Degree Adverb Zhī 之 in Modern Chinese

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Abstract
Chinese ZHI (之) is a polysemous word with various functions. It was frequently used as a pronoun, a particle as well as a verb in ancient Chinese. Recently, it is used as a degree adverb. However, such a usage is not listed in dictionaries, and it has not been discussed in any studies on ZHI yet. The author assumed this is a new emerging use of ZHI in colloquial language. The paper studied the degree adverb ZHI, aiming to figure out how the extent meaning of ZHI was derived. The findings and conclusions may provide Chinese learners and teachers with an effective way to learn and teach the polysemous ZHI.

Keywords: collocation, semantic extension, degree adverb, generalization

INTRODUCTION

In Chinese, degree adverbs are most commonly used to express the extent of something. There are numerous degree adverbs in Chinese; hénn (很; very), fēicháng (非常; very), jí (極; very) and xiāngdāng (相當; quite) have been traditionally used to express an excessive extent, whereas chāo (超; super) and wúdí (無敵; invincibly) are becoming more prevalent in modern Chinese. The author of this study observed that zhī (之) has developed a usage as a degree adverb in modern Chinese. Many of Chinese degree adverbs were generated from lexical words through grammaticalization. This study examined the usage of zhī as a degree adverb to determine whether such usage was derived from a lexical word via grammaticalization or from other derivational routes. The synchronic modern Chinese corpus was analyzed to identify possible routes of the derivation.

The Corpus

The corpus used in this study for analysis and inference was collected online, mainly collected from Google search engine. Such usages are not included in the Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese, indicating that they are relatively contemporary and colloquial expressions. The Chinese corpus comprised expressions from mainland Chinese, as well as from Taiwanese Chinese and Hong Kong Putonghua. In addition to collecting the synchronic corpus, this study also observed the use of the
same expression in different eras from a diachronic perspective. The sequential order of the emergence of expressions could therefore be determined for inferring the derivational sequence of zhī. In the examples, the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Putonghua expressions are marked.

Collecting the corpus was challenging. Zhī has numerous usages; moreover, the distinction of parts of speech in Chinese is not clear, and the punctuation is not rigorous. Therefore, each example required careful reading and interpretation. Because numerous Chinese verbs and adjectives can also be used as nouns, not all expressions that contained the verbs or adjectives following zhī could be collected as examples. In addition, simply entering the character 之 to search for the “zhī + ADJ/V” construction that expressed a degree would receive far too many results. To accurately and efficiently collect the required examples, the author attached specific predicates to zhī (e.g. zhī kěwù之可惡; extremely hateful) to perform the search. Because Chinese predicates are so numerous, searching them individually was time-consuming. This study focused on a corpus that mostly comprised predicates following fēicháng zhī (非常之; extremely) to observe the derivational relationship between the “fēicháng zhī + predicate” and “zhī + predicate” constructions and to determine their distribution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of Zhī

Zhī does not appear to occupy a crucial status in modern Chinese, and is mostly used to replace de (的; of). By comparison, zhī conveys an abundance of meanings in ancient Chinese, which contained few frequently used function words. Among these few function words, zhī played a prominent role. Zhī in ancient Chinese was both a content word and function word. Because of the variety of usages and prevalence of zhī, substantial research has been completed on its usages. Shen (2009) noted that in Mengzi, zhī was used as a verb, conjunction, pronoun, multifunctional word, and particle. Yuan indicated that in Analects, zhī was employed as a verb, conjunction, pronoun, and particle. Jia (2007) identified the syntactic positions of zhī in all its usages in ancient Chinese, reporting that it could be categorized as a neutral word in ancient Chinese; as a content word, it could serve as a pronoun and verb; and as a function word, it could serve as a conjunction, modal particle, particle, and preposition. Moreover, Feng (2012) proposed a derivational process of several meanings of zhī based on their connections. According to the Shuowen Jiezi, the original meanings of zhī were “to grow, to breed”. Feng claimed that these meanings were later extended to mean “going from one place to another”. On the basis of this meaning, zhī was further extended to serve as a demonstrative pronoun, meaning “this or that”. However, Feng merely noted the usages of zhī as a content word and did not elaborate on zhī as a function word.

1 Shuowen Jiezi explains: “Zhī means to grow and resembles a plant that has sprouted, developing strong stems.”
Derivation of Other Degree Adverbs

Regarding the formation of adverbs, Yang (2005) proposed that structural variation serves as the basis for the grammaticalization of content words. Variations in its construction and syntactic position transform a content word, which exerts core functions, to an adverb, which operates modifying functions and undergoes meaning abstraction. Most degree adverbs in Chinese are derived from content words.

Wang (2003) investigated the origin of the degree adverb *hěn* (很; very). *Hěn* was originally an adjective meaning “disobedient,” and was later extended to mean “vicious and grumpy”. Regarding the syntactic position, *hěn* was initially used in collocation with other synonymous or similar adjectives to serve as predicates, in which both adjectives had equal status. Examples of this include *hěnlì* (很戾; vicious and grumpy) and *hěnào* (很傲; vicious and proud). Eventually, the status of the two adjectives became imbalanced. In the “*hěn* + adjective” construction, the other adjective became the head, whereas *hěn* became a modifier. Liu (2008) studied the grammaticalization of the degree adverb *guài* (怪; quite), indicating that the usage of *guài* as a degree adverb was derived from its usage as an adjective that meant “unusual.” In addition, when *guài* serves as a verb, the variation of its construction triggered grammaticalization.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Reanalysis

Reanalysis is a mechanism of linguistic change, and it is commonly adopted to explain the syntactic changes that take place in language history. According Langacker (1977), reanalysis is “change in the structure of an expression or class of expressions that does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestation”. Hendrik (2009) stated that reanalysis takes place on the syntagmatic level of language and causes a single surface sequence of linguistic elements to receive a new syntactic and semantic interpretation. Reanalysis is usually an alternative when a surface sequence appears to be ambiguous. There would be a split between an old representation and a new one for the same surface sequence, and the newly established representation may manifest itself in new surface sequences irreconcilable with the old analysis. Hendrik highlights two central characteristics of reanalysis: it takes place abruptly, consisting in a leap from one discrete syntactic category to another, and (from a language-internal perspective) it has the potential of introducing a genuine novelty in grammatical structure.

Collocation

Word collocations substantially affect semantic changes. Liu (2000) explained this process as being a causal relationship: Word collocations emerge in actual linguistic contexts on the basis of semantic connections, which was later normalized as specific word collocations. As the scope of application of such collocations expands, distinguishing features are formed. Basically, compound words and specific
constructions are likely to be produced from specific word collocations. In addition, Wang (2001) proposed a two-way theory between meanings and collocations from the perspective of cognitive linguistics: collocations are determined by word meanings; moreover, word meanings can also be determined by collocations. Wang claimed that word meaning is necessarily a reflection of the objective external world, because people use language to express their observations of the external world. Word meaning is determined by the objective external world, and collocation is based on the meaning. For example, the collocation *a wonderful idea*, *a strange idea*, *a good idea*, *a bad idea* all satisfy the conventions of English, because it complies with the rules of human cognition. However, the collocation *a green idea*, *an angular idea* and *a sweet idea* violate semantic rules, and no linguistic context that supports this collocation can be identified, because such a collocation is illogical.

Meanings determine collocations, but the relationship also works vice versa. Firth (1957, p. 196)² noted that the optimal method to analyze the meanings and usages of a polysemous word is to examine its collocations. Meaning in collocation refers to the associations a word acquires by being part of commonly applied collocations in specific linguistic contexts, and is typically derived from the influence of other words in these collocations. That is, collocations can affect or even determine the meaning of a word. For example, the Chinese word *dǎ* (打) has more than 20 meanings. Its meaning can only be determined by the collocations that include the word. The meanings of *dǎ* in the following phrases are different.

- *dǎ máoyī* 打毛衣 “to knit a sweater”
- *dǎ jiǔ* 打酒 “to buy wine”
- *dǎ zár* 打雜兒 “to do menial jobs”
- *dǎ suǐ* 打水 “to get water”
- *dǎ qiāng* 打槍 “to fire a gun”
- *dǎ quán* 打拳 “to practice boxing”

The English word *heavy* is also a polyseme, and its correct meaning can be determined only when it is used in collocation with other words: *a heavy blow* (“powerful”); *a heavy crop* (“abundant”); *heavy trafffic* (“crowded”); *heavy applause* (“warm”); *a heavy heart* (“gloomy”); a heavy *vote* (“large quantity”).

Not only do meanings determine collocations, but collocations also determine and create meanings. Two words that are commonly used in collocation tend to share a combined meaning. In the process of grammaticalization, words generally undergo meaning changes. When a word forms a collocation with other words in a specific linguistic context, a new meaning is often derived from this construction.

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² The original sentence is: “You shall know a word by the company it keeps”. 
Generalization

Generalization may happen after a construction is formed. Generalization refers to modifying or supplementing the definitions of things to expand their scope of application. At the beginning, a construction was originally comprised of specific words; however, more words, even words from a different part of speech, entered this construction over time. Although word collocation and construction are not identical, they are related. When certain words are often used in collocation, this collocation becomes permanent and forms a construction. When this construction is employed frequently, generalization of this construction can occur to include other words. Take Chinese “ADJ/V+sl” construction as an example. Liu (2013) mentioned that the excessive complement sǐ originally collocated with only psychological predicates but later extended to all the predicate types including action verbs.

DISCUSSION

The original meaning of zhī at its creation was “stepping on the ground and advancing forward on foot”\(^3\). In the following section, the author presents and arranges usages of zhī in accordance with the *Hanyu Da Zidian, Hanyu Da Cidian, Mandarin Dictionary* edited by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education and previous studies.

Preposition

(1) of

夫子 之 文章。\(^4\)

fūzǐ zhī wénzhāng

pedant ZHI article “The articles of Confucius.”— from *Analects*

(2) among

比 之 匪 人，不 亦 傷 乎?

bǐ zhī fěi rén, bù yì shāng hū

stay ZHI unvirtuous people not also harm PAR

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\(^3\) The original sentence is Zúlû píngdì, túbù qiánwăng (足履平地，徒步前往).

\(^4\) In the paper, the Chinese data is shown in the following manner.

可惡之極

kěwù zhǐ jí

hateful ZHIJI

“Extremely hateful”

The Chinese characters are at the first line; the second line displays pinyin; the third line presents English translations. The complete meaning is enclosed with “”. Some abbreviations are used to indicate function words: GN (genitive), PAR (particle), CL (classifier) and PASS (passive).

\(^4\) X refers to predicates, usually verbs or adjectives.
“Is staying among unvirtuous people not a danger to oneself?” – from Book of Changes

(3) into

決汝、漢，排淮、泗而注之江。

jué rǔ hàn pái huái sì ér zhù zhī jiāng.

dredge Ru Han, dredge Huai Si and divert ZHI river

“Yu dredged the Ru, Han, Huai, and Si Rivers, diverting the water into the Yangtze River.”—from Mengzi

Conjunction

(4) and

樂之弗樂者，心也。

lè zhī fú lè zhě xīn yě

pleasure ZHI no pleasure person mind

“The mind determines the pleasure and displeasure of a person.”-- Annals of Lu Buwei

(5) but

臣恐王為臣之投杼也。

chén kǒng wáng wèi chén zhī tóu zhù yě

I afraid monarch for I ZHI throw weaving shuttle

“I am afraid Your Royal Highness may have doubt about me.” -- Zhanguo Ce (Strategies of the Warring States)

(6) if

邦之賊，惟汝眾，邦之

bāng hī zāng wéi rǔ zhòng bāng zhī

nation ZHI prosperous by you great nation ZHI

不賊，惟予一人有佚罰。

bù zāng wéi yǔ yīrén yǒu yì fá

no prosperous by I alone with fault retribution

“If the nation prospers, then it should be attributed to the efforts of all of you; if the nation does not prosper, then I am the only one to be punished.”-- Book of Documents
(7) then

故民無常處，見利之聚，無之去。

so people without stable place undergo profit ZHI gather without ZHI leave

“Consequently, people do not stay permanently in one place. When they see potential profits, then they congregate. When the potential profits are consumed, then they dismiss.” -- Annals of Lu Buwei

Particle

(8) a modal function without meaning

憤恨久之。

frustrate regret long PAR

“Chenshe has long been melancholy.” -- Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian)

(9) equivalent of de (的)

近塞上之人，死者十九。

near fort above ZHI person dead person nine ten

“Among people who were in the vicinity of the fortress, nine out of ten were dead.”

-- Grandpa Sai lost his horse

(10) indicator of the preposed object

宋何罪之有？

Song what sin ZHI have “What crime does the Song Nation have?” – Gongshu

(11) used between the subject and predicate, which functions to cancel the independence of the sentence

無絲竹之亂耳。

no music instrument ZHI disturb hearing
“No disturbing noisy music is heard.” -- An Epigraph in Praise of My Humble Home

(12) indicator of the postposed noun modifier

淩  萬  頃  之  茫然
líng  wàn  qǐng  zhī  mángrán
transit ten thousand acre ZHI wide

“Rowing a small boat on the river that is tens of thousands of acres wide.”

-- Ode to the Red Cliff

(13) indicator of a complement, equivalent to de (得)

古人  之  觀  于  天地、山  川、草木、鳥獸,
gǔ  rén  zhī  guān  yú  tiān  dì  shān  chuān  cǎomù  niǎoshòu
ancient person ZHI observe at sky earth mountain river flora fauna

往往  有  得，以  其  求  思  之  深  而  無  不  在  也。
wǎngwǎng  yǒu  dé  yǐ  qí  qiú  sī  zhī  shēn  ér  wú  bù  zài  yě
often  have profit because they  explore  think ZHI  deeply  but  not  there

“Ancient people’s observations of the sky, earth, mountains, rivers, flora, and fauna were often fruitful, because they contemplated deeply on everything.” -- Travel Note to the Baochan Mountain

Pronoun

(14) he, him, that

愛  之  欲  其  生。
ài  zhī  yù  qí  shēng
love ZHI want she/he alive

“When a person likes someone, he wishes him/her to live.” -- Analects

(15) his or hers

紂  王  令  推  上  法  場，斬  之  老母。
zhòu  wáng  lìng  tuī  shàng  fǎ  chǎng  zhǎn  zhī  lǎomǔ
Zhou king demand usher to executed place kill ZHI mom

“King Zhou demands to usher his elderly mother to the execution place and kill her.”
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-- Play of King Wu’s Crusade against King Zhou

(16) this

乃如之人兮，逝不古處。

nǎi rú zhī rén xī shì bù gǔ chù

like ZHI person disappear no usual place

“Unlike the sun and the moon, the parents passed away and no longer appeared in the house.” -- Book of Songs

(17) I

君將哀而生之乎？

jūn jiāng āi ér shēng zhī hū

you will pity alive ZHI PAR

“You must have pitied me and wish[ed] me to live.” -- Tale of a Snake Catcher

Verb

(18) to go

百爾所思，不如我所之。

bǎi ěr suǒ sī bù rú wǒ suǒ zhī

hundred you suggest not as good as I ZHI

“The hundred plans you think of are not equal to the course I go.” -- Book of Songs

(19) to arrive

此自少之多，自微至著也。

cǐ zì shǎo zhī duō zhī wēi zhì zhù yě

this from less ZHI many from small to significant

“This develops from few to many, and from small to significant.” -- Miscellaneous Notes of the West Capital

(20) be

吾見子之君子也，是以告情於子也。

wú jiàn zǐ zhī jūnzǐ yě shì yǐ gào qíng yú zǐ yě

I see you ZHI gentry thus tell truth to you
“I find that you are a person of noble character, so I will tell you the truth.”

-- Mr. Gongyang’s Annals

(21) use

故 物 舍 其 所長，之 其 所短，堯 亦 有 所 不及 矣。
gù wù shě qí suǒcháng zhī qí suǒduǎn yáo yì yǒu suǒ bùjí yǐ

so thing dismiss his advantage use his disadvantage also have shortcoming

“Therefore, if a leader dismisses a subordinate’s advantages, and use this person’s disadvantages, then even the saint Yao can exhibit shortcomings.” -- Zhanguo Ce (Strategies of the Warring States)

The *Mandarin Dictionary* edited by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education only includes one usage of *zhī* as a particle, namely “to emphasize or supplement the tone”. The *Hanyu Da Cidian* lists numerous particle usages, but it does not include the usage for emphasis. The variety of particle usages shows the importance of *zhī* in Chinese syntax. However, emphasizing and supplementing the tone is also a key function of *zhī*. Jia (2007) noted that when used as a particle, *zhī* can be placed after an adverb of time to indicate the continuation of time. In addition, *zhī* can also follow an adverb and precede a predicate or subject to emphasize and extend the tone. Emphasis can be achieved through all of these functions.

**Zhī in Modern Chinese**

In modern Chinese, *zhī* can serve as a degree adverb.

(22) 這 還 是 我 人生 頭次 進入 KFC，速食 店 文化 是
zhè hái shì wǒ rénshēng tóuyīcì jìnrù sù shí diàn wénhuà shì

this also be my life first time enter fast food store culture be

被 我們 所 不齒 的，尤其 是 我 在 動畫 公司 的 老闆 的 指導
bèi wǒmen suǒ bùchǐ de yóuqí shì wǒ zài dònghuà gōngsī de làobǎn de zhǐdǎo

PASS we contempt especially be I at animation company boss instruct

更 覺得 他 之 可惡，之 垃圾。（Mainland）
gèng juéde tā zhī kěwù zhī lèsè

more feel he ZHI hateful ZHI garbage

“This is my first time going to KFC. We have contempt for the fast food culture. Since it is in charge of my ex-boss in the animation company, I feel extremely hateful and extremely rubbish.”
【23】印度法規之囉唆，不是台商可以玩得。

India rule ZHI talkative not Taiwan merchant can play

“The laws and regulations of India are very verbose. Taiwanese merchants cannot play with them.”

【24】《鬼入鏡》之討厭啦～半夜不要亂拍

Paranormal Activity 2 is very hateful! Don’t shoot carelessly at midnight.”

【25】...或 maybe be a set South Arica Cape Town sightseeing film

“...or maybe watching a set of sightseeing films on Cape Town, South Africa. The story was very underdeveloped, the plot was very long, and the dialogues were very boring.”

【26】我們母女倆就吵了起來，吵架內容之幼稚，

“Eventually, we (mother and her daughter) had a fight. The content of the fight was extremely immature, and the conversations were very boring.”

【27】想到當時我們因為害怕顧左右而言他之白癡

recall then we because afraid look left right and say other ZHI idiot
“Recalling the time when we tried to evade the topic because of dread, the extremely silly conversation was very funny.”

“I received a few presents recently. I am very happy that I wanted to show them off immediately.”

“The aside contains very many words, very boring and wordy, completely with a Chinese style.”

As an explanation for why zhī has an extent meaning and can serve as a degree adverb, this study proposed that the usage might have been derived either from the word zhī itself or from the influence of external factors. To determine the optimal answer, these two possibilities are examined in the following section.

**Derivation from Zhī**

Zhī was not employed as a degree adverb in ancient Chinese. If the degree adverb zhī is derived through grammaticalization, then it is likely that the verb use of zhī initiated the generation of the extent meaning. When zhī was used as a verb, it meant “to go to” or “arrive at,” showing a close connection with degree. Liu (2007) claimed that in the Hokkien dialect, words that express “to arrive at” can also express extent. The final particle ka in Southern Min was derived from the verb kao through vowel weakening and change of the part of speech. Originally, kao was followed by words that meant “extreme or vertex.” The result of reaching a vertex could be applied to enhance the extent. Kao became ka through vowel weakening in a continuous speech, and then the resultative complement that followed the term was subsequently removed. The extent meaning of zhī was likely produced through the same process. In Chinese, a predicate tagged with zhījí (之極) means “reaching the extreme.”
kěwù zhī jí
hateful ZHIJI “Extremely hateful”

(31) 深圳 的 外來 超 生 戶 著實 可惡 之極 和
shēnzhèn de wàilái chāo shēng hù zhuóshí kěwù zhī jí hé
foreign exceed bear family really hateful ZHIJI and

缺德 之極！ (Mainland）
quēdé zhījí
unvirtuous ZHIJI

“The families that came from Shenzhen and violated the one-child policy are extremely hateful and extremely unvirtuous.”

(32) 自大 之極，就是「自閉」。
zìdà zhī jí jiùshì zì bì
arrogant ZHIJI be autistic

“Extremely Arrogant equals to extremely autistic.”

However, because zhī as a degree adverb appears in front of a predicate, the author had to obtain examples where zhī jí precedes the predicate. From the corpus, only examples with the construction “zhī jí + ADJ/V” were identified.

(33) 戰爭 代價 極 之 沉重
zhànzhēng dàjià jí zhī chénzhòng
war cost very ZHI high

“The cost of war is extremely high.”

(34) 在荷蘭 當 街 打架 是 極 之 少見
zài hélán dāng jiē dǎjià shì jí zhī shǎojiàn
in Holland on street fight be very ZHI uncommon

“It is very uncommon to fight on street in Holland.”

The degree adverb zhī was not derived from jí zhī. First, no reasonable explanation can be provided for why zhī jí, which follows the predicate, was abruptly transformed to jí zhī when it was placed in front of the predicate. Moreover, the internal structure of jí zhī, located in front of the predicate, is different from that of zhī jí. The zhī in jí zhī is a modal particle, whereas that in zhī jí is a preposition. Therefore, the possibility that the
degree verb usage of zhī was extended from the sememe “to go to or arrive at” is quite low.

**Influence of Syntactic Position**

Shih (2006) indicated that there are two factors for a word to develop into a specific syntactic category: an appropriate semantic basis and adequate syntactic environment. Accordingly, whether the usage of zhī as a degree adverb was derived from an adequate syntactic environment and specifically, if the derivation of the usage was influenced by its adjacent words, was investigated. An examination of the corpus revealed that zhī can appear after fēicháng (非常; very.)

(35) 因為 這 種 客人 通常 會 很 鳥毛

yīnwèi zhè zhǒng kèrén tōngcháng huì hěn niǎomáo

because this kind guest usually will very torike

非常 之 嘩唆 ...

fēicháng zhī luōsuō

very ZHI talkative

“Because this type of customer is generally very picky and extremely talkative.”

(36) 有個 非常 之 簡單 的 問卷~ 萬分 感激：)

yǒu gè fēicháng zhī jiǎndānde wènjuàn wànfēn gǎnjī

have a very ZHI simple survey very thank

“Here is a very simple survey. Thank you very much.”

(37) 還是 感到 非常 之 噁心。

háishì gǎndào fēicháng zhī ěxīn

still feel very ZHI disgusting

“I still feel extremely gross.”

(38) 日本 以 臺 制 華 是 非常 之 愚蠢 的

rìběn yī tái zhì huá shì fēicháng zhī yúchūn de

Japan use Taiwan contain China be very ZHI stupid

“The Japanese strategy to use Taiwan to contain the counterattacks of China is extremely foolish.”

(39) 非常 之 惡劣 態度 加 粗魯 動作 行為
very ZHI bad attitude plus rude action behavior

“He has an extremely bad attitude and rude behavior. Buying things from him, you will be scolded and at his disposal.”

(40) 維修 難度 非常 之 高, Microsoft Surface Pro 3

repair difficulty very ZHI high

平板電腦 分解 完成

tablet disassemble complete

“This repair difficulty is extremely high. The disassemblement of Microsoft Surface Pro is completed.”

In Cantonese, fēi seùhng jī (非常之) equals to fēiseùhng (非常), and the phrase can appear at the end of a sentence, such as Hóu sāi leih a, júng jī go baatgō jī haih fēi seùhng fēi seùhng jī (好犀利啊, 总之个八啲只系非 常非常之; Very very excellent!) In addition, it could be followed by a predicate, for example, Gám líih bīn ge fuhk mouh nē, yauh fēi seùhng jī hóu a (啲里边嘅服务呢，又非常之好啊; The service inside is very good.) Since there are similarities among dialects, this linguistic phenomenon in Cantonese is worth considering. In online discussions of fēicháng zhī in modern Chinese, several web users claim that usages such as fēicháng zhī hǎo (非常之好; extremely good) and fēicháng zhī duō (非常之多; extremely numerous) are incorrect despite their wide application, because no dictionary states that zhī can be modified by fēicháng. However, usages listed in dictionaries are not updated fast enough to keep pace with the rapid changes of a language. Expressions that are not included in dictionaries are not necessarily wrong. Instead, they indicate changes in a language. Even if the usages are technically wrong, they produce changes to the language and facilitate generating new usages.

Most web users regard fēicháng zhī as a substitute for fēicháng de (非常地). However, zhī cannot be replaced by de (地); it can only be used interchangeably with de (非常地). Furthermore, fēicháng de (的) modifies nouns rather than adjectives, and in doing so does not have a degree meaning. Consequently, the author determined that the zhī in fēicháng zhī requires further investigation. In Laozi, fēicháng appears before a noun, as
The usage of *fēicháng* discussed here is not equivalent to that in the example from *Laozi*. All sentences examined in this study that include a construction of *fēicháng* have it followed by an adjective or adverb. Although some Chinese adjectives can also be used as nouns, distinction regarding their role in speech can still be made according to their syntactic positions.

When the search scope was enlarged, data in the corpus showed that besides *fēicháng*, other degree adverbs can also be followed by *zhī*.

**jízhì極之**

(41) 被一個極之囉唆的人纏，煩惱不已

*bèi yīge jí zhī luōsuō de rén chán fánnǎo bù yǐ*

PASS one very ZHI talkative person bug worry no end

“I fretted about being bugged by an extremely talkative person.”

(42) 非常極之高興認識靚女路邊攤！（*HongKong*）

*fēicháng jí zhī gāoxìng rènshì jìngnǚ lùbiāntān*

very very ZHI happy know beautiful girl booth

“I’m extremely happy to know beautiful girls at a roadside booth.”

**yŏugòuzhī有夠之**

(43) 最近過的有夠之好

*zuījìn guò de yŏugòu zhī hǎo*

recently live very ZHI good

“I have had an extremely good life recently.”

(44) 近來，天氣真是有夠之冷的

*jīnlái tiānqì zhēnde shì yŏugòu zhī lěng de*

recently weather really be very ZHI cold

“It’s really very cold recently.”

(45) 那天他穿的有夠之隨便，破破爛爛的T恤+

*nà tiān tā chuānde yŏugòu zhī suìbiàn pòpò lànlàn de T xù*

that day he wear very ZHI informal shabby T-shirt
夾腳拖　就來了。

jiájiǎotuō jiù lái le

flip-flops　come PAR

“He dressed extremely informally on that day, arriving at the venue in a tattered T-shirt and flip-flops.”

(46) 真是　臉皮　有夠　之　厚　的。

zhēnshì liănpi yōugòu zhī hòu de

really　skin　very　ZHI thick

“(He/She) is really very brazen.”

xiāngdāngzhī相當之

(47) Samsung Galaxy S 4 簡單　動手　拆，相當　之　好修　呢

jiǎndān dòngshǒu chāi　xiāngdāng zhī hǎo xiū ne

simple　work dissemble quite　ZHI easy fix PAR

“The Samsung Galaxy can be dissembled easily. It is very simple to be fixed.”

(48) 看到　廁所　裡　有人　求婚，　場景　相當　之　感人！（大陸）

kàn dào　cèsuǒ lǐ　yǒurén　qiúhūn　chǎngjǐng　xiāngdāng zhī gǎnrén

see　toilet　in　someone　propose　scene　quite　ZHI touching

“I saw a guy proposing to his girlfriend in the toilet. The scene was extremely touching.”

(49) 陳地瓜　本人　相當　之　帥氣　瀟灑

chéndìguā běnrén xiāngdāng zhī　shuàiqì　xiāosă

himself　quite　ZHI handsome　charming

“Chen Digua himself is quite handsome and charming.”

shífēnzhi十分之

(50) 父母　十分　之　囉唆，　說話　沒完　沒了

fùmǔ　shífēn zhī luōsuo　shuōhuà　méiwán　méiliăo

parent　very　ZHI talkative　talk　no end　no end

“The parents were extremely talkative. They could talk on and on.”
這些實驗看起來十分簡單，可是做起是十分之難的。

“These experiments may seem easy, but they are extremely difficult to be conducted.”

更加之

集合大家的智慧，讓社會更加之和諧。

“Let us gather ideas from everyone to render the society more harmonious.”

在銅鑼灣，找日食比找茶餐廳

It is much easier to find a Japanese restaurant than a Hong Kong Style Café at Causeway Bay.

我們的時代更加之自由了，而我們擁有的快樂時光

“Although we are freer in this era, we have less and less happiness.”

如此之

生命如此之輕！看了這六分二秒的影片後

shēngmíng rúcǐ zhī qīng kàn le zhè liù fèn èr miǎo de yǐngpiàn hòu
Life is so light! How do you feel after the film lasting 6 minutes and 2 seconds?

“Life is so light! How do you feel after the film lasting 6 minutes and 2 seconds?”

The location of the hotel is so great! This hotel is awarded more than two stars.

“The location of the hotel is so great! This hotel is awarded more than two stars.”

I’m not merely happy, but especially happy.

“I’m not merely happy, but especially happy.”

Since this one is especially cute, I took a photo with it.

“Since this one is especially cute, I took a photo with it.”

Because this Chinese person just got off a plane, he was especially thirsty. He took the bowl and drank the soup empty.

“Because this Chinese person just got off a plane, he was especially thirsty. He took the bowl and drank the soup empty.”
It's funny, but extremely terrible.

This is extremely cute, so cute that it is indescribable!

I feel super bored. Can you introduce a few nice cellphone ringtones?

I am extremely excited to receive good news. I've waited for very long.

Although his explanation too really abnormal ZHI wordy
“...although his explanation is also really extremely wordy...”

(65) 不到兩個小時我們就走了近一半，
not to two hour we already walk PAR nearly half

覺得異常之無聊，打道回府...
feel abnormal ZHI bored go back home

“We walked through nearly half of the venue in less than two hours and felt very bored, so we went home...”

wànfēnzhī萬分之

(66) 雖然無以回報~但真是萬分之感謝!!
although no repay but really very ZHI thank

“Although I cannot repay your favor, I am very grateful.”

(67) 大家幫忙推薦一下書籍呀~萬分之感謝！(Mainland)
everyone help recommend a bit book PAR very ZHI thank

“Please recommend some books. Thank you very much!”

These examples show that zhī can be combined with many of the degree adverbs, indicating that such combinations have become a specific construction.

Degree Adverb + zhī + ADJ/V

Zhī is not required in the construction, and when it appears, it serves to emphasize the tone. Therefore, zhī does not develop a new structural meaning\(^5\) in this usage; it just facilitates emphasizing the tone.

The “Deg Adv + zhī + ADJ/V” Construction

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\(^5\) Structural meaning refers to a meaning that emerges only in specific constructions. Take Goldberg’s (1995) famous sentence Pat sneezed the napkin off the table as an example, the structural meaning “caused motion” is indicated only in the construction [Subj V Obj Obl.] The usage of zhī in the construction [degree adverb + zhī + ADJ/V] is a pre-existing one; it does not emerge from this construction.
Regarding the construction “degree adverb + zhǐ + ADJ/V,” zhǐ was combined with merely a few specific degree adverbs at first. Gradually, the range of collocation words was expanded to include all degree adverbs. The corpus data showed that the combinations of zhǐ with fēicháng appeared relatively early. Instances of fēicháng zhǐ followed by predicates can be traced back to the Ching dynasty. Most instances of fēicháng zhǐ by then were followed by nouns. When compared with current examples, fewer instances of fēicháng zhǐ in the early years were followed by adjectives.

(68) 賈母對她的評價可說是非常高

jiāmǔ duì tā de píngjià kě shuō shì fēicháng zhǐ gāo

mother to she  value can say be very ZHI high

“Baoyu’s grandmother has a very high opinion of Skybright.” – Dream of Red Chamber

(69) ...各位邀請我參加這個盛大宴會

gèwèi yāoqǐng wǒ cānjiā zhège shèngdà yànhuì

everyone invite I join this big banquet

見到各位宗兄宗嫂，心情非常高之愉快 1972

jiàn dào gèwèi zōng xiōng zōng sǎo xīnqíng fēicháng zhǐ yúkuài

see every brother sister-in-law mood very ZHI delighted

“I am honored to be invited to this banquet. Seeing all of you from the extended family makes me very delighted.”

(70) 但真實生活中，我對小三嗤之以鼻，

dàn zhēnshí shēnghuó zhōng wǒ duì xiǎosān chīzhīyǐbí

but real life in I to homewrecker contemptuous

非常之厭惡和巴不得殺之而後快。1978（Mainland）

fēicháng zhǐ yànwù hé bābudé shā zhǐ ér hòu kuài

very ZHI annoy and can’t wait kill he/she and after happy

“However, in real life I am contemptuous to home wreckers. I am very annoyed by them, even wishing to have them killed.”

To observe the generalization of the construction from a diachronic perspective, the author searched the year of combination of each degree adverb with “zhǐ + ADJ/V.” The results are presented in Table 1.
Table 1.6 Earliest discovered examples of combinations of specific degree adverbs with “zhī + ADJ/V”?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree ADV + zhī</th>
<th>Earliest Appearance</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fēichángzhī 非常之</td>
<td>Ching Dynasty</td>
<td>賈母對她的評價可說是非常之高</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rúcǐzhī 如此之</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>e租寶發展如此之快在於積極推動“互聯網+融資租賃”模式（即A2P模式）（Mainland）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shífēnzhī 十分之</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>這封信，使意共十分之尷尬</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jízhī 極之</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>盖萊克的官僚政權對十三名參加六月廿五日的工人，判以極之嚴重的監禁。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yícángzhī 異常之</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Obrcimoff 淋定雲母解理面的表面能異常之高</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiāngdāngzhī 相當之</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>...改變它的難度極大,而且投資又相當之大（Mainland）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gèngjiāzhī 更加之</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>這六位夥伴有的會隨著故事發展而犧牲生命,使二代的故事顯得可歌可泣更加之精彩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wànfēnzhī 萬分之</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>急!!!!!! SLDDRW是什麼檔,用什麼軟體才能打開...萬分之感謝！！！！！（Mainland）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tèbiézhī 特別之</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>擱販的生意也特別之好</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chāojízhī 超級之</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>學校圖書館的資源跟資料超級之多。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wúdǐzhī 無敵之</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>這個他們公司有自己研發東西,拭銀布...無敵之好用的</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Owing to space limitations, only the English translation for the whole sentence is displayed in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

7 The history of the Internet begins with the development of electronic computers in the 1950s, so the information appeared before then might not be accessed via Google search engine. As a result, it is possible that the combinations appeared much earlier than the data probed from the Internet. Since the main issue to be proved is the combination of “degree ADV + zhī + ADJ/V” appeared earlier than that of “zhī + ADJ/V”, the accurate time for first appearance is not crucial to the conclusion. Examples without clear appearing time were all excluded.
The combination of *fēicháng zhī* with a predicate appeared the earliest. What is more, the construction is more popular than those of other degree adverbs. Therefore, it is suggested that the “degree adverb + zhī + ADJ/V” construction was initiated with *fēicháng*, and was gradually generalized to include all degree adverbs. Currently, people become accustomed to attaching *zhī* to emerging degree adverbs as a means of emphasis, showing that such a construction has been implanted in people's minds.

**The Origin of degree adverb zhī**

The degree adverb *zhī* is likely to have been derived from the structure “degree adverb + zhī + ADJ/V.” The examples of “degree adverb + zhī” appeared earlier than did the instances of *zhī* alone. Regarding meaning, it is reasonable to assume that *zhī* had developed an extent meaning as a result of its long-term combination with degree adverbs.

\[
\text{Degree Adverb} + \text{zhī} + \text{ADJ/V} \rightarrow \text{zhī} + \text{ADJ/V}
\]

Examples of *fēicháng zhī* with predicates began appearing by the Ching dynasty. However, *zhī* was not used as a degree adverb until 2002. The author thus inferred that the usage of *zhī* as an adverb emerged later than that of *fēicháng zhī*. Search for the same predicate in the corpus data revealed that “*zhī* + ADJ/V” first appeared in 2002, but only the combination *zhīhăo* was found.

**Table 2. Appearance Time of fēicháng zhī + ADJ/V and zhī + ADJ/V**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fēichángzhī + ADJ/V</th>
<th>zhī + ADJ/V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Very good outcome, my skin becomes soft after a couple of weeks.”</td>
<td>“I didn't feed the baby medicine, but finally gave him two thirds because of the family pressure. The effect is extremely good.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some cost seven thousand or eight thousand to tens of thousands, but K&amp;N is very cheap.”</td>
<td>“I seldom use long lenses, so I want to find a very cheap automatic focus one.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fēichángzhī dūo非常之多 (1920)</td>
<td>zhī dūo之多 (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There were certainly very many bad guys in the old society.”</td>
<td>“However, I touched my head and went to Ximending at night. There are extremely many people there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Fragrant and soft, with sweet and thick greasy taste, it is very delicious.”</td>
<td>“I didn’t find the ‘Armed troupe’ and ‘Yi-Chih food’ between the two, so I chose Yi-Chih. Out of expectation, we did not get the...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
worse. The dinner is extremely delicious."

| Degree Adverb Zhī in Modern Chinese |  
|-----------------------------------|---|
| fēichángzhī wēnróu非常之溫柔2001 |  
| zhī wēnróu之溫柔2004 |  
| 雖然很搞笑，唱歌也極難聽，但個性非常之溫柔，簡單，陽光。 | 原來到了小朋友二個月大，小白還是看到小孩就躺下來想要哺乳...對小孩之溫柔的。

"Although I am very funny and very bad at singing, I am very gentle, simple, and with a sunny disposition."

"When the doggies were two months old, Little White still lied down to breastfeed while seeing them...She is extremely tender to her babies."

In addition, the author investigated the years of appearance of other “zhī + ADJ/V” combinations that appeared more recently. The result was in line with the original inference: “fēicháng zhī + ADJ/V” appeared earlier than did “zhī + ADJ/V.”

Basically, even the combination of degree adverbs other than fēicháng appeared earlier than the “zhī + ADJ/V” construction. In Table 3, fēichángzhī kǎixin非常之開心, shífēnzhī kǎixin十分之開心 and jízhī kǎixin極之開心 all appeared earlier than zhī kǎixin之開心.

Table 3. More Recent Examples of zhī + ADJ/V

| Degree Adverb Zhī in Modern Chinese |  
|-----------------------------------|---|
| fēichángzhī hāokuàng非常之好逛2008 |  
| zhī hāokuàng之好逛2010 |  
| 非常之好逛，明亮又大，又整齊，一點都不像一般outlet擺設的亂七八糟 | 信心義區現在真的有好多好多百貨公司啊，那之好逛的程度讓我都迷失志己了～

"It is a very good visit, bright, big and neat, not like a normal outlet in mess at all."

"There are really many department stores in Xinyi district now. The visit there is so good that I almost lost myself."

| fēichángzhī kǎixin非常之開心2002 |  
| zhī kǎixin之開心 2009 |  
| 還可以一邊刷牙一邊對著掛滿一臉同情的同室室友說我非但不鬱悶而且非常之開心 | 這次他猜贏了！！他之開心的呢！跑起來似乎也特別快！！

"I can brush my teeth and tell my roommates who replete with a look of sympathy that I am not depressed but very happy."

"This time he won!! He's extremely happy. He seems to run particularly fast."

| shífēnzhī kǎixin十分之開心2002 |  
|  |  
| 哥哥與憶蓮已經久未碰面，所以一見面十分之開心 |  

"Sandy and her elder brother have not met for long, so they are quite happy for the meeting."

| jízhī kǎixin極之開心2001 |  
|  |  
| 靜香於網上除極之開心地向Fans公佈自己生 |  

"Besides extremely happily announcing to the fans Online that she gave birth to a healthy baby girl Kokomi, Kudou Shizuka also put a photo of her dressing in pajamas and holding a bunch of Bell Orchid."

| fēichángzhī kěwù非常之可惡2005 |  
|  |  
| 海邊老兵會帶你進去，只是要求非常之可惡，需要花費一點聲望才能進入 |  

"Veterans on the beach will take you in. But there is a very hateful requirement, you should have a bit of prestige."

"But actually Amio had murmurs of discontent at this very hateful little donkey."
**CONCLUSION**

The usage of *zhī* as a degree adverb is relatively new. The first instance of it emerged in 2002, only 14 years ago. The author claims that *zhī* developed the usage as a degree adverb because of the influence of other degree adverbs. At first, *zhī* was attached to the degree adverb *fēicháng* for emphasis. The paradigmatic relation of *fēicháng zhī* was later extended to include all degree adverbs. This extension affected the syntagmatic relation within the combinations, affecting *zhī* in the collocations. Because *zhī* frequently appeared with other degree adverbs, people tended to associate one with the other. Therefore, *zhī* inherited a degree meaning from degree adverbs. Originally, *zhī* had a close relationship with the aforementioned degree adverbs. However, as the relationship loosened, other words could also be attached to *zhī*. Eventually, *zhī* was separated from degree adverbs. When *zhī* was eliminated from the degree adverbs, it naturally became one itself.

Analyzing the excessive meaning of *zhī* from the perspective of a collocation relationship has three advantages: a systematic property, authenticity, and reasonableness. Discussing all of the collocations with *zhī* and the process of derivation by degree adverb would be time-consuming. Focusing on the collocation relationship between *zhī* and degree adverbs enabled for a systematic examination, rendering learning and memorizing easier. In addition, examples of the collocations discussed in this study were collected online and exhibited authenticity. Semantic inheritance occurred to *zhī* because of its long-term collocation with degree adverbs in “degree adverb + *zhī* + predicate” constructions. A degree meaning was given to *zhī* by its preceding degree adverbs. This result was reasonable.

It is unnatural that a function word becomes a content word. At first glance, *zhī* could not possibly function as a degree adverb; nonetheless, collocation made it. Through the study, it is obvious that collocation relationship creates a syntactic context for reanalysis; in addition, the words in a collocation tend to share some semantic features.
As for other related studies in the future, such an analysis is necessary to be taken into consideration.

REFERENCES


