My work discusses sentences comprised of adjectival expressions in Mandarin Chinese. My major focus is on the positive degree sentences, the counterpart of English sentences like John is tall. Different from from English, Mandarin Chinese requires a particle hen to occur with the adjective, as shown in (1). The translation of hen is murky. It is ambiguous between English very and a dummy marker. The major goal of this work is to discuss the function of hen.

(1) Afu *(hen) gao.
   Afu HEN (lit. very/ø) tall ‘Afu is (very) tall.’

In the literature, a positive degree sentence, such as John is tall, expresses that John’s height exceeds a contextually given standard (Kennedy & McNally 2005, a.m.o.). The meaning that the standard is exceeded is contributed by the positive morpheme, pos, which is regarded as covert in most languages. Yet some researchers argue that the Mandarin hen is the covert realization of pos. In this work, I propose that hen should not be treated simply as pos in the traditional sense. Rather, hen introduces a subjective standard that is based on an experiencer’s evaluation over the situation. In natural languages, some adjectival expressions are regarded as subjective, such as tasty and fun, which have truth conditions relativized to a judge (Lasersohn 2005, Bylinina 2014, a.m.o.). This concept of subjectivity can be extended to standard setting of gradable adjectives across the board (Bylinina 2014, among others). In the hen structure, the judge is the experiencer who makes observations over the situation. In other words, the truth condition of (1) can be transcribed as (2).

(2) Afu hen gao
   Afu HEN tall
   ‘Afu is tall.’
   \[
   \approx \text{There is an evaluation of Afu’s height, such that Afu is tall according to a judge’}
   \]

My argument for the subjectivity of hen sentences comes from two general tests for subjective predicates: a hen sentence can be involved in faultless disagreement, and it can embed under subjective perceptual verb ganjue, ‘find’, which only selects subjective predicates.

The contribution of this work is to link the idea of subjectivity with the traditional view that the standard is contextually determined. While context sensitivity is still a factor in the standard of Mandarin adjectival expressions, it can be further refined with respect to the concept of subjectivity in Mandarin Chinese. On the contrary, the English adjectival expressions do not seem to have the same characteristics. This lead to a potential cross-linguistic study on whether adjectival predicates are subjective across languages.