

## GRAMMATICAL NOTES

### III

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#### 甚 *shên*

Gabelentz deals with 甚 in §1303 (p. 474) of his Grammar in a way which is barely sufficient and perhaps even misleading. There he discusses 甚 merely as an auxiliary to the superlative, *i.e.* as adverb with the original meaning "sehr, äusserst" ("very, extremely"), in which connection his two first examples (from *Lun-yü* VIII, 10, and *Mêng-tzû* IV, 2, X) are moreover by no means suitable, as there 甚 is a *noun*.

The position is in fact as follows:

- I. 甚 *shên* was originally *adverb*—"very, extremely"; because in front of a noun it can never be an adjective (which as with adjectival original meaning it should of course be) but only an adverb. However, in this capacity it stands—on its own, at least without support—not also 'after adjectives and verbs', as Gabelentz asserts, but only *in front*, *e.g.*:—
- (1) 上帝 | 蹈 "Shang-ti (=ironically for the king) is most changeable": *Shi-king* II, 7, X, 1, 2.
  - (2) 其人甚遠 "this man is very far off": *Shi-king* I, 7, XV, 1.
  - (3) and (4) See Gabelentz examples (3) and (4) from *Shi-ki* LXXV, 8a, and LXXVI, 5a, in §1303.

However, 甚 occurs also:

- II. as an *adjective* which then in a predicative position can quite normally contain also the copula, *e.g.*:—
- (5) 暴其民甚, 則身弑國亡, 不甚, 則身危國削 "Is (a sovereign) very severe in oppressing his people, then his body (*i.e.* he himself) will be murdered and his kingdom will pass away; (if he is) not very severe, then he himself will be in danger and the kingdom will be reduced; *Mêng-tzû* IV, 1, II, 4.<sup>1</sup>
  - (6) 旱既大甚 "the drought has become excessive": *Shi-king* III, 3, IV, 2-8.

(It is particularly clear here that it cannot be an adverb because it is itself preceded by an adverb.)

- (7) 甚矣吾衰也 "extremely-great (intense) is my decay!": *Lun-yü* VII, 5.

<sup>1</sup> Parallel sentences where 甚 and 不甚 are predicates.

- (8) 心爲 | "the heart is the most important": *Mêng-tzū* I, 1, VII, 13.  
 (9) 王之好樂甚 "if the King's love of music were very great":  
*Mêng-tzū* I, 2, I, 3.  
 (10) The same applies to the last example (from the *Shi-ki*) with  
 Gabelentz, p. 474. Furthermore:  
 (11) 莫 | 於生 "if there were nothing greater than life": *Mêng-tzū* VI,  
 1, X, 3.

It is noteworthy (but also to be explained in view of its original meaning in the nature of a comparative) that 甚 can also without further additions designate the comparative—not merely the "very" (of a superlative)—but also the "more" (of a comparative), e.g.

- (12) 民之於仁也, | 於水火 "the people's attitude towards humanity is: that it means *more* (to them) than fire and water":  
*Lun-yü* XV, 34.

Thus likewise in the compound 有甚 to be discussed further on.

III. Finally, 甚 acts also as *noun*, e.g. in the king's dismayed question:—

- (13) 若是其甚與 "is it really so (very) bad?": *Mêng-tzū* I, VII, 17.<sup>1</sup>  
 | is particularly used in the standing compounds: 已甚 *i-shên* and 有甚 *you-shên*; for in both cases | is object of a verb (and thus a noun). That is easily seen in the case of 有 |. In the compound 已 |, for which Gabelentz, *l. c.*, offers two examples, though with incorrect explanation, 已 *i* is verb with the meaning of "going towards (something as a goal)";<sup>2</sup> e.g.

- (14) 彼譖人者, 亦已大甚 "those slanderers have (also) gone to the very extreme": *Shi-king* II, 5, VI, 1.

If 甚 has in this connection the significance of a superlative, then in 有甚, which is in the nature of a comparative, it means "to have more", "there is a more", "there is greater", and the like, e.g.

- (15) 未有甚於此時者 " (with regard to the nation's suffering) there never was anything greater than there is at present," i.e. "the nation's sufferings have never been greater yet than now:"  
*Mêng-tzū* II, 1, I, 11.

<sup>1</sup> 其 must be possessive here. It cannot be modal, as otherwise one should expect the position to be reversed. 若是 does not contain the predicate, but this is understood to be contained in the last words 是 in itself a comparison. 甚 is in itself a comparative.

<sup>2</sup> The original meaning is probably "to come to an end, to end". It occurs for instance in *Shi-king* I, 10, I, 1-3: 無已大康 "let us not go to great (excessive) joy". Legge translates here quite rightly; but on p. 78 of the index he attaches to 已 in this connection and, *ibid.*, II, 5, IV, 1—where it likewise means "going, coming to"—an adverbial significance "excessively". The verbal nature of 已 *i* in the two examples in Gabelentz on p. 474 is clear, viz.

(a) 疾之已甚亂也 "if one hates him to the limit, he becomes rebellious". (lit.: "him hating, to go to the extreme"): *Lun-yü* VIII, 10. The whole combination here acts as an adverb placed behind (or, as the case may be, can be taken for an adverb.)

(b) 仲尼不爲已甚者 "Chung-ni did not do excessive things", i.e. nothing extraordinary: *Mêng-tzū* IV, 2, 10.

- (16) . . . 所欲有甚於生者 "of that which I wish (for myself) there is something more than life", i.e. there is something I like more than life: *Mêng-tzū* VI, 1, X, 2. See in the same sentence the same construction with 死. . . "There is something I dislike more than death". In both cases the compound is followed by a 者. Cf. note 3: 已甚者. That this, however, is not necessary is shown by *Mêng-tzū*'s answer to the king in the instance cited above (Ex. 13) viz. 殆有甚焉 "(I fear) it is even worse" (lit.: (I fear) it is something more). Therefore, *Mêng-tzū*'s reply places the 甚 of the king in the comparative. It may be that in this case the *emphasis* had something to do with it, perhaps by simply raising the tone.
- (17) Regarding 滋 | *tzu shên* "(still) more, to increase" cf. Zach *Sinologische Beiträge* I, Batavia, 1930, No. 313, with examples from *Tso-chuan*, e.g. twenty-first year of Duke Hsi=Ch. Cl. V, 179): 焚之滋甚, 公縱之是 "to burn (the witch,) will only worsen the matter". Cf. also Gabelentz, *loc. cit.*, §388.
- (18) Regarding 孰甚焉 *shu shên yen* "gibt es noch etwas, das grösser wäre als" ("is there still something that is greater than") see Zach, *Zum Ausbau der Gabelentzschen Grammatik in A.M.* III, p. 479.
- (19) 甚衆 *shên chung* "gar viele" ("very many") see Zach in *A.M.* V, p. 246.
- (20) With regard to 甚麼 *shên (mo)* with and without the suffix—"what, which, some" in the colloquial of the Ming and Tsing literature and in modern Mandarin, see Karlgren *New Excursions in Chinese Grammar in Bulletin No. 24 of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, pp. 67, etc.

<sup>1</sup> 殆 at the beginning of a sentence, a modal auxiliary word, which expresses a presumed assumption, namely frequently of an *unpleasant* event, is often followed by a negation. Compare Gabelentz, *loc. cit.* §1250 (p. 461), where, however, in particular the secondary meaning of the *unpleasant* is not stressed. And this appears to me to be essential for the word's etymology; as it allows it to be related to 殆 *i'ai* "to endanger, to be in danger, perilous" so that its original meaning would be "there is a risk that" or "I fear", "I am afraid". Thus quite clearly in *Shi-king* I, 15, I, 2:

女心傷悲。殆及公子同歸 "the girl's heart is filled with grief; (for) she fears to marry the gentleman's son" (viz. she is approaching the unpleasantness . . .) or in *Shu-king* V, 22, 7: 殆弗與弗悟 "I am afraid I shall not get up again and be myself", said the dying king. Toned down then in *Mêng-tzū* VII, 2, 23, 1:

殆不可復 "I apprehend you will not do so a second time" (Legge) and, *ibid.*, VII, 2, 30, 2:

殆非也 "I apprehend not" (Legge). Noteworthy is also the unusual combination with 於, e.g. *Mêng-tzū* IV, 2, XXXI, 1:

殆於不可 "appears to us to be improper" (Legge), see Gabelentz §745a: "(Das) dürfte kaum zulässig sein". Cf. also Zach, *Sinologische Beiträge* I.