

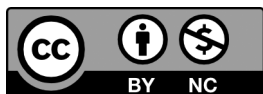
The Origin and Grammaticalization of the Frequency Adverb *Jin* (尽) in Chinese Dialects

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Abstract: The frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) is widely distributed in Mandarin Dialects as well as in Jin, Xiang, Gan, Wu, and Hakka dialects, indicating high-frequency repetition of actions and long-term continuation of states and often carries strong negative evaluative colors. It is derived from the word *Jin* (儘) with the *Jingmu* (精母 , voiceless initial consonant) and *Shangsheng* (上声) tone in the Tang Dynasty (7th-10th c.). Its semantic and phonetic evolution led to a new writing form, *Jin* (儘)'s creation on the basis of *Jin* (盡), which was both simplified to the vulgar form *Jin* (尽) in contemporary written language. In the Middle Ancient Chinese (5th-12thc.), the verb *Jin* (尽) developed a causative meaning in the pivotal structure “*Jin* (尽) +N+VP” and gradually evolved along the semantic continuum of “cause > permit > allow > connive”. When the noun (N) in that structure was omitted, the *Jin* (尽) is adjacent to the VP and gradually grammaticalized from a verb into a modal adverb and then frequency adverb. The grammaticalization path of *Jin* (尽) can be summarized as: “verb with the meaning ‘to connive’ > modal adverb > frequency adverb”.

Keywords: Chinese Dialects; Frequency Adverb; *Jin* (尽); Etymology; Grammaticalization



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1 Introduction

The frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) is widely distributed in contemporary Chinese dialects, semantically indicating high-frequency repetition of actions and long-term continuation of states and often carries strong negative evaluative colors in pragmatics, which is equivalent to adverbs such as *Zongshi* (总是 , always) and *Yizhi* (一直 , continuously) in *Putonghua* (普通话). Although there has been much research on this adverb, scholars have not yet reached a consistent consensus on its character form and grammaticalization path. There are two main viewpoints regarding its etymology and grammaticalization. One holds that the word is written as *Jin* (紧), which is derived from the grammaticalization of the adjective *Jin* (紧 , tight), as seen in the works of Zhang (2007: 342-344), Chen (2014), Luo (2021); Another perspective suggests that this word is written as *Jin* (尽), *Jin* (儘) or *Jin* (儘), derived from the verb *Jin* (尽)

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meaning “to connive”, and its grammaticalization occurs in the structure “*Jin* (尽) [*Zhe* (着)] + N + VP” where the noun (N) is omitted, causing the verb *Jin* (尽) to be reanalyzed as an adverb when placed before the VP, as seen in the works of Gao (2023) and Pi (2024). We endorse the latter perspective; however, this view frames the grammaticalization path as “the verb meaning ‘to connive’ > frequency adverb”, which overlooks the transitional stage of modal adverb between the two to a certain extent. This means that there is still room for further discussion on the grammaticalization path of the frequency adverb *Jin* (尽). This article will investigate the etymology and grammaticalization path of the frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) from the perspective of synchronic distribution and diachronic evolution, and propose the following grammaticalization path: “verb with the meaning ‘to connive’ > modal adverb > frequency adverb”.

2 Geographical Distribution of the Frequency Adverb *Jin* (尽) in Contemporary Chinese Dialects

The frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) is widely distributed across contemporary Chinese dialects. This part refers to the dialect divisions in the *Language Atlas of China—The Volume of Chinese Dialects* (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, et al., 2012). It investigates the usages and geographical distribution of *Jin* (尽) through various dialect literature. The following two tables give a concise overview of *Jin* (尽), including its distribution, phonetic characteristics in Mandarin and non-Mandarin regions, and whether “*Jin* (尽) + VP” can be reduplicated.

Table 1 Geographical Distribution and Phonetic Forms of the Frequency Adverb *Jin* (尽) in Mandarin Dialects

Subdialects	Location	pronunciation		Reduplicative construction of “ <i>Jin</i> (尽) +VP”
		Monosyllable	Disyllable	
Northeastern Mandarin	Shenyang, Liaoning	—	[teĩn ²¹⁴ tɕʰ ⁰]	√
Beijing Mandarin	Beijing	—	[teĩn ²¹³ tɕ ⁰]	
Jilu Mandarin	Jinan, Shandong	—	[teĩc ²¹³ tɕ ⁰]	
Jiaoliao Mandarin	Yishui, Shandong	—	[tɕ ^{hiŋ} 53 tɕ ⁰]	
Lanyin Mandarin	Urumqi, Xinjiang	[teĩn ²¹³]	—	
Jianghuai Mandarin	Nanjing, Jiangsu	[tsĩn ¹¹]	—	√
Central Plains Mandarin	Xuzhou, Jiangsu	[teĩc ⁴⁵]	—	
Southwestern Mandarin	Chengdu, Sichuan	[teĩn ⁵³]	[tɕ ⁵³ tau ⁰]	√

Note: The term “reproducibility” refers to the adverb *Jin* (尽), which can be reduplicated as “*Jin* (尽) VP *Jin* (尽) VP” when modifying verbs. These findings come from dialect literature. A missing checkmark does not mean the reduplication is ungrammatical, but that it is unattested in recorded literature. The same principle applies to the following table.

Table 2 Geographical Distribution and Phonetic Forms of the Frequency Adverb *Jin* (尽) in non-Mandarin dialects

Dialects	Location	Pronunciation		Reduplicative construction of “ <i>Jin</i> (尽) +VP”
		Monosyllable	Disyllable	
Jin dialect	Shenmu, Shaanxi	[teĩx ²¹³]	—	
	Datong, Shanxi	[teĩc ⁵⁴]	—	
	Zhangjiakou, Hebei	[teĩj ⁵⁵]	—	
Xiang dialect	Changsha, Hunan	[tsĩn ³¹]	—	
	Yiyang, Hunan	[teĩn ³¹]	—	
	Loudi, Hunan	—	[tsĩn ⁴¹ te ⁰]	
	Shaoyang, Hunan	—	[teĩn ⁴² tau ⁰]	√
	Hengyang, Hunan	[teĩn ³³]	[teĩn ³³ ta ³³]	√

Continued

Dialects	Location	Pronunciation		Reduplicative construction of “ <i>Jin</i> (尽) +VP”
		Monosyllable	Disyllable	
Gan dialect	Nanchang, Jiangxi	[tɕin ²¹³]	—	√
	Pingxiang, Jiangxi	[tɕiŋ ³⁵]	—	
	Yingtian (Guixi), Jiangxi	[tɕin ⁴⁵]	—	√
	Yueyang, Hunan	[tɕin ⁴⁵]	[tɕin ⁴⁵ tau ⁰]	
	Xianning, Hubei	[tɕiən ⁴²]	—	
Wu dialect	Suzhou, Jiangsu	—	[zin ²¹ zɿ ⁴⁴]	
	Xuancheng, Anhui	[tɕiən ²¹³]	—	√
Hakka dialect	Shanwei (Luhe), Guangdong	[tsʰin ³¹]	—	√
	Longyan (Shanghang), Fujian	[tɕiəŋ ³¹]	—	√
	Ruijin, Jiangxi	[tɕin ²¹]	—	
	Ganzhou (Ganxian), Jiangxi	[tɕieŋ ⁴²]	—	√

The tables above show a wide, continuous pattern in the use of *Jin* (尽) across dialects. It is found in nearly all Chinese dialects, except Min and Yue, including Mandarin, Jin, Xiang, Gan, Wu, and Hakka. Notably, *Jin* (尽) is most common in Mandarin areas, from Northeast Mandarin and Beijing in the north, through Central Plains and Jianghuai regions, to Southwest Mandarin in the south. It is also present in southern dialects like Xiang, Gan, Wu, and Hakka, creating a distribution pattern centered on Mandarin with connections to neighboring dialects.

Phonetically, the frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) in contemporary Chinese dialects has both monosyllabic and disyllabic forms of “*Jin* (尽) + suffix [such as *Zhe* (着), *Dao* (倒), *De* (得)]”, and the disyllabic form is more common in Mandarin dialects. The initial consonant of *Jin* (尽) is mostly an alveolo-palatal affricate [tɕ], and there are also a few dialects where it is an alveolo-palatal affricate [ts] or [tsʰ]. Its vowels often have nasal endings [-n -ŋ] or are nasalized, and the tones are all *Shangsheng* (上声) tones.

Grammatically, it exhibits a high degree of cross-dialectal consistency in its syntactic function. It is used as an adverbial component to modify verbs in all dialects, and it expresses the high-frequency repetition of actions and the long duration of a state in grammar. It can modify not only continuous verbs, such as 别尽着坐在这 (*Béi jǐn zhe zuò zài zhè*, Don't keep sitting here), but also instantaneous verbs, such as 你尽打他做什么 (*Nǐ jǐn dǎ tā zuò shén me*, Why did you keep hitting him) in syntactic combination. Pragmatically, the frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) carries a strong subjective evaluative color, and is often used in negative contexts to express the speaker's subjective dissatisfaction with a certain event, reflecting negative emotional attitudes such as urging and complaining. Morphologically, the “*Jin* (尽) +VP” structure can be reduplicated to form the “*Jin* (尽)VP *Jin* (尽) VP” construction, such as 他尽讲尽讲, 我都烦死了 (*Tā jǐn jiǎng jǐn jiǎng, wǒ dōu fán sǐ le*, He keeps talking and talking, and I'm so annoyed), which further strengthens the subjective negative emotions expressed.

In conclusion, the frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) is a commonly used word in Chinese dialects, used to express high-frequency repetitions of actions or prolonged duration of a state, with a negative evaluative attitude from the speaker. The phrase “*Jin* (尽) +VP” can also be reduplicated to express strong negative evaluation.

3 The Origin of the Frequency Adverb *Jin* (尽)

3.1 Phonetic Divergence of *Jin* (尽) Driven by Semantic Differentiation

In the *Guangyun* (Chen & Qiu, 2011: 278) in the Song dynasty (11th c.), the *Jin* (尽) is recorded with two pronunciations: the first is the *Fanqie* (反切) spelling of *Cirenqie* (慈忍切), which belongs to the *Shangsheng* (上声) tone, *Congmu* (从母 , voiced initial consonant) and *Zhen Rhyme* (轸韵). It is glossed as “to finish; to end”. The second is spelled as *Jirenqie* (即忍切), also belongs to the *Shangsheng* (上声) tone and *Zhen Rhyme* (轸韵), but with the *Jingmu* (精母 , voiceless initial consonant). This reading is illustrated by the sentence from the *Liji* (《礼记》): 虚坐尽前 (*Xū zuò jǐn qián*, When not eating, one sits to the utmost front). The Annotator annotated it as 虚坐尽后, 食坐尽前 (*Xū zuò jǐn hòu, shí zuò jǐn qián*, When dining, one tries to sit in the front as much as possible, otherwise sit in the back as much as possible). Regarding this sentence, the Ming dynasty (17th c.) dictionary *ZhengZitong* (Zhang, 1996: 726) explains the 食坐 (*shí zuò*) as a sitting posture for dining, 尽前 *jǐn qián* is for fear of soiling the mat. The Qing (18th c.) scholar Liu Qi, in his *Zhuzi Bianlüe* (Liu, 1954: 153), comments that it means to reach the extreme front, or to reach the extreme rear, leaving no extra space. Therefore, the meaning of *Jin* (尽) in this sentence is “to cause something/ someone to reach the limit”, which differs semantically from the homograph glossed as “to finish; to end”, though the two meanings are related.

Based on the usages in ancient Chinese, the *Jin* (尽 , to end) functions as an intransitive verb and frequently served as the predicate in sentences during the pre-Qin period (8th-3rd c. BC). For example:

即治乱之刑如恐不胜, 而奸尚不尽。(《韩非子·难二》, *Han Feizi* Annotation Group, 1982: 518)

Jí zhì luàn zhī xíng rú kǒng bú shèng, ér jiān shàng bú jìn. (hán fēi zǐ: nán èr)

(Although punishment may not be sufficient to deal with chaos, evildoers cannot be completely eradicated.)

货尽而后知不足, 是不知量也。(《管子·乘马第五》, Li, & Liang, 2004: 89)

Huò jìn ér hòu zhī bù zú, shì bù zhī liàng yě. (guǎn zǐ: chéng mǎ dì wǔ)

(Stock shortages are realized only after goods are exhausted, due to a poor understanding of the appropriate amount.)

During the same period, the verb *Jin* (尽 , to end) also began to be used in a causative sense, forming the verb-object structure “*Jin* (尽) +NP”. In this usage, *Jin* (尽) functions as a transitive verb, meaning “to cause something/ someone to reach the limit”. For example:

悲仁人之尽节兮, 反为小人之所贼。(《楚辞·惜誓》, Liu, 2010: 244)

Bēi rén rén zhī jìn jié xī, fǎn wéi xiǎo rén zhī suǒ zéi. (chǔ cí: xī shì)

(It is a pity that those men with lofty aspirations who adhere to the integrity of loyalty are instead persecuted by villains.)

缘督以为经, 可以保身, 可以全生, 可以养亲, 可以尽年。(《庄子·养生主》, Zhuang, 2010: 44)

Yuán dū yǐ wéi jīng, kě yǐ bǎo shēn, kě yǐ quán shēng, kě yǐ yǎng qīn, kě yǐ jìn nián. (zhuāng zǐ: yǎng shēng zhǔ)

(Following the natural meridian as a common law, a person can take good care of his health, his life, and his family members, and enjoy longevity.)

We hold the opinion that the transitive usage of *Jin* (尽) developed from its intransitive usage of “to end”. This semantic divergence further led to a phonetic split. According to Hong (2003: 331), most intransitive verbs and their cognate causative counterparts exhibited distinct pronunciations in Old Chinese, commonly manifested as a voiced and voiceless contrast in the initial consonants—a phenomenon known as Voiceless-voiced Alternation (清浊别义). This phenomenon is documented in Lu Deming’s *Jingdian Shiwen* (《经典释文》) in the Tang dynasty (6th c.). Qi (2014) holds that, as a homograph during the medieval Chinese period (5th-12th c.), the character *Jin* (尽) recorded two different words, distinguished by the voicing of the initial consonant in their pronunciation. The phonetic form with the *Congmu* (从母) represented the intransitive verb meaning “to be finished” or “to end”. In contrast, the other one with the *Jingmu* (精母) represented the transitive verb meaning “to cause sth./sb. to reach the limit”.

Furthermore, the *Shangsheng* (上声) tone underwent a subsequent split development in the Tang and Song periods (7th-13th c.). The *Shangsheng* (上声) tone with a voiced initial consonant shifted to the *Qusheng* (去声) tone, while those with a voiceless initial consonant retained the *Shangsheng* (上声) tone. Consequently, the homomorph *Jin* (尽), originally different in the initial consonants, has further developed different tones. This tonal differentiation is documented in the appendix *Jinshi Dongjing Ziyin* (经史动静字音) of *Jingshizhengyin Qieyun Zhinan* (《经史正音切韵指南》) written by scholar Liu (1981: 38) in the Yuan dynasty (14th c.). He noted that when *Jin* (尽) expresses the meaning of “extreme”, it is pronounced *Qusheng* (去声) tone; when it signifies “making someone reach extreme”, it is pronounced *Shangsheng* (上声) tone. This annotation material clarifies that the homograph *Jin* (尽) uses tones to distinguish different meanings.

3.2 Creating a New Character *Jin* (儘 / 儘) Driven by Semantic and Phonetic Differentiation

In the historical development of Chinese vocabulary, it is quite common that the semantic and phonetic evolution of a word would lead to a new character’s creation based on the word’s original character. The word *Jin* (尽) is a good example. When quoting the scholar Liu’s opinion about *Jin* (尽), Chen, a scholar in the Ming dynasty (16th c.), insisted that the character *Jin* (儘) is a variant of *Jin* (盡 / 尽) in folk writings (Chen, D., 2011: 121). Similarly, Wang (2000: 51) also regarded *Jin* (儘) as a later form of *Jin* (盡 / 尽) in historical development. In the Late Tang dynasty (9th-10th c.), we can find a large number of characters *Jin* (盡 / 尽) added a side component *Ren* (亻), constituting the character *Jin* (儘), which recorded the word pronounced *Shangsheng* (上声) tone and meaning “making someone or something to reach an extreme extent”. For example:

舍利弗林间宴座，瞰被轻呵。目犍连里巷谈经，儘遭摧挫。(《敦煌变文集·维摩诘经讲经文》，Wang, 1957: 592)

Shè lì fú lín jiān yàn zuò, shà bèi qīng hē. Mù qián lián lǐ xiàng tán jīng, jīn zāo cuī cuò. (dūn huáng biàn wén jí: wéi mó jié jīng jiǎng jīng wén)

(Sariputra was suddenly gently scolded by someone else while sitting peacefully in the forest. Maudgalyayana was completely frustrated while preaching the scriptures in the streets and alleys.)

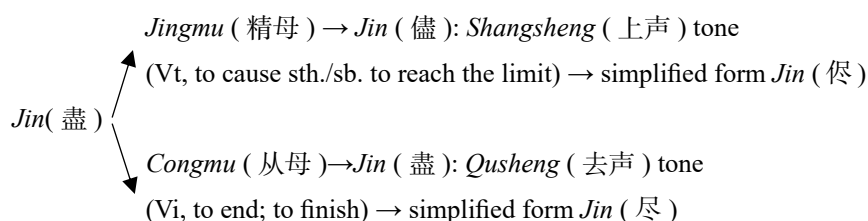
盖此义理儘广大无穷尽，今人恁地说，亦未为是。（《朱子语类》卷一一三，Li, 1988: 2743）

Gài cǐ yì lǐ jǐn guǎng dà wú qióng jìn, jīn rén nèn dì shuō, yì wèi wéi shì. (zhū zǐ yǔ lèi: juàn yī yī sān)

(Perhaps its moral principle is vast and endless, and now it may not be correct for people to explain it this way.)

During the Song and Yuan dynasties (10th-14th c.), a simplified form of *Jin* (𪛗), the vulgar variant of *Jin* (儘), emerged, which was derived by analogy from the simplified vulgar form of *Jin* (𪛗) of the original character *Jin* (儘). After this period, the frequency of using the simplified vulgar font *Jin* (𪛗) for the character *Jin* (儘) is gradually increased. Examples of *Jin* (𪛗) can be found in seven works included in the Catalog of Vulgar Characters from the Song and Yuan Dynasties Onwards (Liu & Li, 1957: 31, 83).

In summary, the correspondences between the writing form, pronunciation, and meaning of *Jin* (𪛗 / 盡 / 儘) are illustrated in the following diagram:



Let us turn around and take a look at the frequency adverb *Jin* (𪛗) in contemporary Chinese dialects presented in the first section. It is uniformly pronounced as the *Shangsheng* (上声) tone, phonetically consistent with the word *Jin* (儘) mentioned above. We can conclude that the word *Jin* (儘) in ancient Chinese is the etymological word of the frequency adverb in contemporary Chinese dialects. Therefore, when we discuss the grammaticalization of the frequency adverb *Jin* (𪛗) in the following text, it refers to the etymological word *Jin* (儘). We still use the simplified Chinese character *Jin* (𪛗) as long as it doesn't cause any misunderstandings in the following text, for both *Jin* (盡) and *Jin* (儘) in ancient Chinese are simplified to *Jin* (𪛗) in contemporary writing language.

4 Grammaticalization of the Verb *Jin* (𪛗) with the Meaning “to connive”

Current academic research on the grammaticalization of the frequency adverb *Jin* (𪛗) primarily involves two etymological explanations. Some scholars, such as Zhang (2007: 342-344) and Chen (2014), propose that this adverb originates from the grammaticalization of the adjective *Jin* (紧 , tight), and associate it with the auxiliary particle *Jin* (紧) that follows verbs to indicate the continuous aspect. However, the particle *Jin* (紧) is grammaticalized from the adjective *Jin* (紧), which functioned as a complement in the predicate-complement structures in the Middle Ancient Chinese (5th-12th c.). It differs significantly from adverbs positioned before verbs in both syntactic placement and evolutionary mechanisms. In addition, the grammaticalization of continuous aspect markers into adverbs is relatively rare in Chinese, such as *Zhe* (着) in *Putonghua* (普通话), *Zhu* (住) in Guangzhou Yue dialect, and *Wen* (稳) in Liuzhou South-western Mandarin dialect, which have been reduced to continuous particles but have not developed the usage of pre-verbal homonym adverbs. Therefore, we argue that the *Jin* (紧) found in dialect literature is merely

a homonymy, and the etymology of this frequency adverb should be *Jin* (儘) [later written as *Jin* (尽)], which means “to cause sth./sb. to reach the limit”. Based on this premise, the following section will systematically outline its grammaticalization path.

4.1 Emergence of the Verb *Jin* (尽) with the Meaning “to connive”

During the Wei, Jin, and early Tang dynasties (3rd-8th c.), the frequency of using the transitive verb *Jin* (尽), which means “to cause sth./sb. to reach the limit”, increased, and it began to appear in the serial verb construction “*Jin* (尽) + NP + VP”. For example:

王更以此赏主人，乃留坐，尽欢而去。(《世说新语·简傲》，Liu, 2011: 769–770)

Wáng gèng yǐ cǐ shǎng zhǔ rén, nǎi liú zuò, jìn huān ér qù.

(Wang Ziyou appreciated the host for this and stayed and sat down while the guest and host enjoyed themselves before leaving.)

正昔在成都，颠沛守义，不违忠节，及见受用，尽心干事，有治理之绩，其以正为巴西太守。(《三国志·蜀书十二》，Chen, S., 2011: 867)

Zhèng xī zài chéng dū, diān pèi shǒu yì, bù wéi zhōng jié, jí jiàn shòu yòng, jìn xīn gàn shì, yǒu zhì lǐ zhī jì, qí yǐ zhèng wéi bā xī tài shǒu. (sān guó zhì: shǔ shū shí èr)

(When Xi Zheng was in Chengdu, he went through ups and downs, but he upheld his moral principles and did not violate his loyalty. When he was appointed, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to his work and achieved success in governing this area. He promoted Xi Zheng as the Chief Executive of Bashu.)

In the examples above, the VP denotes an action performed with the state or manner of “causing NP to reach its limit”. In example 尽欢而去 (*jìn huān ér qù*) means to depart only when one’s joy has reached its limit, while example 尽心干事 (*jìn xīn gàn shì*) means to devote oneself wholeheartedly to a task.

The noun (N) following the verb *Jin* (尽) is typically inanimate in this structure. However, when an animate noun (particularly one with a human referent) occupies the N position, the entire structure may have multiple interpretations. For example:

宝闻魏有内难，乃尽众出距，步卒十二万，骑三万七千，次于曲阳柏津。(《晋书·载记第二十四》，Fang, et al., 1974: 3094)

Bǎo wén wèi yǒu nèi nán, nǎi jìn zhòng chū jù bùzú shí èr wàn, jì sān wàn qī qiān, cì yú qǔ yáng bǎi jīn. (jìn shū: zǎi jì dì èr shí sì)

(Murong Bao heard that there was a domestic crisis in the state of Wei, so he dispatched all his troops to resist, with 120000 infantry and 37000 cavalry, temporarily stationed at Baijin, Quyang.)

Matthias & Jin (2023: 238) propose that the extent of life-like of the referent of a noun can be measured by the Animacy Hierarchy, and humans occupy the highest level in this hierarchy, being volitional actors inherently possessing agentivity. When the noun (N) in above example is an animate noun referring to humans, there may be two semantic

interpretations in this case. One is to use up (exhaust) all the soldiers (troops) to fight, the other is not simply explained as using all the something to achieve a certain goal, but tends to understand it as the initiator of the latter action, indicating “sending or commanding all soldiers to fight”. With this second reading, the entire structure was reanalyzed from “[*Jin* (尽) +N]+VP” structure where “[*Jin* (尽) +N]” is a verb-object phrase to a causative pivotal construction “[*Jin* (尽) +N] [(N+) VP]” where N is both the object of *Jin* (尽) and the subject of VP. In this context, the verb *Jin* (尽) acquires the semantic feature of [+causative], meaning “to assign or make someone do something to the greatest extent possible”.

The emergence of the “[*Jin* (尽) +N]+VP” structure laid the syntactic foundation for the subsequent semantic evolution of *Jin* (尽), among which the strength of the subject’s control over the object N is an important factor affecting its syntactic evolution. During the stage where *Jin* (尽) expressed a causation, the subject of *Jin* (尽) maintained strong control over object N, who was required to unconditionally obey the subject’s demands to perform a certain action VP. When the focus of the context shifted from “the subject’s forceful command” to “the subject actively creates conditions or gives priority”, the meaning of *Jin* (尽) shifted from the strong semantic feature of [+causative] to a weakened feature of [+permit]. For example:

每西域商货至，又先尽贫者市之。（《周书·列传第二十九》，Linghu, et al., 1974: 661）

Měi xīyù shāng dài zhì, yòu xiān jǐn pín zhě shì zhī. (zhōu shū: liè zhuàn dì èr shí jiǔ)

(Whenever merchants from the Western Regions arrived with their goods, the authorities would give priority to the poor to purchase.)

珮委腰无力，冠欹发不胜。鸾台龙尾道，合尽少年登。（白居易《行香归》，Editorial Department of Zhonghua Book Company, 1999: 5116）

Pèi wěi yāo wú lì, guān qī fà bú shèng. Luán tái long wěi dào, hé jǐn shào nián dēng. (bái jū yì, xíng xiāng guī)

(The waist lacks the strength to wear a jade pendant, and the hair is not enough to wear a hairpin. Phoenix Terrace and the path to power should let the youth climb it.)

Although the phrase 先尽贫者市之 (*xiān jǐn pínzhě shì zhī*, Giving priority to the poor for purchasing) is still a pivotal construction, the purpose of the subject expressed in the context is not a mandatory command, but an active permission. The adverb 先 (*xiān*, firstly) in the sentence also clarifies that this command or causation is essentially the subject’s active priority permission, that is, “to allow someone to do something to the fullest extent”. In this context, the causative meaning of *Jin* (尽) is weakened, and its [+permissive] sense is highlighted. The expression in above example 腰无力 (*yāo wú lì*, lacking strength in the waist) and 发不胜 (*fà bú shèng*, hair is not enough to wear a hairpin) indicate that the speaker deeply realizes that he is too old, and the career of high-ranking officials should be given to the youth to climb and pursue. Here, the verb *Jin* (尽) can only be interpreted as “to permit”.

Xu (2003: 230) has proposed that verbs with a causative meaning exhibit an evolutionary continuum: “command > cause > permit > allow > connive”, where the degree of coercion gradually weakens from left to right. The semantic core of “allow” is that someone voluntarily gives permission or leaves space without interference. When the control of the subject in the context further weakens, and it expresses passive acceptance and unrestricted indulgence of someone to do something, the meaning of “connive” arises. After the Mid-Tang dynasty (8th-9th c.), the verb *Jin* (尽) in the “[*Jin* (尽)

+N+VP” structure further weakened from the meaning of “permission” to that of “connivance”. For example:

顾我镜中悲白发，尽君花下醉青春。(白居易《病中答招饮者》，Editorial Department of Zhonghua Book Company, 1999: 4883)

Gù wǒ jìng zhōng bēi bái fà, jìn jūn huā xià zuì qīng chūn. (bái jū yì, bìng zhōng dá zhāo yǐn zhě)

(I can only gaze at my graying hair in the mirror and grieve in vain. May you revel under blooming flowers and savor your youth to the fullest.)

争及此花檐户下，任人采弄尽人看。(白居易《题山石榴花》，Editorial Department of Zhonghua Book Company, 1999: 4895)

Zhēng jí cǐ huā yán hù xià, rèn rén cǎi nòng jìn rén kàn. (bái jū yì, tí shān shí liú huā)

(No other flowers can compare with the pomegranate blossoms under this eave. They are open to others to pick, play, and watch.)

榛棘茫茫何是边，只为终朝尽众喧。(《祖堂集》第四卷，Shi, & Shi, 2007: 212)

Zhēn jí máng máng hé shì biān, zhǐ wèi zhōng cháo jìn zhòng xuān. (zǔ táng jí-dì sì juàn)

(Where is the boundary in the vast expanse of thorn bushes? Just to be disturbed by all the noise all day long.)

The dictionary *Zhengzitong* (Zhang, 1996: 726) annotated that the 尽君 (*jìn jūn*) in the first example above means the same as 任君 (*rèn jūn*, let you). In the second example, the verb *Jin* (尽) and 任 (*rèn*) are used in the same position in parallel structure with synonymous meaning “to connive”. The third example 尽众喧 (*jìnzhòngxuān*) means “to connive at all the noise of the crowd to disturb myself”.

By the Song Dynasty (10th-12th c.), the verb *Jin* (尽) with the meaning of “to connive” was already in widespread use and was conventionally written in its vulgar form *Jin* (儘), as seen in the following examples. It was gradually used to record the meanings of “to allow” or “to connive”, and this relationship between glyph, pronunciation, and meaning thus became conventionally fixed. For example:

标致不寻常。儘他桃杏占风光。谁敢斗新妆。(李德载《早梅芳近》，Tang, 1988: 44)

Biāo zhì bù xún cháng. Jìn tā táo xìng zhàn fēng guāng. Shuí gǎn dòu xīn zhuāng. (lǐ dé zǎi, zǎo méi fāng jìn)

(The wintersweet blooms beautifully but unusually. Let those peach and apricot blossoms dominate the scenery of spring. Who dares to compete with this new makeup look?)

有时携手闲坐，偎倚绿窗前。温柔情态儘人怜。(柳永《促拍满路花》，Tang, 1988: 739)

Yǒu shí xié shǒu xián zuò, wēi yǐ lǜ chuāng qián. Wēn róu qíng tài jìn rén lián. (liǔ yǒng, cù pāi mǎn lù huā)

(Sometimes we hold hands and sit at leisure, leaning against the green window. Your tender demeanor makes people feel affection.)

We can still find that the usage of both the meaning “to allow” and “to connive” coexist in the word *Jin* (尽) in the same Chinese dialects at present. Such as in the dialect of Xiangyang, Hubei, the word *Jin* (尽) in the sentence 尽我想

一呵儿 (*jīn wǒ xiǎng yī hē ér*, Let me think about it) means “to allow”, and in the sentence 尽他一个人，莫管他 (*jīn tā yí gè rén, mò guǎn tā*, Leave him alone, don’t bother him.) means “to connive”. (Yang & Nie, 2023)

4.2 The Emergence of the Modal Adverb *Jin* (尽)

During the Yuan and Ming dynasties (13th-17th c.), the verb *Jin* (尽 , to connive) was already very common. It was often used in combination with the auxiliary word *Zhe* (着) to form “*Jinzhe* (尽着)”, with the same meaning as when *Jin* (尽) was used alone. For example:

如今在前头有的尽你吃，尽你用，我与你那一件厌厌的东西。(《元曲选·包待制陈州粳米》第三折宾白，Zang, 1958: 46)

Rú jīn zài qián tou yǒu de jīn nǐ chī, jīn nǐ yòng, wǒ yǔ nǐ nà yī jiàn yàn yàn de dōng xi. (yuán qǔ xuǎn: bāo dài zhì chén zhōu tiào mǐ, dì sān zhé -bīn bái)

(All the things before your eyes now can be eaten and used as you like, and I will give you that one more thing to relieve your greasiness.)

我这里或是典或是卖，尽着他言，由着他责。(《元曲选·翠红乡儿女两团圆》第二折唱词，Zang, 1958: 467)

Wǒ zhèlǐ huò shì diǎn huò shì mài, jīn zhe tā yán, yóu zhe tā zé.

(Either pawn or sell it here, I connive with the speaking and scolding of you.)

Gao (2023) and Pi (2024) hold the opinion that the noun (N) can be omitted in the construction “*Jinzhe* (尽着) +N+VP” if it has already appeared in the preceding context or is inferable in the context, which leads to a serial verb construction “*Jin* (尽) +VP”. For example:

有意能收放，无心尽去留，梨花梦湘水悠悠。(乔吉《赠江云》，Sui, 1964: 614)

Yǒu yì néng shōu fàng, wú xīn jīn qù liú, lí huā mèng xiāng shuǐ yōu yōu. (qiáo jí, zèng jiāng yún)

(If you have the will, you may control it freely; If not, let it come and go. In dreams as ethereal as pear blossoms, only the Xiang River flows slowly.)

诗云：“有权有势尽着使，见官见府没廉耻。”(《元曲选·包待制三勘蝴蝶梦》第一折宾白，Zang, 1958: 632)

Shī yún: “yǒu quán yǒu shì jīn zhe shǐ, jiàn guān jiàn fǔ méi lián chǐ”. (yuán qǔ xuǎn: bāo dài zhì sān kān hú dié mèng)

(The poem says: “Those with power and influence do the things as they like, showing no shame even when facing the authorities”.)

長老若要吃齋，不須募化，过此牌坊……乃是寇员外家，他门前有个万僧不阻之牌。似你这远方僧，尽着受用。(《西游记》第九十六回，Wu, 2005: 1144)

Zhǎng lǎo ruò yào chī zhāi, bù xū mù huà, guò cǐ pái fāng…… nǐ shì kòu yuán wài jiā, tā mén qián yǒu gè wàn

sēng bù zǔ zhī pái, sì nǚ zhè yuǎn fāng sēng, jǐn zhe shòu yòng. (xī yóu jì-dì jiǔ shí liù huí)

(If you want to have a meal, there's no need to beg for alms. Just walk past this archway... and you'll reach the house of Mr. Kou. There's a sign in front of his house that says, "All monks are welcome". Monks like you who come from far away can enjoy the food freely there.)

In the examples above, the objects of *Jin* (尽) are all omitted, such as 它 (*tā*, it) in the construction 尽去留 (*jǐn qù liú*, let ... come and go), and 他们 (*tāmen*, them) in the construction 尽着使 (*jǐnzhe shǐ*, let ... do it), and 你 (*nǐ*, you) in the construction 尽着受用 (*jǐnzhe shòuyòng*, let ... enjoy it). This omission does not affect our interpretation of the sentences because the omitted objects can either be inferred from the context or have already appeared in the preceding text.

However, changes in syntactic structures can readily induce semantic evolution. Zhang (2014: 347) argues that the serial verb construction is one of the main syntactic structures that induce the adverbialization of Chinese content words. In the structure “(S+) *Jin* (尽) +N+VP”, the verb *Jin* (尽) governs over the subject-predicate structure “N+VP”, meaning the subject the whole sentence does nothing to intervene in the object, and convinces him to do something freely. When the noun (N) is omitted in the pivotal structure (N), the “(S+) *Jin* (尽) +VP” structure has the possibility of reanalysis. It can still be interpreted as a pivotal structure with an omitted noun (N), or be reanalyzed as an adverbial-head structure where *Jin* (尽) modifies the following VP. With the latter interpretation, the *Jin* (尽) downgraded from a verb to an adverb modifying the verb in grammatical function, expressing the speaker's modality of permission that the speaker does not interfere with the action performed by the other party, and requests or encourages him “to do something freely without any restraint”. For instance, the third example above 尽着受用 (*jǐn zhe shòu yòng*) can be interpreted as “connive (you) to enjoy it” or as “you don't need to worry about anything else, just enjoy it”. The reason why this semantic evolution occurs is that it has a common semantic basis with the verb *Jin* (尽), which means “to connive”, that is, [+ unrestricted] and [+ no interference].

In the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th c.), the verb *Jin* (尽) in the “(S+) *Jin* (尽) +VP” structure could no longer be followed by a noun (N), as it was used in interactive dialogues to respond to the other party's hesitation about performing a certain action. When the speaker is still uncertain or hesitant about whether to do something or not, the listener uses the subsequent clause of the clause of “*Jin* (尽) +VP” to alleviate his doubts or concerns, or help him to fulfill his expectations. Therefore, the “*Jin* (尽) +VP” structure is used to express the speaker's request or encouragement to the listener to “do something freely without hesitation or restraints”. Typically, the subsequent clause following the clause containing (S+) *Jin* (尽) +VP is often used to absolve the speaker from liability for potential negative consequences or provide assistance to dispel the speaker's specific concerns. For example:

老嬷嬷道：“……娘子怨老身不知进退的罪，方好开口。”妙观道：“奴有事相央，嬷嬷尽着有话便说，岂敢有嫌？”(《二刻拍案惊奇》卷二，Ling, 1983: 1144)

Lǎo mo dào: “..... niáng zǐ shù lǎo shēn bù zhī jìn tuì de zuì, fāng hǎo kāi kǒu”. Miào guān dào: “nú yǒu shì xiāng yāng, mó mo jǐn zhe yǒu huà biàn shuō, qǐ gǎn yǒu xián?” (èr kè pāi àn jīng qí: juàn èr)

(The old nanny said, “Only if you forgive me for not knowing how to advance and retreat can I speak, my lady”. Miaoguan said, “I have something to beg you for. If you have something to say, just say it, my nanny. How dare I have any disdain?”)

京娘道：“小妹有句心腹之言，说来又怕唐突，恩人莫怪。”公子道：“兄妹之间，有何嫌疑，尽说无妨。”（《警世通言》卷二十一，Feng, 1956: 302）

Jīng niáng dào: “xiǎo mèi yǒu jù xīn fù zhī yán, shuō lái yòu pà táng tū, ēn rén mò guài”. Gōng zǐ dào: “xiōng mèi zhī jiān, yǒu hé xián yí, jīn shuō wú fǎng”. (jīng shì tōng yán: juàn èr shí yī)

(The young lady Jing said, “I have something to say from my heart, but I’m afraid it might seem abrupt. Please don’t take any offense at my word, my patron”. The child replied, “You and I are siblings. How could there be any suspicion? Just say it. It won’t cause any hindrance”).

沈小霞道：“济宁府东门内，有个冯主事……我明日去投奔他……你若有力量支持他，我去也放胆；不然，与你同生同死。”闻氏道：“官人有路尽走，奴家自会摆布，不劳挂念。”（《喻世明言》第四十卷，Feng, 2015: 303）

Shěn Xiǎo xiá dào: “Jì níng fǔ dōng mén nèi, yǒu gè Féng zhǔ shì…… wǒ míng rì qù tóu bèn tā…… nǐ ruò yǒu lì liàng zhī chí tā, wǒ qù yě fàng dǎn; bù rán, yǔ nǐ tóng shēng tóng sǐ”. Wén shì dào: “Guān rén yǒu lù jìn zǒu, nú jiā zì huì bǎi bù, bù láo guà niàn”.

(Shen Xiaoxia said, “Inside the East Gate of Jining government office there’s a head named Feng... I’ll go there for shelter tomorrow... If you can handle him, I’ll go there boldly; otherwise, I will live and die with you”. Mrs. Wen said, “If you, my husband, have a way out, just go ahead. I will handle it myself, don’t worry”).

These examples above all belong to the contexts of question-and-answer dialogues. In the first two examples, the speaker asks the listener to forgive and not to blame before speaking something, so the subsequent clauses “How dare I have any disdain” and “It won’t cause any hindrance” are used to ease the worries of the old nanny and the lady Jing about being criticized or causing trouble for speaking too much. In the third example, Shen Xiaoxia’s couple was traveling together with two officials. The husband feared the officials might kill them in the wilderness during the journey, so he asked his wife, Wen, to choose between escaping alone or dying together before deciding his next action plan. His wife, Wen, uses the subsequent clause “I will handle it myself” to dispel her husband’s worries about her after he ran away.

In terms of semantics, the word *Jin* (尽) in these examples is closely connected with the verb, which no longer emphasizes the attitude of letting someone do something, but indicates that the speaker advises and encourages the listener not to have any concerns and to do something without any restrictions. In terms of grammatical function, it is grammaticalized from a verb into a modal adverb representing a request and permission.

4.3 The Emergence of the Frequency Adverb *Jin* (尽)

The semantic evolution of *Jin* (尽) has not ended after it has been transformed from a verb into a modal adverb. The modal adverb *Jin* (尽) focuses on the description of the discourse modality and the state of action, meaning “unrestricted, uninterred” in semantics, which is the residue of the meaning of “to connive”. It has a strong descriptive nature and a low degree of grammaticalization. When the speaker adopts an “unrestrained” or “uninterred” attitude towards a certain action, it is easy to infer the possibility of the action being repeated and sustained. Such as the example 嬷嬷尽着有话便说 (*mó mó jīn zhe yǒu huà biàn shuō*, If you have something to say, just say it, my nanny), the speaker requests the listener to 说 (*shuō*, say) something without hesitation or restriction. If the action of “speaking” is not restrained,

it is easy to cause the action to continue or repeat for a long time. Therefore, the word *Jin* (尽) in the “*Jin* (尽) +VP” structure is further grammaticalized as a frequency adverb that expresses actions that last for a long time or are done repeatedly. For example:

褚大娘子道：“二叔怎的尽喝酒，也不用些菜？”（《儿女英雄传》第十五回，Wen, 1983: 255）

Chǔ dà niáng zǐ dào: “Èr shū zěn de jìn hē jiǔ, yě bù yòng xiē cài?” (ér nǚ yīng xióng zhuàn: dì shí wǔ huí)

(Aunt Chu said, “Why does my second uncle keep drinking alcohol, but not have any food?”)

这个当儿，太太又拉着他尽着嘱咐：“场里没人跟着，夜里睡着了，可想着盖严着些儿。”……张太太又说：“不咧，熬上锅小米子粥……那倒也饱了肚子咧。”（《儿女英雄传》第三十四回，Wen, 1983: 673）

Zhè ge dāngr, tài tai yòu lā zhe tā jìn zhe zhǔ fù: “Chǎng lǐ méi rén gēn zhe, yè lǐ shuì zháo le, kě xiǎng zhe gài yán zhe xiēr”. ……Zhāng tài tai yòu shuō: “Bù lie, áo shàng guō xiǎo mǐ zi zhōu……nà dǎo yě bǎo le dù zi lie”. (ér nǚ yīng xióng zhuàn: dì sān shí sì huí)

(At this moment, the lady grabbed him and kept reminding him: “No one will follow you in the exam room. When you fall asleep at night, try to wrap yourself up tightly with the quilt”. ...Mrs. Zhang said again: “If not, you could just make a pot of millet porridge...That would fill you up”.)

他老的烟瘾上来了，尽着打呵欠，不等衣服脱完，一头躺下，一口气呼呼的抽了二十四袋。（《官场现形记》第三回，Li, 2005: 26）

Tā lǎo de yān yǐn shàng lái le, jìn zhe dǎ hē qiān, bù děng yī fu tuō wán, yì tóu tāng xià, yì kǒu qì hū hū de chōu le èr shí sì dài. (guān chǎng xiàn xíng jì: dì sān huí)

(His craving for water tobacco has come back. He kept yawning. Before he finished undressing, he collapsed onto the bed and smoked twenty-four packs in one go.)

In the examples above, the verb phrase (VP) in the “*Jin* (尽) +VP” structure represents the action repeated and continuously acted over a period of time in context. For instance, the first example above 尽喝酒 (*jìn hē jiǔ*) illustrates “second uncle refuses to eat food and keeps drinking”, while the second example 尽着嘱咐 (*jìn zhe zhǔ fù*) shows Mrs. Zhang’s continuous instructions followed by more reminding, which indicates that the 嘱托 *zhǔtuō* (reminding) action continues for a while. The third example 尽着打呵欠 (*jìn zhe dǎ hē qiān*) depicts his severe smoking addiction, so he keeps repeatedly yawning. In this context, the word *Jin* (尽) is further grammatically as a frequency adverb to indicate that a certain action is continuously and repeatedly performed.

The frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) often appears in contexts of exhortation, urging or prohibition, and there are often negative adverbs such as “don’t” or “not” in the sentence that express dissuasion or prohibition. In such a negative context, the word *Jin* (尽) is prone to subjectification, producing emotional colors that express the speaker’s complaints, dissatisfaction, and deliberate exaggeration. For example:

你这么大年纪，不要尽着伤心。春英之死，究竟是谁杀的？（《春阿氏》第四回，Leng, 2018: 41）

Nǐ zhè me dà nián jì, bù yào jìn zhe shāng xīn. Chūn Yīng zhī sǐ, jiū jìng shì shuí shā de? (chūn ē shì: dì sì huí)

(You are so old, don’t keep being sad. Chunying has died. Who exactly killed her?)

太太，不必尽着想了，这都是看见兰哥儿进场去了，太太请把这件事放一边罢。（《补红楼梦》第七回，Naihuan, 1992: 60)

Tài tai, bù bì jìn zhe xiǎng le, zhè dōu shì kàn jiàn Lán gēr jìn chǎng qù le, tài tai qǐng bǎ zhè jiàn shì fàng guò yì biān ba. (bǔ hóng lóu mèng: dì qī huí)

(Madam, don't dwell on it. It's just that you saw Brother Lan enter the examination hall. Please set this aside for now.)

雯青看了，自然欢喜，就向着毕叶道：“别尽讲这个了。毕叶先生，我们讲正事吧！”（《孽海花》第十三回，Zeng, 1991: 83)

Wén qīng kàn le, zì rán huān xǐ, jiù xiàng zhe bì yè dào: “Bié jǐn jiǎng zhè ge le. bì yè xiān sheng, wǒ men jiǎng zhèng shì ba!” (niè hǎi huā : dì shí sān huí)

(Wenqing looked at it and was naturally delighted, then turned to Biye and said, “Stop talking about this. Mr. Biye, let's get to the point!”)

Shen (2001) pointed out that subjectification is an evolution of a process involving semantics and pragmatics, that is, “meaning becomes increasingly dependent on the speaker's subjective beliefs and attitudes towards the content of the proposition”. In the first example above 不要尽着伤心 (*bù yào jìn zhe shāng xīn*), when the speaker urges the listener to stop maintaining a 伤心 (*shāngxīn*, sad) state for a long time, the listener is likely to infer from the discourse context of interactive communication that the 伤心 (*shāngxīn*) state may last too long and exceed a reasonable limit, thus assuming that the speaker may have a subjective modal meaning of “impatience” or “complaint”. This subjective modality is very common in the dialects, such as 人家都知道啦，你还尽说 (*rén jiā dōu zhī dào lā, nǐ hái jìn shuō*, I already know about it, but you still keep saying it); 他尽说尽说的，旁人没得法子插嘴 (*tā jìn shuō jìn shuō de, páng rén méi dé fǎ zǐ chā zuǐ*, He kept talking and talking, and no one else could interrupt). These sentences are all full of negative evaluations from the speaker.

In the history of Chinese, the grammaticalization of *Jin* (尽) from a modal adverb to a frequency adverb was likely influenced by the analogy of *Zhiguan* (只管). By the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th c.), *Zhiguan* (只管) had already completed its grammaticalization from a modal adverb to a frequency adverb. For example:

尔只管去江北江南，问尊宿出水与未出水。（《碧岩录》卷三，Yuanwu, 2011: 125)

Ēr zhǐ guǎn qù jiāng běi jiāng nán, wèn zūn sù chū shuǐ yǔ wèi chū shuǐ. (bì yán lù: juàn sān)

(Just go to the north of the Yangtze River and the south of the Yangtze River, and ask Zunsu monk whether he has left the water or not.)

孩子日夜啼哭，只管打冷战不住，却怎么处？（《金瓶梅词话》第五十三回，Lanling, 1993: 665)

Hái zǐ rì yè tí kū, zhǐ guǎn dǎ lěng zhàn bù zhù, què zěn me chù? (jīn píng méi : dì wǔ shí sān huí)

(The child cried day and night, constantly shivering uncontrollably, but what should we do?)

The modal adverb and frequency adverb *Zhiguan* (只管) still exist in contemporary Chinese dialects, such as Huxian in Shaanxi (Xi'an Huyi District Archives Bureau, 2017: 184), Jixi in Anhui (Zhao, 2003: 299), and Suzhou in Jiangsu

(Ye, 1993: 282), and so on.

In the Qing Dynasty (18th-19th c.), the frequency of using the modal adverb and frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) began to increase. It started to undergo disyllabization and was gradually replaced by *Jinguan* (尽管) under the analogy influence of *Zhiguan* (只管). Therefore, there is a modal adverb *Jinguan* (尽管) in Mandarin *Putonghua* (普通话), but no modal *Jin* (尽).

至于这里的一切事情，都有小侄招呼，请老世叔尽管宽心罢了。（《官场现形记》第二十八回，Li, 2005: 311）

Zhì yú zhè lǐ de yī qiè shì qing, dōu yǒu xiǎo zhī zhāo hu, qǐng lǎo shì shū jǐn guǎn kuān xīn bà le. (guān chǎng xiàn xíng jì: dì èr shí bā huí)

(As for all these matters, I will take care of them. Please feel at ease, my dear uncle.)

你们娘儿三个且别尽管哭哇，到底问问那个小子，怎么就会出了这么个岔儿？（《儿女英雄传》第四十回，Wen, 1983: 849）

Nǐ men niáng er sān gè qiě bié jǐn guǎn kū wa, dào dǐ wèn wèn nà ge xiǎo zǐ, zěn me jiù huì chū le zhè me ge chà er?

(Don't cry, you three ladies. Just ask that kid, why did such a mistake happen?)

In summary, the noun (N) in the pivotal phrase “*Jin* (尽) + N + VP” can be omitted when it has already appeared in the preceding context or is inferable in the context, which leads to the word *Jin* (尽) being adjacent to the VP and grammaticalized from a verb into an adverb. When “*Jin* (尽) + VP” appears in an interactive dialogue context in response to the other party's hesitation about whether to do something, the verb *Jin* (尽) is grammaticalized into a modal adverb that requests or encourages the other party to “do something freely without any hesitation”. When the speaker adopts an attitude of “unrestrained” or “unlimited” towards a certain action, the action performed by the other party is inferred to be repeated and continuous in the context, and further grammaticalized into a frequency adverb, which further produces the subjective modal meaning of “impatient” or “complaining” in the interactive communicative context. In a word, the grammaticalization path of *Jin* (尽) follows the sequence: “verb with the meaning ‘to connive’ > modal adverb > frequency adverb”.

5 Conclusion

The frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) is widely distributed in contemporary Chinese dialects and is used frequently in Mandarin, Xiang, Gan, Wu, and Hakka dialect areas. It expresses high-frequency repetition of actions and long-term continuation of states and often carries strong negative evaluative colors in pragmatics. The etymon of the frequency adverb *Jin* (尽) is derived from the word *Jin* (儘) with the *Jingmu* (精母) and *Shangsheng* (上声) tone. Its grammaticalization was triggered in the syntactic environment of the “*Jin* (尽) + N + VP” structure. When an animate noun occupied the N position, the entire structure was reanalyzed as a causative pivotal structure, and the verb *Jin* (尽) acquired a causative meaning. With the weakening of the subject's control over the “N + VP” event, the meaning of *Jin* (尽) has evolved along the continuum of “cause > permit > allow > connive”. When the N was omitted, *Jin* (尽) initiated its evolution chain of adverbialization in the “*Jin* (尽) + VP” structure. The verb *Jin* (尽) is grammaticalized to a modal

adverb in the contexts of requesting or encouraging someone to act boldly without hesitation, and further grammaticalized to a frequency adverb with the pragmatic inference that the speaker adopts an attitude of “unrestrained” and “uninterred” towards a certain action. The grammaticalization path of *Jin* (紧) can be summarized as: “verb with the meaning ‘to connive’ > modal adverb > frequency adverb”. The emergence of the frequency adverb usage does not mean the extinction of other usages. On the contrary, new grammatical function layers are overlaid on the older ones. This is in accordance with Hopper’s (1991) “Layering” principle, which states that when new layers emerge within a functional domain, the old ones do not immediately disappear but instead coexist and interact with the new ones. So, the multi-function usages of *Jin* (紧) still coexist in many dialects, which provides us with robust evidence for tracing its semantic evolution and reconstructing its grammaticalization path.

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