

## Article

# Towards Others: Confucian Shu's (Due Consideration) Three Types of Gongfu (Practice)

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**Abstract:** The Confucian philosophy of the Dao of due consideration 恕 (*shu*) and of “Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire” 己所不欲, 勿施於人 undoubtedly involves the question of “others” and addresses the spiritual pursuit of individual equality, mutual agreement, and communality. Confucianism’s theory of practice 工夫 (*gongfu*), while emphasizing the establishment and success of oneself, also requires the ability to make others established and successful. There are basically three paths for the virtuous subject to reach others: “taking what is near at hand as an analogy” 能近取譬 (*neng jin qu pi*), the “measure” 度 (*duo*) of considering other people’s emotions on the basis of one’s own emotions 將心比心 (*jiang xin bi xin*), and putting oneself in the place of others 推己及人 (*tui ji ji ren*). The present study, drawing on the long commentarial tradition, will fully explicate them as *gongfu*, that is, as concrete processes of moral practice, revealing the three paths of the Dao of due consideration from self to others, and interpreting them in relation to the dimension of the other in Confucian ethical philosophy. All three are unified and highly practical and are effective means of realizing Confucian benevolence 仁 (*ren*). They do not exist in a sequential ascending relationship. Through diligent moral practice, people can “help others to take their stand” 立人 (*liren*) and “help others to realize themselves” 達人 (*daren*) by following any one of the three types of *gongfu*.

**Keywords:** Confucianism; *gongfu* of the Dao of due consideration 恕道工夫; others; taking what is near at hand as an analogy; considering other people’s feelings by one’s own feelings; putting oneself in the place of others



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## 1. Introduction

In the Confucian context, “due consideration” 恕 (*shu*) mainly refers to understanding the other from one’s own inner feelings in order to achieve consistency with them. As for the other dimension of due consideration, many scholars have discussed it usefully in recent years. Jiang Juyuan has pointed out that the thought of due consideration by *Ercheng* 二程 [the Cheng brothers] started from self-fulfillment 成己 (*chengji*), with the goal of helping others to achieve, the ideal of helping the world 兼濟天下 (*jian ji tianxia*), and the method of “giving justice to others” 公理施之於人 (*gongli shi zhi yu ren*), which avoids the philistine understanding of due consideration and forgives the other without forcing them (Jiang 2015, pp. 25–29). Chen Guirong also believes that the reasonable core of due consideration lies in respecting both one’s own subjective consciousness and the subjective consciousness of others, which can achieve the unity of self-interest and altruism (Chen 1999, pp. 41–46). Huang Guangguo focuses on the interaction between “doing the best one can” 盡己 (*jinji*) and “putting oneself in the place of others” 推己及人 (*tui ji ji ren*), interpreting due consideration as an individual’s “positive duty” (Huang 2023, pp. 38–52). Furthermore, it can show a normative system of morality model suitable for people’s actual life and ideological reality for moral construction, and provide a valuable reference for standardizing the requirements of interpersonal relationships at different moral levels. Deng Xiaomang observes that the “golden rule” 金規則 (*jinguize*) of Confucianism “mainly contains a

hypothesis—people share the same mind and the same reason” 人同此心，心同此理 (*ren tong ci xin, xin tong ci li*), which presupposes that the human mind 心 (*xin*) is a pattern. However, this premise of thinking is very problematic because “people’s minds are very different” and the “golden rule” cannot deal with this contradiction. Once one encounters differences, we can only see others as “not human, with minds that are divergent” 非我族類，其心必異 (*fei wo zu lei, qi xin bi yi*) and even eliminate them (Deng 2006, p. 194). Yu Zhiping’s works are more able to remind people that the Confucian doctrine of due consideration contains a tendency for using the subject’s self-consciousness to eliminate the violence of others, and also has the danger of compulsion, against which vigilance is required.<sup>1</sup> In the words of Theo Kobusch, “we find ourselves faced with the problem of how to understand the relationship between understanding or knowing, on the one hand, and forgiving or forgiveness on the other. However, this problem as such is not new; rather, it goes back to antiquity and can hardly be understood without taking into account its historical development” (Kobusch 2022, p. 79). While these discussions are worthy of our attention, this article goes deeper into the topic of whether due consideration can reach others and its interrogation in the ancient Confucian tradition. It will return to the Confucian classics and delve deeper into the original textual context to uncover the three basic propositions of “taking what is near at hand as an analogy” 能近取譬 (*neng jin qu pi*), “considering other people’s feelings by one’s own feelings” 以心度心 (*yi xin duo xin*), and “putting oneself in the place of others” 推己及人. These can fully unfold the specific requirements and operational processes as the practice 工夫 (*gongfu*)<sup>2</sup> of moral cultivation and, using the achievements of historical commentaries, can reveal the three paths of due consideration from the self to the other. Its academic value and significance lies in moving out of an abstract analytical mode studying the Dao of due consideration 恕道, no longer vague or generalized, elaborating the concept of due consideration, etymology, and pragmatic connotation, cutting into the path and way of practice, and specifically pointing out what moral individuals should “do” to move from the self to others. Furthermore, it can open space for the Dao of due consideration and present the dimension of the other in Confucian ethical philosophy. These are precisely the academic interventions that Confucianism urgently needs to construct the philosophy of the other.

## 2. The Etymology and English Translation of “shu”, and the Definition of “gongfu”

The Chinese character meaning “shu” is rather difficult to interpret and worthy of careful study. Purely on the basis of its structure, it is composed of the elements “like” or “as” 如 (*ru*), and “mind” 心 (*xin*). Thus, it appears that *shu* must relate to others, that is, to another person or object. The use of one’s own disposition and mind to treat, understand, and reach other people is the basic sense of *shu*. In due consideration, people have certainly already advanced to an objective state of selflessness 非本己 (*feibenji*). The lexicographical work of Xu Shen 許慎, the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字, states: “*shu*, that is, benevolence 仁 (*ren*)”, directly explaining the idea of “*shu*” with the idea of “benevolence”. This is obviously influenced by Confucian thought because if one wants to put due consideration into force, one must do it in human relationships; that is, it must be related to at least two people. So, we must understand due consideration within a relational structure. Volume 2 of the *Pronunciation and Meaning of All Classics* 一切經音義 (*Yiqie jing yinyi*) claims that “due consideration, is similar to”, and the meaning of “similar to” or “like” simply means that it has obtained a kind of comparative horizon. “To consider other person’s feeling by my own is due consideration” (Shi 1985, p. 85). This means that one can use one’s own disposition and one’s own mind to experience all objects, which certainly includes others, and from this one can understand, sympathize, and ultimately reach a complete understanding of one’s counterparts, which may justly be called due consideration. In the construction of the Confucian virtue system, due consideration is an indispensable and important aspect. In the practice of Confucian self-cultivation, due consideration is also the most basic link. In daily life, due consideration is both a psychological premise and a spiritual preparation that must be obtained in advance for interpersonal communication. Therefore, “only due consid-

eration can become virtue" (Toqto'a 脫脫 1977, p. 10293). Without consideration, virtue loses its foundation. The *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋繁露 of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 quotes Shi Shuo 世碩 as saying: "The accomplishment will influence the future generations; the glory will shine for hundreds of generations. There is no virtue of the sage more beautiful than Consideration" 功及子孫, 光輝百世, 聖人之德, 莫美於恕 (Dong 1989, p. 36). The way of due consideration of Confucianism, called by later generations the "golden Rule", is thus universally valid, applicable to different groups of people in different nations, and relevant everywhere.

As for the English translation of the word *shu*, Tu Weiming translated it as "altruism" and "reciprocity" in his book *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*. Here, "*shu*" contains the dual meanings of altruism and mutual benefit, and the two are often used interchangeably (Tu 1989, pp. 36–42 and 117). James Legge (1814–1897) translated "*shu*" as "reciprocity", that is, "exchange" or "mutuality". He translated the sentence about "*shu*" in *The Analects of Wei Ling Kung* 衛靈公 as "Is not reciprocity such a word? What do you do not want to do to yourself, do not do to others" 其恕乎, 己不所欲, 勿施於人 (Legge et al. 1992, p. 210). Obviously, the translation of "*shu*" into reciprocity and exchange implies the equivalence of self and others and is also very conducive to revealing and highlighting the dimension of otherness in forgiveness and the inherent requirement that the self should treat others equally. However, its defect lies in the loss of the original meaning of empathy and understanding of the word "*shu*". Wing-Tsit Chan's book *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* uses "altruism" to translate the word "*shu*", mentioned by Confucius in *The Analects* (Chan 1963, p. 44). In *The Chinese-English Dictionary of Chinese Philosophy* compiled by Guo Shangxing and Wang Chaoming, there is a special term for "*shu*", explained as "a Confucianist term which is also translated into 'altruism'" (Guo and Wang 2002, pp. 558 and 438).<sup>3</sup> It can be seen that it is possible to translate *shu* into due consideration. At the same time, we also admit that the Dao of due consideration 恕道 seems to include the idea of altruism. Confucius' sentence "己所不欲, 勿施於人" has been translated as "According to Master Kong, if one is loyal to others and does not do to others what one does not like oneself, he would be a man of humanity." However, altruism is only one possible direction for the "superior person" 君子 (*junzi*) to practice "due consideration". It is the possible effect of the action, not the original meaning of the word. Thus, this translation does not grasp the essence of the concept. Since the basic meaning of *shu* is forgiveness and understanding, this article will argue that it can correspond to the English term "due consideration". This is because in English the word "due consideration" itself has the meaning of regard, understanding, thoughtfulness, and concern, and they can not only include the subject's own conscious understanding but also show the other direction of this ideological activity. By translating the word *shu* into due consideration, which directly touches the act of *shu* itself, we can highlight the psychological characteristics of due consideration and conduct thinking and philosophical analysis on the two dimensions of the subject and the other, thus helping us to grasp the essence of the idea.

For Confucianism to enter the world, it must develop itself in reality and build an academic foundation based on the world of daily life, with individual moral cultivation as the basic way of learning. Although Confucianism is called a doctrine, in essence, it does not aim or refer to doctrines or theoretical systems. All of Confucianism's moral standards and doctrines require "practice in affairs", which must withstand the blows and tests of daily life, and be completed with the help of mental cultivation. This is the most fundamental provision of the Confucian concept of "practice" 工夫 (*gongfu*). How to do this is the core question that the Confucian *gongfu* theory seeks to address. *The Great Learning* 《大學》 famously contends that "the ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the empire, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowl-

edge lay in the investigation of things.” 古之欲明德於天下者，先治其國；欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先修其身；欲修其身者，先正其心；欲正其心者，先誠其意；欲誠其意者，先致其知，致知在格物 (Legge et al. 1992, p. 3). According to Confucianism, the attainment of all external achievements is determined by an individual's spiritual ability and level. Moral people, through active and effective cultivation, form their ideal personality, raise their spiritual level, and reach the highest realm of being one with each other, one with the Dao, and one with all things in heaven and earth. The Confucian practice of due consideration does not focus on conceptual definition and theoretical analysis, but should always focus on the implementation of *gongfu*. It advocates expanding the psychological experience that occurs within the moral individual, using effective physical training and control of willpower to approach the other, striving to experience the circumstances, atmosphere, and psychological feelings of the other, and attempting to reach the other's heart through one's own heart, and seeking consensus with others that can be shared. Thus, the Confucian doctrine of due consideration is neither a theoretical system, nor is it simply a logical insight. From the perspective of the *gongfu* theory, the discussion of the Dao of due consideration focuses on one's own cultivation, seeking to achieve connection and unity with the other, without deviating from the original meaning of the Dao of due consideration. This makes it easier to achieve the goal of the Dao of due consideration, which can help others realize themselves.

### 3. Textual Context: “Do Not Impose upon Others What You Yourself Do Not Desire”

For many concepts in Confucianism, Confucius seldom provided a ready-made definition. He was rather good at elaborating and commenting on different objects and problems in specific contexts. But about due consideration, Confucius provided three explanations in *The Analects* 論語.

First, there is a clear stipulation in the chapter *Wei Ling Kung* 衛靈公. Zigong asked, “Is there one word that can serve as a guide for one's entire life? ” And Confucius said, “Is it not ‘understanding’<sup>4</sup> (*shu* 恕)? Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire” (*Analects* 15.24; Slingerland 2003, p. 183). The word “*shu*” and the sentence “Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire” 己所不欲，勿施於人 are enough for a lifetime. “Only benevolence and due consideration can be practiced for a lifetime” 唯仁恕之一言，可終身行之也 (He and Xing 1999, p. 214). It can be seen that only “due consideration” is enough to serve as a life-long code of conduct; due consideration involves others, and benevolence is the inner part, but the two are closely related, indeed one can even say that the way of due consideration simply is the way of benevolence. Therefore, David B. Wong believes that this saying can be plausibly explained, as requiring one to imagine what one would want were one in the place or circumstances of others since it would hardly be an effective way of being sensitive to what others want without noticing the relevance of their circumstances (Wong 2014, p. 178). Qian Mu 錢穆 has written: “The way of benevolence cannot be expected to be realized immediately. Only with due consideration can it be realized in the moment. Not to do to others what you would not wish done to yourself. At first glance it seems to be negative, but it is only in the moment that it is so, expand this mind [the mind of due consideration] and the way of benevolence is in it” (Qian 2002, p. 413). There is due consideration in benevolence, and there is benevolence in consideration. The two are separate and in contact at the same time. For every Confucian, one must follow benevolence and pursue it throughout their life. “*Ren* is clearly the highest human excellence treasured by the Master, and there is something about those who exhibit it that compels respect and efforts at emulation” (Larson and Rosemont 2017, pp. 96–116). Although benevolence can be the highest ideal, it can never be achieved or realized, but it can be expressed by the idea that “If I simply desire goodness, I will find that it is already here” (*Shu Er* 述而) (*Analects* 7.30; Slingerland 2003, p. 74). Benevolence is inherent in oneself. As long as the subject is conscious and works hard, it can be manifested immediately. Benevolence is neither far from one's self, nor is it far from other people, and being able to “take what is near at hand as an analogy 能近取譬” (*Yung Ye* 雍也) (*Analects*

6.30; [Slingerland 2003](#), p. 63) is itself near at hand. It is in the real world that can be felt and touched, and it is neither mysterious nor obscure.

Secondly, there is the exposition in the chapter *Yen Yuan* 顏淵. Ran Yong 冉雍, a disciple of Confucius who was twenty-seven years younger than Confucius, having good moral conduct and the bearing of a ruler of men, asked Confucius about benevolence. Confucius said: “When in public, comport yourself as if you were receiving an important guest, and in your management of the common people, behave as if you were overseeing a great sacrifice.’ Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire. In this way, you will encounter no resentment in your public or private life” (*Analects* 12.2; [Slingerland 2003](#), p. 126). Going out on business should have a feeling similar to receiving honorable guests, living in a high-ranking position, and using people as servants should be like holding a grand sacrificial event. What you do not want should not be imposed on others. Only in this way, no matter in the country or in the family, will there be no resentment from other people. *A Contemporary Reading of Confucius’ Analects* 論語今讀 of Li Zehou 李澤厚 maintains that: “Not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself” can be “opposed to ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye ever so to them’ of the *Bible*”, but in the *Bible*, it is a “religious view of love, active, enthusiastic, sacrificing oneself to save others”, which is more difficult to achieve; whereas in *The Analects of Confucius*, it is “a practical and rational view of human nature, moderation and calmness”, which is easier to follow.<sup>5</sup> However, it is a pity that it has always been regarded merely as a form of self-cultivation. “In fact, it can be used as a traditional resource of some kind of public morality in modern society, that is, individuals all live in an equal and independent group environment based on the principle of contractual relationships, and respecting others means respecting oneself, which may not even have anything to do with personal cultivation, but is a kind of social contract, which is the origin of social morality” ([Li 1998](#), p. 279). The Dao of due consideration originates from one’s own heart, but it is a public law involving others that must be manifested in social relations.

In the third place, in contrast to “Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire”, which stipulates the content of due consideration from a negative aspect, the *Yung Ye* chapter expounds it from a positive aspect: “Desiring to take his stand, one who is Good helps others to take their stand; wanting to realize himself, he helps others to realize themselves” 己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人 (*Analects* 6.30; [Slingerland 2003](#), p. 63). In Confucianism, “help others to take their stand” 立人 (*liren*) and “help others to realize themselves” 達人 (*daren*) have already stepped out of pure self-cultivation and begun to involve other people. To establish oneself 己立 (*jili*) and to realize oneself 己達 (*jida*) are prerequisites, but at the same time as realizing oneself, this can also allow others to establish a virtuous personality, allowing others access to the realm of benevolence. Therefore, the Confucian requirements for benevolence are quite high. In essence, benevolence and due consideration are unified. Establishing others and helping them to realize themselves is the result of the expansion of the individual’s own benevolence, which is a necessary stage of the objectification of the Dao of due consideration, and also the real structure of due consideration as a virtue. In the chapter *Li Ren* 里仁, Confucius said: “one who truly hated a lack of Goodness would at least be able to act in a Good fashion, as he would not tolerate that which is not Good being associated with his person” 惡不仁者，其為仁矣，不使不仁者加乎其身 (*Analects* 4.6; [Slingerland 2003](#), p. 31). A person who is sincere and can hate non-benevolence is a benevolent person, and such a person will not associate with non-benevolent things. In the chapter *Gongye Chang* 公冶長, Zi Gong 子貢 said: “What I do not wish others to do unto me, I also wish not to do unto others.” He tried his best to stop others, including his teacher, of course, from imposing anything on him that he did not want to accept. Confucius immediately scolded him: “Ah, Zigong! That is something quite beyond you” (*Analects* 5.12; [Slingerland 2003](#), p. 44). Although Zi Gong himself could not achieve this, at least he had shown such an aspiration: since I do not want others to impose it on me, I will not impose it on others.

#### 4. The Similarity between Others and Oneself: “Take What Is near at Hand as An Analogy”

The value orientation of Confucianism is to be active in the world and to produce achievements. To be active in the world is simply to face contemporary society and real people; to produce achievements does not necessarily require a foundation of meritorious deeds that attract worldwide attention, nor does it necessarily require incredible and moving deeds. Even in the most ordinary daily life, one can also be virtuous and sage. Therefore, Confucian moral laws and practices of self-cultivation do not appear lofty, vast and impractical, but rather operable and practical. In the chapter *Yung Ye* of *The Analects*, Confucius said: “Now the one of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others. To be able to judge of others by what is high in ourselves; this may be call the art of virtue.” This definition of benevolence by Confucius is made in the context of Zigong asking about “extensively conferring benefits on the people, and [being] able to assist all”. Zigong asked: “Suppose the case of a man extensively conferring benefits on the people, and able to assist all, what would you say of him? Might he be called perfectly virtuous?” And Confucius answered: “Why speak only of virtue in connection with him? Must he not have the qualities of a sage? Even Yao and Shun were still solicitous about this.” In politics and governing the people, if the monarch can extensively confer benefits on the people, and is able to assist all, his virtue is beyond benevolence and close to that of a sage. Even sage kings like Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 lamented the difficulty. To deliver extensive benefits to the people and relieve the suffering of the poor is obviously the inevitable result of the efforts of the one of virtue to implement the Dao of due consideration by “taking what is near at hand as an analogy” 能近取譬. The annotation of Xing Bing 邢昺 observes: “one of benevolence, when one wants to make oneself established and successful, makes others established and successful first. And one can choose an analogy according to its nearness to oneself, doing to others as he would wish done to himself instead of conversely. This can be said to be the way of benevolence” (He and Xing 1999, p. 83). It can be seen that “taking what is near at hand as an analogy” is a necessary path for the practice of due consideration, and can also be regarded as a principle of self-cultivation and practice.

In the answer by Confucius, on the one hand, the essence of benevolence is to make oneself established and successful, as well as to establish and make others successful. The former is the cause and the latter is the result. Confucianism demands of people that if they want to establish a conscious awareness of virtue and personality in their mind, that is, to understand and to reach the status of benevolence, then they should also let others do this. Whether the world is clear or dark, if you are the only one who is benevolent, then you cannot become a true Confucian, since then you are no different from the Taoist who shuns the world and the hermit who walks alone in the mountains and forests. A Confucian must have the feeling of relieving the world and caring for all beings, otherwise, one will not be a Confucian. *The Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 (*Zhongyong*) states: “Sincerity is that whereby self-completion is effected, and its way is that by which man must direct himself. Sincerity is the end and beginning of things; without sincerity there would be nothing. On this account, the *junzi* regards the attainment of sincerity as the most excellent thing. One who professes sincerity does not merely accomplish the self-completion of himself. With this quality he completes other men and things also. The completion of himself shows his perfect virtue. The completion of other men and things shows his knowledge. Both these are virtues belonging to nature, and this is the way by which a union of the external and internal is effected. Therefore, whenever he—the entirely sincere man—employs them, that is, these virtues, their action will be right” (Legge 1970, pp. 418–419). Sincerity 誠 means that one can consciously maintain unity with one’s Ego (本己), Dao 道 means that one can consciously comprehend oneself and achieve oneself. A thing becomes a thing because it has and maintains the desire and requirement to be itself. “Sincerity” is the keyword and core concept of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. All things generate themselves out of their inner sincerity, and similarly, the desire and demand to become themselves

are also innate. In the process of development, all things are actually sustained by an instinct to become themselves rather than others. This is what nature endows them with and can also be called inborn, although the human being cannot know the deeper source of this desire and demand. Without the persistence and perseverance of a thing to become itself, a thing cannot become a thing. Therefore, sincerity is a virtue of Heaven, the ability and character that all things in heaven and earth continue to become themselves. At the same time, the virtue of sincerity is not only at the level of inborn nature, that is, at the level of self-improvement and self-loyalty, it is also reflected in the aspect of transforming and achieving all things. A high degree of self-consciousness of virtue is the symbol of reaching benevolence and the transformation and achievement of all things is the reflection of wisdom. All things can be generated only because they have been integrated with the inner and outer objects of human beings, so they can be used at any time without any obstacle.

According to Confucius, “taking what is near at hand as an analogy” 能近取譬 indicates the basic direction, path and method of the practice of Benevolence. Nearness 近 (*jin*) refers to closeness, referring to oneself, and extending to the use of one’s self, coming from one’s own heart and starting from one’s own psychological feelings. Nearness cannot therefore be a purely spatial concept, but must be a conscious and moral subject that exists in relation to others. Analogy 譬 (*pi*) refers to conjecture and inference and extends to metaphors, speculation, and contemplation. “When one can take what is near at hand as an analogy, one can immediately see that others are very similar to oneself. By considering our own desires and using them to infer (the desires of) other people, we discover that what others want is the same as ourselves. By then putting oneself in the place of another, this is the practice of due consideration, and the method of benevolence is within it” (Qian 2002, p. 165). The path of seeking Benevolence is not in lofty contemplation, nor in the vastness of another world, but only in starting from one’s own disposition and will, that is, trying to understand others, to be considerate of others, and finally reaching others. Therefore, Zheng Ruxie 鄭汝諧, a scholar in the Song Dynasty, said: “What is benevolence? Returning to my own mind and then expanding it to the world, and being able to seek what others want with my own desires, this is the path and method to practice benevolence” (Zheng 1985, p. 30). Confucianism emphasizes activity in the world, so its learning and practice never leave daily life or concrete, living people. Confucianism is neither adept at nor disdainful towards purely metaphysical thought, nor does it indulge in noumenal spiritualities which are difficult to grasp and confirm. However, this does not mean that Confucianism lacks the capacity or ability to pursue these aspects, but rather that Confucianism believes these things to have no immediate practical benefits, and to be too far away from current life to play any role in changing social practices and customs or transforming the mind of people in the interests of unity. “Everything that is outside this body should be drawn to the body for its unity and harmony” (Yang 2006, p. 152). Confucianism’s reflective methodology and its path to the practice of Benevolence always starts from the self and focuses on self-reflection, self-examination, and introspection. In this way, it is easier to gain support and to win the hearts of people. When encountering anything, we can always find reasons and problems within ourselves, rather than blaming everything, everyone else, and external objective conditions. Therefore, Ercheng has said: “one of benevolence is able to make people established and successful. The choice of analogy can be called the path and method of benevolence. People may seek it, actually it will be seen through self-reflection” (Cheng and Cheng 2000, p. 116). As long as we can carry out serious and strict self-reflection and introspection, we will almost always have the possibility of cultivating ourselves and coming into virtue, establishing ourselves and achieving benevolence, and so a certain kind of introspective, inner will in moral life seems more capable of withstanding the slings and arrows of history.

## 5. Understanding Others: “Consider Other People’s Feelings by One’s Own Feelings”

In Confucianism, another basic path to the practice of due consideration is considering other people’s feelings by one’s own feelings. The *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 states: “Measure 度 (*duo*) is the legal system” (Gui 1987, p. 248). The original meaning of measure was to stretch the arms to measure the length of a certain distance. Later, it referred to evaluation, measurement, and calculation, and was extended to conjecture, deliberation, and contemplation. The philosophical significance of measure has attracted the attention of Confucian thinkers since as early as the Han Dynasty. The chapter *The Method of Dao* from the *New Book of Jia Yi* states: “To look at oneself through another is called measure, and vice versa is arbitrariness. To think of others through oneself is due consideration, and vice versa is emptiness” (Jia 1993, p. 371). Here, measure is first raised to a life attitude and to the concept of dealing with others and doing things. To look at oneself from the standpoint of others, or to first observe others and then think of oneself, is called “measure”. Attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to Measure can be called “presumption” or “arbitrariness” 妄 (*wang*); that is, they do not consider the existence of others and do not consider any other factors except oneself. Using one’s own mind and feelings to think about others, to contemplate others, and to put oneself in the place of another is called “due consideration”. The contrary is called “emptiness” 荒 (*huang*); that is, to exclude others from one’s own vision, when there is no place for others in one’s mind, but only for oneself. The difference between measure and due consideration comes from the difference in the starting points of viewing oneself and others, but in essence, the two are the same, for they are both important virtues for treating others correctly in interpersonal communication.

Regarding the starting point, direction, object, and methodological requirements of measure, Volume 3 of *Han Ying’s Interpretation of the Classics of Poetry* 韓詩外傳 states that: “The sage is the one who measures others with himself. Measuring mind with mind, measuring feelings with feelings, measuring categories with categories, it is the same from ancient to modern. So long as the category does not change, the principle will be the same” 聖人以己度人者也。以心度心，以情度情，以類度類，古今一也。類不悖，雖久同理 (Han 1980, p. 113). It can be seen that if measure proceeds from the self, the self must have benevolence. Otherwise, one cannot reach benevolence, or rather, if one has not established their inner benevolence first, then putting oneself in the place of another will be difficult. Without the inner content of benevolence, one may even think of others as being quite as bad as oneself. The direction of measure is to start from oneself and then apply it to others, instead of blindly demanding that others come towards oneself purely for one’s own sake and provide services for oneself. The object of the measure can only be others, not oneself. Those who only measure themselves are isolated from the rest of the world. The method of measure is to conduct analogy and comparison between oneself and others through our mind and our feelings. Tang Yan believes that people need to “promote kindness 善 (*shan*) with kindness, and promote benevolence with benevolence” (Tang 2023, p. 365). Therefore, measuring people is not complicated, as long as one considers other people’s feelings by one’s own feelings.

“Looking at oneself from the perspective of others” and “measuring others from the perspective of oneself” is a dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship. Han Ying (韓嬰) said: “In the past, those who knew the world without leaving home, and understood the Dao of Heaven without looking out the window, were not able to see thousands of miles ahead with their eyes, nor could they hear thousands of miles away with their ears. They were just measuring others with their own mind and feelings. If you hate hunger and cold, you will know that people in the world all desire food and clothing; if you hate labor and fatigue, you will know that people in the world all desire to be pleasant and comfortable; if you hate poverty and distress, you will know that people in the world all desire to be rich and affluent. These are the reasons why the sage does not need to leave his seat and come down to correct the world. Therefore, the way of the man of virtue is simply that of loyalty 忠 (*zhong*) and due consideration!” 昔者不出戶而知天下，不窺牖而見天道者，非目能視乎千里之前，非耳能聞乎千里之外，以己之度度之也，以己之情量之也。己惡饑寒焉，則知

天下之欲衣食也；己惡勞苦焉，則知天下之欲安佚也；己惡衰乏焉，則知天下之欲富足也。如此三者，聖王之所以不降席而匡天下。故君子之道，忠恕而已矣 (Han 1980, p. 127). In fact, all knowledge and truth about the world are generated from the conscious activities of one's mind. The proverbial sage who knows the world without leaving home, and is able to understand the Dao of Heaven without looking out the window, is actually just the virtuous subject trying to exert his ability to "measure", using his own moral sympathy and imagination to understand and be considerate of others. So, of course, through "measure" it can also understand and reach everyone else in different regions and countries, and "measure" should become a useful bridge for people to overcome cultural barriers and cultural conflicts. The value of "measure" itself is universal, applicable to different objects, and can be targeted at different populations.

The measure of the Confucian is permeated with universal rationality and absolute value and is not a simple psychological guess or purely internal emotional desire. The further content of measure should be principle and righteousness, which possess the commensurability of the human mind and can be externalized and objectified. Part 1 of the chapter *Kao Tsze* 告子上 of *Mencius* 孟子 asks: "What is it then of which *they* [referring to one's minds] similarly approve? It is, I say, the principles of our nature, and the determinations of righteousness" 心之所同然者，何也？謂理也，義也 (Zhao and Sun 1999, p. 303). Here, the reason why Mencius directly downplays, omits, or excludes the emotional content of measure, leaving only principle 理 (*li*) and righteousness 義 (*yi*), may be that the former is too difficult to express, describe, and convey, so it cannot be used as a reliable basis for constructing a realistic ethical order. "Benevolence is internal, not external; righteousness is external, not internal." Benevolence is the inner spiritual pursuit, whereas righteousness is a scale and standard that can be formed externally. Although both are "similarities in the human mind", relatively speaking, righteousness seems to be more understandable and operable than benevolence and is more able to gain recognition and promotion among the masses of people.

Why then do different human minds share these "similarities"? Or why does the human mind possess the function of forming and recognizing the truth of virtue? *Commentaries and Rectifications of the Meanings of Words of Mencius* 孟子字義疏證 of Dai Zhen 戴震 explains analytically that the human mind controls the five senses of ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and tongue, and that when the five senses are opened, they can accept external stimuli, so they acquire the vitality of external objects. Since human life has inherited the vitality of heaven and earth, it can communicate with all things that are also born between heaven and earth. All things inherit the *qi* 氣 of the five elements, of Yin and Yang and of heaven and earth, so they can all have the same principle 理 (*li*). Each of the five elements has a generative or destructive relationship with the others. When in a generative relationship, vitality gains nourishment and vice versa. The way of the five elements and Yin and Yang fill heaven and earth and are also instilled in the internal organs of the human body. Thus, the external and the internal are united without conflicts. Therefore, one's mind can not only measure people but also feel things. There can be communication between heaven and human beings, between things and human beings, between others and oneself, and between subject and object (Dai 1961, p. 7). The *qi* of the five elements and Yin and Yang are natural in nature, but once recognized and understood by the human mind, they become the "Ought" of human beings. "Observing and studying carefully the nature of vitality to know its necessity, which is called principle and righteousness, we discover that the natural and the necessary are not two things. From the side of nature, if it is studied and observed to the utmost so that there is no deviation, it becomes necessity. If it is thus and there are no regrets, if it is so and yet remains stable, then it is the ultimate principle of nature. If one simply lets it go naturally such that it becomes deviant, it will lose its nature and become unnatural. Therefore, it must come to necessity to fulfill its nature. Human life is simply vitality, the mind and knowledge—and that is all!" (Dai 1961, pp. 18–9). Principle and righteousness are necessities of humanism, and although they are measured in the mind and come from people's mouths, they also reflect the essence

of heaven. Leaving nature, there can be no transcendental object as a stimulus for its occurrence. Therefore, the way of heaven and the way of humanity, the natural 自然 (*ziran*) and the normative 應然 (*yingran*), enter the world of language thinking that they are not separated or opposed but are always unified in essence. Furthermore, the formation of the interpersonal world proceeds from no more than two sources: one is the ontology of natural vitality and the other is spiritual cognition as a subjective understanding. These constitute the biological bases and epistemological premises of considering other people's minds by our own minds.

## 6. Expand: From Self to Others

A *junzi* practicing the Dao of due consideration must place himself in the place of others 推己及人. In part 1 of the chapter *King Hui of Liang* 梁惠王上 of *Mencius* 孟子, Mencius said to King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王: "Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated: do this, and the kingdom may be made to go round in your palm. It is said in the Book of Poetry, 'His example affected his wife. It reached to his brothers, and his family of the State was governed by it.'—The language shows how king Wen simply took his kindly heart and exercised it towards those parties. Therefore, a King carrying out his kindness of heart will suffice for the love and protection of all within the four seas, while if he does not carry it out, he will not be able to protect his wife and children. The way in which the ancients came greatly to surpass other men, was no other but this: simply that they knew well how to carry out, so as to affect others, what they themselves did" (Zhao and Sun 1999, p. 21). The benevolent government is gradually extended by the monarch, starting with oneself. One first has an internal consciousness of virtue and then external achievements and accomplishments. If one only arranges duties, rules and regulations, disciplines, and so on, one can do some things well, but one cannot really achieve benevolent governance because these are not self-conscious. Ren Jiantao believes that the way to connect others with oneself is for a person who has restrained oneself and obeyed virtue not to impose things on others that one does not like. The key to maintaining non-coercive virtue in interpersonal relationships lies in one's own judgement and action (Ren 2021, pp. 42–61). In Confucianism, the foundation and starting point of politics is morality, not anything else. Self-cultivation and family regulation constitute the premise, cause, and necessary conditions of state governance, and bring peace to all under heaven. Therefore, the monarch has to focus on both political morality and moral politicization at the same time. It has been difficult for future generations to clearly distinguish morality from politics and politics from morality. "Carrying out what you yourself do", from oneself to others, to do one's best, to be sincerely selfless, to consider other people's feelings by one's own feelings, and to help others to settle down, all this is not only an important method of individual moral cultivation but also the only magic weapon for ancient and modern monarchs to govern the state.

The basis and source of the power to expand or put oneself in the place of another lies in oneself. One has to establish oneself, make oneself successful, be self-conscious, and be for oneself. If one does not establish oneself or make oneself successful, one cannot expand oneself or put oneself in the place of another. "To arrive at things through oneself is benevolence; to put oneself in the place of things is due consideration" 以己及物, 仁也; 推己及物, 慈也 (Cheng and Cheng 2000, p. 170). Both "arriving at things through oneself" and "putting oneself in the place of things" are inseparable from "self". If you do not have it yourself, if you are deficient in it yourself, or if you do not have the required moral cultivation, you can never practice benevolence on others. "Arriving at things through oneself" is the spiritual preparation and motivational basis for "putting oneself in the place of things". Zhu Xi 朱熹 emphasized the distinction between "arriving at things through oneself" and "putting oneself in the place of things". He believed that the two could not be equated and that there was a difference between high and low levels. "To arrive at things through

oneself is the practice of the sage that is above the person of integrity.” “Arriving at things through oneself” is the first thing that must be accomplished by those who have reached the highest realm of virtue, and it is one of their basic skills. “The sage has the same feeling and will in himself, so he can arrive at others.” Even if the sage is not hungry and cold himself, as long as the motive of benevolence has sprung up in his heart, he can take the initiative to experience and understand the hunger and cold of others. However, people below the level of the sage generally wait until they have the feeling of hunger and cold before they can empathize with and understand the hunger and cold of others. Knowing that this is true of me, it must be true of others. The sage does not need to expand himself or put himself in the place of another, but ordinary people must rely on expansion. If there is still a need to ponder and contemplate, it means that the moral cultivation of due consideration is not enough. These are superfluous for the sage; indeed, they appear too stiff and rigid. “To [arrive at things] through oneself is a process of nature; to put oneself [in the place of things] is a process of reflection.” “Arriving at things through oneself” is of the self, flowing and manifesting from the inside, and does not need to be touched by external objects; conversely, “putting oneself in the place of things” must be attached to a certain object, and only through the circuit of self-consciousness, to other-consciousness, and then back to the self-consciousness, can one express benevolence and care for others. “To [arrive at things] through oneself is flowing out naturally”; “to put oneself [in the place of things], there will be a turning point” (Li 1997, pp. 619–20). The sage does not need to expand himself, which reduces his link to objectification, but directly allows his benevolence to flow to the outside world. That which he possesses, his spontaneity, and everything he connects with or reaches, are all the result of benevolence. The sage possesses loyalty and due consideration and is natural without any trace of artificiality, basing himself on his own heart and thus arriving at all hearts.<sup>6</sup> But, average people still need to diligently reflect and work hard, to be conscientious and cautious; only then can they achieve benevolence, and the tiniest misstep may lead to its loss.

The sage “[arrive at things] through himself” instead of “putting himself [in the place of things]”, but how can this “[arriving at things] through oneself” appear in its own accord? In Zhu Xi’s view, the sage does not need to “put himself” or “expand himself” to practice due consideration at all. As long as he possesses a sincere mind and then practices with it, he will be able to be benevolent and sage in all things he encounters. This will lead to a great moral distance from those who are still in the process of seeking benevolence. “The due consideration of the sage leaves no trace. When scholars do one thing properly, and then do another one in the same way, and then do ten things, a hundred things, a thousand things in the same way, all do it the same way, and this is to ‘expand’.” The sage is simply doing things as he encounters them. He is loyal to himself and to the moment, without consciously realizing that he is practicing due consideration. There is no trace of deliberate actions at all. First, he obtains the generality of the basis of Dao and then he projects it onto concrete things. Thus, the sage takes the route of understanding from a higher level and then deals with concrete things. However, it is not easy to find a so-called law that can be recognized, grasped, and rationally analyzed from the phenomena results of the due consideration of the sage. When the sage practices the Dao of due consideration, to do a thing simply means to do it, and in the process of doing things, he can always maintain a respectful, sincere, and loyal attitude without double-mindedness and without generating other thoughts. However, for those who are still studying and practicing the Dao of consideration, because they are just starting, they often expand themselves and put themselves in the place of others only when they are dealing with concrete things, blindly imitating their models. They are also deficient in mind and often do not have the capability to put themselves in the place of others. Indeed, when they are not dealing with concrete things, they do not expand themselves or put themselves in the place of others. Thus, they take the route of studying concrete real things and then understanding them from a higher level. “When scholars want to practice the Dao of loyalty and due consideration, they need to expand themselves and put themselves in the place of others before they can get to them.

When they are expanding, there is an intension of comparison. The sage does not need to expand or to put himself in the place of others, but simply ‘in regard to the aged, to give them rest; in regard to friends, to show them sincerity; in regard to the young, to treat them tenderly’. The status of the sage is like a spring flowing naturally” (Li 1997, p. 626). When water reaches a point of fullness, it will overflow by itself, which is purely natural. Continuous cultivation of virtue will benefit others. This is the highest state of *junzi*’s practice of due consideration. Obviously, all those who study Confucianism lack continuous practice.

## 7. Conclusions

In summary, through a detailed linguistic and etymological analysis, we now have a very clear understanding of the concept and connotation of due consideration. In interpreting the classical texts, we have discovered three basic propositions of the Confucian Dao of due consideration—that is, “taking what is near at hand as an analogy” 能近取譬, “considering other people’s feelings by one’s own feelings” 以心度心, and “putting oneself in the place of others” 推己及人. We have not only located them in theoretical analysis and interpreted their meaning, but also pointed out that they are essentially a kind of moral *gongfu* requiring people to go through sufficient practical processes in order to effectively appreciate the dimension of others. This effectively breaks away from the academic model of pure abstract analysis in the study of the Dao of due consideration, emphasizing a way of entering and immersing oneself in the world of life, and pointing out how moral individuals can effectively move from themselves to others. In the Confucian philosophy of the Dao of benevolence, there should be a parallel relationship between “establishing oneself” 立己 and “helping others to take their stand” 立人, “realizing oneself” 達己 (*daji*) and “helping others to realize themselves” 達人, “doing the best one can” 盡己 and “putting oneself [in the place of others]” 推己 (*tuiji*). This can be achieved through both internal and external cultivation and mutual promotion and cannot be understood simply as a theoretical causal relationship or logical relationship between concepts. The three paths of *gongfu*, although derived from different classical textual contexts, are unified and can be used to mutually interpret one another. All three are highly practicable, and all are effective means of realizing Confucian benevolence. At the same time, these three paths can also communicate with each other without any distinction between higher and lower levels and do not constitute a progressive, continuously ascending, or deductive relationship. Choosing one of these paths, through diligent practice, the subject can gain the dimension of the other and effectively reach out to the other, that is, can “help others to take their stand” and “help others to realize themselves”. In this way, it is possible to maintain a positive interactive relationship with others and to assume one’s own moral obligations and social responsibilities, a noble virtue that urgently needs to be saved in real life and to be vigorously defended and promoted. Moreover, it can open up space for the Dao of due consideration and present the dimensions of the other in Confucian ethical philosophy.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Yu (2009). For this issue, please refer to Yu Zhiping’s book *Achieving Humanity through Loyalty and Consideration* 忠恕而仁: 儒家盡己推己、將心比心的態度、觀念與實踐 (Yu 2012, pp. 300–13, 364–94, 418–30).

<sup>2</sup> In this article, the term “*gongfu*” refers to the viewpoint of Ni Peimin. who holds that “*gongfu* is much more than the martial arts, and real martial arts involve far more than fighting skills. Originally used to describe human labor during the third to fourth

centuries, the term *gongfu* was later developed into a locus from which a cluster of meanings emerged, referring to the time and effort spent on something, the ability to accomplish intended results, and the result of such effort and abilities.” The only way to achieve Confucian *gongfu* is through “practice” (Ni 2016, pp. xii–xiv). He also points out that “the term *gongfu* 功夫/工夫 not only wonderfully captures what the entire Confucian philosophy is about, it opens up a huge philosophical horizon with rich implications.” (Ni 2018, p. 267).

- 3 In terms of “loyalty and due consideration”, “恕” is also translated into “due consideration”, and its explanatory text is “Also translated into ‘conscientiousness and altruism’ or ‘faithfulness and forbearance’” (Guo and Wang 2002, pp. 558 and 438). That is, “恕” can also refer to responsibility and selflessness. But, forbearance means forgiveness and tolerance, which is far from the meaning of due consideration and understanding.
- 4 Slingerland translates 恕 as “understanding”, which is different from the “due consideration” used in this article. In order to respect the author, the quotation is written according to the original text of the translation of *The Analects* of Confucius. However, when interpreting the text, the author’s position is still to use “due consideration”.
- 5 Here, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye ever so to them” 己所欲, 施於人 is expressed in *Matthew* (7:12) as “Do to others as you would like them to do to you, for this is the law and the prophets”. In the Christian world, it is called the “Golden Rule”. But, its earliest source is the Jewish classic *Talmud*. As a famous sacrificial priest, Rabbi, Hillel was able to summarize and refine the Jewish classics into one sentence in a very short time: Do not do to your fellow what you hate to have done to you. This is the whole Law, the rest is explanation. Later, he added that we should treat the reputation of our compatriots as our own; we should treat the property of our compatriots as our own; we should treat the body of our compatriots as our own. Compared to reputation, property, and body, Hillel’s interpretation uses images and objects to facilitate the understanding and acceptance of believers, which can lead to the respect of people, property, and rights in the Western world. However, Confucius’ forgiveness directly highlights the word “desire” 欲 (*yu*), which has the meaning of urge, want, and wish. It is more internal and subjective and depends more on the understanding and consideration of the moral subject. Therefore, in later Chinese culture, the understanding of others by oneself always tends to be psychological and emotional.
- 6 Therefore, Qian Mu has said: “The Dao of loyalty and due consideration is the Dao of Benevolence. Actually the ways are all unified in my mind, and can be connected with the minds of ten thousand people, even the minds of the people of future generations” (Qian 2002).

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