

A Study of the Chinese Character *Zhui* 追

Word Count: 1,521

Respected provost, Miss Deng, good morning. My name is Ruxin Zhang and I would like to share with you the topic on the study of the Chinese character *zhui* 追.

The presentation will be divided into three parts. The first part is ‘Motivation’, the second part is ‘The Original Meaning and the Extended Meanings of *zhui* 追’. And finally, I will share with you the ‘Self-Reflection’.

Motivation

Let’s start with the first part.

What I want to share with you today is the word *zhui* 追, which comes from the first chapter of *The Analects of Confucius* 論語. Tseng Tzu said, ‘Conduct the funeral of your parents with meticulous care and let not sacrifices to your remote ancestors be forgotten, and the virtue of the common people will incline towards fullness.’¹ The reason I chose this character is that not long ago when I went home to visit my family during the Christmas holiday, it happened that *the Winter Solstice* 冬至 was also during the holiday. According to Chinese tradition, we should show reverence to ancestors on the day.

In the process of showing reverence to ancestors, the elders reminded me when drinking water think of its source, so as not to forget the root. Moreover, the elders also quoted the idiom ‘*Shenzhong zhuiyuan* 慎終追遠’ from *The Analects of Confucius* to illustrate the importance of showing reverence to ancestors. Therefore, I became interested in the idiom and wanted to understand its meaning, especially the

¹ Original text: ‘曾子曰：慎終追遠，民德歸厚矣。’ Trans. by D.C. LAU, *The Analects of Confucius* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), p.60.

meaning of *zhui* 追. So, I have done a little research and would like to share it with you.

The Original Meaning and the Extended Meanings of *Zhui* 追

Now let's move on to the second part.

In *The Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, which is one of the most famous dictionaries in ancient China, the author Xu Shen said, ‘追, 逐也. The character *zhui* means to chase or pursue.’² He also said 从辵自聲, the character *zhui* has the *chuo* 辵 (walk one moment and stop the next) radical as a semantic constituent and *dui* 自 (public) as a phonetic constituent.³ According to what is mentioned in *The Introduction of Grammatology* 文字學概說, the phonetic component of phonograms can also represent the root of words, and words with the same root often have the same meaning.⁴ To be specific, the common words *guan* 官 and *shi* 師 both come from the root of *dui*. In *The Shuowen jiezi zhu*, *guan* means to govern the public,⁵ while *shi* means that 2500 people constitute a *shi*.⁶ To sum up, *dui* has the meaning of the public. In *The Shuowen jiezi zhu*, *chuo* is defined as 乍行乍止也, walk one moment and stop the next.⁷ Therefore, combining the meaning of *chuo* and *dui*, the original meaning of *zhui* can be defined as expelling people.

Now let's talk about the extended meanings of *zhui*, there are three semantic

² Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.74.

³ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.74.

⁴ Lin Yin 林尹, *The Introduction of Grammatology* 文字學概說 (Xinbei: Cheng Chung Book Co. Ltd., 1971), p.137.

⁵ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.737.

⁶ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.275.

⁷ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.70.

extensions of routes. First of all, as far as ‘Expelling people’ is concerned, it is natural to imagine that the expeller should stand behind the crowd and chase people from back to front. There is a saying in *The Liezi* 列子, ‘Kua Fu did not measure his strength and wanted to pursue the shadow of the sun.’⁸ Through the story of Kua Fu’s race with the sun, we can vividly realize that the word *zhui* here has the meaning of ‘Catching up from the back’. So what are people doing this for? Specifically, it can be discussed in three aspects, external performance, reason, and purpose.

The first aspect is external performance, this state of catching up from back to front can be summarized as tracking, and the performance in action is ‘Following’. Continue to the semantic extension, in order to achieve a certain purpose, the expeller sometimes shows a ‘Tailing’ state when following. And when referring to Han Dynasty general Li Guang in *The Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, there is such a description, ‘The Huns had hundreds of cavalry chasing Li Guang, he took the Hun youth’s bow and arrow while he ran away, and use it to kill the cavalry who tailing him. For this reason, he was able to escape.’⁹ The *zhui* here has the meaning of ‘Tailing’.

However, this state of following others is not limited to pursuing. It may also be because close relatives and friends have to travel far, so we have to see them off. There is a saying in *The Book of Songs* 詩經 that ‘*Boyan zhuizhi* 薄言追之’, which is explained in *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, the author Kong Yingda said, ‘When the guest is about to leave, the host will give a banquet to see him off.’¹⁰

In addition to this kind of action tracking, spiritual tracking can be understood as ‘Remembrance’ meaning. There are many ways to remembrance, one of which is to

⁸ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016), p.170.

⁹ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *The Records of the Grand Historian* 史記(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2019), p.3560.

¹⁰ Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics: Maoshi Zhengyi* 十三經注疏·毛詩正義(Taipei: Yeewen Publishing Company, 2001), p.737.

show reverence to ancestors and never forgetting them. The word *zhui* in the idiom ‘*Shenzhong zhuiyuan*’ from *The Analects of Confucius* means this. The interpretation of this saying in *The Exegesis of The Analects of Confucius* 論語注疏 is, ‘Although the parents have passed away and were buried, and a long time has passed. The filial children still remember them, and show reverence to ancestors with a sincerity.’¹¹

The second aspect is the reason. As far as its performance is concerned, whether it is action tracking or spiritual tracking, the reason why people chase from behind is that to seeking something. The idiom that people often say ‘*Zhuigen jiudi* 追根究底’ has the meaning of investigating the roots of things.¹²

The third aspect is to further investigate its purpose, one of the purposes of catching up can be understood as ‘Clawback and collection’. In *The Changli xiansheng ji* 昌黎先生集, the author said, ‘Those who are rich have already paid their taxes, but the poor can only be forced to pay taxes.’¹³ The *zhui* here means the collection of debts and taxes.

The second extended route is from the perspective of function. What role can people from behind play? The answer is that it can be remedied. There is a saying in *The Analects of Confucius* 論語 that says, ‘What is past is beyond help, what is to come is not yet lost.’¹⁴

In addition to the two semantic extensions of routes mentioned above, according to the annotation of Duan Yucai in *The Shuowen jiezi zhu*, we can find another semantic extension of route. The annotation of Duan Yucai said, 詩禮假為治金玉之鎚. In *The*

¹¹ He Yan 何晏, Xing Bing 邢昺, *Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics: The Exegesis of The Analects of Confucius* 十三經注疏·論語注疏(Taipei: Yeewen Publishing Company, 2001), p.7.

¹² Zhou He 周何主編, *Guoyu Huoyong Cidian* 國語活用辭典(Taipei: Wunan Book Co. Ltd., 2014, 3rd Edition), p.1939.

¹³ Ma Qichang 馬其昶校注, *Hanchangli Wenji Jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注(Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2018), p.695.

¹⁴ Original text: ‘往者不可諫，來者猶可追。’ Trans. by D.C. LAU, *The Analects of Confucius* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), p.149.

Book of Songs and *The Book of Rites*, the word *zhui* 鎚 is borrowed as a tool for carving gold and jade.¹⁵ The *zhui* 鎚 here is the borrowed graph for *zhui* 追, which is phonological borrowing because they are homophones. There is a saying in *The Book of Songs*, ‘*Zhuizhuo qizhang* 追琢其章’. *Maoshi zhengyi* interprets it as ‘*zhui* 鎚 is sculpture.’ This shows that *zhui* 鎚 here means carving.¹⁶

At this point, the analysis of the original meaning and extended meanings of the word *zhui* 追 is over, and the next part is the self-reflection.

Self-Reflection

Let’s now move on to the last part.

Through this analysis of the word *zhui* in *Shenzhong zhuiyuan*, I deeply realized that although our ancestors are far away from us, they are too kind for us. When show reverence to ancestors, we should face them with sincerity and respect. It is precisely because there are ancestors and parents that we are here today.¹⁷ What’s more, all the things we enjoy today, including being able to learn such excellent traditional culture, is due to the kindness of our ancestors for future descendants. Without the kindness of ancestors, this precious spiritual wealth cannot be handed down.

It is often said that a person should remember the kindness of others to him, and repay it. As a Chinese descendant of every surname, since we have benefited from the kindness of our ancestors, we have the responsibility and obligation to inherit the past and enlighten the future. This is because the past has no beginning, and the future has no end. We are an inseparable whole with our ancestors and the future generation. If

¹⁵ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注(Taipei: Hungyeh Publishing Co. Ltd., 2016), p.70.

¹⁶ Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Exegesis of the Thirteen Classics: Maoshi Zhengyi* 十三經注疏·毛詩正義(Taipei: Yeewen Publishing Company, 2001), p.558.

¹⁷ Cai Lixu 蔡禮旭, *Xijiang Dizigui* 細講弟子規(Beijing: Huayi Publishing House, 2007), p.181.

the five thousand years of orthodoxy and the teachings of *ancient sages* 古聖先賢 are cut off in our generation, our ancestors and future descendant will be ashamed of us. Most importantly, only an honest and kind nation can stretch for thousands of years.

Specifically, what should we do to achieve the real '*Shenzhong zhuiyuan*'? *The Dizigui* 弟子規 said, 'I will serve my departed parents as if they were still alive.'¹⁸ If we can always remember the teachings of our ancestors and to do it, we are implementing this saying in our life.

Finally, I write a poem as a conclusion:

When people are careful to show reverence to their ancestors, the virtues of the people will increase 慎終追遠德歸厚.

This fine tradition has been adhered to for generations 世代承傳皆恪守.

It's people's true nature to think about the source when drinking water 飲水思源
本真性.

It's all natural for people to do it, what reason is needed 自然流露何須由?

This is my presentation, if there is any mistake in the content, please criticize and correct it, thank you very much.

¹⁸ Original text: '事死者，如事生。' Yin Yuansheng 因緣生, *Shengxue genzhigen* 聖學根之根(Taipei: World Book Publishing Co. Ltd., 2015),book1, p.19.

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