

**Van Norden, *Classical Chinese for Everyone*
Supplemental Notes and Exercises
Lesson 13**

Supplemental Grammatical Notes on 13.3.3.

In Lesson 13.3.3, I state that N_1 之謂 N_2 is just an archaic way of writing N_1 謂之 N_2 , and that either one can be used to mean “ N_1 is called N_2 .” The former construction is more frequently used in order to define a term, or give a definitive statement about what a thing is, but this is not its exclusive use.

Grammatical Analysis

Wèi 謂 has several uses. As we saw in Lesson 6, it can mean “to say something of someone.”

子謂公冶長。「可妻也。」 (*Analects* 5.1)

Zǐ wèi Gōngyě Cháng: Kě qī yě.

The Master said of Gongye Chang, “He is marriageable.”

子謂子賤，「君子哉若人！」 (*Analects* 5.3)

Zǐ wèi Zǐjiàn: Jūnzǐ zāi ruò rén!

The Master said of Zijian, “A gentleman [is] such as he!”

The Master said of Zijian, “A man such as he is a gentleman!”

As these examples suggest, the transitive verb wèi 謂, “to call,” usually takes a direct object N_1 (the thing that is called, the thing under discussion) and an indirect object N_2 (what that thing is called, or what is said about it). The N_1 can be pulled to the front of the verb (this is technically called “exposure”) and then referred to by a pronoun:

謂 N_1 N_2 → N_1 謂之 N_2

[Someone] calls N_1 N_2 . → As for N_1 , call it/it is called/it should be called N_2 .

This construction de-emphasizes the subject of the verb (the one doing the “calling”) and emphasizes the thing under discussion and what it is called.

But how do we get the alternative construction N_1 zhī wèi 之謂 N_2 ? Zhī 之 is a pronoun here, and pronoun 之 has to be the object of a verb,¹ but we don’t usually find object pronouns in front of their verbs in Classical Chinese. Pulleyblank’s explanation is very helpful. He notes that in the “late Preclassical Chinese of the *Shījīng* and the early Classical Chinese of the *Zuǒzhuàn* and *Guóyǔ*...[a] preposed object was repeated by a pronoun,

¹ Zhī 之 can also be found in front of a noun, N, indicating that it is “this N”; for example, zhī èr chóng yòu hé zhī 之二蟲又何知, “What do *these* two bugs know?!” (*Zhuangzi* 1). This construction is rare in Classical, but fairly common in the *Odes*. The important thing to note, however, is that 之 does not function as a subject pronoun in this use, because it cannot occur by itself as the subject of a verb. It is a bound form—what Kroll describes, with excellent precision, as a “demonstrative adjective” (Kroll, 603), not a demonstrative pronoun—meaning that it can only be used demonstratively preceding a noun. Consequently, this cannot be its use in the construction 之謂.

usually *zhī* 之 or *shì* 是, placed *in front of* the verb instead of after it. This is no doubt a survival of a more widespread placing of pronoun objects in front of the verb in the preclassical language.”² One of the examples that Pulleyblank cites is

戎狄是膺 (*Odes*, no. 300)
Róng Dí shì yīng.
The Rong and Di, these he smote.
He repressed the Rong and Di tribes.

Pulleyblank continues: “One stereotyped survival of this construction both in standard Classical Chinese and later Literary Chinese is with the verb *wèi* 謂.” Pulleyblank gives the following examples:

夫子之謂也。 (*Mengzi* 1A7)
[This expression I just quoted] describes you, Master.

非此之謂也。 (*Mengzi* 2B2)
This [thing you just said] is not what I was talking about.

As Pulleyblank explains, the first example “is derived from: *wèi fū zǐ* 謂夫子 by moving the object *fūzǐ* 夫子 in front and repeating with *zhī* 之—more literally: Your honour, him it refers to.”³ The second example (more literally: [What you have said] is not this that [it] refers to) is derived from *bú wèi cǐ* 不謂此, by moving the 此 in front of the verb and repeating it with the 之.

Let’s look at some examples of how these constructions are used.

N₁ 之謂 N₂

This expression is especially used to express a definition of a term or a definitive statement about what something is. For example:

生之謂性。 (*Mengzi* 6A3)
Shēng zhī wèi xìng.
Life is what is meant by “nature.”

天命之謂性。率性之謂道。修道之謂教。 (*Mean* 1)
Tiān mìng zhī wèi xìng. Shuài xìng zhī wèi dào. Xiū dào zhī wèi jiào.
What is mandated by Heaven is what is meant by “nature.” To follow one’s nature is what is meant by the “Way.” To cultivate the Way is what is meant by “education.”

是之謂大同。 (*History*, “Great Plan”)
Shì zhī wèi dà tóng.
This [what is described in the previous sentences] is what is meant by a “Great Community.”

However, N₁ 之謂 N₂ is not always used to define a term.

² Pulleyblank, p. 70. Italics in original.

³ Pulleyblank, p. 71.

孔子之謂集大成。 (*Mengzi* 5B1)

Kǒngzǐ zhī wèi jí dà chéng.

集 jí t.v., to make complete

成 chéng n., performance (of a musical piece at a concert)

Kongzi is what may be called the “completion of a great performance.”⁴

指不若人則知惡之。心不若人則不知惡。此之謂不知類也。 (*Mengzi* 6A12)

Zhǐ bú ruò rén zé zhī wù zhī. Xīn bú ruò rén zé bù zhī wù. Cǐ zhī wèi bù zhī lèi yě.

If one’s finger is not as good as others, one knows to dislike it. [But] if one’s heart is not as good as others, one does not know to dislike it. This can be said to be not understanding categories [of importance].

N₁ 謂之 N₂

Sometimes this construction is also used to define expressions.

用下敬上謂之貴貴。用上敬下謂之尊賢。 (*Mengzi* 5B3)

Yòng xià jìng shàng wèi zhī guì guì. Yòng shàng jìng xià wèi zhī cūn xián.

用 yòng t.v., to use; here equivalent to 以 yǐ v., with, by means of

For those in subordinate positions to respect those in superior positions is called “honouring the noble.” For those in superior positions to respect those in subordinate positions is called “venerating the worthy.”

自暴者不可與有言也。自棄者不可與有為也。言非禮義謂之自暴也。吾身不能居仁由義謂之自棄也。

Zì bào zhě bù kě yǔ yǒu yán yě. Zì qì zhě bù kě yǔ yǒu wéi yě. Yán fēi lǐ yì wèi zhī zì bào yě. Wú shēn bù néng jū rén yóu yì wèi zhī zì qì yě.

One cannot discuss things with those who are destroying themselves; one cannot work together with those who are throwing themselves away. Those whose words are opposed to ritual and righteousness are who I mean by “those destroying themselves.” [Those who say,] “I personally am unable to dwell in benevolence and follow righteousness” are who I mean by “those who are throwing themselves away.” (*Mengzi* 4A10)

However, in most passages this construction is clearly not being used to give a definitive statement of the meaning of a term.

殘賊之人謂之一夫。 (*Mengzi* 1B8)

Cán zéi zhī rén wèi zhī yì fū.

A mutilator and thief is called a mere “fellow.”⁵

⁴ This sentence is part of an extended metaphor in which Kongzi’s sagacity is compared to the beauty of a symphonic performance. Obviously, it is not *defining* what a “great performance” is.

⁵ This is part of a passage in which Mengzi explains that Tyrant Zhou can be executed because his vicious behaviour forfeits the status of “king” and makes him a “mere fellow” who has committed serious crimes. Obviously, it is not defining what a “fellow” is in general.

N 之謂也

An interesting variant of the use of 之謂 is N 之謂也, which is used following a quotation to indicate that the quotation illustrates or explains the individual or topic under discussion (to which N refers):

詩云。『周雖舊邦其命惟新。』文王之謂也。(Mengzi 3A3)

Shī yún, “Zhōu suī jiù bāng qí mìng wéi xīn.” Wén wáng zhī wèi yě.

The *Odes* say: “Although the Zhou is an old state, its mandate is new.” This refers to King Wen.

詩云。『他人有心。予忖度之。』夫子之謂也。(Mengzi 1A7)

Shī yún, “Tuō rén yǒu xīn. Yú cǔn dù zhī.” Fūzǐ zhī wèi yě.

The *Odes* say: “Another person had the heart, but I measured it.” This describes you, Master.

詩云。『自西自東。自南自北。無思不服。』此之謂也。(Mengzi 2A3)

Shī yún, “Zì xī zì dōng, zì nán zì běi, wú sī bù fú.” Cǐ zhī wèi yě.

The *Odes* say: “From the West, from the East / From the South, from the North.” This describes what I mean.

詩云。『如切如磋。如琢如磨。』其斯之謂與。(Analects 2.15)

Shī yún, “Rú qiē rú cuō, rú zhuó rú mó.” Qí sī zhī wèi yǔ.

The *Odes* say: “As if chiseled, as if filed / As if ground, as if polished.” Does this not describe it [what you were saying]?⁶

Dai Zhen’s Analysis

The brilliant Qing dynasty (1644-1911) philosopher and philologist Dai Zhen 戴震(1724-1777) argued that there is a systematic distinction between the expressions N₁ 之謂 N₂ and N₁ 謂之 N₂.⁷ I would paraphrase Dai Zhen’s distinction as follows:

N₁ 之謂 N₂

N₁ is what is meant by “N₂”

N₁ 謂之 N₂

N₁ is called N₂ (to distinguish it from other things)

The great Sinologist A. C. Graham explains the distinction slightly differently:

...there is a difference of emphasis between *wei zhi* and *zhi wei*. A *wei zhi B* (“A is called B”) answers the question, “What is A called?” while “A *zhi wei B*” (“A is what is meant by B”) answers the question, “What is the thing called B?” Although this is not always the case, the former tends to be used to say that the same thing has several names, the latter to distinguish between different things.⁸

⁶ In this passage, a disciple is citing lines from the *Odes* to illustrate what Kongzi has just said.

⁷ Thanks to Professor Philip J. Ivanhoe for encouraging me, in correspondence, to note Dai Zhen’s suggestion.

⁸ A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, reprint (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992), p. 124. For ease of reading, I have converted the Wade-Giles romanizations that Graham uses to Pinyin. Graham notes that the Song dynasty philosopher Cheng Hao (Mingdao) anticipates Dai Zhen in insisting that there is a distinction between the two expressions, although Cheng Hao does not explain what that distinction is (ibid.).

My own opinion is that there is not a systematic distinction between these expressions in Classical Chinese. (The numerous examples given above do not follow the distinction Dai Zhen suggests.) However, it is an intriguing hypothesis and Dai Zhen might be correct about the specific passages in the *Changes* that are the focus of his discussion. Here is what Dai Zhen says:

In the language of the ancients, there was a distinction between *zhīwèi* 之謂 [“is what is meant by”] and *wèizhī* 謂之 [“is called”]. When one says *zhiwei*, what is said first explains what comes after, as in the *Mean*, “Heaven’s mandate is what is meant by ‘nature.’ Following the nature is what is meant by the ‘Way.’ Cultivating the Way is what is meant by ‘education.’” (天命之謂性。率性之謂道。修道之謂教。) This explains what “nature,” “Way,” and “education” are, as if one had said, “‘Nature’ means Heaven’s mandate. ‘Way’ means following the nature. ‘Education’ means cultivating the Way.” Similarly, when the *Changes* says “The transformation of *yin* and *yang* is what is meant by the ‘Way’” (一陰一陽之謂道), it is explaining what the Way of Heaven is, as if one had said, “‘Way’ means the transformation of *yin* and *yang*.”

In contrast, whenever one says *weizhi*, one is using the word referred to after to make a distinction with regard to a thing referred to first, like in the *Mean*, “To become enlightened from achieving Sincerity is due to nature, while to achieve Sincerity from becoming enlightened is due to education.” (自誠明謂之性。自明誠謂之教。) This is *not* explaining “nature” and “education,” but is using nature and education to distinguish between “becoming enlightened by achieving Sincerity” and “achieving Sincerity by becoming enlightened.” Similarly, when the *Changes* says “What is above with respect to form is called the Way, what is below with respect to form is called entities” (形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器), this is fundamentally not explaining “Way” and “entities.” It is using Way and entities to distinguish between what is “above with respect to form” and what is “below with respect to form.” “Form” means material that has already taken form. “Above with respect to form” is the same as saying “before form.” “Below with respect to form” is the same as saying “after form.” ... When *yin* and *yang* have not yet taken material form, this is what is said to be “above with respect to form.” They do not have the clarity of what is “below with respect to form.” “Entities” refers to what has already taken form and does not transform. “Way” refers to the “Substance of things that one cannot leave behind.”⁹

古人言辭，「之謂」「謂之」有異：凡曰「之謂」，以上所稱解下，如中庸「天命之謂性，率性之謂道，修道之謂教」，此為性、道、教言之，若曰性也者天命之謂也，道也者率性之謂也，教也者修道之謂也；易「一陰一陽之謂道」，則為天道言之，若曰道也者一陰一陽之謂也。凡曰「謂之」者，以下所稱之名辨上之實，如中庸「自誠明謂之性，自明誠謂之教」，此非為性教言之，以性教區別「自誠明」「自明誠」二者耳。易「形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器」，本非為道器言之，以道器區別其形而上形而下耳。形謂已成形質，形而上猶曰形以

⁹ The quoted phrase is from the *Mean* 15. On the metaphysical concept of “Substance,” see Lesson 9. Thanks to Professor Justin Tiwald for advice about translating this passage from Dai Zhen. (He is not responsible for any remaining errors.)

前，形而下猶曰形以後。……陰陽之未成形質，是謂形而上者也，非形而下明矣。器言乎一成而不變，道言乎體物而不可遺。《孟子字義疏證卷中·天道四條》¹⁰

Dai Zhen is making this linguistic distinction as part of a subtle metaphysical disagreement with Zhu Xi and other Song-Ming Dynasty Confucians. Zhu Xi thinks that the “Way” transcends the world of concrete, material objects, and he uses as evidence for this the statement from the *Changes* that 形而上者謂之道。形而下者謂之器, which he interprets to mean “that which transcends form is called the ‘Way’; that which is within form is called ‘entities.’” Dai Zhen objects that Zhu Xi is confusing the *zhīwèi* 之謂 and *wèizhī* 謂之 constructions. The passage from the *Changes* is not *defining* the Way as something that transcends form (if it were defining a term it would use the *zhīwèi* 之謂 construction); instead, the passage from the *Changes* is saying that what is characteristic of *yin qi* and *yang qi* prior to their taking concrete form is that they are governed by the Way alone.

In other words, according to Zhu Xi, the passage in the *Changes* is asserting a categorical distinction between the Way in itself, which transcends physical form because it is pure Pattern (see Lesson 9.3), and the manifestations of the Pattern after it is embodied by *qi* as concrete entities. In contrast, Dai Zhen argues that the *Changes* is merely noting a distinction between the *qi* before it takes concrete form and the *qi* after it takes concrete form.

¹⁰ Source: Dai Zhen, *An Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the “Mengzi,”* <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=554927&remap=gb>