

Analyze the Meaning of the Character *Shu* 數 in Chapter 26 of the Fourth Chapter of *The Analects of Confucius* 論語

character count:1,574

Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Xue Chunyuan. Today I would like to report the meaning of the character *shu* 數 in chapter 26 of the fourth chapter of *The Analects of Confucius* 論語. The reason why I choose this character is that I hope I can understand the meaning of this sentence, and this character has many meanings that can help me better learn philology. Therefore, I choose this character to make a report.

This is my outline.

1. Introduction
2. The Original Meanings of the Character *Shu* 數
3. Analyze the Meanings of the Character *Shu* 數
4. Self-Reflection
5. Conclusion

Introduction

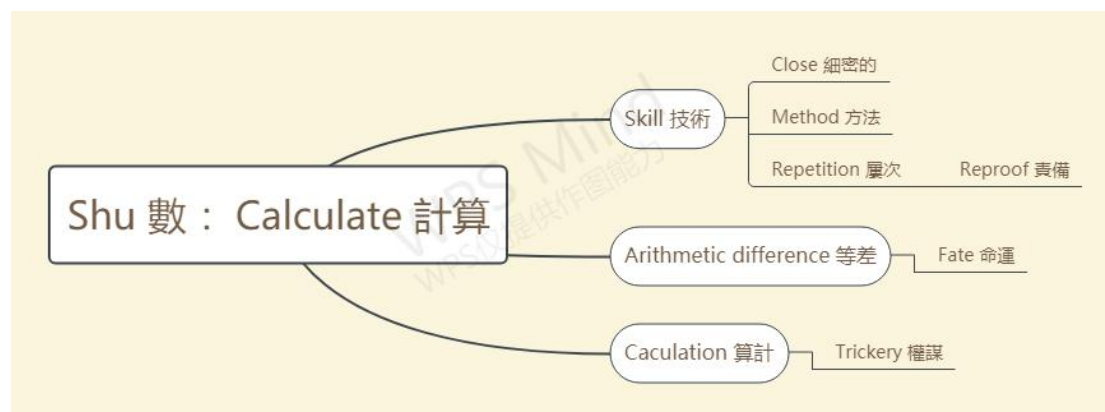
Let us take a look at this sentence first. The translation of this sentence is, “Ziyou said, ‘In the service of one’s prince repeated scolding can only lead to loss of favour; in friendship, it can only lead to estrangement.’”¹In this translation the meaning of the character *shu* 數 is translated as repeated scolding. Then I will first analyze the original and extended meaning of the character *shu* 數

The Original Meanings of the character *Shu* 數

Here we can see that the character of *shu* 數 in small seal script is like this. I look up

¹Arthur Waley, *Library of Chinese Classic: The Analects* (Hunan People’s Publishing House & Foreign Languages Press, 1999.) p.39.

in the *Shuo wen jie zi* 說文解字 and *Guo you huo yong dictionary* 國語活用辭典 finally sort out a character meaning extension road map of this character.



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From the picture, we can see that the original meaning of the character *shu* 數 means to “calculate 計也”³. And then the first line of implication is skill. Continuing from this meaning, it can be divided into three meanings: close, method and repetition. From this sense of repetition can be extended the sense of reproof. The second extended route means arithmetic difference and from arithmetic difference can be extended to the meaning of fate. And the third extended line is the meaning of calculation, at the same time extended to the meaning of the trickery.

Analyze the Meaning of the character *Shu* 數

This is a brief summary of the original and extended meanings of this character. Next, I sorted out some previous interpretations of this character to help analyze. I consulted some books and chose three reasonable explanations: counting, repeated scolding and repeatedly. Although they are different, their connotations are all worth learning. Therefore, I will briefly analyze these meanings.

Now let us look at the first explanation. The first explanation is that the character *shu* 數 used here to mean counting. I refer to the explanation of Zheng Xua 鄭玄 and

² Zhou He and Qiu Dexiu 周何主編, *Guoyu Huoyong Cidian* 國語活用辭典[Chinese Practical Dictionary] p.965.

³ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen Jiezi Zhu* 說文解字注[Commentary on Shuowen] (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p124.

Huang Kan 黃侃 for this meaning. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 believes that character *shu* 數 here means “counting one's own achievements 數己之功勞”⁴ and Huang Ka 黃侃 explains that the character *shu* 數 means “counting 計數也”⁵. It also makes sense if we bring it to the text. According to this translation, the reason for being alienated by others is to show off in front of others. Therefore, to interpret the character *Shu* as calculation, this sentence tells us not to blow one's own trumpet about our achievements. At the same time, it tell us to forget about our own efforts and try our best to think of others. Therefore, the above content is my first meaning of a brief report, let us look at the second meaning.

The second interpretation of the character *shu* 數 here is repeated scolding. The English translation I use here is from *The Analects of Confucius in The Library of Chinese Classics*. This translation was written by Arthur Waley. Here he interprets the character *shu* 數 to mean “repeated scolding”. After consulting the books, I found that the only similar explanation is Yuyue's 俞樾 in *Qun jing ping yi* 群經平議. He thinks *shu* 數 here means “to tell someone's fault to his face 面數人之過也.”⁶ This translation is somewhat similar to Arthur Waley's translation, both of which have critical meanings. However, there are some differences, one emphasizes frequent and the other emphasizes face to face. The effect of these two meanings is also different. One may cause the listener to be bored because of frequent frequency, while the other may make others feel disgusted because others point out his problems to his face and make him feel difficult to accept. It can be seen that this explanation is also reasonable. That is my simple analysis of this explanation, let us look at the next one.

A third interpretation of the character is frequency. We can see that this explanation is similar to the previous one. Therefore, I'm not going to do too much analysis of this

⁴ Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *Lun Yu Zheng Yi* 論語正義(China Publishing House, 1990), p.160.

⁵ Huang Kan 黃侃, *Lun Yu Ji Jie Yi Shu* 論語集解義疏(The Commercial Press, 1937), p.52.

⁶ Yu Yue 俞樾, *Qun Jing Ping Yi* 群經平議, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=93018&page=26>, 23 January 2021.

meaning here. There are many people who put forward this explanation, such as Han Yu 韓愈, Zhu Xi 朱熹, Cheng Shude 程樹德, and Wu Jiabin 吳嘉賓, who are well known to us. They all agreed that the character should be interpreted to mean frequency. This can also be explained clearly in the text. Therefore, it also makes sense to interpret the character *shu* 數 as frequency.

Here are some of my thoughts on this explanation. I think these three explanations are different but they can all be used. First of all, I think the reason why we raise problems with our monarch or friends is more to help them correct their problems. However, there are many ways to remind them, some of which may be acceptable to them and some of which are not. Since we are going to help them, we should do it in the way that is most acceptable to them. And the sentence in this chapter is that Master Ziyong tells us that if we do this we will be alienated. Therefore, the character *shu* 數 explains why we are alienated. Translating the character *shu* 數 as repeated scolding is to remind us that we should not advise others too often and that we should persuade, not scold. If we are alienated and make them unwilling to listen to our persuasion, such a situation loses our original purpose. Therefore, in dealing with such people who do not want to listen to our frequent scolding we should use a gentle tone to slowly persuade. Similarly, we should learn to use euphemism when dealing with people who do not want to hear us point out problems face to face. However, we should not only pay attention to our attitude and timing, but also pay attention to our frequency of persuasion. Therefore, although the three translations are different, we can still benefit from them.

Self-Reflection

So that is all my analysis of this character. Here are some of my personal experiences and some self-reflection to share with you. Perhaps after learning traditional culture, I also have the idea of reminding others from time to time. However, things do not always turn out so well. Some of my friends who have been advised will be afraid of me to ask, and some will even avoid me. At first I wanted to help them and make us

closer. Nevertheless, things did not turn out the way I had hoped, they turned out worse. Since then I have been very afraid of pointing out other people's mistakes because it would alienate us. But I have read a lot of classic have mentioned that a good friend needs to remind others not to make mistakes. It was not until I learned this sentence that I realized there was something wrong with my method. First of all, I reflected that when I tried to persuade others before, I did not think about whether my way of persuading would be accepted. My way of doing this is to say something about my friend's problem directly and then even get a little angry when he does not admit it. After I suggested that he did not change anything and then I was very angry. From then on, we often had some conflict and unhappiness over the matter, and our relationship gradually became estranged. Now reflect on the source of the problem is their own method. I did not take into consideration whether the other party could accept it or not, and I did not change the method or stop that when the other party could not accept it. Thinking about it now makes me regret it very much and reminds me to pay attention to the way I persuade others in the future. It also reminds me of the purpose of my persuasion. We need to identify what is the purpose of our persuasion. Recall at that time their original meaning is good, but gradually became a dislike of others. After our original meaning has changed, in fact, others can also feel it. In addition, we often mention it without considering the timing, which leads to our estrangement gradually. The above is my after reading this sentence some experience and self-reflection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the original meaning of the character *shu* 數 to understand it a lot of extended meaning. Professor Kang often remind us in class that philology is to help us learn the classics and then put them into practice in our daily life. Therefore, I combined with the previous interpretation of a simple analysis of the classical sentence. I also try to use it to reflect on my own problems. I benefited a lot in the whole process. That is all for today. Thank you for listening.

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