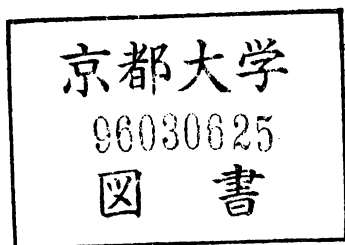


Edwin G. Pulleyblank

Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar



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construction *yǐ* 以, which as a verb means ‘use’ and as a coverb (or preposition) is used for the instrument, fills the role of passive transitive verb complement to *kě*. That is, the meaning of instrument is extended to include agency: ‘the king may be used to’ → ‘the king may be the agent to.’

Like nouns (example 28), adjectives require the copula verb *wéi* 為 after *kě yǐ* 可以.

33. ... *kě yǐ wéi měi hū* ... 可以為美乎

... could [Ox Mountain] be (i.e., remain) beautiful [when its trees were all cut down to supply wood for the nearby city]? (*Mèng* 6A/8)

2. Adjectives

Adjectives must be classed as verbs in Classical, as well as Modern Chinese, since they form predicates without a copula or final *yě* 也, are negated by *bù* 不, and take the aspect markers *yǐ* 矣 and *wèi* 未. Nevertheless, as their behaviour with *kě* 可 shows (see previous section), they differ from intransitive verbs in their syntax and have certain resemblances to nouns.

As the traditional English name implies, adjectives are typically found, not as predicates, but as modifiers of nouns. This is also true in Chinese — *gāo shān* 高山 ‘high mountain’ versus *shān gāo* 山高 ‘the mountain is high.’ As a syntactical form, however, this can be regarded as simply a special case of the general rule that verbs and verb phrases can modify nouns (see Section VII.1b), e.g., *liú shuǐ* 流水 ‘flowing water.’ Monosyllabic adjectives and monosyllabic verbs used attributively in this way are commonly directly followed by the noun they modify, but adjectival phrases of more than one syllable are generally followed by the particle of noun modification, *zhī* 之.

34. *Ruò fú háo jié zhī shì* ... 若夫豪傑之士

As for heroic knights ... (*Mèng* 7A/10)

Comparative degree is expressed by the coverb *yú* 於, which takes on the special meaning ‘than.’

35. ... *zé wú wàng mǐn zhī duō yú lín guó yě* 則無望民之多於鄰國也

... then do not hope that your people will be more than [those of]

the neighbouring countries. (*Mèng* 1A/3)

The copula verb *wéi* 為 can be used with an adjective to give a superlative sense.

36. *Wù jiē rán, xīn wéi shèn* 物皆然，心為甚

Things are all like that and the heart is most so. (*Mèng* 1A/7)

A general characteristic of adjectives is that they can be made into transitive verbs either in a causative sense or in a denominative sense — *měi zhī* 美之 ‘make it beautiful’ or ‘call it beautiful’ — simply by moving the subject into the object position after the verb and supplying another subject as agent.

37. *Wáng qǐng dà zhī* 王請大之

I beg Your Majesty to make it great. (*Mèng* 1B/3)

38. *Sǒu, bù yuǎn qiān lǐ ér lái* 叟，不遠千里而來

You have come, sir, not regarding 1,000 *lǐ* as too far. (*Mèng* 1A/1)
(This regular transformational use of *yuǎn* 遠 ‘far’ to mean ‘call far, regard as far’ must be distinguished from the derived verb *yuàn* 遠 ‘keep at a distance, avoid,’ with change of tone. See example 287.)

Apart from these causative and denominative constructions, which apply to adjectives in general, some predicate adjectives can be followed by nouns which look like objects but which are semantically like oblique cases in a language like Latin or prepositional phrases in English. One of these is *ān* 安 ‘peaceful, content.’

39. *Bǎi xìng ān zhī* 百姓安之

The common people were peaceful under him. (*Mèng* 5A/5)

Note that *ān* 安 can also be used transitively in a causative sense in the normal way.

40. ... *zé bù néng ān Zǐsī* 則不能安子思，

... then he could not make *Zǐsī* content. (*Mèng* 2B/11)

3. Nouns Used as Verbs

Like adjectives, nouns can be used as verbs in a causative sense.

41. *Gù Tāng zhī yú Yìyǐn, xué yān ér hòu chén zhī* 故湯之於伊尹，學焉而後臣之

Thus Táng’s [behaviour] towards Yìyǐn was to learn from him and afterwards make him his subject. (*Mèng* 2B/2)