A Study of Liu Zongzhou's Proposal of Zhengming

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Based on the analysis of an incident that took place in the Chunqiu Period state of Wei, Liu Zongzhou (1578-1645) elaborated on the concept of zhengming *正名 (correcting names, rectifying terms, etc.). Firstly, Liu Zongzhou carefully examined the responsibilities of Confucius (551 BCE-479 BCE), Kuaikui (?-478 BCE), Zhe (492 BCE-481 BCE), Ying, as well as how the proposal of* zhengming *could be effectively implemented. Secondly, Liu Zongzhou's approach emphasizes the consequences of personal error and its rectification. Liu Zongzhou is particularly concerned with the political and ethical issues faced by* zhengming*, arguing that the evaluations of monarchal legitimacy can be approached from an ethical perspective. Thirdly, Liu Zongzhou's proposal is shaped by the late Ming Dynasty's context of foreign invasions and the breakdown of traditional moral teachings. Building on Liu Zongzhou's approach, we can further explore the vital significance of the principle of* zhengming*. While* zhengming *is the ultimate goal and overarching principle, the specific approach varies depending on the time and circumstances.*

Key words: Liu Zongzhou; *zhengming*; Wei State incident; late Ming crisis

1 Introduction

This paper examines Liu Zongzhou's concept of *zhengming.*[1] Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周 (1578-1645), styled Qidong 起东, is known as Master Jishan 蕺山 and was a Confucian scholar during the late Ming Dynasty. The era he lived in faced invasions from a foreign power, Qing 清 Dynasty (1616-1911), placing the Ming 明 (1368-1644) Dynasty and its people in a state of crisis. Consequently, his thought exhibits distinct characteristics and a spirit that set it apart from those of other Confucian scholars such as Hu Anguo 胡安国 (1107-1138), Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200)[2] and Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472-1529) who did not face such threats. Liu Zongzhou's *zhengming* is articulated through his interpretation of a specific historical crisis in the state of Wei, the power struggle between Kuai Kui 蒯聩 (?-478) and his son Zhe 辄 (492-481). By analyzing this event from Confucius's time, Liu proposes judgments that illustrate his approach to addressing analogous problems of political legitimacy and moral disorder in his

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own Ming context.

This article first provides a detailed examination of Liu Zongzhou's proposal and then compares it with those of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming in order to reveal the internal logic and political characteristics of his approach to *zhengming*. Finally, this article analyzes how Liu Zongzhou puts forward this approach in the context of the political environment of his time.

Before discussing Liu Zongzhou's *zhengming* proposals, it is essential to introduce the "Wei incident." By tracing the origins and developments of this event, Zhu Xi provides a succinct summary by citing Hu Anguo's viewpoint：

> The Crown Prince Kuaikui of Wei was ashamed of his mother Nanzi's 南子 (?-479) licentiousness and sought to kill her but failed, leading to his exile. Duke Ling 灵公 (540-493) intended to appoint Prince Ying 郢 as ruler, but Ying declined. After the Duke's death, his wife [Nanzi] appointed him, but he declined once more. Thus, they appointed Zhe, the son of Kuaikui, to resist Kuaikui
> 卫世子蒯聩耻其母南子之淫乱，欲杀之不果而出奔。灵公欲立公子郢，郢辞。公卒，夫人立之，又辞。乃立蒯聩之子辄，以拒蒯聩。 (Zhu Xi 2002: 179).

In response to the Wei incident, Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming proposed different evaluations of this case. Zhu Xi held that

> In the Master's management of political affairs, he would prioritize *zhengming*. He considered it necessary to provide all the details of the affair from beginning to end, inform the Son of Heaven, consult the lords, appoint prince Ying and install him. Then human relations are correct, the Heavenly principle obtained, names correct, instructions followed, and affairs completed.
> 夫子为政而以正名为先，必将具其事之本末，告诸天子，请于方伯，命公子郢而立之，则人伦正，天理得，名正言顺，而事成矣。 (Zhu Xi 2002: 180).

In contrast, Wang Yangming contended:

"Once Kuaikui returns, Zhe should return the state and request punishment. Having been reformed by his son Zhe, and with Confucius sincerely mediating, Kuai Kui would firmly refuse and still appoint Zhe"
蒯聩既还，辄乃致国请戮。聩已见化于子，又有夫子至诚调和其间，当亦决不肯受，仍以命辄。 (Wang Yangming 2011: 21).[3]

Contemporary scholars have tried to summarize the views of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. Zhu Cheng believes that Zhu Xi emphasized the primacy of human relations, the legitimacy of the late king's will, and the power that is held publicly, whereas Wang Yangming focused on the significance of human relations within political power and public life (Zhu Cheng 2022: 8).[4] Cui Shuzhi and Luo Binbin believe that Song scholars aimed to "uphold the name of ruler," primarily

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concerned with the political question of "who can govern a state." In contrast, Wang Yangming sought to "uphold the name of son," placing greater importance on the moral inquiry of "how to be a human being." (Cui and Luo 2021: 4).[5] The comparison of the approaches of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, along with Zhu Cheng, and Cui Shuzhi, and Luo Binbin's analysis of their differences, reveals that Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming differ significantly in their proposals and the philosophical foundations they rely on. In this context, what distinct features characterize Liu Zongzhou's approach in comparison to those of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming?

Zhu, Cui, and Luo's articles have laid the groundwork for my research, but neither addresses Liu Zongzhou's idea of *zhengming,* which is distinct from those of both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. In my view, Liu Zongzhou's proposed evaluations are more practical compared to those of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. Both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming's evaluations are moral proposals constructed upon their interpretations of Confucian ethics. Liu Zongzhou, however, undertakes a thorough consideration of the practical circumstances that Confucius faced at that time, and formulates his *zhengming* in response to these realities. His interpretation is comprehensive and emphasizes contextual considerations, reflecting a spirit of realism that is closely related to the ethnical crisis of the late Ming Dynasty in which he lived.

2 Liu Zongzhou's Approach to *Zhengming* in the State of Wei

The main points of Liu Zongzhou's proposal for *zhengming* are as follows: He provides a detailed analysis of the key figures involved in the Wei State incident, outlining the necessary steps to achieve *zhengming*. Firstly, Liu emphasizes the importance of the *zhengming*. He believes that:

> As soon as the names and role-divisions in the state are not correct, then rites, music, punishments, and policies are all adversely affected, and the state is no longer a state. What *zhengming* connects is enormous! Therefore, when a gentleman names something, it must be sayable in speech; when sayable in speech, it must be practical in action; and rites, music, punishments, and policies can be selected and applied. As for a gentleman in the realm of titles and names, how would he ever be careless and fail to give it his full attention? This is why Confucius was very concerned about the political affairs of Wei.
> 国家名分一不正，而礼乐刑政举受其弊，国非其国矣。'正名'所系，大矣哉！故君子名之必可言，言之必可行，而礼乐刑政举而措之矣。君子于称名之际，其容苟焉而不加之意哉？孔子所以惓惓于卫政也。 (Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 422).[6]

Liu Zongzhou's statement is largely a paraphrase of Confucius's response to Zilu in *Lunyu* 13.3. In Liu's view, *Zhengming* refers to the names and role-divisions in the state, in this case related to the correct person installed on the throne. In the case of Wei, who among Kuaikui, Zhe, and Ying is eligible to be the monarch? Additionally, Liu Zongzhou emphasizes that when a gentleman proposes to *zhengming*, it must be done with no carelessness. Liu Zongzhou's

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proposal exemplifies this by meticulously examining three major protagonists implied in the case: Zhe, Kuaikui, and Ying.

Through a question-and-answer format, Liu Zongzhou discusses what four people involved in the Wei case, Confucius, Zhe, Kuaikui, and Ying, should have done to apply *zhengming*. The first question concerns what Confucius should have done.

> Someone asked, "How about Confucius' *zhengming*?" Liu Zongzhou replied, "If the lord of Wei had humbly entrusted the political affairs to Confucius, inevitably others would not have meddled, policies would not have interfered. By invoking the innate bond between father and son to shape the ruler's conscience, and by not allowing the disappearance of the heavenly principle and people's law, he would have transformed the state's population's views and perspectives, so that Zhe would have quickly repented, welcomed his father's return, and modestly yielded the throne to him. If Kuaikui had received the offer calmly and not rejected it, this would still have been better than installing Zhe on the throne.
> 或问："孔子正名当如何？"曰："使卫君虚心委夫子以政，必当人不与适，政不与间，恻恻于父子一本之良，感格主心，而以天理民彝之不容泯灭者，转移国人之观听，使辄憪然悔悟，迎父聩而逊之位，蒯聩即安然受之而不辞，犹愈于辄之立也。(Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 422).

Liu Zongzhou believes that if Confucius were entrusted with the political affairs of Wei, he would have "shaped the ruler's mind" by informing Zhe about the goodness of a father-son relationship and the long-lasting principles of heaven and the people, thereby guiding public opinion. The Master's goal was, according to Liu, to lead Zhe to repent and act accordingly.

Next, Liu Zongzhou outlines what Zhe and Kuaikui should have done. Based on Confucius's persuasion and guidance, Zhe would have experienced profound repentance, recognizing the error of blocking his father's return. Subsequently, Zhe would have welcomed his father back and abdicated the throne to him. Liu Zongzhou argues that this action would have aligned with the ritual principle governing father-son relationships, thereby rectifying Zhe's role. Confucius meant that the son's correct name was not "ruler," as that title rightly belonged to his father. This rectification corrects both the ethical error of refusing his father's return and the political error in the succession of the throne.

Secondly, Liu Zongzhou discusses what Kuaikui and Zhe should have done:

> Someone asked, "Both Zhe and Kuaikui revolted against their fathers. To let Zhe to be ruler rather than Kuaikui, where is righteousness in this?" [Liu Zongzhou] said, "This was speaking specifically about Zhe of Wei, not about Kuaikui's right to the throne […] If Kuaikui had a little conscience, he would have returned to the state and not claimed the throne for himself. Then Zhe would naturally have had no other option than to accept it. If the handling of the father-son relation had strictly followed this Way, then the human

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> relations would probably have been correct and the names/roles respected."
> 或曰："均一叛父也，舍辄而蒯聩，于义何居？"曰："此专为卫辄言，非为蒯聩言当立也……使蒯聩稍有人心，既反国而不自立，自然辄不得已而受之，而所以处父子者，克尽其道，庶几人伦正而名分肃矣。" (Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 422).

Kuaikui had planned to murder his father's favored concubine, betrayed Duke Ling of Wei, and fled to another state. According to the principle of *zhengming*, such a man should not become the ruler. Why, then, should Zhe relinquish the throne to him? Liu Zongzhou asserts that Zhe's act of relinquishing the throne serves to restore his proper status. Zhe's voluntary abdication does not necessarily mean that Kuaikui should be appointed as the monarch. Liu Zongzhou suggests that Kuaikui should, on one hand, return to Wei to fulfill the ethical rectification of Zhe. On the other hand, Kuaikui must firmly refuse to be monarch, as his crime disqualifies him for the throne. Kuaikui's firm refusal to rule would also be part of *zhengming*. Thus, his refusal to assume the throne fulfills the rectification of ethical names and properly assigns the political roles by acknowledging his ethical failings. It reveals two aspects of "*ming*": political identity and ethical identity. Kuikui's ethical wrongdoing—his attempted murdering his father's concubine—resulted in his loss of political eligibility to be monarch. Zhe also committed an ethical error by refusing his father's return. But Zhe could have corrected his ethical mistake in time by welcoming his father home, which in turn would have allowed the restoration of his political legitimacy to continue being the monarch. For Liu Zongzhou, *zhengming* is rooted primarily in the ethical cultivation of the individual, from which a legitimate political order naturally follows.

Besides Kuaikui and Zhe, Liu Zongzhou also analyzes Ying's role in the succession problem, who Wang Yangming did not mention. Liu Zongzhou believes:

> As for Ying, if he had taken up the command of the former monarch (Duke Ling of Wei, his father) and accepted the throne for himself, this action would have avoided resentment among the brothers. Rather than letting the son of the fugitive obtain the state and let the father and son relation [Kuaikui and Zhe] ultimately remain a difficult spot, he should have personally stabilized the state. Knowing that there is no other way out, but still yielding the state and causing turmoil, he not only abandoned the former monarch's legacy but also caused disorder. How can this be considered benevolent?
> 郢也承先君之命而自立, 可以无憾于兄弟者，即亡人之子可以得国而父子之间终于难处，宁以身定国耳。知不出此，而让国以酿乱，废先君之统，乱矣，焉得仁！(Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 345).

Liu Zongzhou acknowledges that Ying's ascension to the throne, based on the former monarch's order, would have been in accordance with Confucian ritual principle, thus making him a legitimate monarch. If Ying had directly followed the will of Duke Ling of Wei and assumed the throne, the dispute between Kuaikui and Zhe would not have arisen. However, Ying's refusal to accept the monarchy led to confusion and conflict between Zhe and Kuaikui regarding the rightful succession. Given this reality, and unlike Zhu Xi's proposal to "depose Zhe and appoint Ying as the monarch" (Zhu Xi 2002: 179-80), Liu Zongzhou argues that Ying's behavior is not

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benevolent and he needs to take responsibility for the events of the Wei.

3 Basic Principles of Liu Zongzhou's Proposal

The above analysis outlines the actions in terms of *zhengming,* as suggested by Confucius, according to Liu Zongzhou. Several aspects of this interpretation warrant further exploration. Firstly, Liu Zongzhou's analysis of the responsibilities and actions required for the *zhengming* reflects his emphasis on the consequences of personal error and its rectification. Secondly, Liu Zongzhou's analysis demonstrates a flexible, situation-sensitive approach in addressing various unique situations, showing how the principle of *zhengming* could be adapted to complex realities.

It is essential to note that in ancient China, the legitimacy of a ruler's position was determined through the hereditary lineage of the ruling family. For Confucius and Confucianism, family and ethics were inseparable, and the ethical integrity of the ruling family determined the legitimacy of its rule. Therefore, the analysis of the Wei state's *zhengming* event is directly connected to the relationship between morality and politics.-The Wei incident is primarily a political issue concerning the legitimacy of the monarch. However, the theoretical foundation of this issue lies in ethics, specifically in determining who possesses ethical righteousness. In *zhengming*, political resolutions and ethical considerations are inseparable. This is why Liu Zongzhou places particular emphasis on the individual ethical obligations of figures such as Kuaikui, Zhe, and Ying, meticulously analyzing the ethical duties each must bear and the ethical consequences that follow.

Based on individual ethical obligations, Liu Zongzhou argues that Kuaikui and Zhe should be considered separately: "This was specifically about Zhe of Wei, not about Kuaikui." 此专为卫辄言，非为蒯聩言当立也。 (Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 422). First, regarding Zhe, Liu Zongzhou believes that Zhe should welcome his father back and abdicate the throne to Kuaikui. This is essentially based on the ethical principle between father and son, specifically between Zhe and Kuaikui. Second, Kuaikui must return to the state, because rectifying Zhe's legitimacy as monarch requires the cooperation of his father, Kuaikui. However, Kuaikui should not declare himself as monarch, as he has previously committed an illegal act (his attempt to murder his father's concubine), and his refraining from claiming the throne represents the ethical consequence he should bear. Thus, by bringing back his father, Zhe's ethical role is corrected, thereby granting him legitimacy as monarch.

The *zhengming* idea related to the ethical relationship between Kuaikui and Zhe, and the realization of Zhe's legitimacy as monarch through welcoming Kuaikui, demonstrates that Zhe's refusal not only rectifies the incorrect ethical designation but also properly assigns the political roles. This underscores the inseparability of politics and ethics. This view contrasts

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with the one proposed by Cui Shuzhi and Luo Binbin. In their analysis, they attempt to "clarify the boundary between politics and morality" (Cui and Luo 2021: 17). However, distinguishing between political and moral schemes, and advocating for the separation is ultimately untenable according to Liu. While Confucius's *zhengming* addresses the political issue of the legitimacy of the monarch, the evaluation should be approached from an ethical and moral perspective. The inseparability of politics and morality is not a dilemma in the *zhengming*, but rather the foundation for resolving the issue. This is the fundamental characteristic of the *zhengming* issue.

Cui Shuzhi describes the approaches of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming as "thought experiments" (Cui and Luo 2021: 17), highlighting the idealistic nature of their proposals. Zhu Xi's approach advocates deposing Zhe, who had already ascended the throne, and appointing Ying as the new monarch. Liu Zongzhou explicitly opposes this proposal. Wang Yangming, in contrast, presents a scheme rooted in ethical sentiments, envisioning a harmonious relationship between ruler and subject, father and son. This approach is similarly imbued with idealism. In contrast, Liu Zongzhou's proposal is more pragmatic, arising from a careful consideration of the actual circumstances in Wei State.

When examining the legitimacy of the three figures—Kuaikui, Ying, and Zhe—it appears that each had a claim to the throne. Kuaikui, as the original crown prince under Duke Ling of Wei, had a legitimate claim to the throne. Zhe, as Kuaikui's son, also held a hereditary claim. Meanwhile, Ying also had legitimacy stemming from Duke Ling's "dying decree." However, considering the actual circumstances, Kuaikui's attempted murder of his father's concubine, Zhe's refusal to allow his father to return to Wei, and Ying's refusal to accept the throne, all contributed to a struggle for the throne. The "political position" of these three potential monarchs required rectification for various reasons, but only one could be the legitimate monarch. Confronted with this controversial situation, Liu Zongzhou, adhering to the principles of *zhengming*, proposed a solution grounded in this complexity.

Both Zhe's refusal to allow his father's return and Kuaikui's attempt on his father's concubine are acts of rebellion against their fathers, a central issue that *zhengming* should address. Liu Zongzhou weighs the severity of these two actions. He asserts:

> The father-son relation of Kuaikui was one time; the father-son relation of Zhe was this time [when Confucius spoke up]. As times had shifted and affairs changed, it is a dual offense to give up present ethical principles in order to stick to the order of the late king given on his deathbed.
> 蒯聩父子之伦，彼一时也；辄父子之伦，此一时也。时移事异，舍见在之纲常而胶先君之死命，是重之逆也。 (Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 422).

Kuaikui's attempted murder of his father's concubine is an established fact; and with his father, Duke Ling, now deceased, there is no way to correct his ethical mistakes. However, since Kuaikui is still alive, Zhe can restore the father-son relationship by welcoming his father back to the state. Therefore, Liu Zongzhou argues that rectifying Zhe's unfilial behavior should take precedence,

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while Kuaikui's name for being unfilial cannot be rectified due to his father's death.

Liu Zongzhou holds that when Confucius proposed *zhengming*, the priority was to clarify the status of Zhe, who had already become the monarch, rather than Kuaikui, who was no longer the monarch at that moment. This reflects the realism crucial in Liu Zongzhou's considerations.

4 Liu Zongzhou's *Zhengming* and His Time

From Zhu Xi to Wang Yangming, and later Liu Zongzhou, scholars proposed different interpretations of Confucius' appeal to *zhengming*. Zhu Xi advocated for the removal of Zhe and the appointment of Ying. He based his argument on the political mandate of the deceased monarch and the ethical bonds of father-son kinship between Duke Ling and Ying: "Duke Ling wanted to appoint Prince Ying" (Zhu Xi 2002: 179). In contrast, Wang Yangming suggested that Zhe should yield the throne to Kuaikui, but the latter would adamantly refuse the throne, thus allowing Zhe to remain ruler. This view was based on the "father-son relationship" between Zhe and Kuaikui (Wang Yangming 2011: 21). While Liu Zongzhou reached a similar conclusion, he placed greater emphasis on the ethical obligations of Zhe, Kuaikui, and Ying in his theoretical justification, and on the fact that Zhe was already established as the monarch.

This raises the question: Why do different rectification schemes arise from the same event? What accounts for the differences in the works of Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Liu Zongzhou? Could they be related to the distinct eras in the historical periods in which these thinkers lived? Furthermore, was *zhengming* seen as a fixed standard or a scheme adaptable to changing times?

I think that the rectification schemes proposed by various scholars are linked to the times in which they lived. For Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, Cui Shuzhi and Luo Binbin have argued that "Song scholars focused on political objectivity, while Yangming emphasized moral completeness, which is closely related to their political environments" (Cui and Luo 2021: 17). Yu Yingshi held the view that Confucian scholars in Song Dynasty, such as Zhu Xi, generally adopted a "implementing the Way (道) by enlightening the ruler's political orientation." In contrast, Confucian scholars in the Ming Dynasty, such as Wang Yangming, emphasized a social orientation consisting in "implementing the Way by awakening the people" (Yu Yingshi 2006: 36).[7] Applied to *zhengming*, this would mean that the approach of "implementing the Way by enlightening the ruler" centers on the monarch as the focal point of moral education, making him central to the process of *zhengming*. Thus, in Zhu Xi's proposal, the mandate of the deceased monarch is of paramount importance. The ruler of Wei should follow Duke Ling's will—Ying should be the monarch. In contrast, the approach of "implementing the Way by awakening the people" emphasizes the common people as the focus of moral education, shifting the emphasis from the monarch to the people, which is why Wang Yangming's proposal highlights the father-son relationship between Kuaikui and Zhe. This difference in emphasis

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explains, according to Cui and Luo, the divergent rectification schemes proposed by Zhu Xi and other Song Confucians compared to Wang Yangming and other Ming Confucians. Liu Zongzhou's proposal in the same Wei case transcends this very dichotomy. By establishing the conventional framework through Cui and Luo, I demonstrate that Liu Zongzhou's thought represents not just a choice between these earlier models, but a more integrated and stringent response to the political decay of the late Ming.

The era in which Liu Zongzhou lived adds new dimensions to the discussion. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, when faced with foreign invasion (from Later Jin/Qing Dynasty), collapse and the severe disruption of the Confucian moral order (*ming jiao* 名教) due to chaotic governance, Liu Zongzhou's central concern shifted to a more fundamental issue: the destruction of the ethical order and the consequent failure of the Dao (道): "The state has been conquered, and its ruler has perished" 国破君亡 (Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 229). His central question was whether the Way could continue to exist and exert influence in such a deteriorated state.

As Liu Zongzhou asserted:

> The only way for the cosmos to be constantly preserved and not destroyed is to maintain these firm rules and teaching of names. When sons using these principles to serve their fathers, and ministers to serve their lords, they can simply not even for one day fail to shine in their generation. The late emperor's personal sacrifice for the land was living out his life along his correct mandate, firmly exposing the great meaning of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.
> 惟是宇宙之所以尝存而不毁者，止此纲尝名教。子以之事其父，臣以之事其君，不可一日不明于世耳。先皇帝身殉社稷，正命考终，凛然著春秋大义。(Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 229).

Confucian scholars believe that various disorders within the state and the family are the issues that the *zhengming* seeks to address. Its philosophical basis lies in the firm rules and teaching of names. If the state falls and these principles can no longer be upheld, then *zhengming* loses its meaning. For Liu Zongzhou, the death of the Ming emperor signified the collapse of the state; consequently, the teaching of names could no longer be pursued.

This statement reflects both the eternal and authoritative nature of the Confucian moral order and the profound severity of its destruction during the late Ming period. Facing this harsh reality, the Ming emperor chose to uphold the practice of 'rectifying fate' (*zhengming* 正命) as a means of affirming the authority of the moral order even to the point of sacrificing his life. Therefore, this reality made it difficult for Liu Zongzhou to adopt the idealism of Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming; instead, he was compelled to confront concrete reality.

Regarding the event in Wei, Confucius decided to leave the state as *zhengming* could not be effectively implemented in its political affairs. Liu Zongzhou proposed,

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> With a determination as imposing as the axe and halberd, we for the time being rely on this one expression *zhengming*, and righteousness of punishing rebels will shine over myriad generations.
> 迨孔子之去志决而卫事益不可为，凛然斧钺，故托之正名之一言，而讨贼之义著于万世矣。 (Liu Zhongzhou 2012: 422).

In Liu's eyes, this statement reflects both Confucius's predicament and Liu Zongzhou's own. Although Confucius could not immediately implement his rectification scheme in Wei, he maintained the authority to criticize the confusion of names and realities—this was the essence of *zhengming*. This is why, when discussing the event in Wei, the Master opted for proposing the idea of *zhengming* without a specific proposal for how to achieve it. On the one hand, Confucius was not in the service of the monarch of Wei. On the other hand, the rectification scheme should adapt to the times, while the principle of *zhengming* remains an unchanging authority.

For Liu Zongzhou, who was confronted with the reality of foreign invasion and the impending collapse of the country this was a context in which the moral order was severely undermined and the Way could not be implemented. This posed a significant challenge; however, he remained steadfast in his belief in the power of *zhengming* as an eternal and indestructible element of the universe. Thus, Liu Zongzhou believed that as long as *zhengming* was applied, it would always be possible to punish those who destroyed the moral order.

Therefore, when faced with the same event, different rectification proposals emerged with distinct justifications, reflecting the complexity of the names to be rectified and the inherent tension within the principle of *zhengming*. In the case of Wei, whether dealing with Ying, Kuaikui, or Zhe, one could find grounds for their legitimacy as monarch while also identifying their shortcomings and determining how to rectify their roles as either "monarch" or "subject." The primary purpose of proposing an interpretation of *zhengming* was not merely to entertain a discussion, but to establish this as an authoritative cornerstone of Confucianism, preserving discursive authority over incidents that could be framed as a confusion between names and realities. On this foundation, the processes of *zhengming*, aligning speech with action, achieving success, and revitalizing rituals and music could proceed. This may, at least to some extent, explain why Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Liu Zongzhou proposed different rectification schemes for the succession issue in Wei and why *zhengming* has such a wide interpretive scope.

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5 Conclusion

Liu Zongzhou's interpretation of the *Lunyu* 13.3 dialogue carefully analyzes the responsibilities of Kuaikui, Zhe, and Ying. Through his detailed examination, he tries to clarify the ambiguities, divergences, and contradictions present in the Wei incident. As Kuaikui, Zhe, and Ying each pursued rectification based on their own ethical responsibilities, Zhe ultimately remains the monarch. According to Liu, this not only aligned with the reality of the situation but also adhering to the principle of *zhengming*.

Liu Zongzhou opposed appointing Ying as a monarch, reflecting his rejection of Zhu Xi's proposal. He maintained that Zhe should remain the ruler, although his considerations regarding procedure and conduct differed from Wang Yangming. His stance was not based on the moral sentiments inherent in the father-son relationship but on the consequences and rectification of individual errors. Only by correcting these mistakes could the objective of *zhengming* be achieved; on that basis, only Zhe could fulfill this role.

Moreover, Liu Zongzhou's conception of *zhengming* is further demonstrated by the choice he made in the face of the collapse of the political order, the dynastic transition, and the perceived dissolution of the Confucian values that underpinned them. Confronted with the fall of the Ming Dynasty, he chose to commit suicide[8] in order to uphold the enduring legitimacy and authority of the established social order and the teachings of names—an act that can be seen as a form of *zhengming* for the Ming Dynasty under extreme circumstances.

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1 In the study of *zhengming*, the first question is how to translate it. In the history of Chinese philosophy, *zhengming* has various meanings: *zheng* means correction or rectification, while *ming* encompasses designation, status, positions. Consequently, translations of the *zhengming* can take on various forms in different contexts, such as correcting the naming, rectifying roles, adjusting political position. For Liu Zongzhou, particularly in the context of the Wei incident, the focus primarily lies on rectifying political positions, while also engaging in discussions of ethical roles. Given the complexity and multi-layered dimensions of the concept of *zhengming*, this paper sticks to the transliteration.

2 Hu Anguo's viewpoint can be found in the works of Zhu Xi 朱熹, who quoted Hu Anguo's viewpoint and expressed his agreement (Zhu Xi 2002: 179-80).
Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Commentary on the Four Books with Annotations* 四书章句集注, Volume 6 of *the Complete Works of Zhu Xi* (朱子全书), Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2002.

3 Wang Yangming 王阳明, *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming* 王文成公全书, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2011.

4 Zhu Cheng 朱承, "How to Rectify Names: Wang Yangming's understanding of Confucius' Name Rectification 何以正名——王阳明对"孔子正名"的理解," *Journal of Guiyang University*

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(Social Sciences) 4(2002): 8–14.

5 Cui Shuzhi 崔树芝 and Luo Binbin 罗彬彬, "The Third Path to "Zheng ming": On the Dispute over "Zheng ming" between Wang Yangming and Confucian scholars in Song Dynasty" "正名"的第三种路径——评王阳明与宋儒的"正名"之争," *Journal of Guiyang University (Social Sciences)* 6 (2021): 14–29.

6 Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周, *The Complete Works of Liu Zongzhou* 刘宗周全集, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Press, 2012.

7 Yu Yingshi 余英时, *Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism and Political Culture* 宋明理学与政治文化, Nanning: Guangxi University Press, 2006.

8 Liu Zongzhou was preparing to eat when he heard the news of the state's surrender. He pushed the table aside and sorrowfully exclaimed, "This is the time for me to set the nation's fate right." Then, he went on a hunger strike (先生闻监国降，方食，推案恸哭曰："此余正命之时也。"遂不食。) (Liu Zongzhou 2012: 33-4).

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