



Nominal Sentences



The Topic Comment Sentence

Topics and Comments

- ▶ Topic: what you want to write about
- ▶ Comment: what you want to say about topic
- ▶ Most frequently used in **nominal sentences**
- ▶ **Basic structure:**
 - ▶ A 者, B 也。
 - ▶ A zhe, B ye.



Nominal sentences I

- ▶ Nominal sentences = statements of identity

Topic	←	Comment
Noun phrase	←	Noun phrase
宋		小國也。
Song		<i>xiao guo ye.</i>
“Song is a small state”		

- Both parts of the sentences are “noun phrases”, i.e. there is no verb
- 也 is the used at the end to mark the phrase as a noun phrase
- Classical Chinese did not use punctuation. 也 functions like a full-stop in English.



Nominal sentences II

- ▶ Topic or comment can be more complex:

仲子，	齊	之	世家	也。
Zhongzi	Qi	zhi	shijia	ye.
Topic	Comment			
Noun	Noun+	Possesiv+	Noun+	也.

Translation:

“Zhongzi, eminent clan of Qi” (literally)

“[Chen] Zhongzi is of an eminent clan of Qi.”



Nominal sentences III: 'Parsing' a sentence

- ▶ The topic and/or comment of a nominal sentence can become very long and complex:

王 之 不 王, 不 為 也。
Noun + 之 + Neg. + Verb, Neg. + Verb + 也.
Topic Comment

Translation:

“King not acting as king = not do” (literally)

“Your majesty’s not ruling as a **[true]** king is **[a case of]** not **trying.**”



Topic $\neq$ Subject

- ▶ Thomas eats cookies. (Thomas is ‘subject’ in verbal sentence)

- ▶ Nominal sentence:

自由， 民之所欲也。

Ziyou, *min zhi suo yu ye.*

Topic Comment

Subject + *zhi suo* + verb + 也.

Translation:

“Freedom, [this] is what the people desire.”



Stative verbs

- ▶ Comparable to adjectives in English ('high', 'expensive', 'edible')
 - ▶ Maintain their verbal character in Chinese
 - ▶ No need of copula

 - ▶ 嵩山高。
 - ▶ *Song shan gao.*
 - ▶ Mount Song is high.
 - ▶ 宋國小。
 - ▶ *Song guo xiao.*
 - ▶ The Song state is small.
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Kun xue 困學 (*Lunyu* 16.9)

1. 孔子曰：「生而知之者，上也；
2. 學而知之者，次也；
3. 困而學之，又次也。
4. 困而不學，民斯為下矣！」

Kongzi yue: sheng er zhi zhi zhe, shang ye;

Xue er zhi zhi zhe, ci ye;

Kun er xue zhi, you ci ye.

Kun er bu xue, min si wei xia yi.



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Ma bu jin ye 馬不進也 (*Lunyu* 6.15)

1. 子曰：「孟之反不伐。
2. 奔而殿；將入門，策其馬，
3. 曰：『非敢後也，馬不進也。』」

Mengzi: Meng Zhifan bu fa.

Ben er dian; jiang ru men, ce qi ma,

Yue: fei gan hou ye, ma bu jin ye.

