

Grammar revision 4: *suǒ* 所

Suǒ 所 is followed by verbs or prepositions (e.g. *yú* 於, *zì* 自, *cóng* 從; cf. below) and forms noun phrases. It substitutes for the object of the verb or preposition it precedes, but, in contrast to *zhě* 者, never for the subject. Compare the following examples:

來 [so.] comes
來者 the one who comes

來之 to let so. come
所來 the one who [so.] lets come

In general, the translation of a *suǒ* 所 phrase is usually “that which [one V-s]”, or, depending on the preposition, “the place where [one V-s]” (*suǒ yú* 所於), “the place whence [one V-s]” (*suǒ zì* 所自, *suǒ cóng* 所從) etc. *Suǒ* 所 can precede negated verbs, e.g. *suǒ bù wéi* 所不為 “what one does not do”, *suǒ wèi jiàn* 所未見 “what one has not yet seen”.

I. *Suǒ* 所 preceding transitive verbs

1. Substitution of the direct object

所為 what [so.] does
所知 what [so.] knows

2. Verbs of transmitting, giving etc.

2.1 Substitution of the indirect object if the direct object is present

所與人 what [so.] gives sb. else

2.2. Substitution of the direct object if the indirect object is present

所與金 the one whom [so.] gives money

3. Actions involving the movement of objects

3.1 Substitution of the object, if there is a prepositional phrase (*yān* 焉 = **yú zhī* 於之)

所置焉 what [so.] places there
所獻焉 what [so.] presents to him

3.2 Substitution of the prepositional phrase, if there is an object

所置之 where [so.] places it
所獻之 the one to whom [so.] presents it

Suǒ 所 can also substitute for the object of two verbs linked by *ér* 而:

小國所望而懷 that which [people in] small states hopes for and have in their minds

II. *Suǒ* 所 preceding non-transitive verbs

Note that there are hardly any truly intransitive verbs, i.e. verbs that can never take an object. Most verbs or stative verbs preceded by *suǒ* 所 are therefore “transitivised”:

cún 存 ‘to exist’ > ‘to preserve’:

所存 what [so.] preserves

lái 來 ‘to come’ > ‘to let come’:

所來 the one who [so.] lets come

gāo 高 ‘high, tall’ > ‘to regard as high’ (putative) / ‘to increase in height’ (factive):

所高 what [so.] thinks to be high / increases in height

There are, however, exceptions, cases where *suǒ* 所 substitutes for a prepositional phrase:

所遊 where [so.] travels / roams
所長 that at which [so.] is good

III. *Suǒ* 所 preceding prepositions

所自 the place from which
所由 (similar)
所從 (similar)
所為 the one for whom / the reason why (*wèi* 爲)
所與 the one with whom
所以 that by means of which, the reason why

