

## THE SYNTAX OF DURATION PHRASES IN HAN PERIOD CHINESE\*

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In this paper, the different syntactic and semantic constraints in the employment of phrases expressing duration in Han period Chinese will be analysed.

Duration phrases are those grammatical features that indicate the time of reference in a text as a *period (duration) of time*, in a question substituted by “how long?”. They are syntactically and semantically distinguishable from temporal phrases, whose features indicate a particular *point of time*, in a question substituted by “when”. Both categories are subject to certain syntactic constraints and can be distinguished according to their syntactic position in the sentence. I will argue that: (1) duration phrases in preverbal position are analysable as circumstantial adverbials and in postverbal position they are – depending on their syntactic structure – analysable either as included in the VP or as predicates of a sentential subject; (2) semantically, they can be distinguished into those referring to situational duration and those referring to the duration of a resultant state; and (3) the distinction of the different duration phrases is due to the semantics – the situation type (Aktionsart) – of the verb employed.

*Key words:* Han period Chinese, syntax, duration phrase, complement, predicate, situation type.

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, the different syntactic and semantic constraints on the employment of phrases expressing duration in Han period Chinese will be analysed. The data will mainly be based on the *Shiji*, a historical text written during the Western Han period (206 B.C.–23 A.D.) and the *Hanshu*, a historical text written during the Eastern Han period (25–220 A.D.). The focus of the investigation lies on the inherent structure of

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duration phrases, their position within the verb phrase and their interplay with the semantics of the verb. Based on a discussion of duration phrases in Modern Chinese, the investigation will elucidate some of the syntactic differences between the verb phrase in Han period Chinese and Modern Mandarin. Although the general word order of Han period Chinese does not differ from that of Modern Mandarin – both are SVO languages –, the architecture of the verb phrase itself seems to differ remarkably, particularly as far as adjuncts are concerned.

## 2. The syntax and the semantics of duration phrases

### 2.1. Duration versus point of time

Duration phrases are those phrases that refer to the *duration* of a situation in a text, a *period of time*, in a question substituted by ‘how long?’ in Modern Mandarin expressed by *duojiu* 多久, in Han period Chinese by *ji he* 幾何 (X)?

- (1) 受 學 幾 何 歲 ? SJ: 105; 2796  
*shou xue ji he sui*  
 receive learn many how year  
 “For how many years did you receive your instructions?”

They are syntactically and semantically distinguishable from temporal phrases, referring to a particular *point of time*:

- (2) 夏 五 月 癸 丑，王 死 申 亥 家，... SJ: 40; 1708  
*xia wu yue gui chou wang si shen hai jia*  
 summer five month gui chou king die Shen Hai house  
 “In the fifth month of the summer, on the day guichou, the king died in Shen Hai’s house, ...”

These phrases are substituted in a question by ‘when’, in Modern Mandarin *shenme shihou* 什麼時候, in Han period Chinese *he shi* 何時:

- (3) 且 不 求，何 時 得 功？」 SJ: 39; 1658  
*qie bu qiu he shi de gong*  
 furthermore NEG search what time get success  
 “And furthermore if you do not look for it, when will you then achieve success?”

Although duration phrases may have the same surface structure as a lot of temporal phrases – a phrase like *san nian* 三年 may refer to a point of time, ‘the third year’, or to a duration of time, ‘for three years’ –, they normally differ in their syn-

tactic distribution in the sentence: Expressions of the *point of time* are found either in sentence-initial position or in preverbal position<sup>1</sup> while duration phrases are found either in preverbal or in postverbal position. As far as temporal noun phrases consisting of a numeral and a time noun such as *san nian* 三年 ‘the third year’ – or *xia wu yue guichou* 夏五月癸丑 ‘In the fifth month of the summer, on the day guichou’ as in example (2) – are concerned, the sentence-initial position apparently has to be considered their normal position.<sup>2</sup> The preverbal position can be occupied by different kinds of adverbials indicating a point of time. These are: prepositional phrases referring to a concrete point of time, mainly a date; temporal phrases indicating a relative point of time such as *lai nian* 來年; iterative temporal adverbials such as *ri* 日 ‘daily’ or *mei nian* 每年 ‘every year’ and temporal nouns such as e.g. *shi* 時 ‘at that time’.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to temporal noun phrases indicating a *point of time*, the corresponding noun phrases indicating *duration* in Han period Chinese are predominantly found in postverbal position. In preverbal position they are comparably rare and mainly confined to negative sentences.<sup>4</sup> In postverbal position they always follow the direct object and they are almost exclusively the last part of the VP.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, they can occur as the nominal predicate of a sentence as in:

- (i) 是歲元朔六年也。 SJ: 123; 3167  
*shi sui yuan shuo liu nian ye*  
 this year Yuan shuo six year FIN

“This year was the sixth year of the era Yuanshuo.”

<sup>2</sup> These phrases usually only occur immediately preceding the verb when the subject is missing and when the preverbal position is identical with the sentence-initial position.

<sup>3</sup> See Unger (1988, pp. 41f) for preverbal temporal phrases in Classical Chinese.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the preverbal and postverbal duration phrases discussed here, in Classical and Han period Chinese another syntactic feature has been assumed to express duration (Unger 1988, p. 49). These are verbal expressions, syntactically separate clauses in sentence-initial position, that traditionally have been regarded as expressing the duration of an event, but which pragmatically rather serve to express a point of time after an event of a particular duration, as in the following example:

- (i) 居久之，病死。 SJ: 122; 3149  
*ju jiu zhi bing si*  
 stay long OBJ sick die

After a while, he became sick and died.

The analysis of these grammatical features will be postponed to a later time.

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the syntactic constraints of duration phrases in Classical and Han period Chinese differ remarkably from those in Modern Mandarin, as discussed e.g. in Huang, James C. T. (1982, 1998, pp. 32f); Paul, Waltraud (1986, 1988), and others. In Classical and Han period Chinese a construction similar to that in Modern Mandarin, in which the duration phrase precedes the object either with or without *de* 的, i.e. the duration phrase occupies the modifier position of a NP ‘NP de N’, as in the following example, does not exist:

- (i) 他看了三個鐘頭的书  
*Ta kan-le san-ge zhong-tou-de shu*  
 3SG look-PERF 3 -CL hour - SUB book  
 He read for three hours.

## 2.2. The syntax of duration phrases

As far as their syntactic structure is concerned, in Classical and Han period Chinese duration phrases can be divided into those consisting of a state verb, usually the state verb *jiu* 久 ‘long’; phrases such as *zhong shen* 終身 ‘the whole life’<sup>6</sup>; and noun phrases consisting of a numeral and a noun such as *ri* 日 ‘day’, *nian* 年 ‘year’ etc. These noun phrases constitute the majority of duration phrases. In preverbal position they are analysable as (circumstantial) adverbials and in postverbal position they are analysable as circumstantial complements or as predicates of the sentence.<sup>7</sup>

As far as Modern Mandarin is concerned, the special feature of the postverbal duration phrase has been widely discussed in the linguistic literature particularly by Paul (1988, 2000), Ernst (1987) and Li (1987). Two different analyses have been proposed for the postverbal duration phrase in Modern Mandarin: 1. the duration phrase is included in the VP or 2. it is analysed as the predicate of the sentence. The

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This example is taken from Paul (1988, p. 143), example (3), where it is analysed as a case of restructuring but according to Paul (2000, p. 263) examples like these rather have to be labelled as a syntax-semantics mismatch. The only construction in Classical and Han period Chinese which may be comparable to the V-Dur-De-Obj-sentences is e.g. a construction of the kind found in *Lunyu*:

- (ii) 三年之喪，期已久矣 *Lunyu* 17.21/50/1  
*san nian zhi sang qi yi jiu yi*  
 three year ZHI mourning date already long FIN

“A mourning of three years is quite a long time.”

But in this case the duration phrase is found in a modifier head construction that functions as the topic of the sentence. A comparable construction with a noun modified by a duration phrase is found in *Shiji*:

- (iii) ...燒廬舍，持三日糧，... *SJ*: 7; 307  
*shao lu she chi san ri liang.*  
 burn hut house hold three day provisions

“... he burnt huts and houses and grabbed provisions for three days, ...”

Semantically these phrases are completely different from the duration phrases discussed here since they modify exclusively the noun they precede while duration phrases as in (i) qualify the situation expressed by the verb. For comparable cases in Modern Mandarin see Paul (1988, p. 153).

<sup>6</sup> According to Wang Haifen *et al.* (1996, p. 482), *zhong* 終 in this construction has to be analysed as a preposition, but Unger (1988, pp. 46f) does not exclude the possibility that the phrase *zhong* 終 N has to be analysed as a verb-object construction. In any case the whole phrase has to be analysed as a NP expressing duration.

<sup>7</sup> Paris (1988a, pp. 424f) assumes for Modern Mandarin that durational adverbs can be separated into two classes: “duration-dating adverbials”, which are found in preverbal position and “duration-measuring adverbials” which are found in postverbal position. A preverbal duration-dating adverbial can be substituted in a question by ‘when’ and a postverbal duration-measuring adverbial by ‘how long’. According to Paris, their position yields different grammatical functions (p. 425): “Chinese traditional grammar has codified the word order difference between dating and measuring adverbs as the opposition between *zhuangyu* and *buyu*. ... A time *zhuangyu* can be nominal or prepositional/postpositional, but a *buyu* can only be predicative: ...”. In contrast to what Paris assumes for Modern Mandarin, Classical and Han period Chinese have – apart from the temporal adverb *jiu* 久 ‘long, for a long time’, which also can be found in preverbal position in Modern Mandarin – genuine preverbal NP-duration phrases, which in a question can be substituted by ‘how long’.

second structure is labelled Sentential Subject Hypothesis (SSH).<sup>8</sup> According to their position, duration phrases are subject to particular semantic constraints. Regarding Classical and Han period Chinese – as far as NP-duration phrases are concerned – both syntactic analyses of the postverbal duration phrase proposed for Modern Mandarin are possible,<sup>9</sup> but without any additional marking, for example by adverbials, they are difficult to distinguish as the following example (4) shows:

- (4) 孟 嘗 君 置 傳 舍 十 日，孟 嘗 君 問  
*meng chang jun zhi zhuan she shi ri meng chang jun wen*  
 Meng chang prince place guest house ten day Meng chang jun ask  
 傳 舍 長 曰：「客 何 所 爲？」 *SJ: 75; 2359*  
*zhuan she zhang yue ke he suo wei*  
 guest house chief say guest what SUO do  
 “After Mengchang jun had put him up in a guest house for ten days, he asked the master of the guest house: ‘What is my guest doing?’”

In (4) no syntactic evidence argues for an inclusion of the duration phrase in the VP: [<sub>s</sub> NP [<sub>vp</sub> V NP NP<sub>dur</sub>]] or an analysis of the duration phrase as the predicate of the sentence: [<sub>s</sub> [<sub>s</sub>NP VP] [<sub>vp</sub> NP<sub>dur</sub>]].

In contrast to NP-duration phrases, postverbal duration phrases consisting of a state verb such as *jiu* 久 ‘long’ are confined to an analysis as predicate of the sentence: [<sub>s</sub> [<sub>s</sub>NP VP] [<sub>vp</sub> NP<sub>dur</sub>]] as in the following example:

- (5) 昭 王 曰：「吾 欲 親 魏 久 矣，而 魏 多  
*zhao wang yue wu yu qin wei jiu yi er wei duo*  
 Zhao king say I wish be-close Wei long FIN CON Wei much  
 變 之 國 也，寡 人 不 能 親。  
*bian zhi guo ye gua ren bu neng qin*  
 change ZHI state FIN lonely man NEG can close.  
 “The king of Zhao said: ‘It is for a long time now that I have wanted to get close to Wei, yet Wei is a fickle state and I am not able to get close to it.’”

In Classical and Han period Chinese adverbs are restricted to preverbal position and accordingly a postverbal state verb always has to be analysed as the predicate of the sentence.<sup>10</sup> As example (5) shows, during this period a predicative duration phrase can be followed by the final particle *yi* 矣, which is typical for the verbal sentence and accordingly supports a verbal reading, including a possible change of state of the

<sup>8</sup> According to Ernst (1987, p. 2), referring to Teng Shou-hsin (1975), and to Li (1987).

<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, e.g. for example by Unger (1988, p. 48), all postverbal duration phrases are analysed as predicates of their sentences. The same analysis is proposed by Gassmann (1997, p. 232) who also interprets all postverbal duration phrases as predicates of their sentences.

<sup>10</sup> This is not only true for those state verbs that indicate duration but for all state verbs, when in postverbal position.

predicate. This also holds true for NP-duration phrases, which attain a verbal reading when followed by *yi* 矣 as in (6):

- (6) 元 年，漢 興 已 六 十 餘 歲 矣，天 下  
 yuan nian han xing yi liu shi yu sui yi tian xia  
 first year Han rise already six ten more year FIN heaven below  
 乂 安，... SJ: 12; 452  
 yi an  
 regulate in-peace

“In the first year it was already more than sixty years past that Han had risen, the empire was governed and in peace, ...”<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3. The semantics of duration phrases

The duration phrases under consideration correspond to English PPs with *for*: *for an hour*, *for a year*, *for a while*, etc. which give a measure of time. They are usually restricted to atelic predicates, namely to states and to activities (according to Vendler’s (1967) categories) – while time span adverbials (PPs with *in*) are restricted to telic predicates.<sup>12</sup> But duration phrases can also qualify a telic predicate if it views a situation as perfective: with telic verbs they refer to the state which results from the preceding telic action. Accordingly, two different semantic functions of duration phrases can be distinguished: 1. they can measure the *situational duration* of a process or a state without focussing on its initial or final points (no change of state occurs), and 2. they can refer to the *duration of a resultant state*, meaning a state that results from the completion or termination of a telic event, a stative situation with the final point of the preceding situation as its initial point (a change of state has occurred).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Apparently NP-duration phrases cannot co-occur with the final *ye* 也, which views a situation as stative and does not include a possible change of state. But contrastively to NP-duration phrases, the state verb *jiu* 久 ‘long’, for instance, can very occasionally be followed by the final *ye* 也, particularly when negated by the negative *wei* 未, thus implying a stative interpretation of the predicate. NP-temporal phrases followed by the final *ye* 也 evidently have to be analysed as predicates indicating a point of time, as in (i) (see also note 1):

- (i) 是 歲 元 朔 六 年 也。 SJ: 123; 3167  
 shi sui yuan shuo liu nian ye  
 this year Yuan shuo six year FIN

“This year was the sixth year of the era Yuanshuo.”

<sup>12</sup> Verbs can be distinguished by the situation type they refer to, which according to Vendler (1967) can be divided into four different categories: states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. More recent analyses distinguish only three different categories: states, processes and events (Lyons 1977, p. 707, Filip 1999, p. 16) with states and processes being atelic and cumulative and events being telic and quantified respectively. Accomplishments and achievements are both subsumed under events.

<sup>13</sup> See also Paul (1988, p. 27). Concerning the verbs employed, Paul states: “As they are all non-durative, the temporal expressions *san-tian* ‘three days’, *yi-nian* ‘one year’ etc. cannot possibly indicate the duration of the event itself. The only interpretation possible is that *san-tian* ‘three

*Temporal schema of duration phrases:*

1. situational duration: I ..... F<sup>14</sup>  
 //

- (7) 南 登 琅 邪，大 樂 之，留 三 月 · SJ: 6; 244  
 nan deng lang ye da yao zhi liu san yue  
 south ascend Lang ye great enjoy OBJ stay three month

“In the south he ascended the Langye, he enjoyed it very much and stayed for three months.”

In example (7) the duration phrase refers to the situational duration of the state expressed by the state verb *liu* 留 ‘to stay, to dwell’.

2. duration of a resultant state: (I ...) F ....  
 (.....) //

- (8) 高 帝 已 定 天 下 七 年，立 劉 仲  
 gao di yi ding tian xia qi nian li liu zhong  
 Gao di already pacify heaven below seven year enthrone Liu Zhong  
 爲 代 王 · SJ: 106; 2821  
 wei dai wang  
 be Dai king

“When Gaodi had already pacified the empire for seven years he enthroned Liu Zhong as king of Dai.”

In example (8) the duration phrase refers to the state which results from the previous telic situation expressed by the telic verb *ding* 定 ‘to establish, to pacify’. The ‘resultant state’ reading of the verb is additionally supported by the adverb *yi* 已 ‘already’.

The first function is found mostly with activity and state verbs (sometimes with accomplishment verbs) and the second is found mostly with achievement verbs. According particularly to Ernst and Li, these two different functions are labelled as *event duration* and *duration since completion of an event (SCE)*. I would prefer to propose a more general categorisation of these phrases as indicating a *situational duration* or the *duration of a resultant state*.<sup>15</sup> According to their semantics, duration

days’, *yi-nian* ‘one year’ etc. refer to the lapse of time between the (beginning of the) action and the moment of utterance (or another point of time indicated).” In this function, the author analyses the duration phrases as predicates of the sentence. Syntactically, she supports this analysis by the fact that these duration phrases can be preceded by adverbs such as *yijing* 已經 ‘already’ and others or by *you* 有 ‘to have’ or its negation *mei* 沒 ‘not to have’.

<sup>14</sup> ‘I’ refers to the initial and ‘F’ to the final point of the situation while the slashes represent the different stages of the situation.

<sup>15</sup> In my framework of situation types the category *situation* is assumed to be the most general one, equally referring to each kind of activity or state, while the category *event* is restricted to telic situations and accordingly the label *event duration* contradicts an analysis of the situation as atelic / unbounded, namely as a process or state.

phrases differ syntactically: the first category indicating *situational duration* can be found either in pre- or in postverbal position while the second one, *duration of a resultant state*, is regularly found in *postverbal position* either as a postverbal complement or as the predicate of the sentence.<sup>16</sup> Similar to adverbials, duration phrases can enforce a particular situational interpretation of the VP or they can cause a shift of the situation type (Aktionsart) of the verb.

Since duration phrases refer to the duration of a situation – in contrast to point of time phrases, which serve to locate a situation at a particular point on the time axis – they accordingly do not serve to place the situation on the time axis; and the *period of time* marked by a duration phrase can be absolute or relative to the time of reference of the speaker.

As the following examples will show, the semantic distinction assumed for Modern Mandarin is valid for Classical and Han period Chinese as well, depending on the situation type (Aktionsart) of the verb employed and the position of the duration phrase.

### 3. Examples for duration phrases in Han period Chinese

#### 3.1. Preverbal duration phrases

Preverbal duration phrases are, as mentioned already, comparably rare. Some of them are state verbs such as *jiu* 久 ‘long’, some of them are NPs of the same structure as those that are usually found in postverbal position like *shu ri* 數日 ‘several days’ and some of them are phrases with *zhong* 終 ‘end, finish; to the end; whole (time)’. Most of them express the relative duration of the state or activity expressed by the verb without focussing on either the initial or the final point of the situation. As directly quantifying the situation expressed by the verb, they can only indicate the situational duration of the process or state referred to by the verb. In most of the instances the verb is negated<sup>17</sup> and in these cases the occurrence of the situation independent of the situation type – namely whether it is telic or not – is denied and accordingly the duration phrase does not refer to the duration of the situation itself but to the state which endures as long as the situation does not take place.

<sup>16</sup> See also Li (1987, p. 60). Ernst (1987) argues for the inclusion of these duration phrases into VP while Li argues “that duration phrases, no matter whether they are interpreted as SCE or Event duration, can be generated within a VP (the Complement Structure) or as a predicate (the Predicate Structure) (according to Ernst SententialSubjectHypothesis). The Predicate Structure and the Complement Structure must both be available to capture the ambiguity in the syntactic behavior of the duration phrase.” For two different analyses of postverbal duration phrases based on the semantics of the verb see also Paul (1988), particularly chap. 3.

<sup>17</sup> This is at least the case in the Han period text *Shiji*, in which preverbal duration phrases are on the whole quite rare.



## a) examples with preverbal NP [Numeral N] duration phrases

- (9) 三年哭之不反也, ... SJ: 23; 1169  
*san nian ku zhi bu fan ye*  
 three year lament OBJ NEG turn-back FIN

“For three years the mourning has to be observed without turning back, ...”

This example is one of the very rare examples<sup>18</sup> which seem to have an affirmative predicate – here with the process verb *ku* 哭 ‘lament’. But syntactically it is also possible that *fan* 反 ‘turn back’, which is negated, has to be analysed as the main predicate modified by the preverbal duration phrase and by the verb *ku* 哭. Accordingly, this example does not provide unambiguous evidence for the existence of preverbal NP duration phrases in affirmative sentences in Han period Chinese.

The following examples all show NP duration phrases in negative sentences.

- (10) 傳曰：「三年不爲禮，禮必廢；  
*zhuan yue san nian bu wei li li bi fei*  
 tradition say three year NEG make rites rites certainly abolish  
 三年不爲樂，樂必壞。」 SJ: 28; 1355  
*san nian bu wei yue yue bi huai*  
 three year NEG make music music certainly go-to-ruin

“The tradition says: ‘If one does not practise the rites for three years, the rites will certainly be rendered ineffective; and if one does not practise the music for three years, the music will certainly be ruined.’”<sup>19</sup>

In example (10) the duration phrase twice modifies a negated verb phrase with an atelic process (activity) verb *wei* 爲 ‘do’. In an affirmative predicate these VPs would refer to an activity while in the negated form the occurrence of this activity is denied and the duration of the state which obtains while the situation does not take place is expressed.

- (11) 卒至平城，爲匈奴所圍，七日  
*cu zhi ping cheng wei xiong nu suo wei qi ri*  
 hastily reach Ping cheng PASS Xiong nu PASS enclose seven day  
 不得食。 SJ: 56; 2057  
*bu de shi*  
 NEG get eat

“Hastily they reached Pingcheng, they were enclosed by the Xiongnu and for seven days they could not get anything to eat.”

In example (11) the duration phrase modifies the negated telic verb *de* 得 ‘to get’, which in the negated form loses its telic meaning and again refers to the state that obtains while the situation does not take place; and since the predicate thus gains a state meaning it can accordingly be modified by a duration phrase.

<sup>18</sup> It is the only one in the *Shiji* with a NP as a preverbal duration phrase.

<sup>19</sup> This instance is a slightly altered quotation from the *Lunyu* (17.21/50/1).

- (12) 孝 惠 見，問，迺 知 其 戚 夫 人，迺 大 哭，  
 xiao hui jian wen nai zhi qi qi fu ren nai da ku  
 Xiao Hui see ask then know his Qi Fu ren then great lament  
 因 病，歲 餘 不 能 起。  
 yin bing sui yu bu neng qi  
 thereupon ill year more NEG can rise

“After Xiaohui had seen her and inquired about her, he knew that it was lady Qi, then he cried a lot and became ill. Thereupon for more than a year he could not get up.”

In example (12) again a negated telic verb, the verb *qi* 起 ‘to rise’, is modified by a duration phrase, but in contrast to (11) the verb is additionally modified by the modal auxiliary verb *neng* 能 ‘can, be able to’ which itself – apart from the negation – shifts the situation type from telic to atelic.

- (13) 今 朕 夙 興 夜 寐，勤 勞 天 下，  
 jin zhen su xing ye mei qin lao tian xia  
 now I early-morning get-up night sleep industrious work heaven below  
 憂 苦 萬 民，爲 之 怛 惕 不  
 you ku wan min wei zhi da ti bu  
 worry suffer ten-thousand people for OBJ sorrowful anxious NEG  
 安，未 嘗 一 日 忘 於 心，...  
 an wei chang yi ri wang yu xin  
 content NEG once one day forget in heart

“Now, I have got up early in the morning and gone to bed late at night, I have worked hard for the empire and worried about all the people and for them I have been anxious and sorrowful and not happy and I have never forgotten it even for a single day.”

In contrast to the instances above, which all show the negation *bu* 不 ‘not’, in (13) the telic verb *wang* 忘 ‘to forget’ is negated by *wei* 未 which usually negates the achievement of a resultant state or a state in general. In combination with the temporal adverb *chang* 嘗 ‘once, in the past’ it refers mainly to a state that never was and will never be achieved and accordingly it does not block the employment of a duration phrase.

Occasionally, temporal noun phrases can be marked explicitly as adverbials subordinated under the matrix verb. This is extremely rare with duration phrases and with time-span adverbials but more common with adverbials indicating a point of time after a period of time. The next example, which semantically and syntactically is quite similar to (13), is one of the rare examples with a duration phrase marked explicitly as a subordinate by the subordinating connector *er* 而:

- (14) 燕 昭 王 怨 齊，未 嘗 一 日 而 忘  
 yan zhao wang yuan qi wei chang yi ri er wang  
 Yan Zhao king angry Qi NEG once one day CON forget  
 報 齊 也。  
 bao qi ye  
 pay-back Qi FIN

“... Yan Zhaowang resented Qi and he never, not even for a day, forgot to enact his revenge on Qi.”

In this example the duration phrase *yi ri* 一日 ‘one day’ is explicitly marked as a subordinate modifier of the matrix verb *wang* 忘.

*b) examples with other than NP [Numeral N] duration phrases*

- (15) 父 子 夫 婦 終 年 耕 芸， 所 得 不  
       *fu zi fu fu zhong nian geng yun suo de bu*  
       father son husband wife whole year plough weed SUO get NEG  
       足 以 自 存 · *HS: 99; 4111*  
       *zu yi zi cun*  
       suffice PREP self exist

“Father and son, husband and wife plough and weed the whole year long, yet what they get is not enough for survival.”

- (16) 今 子 兄 弟 二 十 餘 人， 子 又 居  
       *jin zi xiong di er shi yu ren zi you ju*  
       now son older-brother younger-brother two ten rest man son also rest  
       中， 不 甚 見 幸， 久 質 諸 侯 · *SJ: 85; 2506*  
       *zhong bu shen jian xing jiu zhi zhu hou*  
       middle NEG much PASS fortunate long be-hostage feudal lord

“Now, you have more than twenty brothers and additionally you are in the middle (you are not the oldest), you have not been favoured very much and have for a long time lived among the feudal lords.”

Examples (15) and (16) again are instances of a rare affirmative predicate modified by a preverbal duration phrase. Both verbs *geng yun* 耕芸 ‘plough weed’ and *zhi* 質 ‘be hostage’ are atelic. In example (15) the duration phrase consists of the NP *zhong nian* 終年 ‘whole year’, which structurally differs from the NP consisting of a numeral and an noun. In example (16) the VP is modified by the state verb *jiu* 久 ‘long’, which in preverbal position is analysable as an adverb; the verb is stative.

In the following example, a duration phrase structurally identical with that in (15) modifies a negated VP with the process verb *ting* 聽 ‘to listen’.

- (17) 文 子 聞 之， 終 身 不 聽 琴 瑟 · *SJ: 31; 1458*  
       *wen zi wen zhi zhong shen bu ting qin se*  
       Wen zi hear OBJ end body NEG listen zither harp

“After Wenzi had heard that, his whole life long he did not listen to a zither or harp ever again.”

Syntactically, preverbal duration phrases do not always need to be distinguished from preverbal temporal phrases indicating a point of time after a particular period of time ‘after X days, years, etc.’ or a semantically very similar time span adverbial ‘in

X days'.<sup>20</sup> As far as the following examples referring to a point of time are concerned, in all these cases the subject is missing and has to be assumed from the context, and accordingly a definite statement about the syntactic position of the temporal phrase cannot be made. But even without a subject, in the following examples the semantics of the verb alone do not allow an interpretation of the preverbal temporal NPs as duration phrases, since they are all telic, namely achievement verbs, and telic verbs only allow postverbal duration phrases referring to the duration of a resultant state. This is also true for the verb *wei* 爲 'to do, to make' or 'to become' in example (20) which is here employed in its telic reading 'to become'.<sup>21</sup>

- (18) 召 肥 義 與 議 天 下，五 日 而 畢 · SJ: 43; 1805  
*zhao fei yi yu yi tian xia wu ri er bi*  
 summon Fei Yi with discuss heaven below five day CON finish

"He summoned Fei Yi for a discussion on [the affairs of] the empire and only after five days were they finished."

- (19) 去 游 燕，歲 餘 而 後 得 見 · SJ: 69; 2243  
*qu you yan sui yu er hou de xian*  
 depart travel Yan year more CON after get appear

"He left and travelled to Yan and after more than a year he was allowed to present himself [at court]."

- (20) 自 卜 數 日 當 爲 侯，從 其 家  
*zi bu shu ri dang wei hou cong qi jia*  
 himself prognosticate several day should become marquis from his house  
 之 長 安 · SJ: 49; 1973  
*zhi chang an*  
 go Chang'an

"He prognosticated for himself that he would become marquis within a few days (after a few days) and from his house he went to Chang'an."

In all three examples, the verb is telic in an affirmative sentence, which blocks an analysis of the preverbal temporal NPs as duration phrases. In examples (18) and (19) the temporal NP is connected with the verb by the connector *er* 而 as in example (14), while in example (20) it immediately precedes the verb. Semantically, an analysis of the preverbal temporal NP in example (20) as a time-span adverbial is very likely but syntactically an analysis as a temporal adverbial indicating a point of time after a period of time as in examples (18) and (19) cannot be excluded. The subject is missing and accordingly a definite statement about the position of the adverbial cannot be made.

<sup>20</sup> See Paris (1988b) who includes these kinds of preverbal adverbials as well.

<sup>21</sup> In a predicate with an atelic reading 'to be' of *wei* 爲, the temporal NP certainly would have to be analysed as a preverbal duration phrase.

### 3.2. Postverbal duration phrases included in the VP [<sub>s</sub> NP [<sub>vp</sub> V NP NP<sub>dur</sub>]]

Most of the postverbal duration phrases are NPs. They are usually the last element of the VP and in transitive sentences they always follow the object. These phrases are the only ones that are liable to both interpretations, i.e. that they are either a complement of the verb or the predicate of the entire clause. Without further modification of the duration phrase by adverbs, negations etc. preceding either the verb or the duration phrase, the two different structures are not always easily distinguishable. If adverbs such as *yi* 已 (or *ji* 既) ‘already’ precede the verb phrase including the postverbal duration phrase they usually have scope over the entire VP and therefore support an interpretation of the duration phrase as a complement of the verb as in the following example:<sup>22</sup>

- (21) 戴 伯 元 年，周 宣 王 已 立  
*dai bo yuan nian zhou xuan wang yi li*  
 Dai bo first year Zhou Xuan king already enthrone  
 三 歲 · SJ: 35; 1571  
*san sui*  
 three year

“In the first year of Daibo, king Xuan of Zhou had already been on the throne for three years.”

If they immediately precede the duration phrase, they have scope only over the duration phrase and therefore enforce its interpretation as the predicate of the sentence as in example (22):

- (22) 元 年，漢 興 已 六 十 餘 歲 矣，天  
*yuan nian han xing yi liu shi yu sui yi tian*  
 first year Han rise already six ten more year FIN heaven  
 下 乂 安，... SJ: 12; 452  
*xia yi an*  
 below regulate in-peace

“In the first year it was already more than sixty years past that Han had risen, the empire was governed and in peace, ...”

As mentioned already, the semantic interpretation of the duration phrase correlates with the type of verb or verb phrase employed: with an atelic verb phrase it denotes situational duration and with a telic verb it usually denotes the duration of a re-

<sup>22</sup> The adverbs mentioned are the Classical and Han period counterparts of the adverb *yijing* 已經 ‘already’ in Modern Mandarin and the arguments given by Paul (1988, p. 28), Ernst (1987, pp. 7f) and Li (1987, pp. 34f) for an analysis of these arguments as c-commanding the whole VP including the duration phrase also hold true for a corresponding analysis of the duration phrase in Classical and Han period Chinese.

sultant state (since completion of an event).<sup>23</sup> Duration phrases following a verb (telic or atelic) marked by the aspectual adverbs *yi* 已 or *ji* 既 ‘already’ respectively, are most of the time analysable as referring to a resultant state as well. This is due to the fact that these adverbs focus on the final point of an action and the state resulting from it.<sup>24</sup> As far as accomplishment verbs are concerned, an interpretation of the duration phrase as denoting situational duration may under certain conditions be possible. Many of the duration phrases refer to the concrete period of time the situation takes.

### 3.2.1. Situational duration

- (23) 生 十 七 年， 有 士 五 人， ... SJ: 40; 1710  
*sheng shi qi nian you shi wu ren*  
 live ten seven year have noble five man

“When he had lived seventeen years / when he was seventeen years old, he [already] had five noble men [who helped him] ...”

In example (23), situational duration of a state is implied by the atelic verb *sheng* 生 ‘to live’, here employed as a state verb.

- (24) 居 匈 奴 中， 益 寬， 騫 因  
*ju xiong nu zhong yi kuan qian yin*  
 rest Xiong nu middle more-and-more treat-leniently Qian then  
 與 其 屬 亡 鄉 月 氏， 西 走 數 十 日  
*yu qi shu wang xiang yue zhi xi zou shu shi ri*  
 with his suite disappear turn-towards Yue zhi west flee several ten day  
 至 大 宛 · SJ: 123; 3158  
*zhi da yuan*  
 reach Da yuan

“After he had stayed [for a while] with the Xiongnu, he was treated more and more leniently, and then Qian escaped with his entourage in the direction of the Yuezhi, and they fled westwards for several ten days until they reached Dayuan.”

- (25) 貳 師 解 而 引 歸， 與 單 于 連 鬥<sup>25</sup>  
*er shi jie er yin gui yu chan yu lian dou*  
 Er shi dissolve CON retreat return with Chan yu repeatedly fight  
 十 餘 日 · HS: 94; 3778  
*shi yu ri*  
 ten more day

<sup>23</sup> See also Li (1987, p. 50): “Duration phrases occurring in verb phrases denoting non-completion will be interpreted as the duration of an on-going state / activity (Event duration). Duration phrases occurring in verb phrases denoting completion of events will be interpreted as duration since completion of events (SCE duration).”

<sup>24</sup> For analysis of these adverbs see Meisterernst (2002).

<sup>25</sup> In the text a more complicated variant of the character is found which I, however, cannot represent here.

“The lines of the Ershi general broke and he began to retreat home and he fought with the Chanyu again and again for more than ten days.”

In examples (24) and (25) the postverbal duration phrase refers to the situational duration of an activity expressed by the process verbs *zou* 走 ‘run’ and *dou* 鬥 ‘fight’. Since the duration phrase is usually the last element of the VP, the VP with *zhi* 至 in (24) has to be analysed as a second VP, although theoretically *zhi* 至 could also be analysed as a preposition.

The following examples show a shift in the interpretation of the predicate including the duration phrase:

- (26) 諸 侯 聞 之， 莫 敢 致 兵 於 齊  
       *zhu hou wen zhi mo gan zhi bing yu qi*  
       feudal lord hear OBJ no-one dare send soldier in Qi  
 二 十 餘 年 · SJ: 46; 1889  
       *san shi yu nian*  
       two ten rest year

“When the feudal lords heard that, no-one dared to send soldiers to Qi for more than twenty years.”

In this example the employment of the auxiliary verb *gan* 敢 ‘dare’ yields a stative meaning of the predicate and blocks the telic reading of the verb *zhi* 致 ‘cause to arrive, bring; send’, while in the following example, the duration phrase itself causes a shift in the situation type of the usually telic verb *gong* 攻 ‘to attack’ to an atelic activity (process) verb.

- (27) 「君 以 齊 爲 韓、魏 攻 楚 九 年， 取  
       *jun yi qi wei han wei gong chu jiu nian qu*  
       prince with Qi for Han Wei attack Chu nine year take  
 宛、葉 以 北... SJ: 75; 2356  
       *yuan she yi bei*  
       Yuan She CON north

“You, my lord, together with Qi and on behalf of Han and Wei attacked Chu for nine years and you took the north of Yuan and She ...”

### 3.2.2. Duration of a resultant state (since completion of an event)

- (28) 句 踐 自 會 稽 歸 七 年， 拊 循 其 士  
       *gou jian zi kuai ji gui qi nian fu xun qi shi*  
       Gou jian from Kuai ji return seven year comfort appease his official  
 民， 欲 用 以 報 吳 · SJ: 41; 1743  
       *min yu yong yi bao wu*  
       people wish employ for pay-back Wu

“After Goujian had returned from Kuaiji [and stayed] for seven years, he had comforted and appeased his people and wished to make use of them to take his revenge on Wu.”

In this sentence the duration phrase refers unambiguously to the duration of a resultant state. The verb is telic and can according to its syntactic environment be interpreted either as an accomplishment or an achievement verb.

- (29) 曲沃武公已即位三十七年矣，  
 qu wo wu gong yi ji wei san shi qi nian yi  
 Qu wo Wu gong already go-up-to position three ten seven year FIN  
 更號曰晉武公。  
 geng hao yue jin wu gong  
 change name say Jin Wu gong

SJ: 39; 1640

“Quwo Wugong had already taken up [and held] his position for thirty-seven years when he changed his name into Jin Wugong.”

Although in this sentence the duration phrase is followed by the final *yi* 矣, which can enforce an interpretation of the duration phrase as the predicate of the sentence, it has to be analysed according to the complement structure and not the predicate structure. The final correlates with the aspectual adverb *yi* 已 ‘already’ indicating a resultant state, and not with the duration phrase. The adverb *yi* 已 has scope not only over the verb but also over the whole VP including the duration phrase and consequently the duration phrase is part of the VP. In this example, the duration phrase refers to the state resulting from the previous action expressed by the telic achievement verb *ji* 即 ‘go up to’.

### 3.3. Postverbal duration phrases as predicates of the sentence [<sub>s</sub> [<sub>s</sub> NP VP] [<sub>vp</sub> NP<sub>dur</sub>]]

Many of the postverbal duration phrases consisting of a noun and a numeral are ambiguous with respect to their syntactic status and can be analysed according to either the complement or the predicate structure.

- (30) ...失期不還五十餘日。  
 shi qi bu huan wu shi yu ri  
 miss date NEG return wu shi yu ri

HS: 94; 3817

“... they missed the date and for more than fifty days they did not return.”

This is not the case if the duration phrase consists of the state verb *jiu* 久 ‘long’. Since there is no postverbal position for adverbials in Han period Chinese, it can – following a VP – only be interpreted as the predicate of a sentential subject, although the same verb functions as an adverbial in preverbal position. Sometimes, the predicative interpretation is supported by the employment of the final *yi* 矣. The predicative duration phrase – regardless of whether it consists of a NP or of the state verb *jiu* 久 – can be modified by different adverbs such as the resumptive *fan* 凡 ‘all, all in all’ or the adverb *yi* 已 ‘already, quite’ or by negations. Since these adverbs never follow the main predicate of the sentence and always have scope over the following phrase, their employment preceding the duration phrase provides some evidence for the predicative structure in Classical and Han period Chinese. All the dif-



ferent kinds of duration phrases mentioned already, i.e. the state verb *jiu* 久 ‘long’, NPs with *zhong* 終 ‘whole (time)’ and temporal NPs, can be employed as the predicate of a sentential subject or likewise of any nominal subject – including embedded sentences nominalised by *zhi* 之 or *qi* 其.

Examples for duration phrases with *jiu* 久:

- (31) 成 王 曰：「晉 公 子 賢 而 困  
*cheng wang yue jin gong zi xian er kun*  
 Cheng wang say Jin prince son worthy CON be-in-difficulty  
 於 外 久，從 者 皆 國 器，... *SJ: 39; 1659*  
*yu wai jiu cong zhe jie guo qi*  
 in outside long follow ZHE all state tool  
 “Chengwang said: ‘The prince of Jin is worthy and it is a long time since he was in difficulties abroad, those who followed him are all ‘tools of the state now’, ...”

- (32) 漢 王 默 然 良 久，曰：... *HS: 34; 1864*  
*han wang mo ran liang jiu yue*  
 Han wang mute SUF good long say  
 “The king of Han had had remained silent for a while and then he said: ...”

In both examples (31) and (32), the predicate refers to a stative situation and accordingly the predicative duration phrase expresses situational duration.

In the following examples, the duration phrases are additionally marked:

Duration phrases in postverbal position containing an immediately preceding adverbial such as the resumptive and topicalising *fan*<sup>26</sup> 凡 ‘all’, the adverb *yi* 已 ‘already, quite’ or a negation are explicitly marked as being the predicate of the sentence:

- (33) 與 曲 沃 通 年，即 位 凡 三 十 九  
*yu qu wo tong nian ji wei fan san shi jiu*  
 with Qu wo go-through year go-up-to position all three ten nine  
 年 而 卒。 *SJ: 39; 1640*  
*nian er zu*  
 year CON die  
 “With the years he spent in Quwo, he had occupied his position thirty-nine years in all when he died.”

- (34) 時 漢 興 已 七 八 十 年，離  
*shi han xing yi qi ba shi nian li*  
 time Han rise already seven eight ten year separate

<sup>26</sup> According to Wang Haifen *et al.* (1996, p. 79) *fan* 凡, is found adverbially before different kinds of predicates including NPs modified by numerals. See also Harbsmeier (1981, pp. 153f).

於 全 經，...  
 yu quan jing  
 at complete classic

HS: 36; 1969

“At this time it was already seventy or eighty years past that Han had risen, it was separated from the time when the Classics were still complete ...”

In examples (33) and (34) the duration phrase, a temporal NP, is immediately preceded by *fan* 凡 ‘all’ and *yi* 已 ‘already’ respectively. Since both verbs *ji* 即 ‘go up to’ and *xing* 興 ‘rise’ are telic, the duration phrase refers to a resultant state.

(35) 今 平 定 未 久，人 民 創 艾  
 jin ping ding wei jiu ren min chuang yi  
 now peace settle NEG long man people fearful-fearful  
 戰 鬥，...  
 zhan dou  
 battle fight

HS: 94; 3807

“Now it is not long ago that the peace was settled, and the people are afraid to fight, ...”

In example (35) the predicative duration phrase is preceded by the negation *wei* 未; it refers to the state resulting from the previous telic action and has accordingly to be interpreted as the duration of a resultant state.

In the following example, the predicate of the sentence, a duration phrase with *jiu* 久 ‘long’, is topicalised and raised to sentence-initial position. This is only possible if the duration phrase has the status of a constituent:

(36) 久 矣 吾 不 復 夢 見 周 公。  
 jiu yi wu bu fu meng jian zhou gong  
 long FIN I NEG again dream meet Zhou gong

Lunyu: 7.5/15/1

“It’s a long time now that I have not seen Zhou gong in my dreams again.”

The verb *jian* 見 ‘see’ which may be considered as the main verb, can be analysed as a state verb ‘see’ or a telic verb ‘meet’. In combination with *fu* 復 ‘again, another time’ the second reading, which yields an interpretation of the predicate as referring to the duration of a resultant state, seems to be more likely. This construction implies a particular rhetorical accentuation and is consequently not very frequent, and since I did not find any instances of it either in the *Shiji* or in the *Han shu*, I can only provide the following example as one from a Han period text:

(37) ... 久 矣 夷 狄 之 爲 患 也。  
 jiu yi yi di zhi wei huan ye  
 long FIN barbarian barbarian ZHI make trouble FIN

HS: 94; 3830

“... and it is a long time now that the Yi- and Di-barbarians have been causing trouble.”

In this example, the sentential subject is embedded by *zhi* 之 and has thus become a nominal one.

### 3. Conclusion

The employment of duration phrases is confined to atelic, namely activity or state predicates. State predicates can be subdivided into those referring to a genuine state and those referring to a resultant state. In the first case, the duration phrase expresses *situational duration* and, in the second case, it expresses the *duration of the resultant state* (SCE duration). With activity verbs, the duration phrases always express situational duration. If the situation type (Aktionsart) of the verb does not conform to these constraints, namely if the verb is telic, the duration phrase causes a shift in the situation type (Aktionsart) of the verb. Furthermore, adverbs, modal auxiliary verbs and negations can be employed to change the situation type (Aktionsart) of the verb. Syntactically, duration phrases referring to *situational duration* can be found either in *pre- or in postverbal position*. In contrast to Modern Mandarin – as described by Li<sup>27</sup> – in Classical and Han period texts preverbal duration phrases are not confined to negative sentences even though in Han period Chinese most of the preverbal duration phrases already precede a negated verb.<sup>28</sup> Duration phrases referring to the *duration of a resultant state* are confined to the *postverbal position*, which reflects the logical order of the situations. According to their syntactic structure both situational duration and resultant state duration phrases can be analysed as verbal complements or as predicates of their sentences. NP-duration phrases can be analysed according either to the complement or to the predicate structure – both more than one post-verbal element and NP predicates are allowed in Classical and Han period Chinese – while duration phrases consisting of a state verb are confined to an analysis according to the predicate structure.

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<sup>27</sup> Li (1987, p. 56) "... we show that the property of duration phrases being indefinite NPs accounts for the fact that a duration phrase occurs preverbally only when the sentence is in the negative form."

<sup>28</sup> But as can be seen in Unger (1988, p. 46) in Classical Chinese affirmative verbs preceded by a duration phrase are not particularly rare.

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