

# A Comparative Study on Unmarked Adjectival Predication and Boundedness in Modern Mandarin and Classic Chinese

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**Abstract:** Conceptualization according to boundedness and unboundedness is a universal characteristic of human cognition. By a comparative analysis on unmarked adjectival predication in modern Mandarin and classic Chinese, this paper aims to investigate the boundedness of adjectival predication from a historical perspective. It is revealed that in classic Chinese unmarked adjectival-predicates were more complicated, and adjectives were able to function as predicates much more freely without the support of functional elements. It is also worth noting that the unmarked adjectival predication in modern Chinese are actually boundarized at the context level from pragmatic perspective. In addition, corpus data and statistic analysis are also used to examine the changes of unmarked adjectival-predicates in different historical period. It can be clearly seen that the use of unmarked adjectival-predicates began to decline in the middle ancient times, then decreased continuously in Song and Yuan Dynasties, and become very restricted and rare in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

**Keywords:** Unmarked adjectival predication, Comparative analysis, Boundedness.

## 1. Introduction

The dichotomy between boundedness and unboundedness is a pervasive characteristic of human cognition (Langack 1987: 486; Paradis 2001). Since there is correspondence between conceptual structure and linguistic structure, the opposition between bounded and unbounded of property in degree of intensity or quantity is manifested by the fact that qualitative adjectives is continuous and unbounded, thus can't be used directly as predicate without the support of functional elements. In modern Mandarin, it is often necessary to add various markers to make the sentence complete and acceptable, e.g., intensifiers, degree complement, comparative components, aspect marker *le*, quantitative phrases, and the reduplication of qualitative adjectives, etc. Obviously, the adjectival predication in modern Mandarin is characterized by boundedness (Lu 1988: 172-186; Shen 1995).

The unmarked adjectival predication in this paper refers to the sentences in which adjectives are used as predicates in bare form, without supporting markers. Obviously, the unmarked form of adjectival predication is at variance with the characteristic of boundedness. However, unmarked adjectival-predicates are observed to exist not only in classic Chinese, but also in modern Mandarin.

Previous studies have discussed adjectival-predicate marking and boundedness in modern Mandarin (Huang 1994; He 1994; Shen 1999; Grano 2012; Pang 2015; Xiong & Yang 2020), and too little attention is focused on the unmarked form of adjectival predication, especially from the diachronic perspective. By comparing unmarked adjectival predication in classic Chinese and modern Mandarin, it is found that the adjectival-predicates in unmarked form is far more free and complicated in classic Chinese, while unmarked adjectival-predicates in modern Mandarin is rather restricted. However, it is worth noting that these syntactic independent forms in

modern Mandarin are actually boundarized via the context. In addition, based on diachronic corpus data and statistic analysis, it is shown that adjectival-predicate in bare form was acceptable and quite common in Old Chinese, but from the middle ancient times, this use began to show a significant downward trend, and in the Ming and Qing dynasties, adjectives were rarely used independently as sentence predicate.

## 2. Unmarked Adjectival Predication in Modern Mandarin

In modern Mandarin, adjectives can function as predicate independently generally when they are used in contrastive construction or interlocution contexts. But in fact, unmarked adjectival predication in modern Mandarin is more complicated than we thought, as illustrated below.

### 2.1. Contrastive construction

The adjectives appearing in contrastive construction are always in an antonymous relationship, expressing a contrastive meaning, as exemplified by (1)-(2). Since comparison is also an important embodiment of adjective gradability (The boundedness of adjectives is associated with gradability, which is manifested through comparison and modification by intensifiers (Quirk et al 1985: 435; Paradis 2001).) (Doetjes 2008: 123-155), thus unbounded properties can also be discretized and boundarized in the contrastive context.

(1)人小心不小。(modern Mandarin)

Ren xiao xin bu xiao.

People small mind NEG small

“(He) is young, but very insightful.”

(2)北方干燥，南方潮湿。(modern Mandarin)

Beifang ganzao, nanfang chaoshi.

north dry south humid

“Dry in the north, while humid in the south.”

## 2.2. Interlocution contexts

In example (3)-(4), I am stupid/he is tall means I'm more stupid/I'm taller than the others, and the contrastive meaning is shown through the context, thus highlights the gradability of qualitative adjectives.

(3)A: 谁愚蠢?

B: 我愚蠢。(modern Mandarin)

A: Shui yuchun?

who stupid

“Who's stupid?”

B: Wo yuchun.

I stupid

“I'm stupid.”

(4)A: 你高还是他高?

B: 他高。(modern Mandarin)

A: Ni gao haishi ta gao?

You tall or he tall

“Who is taller, you or he?”

B: Ta gao.

he tall

“He is taller.”

## 2.3. Parallel construction

The structure of parallel construction is similar to contrastive construction, but adjectives occurring in contrastive construction are always in an antonymous relationship, while in parallel construction there are a set of adjectives with similar or related meanings. Two basic types of parallel construction are distinguished here. The first type, as is exemplified in (5), is a combination of several S+A phrases, namely, taking the form  $S_0 + (S_1 + A_1) + (S_2 + A_2) + (S_3 + A_3) + \dots$ . There happens to be a particular semantic relationship - part-whole - between  $S_1, S_2, S_3$  and  $S_0$  ( $S_0$  may not appear in the sentence, but is implied in the context), and those semantically related adjectives describe  $S_0$  from different aspects. The structural and semantic features of  $S_0 + (S_1 + A_1) + (S_2 + A_2) + (S_3 + A_3) + \dots$  are very similar to the double-subject construction  $S_1 + S_2 + A$ , which will be discussed in section 2.5 below, so we do not make much explanation here.

(5)人漂亮, 家世好, 性格不错。(S<sub>0</sub> in the sentence refers to “she” (贺音 He Yin), which can be inferred from the context.) (Feichengwura, modern Mandarin)

Ren piaoliang, jiashi hao, xingge bucuo.

person beautiful family background good personality good

“She is beautiful, has a good family background and a good personality.”

(6)你漂亮、聪明、活泼、可爱、有上进心。(Huan ni

qiansheng yuan, modern Mandarin)

Ni piaoliang, congming, huopo, ke-ai, you shangjinxin.

you beautiful smart lively cute have motivation

“You are beautiful, smart, lively, cute and motivated.”

The second type, as in (6), take the form  $S + A_1 + A_2 + A_3$ . Obviously, there's only one subject in the sentence, not involving in part-whole relationship. Zhu (1956) distinguishes two adjectival classes for Chinese: the base forms, the expression of a quality, and the complex forms, the description of the state or mood of that quality. The class of complex forms covers a range of subclasses, including reduplicated adjectives (e.g., da-da ‘big-big’, gao-gao-xing-xing ‘happy-happy’, malimahu ‘careless’; heihuhu ‘black’), modifier-head compound adjectives (bingliang ‘ice-cold’, xuebai ‘snow-white’), and adjectival phrases. As for the adjectival phrases, it also has two subclasses, one is composed of an adverb and an adjective (hen xiao ‘very small’; feichang ganjing ‘extremely clean’), and the other is composed of juxtaposed adjectives (e.g., you gao you da ‘tall and strong’). Although it is extremely puzzling to see adjectival phrases figuring among the complex forms, it is indeed share some similar syntactic and semantic characteristics with state adjectives (Waltraud 2006). Obviously,  $S + A_1 + A_2 + A_3$  can be seen as a subtype of juxtaposed-adjective phrases. Zhu (1956) proposes that although juxtaposed-adjective phrases simply present a set of properties and do not directly indicate a quality or degree point, they actually conveys emphasis, implying an intensive meaning. On the basis of discussions above, it's obvious that, on the one hand, just like the state adjectives,  $S + A_1 + A_2 + A_3$  describes the state or mood of the quality belonging to  $S$ ; on the other hand, a set of juxtaposed adjectives can also add intensive meaning to the sentence, indicating gradability by calibrating a property in high degree of intensity, making continuous property bounded.

## 2.4. Complex sentences

As in (7)-(8), the unmarked adjectival-predicates are also found in various complex sentences, such as concessive complex sentence, selective complex sentence, hypothetical complex sentence, causal complex sentence, conditional complex sentence, progressive complex sentence, and coordinate complex sentence. Concessive and selective complex sentence convey a contrastive meaning, and boundarization is achieved by making comparisons. In hypothetical, causal and conditional complex sentences, adjectival-predicate behaves as the reason or condition for the occurrence of another event, thus highlights the intensity of property, or implies a contrastive meaning via the context clues. Correspondingly, in the progressive complex sentence, and coordinate complex sentence, intensive meaning is also expressed by coordination of adjectives with similar or related meanings.

(7)如果累的话, 不用陪我。(Hebao li de danrenchuang, modern Mandarin)

Ruguo lei dehua, bu yong pei wo.

if tired Prt. NEG need accompany me

“If you are tired, you don't have to stay with me.”

(8)因为现在是夏天, 长袖衫是处理的, 所以便宜。(Bu

tou dongxi de ze, modern Mandarin)

Yinwei xianzai shi xiatian, changxiu shan shi  
chuli de, suoyi pianyi.

because now COP summer long-sleeved shirts COP  
on-sale NOM so cheap

“Because it is summer, long-sleeved shirts are on sale, so they are cheap.”

Although there is no conjunctive in (9)-(10), different logical relationships can be observed between the clauses, and link words can be inserted between the clauses as well. There is a causal meaning in examples (9), and a transitional relationship in example (10), an intensive meaning or a contrastive meaning therefore can be inferred from this logical relationship. As is shown in example (9), the property timid leads to the occurrence of a certain condition, which also behaves as a supplementary explanation to the extent of timid in the sentence: he is timid, however, how timid is he? The subsequent clause gives more details - his timidity leads to the consequence that he dare not lose his temper with Mr. Lan. And in example (10), there are two small in the context (“... Don’t listen to my brother! He always says I am young. Although I’m young, I’m not afraid of anything! The sliding weight of a steelyard, though small in volume, may hold down a thousand catties.”)(*Yehuo chunfeng dou gucheng*, modern Mandarin). The first small refers to the young age, compared with the age of his brother, while the second small refers to the small volume of sliding weight, compared with the weight of other things, and contrastive meaning is clearly shown in the context.

(9) 他的胆子小，不敢和蓝先生发脾气。(modern Mandarin, cited from Zhou 2003)

Ta de danzi xiao, bu gan he Lan-xiansheng  
fa piqi.

he GEN courage timid NEG dare with Mr Lan  
lose temper

“He was too timid to lose his temper with Mr Lan.”

(10) 小，怕什么！秤锤小，夺千斤。(Yehuo chunfeng dou  
gucheng, modern Mandarin)

Xiao, pa shenme! Chengchui xiao, duo  
qian-jin.

young afraid what sliding weight small hold  
a thousand-CL

“Although I’m young, I’m not afraid of anything! The sliding weight of a steelyard,

though small in volume, may hold down a thousand catties.”

## 2.5. Double-subject construction

Liao (1985: 323-337) summarizes four different types of frame-lattice relationship that exists between adjacent nouns in Chinese: (i) individuals as frames - components as lattices, (ii) whole as frame - part as lattice, (iii) individual as box - properties as lattice, (iv) scenario as a frame - characters as a frame.

Based on frame-latticework relationship, Zhang (2011) proposes that adjectives can be used to describe Slattice, forming Sframe+Slattice+A (S1+S2+A for short), which is the basic form of double-subject construction. One important

feature of S1+S2+A is that S1 is the whole, and S2 is a part, possessed by S1, and adjectival predicates describe the property of S1, which allows a bare form (example 11-12).

(11) 她眼睛大。(modern Mandarin)

Ta yanjing da.

she eye big

“Her eyes is big.”

(12) 他个子矮，身体胖。(Yingchun hua, modern Mandarin)

Ta gezi ai, shenti pang.

he height short body fat

“He is short and has a fat body.”

Because the adjectival predicate denotes the quality or property of Slattice rather than Sframe, and Slattice is also a part of Sframe, double comparisons are made here: the first one is made between Slattice and other components of Sframe, as is shown in (11), her eyes are large, in which large refers specifically to the eyes, forming a contrast with the non-eye parts; the second comparison is made between the Sframe in the sentence and other types of Sframe, also as in (11), her eyes are large, in which her eyes specifically refers to hers, rather than others. Therefore, double-subject construction is also characterized by gradibility. Although adjectival predicate is unmarked, in fact it has been boundarized by contrastive meaning implied in the context clues.

In summary, the unmarked form of adjectival-predicate in modern Chinese mainly occur in contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction, complex sentences and double-subject construction. How we perceive the world often has corresponding expression in language, so the opposition between bounded and unbounded makes us use various means to realize the boundedness of language expression. Boundedness is a very important characteristic of adjectival predication in modern Mandarin, so the existence of above unmarked forms are extremely special and rather limited. Previous studies mainly focus on explicit sentence-completing elements in modern Mandarin. However, some implicit strategies can be used as well to help adjectival-predicate achieve boundedness. Liu (2007) proposes that pragmatic contrasts can provide exterior connections for originally unbounded objects, by which the boundary of the gestalt structure can be identified. According to the analysis above, the gradibility of adjectives can often be shown through various strategies on the context level. It is found that although adjectives can behave as predicate independently in these constructions above, a contrastive meaning or an intensive meaning can be obtained from the context and these unmarked form are actually bounded from pragmatic perspective.

## 3. Unmarked Adjectival Predication in Classic Chinese

The unmarked adjectival-predicates in classic Chinese can occur in simple sentences, logical relation sentences, contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction and double-subject construction. In order to further examine the differences of unmarked adjectival predication between classic and modern Chinese, we also translate them into modern Chinese while citing relevant

examples of classic Chinese.

### 3.1. Simple sentences

#### 3.1.1. Descriptive simple sentence

Adjectives can function as predicate independently in simple sentences, describing a quality of the thing named, which is the most notable difference between classic Chinese and modern Mandarin, as exemplified by (13) - (15). This type of unmarked adjectival-predicate is very common in the Pre-Qin period and Middle Chinese, however, its use frequency decreased rapidly since Song and Yuan Dynasties, and almost disappeared in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

(13)a. 其庭小。(Zuozhuan, Zhaogong shiba nian, 500BC)

Qi ting xiao.  
PRON courtyard small

“Its courtyard is small.”

b. 庭院很小。(Modern Mandarin)

Tingyuan hen xiao.  
courtyard very small

“The courtyard is very small.”

(14)a. 其车美。(Zuozhuan, Xianggong er shi qi nian, 500BC)

Qi che mei.  
PRON chariot gorgeous

“His chariot is gorgeous.”

b. 他的马车非常华丽。(Modern Mandarin)

Ta de mache feichang huali.  
he GEN chariot very gorgeous  
“His chariot is very gorgeous.”

(15)a. 亡失者多。(《抱朴子·钧世》)

Wangshi-zhe duo.  
lost-books many

“Many ancient books are lost.”

b. 丢失的古书很多。

Diushi de gu shu hen duo.  
lost GEN ancient book very many  
“So many ancient books are lost.”

As is shown in (13a)-(15a), since adjectives occur in simple sentences, which are relatively self-sufficient and independent, and also adjectival-predicates take the bare form, we can hardly obtain an intensive meaning or contrastive meaning from the context. Therefore, with the establishment of boundedness of adjectival predication, it is more likely that functional elements, usually degree word, are added to make the sentence bounded, otherwise, the sentence is incomplete and unacceptable, as is illustrated in (13b)- (15b).

#### 3.1.2. Judgmental simple sentence

In Old and Middle Chinese, a bare form of adjectival predicate, namely S+A, can also convey a judgmental sense, as exemplified by (16a) -(17a).

(16)a. 白狗黑。(Zhuangzi, Tianxia, 3rd BC)

Bai gou hei.

white dog black

“A white dog is black.”

b. 白狗是黑的。(modern Mandarin)

Bai gou shi hei de.  
white dog COP black NOM

“A white dog is black.”

(17)a. 面白。(Sou shen ji, Chapter 6, 4th AD)

Mian bai.  
face white

“The face is white.”

b. 脸是白的。(modern Mandarin)

Lian shi bai de.  
face COP white NOM

“The face is white.”

However, with the grammaticalization of copula shi ‘be’, shi+A began to function as predicate since Middle Chinese (example 18), and meanwhile, S+A expressing a judgmental meaning gradually disappeared. In modern Mandarin, judgmental adjective predication typically take the form shi+A+de, and unbounded properties can also be discretized and bounded via de, as exemplified by (16b) and (17b).

(18) 风月是同。(Quanliangwen, Jindaishu, 6th AD)

Feng yue shi tong.  
wind moon COP same

“Wind and Moon are the same.”

### 3.2. Logical relation sentences

In logical relation sentences, different meanings are expressed through different logical relationships contained in the sentence, for example: concession, selection, causality, condition, hypothesis, progression and coordination. Logical relation sentences include not only complex sentences (example 19, 20, 23, 24, 26), but also contraction sentences (example 21, 22) and serial-verb construction (example 25). Contraction sentence is a very special pattern in Chinese, which takes the form of simple sentence, but expresses different logical meanings as complex sentence. Serial-verb construction describes events that occur successively in chronological or logical order, implying a dynamic meaning. In (19-23), the logical relationships are overt, where a conjunction is present. The link word in (24-26) is absent, however, logical meanings still can be clearly obtained.

(19)a. 虽大, 轻也。(Zuozhuan, Xuangong san nian, 500BC)

Sui da, qing ye.  
although large light Prt.

“Although the tripod is large, it is very light.”

b. 虽然鼎很大, 但很轻。(modern Mandarin)

Suiran ding hen da, dan hen qing.  
although tripod very large but very light

“Although the tripod is very large, it is very light.”

(20)a. 贾季乱, 且罪大。(Zuozhuan, wengong shi san nian, 500BC)

Jiaji luan, qie zui da.  
Jiaji troubled and misconduct big  
“Jiaji likes to go against the emperor and make troubles, and what he does is very bad.”

b. 贾季喜欢作乱,而且罪行十分严重。(modern Mandarin)  
Jiaji xihuan zuoluan, erqie zuixing shifen yanzhong.

Jiaji like make troubles and misconduct extremely bad

“Jiaji likes to go against the emperor and make troubles, and what he does is very bad.”

(21)a. 既庶且侈。(Shijing, Daya, Quane, before 500 BC)

Ji shu qie chi.

both many and gorgeous

“(The carriages) are both numerous and gorgeous.”

b. 车辆既多又华美。(modern Mandarin)

Cheliang ji duo you huamei.

carriages both many and gorgeous

“The carriages are both numerous and gorgeous.”

(22)a. 尧老而舜摄也。(Mengzi, Wanzhang shang, 275 BC)

Yao lao er shun she ye.

Yao old Conj. Shun govern Prt.

“Yao became old and asked Shun to govern the country.”

b. 尧老了而叫舜治理国家。(modern Mandarin)

Yao lao-le er jiao shun zhili guojia.

Yao old-PFV Conj. ask Shun govern country

“Yao became old and asked Shun to govern the country.”

(23)a. 救者多,乃得免。(Shi shuo xin yu, Yaliang, AD 450)

Jiuzhe duo, nai de mian.

rescuer many so can exonerate

“There were many people who tried to save him, so he was exonerated.”

b. 营救他的人很多,于是没有获罪。(modern Mandarin)

Yingjiu ta de ren hen duo, yushi meiyou huo zui.

save him GEN people very many so NEG receive punishment

“There were so many people who tried to save him, so he was exonerated.”

(24)a. 近,不告而驰之。(Zuozhuan, Xianggong er shi si nian, 500BC)

Jin, bu gao er chi zhi.

close NEG tell Conj. speed up it

“The chariot was approaching the Chu camp, and (Wan Shequan) sped in without telling the other two people.”

b. 车子驶近楚营,宛射犬没有告诉这两个人就疾驰而进。(modern Mandarin)

Chezi shi jin chu ying, Wan Shequan meiyou gaosu zhe liang-ge ren

jiu jichi er jin.

Chariot drive close Chu camp Wan Shequan NEG tell this two-CL people

then speed up Conj. enter

“The chariot was approaching the Chu camp, and (Wan Shequan) sped in without telling the other two people.”

(25)a. 饥困欲死。(Baopuzi, Xianyao, AD 325)

Ji kun yu si.

hungry sleepy will die

“(He) was hungry, sleepy, and about to die.”

b. 饥饿困乏,快要死去。(modern Mandarin)

Ji-e kunfa, kuaiyao si qu.

hungry sleepy soon die go

“(He) was hungry, sleepy, and about to die.”

(26)a. 齐大,非吾耦也。(Zuozhuan, Hengong liu nian, 500BC)

Qi da, fei wu ou ye.

state of Qi powerful NEG I partner Prt

“The state of Qi is too powerful to be a partner in marriage.”

b. 齐国太强大,不是和我相匹配的配偶。(modern Mandarin)

Qiguo tai qiangda, bu shi he wo xiangpipei de peiou.

state of Qi too powerful NEG COP with me matched GEN partner

“The state of Qi is too powerful to be a partner in marriage.”

In classic Chinese, generally, adjectives can appear in predicate independently and freely in different types of complex sentences, contraction sentences and serial-verb construction. There is a transitional relationship in (19), a coordinated relationship in (20), a progressive relationship in (21), a continuing relationship in (22-25) and a causal relationship in (26), respectively. Although this unmarked form is also occasionally seen in the complex sentences in modern Mandarin, as illustrated in 2.4, but it is shown a strong inclination to marked form. This contrast can be seen from sentences of classic Chinese and their translations in modern Mandarin, with extra bounding markers added in (19b), (20b), (22b), (23b), (24b) and (26b).

### 3.3. Contrastive construction

As in modern Mandarin, unmarked adjectival predicate can also occur in contrastive constructions in classic Chinese. Antonymous adjectives can either be used together in the same sentence, or appear in separate clauses (example 27-28).

(27)a. 屨贱踊贵。(Zuozhuan, Zhaogong san nian, 500BC)

Lv jian yong gui.

shoe cheap prosthetic-legs expensive

“shoes are cheap, and prosthetic legs are expensive.”

b. 鞋子贱,假腿贵。(modern Mandarin)

Xiezi jian, jiatui gui.

Shoe cheap prosthetic-legs expensive

“shoes are cheap, and prosthetic legs are expensive.”

(28)a. 卫大,鲁小。(Zuozhuan, Zhaogong qi nian, 500BC)

Wei da lu xiao.

state of wei great state of Lu small

“Wei suffered a great calamity, while Lu suffered a small one.”

b. 魏国遭受的灾祸大，鲁国遭受的灾祸小。(modern Mandarin)

Weiguo      zaoshou      de      zaihuo      da      Luguo  
zaoshou      de  
zaihuo      xiao

state of wei      suffer      GEN calamity great      state of Lu  
suffer      GEN calamity small

“Wei suffered a great calamity, while Lu suffered a small one.”

### 3.4. Interlocution contexts

Unmarked adjectival predicates used in interlocution contexts are very common in both classic and modern Chinese. Here are some examples in classic Chinese:

(29)a. 任人有问屋庐子曰：“礼与食孰重？”曰：“礼重。”(Mengzi, Gaozi xia, 275 BC)

Ren      ren      you      wen      Wuluzi      yue: “Li      yu  
shi      shu      zhong?”

Yue: “Li      zhong.”

state of Ren      people have ask      Wuluzi      say      courtesy and  
food which      important say      courtesy important

One person from the state of Ren asked Wuluzi: “Which is more important, courtesy or food?” Wuluzi answered: “Courtesy is more important.”

b. 有一位任国人问屋庐子说：“礼和食哪个重要？”答道：“礼重要。”(modern Mandarin)

You      yi-wei      renguo      ren      wen      Wuluzi      shuo: “Li  
he      shi      nage

zhongyao?” Dadao: “Li      zhongyao.”

have one-CL state of Ren people ask      Wuluzi      say      courtesy  
and food which      important      answer      courtesy important

One person from the state of Ren asked Wuluzi: “Which is more important, courtesy or food?” Wuluzi answered: “Courtesy is more important.”

(30)a. 公谓万曰：“鲁君庸与寡人美？”万曰：“鲁君美。”(Xinxu, Yiyong, 1st BC)

Gong      wei      wan      yue: “Lu      jun      Yong      yu  
guaren      mei?”

Wan      yue: “Lu      jun      mei.”

Duke ask      Chang Wan say      state of Lu emperor Yong  
with I handsome      Changwan say      state of Lu  
emperor handsome

Duke Min asked Chang Wan, “Who is handsome, the emperor of Lu or me?” Chang Wan said, “The emperor of Lu is handsome.”

b. 闵公对长万说：“鲁国的国君庸和我谁英俊？”长万说：“鲁君英俊。”(modern Mandarin)

Min      gong      dui      Chang Wan shuo: “Luguo      de  
guojun Yong he wo

shui yingjun?” Chang Wan shuo: “Lu      jun  
yingjun.”

Min Duke to      Chang Wan say      state of Lu GEN  
emperor Yong with I who handsome      Chang Wan say

state of Lu emperor handsome

Duke Min asked Chang Wan, “Who is handsome, the emperor of Lu or me?” Chang Wan said, “The emperor of Lu is handsome.”

### 3.5. Parallel contexts

In parallel construction, adjectives can either be used together in the same sentence, or appear in separate co-ordinated clauses, similar in meaning and grammatical form.

In modern Chinese, the parallel construction is often in the form of S0 + (S1 + A1) + (S2 + A2) + (S3 + A3) + ... and S+A1+A2+A3, while those in the classic Chinese is much more various and complicated. As is shown in (33), adjectives can co-ordinated with verbs, used as predicate together. And in (34), one sentence is paralleled by another one, showing a similarity of grammatical structure, with similar or related meaning between sentences.

(31)a. 主贤世治。(Lvshi chunqiu, guanshi, 3<sup>rd</sup> BC)

Zhu      xian      shi      zhi.

monarch wise world peaceful

“The monarch is wise and the world is peaceful.”

b. 君主贤明，世道太平。(modern Mandarin)

Junzhu      xianming,      shidao      taiping.

monarch wise world peaceful

“The monarch is wise and the world is peaceful.”

(32)a. 今长大美好。(Zhuangzi, Daozhi, 3<sup>rd</sup> BC)

Jin      chang      da      mei      hao.

now tall sturdy handsome good

“Now (I) am tall and sturdy with a handsome face.”

b. 如今我身材高大魁梧，面目英俊美好。(modern Mandarin)

Rujin wo      shencai      gaoda      kuiwu,      mianmu      yingjun  
meihao.

now I      stature tall sturdy face handsome  
good

“Now (I) am tall and sturdy with a handsome face.”

(33)a. 发白者黑，齿落者生。(Baopuzi, Jindan, AD 325)

Fa      bai      zhe      hei,      chi      luo      zhe      sheng.

hair white those black teeth fall those grow

“The white hair turns black, and the fallen teeth grow again.”

b. 头发白的变黑了，掉落的牙齿重新生长。(modern Mandarin)

Toufa bai      de      bian      hei      le,      diaoluo      de      yachi  
chongxin shengzhang.

hair white NOM turn black Asp. fall GEN teeth  
again grow

“The white hair turns black, and the fallen teeth grow again.”

(34)a. 得之者贵，不待黄钺之威。体之者富，不须难得之货。(Baopuzi, Changxuan, AD 325)

De      zhi      zhe      gui,      bu      dai      Huangyue      zhi      wei.  
Ti      zhi      zhe

fu,      bu      xu      nande      zhi      huo.

grasp it those exalted NEG need Huangyue GEN

power learn it those

rich NEG need valuable GEN asset

“Those who have mastered the Dao will be very noble, and they don’t need to borrow the prestige of Huangyue. People who understand the Dao will be very rich without relying on valuable assets.”

b.掌握了玄道的人会非常显贵，不必借用黄钺的威风。体会到玄道的人会特别富有，无需凭借贵重的资财。(modern Mandarin)

Zhangwo le xuandao de ren hui feichang xianguai, bu bi

jieyong Huangyue de weifeng. Tihui dao xuandao de ren hui tebie fuyou,

wu xu pingjie guizhong de zicai.

grasp Asp. Dao GEN people will extremely exalted NEG need depend on Huangyue GEN power learn Asp. Dao GEN people will very rich

NEG need rely on valuable GEN asset.

“Those who have mastered the Dao will be very noble, and they don’t need to borrow the prestige of Huangyue. People who understand the Dao will be very rich without relying on valuable assets.”

### 3.6. Double-subject constructions

Double-subject construction is also a common form of unmarked adjectival-predicates in classic Chinese, and the semantic and syntactic features are almost the same with modern Mandarin. Here are some examples of double-subject construction in classic Chinese:

(35)a.今吾才小。(Zhuangzi, Gengsangchu, 3rd BC)

Jin wu cai xiao.

now I talent little

“Now I have very little talent.”

b.现在我的才干太小了。(modern Mandarin)

Xianzai wo de caigan tai xiao le.

Now I GEN talent too little CRS

“Now I have very little talent.”

(36)a.临川誉贵。(Shi shuo xin yu, Pinzao, AD 450)

Linchuan yu gui.

Linchuan reputation noble.

“Lin Chuan has a noble reputation.”

b.临川名声高贵。(modern Mandarin)

Linchuan shengming gaogui.

Linchuan reputation noble

“Lin Chuan has a noble reputation.”

### 3.7. The use frequency of unmarked adjectival-predicates across history

Lunyu, Mengzi of Pre-Qin Period, Baopuzi, Sou Shen Ji of Middle Chinese, Jingde Chuandeng Lu, Zhuzi Yulei(Vol. 1-30), Xin Kan Yuan Poetry, Laoqida of Song and Yuan Dynasties, Xiyou Ji, Honglou Meng and Ernv Yingxiong Zhuan of Ming and Qing Dynasties are chosen as linguistic research materials to analyze the changes of the unmarked and marked form of adjectival predication in different historical period.

**Table 1.** Percentages ( and raw figures ) of unmarked and marked adjectival-predicates across history

	Representative literature	Unmarked adjective-predicate		Marked adjective-predicate	
Pre-Qin	Lunyu	47.7%	(172)	52.3%	(189)
	Mengzi	32.1%	(137)	67.9%	(290)
Middle Chinese	Baopuzi	37.4%	(573)	62.6%	(960)
	Sou Shen Ji	30.2%	(209)	69.8%	(483)
Song & Yuan	Jingde Chuandeng Lu	27.5%	(273)	72.5%	(719)
	Zhuzi Yulei(Vol. 1-30)	18.3%	(655)	81.7%	(2923)
	Xin Kan Yuan Poetry	32.6%	(236)	67.4%	(488)
	Laoqida	20.5%	(25)	79.5%	(97)
Ming & Qing	Xiyou Ji	26.8%	(836)	73.2%	(2288)
	Honglou Meng	13.5%	(615)	86.5%	(3950)
	Ernv Yingxiong Zhuan	8.7%	(125)	91.3%	(1319)

By comparing the use of unmarked adjectival-predicates in different historical periods, it can be clearly seen that the frequency of unmarked form has been continuously decreasing from classic Chinese to modern Mandarin. In Lunyu and Mengzi, the representative literature of Old Chinese, the proportion of unmarked adjectival-predicates accounts for 47.7% and 32.1% of the total number of adjectival predicates.

In the Middle Chinese, unmarked adjectival predication began to show a downward trend. The proportion of unmarked adjectival-predicates in Baopuzi is 37.4%, and even lower in Sou Shen Ji, about 30.2% by contrast. The decreasing of unmarked form is generally because that the use

frequency of constructions in relation to degree was raised greatly in middle Ancient times, such as adverbdegree+A (e.g., 甚美 shen mei ‘very beautiful’), comparative construction (e.g., 深于大海 shen yu da hai ‘deeper than the sea’) and analogous construction (e.g., 大如山 da ru shan ‘as huge as a mountain’), which further strengthened the gradability characteristics of adjectives, and thus enhanced the boundedness of adjectival predication.

In Song and Yuan Dynasties, adjectives showed a significant trend of boundarization when behave as predicate, and new marking forms emerged in large numbers, e.g., degree markers and dynamic markers. Correspondingly, a continuous decline is shown in the number of unmarked

adjectival-predicates, which is much lower than the marked form. Although, the unmarked form is more frequently used in *Jingde chuandeng lu* (27.5%) and *Xin Kan Yuan Poetry* (32.6%), in other two books, *Zhuzi Yulei* (Vol. 1-30) and *Laoqida*, which consist largely of spoken discourse, the proportion of unmarked form in total number of adjectival-predicates is as low as 18.3% and 20.5%, respectively.

As for the Ming and Qing dynasties, different kinds of marked adjectival-predicates were getting unprecedentedly enriched and developed. Correspondingly, in *Hongloumeng* and *Ernv yingxiong zhuan*, the proportion of unmarked adjectival-predicates even decreases to 13.5% and 8.7%, forming a striking contrast to the statistics in early period.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper examines the class of unmarked adjectival-predicates in modern Mandarin and classic Chinese. The unmarked form of adjective predication in modern Chinese mainly appear in contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction, complex sentences and double-subject construction, while the unmarked form of adjectival predication in classic Chinese mainly appear in simple sentences, logical relation sentences, contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction, and double-subject construction. It is obvious that the unmarked adjectival predication in ancient Chinese are richer and more complicated, which are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

Firstly, the unmarked form of adjectival predication in classic Chinese not only cover the subclasses of those in modern Mandarin, but also can appear in simple sentences and different kinds of logical relation sentences. In simple sentences, unmarked adjectival-predicates generally denote properties that we ascribe to entities, or convey a judgemental meaning. However, simple sentences are independent and self-sufficient, in which the gradability or intensity of qualitative adjectives is uncertain. With the development of boundedness, this use gradually disappeared since Song and Yuan dynasties, and become totally unacceptable and ungrammatical in modern Mandarin. As for logical relation sentences, in classic Chinese, unmarked adjectival-predicates not only appear in complex sentences, also even in contraction sentences and serial-verb construction, while in modern Mandarin, unmarked adjectival-predicates only appear in complex sentences, very rare and limited.

Secondly, although some unmarked form both exist in ancient and modern Chinese, their use frequency and use range in modern Mandarin is incomparable to classic Chinese. Adjectives can function as predicate far more independently and freely, especially in Old and Middle Chinese. Even in the Song and Yuan dynasties, boundedness still was not a obligatory requirement for adjectival predication, and various markers were added just owing to the semantic need. By contrast, adjectival predication in modern Mandarin is characterized boundedness. Although adjectives can behave as predicate independently in contrastive construction, dialogue context, etc., a contrastive meaning or an intensive meaning can be clearly obtained from the context, and these unmarked form are actually bounded in some way.

The difference of unmarked adjectival-predicates between classic Chinese and modern Mandarin shows the transition from boundedness to boundedness occurring in Chinese

adjectival predication across history. The historical corpus data and statistic analysis are also used to sort out this evolution process. When one is rising, the other is falling. It can be clearly seen that the use of unmarked adjectival-predicate began to decline in the middle ancient times, then decreased continuously in Song and Yuan Dynasties, and become very restricted and rare in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

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