

An Attempt to Properly Interpret a Sentence from the Analects by Studying the Chinese Character *Shi* 適

Word count: 1499

Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Guan Wenyan, the topic of my presentation is, ‘An Attempt to Properly Interpret a Sentence from the Analects by Studying the Chinese Character *Shi* 適’.

The presentation will be divided into five parts. Firstly, I will talk about my motivation in choosing this topic. Secondly, I will introduce to you different scholars' interpretations of the character *shi*. Thirdly, I will discuss the original and extended meanings of *shi*. And then, I will analyse from the perspective of Confucianism. Finally, I will share with you my self-reflection and give my conclusion.

Motivation

When I was reading the *Analects of Confucius*, I came across a sentence. It says: ‘君子之於天下也，無適也，無莫也，義之與比。’¹

Because Confucius and his disciples lived more than two thousand years ago. During this period, the language we use, especially the spoken language, has undergone tremendous changes. After the May Fourth Movement, the written language was also transformed into the spoken language used by people at that time. Then it becomes even harder for modern people to understand the words left by our ancient sages.

Thus, I have a lot confusion about that sentence in the Analects. The first half of the sentence is relatively easy to understand. ‘君子之於天下也’ means ‘The superior man, in the world...’. The latter part, ‘無適也，無莫也，義之與比’，however, is difficult to understand. Therefore, I searched for some books, and wanted to see the views of both ancient and modern scholars on this sentence.

¹ He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.54.

Different scholars' interpretations of *shi*

Scholars have different opinions on the character *shi*. Therefore, *shi* is the key to explaining this sentence. Those explanations can be roughly divided into three categories.

i. Close, conversant

Fan Ning of the Jin Dynasty stated, '*Shi* 適 means close, and correspondingly *mo* 莫 means distant.'² Then the meaning of the whole sentence is, 'The superior man will not be close to anyone, and also will not alienate anyone. He will only be close to the people with benevolence and righteousness.'³

ii. Definitely have to do

As Zhu Xi stated, '*Shi* means definitely have to do, and *mo* means definitely forbid oneself to do.'⁴ The whole sentence means, 'People do not have to worry about what to do or what not to do. Instead, they may just do whatever they should do so long as it accords with the due social and ethical norms.'⁵

iii. Borrowed by character *di* 敵, be hostile to

Huang Huaixin said, 'In ancient times people wrote *di* 敵 as *shi*, and the *shi* here is a borrowed graph which should be pronounced the same as *di*. *Di* here means be hostile to someone or something. And correspondingly, *mo* 莫 was borrowed by the character *mu* 慕, which means to adore someone or something.'⁶ In this way, the whole sentence means, 'The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; he will follow what is right.'⁷

However, we are currently unable to determine which interpretation is appropriate. Thus, I searched the original and extended meanings of *shi*, trying to get more information.

² Huang Kan 皇侃, *Lunyu Jijie Yishu* 论语集解义疏(Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1937) p.48.

³ Huang Kan 皇侃, *Lunyu Jijie Yishu* 论语集解义疏(Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1937) p.48.

⁴ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集注(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983) p.71.

⁵ Wu Guozhen 吳國珍, *A New Annotated English Version of the Analects of Confucius* 論語最新英文全譯全註本(Fujian: Fujian Education Press, 2015) p.115.

⁶ Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, *Lunyu Xinjiaoshi* 论语新校釋(Xi'an: San Qin Press, 2006) p.80.

⁷ He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.54.

The original and extended meanings of *shi*

In the *Shuowenjiezi* dictionary, Xu Shen stated that, ‘*Shi* means to go to somewhere. *Chuo* 𡳿 is its pictographic symbol and *chi* 𡳿 is its phonetic.’⁸ The original meaning of *chuo* is to walk. The graph *di* 𡳿 is the development and change of the graph *chi* 𡳿, which does not affect the meaning of *shi*.

According to the *Chinese Practical Dictionary*, the original meaning of *shi* is to go somewhere. And then it can be extended to the meaning of ‘return’. In ancient times, when a woman got married, she would leave her home to live with her husband. So *shi* also has the meaning of a woman getting married. Sometimes you need to walk to get somewhere, and you need well-fitting shoes. Therefore, *shi* can also be extended to the meaning of fit or suit.⁹

In a word, there is no direct connection between the original meaning of *shi* and the three explanations suggested by different scholars as we mentioned above. Therefore, I want to change my direction to explore the character *di* 敵 which could have borrowed *shi* to represent it, and to see if there are any examples in the ancient books to support this. As *Nine Classics* states, ‘*Shi Ji Biography of Tian Dan* states: “We have to confuse the enemy at the beginning and make them unguarded (適人開戶).” *Shi Ji Biography of Li Si* states: “All the civil and military officials revolted against Qin and did not resist Liu Bang(群臣百官皆畔，不適).” All the *shi* 適 are borrowed graphs of *di* 敵. Therefore the character *shi* is used to represent *di* in ancient times.’¹⁰

As the *Shuowenjiezi* dictionary states, ‘*Di* means enemy or hostility. *Pu* 攴 is its pictographic symbol and *chi* 𡳿 is its phonetic.’¹¹ *Pu* is the shape of a hand-held device, which relates *di* to the meaning of hitting. Please look at the differentiation of graphic forms of these three

⁸ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowenjiezhizhu 說文解字注* [Commentary on *Shuowen*] (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.71.

⁹ Zhou He and Qiu Dexiu 周何主編, *Guoyu Huoyong Cidian 國語活用辭典* [Chinese Practical Dictionary] (Taipei: Wunan Book Co. Ltd., 2016, 3rd Edition), p.1957.

¹⁰ Hui Dong 惠棟, *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku Quanshu: Nine Classics* 景印文淵閣四庫全書: 九經古義 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1986), volume.191, p.465.

¹¹ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowenjiezhizhu 說文解字注* [Commentary on *Shuowen*] (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.125.

characters. *Shi* 適 and *di* 敵 are all phonograms, and *chi* 啻 is their common phonetic. *Chuo* 𡗗 means to walk. *Di* and *chi* share the same character in very ancient times. *Chi* now is often used after a character that expresses doubt or negation, which originally means only or merely. Gradually, *di* was added a pictographic symbol *pu* which means hitting. Considering their graphic forms, it is entirely possible for ancient Chinese to borrow *shi* to represent *di* in their time.

Analysis from the perspective of Confucianism

Mencius said, 'In regard to inferior creatures, the superior man is kind to them, but not loving. In regard to people generally, he is loving to them, but not affectionate. He is affectionate to his parents, and lovingly disposed to people generally. He is lovingly disposed to people generally, and kind to creatures.'¹² This shows that the love in Confucianism is not indiscriminate. It is a kind of love that extends from near to far.¹³ It extends from love for relatives to love and respect for all people and things. Therefore, the statement of the superior man will not be close to anyone is inappropriate.

It is also inappropriate to state that people do not have to worry about what to do or what not to do. Because they should do things that accord with the due social and ethical norms, which is already a standard. This statement is contradictory.

As Mengzi "*Liang Hui Wang*" states, 'The benevolent have no enemy.'¹⁴ It just proves the correctness of *shi* being interpreted as *di*. 'The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; he will follow what is right.'¹⁵ This interpretation conforms to the Confucian doctrine of the mean, and it also regards benevolence and justice as a standard.

Self-reflection and conclusion

Benevolent people do not regard anyone as an enemy in their hearts. If we want to be

¹² Zhao Qi 趙岐, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Mengzi Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 孟子注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.443-444.

¹³ Zhao Yinghuan 趙映環, 'Analysis of two Doubtful Points in the Analects 論語析疑二則', *Journal of Fujian Business University* 福建商业高等专科学校学报, 5(2007), 79.

¹⁴ Zhao Qi 趙岐, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Mengzi Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 孟子注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.18.

¹⁵ He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.54.

benevolent, we should not focus on others' mistakes, but reflect on our own problems. If we are wrong, we should correct them. And if we are not at fault, we could use the opportunity to warn ourselves not to make mistakes in the future. Sufferings can also be regarded as bitter gifts for us, because we can be alert and get promoted afterwards.

In my own case, it seems that every time I go to a different environment and come into contact with a different group, there will always be people I find very easy to get along with, and people I do not want more contact with. In the past, I would only spend time with people I liked, and avoid people I did not feel good about. But somehow life just plays tricks on us. Sometimes the deeper those people we dislike, the more of the time we have to spend with them. But after a period of time, when I really make changes and take the initiative to think for the other one, that person can really feel it. In this way, our relationship has naturally improved. Later, I gradually discovered that the reason why I am so sensitive to the problems of that person is actually because I myself have similar problems too. After I corrected myself, the problems I had been so concerned about in that person did not show up that often anymore. I believe that it is the power of sincerity. When we really do good for others, they will be moved.

When encountering adversity, we can consider this as a good opportunity to help ourselves improve. While getting along with people we like or accompanied by luck, we should not be greedy as well. Because in that case we would have strayed from the doctrine of the mean and indulge in the pursuit of unbridled pleasure.

In conclusion, we learned the important teachings from Confucius by studying the character *shi* 適. We now know, 'The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; he will follow what is right.'¹⁶ We have no prejudice against anyone or anything, nor greed to them as well. That's because we don't always think about ourselves, furthermore, we take responsibility for our country, the whole mankind, and the entire world as well.

¹⁶ He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.54.

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