

課文 (Text)

宋人有閔其苗之不長而揠之者，² 芒芒然歸，³ 謂其人曰：⁴ 「今日病矣，⁵ 予助苗長矣！」⁶ 其子趨而往視之，⁷ 苗則槁矣。⁸ 天下之不助苗長者寡矣！⁹ 以為無益而舍之者，¹⁰ 不耘苗者也；¹¹ 助之長者，揠苗者也；非徒無益，而又害之。¹²

《孟子·公孫丑上》¹³

註釋 (Annotations)

1. 甲 jiǎ the first of the ten so-called Heavenly Stems (天干 tiāngān): 甲 jiǎ, 乙 yǐ, 丙 bǐng, 丁 dīng, 戊 wù, 己 jǐ, 庚 gēng, 辛 xīn, 壬 rén, 癸 guǐ. Among other things, they are used as serial numbers.
- 揠 yà to pull up.
- 苗 miáo seedlings; sprouts (of grains).
2. 宋 Sòng the name of a feudal state during the Spring and Autumn (春秋 Chūnqiū) period (ca. 770–403 B.C.) of the Zhōu 周 Dynasty (ca. 1045–256 B.C.), located in the eastern part of present-day Hénán 河南 province. (See Chronology of Major Chinese Dynasties and Periods.)
- 閔 mǐn to feel sorry for; to commiserate with. (Written as 憫 in later times.)
- 其 qí his. (A general third-person possessive pronoun, hence, “his; her; its; their”, depending on the context.)
- 之 zhī somebody’s; something’s. (A possessive marker after a nominal expression.)
[See 文法闡釋 I (1).]

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過而往視
以為無益
者也；非

徐丑上》¹³

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a conjunction of verb phrases or clauses.

[See 文法闡釋 I (2).]

之 zhī

them. (A general third-person pronoun only for the objective case, hence, "him; her; it; them", depending on the context.)

者 zhě

a particle. (It generally nominalizes the verb or verb phrase to which it is attached.)

[See 文法闡釋 I (3).]

3. 芒芒然 máng máng rán

looking tired. (The duplicative 芒芒 means "blank and inactive"; 然, as a suffix, means "in such a way or manner".)

歸 guī

to return; to go back to where one belongs. (Normally, one's home.)

4. 謂 wèi

to speak to; to address.

其人 qí rén

his people, i.e., his folks at home.

曰 yuē

to say. (This word often serves to indicate a quotation from direct speech in Classical Chinese.)

5. 病 bìng

exhausted; suffering badly. (Note that in Classical Chinese this word means "to be in a severe condition [for any reason]", unlike in Modern Chinese where it means "to have some medical problem [or disease]".)

矣 yǐ

sentence-end particle, indicating that what the sentence describes is a new situation. (It is an equivalent to the sentence-end particle *le* 了 in Modern Chinese.)

[See 文法闡釋 I (4).]

6. 予 yú

I. (A pronoun.)

7. 趨 qū

to walk fast.

往 wǎng

to go to.

視 shì

to look at.

8. 則 zé another conjunction for verb phrases or clauses.
[See 文法闡釋 I (2) for the difference between 而 and 則.]
- 槁 gǎo withered.
9. 天下 tiān xià the whole world. (Literally, "[all] under the sky".)
- 寡 guǎ rare; few.
10. 以為 yǐ wéi to regard (someone or something) as. (The full form is 以 A 為 B. Note that the object of 以 here is implied. Also note that these two words have separate functions in Classical Chinese, whereas in Modern Chinese they have become the compound "to think".)
- 無益 wú yì of no help; without avail; useless.
- 舍 shě to give up; to ignore; to discard. (Written as 捨 in later times.)
11. 耘 yún to weed.
- 也 yě sentence-end particle, indicating confirmation.
[See 文法闡釋 I (4).]
12. 非徒... fēi tú ... not only ..., but also (Similar to 不但...
而又... ér yòu ... 而且... in Modern Chinese.)
- 害 hài to harm.
13. 孟子 Mèngzǐ *Mencius*. Title of a work collecting the sayings and activities of Mencius 孟子 (ca. 372 B.C.–289 B.C.) whose fame is only second to that of Confucius in the Confucian school of thinkers.
- 公孫丑 Gōngsūn Chǒu name of a person; here, the title of a chapter from *Mencius*.
- 上 shàng part one.



文法闡釋 (Grammar Notes)

I. Some most commonly-used grammar particles

Though very short in length, this extract contains quite a few of the most commonly-used grammar particles. To grasp the specific functions of these particles is most important for understanding Classical Chinese texts. As function words, they are, however, very complex. In the following, we can, therefore, only give each of them a definition specifically used for understanding the context of the extract.

(1) The character 之

The character 之 is used to denote two unrelated meanings in Classical Chinese. The first is a pronoun, as in 揠之, 視之, 舍之, 助之, and 害之, and it serves as the object of a verb. The other is a possessive marker to be attached to a noun (or pronoun), as in 苗之不長 “the seedlings’ not growing” and 天下之不助苗長者 “those of the world who do not assist the seedlings in growing”. However, when the object of this possessive marker is a verb phrase, as in 苗之不長, we can say for practical purposes that it turns the whole phrase into a noun clause (i.e., “the seedlings’ not growing” is the same as “that the seedlings are not growing”) serving as the object of its preceding verb (閱 in this case).

(2) The conjunctions 而 and 則

Both 而 and 則 are conjunctions used to join clauses to form compound sentences. However, since sentences (hence, clauses) are often without subject (omitted or implied) in Chinese, these conjunctions may seem to connect verb phrases (when the predicates are verb phrases) or even nouns (when a noun serves as predicate). Syntactically, both 而 and 則 indicate that what precedes them is the subordinate (adverbial) clause, while what follows them is the main clause. Semantically, the relationship between the two clauses (events) connected by 而 is somewhat ordinary and matter-of-fact, therefore, 而 can be translated as “and (thus)”, as exemplified by 閱其苗之不長而揠之 “(he) felt sorry that his seedlings did not grow, and thus pulled at them”; 其子趨而往視之 “his son walked in a hurry and went to see them”; and 以為無益而舍之 “(someone) regards it to be of no avail and thus gives it up”. (To better reveal the subordination of the clause in front of 而, it

can be translated with such words as “when” or “because”.) On the other hand, the semantic relationship between the two clauses connected by 則 seems to be rather contrastive, conditional, or contradictory. The only example we have in this extract, 苗則槁矣, is not typical enough, because 則 is preceded only by the noun 苗. Nevertheless, the sentence should be understood as, “As for those seedlings (he pulled at), well, they have all withered!”

(3) The particle 者

The particle 者 is generally defined as a nominalizer. That is, when being attached to the end of a verb or a verb phrase, it turns the whole phrase into a nominal expression. Such an expression usually means, in a concrete sense, “one who does (or those who do) something”, as exemplified by expressions in this extract such as 閔其苗之不長而揠之者 “one who felt sorry that his seedlings did not grow, and thus pulled at them”. Note that 者 can, sometimes, also be used in a more abstract sense for emphasis, transforming a verb or a verb phrase into “a certain action”, like an infinitive phrase (“to do something”) or a gerund phrase (“doing something”). For such usage, it can even be attached to a name, changing its meaning to “a certain person (or thing) that people call by that name”. For example, 韓信者, 淮陰人也 “The person known as Han Xin was a man from Huaiyin”.

(4) The sentence-end particles 矣 and 也

矣 and 也 are the two most frequently-used sentence-end particles in Classical Chinese. When attached to a sentence, 矣 implies that what the sentence describes is a new situation. The meaning and function of 矣 is very similar to the sentence-end particle 了 in Modern Chinese. For example, 今日病矣! can be translated into Modern Chinese as 今天累死了! And 苗則槁矣! can be rendered as 原來好好的苗現在都枯槁了! On the other hand, 也 implies that the sentence to which it is attached is merely a statement describing a plain or static situation, with an undertone of assertion, as if to say “and that’s it”. Since Classical Chinese does not have a copular verb, a sentence like “A is B” in Classical Chinese would simply be “A, B” to which 也 is often added as a sentence-end particle (A, B 也). But 也 should not be equated with the verb “be”, though it often marks equational sentences. For example, 助之長者, 揠苗者也 “Those who hasten it are people who pull at their seedlings”.

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II. 揠苗助長

The title of this Mencian fable is a typical four-character compound which has become a common Chinese idiom. It is a condensed form derived from 揠苗以助之長 "to pull at a young plant in order to help it grow". It means metaphorically "to cause damage to somebody or something from overzealousness or impatience".

III. 宋人有-VP-者

In the Chinese story-telling tradition (and historical writings), this sentence pattern is frequently used to introduce a character (person). 宋人 "(of) the Song people" is the topic, which, therefore, should be followed by a slight pause when reading aloud. 者, the nominalizer, turns the VP into a nominal which serves as the object of the verb 有 "there is; there are".

IV. 以為無益而舍之者，不耘苗者也。

This is an equational sentence of the "A, B 也" type, with both its subject and predicate represented by a phrase nominalized by 者. An equational sentence does not necessarily always mean "A is B". It may also imply "A means B", or "A is just like B", which is what it does in this metaphorical saying. The sentence means, therefore, "Those who neglect it because they regard it to be without benefit to them are like people who do not weed their seedlings". (Note that the pronoun 之 does not refer to 苗. In the original text from *Mengzi*, it refers to the 浩然之氣 hào rán zhī qì, the mysterious qì of a righteous mind. But it can also be taken to refer to any work or business one is undertaking, if this metaphor is quoted as a warning against overzealousness or impatience.)

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