

Van Norden, *Classical Chinese for Everyone*
Supplemental Notes and Exercises

Supplemental Grammatical Notes on 1.3.3.

1. Many dictionaries and textbooks of Classical Chinese define the N1 N2 也 construction as “indicating that one noun or noun phrase is equivalent to, or to be identified with, another.”¹ It is certainly true that N1 N2 也 sometimes expresses the identity of N1 and N2. Consider the following two definitions from the 說文解字:²

志意也。

志 zhì n., intention
意 yì n., idea, thought
也 yě (See 1.3.3.)

“Intention” is idea.
“Intention” means idea.

意志也。

“Idea” is intention.
“Idea” means intention.

2. However, in its most common usage, N1 N2 也 means that N1 is a member or a subset of the set N2

拜下禮也。 (*Analects* 9.3)

拜 bài s.v., to bow
下 xià n., bottom (拜下 is here equivalent to 拜於下)
禮 (礼) lǐ n., rite, ritual
也 yě (See 1.3.3.)

Bowing at the bottom [of the stairs, before ascending] is [an instance of] ritual.

宋小國也。 (*Mengzi* 3B5)

宋 Sòng n., Song (name of a state located in what is now eastern Henan Province)
小 xiǎo s.v., to be small
國 (国) guó n., state
也 yě (See 1.3.3.)

¹ This is from the usually excellent Paul W. Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, rev. ed. (Boston: Brill, 2017), p. 538.

² For the 說文解字, see *Classical Chinese for Everyone*, Introduction.

Song is [an instance of a] small state.

人仁也。（釋名：釋形體）

人 rén n., person, human

仁 rén n., benevolence, humaneness

也 yě (See 1.3.3.)

Humans are benevolent [creatures].