

9.4 Setting the stage: Verb-zhe (着 ; often 著 in Taiwan)

Of the three particles associated with the verb in Chinese, guo was encountered early on, le (in its post-verbal manifestation) more recently, but zhe has been almost completely avoided until now. There is a reason for this. Most of the language presented so far has dealt with events, actions or inner states. Zhe is rare in such language. Zhe serves primarily to set the scene (‘the door’s open, there’s a vase on the table, the blinds are drawn’) and to indicate the various configurations of the actors (‘a man’s standing at the door, he’s wearing a long robe and holding a pipe in his hands’). Like guo and le, zhe precludes any other attachments to the verb – other suffixes (such as guo or le) or verbal complements (such as wán or guòlai).

9.4.1 Verbs involving configuration or bodily attitudes

Zhàn and zuò and the words listed below are examples of verbs that involve attitudes or configurations of the body that are compatible with the persisting state interpretation and therefore particularly susceptible to the zhe suffix.

zhàn	zuò	tǎng	shuì<jiào>	dūn	děng	dīng	lèng
stand	sit	lie	sleep	squat; crouch	wait	watch intently	stare blankly

Examples

Tā zài dìbǎn shàng shuì-zhe ne. He's asleep on the floor.
Tā zài shāfa shàng tǎng-zhe ne. She was lying on the sofa.
Tāmen zài ménkǒu děng-zhe nǐ ne. They're waiting for you at the door.

Bié lèng-zhe. Lái bāng wǒ ná! Don't just stare; give me a hand.
Duìbuqǐ, wǒ lèi+de bùdeliǎo. Sorry, I'm exhausted.

Dàbiàn, zuò-zhe bùrú dūn-zhe With #2, sitting isn't as comfortable
shūfu! as squatting.
Wǒ tóngyì. I agree.

Standing or sitting in class?

The act of standing up can be expressed as zhànqǐlai; the act of sitting down, as zuòxià – both making use of directional complements (comparable to English ‘up’ and ‘down’). However, once the acts have been performed, the resulting states are ‘standing’ and ‘sitting’, respectively: zhàn-zhe and zuò-zhe:

Kuài yào shàngkè de shíhou lǎoshī gēn nǐmen shuō shénme ne? Tā shuō
“Shàngkè.” Nǐmen jiu zhànqǐlai gēn tā shuō: “Lǎoshī, hǎo.” Ránhòu ne? Nǐmen
děi zhàn-zhe, duì ba? Zuò-zhe tài shūfu le, rúguǒ nǐmen yǒu yìdiǎnr lèi de huà,
hěn kuài jiu huì shuìzháo de. Zhàn-zhe shuō wàiyǔ gèng hǎo. Dāng nǐmen liànxí
duìhuà de shíhou, lǎoshī jīngcháng shuō: “Zhàn-zhe kěyǐ, zuò-zhe yě kěyǐ.” Zhè
shíhou nǐmen cái kěyǐ zuòxià. Dànshi rúguǒ nǐmen bànyǎn de shì fúwùyuán de
huà, nà nǐmen zuì hǎo zhàn-zhe. Zài Zhōngguó, fúwùyuán shì bù gēn kèrén zuò
zài yìqǐ!

Notes:

ránhòu ‘afterwards’	dàduōshù ‘the majority’
dāng...de shíhou ‘when’	liànxí ‘practice’
duìhuà ‘dialogues’	bànyǎn ‘take the role of’; act’
huì...de ‘will [in predications]’	

Verbs of wearing (chuān, dài ‘wear [accessories]’, jì [ties]) and holding (ná ‘carry; hold’, dài ‘lead; bring’) also commonly appear with zhe:

Tā jīntiān chuān-zhe yí jiàn hóng dàyī ne.	Today she’s wearing a red coat.
Tā tóu shàng dài-zhe yì dǐng qíguài de màozi.	She was wearing a curious hat on [her] head.
Nǐ shǒu lǐ ná-zhe de shì shénme? <i>Yì bāo kǒuxiāngtáng!</i>	What are you holding in your hands? <i>A pack of bubble gum.</i>
Nǐ kàn, tā shǒu lǐ ná-zhe qiāng. <i>Nǐ fāngxīn ba. Shǎoshù mínzǔ hěn xǐhuan dǎliè.</i>	Look, he’s got a gun. <i>Don’t worry! Minority people love to hunt!</i>

9.4.2 Doors and windows

In addition to the configurations of people, the arrangement of furnishings and other objects in a room can also be presented with *V-zhe*.

<i>Ns</i>	yǐzi chair	zhuōzi table	huà<r> picture	dēng light	huāpíng vase	chuānghu window	qiáng wall
<i>Vs</i>	guà hang	fàng put	bǎi arrange; display		suǒ lock	guān close; shut	kāi open

a) Item *V-zhe*

Mén kāi-zhe <ne>. <i>Mén kāi-zhe – kěyǐ.</i>	The door’s open. <i>It’s okay open.</i>
Dēng kāi-zhe ne. <i>Qǐng bǎ tā guānshàng.</i>	The light’s on. <i>Please switch it off.</i>
Chuānghu guān-zhe ne. <i>Méi guānxi, tài lěng le.</i>	The window’s closed. <i>Never mind, it’s too cold [to have it open].</i>
Mén suǒ-zhe ne. Jīnbuqù. <i>Wǒ yǒu yàoshi.</i>	The door’s locked. Can’t get in. <i>I have a key.</i>

b) Existence: Location V-zhe item

V-zhe can also provide a more precise substitute for yǒu in the existence pattern:

LOC'N yǒu ITEM	>	LOC'N V-zhe ITEM
Chuānghu pángbiānr yǒu yì zhāng zhuōzi.		There's a table next to the window.
>		
Chuānghu pángbiānr fàng-zhe yì zhāng zhuōzi.		There's a table standing next to the window. (ie 'placed there and remaining')

English often uses the verbs 'stand' or 'sit' in such contexts, extending terms that are otherwise only applied to humans to physical objects. Chinese does not do this:

Zhuōzi shàng fàng-zhe yí ge huāpíng.	There was a vase sitting on the table.
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Other examples:

Zhuōzi shàng bǎi-zhe jǐ zhāng míngpiàn.	A number of business cards were arranged on the table.
Qíang shàng guà-zhe yì fú huà.	Hanging on the wall was a painting.
Shāfa shàng zuò-zhe yí ge jǐngchá.	A policeman was sitting on the sofa.
Zhuōzi dǐxia shuì-zhe yí ge xiǎo wáwa.	A baby was sleeping under the table.

c) Location: Person Location V-zhe <ne>.

The location pattern with zài also has its correlate with V-zhe:

Tā zài chuáng shàng zuò-zhe ne.	They are/were sitting on the bed.
Tāmen zài shāfa shàng shuì-zhe ne.	They're sleeping on the sofa.
Kèren zài ménkǒu dēng-zhe nǐ ne.	[Your] guest's waiting for you at the door.

d) V-zhe V

Zhe frequently accompanies the first of two verbs. In such cases, *V-zhe* provides the setting, or context, for the second verb:

Tā ná-zhe huà huíjiā le.	She went home, holding the painting.
Bù yīnggāi dī-zhe tóu zǒulù!	You shouldn't walk with your head down.

Tā xiào-zhe shuō:	She laughed and said:
Wǒ méi shíjiān gēn nǐ cāi-zhe wánr.	I don't have time to play guessing games with you. ('guess-ing have fun')

Notes

- a) dī 'to lower'; contrast dǐxià 'under; underneath'.
 b) xiào 'laugh; smile'; cf. xiàohuà 'a joke'; kāi wánxiào 'be kidding'.
 c) cāi 'guess'; cāiduì 'guess right' and cāicuò 'guess wrong'; cāibuchū 'cannot guess'

e) V-zhe in imperatives

Zhe can also appear in imperatives:

Nǐ liú-zhe ba.	You take [it]. ('keep-persist')
Ná-zhe ba.	Hold [it], please. ('hold persist')
Děng-zhe ba.	Hang on.
Tīng-zhe – bié zài shuō le!	Listen – don't say any more!

f) Negation

There seems to be relatively little need to report the negation of a persistent state. But where it occurs, it is formed with méi<you>, (usually) without zhe:

Mén shì bu shì kāi-zhe ne? <i>Méi kāi, guān-zhe de.</i>	Is the door open? <i>It isn't open, it's closed.</i>
Qǐngwèn, jǐ diǎn? <i>Duìbuqǐ, wǒ jīntiān méi dài biǎo.</i>	What's the time, please? <i>Sorry, I'm not wearing my watch today.</i>

Exercise 2

a) Provide English paraphrases:

- Zhàn-zhe gànmá? Zuòxià ba. / Wǒ zhàn-zhe bǐ zuò-zhe shūfu.
- Nǐ kàn, Wèi lǎoshī shǒu shàng dài-zhe yí ge dà jīn biǎo, shēn shàng chuān-zhe yí jiàn pídayī. / Duì, tā gāng zhòng-le yí ge dàjiǎng!
- Xuéxiào de dàménkǒu xiě-zhe 'Hǎohǎo xuéxí, tiāntiān xiàng shàng.'
- Nǐ kuài chūqù kànkàn, mén wàitou zhàn-zhe yí ge lǎowài, shuō shì yào zhǎo nǐ.
- Wàitou xià-zhe xuě, kěshì yìdiǎnr dōu bù lěng!

biǎo	N 'watch'	xuě	N 'snow'
gāng	ADV 'just; a short while ago'	xuéxiào	N 'school'
zhòngjiǎng	VO 'win a lottery; hit the jackpot (hit-prize)'		

b) Provide Chinese paraphrases:

1. When we got there, there were already people waiting for us in front of the door.
2. “The door’s open, you can go on in,” I said.
3. “The door’s locked, we can’t get in,” they said.
3. Don’t stand; the people sitting in the back can’t see. There are seats in front still.
4. There was a table by the door with several bottles of soda arranged on it.
5. On the wall above the table was a sign (páizi) with characters written on it.

9.4.3 Ongoing acts versus persisting states

First impressions tend to associate *V-zhe* with English *V-ing*: zhànzhe ‘standing’; zuòzhe ‘sitting’. However, while it is true that many cases of *V-zhe* do correspond to *V-ing* in English, the reverse is not true: many cases of *V-ing* do not correspond to *V-zhe*. The reason for this is that English uses *V-ing* for both *ongoing acts*, and for the *ongoing states* that result:

She’s standing up right now. Tā zhèng zài zhànqǐlai ne. [act]

She’s not moving, she’s
just standing there. Tā bú dòng, jiù zài nàr zhàn-zhe ne.
[state]

Zhèng zài supports the directional complement, qǐlai, to underscore the fact that the action is happening before our eyes – it’s ongoing; while the presence of zhe after zhàn indicates that the standing is persistent. While both are in a sense ongoing, Chinese distinguishes them as *ongoing act* versus *persisting state*.

Recall that ongoing or recent actions are often explicitly marked by zài placed in the adverbial position right before the verb:

Tāmen hái zài xǐzǎo ne.	They’re still bathing.
Nǐ zuìjìn zài zuò shénme?	What have you been doing lately?
Tāmen tiāntiān zài xuéxí	They’ve been studying Chinese daily.
Zhōngwén.	

To emphasize how current the action is, the ADV zhèng ‘exact’ can be placed before zài:

Tā zhèng zài chīfàn ne. Yihuǐr gěi nǐ dǎguoqu, xíng ma? <i>Xíng, bù jí, bù jí.</i>	She’s eating right now. Can she phone you [back] in a short while? <i>Sure, no hurry.</i>
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Wǒ zhèng zài xǐzǎo de shíhou, jǐngchá gěi wǒ dǎ le ge diànhuà. <i>Tāmen gēn nǐ shuō shénme?</i>	The police phoned me just as I was having a bath. <i>What did they want?</i>
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Tā zhèng zài gēn tā shuōhuà ne. <i>Tāmen zài shuō xiē shénme?</i>	She’s talking to him right now. <i>What are they talking about?</i>
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In fact, for some northern speakers, the pattern can be further reinforced by a following zhe – along with final ne:

Zhèng zài xià-zhe yǔ ne.	It's raining right now!
Zāogāo, wǒ de sǎn wàng zài jiā lǐ le.	Drat, I've left my umbrella at home!

The fact that zài may co-occur with zhe may seem strange, since in the last section, *V-zhe* was viewed in contrast to the *zai-V* pattern. But apparently, in some cases the two notions of ongoing and persisting can complement one another. The range of the *V-ing* form in English (the so-called progressive tense) – which includes ongoing actions (putting on) and persistent states (wearing) – is, after all, a precedent for associating the two notions.

9.4.4 Perspectives

Notice that some situations can be interpreted as ongoing actions or persistent states:

Tā zhèng zài shuìjiào ne.	She's just going to bed.	[action]
Tā shuì-zhe ne.	She's asleep.	[state]
Tā zài děng chē.	He's waiting for a bus.	[action]
Tā děng-zhe ne.	He's waiting.	[state]
Tāmen zài chīfàn ne.	They're eating.	[action]
Tāmen yíkuài chī-zhe fàn ne.	They're having a meal.	[state]
Tāmen dōu zài tiàowǔ.	They're all dancing.	[action]
Péngyou chàng-zhe, tiào-zhe, gāoxíng-jíle!	The friends are extremely happy, singing and dancing.	[state]
Tā zhèng zài chuān dàyī ne.	She's putting on her coat right now.	[action]
Tā chuān-zhe dàyī ne.	She's wearing a coat.	[state]
Tā zài ná qiāng.	He's picking up a gun.	[action]
Tā shǒu lǐ nǎzhe yì zhī qiāng.	He's holding a gun.	[state]
Tā zài bǎ shū fàng zài hézi lǐ.	He's putting the books in a box.	[action]
Hézi lǐ fàng-zhe hěn duō shū.	There are lots of books sitting in the box.	[state]

Exercise 3

Paraphrase in Chinese:

1. The soup's hot. / The soups heating up. / The soup's heated.
 2. She's closing the door. / She closed the door. / The door's closed.
 3. He's putting on his shoes. / He was wearing sandals (tuōxié). / He put on his shoes.
 4. I'm just in the process of finishing up my report (bàogào).
 5. She's in the bath right now; can you come back in 20 minutes?
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9.4.5 At the temple

Lǎo Wèi is visiting the Qìngfúgōng in the Chinese quarter of Rangoon (Yángguāng), Burma (Myanmar). Qìngfúgōng means, literally, 'palace celebrating good fortune'. In China and Southeast Asia, temples are often considered palaces of the gods, hence the use of the term gōng 'palace' in the name. [Sū xiānshēng is based on a real person, a Sino-Burmese whose ancestors emigrated to Burma by way of Singapore early in the 20th century. Typical of Sino-Burmese, he speaks Hokkien (Mǐnnányǔ), Burmese (Miǎndiànyǔ), as well as some Mandarin.]

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|-----|--|--|
| Wèi | Sū xiānshēng, zhè shì Qìngfú-gōng – gōngdiàn de gōng, duì ma? Wèishénme jiào gōng? | Mr. Su, this is Qingfu Gong – the <i>gong</i> of 'palace', right? How come it's called a 'palace'? |
| Sū | Zài Dōngnányà, gōng yě shì sìmiào de yìsi. | In Southeast Asia, 'palace' also means 'temple'. |
| Wèi | Nà, zhèi ge sìmiào hěn yǒu yìsi. Nǐ kàn, ménshàng de ménshén – zhēn wēiwǔ! | Well, this temple is interesting. Look at the door guardians on the door – they're quite impressive! |
| Sū | Zhè shì Yángguāng zuì lǎo de sìmiào, 1898 nián jiànli de. | This is Rangoon's oldest temple; it was established in 1898. |
| Wèi | Sū xiānshēng, qǐngwèn, zhè shì shénme shén? | Mr. Su, can I ask you what god this is? |
| Sū | Guān Dì; huòzhě Guān Lǎoye. Běnlái shì ge jiāngjun, shì Sānguó shídài de yīngxióng. Sǐdiào yǐhòu chéng-le ge shén. | It's Guan Di; or 'Lord' Guan. He was originally a general, a hero from the time of the 3 Kingdoms. After he died, he became a 'god'. |
| Wèi | Nǐ zěnme zhīdao shì Guān Dì. | How do you know it's Guan Di? |

- Sū Nǐ kàn, gèzi hěn gāo, yǒu cháng Look, he's tall, has a long beard,
húzi, hóng liǎn, tóu shàng dài-zhe a red face, he's got a special hat
<yí> ge tè sè de màozi, shǒu lǐ on his head, and a book in his hand.
ná-zhe yì běn shū.
- Wèi Liǎn hěn kǐpà. Tā shǒu lǐ ná-zhe What a frightening face! What's the book
de shì shénme shū ne? he's holding?
- Sū Hǎoxiàng shì Kǒngfūzǐ de Chūnqiū. Looks like it's Confucius' Spring and
Guān Dì yě shì yǒu xuéwen de. Autumn Annals. Guan Di is learned as well.

Notes

- a) Qìngfúgōng 'The temple of blessed happiness'.
 b) sìmiào Generic word for 'temple'.
 c) shén 'god; divinity'; shén are usually deified historical figures whose spiritual power can be called on for protection or assistance. Guān Dì was Guān Yǔ, the third of the heroes who swore brotherhood in the famous 'peach garden oath' that opens Sānguó Yǎnyì 'The Romance of the Three Kingdoms'. He has many other names, including Guān Lǎoye 'Grandpa Guan' – which in this context is probably better translated 'Lord Guan'.
 d) yīngxióng 'hero' – also the name of a Zhāng Yìmóu's film.
 e) sǐdiào 'die-fall' = sǐ le 'died'.
 f) chéng 'become'
 g) húzi 'beard'
 h) tè sè N 'special, unusual qualities', ie 'a hat of an unusual type'; the tè of tèbié and the sè of yánsè. Tè sè is a N, not a SV.
 i) kǐpà 'frightening (able-fear)'; cf. kě'ài.
 j) Chūnqiū 'The Spring and Autumn Annals (spring-autumn)', a chronicle of the State of Lǚ (that covered parts of modern Shāndōng) from 722-481 BC. It is considered to have been edited by Confucius in such a way as to illustrate his political philosophy.
 k) yǒu xuéwen de 'one who has ~ shows learning, scholarship' (of a person, or a work).



Gods of Literature and War at the Man-Mo (Wén Wǔ) Temple, Hong Kong

9.5 Colors

The Chinese core color terms are the following:

hóng	zǐ	huáng	lǜ	lán	hēi	bái
red	purple; violet	yellow	green	blue	black	white

Qīng, a term that was applied to dark greens, blues and some browns – the colors of earth and sky – in earlier Chinese, appears in certain phrases, such as qīngcài ‘green vegetables’ or qīngshān-lùshuǐ ‘green mountains and blue waters’ (a standard description for lush scenery).

When used to modify a noun, color terms are often suffixed with sè, from yánsè ‘color’:

huángsè de	hóngsè de	zǐsè de	lǜsè de	lánsè de
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Secondary color terms have been formed by extending the meaning of words from other semantic domains, eg ‘grey’ from ‘ash’:

huīsè de	kāfēisè de	zōngsè de	chéngsè de
<i>ashes</i>	<i>coffee</i>	<i>palm</i>	<i>orange</i>
> <i>grey</i>	> <i>dark brown</i>	> <i>brown</i>	> <i>orange</i>

Not surprisingly, colors have rich cultural associations in China. Traditionally, red (the color of blood) is considered festive and auspicious, and for that reason, was adopted by the Communist Party. Doorway scrolls (duilián) are written on red paper; presents are often wrapped in it. Charms (symbols on paper, sold in temples) were generally written

on yellow paper. Only the emperor could wear yellow. White was associated with funerals.

Examples:

hóng yīfu	lán xiézi	hēi màozi
hóngsè de yīfu	lánsè de xiézi	hēisè de màozi
<i>red clothes</i>	<i>blue shoes</i>	<i>black hats</i>

Usage

Xiànzài zài Zhōngguó shénme yánsè de chē zuì liúxíng?	What color cars are most popular in China these days?
Chuān hēisè de yīfu hěn kù!	It's cool to wear black clothes!
Chuān huángsè de T-xù de nèi wèi shì shuí [shéi]?	Who's that wearing the yellow T?
Jì hóngsè de lǐngdài de shì Jiāng Zémín.	The person in the red tie is Jiāng Zémín.
Nǐ kàn, tā chuān hóng xié, tài qíguài le!	Look, he's wearing red shoes, [that]'s too weird!