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## THE DIACHRONIC EVOLUTION OF POSTURE VERBS IN CHINESE

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### ABSTRACT

The linguistic properties of the three most common verbs of posture, which express positions, such as *zuò* ‘sit’, *zhàn* ‘stand’, *tǎng* ‘lie’ have been thoroughly studied in a wide range of languages belonging to typologically different language families, but they have never been extensively investigated in Chinese. Our article traces the diachrony of these verbs from the Archaic Chinese period (5th - 2nd centuries BCE, corresponding to the Classical Chinese by excellence) to the present-day Chinese, showing that they have very rarely been grammaticalized into aspect markers, as has been the case in other languages. We also examine the semantic distinction between the expression of a dynamic vs. static action, as well as the syntactic behavior of these positional verbs. We finally discuss their links with locative / existential verbs from the Early Medieval Chinese onwards (3rd c. CE) and the grammaticalization path that has been hypothesized according to which the posture verbs have been first reanalyzed into locative/existential verbs before being grammaticalized into aspectual markers will be tested.

KEYWORDS: Chinese; posture verbs; diachrony; semantics; syntax.

### 1. Introduction

Since Newman (2002) the verbs of posture, and especially the three basic verbs ‘sit’, ‘stand’ and ‘lie’ have been extensively studied, from the point of view of typological linguistics, but also of cognitive and conceptual linguistics in a wide variety of languages belonging to different linguistic families, including in East Asian and Southeast Asian languages: in Korean (see Song 2002), in Austroasiatic (see Enfield 2002) or in Tibeto-Burman (Post 2008; Noonan and

Grunow-Harsta 2002). However, this subject of study was not very well treated in standard Mandarin Chinese or in other Sinitic languages, neither in synchrony, nor a fortiori in diachrony. Two articles by Wang *et al.* (2010) and Yin *et al.* (2019) can only be cited, devoted, the first one to the ‘standing’, the second one to ‘lying’ verbs.

Our modest contribution is intended to momentarily fill this gap. The main issues that will be discussed in this paper are the following:

- (i) Do posture verbs have the same form depending on whether they are dynamic (action of entering a posture) or stative (state resulted from that action, also called ‘at-rest’ position)?
- (ii) What processes are underway to derive the extended meanings of these verbs from the basic meanings? Can they be considered as metaphorical extension or rather as metonymisation or pragmatic inferencing?
- (iii) Have these verbs been the source of grammaticalization mechanisms, as is the case in many other languages where they have been grammaticalized into aspectual markers (see, among others, Kuteva 1999, Lichtenberk 2002, Song 2002)?
- (iv) Have these originally intransitive verbs been transitivized?

## 2. Issues under discussion

### 2.1. Stative / Dynamic

STANDING, SITTING, LYING – When these three verbs are stative (to be in a standing position, in a sitting position or in a lying position), there are significant differences between these three states in terms of the sensorimotor control which is needed to maintain the position, as Newman (2002a) already pointed out. He stressed that there is a graduation from standing (requiring most control) to lying (less control) through sitting. The STANDING position indeed implies a highest degree of control for both upper and lower parts of the body; With the SITTING posture, more easily maintained, we are dealing with a medium degree of control; the LYING posture, finally, requires the lowest degree of control.

Languages also differ in the ways in which postures may be described by single lexical items. In English, *I sat on a chair* can have two meanings: (i) I

sat myself down on the chair, or (ii) I was sitting on a chair (and I did not move). In French, we do not have simple verbs but more complex verb phrases (VP) with the auxiliary *être* followed by the verb of posture for a stative meaning: *être assis*, *être debout*, *être couché/allongé*, and verbs with their pronominal form: *se dresser/se tenir debout*, *s'asseoir*, *se coucher/s'allonger* for the dynamic meaning.

Chinese dynamic posture verbs are also now often composed of a stative verb followed by a satellite (or path) verb, as in: *zuò-xià* 坐下 'sit down', *zhàn-qǐlái* 站起来 'stand up', *tǎng-xià* 躺下 'lie down', etc. These compounds began to appear slowly in Chinese in the Early Medieval period (3rd–6th CE) and they only became common in modern Chinese (14th–18th CE). (Peyraube 1980).

## 2.2. Basic meanings > Extended meanings (> means a diachronic derivation)

We claim that the derivation from the basic meanings of the posture verbs to their extended meanings is made through a mechanism of semantic extension, and we understand “semantic extension”, as Enfield (2002) did, not as a kind of relationship among entities within a synchronic system, but as a process that occurs over time (having then a diachronic dimension) in both the linguistic system and the conceptual one (cognitive).

Posture verbs may be extended to non-human referents to help conceptualize the position of some entity, as in (1)–(3).

- (1) The computer sits on the table.
- (2) The house stands on private property.
- (3) Her clothes are lying on the floor.

They do not refer to humans sitting, standing, or lying which are the canonical states and which constitute the central meanings of the posture verbs. The use of such expressions is generally limited, and languages differ in the use of these extended meanings of posture verbs. In French, for example, they are only allowed with [+Animated] subjects, which is not the case in English, as seen above. Examples are given in (4)–(6).

- (4) Le cheval est debout sous l'arbre. (French)  
'The horse is standing under the tree.'

- (5) Mon chien peut se tenir debout sur deux pattes pendant cinq secondes. (French)  
 'My dog can stand up on two feet for five seconds.'
- (6) \* *Le vase précieux est debout sur le piano de ma maison.* (French)  
 'The precious vase stands on the piano in my house.'

English is therefore more generous than French for the use of these extended meanings, but less so than Dutch, which has many more (see Lemmens 2002). Chinese would be rather close to English in this respect, as we will see later. We can very well have sentences like (7) with posture verbs supporting non-animated subjects.

- (7) 烛台立在柜子上  
 Zhútái lì zài guizi shàng  
 candlestick stand at cabinet above  
 'The candlestick is standing on the cabinet.'

### 2.3. Grammaticalization

In several languages, posture verbs have been grammaticalized into auxiliaries, demonstratives or more often into aspectual markers, especially the progressive or durative aspect. Kuteva (1999), and later Lichtenberk (2002) assumed that there could be such a grammaticalization path: posture > locative/existential use > aspectual use. Many examples can be found in Australian languages (see Austin 1998) for the three STANDING, SITTING, and LYING verbs. In Spanish, 'lie' can be used as a habitual aspect. But the grammaticalization of these verbs into functional morphemes is much less frequent than for other basic verbs such as 'go', 'come', 'exist', 'give', 'make', etc. as can be seen in Heine and Kuteva (2002 / 2020).

They have been reported to be relatively infrequent in large corpora of spoken texts, if compared to other verbs. In Lao, it is notable that while many verbs (such as 'arrive', 'come', 'finish', 'go', 'give', 'take') function as markers of aspect or modality, the words for 'stand', 'sit' and 'lie' show none of these grammaticalized functions (see Enfield 2002). It is also the case, apparently, in Chinese, as we will see below, although several cases of such grammaticalization processes can be reported in the history of Chinese or in some dialects (or Sinitic languages), especially involving the posture verb 'sit'.

If they are not grammaticalized in TAM (Tense-Aspect-Modality), they are nevertheless veryoften used as secondary verbs (V) in serial verbal constructions, entering in what is called ‘associate posture constructions’ of the form ‘V<sub>POSTURE</sub> + V<sub>ACTION</sub>.’

- (8) 他坐着看书  
 Tā zuò zhe kàn shū  
 3SG sit DUR/PROG read book  
 ‘He reads a book sitting down.’

where *zhe* 着 is a durative or progressive marker conveying the idea that an event is taking place while an action is being performed.

- (9) 他站着睡觉  
 Tā zhàn zhe shuìjiào  
 3SG stand DUR/PROG sleep  
 ‘He sleeps standing up.’
- (10) 她躺着运动  
 Tā tǎng zhe yùndòng  
 3SG lie DUR/PROG do.exercise  
 ‘She exercises lying down.’

The three of them can also appear in an existential / locative construction:

- (11) 有一位老太婆在炕上坐着  
 Yǒu yī wèi lǎotàipó zài kàng shàng zuò zhe  
 exist one CLF old.woman at heatable.brick.bed above sit DUR  
 ‘There is an old woman sitting on the heatable brick bed.’
- (12) 炕上坐着一位老太婆  
 Kàng shàng zuò zhe yī wèi lǎotàipó  
 heatable.brick.bed above sit DUR one CLF old.woman  
 ‘An old woman is sitting on the heatable brick bed.’
- (13) 有一只猫在柜子上躺着  
 Yǒu yī zhī māo zài guìzi shàng tǎng zhe  
 exist one CLF cat at closet above lie DUR  
 ‘There is a cat lying on the closet.’

- (14) 柜子上躺着一只猫  
 Guizi shàng tǎng zhe yī zhī māo  
 closet above lie DUR one CLF cat  
 ‘A cat is lying on the closet.’

In these four above examples, the existential sentences – which involve the existential verb *yǒu* 有 and in which the locative phrase is in the final position – are quasi-synonymous with the locative sentences where the locative phrase is a topic at the beginning of the sentence.

#### 2.4. Transitivity verbs

Posture verbs are typically intransitive, but they can be sometimes transitivity-ized. They are then ‘labile’ or ‘ambitransitive’ to use Dixon’s (1994: 18; 54) wording, i.e., they are both intransitive (basic) and transitive. This is the case in Chinese for our three basic posture verbs *zhàn*, *zuò*, and *tǎng*.

- (15) 她站门口儿等你 =  
 Tā zhàn mén kǒu děng nǐ  
 3SG stand door entrance wait 2SG  
 ‘She’s standing at the door waiting for you.’
- (16) 她站在门口儿等你  
 Tā zhàn zài mén kǒu děng nǐ  
 3SG stand at door entrance wait 2SG  
 She’s standing at the door waiting for you.
- (17) 你坐椅子(上), 我坐沙发(上) =  
 Nǐ zuò yǐzi (shàng), wǒ zuò shāfā (shàng)  
 2SG sit seat (above) 1SG sit sofa (above)  
 ‘You sit on the chair, I sit on the sofa.’
- (18) 你坐在椅子上, 我坐在沙发上  
 Nǐ zuò zài yǐzi shàng wǒ zuò zài shāfā shàng  
 2SG sit at chair above 1SG sit at sofa above  
 ‘You sit on the chair, I sit on the sofa.’

- (19) 你躺床(上), 我躺炕(上) =  
 Nǐ tǎng chuáng (shàng), wǒ tǎng kàng (shàng)  
 2SG lie bed (above) 1SG lie heatable.brick.bed (above)  
 ‘Lie down on the bed, I lie down on the heatable brick bed.’
- (20) 你躺在床上, 我躺在炕上  
 Nǐ tǎng zài chuáng shàng, wǒ tǎng zài kàng shàng  
 2SG lie at bed above 1SG lie at heatable.brick.bed above  
 ‘You lie in bed, I lie on the heatable brick bed.’

In (17) and (18), both the locative preposition *zài* 在 and the localizer *shàng* 上 can be absent, even if the sentences are probably better with the localizer *shàng* 上.

Why such a situation? Because the noun phrases (NP) that are the direct objects of the posture verbs refer to entities that are typically associated with the posture: ‘sit’ is associated to ‘chair’ ‘sofa’, etc. ‘lie’ is associated to ‘bed’, *kàng* ‘heatable.brick.bed’, etc. If we change the object of the verb ‘sit’ by a NP that is not particularly associated with the posture ‘sit’, such as ‘mirror’ or ‘blackboard’ for example, we get a sentence that is not very acceptable. The same is true with the verb ‘lie’, as in (21)–(22).

- (21) \* 你坐镜子  
 Nǐ zuò jìngzi  
 2SG sit mirror
- (22) \* 他躺黑板上  
 Tā tǎng hēibǎn shàng  
 3SG lie blackboard above

### 3. Analysis of the three basic posture verbs

#### 3.1. Standing *lì* 立

*Lì* is already attested in the language of the oracle bone inscriptions (OBI 12th–11th BCE) and continues to be commonly used until the Ming period (14th–17th c. CE). It had both basic and extended meanings. Examples in Archaic Chinese are given in the following subsections.

## 3.1.1. Basic meaning – Stative

- (23) 豕人立  
 Shǐ rén lì  
 pig man stand  
 ‘The pig, like a man, was standing.’ (*Zuozhuan*, 5th–4th BCE)
- (24) 晏平仲端委立于虎门之外  
 Yàn Píng zhòng duān wěi  
 Yan Pingzhong black.dress black.hat  
 lì yú Hǔmén zhī wài  
 stand at Humen MODIF outside  
 ‘Yan Pingzhong (with) the black dress and the black hat was standing outside the gate of Humen.’ (*Zuozhuan*, 5th–4th c. BCE)
- (25) 王立于沼上  
 Wáng lì yú zhǎo shàng  
 king stand at pond above  
 ‘The king was standing in front of the pond.’ (*Mengzi*, 4th c. BCE)

[+ Dynamic] meaning in a causative use is shown in (26).

- (26) 乃立囚  
 Nǎi lì qiú  
 then stand captive  
 ‘(He) then made the captive stand up.’ (*Zuozhuan*, 5th–4th c. BCE)

## 3.1.2. Extended meaning

- (27) 是以隱公立而奉之  
 Shì yǐ Yīn Gōng lì ér fèng zhī  
 DEM for Yin Gong promote and rule it  
 ‘For this reason, Yin Gong was promoted ruler and ruled it (the country).’ (*Zuozhuan*, 5th–4th c. BCE)

where *lì* has the meaning of ‘to be promoted ruler’. It has also the meaning of ‘to sign’ (a document), but much later (e.g., 24), and sometimes of

‘immediately’, ‘instantly’, mostly when *lì* is dissyllabic (see *infra* ex. 27). As a matter of fact, when *lì* is dissyllabic, the extended meanings are more numerous and diversified.

- (28) 立下文书  
 Lì xià wénshū  
 sign down document  
 ‘(He) signed the document.’ (*San guo yanyi*, 14th c. CE)

### 3.1.3 Dissyllabic words with *lì* 立

In Medieval Chinese, there are also utterances of dissyllabic words with *lì* 立. The most common is *lìdì* 立地 with both basic (25 and 26) and extended (27) meanings, as in in (29)–(31).

- (29) 早早开门，莫教奴家立地  
 Zǎozǎo kāi mén, mò jiào nújiā lìdì  
 quickly open door NEG CAUS servant stand  
 ‘Open the door quickly, don’t let me (the servant) stand (there).’  
 (*Zhangxie zhuan yuan*, 12th–13th c. CE)
- (30) 师教他身边立地  
 Shī jiào tā shēnbiān lìdì  
 Master ask 3SG next.to stand  
 ‘The Master asked him to stand next to him.’ (*Zu tang ji*, 10th c. CE)
- (31) 立地便书文契  
 Lìdì biàn shū wénqì  
 immediately then write contract  
 ‘(He) then immediately wrote the contract.’ (*Dunhuang bianwen ji*, 9th–10th c. CE)

In this last example, *lìdì* has the meaning of ‘immediately’. *Lìdì* also has sometimes the extended meaning of ‘to stop’. Other dissyllabic words with *lì* are *lìděng* 立等 ‘immediately’, *lìzhā* 立扎 ‘to stop’. Examples are shown in (32)–(33).

- (32) 立等知县差人把雷横捉拿到官

Lìděng zhīxiàn chāi rén bǎ  
immediately magistrate send someone OM

Léi Héng zhuōná dào guān  
Lei Heng arrest to court

‘The magistrate immediately sent someone to arrest Lei Heng (and bring him) to court.’ (*Shui hu zhuan*, 16th c. CE)

- (33) 早来到山坡直下，冻钦钦的难立扎

Zǎo lái dào shānpō zhīxià  
early come to mountainside straight.down

dòngqīnqīnde nán lìzhā  
very.cold difficult stop

‘(He) went early down to the mountainside and (he) had difficulty to stop (there) because of the cold.’ (*Hui lan ji*, 14th c. CE)

The position ‘stand’ implies that when this position is reached, there is no more movement possible, and one is at a standstill. The connection between ‘stand’ and ‘stop’ is obvious. The derivation that led to the meaning of ‘immediately’ is more difficult to conceive. One might think that the original meaning of *lì* in the dissyllables *lìdì* or *lìděng* has nothing to do with ‘stand’.

Finally, it is interesting to note that *lì* did not disappear completely in Contemporary Chinese. But it is only used with [–Animated] referents, as in (34).

- (34) 书立在架子上

Shū lì zài jiàzi shàng  
book stand at shelf above

‘The book stands on the shelf.’

### 3.2. Standing *zhàn* 站

*Zhàn* 站 appeared quite late, under the Tang (ca. 10th c. CE), but it was really used only under the Ming (15th c. CE). There are no examples of *zhàn* in the *Yuan kan zaju sanshi zhong* (14th c. CE), only *lì*. See Wang *et al.* (2010). It is not always easy to decide whether we are dealing with a stative meaning or a

dynamic meaning, even in context, but the following examples can be cited of basic stative meaning *zhàn* ‘to be standing’ (31)–(33) and basic dynamic meaning ‘to stand up’ (34)–(35) in Late Medieval and Modern Chinese.

- (35) 众人都来前面站  
 Zhòng rén dōu lái qiánmian zhàn  
 all people all come in.front.of stand  
 ‘All people came to the front standing upright.’ (*Qingping shantang huaben*, 12th–13th c. CE)
- (36) 平儿站在炕沿边  
 Píng’er zhàn zài kàng yán biān  
 Ping’er stand at heatable.brick.bed along beside  
 ‘Ping’er was standing beside the heatable brick bed.’ (*Hong lou meng*, 18th c. CE)
- (37) 向着他两个规规矩矩的一站  
 Xiàngzhe tā liǎng ge guīgūjǔjǔde yī zhàn  
 towards 3SG two CLF in.a.disciplined.manner SEM stand  
 ‘Stand in front of the two of them in a disciplined manner.’ (*Er nǚ yingxiong zhuan*, 19th c. CE)
- (38) 等我窦娥站立  
 Děng wǒ Dòu E zhànli  
 let 1SG Dou E stand  
 ‘(They) let me (Dou E) stand.’ (*Dou E yuan*, 14th c. CE)
- (39) 罢罢罢，你站在一边，我替你报复去。  
 Bà bà bà, nǐ zhàn zài yī biān,  
 enough.enough.enough 2SG stand at one side  
 wǒ tì nǐ bàofù qù  
 1SG in.place.of 2SG revenge go  
 ‘Enough is enough! You stand aside, I’ll take revenge for you.’ (Fan Kang, *Zhu ye zhou*, ca. end of 13th c. CE)

*Zhàn* has also several extended meanings, including some extensions to non-human referents, as can be seen below: ‘to stop’ (e.g., 40), ‘to stop/to walk’ (41).

- (40) 黑压压的站了一街的车  
 Hēiyāyāde zhàn le yì jiē de chē  
 in.the.dark stop PFV one.full street MODIF car  
 ‘A street full of cars stopped in the dark.’ (*Hong lou meng*, 18th c. CE)
- (41) 我们这位小姐专爱站门子  
 Wǒmén zhèi wèi xiǎojiě zhuān ài zhàn ménzi  
 2PL DEM CLF young.lady especially like stop street  
 ‘That girl of ours especially likes to walk the streets.’ (*Guan chang xian xing ji*, 1903)

These extended uses of *zhàn* are also common in today’s contemporary language (42).

- (42) 有关这个问题你站(在)什么立场  
 Yǒuguān zhèi ge wèntí nǐ zhàn (zài) shénme lìchǎng  
 concerning DEM CLF question 2SG locate (at) what position  
 ‘What is your position concerning this question?’

All these extended meanings for *lì* and for *zhàn* - that has replaced *lì* under the Ming - have been produced through metaphorical extension or pragmatic inferencing. As can be seen in the examples above, *lì* and *zhàn* can be extended to encode the spatial position of inanimate as well as animate entities, much more easily than other posture verbs, as we will report below. This is also incidentally the case in Korean where the division is even clearer since ‘sit’ and ‘lie’ can only be extended to encode animate entities. On the other hand, in this language, ‘sit’ and ‘lie’ have been grammaticalized as progressive aspect markers, but not ‘stand’ (see Song 2002).

### 3.3. Sitting 坐 *zuò*

There were not really seats to sit on – and *a fortiori* chairs – in Ancient China, at least until medieval times. The ‘sitting’ position must then be understood at the time as ‘sitting on one’s heels. Examples are given in (44)–(47).

- (43) 孔丘与其门弟子闲坐  
 Kǒng Qiū yǔ qí méndǐzǐ xián zuò  
 Kong Qiu (Confucius) with 3POSS disciple leisure sit/kneel  
 ‘Confucius was sitting/kneeling around with his disciples.’ (*Mozi*, 4th c. BCE)

- (44) 今日岩前坐，坐久烟云收  
 Jīnrì yán qián zuò , zuò jiǔ yānyún shōu  
 today rock in.front.of sit sit for.a.long.time clouds dissipate  
 ‘Today (I) sat in front of the rock, sitting (there) for a long time the clouds have dissipated.’ (*Hanshan poem*, ca. 8th CE)
- (45) 师才见僧来，便面壁坐  
 Shī cái jiàn sēng lái , biàn miàn bì zuò  
 Master just see monk come then face wall sit  
 ‘The Master, having seen the monk arrive, sat down facing the wall.’  
 (*Zu tang ji*, 10th c. CE)
- (46) 李智、黄四约坐  
 Lǐ Zhì Huáng Sì yuē zuò  
 Li Zhi Huang Si meet sit  
 ‘Li Zhi and Huang Si met to sit (and chat).’ (*Jin Ping Mei cihua*, beginning of 17th c. CE)
- (47) 那春梅坐着纹丝也不动  
 Nà Chūnméi zuò zhe wénsīyě bù dòng  
 then Chunmei sit DUR/PROG at.all NEG move  
 ‘Then, Chunmei was sitting and not moving at all.’ (*Jin Ping Mei cihua*, beginning of 17th c. CE)

From Archaic Chinese to Modern Chinese, the verb *zuò* has thus kept its basic meaning of sitting.

What is particularly interesting about this posture verb is that it has been commonly used since Late Medieval Chinese (7th–13th c. CE) with its extended meaning of ‘to live’, ‘to stay’ ‘to reside’. This is not unexpected. In several languages, the meaning of ‘sit’ often occurs in polysemy with ‘live’, ‘stay’ meanings (see Newman 2002a). In Chantyal, a Tibeto-Burman language, ‘sit’ is the only verb of posture to have extended its meaning much beyond the expression of a basic posture verb. It has acquired a range of different meanings, including ‘live’, ‘be in a place’, ‘stay’, ‘remain’, ‘rest’. Cf. Noonan and Grunow-Harsta (2002) who has even hypothesized such a derivation: *sit* > *stay* > *live* / *remain* > *be at*. Tan Fengyu (2021) also notes that in several dialects of Cantonese (Goulou, Geyang, etc.) and some Tai-Kadai Languages the verb *zuò* 坐 ‘to sit’ is used both as a verb *zài* 在 ‘to be at’ and also as the preposition *zài* ‘at/to’. She hypothesizes that these uses have been borrowed from the

Hmong Languages, which is a debatable hypothesis since the phenomenon already existed in Medieval Chinese.

Examples in Chinese are given in (48)–(50).

- (48) 向吾宅里坐，却捉主人欺  
 Xiàng wú zhái lǐ zuò , què zhuō zhǔrén qī  
 towards 1POSS house inside stay but OM owner deceive  
 ‘Stay in my house but deceive the owner.’ (*Dunhuang bianwen ji*, 9th–10th c. CE)
- (49) 昨来到和尚处 问佛法 轻忽底 后生来东石头上坐  
 Zuó láidào héshang chù wèn fó fǎ  
 some.time.ago arrive monk place ask Buddha teaching  
 qīnghū dǐ hòushēng lái dōng shítóu shàng zuò  
 neglect MODIF young.man come east rock above live  
 ‘That indecent young man who arrived some time ago at your place (in order to) ask for the teaching of Buddha lives on the rock to the east.’ (*Zu tang ji*, 10th c. CE) (Our thanks to Christoph Anderl who provided the English translation.)
- (50) 马大师下八十八人坐道场  
 Mǎ dà shī xià bāshíbā rén zuò dàochǎng  
 Ma grand Master among eighty.eight people live monastery  
 ‘Among the disciples of Grand Master Ma (Zu) there were eighty-eight people living in the monastery.’ (*Zu tang ji*, 10th c. CE)

In all these examples the extended meaning of *zuò* as ‘live’ might stem from the notion of *zuò chán* 坐禅 ‘sitting meditation’ and from the formulaic expression *zuò dàochǎng* 坐道场, ‘sit in the place of the Buddha’, i.e. the meditation hall, hence, by extension, ‘live in a Buddhist temple’. (Our thanks to a Reviewer of this article who has provided such an explanation.)

Other extended meanings of *zuò*, which are quite common, but only attested since the Pre-Modern period (15th–17th c. CE), are ‘to place’, ‘to put’ (51)–(52). These extended meanings have been preserved today in contemporary Chinese, especially in the written language. See (53).

- (51) 小王下来把壶坐在火上  
 Xiǎo Wáng xiàlái bǎ hú zuò zài huǒ shàng  
 Xiao Wang come.down OM kettle put(sit) at fire above  
 ‘Xiao Wang came down (and) put the kettle on the fire.’ (*Jin Ping Mei cihua*, beginning of 17th c. CE)
- (52) 不防火盆上坐着一锡瓶酒  
 Bùfáng huǒ pén shàng zuò zhe yī xīpíng jiǔ  
 unexpectedly fire pit above place(sit) DUR one CLF alcohol  
 ‘A tin bottle of wine was placed on the fire pit unexpectedly.’ (*Jin Ping Mei cihua*, beginning of 17th c. CE)
- (53) 屋子中央蹲着煤炉，上面坐一壶水  
 Wūzi zhōngyāng dūn zhe méilú ,  
 room center place(squat) DUR charcoal.stove  
 shàngmiàn zuò yī hú shuǐ  
 above place(sit) one CLF water  
 ‘A charcoal stove was placed (squat) in the center of the room, and a kettle water was placed (sit) on it.’ (*People’s daily*, May 30, 1981)

The following extended meanings, though non prolific, can also be found in Medieval times: *zuò* = ‘to extend’ in example (49). *Zuò* even changes categories and becomes an adverb, meaning ‘suddenly in (50)’ or ‘in vain’ in (51). It also can function as a future marker, a causative verb, a preposition ‘because’, a conjunction ‘moreover’, etc. See Jiang *et al.* (1997) for several examples dating the Tang dynasty (7th–10th c. CE).

- (54) 你把这墙拆了，坐出东边一步去  
 Nǐ bǎ zhè qiáng chāi le , zuòchū dōng biān  
 2SG OM DEM wall dismantle PFV sit.out (extend) east side  
 yī bù qu  
 one step go  
 ‘Dismantle this wall and extend it about ten centimeters to the east.’  
 (*Xing shi yinyuan zhuan*, 17th c. CE)

- (55) 同心一人去，坐觉长安空  
 Tóng xīn yī rén qù, zuò jué Cháng' ān kōng  
 same heart one person leave, suddenly feel Chang'an empty  
 '(My) love has left, I suddenly feel that Chang'an is empty.' (*Bai Juyi poem*, 9th c. CE)
- (56) 坐度此芳年  
 Zuò dù cǐ fāngnián  
 in.vain pass DEM golden.days  
 '(We) passed in vain these golden days.' (*Wei Yingwu's poem*, 8th c. CE)

In this last example, the adverb *zuò* can be interpreted as a presupposition negative marker.

Many of these extended meanings of *zuò* are no longer full verbs, but adverbs, particles, prepositions, and even conjunctions. We can then consider that we are dealing with classical processes of grammaticalization. These derivations took place under the Tang or the Five Dynasties periods, i.e., from the seventh century up to the tenth century. The above examples have been indeed taken from the *Dictionary of the Language of Tang and Five dynasties* by Jiang *et al* (1997).

In some Sinitic languages of Northwest China, strongly influenced by the Altaic languages of the region (which together form a linguistic area commonly known as the Gansu-Qinghai linguistic area), *zuò* (or *zuòzhe*) is also what Yang (2021) calls a continuous marker meaning that the action is continuous while the state remains unchanged. It then reinforces the continuous aspect already expressed by the aspectual particle *zhe* attached to the main verb. Examples are given in (57)–(58).

- (57) 门关着坐着哩  
 mén guān zhe zuòzhe li  
 door close DUR PROG PRT  
 'The door is keeping closed.'
- (58) 暖傢你哈等着坐着  
 Àijiē nǐ-ha děng zhe zuòzhe  
 Aijie 2SG-ACC wait DUR PROG  
 'Aijie is waiting for you.'

3.4. Lying *tǎng* 躺

*Tǎng* 躺 did not appear before the Yuan dynasty (13th–14th c. CE). The verb *wò* 卧 was previously used, but with a slightly different meaning, ‘to rest lying’. See Yin et al. (2019).

- (59) 有欲为王留行者，坐而言。不应，隐几而卧

Yǒu yù wèi wáng liú xíng zhě , zuò ér yán  
there.is wish for king detain come the.one.who sit and speak

bù yìng yǐn jī ér wò  
NEG answer lean.upon stool and rest.lying

‘A person who wished to detain him on behalf of the king, came, sat down, and spoke (to him). (Mencius) did not answer, leant upon his stool and rest lying.’ (*Mencius*, 4th c. BCE)

*Tǎng* 躺, first written *tǎng* 倘 appears under the Yuan dynasty. Several examples can be found in the operas of the Yuan, but the use of this *tǎng* 倘 is still rare. Other examples can be found in *Shui hu zhuan* (16th c. CE), and according to Liu (2011), 22 of them are attested in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* (beginning of 17th c. CE), eight in the *Ping Yao zhuan* (16th c. CE). Later, we must wait for the *Hong lou meng* (18th c. CE) and the *Ernu yingxiong zhuan* (19th c. CE) for *tǎng* 躺 to become quite common. See examples (60)–(63).

- (60) 站着的是我邓老九的房子，躺着的都是我邓老九的地

Zhàn zhe de dōu shì wǒ Dèng Lǎojiǔ de fángzi,  
stand DUR the.one all COP 1SG Deng Laojiu MODIF house

tǎng zhe de dōu shì wǒ Dèng Lǎojiǔ de dì  
lie DUR the.one all COP 1SG Deng Laojiu MODIF land

‘Everything that is standing belongs to my - Deng Laojiu - house, everything that is lying down belongs to my - Deng Laojiu - land.’ (*Ernu yingxiong zhuan*, second half of 19th c. CE)

The basic meaning of *tǎng*, like *zuò*, *zhàn* or *lì* can be [+ stative] or [+ dynamic], as shown below.

- (61) 你躺一会儿吧  
 Nǐ tǎng yīhuìr ba  
 2SG lie a.moment PRT  
 ‘Lie down for a moment!’ ([+ dynamic])

- (62) 她在床上躺着  
 Tā zài chuáng shàng tǎng zhe  
 3SG at bed above lie DUR  
 ‘She is lying in the bed.’ ([+ stative])

This full-fledged stative meaning is conferred by *zhe* 着.

- (63) 他躺在床上  
 Tā tǎng zài chuáng shàng  
 3SG lie at bed above  
 ‘He is lying in the bed / He lies down in the bed.’ (Both [+ stative] and [+ dynamic])

What is different from the other posture verbs *zuò*, *zhàn* or *lì* is that *tǎng* has practically no extended meaning, so there was no grammaticalization process concerning *tǎng*.

There are, however, some rare exceptions in very special cases, such as this one: *tǎng zài gōngláobù* ‘lying on the credit rolls’, as in (64).

- (64) 我不能躺在功劳簿上睡大觉 (袁隆平)  
 Wǒ bù néng tǎng zài gōngláobù shàng shuì dà jiào  
 1SG NEG can rest at laurels above sleep big sleep  
 ‘I cannot rest on my laurels and have a big sleep (i.e. cannot rely on my past achievements).’ (Yuan Longping)

Examples (61) to (64) above are Contemporary Chinese.

Before concluding this short study, we would like to come back to the dichotomy between the stative (to be in a standing position, in a sitting or in a lying position, i.e. ‘at-rest position’) and dynamic meanings, mentioned above in Section 2.1. Throughout the course of Chinese history, the distinction between these two actionalities, which, as we have seen, is not always easy to make, depends on the context. It is the context that allows us to have one interpretation rather than another. We must wait until the end of the Pre-Modern

Chinese and the beginning of the Modern Chinese period to see an outline of a differentiation between these two states.

The distinction is then expressed, not systematically by the verbal forms as in French (see *supra*), but by the order of the words. And it often remains blurred, as in English where *I sat on a chair* can have two meanings: (i) I sat myself down on the chair ([+ dynamic]), or (ii) I was sitting on a chair [and I did not move)] ([+ stative]).

In fact, if sentences where posture verbs followed by an aspectual particle are placed behind the locative phrase, as in (65), (66) or (67), are unambiguously only [+ stative], the same cannot be said when these same locative phrases follow the posture verbs in question, as in (68), (69) or (70).

- (65) 我在台阶上站着  
 Wǒ zài táijiē shàng zhàn zhe  
 1SG at step above stand DUR  
 'I am standing on the steps.' ([+ stative], never [+ dynamic])
- (66) 他在椅子上坐着  
 Tā zài yǐzi shàng zuò zhe  
 3SG at chair above sit DUR  
 'He is sitting on the chair.' ([+ stative], never [+ dynamic])
- (67) 她在地上躺着  
 Tā zài dì shàng tǎng zhe  
 3SG at ground above lie DUR  
 'She is lying on the ground.' ([+ stative], never [+ dynamic])
- (68) 我站在台阶上  
 Wǒ zhàn zài táijiē shàng  
 1SG stand at steps above  
 'I stand on the steps. / I am standing on the steps.' (both [+ stative] and [+ dynamic])
- (69) 他坐在椅子上  
 Tā zuò zài yǐzi shàng  
 3SG sit at chair above  
 'He sits on the chair. / He is sitting on the chair.' (both [+ stative] and [+ dynamic])

- (70) 她躺在地上  
 Tā tǎng zài dì shàng  
 3SG lie at ground above  
 ‘She lies on the ground. / She is lying on the ground.’ ([+ stative] as well as [+ dynamic])

In other words, we have a situation comparable to that of English. But this is far from always being the case. It depends, as often in Chinese, on the discursive-pragmatic context, and especially on the semantic nature of the locative phrase (e.g. 71 vs. 72) or of the subject (if it is unanimated, as in 73 and 74) of the posture verb, which often blocks the dynamic interpretation when the verb is in the final position. Thus, there are differences between verbs that can be both [+ stative] and [+ dynamic], others that are [+ stative] and never [+ dynamic]. Among the verbs that are [+ stative] and [+ dynamic], some of them, in context, are only [+ stative] and cannot be [+ dynamic], as in (71)–(74).

- (71) 她在棺材里躺着  
 Tā zài guāncái lǐ tǎng zhe  
 3SG at coffin inside lie DUR  
 ‘She is lying in a coffin.’ ([+ stative])
- (72) 她躺在棺材里  
 Tā tǎng zài guāncái lǐ  
 3SG lie at coffin inside  
 ‘She is lying in a coffin.’ ([+ stative] not [+ dynamic])
- (73) 白杨树在山坡上站着  
 Báiyáng shù zài shānpō shàng zhàn zhe  
 Poplar trees at hillside above stand DUR  
 ‘Poplar trees are standing on the hillside.’ ([+ stative])
- (74) 白杨树站在山坡上  
 Báiyáng shù zhàn zài shānpō shàng  
 Poplar trees stand at hillside above  
 ‘Poplar trees are standing on the hillside.’ ([+ stative] not [+ dynamic])

#### 4. Conclusion

The three verbs of posture *zhàn* 站, *zuò* 坐 and *tǎng* 躺 have basically the same forms for expressing both stative and dynamic actions. The differences are made at the level of syntax (whether the locative phrases are in pre-verbal or post-verbal position).

Like many other languages in the world, they (at least two of them: ‘to stand’ and ‘to sit’) have various extended meanings. These extended meanings have been derived from their basic meanings through the processes of metaphorisation and/or metonymisation (semantic derivations). Some of them have also been grammaticalized, especially the verb *to sit*. However, many of these extended meanings that were quite common in Medieval and Pre-Modern Chinese have been lost today in Contemporary Chinese.

This was particularly the case when these extended meanings were generated by a process of grammaticalization: Verb > Auxiliary Verb, Verb > Adverb, Verb > Preposition, Verb > Conjunction, etc.), and even Verb > Aspectual marker for the durative or progressive, above all for the verb *zuò* ‘to sit’. Thus, it is not entirely true to say that the verbs of posture have not been grammaticalized in Chinese. They have been, but very rare cases remain today.

What is true is that among the wide range of extensions for *lì/zhàn* and *zuò*, very few of them have been and are now attested in Standard Mandarin to be the result of a grammaticalization mechanism from a verb to a Tense-Aspect-Modality (TAM) marker, especially the durative or progressive marker, which is commonly attested in other languages such as Tarana in Bolivia for ‘to stand’, ‘to sit’ and ‘to lie’, or only for ‘to sit’ and ‘to lie’ but not for ‘stand’ in Korean, or even an habitual marker issued from the verbal source of ‘to lie’. However, the phenomenon seems quite common in some North-western dialects (or Sinitic languages) called Mandarin *lan-yin*, e.g. in Gan’gou 甘沟话, where one finds examples such as (57) or (58) above, where the verb *zuò* ‘to sit’ (followed or not by the suffix *zhe*) is commonly used as an aspectual marker for expressing the durative or progressive aspect.

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## 6. Chinese linguistics periodization (Peyraube, 2017):

Pre-Archaic period (Oracle Bone Inscriptions period) (12th–11th c. BCE)

Early Archaic period (10th–6th c. BCE)

Late Archaic period (5th–2nd c. BCE)

Pre-Medieval period (2nd c. BCE–2nd c.)

Early Medieval period (3th–6th c.)

Late Medieval period (7th–13th c.)

Pre-Modern period (1250–1400)

Modern period (15th c.–18th c.)

Contemporary period (19th c. present day)

## 7. Abbreviations:

1	first person pronoun
2	second person pronoun
3	third person pronoun
ACC	accusative
CAUS	causative
CLF	classifier
COP	copula
DEM	demonstrative
DUR	durative
MODIF	modifier
NEG	negation
NP	Noun Phrase
OBI	Oracle Bone Inscriptions
OM	object marker
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive

PROG	progressive
PRT	final particle
SEM	semelfactive
SG	singular

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