

Exemplary persons in the *Kunzhiji* 困知記 :

An investigation of exemplars as objects of admiration in the
philosophy of Luo Qinshun 羅欽順 (1465 – 1547 CE)



Universiteit Leiden

Master's thesis: Asian Studies: History, Arts and Culture

Frank Sewnandan

Student number: S2321238

Supervisor: dr. Paul van Els

Date: 15/12/2019

Table of contents

Table of contents	2
Note on Romanization.....	3
1. Introduction.....	4
2. Historical context.....	10
2.1. Luo Qinchun and the <i>Kunzhiji</i>	10
2.2. The intellectual climate	11
3. Metaphysics and virtues.....	12
3.1. <i>Li</i> and <i>qi</i>	12
3.2. <i>Liyi fenshu</i> , human nature and <i>xingjili</i>	13
3.3. The investigation of things and desires	14
3.4. Virtues	15
4. Admiration	18
4.1. Sage	18
4.2. Worthy	20
4.3. Gentleman.....	21
4.4. Order of exemplarity	22
4.5. Objects of admiration	24
5. Emulation.....	24
5.1. Imitability of the sage	24
5.2. Imitability of the path towards sagehood	25
6. Conclusion	28
7. Bibliography	30
Primary sources	30
Secondary literature.....	30

Note on Romanization

Throughout this thesis I will use the *pinyin* system for the transliteration of Chinese names and terms. There are only two exceptions to this, these are the names of Confucius and Mencius. I have chosen to leave these names in their Romanized forms because of the familiarity with these names in the West. Furthermore, I use the names of Chinese authors that they use themselves in their writings in English. In the cases in which I use quotations from other authors that use the Wade-Giles transliteration system, I changed them to fit the *pinyin* system.

1. Introduction

Exemplary persons play a significant role in the writings of Chinese philosophers throughout history. In the Confucian tradition there are multiple designations for exemplary persons. The most important of these are *shengren* 聖人 (often translated as ‘sage’), *junzi* 君子 (often translated as ‘gentleman’) and *xian* 賢 (often translated as ‘worthy’).¹ Who precisely counts as a sage or what precisely constitutes a gentleman or whether being a worthy is something to be strived after in the Confucian philosophical discourse, can differ per period, school, thinker and text. For example, Mencius (372 – 289 BCE) distinguishes three categories of exemplary persons: the gentleman, the worthy and the sage. In his understanding the gentleman is a person who is of moral excellency but is still in a process of cultivating his morality. The worthy is, according to Mencius, above all an able man, someone who has both moral qualities and is capable of assisting a ruler. Furthermore, in the *Mencius* the sage embodies utmost excellency and functions as the highest exemplar, in the text the term sage is almost exclusively used to refer to old kings from the past.² A different conception of exemplary persons can be found in the writings of Xunzi (298 – 238 BCE), who distinguishes three types of exemplary persons which each form a stage in self-cultivation. According to Xunzi, the *shi* 士 (‘scholar official’) is the lowest exemplar, above him is the gentleman, and the highest exemplar is the sage.³ Xunzi regards the different exemplars as representing stages in one’s moral cultivation.

In the Classical Confucian view from the Warring States period (481 BCE – 221 BCE) however, despite the fact that Mencius and Xunzi consider the sage to be the utmost exemplary person, the most discussed exemplar is not the sage but rather the gentleman. The reason that is often given for this fact is that although the exemplary figure of the sage serves as an embodiment of all sorts of valuable qualities in Classical Confucianism, the sage is interpreted to be more of a distant ideal rather than a concrete example accessible to human beings.⁴ In other words, for common man it was practically impossible to attain sagehood, whereas becoming a gentleman was not. A significant change took place in the conception of Confucian thinkers in the Northern Song (960 – 1127 CE) with regards to the attainability of sagehood. Whereas earlier Confucians regarded sagehood as a distant and elusive state of being, the Neo-

¹ I use these translations throughout this thesis.

² ‘Introduction’ in: *Mencius*, trans. Karel van der Leeuw (Budapest: DAMON, 2008), 48-49.

³ Aaron Stalnaker, “Xunzi on Self-Cultivation” In: Hutton, Eric (eds) *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), 57.

⁴ Wm. Theodore De Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5.

Confucian thinkers of the Song gained a new confidence regarding the human capability to attain sagehood. Underlying this confidence was the newly developed metaphysical conception of unity of which an influential expression has been the phrase *liyi fenshu* 理一分殊 (“principle is one, but its particularizations are diverse”). Essentially, the phrase *liyi fenshu* epitomizes the view that there is a unifying principle (*li* 理)⁵ underlying the manifoldness of the phenomenal world that connects heaven, earth and the myriad things. This metaphysical view accommodated the idea that all men are born with the same ontological mind as sages and that consequently as “embodying *li* or principle in all of its manifestations, every person had the potential for thinking and acting like a sage.”⁶ The sage became, like the gentleman, an accessible ideal in this renewed vision by the Neo-Confucians of the Song. As such sagehood became an explicit ethical goal for Song Neo-Confucian teachers to strive towards in one’s life, surpassing the ideal of the gentleman.

The differences between the views of Mencius and Xunzi of exemplary persons and the metaphysical shift that resonates in the understanding of the Neo-Confucian thinkers highlight the fact that there exists diversity in the interpretations of exemplary persons in the writings of Confucian thinkers throughout time. In general, with regards to the historiography on Neo-Confucian thought, conceptions of exemplary persons are predominantly explained by displaying either the views of Zhu Xi (1130 – 1200 CE) or those of Wang Yangming (1472 – 1529 CE).⁷ Broadly, Zhu Xi’s thought is held to be representative for the Song Neo-Confucians and Wang Yangming’s outlooks are taken to be emblematic for the Ming period. While it is true that Zhu Xi’s thought set the tone for the Neo-Confucian views on exemplary persons in the centuries after him even through the Ming dynasty, views by other influential thinkers are seldom taken into account. In addition, Wang Yangming’s view on exemplary persons is oftentimes discussed with reference to Zhu Xi’s perspectives rather than in context of his fellow Ming Neo-Confucian thinkers. In order to not only do justice to the diversity within Neo-Confucianism, but also to obtain a more accurate and comprehensive view of the different outlooks on exemplary person in the Ming, it can be a worthwhile endeavor to bring the views

⁵ For the remainder of this thesis I will leave this term untranslated. I do so because it is difficult to translate and to preserve its particular meaning.

⁶ Daniel K. Gardner, “Modes of Thinking and Modes of Discourse in the Sung – Some Thoughts on the Yu-Lu (Recorded Conversations) Texts”, *Journal Of Asian Studies* 50, no. 3 (1991): 583.

⁷ It is the Neo-Confucian tradition that is mainly associated with state orthodoxy in China, yet there are multiple schools within this tradition as well as ‘unorthodox’ individual thinkers. The two major schools within the Neo-Confucian tradition are the *daoxue/lixue* or Cheng-Zhu school and the *xinxue* or the Lu-Wang school. The former is named after Cheng Yi (1033 – 1200 CE) and Zhu Xi (1130 – 1200 CE), who are two of the most prominent thinkers of the Song dynasty. The latter is named after Lu Xiangshang (1139 – 1193 CE), another thinker from the Song, and Wang Yangming (1472 – 1529 CE) who is the single most influential thinker of the Ming dynasty.

of other Ming Neo-Confucians thinkers into the scholarly dialogue on exemplary persons. Therefore, this thesis analyses the views of Luo Qinchun (1465 – 1547 CE) on exemplary persons in his main work the *Kunzhiji* 困知記 (“Knowledge Painfully Acquired”).

The reason an analysis of Luo’s conception of exemplary persons can be fruitful is because of several things. Let me begin by explaining why it is valuable to study Luo, and then turn to why studying exemplary persons in the Ming can be rewarding. First, Luo is considered to be among the foremost thinkers of Ming Neo-Confucianism, as he made important philosophical contributions, has taught students that would later become important thinkers themselves, and even was influential outside China. The importance of Luo in the Neo-Confucian tradition then, adds relevancy to the analysis. Second, analyzing Luo’s views on exemplary persons can contribute to positioning his philosophy in the historiography. For, Luo’s thought is scarcely studied in Western scholarship. The Western language scholarship on Luo is limited to only two studies of significance, an English translation of Luo’s main work the *Kunzhiji*⁸, and more recently a substantial article by Youngmin Kim.⁹ Despite this limitation, Bloom provides a comprehensive account of the Chinese and Japanese historiography concerning Luo’s thought in the introduction of her translation of the *Kunzhiji*.¹⁰ What this exploration of the historiography makes clear is that the relation of Luo Qinchun’s philosophy to other thinkers in the Ming is interpreted in varied ways. Using exemplary persons as an angle to approach Luo’s philosophy, the analysis contained in this thesis can be insightful and can possibly form a modest contribution to the debate.

⁸ Luo Qinchun, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired: The "K'un-chih Chi"*, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁹ Youngmin, Kim, “Luo Qinchun (1465-1547) and his intellectual context”. *T'oung Pao*, 89, 4 (2003): 367-441.

¹⁰ Bloom basically distinguishes three strands of interpretations of Luo’s thought: the interpretations of non-Marxist Chinese scholars, that of Japanese scholars and that of Marxist Chinese scholars. In the non-Marxist Chinese interpretations Luo is often portrayed as a warden of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy and an opponent of Wang Yangming thought. These accounts mainly focus on Luo’s intellectual style and how it resembles that of the Song Neo-Confucians, notably Zhu Xi. In this view, Wang Yangming’s emphasis on an intuitive intellectual style highlights the divergence between Luo and Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy on the one hand, and Wang Yangming on the other hand. Similarly, in this regard, Luo’s thought has been interpreted along the lines of intellectualism versus anti-intellectualism, as intellectualist. Japanese scholarship on Luo’s thought has primarily focused on Luo’s metaphysics. In this context Luo is mainly regarded as having commenced a philosophical trend that is called “*qi* philosophy”. This trend is supposedly instigated by Luo in the Ming and found its culmination in the thought of Dai Zhen (1724 – 1777). By interpreting Luo as a *qi* philosopher, Japanese scholarship focusses on Luo’s emphasis of *qi* in metaphysics. In this light, Luo’s philosophy is viewed as a departure of the “*li* philosophy” of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. In Marxist historiography Luo has been interpreted among the lines of an opposition between idealism and materialism. In these writings idealism is generally interpreted in two ways. One way is the subjective idealism that the Buddhists and the Lu-Wang school of Neo-Confucianism supposedly advocate. And the other is the objective idealism that the Cheng-Zhu School is held to endorse. Opposed to both forms of idealism Marxist scholars posit a materialism that they link to thinkers such as Zhang Zai, Wang Anshih, Chen Liang, Luo Qinchun, Wang Tingxiang and Wang Fuzhi. In Marxist accounts then, Luo is predominantly regarded as a materialist because of their emphasis on *qi*.

Studying exemplary persons in Ming Neo-Confucianism is worthwhile for multiple reasons. The first reason is that the topic is relatively unexplored. For, although there are some notable studies on exemplary persons in the Confucian tradition, there are few studies that thoroughly treat exemplary persons in Neo-Confucian texts.¹¹ Furthermore, most studies that deal with exemplary persons in the Confucian tradition are generally concerned with Classical Confucian thought, the figure of Confucius, or either the gentlemen or the sage.

Second, the more comprehensive studies of exemplary persons in (Neo-)Confucianism are generally scant with regards to theoretical sophistication. Yet recently, studies on Confucian ethics in general and exemplary persons in particular, are increasingly connected to discussions about theories of virtue or virtue ethics.¹² Notable studies on exemplary persons in Confucianism from a virtue ethical perspective are done by Sor-hoon Tan and Amy Olberding.¹³ Tan has analyzed exemplary persons in the *Lunyu* 論語 ('Analects') with specific attention to imagination and emotion, arguing that the imagination of the emotions of the exemplars is crucial to the personal endeavor of emulating their ways. Such a focus on the emotional role of exemplary persons in Confucian texts and emulation can also be found in the work of Olberding.

In this thesis, I too focus on moral exemplars from a more theoretical standpoint. Specifically, I approach exemplary persons from a perspective that is roughly based on Zagzebski's theory of *exemplarism*. In general, there are two ways to employ such an approach. Firstly, it can be used as an ethical theory, in which one would come up with new or adjusted (virtue) ethical theories. And secondly, it can also be used as a framework to interpret the views of thinkers from the past.¹⁴ In this thesis, it is not my intention to develop my own virtue ethical

¹¹ A noteworthy exception is De Bary in 'Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation' in *Unfolding*, where he focusses on the text *Jinsilu* 近思錄 by Lü Zuqian and Zhu Xi. Another work that focusses specifically on the path to sagehood by the Neo-Confucian Gao Panlong is R.L. Taylor, *The Cultivation of Sagehood as a Religious Goal in Neo-Confucianism: A Study of Selected Writings of Kao P'an-lung (1562-1626)* (Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press, 1978). For a work on Neo-Confucian sagehood that is less inclined to history but rather to contemporary ethical philosophy see Stephen C. Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹² Contemporary philosophy in general has in the recent decades seen a significant increase in discussions about virtue. Some scholars would even go as far as to classify this trend as a "virtue turn". This trend is not only visible in philosophy but finds its extension also in other areas of study. The discussions of virtue have also caught the attention of historians, scholars of religion and sinologists. In fact, more often scholars of the Confucian philosophical tradition now categorize it as falling under the designation 'virtue ethics'. For a description of this trend in Chinese philosophy see Eric Hutton, "On the "Virtue Turn" and the Problem of Categorizing Chinese Thought." *Dao* 14, no. 3 (2015): 331-53.

¹³ Sor-Hoon Tan, "Imagining Confucius: Paradigmatic Characters and Virtue Ethics" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2005): 409-26. ; Amy Olberding, "Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism and the Analects" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2008): 625-39.

¹⁴ Hutton, "Virtue Turn", 334.

theory. Rather, I use a particular virtue ethical theory as an interpretative framework to analyze Luo's views on exemplary persons. Being conscious of the possible concerns that applying a modern concept such as 'virtue ethics' to Chinese philosophy from pre-modern times, I want to make clear that in no sense I claim virtue ethics or Zagzebski's exemplarism to have some sort of explanatory role in the sense that Luo holds a certain view because he is a virtue ethicist/exemplarist. Rather, by performing a close reading from a Zagzebskian perspective, I only attempt to make descriptive claims as to enhance understanding and obtain a more accessible vision of Luo's views on moral exemplars.

It is useful to describe Zagzebski's theoretical framework here in brief as to obtain a proper understanding of how exemplary persons are approached in this thesis. In her recent work *Exemplarist Moral Theory*¹⁵, Zagzebski attempts to postulate a foundational moral theory that stems from direct reference to particular persons. She calls this theory both 'exemplarist moral theory' and 'exemplarism'. The central claim of this theory is that all concepts related to morality, including 'virtue', 'duty', 'right act' and 'good life', arise out of direct references to exemplars. Zagzebski considers exemplars to be those paradigmatically supremely excellent and admirable persons who show people the human capability to the utmost and inspire them to expect more from themselves.¹⁶

Two central aspects of Zagzebski's moral theory of exemplarism that can function as a useful evaluative tool with regards to analyzing exemplary persons in the *Kunzhiji*, are admiration and emulation. To begin with admiration, Zagzebski argues that although there are more emotions related to moral value, admiration is particularly important with regards to perceiving it.¹⁷ In the most general sense, Zagzebski describes the object of admiration as the 'imitably attractive'. Such a formulation, she states, highlights two particular aspects of the emotion of admiration: "(1) the object appears attractive, not repulsive or evaluatively neutral; (2) the way in which the object is attractive typically gives rise to the urge to imitate or emulate the object."¹⁸ Very common objects of admiration are exemplary persons because people often

¹⁵ Linda Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁶ In principle, Zagzebski presents her moral theory of exemplarism as fundamental and independent of particular paradigms in which exemplars might find themselves. Nevertheless, she does recognize that there exists diversity among exemplary persons and to account for this by setting forth a threefold typology consisting of persons who are commonly identified as saints, heroes and sages. To give an impression of what type of persons are generally considered to be exemplars: with saints Zagzebski means persons who are both spiritually and morally exemplary. With heroes Zagzebski means persons who often help others in need or pursue other moral ends by taking great risks. Heroes, despite their impressive moral achievements, do not have to be admirable in every respect. Sages, also wise persons, are characterized by moral, intellectual and sometimes spiritual excellences according to Zagzebski.

¹⁷ For a more detailed argument see Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 31.

¹⁸ Zagzebski, 35.

admire different acts carried out by persons and certain qualities persons might possess. And if the object of admiration were an exemplary person, then this person would appear to someone as attractive and urges this someone to emulate the exemplar.

According to Zagzebski one can make a division between those personal qualities of exemplary persons based on natural versus acquired excellences.¹⁹ Both types of qualities are, insofar they are excellent, admirable. Nevertheless, it feels different to admire an inborn excellency, than one that is acquired. The difference between natural and acquired excellences described earlier resonates in the way a person can emulate these qualities. This brings us to the second aspect of Zagzebski's theory, emulation. Namely, the difference between natural and acquired excellences described earlier resonates in the way a person can emulate these qualities. For, a person can emulate a person whose admirable qualities are acquired, but innate natural qualities are not imitable. Yet, these different types of qualities, despite their contrasts, often go together as they are expressed through a person. For, to express natural talent in a way that it can be perceived as admirable it is often necessary to be accompanied by for example effort and perseverance. Nevertheless, Zagzebski hypothesizes that the object of admiration for a natural excellence, because of its inimitability, is not imitably attractive. Yet, although some forms of exemplarity might be unattainable, exemplars can still be perceived as models for moral improvement and cultivation.

In this thesis I argue that Luo Qinshun regards different categories of exemplars to all be part of an orderly sequence in which the sage stands as the ultimate exemplar. And that in this sequence, the gentleman and the worthy should be regarded as aspirants on a path towards the ultimate state of being of the sage. Despite the fact that Luo regards the sage to be the ultimate exemplar however, I argue that in the *Kunzhiji* the path towards sagehood appears to be more admirable and imitably attractive than the actual state of sagehood itself.

In order to make my points clearly, this thesis is structured as followed. Chapter 2 introduces Luo Qinshun and the *Kunzhiji* by providing some basic details about Luo's life and the historical context in which the *Kunzhiji* was written. This will help in contextualizing the content of the remainder of the thesis. Chapter 3 contains an elaboration of Luo's metaphysical views and how these relate to exemplary persons and virtues. It focusses on the questions of whether Luo's metaphysics allow for the attainment of becoming an exemplar, of what constitutes human nature and of what Luo considers to be some valuable qualities. Chapter 4 attempts to establish comprehensive categorizations of each category of exemplary persons.

¹⁹ Zagzebski, 38.

Special attention is paid to how these categories relate to each other. Chapter 5 deals with the question of emulation. The chapter focusses on whether exemplary persons are imitatively attractive.

2. Historical context

In order to familiarize ourselves with Luo Qinchun, the *Kunzhiji* and the intellectual climate in which it was written, I sketch a brief biographical account of Luo Qinchun and the *Kunzhiji* as well as provide a short description of Luo's intellectual climate in this chapter. I furthermore demonstrate how Luo presents himself in the *Kunzhiji* as a faithful follower of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy.

2.1. Luo Qinchun and the *Kunzhiji*

Luo was born in 1465 CE in Taihe county in Jiangxi province in China. During his life he was engaged in public service from which he retired in 1527. The years following his retirement, Luo dedicated to study and reflection at home. It was only when Luo was in his sixties that the original *Kunzhiji* was published in 1528, which counted two sections or *juan*. Four supplementary *juan* were added in 1531, 1533, 1538 and 1546, in respective order.²⁰ Although the text is philosophically rich, the *Kunzhiji* is not a systematic philosophical treatise, rather it is a collection of various notes and contemplations documented over years. Yet this does not make the text unintelligible or incoherent. Rather, as Bloom claims, the *Kunzhiji* is a text that attests to rigorous and accurate textual research of which the “tone is reflective; the choice of language is precise; [and] issues are sharply defined.”²¹ What is more, the influence of the *Kunzhiji* during the Ming was significant, and the text circulated widely not only in China but in Japan and Korea as well.

²⁰ The translation of the *Kunzhiji* by Irene Bloom that I make use of includes only the first two *juan* and a selection of the third. Nevertheless, Bloom claims that there is consensus that the essentials of Luo's philosophy are contained in the original two *juan*, and that there are no substantive changes of shifts in emphases to be found in the latter *juan*. As such, she claims that the text represents Luo's mature thought and his “final conclusions”. See “Introduction” in: Luo Qinchun, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired: The "K'un-chih Chi"*. trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 7-11. Furthermore, Bloom's translation also contains two letters written by Luo to Wang Yangming dating from 1520 and 1528. I will not make use of these letters as I limit myself to the text of the *Kunzhiji* only.

²¹ Bloom, 7.

2.2. The intellectual climate

The period in which the *Kunzhiji* was written was characterized by an intellectual climate that was very diverse. There were the Neo-Confucians associated with Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, there was Wang Yangming and Neo-Confucian scholars affiliated to his influential thought, and there were the Buddhists and Daoists, all of whom left their marks on the intellectual environment. Leaving aside their actual philosophical similarities and differences for now, Luo identifies himself as a follower of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. Yet, he does not literally adhere to the writings of the Cheng-Zhu thinkers. The following passage from the *Kunzhiji* captures Luo's personal relationship with Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy aptly:

“I have taken up all of the writings of Cheng and Zhu, meditating deeply and reflecting carefully on them, reading them over and over again without putting them down. It is only in the case of the views of the elder Master Cheng that I feel not the slightest doubt. (...) The reason that I have doubts is that I have yet to see that they finally achieve unity. Can this be called “still not seeing everything clearly”? To search their statements for what is not yet unified can only be done by one who genuinely honors and trusts them. This is why I devote all my mind to this and dare not be neglectful.”²²

In this passage, Luo expresses his honor and trust regarding the masters of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, as well as his distinct inclination to the views of the elder Master Cheng (Cheng Hao). However, he also articulates doubt concerning the thought of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Luo recognizes the differences between on the one hand Cheng Hao and on the other hand Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Yet, Luo states: “inasmuch as their theories all coexist, one must try to find a way to reconcile them and recover the ultimate unity.”²³ It is this ‘recovery’ of unity to which Luo devotes all his mind and thus, rather than outright rejecting the views of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, he dedicates himself in the *Kunzhiji*, as an ardent follower of orthodoxy, to resolving the problems in their views. Luo's main endeavor consists of positing a theory of unity based on a reinterpretation of the notion of *liyi fenshu*, he states:

²² Bloom, 63.

²³ Ibidem, 59.

I had devoted years to it when suddenly one day it seemed to me that the whole of it has become transparently clear. I submit that the subtle truth of the nature and endowment is summarized in the formulation, “Principle is one; its particularizations are diverse.”²⁴

In order to understand what Luo meant with his theory of unity and how it relates to exemplary persons, it is necessary to explicate those paradigmatic premises that constitute the points of departure of Luo’s philosophy.

3. Metaphysics and virtues

As shown in the previous chapter, Luo identifies himself as an adept of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, and, like virtually all Neo-Confucians of the Ming, his writings therefore proceed from the basic metaphysical paradigm of the Song Neo-Confucians. In this chapter I explicate some crucial terms that characterize this paradigm as well as Luo’s particular metaphysical views. Furthermore, I demonstrate how Luo’s metaphysical views influence his outlooks on exemplary person. I end the chapter with a discussion on the various virtues that are mentioned in the *Kunzhiji*.

3.1. *Li* and *qi*

To begin with a notion that plays a central role in the philosophies of all Neo-Confucians, *li* or ‘principle’. The usage of this term by Neo-Confucians can include the meaning of pattern, order and norm, but its precise meaning can differ per thinker. The conception of *li* by the Cheng-Zhu school forms the standard interpretation in Neo-Confucian thought. Therefore, it can be informative to turn to Zhu Xi’s view on *li*. Consider the following statements by Zhu Xi concerning *li*: “With regard to all things in the universe, each and every one of them is certain to have a reason why it is as it is and a rule to which it should conform. This is what is meant by *li* (principle).”²⁵ And “All affairs and things have moral principle – absolutely nothing is without it.”²⁶ In this view by Zhu Xi, the idea is that there is a principle, *li*, that is contained in everything in the world and to which in turn everything in the world acts in accordance to. As

²⁴ Bloom, 64-65.

²⁵ Daniel K. Gardner, *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2007), 136.

²⁶ Zhu Xi, *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections From: The Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically*. trans. Daniel K. Gardner, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 124.

such, *li* can best be regarded as a sort of universal principle or pattern that underlies the phenomenal world. What is more, in the interpretation of Zhu Xi, *li* has a normative aspect to which all things ought to conform.

Generally, in Neo-Confucian thought, *li* is closely related to the concept of *qi* 氣 (often translated as material force or vital stuff).²⁷ Ivanhoe succinctly describes this relation in the interpretation of Zhu Xi as: “*Li* gives form and meaning to all things but is itself without perceptible form or meaning. In order to possess either, it must be embedded in *qi* (...). *Qi* is that of which the world is made.”²⁸ In other words, all natural phenomena are constituted from *qi* and it is in this *qi* that *li* resides and structures *qi*. *Li* thus refers to a sort of overarching principle, and *qi* refers to the physical manifestations in the world within this arch.

At a basic level, Luo interprets the terms *li* and *qi* to have the same meaning as in Zhu Xi’s understanding. However, he differs from Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy to the extent that Luo regards *li* and *qi* to be inseparable. Namely, Zhu Xi was generally interpreted in the Ming as advocating a dualism that separated *li* and *qi*. Luo repeated the statements of Zhu Xi such as “*Li* and *qi* are definitely two things” and “*qi* is strong and *li* is weak” in order to show that Zhu Xi allowed for a dualism.²⁹ Such a view was at odds with his own more monistic endeavor. Luo makes very clear that his view differs from that of Zhu Xi when he states:

And amid all of this prolific variety and phenomenal diversity there is a detailed order and an elaborate coherence which cannot ultimately be disturbed, and which is so even without knowing why it is so. This is what is called principle. Principle is not a separate entity which depends on material force in order to exist or which “attaches to material force in order to operate.”³⁰

3.2. *Liyi fenshu*, human nature and *xingjili*

The relation between *li* and *qi* is also expressed in the phrase *liyi fenshu* 理一分殊 (‘principle is one, but its particularizations are diverse’). The basic idea that this phrase conveys is that *li* is one, even though it is manifested in great variety in the phenomenal world. So, everything in

²⁷ I will leave this term untranslated to preserve its particular meaning and because it is a term that is quite familiar in the West.

²⁸ Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 47.

²⁹ Bloom, 60.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 58.

the world is constituted of *qi* and the things in the world come in great variety, yet the *li* that is embedded in all these diverse phenomena remains one. The implication of this unitary conception is that it establishes a connection between all things (including people) in the world by virtue of a shared *li*. Of relevance in relation to exemplary persons, in particular the figure of the sage, Luo connects these metaphysical outlooks to the possibility to attain sagehood. Alluding to Mencius, Luo states:

This is the explanation for the subtle truth of the nature and endowment. In terms of its oneness, "every human being can become a Yao or a Shun," and in terms of its diversity, "only the very wisest and the very dullest do not change."³¹

Here Luo, by using the ancient sages Yao and Shun as a metaphor, explicitly expresses the idea that each person can potentially attain sagehood.

This idea of a connection between humans and all things in the world is further elaborated by the phrase *xing ji li* 性即理 ("human nature is identical with principle"). The term *xing* 性 or 'human nature' essentially refers to that what humans are endowed with by heaven. It is that inherent principle that resides in the self, the *li* of human beings. Luo thinks that human nature is fundamentally good and that it is the source of morality.³² The phrase *xing ji li* captures the idea that human nature is identical to *li*, and thus that the self (associated with *xing*) forms a continuum with the world. For, as explicated by the phrase *liyi fenshu*, both the self and all things in the world possess the same *li*.

3.3. The investigation of things and desires

In order to perceive *li* and reach the goodness of human nature, Luo advocates the investigation of things, *gewu* 格物:

The investigation of things and the extension of knowledge are the beginning of learning. Subduing the self and returning to propriety are the end of learning. The Way is originally inherent in man, and the fact that one cannot become completely identified with it is because things and the self are contraposed so

³¹ Bloom, 65.

³² Ibidem, 66.

that one knows only that there is this self. As the consciousness of self grows stronger by the day, one becomes that much further removed from the Way. When things are investigated, it is no longer things but only principle that is perceived, and when the self has been subdued, it is no longer the ego but only principle that one follows.³³

As this passage highlights Luo thinks that it is through investigation things and thereby extending one's knowledge that a person can be enabled to perceive *li*. What this passage also puts forth is the idea that there are selfish attitudes that can obstruct one from perceiving *li*.

Luo's view on selfish desires is somewhat different from most Neo-Confucians. Namely, whereas generally desires are understood by Neo-Confucians as outright evil, Luo held that "the desires cannot be spoken of as evil."³⁴ In his view, all desires are qualities of the nature and therefore good. The key to dealing with desires according to Luo lies in the regulation of them. The following passage explains it clearly:

The fact that man has desires definitely derives from heaven. Some are necessary and cannot be repressed; some are appropriate and cannot be changed. If those irrepressible all conform to the principle if what is appropriate, how can they not be good? It is only heedlessly giving way to the passions, indulging the desires, and not knowing how to turn back that is evil.³⁵

This brings us to the issue of what Luo thinks what happens when one does not control one's desires and what virtues are associated with those who can control one's desires.

3.4. Virtues

In order to understand what good qualities or virtues are in Luo's view it can be informative to first elaborate on two categories of persons of a somewhat low degree in terms of admiration. To begin with the category of ordinary people, or *changren* 常人. Ordinary people basically embody what people are by nature. Although earlier we have seen that Luo considers people to have a good nature, he also claims that despite this good nature the ordinary man "is confused

³³ Bloom, 74.

³⁴ Ibidem, 68.

³⁵ Ibidem, 121.

and distracted and without a moment's calm" for "his mind is carried away by things. And his nature is beclouded."³⁶ What we want to know, then, is what qualities does Luo associate with good nature, and what qualities he thinks a person embodies when this nature is beclouded.

To begin with the latter, the term that Luo uses to indicate persons whose nature is severely beclouded is 'petty man', or *xiaoren* 小人. About these petty persons Luo states: "The mind of a petty man is directed toward evil, but he always feigns humaneness and rightness in order to conceal his treachery."³⁷ This short phrase captures some important qualities of the petty man. Firstly, his mind is evil and as such his nature is thus indeed beclouded. Secondly, he tries to conceal his treachery under the guise of humaneness and rightness. What this implies is that a petty person is thus neither humane nor right. Elsewhere in the *Kunzhiji*, Luo furthermore describes the petty man as insincere, being quarrelsome and indulging in idle talk.³⁸ So, both the ordinary man and the petty man have a nature that is beclouded. And these persons lack the qualities of humaneness and rightness, as well as embody the qualities of insincerity, quarrelsomeness and pretentiousness. A question that arises from this brief examination of the ordinary and petty man, is whether Luo regards persons whose nature is not beclouded to be embodying the qualities of humaneness and rightness then, as well as to be sincere, not quarrelsome and not pretentious. But before I will turn to this question, I first want to address the categories of the ordinary and the petty in relation to Zagzebski's notion of admiration.

Zagzebski suggests that the emotion that is aroused when encountering people who are not admirable, is contempt. With regards to how Luo presents the ordinary man and the petty man in the *Kunzhiji*, I suggest that there is a difference in degree of how contemptible either category appears in the text. Namely, Luo presents the petty man as genuinely contemptible, while there is no clear instance of Luo expressing genuine contempt for the ordinary person. In one passage in which Luo discusses about ordinary people, Luo also explains what a student must strive towards by which Luo suggests that this student should try to develop himself as to move away from the state in which an ordinary person finds himself.³⁹ However, Luo does not express real contempt with regards to the ordinary man. Rather, the state towards which the student must strive is presented by Luo as attractive. With regards to the petty man, on the contrary, Luo presents him in a much more contemptible way by using strong terms such as evil and even the term 'petty' is derogative in itself. This difference in amount of expressed

³⁶ Bloom, 105.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 86.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 118.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 105.

contempt could be explained by the fact that Luo considers the ordinary man to be confused and distracted, which seems to indicate some degree of innocence or unawareness. Whereas the petty man is much more contemptible for his evil characteristics are in no sense innocent.

Let me now then turn to the virtues of those persons whose nature is not beclouded. One illuminating passage on this matter is worth quoting at some length:

“When one takes up the definitions offered by our Confucian predecessors, one finds that it was only the elder Master Cheng who, in speaking of “forming one body with all things without any differentiation,” seems to have understood it fully. He also thought that “Rightness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness are all humaneness.” Thus all the distinct particularizations are brilliantly clear, and not one is omitted. It is precisely because not one is omitted that all in their wholeness and entirety constitute this one thing. This is what is meant by “without any differentiation.” The general idea of Master Zhang’s “Western Inscription” is consonant with this. As to others who saw humaneness as impartiality or love and the like, everything can be understood if we infer from the idea of “forming one body.”⁴⁰

This passage is very rich and contains a lot of aspects of Luo’s thought. A whole array of admirable qualities is mentioned, consisting of rightness (*yi*, 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), faithfulness (*xin* 信), impartiality (*gong* 公), love (*ai* 愛), and most the encompassing humaneness (*ren* 仁). Despite this wide variety, Luo characteristically interprets these qualities among the lines of *liyi fenshu* and thereby regards each to be contained and united in the term ‘humaneness’. It might be clear that Luo considers all these qualities and humaneness in particular to be valuable, yet, besides humaneness, he does not engage in detailed elaboration of them. In another passage Luo confirms by appealing to Mencius that these qualities are possessed by those whose nature, unlike the ordinary and petty man, is not beclouded: “[Mencius] said, “Humanity, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are not infused in us from without. We possess them inherently. Failure to realize this is due to lack of thought.”⁴¹ What this examination of the different virtues seems to suggest is that people whose nature is not beclouded are characterized by these qualities.

⁴⁰ Bloom, 77.

⁴¹ Ibidem, 139. Brackets mine.

4. Admiration

In the *Kunzhiji* Luo uses different terms to indicate different categories of persons, some of whom can be reasonably thought of as exemplary persons. The most notable categories of persons in the *Kunzhiji* are the sage, the worthy and the gentleman. Nevertheless, there are no comprehensive descriptions of each category and how these relate to each other in the text. Therefore, in this chapter, I try to establish a characterization of each category by bringing together different instances of evidence throughout the text of the *Kunzhiji*. Furthermore, I investigate how these categories relate to each other in terms of an order of exemplarity.

4.1. Sage

To begin with the sage, by far the most frequent mentioned category of persons in the whole text. Unlike works like the *Lunyu*, there are only a few concrete embodiments of sages mentioned in the *Kunzhiji*. There are a few instances in the *Kunzhiji* where Luo refers to Confucius as a sage. In these passages Confucius, indicated by the term sage, is regarded to be the author of important books such as the *Xici* 繫辭 ('The Appended Remarks') and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 ('Spring and Autumn Annals').⁴² And there are also fragments in the text that Luo speaks of the sages of antiquity, in these instances he refers to the ancient sage-kings. Notable examples of these sages of antiquity that are mentioned in the *Kunzhiji* are Yao and Shun. However, far more often Luo speaks about sages in a rather general way, without referring to concrete individuals. Most appearances of the term sage in the *Kunzhiji*, namely, refer to an ideal state of being.

Luo considers the sage to be the ultimate standard for man.⁴³ What this ideal state that the sage embodies is, is described quite vaguely and this is not without reason. Namely, the sage has investigated and grasped *li* to the utmost and in this regard Luo states: "When things have been investigated and knowledge has been extended, the nature and destiny are perfectly understood (...). If one reaches the ultimate point, there are things that are not easy to explain."⁴⁴ The thus is a person who has penetrated *li* and is thereby in an ultimate state that is hard to describe. Yet, Luo describes, again somewhat vaguely, several abilities that the sage possesses.

⁴² Bloom, 112, 133.

⁴³ Ibidem, 112 -113.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 83.

According to Luo, one of the abilities of the sage is that he is able to accord with the principles of the transformations of heaven and earth. And that, by virtue of this, he is able to sincerely follow the golden mean and to follow “the desires of one’s mind without transgressing the bounds of decorum.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, Luo claims that it is within the ability of the sage that he, with regards to the transformations of heaven and earth, “establishes a compass for them and allows not deviation from the Way of the Mean”⁴⁶ and that only the sage is able “to respond to transformation before it materializes.”⁴⁷ What these various abilities mainly make clear is that the fact that the Sage has grasped *li* to the utmost has engendered a set of superior skills, stemming forth from being in this ultimate state.

With regards to the different virtues that we have encountered in the previous chapter, there are practically no direct references in the *Kunzhiji* to these virtues in relation to the sage. Nevertheless, to the extent that the sage has grasped *li* and that his nature therefore is not beclouded, we can infer that the sage does embody these virtues. For, Luo states: “Mingdao⁴⁸ once said, “The concept of principle of nature I have realized directly for myself.” This is the method by which one comprehends humanity.”⁴⁹ In other words, grasping *li* results in the comprehension of humanity or humaneness, under which the other various virtues can be subsumed. Accordingly, the sage comprehends all of these virtuous traits.

Yet, in the *Kunzhiji* it are not the particular virtuous qualities or practices of the sage that are being emphasized, for the sage is predominantly mentioned in reference to his role as teacher or by virtue of his teachings. For example, Luo states: “The sage (...) offers instruction, wanting people to have foreknowledge of what they are to be vigilant about so as to avoid remorse and humiliation as well as misfortune.”⁵⁰ And his teachings, that are said to be enclosed in the classics (*jing* 經)⁵¹, Luo holds to be complete and superior. Luo states: “Could there have been something omitted in the words of the Sage? This is quite unlikely.”⁵² And about a certain passage in a classic Luo states that it: “reveals moral principle in its very essence. Were the author not a sage 聖人, he could not have said it.”⁵³ In relation to these teachings, the term

⁴⁵ Bloom, 51.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, 114.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 112.

⁴⁸ Cheng Hao.

⁴⁹ Bloom, 103.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 112.

⁵¹ Refers to the classic text of the Confucian canon, notable are the *Sishu* 四書 and the *Wujing* 五經.

⁵² Bloom, 156.

⁵³ Bloom, 121.

‘sage’ also appears in the *Kunzhiji* in combination with the term worthy, as *shengxian* 聖賢 or ‘sages and worthies’. To this I will resort in the next section.

Thus far, we have seen that Luo regards the sage to be the ultimate standard for man, who has penetrated *li* to the utmost and consequently has superior skills and understanding of humaneness. Furthermore, Luo ascribes significant importance to the role of the sage as teacher as well as his teachings. He uses the term to refer to both sages of the past as well as an ideal state of being. Although Luo sometimes describes this ideal state of sagehood rather vaguely, Luo’s admiration for the sages is very clear. This admiration is captured when Luo appeals to the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (‘Doctrine of the Mean’): “in the Mean it says, “How great is the Way of the sage.”⁵⁴

4.2. Worthy

Another frequently appearing category of persons is the category of the worthies. In one instance in the text, Luo uses the term worthy to refer to what he regards to be his predecessors in the learning of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. In that particular passage Luo criticizes those persons who arrogantly place themselves above Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi and “devote one’s entire life to seeking the Way only to collect what able and virtuous men of an earlier day discarded.”⁵⁵ In this passage the term worthy, translated as ‘able and virtuous’, is thus used for other Neo-Confucian master’s from the Cheng-Zhu tradition.

The term worthy is also used for the person who is suitable to perform political affairs right. Luo thinks that the people will become obstinate when not ruled by a worthy, but “as soon as one gets hold of a worthy man to govern them, they will be conscientious and united in their response to him.”⁵⁶ So, the term worthy is both used for Neo-Confucians from the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy as well as for political adept persons. It could be the case that Luo regards the worthy Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians to be suitable for politics, but nowhere in the text is he vocal about this.

Most frequently, the term ‘worthy’ appears in combination with the term sage as *shengxian* 聖賢 or ‘sages and worthies’. In these appearances, the term ‘worthies’ refers to a category of persons that shares with the sage that they both are involved in the classics and expound valuable teachings. For example, Luo holds that “the classics of the sages and worthies

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 54.

⁵⁵ For this particular passage Bloom has translated *xian* 賢 not as ‘worthy’ but as ‘able and virtuous’. Bloom, 62.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 87.

are as clear as the sun and the stars”⁵⁷ with regards to a particular matter and that “all of the classics of the sages and worthies of antiquity are subtle.”⁵⁸ Like the sage, thus, Luo does also emphasize the worthy’s role as educator. Luo, holds these teaching very dearly as he himself “never put the books of the sages and worthies out of my hand for even a day.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, he considers them to be crucial instructions for man: “All the words of the sages and worthies are designed to lead man to get hold of his lost mind.”⁶⁰

Whereas the most fundamental aspect of sagehood is being in the state of grasping *li* to the utmost, there are no clear statements in the *Kunzhiji* on whether the worthies have grasped *li* to the utmost, partially or at all. A reason for this could be that the term worthy is principally used, besides in conjunction with the term ‘sages’, to refer to concrete individuals rather than to an ideal state of being. Concrete individuals could be evaluated differently and be in a different state of grasping *li*. Nevertheless, the fact that Luo considers their teaching to be of such value, they must have some profound understanding. After all, the fact that Luo claim that the words of the worthies are designed to lead man to get hold of his lost mind, suggests that worthy himself does not have a lost mind. Later in this chapter I will discuss the relation between the sages and the worthies in terms of their levels of attainment.

Another thing that is absent in the *Kunzhiji* are statements concerning whether the worthies possess the virtuous qualities that can be summarized by the term humaneness. There are no instances in the text where Luo connects these virtues directly to the worthies. As we have seen then, the term ‘worthy’ refers in the *Kunzhiji* both to Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian master as well as to people who possess the skills to benefit government. Furthermore, the worthies are involved in the teachings of the classics, and thereby also profound educators.

4.3. Gentleman

In the *Kunzhiji* the term ‘gentleman’ only sparsely refers to concrete individuals. There are no direct references to individuals in the sense that Luo would say this person *is* a gentleman. However, there are two instances in the text that Luo hints at actual persons to be gentlemen, and he does so with reference to two rough Neo-Confucian contemporaries of his. In one passage Luo speaks about Wu Yubi (1392 – 1469 CE) to whom only few can compare in terms of love of learning and dedication to moral principles. In Luo’s view, Wu Yubi surely embodies

⁵⁷ Bloom, 160,

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 113.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 138.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 143.

the way of the gentleman (*junzi zhi dao* 君子之道).⁶¹ Also, about Xue Wenqing⁶² Luo states that “an examination of his attainment reveals that there are few who can match him. He deserves to be called “a scholar after the manner of the gentleman.””⁶³ Both instances indicate that Luo uses the term ‘gentleman’ in reference to contemporary Neo-Confucian scholars that are high in virtue. The virtues that Luo uses to describe these scholars are terms like pure (*chun* 純), genuine (*du* 篤) and earnest (*shi* 實).

In terms of whether the gentleman’s nature is turbid Luo states: “The mind of the gentleman is directed toward goodness, and he is definitely free of any trace of evil.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Luo states that: “when “the gentleman accords with the course of the Mean,” he is only following heaven. He does not allow selfish calculation to play any role in it.”⁶⁵ These passages suggest that Luo regards the gentleman to have cleared his *li*. Moreover, Luo stresses the fact that the gentleman is in control of his feelings when he states that the Way of the gentleman is “the harmony after [the feelings] have been regulated so as to attain their due degree.”⁶⁶ This way of the gentleman then, seems to be very much alike to the way of the sage. And it is true that in the *Kunzhiji* there are no instances in which these ‘ways’ are contrasted.

Unlike the sages and the worthies, the gentleman is nowhere in the text presented as an instructor of any teachings. A reason for this could be that Luo does not regard the gentlemen to be involved with the transmission of the teachings of the classics. Luo uses the term for rough contemporaries who indeed are not involved in the transmission of the classics as the ancient sages and the worthy masters of Neo-Confucianism such as the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi.

4.4. Order of exemplarity

The relation between the different categories and how they might express different levels of moral status in Luo’s view, might be already visible to a certain extent. It is however necessary to establish it clearly. As we have seen the different categories overlap with regards to certain aspects and differ on others. And it is thus not yet clear how these categories relate in terms of level of exemplarity.

Luo is quite explicit with regards to the order of exemplarity of these different categories. As mentioned earlier, he considers the sage to be the ultimate standard for man. With the sage

⁶¹ Bloom, 147.

⁶² Xue Xuan (1389 – 1464)

⁶³ Bloom, 148.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, 86.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 131.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 70.

thus being the ultimate exemplar, the categories of the worthy and the gentleman seem to be below it in terms of attainment. That the worthy represents a lower level of exemplarity than the sage is confirmed by Luo when he states: "'Scholars aspire to become worthies," and "worthies aspire to become sages." There is indeed an orderly sequence."⁶⁷ What this statement makes clear is that Luo regards worthies to be aspirants in an endeavor to become sages. This implies that they do not have a similar status. The other category of persons Luo mentions is that of scholars (*shi* 士). The category of scholars is mainly an occupational one to the extent that it refers to one's occupation rather than one's moral attainment. It thus seems to be a rather neutral term with regards to moral attainment, and it is probably therefore that Luo considers it to be to lowest in order. How the gentleman fits in this order is not made explicit. On the one hand, Luo clearly posits the sage as the ultimate exemplar, which would suggest that in addition to the worthy, the gentleman would also be below the sage in the order of exemplarity. On the other hand, we have also detected a lot of commonalities between the sage and the gentleman. Yet again, we have also distinguished certain commonalities between the sage and the worthy.

That despite the commonalities between the gentleman and the sage, the difference between their level in attainment, with the sage as signifying a superior level, can be explained by the fact that Luo states: "'When the gentleman is reverent and not neglectful," he is close to fulfilling the Way of heaven."⁶⁸ This statement indicates that there are conditions to which the gentleman is subjected in order to come close to the attainment of the sage. The conditions suggest that there are also gentlemen who are not reverent and neglectful, and furthermore the term 'close' indicates that even when the gentleman meets the conditions, he will still only be close to the sage.

It is also difficult to determine the difference in level of moral attainment between the gentleman and the worthy. Both seem to be below the level of the sage, and above the level of the mere scholar. It could be the case that there is no significant difference in their level of exemplarity and that the terms are used to designate different people. In this interpretation the term worthy refers to the Neo-Confucian masters of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, whereas the term gentleman is more reserved for rough contemporaries of Luo. Still, evidence to determine significant difference in level of attainment is scarce.

Nonetheless, regardless of how the worthy and the gentlemen compare with each other in terms of moral attainment, their relation to the sage in this regard is overly clear. The sage

⁶⁷ Bloom, 75.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 76.

is the ultimate standard for man, and the worthy and gentleman are inferior in terms of attainment. To the extent that Luo adheres to the view that there is an orderly sequence in attainment, and the fact that both the worthy and the gentleman are below the sage in this regard, the worthy and the gentleman should be seen as aspirants to attain the ultimate level embodied by the sage. Viewed in this way, the aspiring worthy and gentleman should be regarded as aspirants, learners or as it is expressed in the *Kunzhiji*, as students, *xuezhe* 學者.

4.5. Objects of admiration

With this investigation of the categories of exemplary persons in the *Kunzhiji*, and considering the different virtues distinguished in the previous chapter, it might be clear that there are a lot of things that could be signified as being admirable. Throughout the *Kunzhiji* exemplars are mentioned together with admirable special abilities, virtues, and intellectual achievements. From the examination of how these different categories of exemplary persons relate we can reasonably infer that the sage is the exemplar that deserves most admiration, but nevertheless the worthy and the gentleman are also spoken of in very admirable ways. Yet, Zagzebski argues that an actual object of admiration is something that is imitably attractive. This is to say that not only the object appears attractively and admirably, but also that it urges one to imitate the object. Although Luo's conception of an orderly sequence seems to hint at the urging of emulation, the question remains whether the sage, as ultimate standard, is also imitably attractive.

5. Emulation

In this chapter I turn to the issue of the emulation of objects of admiration. The focus of this chapter is whether the sage as ultimate exemplar is possible to emulate and to whether he an imitably attractive object of admiration.

5.1. Imitability of the sage

In the previous I explained that Luo regards there to an orderly sequence in attainment, and that the sage forms the ultimate goal of this sequence. Gentlemen and worthies are in this regard students insofar that they follow the orderly sequence as to reach the attainment of sagehood. If Luo truly holds the view that there is an orderly sequence and that worthies, gentlemen and even those below ultimately could become a sage, then the sage or at least his qualities must be possible to emulate. According to Zagzebski, crucial to this imitability is the issue of innate

versus acquired excellences. Not only leads this issue to a difference in the way one feels admiration for an inborn excellency and for one that is acquired. The difference between innate and acquired excellencies also works through in terms of imitability. And thus, a determining factor in whether the sage can be emulated concerns the question of whether that what makes him admirable can be acquired or whether this is something one innately possesses. For if a quality is innate, it might not be possible to emulate and that would make it not imitably attractive.

The question about whether the sagely qualities are innate or acquired might seem futile to pose, for as we have seen earlier, Luo adheres to the Mencian view that human nature is good and that qualities such as humaneness stem forth for *li* that one innately possesses. Innately then too, each person has the potential to emulate a sage. However, we also have seen that there are people whose nature is beclouded, and that there can be different gradations in this. And it is true that Luo thinks that some persons are further in the orderly sequence to sagehood than others. Although there are no passages in the *Kunzhiji* in which Luo explicitly claims all or any sages to be born as sages, he does address the matter of innate difference in level of attainment directly: “how can the student attain to the state of one who is born with knowledge?”⁶⁹ Indeed, although knowledge might not be the main characteristic of a sage, it is clear that Luo recognizes that there are different gradations in which one’s nature can be turbid by birth and that this has implications for one’s attainment of sagehood. Nevertheless, nowhere in the text does Luo state that emulation of any sagely quality is impossible. The sage is thus not some sort of fundamental other that is unreachable for man. But rather, it confirms the view of the orderly sequence, in which there is a continuity between the worthy and gentleman (and even those below them) as students or aspirants and the sage as the ultimate goal.

5.2. Imitability of the path towards sagehood

Luo, as we have seen, thus thinks that emulation is possible, but he also acknowledges that this is more difficult for some than for others. According to Luo, the key to the emulation of sages lies in learning but nonetheless, Luo establishes a variety of preconditions that must be met in order learn and emulate the sage successfully. Taking into account that the sage is that person who has grasped *li* to the utmost, Luo thinks that “the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge are the beginning of learning” and that “subduing the self and returning to

⁶⁹ Bloom, 139-140.

propriety are the end of learning.”⁷⁰ What this means for the student is highlighted in the following passage:

Principle is truly extremely easy and extremely simple, and yet grasping the principles of the world in what is easy and simple is a matter of perfecting one's ability. The tasks of the student are broad learning, careful inquiry, sober reflection, clear discrimination, and earnest practice. Not one of these can be dispensed with. By proceeding on the basis of these five one may arrive at what is easy and simple. But if one dislikes the complexity involved in scholarship and yearns for a shortcut to the realm of ease and simplicity, this can hardly be called the ease and simplicity of principle. Fondness for the sublime and the desire for speed are among the common failings of scholar.⁷¹

This passage clearly displays the difficult conditions the student must meet in order to become a sage. Despite the difficulty associated with these conditions, they nonetheless appear rather admirably in the text. In fact, although Luo expresses how hard it is to arrive at attainment, he does not present the ultimate state as less imitably attractive because of this. Rather, Luo presents the hardships of learning in such a way that learning in these conditions appears to be an admirable quality in itself. Such admirable presentations appear also in other places in the *Kunzhiji*. The following passage is a good example of this:

Yenzi's inquiry about "subduing the self and returning to propriety" is surely not easy to discuss. (...) When it has been completely dispelled, we are made one with principle without any differentiation. But this task is most difficult, and while one may be able to become great, he may yet be unable to transform. People like us who lag behind both in natural endowment and capacity for learning can only follow the advice of Xie Liangzuo to "follow the nature and subdue the self in precisely those points where partiality is difficult to subdue." This is the genuine task of daily life.⁷²

⁷⁰ Bloom, 74.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 57.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 75.

This passage explicitly raises the issue that one might never transform as to attain the ultimate sagehood. It is a profound recognition of the difficulties that accompany the road to sagehood. Nevertheless, in no instances does Luo make the ultimate goal less attractive or admirable. In fact, the passage quoted above suggests is that confronting these hardships in one's path to sagehood is in fact genuine, and to an extent inevitable to face. Earlier I explained that Luo has a distinct view of desires as being fundamentally part of human nature. And it is for this reason that Luo thinks that desires are something that should be not eradicated or considered outright evil, rather Luo advocated the view that one must regulate and control these desires. Similar to the way Luo view desires to be a fundamental and inevitable part of human life, Luo views the hardships of learning to be an essential part of road to sagehood. Luo presents the road to sagehood in such a way, that it itself appears to be an object of admiration.

In the previous chapter I made clear that Luo does not really mention particular qualities that the sage embodies besides the fact that he has a superior understanding through his grasping of *li*. All other skill and virtues stems forth from that. In one passage Luo even states that being a sage is easy, or that after one's attainment things are easy. This absence of concrete descriptions of what sagely qualities actually are then, makes it much less imitably attractive. Furthermore, taking into consideration that Luo presents the path to sagehood in a highly admirable way then, suggests that the urge of emulation is principally aimed towards the particular conditions that one must meet to become a sage rather than the actions or qualities of the actual sage. So, although the sage remains the ultimate standard for man, and remains in fact the ultimate goal in the orderly sequence. In terms of emulation, it are predominantly the qualities that one must possess to engage successfully in learning and achieving sagehood that appear to be the objects of admiration. For, they appear much more imitably attractive than the vaguely described qualities that flow forth from grasping *li* to the utmost.

To relate these finding the theory of Zagzebski then, the fact that Luo regards the sage to be very much part of the orderly sequence of learning and thus, not some 'other' but rather an attainable goal, makes the sage as an ideal imitably attractive. Furthermore, Luo does not express a clear difference in admiration towards innate qualities or acquired qualities. Yet he does recognize that for some it is more difficult than for others. And the conditions that need to be met to attain sagehood can easily be perceived as admirable. In addition, we have also seen that the descriptions of the actual state of sagehood are rather vague, despite the fact that there definitely are identifiable qualities with regards to this state of being. This contrasts with the fact that the road to sagehood and the severe conditions one must meet and the qualities one must possess to meet these, are described very vividly and admirably. What this makes clear

then, is that in terms of admiration and emulation, Luo presents the road towards the attainment of sagehood more imitably attractive than the actual state of sagehood itself. It can thus reasonably be said that the road to sagehood is an at least, if not a more, imitably attractive object of admiration than the actual state of being of the sage.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the different categories of exemplary persons in Luo Qinchun's *Kunzhiji*. I started by showing that Luo was engaged in an endeavor to recover the theory of unity in the Cheng-Zhu tradition and that he tried to solve this with a reinterpretation of the phrase *liyi fenshu*. I furthermore demonstrated that Luo's metaphysical scheme theoretically allows for the possibility that all people potentially could become a sage, by virtue of his conceptions of *liyi fenshu*, *xingjili* and the fact that he adheres to the view that human nature is good. Additionally, I highlighted the fact that Luo's interpreted desires to be fundamentally part of human nature and that he emphasized the task to regulate these desires.

With regards to the characterizations of the different categories of exemplary persons in the *Kunzhiji* I argued that Luo uses the term 'sage' in reference to Confucius and ancient sage kings, as well as to refer to an ideal state of being of persons who have penetrated *li* to the utmost and consequently possess superior skills and a profound understanding of humaneness. I furthermore showed that the term sage often appears together with the term 'worthy' in reference to their roles as teachers. With the term 'worthy' Luo also refers to the masters of from the Cheng-Zhu tradition as well as politically adept individuals. The category of the gentleman is reserved for highly admirable persons who seems to be very close to the attainment of sagehood. Luo uses the term for some of his rough contemporaries. I also briefly resorted to the categories of ordinary people and petty men. Luo regards the ordinary man in a more or less neutral way, whereas for the petty person Luo clearly expresses contempt. Insofar as the exemplary categories are admirable, the category of the petty person thus indeed seem to its opposite, contemptible.

The categories of the sage, worthy and the gentleman all appear in the *Kunzhiji* as highly admirable exemplars. Yet, as I have argued, Luo adheres to a view of an orderly sequence of attainment in which the sage is held to be the utmost exemplar as embodiment of an ultimate state of being. In this orderly sequence the gentleman and the worthy should be viewed as aspirants or students, both part of the same sequence. Yet, Luo regards this path to sagehood to be extremely difficult. Nevertheless, Luo never denies the possibility to become a sage. He

displays a realistic path of sagehood of which hardships are an inseparable part. The way Luo describes this path and how vaguely he describes the actual state of sagehood, point out that the path towards sagehood appears to be just as admirable and maybe even more imitably attractive than the actual state of sagehood.

7. Bibliography

Primary sources

Luo Qinshun. *Knowledge Painfully Acquired: The "K'un-chih Chi"*. trans. Irene Bloom. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Zhu, Xi. *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections From: The Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically*. trans. Daniel K. Gardner. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Secondary literature

Angle, Stephen C. *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

De Bary, Wm. Theodore. *Learning for One's Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

De Bary, Wm. Theodore. *The Trouble with Confucianism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.

De Bary, Wm. Theodore. *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*. New York [etc.]: Columbia University Press, 1975.

Gardner, Daniel K. "Modes of Thinking and Modes of Discourse in the Sung – Some Thoughts on the Yu-Lu (Recorded Conversations) Texts". *Journal Of Asian Studies* 50, no. 3 (1991): 574-603.

Gardner, Daniel K. *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2007.

Hutton, Eric. "On the "Virtue Turn" and the Problem of Categorizing Chinese Thought." *Dao* 14, no. 3 (2015): 331-53.

Ivanhoe, Philip J. *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000.

Kim, Youngmin. "Luo Qinshun (1465-1547) and his intellectual context." *T'oung Pao* 89, no. 4 (2003): 367-441.

Kim, Youngmin. "Rethinking the Self's Relation to the World in the Mid-Ming: Four Responses to Cheng-Zhu Learning" *Ming Studies*, no.1 (2000): 13-47.

Mencius. *Mencius*. trans. Karel van der Leeuw. Budel: DAMON, 2008.

Olberding, Amy. "Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism and the Analects." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2008): 625-39.

Stalnaker, Aaron "Xunzi on Self-Cultivation" In: Hutton, Eric (eds) *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2016.

Tan, Sor-Hoon. "Imagining Confucius: Paradigmatic Characters and Virtue Ethics." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2005): 409-26.

Taylor, R.L. *The Cultivation of Sagehood as a Religious Goal in Neo-Confucianism: A Study of Selected Writings of Kao P'an-lung (1562-1626)*. Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press, 1978.

Zagzebski, Linda. *Exemplarist Moral Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.