# Mind your Motive: Liu Zongzhou’s Philosophy of the *Duti* 獨體 Theory and the *Shendu* 慎獨Moral Practices

## Introduction

Liu Zongzhou (劉宗周, 1587-1647), a Confucian scholar who lived during the Ming and Qing transition, referred to *shendu* (慎獨, conventionally translated as "vigilance in solitude") as the essence of the teachings of the sages. *Shendu* is a Confucian intellectual concept that is mentioned in two classical texts, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean.* Typically, it stands for moral cultivation. Moreover, this cultivation is designed to encourage the superior man to be watchful of his conduct in life.

However, it is worth noting that the concept of *shendu* differs in meaning in the two texts. *The Great Learning* stresses that the word *du* denotes the condition of being alone, whereas *The Doctrine of the Mean* describes it as a state of mind that is hidden from our view. In accordance with the commentarial tradition, the concept of *shendu* gradually becomes coherent in these two texts. It is assumed to emphasise the examination of the *self*. Spatially speaking, it is a place in the mind about which others have no knowledge, only the self knows of its existence. In temporal terms, it denotes a time that is yet to come. Specifically, it is the moment when one's emotions and feelings have yet to be stirred but are about to be stirred. Furthermore, it refers to a state of mind of which we might not be presently aware, but which we can draw into our consciousness when required.

Building upon the existing interpretation of *du*, Liu Zongzhou introduces an ontological argument. He indicates that *du* is the object of moral practice and suggests that the meaning of *du* in the concept of *shendu* stands for a separate, unique, and independent entity (*duti*, 獨體). When people engage with the external world, the interaction generates two states of the psyche, namely: movement and stillness. Hence, the *du* entity can be defined by distinguishing between the two activities. In other word, it exists without being attached to the activities of the psyche, even though it is presented through these activities.

In addition, Liu Zongzhou’s theory suggests that the faculty of *du* plays a role in the interaction between the human mind and external phenomena. It stimulates the mind to respond in accordance with principles that have been conferred by Heaven. Liu Zongzhou believes that self-knowledge of the *du* entity is the manifestation and succession of human natural goodness. The *shendu* practice stands for cultivating the ability to perceive the *du* entity. Furthermore, Liu Zongzhou believes that attaining virtue consists of the process of examining the existence of the *du* entity. With this framework, his theory connects the ontology of the human heart-mind and nature with the practice of moral cultivation.

Two texts will be discussed in this research, namely: *Human Schematic* and *The Records of Ming Scholars*. *Human Schematic* is a crystallization of Liu Zongzhou’s philosophical thoughts, which reinterprets Confucian classics based on the practice of moral cultivation. *The Records of Ming Scholars* was composed by Huang Zongxi (黄宗羲, 1610-1695), who studied directly under Liu Zongzhou. He devoted a chapter to summarizing his teacher’s discourse and teachings. By cross reading the two texts, this essay explores Liu Zongzhou’s philosophy of *duti* theory and his *shendu* teachings of moral cultivation. Specifically, it explores the activities of the *du* entity, and discusses the relationships between the *du* entity, the human mind, and nature. Furthermore, this paper summarises the steps of *shendu* practicein the *Human Schematic* as a means of developing virtue. This prompts consideration of how the embodiment of the *du* entity assists in the actualisation or fulfilment of the *shendu* moral cultivation. Finally, having presented a discussion of Liu Zongzhou’s theory in the context of the intellectual history of the Ming and Qing transition, this essay concludes by addressing the following question: *What motivated Liu Zongzhou to generate his theory?*

## The Meaning of Du in the Classical Texts and the Commentarial Tradition

The concept of *shendu* (vigilance in solitude) appears in the *Da Xue*, (大學, *the Great Learning*) and the *Zhong Yong* (中庸, *The Doctrine of the Mean*). In general terms, the *shendu* concept denotes the moral cultivation of the psyche. In particular, it stresses the notion of self-consciousness that involves introspectively looking inward to examine the activities of the heart and mind before we act out. The word *du* functions as a noun and is conventionally translated as solitary or single. The idea of *du* in the concept of *shendu* indicates that human beings are conscious not only of the world around them but also of themselves, their activities, bodies, and their mentality. Simply speaking, they are the object of awareness.

In the *Da Xue*, the concept of *shendu* is placed under the heading of *chengyi*, (誠意, causing one’s will to be sincere). Thus, *shendu* is designed to make one’s will sincere. According to the *Da Xue*, "what is meant by 'making one's will sincere' is allowing no self-deception." 所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也。[[1]](#footnote-1)When one engages with external things, one's internal thoughts should be consistent with one’s external manifestations. *The Da Xue* states:

小人閑居為不善，無所不至，見君子而後厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。

When the inferior man is alone and leisurely, there is no limit to which he does not go in his evil deeds. Only when he sees a superior man does he then try to disguise himself, concealing the evil and showing off the good in him.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The text encourages the reader to consider the use and meaning of this disguise.[[3]](#footnote-3) Self-deception is a violation of authenticity. It distorts the views of the self, others, and the world that may render us blind to morality. Self-deceivers fail to take responsibility for their behavior. Yet, the pivotal issue is whether one is, or can be, conscious of one's self-deception, or whether one can justify one's self as authentic. In the text, the word *xianju* 閒居, which means being alone, is used to define the meaning of *du*. It emphasizes the separation of connections with others in space. The word *du* refers to the mind being alone within oneself; in addition, it is the condition for introspection and the awareness of self-deception or self-authenticity.

In the *Zhong Tong*, the concept of *shendu* is located under the heading of *xiudao* (修道 “cultivating the Way”). It requires that the superior man should not “leave the Way for an instant.”不可須臾離也[[4]](#footnote-4) Therefore, the superior man must be watchful and ensure that he continues to cultivate the Way. In this respect, the text states, "The superior man is cautious over what he does not see and apprehensive over what he does not hear.” 戒慎乎其所不睹，恐懼乎其所不聞。[[5]](#footnote-5) The text emphasises the notion of raised self-awareness. In contrast to the *Da Xue*, the *Zhong Yong* defines *du* as a mental state that is subtle and hidden and cannot be seen or heard easily. The sentence “Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused.” 喜怒哀樂之未發 is presented in the text to actualise the state of *du.* Specifically, it refers to a mental state of equilibrium.[[6]](#footnote-6) In other words, this mental state is represented as a steadiness that exists before individuals engage with external things. To sum up, in terms of *du*, the *Da Xue* discusses self-examination in a solitary condition, whereas the *Zhong Yong* refers to a hidden state in the human heart-mind.

Zheng Xuan (鄭玄 127--200), an influential commentator on the Confucian classics, was the first person to combine the *shendu* concept presented in the two texts. He relied on the *Da Xu*e text to explain the notion of *shendu* that was presentedin the *Zhong Yong*. He noted:

慎獨者，慎其閒居之所為。小人於隱者，動作言語，自以為不見睹，不見聞，則必肆盡其情也。若有佔聽之者，是為顯見，甚於眾人之中為之。

Being watchful over himself when he is alone is his being cautious in what he does when living alone. When the inferior man lives in seclusion, indicated by his actions and words, if he takes himself to be unseen and unheard, then he inevitably give free rein to his emotions and feelings. If someone were to see him or hear him, his disguise would be very apparent -- even more so than if he were in the midst of a crowd.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The meaning attributed to the word *du* in the *Da Xue* and the *Zhong Yong* are different. Nevertheless, Zheng Xuan uses the word *xianju* (when one is alone) in the *Da Xue* to explain the term *du* in the *Zhong Yong*. To highlight the moral distinction between the superior man and the inferior man, Zheng Xuan comments on the practices of the inferior man when he is alone. He employs extras from the *Da Xue*, including "the inferior man will not stop to do evil deeds when he is alone." 小人閒居為不善.[[8]](#footnote-8) This indicates that the inferior man lacks the ability to restrain his behavior. In addition, Zheng Xuan used the term *siqing*, 肆情 to ‘give free rein to one’s emotions and feelings,’ to supply the meaning of the evil deeds in the *Da Xue*.[[9]](#footnote-9) With the help of Zheng Xuan’s note, the meaning of *du* has been transformed from a state of being alone into a concrete behavior. Zheng Xuan’s understanding of *shendu* indicates that a superior man must exercise caution in respect of his emotions when he is alone. The word *du* refers to the emotions and feelings that are encountered when the individual is alone. In other words, the self-consciousness is cautious in terms of dealing with human emotions and feelings.

Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130--1200), the most influential Chinese neo-Confucian scholar, internalised Zheng Xuan's interpretation of *shendu*, using *du* to indicate not human behavior, but substantive self-knowledge. That is, it is not about a person’s behavior when he is not seen or heard by others. In Zhu Xi’s notes, he defines *du* as a place that others do not know. It is known only by the self.[[10]](#footnote-10) Thus, the word *du* becomes more meticulous and concrete. The self-knowledge that Zhu Xi discusses is not trivial (e.g., knowing that I am sitting at this desk with my legs crossed). Rather, it is the self-knowledge of noticing the growth of human desires.[[11]](#footnote-11)

According to Zhu Xi’s description, *du* is a place that exists “in the midst of darkness and subtleties, and even if the signs do not yet have form and are hidden, there is already action.”幽暗之中，細微之事，跡雖未形而幾則已動。[[12]](#footnote-12) This points to the potential desires that exist in the mind. Specifically, it is important to notice desires that grow in the deep heart which might generate temptation, untamed emotions and immorality in reality. Thus, according to Zhu Xi, the concept of *shendu* stands for moral cultivation that requires one to be cautious of the human desires. The term *du* in Zhu Xi's interpretation could be explained from three perspectives. Regarding its state, it is subtle and hidden; in terms of time, it indicates that desires are about to arise, but have not yet; and regarding its space, it focuses on the heart-mind, where it is equivalent to self-knowledge.

## Liu Zongzhou and his Shendu Philosophy

At the transition of the Ming and Qing dynasties of China, Liu Zongzhou expounded the philosophy of *shendu*. Huang Zongxi, one of his students, said that “everyone in Confucianism taught the *shendu* doctrine, but only his teacher got the true meaning of it.” 儒者人人言慎独，唯先生始得其真。[[13]](#footnote-13)

Liu Zongzhou’s biography suggests that he criticized the corrupt officials of Ma Shiying (馬士英1596--1647) and Ruan Dacheng (阮大鋮1587--1646) in court. As a consequence, the emperor stripped Liu Zongzhou of his high status and reduced his social standing to that of a commoner. Subsequently, Liu devoted himself to the propagation of Confucius’s teachings and made the following speech when he was forty-eight years old:

先生痛言：世道之禍釀於人心，而人心之惡以不學而進。今日理會此事，正欲明人心本然之善，他日不至凶於爾國，害於爾家。座中皆有省。每會，令學者收斂身心，使根柢凝定，為入道之基。嘗曰：此心絕無湊泊處，從前是過去，向後是未來，逐外是人分，搜里是鬼窟，四路把截，就其中間不容發處，恰是此心真湊泊處。此處理會得分明，則大道達道皆從此出，於是有慎獨之說焉。

The master [Liu] said bitterly that the evilness of the world is caused by human hearts, and that the evilness of human heart are propagated by their ignorance. Today, understanding this matter is to comprehend the natural goodness inside human heart, so that in future it[the evilness of the human heart] will not be harmful to your country and to your family. The audience reflected on themselves. At each meeting, the scholars are asked to control their minds and bodies, and to make their foundations solidified, as it is the basis of entering the Way. He said, “There is no place for this heart-mind to be tied up; moving back is the past, moving forward is the future, moving toward the outside are human affairs, moving toward inside is the ghost cave. The four directions intersect. It [our heart-mind] can simply fit within the center where nothing is allowed to rise; this is precisely a place to stay for our heart-mind. If this principle could be understood clearly, then here is where the great Way and attainment of the Way come from. Therefore Liu had the *shendu* doctrines.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The key that inspires Liu Zongzhou’s philosophy of *shendu* can be summerised as “first understand the natural goodness of the human heart.” It is represented as a way to overcome the evilness within the human heart. Perhaps Liu Zongzhou had witnessed too many evil deeds in his encounters with officialdom, and as a result emphasised the natural goodness of the human heart and its ability to curb corruption. He believed that human goodness was contained within our hearts, and it existed as a single entity waiting to be perceived by the mind.

Moreover, Liu Zongzhou also noticed that the human heart tends to become preoccupied with external temptations. It is easy to become obsessed with things and to be held in the grip of desire. This is where evil arises. Thus, Liu Zongzhou claimed that the natural goodness of the human heart must be found in the place where desire is absent. Through the work of *shen*, being cautious and mindful, the natural goodness can be manifested by self-knowledge. The faculty that stimulates the self-knowledge of the mind is *du* entity. As Liu states:

夫心有獨體焉，即天命之性。而率性之道所從出也。

The mind has a unique entity, which is the nature that Heaven has conferred. It is the accordant path from that human nature emerges.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The *du* entity is a heart-mind faculty that can encourage people to return to the path of the goodness of human nature. Therefore, in Liu Zongzhou’s interpretation, *shendu* is not only about moral practice, but it also involves proving the existence of the *du* entity and human goodness. Referring to Liu Zongzhou:

自昔孔門相傳心法，一則曰慎獨，再則曰慎獨。

In the old days, Confucianism passed down the principle of the learning of heart-mind, one of which was *shendu*, vigilance in solitude, and the other was *shendu*, being cautious of *du* entity.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The first *shendu* follows the commentarial tradition that understands it as a moral practice, while the second one is Liu’s own interpretation that recognizes *du* as an independent entity which requires students to be cautious of. This is the basis of Liu Zongzhou’s theory of *shendu*, and it is also the main focus of Liu Zongzhou’s scholarship in his later years. With such an understanding, Liu was dissatisfied with Zhu Xi's interpretation of the concept of *shendu*. Liu indicated that the existence of an entity is unseparated from the manifestation of the phenomenon. According to Liu Zongzhou, he stated:

自可見者而言，則謂之用；自其不可見者而言，則謂之體，非截然有兩事也。

From the visible side, it is called the use; from the invisible side, it is called the body. It is not like there are two distinct things.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Hence, he criticized the fact that Zhu Xi only explained the phenomena and ignored the existence of the *du* entity, stating:

朱子于獨字下补一知字，可為擴前圣所未发。然专以属之动念边事，何耶？岂静中无知乎？使知有间于动静，则不得谓之知矣。

Master Zhu adds the word *zhi*, knowing, under the word *du*, it can expand [the meaning] that the sages before him had not developed. But this only relates the meaning with active intention; why? Is there no self-knowing in stillness? If we make a gap for self-knowing between [the activities of] stillness and activation, then it cannot be called self-knowing.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Zhu Xi describes the *duzhi* as the place within the heart-mind that only the self knows. In respect of Liu Zongzhou's understanding of Zhu Xi, the latter’s so-called *du* only relies on the intentions to make them manifest through self-knowledge. However, this does not mean that *du* cannot be known in the stillness of the mind. In other words, the entity exists in stillness where there is no intention in the mind. Liu Zongzhou also said:

人心之獨體，不可以動靜言，而動靜者，其所乘之位也，分明是造化之理。

The *du* entity within the human mind cannot be described as movement or stillness, but the movement or stillness are positions that it occupies, which is clearly the principle of it [the heart].[[19]](#footnote-19)

獨字是虛位，從性體看來，則曰莫見莫顯，是思慮未起，鬼神莫知也；從心體看來，則曰十目十手，是思慮既起，吾心獨知時也。然性體即在心體中看出。

The term *du* is positioned in the void. From the perspective of human nature, it could be said that *du* is not visible and manifested; it is when the will has not yet arisen, so even ghosts and spirits are unable to know. From the perspective of the human heart-mind, it could be said that what ten eyes behold and ten hands point to, the will responds to, and it is the time when my heart-mind knows itself. However, the human nature could be apprehended through the human heart-mind. [[20]](#footnote-20)

The existence of the *du* entity is independent of its functions or activities. It appears in either a visible or hidden state determined by the activities of movement and stillness.

The transformation between the apparent and the hidden depends on the will inside the mind. Here, Liu Zongzhou applies Zhu Xi’s interpretation. However, he transforms the term *duzhi*, allowing it to denote more subtle and meticulous inner activities. The time when a person carefully deliberates affairs is the time “when my mind knows itself.” This emphasizes the self-knowledge related to the activities of the inner mind. Self-knowledge can manifest the *du* entity. Such manifestations are a phenomenon that is only revealed by the *self*. They do not represent the *self*. In the stillness, the ability to perceive the *du* entity through self-knowledge is hidden and encompassed in the nature of our body.

Moreover, Liu Zongzhou further indicates that the *du* entity is the connection between human nature and the heart-mind. The du entity is contained within the human heart-mind, and it represents as the goodness of human nature. Therefore, apprehending the *du* entity can reveal the function, attribute, meaning, and value of the human heart-mind and nature. To appreciate the relationship between the *du* entity, the human heart-mind, and human nature, it is necessary to examine the notion of movement and stillness. What do movement and stillness refer to in Liu Zongzhou’s discussion? What is the interaction between the *du* entity and the mind and nature in relation to different activities of the psyche?

## The Du Entity with the Activities of the Mind and Human Nature

Liu observed the psychological mechanisms and incorporated his analysis of the human heart-mind into his philosophical discourse. He merged his theory with methods of moral cultivation in his *Renpu* 人譜 (*Human Schematic*). The philosophical framework of the *Renpu* revolves around one important issue: *How to be a human-being*. It teaches the moral practice with a specific focus: *How to be human by being mindful of the self*.

The *Renpu* begins with a discourse that defines the *du* entity. Further, it discusses the activities of the psyche that exist in the interaction between the human mind and external things. Specifically, the *Renpu* indicates the state of movement and stillness in the human heart-mind. Liu states:

獨體本無動靜，而動念其端倪也。動而生陽，七情著焉。…七情之動不勝窮，而約之為累心之物，則嗜欲忿懥居其大者。

There is no movement or stillness in terms of the *du* entity, but its point is the activation of an intention. Movement grows activities, and seven feelings are demonstrated. …the movement of seven feelings is inexhaustible, and if they are considered to be a burden to the heart-mind, then indulgence, resentment, and anger are the serious of them all.[[21]](#footnote-21)

When external ideas stimulate our minds, this, in turn, causes the mind to produce the intentions to respond to things. This is called *dongnian*  (動念the activation of intention). The movement is represented as a mental state that can easily be pulled and exerted by external things. When the mind is activated by things, then, according to Liu, seven emotions follow: excessive happiness, displaced anger, exaggerated grief, overwhelming anxiety, spoiling, malicious behavior, and the indulgence of desires.[[22]](#footnote-22) They display a certain kind of pathological psychology when interacting with the outside world. Such psychology causes people to become obsessed with responses to external things. Liu states:

人心終日如馬足車輪，奔馳無止，果系何物受累？

Human heart-mind is like the horses' feet and wheels, running inexorably; what makes it that suffers?”[[23]](#footnote-23)

The temptation presented by external things drives the mind towards a sense of chasing and longing, and like wheels, it keeps moving without stopping. Liu Zongzhou quested people for deliverance from metaphysical burdens. The continuous movement of the mind also forces us to keep making faults, leading inexorably to a worsening of the situation. He further connects the inner activities of the heart-mind with the process of making faults. The fault is always planted within the subtle movement of the mind, which is called *wang* (妄 delusion). As Liu states:

妄根所中曰惑，為利為名，為生死，其粗者，為酒色財氣。

Falling into the delusional root is known the confusion of mind, for pursuing profit, fame, birth and death; and those boorish people pursue wine, sex, wealth, and power.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The heart-mind is confused by the outside world, and tends to become enmeshed in external temptations. It is easy to fall into the grip of desire. Therefore, the heart-mind should be aware of the delusion. Specifically, noticing the temptation of external things can be harmful to the heart-mind. It is important to divert the mind from chasing and longing to stillness, a place where no desire is allowed to emerge. Liu further indicates:

念如其初，則情返乎性。動無不善，動亦靜也。轉一念而不善隨之，動而動矣。是以君子有慎動之學。

If the thoughts are as they were at the beginning, the emotions return to their human nature. There will be no harm in movement, and movement remains as stillness. If a thought changes and is followed by an evil one, then the active state [of mind] will keep moving. This is why the superior man has the wisdom to be cautious of [mind] movement.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The heart-mind can be the manifestation of human nature. The prerequisite is to be able to control the mind. Specifically, being aware of the natural goodness of the human heart, which prompts the mind to move from the desire. Consequently, mind activity moves from movement to stillness. The stillness refers to a mental state that is not moving by any desires, it denotes a state of self-restraint.

In addition, the key to the process of movement to stillness lies on the exploration and development of the *du* entity. Liu further indicates:

於焉官雖止，而神自行，仍一一以獨體閑之，靜而妙合於動矣。天命之性不可見，而見於容貌辭氣之間，莫不各有當然之則，是即所謂性也。

In this way, although the organs stop moving, the spirit operates and is skillfully controlled by the *du* entity; therefore, the stillness is perfectly united with movement. The heavenly nature cannot be visually seen, but it is demonstrated in the appearance, speech, and breath, all of which accord with their own rules; that is, so-called nature.[[26]](#footnote-26)

慎獨而中和位育，天下之能事畢矣。

*Shendu* nourishes the state of harmony, and it makes all myriad things in the world possible to be accomplished.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Referring to the *Zhongyong*, it states: "What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature; to follow our nature is called the Way." 天命之謂性，率性之謂道。[[28]](#footnote-28) The heavenly nature potentially sets a basic path for the mind to follow. The *du* entity can bring out the path, make it play roles, and develop values in the life. It is known as the succession of natural goodness. However, the natural goodness of the human heart must be found in a place where desires are absent. Thus, the process of succession can only be achieved by adjusting the heart-mind. In a practical sense, this means one much keep the mind at the state of stillness without being pulled by external things. This is the purpose of the *shendu* practice*.* In other words, *shendu* is key to achieving the equilibrium of stillness and movement of the heart-mind.

## The Moral Practice of Shendu: The Essentials of the Authenticated Humans with The Ledger of Demerit

Liu Zongzhou begins the *Renpu* with an exposition of his own philosophical system; that is, his theory ofthe *du* entity. The second half of the book is devoted to teaching his students about specific moral practices.

The contemporary Chinese philosopher Tang Junyi (唐君毅, 1909-1978) once commented on Liu’s work:

《人譜》所言之為學之道，及其所列之種種過，初看似多拘礙。然細看得其本旨，在成就一由心而身，由內而外，有本而末之作聖之功，則知其皆實學。高明之士，若果能於其所謂『凜閒居以體獨』，『卜動念以知幾處』，用得工夫，亦必日日以其所謂『大過』、『叢過』自檢點，然後能作聖也。

The way of learning and the various faults listed in the *Renpu* may at first appear to be a constraint. However, if we read it closely, we can understand its essence, in which it lies in the attainment of sagehood from the heart to the body, from the inside to the outside, and from the first to the last; thus, knowing that it [the *Renpu*] is all practical learning. A masterful man who can apply himself to what [Liu] calls "respectfully apprehending the du entity while alone," and "knowing the subtleness of mind through assessing intention," to practice, he also must inspect himself every day from what [Liu] calls "great faults" or "numerous faults," and then he could become a sage.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Tang's comment mentions two parts of the *Renpu*, the *Zhengren Yaoyue* (證人要約*The Essentials of the Authenticated Humans*) and the *Jiguo ge* (紀過格*The Ledger of Demerit*). The *Zhengren yaoyue* describes moral practice positively by constructing the process of attaining sagehood in six stages. This establishes the theory that virtuous conduct can be achieved from the slightest inner mental state to a visible external behavior. Referring to Tang, the practical study of Liu Zongzhou's moral cultivation starts from the inner thoughts of the mind. Subsequently, it gradually progresses to outer behavior. In essence, the *Zhengren Yaoyue* examines *Da Xue*'s doctrine of integrity, that what truly is within will be manifested without. In other words, moral conduct comprises the straight expression of the mind.

The *Jiguo ge* lists over a hundred faults that humans are prone to commit, from the minor to the serious, so that students can always inspect their conduct and stop their mistakes in time. Thus, moral practice must be performed in accordance with the *Jiguo ge*. Liu Zongzhou also tended to name and define these faults. Liu believed it was necessary to define these faults in order to investigate their real causes. Many of the faults that are listed in the *Jiguo ge* have the potential to generate little or even no consequences. Yet, Liu still exposes them. In Liu's practice, correcting thoughts is knowing what a fault can be. The fault does not depend on consequences; instead, it depends on impure motivations and intentions. In other words, the inner evil thoughts of the mind are the focus and object of moral practice.

The first stage cultivation is the acknowledgement of the evil thought when it arises within the mind. According to Liu, it is essential to know it and stop it. If we cannot stop the thought from arising, it generates the *weiguo* (微過, slight fault) that is indescribable and inexplicable.[[30]](#footnote-30) At this stage, the fault is not evident. Only the *du* entity knows about it, 獨知主之.[[31]](#footnote-31) Therefore, the *Renpu* requires the student to apprehend the thought to activate the *du* entity in order to make it play its role.

The second stage involves the management of emotions and feelings. Liu Zongzhou indicates that we should not wait until emotions are fully formed and evident. Rather, they should be addressed and remedied when they initially emerge.[[32]](#footnote-32) He further warns that the failure to control emotions at this point, faults will begin to form. The *Jiguo ge* defines the faults that occur at this stage as *yinguo* (隱過, hidden faults). These faults arise from the improper development of the seven emotions outlined above. However, the faults can be hidden within the mind. At this stage, faults have not yet been revealed and have not generated any serious consequences. However, the signs of the faults become slightly evident.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The third stage focuses on the introspection of outward conduct, including speech and behavior. At this stage, Liu Zongzhou seeks the cultivation of dignity and focuses on the order and seriousness of speech and behavior. Correspondingly, if people do not carefully examine their conducts at this stage, the *xianguo*顯過, apparent faults emerge.[[34]](#footnote-34) In this stage, Liu proposed thirty inappropriate manners that accord with nine physical appearances, namely: feet, hands, eyes, mouth, sounds, head, breath, standing, and face. [[35]](#footnote-35) According to Liu:

以上諸過，授於身，故曰顯。仍坐前微、隱二過來，一過積三過。

All of the above faults are related to the body, so they are known as appearance. The above faults are generated from [the ignorance of correcting the] previous stages of faults, the slight faults and hidden faults. It accumulates as three stages of faults.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The fault of physical appearance comes from a lack of attention to emotions, and the inability to control emotions. In essence, faults are generated from insufficient self-awareness and consciousness of the self. Since emotions and feelings will be expressed through outward conduct, the faults caused at this stage will be visible in the appearance.[[37]](#footnote-37) Thus, the moral cultivation at this stage requires students to give more attention and introspection to the appearance in order to ensure it is modified.

The fourth stage extends the focus from the self-appearance and behavior to the relationships with others. It requires students to be watchful of their behavior when dealing with the relationship of the *wulun* 五倫, five relationships. Correspondingly, the *Renpu* calls the faults committed in this stage as *daguo* 大過, major faults. For example, sixteen faults can appear between friends, including laziness, jealousy, and harboring grudges.[[38]](#footnote-38) In fact, faults in this stage incorporate the faults accumulated from the previous stages, namely: the subtle, hidden, and apparent faults. In other words, they are caused because of the ignorance of self-correction of faults in previous stages.[[39]](#footnote-39) According to Liu, the major faults invariably emerge in appearance and speech.[[40]](#footnote-40) For instance, referring to the appearance of the mouth, *gaosheng*高聲, “talking too loud” is an apparent fault. When one talks too loudly with a superior or their parents, this represents a major fault because it concerns the five relationships.

The fifth stage further expands the management of relationships from the five relationships to all things in the world. As Liu states:

盈天地間皆吾父子、兄弟、夫婦、君臣、朋友也。

All things within heaven and earth are the relationships of my father and son, brothers, husband and wife, ruler and subjects, and friends.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Practice of this stage requires the examination of all affairs. It cultivates being self-aware and watchful over all real affairs of life in order to refine the behavior and achieve harmony with external things. Liu Zongzhou offers a criticism to scholars:

今學者動言萬物備我，恐只是鏡中花，略見得光景如此。若是真見得，便須一一與之踐履過。

Today's scholars that are talking about that [the principles of] myriad things completed within my heart that there are only flowers in the mirror, flickering light, and passing shadows. If one could really comprehend it (the principle), then he must practice through [affairs] one by one.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Wang Yangming, a Chinese neo-Confucian philosopher (王陽明, 1472--1529) had the same idea of “polishing in the actual affairs of life.” 事上磨煉[[43]](#footnote-43) Self-introspection must be meticulous and comprehensive. It should cover every trivial detail in life. Students must be cautious of every aspect of their existence and every situation they encounter in life. This includes their responses to both living things and objects. Hence, it is necessary to cultivate the ability to examine inwardly and to introspect self-interactions with external objects in the world. Moral cultivation at this stage is called the *wuwu taiji* 物物太極*.* *Taiji* refers to an ultimate standard, and the *wuwu* denotes the correspondence between things that are reflected in the heart and the objective things in the world.[[44]](#footnote-44) In other words, this stage requires students to understand the ultimate standards that could harmonize the self and external things.

Accordingly, at this stage, the faults that are listed in *Jiguo ge* refers to failures of harmony between the self and things. These are the common faults, including gambling, addiction to alcohol, and extravagance.[[45]](#footnote-45)Liu Zongzhou suggests that the faults made at this stage are the combination of one hundred actions. He believes that these faults comprise the accumulation of minor conducts and are not generated by one single action. Therefore, Liu urges us to pay attention to the minor conducts in life, quoting, “If one does not restrain oneself on small acts, he will veer off the path toward great virtue.” 細行不矜，終累大德[[46]](#footnote-46) In other words, failure to be alert to faults at this stage prompt the permanent departure from the path toward sagehood.

The management of relationships with myriad things in the world and the apprehension of the ultimate principle of engaging with the world renders it possible to enter the sixth stage. One can prepare to become a sage at this stage since there will be no fault shown. Liu emphasized that the only work that is required is to be consistent with moral cultivation, stating:

自古無現成的聖人，即堯、舜不廢兢兢業業。其次，只一味遷善改過。

There have been no ready-made sages since the ancient times. Even Yao and Shun did not stop working hard, to correct their self-faults in order to move forwards to the goodness.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The key to this work is self-assessment through the five stages of faults. Liu further stated that:

學者未歷過上五條公案，通身都是罪過。即已歷過上五條公案，通身仍是罪過。

If a scholar has not experienced the above five cases, his whole body is sinful. Yet, even if one has experienced the above five cases, he feels his whole body is still sinful. [[48]](#footnote-48)

This indicates that an increased wish to correct one’s faults is typically accompanied by the realization that one’s faults are infinite. In other words, if the intention of moral cultivation is sincere, there will be no sense of complacency when faults are corrected. The Ming Confucianism scholar, Xue Xuan(薛瑄, 1389-1464), was determined to overcome his emotional defect of anger. He had been cultivating himself for over twenty years. However, he observed that the path was endless. During the process of cultivation, Xue Xuan’s understanding of anger became more nuanced. For example, common people may think that showing anger is actual anger, but for Xue, feeling displeasure within his heart already counted as anger.[[49]](#footnote-49) In the *Analects of Confucius*, Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉sought to reduce his faults but was unable to do so.[[50]](#footnote-50) This is because the sages never feel satisfied with their own virtue and are aware that defects remain unresolved. In other words, the work of attaining sagehood does not depend on external requirements. Rather, it depends on the self, including knowledge of one's faults and continually correcting them. Liu further stated:

才認己無不是處，愈流愈下，終成凡夫；才認己有不是處，愈達愈上，便是聖人。

The more you think that there is no fault with you, the lower you go, the more you will become a common folk; the more you recognize that there are always faults with you, the higher you achieve; you will become a sage eventually. [[51]](#footnote-51)

The attainment of sagehood is a high ambition. It is a grandiose aim, but the path towards fulfilling this objective must be taken underfoot. In the sixth stage, wherein the individual becomes a sage, the capacity for self-correction is pushed to the extreme. At this stage, the individual has a keen insight into the appearance of evil thoughts, and this insight is the *du* entity at work. It seems to be that the *Jiguo ge*’s examination of faults returns to the first stage, which is the correction of subtle thoughts.

## Conclusion

This essay provides a basic cross-reading of two texts, the *Renpu* and Liu Zongzhou’s chapter in *The Records of Ming Scholars*. Liu Zongzhou’s discourse in *The Records of Ming Scholars* primarily comprises his thoughts on his philosophical framework, whereas the *Renpu* is a functional work that serves as a guide for students wishing to cultivate virtue. The practical work that *Renpu* focuses on is self-correction. In particular, it targets the *nian* 念, a word that might be translated as thought, will, or intention, according to context. In essence, *nian* is the initial reaction that occurs when one engages with the external world. It is the mental state of movement and the cause of one’s emotions and behavior.

According to the *Renpu*, the development of making faults regards *nian* as the starting point that is listed as the object at the first stage of faults. It is the root of all faults. This is because, the *nian* drives people’s emotions and behaviors. It can create a strong sense of longing and form the desire in the human mind. Eventually, when the desire acts out, it is displayed in human conduct and has consequences in human affairs. This is a process of externalization from subtleness to apparentness.

In addition, in terms of moral practice, *nian* is the end point of self-examination and introspection. Rather than causing faults, moral cultivation is a process of internalization from apparentness to subtleness. Self- examination starts from the awareness of the most evident faults, such as misbehavior, and finally progresses to profound self-knowledge of one's own thoughts. Thus, it encompasses considering your motives, refining inner thoughts, and transforming thoughts from human desire to the natural goodness. Being extremely mindful of the inner thought renders it possible to overcome the faults of self-deception and to achieve the virtue of integrity. Therefore, in Liu Zongzhou’s view, the wisdom of achieving sagehood could be concluded as a process of internalization.

Moreover, in the examination and self-correction of thoughts, it is the faculty of the *du* entity that plays the pivotal role by being self-aware of the natural goodness contained in the human heart. In relation to desires in mind, it can free our mind from the longings. However, Liu Zongzhou tends to assert that all the *nian* is evil, since it causes metaphysical burdens for human beings. In particular, it has a tendency to produce the desire, which would be additionally harmful to the natural goodness. In fact, Liu Zongzhou rejected the possibility that *nian* could motivate virtuous conduct, refuting the proposition that it might guide people toward the performance of good deeds. This resulted in his criticism of the prevailing attitudes of his day.

The composition of the *Renpu* was prompted by the circulation of Yuan Huang’s (袁黃, 1533--1606) *Gongguo ge*功過格, *A Ledger of Merit and Demerit*. Liu Zongzhou criticized this work on the grounds that it was too utilitarian, as it established the sense that people thought their fate resulted from their previous actions. Wang Fansen 王汎森argues that Liu Zongzhou opposed the *Ledger of Merits and Demerits* for three reasons. First, Liu Zongzhou was against Yuan’s application of the Buddhist concept of Karma in order to encourage people to invest in moral cultivation. Second, he opposed the idea of reflecting on and correcting mistakes afterwards. Third, he felt that calculating merits and demerits tended to make people feel complacent.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In fact, calculating merits and making amends for mistakes does not prevent future mistakes. Meanwhile, calculating merits could also lead to a failure to perform good deeds or even promote evil behavior if deeds are too small or not perceived as big enough. In essence, this thinking does not help moral cultivation. It does not raise self-awareness in a psychological sense. Hence, it does not improve knowledge about what you are doing or increase understanding of the consequences. The essence of the issue is that moral cultivation is not about weighing up and calculating human affairs. Rather, the heart-mind must be conscious of the goodness of the heart, which is the foundation of moral cultivation. Therefore, Liu Zongzhou focused on the internal and delicate issue of the heart-mind rather than the superficial results of human affairs.

Moreover, if one only focuses on merits and virtues, any intention to perform good deeds remains based on the pursuit of power and profit. In this way, virtuous cultivation leads to self-deception. According to Liu Zongzhou:

進之則為鄉原，似忠信，似廉潔，猶宴然自以為是，而近世士大夫受病，皆坐一偽字，使人名之假道學。

Moving forward, one will be the careful people in the villages, seemingly faithful, honest, still calmly keen his own beliefs. Contemporary scholars have identified a defect whereby the word indicates *hypocrisy*, which causes people to regard it as fake doctrine. [[53]](#footnote-53)

People who practice self-deception are complacent about showing their apparent virtuous conduct. They not only deceive themselves, but also dupe others around them into regarding them as virtuous people. Liu Zongzhou believed that moral cultivation lies in the *self*. It is not for presentation to *others*. The key to cultivation starts with the correction of one's faults, the serious perception of faults, and the realization of the true intentions, and the motive to address faults within the heart. Therefore, Liu Zongzhou 's *Jiguo ge* only records faults, not merits. It demonstrates Liu Zongzhou's consideration of the motivations that inform moral practice.

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1. Zhu Xi, *Da xue*, 7; translation by Chan, *Source Book*, 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Zhong Yong*, 17-18; translation by Chan, *Source Book* 97-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Translation by Johnston, *Daxue and Zhongyong* , 216-217, with some modifications. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Johnston, *Daxue and Zhongyong* , 154-155. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Zhu Xi indicates that: “This is how he is able to nip human desires in the bud, not letting them grow larger in the midst of the hidden and trifling so as to reach the point of becoming distant from the Way. 所以遏人欲於將萌，而不使其滋長於隱微之中，以至離道之遠也。” Ibid, 410-411. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Huang, *Mingru xuean*, 1514. Texts about Liu Zongzhou are translated by the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Yao, *Liu Zongzhou Nianpu*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Liu, *Renpu*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Dai, *Liu Zongzhou Quanji*, vol.2, 466. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Huang, *Mingru Xuean*, 1527. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Mingru Xuean*, 1523. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, 1518. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Renpu*, 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The seven feelings are named as following: 溢喜，遷怒，傷哀，多懼憂，溺愛，作惡，縱欲, in *Renpu*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Mingru Xuean*, 1592. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Renpu*,7. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Mingru Xuean*, 1592. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Renpu*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Chan, *Source Book*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Tang, Zhongguo Zhexue Yuanlun: Yuanjiao Pian*中國哲學原論·原教篇, 491. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Renpu*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Renpu*,7. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid,8. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid.7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Nine physical appearances are足容、手容、目容、口容、聲容、頭容、氣容、立容、色容, recorded in *Renpu*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Renpu*,9. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Renpu*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Mingru Xuean*, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Renpu*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Renpu*, 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Renpu*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *Mingru Xuean*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Lau D.C. trans. *Confucius:* *The Analects*, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Mingru Xuean*, 1518. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Wang Fansen, 王汎森. “Mingmo qingchude renpu yu xingguohui” 明末清初的人譜與省過會, in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishiyuyan yanjiusuo jikan*, 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊, vol 63, (1993),679-712. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Mingru Xuean, 1569. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)