotic beasts. Later in his reign, the emperor also ordered the release of exotic

[87] Mote, *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty,* Part 1, 397-399.
[88] Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Western* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 59-60. For biographies of Wang Yue and Yu Zijun, see *DMB*, 1455-60 (Wang Yue), and 1620-24 (Yu Zijun).
[89] *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 明孝宗實錄, *juan* 19, 454.
[90] Idem. 455.
[91] *MS, juan* 15, 185.

animals kept by the eunuchs.[92] Unlike his martial predecessors, the Hongzhi emperor's legitimacy was to be based in his adherence to a vision of rulership that privileged diligence, gravity, and civil accomplishments over frivolous excursions and martial prowess. Hongzhi's civil officials were determined to see to it that the emperor would conform to their image of a wise ruler.

In 1487, Qiu Jun completed his magnum opus, *Daxue yanyi bu* 大學衍義補, and presented it to the throne. Written as a complementary text to Southern Song scholar Zhen Dexiu's 真德秀 *Daxue yanyi* 大學衍義, Qiu Jun's work focuses on the application of the philosophies discussed by Zhen Dexiu and expanded the scope of the previous text with his writings on rulership, or "ruling and bringing peace to the realm" (*zhi guo ping tian xia* 治國平天下). Like many contemporary literati, Qiu Jun was against the emperor cultivating his military ethos by indulging in activities such as imperial progresses, imperial hunt and archery.[93] Qiu Jun was not against military matters per se as the author devoted two out of the twelve chapters of *Daxue yanyi bu* on military defense. Qiu Jun's examination of military defense along the northern borders could very well be the most comprehensive discussion of its kind in the mid-Ming period.[94] However, Qiu Jiun's overall philosophy when it came to Ming's northern policy was non-aggressive and anti-expansionist. The central idea is the need for a just cause for war. In Qiu Jun's opinion, raising an army without provocation is not heavenly-sanctioned and thus, unworthy for a moral ruler. Based on this reasoning, Qiu Jun criticized the first emperor of the Qin and Yangdi 煬帝 of the Sui

[92] *MS, juan* 15, 194.
[93] For Qiu Jun's thoughts on imperial activities please see Qiu Jun 丘濬, "Wang chao zhi li" 王朝之禮, in *Da xue yan yi bu* 大學衍義補, *juan* 47, *SKQS*, vol. 712, 559.
[94] Lee Cheuk Yin 李焯然, *Qiu Jun ping zhuan* 丘濬評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe 南京大學出版社, 2005), 166.

dynasty for their egotism and misplaced desire for accomplishment. In defense matters, Qiu Jun was firmly against taking an aggressive and proactive stance—preferring to take a more defensive position.[95] Qiu Jun also warned against the emperor going personally into the field in a memorial discussing border defense:

> There is no need [for your Majesty] to personally drive the chariot with six horses into the desert, using the bow and arrows, and lower oneself to fight an undignified enemy that is like animals. There is no glory in winning. And if you lose, unfortunately, will it not encourage the arrogance of the barbarians and leave only humiliation to the Chinese?
>
> 正不必親駕六飛，躬臨沙漠之區，自親矢石之用，屈帝王之尊，為犬羊之敵。勝之不足以為武，不幸而敗，豈不長夷狄之威而貽中國之恥哉？[96]

In this instance, Qiu Jun was dangerously close to humiliating Hongzhi's grandfather, Yingzong. However, the Tumu debacle was too devastating an event for the Ming emperor to ignore. Qiu Jun was twenty-nine years of age when the Tumu incident happened, and it was possible that he had taken part in the defense of Beijing led by Yu Qian.[97] The disaster that befell the Ming regime at Tumu left an indelible mark on the literatus. Hongzhi was highly sympathetic to the pacifist attitudes of his Confucian officials— striving to meet their expectation as a moral exemplar. As a result, contemporary literati almost unanimously lauded Hongzhi as the emperor who rejuvenated mid-Ming politics because of his moral cultivation and, most importantly, his willingness to work with his Confucian scholar-officials. The emperor was not without military aspirations and continued to be concerned with military matters

[95] Idem. 170.
[96] Qiu Jun, "Shou bian gu yu zhi lue" 守邊固圉之略, in *Da xue yan yi bu*, *juan* 150 , in *SKQS*, vol. 713, 726.
[97] Lee, *Qiu Jun ping zhuan*, 167.

throughout his reign. Military reviews were still conducted which the emperor attended. He also frequently consulted officials about military matters after the morning audience and before the noon audience. For example, The Minister of War, Liu Daxia 刘大夏, was frequently summoned by the emperor after the official audience to discuss military issues privately.[98] Near the end of his reign in 1505, the Mongols once again raided the border defense zone at Datong. Xiaozong summoned his trusted grand secretaries to discuss the problem and asked, "Our dynasty's emperor Taizong (the Yongle emperor) often led his troops beyond the Great Wall; if there any reason why we cannot do the same in the present?" It was possible that the emperor was stirred by his sense of moral responsibility after hearing of the indignant raids by the Mongols. But at the same time, his trusted eunuch Miao Kui 苗逵 also encouraged the emperor to personally lead an army to repel the Mongols. The scene was frighteningly similar to that of Yingzong and his trusted eunuch Wang Zhen. Liu Daxia was strongly against this idea and with the help of other officials, managed to skilfully dissuade the emperor from likely repeating the mistake of Yingzong at Tumu.[99] Liu Daxia's argument was based on the perceived weakness of the Ming military machine vis-à-vis the Mongols. The morale of the troops, especially those from the hereditary military households, was at an all-time low. The actual fighting force was way below the nominal strength of three million officers and soldiers.[100] Both emperor and official knew that a major institutional reform must happen before things could be turned around for the Ming military. When Hongzhi's notorious successor, the Zhengde emperor (r. 1505–1521) attempted to emulate his martial

[98] Chen Hongmo 陳洪謨, "Zhi shi yu wen" 治世余聞, in *Cong shu ji cheng xin bian* 叢書集成新編, 720.
[99] Chen Hongmo, "Zhi shi yu wen" 治世余聞, in *Cong shu ji cheng xin bian*, 720.
[100] Mote, *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty, Part 1*, 373.

ancestors by taking on a personal interest of the military, his actions were quickly dismissed by the scholar-officials as unbefitting for an emperor. They saw the emperor's attraction to hunting, archery and other martial activities as a frivolous distraction from the grave matters of state. They perceived that the palace eunuchs had deliberately led the teenage emperor astray so that they could ingratiate themselves with Zhengde and win political influence.[101] The emperor's martial tendencies were to be curbed, rather than encouraged. In 1517, Zhengde personally led his cavalry to Xuanfu 宣府 (possibly the most important garrison within the Ming Nine Borders) and encountered the raiding party of Batu Möngke (also known as Dayan Khan, the Mongol leader who had by that time secured the allegiance of most of the Mongol tribes and occupied the Ordos) and in a two-day confrontation, forced the Mongols to retreat to the steppes.[102] This rather remarkable victory and reversal of Tumu was played down by the literati even though the battle managed to demonstrate the tactical acumen of Zhengde as military commander. Scholar-official and renowned poet Xu Zonglu 許宗魯 (1490–1539) recounted Yingzong's defeat and captivity in his poem "Tumu xing 土木行", tying them to Zhengde's military adventures along the borders. The poem begins with the defeat of Yingzong at Tumu and for sixty years until now ("至今相去六十載"), the ghostly cries of the slain soldiers could still be heard in the night ("風雨猶聞鬼夜號"). Then the poem mentions Zhengde who frequently ventured out of the palace but the six armies did not suffer the same fate like those [unfortunate souls] sixty years ago ("後來武宗亦頻出／六師狼狽非前日").[103] Xu Zonglu could have celebrated

[101] James Geiss, "The Leopard Quarter during the Cheng-te Reign," in *Ming Studies* 24 (1987): 1-38.
[102] John Dardess, *Ming China, 1368–1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire*, 46-47.
[103] Xu Zonglu 許宗魯, "Tumu xing" 土木行, in *Shao hua shan ren qian ji* 少華山人前集 *juan* 4, in Beijing *tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊, vol. 103, 495.

Zhengde's victory by including martial emperors like Hongwu, Yongle and Xuande in this poem but instead, he chose Yingzong as a point of reference. This completely undermines Zhengde's military achievement and denies him the rightful place as a successor to early Ming tradition of active military rulership. There were signs of a possible ascendency of the military that might actually lead to a revival of the Ming military power during Zhengde's reign. However, the fact that anything martial was closely associated with the emperor's mischief and also his entourage of eunuch and military sycophants could only lead to the extinguishing of small sparks of revival— the civil bureaucracy would see to that. The signal from the literati was clear— the traditional military leadership with the emperor at the forefront was no longer something that was desired and encouraged. When Zhengde passed away at the age of twenty-nine without an heir, the chief architect for the succession by Zhu Houcong 朱厚聰 (the future Jiajing emperor), the Chief Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe 楊廷和 (1459–1429), also ensured the revival of the civil bureaucracy over the eunuchs and the military.[104]

[104] Dardess, *Ming China, 1368–1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire*, 49.

1.3.3 The Rise of Literati Military Culture in the mid-Ming

Just as the military leadership and military ethos of the Ming emperors from Yingzong onwards was slowly eroded, a new military culture evolved. And at the helm of this military culture were none other than the literati. If the creation and the promotion of military culture was very much an imperial affair in the early Ming, the continued evolution of this culture was a result of the transfer of the ownership of cultural production from the Forbidden City to the literati class by the mid-Ming. It is tempting to regard a cataclysmic event like the Tumu Incident as the origin of this shift. However, the underlying reasons were far more complex.

The early Ming military system was able to successfully replicate the stability that was enjoyed by the Song military by using checks and balances, while concurrently adopting the Yuan's hereditary military solution in ensuring manpower supply and self-sufficiency. The 'checks and balances' entailed the destruction of military nobility consisting of military generals who had helped the Zhu Yuanzhang in the founding of the dynasty. A strong army consisting of units from all over the empire was stationed near the capital at all times— rotating there in turn for training purposes but ultimately, to prevent regional militarisation and the rise of warlords.[105] The military power was then transferred from these nobles of merit to the imperial princes and with the ascendency of the Prince of Yan who became the Yongle emperor, military authority was back firmly in imperial hands. And as the Ming capital was moved to Beijing, the complex task reorganisation of the border defense were handed over to civil officials who were appointed as temporary grand coordinators.[106] Subsequently, Ming emperors from Xuande onwards began to

[105] Liew Foon-Ming, *The Treatises on Military Affairs of the Ming Dynastic History (1368-1644): An Annotated Translation of the Treatises on Military Affairs Chapter 89 and Chapter 90, Part One*, 50-55.
[106] Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times", 3-4.

employ civil officials to handle military matters as military officers were not able to handle the increasingly complex military affairs. During and after the Tumu incident, the civil officials took on more military responsibilities as the empire faced a crisis of military leadership— the military officers' authority had already been transferred to the person of the emperor and yet, with the defeat of Yingzong at Tumu, imperial military leadership had lost its former lustre as its authority was slowly transferred to the civil officials. Adding to that, the foundation of the Ming military system which was based on hereditary military households organised into guards-battalions or *wei-suo* 衛所 slowly collapsed under the heavy burden of supporting itself.[107] During the early Ming, the Ming armies were recruited from hereditary households and led by hereditary officers— all of whom were given the task of farming for their sustenance. It was system that the new Ming regime inherited from the Yuan. However, the Ming founder inherited an economically damaged empire and as a result, could not develop the same resource-gathering capability as the Song and the Yuan. As a result, a self-sufficient Ming military was just a legend devoid of reality.[108] When the society and the economy started to grow steadily again in the 15th century, the structurally weak Ming military system entered into crisis as soldiers were involved in mass desertions as they faced hunger, and also exploitation by their superiors. By the early 16th century, it was typical for a military colony in the interior to operate at ten percent of its prescribed strength while the seventy-eight *wei* units (with 380,000 registered hereditary military households in the early 15th century) could only provide the capital garrison with 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers.[109] The situation was especially serious in the south as the hereditary military presence there had always been less compared to the

[107] Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*, 107-108.
[108] Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China*, 63-65.
[109] Idem. 68.

north. The guard units in Guangxi started with around 120,000 soldiers during the Hongwu period and were left with 18,000 soldiers in 1492. The city of Nanchang was assigned 4735 soldiers but by the beginning of the 16th century, there were only 141 soldiers in active service![110]

The declining Ming military made it harder for the Ming regime to deal with the disruptions caused by socio-economic changes (internal revolts) and foreign invasions. Because of the minimal presence of hereditary military forces in the south coupled with the declining authority of the military officers, civil officials and various non-commissioned members of the literati stratum had to take the initiative and shoulder the responsibility of providing military leadership. In 1444 and 1448, the outbreak of rebellions led by Ye Zongliu 葉宗留 in Zhejiang and Deng Maoqi 鄧茂七 in Fujian revealed the military weakness of the *weisuo* system, especially in the south. These local military units were usually understaffed and led by military officers whose authority was seriously curbed by the court. Three government military units numbering 300, 2,000 and 4,000 respectively were sent to stop Deng Maoqi initially. They were all defeated by numerically superior rebels (with more than 10,000 men).[111] As the campaign grew in complexity and scale, civil officials such as the Minister of Justice Jin Lian 金濂 (1392–1454) and the censors, Zhang Hai 張海 and Ding Xuan 丁宣, were called in to assist (and to supervise) the hereditary officers and members of the merit nobility who were commanding the troops.[112] Already during this campaign, it is possible to detect an increasing encroachment of civil officials on military affairs, and ultimately, the military authority of the military

[110] Idem. 67-68.
[111] Gu Yingtai 谷應泰, *Mingshi jishi benmo* 明史紀事本末, *juan* 31, 462.
[112] Idem. 464.

officers. The civil officials were no longer just performing the tasks of observing, inspecting, and reporting on the troops, but also leading the troops personally when required.[113] The practice of appointing censors as Regional Investigating Censor, Grand Coordinators, and Supreme Commanders to deal with military crises gradually became a bureaucratic mainstay for the Ming central government. In the beginning, these were temporary assignments with the understanding that military crises would be resolved within certain time frames. These assignments eventually became permanent positions for the censors as they were posted to various places of great strategic importance.[114]

By the second half of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, there were increasing examples of civil officials who were given military assignments to actually take part actively in armed engagements— often replacing the military officers as the de facto commander or field marshal. A case in point was the campaign against the Prince of Ning rebellion of 1519. Even though the size of the rebel army under the Prince of Ning was considered modest and was a motley crew of criminal elements and mercenaries, there were not enough government troops nor experienced military commanders stationed in the Jiangxi region to offer effective resistance.[115] The fate of southern China was left in the hands of scholar-officials such as Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529),Wu Wending 伍文定 (1470–1530), Xing Xun 邢珣 (1462–1534), Xu Lian 徐璉 (1468–1544), and Dai Deru 戴德孺(?–1527), who

[113] The censor Zhu Ying who was tasked with the defense of Chuzhou 處州 scored a remarkable victory against Ye Zongliu's troops and even captured and executed Ye's comrade Zhou Mingsong 周明松. The prefect of Jianning 建寧 and Right Administration Vice Commissioner of Fujian, Zhang Ying 張瑛, drove back an attack by Deng Maoqi and killed more than 500 rebels in battle. Gu Yingtai , *Mingshi jishi benmo*, *juan* 31, 464-465.
[114] Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times", 3.
[115] The Prince of Ning claimed a rebel force of 100,000 men but in reality, it was likely no more than 60,000. Wang Shouren could only muster less than 40,000 men. Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, juan 47, 698-700.

shouldered the responsibility of defeating the rebels with insufficient troops and limited resources. Wu Wending, who was the prefect of Suzhou during the rebellion, was likely in charge of mobilising the local population, as grassroots militarisation became the norm by the beginning of the 16th century in order to produce local militias that were capable of defending their localities in times of military unrest and banditry.[116] As a presented scholar, Wu Wending went on to become Wang Yangming's greatest ally in quelling the rebellion, as the prefect was also an experienced military commander who had suppressed earlier uprisings in Jiangxi and Henan, some of which he had accomplished along with Wang Yangming.[117] Xing Xun was also a presented scholar and served as the prefect of Ganzhou 贛州 during the Prince of Ning rebellion. Xing had assisted Wang Yangming in fighting rebels in Jiangxi in 1516 and was well-known as a military commander who often fought as vanguard.[118]

Wang Yangming was just the latest in a line of civil officials who had been tasked with dealing with military crises in the southern part of the empire during the mid- Ming period. After the Deng Maoqi rebellion in the mid-15th century, military leadership was gradually transferred from the hereditary military officers to civil officials. Some of these civil bureaucrats were even willing to use brutal force in dealing with uprisings.[119] Such boldness in command displayed by these civil officials was likely the result of receiving greater discretionary authority (*bianyi xingshi* 便宜行事) from the court in order to direct and manage entire military campaigns. It

[116] Kai Filipiak, "“Saving Lives”—Lü Kun's Manual on City Defense", *Journal of Chinese Military History* 1, 2 (Jan 2012): 158-161.
[117] *MS*, juan 200, 5280-5281.
[118] Idem. 5282.
[119] In 1470, Right Censor-in-chief and Supreme Commander Xiang Zhong 項忠 (1421–1502) brutally suppressed a rebellion in Jingxiang 荊襄 (in Hubei province). He was criticised for his indiscriminate massacre of the local civilian population. Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, *juan* 38, 565.

was not an easy decision for the emperor but with the aim of effective regional military leadership, pragmatism triumphed. Discretionary authority in the hands of a superior civil official could produce miracles (or bringing about abuse with some others). No other event signifies this shift in military authority better than Wang Yangming swift victory over the rebel forces that was attained within forty-two days. Zhengde realized that his military leadership was made redundant but insisted on carrying on with the campaign. The success of Wang Yangming as military leader and his increasing fame as a distinguished philosopher of *xinxue* (心學— the "Learning of the Heart-mind" school of Neo-Confucianism) could very well influence many literati in their pursuit of knowledge and meritorious achievement or *shigong* 事功. For the more enlightened civil officials, tasks such as famine relief, flood control, economic policies, and military affairs— all these were part of a larger program of improving the lives of the people that they called 'ordering the world and aiding the people' or *jingshi jimin* 經世濟民. Those literati who embraced this moral commitment understood that their role in serving the state was to mobilise whatever resources the state afforded them to ensure that the people did not perish in hard times and flourished in good ones.[120] The pursuit of military achievement— something that was the domain of military men, was now considered a worthy goal for a scholar.

When another devastating wave of disorder brought along by the *wokou* ('Japanese' pirates— which in reality was a mix of Japanese and Chinese) swept the south-eastern coast of China beginning in the 1540s and reached its peak by 1555 (eight out of eleven prefectures in Zhejiang was ravaged by the *wokou*), it sent a shockwave that brought the wealthier, and culturally sophisticated region of the Ming

[120] Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*, 125-126.

empire to its knees. As a result, coastal defense became one of the main policy concerns of emperor Jiajing's government and the sea-prohibition policy or *haijin* 海禁 that was first enacted by the founding emperor, Hongwu, was now being strictly enforced in an effort to cope with the *wokou*.[121] The 'Jiajing wokou' was a complex issue that has its origin found in trade, or the lack of it (due to the sea-prohibition policy). The long-term impact of Ming's *haijin* was that it promoted more piracy by driving traders into smuggling. And as competition among smugglers intensified, they started to arm themselves and escalate violence along the coast.[122] Some of these Chinese smugglers escaped to Japan and cooperated with local Japanese powers to organise raids along the Chinese southern coast— the most famous example was Wang Zhi 王直 who set up his trading/raiding base in Hirado 平戶 with the patronage of the hereditary lord Matsura Takanobu (松浦隆信, 1529–1599).[123] With the injection of men and resources from the Japanese, these raids were so well-coordinated that they were in essence military invasions.

As Wang Zhi launched his large-scale attacks beginning in 1553, news of defeat began to reach the court in Beijing, The Ming government once again recognised that the *weisuo* could not be relied upon to defend the affected coastal regions (Changguo *wei* 昌國衛 at Ningbo was defeated March 1553, Linshan *wei* 臨山衛 in Shaoxing followed shortly in April and Jinshan *wei* 金山衛 in August).[124] Much of the defense of the southeastern coast was once again left in the hands of local civil officials and civil officials appointed directly by the emperor with the specific

[121] Ng Chin-keong, *Boundaries and Beyond: China's Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times*, 70.
[122] Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*, 223.
[123] Makoto Ueda 上田信, *Hai yu diguo: Ming Qing shidai* 海與帝國: 明清時代, 252.
[124] Zheng Liangsheng 鄭樑生, *Mingdai Zhong-Ri guanxi yanjiu: yi Mingshi riben zhuan suojian jige wenti wei zhongxin* 明代中日關係研究：以明史日本傳所見幾個問題為中心, 363-364.

goal of fighting piracy. Earlier in 1548, the Right Censor-in-chief Zhu Wan 朱紈 (1494–1549) was made Grand Coordinator of Zhejiang with the concurrent task of overseeing the coastal defense and military affairs of Fujian and Zhejiang (*tidu Min-Zhe haifang junwu* 提督閩浙海防軍務).[125] A year later, due to the increase in instability and violence along the coast, Zhu Wan's request for authority over the government troops was swiftly granted by the court.[126] According to Ng Chin-keong, the appointment of a single official with responsibility for the affairs of both Zhejiang and Fujian made it possible for the first time to provide military coordination between the two provinces.[127] Ming governance had grown to such complexity that military campaigns now required both administrative and strategic expertise which only an experienced civil official (and in this case, likely from the Censorate) could hope to offer. By the mid-Ming, the practice of appointing Censors as with temporary military assignments became institutionalised. Zhu Wan's was succeeded by Wang Yu 王忬 (1507–1560), Zhang Jing 張經 (1492–1555), and Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1512–1565)— all of whom had been censors before being appointed as Grand Coordinator or Supreme Commander to deal with the situation along the coast. During Zhang Jing's tenure as Supreme Commander, he had civil and military authority over Shandong, the South Metropolitan Region, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi— a total of six coastal provinces.[128] When Hu Zongxian, who was frequently credited with ending the Jiajing *wokou* crisis, succeeded Zhang Jing as the Supreme Commander of Southern Metropolitan Area, Zhejiang, and Fujian (a role created by the court specifically to deal with the *wokou* crisis) in April

[125] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 325, 6019.
[126] Idem. *juan* 335, 6141.
[127] Ng, *Boundaries and Beyond: China's Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times*, 121.
[128] *DMB*, 47.

1556, he was the most powerful official in China outside of Beijing. When Hu set up his campaign headquarters in Hangzhou, he was to gather some of the most brilliant literati of his time to work on the common goal of eradicating the *wokou*. Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593), Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (1518–1596), Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512–1061), Wang Yin 王寅, Jiang Zhou 蔣洲 (?–15972), Zheng Ruoceng 鄭若曾 (1503–1570), 羅龍文 (?–1565), Zhou Shuxue 周述學, Tian Rucheng 田汝成 (1503–1557) and many others— literati with different backgrounds entered in Hu Zongxian's *mufu* 幕府 (literally 'tent government' or private secretariat) to offer their literary talents and military expertise.[129] A few of these literati even went on to the front line and engaged in battles with the enemies.[130] In the *mufu*, these literati were able to interact with one another, and also with scholar-officials such as Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507–1560), and Tan Lun 譚綸 (1520–1557) who were brilliant military commanders in their own rights. Some of the most brilliant military men of the era, men such as Yu Dayou 俞大猷 (1503–1579) and Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588) frequently discussed military matters with their private secretary or *muliao* 幕僚. The *mufu* of mid-Ming created the ideal environment for this new literati-driven military culture to be produced and nurtured— as it provided the perfect space for literati to discuss, to debate, and to write about all things related to war.

The installation of Wang Yangming and Hu Zongxian as the de facto chief military commanders during the mid-Ming period effectively ushered in an interesting

[129] Lü Jingbo 呂靖波, "Hu Zongxian mufu renwu kaolue" 胡宗憲幕府人物考略, *Journal of Chuzhou University* 滁州學院學報, vol.10, no. 4 (Jul 2008): 5-7.
[130] Zhu Xian 朱先, Guan Maoguang 管懋光, and Shen Kun 沈坤 were involved in battles. Ni Yajing 倪雅静 and Gu Guohua 顧國華, "Lun kangwou mingjiang Hu Zongxian muxia wenren de maodun xintai" 論抗倭名將胡宗憲幕下文人的矛盾心態, *Journal of Yancheng Teachers University (Humanities & Social Sciences Edition)* 鹽城師範學院學報 (人文社會科學版), vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan 2018): 40.

period of literati-led military culture in late imperial China. Wang Hongtai has remarked that the pro-military trend (*shangwu fengqi* 尚武風氣) in the Ming dynasty really began with Wang Yangming.[131] The martial ethos that was so prevalent among the emperors in the early days of the Ming was gradually eroded by the ascendency of the literati-driven culture that focused on intellectual pursuits rather than military excellence from the Yingzong period in the mid-fifteenth century onwards. Even though there was an increasing number of scholar-officials taking on military roles that traditionally belonged to the military class, it took someone like Wang Yangming to promote military culture on a grander scale. The success of Wang's military campaigns, combined with the intellectual achievement of Wang Yangming, inspired many contemporary scholars. A significant number of Wang Yangming's disciples, followers, and admirer now saw the possibility of putting *xinxue* to work in order to gain meritorious achievements. Military achievements as *shigong* was now a worthy pursuit for the literati. It was also a part and parcel of the literati's duty to *jingshi jimin*. And when Hu Zongxian assumed command of the entire *wokou* campaign and needed talented literati for his *mufu* in Hangzhou, it was not difficult for him to recruit them. With patronage from the Supreme Commander, these literati wrote martial-themed poetry even as they were busy coming up with creative military solutions in the *wokou* crisis. If a new military culture spearheaded by the literati was born after the Tumu defeat of 1449, it reached its maturity in the Zhengde and Jiajing periods during the early 16th century.

[131] Wang Hongtai 王鴻泰, "Wugong, wuxue, wuyi, wuxia: Mingdai shiren de xiwu fengshang yu yilei jiaoyou" 武功、武學、武藝、武俠：明代士人的習武風尚與異類交游, *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology Academia Sinica* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊, vol. 85, no. 2 (2014): 212.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis and Areas of Interest

1.4.1 Organisation of the Thesis

In the preceding sections, I have tried to provide a detailed overview of changes in attitude towards military warfare at the level of the imperial court and literati. My central contention in this thesis is that a further crucial change took place around the 1550s in response to the *wokou* attacks by people like Wang Zhi, such as described above. A central role in this development was played by the scholar-official Tang Shunzhi, who will be the subject of Chapter Two. He was an important literary figure in the mid-Ming whose uneven official career was marked by his transformation from a promising civil official to a military general. Though celebrated by his contemporaries as a master of the prose and literary theorist, Tang's official career ended quite early because of he was a co-author of a remonstrative memorial to the Jiajing emperor around 1539. Although neither a disciple nor a self-professed follower of Wang Yangming's teachings, Tang had studied Learning of the heart-mind seriously and was inspired by the philosopher. A life-long student of martial arts and military study, Tang wrote the *Military Compendium* (*Wubian* 武編), a collection of military knowledge, while living as a recluse after his dismissal from the court. This work was an important part of traditional Chinese military writings and went on to inform military works of later writers, chief among which was *New Treatise on Effective Discipline* (*Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書) by the military general Qi Jiguang. Tang's martial ethos is also evident in some of his prose and the letters he wrote to various friends and acquaintance. In one prose narrative, *A Narrative of the Military Exploits in Guangyou* (*Xu Guangyou zhanggong* 敘廣右戰功), we can see Tang Shunzhi's attempt in creating an ideal military man through a real-life war hero who exemplified Tang's martial ideals.

In Chapter Two, I will also examine the correspondence between Tang and Weng Wanda 翁萬達 (1498–1552), at the time the Right Vice Censor-in-chief and Grand Coordinator of Shaanxi. Weng Wanda was Tang's friend and senior in the government. And like Wang Yangming, Weng was also an able field commander whose military achievements greatly enhanced his civil official career— he was thrice appointed as Minister of War. Looking past the formalities in these letters, we can see the figure of the scholar Tang Shunzhi who tried to impress the senior government official Weng Wanda with his military knowledge and strategic acumen, as a means to be returned to government service. This presents us with an interesting case study of the value of military knowledge in the mid-Ming— as a way to achieve a neo-Confucian ideal of 'ordering the world' by engaging in military affairs. Even though Tang's subsequent return to government was wrought in controversy because of his association with Zhao Wenhua 趙文華 (?–1557) and Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480‑1567), he nevertheless tried to distance himself from them as much as possible without seriously jeopardising his opportunity to serve in a military capacity.

If Wang Yangming was the literatus par excellence in terms of being the inspiration to countless other literati for attaining the ideal of or 'completeness in the civil and the martial' or *wenwu shuangquan* 文武雙全 with his role as a scholar-general or *rujiang* 儒將, Tang Shunzhi's career could very well typify the martial ethos that was adopted by post-Yangming literati who regarded military study and military matters as an integral part of being a Confucian.

In Chapter Three , I will examine the person of He Liangchen 何良臣, partly in juxtaposition to with Tang Shunzhi. Whereas Tang Shunzhi was a literary celebrity during his lifetime, we know very little of He Liangchen outside of his published work, *Zhenji* 陣紀(earliest version in 1591) which his admirers regard as a milestone

in Chinese military writing— commending it for its originality and its pragmatism despite its adherence to the military tradition of Sun Zi and the Seven Military Classics compiled during the Song dynasty. Because so little is known about him, modern day historical narrative of He Liangchen tend to idealise him as an altruistic patriot who wanted to save his people from the *wokou* by joining the military as a commander. But who was He Liangchen, really? Combining the few available sources (prefaces in Zhenji, and Zhenji itself) and some new ones (e.g. a poem attributed to He Liangchen), I have made an attempt to reconstruct the life of He Liangchen. And in the process, I have discovered that He Liangchen was a member of a new breed of literati from mid-Ming, longing to be freed from the bondage of civil examinations even as they struggled against a system that was becoming increasingly hostile to the ambitions and dreams of so many Confucian scholars. Even as they were failures socially, these literati started to see themselves as individuals rather than a collective and dared to pave their own paths. One of these paths was a military career. However, was He Liangchen really free from the pursuit of literary achievements? Did He Liangchen saw himself as a soldier, or did he continued to regard himself more of a literatus?

The writing and publication of *Zhenji* was made possible by He Liangchen's literati patrons. Patronage was something that had to be fought for and in He Liangchen's case, it was his reputation as a scholar-general. Being a scholar who was also a professional soldier (as a minor commander), allowed He Liangchen to enjoy the prestige that was otherwise denied to him because of his failure in the civil examinations. He Liangchen's military status attracted various literati, including literary luminaries such as Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) into his social circle. Yet, his literary background also won him the friendships of military men such as Qi

Jiguang, with whom he discussed and shared military tactics. In other words, He Liangchen's status as a scholar-general, albeit a less illustrious one, still gave him the option of traversing freely between two different social groups within the mid-Ming social hierarchy.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I turn my attention from individual literati to the institution of *mufu* (private secretariat), which developed in the mid-Ming period. Beginning with Wang Yangming's temporary private secretariat that was set up as a response to the banditry and uprisings southern Jiangxi to the Rebellion of the Prince of Ning, the *mufu* in the mid-Ming was a by-product of the transfer of military authority from the hands of the military class to the civil bureaucracy. The solutions to the military crises brought along by the Oirat Mongols in the north and the *wokou* in the south required flexibility and improvisation which only the Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders, who were granted total discretionary authority by the court, could provide. Flexibility came in the form of private recruitment.[132] The literati who joined Wang's *mufu* were responding as much to a call of duty, and out of admiration for the person of Wang Yangming whom they admired. The desire to attain 'meritorious achievement' through handling military matters was fast becoming acceptable in neo-Confucian thoughts. The success of Wang Yangming's military adventures was also the success of the *mufu* as an institution. Though temporary in nature, the *mufu* provided the perfect testing ground for those literati who were committed to military studies (*wuxue* 武學) to flex their intellectual, and for a few, even their physical muscle in putting military knowledge into action.

[132] Wang Quanwei 王泉偉, "*Mingdai zhouxian liaoshu yu muyou yanjiu*" 明代州縣僚屬與幕友研, 125-126.

This is probably the reason behind the success of Hu Zongxian's *mufu* in Hangzhou at the height of the *wokou* crisis— Wang Yangming's *mufu* fully realised the potential of this new breed of literati whom Kai Filipiak addressed as 'non-professionals'. They went on to support and win military campaigns for the Ming regime.[133] Hu Zongxian's *mufu* is considered by many as one of the most important in the entire Ming history because of its role in the eradication of the *wokou* threat of the 1550s.[134] I will argue in this chapter that Hu's private secretariat importance lies in the fact that throughout the eight years of its existence, the institution of the Ming *mufu* managed to reach its maturity, and as a result, became a model for later *mufu* until the end of Ming dynasty. The literati who entered into Hu Zongxian's *mufu* could generally be divided into three types— 1) those who provided administrative support and advised in strategic matters (e.g. Xu Wei and Shen Mingchen); 2) those who were directly or indirectly involved in dealing with the *wokou* as planners, negotiators, or even as spies (e.g. Mao Kun and Luo Longwen); and finally, 3) those who took the fight to the enemies by engaging directly in battles (e.g. Shen Kun and Guan Maoguang).[135] In Chapter Four I will examine the various roles of the *muliao*, what sort of military contributions they made, how involved they were in military matters, the dynamics of their interactions, how conducive their social environment was as they were attaining their meritorious achievements— all these leading to the cultivation of a literati-led military culture.

[133] Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times," 1-15.
[134] Lü Jingbo, "Hu Zongxian mufu renwu kaolue," 5.
[135] Idem. 7.

1.4.2 Areas of Interest

Throughout the empirical narratives of the following chapters, there are several overarching themes as well, which should be briefly discussed at the outset.

Wen and Wu relations in the Ming Dynasty

In early April 1573, the Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582) told a story about Han Wendi 漢文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE) testing his border garrison to the young Wanli 萬曆 emperor (r. 1572–1620), teaching him the importance of maintaining proper procedure even in times of peace. Zhang pointed out the disadvantages of the present situation whereby military commanders had to submit to civil officials in the accompanying memorial. The remedy was for the "emperor to pay attention to able commanders in order to give the commanders greater authority so that they could maximize their military talent."[136] Furthermore, Zhang added:

> Our imperial Ancestors gained the realms with the tip of sabre, but the tip of the writing brush spoils it in the present. Furthermore, to combine the use of both the civil and the martial is the secret to long-lasting success. There is a common saying that says, "the civil officials pacify the realms with their brush while the military officials achieve peace with their dagger-axe".
>
> 我祖宗用刀尖上掙來的天下，今日被筆尖兒上壞了。且文武並用乃長久之術。俗語說‘文官把筆安天下，武將提戈定太平’。[137]

After the lecture, the Wanli emperor attempted to discuss the lesson with his eunuch attendants but none of them were able to provide him with satisfactory

[136] *Wanli qiju zhu* 萬曆起居注, *juan* 1, 59-60.
[137] Ibid.

answers. After giving some thought to the lesson, the emperor was reported to say, "the master [Zhang Juzheng] meant to say that for governance, one must surely use civil [means] but also military [means]… Although Teacher Zhang is a civil official himself, he does not conceal the shortcomings [of civil means]. On behalf of the court, he wants to protect field commanders and repair and arrange armaments and military provisions. Truly this can be called public loyalty and devotion to the country. For a long time, he sighed in admiration."[138]

Zhang Juzheng's lessons on the importance of combining the *wen* and *wu* binary in governance were to impress the young emperor profoundly. Zhang's use of language was more vernacular than classical as it was meant for a young audience. More importantly, the tutor enjoyed more freedom to be direct in discussing sensitive issues in this setting and the enthusiastic and bright student probably sensed the sincerity of the tutor's words. Although there are no extensive records of the details of the Wanli emperor's lessons under Zhang Juzheng, based on Zhang's focus on military reform, a significant number of them were likely about the military.[139]

With the young emperor' support, Zhang was able to introduce a new silver-based tax system (known as the Single Whip Reform), that helped to bring in much-needed cash to supply the military. Zhang also strengthened the border defenses, and tried to establish and expand a stable defensive perimeter in the North— all to be emulated by the emperor.[140] Also early in the emperor's reign, the government was to adopt a general policy whereby only officials with military experience received

[138] Translation by Julia K. Murray. Julia K. Murray, "Didactic Picturebooks for late-Ming Emperors and Princes", 245.
[139] Zhang Haiying 張海瀛, *Zhang Juzheng gai ge yu Shanxi Wanli qingzhang yanjiu* 張居正改革與山西萬曆清丈研究, 29-32.
[140] Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great Asian War 1592–1598*, 23.

appointment in senior positions in the Ministry of War.[141] This particular policy could imply at least two realities, first, there was a significant increase in the number of civil officials who were able to handle military matters (especially after the repeated military confrontations with the *wokou* and the Mongols), and second, the increased complexity of administrating the Ming military required an institutionalisation of a cadre of 'professional' civil officials to handle military affairs almost exclusively. If the top brass of the Ministry of War were expected to have military experience, the same expectation would be filtered down to their subordinates. To acquire military knowledge (whether through practice or reading) would less likely be frowned upon by traditional Confucian literati because now it could actually lead to a viable career in the government. The increase in policy questions in the civil examination papers from Jiajing and Wanli periods also meant that greater study of military affairs was required for the scholars.[142] Tan Lun, who was appointed the Minister of War when the Wanli emperor ascended the throne, wrote that, "to have *wen* and not be *wu* is a scholar behind the times/ to have *wu* and not *wen* is to be an ignorant man."[143] Looking back at the history of the dynasty, this had not always been the case.

The *wen* 'civil' and *wu* 'martial' binary had occupied an important place in political, social, and cultural discourse in Chinese history for two millennia. As early as the Spring and Autumn period, matters related to *wen* and *wu* carried the same weight at least in theory.[144] In politics, *wen* and *wu* represent the two broad branches of government and the personnel that belonged to their respective institutional

[141] Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *The Cambridge History of China Vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1*, 520.
[142] Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of the Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 445.
[143] Kathleen Ryor, "Wen and Wu in Elite Cultural Practices During the Late-Ming", in *Military Culture in Imperial China*, 219-42.
[144] "The great affairs of the domain lies with sacrifice and warfare 國之大事, 在祀與戎" Stephen W. Durrant, Li Wai-yee, and David Schaberg, *Zuo Traditions: Zuozhuan : Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"*, vol. 2, 803.

hierarchies (e.g. the Six Ministries and the Military Commissions). In socio-cultural terms, *wen* and *wu* are used as some sort of labels— those who possesses *wen* are cultured and literary, while those who possesses *wu* care about military matters or subscribe to certain martial ethos. Achieving a balance between *wen* and *wu* was an ideal that was difficult to realize thus admired by many and governments in ancient China tended to allow one to play a more important role than the other throughout history.[145] For example, in the early Tang dynasty, civil officials gave the impression that they were talented in handling both civil and military matters as there was no clear ranking of both.[146] But by the time when Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705) came into power, there were civil officials who were reluctant to be transferred to military posts.[147] When Wei Cou 韋湊 was transferred from his civil post to a military one (general-in-chief of the Right Guard), Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) told him:

> According to our [dynastic] tradition, the position of general-in-chief of the guards is exchangeable with the ministers of the Six Ministries. Recently, there is gradually a preference for all thing *wen* and disdain for this position [general-in-chief]. Your reputation and capability are fine and so I intend to elevate this position through your temporary appointment. Do not refuse then.
>
> 皇家故事，諸衛大將軍共尚書交互為之。近日漸貴文物，乃輕此職。卿聲實俱美，故暫用卿，以光此官，勿辭也。[148]

The poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852), who lived near the end of the Tang dynasty, wrote with regret that literati in his days were either afraid or ashamed of talking about

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[145] Fang Cheng-hua (方震華), *Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875-1063)*, 1.
[146] Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, *Sui Tang zhidu yuanyuan luelun gao* 隋唐制度淵源略論稿, 200.
[147] Fang, *Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875-1063)*, 12-16.
[148] Dong Gao 董誥 et al., *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文, *juan* 993, 10288.

military matters.[149] Yet, by the end of Tang and the beginning of the of the Five Dynasties period (907–960), the prestige and values of the literati were called into question. There were some literati who saw a career in the military as an alternative route to power and made the switch. Civil officials working in the provincial governments became much more engaged with the military in areas such as strategy because in a harsh, militant world, this was the way to survive.[150] And so the power relationship between *wen* and *wu* was never static.

In the early Ming, military men belonged to the elite class and enjoyed special privilege accorded by the founding Hongwu emperor. The emperor wanted to secure the loyalty of these military men especially in the uncertain early years of the dynasty. Many of high-ranking military personnel even enjoyed special legal protection—whereby even capital crimes committed by them or by their offspring were frequently overlooked and dismissed without legal consequences.[151] Things began to change when the Chief Military Commission (*da dudu fu* 大都督府) was abolished in 1380 and replaced by the five military commissions (*wujun dudu fu* 五軍都督府).[152] This was a signal that the emperor was beginning to curb the power of the military. The Chief Military Commission was the chief government branch in military administration and was staffed by top-ranking military officers. They were responsible for the training, deployment, and command of troops. Once the Chief Military Commission was reorganised into five separate military commissions, it had already lost its political power and control of central affairs since all decisions

[149] Du Mu 杜牧, He Xiguang 何錫光 ed., *Fangchuan wenji zhu* 樊川文集注, *juan* 10, 722.
[150] Fang, *Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875-1063)*, 84-89.
[151] Cheng Caiping 程彩萍, "Mingdai wuguan fanzhui zhi sifa shijian" 明代武官犯罪之司法實踐, in *Mingshi yanjiu* 明史研究, vol. 12 (May 2012), 297-8.
[152] *MS*, *juan* 6, 1857.

regarding the military would be decided by the person of the emperor and the Ministry of War (staffed by civil officials). The Ministry of War now decided all military matters except the direct command of armies in the field. The ministry could mobilize troops and appoint the military officers for campaigns. In this manner, commands became temporary, as officers were appointed as Regional Commanders (*zongbing guan* 總兵官) and assigned troops for specific campaigns, after which they would be relieved of their commands again.[153] From the point of view of the Ming emperors, this helped to address the issue of the undesirable influence of military leaders over their subordinates which might become a direct challenge to imperial authority. When officials in later years of the Ming frequently lamented that 'soldiers and generals had no mutual understanding' (*bingjiang bu xiangxi* 兵將不相習), they were in fact criticising the above practice of temporary commands, which to them was a main reason for the weakness of the Ming military. Yu Qian was well aware of this problem when he was reorganising what remained of the Ming military for the defence of Beijing after the Tumu debacle and he was determined to correct it.[154]

By the mid-Ming during the reign of the Jiajing emperor, the increase in regional military administration, combined with the existence of an inflated officer corps whose professionalism (and loyalty) was hard to ascertain, required the central government to deploy civil officials with appointments such as Supreme Commanders, Grand Coordinators, Regional Inspectors with greater authority in recommending and appointing their own military commanders. Xiang Dushou 項篤壽 (1521–1586) who worked as director of a bureau in the Ministry of War attested that the promotion and demotion of military officers by the Ministry of War were all based

[153] Charles O. Hucker, ''Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty,'' in *Studies of Governmental Institutions in Chinese History*, 120.
[154] *MS, juan* 89, 2175.

on reviews either by Supreme Commanders or Regional Investigating Censors.[155] In the local gazetteer of Jinghai wei 靖海衛, a coastal guard unit south of Weihai 威海 in Shandong province, there is a record of a guard commander committing suicide by drowning because he failed an inspection by the Grand Coordinator and Regional Investigating Censor.[156] The incident seemed to indicate the extent of the authority of civil officials which overshadowed that of military officers. Perhaps because of this and similar incidents, one might come to the conclusion that the suspicion of emperors concerning their military officers' loyalty and their potential for treason ensured the relevance curb on the military power. But was imperial suspicion the real reason behind this policy? Or if we were to take the question further— was there even a planned, deliberate policy in the very first place?

In Chinese historical tradition, the Song dynasty is applauded for its highly evolved civil culture but criticized for its weak military performance when compared to the preceding period of political disunity and military upheavals after the dissolution of the Tang dynasty. Even when compared to earlier dynasties, the Song policy to 'value the civil and to curb military' (*zhongwen yiwu* 重文抑武) was most pronounced.[157] However, according to Peter Lorge, this shift of political power from the military to the civil bureaucracy has often been over-simplified.[158] In fact, from the founding of the dynasty in 960 until its end in the hands of Mongols in 1279, there was no such shift in the first place.[159] The Song military machine was ready to retire

[155] Xiang Dushou 項篤壽, "Tiwei xingxha wuzhi lüli dengzhu jiangcai yibian tui yongshi" 題為行查武職履歷登注將材以便推用事, *Xiao sima cao* 小司馬草, *juan* 2, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, vol. 62, 250.
[156] *Shandong sheng Jinghaiwei zhi* 山東省靖海衛志, *juan* 7, Zhongguo fangzhi congshu: Huabei difang vol.3 中國方志叢書· 華北地方第 3 號, 52.
[157] Fang, *Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875-1063)*, 1.
[158] Peter Lorge, *The Reunification of China: Peace through War Under the Song Dynasty*, 1.
[159] Lorge, "The Northern Song Military Aristocracy and the Royal Family," in *War and Society*, vol. 18, no. 2 (October, 2000): 37-47.

with privileges and honours after the wars of the founding of the dynasty came to an end. The civil officials came to the forefront because running the government was now mainly a civil affair. Stakeholders within the dynasty concluded that their interests were better served with the continuing existence of the Song regime.[160] Perhaps, the ensuing chaos and violence brought about by competing regional military powers after the fall of the Tang dynasty were still fresh in the minds of everyone? Still, researchers have pointed out that the northern Song emperors continued to maintain a huge standing army while many civil officials did engage in military affairs. Institutionally, the Song state was moving towards civil rule and as such there was greater reliance on a civil bureaucracy staffed by literati who had qualified by passing the civil service examinations. Consequently, the civil bureaucracy as the chief government organ, and those who worked in it, would have greater prestige over the military officers. Over time, the social standing of the military personnel declined while the civil service bureaucrats ascended. This whole process was natural and logical. It did not require the Song state to consciously and purposefully devise a policy of political and social engineering that was skewed towards the civil bureaucracy at the expense of the military. To paint the entire Song as a regime that neglected the military in one rigid, broad stroke is an erroneous exaggeration.[161]

Similarly, when we examine the relation between the civil officials and the military personnel of the Ming dynasty through the lens of a *wen-wu* binary, we have to question the accuracy of the picture that emerges, if we really get the full picture in the first place? In one of Ling Mengchu's 凌濛初 (1580–1644) short stories, there is

[160] Lorge, *The Reunification of China: Peace through War Under the Song Dynasty*, 280.
[161] Song Yansheng 宋彥陞, "Guanyu Songdai 'zhongwen qingwu shuo' de jidian fansi" 關於宋代「重文輕武說」的幾點反思, *Bulletin of historical Research(National Taiwan Normal University* 臺灣師大歷史學報, no. 49 (June, 2013), 351.

one memorable remark given by a protagonist that gives us an idea of the relation between *wen* and *wu* in the Ming:

> In a military household there must be a son who passes through the *hongmen* [school] so that he could befriend cultured literati, and not be bullied by others.
>
> 武弁人家，必須得個子弟在黌門中出入，方能結交斯文士夫，不受人的欺侮。[162]

The protagonist Wen Fei-e 聞斐娥 is a young girl of seventeen from a well-to-do hereditary military household. Despite her father being *can jiang* (Assistant Commander) who had previously passed the military examinations, he was frequently belittled (*shouren zhimu* 受人指目, which literally means 'to have people pointing their fingers and staring'). In the context of the story, a member from a hereditary military household tends to have a lower social standing. People were pointing fingers and staring at Wen Que, Fe-e's father, not because they were in awe of his military background, but rather because he was a representative of a social class that was perceived as violent, uncouth, and most likely, illiterate. There was only one logical solution to this problem according to the protagonist, and that was to have member from the household to enrol in a school, befriend other literati, and climb the social ladder as a scholar, and hopefully, a scholar-official in the future. Similar stories and anecdotes of such nature are scattered among Ming literati writings, and according to modern scholars, they are evidence of how the literati viewed the the military class, which some saw as a direct result of the Ming policy of 'using civil officials to control the military' *yiwen tongwu* 以文統武. And the example of general Qi Jiguang's

[162] Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, "Tongchuang you renjia zuozhen nü xiucai yihua jiemu" 同窗友認假作真女秀才移花接木, in *Erke paian jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇 (*Slapping the Table in Amazement: Series 2*), *juan* 17, 329.

interaction and networking with the literati seems to attest to the Ming military men's need to create a cultural identity to help them transcend their relatively low social status caused by their hereditary military lineage.[163]

The Yuan had introduced the institution of the hereditary military households which was adopted by the Ming. With the hereditary military household, the early Ming government further institutionalised the socio-cultural divide between military men and civil officials. The gradual shift to a literati-dominated government, combined with the reduction of military authority with the power transfer to the Ministry of War, guaranteed the eclipse of military prestige. As the military class lost their political power, their social status suffered too. And as the Ming military increasingly relied on auxiliary non-Han Chinese troops to augment the main central armies in various campaigns, the reputation of the military class took a further hit as these auxiliaries were often ill-disciplined (under weak commanders) and disturbed the civilian population. Combined with the traditional geographical divide between *wen* (south) and *wu* (north) elites in the Ming, with many of the military establishment stationed in the northern borders while the bulk of the civil bureaucracy was made up of southern literati. It was convenient for the literati to create a social and cultural 'other' following this geographical divide. And just like the earlier dynasties (Tang and Song), this Ming phenomenon was not unique.[164] There had always been some degree of discrimination of the military men. Many literati, however, were still attracted to martial ethos (*shangwu jingshen* 尚武精神), military studies, and even

[163] Wan Ming 萬明, "Cong Qi Jiguang de wenhua jiaoyou kan wan Ming wenhua shiyu xia de 'wuchen haowen' xianxiang" 從戚繼光的文化交遊看晚明文化視域下的「武臣好文」現象, in *Ludong University Journa*l (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition) 魯東大學學報:哲學社會科學版 vol. 26, no. 4 (2009), 1.

[164] Fang Chenghua, "Chuantong lingyu ruhe fazhan?: Duyi Songdai zhengzhishi yanjiu de jidian guangcha" 傳統領域如何發展？一對宋代政治史研究的幾點觀察, *Historical Inquiry* (National Taiwan University) 臺大歷史學報. no. 48 (Dec 2011), 176.

martial arts (*wushu* 武術) because of the cultural ideal of completeness in both *wen* and *wu*, even though many of them continued to harbour a cultural disdain for military men. And in critical periods in Ming history when foreign threats increased and intensified, more literati began to embrace martial ideals as they engaged more with military studies and interacted directly with military men. The dynamics of *wen* and *wu* in the Ming dynasty was thus far from static as it responded to the changing needs of the Ming polity.

The Influence of Wang Yangming and his Philosophy

In trying to piece together the origins of military culture among the mid-Ming literati, it is impossible not to detect Wang Yangming's influence on generations of literati after him. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) remarked that "in terms of literary achievements, the Ming dynasty had nothing comparable to earlier dynasties, but only in the field of Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism the Ming managed to surpass them all".[165] When Huang was uttering those words, Wang Yangming's branch of Neo-Confucianism must have been on his mind. Though not without its detractors throughout the Ming, Wang Yangming's teaching of his 'Learning of the Heart-Mind' eventually went on to become an important branch of Neo-Confucian thought. It went on to influence generations of scholars even after the fall of the Ming and this has continued to this day. As a result, modern scholarship of Wang Yangming mainly focuses on his contribution to philosophy. His military successes were well-known and were frequently discussed as an additional accolade to the man's greatness as a philosopher and a military general.[166] On the other hand, Wang's military achievements as an extension of his philosophy— or to be precise, philosophical reinterpretation of Cheng-Zhu's philosophies, and its influence on later literati and officials who bridged the *wen-wu* divide has not received much critical analysis.[167] However, it is my opinion that an understanding of Wang Yangming's philosophy in relation to his 'meritorious achievements' will help us explain why

[165] Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, *Mingru xue'an* 明儒學案, 7.
[166] The Qing compilers of the Ming Dynastic History regarded Wang Yangming as the greatest military commander who was originally a civil official in the entire Ming dynasty. "始以直節著，比任疆事，提弱卒，從諸書生掃積年逋寇，平定孽藩。終明之世，文臣用兵制勝，未有過守仁者也." *MS*, *juan* 195, 5170.
[167] One notable, and recent, exception is George L. Israel's research that seeks to connect Wang Yangming's moral philosophy with his civil-military policies especially during his tenure as a Grand Coordinator in the south. George Lawrence Israel, *Doing Good and Ridding Evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming*.

Wang Yangming was so influential to those mid-Ming literati who were involved in managing military affairs.

Wang Yangming's suppression of the Prince of Ning Rebellion of 1519 was a great military feat in itself. But Xu Fuguan felt that Wang Yangming's success in navigating the harrowing aftermath and remain largely unmoved was more impressive than defeating the rebels.[168] Encouraged by his favourites, the martial Zhengde emperor decided to personally lead an army to the south to meet the rebels. When news of Wang Yangming's victory reached the imperial entourage before they even arrived in Jiangxi, the emperor was naturally disappointed. His favourites then took matters upon themselves and urged Wang Yangming to release the traitorous Prince of Ning Zhu Chenhao 朱宸濠 (1476–1521) so that the emperor could be the one to capture him. At the same time, two of the emperors favourites, Jiang Bin 江彬 and Zhang Zhong 張忠, were eager to curry favour by accusing Wang of treason.[169] For a moment, it seemed that this farce was going to cost Wang Yangming his life. Wang managed to avert disaster after some ingenious political maneuvering. Xu Fuguan attributed Wang Yangming's political success to his adherence to Confucian principles and concerning himself only with things which 'arises from the mind-heart of humanity and rightness.'[170] Wang was not concerned with the dangers to his life nor his political career but rather with doing what is just. But it was not simple righteous bravado but rather a clear headed assessment of the true nature of political situation that Wang found himself in which helped him to overcome the dangers that

[168] Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, "Wang Yangming sixiang bu lun" 王陽明思想補論, in *Zhongguo sixiang shi lunji xubian* 中國思想史論集續編, 506-507.
[169] Gu, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, *juan* 47, 703-704.
[170]"出於仁義之心" Xu, "Wang Yangming sixiang bu lun," 496. George Lawrence (Larry) Israel trans., "The Prince and the Sage: Concerning Wang Yangming's "Effortless" Suppression of the Ning Princely Establishment Rebellion," in *Late Imperial China*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Dec 2008), 70.

waited him. Wang Yangming's political actions and his meritorious achievement "all derived from his humanity of self-cultivation (*xiu ji zhi ren* 修己之仁), which is also to say from his "extending his innate knowledge of the good" (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知)."[172] According to Wang's doctrine, to say that his actions were in accord with innate knowledge of the good is to say that he had unified knowledge and action.[173] *Zhi liangzhi* meant, in Dardess words, "radiating one's rediscovered ethical identity, polished by discussion and inward reflection to a high gloss, until it shone like a light, affecting and attracting others.[174] And it was this innate knowledge of the good that guided Wang Yangming when he was faced with great obstacles and life-threatening situations. As such, Wang's military achievements were the result of his inner sageliness (*nei sheng* 內聖) through his *liangzhi*. According to Lü Miaofen, the enthusiastic reception of Wang Yangming's teachings was very much a result of his fame as a military genius and him being recognised as one who "prominently displayed the definitive Confucian political ideal of sageliness within and kingliness without (*wai wang* 外王)."[175] It was new and it was ground-breaking.

Not surprisingly, Wang Yangming's teaching was well-received among the local elites from the province of Jiangxi, especially Ji'an 吉安 prefecture (known as Jizhou 吉州 until Yuan dynasty) where he had spent a significant portion of his political career governing, and also invested his time in recruiting students and giving lectures. Some of these lectures attracted as many as three thousand attendants, not

[172] Xu, "Wang Yangming sixiang bu lun," 496. George L. Israel trans., "The Prince and the Sage: Concerning Wang Yangming's "Effortless" Suppression of the Ning Princely Establishment Rebellion," 70.
[173] Wang Yangming, Wing-tsit Chan trans. *Instructions for Practical Living, and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, 229.
[174] John W. Dardess, *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and his Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 229.
[175] Lü Miaofen 呂妙芬, *Yangming xue shiren shequn: lishi, sixiang yu shijian* 楊明學士人社群—歷史，思想與實踐, 46.

just from Ji'an bit also other provinces such as Jiangsu and Guangdong. Wang Yangming's philosophical influence was so pervasive in Jiangxi that after his death, it was a common sight for example, to see students hailing from Taihe 泰和 county in Ji'an prefecture forming philosophical groups to explore the new Confucian ideas of Wang Yangming.[176] Wang Yangming, together with his disciples from the Jiangyou 江右 group that consisted of Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563) from Yongfeng 永豐, Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562) from Anfu 安福, Ouyang De 歐陽德 (1496–1554) from Taihe, and Luo Hongxian 羅洪先 (1504–1564) from Jishui 吉水, were later honoured together in a Five Worthies Shrine at the Jingju 靜居 Monastery located in Ji'an.[177] It was this select group of Wang Yangming's students who kept his philosophy alive despite the persecution from more orthodox scholars, and who further developed and spread his ideas. In return, Ji'an, and Jiangxi as a whole, became a prestigious centre for Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucianist teachings.[178]

Ouyang De was one of Wang Yangming's most influential students as well as an apologist whose active proselytisation of his master's philosophy impressed the future Chief Grand Secretary Xu Jie 徐階 (1503–1583).[179] Xu Jie then became a protégé of Nie Bao, who as an important follower of Wang Yangming who managed to develop his own interpretation of his master's doctrine of *liangzhi*, advocating a *zhujing* 主靜 (*emphasizing tranquility*) approach that has its origins in the Song

[176] John Dardess, *A Ming Society: Tai-Ho County, Kiangsi, in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*, 155.
[177] Anne Gerritsen, *Ji'an Literati and the Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China: China Studies 13*, 161.
[178] Idem. 216-217.
[179] Dardess, *A Ming Society: Tai-Ho County, Kiangsi, in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*, 221-222.

Confucianism of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤.[180] As a civil official, Nie was demonstrated his expertise in handling military affairs. He even personally led the army and successfully defended Pingyang 平陽 and Datong 大同 in Shanxi from Mongol incursions.[181] Nie Bao eventually became the Minister of War and was instrumental in spotting and promoting able military commanders like Zhang Jing, Yu Dayou and Tang Kekuan 湯克寬 to play important roles in the campaign against the *wokou*—sowing the seeds that led to the final victory years later when Hu Zongxian was in charge of the campaign. Luo Hongxian, friend of Tang Shunzhi and Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507–1571) studied Wang Yangming's philosophy even though he had never met the master. After Luo was dismissed from the civil service (together with Tang Shunzhi), he devoted his life to studying Wang Yangming's *xinxue* critically, and also committed his time to practical matters like cartography and city defense.[182] Luo eventually became one of the leading Confucian thinkers of his time.

Outside of Jiangxi, Wang Yangming's philosophy also attracted the attention of literati who were strictly speaking, not official followers of Wang Yangming. Tang Shunzhi was one them. Although a devotee of Li Mengyang's 李夢陽 (1472–1529) literary archaist movement (*fugu* 復古) in his younger days, Tang Shunzhi turned his back on the ancient literary style of the Qin and Han dynasties, and made a stylistic change to the Tang and Song style. An encounter with Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583), a direct disciple of Wang Yangming, caused an intellectual shockwave in the minds of Tang Shunzhi, Wang Shenzhong 王慎中 (1509–1559), and Luo Hongxian (all future

[180] Jia Qianchu 賈乾初, "'Zhujing' de zhengzhi— Nie Bao zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu" "主靜"的政治—聶豹政治思想研究, *Guiyang xueyuan xuebao: shehui kexue ban* 貴陽學院學報:社會科學版 vol. 12, no. 3 (2017), 22.
[181] Huang, *Mingru xue'an*, 371.
[182] *DMB*, 981–982.

founding members of the literary movement to imitate Tang-Song prose), possibly leading them to abandon their original literary pursuits as they turned inward (through tranquil meditation) in search of the 'true spirit' of literature (*zhen jingshen* 真精神). Under the influence of Wang Yangming's philosophy, Tang Shunzhi and Wang Shenzhong broke away from the literary archaist movement.[183] After his dismissal from the government (together with Luo Hongxian), Tang became a recluse and a serious student of philosophy, literature, mathematics, military arts, and everything else that was worth studying. Wang Yangming's school of Neo-Confucianism became a focal point of Tang's later intellectual development even though he never professed to be a Yangming devotee, unlike his close friend Luo Hongxian.[184] Viewed in this context, Tang Shunzhi's ensuing return to the government and his transformation into a military commander become somewhat easier to comprehend. Wang Yangming's school of thought could have appealed to Tang's desire to break free from the trappings of orthodoxy— whether it was Neo-Confucianism or literature. Wang's philosophy also aligned perfectly with Tang Shunzhi's ambition to order the world through military achievements and fulfill his 'kingliness without'.

Weng Wanda (who as Minister of War was succeeded by Nie Bao in 1552) was a senior statesman, a seasoned military general, poet, and friend of Tang Shunzhi. Their correspondence and their discussion on military affairs will be examined at length later in this thesis. Ma Chor-kin had observed that although Weng Wanda was a follower of Wang Yangming's teachings, he was really most interested in emulating

[183] Ma Meixin 馬美信, "Yangming xinxue yu wenxue fugu yundong" 陽明心學與文學復古運動, *Fudan xuebao: shehui kexue ban* 復旦學報:社會科學版 no. 6 (1993), 102.
[184] Huang Zongxi regarded Tang Shunzhi as a legitimate follower of Wang Yangming because of his close association with Wang Ji. Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xue'an*, 599. Also see Zhou Qun 周群, "Lun Wang Ji dui Tang Song pai wenxue sixiang de yingxiang" 論王畿對唐宋派文學思想的影響, *Qilu xuekang* 齊魯學刊, no. 5 (2000), 18.

Wang's successful 'practical application' (*shijian gongfu* 實踐功夫) of his philosophy rather than the metaphysical aspect of it.[185] As a Minister of War and also military general, Weng Wanda was able to manage military affairs with competence, and if he was indeed trying to follow the path of Wang Yangming in attaining 'meritorious achievements' in the process, he would have considered successful.

I have mentioned the above persons who were early disciples and followers of Wang Yangming because of their subsequent influence in politics and society after their master's death. The devotion and the intellectual brilliance of the early disciples ensured that Wang Yangming's philosophy was properly preserved and transmitted to future generations of scholars. There were obstacles placed along the way by the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy but over time, Wang's ideas found a foothold in the government and among elite circles of the mid-Ming society. Part of the reason for its success had to do with having Jiangxi as the powerbase, with its extensive network of literati who went on to become the next generation of political elites. Along with Wang Yangming's teaching on moral cultivation, there was a strong focus on achieving 'kingliness without'. Larry Israel put it succinctly, "Wang Yangming's philosophy was therefore always one of action tied to a vision of socio-political order and the kind of knowledge guaranteeing its very possibility, rather than focusing on the philosophical context of his philosophy of self-cultivation (sageliness within)".[186]

The mid-Ming was a period when profound changes began to take place. The social elites began to examine their identity and their place in the society. Even though traditional study for the civil service examinations still took center stage,

[185] Ma, Chor-kin 馬楚堅, *The Life and Thought of Weng Wanda*, Thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1998, 54.
[186] Israel, "The Prince and the Sage: Concerning Wang Yangming's "Effortless" Suppression of the Ning Princely Establishment Rebellion", 72.

literati became increasingly adventurous in exploring new fields of study. With the new wave of Mongol threats, combined with the raids by putative Japanese pirates in the south, military study became one of the more important fields of study outside Neo-Confucianism. To many literati who had the ambition to ‘order the world’ with their learning, Wang Yangming’s, with his teachings and meritorious achievement, would have been an excellent example and role model.

Military crisis in the south during the mid-Ming

The Ming state in the second century of its existence witnessed external threats to its national security mainly from two fronts— the Mongols in the north and the *wokou* in the southeastern coast, what the Chinese traditionally termed 'northern caitiffs and southern Japanese pirates' (*beilu nanwou* 北虜南倭). Even though *beilu nanwou* might suggests that both threats were on equal terms, the truth was far from it. Mao Kun who had served in Hu Zongxian's *mufu* gave an explanation of the differences between these two threats: the Mongols' natural habitat and reliance on cavalry allowed them to launch their attacks on China only in autumn and so their window of opportunity was limited. This predictability was advantageous to the defenders. However, the same could not be said about the *wokou* who arrived from sea whenever the weather conditions were favourable, and so enjoyed a larger window of operation. In addition, the long coastline that stretches for 'three thousand *li*' made it hard to defend. The various guards and garrisons were simply not up to the task of defending the coastline.[187]

As a result, the defense against the Mongols, though a top priority in terms of national security for the Ming, was very much the domain of the imperial court and its policy makers. 'Border defense' or *bianfang* 邊防 had been a hot topic in national policies since the beginning of the Ming dynasty and continued to be so until its end. However, a large number of literati and the population in general were not invested in border defense for this simple fact: the northern border was too far away. Most importantly, there was a literal and psychological safety barrier that fuelled their sense of security: the Great Wall (known as *bianqiang* 邊牆 in the Ming) with its seven

[187] Mao Kun 茅坤, "Yu Li Jiquan zhongchen yi haikou shiyi shu" 與李汲泉中丞議海寇事宜書, *Mao Kun ji* 茅坤集, *juan* 2, 213-214.

formidable passes (Shanhai 山海, Juyong 居庸, Zijing 紫荊, Niangzi 娘子, Pingxin 平型, Yanmen 雁門, and Jiayu 嘉裕) strategically distributed along the entirety of the wall.[188] No matter what the true value of the *bianqiang* as a defense measure was, having a tangible defense against a not-so-tangible enemy certainly helped (most of the population in Ming China lived far away from the borders and never encountered the Mongol intruders in their lifetime). A similar defense could not be found along the southeastern coast of Ming China— no wall separated the invading *wokou* from the people living in Jiangnan, and the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong.

The *wokou* incursions exposed the weakness of the Ming defense system along the southeastern coast and directly threatened the Jiangnan region which was the economic and cultural center of the empire. Village and towns were raided. The way of life of the people of Jiangnan was violated. The lives of the landed gentry and the masses were equally 'on the line' because unlike the military emergencies in the northern border that most people heard about, the *wokou* could be seen and their trail of violent destruction was only too visible. 'To slaughter, pillage, and having no regard for human life— this is the very nature of the *wokou*' was a common refrain among many who lived in the affected regions.[189]

In order to have some perspective on the shockwave that *wokou* sent across Chinese coast, I will discuss briefly a vivid account from a contemporary source of a raid that took place in Haiyan 海鹽, Zhejiang, in 1553 and which was only one of many in the mid-16th century. When the *wokou* ships arrived and anchored at the shore, the townsfolks gleefully gathered to catch the sight. As the last incursion had

[188] Lai Jiancheng 賴建誠, *Bianzhen liangxiang: Mingdai zhonghou qi de bianfang jingfei yu guojia caizheng weiji* 邊鎮糧餉：明代中後期的邊防經費與國家財政危機, 1351–1602, 238-239
[189] Fan Zhongyi 范中義 and Tong Xigang 仝晰綱, *Mingdai wokou shilue* 明代倭寇史略, 208-209.

been a century ago, many of the people present that day had never seen a Japanese up close and so no one suspected any foul play. Incidentally, most people on these ships were not Japanese in the first place, but Chinese, despite the label of "dwarf bandits" or *wokou* that had originally been coined for the Japanese pirates of a century before. When the noon passed, the *wokou* began the first of their series of attack on the city of Haiyan.[190] At the end of the fourth (and last) incursion, they had slaughtered close to around 3700 civilians. When they returned in April 1554, they encountered and defeated the Ming military— as many as 1475 soldiers perished by sword or drowning. Riding on their success, this same band of pirates decided to attack the city of Jiaxing 嘉興 later on the same day. When they failed to breach the city defenses, the pirates returned to Haiyan in fury. Some of them entered the Jiang household and killed the entire family of five, including a sleeping child. The *wokou* then proceeded to 'drink wine mixed the blood from their victim'.[191] This account is terrifying to the point of exaggeration but it does express the fear and trauma of those who lived in the affected Jiangnan region.

Wang Hongtai has written that it is well-worth the effort to study the history of the Jiajing *wokou* from a socio-cultural historical perspective— to find out how did the people view, understand, and imagine this disorder. How did they reconcile with the disorder? How did it affect and influence society and culture?[192] Wang suggested that the crisis created a sense of solidarity in Jiangnan society as people were united by their common anxiety, their concern for one another, and common discourse. 'What are we going to do with the *wokou*?' became the common topic that was

[190] Cai Jiude 采九德, *Wobian shilue* 倭變事略, *juan* 1, in *Yanhu zhilin* 鹽邑志林, 393.
[191] "取血漬酒飲之" Cai, *Wobian shilue*, *juan* 1, in *Yanhu zhilin* 鹽邑志林, 424.
[192] Wang Hongtai 王鴻泰, "Wou dau yu xiashi— mingdai wouluan chongji xia Jiangnan shiren de wuxia fengshang" 倭刀與俠士—明代倭亂衝擊下江南士人的武俠風尚, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, vol. 30, no. 3 (2012), 63.

discussed and debated among local elites and commoners alike. A common crisis created a shared platform for interaction, and exchange of ideas and information.[193] The private secretariat of Hu Zongxian could be viewed as such a platform— its sole purpose of eradicating the *wokou* encouraged those who were a part of it to have intense intellectual exchanges. Military-minded literati discussing military affairs with one another. It was not a place for empty talks as ideas could actually be turned into action. Military theories were tested in the field, either by military commanders like Yu Dayou or Qi Jiguang, or by the literati themselves.

The *wokou* crisis created the motivation for people, especially the literati, to care about military matters. These literati thought and wrote about it with an intellectual intensity that was unseen in earlier period of Ming. Interestingly, in Ong Chang Woei's study of the Guanzhong 關中 literati, he discovered that those of them who lived in the Shaanxi frontiers were more ready to build a career via military affairs.[194] Similarly, many mid-Ming literati attempted to convert their ideas into action by participating in the fight against the *wokou*— either working as military advisors or joining the army. It also created opportunities for those military-minded literati to have an alternative career other than the civil service or giving them another path into the civil service other than passing the civil service examinations.[195] If military culture of the literati was already in place especially after Tumu, when the transfer of military authority from the military class into the civil officials had intensified, the military crisis brought along by the *wokou* was the catalyst that brought it to the forefront.

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[193] Wang, "Wou dau yu xiashi— mingdai wouluan chongji xia Jiangnan shiren de wuxia fengshang", 85.
[194] Ong Chang Woei, *Men of Letters within the Passes: Guanzhong Literati in Chinese History, 907-1911*. vol. 305 (Cambridge, Mass: published by the Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 21-75.
[195] Wang , "Wou dau yu xiashi— mingdai wouluan chongji xia Jiangnan shiren de wuxia fengshang", 86.

1.5 The State of the Field

Chinese military history has been emerging as a new and important sinological field in its own right since around 1990. In their inaugural essay written for the *Journal of Chinese Military History*, David Graff and David Curtis Wright both expressed the belief that Chinese military history will only increase in importance along with China's growing economic, political, diplomatic and military power.[196] There are sinologists see the study of Chinese military history as an old-fashioned topic— holding on the belief that China has been historically pacifist and anti-military.[197] There are also those who harbour suspicion of current historians of the topic being advocates of a strident military posture towards China.[198] The existence of diverse perspectives regarding the study of Chinese military history is understandable because traditionally it is not considered a worthwhile undertaking among Chinese scholars. In a paper published in 2010, Peter Lorge remarked upon the "great amount of traditional Chinese military writings left unexploited by post-1911 scholarship (China and the West)".[199] Lorge was merely echoing Fairbank who articulated the same views more than thirty years ago in his essay in the seminal *China's Ways in Warfare*.[200] Fairbank saw that unique military record of China and how it was largely ignored by historians. He raised the issue that China did have a varied military experience that deserves a closer look and more systematic study. If the situation of

[196] David A. Graff and David Curtis Wright, "Inaugural Essays from the Editors", in *Journal of Chinese Military History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.
[197] An anti-military Chinese culture is a powerful idea that influenced both the perceptions of scholars (from the east and the west) with regards to Chinese military history in the first half of the 20th century. In 1939, the prominent Chinese historian Lei Haizong coined the term "demilitarized" culture (*wu bing wen hua* 無兵文化) to explain how then Chinese ability to fight was sapped by centuries of Confucian culture- a process that began after the end of Warring States period, see Lei Haizong, *Zhongguo wenhua yu zhongguo de bing*, 126.
[198] Graff and Wright, "Inaugural Essays from the Editors", 1.
[199] Peter Lorge, "The Many Ways of Chinese Warfare", *Historically Speaking*, vol. 11, no. 5 (November 2010): 24-25.
[200] Frank Kierman and John K. Fairbank eds. *China's Ways in Warfare*.

the study of Chinese military history appeared to be dire in the west, then it is no different when it comes to Chinese and Japanese scholarship. The post-1911 study of Chinese military history was largely confined to the military classics (specifically the Seven Military Classics or W*ujing Qishu* 武經七書), thus confining the historical period of study from the Western Zhou to the Han dynasty.[201] If scholars were interested in military affairs outside of the classics, it would more often than not be institutional or organizational history (*zhidu shi* 制度史) that caught their attention.[202] Yu Zhijia 于志嘉, who worked tirelessly on Ming military institution, has also brought our attention to the dynamics and workings of civil and military jurisdictions under the deliberate Ming policy of dividing power between military and civil administrations as an imperial control strategy.[203]

The situation in the west is slightly more encouraging beginning with Kierman and Fairbank's *China's Ways in Warfare* which ushered in a new era in the study of Chinese military history, as it was a major concerted effort by the West to understand Chinese military affairs from ancient times up till the late imperial period. Wang Gungwu 王賡武 pointed out in his review that the neglect in the study of Chinese

[201] Lewis Bernstein, "Review of *Warfare in History*, ed. Hans van de Ven", *Journal of Military History,* vol. 65, no. 3, (2001): 776-777. Lewis Bernstein defined the field of Chinese military history 'relatively unexplored' and welcomed more 'empirical studies' to counterbalance the nearly exclusive focus on the military classics such as Sun Zi's *Art of War*.

[202] Many earlier works were focus on the Ming institutions of the military guards system or *wei-suo* 衛所, the military colonies *juntun* 軍屯 and the hereditary military household *junhu* 軍戶. See Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, "Shi Mingdai dusi weisuo zhidu" 釋明代都司衛所制度, *Yugong banyuekan* 禹貢半月刊 3.10 (1935), 459–64. A seminal on *juntun* is Wang Shuquan's 王毓銓 *Mingdai de juntun* 明代的軍屯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1965). Gu Cheng 顧誠 then expanded on the research with his "Mingdiguo de jiangtu guanli tizhi" 明帝國的疆土管理體制, Lishi yanjiu 歷史研究 3 (1989), 135–50, rpt. in his *Yinni de jiangtu: weisuo zhidu yu Ming diguo* 隱匿的疆土：衛所制度與明帝國 (Beijing: Guangming ribao 光明日報, 2012, 2nd imprint 2013), 48–71. Li Xinfeng 李新峰 then built on the above works with his *Mingdai weisuo zhengqu yanjiu* 明代衛所政區研究(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 2016).

[203] Yu Zhijia 于志嘉, "Ming Beijing xing dudufu kao" 明北京行都督府考, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 79.4 (2008): 331–73.

military history by the West had not been due to lack of historical materials but probably stemmed from the feeling that Chinese traditional warfare is not relevant to the understanding of modern China, especially as China seemed to have been militarily imitative of the West for the past century.[204] For example, eminent western military historians such as John Keegan concluded that "in Chinese culture, the requirements of farming are antithetical to warfare" in *A History of Warfare* (1993). Geoffrey Parker remarked "in contrast [with the Chinese way of war], "the "Western way of war" is characterized by the primacy of technology, discipline and a vision of war aimed at decisive victory and the enemy's unconditional surrender".[205] These views by contemporary historians tend to reinforce the deep-seated perspectives of China being a pacifist Confucian state throughout history- a perspective perpetuated by earlier generations of historians. However, alternative voices and new perspectives can be found in western scholarship beginning in the early 1990s. For example, Mark Lewis suggested, "Discipline was vital to the Chinese military traditions e.g. large infantry army of 500,000 soldiers organized in the Warring States Period".[206] These alternative views began to gather strength in the late 1990s, coinciding with the appearance of Alastair Johnston's *Cultural Realism* (1998), and culminating in Van de Ven's *Warfare in Chinese History* (2000) and Nicola di Cosmo's *Military Culture in Imperial China* (2009).

Alastair Johnston, in his influential work *Cultural Realism* (1998), suggested the historical existence of not one, but two consistent and temporally persistent strategic cultures in China— the Confucian-Mencian paradigm, which assumes that conflict is avoidable and military force should be last resort, and the *parabellum*

[204] Wang Gungwu 王賡武, review of "*Chinese Ways in Warfare* by Frank A. Kierman and John K. Fairbank", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Winter, 1975-1976): 595-597.
[205] Geoffrey Parker, *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West*, 2-9.
[206] Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 97-137.

paradigm, which assumes that conflict is a constant feature in human affairs and that the application of violence is highly preferred in dealing with the enemy. From his reading of selected military texts (mainly from the Ming dynasty) and also official memorials, Johnston believes that the *parabellum* paradigm is the dominant one of the two strategic approaches while the putative pacifist culture of imperial China remained purely symbolic.[207] *Warfare in Chinese History* (2000) which stemmed from the same research focus on strategic culture, contains a collection of essays aimed at challenging the old paradigm of a "persistent military tradition reflecting an anti-military Chinese culture in which the civil was always ascendant over the military and which abhorred the use of violence, preferred defense over offense and favoured the indirect approach to frontal assaults and total destruction of the enemy." Lau Nap Yin 柳立言, Peter Perdue, Denis Twitchett's essays confirmed Johnston's earlier theory. Essays by the editor, Huang Kuanchong 黃寬重, and David Graff managed to challenge the common supposition that wars were just brief interruptions in civilian-oriented normality. The essays also contain an unequivocal awareness of many examples where civil bureaucrats were commanding military forces, suggesting at least in practice, there was no strict separation of the military and the civil spheres. These new perspectives on Chinese military history no doubt influenced Kai Filipiak's later view of how the Ming civil bureaucrats, who as non-professionals, actually handled military matters.[208] Civil and military relations and the *wen-wu* binary continued to be important and interesting topics for further examination. *Civil-Military Relations in Chinese History* (2015) attempted to bring together scholars

[207] Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, 249.
[208] Kai Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times", in *Ming Studies*, 66 (Sep 2012): 1-15.

whose objectives were to improve our understanding of interactions, exchanges, influences, and interdependences between both spheres in imperial China.[209]

Military Culture in Imperial China (2009)- a collection of papers from a 2001 conference on Military Culture in Chinese History held at the University of Canterbury (Christchurch) continued to contribute to our understanding of the roles of civil and military officials in military affairs.[210] There is an overall emphasis on strategic culture and also society's inclination for war and military organization. In other words, scholars are concerned with the relationship between war and the individuals (literati and the commoners) and the society as a whole. These papers were a departure from the usual Chinese military historiography that tends to concentrate on the institutions or individual warfare. The discussions on the *wen* and *wu* binary and the chapters on the cultural exchange between the civil officials and the military men of Ming allow us to take a closer look at how the Ming literati viewed military matters. This broke the pattern of western scholarship's neglect of military personnel in favour of the civil officials and the literati.[211] In the same year that *Military Culture in Imperial China* was published, we also saw the arrival of Kenneth M. Swope's *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, which dealt with the almost forgotten Chinese-Korean-Japan war of the end of the sixteenth century. Combined with Swope's earlier research on late-Ming military, the book put forth a convincing argument and revisionist view on the Wanli emperor's much neglected military leadership.[212]

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[209] Kai Filipiak ed., *Civil-Military Relations in Chinese History: From Ancient China to the Communist Takeover*.
[210] Nicolai Di Cosmo (ed.), *Military Culture in Imperial China.*
[211] David M. Robinson, "Why Military Institutions Matters for Ming History.", 302.
[212] Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*.

The research on China's strategic culture was followed immediately by another important work, Wang Yuan-kang's *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (2011). Wang argued in his book that China has a strategic culture that is predominantly peaceful but that this culture has actually little influence over the country's grand strategy imperial times. Examining historical examples, Wang noticed that powerful Chinese states since Song times were largely "primed for offence" whenever the strategic conditions were favourable and opportunity presents itself.[213] There were times when Confucianism managed to exert its influence on strategic behaviour, especially those concerning internal disorders. But frequently in the interest of survival, China was pushed towards aggressive realpolitik behaviour.[214] I am in general agreement with Graff's assertion that China was no less or more martial than any other major world power, past or present.[215]

Stepping into the second decade of the new millennium, we see the increased interest in the study of military history of Ming China with new publications. The years s2013 and 2014 saw the arrival of David M. Robinson's *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* and Kenneth M. Swope's *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty: 1618-1644* respectively. *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* explores how the royal hunt, polo matches, archery contests, equestrian demonstrations, and the imperial menagerie were represented in poetry, prose, and portraiture. It painted a picture of a Ming military culture that was perpetuated and dominated by the emperors, with the help of the civil officials who were stake-holders in the imperial enterprise.[216] Swope's *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty* focus on the Ming military machine in the last years of Emperor Wanli's reign and their

[213] Wang Yuan-Kang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*, 21-23.
[214] Idem. 24-27.
[215] Graff and Wright, "Inaugural Essays from the Editors": 4.
[216] David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*.

subsequent defeat by the Manchus. It attempts to dispel the oft promoted myth of a weak Ming military versus the great Manchu military. Recently, Swope also provides a more detailed account and analysis of Ming military intervention in Vietnam in the early fifteenth century.[217]

And while Ming military culture was being discussed in full-length works, scholars also turned their attention to how the scholar officials discussed and debated about war throughout Chinese history. Topics such as classification of warfare, debates about strategy and tactics in the field, and as simple as deciding whether to go to war in aid of another country are covered in *Debating War in Chinese History* (2013).[218] Meanwhile, the comparison between the Europe and China in the area of military innovation (as part of the continuing discussion of Military Revolution debate) was picked up by Tonio Andrade in his *The Age of Gunpowder, China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History* (2017).[219]

With the newer works written on Chinese military history in the last two decades, it is certainly a sign of fruition of the research interest and effort that has been committed. As Paul Jakov Smith has remarked in 2011, "the proliferation of books, theses, articles, conference presentations, and study groups on the military in China all demonstrate that war has finally become a mainstream topic in the field of Chinese history".[220] Things are certainly looking bright in terms of the future of the field of Chinese military history and I believe it is going to be the same for late imperial Chinese history.

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[217] Kenneth M. Swope, "Causes and Consequences of the Ming Intervention in Vietnam in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *Ming China: Courts and Contacts 1400–1450*, 37–45.
[218] Peter Allan Lorge ed., *Debating War in Chinese History*.
[219] Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History*.
[220] Paul Jakov Smith, Review of *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*, by Yuan-kang Wang. *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 42 (2013): 492-501.

1.6 Conclusion

A large part of this thesis was possible because of the invaluable work done by David Robinson beginning with his research on Ming martial spectacles in the imperial court and how the early Ming regime posited themselves as the overlord of eastern Eurasia, just like their Yuan predecessor. Just as the first six emperors beginning with Yongle actively engaged the Mongols across the border (either enemies or allies), these same emperors understood the value of fostering imperial prestige and projecting their power through military drills, imperial hunts, horsemanship, archery, etc.— just like their Eurasian counterparts. The Ming court used martial spectacles to define and demonstrate their rulership.[221]

The emperors had partners in their grand display of martial prowess. The scholar-officials invested their time (and career) into the fashioning of this imperial martial ethos. And after the Tumu incident, these scholar-officials changed their rhetoric, actively discouraging any direct imperial involvement in military matters. The emperor remained as the final arbiter of all political and military matters of course, but there was no longer the need for him to lead armies in the field (given the fact that the last time an emperor tried doing that it did not end well). Furthermore, Yu Qian proved that civil officials could handle military affairs as well (and maybe even better than the throne). While criticising the Ming emperors of the mid-Ming for their martial spectacles and military pursuits, many of these educated men were deeply interested in military history, contemporary military issues, martial arts, and heroic action.[222] The emperors have lost their main supporters and partners, the scholar-officials, in their imperial scheme of cultivating and maintaining their military culture.

[221] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 360.
[222] David M. Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China*, 170-172.

But these scholar-officials had now taken over the leadership of creating and cultivating the military culture of the Ming dynasty. This creative energy and fervour for all things military were then trickled down from the political elites to other members of the literati. By the end of Zhengtong's reign, officials felt increasingly entitled to formulate policy, policy that only required the emperor's approval rather than his input.[223] And in military matters, officials had greater freedom and responsibility in handling them. But such freedom was not just confined to the imperial court. This is the point where the present work departed from David Robinson's earlier research. As civil officials were increasingly given military assignments, how did they view themselves in these military roles? Was there a fundamental change in their perspective of the *wen* and *wu* dichotomy? And as members of the literati became stakeholders and partakers in this new military culture, what did they hope to get out of it? Or what did they contribute? What were the different literati networks that produced and enjoyed this culture? And finally, what effects did this literati military culture cast on the historical development of the Ming as a whole? These are some of the questions I came up with when I started this research and which I hope to discover the answers in the course of my writing.

[223] Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 363.

2. Tang Shunzhi: Civil Official and Self-Made Military Commander

2.1 Creating the ideal military man

Zijiang [style name] master Shen, after inheriting the post of commander at a young age, was already fighting bandits on horseback and was feared by them. Before long, he was deployed to Yongan where he led a few hundred men to raid the Chencun stronghold. The bandits erected walls high up on the mountain and master Shen ascended alone riding his horse. However, the bandits descended, luring master Shen into a mire. The horse was trapped while it kept its balance with its muzzle, and soon pranced its way on to solid ground. Three chieftains hurried towards the mire to attack master Shen with one chieftain advancing on the left holding a spear and another chieftain moving on the right while brandishing a sword. Blocking the horse's way was a chieftain who was ready to fire his crossbow ten steps behind. Master [Shen] turned his head to avoid the spear while lifting his right leg [from the stirrup] to allow the sword's advance. The spearhead flew past the neck [of master Shen] by a mere inch while the blade of the sword is caught in stirrup, causing the metal to break with a loud clang. Master Shen shot the man with the spear, hitting his exposed neck and killing him. [The master] slung the bow over his right arm, drew his sword with his right, and hacked the chieftain at the stirrups, cutting his face and breaking his teeth, thereby killing him. The chieftain with the crossbow nervously dropped his weapon, crouched his body and tried to escape back to the mountains on all fours before the master shot him in the back.

紫江沈公，自襲指揮使時，未弱冠，已能馳馬手搏賊，賊憚之。未幾調征永安，嘗以數百人擣陳村寨。賊墻立山上，公一人拍馬而登。賊卻下山，誘公入淖中，馬陷，以吻拄淖中，而騰其足及於陸。三酋前趨淖劫公，一酋鏢而左，一酋刀而右，夾馬一酋彀弩十步外。公捩頸以過鏢，而挑右足以讓刀。鏢離

頸寸而過，刃著於鐙，鞥然斷鐵。公射鏢者，中缺項，殪。左挂弓而右掣刀，斫刀酋於鐙間，斷其頰車折齒，殪。弩者恟失弩，僂而手行上山，公又射之中膂。[224]

The passage above came from a prose narrative, *A Narrative of the Military Exploits in Guangyou* (*Xu Guangyou zhanggong* 敘廣右戰功), on the military career of Shen Xiyi 沈希儀 (1491–1554), a military officer who was a member of the hereditary military class stationed in the Guixian 貴縣 (Guigang in present day Guangxi province). He first rose to prominence in the 1517 suppression of a tribal uprising in Yongan 永安 when he defeated and killed the three chieftains leading the rebellion (as recounted in the above account).[225] Shen's following military successes during emperor Jiajing's reign led to his promotion to Vice Commissioner-in-Chief and, finally, Regional Commander before his death.[226] Shen was at one time, the military advisor to the reinstated minister of war Wang Yangming when the latter was appointed as Superintendent of Military Affairs in Guangdong, Guangxi, Jiangxi and Huguang in 1527. Shen also assisted the Supreme Commander Zhang Jing in the suppression of the Yao aboriginal rebellion in Guangxi in 1537. All things considered; Shen Xiyi was a distinguished military officer with a successful career. *Xu Guangyou zhanggong* was collected into Jiao Hong's *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄 which became an important source for the Qing compilers of the *Ming shi*.[227] When Shen Xiyi was inducted into the biographies of the *Ming shi*, the editors

[224] Tang Shunzhi 唐順之, "*Xu Guangyou Zhangong*" 敘廣右戰功, in *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 562.
[225] *MS*, *juan* 211, 5591.
[226] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 360, 6435.
[227] Jiao Hong 焦竑, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄, *juan* 106, 196-207.

were likely impressed enough by the masterful narrative of *Xu Guangyou zhangong* that they adopted the text almost in verbatim.[228]

Xu Guangyou zhangong was written by Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507–1560), one of most celebrated literary figures from the late-Ming period. Although Tang began his bureaucratic career at the prestigious Hanlin academy, Tang became a military commander at the end of his life when he returned to the civil service. Tang's official appointments as a Military Commissioner, his affinity of the martial coupled with his literary fame helped him to establish friendships with many military officers such as Yu Dayou, Qi Jiguang, Ma Yong 馬永 (?–1540) and Shen Xiyi. As a practitioner of martial arts, a serious scholar of military strategy and weaponry, and the experience as a Military Commissioner, Tang Shunzhi managed to imbue his military knowledge into his narrative of Shen Xiyi's exploits. Reading the opening sequence, the reader will get a very good sense of the action and the danger that came from the confrontation of a lone soldier against three deadly foes. The military commander riding fearlessly into enemy territory like a lone ranger only to be caught in a deadly trap. With his horse mired in mud and three enemies who each wielded a lethal weapon, Shen Xiyi was on desperate terrain, or *si di* 死地 (in Sun Zi's chapter on Nine Terrains). It was a fight or perish situation and Shen chose to fight just like what Sun Zi advised, "For this reason…I do battle on desperate terrain". [229] The subsequent battle sequence is so vividly described and expertly paced that it could have been taken out from the pages of a modern novel of the martial hero/knight-errant (*wuxia* 武俠) genre. The action sequence of Shen Xiyi evading the attacks

[228] The editors of *SKQS* mentioned that Tang Shunzhi's strong command of the classical prose style contributed to his masterly narrative technique. *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao (zhengli ben)* 四庫全書總目提要 (整理本), *juan* 53, 746.
[229] "Where my army will survive if we quickly do better but will perish if we hesitate, that is desperate terrain." From Sun Zi, *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*, translated by Victor Mair, 118.

before swiftly taking down his opponents one after another, was constructed by someone who was not just well informed about martial arts, but clearly passionate about it. By placing Shen Xiyi in a desperate situation and have him succeeded in fighting for his life with a series of calculated moves, Tang Shunzhi managed to introduce to the reader a protagonist who was courageous (charging on horseback alone), calm and composed (by getting out of a desperate situation), and highly-skilled (killing the three attackers single-handedly). Tang who was a student of the military strategy clearly understood the important qualities that make a good soldier. For the rest of the prose, Tang would set off to establish Shen Xiyi as a superb military commander and strategist.

In the next military engagement, Shen Xiyi gave chase to a group of raiders belonging to the Yao 猺 minority who had raided Lingui County earlier and then escaped back to their base. Two narrow passes lead to the raiders' base, and, anticipating the pursuit of the government troops, the raiders laid in ambush at one of the passes and sent ahead a few local Yao civilians to warn Shen Xiyi of the closure of one of the passes, so as to lure the government troops to the ambush. Shen saw though the deception, marched through the supposedly closed pass and attacked the raiders' base. The *Ming shi* account of the event (which was largely borrowed from Tang Shunzhi) recorded that the raiders rode back in panic after learning that their home base was under attack, only to be defeated by Shen's troops.[230] In Tang Shunzhi's account, it was Shen Xiyi who sent back some Yao people to inform the raiders that the government troops had marched through the other pass and were attacking their base, thus drawing them out of the ambush only to be ambushed by the government troops lying in wait. The action did not end here:

[230] *MS*, *juan* 211, 5591.

> The bandits scuttled while the master [Shen] alone continued in pursuit of a chieftain. The chieftain rode towards the edge of a cliff, was trapped, and abandoned his horse before jumping into the stream below. The master jumped into the stream with his horse and was submerged into the deep water before the horse managed to find its way to the shore with its hair totally soaked. [The master] tied the horse to a tree and continued in search for the chieftain along the stream. The chieftain swam in the stream in order to escape but his reflection was spotted [by the master] who then shot an arrow into it, saw blood threads emerged before jumping in for the kill. Later, as the rest of the troops arrived by the cliff, they saw the master holding the [chieftain's] severed head while standing in the water.
>
> 賊奔，公獨逐一酋。酋騎而走崖，窘，釋騎跳而下澗。公騎跳而下澗，澗深沒顛，馬浮而岸，毛盡濕。束濕馬於樹，緣澗而求酋。酋泅水而逃，矚水中影射之，血縷而上，入水斬之。後騎相屬至崖，望見公提人頭立水中。[231]

The powerful image of the cunning hunter pursuing his prey relentlessly is simply breath-taking. The final image of the victor carrying his bloody trophy is violent enough that it precluded its acceptance by the literati editors of *Ming shi*. Tang Shunzhi's portrayal of commander Shen at this point borders on recklessness, yet it is juxtaposed by a cunning mind that was calculating when it came to tactical and strategic considerations. Following the fight against the Yao raiders and the hunt for the escaping chieftain, Tang Shunzhi turns the reader's attention to Shen's tactical genius.

Shen Xiyi was informed by his spies that around eight thousand bandits had left Lipu 荔浦 county to conduct raids in the east after crossing the river. Shen

[231] Tang, "*Xu Guangyou Zhangong*," in *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 562-563.

mobilized five hundred men at short notice and had them lie in wait near the river for the bandits' return. There were two points along the river where the returning bandits could cross— one was Huashi Beach 滑石灘 which was a narrow riverbank and the other was Jiaolong Beach 蛟龍灘 which was wider (and likely the crossing of choice for the bandits). Shen Xiyi then ordered his men to quickly cut down the bamboos along the river and fashioned them into a few hundred flags and pennants. These were then erected along the Jiaolong tan while fire was started to create a smokescreen. Together with a dozen of soldiers stationed there as a decoy, the returning bandits were deterred from crossing the Jiaolong tan and were diverted to the Huashi tan. By then, the main bulk of Shen Xiyi's troops were deployed at the narrower crossing where the bandits' superior number no longer held any advantage. Just like the Spartans who ambushed the Persians at Thermopylae, Shen brought a crushing defeat to an enemy that was sixteen times the strength of the Ming troops:

> By means of five hundred men eight thousand bandits crushed, such results were often [achieved] when the master [Shen] employed craft.
>
> 以五百人破八千餘賊，公用奇往往如是。[232]

Tang Shunzhi saw the victory as a result of Shen's use of craft, or *qi* 奇, a traditional Chinese strategic concept since Sun Zi and Wu Zi.[233] Shen Xiyi was not just a soldier but also one who could think strategically and tactically in order to secure his victories. Shen Xiyi fulfilled the classic ideal of military commander.

The early Republican literary scholar and critic Qian Jibo 錢基博 (1887–1957) praised the work for the vibrant images and sound that is generated by the narrative

[232] Tang, "*Xu Guangyou Zhangong*," in *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 563.
[233] *Qi* is the opposite of Zheng 正 (which is often translated as orthodox or conventional), this dichotomy had been considered the foundation of strategic thinking, in both military and politics, for two millennium.

that is "like a painting and is highly entertaining".[234] However, Qian also criticised parts of the work for being verbose, badly organized and bordering on being anecdotal. Qian's criticism arose because he saw the work belonging to the historical biography genre, but the author had perhaps taken too much liberty by including the anecdotes of the protagonist. However, Qian was missing the point because *Xu Guangyou zhangong* is as much a historical biography as Tang Shunzhi's reimagining of the life and military exploits of a real warrior. This is perhaps the reason why Ma Meixin regards *Xu Guangyou zhangong* as the most literary among the author's narrative prose writings.[235] Although the title suggests that the work is intended to record merit or *jigong* 記功, its style does not conform to the often-stereotypical treatment of the subject's achievements for the instruction of later generations.[236] The author took some creative license in crafting his narrative. However, *Xu Guangyou zhangong* maintains a high level of historicity. Tang Shunzhi knew Shen Xiyi personally and learned about the historical events directly from the general. But in the process of putting the conversations of Shen Xiyi and himself onto paper, Tang also included his martial ideals in it. The younger Tang saw himself in the elder, more seasoned general. Likely written near the end of Shen's military career or even after his death, *Xu Guangyou zhangong* is Tang Shunzhi's tribute to a military officer who possessed all the essential attributes that make a great commander— being a man of action who fought courageously and yet did not rely on brute force alone, as Shen was a also a master of deception. As master Sun said, 'therefore, war is premised upon deception, motivated by advantage, and modified by dividing and joining'.[237] Tang

[234] '歷歷如繪, 備極聲色' Qian Jibo 錢基博, *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史, 880.
[235] Ma Meixin 馬美信 and Huang Yi 黃毅, "Introduction," in *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 11.
[236] Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, 3rd Edition, 150.
[237] Sun Zi, *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*, 102.

had composed his text in such a way that the various military exploits recorded and represented in *Xu Guangyou zhangong* actually fulfilled the above criteria. However according to Qian, Tang's prose is ultimately unique and beautifully executed. Style aside, the beauty of the prose also lies in the colourful creation of a protagonist belonging to an archetype that was traditionally underrepresented and often painted in a bad light in Ming historiography, that of a military man, or *wuren* 武人.[238]

One only needs to compare the biography of Shen Xiyi found in *Ming shi* and the account in *Xu Guangyou zhangong* (which as noted earlier, is the source for the *Ming shi* account) to notice the startling differences. There is even a note of macabre humour found in Tang's prose that did not make its way into *Ming shi*:

> After killing the three chieftains in succession, the rest of the troops arrived in search for [and severed] the heads. The master [Shen] gave two chieftains' heads to his men and kept the severed head with shattered cheeks as his prize [for reward]. During the examination of merit, the severed head with the shattered cheeks was rejected because it was badly disfigured but the army inspector, provincial administration commissioner Wu intervened angrily saying, "Do the bandits stick out their necks and wait to be lopped off?" and he ordered the merit to be recorded.
>
> 既連斃三酋，後騎至，找其首。公以二酋讓後騎，而囊斷頰者自為功，…。驗功，或以斷頰者非全首難之，監軍吳布政怒曰：「賊豈伸頸而待斫乎？」命紀之。[239]

[238] Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 wrote that the literati generally viewed the military as undesirable— even demonizing it in some cases. Huang Zongxi, "Qian Zhongjie gong zhuan 錢忠介公傳" in *Huang Zongxi Nanlei zazhu gaozhenji* 黃宗羲南雷雜著稿真跡, 251.
[239] Tang, "*Xu Guangyou Zhangong*," in *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 562.

This short passage is darkly humorous and at the same time, reveals quite a lot to the reader, e.g. the personality of Shen Xiyi as a selfless leader who was willing to share the prize of victory with his men. It also illustrates the uneasy relationship between the soldier and the bureaucracy. Shen was lucky that a fair and understanding civil official intervened on his behalf. As shown in an episode found later in the account, he was not so lucky all the time.

In 1526, the aboriginal leader Cen Meng 岑猛 rebelled with more than ten thousand men in Tianzhou 田州, Guangxi. The Right Censor-in-chief Yao Mo 姚謨 was appointed as the Grand Coordinator to Guangxi to quell the rebellion. Using the strategy of divide and rule suggested by Shen Xiyi, Yao Mo successfully suppressed the rebellion. Yao then played down the contributions of Shen in order to acquire greater merit for the military success. Shen did not pursue the matter nor was he in a position to challenge a high-ranking civil official such as Yao. By the mid Ming, the social and political status of the military class was a far cry from the early years of the empire. The odds were simply stacked against Shen. As a result, Shen did not receive a promotion. Yao on the other hand, was promoted to Left Censor-in-chief.[240] Yao's success however, was short-lived. Ignoring Shen's advice of reestablishing local rule, Yao went ahead with installing the so-called floating officials (*liuguan* 流官) who were made up of Han Chinese as a means of reasserting Ming control over the troubled region. [241] Consequently, Tianzhou was engulfed in rebellion once again. It took considerable Ming effort to suppress the rebellion and in the process, Yao was impeached by a censor for 'suppressing the barbarians without a good plan thus making empty promises and deceiving the emperor'.[242] Yao was consequently fired

[240] *MS*, *juan* 200, 5278.
[241] Tang, *Xu Guangyou zhangong*, 565.
[242] Gu Yingtai 谷應泰, , in *Mingshi jishi benmo* 明史紀事本末, *juan* 53, 805.

from his job by the emperor and replaced by Wang Yangming, who according to Tang Shunzhi, was more sympathetic to the needs of the natives and was open to suggestions from a lower ranking military officer such as Shen.[243] Shen Xiyi's grasp of local knowledge and political acumen stood in stark contrast to Yao Mo's insensitivity to local governance. In 1558, Tang was tasked with inspecting the Jizhou 薊州 garrison troops along the northern borders as a director of a bureau in the war ministry. His subsequent report pointed out the all too familiar problems that were plaguing Ming army in the 16th century.[244] Tang wrote:

> Your humble servant had inspected the troops of Jizheng to find out the reasons for the many desertions and arrived at the conclusion that it has everything to do with the unending labour at the border walls. Senior military officers encroaching [the men under them], exploiting whatever little [the men had].
>
> 臣閱軍薊鎮、究軍所以多逃亡之故、皆曰邊牆之工卒歲不休，…將官侵克，毫厘剝削。[245]

According to Tang, because most of the troops that were sent to the border garrisons were not originally from the region, their lives were made even more miserable. These soldiers were almost like criminals who were exiled and it was small wonder that they harboured so much discontentment which eventually led to their desertion. Tang was certainly sympathetic to the plight of the soldiering class because of his first-hand experience as a military inspector. Tang echoed the same sentiments on

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[243] *Ming Shizong shilu* 明世宗實錄, *juan* 77, 1709.
[244] Late-Ming observers had noted the state of poverty many soldiers found themselves in. Mao Bowen 毛伯溫 mentioned that border garrison troops lived in poverty as the salaries they received were insufficient to meet the needs of their families. Lai Jianchen 賴建成, *Bianzhen liangxiang* 邊鎮糧餉, 234. The supreme commander of Jiliao 薊遼, Yang Xuan 楊選 reported that many border troops did not receive their pay on time and very frequently had arrears of two to five months. Chen Zilong 陳子龍, *Huangming jingshi wenbian* 皇明經世文編, *juan* 196, 2024-2025.
[245] Tang Shunzhi, "Tiaochen Jizhen bu bing zu shi shi yi shu 條陳薊鎮補兵足食事宜疏," in Chen, Zilong, *Huangming jingshi wenbian*, *juan* 259, 2737.

other occasions as well. In a letter addressed to the Grand Secretariat, Tang mentioned that many soldiers stationed along the borders were owed at least five months of salary.[246] On the other hand, he could not come up with effective countermeasures that could solve the problem. Tang was not alone. A decade after Tang's death, the pro-reform grand councilor Zhang Juzheng faced the same problem and could not come up with successful solutions either.[247]

Tang ended his *Xu Guangyou zhanggong* with the following character summary of Shen Xiyi:

> Master [Shen] was brave and perceptive and was good at appeasing his men. His personal wealth, salaries, and rewards- half of these were given to informants. He brought and offered his personal wealth for every mission so that those who advanced first [into the enemy's] and those who beheaded enemies may be promptly rewarded on the spot without any delay and as a result these men offered all of their strength without reservation. Master smiled and said, 'others use their wealth to accumulate bribes in order to gain advancement in officialdom. I myself, on the other hand, use wealth to heap up [enemy] heads in order to gain advancement in officialdom. How is that not a good stratagem?'
>
> 公膽勇機警，善撫士。其私財與所得俸祿賞賜，半以給諸人為耳目者。其出兵多齎私財以行，有先登與斬首者，就陣給賞，不失頃刻，故人爭盡死力。公嘗笑曰：「人以貲財積賄賂而博官，吾以貲財積首級而博官，豈為非計哉！」[248]

Tang Shunzhi framed Shen's statement as a humorous and self-effacing response to the widespread corruption among military officers by the late-Ming. Shen was the antithesis of the corrupted military officers that Tang Shunzhi came in contact with

[246] Tang, "Ji neige ji benbing zhulao shu" 寄內閣及本兵諸老書, in *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 355.
[247] Zhang Juzheng 張居正, *Zhang Juzheng ji* 張居正集, vol. 2, 48.
[248] Tang, *Tang Shunzhi ji*, 578.

during his assignment to Jizheng as a military inspector. Tang Shunzhi identified with the incorruptible general who took care of his men. Tang was sympathetic to the plight of the ordinary soldiers. He was not alone in that aspect as many other late-Ming officials who were given military assignments frequently reported on the exploitation of the troops by their officers. Ma Zhongxi 馬中錫 (1446–1512) who served as vice-minister of War during the reign of Chenghua 成化 emperor (1464–1487) wrote in his poem about the disparity between the military officers and their men along the borders:

> The generals embraced the foreign beauties in drunken merriment,
> while the impoverished troops marched on like beggars.
> 將軍笑擁胡姬醉，戍卒貧同乞丐行。[249]

The lowly troops submitted themselves to be part of the grand strategy (and a pitiful existence) simply because most of them belonged to the hereditary military class and under the *wei-suo* system that was in decline and plagued by abuses.

Xu Guangyou zhanggong was the result of Tang Shunzhi's fascination with the martial, which by the mid-Ming was quite common among the literati. Although there are some veiled criticisms of the military institution, the work is really about Tang's ideal role model of a military officer in the person of Shen Xiyi. It was unusual for a man of letters, especially one who had achieved a celebrity status, to pen a narrative that promotes a military man and martiality without reservation in the Ming. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, famous literati had written poetry in praise of the martial ethos of the early

[249] Ma Zhongxi 馬中錫, "Qiuri Yulin dao Zhong" 秋日榆林道中, in *Ma dongtian man gao* 馬東田漫稿, *juan* 3, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, vol. 41, 386.

Ming emperors. The celebratory tones of these poetic works were rather muted after the Tumu incident of 1449, as there was a reversal in the military fortunes of the dynasty. Tang's work stands as a testimony of the changing perspective of a large number of literati elites towards the military, which became much more visible in the mid-Ming and especially during the Jiajing period. However, it is easy for us (and certainly attractive for some of Tang's contemporaries) to dismiss the work as nothing more than a result of one man's obsession with military things. It is therefore essential that we turn to the life and career of Tang Shunzhi to examine the origins and extent of his martial ideals.

2.2 The Political and Literary Career of Tang Shunzhi

Tang Shunzhi was a native of Wujin 武進, a county within Changzhou 常州 prefecture in modern day Jiangsu province. He came from a family of office holders, beginning with minor official in the Hanlin Academy, Tang Huafu 唐華甫, who eventually settled in Wujin at the end of Song dynasty. As a young man, Tang Shunzhi had a broad education that included the study of astronomy, music, geography, mathematics, geometry, military strategy and martial arts, besides the canonical classics required for the civil examinations.[250] Because of his chronic ill health, Tang dedicated himself to the practice of martial arts as a counter measure. He became proficient with various martial techniques and this would serve him well in his later career of combating the *wokou*.

Tang passed the entry-level county, department or prefectural licensing examination at the age of sixteen to become a licentiate or *shengyuan*. He came in at the sixth place in the triennial provincial examination in 1528 at the age of twenty-two. And in following year during the triennial metropolitan examination, Tang successfully became the *huiyuan* 會元 after achieving the first place. In the final palace examination, Tang came in fourth, after Luo Hongxian 羅洪先, Yang Ming 楊名 and Ouyang De 歐陽德. Meanwhile, the Jiajing emperor had reviewed the examination scripts of the top six candidates and was impressed by Tang's essay skills. Tang's talent in writing eight-legged essays for civil examinations propelled him to fame.

Tang Shunzhi was also a celebrated literary theorist, who early in his career advocated the prose writing style of the Qin and Han dynasties, and the poetic style of

[250] *MS*, *juan* 205, 5424.

the Tang dynasty.[251] This Archaist literary movement was spearheaded by eminent mid-Ming statesman, Li Dongyang 李東陽 (1447–1516) and later embraced and promoted enthusiastically by a group of seven literati led by Li Mengyang. These seven literati were collectively known as the Early Seven Masters (*Qian Qizi* 前七子).[252] Under the influence of his mentor, Wang Shenzhong, Tang Shunzhi subsequently abandoned his earlier advocacy of the ancient literary styles and turned his attention to the more recent Tang and Song dynasties for inspiration. Together with Wang and six other like-minded literati, Tang Shunzhi became the important leader of the Eight Talents of the Jiajiang Reign Period or *Jiajing ba caizi* 嘉靖八才子, leading the so called Tang-Song literary revival movement. Together with his literary compatriots, Tang was credited by his contemporaries in giving Ming literature new life as later writers became more creative and less imitative especially in their prose writing.[253] Even though the Eight Talents could not successfully halt the tide of the classical revivalists as it was later championed by another influential group of literati known as the Later Seven Masters or *Hou Qizi* 後七子, Tang had managed to leave an indelible mark on Ming literary history.

As one of the top candidates in the 1529 imperial examination, Tang should have begun his career in the Hanlin Academy— a much coveted career path for many before him. However, it was around this time that the Jiajing emperor carried out a reform of the Hanlin Academy.[254] Since the Tianshun period (1457–1464), the Hanlin Academy had become the 'training grounds', the 'reserves' for officials belonging to

[251] *MS*, *juan* 205, 5424.
[252] An excellent discussion of Ming Archaism as perceived by its chief advocates, Li Mengyang and He Jingming 何景明 is found in Daniel Bryant's chapter "Archaism" in *The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483–1521) and His World*, 388-415.
[253] *DMB*, 1254
[254] *MS*, *juan* 205, 5422.

the highest echelons of the government- especially the Grand Secretariat.[255] By the Jiajing period, the system had been intitutionalised and became rigid. "Only *jinshi* enters the Hanlin and only Hanlin [scholars] enters the Grand Secretariat."[256] The chief concern of the reform was to make sure that the Hanlin Academy ceased to be the only channel in selecting the top officials for the government. The chief architects of this reform were the emperor and secretary Zhang Cong 張聰 (renamed Zhang Fujing by the Jiajing emperor, 1475–1539), and it was largely endorsed by the then Senior Grand Secretary Yang Yiqing 楊一清 (1454–1530).[257] Zhang Fujing and Yang Yiqing had both risen to prominence within the government without going through the Hanlin route and were naturally in favour of the reform, which to all intents would eradicate various malpractices associated with Hanlin Academy. In a secret memorial submitted by Zhang Fujing to the emperor, the newly appointed secretary claimed, "For many years, the evil and treacherous were in charge of the running the country and they have recruited the unrighteous", "As the Grand Secretariat speaks on behalf of the emperor, it is of utmost importance. The secretaries of days past were the ancestors of the secretaries in the present; the secretaries in the present are the descendants of the past secretaries. The cycle continues and is unending."[258] The idea that there was a concentration of power in the hands of a chosen elite at the highest echelon of the imperial government did not sit well with the Jiajing emperor, who was still at the early stage of consolidating his power within the court after emerging

[255] Zhao Yi 趙毅 and Hu Kecheng 胡克誠, "Yang Yiqing Yu Dali Yi" 楊一清與大禮議, in *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 東北師範大學 (哲學社會科學版) no. 6, 2009, 131.
[256] *MS*, *juan* 70, 1702.
[257] Zhang Cong respectfully requested his name be changed as it was the same character Cong 聰 found in the Jiajing emperor's name Zhu Houcong 朱厚聰. Zhang Fujing 張孚敬, *Yudui lu* 諭對錄, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, *juan* 57, 370-371.
[258] Idem, 62.

victorious (but not unscathed) from the Great Rites Controversy.[259] The Hanlin 'purge' would allow the emperor to get rid of those who "formed political cliques" and conspired against him during the Great Rites Controversy.[260] Although the Senior Grand Secretary Yang Yiqing voiced his concern about the possible indiscriminate removal of Hanlin academicians, the Jiajing emperor was determined to carry out his 'political purge'. Yang urged the emperor and Zhang Cong not to replace the Hanlin academicians, temporary appointments that were filled by the top examination candidates. However, the emperor refused to listen and as a result, twenty-two Hanlin academicians were transferred out in 1526. Zhang Fujing, who had aligned himself closely with the Jiajing emperor's position (and was likely in a power struggle with the Senior Grand Secretary), came up with the list of replacements for the emptied posts in the Hanlin Academy. When a new round of Hanlin academician selection began after the conclusion of the imperial examinations in 1529, the emperor was adamant about not appointing any new Hanlin academic from the pool of top candidates— one of them was Tang Shunzhi.[261]

However, Zhang Fujing was in favour of keeping Tang as a new Hanlin recruit. Tang, who was never an admirer of the Grand Secretary and to a certain extent, even detested the man for his politics, declined his offer. As a result, Tang was given an assignment as a secretary in the ministry of War.[262] In retrospect, Tang seemed lucky that he still got a posting after turning down the Senior Grand

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[259] *The Great Rites Controversy* took place from 1524 after the young Jiajing emperor took the throne from his cousin Zhengde. It was an argument over ritual propriety that concerned the adoption of Jiajing as a legitimate heir of Zhengde, which the young Jiajing emperor refused because of the moral principle of not forsaking one's biological parents due to filial piety. However, the controversy escalated to become a contest of will and authority between the throne and the entire Confucian civil bureaucracy. This topic has been well reaserched by various scholars. A more recent work in English on this topic is John Dardess' *Four Seasons: The Ming Emperor and his Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth Century China*.

[260] Yang Yiqing, "Mi yu lu" 密谕录, *juan* 5, in *Yang Yiqing ji* 杨一清集, 996.

[261] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 100, 2365.

[262] *DMB*, 1253.

Secretary's offer. Zhang was genuinely impressed by Tang's literary talents. For an early career bureaucrat to reject an offer from a figure like the Senior Grand Secretary was akin to career suicide. Tang was not alone in this, as Chen Shu 陳束, another examination candidate who was awarded the top honours like Tang, also declined Zhang Fujing's invitation to be a part of his political clique. Chen was transferred to the ministry of Rites as a secretary. His career never recovered from his refusal to align himself to Zhang Fujing by the time of his death at the young age of thirty-three.[263] Just like his compatriot, Tang's refusal to be Zhang Fujing's man also gives us a hint of his strength of character and his moral principles.

Tang's ill health forced him to take sick leave from his post at the ministry of War just after working there for a year. As his health turned for the better, Tang returned to Beijing in 1532, this time to join the ministry of Personnel also as a secretary. But in August 1533, Tang was transferred back to the Hanlin Academy as a compiler because of a serious shortage of manpower (not exactly a surprising outcome of Senior Grand Secretary Zhang's earlier political manoeuvre). Whether Zhang liked it or not, the imperial history and veritable records needed to be written and compiled. The Jiajing emperor gave a direct order this time round to recruit Hanlin academics from the existing pool of imperial officials. It was meant to be a temporary assignment for these officials including Tang Shunzhi. When the veritable records project was near completion, Zhang once again wanted to keep Tang around in the Hanlin Academy, hoping to patronize the literary genius. Once again, Tang's ill health forced him to take leave and so rejected the Senior Grand Secretary's offer. However, Tang was not so lucky this time and the Senior Grand Secretary's good graces ran out because rumours about Tang's feigned illness to deliberately distance

[263] *MS*, *juan* 220, 7371.

himself from the Senior Grand Secretary began circulating. There could be some truth in the rumours as claimed by Tang's biographers, but we will never know for certain. Shao Jianwei saw ill health as a central theme in the rather tragic life of Tang Shunzhi.[264] Whatever the truth was, Tang was subsequently fired in 1535 without the prospect of being appointed to the civil service again.[265] He was twenty-nine years old.

Zhang Fujing died four years later in 1539 and a new heir apparent was installed. The Jiajing emperor then appointed some forty officials as the crown prince's tutors and advisors. Tang Shunzhi was among these new appointees. It was a fortunate turn of events for Tang, as his official career was revived. But Tang's good fortune did not last long. As the emperor was increasingly obsessed with Daoist rituals and spending less time seeing his officials, there was talk of letting the heir apparent do the job instead. Together with Luo Hongxian and Zhao Shichun 趙時春 (1509–1567), Tang Shunzhi submitted two separate memorials to the emperor intimating that since the emperor could not maintain the tradition of daily audience with his officials, it might be appropriate to allow the heir apparent to act on his majesty's behalf. The Jiajing emperor saw this as an attempt to force his hand in giving away his power and he furiously accused that the memorial's content was "against human nature and had lost the *Dao*".[266] The three officials were dismissed from their office and had their names removed from the civil service register. Luo retired to his native Jishui 吉水 in Jiangxi province for good and committed the rest of his life in the intensive study and promotion of the philosophy of Wang

[264] Shao Jianwei 邵建偉, "Bielun Tang Jingchuan Mingyun Zhong De Beiqing Qingjie 別論唐荊川命運中的悲情情結" in *Journal of Changzhou University (Social Science Edition*) 常州大學學報 (社會科學版), vol. 14, no. 1, 63-67.
[265] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 172, 3741-3742.
[266] Idem. *juan* 244, 4916-4917

Yangming.[267] At the same time, Luo dedicated himself to the study of geography and cartography, military strategy and various esoteric subjects. Zhao also retired but was later recalled to serve as censor of the military after the invasion of the Mongols under Anda Khan 俺達汗 in 1550.

Tang, like his compatriots, left the government and retired to his hometown once again— although this time there was little prospect of returning to government service. In the hills of Yixing 宜興 situated not far from his home, Tang built a cottage and spent more than a decade studying and writing, playing hosts to his friends so that he could engage them in intellectual discussion.[268] Likely influenced by Wang Yangming's disciple Wang Ji 王畿, Tang spent a good part of his time in retirement studying the teaching of Wang Yangming. Tang had met Wang earlier in 1532 when the latter was residing in Beijing, Tang took the time to study under him. When Tang left government service for the first time because of ill health , Wang Ji and his fellow Yangming disciple Wang Geng 王艮 (1483–1541, founder of the Taizhou school that departed from Wang Yangming's philosophy) visited him in his hometown. As a student of Wang Yangming's philosophy, Tang did not fully accept the latter's ideas about instant and effortless enlightenment. Tang's views on Wang Yangming's thoughts were not too different from his friend Luo Hongxian, who saw himself as a serious student of Wang even though he had never met the famous statesman in person.[269]

The period of 1541 to 1558 was an important point in Tang's life. Stripped of his civil official status for the second time, he could now concentrate on his studies

[267] Lü Miaofen 呂妙芬, "The Yang-ming Chiang-hui Activities in Chi-an Prefecture during the Ming Dynasty" 明代吉安府的陽明講會活動, in *Journal of the Institute of Modern History, Academic Sinica* 中央研究院近代歷史研究所期刊 , vol. 35 (2001), 227-233.
[268] *DMB*, 1253.
[269] Lü, 'The Yang-ming Chiang-hui Activities in Chi-an Prefecture during the Ming Dynasty', 227.

and writings. It was during this time that Tang wrote his most important works. However, Tang was never really detached from the Ming politics nor did he distance himself from the political elites. Besides refining his thoughts on literary theory and philosophy during this time, Tang continued to cultivate his interests in the military. He kept his network of government officials— many of them were involved in military affairs— through frequent correspondence. His study of the military strategy also culminated in the publication of a dedicated work on the subject, The *Military Compendium* (*Wu bian* 武編). All these hard work would pay off when he returned to the civil service years later.

2.3 Waiting to Rise from the Eastern Mountains

In 1543, Tang spoke to his good friend and member of the Eight Talents literary cohort, Mao Kun 茅坤, advising him to take up an official appointment despite his ill health. Tang himself was likewise suffering from ill health and his words to Mao Kun thinly masked his own desire to return to government service once again. Mao reviewed that he was contemplating not taking up an official appointment as magistrate of Dantu 丹徒 (in modern Jiangsu province) due to his struggle with illness. When Tang Shunzhi heard about it, the retired recluse travelled to meet Mao Kun in person, telling him that his illness was not life threatening and that it was likely a case of Mao in deep mourning over the death of both of his parents in 1540.[270] Tang words were seemingly insensitive and assertive. "Why would anyone miss the chance of serving in the government just because of mere illness?" This was likely what was going on in Tang's mind. Having been forced out of the government because of court politics, Tang did not wish his friend to give up his career and the opportunity to serve his country. Mao went on to take up his appointment at Dantu. Mao Kun's later career involved military appointments and he was promoted to Surveillance Vice Commissioner in charge of military defense circuits for his success in suppressing an indigenous rebellion in Guangxi. After his dismissal from the government in 1555, Mao Kun was invited to be Hu Zongxian's military adviser two years later to deal with the Japanese pirates. It was while serving under Hu Zongxian that Mao managed to keep first-hand accounts of the dealings with the *wokou* that provided later historians with valuable source materials.[271]

Around 1545, Tang replied to the Vice-minister of War, Weng Wanda with a

[270] Zhang Mengxin 張夢新, *Mao Kun yanjiu* 茅坤研究, 97-8.
[271] Idem. 32–33.

letter and at the same time made a request for maps of the northern borders. Newly appointed as Right Vice Censor-in-chief and Grand Coordinator of Shaanxi, Weng Wanda was Tang's friend and senior in the government. Weng had written a letter to Tang earlier asking for his strategic advice for his new appointment as Grand Coordinator of Shaanxi. Weng was trusted by the emperor Jiajing and was widely regarded as the foremost expert in border affairs.[272] When he was working in the border garrison of Xuanhua 宣化 as Supreme Commander, Weng boldly dismissed incompetent generals and replaced them with more able commanders; one of them was none other than Shen Xiyi.[273] Weng's military leadership led him to the appointment as Minister of War on three occasions (1549, 1550 and 1552) simply because when the emperor had to dismiss the incumbent ministers, he always fell back on the reliable Weng. A native of Chaozhou 潮州 in the Guangdong province, Weng was Tang's senior in the government and likely a role model that the younger man could look up to. Early in his career, Weng had not wished to become a member of the political clique that was led by the Grand Secretary Zhang Cong, who was a favourite of the emperor because of Zhang's support of him in the Great Rites Controversy. As a result, Weng had been demoted and assigned to the post of magistrate in the frontier province in the southwest in 1533. Tang Shunzhi's later refusal to join Zhang Cong's political cadre that led to his dismissal from government in 1535 could very well have been encouraged by Weng.[274]

[272]Wang Sitong 萬斯同, *Mingshi chaoben* 明史鈔本, vol. 70, *juan* 296, 13.
[273] *MS*, *juan* 198, 5252.
[274] Lin Daqin 林大欽 (1512–45), the Chaozhou optimus of the palace examination of 1532, was actively encouraged by Weng Wanda to avoid being a member of Zhang Cong's political circle. See Ma Chor-kin 馬楚堅, *The Life and Thought of Weng Wanda*, DPhil Thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1998, 101.

Ma Chor-kin believed that it is highly possible that Weng was a scholar who also knew martial arts even though there is a lack of direct textual evidence.[275] Nevertheless, he went on to make a name for himself as an able military commander when he was posted to Shaanxi as Vice Censor-in-chief. Tang Hezheng 唐鶴徵 wrote in his biography of Weng Wanda:

> [Weng] Wanda put on his armour and led the troops personally when the reinforcements of a few thousand troops under the command of Jiang Yingxiong arrived from Huailai. The subordinate commanders advised, "The enemies are too numerous for us to attack." Wanda then replied, "I am determined to fight the enemy till only one of us is standing." He then charged first toward the enemy and none dared to disregard his orders.
>
> 萬達躬擐甲冑，西路參將姜應熊等兵數千人，自懷來來援。麾下將請曰：「虜騎充斥未可進。」萬達曰：「我志決矣。誓不與此虜俱生。」於是馳驅先入，眾無幹後者。[276]

Tang Hezheng was Tang Shunzhi's son, and he was likely influenced by his father's pro-military perspective. It is not difficult to detect from his writing that Tang Hezheng shared his father's admiration of Weng Wanda as a fine example of the civil-military official par excellence. One of Weng's first orders as the newly appointed Grand Coordinator of Shaanxi was to prohibit the execution of surrendered troops. The strategic reasons behind this were to win over the enemies and to increase the number of informants.[277] But in the eyes of the contemporary literati, Weng's actions were borne out of the man's altruistic nature— the ideal of humaneness that was an important characteristic of a scholar-general.

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[275] Ma, *The Life and Thought of Weng Wanda*, 40.
[276] Tang Hezheng 唐鶴徵, *Huangming fushi bian* 皇明輔世編, *juan* 6, 32-33.
[277]He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠, *Mingshan zang* 名山藏, *juan* 77, 4798.

In Tang's letter to Weng, whom Tang had not met since they had both worked in Beijing and gone their separate ways in 1535, the author began by praising Weng's military achievements. Tang mentioned Weng's success in the civil and military administration of Vietnam and Weng's new appointment as Vice Censor in chief in charge of the military affairs in Shaanxi. Tang then compared Weng to the famous generals who served with distinction under the Zhou rulers. It is easy to presume the letter to be a work of flowery compliments with its opening words. But as we read on, the true messages are revealed in the literary style that Tang was known for:

> I have been made aware that in the ancient times when a general received his command he would forget about home, and when he heard the sounds of beating drums [and advance with his troops] he would forget about himself- that is the *dao* of loyalty outside of the imperial court. All military promotions should be settled in the field and not be overturned by the imperial court, as this is the *dao* behind military appointments by the court. If not, the tips of the spears will cross each other in the field while decisions are being made in the [distant] temple hall. Changes take place in the field rapidly while strategies are still being devised in the imperial court. This is why since of old great warriors were impeded [by the interference from the centre and glory was hard to achieve.
>
> 僕竊聞之，古者將受命之日，則忘其家，臨桴鼓則忘其身，是閫外效忠之道則然；軍功爵賞皆決於外、不從中覆、是廟堂委任之道則然。不然，則鋒鏑交於原野，而決策於廟堂，機會變於斯須，而制勝於九重，此自古豪傑之士所以每患於掣肘而功之難成。[278]

Tang was criticising the practice of the Ming court of limiting the power of their military commanders and interfering with decisions in the field. The appointment of

[278] *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 323-324.

civil officials to oversee the military operations was a method employed to keep a watchful eye on the military commanders on behalf of the emperor. However, this supposedly clever measure ended up transferring the power from the military men to the civil officials and this situation was causing some measure of discomfort and unease within the imperial court. Tang was against this limitation of autonomy and interference from the court, which he saw as a big obstacle to military success. The commander-in-chief (in this case the Grand Coordinator) should be given autonomy in the field:

> Because you believe in the importance of loyalty from a military commander in the field, all under heaven would place their trust on you. I am uncertain if your appointment as a Grand Coordinator by the court would be any different from the previous Grand Coordinators?
>
> 今闡外效忠之道，在公能自信之，而天下亦以此信公矣，不識廟堂之所以委任，其亦必有以異乎前時所謂總制者否也？[279]

Tang briefly cited an earlier example when a Grand Coordinator was dismissed because his request for supplies had angered a Grand Secretary. “As such,” wrote Tang, “there appears to be very few examples of truly autonomous commanders who acted arbitrarily.” According to Tang, extraordinary men are required for extraordinary achievements. Such talented individuals should be granted special power and discretion. The call for more power to be granted to civil officials with military appointments was shared by Zhang Han 張漢 (?–1567), who was made Grand Coordinator of Northern Metropolitan region, Henan, and Shangdong in 1544, the same year that Tang was writing this letter. Zhang Han proposed that Grand Coordinators should be given the autonomy in the selection of commanders, the

[279] *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 324.

training of troops, and in reward and punishments. The last point includes the execution of leading military commanders.[280] Zhang's proposal was debated in court but was ultimately rejected by the Jiajing emperor, who was not favourable to the idea of delegating too much power to officials in the field.[281]

Then Tang went on to encourage Weng to perform his duties (as the new Grand Coordinator of Shaanxi) fearlessly and advised him to employ the best talents to assist him as his private secretaries. Tang wanted Weng to know that he was still available as a talented military advisor. That is why he went on to say:

> As for former generals who have left the jobs and are free, and even old soldiers who used to stand guard on the mounds, they still possess some merit and are willing to serve.
> 至於負暇故將，守墩老卒，苟有一長，亦得自效。[282]

Even though Tang was in retirement, he was ready to offer himself to the service of his country. And in order to prove that he knew what he was talking about, Tang put in his request for the strategic maps of the Xuanfu, Datong, and the three passes. According to Tang, the older borders maps were so badly drawn that they lacked any practical value. Only the newer ones that were produced by Liu Tianhe 劉天和 (1479–1546) were good enough. Liu was another civil official who had a highly successful career as a military commander. From 1536 to 1540, Liu scored a number of impressive victories against Mongol intruders while serving as Vice Minister of War and Grand Coordinator of the Three Borders (Gansu 甘肅, Yansui 延綏, Ningxia 寧夏).[283] A sort of Renaissance man and a kind of precursor to the later Xu Guangqi,

[280] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 296, 5649-5652.
[281] *MS*, *juan* 204, 5384.
[282] *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 324.
[283] Zha Jizu 查繼祖, Zhuiwei lu 罪惟錄, *juan* 19, 2387-2388.

Liu was also credited with improvements in military weaponry and producing works on medical science.[284]

Tang followed his request for maps with his own take on securing the border against foreign invasion:

> It is possible to know where the intrusion points of the caitiffs are and deal with them accordingly by using maps in strategic planning—to fortify in order to defeat one's enemies. So many had remarked that the caitiffs come and go like unpredictable weather, but this is not entirely true. Also, the caitiffs do not stage a full-scale invasion unless they have tens of thousands cavalry and these many horses require a daily supply of grass and water. These are in short supply in the desert— especially in the quantity that is required by so many horses. When the caitiffs ride south, they would have to ride close to areas that provide them with grass and water. The intruders could not ride with thirsty and hungry horses through a thousand *li* of barren land. Consequently, even though the border walls run tens of thousands of *li*, and the movement of the caitiffs may be unpredictable like the weather, it is still possible to predict the routes that will be taken by the intruders.
>
> 虜之所從入，與吾之所以制虜，皆可以按圖而坐籌之，是以守固而戰克。人皆言虜人來去如風雨，此亦未必盡然。且虜人非萬騎不能大舉，騎不可一日無水草，沙磧少水，而水草可飲食萬騎者尤為難得。虜人擁騎南下，須是覘得水草便利處，然後可入，其無水草處，虜人亦不能以饑渴馬致千里也。是以邊城雖綿亘千萬里，虜人雖是風雨來去，而其所從入大約可以先定。[285]

So, if one could pinpoint the few possible routes that were limited to the intruders, then it would be easier to allocate resources to the defense of these intrusion points without 'spreading too thin'. This was Tang's strategic advice on border defense. He

[284] He, *Mingshan Zang*, *juan* 77, 4816.
[285] *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 324-325

then continued to discuss the disadvantages of recruiting men from the southeast to defend the northern border- preferring the use of local troops instead. True to his Tang-Song literary leanings, Tang then reminded Weng that a similar advice was given to Liu Gongchuo 柳公綽 (763–832) by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) during the Tang dynasty.[286]

Tang was eager to be of service to the court in his retirement. From the content and the tone of the letter, it is clear that Tang was making a thinly veiled appeal to his senior, Weng Wanda. Tang was careful in drawing the parallel between Weng and Liu Gongchuo, the late-Tang scholar-official who was praised for taking up arms to defend against regional warlords. In his famous letter to Liu Gongchuo, Han Yu praised Liu's military leadership despite being a scholar-official:

> You [Liu Gongchuo] are a scholar who practiced the poetry, calligraphy, rites, and music [four classics] — cultivated benevolence and righteousness while abiding by moral standards at the same time. Now that you have left the civil and took on the martial, the three armies marched at the sound of your drums, committing and pledging their lives for war. You have suffered together with the troops, who in return, were grateful. You have eaten with them. Your inspection of the province had raised the morale of the troops. When your horse killed a soldier by accident, you upheld justice by executing the animal. Even the renowned generals of old could not surpass you!
>
> 閣下書生也，《詩》《書》《禮》《樂》是習，仁義是修，法度是束。一旦去文就武，鼓三軍而進之，陳師鞠旅，親與為辛苦，慷慨感激，同食下卒，將二州之牧以壯士氣，斬所乘馬以祭踶死之士，雖古名將，何以加茲！

[286] Han Yu 韓愈, "Yu Ezhou Liu Zhongcheng shu" 與鄂州柳中丞書, in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注, 222-224.

Like Liu Gongchuo, Weng Wanda excelled as a civil official, a Confucian scholar, and even more impressively, a military general. However, Tang was quick to point out to Weng that despite the usefulness of strategic maps, it is even more important to have men who could interpret them and devise grand strategies- men like Tang himself. Tang ended the letter in a humble, almost self-effacing tone– citing his illness as the reason behind his lack of propriety in the writing of the letter ("I am terrified of my bold words"). But just like Liu Gongchuo who exclaimed previously that the court had underestimated his military leadership simply because he was a member of the literati, Tang was appealing to Weng's better judgment— after all, was not Weng himself also a member of the literati who was entrusted with great military responsibility? As a learned scholar, Weng would not have missed the analogy between Tang Shunzhi and Han Yu. Han Yu later confessed in his letter that he was weak and lacked courage and as a result could only serve a minor role in the government. But since he was inspired by Liu Gongchuo, he would always support the general in the imperial court.[287] Tang Shunzhi, like Han Yu, had suffered in their career because of the political infighting at the highest level of the government. Han Yu was demoted in 819 and posted to the outlying Chaozhou 潮州 in the far south but was subsequently recalled back to the capital. Tang was certainly hoping the same for himself and like Han Yu before him he was ready to commend Weng for his meritorious achievements:

> Now that your Excellency has successfully defeated the caitiffs, I will sing of your victory with my humble poetry that would echo "Caiqi" and "Jianghan"[288] (from the *Classic of Poetry*). This is to

[287]"愈誠怯弱不適於用，聽於下風，竊自增氣，誇於中朝稠人廣眾會集之中." Han Yu, **"**Yu Ezhou Liu Zhongchng shu," in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, 224.
[288] Both "Caiqi" 采芑 and "Jianghan" 江漢 collected in the *Shijing* 詩經 were odes to the martial achievements of officials who were entrusted by the Zhou rulers to defeat the barbarians.

> praise our emperor's wisdom in using the best talent. Will you grant me the honour?
>
> 俟公破虜功成，當以向時彫蟲末伎作為鐃歌鼓吹曲，以繼采芑，江漢之餘響，以彰我明天子任賢使能之效，公其許我乎?[289]

Weng replied sometime later, expressing his gratitude for Tang's advice and willingness to share his innermost thoughts. Weng then went on to lament that his fellow officials did not share the same vision on matters of national defense. To make matters worse, generals were often handicapped by interference from the imperial court:

> It is written in *The Art of War* that 'the general who is capable and whose ruler does not interfere will be victorious.' Now I am not a capable general and yet the court keeps a tight rein on me. It is like tying the hoofs of an old horse while trying to make it move— only death awaits.
>
> 法曰：將能而君不馭者勝。今僕非能將，而又從中馭，駑馬繫蹄，欲使之走路，且死矣。[290]

Weng mentioned that he had submitted a memorial to the emperor when he was first appointed to be the Grand Coordinator, advising him not to 'calculate easy victories and pursue small mistakes' in military matters. But the Jiajing emperor was not someone who would loosen his control of military power in the field. Weng, like many civil officials before him who took on military assignments, could only complain of his predicament in letters without being able to do anything about it. Weng then turned to defense matters and talked about it briefly before informing Tang that he had been looking through strategic maps

[289] Tang, "Letter in response to the Grand Coordinator Weng" 答翁东压总制, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 323.
[290] Weng Wanda 翁萬達, "與唐荊川書" Letter addressed to Tang Jingchuan, in *Weng Wanda wenji* 翁萬達文集, 618-619.

of the northwest and found many of them wanting. Finally, Weng thanked Tang for his advice and praised him for the gift poems that he had written for a general Qiu in commemoration of his campaign to the south— which Weng had since copied for his own enjoyment.[291] Weng was flattered by Tang's offer to compose poetry in his honour.

The borders maps from Weng arrived as promised and Tang wrote another letter to thank Weng:

> I have read your letter and the borders maps sent by you, and all of a sudden, I found myself among the border walls, surrounded by the sound of beating drums, and listening to the heightened conversation amongst the sounds of swords and applauding hands. I am most comforted by your reply…My good sir, you have ignored the intricacies and wrote me a long reply to instruct me [on military matters]. I am touched by your sincerity and as such, how could you not be a man who would listen to the advice of others and to make full use of their strategies?
>
> 讀來教並所寄邊圖, 忽如置身於塞垣鼓擊之間, 而聽鳴劍抵掌之雄談, 甚慰甚慰! …吾丈仍不以為迂曲賜教答, 推是心也, 則安有不能集眾思廣忠益 ,而屈群策者乎? [292]

Weng was a man who valued talents and he subsequently submitted a memorial to the emperor to recommend the reinstatement of Tang and another friend of his by the name of Cheng Ting 程霆. Weng had worked with Cheng Ting in the south in 1529 and been impressed by the latter's talent and character (Cheng was awarded the *jinshi* degree in the same year as Weng). And like Tang Shunzhi, Cheng had retired earlier from government service and became a recluse. To Weng, this was a terrible waste of

[291] Tang, "南征歌十二首" Twelve Songs on the Southern Campaign, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 148.
[292] "答翁东压总制" Letter in response to the Grand Coordinator Weng, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 326.

talent. In his memorial, Weng began by reminding the emperor of the Tang's literary talent, just as he had mentioned about Cheng's moral character. This is a clever move because it was the Jiajing emperor himself who had personally reviewed and graded Tang's examination essay years ago:

> Tang Shunzhi was once the best among many literati, striving for excellence in the arts and literature, he was to gain profound insights and pointed out the essential. As a result, his name was known throughout the country.
>
> 唐順之曾魁多士，益奮藝文，睹奧抒英，擅名海內。[293]

Weng was quick to inform the emperor that Tang was not the kind of man of letters, who cared only of poetry and words (*diaochong zhi ji* 雕蟲之技 or *the art of carving worms*). Instead, Tang was a pragmatic man who had a deep understanding of the borders and the military as he had been keeping track of current affairs.

Despite his poor health. Tang possessed a powerful mind:

> In his analysis of the state affairs, he always gets to the crux of the matter unlike the typical scholar…he is a great talent in this land.
>
> 有所論議，必中肯綮，迥異書生…蓋天下奇才也。[294]

Moreover, Weng could vouch for the moral character of Tang:

> When we appraise a person, it is enough to just look at his home. Both [Cheng] Ting and Shunzhi live a calm and carefree life and worry not about what is on the outside. They practise self-cultivation to the highest order without any moral flaws.
>
> 夫觀人者，觀於其家而已矣，霆與順之，家居恬然，不願于外，束脩至行，無瑕疵。[295]

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[293] Weng, "舉所知以裨不逮疏" *Ju suozhi yipi budai shu*, in *Weng Wanda wenji*, 413-416.
[294] Weng, *Ju suozhi yipi budai shu*, in *Weng Wanda wenji*, 416.
[295] Ibid.

Most importantly, Tang is not into partisan politics (which the Jiajing emperor absolutely abhorred):

> High officials and men of renown could not hope to recruit him. In terms of moral character, it is not farfetched to compare [Tang] to Guo Tai and Xu Zhou (famous recluses not tempted by fame and power) of past. Your humble servant has been thinking of this man during sleep and wake, not being able to put my mind to rest, while frequently deliberating if I should put forward my recommendation.
>
> 達官顯人，不能物色，論者至方以古之郭泰、徐穉，豈為過哉。臣愚寤寐斯人，委心無量，屢欲論薦，翻爾逡巡。[296]

Knowing that defending the northwest borders was at the top of the emperor's priorities, Weng recommended Tang Shunzhi and Cheng Ting without reservation:

> If your majesty could graciously accept my suggestion in this urgent time of searching for talent to defend the borders, your humble servant hereby offers my advice with boldness. There are many who are outstanding and wise in this land, thus how could [Cheng] Ting and [Tang] Shunzhi be the only ones who could work together! However, it is written in the Analects that, "to truly know someone is difficult". But for these two servants of yours, your humble servant was fortunate to have met them and know them. I hereby request your order to make enquiries with the relevant ministries [with regards to the two former officials] and if your humble servant's words could be verified, let their reinstatement be deliberated in court without delay. Your humble servant knows that they would not let your majesty or myself down and forsake their great learning.
>
> 皇上嘉納，尤拳拳以求人備邊為急，臣是以敢遂言之。天下豪賢，項背相望，可與共事，豈獨霆與順之哉。語曰，「知人不易，人不易知」。若二臣者，臣幸見而知者也。如蒙乞敕該部

[296] Weng, *Ju suozhi yipi budai shu*, in *Weng Wanda wenji*, 416.

查訪，如果臣言不謬，早為議請起用。臣知其必不負君，必不負友、負所學也。[297]

The memorial demonstrates Weng's desire in acquiring the best talents for his grand strategy and his willingness to 'go out on a limb' in order to achieve that. This was important as the Jiajing emperor was all too eager to find fault and punish those officials who did not perform in matters of military defense. It is also possible that Weng genuinely saw Cheng and Tang as men who possessed great talents that went unappreciated (*huaicai buyu* 懷才不遇) .

Unfortunately for Tang, he did not achieve the reinstatement in government service that he was hoping for. We do not know the exact reasons. Weng Wanda was totally preoccupied with his new job as Grand Coordinator from 1544 until his recall to the capital as Minister of War in 1549. Between repairing the defense structures and repelling several Mongolian incursions, Weng might not have had the time to actively fight for Tang's reinstatement. By the time Weng was promoted to Minister of War, he served less than a year before taking leave due the death of his father. When the Jiajing emperor once again recalled Weng back to the court in 1550, his late arrival in the capital (travelling from the far south) was viewed by the emperor (and certainly Weng's political rivals) as disrespectful. Weng was then reprimanded and dismissed from the government. Despite his seemingly powerful appointment as Grand Coordinator, Weng's political career was ultimately at the mercy of the emperor and the Secretariat. There is strong evidence showing that Weng was on good terms with the Grand Secretary, Yan Song 嚴嵩, the most powerful man in the

[297] Weng, *Ju suozhi yipi budai shu*, in *Weng Wanda wenji*, 416.

government at the time.[298] Yan could very well have supported Weng's political appointments. However, it would be erroneous to overlook the emperor Jiajing's lack of trust and its effects on high-ranking officials undertaking military operations away from the capital. All in all, Weng was at a low point politically and was even less likely to be in a position to fight for Tang's reinstatement by this time. Unfortunately for Tang, Weng was his best hope of re-entering civil service and it soon became clear that this hope was lost. As a result, Tang's time to 'rise again from the Eastern Mountains' would come only over a decade later.

2.4 The Comeback

In 1558, exactly six years after Weng Wanda died before the imperial edict for his re-appointment could reach him in his hometown, Chaozhou, Tang Shunzhi was recalled to the government. Made a director of a bureau in the War Ministry in Beijing, Tang was sent to Jizhou 薊州 (northeast of Beijing) to inspect the border garrisons that were under the command of Wang Yu, the Supreme Commander of Ji-Liao 薊遼總督 and the father of the Wang Shizhen. After his work in the northeast was completed by the end of 1558, Tang was reassigned to Zhejiang 浙江 to assist the Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian in the campaign against the Japanese pirates. After his short time fighting the Japanese *wokou*, Tang received two titular promotions and was made the governor of Fengyang 鳳陽 in 1559. Tang immediately made plans to reorganize the defense of the region while travelling to the south to

[298] Weng Wanda and Yan Song shared similar views in national policies especially those pertaining to defense. Yan even wrote a moving epitaph in honour of Weng after his death. However, Weng tried his best to remain non-partisan throughout his political career and managed to do so with some degree of success. See Weng Wanda's epitaph in Yang Song, *Qianshan tangji* 鈐山堂集, *juan* 36, 8. Further proof of the close working relationship between Weng and Yan could also be found in their correspondence collected in Weng's collected works. *Weng Wanda ji* 翁萬達集, *juan* 15, 545-549.

assume his governorship. He never made it to Fengyang. Already seriously ill, Tang passed away in a boat while travelling on the Grand Canal.[299]

It was less than two years from the time when Tang was recalled to the government and until his untimely death at the age of 53. His actual time spent in the field as a military commander was even shorter, i.e. less than half a year. Zhao Yuan viewed this short period of action an 'extreme focus of will power' by Tang, combined with 'reckless abandon.'[300] Tang's first job after returning to the civil service in 1558 was the inspection of the borders garrisons in Jizhou 薊州 and he took the job seriously. Between July and November of that year, Tang managed to travel across the northern border, recording what he saw among the troops, and submitted a memorial to the emperor at the end of his tour. In this memorial, Tang reported that between the two major passes of Shanhaiguan 山海關 and Juyonguan 居庸關, out of the recorded troop strength of 93,824 only 59,062 were counted. A third of the total garrison troops had actually deserted. According to Tang, the real issue here was the lack of training of the troops rather than lack in number of troops.[301] Tang observed that the supposedly elite troops of Jizhou, renowned since the Tang dynasty, had lost its edge. Many of them "could not even wield their weapons effectively, let alone being well-versed in basic military formations." The troops also lacked discipline that they would not be able to form an effective defense, not to mention carrying out military assaults.[302] "It has been eight to nine years since the events of *gengxu* 庚戌 (invasion of Beijing by the Mongols led by Altan Khan) and many Supreme Commanders and Grand Coordinators had come and gone", wrote Tang, "only Yang

[299] *DMB*, 1255.
[300] Zhao Yuan 趙園, "Guanyu Tang Shunzhi de wansui zhi chu" 關於唐順之的晚歲之出, in *Journal of Nantong University (Social Science Edition)*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2005), 92.
[301] Tang, "Fukan Jizhen bianwu shoushu" 覆勘薊鎮邊務首疏, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 808.
[302] Tang, "Fukan Jizhen bianwu shoushu", in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 810.

Bo 楊博 (Supreme Commander of Jiliao from 1554–55) emphasised on the importance of training rather than the usual requests for more troops."[303] In conclusion, "the Supreme Commander Wang Yu, the Ouyang An 歐陽安, and the Grand Coordinator Ma Pei 馬佩…are all guilty of failure in discharging one's duties."[304] This was the fair but damning report that led to Wang Yu's dismissal and recall to Beijing. Yang Bo was re-appointed as Supreme Commander once again—perhaps as a result of Tang's report. Another outcome of Tang's report was the blemish it created on Tang's reputation. Many contemporary elites sided with Wang Yu and especially his son, Wang Shizhen. They considered Tang to be acting under the orders of the Senior Grand Secretary, Yan Song.[305]

When Tang Shunzhi was reassigned to Zhejiang to help with the campaign against the *wokou*, Tang literally saw himself as a military commander rather than an inspector. After the Ming army's advance was repeatedly checked by the Japanese pirates occupying Chongming 崇明, an island at the mouth of the Yangtze, Tang Shunzhi reportedly marched towards the enemy with a sword in his hand without any backup.[306] This behaviour was undoubtedly reckless, especially since Tang's official duty was to observe the southern campaign and assist Supreme Commander Hu. In a letter written by Zheng Xiao 鄭曉 (1499–1566), a colleague of Tang who was also responsible for the southern campaign against the pirates, Zheng reminded Tang that his job was to 'observe the military situation' and not to 'brave the arrows and stones

[303] Tang, "Fukan Jizhen bianwu shoushu", in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 811.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Zuo Dongling 左東嶺, *Wangxue yu zhongwan Ming shiren de xintai* 王學與中晚明士人的心態, 472-473.
[306] *MS, juan* 205, 5423.

while commanding the troops' as this was the responsibility of the Supreme Commander and military commander.[307]

Tang was aware of his displays of bravado and remarked in a rather self-effacing way that he had 'taken his job too seriously'. Nevertheless, he did explain the rationale guiding his actions to his friends:

> I have frequently overestimated my own abilities and as a result, I suffered dearly because I tried to achieve the impossible.
>
> 平生不自量, 吃虧處正是欲揀難事做。[308]

Even though the imperial court appointed Tang as a military observer, he explained that he was simply not satisfied with just "sitting comfortably in the provincial city [away from the frontlines]", drafting official documents for junior military commanders on a daily basis. With regards to the controversy surrounding his military service by the literati, Tang remarked "no man enjoys putting oneself in harm's way" and that these controversies arose because he always choose to "confront difficult challenges instead of avoiding them."[309] Once again, it is not difficult to find the inspirations of Tang's martial sentiments of course— as seen in the his narration of Shen Xiyi's exploits, and his admiration for civil officials who personally led troops into battles. While Tang was still living as a recluse, he wrote a series of letters to the Supreme Commander of Shaanxi, Zeng Xian 曾銑 (1509–48), whose controversial grand strategy of reclaiming the Ordos region from the Mongols put him in confrontation with Yan Song. Tang admired Zeng greatly for being a Supreme Commander who dared to go into battles personally:

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[307] Zheng, Xiao 鄭曉, "Da Jingchuan Tang yingtai" 答荆川唐银臺, in *Huangming jingshi wenbian* 皇明經世文編, *juan* 218, 2273.
[308] Tang, "Yu Bai Bolun yibu er" 與白伯倫議部二, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 373.
[309] Ibid.

> It has always been the case that the commander-in-chief left the fighting to his subordinates when he shut the city gates, surrounded himself with troops, and talked about strategies— thus frequently leading to defeat. Only you would don a suit of armour and carry a halberd— supervising the battles in person amongst the walls and warhorses, slicing the ears and spilling the blood of many. It took a hundred years before cunning caitiffs and famous chieftains finally witness the awesomeness of a supreme commander such as yours. [As a result] even military men dare not assume that Confucian scholars are afraid of braving arrows and projectiles.
>
> 自來總帥往往以戰事委之麾下，而自以擁兵閉城座談為得計，是以動多敗劒 。獨吾丈擐甲仗鉞 ，身自督戰，出入塞垣戎馬間，蹀血斬馘，使黠虜名酋百年來至是始識大帥風采，而介胄之士於是亦不敢謂文儒怯於冒矢石。[310]

In the persons of Zeng Xian, Weng Wanda, and a few other contemporaries, Tang saw the culmination of the ideal civil-military men— Confucian scholars who were equally adept in leading armies and composing poetry. Surely, what could be better than a philosopher-warrior who could articulate philosophical thoughts yet possessed the martial prowess that traditionally belonged to a purely military man such as Shen Xiyi? If Zeng Xian, who was very much a career official with the Censorate, could bravely take on the Mongols, Tang Shunzhi could also take on the *wokou* with the same courage. It was important to prove to the naysayers that a scholar could indeed excel as a military commander.

This could very well explain Tang's motivation and determination to return to government service. Tang possibly saw this as an opportunity to prove his martiality with the status of a literatus. He had spent a big part of his life preparing for this military role— especially so when he was living as a recluse:

[310] Tang, "Da Zeng Shitang zongzhi er" 答曾石塘總制二, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 328-329.

> For the past forty years, I have been dismissed from the court more than once. Yet the thought of serving the country and the people I do not dare to forget. I dared not neglect my study of the country's affairs.
>
> 自四十以前，雖屢經廢錮，至於為國為民一念，每飯未之敢忘，當世之務一切不敢廢習。[311]

Tang's expertise in military affairs was well known to his contemporaries even though Tang himself repeatedly maintained that he was "essentially a scholar who had no experience in the military." In another letter to Hu Zongxian, Tang also acknowledged that he was just a "scholar who had to train soldiers who have not seen any training even for a day."[312] The fact was that Tang was interested in all things military and "always studied them with total focus and dedication."[313]

Thus, this was simply not a matter of political careerism— an allegation made by many of Tang's contemporary literati. Many literati saw Tang's return to the civil service as a result of the recommendation by the Minister of Works, Zhao Wenhua 趙文華 (?–1557), and sanctioned by none other than Zhao's patron, the Senior Grand Secretary, Yan Song— whom these literati feared and loathed. The literati considered Yan Song and his son, Yan Shifan 嚴世藩 (1513–1565) to be directly responsible for the deaths of Zeng Xian and his patron, the former Senior Grand Secretary, Xia Yan 夏言 (1482–1548) over the issue of recovering the Ordos region from the Mongols.[314] They viewed Tang's reappointment as a sign that the once highly regarded recluse had abandoned the Way by attaching himself to (*yifu* 依附) the dishonourable Yan

[311] "Yu Wan Liangxi libu" 與萬兩溪吏部, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 336.
[312] Idem. 358.
[313] Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成, "Tang Jingchuan xiansheng benzhuan" 唐荊川先生本傳, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1088.
[314] *MS*, *juan* 308, 7916.

Song— all for the sake of officialdom and power. Tang Shunzhi's comeback became one of the major controversies of the Ming literary world, as it did not conform to the Ming literati's Confucian standards. Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536–1618) summarized this view:

> To be recommended by a base person is humiliating; to be rejected by a noble person is shameful.
> 为小人所荐者辱也, 为君子所弃者耻也。[315]

As a result, Tang's reputation was tarnished because of the literati's biased opinion of Yan Song and his henchmen. Tang's critics chose to ignore Tang's initial reluctance in returning to government service through Zhao Wenhua in many of his letters to his friends. Tang's detractors also ignored the fact that Zhao Wenhua was aware of Tang's talent since the time when they were fellow candidates in the metropolitan examination of 1529. Even the prominent disciple of Wang Yangming, Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583), who was Tang's best friend of some thirty years, wrote a thinly-veiled criticism of Tang's 'exit from the mountains' (*chushan* 出山).[316]

Even though Zeng Xian's death was largely collateral damage of the political struggle between Yan Song and Xia Yan, Tang did tried to warn Zeng of the his overly ambitious project of recovering the Ordos region.[317] Tang was deeply aware of the perilous political landscape (he would have learnt his lesson well as a victim) and knew that the emperor did not like to be pushed into a corner regarding his decision for military action against the Mongols. Tang tried to warn his friend while Yan Song took this opportunity to destroy his political rival, Xia Yan. With the death of Xia Yan, Tang would certainly regard the Grand Secretaries Yan Song and Xu Jie as his

[315] Lü Kun 呂坤, *Shenyin Yu* 呻吟語, 251.
[316] Zuo Dongling, *Wangxue yu zhongwan Ming shiren de xintai*, 435.
[317] Tang, "Da Zeng Shitang zongzhi er," in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 328-329.

only hope for his intended return to the government. It was not political ambition that motivated Tang but rather, his desire to serve the country. In his letter to Yan Song, Tang explained himself clearly:

> Your Excellency [Yan Song] recruits a person for the sake of the country and thus, this person should thank you on behalf of the country. And if one should express his gratitude on behalf of the country, nothing is better than doing it personally. If one should express his gratitude in person, there is no better way than to offer oneself to the service of his country.
>
> 相公為天下國家而用乎其人，其人宜為天下國家謝相公也，為天下國家謝相公，則莫如以身謝之。以身謝之，則莫如致其身以為天下國家之用。[318]

Tang was grateful for Yan Song's recommendation but he was unequivocal about who he was ultimately serving. After Tang's death, Wang Ji, who was critical of Tang when he re-entered government service, somehow came to his senses and wrote:

> My friend, when you were still a recluse in the mountains, many admired your nobleness. When you were summoned back to the government, you were caught in a dilemma. Many thought you had abandoned your long-cherished principles but who really knew that you were doing it for the sake of saving the world as this is part on your nature; your belief strong as metal and rock.
>
> 方兄之在山,人皆慕其高尚; 及其被召而出也, 跋前濒后, 或以为变其守 , 是岂知兄救世一念, 根于天性, 与金石而同坚。 [319]

In 1552, Tang wrote to Xu Jieto congratulate him for his appointment as a Grand Secretary.[320] "Now that you [Xu Jie] have occupied the post of a chief minister, you will surely achieve a hundred years of peace for our country," wrote Tang. But

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[318] Tang, "Yu Yan Jiexi xianggong" 與巖介谿相公, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 344.
[319] Wang Ji 王畿,"Ji Tang Jingchuan muwen" 祭唐荆川墓文, in *Longxi Wang xiansheng quanji* 龙溪王先生全集, *juan* 19, 1469.
[320] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 383, 6773-6774.

before this *pax sinica* could begin, Tang reminded Xu of the threat posed by the *wokou* in the southeast, and the rumour that the pirates were engaged in large-scale shipbuilding in preparation for invasion, and asked, "what is your [Xu Jie's] plan?"[321] Immediately after Xu's appointment to the Grand Secretariat in April 1552, the Japanese pirates attacked Taizhou 台州 (located on the eastern coast of the Zhejiang province) within a month.[322] In the usual fashion, Tang reminded Xu Jie in his letter of the earlier times when they used to talked about serving the country. The large-scale invasion of the *wokou* in 1552 was shocking to the people living in the southern coastal region. Even though the pirates made numerous incursions since 1540, these were often small-scale, resulting in skirmishes between the prates and the government troops that were limited in terms of destruction and casualty as they were largely confined to naval battles. Beginning in 1552 and lasting till 1557, these *wokou* invasions had increased in scope. Within the period of five years, there were a total 169 incursions, averaging 28 per year.[323] Assisted by Chinese armed traders and sea merchants who were based in the southeast coastal region, the Japanese pirates managed to build strongholds (e.g. Chongming Island 崇明岛 near Shanghai) along the Chinese coasts and launched multiple raids inland. The *wokou* threat had evolved from raiding parties of a few hundred men, to armed troops that numbered thousands to tens of thousands.

The trail of violence left behind by the *wokou* shocked and devastated the people living in the south. It especially left an indelible mark on the psyche of the late-Ming literati. Tang's contemporary, Gui Youguang 歸有光 composed twenty-four poems on the *wokou* invasion that focus on the violence and suffering

[321] Tang, "Da Xu Chunzai xianggong di er shu" 答徐存斋相公第二书, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 323.
[322] Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, *juan* 55, 847.
[323] Fan Zhongyi 范中义 and Tong Xigang 仝晰纲, *Mingdai wokou shilue* 明代倭寇史略, 23.

experienced by the common people living in the southern coast.[324] In one poem, Gui wrote about how his home, the Jiangsu province, was 'being dealt a bad hand':

> Wu [Jiangsu province] had seen famine for many years and
> experienced the sorrow of empty textile looms [finances].
> The land was spared the ravages of war but now ships with sails
> made out of coconut [pirate ships] are arriving at sea.
>
> 自是吳分有歲災，
> 連年杼軸已堪哀。
> 獨饒此地無戎馬，
> 又見椰帆海上來。[325]

In another poem, Gui expressed the enormous hardship that was to be endured by the people, even as they continued to offer their young men to be conscripted and killed in the fight against the *wokou*— liked an "offering of flesh and blood to the jackals and tigers" as "the sea turned into red."[327] It is noteworthy that Gui Youguang was one of the earliest Ming literati to compose martial poetry expressing sympathy for and describing the common people's suffering. Many earlier and contemporary literati such as Xu Wei, and even Tang Shunzhi tended to focus on the battles and the heroics of military confrontations— mainly through the 'hero's perspective.'[328] But Gui Youguang was writing as an eyewitness who was in the thick of the conflict. The Mongols were real, but they were confined to the northern borders, far away from the safety of the Yangtze region. The *wokou* threat, on the other hand, was literally on the doorstep of these southern elites. In 1554, Gui had to escape with his family from his

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[324] A detailed study of this collection of poems by Gui Youguang can be found in Yan Zhiying 顏智英, "Lun Gui Youguang shi zhong de shuxia— bing shu qi guwen Zhong de yu kou sixiang" 論歸有光詩中的海戰書寫— 兼述其古文中的禦寇思想, in *NCKU Journal of Chinese Literature* 成大中文學報, no. 43 (Dec 2013): 87-126.
[325] Gui Youguang 歸有光, "Haishang jishi shisi shou" 海上紀事十四首, in *Zhenchuan xiansheng bieji* 震川先生別集, *juan* 10, 970.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Yan, "A Study on Gui Youguang's Poems Concerning the Sea Battling - With the discussion of the thoughts about resisting Japanese Pirates of Gui's proses," 95.

hometown Anting 安亭 to seek refuge behind the city walls of Kunshan 崑山 (next to Shanghai) in the face of another wave of *wokou* invasion. From early April to late May, the invaders tried to breach the city walls more than thirty times but failed in their attempts. When the attackers gave up on the siege and left, they "slaughtered those who remained outside the city walls, torched the empty houses, so as to vent their frustration and anger".[329] The siege of Kunshan city happened two years after Tang wrote the letter to the grand secretariat Xu Jie asking the latter what were his plans regarding the *wokou.* By that time, the destruction and violence wrought by the invaders would have terrified the southern elites. When some of them had gotten out of their initial state of shock, they were propelled to act. As a native of Changzhou, Tang was an eyewitness to the devastation brought over by the *wokou*.[330] In 1555, a group of pirates numbering about fifty attacked the cities of Suzhou and Changzhou, exposing the weakness of the Ming military and defenseless commoners of the south. Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 , leader of the late-Ming Donglin faction, wrote:

> In a short time, the *wokou* invaded the Southeast, bringing great turmoil and causing misery beyond words. For a period of five to six years, they were unstoppable. Shunzhi was so indignant that he frequently forgot his meals while keeping a scroll in his sleeve, secretly reading it. These were the works of the seven greatest military strategists in history— such as the Marquis of Liu the Marquis of Ye, and Li Zhongding.
>
> 已而倭入犯东南，骚动蹂躏特甚，惨不忍言，歷五六歲無能一創。顺之愤懑废食，時時攜一編袖中，或竊視之，乃七大傳，自留侯，鄴候，李忠定皆在焉，蓋古今所謂大經略也。[331]

[329] Gui Youguang, "Kunshanxian wokou shimo shu" 崑山縣倭寇始末書, in *Zhenchuan xiansheng bieji* 震川先生別集, *juan* 8, 183.
[330] Tang, "Tiaochen haifang jinglue shishu" 條陳海防經畧事疏, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 834.
[331] The Marquis of Liu, the Marquis of Ye and Zhang Zhongding are Zhang Liang 張良 of Western Han dynasty], Li Mi 李泌 of Tang dynasty, Li Gang 李綱 of Song dynasty, respectively. These men were all literati who became military generals during times of crisis. Gu, "Tang Jingchuan xiansheng

Li Zhi recorded that when Tang was passing through Suzhou, he witnessed the *wokou* impaling infants for amusement and vowed to destroy every single one of them.[332] It is therefore hard to imagine that Tang would not seize the opportunity to meet the Minister of Works, Zhao Wenhua when the latter arrived in the south under imperial orders to inspect the defense against the *wokou* in the same year of the invasion of Suzhou and Changzhou. After having spent so many years studying and writing about the military, it was time to put his knowledge into practice. Tang's 'emergence from the mountains' was an act of considerable will in the face of so many detractors. When the period of mourning was over for Tang in 1557 (Tang's father had passed away in 1555 around the time when Zhao Wenhua recommended Tang's reinstatement), Tang returned to the government as a military inspector and the man had no intention, nor was he satisfied, to remain as one.

benzhuan" in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1087.
[332] Li Zhi 李贄, *Xu Cangshu* 續藏書, 507.

2.5 The Death of a Scholar and the Birth of a Legend

> Those who possess the edition and managed to familiarise and absorb its content will be invincible in the world. Master Jingchuan familiarised and absorbed the book's content so that he could decimate the *wokou* in the south, and smashed the barbarians in the north— using most of [the strategies in] it.
>
> 得是编熟之化之，天下无就敌矣！荆川先生熟而化此，以南剿倭，北创虏，十用其七八。[333]

The edition in question in the above foreword is Tang Shunzhi's *Wu Bian* which Tang began writing during his period of living as a recluse, and completed in his last years working in the military. *Wu Bian* was never published during Tang's lifetime, as the custodian of his manuscript Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540–1620) refused its publication, arguing that the military matters/knowledge belonged to the 'way of the yin' (兵陰道也) and it was not the right time to be made available. Jiao Hong's reservation stemmed from the long-held Confucian perspective on all things military. However, like Tang Shunzhi, Jiao Hong was also a pragmatic man of his times, and the times were bad for the Ming dynasty at that point— the Manchus had broken away from their Ming masters and founded the Later Jin dynasty. The work was finally published in 1618, when the Manchu leader Nurhachi announced the "Seven Grievances" manifesto, setting himself up as a legitimate challenger to the Ming dynasty. Tang's military work might come in handy in facing the new threat from the northeast.

The editors of the *Siku Quanshu* wrote in the bibliographic description of Tang's Military Edition that it is a work written by a man who "possessed great knowledge in military matters from ancient times to the present" but

[333] Guo Yi E 郭一鶚, "Foreword" 弁首 to Tang Shunzhi's *Wu Bian* 武編, collected in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成 vol. 13, 15.

"failed to live up to everyone's expectation when he was appointed as an official in the effort to stem the tide of the *wokou* in the south", so much so that "he was circled by the enemy as a result of his egotistical decision to engage them enemy head on", and was only "saved by [the Supreme Commander] Hu Zongxian's strategic foresight" who henceforth, held Tang Shunzhi "like a pawn in his hand."[334] These are certainly not kind words from the Qing dynasty scholars, who could very well have been influenced by the well-documented controversy surrounding Tang's return to the government. It was not difficult for them to form such a critical opinion of Tang Shunzhi since the *Veritable Record of Emperor Shizong,* undoubtedly the most important source of Ming history for Qing scholars, has this entry:

> Shunzhi initially wished to make a name for himself by seeking novelty [as a scholar] but was unexpectedly dismissed from government, living as a recluse for more than ten years. The court wanted to be purged of men who had inflated reputation and lacked substance. Even though Tang was recommended by many in numerous occasions, he was never recalled. In time, the *wokou* threatened the southeast and the Vice-minister of Works Zhao Wenhua was to inspect Jiangnan. Shunzhi with sought out Wenhua with his plans, and as a result, he became a friend of Yan Shifan, the son of Yan Song…Shunzhi was originally a scholar who managed to make use of his [literary] talent when he was appointed as an official in the Hanlin academy. His literary works were well written and certainly worth reading. It happened that he was deluded in thinking that he was an expert in military matters, dedicating himself to it, overestimated his abilities, and not realising that he possessed none. He desired to achieve martial accomplishments but ended up exposing his weakness and was ridiculed by everyone.

[334] Ji Yun 紀昀, Lu Xixiong 陸錫熊, et al., "Wu bian tiyao" 武編提要, in *SKQS*, vol. 727, 205.

> 順之初欲獵奇致聲譽，不意遂廢。屏居十餘年，上方摧抑浮名無實之士，言者屢薦之，終不見用。會東南有倭患，工部侍郎趙文華視師江南，順之以策幹文華，因之交歡嚴嵩子世蕃…順之本文士，使獲用其所長，直石渠金馬之地，其著作潤色，必有可觀者。乃以邊才自詭，既假以致身，遂不自量，忘其為非有，欲以武功自見，盡暴其短，為天下笑云。[335]

And adding oil to the flames of scandal are the words of highly-regarded Wang Shizhen, who wrote in a biographical sketch (*xingzhuang* 行狀) of his late father Wang Yu that his execution was largely attributed to the damning report submitted by Tang Shunzhi, who was recalled to the government by Yan Song (and likely acting under the Chief Grand Secretary's orders).[336] Early Qing Confucian and historian Sitong 萬斯同, who provided the early draft of *Mingshi*, and protégé of Huang Zongxi, viewed the accusations against Tang's moral standing as unjustified.[337] Wan Sitong was also echoing his teacher's views on Tang, who saw that Tang's controversy as unfounded.[338] Despite the controversy that surrounded Tang Shunzhi, the man was also fiercely defended by many supporters. Zheng Xiao wrote to Tang in another letter saying, "In all these years, good men had said that the threats from the southern pirates and the northern barbarians could only be pacified by master [Tang Shunzhi]."[339] Tang could not have remained untouched by this keen expectation of his

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[335] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 483, 8061-8062.
[336] Wang Shizhen 王世貞, "Xiankao sizhi fujun xingzhuang" 先考思質府君行狀, in *Yanzhou sibu gao* 弇州四部稿, *juan* 98, in *SKQS*, vol.1280, 568.
[337] Wan Sitong wrote to defend Tang's decision in returning to the government through Yan Song and suggested (although without hard evidence) that the 'character assassination' of Tang in *Ming Shilu* was attributed to Zhang Juzheng 張居正. See Zheng Jixiong 鄭吉雄, *Zhedong xueshu yanjiu: Jingdai Zhongguo sixiang shi zhong de zhishi, daode yu xianshi guanhuai* 浙東學術研究: 近代中國思想史中的知識、道德與現世關懷, 172-173.
[338] Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, "Zhuanshi lou cangshu ji" 傳世樓藏書記, in *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集, vol.10, 129.
[339] Zheng Xiao 鄭曉, "Yu Tang Jingchuan douxian" 與唐荊川都憲, in *Ming jingshi wenbian*, *juan* 218, 2274.

emergence displayed by his ardent supporters— even if this expectation required him to go beyond his physical and intellectual limits.

Tang's lifelong friend, Luo Hongxian was in the best position to defend Tang's decision. Regarded by the detractors of Tang as a moral exemplar (an ideal that they thought Tang had turned his back on), Luo Hongxian was faithful to his calling as a recluse without ever returning to the government. When Tang 'exited from the mountains', Luo Hongxian wrote to the former Minister of War and a student of Wang Yangming, Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563):

> [Tang] Jingchuan is an outstanding statesman, whose conduct is exemplary, whose learning is excellent, whose resolve is steely, and whose energy is vigorous. The world could choose not to use him but if it does, he would certainly bring forth great and small achievements, all in a very short time.
>
> 荆川命世之傑也, 其行峻潔, 其學精進, 其志堅鋼, 其精力壯健。世不用则已, 小用则小益, 速用则速效。[340]

"It was imperative for Tang to exit from the mountains", added Luo, while he himself was "better suited to live the rest of his days in the mountains and the forest".[341] Luo, who had been Tang's closest friend for almost thirty years since they were both awarded the *jinshi* degree, knew exactly what he was talking about. As a follower of Wang Yangming's teaching, both Luo was influenced by Wang's philosophy of 'unity of knowing and acting', which states that there is no true knowledge without action. To Luo, Tang Shunzhi's period of reclusion was also a period where knowledge was accumulated. It was then the right time for Tang to act on what he knew. One type of knowledge certainly stood out for Tang— and it was military. As

[340] Luo Hongxian 羅洪先, "Yu Shuangjiang gong" 與雙江公, in *Nian'an wenji* 念庵文集, *juan* 4, in *SKQS*, vol. 1275, 107.
[341] Idem.109.

mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tang had immersed himself in the study of military knowledge ever since he was dismissed from the court. His studies on philosophy, Buddhism and Daoism helped to build up a kind of mental fortitude that gave him the kind focus he needed to fulfill his goal of saving the nation.[342] Tang knew the risks of returning to the government through Yan Song but the urgency of dealing with foreign military threats took priority. Tang had frequently expressed in his writings the importance of pragmatism and not separating practical knowledge from moral cultivation.[343] Tang's desire to 'order the world' would supersede all considerations with regards to his personal reputation.[344] Tang was also aware of the costs of his commitment— both mental and physical. He wrote to Luo Hongxian after he had completed his assignment as a military inspector in the northwest and before he travelled to the south to deal with Japanese piracy:

> Ever since I returned to the capital [the court], I am sick in my spleen and my bones. During the two months when I was in Jimen [Jizhou] and burdened with illness, I rode to the farthest reaches of the empire and scaled the edge of many cliffs— covering a distance of over three thousands *li*. I have inspected men in armour, tens of thousands of them— hoping to find out if they were weak or strong. Blood-tinged air did I breathed while chilling sands warmed my face. I have just returned and without even warming the bed, I have to travel across the seas— braving the terrifying waves to battle the devilish barbarians.
>
> 弟自入京师，病脾骨立。扶病往蓟门两月间，登驰绝徼峭壁，三数千里之途。阅过铁靴铜面之辈，十余万人，一一欲辨其弱强。腥风酸鼻，惊沙煖面。归来席未暖也，又复将荷戈渡海，冒惊波而斗鬼夷。[345]

[342] Zuo Dongling, *Wangxue yu zhongwan Ming shiren de xintai*, 477.
[343] Tang, "Da Yu xundao shu" 答俞教諭書, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 194-196.
[344] Tang, "Ji Youhuai fujun wen" 祭有懷府君文, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji,* 606.
[345] Tang, "Yu Luo Nian'an" 與羅念庵, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji,* 352.

Tang knew his poor health was at stake here, but it was not going to stop him from answering his calling, his singular mission of taking the fight to the *wokou*. Even his Confucian upbringing and sensibilities were going to deter him from killing the enemies. In his 'Ceremonial Address to the Sword' or *Jidao wen* 祭刀文, written before Tang began his campaign in the south, he wrote that "Heaven treasures life" and so he would never "kill for the sake of personal glory".[346] However, killing in war is justified, especially when it was to save the lives of the innocent. As such:

> The Heaven has no alternative but to give the authority to kill to the Son of Heaven while the Son of Heaven has no alternative but to entrust the authority to kill to his servants— kill only when all other options are exhausted as such is the way to understand the will of Heaven. In the ancient times the guilty must be executed so as the preserve the lives of many and so to kill is also to give life.
>
> 上帝不得已而以司殺之權寄之天子，天子不得已而以司殺之權付之閫外之臣，必不得已而后殺，所以體天心也。上古有罪者一人不殺則千萬人人不能生，故殺人所以生人也。[347]

Clearly, Tang saw himself as more than a military inspector when he returned to the government. He was a military general who was given the authority by the Heaven and the emperor to fight the *wokou*. Tang's literary output in this period became increasingly martial in content. But how well did Tang perform in his newly appointed military role?

In April 1559, the Japanese pirates amassed a sizeable naval force near Chongming island 崇明島 at the mouth of the Yangtze River (near Shanghai). Tang, who was by this time the de facto forward echelon commander, decided to bring the

[346] Tang, "Jidao wen祭刀文" in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 608.
[347] Tang, "Ji liudao si qipai si dao zhi shenwen" 祭六纛司旗牌司刀之神文, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 607.

fight to the enemies. Since arriving in the south, Tang was not contented to be merely a military observer. Wearing armour and on horseback most of the time, Tang was soon directing field operations with the blessings of Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian.[348] Tang had previously proposed the strategy of meeting the enemies at sea rather than on land.[349] The *wokou* near Chongming Island thus presented him with the perfect scenario to put his ideas to the test.

After promising the soldiers rewards (and also punishments if they were hesitant to attack), Tang led the troops to strike at the *wokou*. Forcing the *wokou* to abandon their plans of landing in an area north of the Yangtze, Tang's naval force defeated them at sea. "Thirteen vessels were sunk and one hundred and twenty enemy heads were collected" remarked Hong Chaoxuan, who recorded Tang's exploits, "it was a victory unheard of since the court first deployed troops in Suzhou and Songjiang".[350] Accompanied by the veteran general Liu Xian 劉顯, Tang then proceeded farther north to Yaojiadang 姚家蕩 (modern day Yancheng 鹽城) to assist the Grand Coordinator of Fengyang Li Zhu李遂, in destroying another group of *wokou*. The remaining *wokou* who survived the attack retreated to Miaowan 廟灣 (modern day Funing county 阜寧縣) to regroup. It was at this juncture that Tang received an urgent message from Hu Zongxian, notifying him of another *wokou* had returned and ready to launch an attack on Sansha 三沙 near Chongming Island.[351] The job of finishing off the *wokou* who barricaded themselves in Miaowan to two able officials, Grand Coordinator Li, and the Surveillance Vice Commisioner Liu Jingshao

[348] *DMB*, 1254.
[349] Tang, "Sansha baojie shu" 三沙報捷疏, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 827.
[350] Hong Chaoxuan 洪朝選, "Jingchuan Tang gong xingzhuang" 荊川唐公行狀, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1040.
[351] Zhao Shichun 趙時春, "Ming dufu Fengyang deng chu duchayuan you jiandu yushi Jingchuan Tang gong muzhiming" 明督撫鳳陽等處都察院右僉都御史荊川唐公墓志銘, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1052.

劉景韶.[352] When Tang returned to Sansha near Chongming Island, around 2000 *wokou* vessels were waiting for him. Tang then set out to plan the attack and with the help of Regional Vice Commander Lu Tang 盧鏜, the *wokou* were defeated.

All these victories scored by the Ming troops seem to be impressive enough. But according a number of Ming sources, they were not— especially those that directly involved Tang as commander. This is the entry on the battle of Miaowan in *Guoque* 國榷, Tan Qian's private historical work:

> In the fifth month, the Ming troops in Jiangbei attacked the *wokou* in Miaowan— stormed their hideout and decapitating four thousand. Our [Ming] troops suffered great loss and subsequently retreated and fortified our position. At that time, the enemy encampment was well-defended and so the Grand Coordinator Li Zhu suggested laying siege to it, as our troops were tired of repeated assaults. As the bandits were running low on food while all escape routes by sea or land were cut off, it was possible to secure a total victory. Vice Commissioner Tang Shunzhi thought that Li was apathetic and so he put on his armour and advanced toward the enemy with a spear in hand. Tang challenged the bandits repeatedly, but they refused to fight. [Li] Zhu then organised an offensive into the bandit's stronghold and was met with fierce resistance that led to many casualties. After that, the bandits made several attempts to rob, while searching for ships as a means of escape. Tang realised that he had miscalculated. He then gave the excuse of needing to coordinate the attack on the *wokou* at Sansha and returned to the south.
>
> 五月，江北兵攻倭於廟灣，衝其巢，斬首四千。我兵死傷過當，復退守之。時賊營甚固，巡撫李逐以我軍鼓戰而疲，宜圍守之。賊乏食，且水陸斷其行道，可收全勝。通政唐順之以為玩寇，乃自擐甲持矛靡兵以進。屢挑戰，賊終不出。逐督兵入

[352] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 472, 7935.

險，賊盡銳東西衝，殺傷相當。自是復稍稍出掠，覓舟為走計矣。順之知失計，乃駕言經略三沙倭南去。[353]

Tan Qian placed Tang Shunzhi in a bad light with his treatment of the Jiangbei campaign that eventually saw the destruction of *wokou* power in that region. Tang Shunzhi was portrayed as a general who failed in his strategic planning— a general who was too eager and too rash, who viewed personal glory as more important than the safety of his men. The final nail to the coffin is the accusation that Tang left his men behind with the excuse that he needed to attend to the conflict in Sansha. Writing the history at a later period, Tan Qian was likely influenced by appraisal of Tang contained in *Ming Shilu*. The controversy surrounding Tang's return was not easily forgotten. The association with Yan Song had far reaching repercussions and one area that was affected was Tang's military achievements.

Another example of such negative appraisal of Tang's late military career would be the entry in *Ming shi* about the second wave of *wokou* attack on Sansha a month later after the Ming forces defeated the *wokou* the first time. *Ming shi* records that "both Commanders Lu Tang and Liu Xian were ordered to attacked but were driven back":

> Shunzhi was enraged and he personally led the battle formation on horseback. The bandits [*wokou*] saw the official army from their tall ramparts and after seeing how Shunzhi was leading a disciplined troop, chose to barricade themselves. [Liu] Xian requested for a withdrawal and was refused by Shunzhi, who then drew his sword and advanced a hundred paces toward the enemy's encampment. [Lu] Tang and Xian feared imminent defeat [if Shunzhi was captured] and asked Shunzhi to retreat.

[353] Tan Qian談遷, Guoque國榷, *juan* 62, in *Mingshi jishi benmo* 明史紀事本末, 864.

順之憤，親躍馬布陣。賊構高樓望官軍，見順之軍整，堅壁不出。顯請退師，順之不可，持刀直前，去賊營百餘步。鏜、顯懼失利，固要順之還。[354]

Tang, in this case, was back to his usual antics of playing the military general and eager to score a victory— which could lead to the defeat of the Ming forces if he was killed on the spot. Luckily, Lu Tang and Liu Xian were quick in their response and pulled back the foolish general.

Hong Chaoxuan, while writing the biographical sketch of Tang Shunzhi, gave a much more detailed account of the same campaign in Miaowan. Although not totally devoid of bias, Hong's inclusion of crucial details helped to give a more balanced appraisal of Tang's role in the war:

> On noon the next day, the armies attacked Miaowan. Many bandits were hit by arquebus rounds and swiftly returned to their nest [stronghold]— as such their heads could not be cut off [for counting]. The bandits hid in their nest that was strong and well-defended. And so, the Master [Tang] and the Censor-in-chief Master Li Zhu discussed and concluded that they should form a two-front incendiary attack from the north and south. At the same time, generous rewards were promised to any soldiers who would perform well.
>
> 明日午，諸軍戰廟灣，巢賊雖中鉛彈，馳入巢，不能割首級，而巢中賊據巢堅厚，守益固。於是公始與江北都御史李公逐議以南北夾擊而用火攻，又懸賞格募將士立功。[355]

The Tang Shunzhi mentioned in this account was a general who was willing to work closely with other people— people like Li Zhu who had been in charge of the *wokou*

[354] *MS*, *juan* 205, 5423.
[355] Hong Chaoxuan 洪朝選, "Ming duchayuan you jiandu yushi xunfu Fengyang deng chu defang tidu junwu qian you chunfang yousijian jian Hanlin yuan bianxiu Jingchuan Tang gong xingzhuang" 明督察院右僉都御史巡撫鳳陽等處地方提督軍務前右春坊右司諫兼翰林院編修荊川唐公行狀, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1041.

campaign in Jiangbei and thus had better understanding of the lay of the land. Hong Chaoxuan then gave a detailed account of the deployment of various personnel and weaponry in preparation for the assault on the enemy— all these a result of Tang and Li's military leadership. The attack greatly demoralised the *wokou* and when they made a desperate attempt to ambush the Ming forces, Tang was able to outwit and killed many of them. Tang had to retreat only after the wokou had regrouped and began laying heavy fire around Tang and his troops (as usual, Tang was personally leading his men).[356] It was at this juncture that Tang received a summons to return to Sansha as another wave of *wokou* invasion was imminent:

> Master Tang thought that the bandits at Miaowan would soon be captured anyway. Fearing that he might miss the opportunity [to defeat the *wokou* at Sansha] and considering that he was responsible for [the operations in] both north and south of the Yangtze, he had no choice but to abandon [the Miaowan] and set out for the south [Sansha].
>
> 唐子以廟賊將入囊中，恐失機會，念一身而兼南北之任，不得已棄歸。[357]

This account by Li Kaixian 李開先 is very different from the earlier *Ming shilu* account where Tang was accused of abandoning his duties due to his incompetence the need to avoid embarrassment.

When Tang arrived in Sansha, he found out that the field commanders were reluctant to engage the enemy who were hiding in their stronghold for a month. Tang believed that strategically, it was imperative to attack the enemy when they "just set up their fortified positions while their ranks were plagued by hunger and fatigue". Tang was angry with the commanders because they had allowed the enemy to

[356] Idem. 1041.
[357] Li Kaixian李開先, "Jingchuan Tang duyushi zhuan" 荊川唐都御史傳, in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1066.

reinforce their position instead of taking advantage of their relative weakness when they first returned to Sansha.[358] Unwilling to waste any more precious time, Tang was determined to storm the fortification of the enemy. The accounts in *Ming shi* and *Ming shilu* both described what happened next as a near fiasco— with Tang freely displaying his bravado and endangered his own life and possibly, those of his men. Li Kaixian, like Hong Chaoxuan, gave a detailed account that could get us closer to the truth. Tang commanded his field commanders to lead the attack, but they were met with setbacks. Li Kaixian wrote that before this battle, Tang Shunzhi would always wear his armour and be the first to advance towards the enemy. But because of dehydration and need of recuperation, he had to stay in the rear to strategise. His generals, however, could not be relied upon and so the master had to personally lead another offensive. How were the generals unreliable? Li went on to explain:

> At that time, Master Tang was newly promoted to Vice Commissioner and still holding the old official seal and appointment documents, he had to return to Taichang to await and carry out new orders. When a few generals saw that he was leaving, they provided ships to the bandits [*wokou*]— wishing to send them away to make trouble elsewhere.
>
> 唐子時方陞通政，以舊璽書權輕，且還太倉以待新命行事。諸將官見其去，即欲以船與賊，送之出洋，嫁禍他方，己得無事。[359]

It is a well-known fact that the Ming military had lapsed in both fighting strength and discipline by this time. It is therefore not surprising such blatant shift of responsibility was happening. Li and Hong's accounts allow us to see the context of Tang Shunzhi's bravado— that it was not a vain attempt at martial glory at the expense of

[358] Li, "Jingchuan Tang duyushi zhuan" in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1066.
[359] Li, "Jingchuan Tang duyushi zhuan," in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1066.

human lives. Tang had to be at the front of the troops because the lack of control and tough supervision likely result in certain defeat for the entire war against the *wokou*, not just a few battles. Hu Zongxian, with all his administrative genius in organizing the *wokou* campaign, was at the end of the day a highly efficient bureaucrat. Without the next tier of bureaucrats who were not averse to working in the field— bureaucrats such as Tang Shunzhi, Li Zhu, Tan Lun 譚綸 and Liu Jingshao, the next tier of military commanders such as Yu Dayou, Qi Jiguang, and Lu Tang would not be as effective. Tang saw the problems within the Ming military (especially since he had previously inspected the border troops in Jizhou) and was determined to make things work within the limitations. The outcome was the eventual eradication of the wokou threat in the Jiangbei and Chongming region. This victory led to Tang's well-deserved promotion to Assistant Censor-in-chief as Hu Zongxian attributed the military success to Tang's strategic planning, rather than considering this to be misplaced credit (by Hu Zongxian) that some literati were trying to insinuate.[360]

Tang's military achievements within such a short span of time are then, in my opinion, remarkable. Unfortunately, his detractors were committed to downplaying his military achievements since his resurrected career that was helped by Yan Song was in essence, a military one. These detractors had powerful voices since the *Ming shilu* and the later *Ming shi* are considered the orthodox histories and were widely read.

Li Kaixian, who wrote to Tang when he first returned to government service advising the latter to "swiftly accomplish what he set out to do and retire, so that he

[360] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 472, 7931-7932. Also see Zheng Liangsheng 鄭樑生, *Mingdai Zhong Ri guanxi yanjiu* 明代中日關係研究, 460.

could preserve his reputation", was very clear about the controversies surrounding Tang from the outright and saw the problem for what it was:

> He [Tang] wrote ten letters between Yan Song and his son [Yan Shifan]— most of them are about fighting the bandits [wokou] and are carved and collected in *Fengshi ji*. Those who knew about it did not wish to read the letters. As a result, the astonishing strategies and grand plans were not put to good use, and they were subsequently taken away swiftly by the heaven.
>
> 其與巖介溪父子往復十簡，固多言及禦賊事，刻在奉使集中，見者多不欲讀之。奇謀偉畫，未得盡展，而天遽奪之速之。[361]

Tang's association with Yan Song had tainted his reputation so much that many were reluctant to see beyond the surface of their relationship. It was easy to read and take in the official versions of Tang's return to government. The verdict has been reached and Tang was guilty of sacrificing Confucian morality for the sake of political power. There was no need to look at other evidence, especially letters written to Yan Song— never mind what had really transpired in those letters. And because Tang died shortly after his campaign in the south, it was impossible for him to prove his innocence.

In 1560, Tang received the somewhat important appointment as the governor of Fengyang 鳳陽, the ancestral home of the Ming emperors. Although very ill after the campaign in the south, Tang began organising the defense against another possible wave of *wokou* attack while on his way to assume his post. It was while travelling on a ship that Tang succumbed to his illness.

[361] Li, "Jingchuan Tang duyushi zhuan," in *Tang Shunzhi Ji*, 1058.

Tang's writings on coastal defense and his strategy of meeting the *wokou* at sea was adopted by Hu Zongxian and well-regarded by subsequent generals who were put in charge of the military, such as Tan Lun who became the Minister of War.[362] In the short span of his military career, Tang presented himself as a scholar-general, through his actions and words. In his own way, Tang had helped to define what it meant to be a scholar-general— one who could embrace the ideal of the "completeness in the civil and the martial". There were certainly other civil officials who were like him in the mid 16th century Ming court— men who had to take on military appointments and even excelled in them. Tang Shunzhi was unique because of his reputation as a foremost literary master. He could have kept his reputation intact and avoided controversy if he followed the path of his good friend, Luo Hongxian. Instead, Tang chose the difficult, but ultimately, more honourable way of saving his countrymen from the Japanese pirates. His short career was nevertheless filled with almost superhuman energy— whether it was on the battlefield or in his writings, and this no doubt helped to romanticize his story, his persona. The legacy that Tang left behind was an inspiring one, even with all the controversies that surrounded him when he was alive.

Wu Peifu 吳佩孚(1874-1939), the Republican general and Beiyang 北洋 warlord, was facing the increasing military threat from the Japanese. He lamented:

> I am a professional soldier who has been entrusted with the responsibility of eradicating chaos and bringing peace to my country. After pondering, I suddenly realised where I am. The threat of the [Japanese] bandits has increased much in the present, but how

[362]Li Defeng 李德鋒, "Tang Shunzhi junshi sixiang tanxi" 唐順之军事思想探析, Journal of Ningxia Teachers University (Social Science) 宁夏师范学院学报（ 社会科学），no. 4, vol. 42 (August 2011), 57.

> will there be another Master [Tang] Jingchuan? I could not help but to aspire to be like him.
>
> 吾人廁身軍籍，負國家治亂安危之重，審乎此，當憬然知所以自處矣。今日寇益深，豈更有荊川先生乎？不禁有高山景行之志也。[363]

Being from Shandong province, Wu Peifu had mentioned Qi Jiguang earlier in his writing. Qi Jiguang, was a professional soldier who was born in Shandong, just like Wu. But to Wu, the ultimate ideal was Tang Shunzhi— simply because Tang was not born to be a warrior, but he ended up surpassing those who were, by virtue of his military achievements. Tang's legacy as a military general was to pave the way for many civil officials who began to see military appointments as a calling— a calling worthy of their dedication apart from their literary pursuits.

[363] Wu Peifu 吳佩孚, Preface to *Ming Tang Jingchuan xiansheng nian pu* 明唐荆川先生年谱, in *Beijing tushuguan cangzhen ben nianpu congkan* 北京圖書館藏珍本年譜叢刊 vol. 47, 347-348.

3. He Liangchen: The man who cast away the brush and joined the military

3.1 Introduction

Among the numerous *bingshu* 兵書 or 'military books' that were published in the Ming dynasty, *Zhenji* 陣紀 by He Liangchen 何良臣 is well regarded in People's Republic of China as a fine example of the literati literary output relating to military knowledge. Admirers of He's work often saw it as a milestone in Chinese military writing- praising its originality and its pragmatism despite its adherence to the military tradition of Sun Zi and the *Seven Military Classics* (*Wujing qishu* 武經七書) compiled and published during the Song dynasty.[364] Besides *Zhenji*, He Liangchen allegedly authored three other military works but unfortunately, none survived.[365] A casual search for this man on the internet will yield results that unanimously regard He Liangchen as a patriotic intellectual who gave up his study for the civil service examinations and his privileged status to join the military at a time when China was caught in 'deep waters and intense heat'— besieged by the Mongols in the north and attacked by the *wokou* in the southeast. In other words, a national hero. However, the reality is that we know little of this man and there are precious few clues for us to piece together the life of this man. Unlike Qi Jiguang, whose life and military exploits were recorded extensively by his contemporaries, we could only find bits and pieces of information about He Liangchen mainly from *Zhenji*. Like He Liangchen, Qi Jiguang was a military commander who had also authored *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書

[364] Alastair Johnston saw *Zhenji* as a good example of Ming strategic thinking that stressed on the preemptive application of violence and dismissing the sole dependence on stratagem. Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, 177.
[365] They are *Junquan* 軍權, *Liqi tushuo* 利器圖說 and *Zhisheng bianyi* 制勝便宜. There is no known record of their publication dates (or if they were published at all) and the actual content.

(written in 1560) and *Lianbing shiji* 練兵實紀 (completed in 1571), two important, and possibly more famous, Ming military texts. However, Qi came from a hereditary military household and was a high-ranking general by the time he was publishing *Jixiao xinshu*. He Liangchen was none of these. And unlike Tang Shunzhi, who was *jinshi* who came in first in the provincial examination and fourth in the palace examination, and a renowned literatus when he returned to the government as the Director of the Bureau of Operation in the Ministry of War (*zhi fang si lang zhong* 職方司郎中) with the aim of fighting the *wokou*, He Liangchen was not as famous as a member of the literati and certainly did not achieve much success in the civil service examinations.

So why do we want to study this man? Especially since his only claim to fame was his military work and not much else. Where do we place He Liangchen in this examination of mid-Ming military culture? If Tang Shunzhi's life and later career helped to make him a larger-than-life representative of the mid-Ming literati's martial ethos, then perhaps by examining the life and works of He Liangchen will help us understand how the rest of the literati class, especially those who were not successful in pursuing a conventional career in the civil service, actually acted as consumers and producers of this military culture. Was it purely altruism and patriotism that drew He Liangchen to a military career? What was his motivation behind the writing of his military works? What drove him to forfeit his literatus status and join the military? Only by answering these questions do we get a more comprehensive picture of the different people who partook in this military culture.

3.2 Early life

Currently, what we do know about He Liangchen's life and career can be found in the four prefaces and epilogues collected in the various published editions of *Zhenji*. These writings contributed by different authors give us an outline of the person of He Liangchen even though they are lacking in detail. Even though *Zhenji* was praised by the compilers of *Siku Quanshu*, its author did not manage to earn a biographical entry in the *Official Record of the Ming Dynasty.* Modern scholars who have paid attention to *Zhenji* were mostly satisfied with the rather brief biographies of its author scattered among the prefaces and epilogues. The text itself is more important than its author so it seemed. And maybe, it is the image of He Liangchen as a sacrificial patriot that takes priority over the real He Liangchen?[366] The editors of the *Siku Quanshu* abstract of He Liangchen's *Zhenji* told us that he was a native of Yangzhou 揚州.[367] This was the only mention of He's birthplace being Yangzhou and nowhere else. However, in the preface and epilogue of *Zhenji*, the authors mentioned Kuaiji 會稽 (alternative name of Yuyao 余姚) in modern day Zhejiang as the birthplace.[368] Most modern scholars also cited Yuyao as his birthplace.[369] Interestingly, Yuyao also happened to be the birthplace of Wang Yangming, the philosopher and military commander whose life and career inspired many literati to pursue *shigong* 事功 or 'meritorious achievements' while committing to *shixue* 實學 or 'substantive learning'.

[366] Xie Wenchao 解文超, *Mingdai bingshu yanjiu* 明代兵書研究, 41.
[367] Abstract of *Zhenji* from *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成, vol. 25, 647. Also see *Qinding Siku Quanshu Zongmu zhengli ben* 欽定四庫全書總目整理本, vol. 1, 1301.
[368] He Liangchen 何良臣, *Zhenji* 陣紀, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成, vol. 25, 649, 621, and 623.
[369] Xie, *Mingdai bingshu yanjiu*, 41. See also Chen Bingcai 陳秉才, *Zhenji qianshuo* 陣紀淺說, 1.

We have no record of his year of birth and year of death. He was likely born during the reign of emperors Jiajing (1522–1566) and had was active through the reigns of Longqing (1567–1572) and Wanli (1573–1620), that is if the information found in the prefaces and epilogue, and the contents of *Zhenji* is indeed accurate in the first place. His given name of Liangchen 良臣 (meaning "good subject" or "good official") and his courtesy name Weisheng 惟聖 (which likely means "be sagely"), suggest to us that He's parents wished him to embark on a scholarly career that was no different from tens of thousands of other educated young men of the mid to late-Ming period. Although an increasingly popular alternative career in commerce would likely generate higher financial rewards, no other career could offer what mid-Ming bureaucracy could offer: status; honour; extra-statutory income from gifts and other emoluments; literary fame, etc.[370] The civil service examinations or *keju* 科舉 was after all, a 'field where legitimate and formal struggle of ascendance in the social hierarchy of Ming China'.[371] It would have come as a surprise to his parents when they learned of He Liangchen's chosen career of a military commander. We do not have the exact reasons behind He's decision to join the military except that his admirers all cite patriotism. His love of all things military would be another. What if it all stemmed from practical considerations? The cutthroat competition among the many scholars for limited number of degrees, particularly the highly coveted palace degree, meant that an official appointment is not guaranteed.[372] This was especially true for the literati living in the southern provinces where higher economic productivity and larger population, which translated into superior cultural resources

[370] Dardess, *A Ming Society: T'ai-ho County, Kiangsi, in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*, 139.
[371] Kai-wing, Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*, 91.
[372] Wu Xuande 吳宣德, *Zhongguo kaoshi zhidu tongshi* 中國考試制度通史 vol. 4: Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, 485-86.

for the rigorous private education required for the preparation for *keju*, produced higher caliber candidates than any other parts of Ming China.[373] The author of the abstract of *Zhenji* in *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫總目提要 said this about He Liangchen:

> In his youth, he gave up his status as a *zhusheng* to join the army, eventually attaining the rank of mobile corps commander of Jizhen during Emperor Jiajing's reign.
>
> 弱冠棄官諸生從軍，嘉靖间官至薊鎮游擊。[374]

If He Liangchen was a *zhusheng* 諸生, a 'county student' who had enrolled in the state school, it would mean that he was among the ranks of hundreds of thousands of scholars in the empire studying to pass the the civil service examinations. There is no mention of whether he had passed the basic examination to become a *xiucai* 秀才 or 'cultivated talent'. Even if he was *xiucai*, there would still be the three remaining hurdles to prestigious official appointments in the form of the provincial, metropolitan and the palace examinations. Countless literati had failed to overcome these three hurdles before He Liangchen and these numbers continued to rise after his time. Gui Youguang, friend of Tang Shunzhi and a contemporary of He Liangchen, failed to pass the provincial civil service examinations six times before finally succeeding in 1540.[375] Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646), who was famous for his collections of vernacular stories, was never successful at the metropolitan examinations.[376] There were also those who had the doors of civil examinations forever closed on them

[373] Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*, 26.
[374] Abstract of *Zhenji* from *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 647.
[375] Gui eventually passed the metropolitan civil examination and awarded the *jinshi* degree, only at the age of sixty. Gui Youguang 歸有光,*Zhenchuan xiansheng ji* 震川先生集, 375-381.
[376] Lu Shulun 陸樹侖, *Feng Menglong yanjiu* 馮夢龍研究, 1-30.

because they were implicated in crimes merely by association. Such was the tragic fate of Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1524), the legendary Ming literary genius. John Dardess describes the brutality of the Ming civil service examinations by saying that "the aspirants were many, the available positions few."[377]

In the 1591 preface to *Zhenji*, the author Cheng Xun 成遜 described He Liangchen as well-known literati who excelled in poetry:

> Commander He Jiming (He's sobriquet) practised the literary arts and was renowned for his poetry in his hometown. Distinguished gentlemen from everywhere knew Jiming through his poetry.
> 乃際明何將軍，早歲於文辭，籍然以詩文名寓內，而宇內諸名公, 僉以詩文知際明。[378]

Cheng Xun was conventionally generous with his praise, but it is difficult to verify his words, as none of his biographies contain any examples of his poetry. The preface to *Zhenji* mentioned He Liangchen's poetry collection *Qiankun ji* 乾坤集, which may have been published but is now lost. If He Liangchen was indeed a talented poet, that alone would not have been sufficient to guarantee a life of wealth, prestige, and honour. These things were out of reach for most literati unless they that climbed 'the ladder of success' via the civil service examinations.[379] The almost perennial failure made the civil examination a protracted ordeal for the candidates and their families especially for those with humble backgrounds.[380] By the mid-Ming there certainly were career alternatives for the literati who were unsuccessful in their pursuit of the highest examination degrees. These career alternatives frequently involved *maiwen* 賣

[377] Dardess, *A Ming Society*, 139.
[378] Cheng Xun 成遜, Preface to *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 649.
[379] Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911*, 92-107.
[380] Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*, 94.

文 or 'selling *wen*'- hiring out their literary talents by becoming writers, editors, compilers, and proofreaders in the burgeoning publishing market.[381] Also, there were some who became *muliao* 幕僚 or 'private secretaries' for important government officials— especially those censors from the Censorate who were deployed regionally to deal with specific issues such as civil and military unrests. Painter and calligrapher Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593) was a *zhusheng* like He Liangchen who had failed repeatedly in the higher examinations— eight times to be exact. Xu later became a professional writer and subsequently, a *muliao* in Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian's military government tasked with solving the *wokou* crisis in the Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces in the 1550s (more on this in the next chapter).[382] He Liangchen could have also been hired as a *muliao* by one of these high-ranking civil officials according to Cheng Xun.[383]

[381] Shen Junping 沈俊平, *Juye jinliang: Ming zhongye yihou fangke zhiju yongshu de shengchan yu liutong* 舉業津梁: 明中葉以後坊刻制舉用書的生產與流通, 155.
[382] *DMB*, 610.
[383] Cheng, Preface to *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 649.

3.3 Military career and political connections

Although none of his poems were found in the few primary sources related to He Liangchen, I have discovered a poem attributed to him from a provincial gazetteer of Guangxi province. The title of the poem is *Guo gu tian* 過古田 or 'Crossing the Ancient Fields' and I believe that this could be the only example of He's poetic output currently known:

> Hundreds of barbarians are hiding in the haze of miasma,
> The pathways are different from those in the Central Plains.
> The moon is cold over a thousand hills of bones,
> While the clouds cover ten thousand ravines filled with beasts.
> For years my past wounds ache late at night,
> Even as I am fortunate to be alive after the battle.
> I sat down to ease my sorrows,
> Yet I could not even have a cup of wine on credit.
>
> 百蠻煙瘴裏，
> 道路異中原。
> 月冷千丘骨，
> 雲封萬壑猨。
> 年來傷遇晚，
> 戰罷幸身存。
> 欲作消憂座，
> 無能貰一墫 。[384]

If the poem is indeed He Liangchen's it would have dated from the end of his life. The poem describes a soldier as a tragic figure whom had to deal with both physical and emotional trauma after retiring from a life of violence. The battle-

[384] He Liangchen, "Guo gu tian" 過古田, in *Guangxi tongzhi* 廣西通志, Jing Gong 金鉷, ed., *juan* 122, in *SKQS*, vol. 568, 601.

weariness found in the poem is moving and genuine. The poem could very well be auto-biographical. In his postscript for *Zhenji*, Huang Daoyue 黃道月 wrote that:

> The commander [He] was in deep sorrow! Therefore, he could not help himself sighing and crying to Heaven. Whenever [Heaven] did not respond, he turned to poetry and songs so as to express the forbidden words that he wanted to say and the things that he was able to do yet could not carry out.
>
> 將軍愴愴乎悲焉。以故感慨亡聊，仰天而呼，不應，輒寄之歌詠，以暢發其所欲吐所受禁而能為不得為之情也。[385]

Huang suggests that He Liangchen was writing poetry not just because he wanted to express patriotic and heroic sentiments, but also because of disillusionment and dissatisfaction. The poem is thematically similar many others belonging to the *biansaishi* 邊塞詩 or 'frontier poetry' genre— especially the ones dealing with war and violence. An extremely popular genre in the high-Tang and mid-Tang periods, poets composed paeans to celebrate the glory of the Tang military and how it was being used to project the empire's power beyond its borders. Filled with patriotism, heroics, and romanticism, *biansaishi* was the perfect vehicle for the expression of martial ethos.[386] As shown in the first chapter, early Ming court officials frequently composed 'frontier poems' to commemorate military campaigns and hunts for the emperors. By the mid-Ming, poetic output of this genre was likely more significant due to the increased contact between the literati and the border regions as more and

[385] Huang Daoyue's postscript found in *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 64. Huang Daoyue was among the 281 scholars who achieved the third rank (sanjia 三甲) in the metropolitan examination of the 14th year of Wanli's reign (1586). When he wrote the epilogue for *Zhenji*, Huang was serving as a *zhongshu sheren* 中書舍人 or Secretariat Drafter, a low-rank but highly prestigious post. See *Ming qing jinshi timing beilu suoyin* 明清進士題名碑錄索引, 2567.

[386] Chen Zuohong 陳作宏, "Qianlun Weng Wanda de biansaishi" 淺論翁萬達的邊塞詩, in *Journal of Hanshan Normal University* 韓山師範學院學報, no. 1 (2015), 10

more military assignments were given to civil officials. These officials, and their accompanying private secretaries, began to compose *biansaishi.* The difference was they were now doing it for themselves rather than the emperor. The Ming Minister of War Tang Long 唐龍 (1477–1546), who was appointed as the Supreme Commander for the three borders of Yansui 延綏, Ningxia 寧夏, and Gansu 甘肅 (*Zongdu Shaanxi sanbian junwu* 總督陝西三邊軍務) in 1532, composed his *Chusaishi* 出塞詩 (Poems on Travelling to the Borders) depicting scenes of war like the Tang poets.[387] His contemporary Weng Wanda, who also spent a significant portion of his career managing northern border affairs as Supreme Commander at the borders, composed *biansaishi* emulating the heroic style of the Tang ports even though he frequently infused eschewed the overt romanticism in preference of the 'flesh and blood' of realism.[388] It is probable that Weng's poetic style was influenced by the *bense* 本色 'true colours' concept of his good friends Tang Shunzhi and Wang Shenzhong, who proposed a more direct and individualistic approach in expression so that the intrinsic qualities of the poet/writer would show up in his work.[389] If He Liangchen's poetry collection is still in existence, it would not be a surprise to find a considerable number of military-themed poems.

We do not know when exactly He Liangchen joined the military. However, *Zhenji* does provide some clues about the time and places where He Liangchen was active as a military personnel. There is also an entry in the *Veritable Record of Ming*

[387] Lu Youming 盧有明 and Liang Zuping 梁祖萍, "Mingdai Ningxia Biansaishi chuangzuo ticai luelun" 明代寧夏邊塞詩創作題材略論, in *Journal of Ningxia University(Humanities & Social Sciences Edition)* 寧夏大學學報: 人文社會科學版 vol. 36, no. 4 (2014), 81.
[388] Chen, "Qianlun Weng Wanda de biansaishi", 11.
[389] Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity*, 154.

Shizong that recorded an event that took place in what might probably be the beginning of his military career:

> Regional Inspector of Shandong, Censor Zhou Sisheng investigated and reported on the barbarian raid of Fort Daning of Yizhou [in present day North Korea], Liaodong that took place on the first lunar month of the thirty-fifth year [of Jiajing's reign, 1556]. The Order for rewards and punishments to the Army found Assistant Regional Commander Zhao Chengmou and Commander He Liangchen guilty as charged but have been allowed to redeem [themselves].
>
> 巡按山東御史周斯盛勘上三十五年正月，虜犯遼東義州大寧堡，官軍功罪詔參將趙承懋，指揮何良臣，準贖。[390]

He Liangchen was likely in his twenties when he was charged.[391] We have no idea of the nature of his transgression. By this time, he was a minor commander stationed in the Northeast China. The fact that he got away with just a 'penalty through atonement' or *Shuxing* 贖刑 (by payment of money or service), instead of more common punishments such as flogging or execution, suggests that the offence was a minor one.[392] It was quite common for military officers to receive light punishments along the border when Mongol raids were not successfully repelled (e.g. some Ming casualties and not enough enemy casualties). This is the first record of "a bump on the road" for He's military career. What happened next in his career? *The Veritable*

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[390] *Ming Shizong shilu* 明世宗實錄, *juan* 454, 7688.

[391] My estimation of He Liangchen's age at his 20s is based on the last entry (in 1603) about He in *The Veritable records of Ming* when he was still serving in the military in his old age (late 60s). It was not uncommon for a seasoned officer to serve until an advanced age. Liu Ting 劉綎 (1558-1619), the regional commander of Liaoyang, led his army in the Battle of Sarhu (1619) and perished at the age of 61. Earlier in the dynasty, Geng Bing Weng 耿炳文 (1334–1403) led an army into the field against rebel prince Zhu Di 朱棣(1360–1424, r. 1402–1424), when he was already 65 years old.

[392] Military personnel were given certain concessions for a various reasons (professional role, income, etc.). See Zhang Guanhui 張光輝, "Mingdai shuxing de yunzuo" 明代贖刑的運作, in *Journal of Sichuan University(Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* 四川大學學報: 哲學社會科學版, no. 3 (2005), 117 and 119.

Record does not help much in that the next entry where it mentions He Liangchen's name again is thirty-five years down the road in 1591. However, Huang Daoyue's epilogue for *Zhenji* briefly mentions that He Liangchen "tied up his hair and joined the navy" (自結髮從戎海上). Xie Wenchao also suggests that He might have become a *muliao* as mentioned in the preface of *Zhenji*:

> Therefore [Liangchen] held the brush while serving in the military and alternating between them. Commander Li and Minister [of War] Yang graciously held him in high esteem, inviting him to join their military tent, assisting them in the training the troops and strategizing the important affairs of various borders, placing great trust in him.
>
> 以故握管從戎，輒投輒效，總督李公，司馬楊公雅重之，入蓮幕，日與訓飭府兵，及籌諸邊要務，蓋深當於其言也。[393]

But whose *mufu* was He Liangchen serving under? 'Minister of War Yang' 司馬楊公 was possibly Yang Bo 楊博 (1509–1574) who was the Supreme Commander of Jizhou and Liaodong from 1554 to 1555, and again from 1559 to 1561. The 'Li gong' 李公 mentioned in the above extract could be Li Wenjin 李文進 (1508–1562), who rose through the ranks as an able administrator and military commander. Li was the Supreme Commander of *Xuanda* (Xuanfu 宣府 and Datong 大同) from 1560–1562. Earlier in 1552, Li Wenjin was serving as the Surveillance Vice Commissioner of Zhejiang, scoring a series of impressive military victories against the *wokou* together with the brilliant commanders Yu Dayou and Tang Kekuan 湯克寬.[394] It was possible that He Liangchen met Li when he was also deployed to the southeastern coast. And when He Liangchen was later serving in Liaodong, he could very well have served

[393] Xie Wenchao, *Mingdai bingshu yanjiu*, 42.
[394] *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 401, 7030.

directly under Yang Bo. A military officer who was originally a literatus, He Liangchen might have caught the attention of Supreme Commander Yang, who was himself an expert in military affairs despite being a civil official. We know that He Liangchen was punished with *shuxing* in 1557 because of an earlier Mongol intrusion in Liaodong in 1556. It just happened that Yang Bo was recalled by emperor Jiajing to Beijing in 1554 to replace Nie Bao as the Minister of War. But instead, Yang Bo took leave from government service to observe a period of mourning when his father died and Wang Yu took his place instead in 1555. [395] Yang Bo's refusal to join the faction of the Grand Secretary Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480–1567) earned him the animosity of the Grand Secretary.[396] Unfortunately, the new Supreme Commander Wang Yu was also blacklisted by Yan Song.[397] An interesting entry in Huang Daoyue's preface notes an episode in He's career:

> The commander [He] was selling his sword out of poverty but he was stopped by the Minister of War Wang Yuanmei. The commander finally changed his mind and endured poverty in order to keep the sword.
> 將軍以貧賣劍，王司馬元美止之，將軍忍貧以存劍。[398]

Yuanmei 元美 was the courtesy name of Wang Shizhen , one of the greatest literary figures of the Ming dynasty. By the time Wang Shizhen was mentioned in Huang's preface, he was appointed as the Vice Minister of War in the Southern capital of Ming (hence he was addressed as *sima* 司馬, the ancient title reserved for Ministers of War).[399] Even though Nanjing was the auxiliary capital, its Ministry of War was very

[395] *DMB*, 1526.
[396] *MS*, *juan* 214, 5657.
[397] *MS*, *juan* 204, 5399.
[398] Huang, Postscript in *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 64.
[399] Wang Shizhen was appointed as the Vice Minister of War in Nanjing hence the title of *Sima*. Shizhen's father Wang Yu, who was posthumously awarded the rank of Minister of War in 1587. See *DMB*, 1399.

important and ranked first in the ministerial hierarchy during the mid-Ming. This was due to the ministry's role in overseeing the suppression of the Japanese pirates and the increasing number of aborigine uprisings in the southwest.[400] Moreover, Wang Shizhen's father was none other than the Supreme Commander of Jiliao Wang Yu, who succeeded Yang Bo in 1555. It is now clear that He Liangchen was indeed socially and politically connected to Wang Yu, Yang Bo, and Wang Shizhen.

The censor Zhou Sisheng who found He Liangchen guilty earlier, was also responsible for impeaching Wang Yu for a series of military defeat. The early Qing historian Gu Yingtai 谷應泰 (1620–1690) suggested that Zhou Sisheng was also Hu Zongxian's confidant; he offered Hu advice when he was dealing with the *wokou* leader Wang Zhi 汪直.[401] Although there is no conclusive evidence of Zhou Sisheng belonging to the Yan Song faction, the probability is high as Zhou was sent from the central government to support the anti-piracy efforts in Zhejiang, which by then was firmly under Yan Song's control as it was spearheaded by Hu Zongxian and the censor Zhao Wenhua 趙文華— both considered as belonging to Yan's faction in court.[402] Wang Yu, who was the target for Zhou Shisheng's political attacks, was later executed. He Liangchen was likely a victim of a larger political struggle that was playing out in the capital.

Scholars have suggested that He Liangchen was stationed in the southeastern coast for an unknown period of time (*cong rong hai shang* 從戎海上) before or during the height of the Japanese pirates crisis (1555–1561) and this could account for the detailed reference to military commander Qi Jiguang's battle formations found in

[400] Fang Jun, *China's Second Capital: Nanjing under the Ming, 1368-1644* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 121-22.
[401] Gu Yingtai 谷應泰, *Mingshi jishi benmo* 明史紀事本末*, juan* 55, 862.
[402] Twitchett and Mote, eds., *The Cambridge History of China Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644 Part 1*, 498.

Zhenji. It is hard to ascertain Qi's relationship with He Liangchen. However, He Liangchen wrote about a discussion on the use of weapons that he had with Qi Jiguang.[403] It is logical to assume that there could be other occasions when the two military officers met to discuss on tactics and strategy. Qi's battle tactics were tested and employed in 1561 when a fresh batch of Japanese pirates landed on the coast of Taizhou 台州 in Zhejiang. If He Liangchen was indeed performing his tour of duty in the southern coastal provinces during the same period, he must have had a first-hand experience of Qi's tactics.[404] However, the detailed information of Qi Jiguang's tactics, especially the 'Mandarin Duck Formation' or *Yuanyang zhen* 鴛鴦陣 found in *Zhenji*, was also contained in Qi's *Jixiao xinshu* which was published in 1560. He Liangchen would have read Qi Jiguang's draft or the final published version while he was stationed in the north. Qi's battle formations would have made an impression on He Liangchen that he decided to include it in his own work.

Qi Jiguang was reassigned to the northern border from 1568-1583 after the end of the *wokou* threat in 1567.[405] Qi was promoted to area commander of Jizhou, to be in charge of the tactical defense of the garrison towns of Jizhou, Baoding 保定 and Changping 昌平 which formed the major defensive line protecting Beijing against the Mongol and Jurchen threat from the northeast. It was possible that He Liangchen was also deployed to Jizhou during this period, as this was one of the last places of deployment towards the end of his military career. Jizhen was also known as Jizhouzhen 薊州鎮. Because of its proximity to Beijing, Jizhouzhen was one of the

[403] He, "Jiyong" 技用, in *Zhenji*, 738.
[404] Between 1558 to 1560, Qi Jiguang was engaged in training his new troops made up of recruits from Yiwu 義烏, near Hangzhou. It was likely that his Mandarin Duck Formation was tested and perfected while training this group of soldiers. See *DMB*, 220-221.
[405] Twitchett and Mote, eds., *The Cambridge History of China Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644 Part 1*, 504.

Nine Border Defense Garrisons or *Jiubian* 九邊 that were set up to ward off Mongol invaders. Early Qing cartographer and geographer Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹(1631–1692) left a comment on the strategic importance of Jizhouzhen as:

> Jizhou is the left guard of the capital, and together with Xuanfu and Liaodong, they formed an east-west defense line. It is certainly an important place of the defense lines.
>
> 按薊州為京都左輔，…與宣府，遼東東西應援，誠藩屏重地也。[406]

Gu Zuyu, a Ming patriot who saw the Ming rulers' lack of knowledge of strategic geography as the main reason for the dynasty's demise, paid special attention to military defense in his work.[407] The information on the military in Jizhouzhen found in Gu's *Dushi fangyu jiyao* provides us with a fairly accurate account of the administrative and bureaucratic structure that was particular to the late-Ming border defense:

> One Censor-in-chief appointed as the Supreme Commander of Liao [Liaodong] and Ji [Jizhou] stationed in Jizhou. One Censor-in-chief appointed as Grand Coordinator of Shuntian and stationed in Zunhua (northeast of Beijing). Surveillance Vice Commissioner appointed as supervisor of the Miyun Military Defense Circuit and stationed in Jizhou. One Investigating Censor to be appointed as Regional Inspector for Shanhaiguan. Together with a Secretary of the Ministry of War, they will be stationed at Shanhaiguan. One General Regional Commander to be appointed and together with five Assistant Regional Commanders, they will be stationed in Miyun. One Mobile Corps Commander to be appointed and stationed in Jianchang commandery.

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[406] Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹, *Yutu yaolan* 輿圖要覽, *juan* 4, collected in *Dushi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要, vol. 12 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2005), 6045.
[407] Gu, *Dushi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要, vol. 1, 2.

> 總督遼薊都御史一，駐薊州。巡撫順天等處都御史一，駐遵化。密雲兵備副使一，駐薊州。巡按山海關監察御史一，兵部主事一，駐山海關。將軍總兵官一，駐密雲。參將五。游擊參將一，駐建昌營。[408]

He Liangchen only managed to achieve the rank of a mobile corps commander or *youji canjiang* 游擊參將 (a mid-level military officer) in his career.

Meanwhile, Qi Jiguang enjoyed the patronage of Chief Grand Secretary Xu Jie, who replaced Yan Song in a power struggle, and Zhang Juzheng, a student of Xu Jie who later dominated the government from the reign of Emperor Longqing to the early reign of Emperor Wanli.[409] Zhang Juzheng was instrumental in Qi's promotion in 1574 to Senior Commissioner-in-chief (*zuo dudu* 左都督), the highest rank in the Ming military hierarchy.

Recent studies have suggested that there were more dynamic interactions between civil officials and their military counterparts beginning in the mid-Ming.[410] The rising importance of military affairs in late-Ming coupled with the increasing involvement of civil officials in military matters created a new atmosphere where martial sentiments were promoted rather than shunned. The interactions between the civil and military officials helped to increase the overall prestige and cultural cachet of both sides, particularly the latter.[411] It is certainly not inconceivable that He Liangchen, with his background in the literary arts, became acquainted with and even patronised by the likes of Qi Jiguang. However, it will be erroneous to view these exchanges as purely cultural, that they were a part of the trendy pastimes of the Ming

[408] Gu, *Yutu yaolan*, *juan* 4, 6050-6052.
[409] For Xu Jie's biography, see *DMB*, 573-575. Also see John Dardess' account of the political struggle between Xu Jie and Yan Song in *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and His times*.
[410] See Kathleen Ryor, "*Wen* and *Wu* in Elite Cultural Practices", in *Military Culture in Imperial China*, Nicola di Cosmo, ed., 220.
[411] Kenneth Swope, *Military Collapse of the China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-1644*, 2.

social elites— where civil and military elites exchange literary gifts and weaponry. I will stress that there was always a practical dimension to them.

In the nineteenth year of Emperor Wanli's reign in 1591, the Vice-Minister of the Court of Judicial Review, Zeng Qianheng 曾乾亨 (1538–1594), was in favour of promoting He Liangchen.[412] By this time, He Liangchen was a *rongzheng zhongjun* 戎政中軍, a minor position in the capital garrisons and was likely in his late fifties or early sixties. Even though this was near the end of He Liangchen's military career, he was not free from the political quagmire which was a defining feature of the Ming court. By 1591, Zhang Juzheng had been dead for nine years and Qi Jiguang, who fell from grace due to his association with Zhang, also died three years earlier. The Wanli Emperor continued to be obsessed with dismantling the legacy and influence of Zhang in the government.[413] He Liangchen might have been too close to Qi Jiguang (and indirectly, Zhang Juzheng) to be totally immune to the political fallout despite his relatively low rank. This might explain He's fall from grace in 1596, when he was demoted after being impeached by the censor who was in charge of military affairs in the Beijing, Shen Sixiao 沈思孝 (1542–1611), who was a member of the Donglin faction and a well-known opponent of Zhang Juzheng.[414]

He Liangchen's military career had its ups and downs but whose military career was an exception, especially in the Ming dynasty. Factional struggles among the civil officials in Beijing often trickled down to their immediate associates and allies. Qi Jiguang, with all his military achievements and strong political backing, suffered career setbacks repeatedly. What hope did He Liangchen have as a low-ranking commander? In a way, theirs was the tragic story of the Ming military men—

[412] *Ming Shenzong shilu* 明神宗實錄, *juan* 242, 5667.
[413] Fan Shuzhi 樊樹志, *Wanli zhuan* 萬曆傳, 202-218.
[414] *Ming Shenzong shilu*, *juan* 299, 5603.

whose authority was taken from them by the civil officials whose every political move and misstep would make or break the careers of countless military officers. In the high stakes political chess games played by the Grand Secretaries such as Yan Song, Xu Jie, Zhang Juzheng, the military officers were just pawns to be sacrificed when necessary.

3.4 The civil and military contributors of *Zhenji*

In the second fascicle of *Zhenji*, we find a discussion on the use of *bingche* 兵車 or 'battle wagon' between He Liangchen and Qi Jiguang.[415] Qi was proposing the use of livestock instead of manpower to pull the wagons during combat. He Liangchen counter-proposed with the placement of the 'drive unit' in the center, and at the sides of the back instead of the front of the wagon. This, he argued, would allow firearms to fire in the front while increasing mobility, thus making the wagons 'invincible in battle'.[416] Qi Jiguang could have dismissed He's suggestion as an interesting idea but impractical to implement because of the enormous time and resources needed to create the technology. But he did not. Qi continued to explore the use of battlewagons, no doubt encouraged by the successful deployment of battlewagons in actual battles by Yu Dayou at Datong in 1559. So how did He Liangchen knew so much details about the battlewagons? Incidentally, Li Wenjin who had worked with Yu Dayou in Zhejiang, became the Grand Coordinator of Datong and was Yu's superior. Li Wenjin cooperated with Yu Dayou once again and defeated the Mongols using Yu's battlewagon design and tactics. Li then memorialised to the court to incorporate battlewagons in the capital garrison.[417] It is therefore entirely possible that He Liangchen continued to keep in contact with Li Wenjin, and learned about the battlewagons. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of their correspondence in the form of letters.

Yu was later posted back to the southeast in 1561 and worked with Qi Jiguang in the fight against the *wokou* from 1563 onwards. Incredibly, Yu managed to find the

[415] He, *Zhenji*, *juan* 2, 738.
[416] For a thorough discussion on Ming battlewagon, please see Zhou Weiqiang's PhD dissertation, *The Battlewagons in Ming China*.
[417] *MS*, *juan* 212, 5605.

time to write the first text on the tactical use of battlewagons in the Ming.[418] Qi could have read Yu's work and even discussed with Yu on the finer points. He Liangchen's brief mention of the discussion with Qi Jiguang on a military topic that they both learned from other sources points us to a dynamic network where sensitive military knowledge were discussed, exchanged, and borrowed among civil and military officials. As a result, we can see the inclusion of Qi Jiguang's strategic and tactical thinking in He Liangchen's *Zhenji*, while Yu Dayou's pioneering work on the battlewagons is also found in Qi Jiguang's *Lianbing shiji* 練兵實紀.[419]

Even though He Liangchen managed to cultivate a healthy network with high-ranking military officers, it was his network of civil officials that provided the crucial support for his career and for whom he owed the publication of *Zhenji* and likely a few of his other works that never survived. No less than four civil officials contributed to the prefaces and postscripts. And again, most of these contributors were civil officials who were tasked to handle military affairs in the northeastern borders and the capital.

Cheng Xun, the author of one of the prefaces, was a native of Changyuan county 長垣縣 in Henan province. According to the Changyuan county gazetteer, Cheng Xun was awarded the *jinshi* degree in 1571 and enjoyed a rather successful career in the Censorate by the time he received the appointment of Assistant Censor-in-chief in Beijing.[420] Cheng Xun spent a big part of his career managing military affairs in the north-eastern borders and was based in Kaiyuan 開原 where Li

[418] Yu Dayou 俞大猷, "Datong zhen bingche caofa" 大同鎮兵車操法, in *Zhengqitang ji* 正氣堂集, *juan* 11, in *Siku weishoushu jikan* 四庫未收書輯刊, series 5, vol. 20, 8-12.
[419] Qi Jiguang's second military work was written during his last military posting to Jizhou in the north and was meant to address land-based warfare along the borders. Hence, the extensive discussion in the use of battlewagons in *Lianbing shiji*. Qi Jiguang, *Lianbing shiji* 練兵實紀, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成,vol. 19.
[420] Li Yuyuan 李於垣 and Yang Yuanxi 楊元錫, *Changyuan xianzhi* 長垣縣志, *juan* 11, vol. 1-4, 774.

Chengliang 李成梁 was the ranking military officer.[421] Cheng Xun was concurrently the Surveillance Commissioner to Jizhou and Liaodong in 1591 when he wrote the preface to *Zhenji*. He Liangchen was introduced to Cheng Xun by a mutual friend, Xu Shanchang 徐善長 (*jinshi*, 1580). It was Xu who later requested Cheng to write the preface to *Zhenji*.[422] Cheng Xun mentioned in the preface that both Xu and himself were posted to Liaodong to manage the military and border defense around the same time. It was Xu who helped to make the publication of *Zhenji* a reality, first by introducing the author to the network of civil officials who took an interest in *Zhenji*, before subsequently writing the prefaces for the book himself. Xu proofread and edited *Zhenji*. Most importantly, Xu and the other civil officials likely provided the funds for *Zhenji*'s publication as He Liangchen's lowly military rank did not come with generous remuneration.[423] It would not have been possible for He to fund the publication.

Zhang Yingdeng 張應登 who wrote the epilogue two years before the official publication of *Zhenji*, was a *yanguan* 言官 or 'speaking official' from the Six Offices of Scrutiny (*liuke* 六科). A native of Neijiang 內江 in modern southeast Sichuan, Zhang spent most of his career alternating as the Supervising Secretary (*jishi zhong* 給事中) for Personnel and War in the Six Offices of Scrutiny. When serving in Shandong, his superiors took notice of Zhang's talent of managing border affairs and assigned him to northwestern borders in modern day Gansu.[424] In his epilogue to *Zhenji*, Zhang Yingdeng wrote:

[421] *Ming Shenzong shilu*, *juan* 198, 3731.
[422] Zhou Ji 周璣, *Ji xianzhi* 杞縣志, vol. 1, *juan* 3, 619.
[423] Huang Daoyue, Postscript to *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 64.
[424] *Sichuan Tongzhi* 四川通志, *juan* 9, in *SKQS*, vol. 559, 405.

> I like to be in the company of those who discuss poems and talk about military affairs; upon entering the capital I came to be with He Jiming [Liangchen], who was made a commander in the Ministry of War.
>
> 余喜与谭诗谭兵者游，入长安，得何际明者，为司马门偏裨。[425]

It is not difficult to picture a scene where these literati came together to engage in merry-making and discuss the arts except that there was the additional focus on military affairs. Such gatherings were becoming common in the mid-Ming. Chen Baoliang has pointed out the relationships between the late-Ming literati, the civil officials and the military officials and how much they interacted and influenced one another.[426] For such was a trend that started among the mid-Ming intelligentsia as more and more "non-professionals" such as Zhang Yingdeng, Xu Shanchang and Cheng Xun were tasked with managing military matters.[427] For a group of civil officials with military portfolios, such gatherings provided an informal platform to 'talk shop'. And for someone like He Liangchen who managed to move quite successfully between the worlds of the literati elites and the military elites, he would naturally have been a *persona grata* in such circles. His military career would have been in so many ways affected by his friendship with these civil officials who worked in offices dealing with the military. And so was his career as a writer.

Chow Kai-Wing talked about the writing and sale of prefaces as part of the process of the commodification of writing in the late-Ming– arguing that preface writing grew in importance as a source of income and a means of social networking,

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[425] He, *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 823.
[426] Chen Baoliang 陳寶良, "Mingdai wenren bianxi" 明代文人辨析, in *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, 19:1, (June 2001), 189-190.
[427] Kai Filipiak, "The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times", in *Ming Studies*, vol. 66 (September 2012), 3.

creating publicity for writers and generating patronage.[428] A well-written preface or epilogue by a famous literatus would lend credibility to the author and his published work. Very often such prefaces commanded steep prices. It was not something a low-ranking military officer could afford. He Liangchen managed to cultivate good relationships among a group of civil officials who probably saw He Liangchen as the embodiment of the ideal of civil and martial. Therefore, they agreed to writing prefaces for him as literary gifts, which was important to any Ming publication. One thing to bear in mind is that this social network between the civil and military officials was no different from the literati-only networks, i.e., they involved hierarchies. This might explain why a famous literatus such as Wang Shizhen, newly appointed Vice-minister of Justice of Nanjing and leader of a classical revival literary movement, contributed a preface to the second edition (also known as the fourteen fascicles version) of Qi Jiguang's *Jixiao xinshu*.[429] We cannot be certain about the reason why Wang Shizhen did not do the same for He Liangchen. Perhaps, He decided not to approach Wang for it. Perhaps, the two men did not meet again. Or perhaps, it was simply a case of both men did not being in the same network of friends, patrons, and admirers. Qi's high military rank and past military achievements were both impressive. But what would finally earned him the admiration and respect from Wang Shizhen, was his literary aspirations and poetic output. Qi Jiguang had a collection of high-quality poetry under his name and he was also involved in the printing and publication of *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華— an anthology of literary works dating from the Liang to the Five Dynasties era that was first printed in the Song dynasty. Qi's reprint included some many of the missing content and helped to preserve this

[428] Chow Kai-wing, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*, 110.
[429] Qi Jiguang 戚繼光, *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成 vol. 18, 711-718.

important work.[430] Wang Shizhen, and other renowned literati such as Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525–1593) saw in Qi Jiguang the rare breed of military men who managed to combine the best of *wen* and *wu* in a person, so much so that the line separating them was no longer so obvious.[431]

He Liangchen's acquaintance with Wang Shizhen on the other hand, was only briefly mentioned in the postscript. Even though He's status as a member of the literati was in theory, higher than the hereditary military status of Qi Jiguang, his lack of *gongming* 功名 or 'official qualifications' caused his social standing to be superseded by Qi's military and literary achievements. This could very well be the explanation why he did not move in the same social circle as Qi Jiguang and his literati friends. However, like Qi Jiguang, He Liangchen was valued and respected in his own network of literati acquaintances that they all contributed to the publication of his writings. So what really attracted these literati to military officers like Qi and He? The early Qing scholar Wang Shizhen 王士禛 had this to say about Qi Jiguang's poetry:

> They displayed authentic heroism, something which the literati failed to express.
>
> 皆見英雄本色，有文士所不能道者。[432]

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[430] Wan Ming 万明, ""Cong Qi Jiguang de wenhua jiaoyou kang wangming wenhua shiyu xia de 'wuchen haowen' xianxiang" 從戚繼光的文化交遊看晚明文化視域下的「武臣好文」現象, in *Ludong University Journa*l (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition) 魯東大學學報:哲學社會科學版 vol. 26, no. 4 (2009), 1.

[431] Wang Daokun achieved his Jinshi degree together with Zhang Juzheng and Wang Shizhen in the same year in 1547.Wang was the Surveillance Commissioner in charge of monitoring the war effort in Fujian where Qi Jiguang was leading the fight against the *wokou*. Both men worked well together and became close friends. See Zhao Keshen 趙克生. "Mingshi Wang Daokun zhuang buzheng" 《明史・汪道昆傳》補正, in *Historiography Research in Anhui* 安徽史學, no. 3 (1997): 31-34.

[432] Wang Shizhen 王士禛, "Gulai wuren neng shi" 古來武人能詩, in *Xiangzu biji* 香祖筆記, *juan* 11, 110.

Perhaps it was this authenticity of being a real military man— one who had seen action in the battlefield and confronted death and destruction. It was something that the military-minded literati of the mid-Ming valued and treasured.

3.5 Introduction to *Zhenji*

Not all the literati-turned-soldiers produced military books in the mid-Ming. Chen Di 陳第 (1541–1617), who was a scholar from Fujian, served as a private secretary under Yu Dayou and like He Liangchen, Chen eventually became a Mobile Corps Commander fighting the *wokou* with Yu, Qi Jiguang, and Tan Lun. Chen Di's background and career choice were too similar to He Liangchen. However, after Chen Di retired from military service around the age of fifty, he devoted his time to travelling around China, conducting fieldwork for his study of phonology.[433] But he had never written a single work on the military. Chen Di's transition from literatus to military officer, and back to literatus at retirement, was an example of how the fluidity of the demarcation between the *wen* and *wu* in the mid to late-Ming. Perhaps to Chen Di, getting back to become a literatus from being a military man was never a problem— especially as he had never given up his identity as a scholar-elite. He Liangchen's literary works did not survived and so we do not have a lot to go on in helping us understand the man. We will have to turn to *Zhenji* then as it is our chief source in reconstructing and understanding the person of He Liangchen.

Since its first publication in the late sixteenth century, *Zhenji* has been highly regarded as one of the most important military works to come out of the Ming dynasty since the completion of the *Seven Military Classics* in the Song dynasty.[434] He Liangchen's contemporaries saw the work as "practical and original and not merely

[433] Xiao Mansheng 肖滿省, "Chen Di Yixue chengjiu shulun" 陳第易學成就述論, in *Journal of Minjiang Uniuversity* 閩江學院學報, vol. 34, no. 1 (2013), 15. Besides, writing on linguistics phonology, Chen Di also wrote on *Book of Changes* and a travelogue on Taiwan (when he was on a campaign against the Japanese pirates stationed there).

[434] There is presently no record of the actual publication date of *Zhenji*. Most scholars suggest it was published between 1560 and 1589. Ge Yewen proposed a more exact time frame, i.e. not earlier than 1575. Ge Yewen 葛業文, "*Zhenji* chengshu shijian kao" 《陣紀》成書時間考, in *Sunzi Studies* 孫子研究, no. 5 (2015): 103-107. At this point, there is still no conclusive time of publication available.

written in pursuit of empty fame."[435] Zhang Yingdeng wrote in the epilogue that reading *Zhenji* "is like seeing tens of thousands of troops marching unopposed and even accomplished generals could not hope to match [He Lianchen's ingenuity]." Zhang Yingdeng's was certainly generous with his praise for He Liangchen. We cannot be sure of He Liangchen's supposed lack of interest in the pursuit of fame. A much more balanced critique in my opinion, is actually from the Qing editors of the *Siku Quanshu* who were usually quite critical of Ming military writings:

> Many of the Ming military thinkers, after Qi Jiguang completed his various military books, were more often than not collecting old [and unoriginal] thoughts and produced unworthy theories. For example, Tang Guanglie's traps with spikes and Peng Xiang's wooden men and fire horse are almost theatrical. Only Liangchen was among the troops and had first-hand knowledge [of warfare] and so his are not empty theories and they are decisively superior to those who merely sat and talked [about warfare]. Among the Ming military thinkers, he was among the most practical and logical.
>
> 明代談兵之家，自戚繼光諸書外，往往捃摭陳言，橫生鄙論。如湯光烈之掘穽藏錐，彭翔之木人火馬，殆如戲劇。惟良臣嘗身在軍中，目睹形勢，非憑虛理斷，攘袂坐談者可比。在明代兵家，猶爲切實近理者矣。[436]

Qi Jiguang's military writings were praised by the Qing editors of *Siku Quanshu* (among the total of twenty military works from past dynasties that were included in the collection). The early Qing government under emperors Yongzhen and Qianlong was sensitive to any writings related to the Ming military (military books, military-related memorials, etc.) – especially those that were written during the period when

[435] "鑿鑿足當實用，非徒拾前人咳唾，僅僅盜浮聲也者" in Cheng Xun, preface to *Zhenji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, vol. 25, 649.
[436] Abstract of *Zhenji* from *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao*, vol. 25, 647.

the Ming was at war with the Manchus.[437] However, the Qianlong emperor was, at the same time, making deliberate attempts in the construction and projection of the Qing's martial image. In Waley-Cohen's words, it was the Qing's "imperial policy to co-opt and transform political, ideological, ceremonial, intellectual, spiritual, moral, physical, visual, and material culture in such a way as to draw attention to and command respect for military success, martial values, and their most glorious consequence: imperial expansion."[438] As a successful military officer who also wrote a practical treatise on military tactics, the Qing authorities would have preferred Qi Jiguang than those Ming literati who merely 'dabbled in the military'. He Liangchen's original status as a member of the literati might seem to a problem at first glance but what is important is his subsequent conversion to a military career. The early Manchu Qing rulers claimed simultaneous descent from two sets of traditions, Chinese and Inner Asia. Thus in one hand, they held themselves as Confucian sage rulers of China and on the other hand, the successor of the martial traditions represented by the Tibetans and Mongolian and under the influence of Buddhism.[439] It was the Qing's intention to embrace Confucianism without losing their martial ethos. For example, the Qianlong emperor (who commissioned the *Siku Quanshu*) liked to compare his reign to that of Emperor Taizong of the Tang (626–49), whom the Chinese literati traditionally regarded as having embodied an ideal combination of *wen* and *wu* virtues. Ming men such as Tang Shunzhi, Qi Jiguang and He Liangchen would sit well with this ideal, as they were not those who merely 'armchair generals' but seasoned military officers who were equally at ease with holding the writing brush or brandishing the sword.

[437] Zhou Weiqiang, *The Battlewagons in Ming China*, 8-10.
[438] Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty*, 1.
[439] Ibid.

Since the publication of *Zhenji* in 1591, around ten different editions have appeared. The earliest block-printed (or *keben* 刻本) edition of *Zhenji* was edited by Xu Yuan and was published in the 19th year of Wanli's reign- thus known as the Wanli edition henceforth.[440] Later editions of the book are found in various Qing collectanea such as the *Mohai jinhu* 墨海金壺 (1817), *Zhucong bielu* 珠叢別錄 (completed between 1837-1844), *Xiyin xuan* 惜陰軒 (1846), *Wuzhong pinghua shuwu* 戊中瓶花書屋 (1848), *Chang'en shuwu* 長恩書屋 (published during emperor Xianfeng's 咸豐 reign), *Banmu yuan* 半畝園 (published in emperor Tongzhi's 同治 reign), and the *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (published in 1935).[441] *Zhenji* was unlikely to achieve the kind of commercial success enjoyed by popular novels and novellas even though it was well received by the literati, especially the book collectors of the Qing period.

When the book was finally put into print in 1591, Tang Shunzhi had passed away for thirty years and Qi Jiguang just died three years ago in 1588. The whole *Wokou* crisis was over. The 1567 lifting of the maritime ban combined with the timely opening of the new entrepôt of Macau (1557) and Manila (1571) certainly contributed to the end of the *Wokou* crisis. But it was only possible with the earlier military intervention by the Ming military under the leadership of civil officials such as Hu Zongxian and Tan Lun, and executed in the field by military officers such as Tang Shunzhi, Qi Jiguang and Yu Dayou were more decisive.[442] Having experienced first-

[440] Part of the collection in the National Library of China, PRC.
[441] I am using the version of *Zhenji* collected in the *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成 which is based largely on the version found in *Congshu jicheng chubian,* which in turn is based on the earliest Wanli edition. Other editions tend to contain embellishments or omissions that in my opinion, do not add any value and even impede the reading of the text.
[442] Andrew R. Wilson, "The Maritime Transformations of Ming China", in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds. 258-263.

hand the battles fought against the *wokou*, He Liangchen was in the best position to assess the various tactical, operational and technological innovations adopted by the Ming army. Conversely, He was aware of the various problems that plagued the Ming military. With the *Wokou* behind him and new threats in the horizon (Toyotomi Hideyoshi would invade Korea in 1592 with the intention of conquering China), there seemed to be no better time for him to publish his book.

Zhenji is divided in four fascicles and sixty-six chapters. One could roughly divide the book into two main thematic sections, one part that is devoted to the selection and training (*xuanlian* 選練) of soldiers and the other part that forms the tactical and strategic (*zhanlue* 戰略) core of the book.[443] It is in the section on *xuanlian* where we will find the philosophical and ideological foundation of the military thought found in the text.

3.6 The influence of *Wuzi* and Confucian philosophy in *Zhenji*

Zhenji was a product of its time. And like many Ming military texts written at the time, *Zhenji* was heavily influenced by the *Seven Military Classics*, which was relatively widely read among scholar officials, military leaders and even emperors.[444] And because these early military classics themselves contain early philosophies from the Spring and Autumn, and the Warring States periods, these military thoughts were in turn transmitted and found their way into the most of the Ming military books. *Zhenji* consequently incorporated many of these philosophies in its strategic thinking. This is especially true when reading the first fascicle of *Zhenji* which focuses on the theme of *xuanlian* 選練 or 'selection and training'.

[443] Wang Lianbin 王聯斌, "Mingdai bingshu jiqi junshi lunli sixiang" 明代兵書及其軍事倫理思想, in *Military History Research* 軍事歷史研究, no. 3 (1996), 143.
[444] Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 176.

The concept of *Xuanlian* in *Zhenji*, is covered by the following chapters—*muxuan* 募選 (recruitment of troops), *shuwu* 束伍 (disciplining the troops), *jiaolian* 教練 (training of troops), *zhiyong* 致用 (putting into practice), *shangfa* 賞罰 (reward and punishment), and *jiezhi* 節制 (control and command). These chapters are united under the central concept of *Zhijun* 治軍 or *zhibing* 治兵 . *Zhijun* literally means the 'ordering and managing the army'. To '*zhi*' is to bring order to something. It should not be confused with *yongbing* 用兵, which at times share the semantics of *zhijun* in Chinese military texts. *Yongbing*, strictly speaking, has more to do with the strategic and tactical deployment of troops. *Zhijun* or *zhibing* has an ancient origin that stretches back to the Spring and Autumn period. The Warring States military text *Wuzi* gives us the definition of *zhibing* as Marquess Wu of Wei (Wei Wuhou 魏武侯) asked Wu Qi 吳起 (440–381 BC) the following questions:

> Wuhou asked, "How does an army achieve victory?"
> Qi replied, "With *zhi* [managing] the army will be victorious."
> Wuhou asked again, "Is it not about numbers?"
> [Qi] replied, "If the rules are not clear, the rewards and punishments untrustworthy, the army does not halt at the clash of the cymbals or advance at the beating of the drums, even if [the army] numbers in the millions, what good will it do?"
>
> 武侯問曰：「兵何以為勝？」
> 起對曰：「以治為勝。」
> 又問曰：「不在眾乎？」
> 對曰：「如法令不明，賞罰不信，金之不止，鼓之不進，雖有百萬，何益於用？」[445]

[445] Wu Qi 吳起, "*Zhibing*" 治兵, in *Wuzi* 吳子, in *Wujing qishu* 武經七書, Zeng Lianggong 曾亮公 ed. 106.

Wuzi viewed the ordering and management of troops as the basis of a victorious army because the end result of a good management of troops is discipline. The ideal of military discipline being fostered through good troop management continued to be relevant in Chinese military thinking down the ages. This was especially true in the case of the mid-Ming, when the military discipline was a big issue and when unchecked, it frequently led to military defeat or harassment of civilians. *Zhenji* clearly supports this the idea of troop discipline.[446] However, there is also a moral dimension to *zhijun*. For example, there is an entry in *Xu zizhi tongjian* 續資治通鑑 about the legendary Southern Song general Yue Fei 岳飛:

> Whenever the troops were resting at the base camp, [general Yue] would instruct the troops to climb and jump over obstacles, and always in their heavy armour as they went through the training. If a soldier so much as took a rope from the civilian to tie up a bundle of hay, he would be summarily executed to serve as a warning.
> Soldiers seeking shelter at night and even though civilians welcome them into their homes, no one dared to enter. This was because of the military codes that commanded soldiers "not to tear down houses even if dying of cold" and "not to rob even if dying of starvation." When soldiers fell ill, [the general] would personally prepare the medication. When various commanders were away on campaigns, general Yue's wife would visit their wives in person.
> For the men who fell in battle, [the general] would cry for them and raise their orphans. When there were rewards [from the court], they were distributed fairly among the men and none were misappropriated.
> [General Yue] was good at employing few to attack many. Whenever there was an operation, there would be a tactical planning meeting of all the commanders and as a result, the army was invincible. Even when facing an enemy's ambush, the army

[446] He, "*Jiezhi*" 節制, in *Zhenji*, 686.

remained calm and steady. Because of this, there was a saying that "it is easy to move the mountains, but difficult to move the Yue army." Zhang Jun tried to find out about [Yue Fei's] secrets in *yongbing* and general Yue replied, "Humaneness, Trustworthiness, knowledge, bravery, and sternness- all of the above and none should be missing."

师每休舍，课将士注坡跳壕，皆重铠以习之。卒有取民麻一缕以束刍，立斩以徇。卒夜宿，民开门愿纳，无敢入者，军号「冻死不拆屋，饿死不掳掠」。卒有疾，亲为调药。诸将远戍，飞妻问劳其家；死事者，哭之而育其孤。有颁犒，均给军吏，秋毫无犯。善以少击众。凡有所举，尽召诸统制，谋定而后战，故所向克捷。猝遇敌不动。故敌为之语曰：「撼山易，撼岳家军难。」张俊尝问用兵之术，飞曰：「仁、信、智、勇、严、阙一不可。」[447]

In the beginning of this passage, Yue Fei was presented as a military commander who drilled his troops during peacetime. The rest of the passage actually focuses on enforcing troops discipline among the civilians and also the benevolent, and paternal leadership style of the Yue Fei. When Yue Fei's superior, Zhang Jun 張俊, asked for Yue's secret in *yongbing*, the general's answer was a highly moralistic one. Yue Fei's answer does not come as a surprise as it was directed at a military commander who was exactly at the opposite end of the moral spectrum compared to Yue. In fact, the five qualities [of a good military general] mentioned by Yue Fei were lifted from page in *Sunzi's Art of War*.[448] Zhang Jun was traditionally considered as one of the men (together with Qin Gui 秦檜) who machinated the wrongful arrest and execution of Yue Fei.[449] As a military general, Zhang lacked discipline and it was the same for the

[447] Bi Yuan 畢沅, *Xu zizhi tongjian* 續資治通鑑, *juan* 124, 3300-3301.
[448] Sun Wu 孫武, *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*, Victor Mair, trans, 77.
[449] *Songshi* 宋史, *juan* 369, 11475-11476, 11494.

soldiers who were under his command.[450] Yue Fei's forthright answer to his superior's question doubled as a criticism. On the one hand, Zhang was actually asking for strategic and tactical advice, the secrets to effective *yongbing*. On the other, Yue was giving an answer about *zhijun*, which was the foundation of how to *yongbing* effectively. The juxtaposition of Zhang and Yue by Bi Yuan 畢沅, the Qing editor of *Xu zizhi tongjian*, likely echoed the traditional disdain harboured by the literati towards Zhang Jun, who was originally a bandit, and his rise to prominence was based on nothing more than brute force and cunning.[451] However, in the eyes of the Confucian literati, the real transgression of Zhang Jun was not so much of his notorious beginnings as a bandit (social status), but rather, his lack of moral compass after assuming military leadership.[452] Bi Yuan was aware of the quality of the army recruits in the Southern Song dynasty- they were largely made up of ex-outlaws and other undesirable elements of society.[453] What is also important to take note here is the stress on the importance of morality of the armies- an idea that was still relevant during the Qing.

The question of the quality of soldiers and their moral foundation are very much the central themes in *Zhenji*. Hence, the first chapters of the text are devoted to that. Because of this, *Zhenji* can be regarded as a inheriting and continuing the philosophical tradition of *Wuzi*, more than the other penultimate Chinese military

[450] Xu Mengxin 徐夢莘, *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編, *juan* 136, 991.
[451] Xu Mengxin, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, *juan* 136, 986.
[452] Bi Yuan was tasked with the suppression of rebellions in Xinjiang and the also the rebellion of the White Lotus Sect during the emperor Qianlong's reign. Unfortunately, his achievement as a civil official in charge of military affairs was rather limited. The editors of *Qing shigao* commented that Bi Yuan was "inept in managing the army" (然不長於治軍). See "Bi Yuan zhuan 畢沅傳" in *Qing shigao* 清史稿, 10976-10978.
[453] For an understanding of the military organization in the early days of the Southern Song, please see Leung Wai-Kei 梁偉基, "Songdai Hebei bingma da yuanshuai fu chutan: Yi wuli chongjian wei zhongxin" 宋代河北兵馬大元帥府初探：以武力重建為中心, in *Journal of Chinese Studies* 中國文化研究所學報, no. 55 (July 2012): 59-80.

classic, *Sunzi*. Victor Mair has noted that Sunzi, as part of the Daoist canon, "advocates adherence to the *dao* 道 as the chief criterion for victory in battle" and thought that *Sunzi* was more of a military text for the *wuwei* 無為 or 'non-action'-minded general.[454] Though regarded as a Daoist and sometimes, Confucian text, *Sunzi* surprisingly does not mention *de* 德 (virtue or excellence of character) at all. Mair also noted that despite the importance of *li* 禮 (civility, ritual, etiquette, propriety) in early Chinese military thought, *Sunzi* does not mention *li* even once. Thus, *Sunzi* may have been estranged from Confucianism.[455] In this sense, the philosophical foundation of *Wuzi* is fundamentally more Confucian than *Sunzi*. As a text that deals with the systematic destruction of human lives, *Wuzi* appears to raise the Confucian moral banner higher than *Sunzi*. *Zhenji*, like many Ming military texts steeped in Neo-Confucian philosophy, will be closer to *Wuzi* in spirit.

In the first chapter of *Wuzi* known as *Tu Guo* 圖國 or 'striving for good governance of the state', Wu Qi donned the *rufu* (儒服 or 'Confucian gown') when he had an audience with the ruler of the state of Wei, Wei Wenhou 魏文侯.[456] In this meeting Wu Qi saw through his master's hypocrisy of claiming that he was not interested in matters of war even when there were obvious signs and evidence that the ruler had expansionist ambitions. Wu Qi then reminded his master:

> Formerly, the lord of *Cheng Sang clan* [mythical tribe from pre-historic *Shen Nong* 神農 times] cultivated *de* [virtuous governance] and neglected *wu* [military], leading to the state's demise. And there was the lord of *Hu* [from Xia Yu 夏禹 period], who was bellicose because of their strength in numbers and thus lost the state. The

[454] Sun, *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*, 47.
[455] Sun, *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*, 48.
[456] Wu, "*Tuguo*" 圖國, in *Wuzi*, 85.

> wise ruler should reflect on this [lesson] and must cultivate *wen de* [civil virtues] while ordering the military defense externally. Hence, not advancing to confront the enemy is failing to do what is righteous. And to weep over stiff corpse afterwards is to fail in doing what is humane.
>
> 昔承桑氏之君，修德廢武，以滅其國。有扈氏之君，恃眾好勇，以喪其社稷。明主鑒茲，必內修文德，外治武備。故當敵而不進，無逮於義矣；僵屍而哀之，無逮於仁矣。[457]

It is in this opening passage that we see the philosophical foundation of *Wuzi*- the importance of cultivating virtue within and preparing for war externally. The *de* in question here is Confucian- where virtue was an "ethical concept akin to goodness" rather than *de* being "an immanence of the *dao* in the individual, a kind of charismatic power" in Daoism.[458] The cultivation of virtue begins with the ruler educating the people and forging a close bond with them:

> In the past, those who strived for good governance in their states most certainly tried to educate their people and to be close to them…Therefore, a master who possesses the *dao* would bring his people in harmony and unity before using them for the great purpose [of war].
>
> 昔之圖國家者，必先教百姓而親萬民。… 是以有道之主，將用其民，先和而造大事。[459]

What then, should the people be educated in? *Wuzi* explains later in the text:

> And therefore the sage controls the people with *dao*, governs them with righteousness, motivates the people with propriety, and soothes

[457] Wu, "*Tuguo*" 圖國, in *Wuzi*, 86.
[458] Sun, *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods Methods*, 48.
[459] Wu, "*Tuguo*" 圖國, *Wuzi*, 88.

> them with humane treatment. For when these four virtues are practiced, the people will flourish; when they are neglected the people decline.
>
> 是以聖人綏之以道，理之以義，動之以禮，撫之以仁。此四德者，修之則興，廢之則衰。[460]

The four virtues are essentially Confucian and formed the backbone to the ideological education endorsed by *Wuzi*. For Wu Qi, the cultivation of the four virtues of *dao* 道, *yi* 義, *li* 禮 and *ren* 仁 (*dao*, righteousness, propriety, and humaneness) among the population is directly related to the survival and flourishing of the state. In theory, this ideological inculcation is extended to everyone and so included those who were in the military. He Liangchen observed the same principles in *Zhenji* as he quoted *Wuzi*'s moral maxim on governance of the state and the troops:

> Teach them virtue; encourage them with righteousness, so that they may know indignity. It is when one knows indignity, one will know honour when advancing in the face of death and one will know humiliation when retreating for survival. [Knowing indignity] it will be sufficient for bigger states to wage war, or smaller states to defend themselves.
>
> 教之以禮，勵之以義，使有恥也。夫人有恥，必知進死為榮，退生為辱，在大足以戰，在小足以守矣。[461]

So what exactly is *Zhenji* trying to achieve by adopting some of these Confucian-Mencian concepts found in *Wuzi* and other early military texts? First of all, He Liangchen saw that it is essential to adopt a moral foundation when trying to create an army- not just any army but a righteous army (*yijun* 義軍). Only an ideologically sound army could dispel the ills that have been plaguing the Ming military, which He

[460] Wu, "*Tuguo*" 圖國, *Wuzi*, 89.
[461] He, "*Shuwu*" 束伍, in *Zhenji*, 662.

Liangchen must have encountered personally when fighting the *wokou*. After *Zhenji* was published, the *wokou* threat was the least of the Ming dynasty's worries. The author gave a list of five traditional internal and external threats to the state. One of these external threats comes from "four barbarians" (*siyi* 四夷). The author argues that the source of this threat is an inadequate attention to military affairs by the state.[462] In other words, *Zhenji* was not blind to the fact that all military planning and directives came from the government. If the Ming army was inadequately trained to deal with the earlier *wokou* threat and subsequent external threats, the root of the problem lies with the state. By framing the ordering of the army as a moral issue that could be, partly if not wholly, solved with a moral solution, *Zhenji* logically extend this problem and solution to the Ming state. If the state and the emperor are unrighteous (*buyi* 不義), so will its army (*buyi zhi shi* 不義之師). In order to effectively deal with future threats, the army needs to be reformed. But ordering the army (*zhijun* 治軍) is not possible without ordering the state (*zhiguo* 治國).

In essence, *Zhenji* philosophical foundation lies with the Confucian tradition with mainly Wuzi as its spiritual ancestor, followed by Sunzi and other similar early (pre-Qin) military texts. Both *zhijun* 治軍 and *zhanlue* 戰略 could only be carried out if the first condition is fulfilled— i.e. the state must be put in order.[463] For an intellectual like He Liangchen who lived during a period where there seemed to be social and political disorder because of external and internal factors, it is understandable why he would find Wuzi's philosophy of 'ordering the state before everything else' appealing.

[462] He, "*Shuairan*" 率然, in *Zhenji*, 708-709.
[463] Wang Lianbin, "Mingdai bingshu jiqi junshi lunli sixiang," 145.

3.7 *Zhenji* among the Ming Military Books

Zhenji, was not created in a vacuum. The mid-Ming military culture was one that witnessed the interactions of literati and military men, where ideas exchanged frequently. Despite being universally praised for its originality, *Zhenji* is a work that adhered closely with Confucian-Mencian tradition of military writing. It is also a work that borrowed, adapted, and refined with other contemporary works of the same genre.

> And as for the method of *yongbing*, it is to educate and to admonish first and foremost.
>
> 故用兵之法，教戒為先。[464]

Wuzi stressed that the most important thing in military command is training. It is not surprising that *Zhenji* begins with the section on *muxuan* 募選 or 'recruitment and selection' in the first chapter, stating that:

> To recruit without understanding the key principles is to fail in gathering the many men and to gather men without careful selection is to fail in using them [for battle]. Therefore, it is important to recruit many but select few. To recruit many is to gather those who are both wise and foolish and to select few is to find the elites.
>
> 募非握機，無以合眾，眾非精選，無以得用。…故募貴多，選貴少。多可至賢愚，少則乃有精銳。[465]

According to *Zhenji*, the recruitment of soldiers begins with numbers, as this would ensure different types of men to be gathered for final selection. In traditional Chinese military thinking, numbers continued to be a determining factor on the fields of battle. Despite the value given to strategy and the ultimate goal of "causing the enemy forces to submit without battle", the military engagements from early to late-Ming period

[464] Wu, "*Zhibing*" 治兵, in *Wuzi*, 109.
[465] He, "*Muxuan*" 募選, in *Zhenji*, 653.

often called for a superior number of troops bearing upon the enemies.[466] Starting from the Hongwu emperor's campaign to drive out the Mongols to the Yongle emperor's expeditions into the Mongol territories with the aim of eradicating the Mongol threat once and for all, troops amounting to 250,000 to 300,000 men were deployed- a staggering number in the pre-modern times.[467] Zheng He's supposedly diplomatic missions to Southeast Asia saw the deployment of around 250 ships and more than 30,000 soldiers. The famous Tumu debacle in 1449 saw the destruction of at least half of the allegedly 500,000 strong Ming army.[468] Of course, we have to bear in mind that military strength could be, and very often was inflated in Chinese historical records.

After the Tumu incident, the court was increasingly reliant on recruitment of troops from other regions (such as the aborigines auxiliary troops from Guangxi) to augment, and in some cases, to replace the regular troops. Less than twenty years later in 1465, the censor Han Yong was given total civil and military authority in coordinating the campaign against the Yao 'bandits' in Guangxi. It was a major expedition and involved an army made up of 160,000 soldiers. However, only 30,000 of them were regulars, the remaining majority of the troops were conscripts made up of locals from the region. [469] And by the mid-Ming, the absolute troop strength of the regular Ming army was reduced to an alarming level. This coincided with the decline of the *wei-suo* system which was the traditional source of manpower for the Ming

[466] Originally from Sun Zi 孫子, the idea of causing the enemies to surrender without battle has been regarded as idealistic and could be fatal in reality. See Sun Zi, *The Art of War: SunZi's Military Methods*, 85.
[467] For the Ming founder's military campaigns, see Edward Dreyer's "Military Origins of Ming China" in *Cambridge History of China: Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, vol. 1*. For Chengzu's Mongols campaigns and maritime expedition, see Chan Hok-lam's "The Ch'ien-wen, Yung-lo, Hung-his, and Hsüan-te reigns, 1399-1435" in *Cambridge History of China: Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, vol. 1*., 226-36.
[468] F.W. Mote, "The T'u-mu Incident of 1449", in Frank Kierman and John King Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, 243-272.
[469] Gu Yingtai 谷應泰, *Mingshi jishi benmo*,明史紀事本末, *juan* 39, 573.

military. The reality was that the demands of soldiering, combined with corvée labour (e.g. wall-building along the border), and subsistence-farming, was unsustainable for the average soldier living in the military farming-colonies.[470] In other words, military self-sufficiency as envisaged by the Ming emperors was a myth. The result was large-scale desertion for many of these hereditary military men.

When Song Yinchang 宋應昌, the *jinglue* 經略 or Military Commissioner of Korea, deplored that the Ming expeditionary forces in aid of Korea against the Japanese amounted to not more than 36,000 men in 1592, he could be remembering the mighty Ming armies of those early days.[471] Even at the height of the *wokou offensive*, the crack troops under Q Jiguang made up of *Yiwu* 義烏 natives from Zhejiang numbered not more than 4,000 men.[472] However, there were certain advantages for voluntary military conscription. Chief among them being quality control— all recruits were selected based on a set of selection criteria that ensured only those who have met them could join up. As a result, even though the total size of such recruited battalions were tiny compared to those with the hereditary military class, the quality of individual soldier was much higher.[473]

The practical consideration of increased voluntary conscription in the mid-Ming required administrators and military thinkers to come up with solutions. This was the reason why selection and training became the chief focus of numerous mid to late-Ming *bingshu*. *Wuzi* gave a list of candidates based on the simple criteria of

[470] Peng Yong 彭勇, *Mingdai beibian fangyu tizhi yanjiu* 明代北邊防禦體制研究: 以邊操班軍的演變為線索, 267-270.
[471] Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*, 150.
[472] Fan Zhongyi 範中義, *Qi Jiguang Pingzhuan* 戚繼光評傳, 59.
[473] Chen Xuewen 陳學文, "Mingdai kangwou Qijiajun zhujian" 明代抗倭戚家軍組建, Zhejiang Academic Journal 浙江學刊, no. 6 (2009), 47.

physical and mental abilities.[474] He Liangchen went further with selection of men in *Zhenji*. The goal of recruitment does not mean a random gathering of men able to fight compared like in the past. Fielding half a million fighting men was no longer possible by the mid-Ming. A general must now select carefully from a much smaller pool of men to be trained and so he must have a clear idea of the selection criteria. *Zhenji* explains what kind of men should be recruited:

> Honest men are most preferred while dissipated men are to be avoided. What is vital is not so much an individual's skill in the martial arts or his physique, but rather his spunk and courage. It is suitable to recruit those from the country farms, and fear deeply those who are crafty in the cities.
>
> 最喜誠實，獨忌遊閒。不在武技勇偉，而在膽氣精神。宜於鄉落田農，深畏市井狡猾。[475]

And the author goes on to explain the rationale behind the choice of men:

> Only country folks will fear the government officials and revere the law as they share in common the sincerity and trust, not second-guessing our leadership and control.
>
> 獨鄉野之人懼官畏法，誠信易於孚感而且不敢度測我籠絡之術。[476]

From a military point of view, it is ideal to the recruit and select men who would become soldiers who followed orders without question. *Zhenji* fundamentally shares the same principles regarding recruitment as Qi Jiguang's *Jixiao xinshu, which* was published some years earlier in 1560. In *Jixiao xinshu*, Qi Jiguang began with a chapter on *shuwu* 束伍 (disciplining the troops) and stated his preference for recruitment:

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[474] Wu, "Zhibing", in *Wuzi*, 110.
[475] He, "*Muxuan*", in *Zhenji*, 653.
[476] Idem. 656.

> First, avoid by all means the city drifters who are crafty and one may judge them by their clean faces and slick moves. They are also deceitful men who possess a shifty demeanor and are unfazed in the presence of government authorities. There is only one type of men we could use and that are the honest ones from the countryside.
>
> 第一切忌不可用城市遊滑之人，但看面目光白、形動伶便者是也。奸巧之人，神色不定，見官府藐然無忌者是也。第一可用，只是鄉野老實之人。[477]

Qi then went on to explain that men from the countryside were more willing to submit to authority as soldiers so long there is *en xin* 恩信 'benevolence and trust':

> First, we subject the men to extreme awe and power in order to control them before we win them over with great benevolence and befriend them with sincerity.
>
> 先以異出常情之威壓之，使就我彀中，而即繼之以重恩收其心，結之以至誠。[478]

According the Qi, such men would follow orders to their death when the general demands it. This idea was repeated by He Liangchen in *Zhenji*:

> Now we control [the men] with great awe and power so that once conscripted, they would fear martial law. Then we show them benevolence and sincerity. When they fear the law, they would appreciate benevolence. Fearing the law and grateful for benevolence, their hearts and minds would be subdued. Once we have subdued their hearts and minds, these soldiers could be relied on.
>
> 即繩以重威，使其入伍便畏軍法，繼以恩信。彼既畏法，便知感恩；畏法感恩，心自制服；制得其心、則士可用。[479]

[477] Qi Jiguang, *Jixiao xinshu*, 72.
[478] Idem. 75-77.
[479] He, "*Muxuan*", in *Zhenji*, 656-657.

According to Qi and He, there was a clear distinction here between those men from the countryside and those who were city dwellers. Both authors saw the urban folks as less desirable- chiefly because they have been polluted by the urban materialism and sophistication. Frederick Mote suggested that Chinese cities, as late as late-Ming, still characteristically contained rural life and agricultural activities within them. Simultaneously, there almost invariably were urban densities and urban functions extending well beyond city walls.[480] Consequently, the Chinese maintained a fundamental commitment to the values of rural life that was far more operational and more binding, than were the sentimental idealisations of the 'pastoral' that sometimes appeared in the West.[481] Nevertheless, increasing wealth as a result of commercial activities among the merchants in the mid-fifteenth century to the late-sixteenth century, especially in the urban centres in Southern China created a state of anxiety among the many members of the literati. The proliferation of commerce was seen as "troubling to the scholastic Confucian commitment to social hierarchy resting on settled village life."[482] Contrary to what Mote said about the lack of sentimental idealisation of the rural in China, many mid to late-Ming literati started to write about the "simple but righteous rural folks" as opposed to those city folks who "are fond of cheating" and "by nature obstinate and bad-tempered."[483] This could explain why Qi Jiguang and He Liangchen shared this same sentiment.

Zheng Ruozeng's *Chouhai tubian* 籌海圖編 which was published in 1562 (around the time of *Jixiao Xinshu*'s completion) also contained the same idea by

[480] F.W. Mote, "A Millennium of Chinese Urban History: Form, Time and Space Concepts in Soochow," in *Rice University Studies*, vol. 59, issue 4 (1973), p. 38.
[481] Mote, "A Millennium of Chinese Urban History: Form, Time and Space Concepts in Soochow," 37.
[482] Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*, 124.
[483] Idem. 124-5.

making reference to Qi's work.[484] Zheng Ruozeng almost quoted Qi Jiguang's writing on recruitment in verbatim even more so than He Liangchen in *Zhenji*. As a serious scholar, Zheng would have been affected by the social changes that were happening around him.

After recruiting and selecting the right men, it was time to train them. The most influential Ming military texts on training were both written by Qi Jiguang. The theoretical and practical aspects of military training (all tested in the battlefields) so comprehensively covered by Qi made it hard for mid-Ming military thinkers to ignore. As such, we can see examples of Qi's ideas on these topics in other military texts written around the same time and beyond. The information did not travel one way as ideas were exchanged. In *Zhenji*, He Liangchen discussed the concept of *danqi* 膽氣 or literally 'the *qi* in the gallbladder' which denotes bravery. *Danqi* could be trained, argued He Liangchen, and is the foundation of *wujiao* 五教 or 'Five Teachings'— the training of the eyes, ears, limbs, and hearts and minds of every soldier.[485] He Liangchen then went on to explain:

> Without *danqi,* a soldier though skilled in martial arts, would be useless. Therefore, those who excelled in military training would train the *danqi* of the troops. The *dan* [gallbladder] comes in big and small and are unpredictable. There are both courageous and fearful *qi* that cannot be easily made known to others. A courageous man with a small *dan* is useless. A man with a big *dan* yet never fills it with [courageous] *qi*, he will not demonstrate bravery.
>
> 兵無膽氣，雖精勇，無所用也。故善練兵者，必練兵之膽氣。夫人之膽有大小，其大小不可預知；氣有勇怯，其勇怯不能憑識。人而膽小，雖勇弗用；膽不以氣，雖大弗張。[486]

[484] Zheng Ruozeng 鄭若曾, *Chou hai tu bian* 籌海圖編, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成, vol. 15, 862-865.
[485] He, "*Jiaolian*" 教練, in *Zhenji*, 665.
[486] Idem. 667-668.

The conceptual metaphor of *danqi* came originally from traditional Chinese medical thought that explains that courage and bravery (psychological) are products of a physical organ (gallbladder) and *qi*. A person is brave when his gallbladder is filled with courageous *qi*.[487] And so in Chinese military thought, a soldier's bravery (psychological) could be increased by producing more *qi* in the gallbladder (physical), which would then be converted to acts of valour. All these can be achieved by proper training. The concept of *danqi* is not new in Chinese military thought. But by the mid-Ming, the once abstract concept of *danqi* could now be materialised with proper training methodology according to the military thinkers. Like He Liangchen, Yu Dayou also saw training *danqi* as the foundation of military training:

> The method of training a soldier is first and foremost, to train the *dan*. The method of training the *dan* is to first practise the [martial] arts. Once skilled in [martial] arts, the *dan* too will be big. A big *dan* makes a strong soldier.
>
> 教兵之法，練膽為先；練膽之法，習藝為先。藝精則膽壯，膽壯則兵強。[488]

There is a certain methodology to increase once *danqi*, and it all starts with mastering the various techniques of the martial arts. A soldier cannot be courageous if he lacks confidence. And this confidence comes from knowing that you are skillful in battle. Qi Jiguang devoted a chapter on the discussion on *danqi* in *Jijiao Xinshu*. However, he developed the concept of *qi* further by associating it with the Mencian *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣 'great moral force':

> *Qi* determines victory or defeat in battle.

[487] Yu Ning, "Metaphor, Body, and Culture: The Chinese Understanding of Gallbladder and Courage," in *Metaphor and Symbol* 18, no. 1 (2003),14-15.
[488] Yu Dayou 俞大猷, *Bing luedui* 兵略對, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成, vol. 40, 209.

兵之勝負者，氣也。[489]

It is no longer just *danqi* alone that wins battles, but an encompassing *qi* that permeates the heaven and earth, and as identified by Mencius, governs the *zhi* 志 or 'will'.[490] The *zhi* is the leader of the *qi*.[491] And with *zhiqi* 志氣 (akin to morale), soldiers will win battles. To Qi Jiguang, this *qi* is the outward manifestation of the heart-and-mind. And so, by training the heart-and-mind of the soldier, *qi* will be produced, and it includes morale, bravery, and morally righteousness.[492]

Ultimately, many of these mid-Ming authors of military books agreed that sound training methodologies were the way to military success, and the larger goal was a military reform that would hopefully lead to a dynastic rejuvenation. There was also a slightly stronger focus on the individual soldier and his place/role within the entire military cohort compared to the military texts from earlier periods. What was really remarkable was the way mid-Ming military thinkers (both military men and literati) actually worked independently while actively engaging one another intellectually. This focus on pragmatic military training was to influence the late-Ming literati who continued to think and wrote about the military— e.g. Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 with his *Wubeizhi* 武備志, and Xu Guangqi's 徐光啓 *Xuanlian tiaoge* 選練條格.[493]

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[489] Qi Jiguang, "Huowen" 或問, in *Jixiao xinshu*, 56.
[490] Yao Xinzhong. *Reconceptualizing Confucian Philosophy in the 21st Century*, 197.
[491] Ibid.
[492] "氣發於外，根之於心." Qi Jiguang 戚繼光, *Jixiao xinshu zhushi: shisi juan ben* 紀效新書: 十四卷本, Fan Zhongyi 範中義 ed. 211.
[493] All the military texts listed here contain chapters on training with methodologies that were very similar to earlier military texts such as those written by Qi Jiguang and He Liangchen. In fact, Mao Yuanyi almost copied the entire section of Qi's writing on training in *Wubeizhi*. Zhao Na 趙娜, "Mao Yuanyi Wubei zhi yu Qi Jiguang zhushu guanxi kao" 茅元儀《武備志》與戚繼光著述關係考, in *Journal of Henan Normal University* 河南師範大學學報, vol. 39, no. 3 (May 2012): 140-144.

3.8 Conclusion

In the chapter named *Yinshi* 因勢 or 'according to situations' in *Zhenji*, He Liangchen wrote:

> Therefore, those who excel in military adapts to the enemy and employs change, will adapt to the different people with different policies, will adapt to the terrain and creates [favourable] condition, will adapt to enemy's condition and creates one's own formation, and create rules according to the laws of the state.
>
> 所以善兵者，必因敌而用变也，因人而异施也，因地而作势也，因情而措形也，因制而立法也。[494]

He Liangchen could have 'walked the talk'. Living in the mid-Ming period where society was rapidly changing, He Liangchen had to adapt to the new social and political realities. Unlike Tang Shunzhi who had achieved *gongming* 功名 and lived the life of a celebrity scholar, He Liangchen was merely a scholar without merit and with limited options in life and career. However, the increasing militarization of the scholar-officials in a time of military crises was not lost on him. To become a private secretary in a military administration or even a military officer were now viable options to a scholar. Pragmatism and patriotism could have gone hand-in-hand for He Liangchen. The mid-Ming military culture which the literati were both producers and consumers provided He Liangchen with the right social and cultural network for self-promotion and recognition. In a culture where martial values were progressively becoming acceptable and even desirable among the social elites, He Liangchen's *wen-wu* credentials became useful and helped him to find a place in a social circle that he was otherwise, excluded from.

[494] He, "*Yinshi*" 因勢, in *Zhenji*, 789.

4. The Ming *mufu* and its Role in the Development of Military Culture among the Mid-Ming Literati.

4.1 Introduction

The present chapter examines the late-Ming *mufu* 幕府 or 'private secretariat' and the part this particular institution played in the perpetuation and advancement of literati military culture. I will argue that the *mufu*, especially those that were set up for military purpose, provided the late-Ming literati not just another legitimate employment opportunity, but also a platform where military-minded literati discussed, practised, and refined their military ideas— whether it was through strategic planning, writing military works, or taking part in direct military operations.

Mufu were set up because officials who were deployed to various regions from the central government required their personal entourage of administrative staff and advisors. Many times, the central government could not provide the required manpower and so the hiring became the responsibility of the deployed officials. Those who were hired were mainly members of the literati who were not part of the official bureaucracy (because of failure in the civil examinations and other reasons). From the Tang dynasty onwards, the *mufu* became an alternative entry point into the government for many aspiring literati.[495] It allowed talented individuals who failed to do well in the increasingly competitive civil examinations to become private secretaries or *muliao* 幕僚, and have a chance to take part in the political life of the imperial China.

In the beginning years of the Ming dynasty, literati joined *mufu* because it was a legitimate way of entering officialdom apart from taking part in the civil

[495] Lü Jingbo吕靖波, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu* 明代文人遊幕與文學研究, 1.

examinations. The transition from Yuan to Ming made it difficult for scholars to enter into government service via the usual channels. These *muliao* took on mainly strategic and administrative roles as the Ming founder was trying to defeat the various contenders for the control of China while busy establishing his government in Nanjing. Some of these *muliao* were eventually absorbed into the official Ming bureaucracy once the dynastic foundation was well established. In the later years, the dynasty witnessed fundamental changes in the political system and the *mufu* system. As a result, the Ming literati's reason for joining the *mufu* became primarily an economic one, rather than a political one. There was also greater mobility among these *muliao* when seeking employment in the *mufu* by the late-Ming since the increase in military emergencies led to the creation of temporary private secretariats by Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders (all of whom were effectively regional governors) where men with different talents were recruited both locally and from other places in the hope of success in dealing with the military situations and a subsequent career. The court simply could not provide the required personnel with the relevant skillsets.

One best example of such a *mufu* is the one that was set up by Wang Yangming during the rebellion of Prince of Ning of 1519. The subsequent *wokou* incursion into China's southern coastal region required a concerted effort from the Ming court which resulted in the formation of the *mufu* of Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian. The military success of these private secretariats led to what Lü Jingbo considers as the renaissance and the highpoint in development of the Ming *mufu*— the period beginning with emperor Longqing's reign that stretches all the way after the fall of Ming (during the Southern Ming regimes).[496] These *mufu* were set up with

[496] Lü, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 5.

military objectives in mind and they were staffed by remarkable late-Ming literati of whom many were well-versed in military matters. It was while serving in the *mufu* that these literati experienced first-hand, the reality of military conflicts, and were able to increase and refine their military knowledge as a result. The *mufu* provided them with a platform to present their military ideas— whether they were in the form of military books, cartography, or poetry. The *mufu* also facilitated the interactions and exchange of these ideas between such military-minded literati and many military commanders. In other words, the military culture among the late-Ming literati existed and flourished in large part as a result of the formation of these private secretariats.

4.2 Origins of the Ming *mufu*

> Recommendation of the worthy to the court is different from the recruitment of your own men. When I recruit my own men, the discretion and authority are all mine. And so, talented men with less than virtuous character would still be hired. When the court recommends talents, their appraisals are rigidly written in black or white, omitting the weak spots and recording only the strengths. If none would speak with openness, who would give a second thought [about the recommendations]?
>
> 凡薦賢于朝，與自己用人又自不同，自己用人，權度在我，故雖小人而有才者，亦可以器使。若以賢才薦之于朝，則評品一定，便如黑白，其間舍短錄長之意，若非明言，誰知之？[497]

The above words were written in 1491 by a twenty-year-old Wang Yangming, who had begun to take a serious interest in military knowledge a few years before.[498] It would take a few more decades before Wang Yangming became a successful military

[497] Wang Yangming, "Da Fang Shuxian dinghai" 答方叔賢丁亥, in *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, *juan* 21, 828.
[498] Qian Dehong 錢德洪,"Nianpu" 年譜, in *Wang Yangming quanji*, *juan* 33, 1222. Larry Israel also provided an excellent account of Wang Yangming's military interest in English. See George Lawrence Israel, *Doing Good and Ridding Evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming.*

general. In the above letter, Wang was actually talking about the idealised system of *pishu* 辟署, where high-ranking government officials and regional administrations could enlist the service of low-ranking officials with a high level of autonomy from the central government.[499] The *pishu* system originated from the Qin-Han period and continued to survive in various forms all the way until the Yuan dynasty.[500] This system was meant to ensure that talented officials, even if they were low-ranking, would not be overlooked by the central government as they could be talent-spotted by higher-ranking officials and hired outside of the usual channel of bureaucratic employment. The institution of the private secretariat or *mufu zhidu* 幕府制度, was likely an offshoot from the *pishu* system. The *mufu* originated from the Warring States period when it basically meant the physical tent where the military generals resided during campaigns. Because of incessant warfare from the end of the Han dynasty onwards, the system of autonomous hiring of staff for the military command became increasingly institutionalised, especially in the Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589), whereby military generals were frequently allowed to set up (*kaifu* 開府) their temporary military administration—known as *junfu* 軍府.[501] Because of military emergencies, these temporary military administrations enjoyed freedom from the central government in employing low-ranking civil officials to staff the *mufu*- as they provided advisory, secretarial, and logistical support. Because of the autonomous nature of the private secretariats, some of these temporary military administrations became more or less independent and started to challenge the central government. A classic example was the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) when

[499] Chen Maotong 陳茂同, *Zhongguo lidai xuanguan zhidu* 中國歷代選官制度, 66-8.
[500] Lü, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 8.
[501] Yoshiaki Kawamoto, 川本芳昭, *Zhonghua de bengkui yu kuoda: Wei Jin Nanbei chao* 中華的崩潰與擴大：魏晉南北朝, trans. Li Yanhua 李彥樺, 299-300.

autonomous provincial military governors decided to stage a revolt and challenged central authority.[502]

The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang set up his *mufu* when he was still one of several competing rebel armies fighting against the Yuan regime and each other.[503] Like any other period of political fragmentation in imperial China where several armed factions contested for dominance, men of talents were actively sought and recruited by the leaders of these factions in hope of providing them with the 'edge' that they needed. Zhu Yuanzhang was just following the tradition and modus operandi of warlords in Chinese histories. Men of learning and prestige were enlisted by dignified inducements.[504] The recruitment of Zhuge Kongming 諸葛孔明 by Liu Bei 劉備 during the Three Kingdoms (220–280) period is a classic example.[505]

Zhu Yuanzhang was eager to recruit some of the most renowned literati of his time to assist him in his bid for supremacy. Qian Mu had remarked that the Ming founder's attempt at searching and recruiting of literati talents had surpassed previous dynasties.[506] Among these private secretaries was Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381). When Zhu Yuanzhang recruited Song Lian in Nanjing in 1360, the famous literatus was already 51 years old and had failed the Yuan civil examinations repeatedly.[507] But his reputation as the leading Confucian scholar and teacher won the admiration of Zhu. A decade earlier in 1349, the Yuan court had wanted to summon Song Lian to

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[502] Guo Runtao 郭潤濤, "Zhongguo mufu zhidu de tezheng, xintai he bianqian" 中国幕府制度的特徵、形态和变迁, in *Journal of Chinese Historical Studies*中國史研究, issue 1, (1997).
[503] Chen, "Ming dai mu bin zhi du chu tang", in *Zhongguo shi yanjiu*, 136.
[504] Mote, "Rise of the Ming Dynasty," in *The Cambridge History of China Vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1*, 27.
[505] Chen Shou 陳壽, *Sanguozhi* 三國志 (Records of the Three Kingdoms), *juan* 35, 912.
[506] Qian Mu 錢穆, "Du Mingchu kaiguo zhu chen shiwen ji" 讀明初開國諸臣詩文集, in *Zhongguo xueshu sixiangshi luncong* 中國學術思想史論叢, vol. 6, 216.
[507] Xu Yongming 徐永明, *Song Lian nianpu* 宋濂年譜, 84.

the capital to assume duty in the prestigious Hanlin Academy at the recommendation several senior officials who were admirers of Song Lian's scholarly achievements despite his lack of success in the civil examinations.[508] Disillusioned with the Yuan regime, Song Lian had rejected the appointment and instead concentrated on his literary pursuits, earning the respect of many fellow literati as a result. Zhu Yuanzhang tried his best to recruit Song Lian. And so in 1360, after Zhu Yuanzhang had seized control of most of eastern Zhejiang, he prepared appropriate gifts (consisting of books and money) to formally invite not just Song Lian, but also brilliant literati such as Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–1375), Zhang Yi 章溢 (1314–1369), and Ye Shen 葉琛 (1314–1362), to become advisers in his newly established government in Nanjing. Later historians saw this as Zhu Yuanzhang's brilliant strategy in winning the support of the literati in his bid for power.[509] When the Ming founder finally recruited Song, Liu, Zhang, and Ye, he said to them that it was "for the sake of all under heaven that he had to put them in great inconvenience".[510] However, Zhu Yuanzhang's relationship with his literati advisors was based on his pragmatic needs and political considerations and so he never really trusted the scholars fully.[511]

Around the same time, Zhu's rivals Chen Youliang 陳友諒 (1320–1363), Zhang Shicheng 張士誠 (1321–1367), Fang Guozhen 方國珍 (1319–1374), Ming Yuzhen明玉珍 (1331–1366) and others were also recruiting many literati for their

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[508] Xu, *Song Lian nianpu* 宋濂年譜, 50.
[509] Xu Yongming 徐永明, "Butong chujing xia Song lian de huodong ji chuangzuo不同处境下宋濂的活动及创作", in *Journal of Zhejiang University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 浙江大学学报 (人文社会科学版), vol. 35, no. 5 (2009), 139.
[510] Zhao Yi 趙翼, Ershi er shi zhaji jiaozhen廿二史札記校正 *juan* 36, 837-838.
[511] "In the early days of the dynasty when Emperor Taizu conquered a city, he would order the military commanders to guard it, and at the same time disallowed any literati to discuss and influence the decisions [of the military commanders]"
太祖于國初所克城池，令將官守之，勿容儒者在左右議論古今. Liu Chen 劉辰, Guochu shiji 國初事蹟, in *Guochao diangu* 國朝典故, *juan* 4, 88-89.

mufu. For example, Fang Guozhen, whose control of eastern Zhejiang was eventually wrestled away by Zhu Yuanzhang, recruited Liu Renben 刘仁本, Zhang Benren 张本仁, Zheng Yongsi 郑永思, and many others in his *mufu*.[512] Besides helping Fang with administration (especially in the area of grain shipment to the capital vis the canals), Liu Renben also organized various cultural activities amidst the anxiety and uncertainties brought forth by the unrest.[513]

On the other hand, the interaction between Zhu Yuanzhang and his literati advisors, especially Song Lian, set a precedent for similar interactions between late-Ming military men and members of the literati— such as Qi Jiguang and Tang Shunzhi, Yu Dayou and Xu Wei, etc. It is possible that through the frequent interactions with his literati advisors, the Ming founder was able to acquire a certain level of cultural sophistication that was otherwise impossible for an illiterate warlord who came from the peasantry. Zhu composed a somewhat rudimentary poem in praise of his teacher Song Lian:

> [Song] Jinglian made his home in Jinghua east
> While his learning encompassed the world.
> The sages of old had rites and music aplenty
> That instruct the present in moral standards and family traditions.
> 景濂家住金華東，
> 滿腹詩書宇宙中。
> 自古聖賢多禮樂，
> 訓今法度舊家風。[514]

[512] Zhou Mingchu 周明初 and Wang Shunxin 王禹舜, "Sadula ru Fang Guozhen mufu shuo bianxi" 萨都剌入方国珍幕府说辨析, in Journal of Nanjing Normal University (Social Science Edition) 南京师大学报 (社会科学版), no. 3 (May 2017), 123.
[513] For a detailed discussion of Liu's activities before Zhu Yuanzhang ordered his death in 1367, see Chen Weilan 陳衛蘭, "Liu Renben zai Zhedong wenhua shi shang de gongxian" 劉仁本在浙東文化史上的貢獻, in Journal of Taizhou University 台州學院學報, vol. 38, no. 5 (Oct 2016), 13-17.
[514] Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, "Yuzhi shi er zhang" 御制诗二章, in *Song Lian quanji* 宋濂全集, Huang Linggeng 黄靈庚 ed. vol. 5, 2533.

Interestingly, Song Lian also revealed on an occasion his admiration and appreciation of the martial in the presence of the Taizu emperor:

> I [Song Lian] was in audience with the emperor in the White Tiger Hall.
> The emperor turned to me and asked, "What do you think of Hu Shen?"
> I replied saying, "He is accomplished in both civil (*wen*) and martial (*wu*)."
> His majesty said, "Indeed! I rely on him for the defense of eastern Zhejiang."
> And that is why his majesty depended heavily on master [Hu].
> I have had the great fortune to know master [Hu] personally for five to six years. And when I saw master [Hu] commanding the three armies with his ears hot from drinking wine, there was no stopping his gallantry. And when he engaged in literary discussion and poetry critique with [civil] officials, he was humble like a commoner-scholar. I could not deny his bravery, nor could I not admire his humility.
>
> 昔濂侍上于白虎殿。忽顧問曰：「胡深何如人？」
> 濂对曰：「文武才也。」
> 上曰：「誠如卿言。浙東一障，朕方賴之。」
> 則上所以倚公者至矣。
> 濂辱公交者五、六春秋，见公酒酣耳热，指挥三军，而雄姿奋扬不可遏，及与荐绅之流论文评诗，则欿然布衣书生也。濂未尝不服其勇而爱其谦。[515]

Hu Shen 胡深 (1315–1367) was a talented military commander who defected to Zhu Yuangzhang's camp when different warlords were still fighting for supremacy and he was subsequently killed in a military operation before the founding of the Ming

[515] Song Lian 宋濂, "Da Ming guwangfu canjun zhuifeng Jinyunjun bo Hugong shendao beaming" 大明故王府參军追封缙云郡伯胡公神道碑铭, in *Song Lian quanji* 宋濂全集, Huang Linggeng 黄靈庚 ed. vol. 3, 1228-1233.

dynasty.[516] Because of the nature of a *mufu*, there was much interaction between military officers and civil officials. The political status of military personnel was also at an all-time high during this period and there was no rigid line of division between the civil and the military. But what is interesting here was that Song Lian actually esteemed general Hu Shen through the eyes of a Confucian scholar— focusing on the military man's virtue and learning. Hu Shen, as an 'accomplished scholar and warrior', had 'acquired an advanced knowledge of the classics and teachings of the hundred schools'. The general 'never turned his back on virtuous men who needed his help'. He 'commanded troops for more than a decade but had never killed indiscriminately'.[517] In another epitaph written for Yu Guang 于光 (1324–1370), a rebel general who also defected to Zhu Yuanzhang's side, Song Lian praised Yu for his martial prowess that was matched by his various accomplishments in 'playing musical instruments, reciting poetry from the past to the present, and medical knowledge in acupuncture'. Yu Guang was both a 'respectable gentleman' and a warrior who struck fear in all 'who saw him on horseback with his weapon drawn'.[518] Although it is plausible to dismiss Song Lian's praise of military men as merely conforming to the genre of epitaph-writing, it is also important to note that Song Lian belonged to the Wuzhou 婺州(present day Jinhua 金華 in Zhejiang) literary circle, which since the beginning of the Jin/Yuan period had focused on pragmatism and applicability in their study of Confucianism and serving in the government formed part of their collective political thinking.[519] A strong military was essential in ending

[516] *MS*, *juan* 133, 3889-3891.
[517] Song Lian, "Da Ming guwangfu canjun zhuifeng Jinyunjun bo Hugong shendao beaming," 1229-1232.
[518] Song Lian, "Gu huaiyuan da jiangjun tongzhi Yingyang wei qinjun zhihuishi si shi Yu jun muzhiming" 故懷遠大將軍同知鷹揚衛親軍指揮使司事于君墓誌銘, in *Song Lian quanji*, vol. 3, 1312.
[519] Chen Zhifeng 陳志峰, "Fang Xiaoru yu Mingchu Wuzhouy wenren fengshang 方孝孺與明初婺州文人風尚" in *Xinya luncong* 新亞論叢, no. 10, (June 2009): 86-92.

the civil war and bringing peace to China. Song Lian could certainly appreciate the martial ethos of his time. Working closely with military men in the *mufu* probably helped to fuel Song Lian's admiration of the martial ethos and allowed him to construct the ideal image of the scholar-general in early Ming. As discussed in other chapters of this dissertation, the idea of the scholar-general was subsequently embraced by members of the literati in the later period of the dynasty.

After defeating his last rival Zhang Shicheng in 1367, Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming dynasty with Nanjing as its capital in the following year and proceeded to consolidate imperial authority.[520] The Ming founder was deeply concerned with his military generals accumulating too much power for themselves. Coupled with his inherent disdain for the literati, Zhu Yuanzhang set off to limit the practice of 'private hiring' of scholars within the government, and among the hereditary nobles.[521] This was in line with the early Ming's overarching political agenda of centralizing and tightening control of the official bureaucracy.[522] The *mufu* system continued to exist since regional governors and even princely courts would still require administrative staff. However, the manpower would now be appointed and sent by the central government rather than being recruited directly and privately. The *Great Ming Code* explicitly forbids the private appointment of staff by government officials and those who broke the law would be 'a hundred strokes and be

[520] Edward Farmer, "Yi guo zhi jiazhang tongzhi: Zhu Yuanzhang de lixiang shehui zhixu guannian" 一國之家長統治：朱元璋的理想社會秩序觀念, in *Ming Taizu de zhiguo linian ji qi shijian* 明太祖的治國理念及其實踐, Zhu Honglin 朱鴻林 ed. 7-8.
[521] Liu Chen 劉辰, "Guochu shiji" 國初事蹟, in *Guaochao diangu* 國朝典故, *juan* 4, 88-89.
[522] For a detailed account and discussion of Zhu Yuanzhang's ideas on reorganizing the bureaucracy, please see Qiu Zhonglin 邱仲麟, "Ming Taizu de renguan linian yu Hongwu chao de wenguan shizhi zhidu 明太祖的任官理念與洪武朝的文官試職制度" in *Ming Taizu de zhiguo linian ji qi shijian* 明太祖的治國理念及其實踐, 169-212. Edward also gave a comprehensive account on this topic. Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355-1435*.

terminated from the civil service'.[523] These private secretaries were vetted by the central government before they were sent to staff the *mufu* of the regional governors.[524] Ironically, the 'repressive' Yuan regime actually granted greater autonomy to local governments in hiring their bureaucratic staff.[525]

In his first year as the emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang took Li Wenzhong 李文忠 (1338–1384) to task for recruiting five scholars without seeking imperial approval. These scholars were later taken into custody and transferred to Nanjing, where two of them were executed for 'interfering in official business.'[526] Also in 1374, six years into Ming Taizu's reign, the literatus Gao Qi 高啟 (1336–1373) was executed because of his association with Wei Guan 魏觀 (1305–1374), under whom Gao Qi had served as a *muliao*. Gao Qi had previously rejected the invitation from the emperor to become the Vice-Minister of Revenue. Instead, when Wei Guan set up his local office in Suzhou as the prefectural magistrate, he privately recruited Gao Qi and a few other literati to assist him in his administration.[527] The emperor had already started his ban on private recruitment of literati by capital and local officials in order to prevent collusion between the literati and government officials (and especially the military officials). Combined with his mistrust of the Zhejiang and Suzhou regions, which was the power base of his previous rival Zhang Shicheng, the recruitment of Gao Qi by Wei Guan was seen as outright defiance of an

[523] Liu Weiqian 劉惟謙 et. al., *Da Ming lü* 大明律 (The Great Ming Code), *juan* 2, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, vol. 276, 524.
[524] Lü Jingbo, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 15.
[525] "Xuanju kao" 選舉考, in *Xu wenxian tongkao* 續文獻通考, *juan* 45, 3197-3198.
[526] Liu, "*Guochu shiji*," in *Guochao diangu*, *juan* 4, 88-89.
[527] *MS*, *juan* 140, 4001-4002. Also see Frederick Mote, *The Poet Kao Ch'i, 1336-1374*.

imperial order, and an insult to the emperor (since he had invited Gao Qi to join the government earlier), to push the paranoia of the emperor over the edge.[528]

Zhu Yuanzhang's attempt in breaking up the private networks formed between military elites and the literati in order to safeguard imperial power spelled the end of original *mufu* institution in early Ming. It also ended the close interaction and cooperation between civil officials and military commanders that took place under the *mufu*. And as the prestige of *wen* was increasingly valued over *wu* in the Ming government, the line that divided the civil officials from their military counterparts became clearer and more rigid. For the next 130 years (1368–1505) after the implementation of Taizu's policy of civil service recruitment, there is only a total of 15 recorded cases of *muliao* entering the service.[529] There was Tang Yushi 唐愚士 (1350–1401), much admired by Fang Xiaoru (student of Song Lian), who became a *muliao* under the Duke of Cao Li Jinglong 李景隆 (?–1421), who inherited his title after his father Li Wenzhong's died in 1384. Tang served as an adviser to Li Jinglong and a tutor to Li's children.[530] In the expedition to Liaodong in 1387 against the Uriankhai horde under the leadership of the Northern Yuan general Naghachu, Tang accompanied his *muzhu* 幕主 or 'tent master', and wrote a staggering 206 poems celebrating the martial ethos of the Ming armies and at the same time providing historians with a detailed timeline of this important military operation in the northeastern frontiers.[531] Another notable literatus who became a *muliao* during the

[528] For a detailed discussion of the relation between the Wei Guan/Gao Qi incident and the institution of *zhengpi* 徵辟 (imperial and official recruitment), please see Min Yongjun 閔永軍 and Xu Jianzhong 許建中, "Mingchu zhengpi zhidu yu Gao Qi zhi si" 明初徵辟制度與高啟之死, in *Jiangsu Social Sciences* 江蘇社會科學 (2016), 224-230.
[529] See chart of *muliao* in Lü, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 251-252.
[530] Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺, "Shidu Tang jun muzhiming" 侍讀唐君墓誌銘, in *Xunzhizhai ji* 遜志斋集, *juan* 22, *SKQS*, vol. 1235, 638.
[531] Tang Yushi 唐愚士, *Tang Yushi shiji* 唐愚士詩集, *SKQS*, vol. 1235, 519-589.

Hongwu period was Wang Xing 王行 (?–1393). Unlike Tang Yushi above, Wang Xing never sat for the civil examinations after the Yuan-Ming transition but chose to become a private tutor instead in Suzhou.[532] When visiting his sons who were living in Nanjing, Wang was invited by the Duke of Liang, Lan Yu 藍玉 (?–1393), to become a private tutor to his family members. At the same time, Lan Yu also valued Wang Xing's advice on military matters as Wang was a specialist in that field.[533] Wang was eventually executed because of his association with Lan Yu, who was accused of treason and killed thereafter by the Ming founder. Both Tang Yushi and Wang Xing belonged to the group of literati who were caught in the Yuan-Ming transition that disrupted their traditional career paths. They were contented to serve as advisors to powerful military elites of the new dynasty instead of entering the official bureaucracy, only to become the victims of the Ming founder's imperial will in consolidating imperial authority.

The military culture of the beginning years of the Ming was dominated by the military elites who accompanied Zhu Yuanzhang in his many battles for supremacy. Many of the literati who were recruited into these private secretariats also ended partaking in the creation of a military culture due to the strategic advisory roles that many of them played. What happened to this early military culture after the founding of the Ming dynasty? According David Robinson's work on martial spectacles in the Ming court, the martial ethos of the early was kept alive through a combination of imperial initiatives and the civil officials' literary input.[534] As leading literati joined the Ming civil service as a promising career (to many, the only worthy career), they continued to engage with the military. However, their engagement with the military

[532] *MS*, *juan* 285, 7330.
[533] Wang Qi 王錡, Yupu zhaji 寓圃雜記, *juan* 5, 35.
[534] David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*.

was largely limited to planning and drafting of defense policies (if they worked in the Ministry of War), or producing works of art (painting and poetry, etc.) that celebrated and promoted the imperial martial ethos. This engagement was of a different nature compared to the *mufu* in before the founding of the dynasty where literati had first-hand exposure to bloody conflicts and close interactions with the military men.

After the Hongwu period (1368–1398) the governing of the Ming state became increasingly complex. At the same time, the civil bureaucracy continued to grow and evolve in order to deal with this increasing complexity in governance. There was less demand for private *muliao* to staff the offices of high-rank officials. And when there were requests for *muliao* especially among the regional governors, their *mufu* were, by and large, staffed with centrally approved administrative staff. The founding emperor's policy was still fresh and was meant to be enforced by later emperors. Having said that, there continued to be some exceptions of *muliao* being called into service on record. One of these was the Zhejiang native, Zhou Ding 周鼎 (1401–1487).

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Zhou Ding displayed little interest in the civil examinations and became a renowned scholar and teacher. He was later employed as a private tutor by the Vice-Censor-in-chief Jin Lian 金濂 (?–1454), in 1441. Three years later, Zhou Ding was brought into government service in the Ministry of Justice when his former employer Jin Lian was promoted to Minister of Justice. Without an official degree and thus relegated to a lowly position, Zhou Ding resigned on the pretext of poor health even though his opinions were highly valued by Jin Lian.[535] In 1448, as a result of disputes with local landlords over extra payment of

[535] Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, "Zhou Muyang Ding" 周沐陽鼎, in *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝诗集小传, 195.

rents, a peasant revolt led by Jiangxi native Deng Maoqi 鄧茂七 erupted in Fujian.[536] The scale of the peasant revolt was the largest and also probably the deadliest since the founding of the Ming dynasty (as several hundred thousands of these peasant rebels were sufficiently militarized earlier under the self-defense *baojia* scheme). Jin Lian was asked to accompany the leading general as a campaign advisor (*canzan* 參贊) to help suppress the rebellion and he decided to recruit Zhou Ding for his private secretariat. When Zhou Ding volunteered to ride with the chiliarch Gong Zhuqi 龔逐奇 and a small band of soldiers into a rebel stronghold to persuade them to surrender— an operation without limited 'intel'. It was considered an audacious move for a scholar that earned Zhou the respect of the military men.[537]

Besides Zhou Ding, there was also Wang Xun 王訓 (?–1497) who hailed from Guiyang 贵阳 and was the first Guizhou native to be awarded the *juren* degree when he sat for the 1435 provincial examination in Yunnan.[538] In 1448, Wang Xun was recruited as a *muliao* by the Minister of War Wang Ji 王驥 (1378–1460), who had been tasked with leading the fourth campaign (so called Luchuan-Pingmian Campaigns 麓川平緬戰爭) against the Shan state of Mong Mao in the far south of Guizhou 貴州.[539] After the war, Wang Xun again became a military advisor in 1449 when he entered into the *mufu* of Vice Minister of War Hou Jin 侯璡 (1396–1450), who was ordered to suppress a Miao rebellion in Guizhou.[540]

[536] Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming* China, 84-85.
[537] Qian, "Zhou Muyang Ding," 195.
[538] Xie Dong Shan 謝東山 et al., J*iajing Guizhou tongzhi* 嘉靖貴州通志, *juan* 9, *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Guizhou fuxian zhiji* 中國地方志集成：貴州府縣志輯, vol. 1, 415.
[539] Liew Foon Ming, "The Luchuan-Pingmian Campaigns (1436–1449) in the Light of Official Chinese Historiography," in *Oriens Extremus* 39, no. 2 (1996), 190.
[540] Xie et al., *Jiajing Guizhou tongzhi*, *juan* 9, 415.

Even though the Minister of War Wang Ji had informed the court with a memorial regarding his hiring of Wang Xun for the Luchuan campaign, we have no records of the reply from Beijing. What is common between these two cases was that they were both special hires that occurred as a result of social unrest in the southwest. They were also recruited because their experience in military affairs. The scale of the revolts and the speed with which they spread across multiple counties caused a great concern to imperial court, and likely prompted the court to allow extra-legal means taken by officials in the fields of operation— in this case, the private recruitment of *muliao* that was specifically disallowed by the founding emperor.

As we will see below, Zhou and Wang's roles as military advisors in temporary military commissions would become a much more common sight during the Zhengde and Jiajing periods.

4.3 The mid-Ming Re-emergence of the *Mufu*

In 1499 (12th year of Hongzhi 弘治), Wang Yangming as a new metropolitan graduate, submitted a memorial to the court while serving in the Ministry of Works. In it, he discussed manpower issues pertaining to border defense and criticised the conservative perspective on human resources held by those in the administration:

> What do I mean by disregarding the shortcoming while capitalising on the strength? Your humble servant thinks that a man's talents and abilities, since he is no sage, must have both strengths and shortcomings, displayed in plain sight or hidden from view…To capitalize on one's benevolence, remove one's greed; to capitalize on one's wisdom, remove one's deception; to capitalize on one's bravery, remove one's anger. If one seeks talents in times of urgency and difficulty yet desires to stay within the boundaries of rules and regulations, I know for certain that he will be unable to do so.
>
> 何謂舍短用長？臣惟人之才能，自非聖賢，有所長必有所短，有所明必有所蔽…用人之仁，去其貪；用人之智，去其詐；用人之勇，去其怒。夫求才于倉猝艱難之際，而必欲拘于規矩繩墨之中，吾知其必不克矣.[541]

In writing this memorial, Wang was echoing his sentiments regarding the subject that could already be found in an earlier letter he wrote to Fang Xianfu 方獻夫 in 1491.[542] In the earlier letter, Wang talked about '*zi ji yong ren* 自己用人' or to employ/recruit others personally. Reading both writings, one can already see the germ of Wang Yangming's philosophy on recruiting talents— that it was something that could only be achieved if the recruitment was done personally, without the constraints,

[541] Wang Shouren 王守仁, "Chen yan bianwu shu" 陳言邊務疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 9, 286-287.
[542] Wang, "Da Fang Shuxian dinghai" 答方叔賢丁亥, in *Wang Yangming quanji*, *juan* 21, 828.

restrictions, and prejudice, that were imposed by the court. This was especially true during critical times.

Such critical times were for instance the years that Wang Yangming was engaged in suppressing armed unrest in Fujian (1517), Jiangxi (1517), and northern Guangdong (1518).[543] Earlier in 1516, Minister of War Wang Qiong 王瓊 (1459–1532) who had already known Wang Yangming through mutual friends, decided to appoint the him as the Grand Coordinator of Southern Gan 南贛 (an area that included the bordering regions of Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, and Huguang).[544] As Grand Coordinator, Wang Yangming was granted both intra- and inter-provincial authority over a large, troublesome area in the Ming empire so that he could coordinate civilian and military provincial and military officials to "pacify and sooth the military and the civilians, to build defensive walls and moats, and to end treachery and corruption".[545] The unrest in southern Gan was a 'chronic illness' for which the Ming government repeatedly failed to find a permanent cure— in other words, a "hot potato" that no court officials wanted to take on as an assignment.[546] By October 1517, Wang was granted the additional title of military superintendent (*tidu junwu* 提督軍務) with greater discretionary authority in the field by the emperor. This basically amounted to virtually 'unlimited power to act on his own authority without outside influence'.[547] This was partly the result of earlier memorials submitted by Wang, but mainly it was possible because of the support from the Minister of War

[543] For a good review of these southern campaigns and Wang's role as a military leader, please read George L. Israel's *Doing good and ridding evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming*, 46-113.
[544] Wang Qiong was also impressed by Wang Yangming's military knowledge. *MS*, *juan* 195, 5160.
[545] Wang, "Xie en shu" 謝恩疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 9, 298.
[546] Yang Zhengxian 楊正顯, *Yixin yun shiwu: Zhengde shiqi de Wang Yangming* 一心運時務: 正德時期 (1506-21) 的王陽明, 99.
[547] Israel, *Doing good and ridding evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming*, 79.

Wang Qiong.[548] These requests for field authority and freedom in command were risky politically and potentially deadly.[549] But the net result and the reward for the court's decision on this issue was the killing and capture of eighty-six bandit leaders and their three thousand followers, while some further two thousand dependents were taken prisoner— all these within 2 months after Wang received his new title and discretionary power.[550] By the end of the southern Gan campaign, Wang managed to bring the area back under Ming control and established three counties that have remained to this day: Pinghe 平和 in southwestern Fujian, Chongyi 崇義 in southern Jiangxi, and Heping 和平 in northern Guangdong.[551]

However, it is important to note that with the broad discretionary power invested in Wang Yangming, he was also able to set up his own private secretariat and recruit his own *muliao* for the southern Gan campaign. One of Wang's earliest *muliao* was Long Guang 龍光 (1470–1554) from Jishui county, in Jiangxi. Once the Grand Coordinator Wang arrived in southern Gan, he continued to engage in intellectual discussions with the local literati, especially those who came from Jiangxi and who flocked to see him because of his literary reputation.[552] According to Luo Hongxian who wrote Long Guang's epitaph, Long Guang's son Long Lüxiang was one such

[548] See "Gongzhi daozei er ce shu" 攻治盜賊二策疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 9, 315.
[549] The discretionary power that was granted to Wang Yangming became a contested point among political factions in the court when Wang was recalled to the government in 1527 to quell a rebellion in Guangxi. Wang was accused of crossing the Ming border into Vietnam— an accusation that was somewhat credible only because of Wang's freedom of action in the field. See Timothy Brook's "What happens when Wang Yangming crosses the border?" in Diana Lary ed. *The Chinese State at the Borders*, 74-90.
[550] Wang, "Hengshuitong gang jieyin shu" 橫水桶崗捷音疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 10, 338-349.
[551] For the establishment of the three counties, please see Wang, "Li Chongyi xian zhi shu" 立崇義縣治疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 10, 350-352, "Tianzhi Heping xian zhi shu" 添置和平縣治疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 11, 366-371, and "Zaiyi Pinghexian zhi shu" 再議平和縣治疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 11, 380-383.
[552] Zhang Yixi 張藝曦, *Yangming xue de xiangli shijian: yi Ming zhongwan qi Jiangxi Jishui, Anfu liangxian wei li* 陽明學的鄉里實踐：以明中晚期江西吉水，安福兩縣為例, 55.

admirer of Wang Yangming while Long Guang himself was initially hostile to Wang's teaching and forbade his son from attending Wang's lectures.[553] After a change of perception on Long Guang's part, he decided to become a follower of Wang and joined as his *muliao*.[554] Long Guang then assisted Wang for the rest of his campaign in the south until its conclusion in 1518. Another literatus that was recruited by Wang was Ji Yuanheng 冀元亨 (?–1522), a provincial examination degree holder from Huguang 湖廣 and a follower of Wang's teaching when Wang was serving his political exile in Guizhou. Qi Yuanheng later became a *muliao* and a tutor to Wang's children when Wang moved to southern Gan as *xunfu*.[555] When rumours of regional rebellion were circulating in Beijing, Grand Coordinator Wang was granted the additional role as superintendent of military affairs by the Minister of War and was ordered to stay put in Ganzhou 贛州 to keep an eye on the Prince of Ning, even though Wang had completed his assignment of ending the banditry in southern Gan.[556] Wang then sent Ji Yuanheng to conduct espionage at the Prince of Ning's residence in Nanchang, where the prince was also recruiting literati for his *mufu*. Ji then gathered enough proof that confirmed the prince's intention to start a rebellion, then managed to escape before he was captured. It was a daring exploit for a literatus.[557]

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[553] Luo Hongxian who was a Jishui county native himself, was stopped in his tracks to attend Wang Yangming's lecture by his father Luo Xun 羅循. See Zhang, *Yangming xue de xiangli shijian: yi Ming zhongwan qi Jiangxi Jishui, Anfu liangxian wei li*, 92.

[554] Luo Hong Xian 羅洪先, "Ming gu Zhili Xuzhou panguan Beishan Long jun muzhiming" 明故直隸滁州判官北山龍君墓志銘, in *Luo Hongxian ji* 羅洪先集, *juan* 21, 862.

[555] Wang, "Zi liubu shenli Ji Yuanheng" 咨六部申理冀元亨, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 17, 608.

[556] Qian Dehong,"Nianpu" 年譜, in *Wang Yangming quanji*, *juan* 34, 1258-1259.

[557] Ji Yuangheng was arrested for collusion with the enemy after Zhu Chenhao's defeat as Wang Yangming's enemies in the court used Ji as a political pawn in plotting against Wang. Ji was tortured to force him to implicate Wang as siding with the Prince of Ning. Ji refused and was only released from prison in the first year of Jiajing's reign. He died 5 days later after being freed. Ji was the only *muliao* who earned a place next to Wang Yangming's biographical entry in *Ming shi*. *MS*, *juan* 195, 5169-5170.

When the news of Prince of Ning's rebellion reached Wang and his entourage in Fengcheng 豐城 in June 1519, "Long Guang's fellow *muliao* were speechless with shock and could not formulate any plans [to deal with the emergency]".[558] According to Luo Hongxian, it was Long Guang's idea that Wang Yangming should change his course at the very last minute and journeyed south to Ji'an, thus saving him from clutches of Zhu Chenghao, the Prince of Ning.[559] When Wang and his entourage were escaping to the south by boat, he and his *muliao* came up with a plan to deceive Zhu Chenhao into believing that the court had already known his plan for insurgency beforehand and had been assembling an 400,000 strong army as response.[560] Qian Dehong gave a detailed account of how the Wang's *muliao* (Long Guang, together with Lei Ji 雷濟, Xiao Yu 蕭禹, and Wang Zuo 王佐) plotted successfully against the rebel prince and his own *muliao*— contributing to the rebel's defeat at Lake Poyang on 20th August 1519.

Because of the urgency of the rebellion and the fact that Wang Yangming had no troops directly under his command (this was after the conclusion of his southern Gan campaign), the Grand Coordinator had to rely on the secondment of local officials (such as the prefect of Ji'an, Wu Wending 伍文定) and the recruitment of more local literati for his fight against the rebels. Besides the *muliao* mentioned earlier, Li Zhong 李中 (1514 *jinshi*) was a renowned literatus and Confucian scholar of Jishui, had earlier entered into Wang's *mufu* as a military advisor in the southern

[558] Luo, "Ming gu Zhili Xuzhou panguan Beishan Long jun muzhiming," in *Luo Hongxian ji*, *juan* 21, 862.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Qian Dehong 錢德洪, "Zhen Chenhao fanjian yishi" 征宸濠反間遺事, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 39, 1468-1474.

Gan campaign but continued to serve during the Prince's rebellion.[561] Another local literatus elite, Lan Chun 藍純, who was serving as a *yiguan* 義官(voluntary official) in Jishui county and renowned for his bravery, was recommended by Ji'an prefect Wu Wending to serve under Wang Yangming, becoming his most trusted advisor.[562]

Luo Hongxian was of the opinion that Wang Yangming might not have achieved his military success in the south if he had not actively sought out "those among the people who were savvy about the military (*zhibing zhe* 知兵者) and treated them with the right propriety".[563] It was the largest group of literati *muliao* that was privately gathered (and recorded) since the time of Zhu Yuanzhang. According to Lü Jingbo's research, there were as many as twenty-four literati who were recruited into Wang's *mufu* during the Prince of Ning rebellion.[564] Twelve of these *muliao* were recruited privately by Wang Yangming while the rest were civil officials who were recruited under secondment about whom which Wang was required to memorialise the court.[565]

Not only did Wang Yangming recruited his private group of *muliao*, the Prince of Ning also had his *mufu* staffed with literati such as Li Shishi 李士實, Liu Yangzheng 劉養正, and Xie Shichen 謝時臣. At one point, the prince also recruited the famous Tang Yin 唐寅, who later discovered the prince's treasonous intention and according to an anecdote escaped by feigning madness.[566] No self-respecting rebel prince would start a rebellion without gathering around him men of learning whose

[561] Luo Hongxian, "Ming gu tongyi daifu zongdu Nanjing liangchu duchayuan youfu duyushi Guping Li xhiansheng xingzhuang" 明故通議大夫總督南京糧儲都察院右副都御史谷平李先生行狀, in *Luo Hongxian ji*, *juan* 18, 748.
[562] Zhang, *Yangming xue de xiangli shijian: yi Ming zhongwan qi Jiangxi Jishui, Anfu liangxian wei li*, 127-8.
[563] Luo, "Ming gu Nantian Lan jun muzhiming" 明故南田藍君墓誌銘, in *Luo Hongxian ji*, *juan* 21, 843.
[564] Lü, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 64.
[565] Wang, "Liu yong guanyuan shu" 留用官員疏, in *Wang Yangming quan ji*, *juan* 12, 396.
[566] *MS*, *juan* 286, 735

military knowledge could have tipped the balance and influenced the outcome. Even the seasoned soldier Prince of Yan, Zhu Di had with him the monk-strategist Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝 as adviser, what more if it was just an imperial clansman (*zongshi* 宗室) such as Zhu Chenhao who spent his entire life living in princely prestige and luxury, who hardly travelled outside his fief, and most importantly, never had any practical military experience at all.[567]

These military-savvy literati in return helped Wang Yangming to defeat the rebels by employing stratagems and engaging in psychological warfare by sowing doubts and discord (*fanjian* 反間) within the prince's ranks. And in the case of Ji Yuanheng, some of them even played the roles of a spy. These literati *muliao* were able to make informed decisions and gave the required strategic advice— something that could only happen if these literati had studied military works besides the Confucian canon. It is also worth mentioning that because of the urgency of coming up with a military response to the rebellion, Wang Yangming had to recruit his men locally and hence most of his *muliao* during the rebellion came from Jiangxi— specifically from the counties of Jishui and Anfu. It is safe to assume that at least half of these Jiangxi *muliao* were knowledgeable in military matters and so, it is highly probable that by mid-Ming, many literati were still interested in military knowledge, even though the civil service examinations requirement forced them to devote most of their time and energy on the canonical classics.

The significance of Wang Yangming's *mufu*, and to a large extent, Zhu Chenhao's too, lies in the fact that the war was a contest between two military leaders with their literati *muliao*. The narrative, traditionally, had been one that focused on the

[567] The kind of life led by a Ming prince is briefly but accurately summarized in David M. Robinson's "Princely Courts of the Ming Dynasty", in *Ming Studies*, 65, (2012): 1-12.

strategic brilliance of the philosopher-general versus the incompetence so pathetically demonstrated by the prince. In reality, it was also a war that was fought on the battlefield among soldiers, and behind closed doors of the two private secretariats where literati became military advisers, pitting their knowledge of military classics against one another. The fact that the rebellion only lasted for forty-two days before it was put down limited the interaction between these literati *muliao* and also the possibility of self-reflection that was required for the production and transmission of military thoughts and knowledge— something that would likely have happened in a prolonged conflict. Nevertheless, the success of Wang Yangming's *mufu* paved the way for a revival of the *mufu* system that used to flourish in the early days of the empire. It gave the later Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders the legitimate precedence to create and staff their own private secretariats (via private recruitment and also bureaucratic appointment), when they were dispatched from the central government to the provinces to tackle local problems. When these problems were military in nature, and there were increasingly more of them from the middle of the 16th century, it was imperative that literati who were well-versed in military affairs were recruited. When the *wokou* crisis during emperor Jiajing's reign posed a serious threat to the overall stability of the empire and a Supreme Commander had to be dispatched, it heralded in the 'golden age' of the Ming *mufu*, and of the military culture of the literati.

4.4 The Mid-Ming *mufu* of Hu Zongxian

Since the end of the practice of the private recruitment of men of talent brought forth by Zhu Yuanzhang, many literati had lamented the demise of the centuries-old practice whereby a high level official could enlist low-ranking officials with a high level of autonomy from the central government (the afore-mentioned *pishu* system) that was the foundation of the *mufu*. These literati idealised the ancient *pishu* system, citing examples from the Tang dynasty, which they felt was founded partly because men of talents were recognized and recruited [under the *pishu* system] without any discrimination.[568] Such sentiments did not come as a surprise since the increasingly competitive civil examinations very much guaranteed that only a selected few would be able to attain the coveted *jinshi* degree and even fewer would eventually land a career in the government. Many literati thus looked to the idealised past where scholars were supposedly simply recognised for their talents rather than their achievements in examinations. In absence of the *pishu* system, what would the majority of literati do if they failed to make it into the civil service via the default path of civil examinations?

Tang Shunzhi's friend, Wang Shenzhong, talked about the plight of Ming poets who failed to enter into the civil service:

> When one looked at the poets in the Tang period whose talents were unrecognised, one would observe that these men were not against paying respect to those who were from high places, …during those times, court officials were allowed to recommend talents, regional governors were permitted to employ [their own] officials, and as a result, unrecognised poets though frustrated in the examination halls, were fortunate in being recommended and employed.

[568] Wang Qiao 王樵, "Zeng Yuan Eryin xu" 贈袁二尹序, in *Fanglu ji* 方麓集, *juan 3*, *SKQS,* vol. 1285, 171.

> 予觀唐世詩人不偶者，顧不以謁顯者為戒，……其時公卿得以薦士，節鎮得以辟官，故不偶之詩人雖失意于場屋，而多僥倖于薦辟。[569]

In reality, whilst Wang Shengzhong was lamenting the misfortune of poets, a gradual revival of the system of *mufu* that resembled those of earlier dynasties was already taking place. The success of Wang Yangming's *mufu* in aiding the philosopher-general was not unnoticed by some mid-Ming scholars. In lieu of an official career via the civil examinations, joining a *mufu* was considered an honourable career that helped the reputation of individual literatus.[570] More importantly, Wang's private recruitment of local talents during the times of military emergency became gradually acceptable once again. Literati with some degree of military knowledge, and there were quite a number of them by the mid-Ming, saw this as a legitimate way to serve their country regardless of their achievements in civil examinations, as they could now offer their service to the various high-ranking officials who were given temporary assignments of a military nature. These private secretariats would in turn provide the intellectual space for literati to exchange military knowledge and refine their military thought.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the increased military activities (especially those concerning the Japanese pirates) during the mid 16th century necessitated the granting of greater autonomy in the management of human resource among the regional governors— the Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders

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[569] Wang Shengzhong 王慎中, "Song shiren Shen Qingmen xu" 送詩人沈青門序, in *Zunyan ji* 遵言集 , *juan* 11.

[570] Ni Yajing 倪雅靜 and Gu Guohua 顧國華, "Lun Kangwou mingjiang Hu Zongxian muxia wenren de maodun xintai" 論抗倭名將胡宗憲幕下文人的矛盾心態, in *Journal of Yancheng Teachers University(Humanities & Social Sciences Edition)* 鹽城師範學院學報, 38, no. 1 (Jan 2018), 40.

which were supposedly temporary assignments. As the military emergencies on the southeastern coast became dire, the Ming court had no choice but to grant the successive Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders a larger degree of autonomy so as they could deal with the changing situations in the field appropriately.[571]

When Hu Zongxian was asked to succeed the unfortunate Zhang Jing as the Supreme Commander of Southern Metropolitan Area, Zhejiang, and Fujian (a role created by the court specifically to deal with the wokou crisis) in April 1556 with his headquarters in Hangzhou, he was possibly the most powerful official in China outside of Beijing. His predecessor Zhang Jing was the Supreme Commander of Shandong, the Southern Metropolitan Region, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi— wielding unspecified civil and military power over a total of six coastal provinces before his fall from grace and death.[572] It was an unprecedented move by the Ming court, and goes to show how seriously the government perceived the *wokou* threat. When Hu succeeded Zhang as the man in charge of the entire Ming offensive against the *wokou*, he was careful not to suffer the same fate as his predecessor— as the promotion to such a high-profile official role also came with enormous risks. Hu was quite successful in this regard as he held on to the post for six and a half years, the longest compared to his predecessors— achieved no doubt with the political backing from Grand Secretary Yan Song and the Jiajing emperor.[573] Hu's talent in military command helped.[574] But more importantly, his acute political sense that

[571] Lü, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 28.
[572] *DMB*, 47.
[573] Idem. 634.
[574] Hu's military achievements tend to be overshadowed (often deliberately) by 'heavyweights' such as Qi Jiguang and Yu Dayou. The fact was that Hu had been an abled commander himself since before his appointment as Supreme Commander in 1556. See Ivy Maria Lim, "Qi Jiguang and Hu Zongxian's Anti-wokou Campaign", in *The Maritime Defence of China*: Ming General Qi Jiguang and Beyond, Teddy Y.H. Sim ed. 29-31.

helped him navigate the treacherous political undercurrent that was beneath the grand campaign against the *wokou*. On top of these, Hu had a gifted and effective team of subordinates working under him during his tenure as the Supreme Commander.

When Huang Zongxi examined the private secretariat of Hu Zongxian during the mid-Ming, he wrote:

> When I looked at Hu's *mufu*, [I could see] Zhou Yunyuan's knowledge of *Yijing* and astronomy, He Xinying as a knight errant, the poetry and literary works of Xu Wei and Shen Jiaze, an also Zong Xin's skills in negotiation, these were exceptional people like the ancients! Not many could be their equals, let alone mere scholars who earned their degrees and accolades from the examination halls!
>
> 吾观胡之幕府，周云渊之易历，何心隐之游侠，徐文长、沈嘉则之诗文，及宗信之游说，皆古振奇人也! 旷世且不可得，岂场屋之功名，所敢望哉![575]

Hu Zongxian's *mufu* was staffed with numerous talented individuals in the mid-Ming— offering their talents in service of a worthy but difficult cause of ending the piracy threat in the eastern coasts of China. And like those *muliao* serving Wang Yangming before them, these literati came from various backgrounds and most did not have any official qualifications. The success of Wang Yangming's *mufu* in military crises became a kind of model that later grand coordinators and supreme commanders could emulate. Although not all the *muliao* were directly involved with the military in Hu's tent government, those who were managed to accomplish much. Hu Zongxian had with him a purpose-driven tent government with only one objective- the total eradication of the *wokou* threat from China's eastern coast. It was a different kind of military crisis compared to what Wang Yangming was facing. It was not an

[575] Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲, *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黄宗羲全集, 598.

internal rebellion where the enemies of the state were not that different in terms of strategic thoughts and tactical conventions. Even the formidable Mongols were predictable in these regards. But the *wokou* brought a different kind of warfare to the coasts and even the hinterland. They employed guerrilla tactics- that demanded a different kind of tactical response from the ill-prepared Ming army. The urban battles with its close-quarter engagements required a radical re-thinking of military training and organisation for the Ming army (which culminated in the publication of Qi Jiguang's tried-and-tested training methodology in his military treatises). The challenges were many. Hu Zongxian had to recruit the best advisors and administrators for his temporary command if he was to have any chance of winning the war against the *wokou*.

Owing to the relative stability of Hu's regional administration, those literati who were dealing in military matters had the space and time to develop their military thoughts further through active interaction with other like-minded scholars, and through actual participation in military campaigns— all within the comfortable confines of the Supreme Commander's *mufu*.

4.5 Xu Wei as Hu Zongxian's *muliao*

Of all the talented literati mentioned by Huang Zongxi, Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593) was probably the most well-known. Often touted by mainland Chinese scholars as an anti-'feudal' figure because of Xu's self-image as an iconoclast and eccentric, and his famous cursing of the emperor, recent studies have shown that Xu was not the kind of anti-establishment hermit as which he has been frequently typecast.[576] As a native of Shaoxing 紹興 in Zhejiang, Xu was to witness firsthand the onslaught of the

[576] Edward Isaac Luper, "Lord and Minister Like Fish and Water: Xu Wei's Poems on Emperors Past and Present", in *Ming Studies*, issue 75, (May 2017), 2.

wokou with all its brutality. When general Yu Dayou marched into Shaoxing to meet with Wang Yu, Grand Coordinator of Fujian and Zhejiang, after defeating the *wokou* in a major naval battle in 1553, Xu Wei composed a gift poem to celebrate the general's victory:

> As a lone city sitting enjoined with the eastern coast;
> how could it stay whole when ravaged by passing bandits?
> As the *mufu* set up new camps for *Yue* cavalry;
> Our general equal to those of yore took command of the battleships.
> As the fierce battle was raging throughout spring, the sky darkened ;
> Pursuing deep into the night all over the islands and sandbanks.
> I hear that the victory rewards will have to wait;
> As Kou Xun will only need one more year.
>
> 孤城一帶海東懸，寇盜經過幾處全？
> 幕府新營開越騎，漢家名將號樓船。
> 經春苦戰風雲暗，深夜窮追島嶼連。
> 見說論功應有待，寇恂真慾借明年。[577]

The poem expressed Xu's admiration of Yu Dayou, alluding to military success with the Eastern Han general Kou Xun 寇恂, whose capture of Wang Mang's Luoyang was pivotal in helping Liu Xiu established the Eastern Han dynasty. The final victory against the *wokou* did not happen in the following year as Xu hoped. In the same year, Xu sent off a fellow literatus Lü Guangwu 呂光午, who decided to join the army to fight against the *wokou*.[578] Lü Guangwu was the brother of Lü Guangsheng 呂光升, who with nine other literati (including Xu Wei, and Shen Lian 沈鍊, who was subsequently killed because of his criticism of the Yan Song), was a member of a literary society made up of Shaoxing intellectuals. Most of its members were

[577] Xu Wei 徐渭, "Zeng Yu canjiang gong" 贈俞參將公, from *Xu Wen Chang yigao* 徐文長逸稿, in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集, 790.
[578] Xu Wei, "Zeng Lü Zhengbing chang pian" 贈呂正賓長篇, in *Xu Wei ji*, 113.

followers of Wang Yangming's teachings. According to Wang Shizhen, Shen Lian was mentored by philosopher-general himself when he was still a young student.[579] It was an intellectual circle where Wang Yangming's philosophical teachings and his military achievements were held in high regard. Both Shen Lian and Xu Wei have learnt martial arts as young men.[580] The literary society afforded these scholars a space to nurture a budding military culture that was no doubt encouraged by the real military threat of the *wokou*.

Likely inspired by the martial ideals and patriotism displayed by his compatriots, Xu travelled to Gaobu 皋埠, east of Shaoxing, to offer his strategic advice to the local magistrate Liu Xi 劉錫. Favouring a more defensive approach, the magistrate rejected Xu's proposal which was more aggressive.[581] Though disappointed, Xu stayed on to help with bolstering the defense of the city in anticipation of a new wave of *wokou* attacks. It was during these encounters with the military and the civil bureaucracy that Xu was inspired to write poetry that lamented the plight of the soldiers and criticised the rampant corruption of those who were in command.[582] It was clear that at this juncture of his life, military matters had become an important focus for Xu Wei.

Despite being in the company of Shaoxing natives who were successful in the civil examinations (Zhu Dashou 諸大綬 was awarded the optimus of imperial examination of 1556, together with two other *jinshi*), Xu himself failed the civil examinations repeatedly. However, with his celebrated literary reputation, Xu Wei

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[579] Wang Shizhen, "Shen Qingxia muzhiming" 沈青霞墓志铭, in *Wang Shizhen wenxuan* 王世貞文選, 110.
[580] Peng Yingshi 彭應時, who instructed the Xu in the use of *jian* 劍 when Xu was fifteen year old, was killed in a battle against the *wokou*. Xu Wei wrote a short biography to commemorate his teacher. See Xu Wei, "Peng Yingshi xiao zhuan" 彭應時小傳, in *Xu Wei ji*, 628.
[581] Xu Wei, "Ni shangfu shu" 擬上府書, in *Xu Wei ji*, 461.
[582] Xu Wei, "Haishang qu" 海上曲, in *Xu Wei ji*, 59.

caught the eye Hu Zongxian and was then recruited by him in 1557 when the latter was given the additional post of Grand Coordinator of Zhejiang.[583] It was an immense honour for Hu and this gesture represented the Jiajing emperor's highest trust and expectation. Xu Wei was charged with composing a memorial to the emperor on Hu's behalf to express his gratitude to the Jiajing emperor. Amongst Xu's many written works produced during his tenure in Hu's *mufu*, this Memorial of the White Deer (Bailu biao 白鹿表) must count as the most famous of his literary output at the time. Capitalising on Jiajing's obsession with Daoist mysticism and fascination with auspicious signs (*xiangrui* 祥瑞), Xu Wei transformed a congratulatory memorial (penned by another *muliao* originally) into a literary tour de force of political strategy. With the death of his patron, the Minister of Works Zhao Wenhua, and the renewed wave of *wokou* intrusion in 1558, Hu Zongxian found himself in a precarious situation as the impatient emperor was displeased with Hu's progress. Grand Secretariat Yan Song's political enemies smelled blood and were quick to encircle Yan and those whom they considered as his henchmen. Hu Zongxian was increasingly isolated as he was rapidly losing the backing from the central court. The capture of a white deer (an auspicious beast) in Zhoushan 舟山 became a golden opportunity for Hu to regain imperial favour.[584] The key here was the drafting of a memorial to congratulate the emperor— a task that was completed eventually by Xu Wei in a spectacular fashion. The memorial managed to 'buy time' for Hu Zongxian and was instrumental in ending the most serious *wokou* threat faced by the Ming regime. It was at this critical moment that Xu Wei became an indispensable member of Hu's talented entourage.

[583] Some scholars tended to record 1558 as the year when Xu Wei first joined Hu's entourage. In fact, that was the year that Xu re-entered Hu's *mufu*.
[584] *MS*, *juan* 205, 5413.

Xu Wei's entry into Hu Zongxian's *mufu* was a turning point for the disillusioned scholar, who went on to build a short, but successful career as a *muliao*.

Although Xu Wei became an important member of Hu Zongxian's entourage primarily for his literary talents, he also had the opportunity to offer his strategic advice to his master. The successful capture and execution of the *wokou* leaders, Xu Hai 徐海 and Wang Zhi 王直 are traditionally attributed to Xu Wei's strategic thinking, although it was likely a collaborative effort between the muliao, the military officers, and Hu himself.[585] Although flamboyant and vocal, Xu Wei had nonetheless confessed of his own adequacy as a military strategist.[586] In military matters, he was deadly serious. In Xu's detailed proposal on the campaign against Wang Zhi who was in control of the strategic archipelago of Zhoushan (near Ningbo, Zhejiang), the *muliao* advised Hu Zongxian on the importance of *zhijun* (治軍 managing the troops) but cautioned on the overreliance of *shangfa* (賞罰 punishment and reward). According to Xu Wei, *shangfa* is "useful in ensuring that the troops would follow orders when marching in formation, but ultimate useless in the heat of battle where soldiers would choose cowardice when facing insurmountable odds."[587] Xu then suggested in organising the army into squads of five men, followed by platoons of twenty-five men, and companies of a hundred men— achieving Sun Tzu's "commanding many as if a few." It seems that so far, Xu Wei did not bring anything new to the table as he was reiterating conventional military wisdom from the classics. But for the rest of the proposal, Xu demonstrated his strategic thinking that was based on the realistic requirements of fighting in an archipelago of islands, where the complexity increases due to the combination of naval and land warfare. Xu's strategic

[585] Qian Qianyi, "Xu Jishi Wei" 徐記室渭, in *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 510.
[586] Xu, "Ni shang dufu shu" 擬上督府書, in *Xu Wei ji*, 465.
[587] Idem. 463.

thinking was based on his experience of previously "serving among the troops in Gaobu, surveying the bandits' strongholds by boat, and familiarizing himself with the geography of the region."[588]

When Tang Shunzhi was working alongside the Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian in Zhejiang, he would have interacted and cooperated with dozens or more *muliao*. One of them was Xu Wei. When Xu Wei mentioned how he "did not dare to say even one word in the presence of various commanders and officials" for fear of embarrassing himself, he was likely talking about being in the presence of one such as Tang Shunzhi.[589] Xu Wei had gained the acquaintance of Tang Shunzhi previously through the introduction of Wang Ji 王畿 and Ji Ben 季本, both disciples of Wang Yangming. Tang Shunzhi was passing through Shaoxing in 1552 and was invited by the locals Wang and Ji to join them in a gathering on a boat. Xu Wei was already a student of Ji Ben and he was present at this gathering— subsequently writing a poem to commemorate the event.[590] Tang was sufficiently impressed by the literary talent of Xu Wei that they remained in touch from then on. Xu Wei respected Tang and regarded him as his teacher. When Xu Wei met Tang Shunzhi again in 1558, Tang, who was both the leader of the Tang-Song literary movement and a military commander at the same time must have been inspirational for Xu. There was frequent interaction between the two men in the six months that Tang was working under the Supreme Commander.[591]

Xu Wei, like many military-minded literati, were fond of military men and eager to cultivate friendship with them. Besides interacting with his fellow literati in

[588] Xu, "Ni shang dufu shu" 擬上督府書, in *Xu Wei ji*, 465.
[589] Zhou Qun 周群 and Xie Jianhua 謝建華, *Xu Wei Pinzhuan* 徐渭評傳, 47.
[590] Xu Wei, "Renzi Wujing Tang xiansheng guo Kuaiji, lunwen zhou zhong, fu xie zhu gong song dao Keting er bie, fu ci" 壬子武進唐先生過會稽，論文舟中，復偕諸公送到柯亭而別，賦此
, in *Xu Wei ji*, 66.
[591] Idem. 1334.

the *mufu*, Xu would find opportunity to interact with military men. He would ride out with them on military patrol and hunt. These excursions were highlights during Xu Wei's time under Hu Zongxian's employment so much so that Xu would compose poetry on these occasions after getting intoxicated. In one of the hunts which Xu Wei participated, Xu's colleague Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (1518–1596) who had missed the event, commemorated it in a poem that captured vividly that martial ethos of Xu Wei:

> The scholar Xu with a heroic spirit and a heart of valour,
> Desires to chase the wind for ten thousand *li*;
> Defeating many enemies with scholarship and swordsmanship,
> The spirit in eyes that are clear as the water in autumn.
> 徐生氣豪心膽雄，直欲萬里追長風
> 學書學劍萬人敵，一雙瞳神秋水碧。[592]

Xu Wei also befriended the likes of renowned generals such as Qi Jiguang and Yu Dayou, and junior commanders such as — writing poetry to congratulate them for their respective military victories.[593]

Xu Wei, like Wang Shengzhong and others before him, continued to idealise in his writings the ancient system of *mufu* where all talents were recognized, regardless of their social status, or if they were successful in the civil examinations.[594] This was because the Ming court merely loosened their grip on human resource matters in regional administrations rather than leaving it entirely up to the Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders. The regional coordinators and commanders

[592] Xu Wei 徐渭, "Zeng Yu canjiang gong" 贈俞參將公, from *Xu Wen Chang yigao* 徐文長逸稿, in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集, 790.
[593] Shen Mingchen 沈明臣, "Chu lie pian wei Xu Jishi yu Wang jiangjun zuo" 出獵篇為徐記室與王將軍作, from *Fengdui lou shi xuan* 豐對樓詩選, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, vol. 144, 209.
[594] Xu Wei, "Daizeng jinwei zhen xu" 代贈金衛鎮序, in *Xu Wei ji*, 934-935.

could now source for their talents, but they could only hire them officially after informing, and waiting for approval from the court. The court did reject some of these personnel recommendations, as seen in the case of Tang Shunzhi from the previous chapter, when Weng Wanda's memorial to reinstate Tang fell on deaf ears in the central government. However, even though there existed still a fundamental difference between old and new *mufu* system, the net effect of this newly granted autonomy was that a greater variety of men of talent could now be employed regionally. Many of these *muliao* became military advisors and private secretaries, while others even took on the roles of tutors educating the offspring of their employers.[595]

For this reason, despite Xu Wei's reminiscence of the glorious *mufu* of the past, joining Hu Zongxian's *mufu* actually gave Xu Wei the platform to strengthen his reputation as one of China's greatest intellectuals and artists, and arguably, a brilliant strategist. Unfortunately, Xu's career after leaving Hu's *mufu* was never to achieve these heights again.[596]

4.6 Zheng Ruozeng and *Chou Hai Tu Bian* 籌海圖編

The *muliao* serving under Hu Zongxian were literati of different backgrounds. They were hired chiefly for their literary talent. The *mufu*, even though a temporary civil and military administration in principle, was nonetheless burdened with paperwork. The literati fit the job requirements like gloves— drafting official documents that circulated within the administration and those that were dispatched to Beijing. They also composed important memorials meant for the eyes of the emperor (such as the congratulatory memorial written by Xu Wei and discussed above).

[595] Chen, "Ming dai mu bin zhi du chu tang", 136.
[596] Zhu, *Ming Qing zhijiao wenren youmu yu wenxue shengtai: yi Xu Wei, Fang Wen, Zhi Yizun wei ge an*, 35.

Military talent was more of a bonus, than a prerequisite. However, this did not deter scholars with military, or other interests, to join the *mufu*. One such individual was Zheng Ruozeng, who joined Hu Zongxian's *mufu* and distinguished himself as a geographer and a military thinker.

Zheng Ruozeng 鄭若曾 (1503–1570) became a *gongsheng* 貢生, or tribute student, and entered the National University (*Guozijian* 國子監) in 1536. Although lower in rank compared to those scholars who sat for the metropolitan examinations, a sizeable number of tribute students who graduated from the National University were given official posts in the government in the earlier times. But by the Jiajing period, such appointments were no longer as common. Zheng Ruozeng sat for the provincial examinations twice and failed both times.[597] Disillusioned with the civil examinations, he returned to his hometown to devote his time to study and teaching.

As a young man growing up in Kunshan 崑山, Jiangsu province, Zheng Ruozeng had been a student of Wei Jiao 魏校, a prominent scholar who also taught another Kunshan native, Gui Youguang. Zheng and Gui both went on to marry the daughters of Wei Xiang 魏庠, cousin of Wei Jiao. After quitting the examinations for good, Zheng Ruozeng became a student of the renowned Confucian, Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水.[598] Zheng also became friends of Tang Shunzhi and Mao Kun— two scholars who together with Gui Youguang and a few others, were part of the Tang-Song literary movement (see chapter two). This group of literati was influenced by the contemporary intellectual current that was dominated by the teachings of Wang Yangming and Chan Ruoshui, believing that as a Confucian, one should contribute

[597] *DMB*, 204-205.
[598] Zheng Ruozeng 鄭若曾, *Zheng Kaiyang zazhu* 鄭開陽雜著, in *SKQS*, vol. 584, 1-2.

something to the society rather than devoting oneself entirely to intellectual pursuit.[599] As the pursuit of literary excellence for the sake of the civil examinations had lost its luster after repeated attempts, Zheng, like his circle of literati friends, decided to focus on studies that were practical in nature. In the mid-Ming, this likely meant a field of specialisation such as the military arts and history. It was not a coincidence when the paths of these three men converged in the *mufu* of Hu Zongxian.

While his friend Tang Shunzhi committed himself to the study of military arts, Zheng Ruozeng turned his attention to the study of geography of China's coastal regions with the objective of devising a comprehensive strategy of coastal defense.[600] He started to collect source materials in the late 1540s with the encouragement and financial support of Tang Shunzhi. Zheng was encouraged by Tang Shunzhi to begin his study simply because since the beginning of the Ming, there had been insufficient serious works written about the Japan and coastal defense. Tang Shunzhi wished that Zheng's work would become the standard that generations after would benefit from.[601] The first fruits of his labour was *Yanhai tuben* 沿海圖本 (1555), a strategic atlas of the coastal region ranging from the Liaodong Peninsula to southern Guangdong.[602] Twelve maps were produced for this atlas after a wave of *wokou* incursions that directly threatened Zheng's hometown Kunshan took place in 1552. The prefect of Suzhou, Wang Daoxing 王道行 was so impressed by the manuscript of *Yanhai tuben* that he helped Zheng to publish it. After the publication of *Yanhai tuben* and encouraged by its reception, Zheng started on what would become his magnum

[599] *DMB*, 205.
[600] Zheng Ruozeng, *Chouhai tubian* 籌海圖編, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成, vol. 15, 1.
[601] Li Gongzhong 李恭忠 and Li Xia 李霞, "Wokou jiyi yu Zhongguo haiquan guannian de yanjin cong *Chouhai tubian* dao *Yangfang jiyao* de kaocha" 倭寇記憶與中國海權觀念的演進: 從《籌海圖編》到《洋防輯要》的考察, in *Jianghai Xuekan* 江海學刊, no. 3 (2007), 151.
[602] *DMB*, 205.

opus, *Chouhai tubian* 籌海圖編. For the next few years Zheng would take every opportunity to conduct geographical surveys of the coastal regions— collecting the latest and most updated information from various sources that had to do with coastal defense.[603] After Tang Shunzhi passed away in 1560, Wang Daoxing became Zheng's patron. Wang then sent a copy of *Yanhai tuben* to Hu Zongxian around the time when he was appointed as the Supreme Commander. Hu Zongxian was so impressed by the atlas that he invited Zheng to become part of his *mufu*.[604] Now with the support of a powerful patron who saw the value of a comprehensive study of coastal defense, Zheng worked at a breakneck speed and went on to complete *Chouhai tubian* in 1561.[605]

Despite being assigned under the category of Geography by the Qing editors of *Siku Quanshu*, *Chouhai tubian* was more than a work on geography. For *tubian* 圖編, the compilation of illustrations and maps, was meant to serve the objective of *chouhai* 籌海 or managing the seas for military purpose. Maps of China's coastal region that were produced before *Chouhai tubian* then to pay more attention to aesthetics— something that irked Zheng Ruozeng as he clearly wanted his maps to have strategic functions that were useful to the military.[606] This military objective was clearly articulated by the military officer Lu Tang 盧鏜 in his preface for *Chouhai tubian*:

> The author of *Chouhai tubian* will manage the southeast sea so as to pacify the *wokou*.

[603] Zheng Ruozeng, "Fan Weiyi xu" 范惟一序, in *Chouhai tubian*, 1.
[604] Tong Jie 童傑, "Zheng Ruozeng *Chouhai tubian* de shixue jiazhi" 鄭若曾《籌海圖編》的史學價值, in *Journal of Historiography* 史學史研究, issue 146, no. 2 (2012), 22.
[605] Ibid.
[606] Zheng, "Fan li" 凡例, in *Chouhai tubian*, 35.

《籌海圖編》者，籌東南之海，以靖倭寇也。[607]

The voluminous work contains thirteen *juan*, which are then divided into eight parts. Part one contains maps of the China's eastern coast and its offshore islands, and also surrounding countries such as Korea and Japan. Beginning with part two, Zheng Ruozeng was concerned with knowledge of the Japan and its people— all this for the sake of knowing one's enemies. Part three provides much more detailed maps of China's coastal region from the Liaodong Peninsula to Guangdong that were specifically targeted by *wokou*, together with an account of Ming troop distribution in these areas; part four gives a chronological record of *wokou* raids in this region while part five details the routes taken by the *wokou* in their incursion of China; part six records the different methods and strategies employed by Hu Zongxian to secure the Ming forces' victories against the Japanese pirates; part seven contains a moving account of Ming officials and civilians who had lost their lives in the struggle against the *wokou*; the final part discussed the how the Ming government dealt with the Japanese traditionally and also provides illustrations of the weapons and naval vessels used by both sides.

Zheng had initially planned for a more modest handbook that would help officials managing the coastal affairs to deal with the Japanese pirates.[608] Despite his ambition to defeat the *wokou* strategically and also having the generous support of his friend, Tang Shunzhi, it was simply beyond the means of an independent scholar to embark on an encyclopedic project of that magnitude. This changed when Zheng entered Hu Zongxian's *mufu*.

[607] Lu Tang 盧鎕. "Lu Tang Ba" 盧鎕跋, in *Chouhai tubian*, 1333.
[608] *DMB*, 206.

In his acknowledgment written after the completion *Chouhai Tubian*, Zheng carefully credited the people (many of were literati either serving as muliao or had experience handling military affairs) who had assisted him and made the publication of his work possible:

> This compilation began with an idea of Jingchuan, its completion assisted by Longchi, and the errors corrected by master Junior Guardian. And those who have provided their assistance are master Boquan Hu Song, master Qingjiang Du Zheng, master Zhongfang Fan Weiyi, master Loujiang Tang Ai, master Yangshan Ling Yunyi, master Erhua Tan Lun, master Yindong Wang Chunze, master Yi'an Tang Shu, master Yunzhai Yan Zhong, master Lumen Mao Kun, master Xianghai Zhai Chongxiao, master Songpo Li Xiu, master Nantang Qi Jiguang, master Shuinan Cai Rulan, and master Jiuhe Yu Xianke.
>
> 是編也，肇意於荊川，玉成於龍池，而少保公實釐正之。其翼而輔之者，則柏泉胡公松，晴江杜公拯，中方范公惟一，婁江唐公愛，洋山凌公雲翼，二華譚公綸，印東王公春澤，一庵唐公樞，允齋嚴公中，鹿門茅公坤，翔海載公沖霄，松坡黎公秀，南塘戚公繼光，水南蔡君汝蘭，九河俞君獻可。[609]

It was a necessary gesture as Zheng likely spent a little more than a year in Hu Zongxian's *mufu* before he resigned, and it was during his time in Hu's *mufu* when he received the most support for his work.[610]

So, who were these people who helped Zheng to complete *Chouhai tubian*? Jingchuan or Tang Shunzhi need no further introduction.[611] As a scholar who cared deeply about the Ming military, it was only logical that Tang inspired Zheng to devote his studies to a field that would increase the Ming military chance in defeating the

[609] Zheng Ruozeng, "Zheng Ruozeng yin" 鄭若曾引, in *Chouhai tubian*, 29-30.
[610] *DMB*, 205.
[611] Chang Bide, et al., ed. *Ming ren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 明人傳記資料索引, 398.

enemies from the sea. When Tang passed away in 1560, Zheng was able to continue his work because of the general support from Wang Daoheng 王道行 (sobriquet Longchi 龍池), prefect of Suzhou.[612] After completing the first draft, the Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian or the Junior Guardian referred to above helped Zheng in proof-reading and editing. According to Zheng Ruozeng, these three men contributed the most from the conceptualisation to the completion of *Chouhai tubian*.

However, Zheng's time as a *muliao* afforded him the opportunity to interact with other officials and scholars who essentially shared the same vision of defeating the *wokou* and were working tirelessly towards that goal. One of these officials was Hu Song 胡松 (1503-1566), who like his friend Tang Shunzhi, rose to prominence in the government because of Zhao Wenhua and Yan Song. When Zheng was serving in Hu's *mufu*, Hu Song was the Right Vice Censor-in-chief, the Grand Coordinator of Jiangxi, and was previously Provincial Administration Commissioner of Zhejiang (1539-40). Like Zheng, Hu Song was also a scholar who was devoted to practical statecraft.[613] Hu Song was also a friend of Luo Hongxian, whose work as a cartographer was exemplary.[614] As such, Hu Song would have seen the value of supporting Zheng Ruozeng's work. Mao Kun was also a *muliao* with impressive military experience serving in Hu Zongxian's *mufu* at this time. Having a keen interest in military matters, Mao Kun had even seen action in the field while suppressing the Yao people's revolt in Guangxi as Assistant Surveillance Commissioner (in charge of a Military Defense Circuit) before being forced into retirement in 1555.[615] Hu Zongxian called Mao into service as he admired the latter's

[612] Chang Bide, et al., ed. *Ming ren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 明人傳記資料索引, 61.
[613] *MS, juan* 202, 5345-5347.
[614] Li Chunfang 李春芳, "Libu shangshu zeng taizi shaobao shi Zhuangshu Hu gong Song muzhiming" 吏部尚書贈太子少保謚莊肅胡公松墓誌銘, in *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄, *juan* 25, 210-212.
[615] Chang, et al., ed. *Ming ren zhuanji ziliao suoyin,* 366.

military achievement.[616] Mao Kun was very much influenced by his good friend Tang Shunzhi's martial aspirations and he would become another supporter of Zheng Ruozeng. It was likely helpful that Mao was also a leading book collector of his time— his library (Baihua lou 白華樓) would have been an invaluable source of books for Zheng Ruozeng.[617] It is highly possible that through the network of Gui Youguang, Tang Shunzhi, Mao Kun, and Hu Song, Zheng was able to gain access to the cartographic portfolio of Luo Hongxian.

Among the many scholar-officials who had helped Zheng Ruozeng in his project, two individuals stand out particularly. Ling Yunyi 凌雲翼 and Tan Lun 譚綸 were awarded the *jinshi* degree three years apart (Tan 1544 in and Ling in 1547). Both men were battle-tested in the early stages of their career— as promising civil officials with military portfolios they managed defend the Ming regime against various enemies. They rose through the ranks and even became Ministers of War during the reigns of Longqing and Wanli.[618] These abled civil-military officials were part of the cadre that Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng relied on for his military reform beginning in the Longqing reign that lasted till the early years of the Wanli period. Tan Lun eventually passed away in 1577 while still serving as a Minister of War and was generally lauded by many for his even-handed yet highly disciplined military leadership.[619] Ling Yunyi, on the other hand, was dismissed from the civil service after being impeached for misconduct. Unlike Tan Lun, Ling had a reputation among

[616] Zhu Geng 朱賡, "Ming Henan ancha si fushi fengchi beibing Daming dao Lumen Mao gong muzhiming" 明河南安察副使奉敕備兵大名道鹿門茅公墓誌銘, in *Mao Kun ji* 茅坤集, 1348.
[617] Zhang Mengxin 張夢新, "Mao Kun zhushu kao" 茅坤著述考, in *Zhejiang daxue xuebao* 浙江大學學報, vol. 29, no. 5 (Oct 1999), 129.
[618] Tan Lun's biography in *MS*, *juan* 222, 5833-5836. Ling Yunyi's biography in *MS*, *juan* 222, 5861-5862.
[619] Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄, *juan* 39, 800-801.

his contemporaries for cruelty and being fond of killing.[620] The parallel careers of Tan Lun and Ling Yunyi that somehow ended differently managed to cast a light on the nature of the militarization of Ming civil-officials that blurred the lines the separate the *wen* from the *wu*— for these civil officials who discovered the savagery and brutality of their jobs also discovered something about themselves. Some managed to keep their sanity and their moral compass while others succumbed to the lure of violence.

What is remarkable was the network that Hu Zongxian's *mufu* could build for these literati to connect with one another in order to do something extraordinary. The *mufu* was a purpose-driven space. All the official records containing the latest on everything about the coastal region were available to Zheng.[621] When there were gaps of knowledge because of a lack of written records, Zheng was able to conduct interviews with both Ming subjects and Japanese pirates and hear their first-hand accounts. Most importantly, it was the concentration of so many literati whose minds were focused on military and strategy, who were able to transcend the social boundaries created by the civil examinations, gave Zheng the much-needed support and input to complete his monumental work in such a short time.

Hu Zongxian's *mufu* had a total of twenty-seven literati working under him. Out of these, twenty-three came from the Southern Metropolitan Region and Zhejiang— places that were ravaged by the *wokou*.[622] For example, literati such as Xu Wei, Shen Mingchen, and Tian Rucheng 田汝成 who helped to draft reports while producing military strategies were Zhejiang natives. Anhui native Luo Longwen 羅龍文 acted as negotiator and was instrumental in capturing the wokou leaders Xu

[620] *MS*, *juan* 222, 5862.
[621] Tong, "Zheng Ruozeng *Chouhai tubian* de shixue jiazhi," 22.
[622] Lü, *Mingdai wenren youmu yu wenxue yanjiu*, 79.

Hai and Wang Zhi. Other Anhui natives Guang Maoguang 管懋光 and Wang Yingqing 汪應晴, together with Zhejiang native Shen Kun 沈坤 were both directly involved in battles and skirmishes against the enemies. These private secretaries' personal experience and shared identity as victims of the *wokou* united them for a common cause. They committed themselves to strategy, to espionage, and to violence, by devoting their time and creative energy to this common cause of defeating the *wokou*.

4.7 Conclusion

In first year of Tianqi 天啓 emperor's reign (1621), Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1594–1640) published the first edition of his military compendium, *Wubei zhi* 武備志 (Treatise on Military Preparations). It was the culmination of fifteen years of study and standing at 240 volumes containing two million characters, it is the largest military work in Chinese history.[623] However, it was in a way inevitable, as Mao Yuanyi merely picked up where Zheng Ruozeng had left off almost sixty years ago with *Chouhai tubian*. As the grandson of Mao Kun, whose private library likely provided many resources for Zheng Ruozeng, Mao Yuanyi had access to his grandfather's collection of books.[624] From a very young age, Mao Yuanyi had already gravitated towards military books, partly inspired by the exploits of his grandfather.[625] After failing the provincial examination in 1612 at the age of nineteen, Mao moved to Nanjing to join a circle of literati who were interested in poetry and military studies.[626] Studying and writing on the military probably took on a new meaning and impetus with the rise the founding of the Later Jin by Nurhaci and the defeat of the Ming forces at Fushun 撫順 in 1618. In 1619, the year when Mao Yuanyi completed *Wubei zhi* the Later Jin army defeated the Ming armies at the disastrous Battle of Sarhu 薩爾滸.[627] The days of military glory as exemplified by the Three Great Military Campaigns of Wanli in 1590s, made possible by the years of military and fiscal reforms of Zhang Juzheng, were no more. Ming China was now facing a new

[623] Zhao Na 趙娜, "Mao Yuanyi Wubei zhi yu Qi Jiguang zhushu guanxi kao" 茅元儀《武備志》與戚繼光著述關係考, in Journal of Henan Normal University 河南師範大學學報, vol. 39, no. 3 (May 2012), 141.
[624] Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀, "Song Xian Xu" 宋獻序, in *Wubei zhi* 武備志, 62.
[625] *DMB,* 1053.
[626] Zhao Na, "Mao Yuanyi *Wu bei zhi* yanjiu" 茅元儀《武備志》研究, PhD diss., Huazhong shifan daxue 華中師範大學, 2013, 7-8.
[627] Swope, Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44, 11-33.

military reality— a formidable foreign aggressor that had replaced the Mongols as the most dangerous military threat.

The Mao family also produced another member who became a writer of foreign and military affairs. Mao Ruizheng 茅瑞徵 (1597–1636) was Mao Yuanyi's younger cousin. Like Mao Yuanyi, Mao Ruizheng had access to the considerable book collection of the family library and was interested in studies outside of the civil examinations. Nevertheless, Mao Ruizheng became a *Jinshi* in 1601 and first served as a magistrate, then Right Administration Vice Commissioner of Fujian, and finally to become the Chief Minister of the Court of Imperial Entertainments in Nanjing.[628] Among his works, Mao Ruizheng was perhaps most remembered for *Wanli san dazheng* (The Three Great Campaigns of Wanli 萬曆三大征), *Huang Ming xiangxu lu* (Records of Foreign Affairs of the Ming Dynasty 皇明象胥錄), and *Dongyi kaolue* (A Study of the Eastern Barbarians 東夷考略). These works demonstrate Mao Ruizhengs depth of knowledge on issues pertaining to the military and foreign affairs. Mao's works are important sources on the rise of the Manchus and were therefore banned during the Qing dynasty.

Both Mao Yuanyi and Mao Ruizheng inherited the legacy of Mao Kun, and in many ways, also the legacies of the mid-Ming literati who devoted themselves to 'substantive learning' (*shixue* 實學) in the hope of saving the empire. The dominating focus of 'substantive learning' is martial in nature, and the mid-Ming *mufu* of Wang Yangming and Hu Zongxian became the hotbed of a military culture that was passed on to later generations of Ming literati. Even military commanders recruited their own *muliao* while campaigning. Brilliant generals such as Qi Jiguang and Yu Dayou

[628] *DMB*, 1041.

employed many literati such as Chen Di 陳第 and Yan Jun 顏均, to aid them in their decade-long campaign against the *wokou.*[629] When writing on naval warfare in *Wubei zhi*, Mao Yuanyi relied on Zheng Ruozeng's *Chouhai tubian*.[630] The same was true for Mao Ruizheng as he examined the naval sovereignty of Ming China in his writings.[631] Thus, the military knowledge created as a result of the military culture within the *mufu*, was passed down and refined by other military-minded literati.

Once outside of the civil service career path, Mao Yuanyi was free to pursuit his interests. It was not surprising to find Mao Yuanyi eventually becoming a *muliao* like his grandfather. In 1621, he was invited to join the *mufu* of the Minister of War Sun Chengzong 孫承宗 (1563–1538), who was subsequently appointed *jinlue* (Military Affairs Commissioner) of Liaodong after the a series of Ming defeat in the northeast. While serving in Sun Chengzong's *mufu*, Mao Yuanyi was able to work alongside some of the best military minds of the late-Ming— the brilliant military commander Mao Wenlong 毛文龍 and the *jinshi* turned military commander Yuan Chonghuan 袁崇煥. There was Sun Yuanhua 孫元化, a Christian convert and student of Xu Guanqi who studied Western military technology and who was later appointed Military Commissioner responsible for Armament in the field even though he failed the *jinshi* examination.[632] Lu Shanji 鹿善繼, *jinshi* and a follower of Wang Yangming, became a co-author with Mao Yuanyi, producing an important military work *Cheying baiba da* 車營百八答. Mao Yuanyi continued to serve under Sun

[629] Chen Di became a protégé of Yu Dayou and like He Liangchen, Chen subsequently became a military commander in the north. Chen Di, "Gao Yu Xujiang xianshen 告俞虛江先生", in *Yizhaishi wenji* 一齋詩文集, 38. See also Yu Dayou, "Yu Liang Ming lao shu 與梁鳴老書", in *Zhengqi tangji* 正氣堂集, *juan* 1, 577.
[630] Mao Yuanyi, "Haifang" 海防, in *Wubei zhi* 武備志, *juan* 209, 8848.
[631] Guo Yuan, "*Chouhai tubian yu Mingdai haifang*," in *The Journal of Ancient Civilisations*, 73.
[632] Peter M. Engelfriet, *Euclid in China: The Genesis of the First Chinese Translation of Euclid's Elements Books I-VI (*Jihe yuanben; *Beijing, 1607) and its Reception up to 1723*, 334.

Chengzong and was made a Vice Commander-in-chief for his military achievements until his dismissal in 1629. It was chiefly due to Sun Chengzong's efforts in the northeast that managed to halt the advance of the Manchus which would have brought on an even earlier downfall of the Ming.

The short examination of Mao Yuanyi's career and the late-Ming *mufu* of Sun Chengzong is to highlight the legacy that was left behind by the mid-Ming *mufu*. This was a legacy that centered around literati who chief objective was to *jingshi jimin* 經世濟民 (ordering the world and relieving the people) and their tool of choice was 'substantive learning' with a strong focus on the military. The mid-Ming *mufu* allowed literati who were interested in the military to blossom, as they were given the opportunity to practise what they had learnt. Instead of thinking and writing about the military individually, the *mufu* managed to unite these literati as a collective with a sharpened sense of purpose. The late-Ming mufu inherited this legacy and evolved into an institution that had even greater focus on the martial. The military challenges faced by these late-Ming literati demanded that. The military culture intensified even as the line between what was civil and what was martial became increasingly less obvious. By the end of the Ming dynasty, civil officials who commanded troops into battle on horseback was no longer an uncommon occurrence.

In the ninth year of Wanli in 1581, Xu Wei reminisced on the much more glorified practice of recruitment of *muliao* in the past:

> From Western Han dynasty to Song dynasty of the Zhao, whenever civil or military officials had to inspect both central and the border regions, were appointed as generals, or received temporarily the tiger tally [military command], and granted full discretionary authority, they could all recruit their own men so as to make up for any inadequacy. Regardless of whether these persons were serving in the government or not, or if they had low status as peasants or

servants, they could be recruited and quite often became chief advisers to the son of heaven.

自西漢至趙宋，凡文武大臣簡鎮中邊，職將帥，或暫領虎符，得專征者，皆得自辟士，以補所不及。毋論已仕與不仕，雖賤至甿隸廝養，亦得辟，往往有入相天子。[633]

Xu Wei wrote the above twenty years after he had left the service of the Supreme Commander Hu Zongxian. Xu probably said these words while in a state of disappointment and self-pity. It could also be that after all these years, he remembered that he was once a part of something extraordinary.

[633] Xu Wei, "Daizeng Jinweizhen xu" 代贈金衛鎮序, in *Xu Wenchang yigao*, in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集, *juan*, 934-935.

5. Conclusion

> The world has many difficult tasks and the military is the hardest of them all.
>
> 天下之事難者多矣，至於兵則難之尤者也。[634]

Qi Jiguang made the above utterances in his seminal military text and explained that the difficulty was the result of the age-old prejudice of regarding military arts as the least important, and that the general bias against soldiers— seeing them as *yumin* 愚民 or 'ignorant people'. He argued that this was not right because if people (literati in this case) could understand that the wars brought by the rebellions of Shang Tang 商湯 and Zhou Wuwang 周武王 were moral and just, then they should also see the importance of the military and recognise the moral dimension of the martial. Speaking as someone who was from a hereditary military household, Qi's view likely stemmed from his personal experience of facing discrimination from the civil officials, the literati, and society at large. The same anecdote of a high-ranking military officer bowing and calling himself a *zougou* 走狗 or 'lackey' before a lower rank civil official circulated among literati.[635] Such deep-seated prejudice was so widespread in the Ming that Huang Zongxi, writing after the fall of Ming, remarked:

> Since the scholars had not commanded armies for a long time, they either viewed military affairs as labour intensive work befitting the strongmen; or conspiracies befitting those who were treasonous.

[634] Qi Jiguang, Preface to *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成, vol. 18 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe 解放軍出版社, 1994), 5.
[635] This same anecdote was collected and retold in the writings of Shen Defu and Huang Zongxi. Shen Defu, "Wuchen zicheng" 武臣自稱, in *Wanli yehuo bian*, 452. Also see Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, "*Bingzhi* er" 兵制二, in *Mingyi daifang lu* 明夷待访录 (Beijing: Zhonghu shuju 中華書局, 2011), 125.

> 自儒生久不為將，其視用兵也，一以為尚力之事，當屬之豪健之流；一以為陰謀之事，當屬之傾危之士。[636]

Huang Zongxi continued to reiterate his point about the *wuchen* 武臣 or 'military officials' being treasonous and untrustworthy:

> When the wars [against the Manchu and the peasant rebels] broke out, some civil officials told the emperor, "Because *wuchen* are not valued in the present, there is no military achievement." As such, the emperor Yizong [temple name of the Chongzhen 崇禎 emperor] began to fully entrust the military generals and not place them under the authority of the civil officials. In a few years' time, these *wuchen* amassed their troops, robbing and pillaging alongside the [rebel] bandits.
>
> 兵興以後，有言於天子者曰：「今日不重武臣，故武功不立。」於是毅宗皇帝專任大帥，不使文臣節制。不二三年，武臣擁眾，與賊相望，同事虜略。[637]

Huang Zongxi remained as a loyalist of Ming after its fall, was trying to examine the reasons that led to its demise and saw the military strongmen's selfish ambition as a contributing factor. Huang probably had the general Zuo Liangyu 左良玉 (?-1645) in mind. Zuo Liangyu was arguably the most talented military general in the campaign against the peasant rebels. But as a military officer, he was frequently at odds with his civil superiors. Immediately after the fall of Ming in 1644, Zuo Liangyu was in command of 800,000 troops and became the most feared warlord in the Southern Ming regime. As an untameable and ambitious general, Zuo Liangyu actually fit in the stereotype of an illiterate and uncouth military man who managed to seize power

[636] Huang, "*Bingzhi* san" 兵制三, in *Mingyi daifang lu*, 137.
[637] Huang, "*Bingzhi* er" 兵制二, in *Mingyi daifang lu*, 125.

by taking advantage of the emperor's trust in crisis.[638] Huang argued that national security was the sole responsibility of the *junzi* 君子 (gentlemen) and the *xiaoren* 小人 (petty men) should just continue to be "ordered around and stick to manual labour":

> If petty men were valued and entrusted [with the military leadership], how will the gentlemen be exalted?
> 使小人優為之，又何貴乎君子耶？[639]

Huang Zongxi's comment on the military man is telling as it reviews to us that even after the fall of the Ming dynasty, the literati's attitude towards *wuren* was still entrenched in the *wen-wu* binary thinking of earlier times. However, Huang's negative was directed at the *wuren* but not *wu* itself. Therefore, the ultimate solution to the military weakness of late-Ming according to Huang Zongxi was to:

> Combine *wen* and *wu* so that the scholars consider military knowledge as an integral part of their identity, studying it so one may know that it is nothing extraordinary.
> 使文武合為一途，為儒生者知兵書戰策非我分外，習之而知其無過高之論。[640]

The military men should abstain from needless violence and "learn to be loyal to the emperor and love the common people as that is the foundation of using force." In Huang Zongxi's view, there is nothing wrong with *wu* as long as it remains under the control of the literati. The use and execution of *wu* by the *wuren* is permissible only if it is under the purview of the *shiren* 士人, and only if the *wuren* had surrendered himself to the Confucian morality.

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[638] *MS*, *juan* 273, 6987 and 7010.
[639] Huang, "*Bingzhi* er" 兵制二, in *Mingyi daifang lu*, 127.
[640] Huang, "*Bingzhi* san" 兵制三, in *Mingyi daifang lu*, 137.

What Huang Zongxi had put forward as solutions were in fact the realities of the Ming regime. In the introductory chapter of this work, I recounted the destruction of the military nobility by the Ming founder and the consolidation of imperial power by the Yongle emperor, the military class had been steadily losing their political power followed by their social prestige. As military power returned into the hands of the emperors, they saw the need to fashion themselves as military leaders and portrayed a martial image that was familiar to their Eurasian counterparts. The Yongle emperor continued to campaign against the Northern Yuan while projecting the Ming martial prowess through martial spectacles. When there was no more campaigning after Yongle, successive emperors kept up with the military spectacles. The throne became the creator of this martial culture while the civil officials in court assisted in its promotion through their literary output. The military officials were part of this imperial military culture, but they were in no way shaping it.

By the time of the Tumu incident, the Zhengtong emperor ignored the advice of both his civil, and more importantly, military officials, whom anyone in the field should be trusting anyway. It was not a simple explanation of the eunuch Wang Zhen's influence over the emperor at work here but rather, the erosion of the military officials' political status in the preceding fifty to sixty years had denied them an authoritative voice in the government. The disastrous defeat and capture of the Zhu Qizhen in 1449 paved the way for the ascendency of the civil officials in all areas of the government, but most notably the military. And with Yu Qian's strategic and organizational genius leading what remained of the Ming army after Tumu in defending the empire, the fate of the military class was pretty much sealed. Since then, most military campaigns were led by civil officials from the Censorate with temporary military appointments. Strategic and tactical decisions could be made by

these ‘non-professionals’ without consulting the professional military officers. The military authority of the civil officials reached its zenith in the mid-Ming when the appointment of Supreme Commander was created. Supreme Commanders such as Zhang Jing, Wang Yu, Hu Zongxian, Liu Tao 劉燾 (1511–1598), Cao Bangfu 曹邦輔 (1507–1575), Tan Lun and many others had total authority over civil and military officials in the often large areas (sometimes encompassing a few provinces) under their jurisdiction. When the defense focus was shifted to China’s northeast after the signing of the Longqing Peace Treaty of 1571 that ended military confrontation with the Mongols, a new war front produced a successive line of military leaders such as Sun Chengzong, Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼 (1569–1625), Yuan Chonghuan 袁崇煥 (1584–1630), and Yang Sichang 杨嗣昌 (1588–1641)— all civil officials. Even with his reputation as a commander fighting the peasant rebels in the twilight years of the Ming, Zuo Liangyu was overshadowed by civil-military officials such as Lu Xiangsheng 盧象昇 (1600–1639), Sun Chuanting 孙传庭 (1593–1643), and Hong Chengchou 洪承畴 (1593–1665). Thus, Huang Zongxi’s argument that the Ming dynasty could have been saved if there were more civil officials who were also military experts could not have been more incorrect.

The second and third chapters allow me to answer this question, “how did an individual member of the Ming literati respond to the militarisation of the civil service while the line the separated between civil and the martial was no longer as clear and rigid as in the early days of the empire?” It is not an easy question to answer given the complexity of literati class and the long duration of this development. The Ming literati was not a homogenous group of people and by the mid-Ming, as the rapid socio-political change divided them further. Yet remarkably, amidst these changes

and the confusions they brought about in the mid-Ming society, one element actually managed to bring many them together. *Wu* became a focus for many of these literati. By focusing on Tang Shunzhi and He Liangchen, two members of the literati who were at the opposite ends in terms of their social standing, I hoped to give a more complete picture of how the literati actually posit themselves in a government that expected the civil officials to be able to handle more and more military affairs. In the case of Tang Shunzhi, military affairs re-opened the door to officialdom that allowed him to have a last shot at serving his country after being dismissed earlier by the Jiajing emperor. For someone like He Liangchen, whose lack of success in the civil examinations mirrored so many others in the Ming dynasty, embracing the military was one way to achieve some social success and the ticket to enter the social circles of scholar-officials. However, such social and career mobility would not have been possible if there was no culture of war in place. Studying early Chinese military thoughts, Christopher Rand had come to the conclusion that there was always the notion that "war is a natural, evolving attribute of the human community, and that martial activity allowed, paradoxically, for the advancement of civilized life". And as a result, "war was perceived as an impetus for positive change rather than a negative feature of social life."[641] After the Tumu military disaster, the weakness of the Ming military institution was revealed especially with the *wei-suo* system going into decline. During the Chenghua period (1464–1487), there was an increase in military confrontations in different parts of the empire which the government managed to handle decisively and effectively. During the Hongzhi and Zhengde periods, the northern border was once again under serious threat from the Mongols, and finally in

[641] Christopher C. Rand, *Military Thought in Early China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017), 5-6.

Jiajing period, the *wokou* joined the Mongols in exerting immense military pressure on the Ming empire. War became an everyday reality for the mid-Ming literati like Tang Shunzhi and He Liangchen. Ironically, war also provided these men with opportunities in career advancement as educated men who were also well-versed in military matters were appreciated. Both Tang and He possessed a 'cultural capital of war' that was valued among the literati circles that actively promoting military culture.

And so in the fourth and last chapter, we switched to a wider view and examine the groups of literati who managed to take advantage of military conflicts for their careers. These literati, however, were no sole driven by a desire to succeed socially and financially. As mentioned earlier, war was no longer something that these men read in paeans praising the martial ethos of emperors or *biansai shi* that romanticised the martial heroics in exotic northern borders. War was a reality to many literati and a sense of impending disaster motivated many of them to acquire military knowledge. Coupled with the traditional Confucian concept of 'ordering the world', which found its perfect example in the person and military achievements of the sage-general Wang Yangming, likely encouraged these literati to perceive martial activities as something positive, and even essential, for the 'advancement of civilized life'. Yu Yingshi suggests that in the 16th century, Confucianism took a decidedly new turn as many literati seem to have come to the conclusion that the traditional Confucian project known as "bring *Dao* to the world with the support of the throne" (*dejun xindao* 得君行道) was but an illusion.[642] These literati did not give up on their collective mission of "the amelioration of human affairs" and began to explore the

[642] Yü Ying-shih, "Reorientation of Confucian Social Thought in the Age of Wang Yangming", in *Chinese History and Culture*, 273.

new possibilities of opening up and expanding social and cultural spaces, independent of the imperial court.[643] These men founded private academies, some conveyed their message to the masses in public lectures and quasi-religious activities, others devoted their lives in rebuilding local communities (xiangyue 鄉約 or "country compact"), or even became businessmen. The choice of pursuing military knowledge and embarking on a military by the literati should be viewed as part of the social and intellectual change in the mid-Ming. The study of military strategy and martial arts took on a practical dimension as the literati believed that they could actually apply their acquired knowledge for the betterment of their state and society, besides their own lives. And with the *wokou* incursions into the 'cultural heart' of the Jiangnan region and threatening 'civilized life', there came the urgency to embrace martiality. The desire to learn and discuss about military matters and to express individual martial ethos led to the creation of networks of like-minded martial-focused literati who interacted with one another and also with the selected few who were from the 'other side'— the cultured military men who crossed the *wen-wu* divide (for example He Liangchen, Yu Dayou, Qi Jiguang, Chen Di, etc.). The creation of the *mufu* to deal with military crises also provide a much stable (though temporary) platforms for such cultural and intellectual exchange. Although everyone was strictly just 'passing through' the private secretariats, its transient nature did not hinder the 'creative energy' of its members. Military knowledge was exchanged, refined, and even saw publication simply because patronage and funding were much more readily available among the social and intellectual networks that were formed. Pragmatism went hand

[643] Yü,"Reorientation of Confucian Social Thought in the Age of Wang Yangming", in *Chinese History and Culture*, 274.

in hand with aestheticism as poetry with martial themes were created to celebrate the martial ethos shared by these literati and some of the military men.

As a unique military culture was created among these mid-Ming literati (and to some extent, their military counterparts) where they were given a chance to assume other identities other than a scholar.[644] For some, it afforded them the opportunity to acquire social and cultural capital that otherwise, were denied to them because of their lower social status. He Liangchen was able to publish *Zhenji* because he was accepted into network of literati who appreciated his dual identities as both scholar and warrior. Xu Wei found the respect and recognition that he so deserved in the *mufu* but not from the state when he repeatedly failed the civil service examinations. Tang Shunzhi was able to return to the government as a civil bureaucrat but passed away on the job as a military commander because the militarization of civil officials had come of age by the mid-Ming. Kenneth Swope saw the omnipresence of military matters in political discussion and the extensive use of civil officials to manage military affairs as an indication of the "general militarisation of late Ming culture and society."[645] The freedom that Tang enjoyed as a regional military inspector was only possible because his authority surpassed the military officers working with him and the military officers had by then, recognised and accepted this reality. But was this the only reality? Recent scholarship had already examined and challenged this traditional view of civil ascendency and martial decline in politics and society of the second half of the history of imperial China.[646] The civil-military relations of mid-Ming was much more dynamic and complex, as seen from the examples of Qi Jiguang (from the military

[644] Wang, "Wou dau yu xiashi— mingdai wouluan chongji xia Jiangnan shiren de wuxia fengshang", 92-93.
[645] Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–44*, 3.
[646] Filipiak ed., *Civil-Military Relations in Chinese History*, 11.

class), He Liangchen (from literatus to military officer), and Chen Di (from literatus to military commander and back to literatus).

In 1619 after the Ming army was defeated by the later Jin army of the Manchus at the Battle of Sarhū, Xu Guangqi submitted a series of memorial to the court urging for military reform. In one of them, he proposed to rethink about military training (*xuanlian* 選練) and his ideas were borrowed from the mid-Ming military thinkers.[647] Three years later in 1622, the Minister of War and Military Commissioner Sun Chengzong arrived in Liaodong to reorganised the defense against the Later Jin. Serving in Sun Chengzong's *mufu* was Yuan Chonghuan（civil official turned military commander), Lu Shanji 鹿善繼 (military adviser who was also a Wang Yangming follower), Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (grandson of Mao Kun and the author of *Wubeizhi* 武備志— probably the most important military encyclopedia from the Ming), and Sun Yuanhua 孫元化 (or Ignatius Sun— Catholic convert, student of Xu Guangqi, and the foremost Ming expert of military technology). Such a diverse group of military experts working together in a late-Ming private secretariat had its origins in the mid-Ming *mufu* of Wang Yangming and Hu Zongxian and by extension, this was the legacy of the mid-Ming military culture of the literati.

[647] Xu Guangqi 徐光啓, "Bing fei xuanlian juenan zhanshou shu" 兵非選練決難戰守疏, in *Xushi baoyan* 徐氏庖言(Shanghai;: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 153-156.

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MS — *Ming shi* 明史. Zhang Tingyu et al., eds. 1736. Rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1974.

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