

Essay Structuring & Logic of Writing

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About the Lecturer

- Associate Professor Xicheng Liu
- Teaching (partial list):
 - Economic Principles in Traditional Chinese Culture
 - Political Economy
 - *Sun Tzu's Art of War* & Porter's Business Theories
 - The Chinese Conceptions of the “Self”

Content

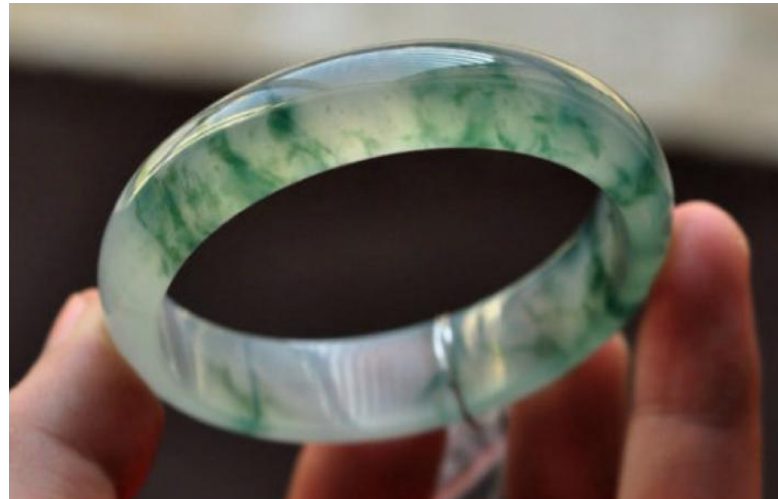
- What is an Academic Thesis?
- The Structure and Elucidation Techniques of a Thesis
- Example Essay

What is a Thesis?

An Interesting Interpretation of “Thesis”

Thesis = 論

- 論 → thought/logic
- “Thought, like jade, has a texture that reveals its inner nature from without.” — *Shuowen Dictionary*



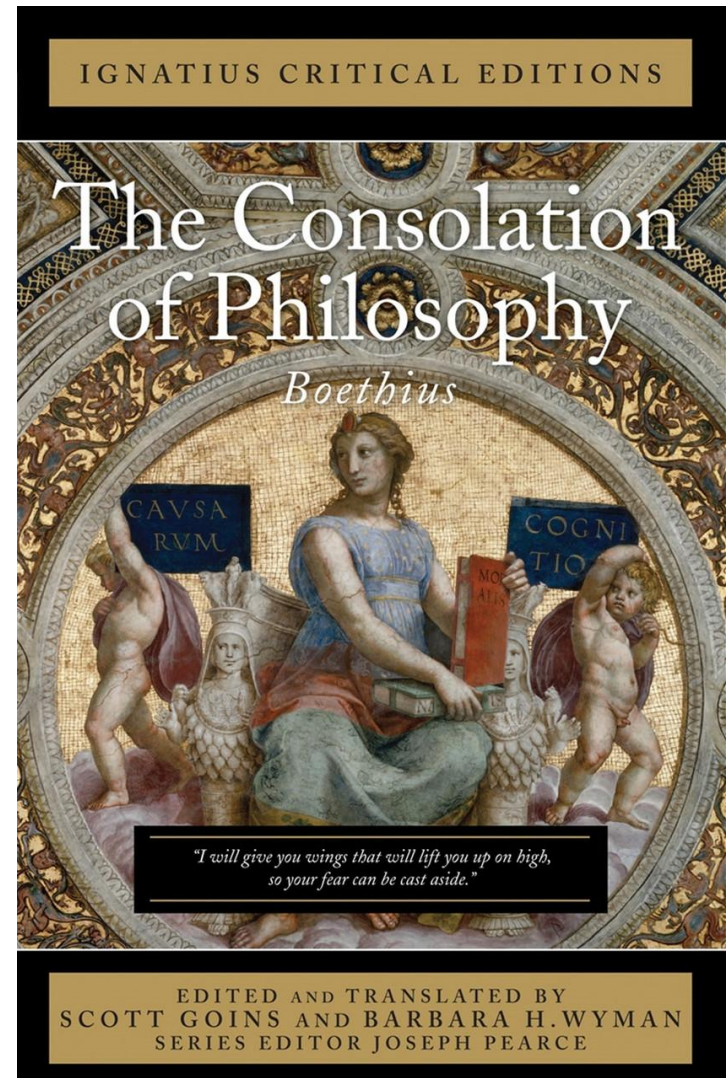
What is a Thesis?

- *The Consolation of Philosophy*
 - **Author:** Boethius
 - **Time:** 524 AD (Although written in a Roman prison, it became a foundational textbook throughout medieval Britain and Europe)
 - **Type:** Philosophical Treatise

What is a Thesis?

- *The Consolation of Philosophy*

- **Description:** This work, written in a prosimetrum style (alternating prose and verse), explores core philosophical issues like fortune, free will, evil, and God's foreknowledge. It provides solace through rigorous **logical reasoning** and philosophical dialogue. For centuries, it was widely copied and studied, forming a core text in early universities like Oxford and Cambridge. **Its discursive structure can be viewed as a philosophical thesis.**



What is a Thesis?

- *Policraticus (The Stateman's Book)*
 - **Author:** John of Salisbury
 - **Time:** 1159AD
 - **Type:** Political Philosophy Treatise

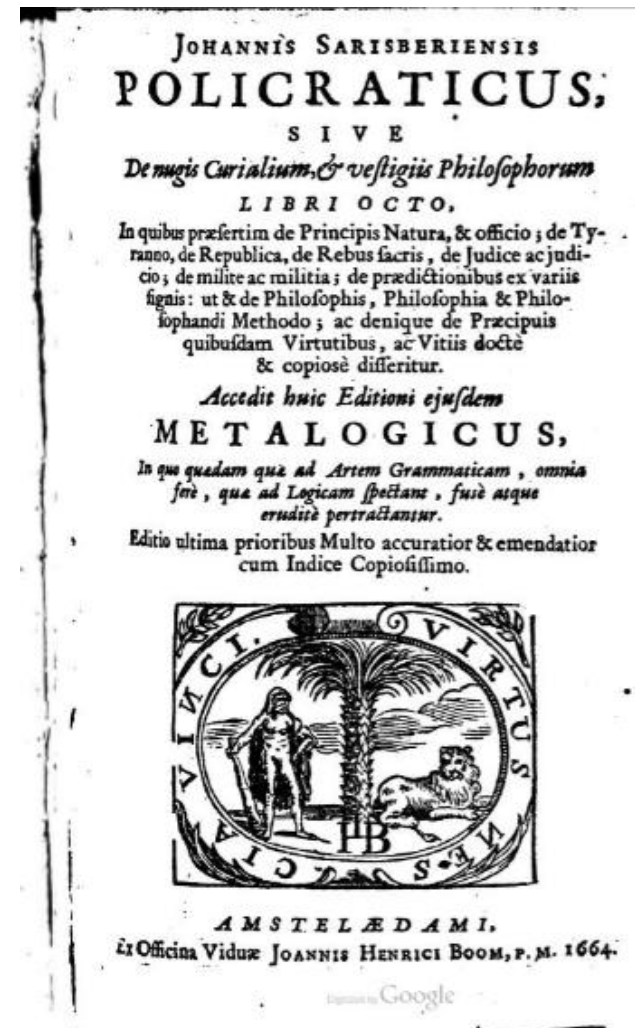
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What is a Thesis?

- *Policraticus (The Stateman's Book)*

➤ **Description:** This was the first systematic treatise on political philosophy in medieval Europe. It delves into the duties of a prince, the nature of tyranny, and the justification for tyrannicide. The author **supports his arguments** with extensive references to Roman law and classical texts. Its **clear structure** and thorough **argumentation** make it a classic political thesis that profoundly influenced later English common law and concepts of monarchy.

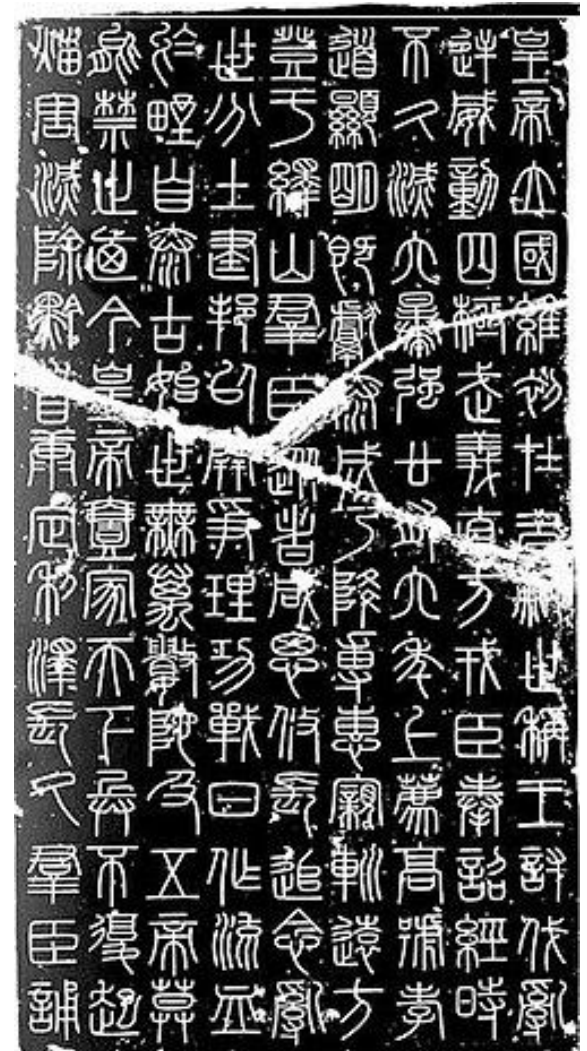


What is a Thesis?

- *Petition Against the Expulsion of Guest Residents* 諫逐客書
 - **Author:** Li Si
 - **Time:** 237 BC (Qin Dynasty, China)
 - **Type:** Argumentative Essay

What is a Thesis?

- *Petition Against the Expulsion of Guest Residents* 諫逐客書
 - **Description:** A highly successful practical argumentative essay. When the Qin king ordered the expulsion of all foreign advisors, Li Si submitted this petition to dissuade him. Instead of direct protest, he persuades by listing the achievements of past foreign advisors in Qin and the king's fondness for other states' treasures and music. Using contrast and reductio ad absurdum, he builds his case layer by layer, ultimately convincing the king to revoke the order. It is a “thesis” that triumphs through rigorous logic and the art of persuasion.

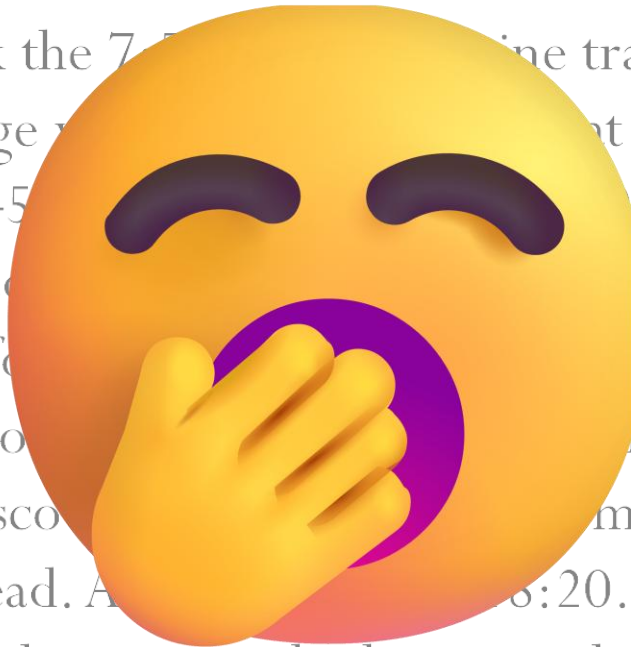


Example Passage 1

Tuesday, October 17th. Overcast. Woke up at 6:45 AM to the alarm. Made a cup of tea with semi-skimmed milk. Ate two pieces of toast with margarine. Took the 7:52 Northern Line train from Clapham Common; the carriage was quite full. Arrived at the office by 8:40. Checked emails for 45 minutes. Attended the 10:00 weekly team catch-up, which lasted 52 minutes. Had a chicken and stuffing sandwich from Pret for lunch at my desk at 12:30. Processed 17 invoices in the afternoon. Sent 8 follow-up emails. Left the office at 17:05. Stopped at Tesco Express on the way home to buy a pint of milk and a loaf of bread. Arrived home at 18:20. Heated a ready-made cottage pie for dinner. Watched an episode of a property show on BBC One. Read three chapters of a library book. Brushed teeth at 22:15. Went to bed at 22:40. Set the alarm for 6:45 AM again.

Example Passage 1

Tuesday, October 17th. Overcast. Woke up at 6:45 AM to the alarm. Made a cup of tea with semi-skimmed milk. Ate two pieces of toast with margarine. Took the 7:50 AM train from Clapham Common; the carriage was empty. Arrived at the office by 8:40. Checked emails for 45 minutes. Attended a 1:00 weekly team catch-up, which lasted until 2:00. Ate a sandwich and stuffing from Pret for lunch. Processed 17 invoices in the afternoon. Left the office at 17:05. Stopped at Tesco on the way home to buy a pint of milk and a loaf of bread. Arrived home at 18:20. Heated a ready-made cottage pie for dinner. Watched an episode of a property show on BBC One. Read three chapters of a library book. Brushed teeth at 22:15. Went to bed at 22:40. Set the alarm for 6:45 AM again.



Example Passage 2

The installation of the “Waves” sculpture, a tangled mass of polished steel and recycled plastic, on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square has sharply divided public opinion. To some, its chaotic form brilliantly captures the unsettling churn of the ocean, a powerful, if ugly, statement on the plastic pollution crisis. They praise its boldness and environmental message. Others see only an eyesore—a confusing heap of junk that insults the square’s historic grandeur and fails to uplift the public spirit.

Example Passage 2

The installation of the “Waves” sculpture, a tangled mass of polished steel and recycled plastic, on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square has sharpened public opinion. To some, its chaotic form brilliantly captures the unsettling churn of the ocean, a powerful, visceral commentary on the plastic pollution crisis. They praise its environmental message. Others see only an ugly heap of junk that insults the square’s traditions and fails to uplift the



The Secret Lies in the Topic

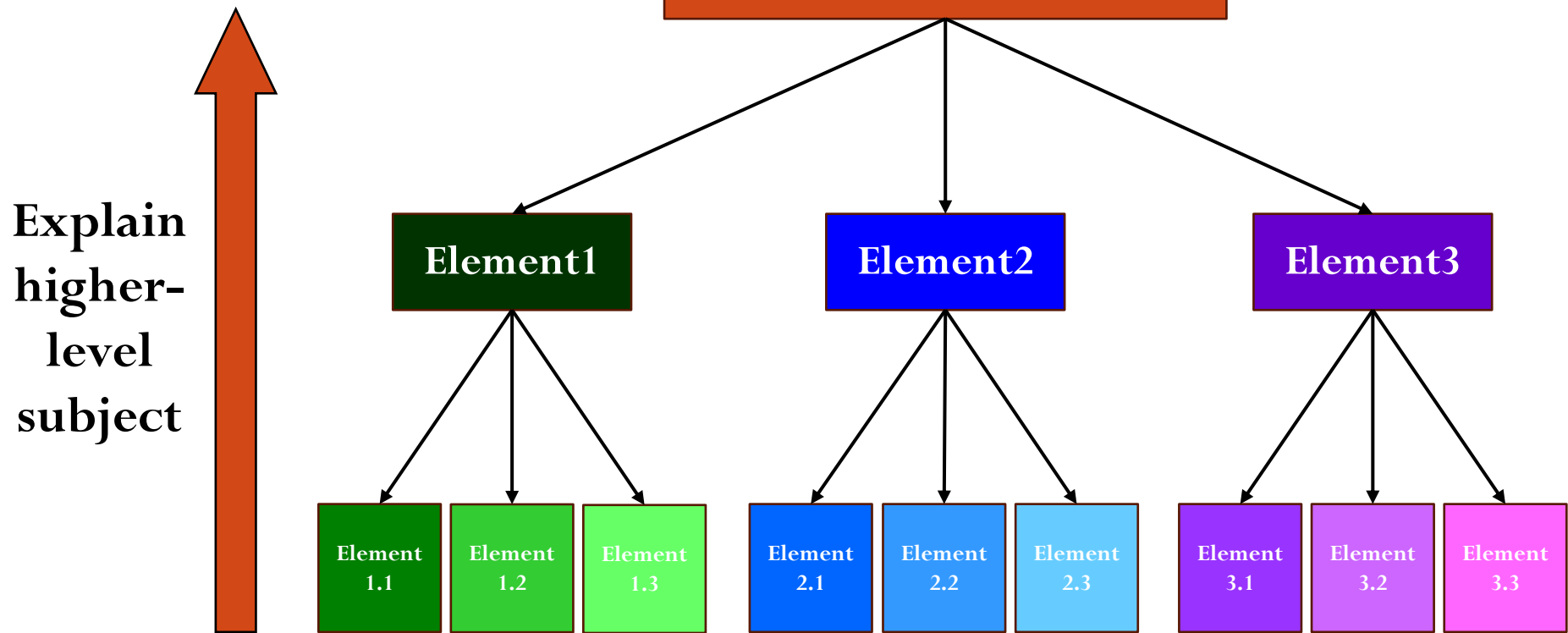
- **Economics**
 - The Impact of Remote Work on Urban Commercial Real Estate
- **Politics**
 - Social Media Algorithms and the Rise of Political Polarization
- **Philosophy**
 - Artificial Intelligence and the Challenge to Human Moral Agency
- **Art**
 - NFTs as a Transformative Force in Digital Art Ownership
- **History**
 - The Printing Press as a Catalyst for the Protestant Reformation
- **Physics**
 - The Feasibility of Harnessing Nuclear Fusion for Baseload Energy
- **Mathematics**
 - Topological Data Analysis in Deciphering Genomic Sequencing Patterns

The Secret Lies in the Topic

- The purpose of a thesis is to “resolve doubts.”
- But if the thesis topic is presented as a declarative sentence, leaving no question to answer, how should this be addressed?
- Transform the declarative sentence into an interrogative one → it remains an act of “resolving doubts.”

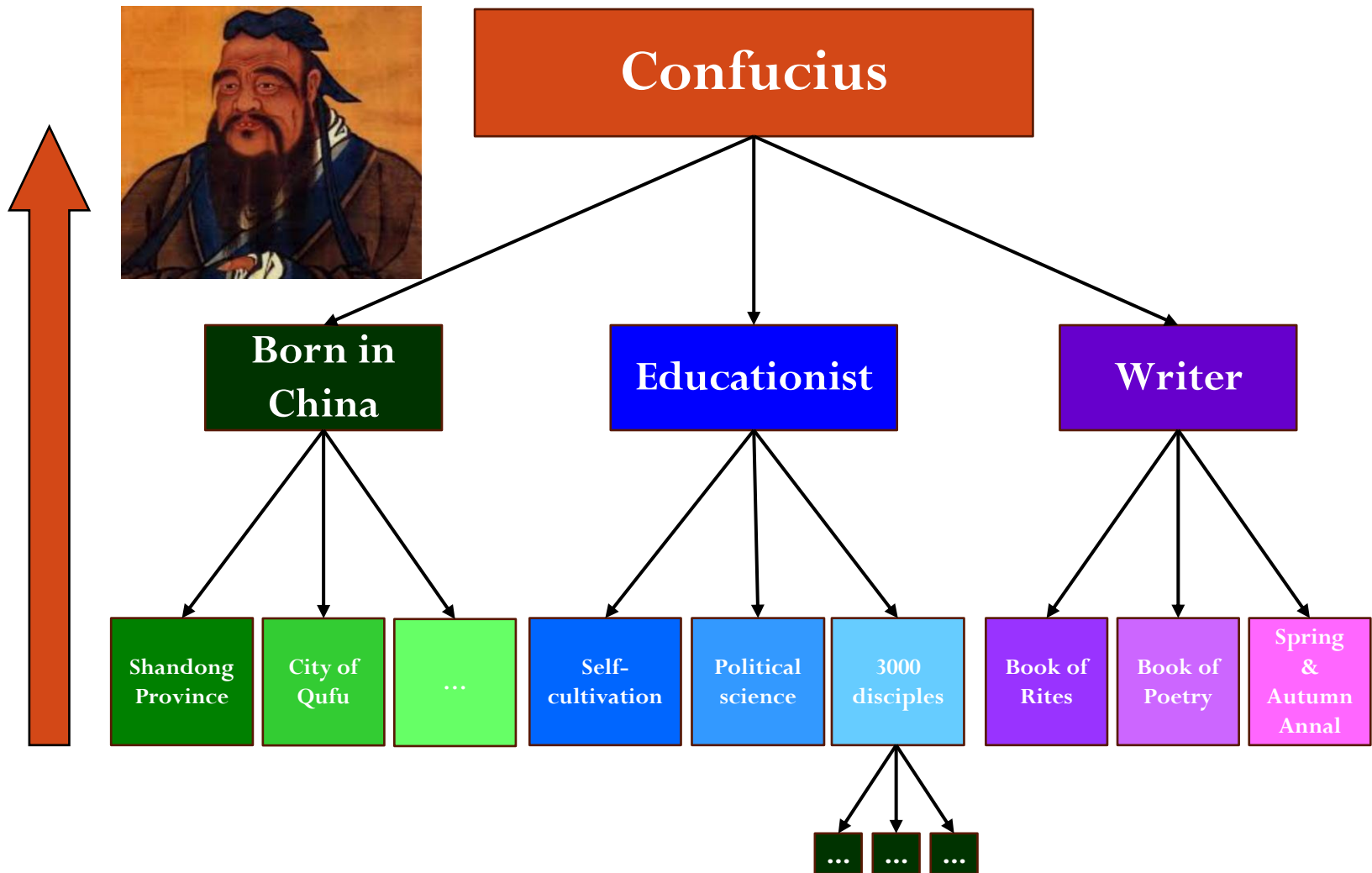
The Structure and Writing Techniques of a Thesis

The Pyramid Structure

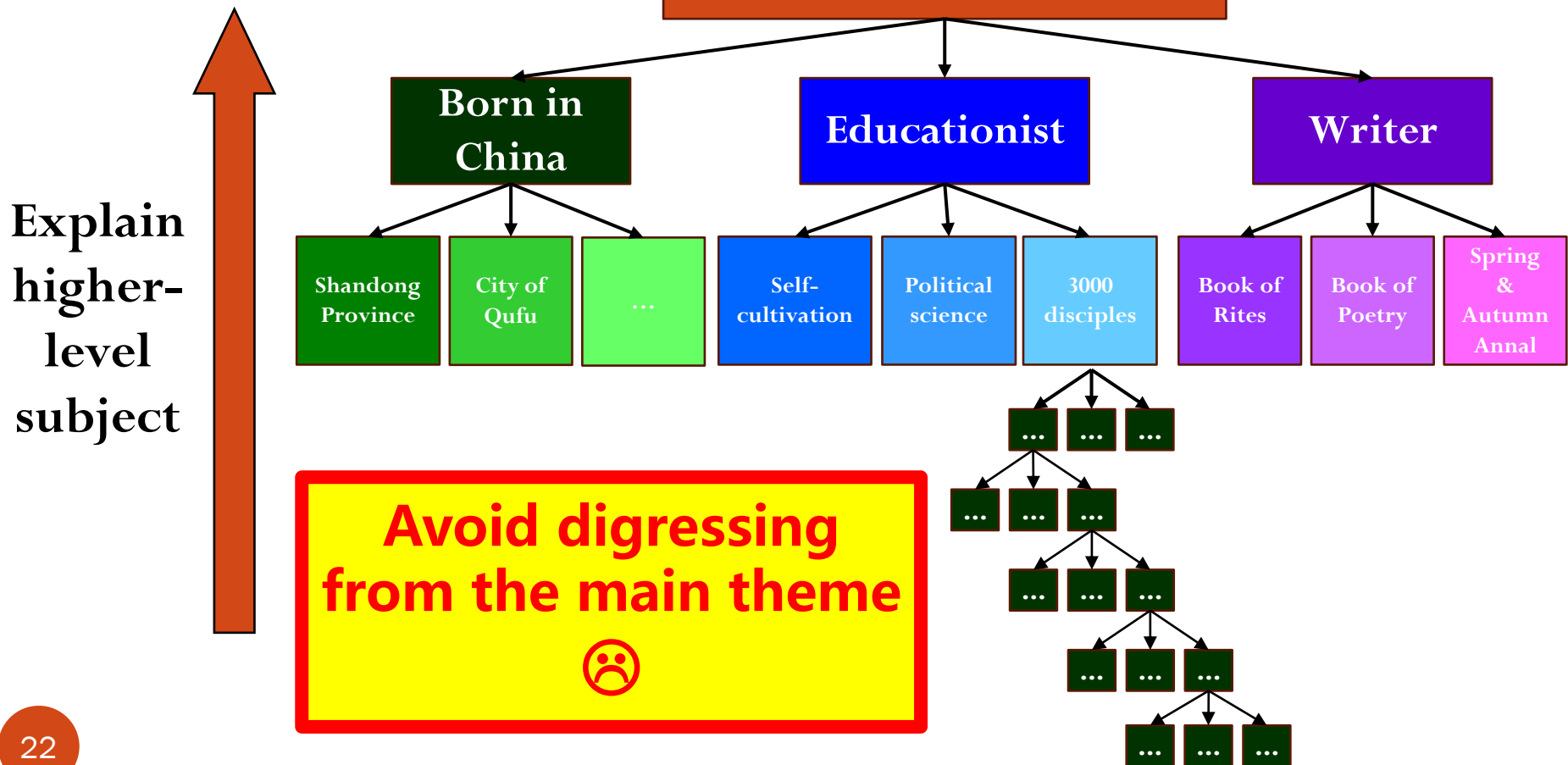


The Pyramid Structure

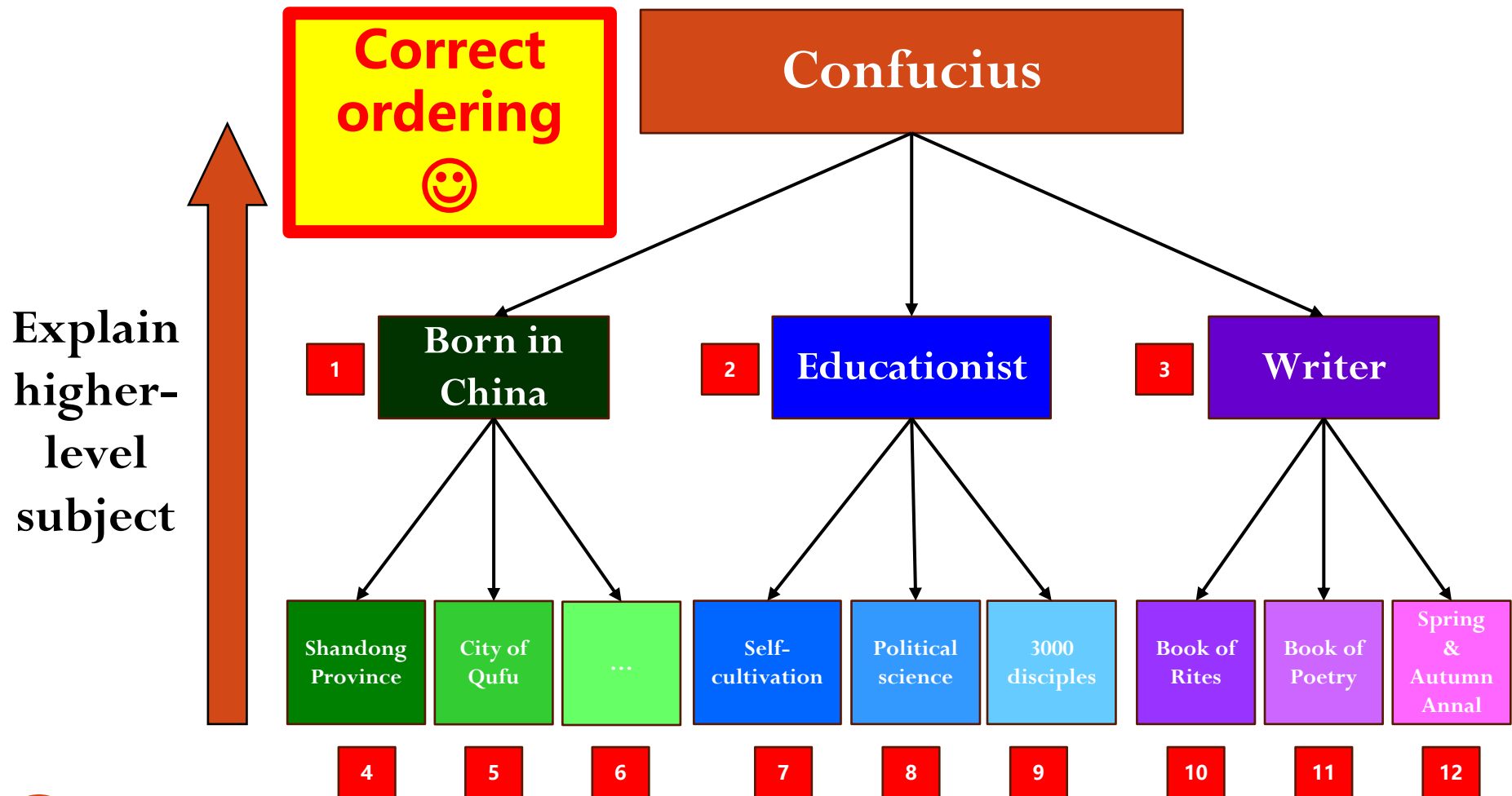
Explain
higher-
level
subject



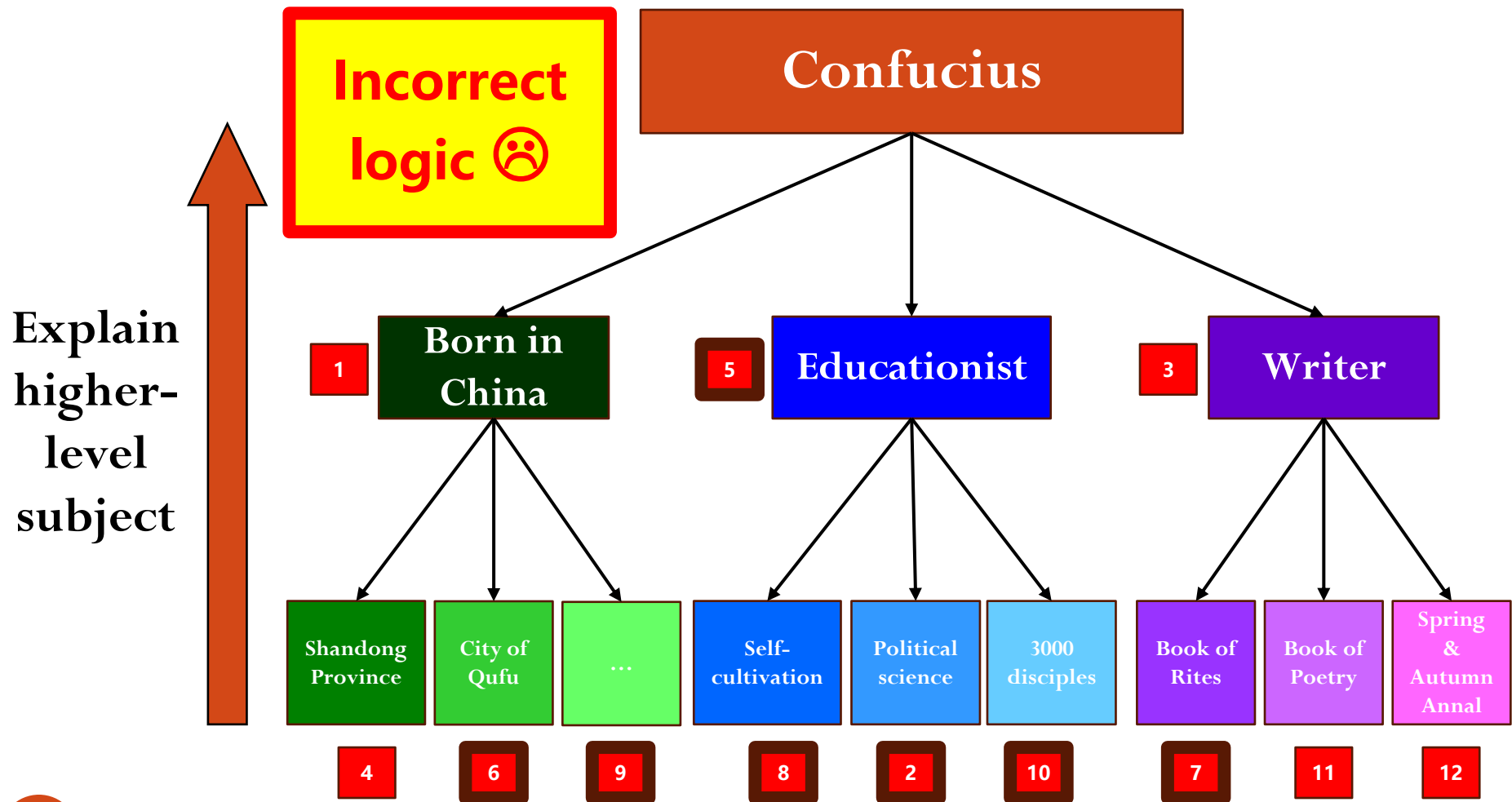
The Pyramid Structure – Caution



The Pyramid Structure – Caution



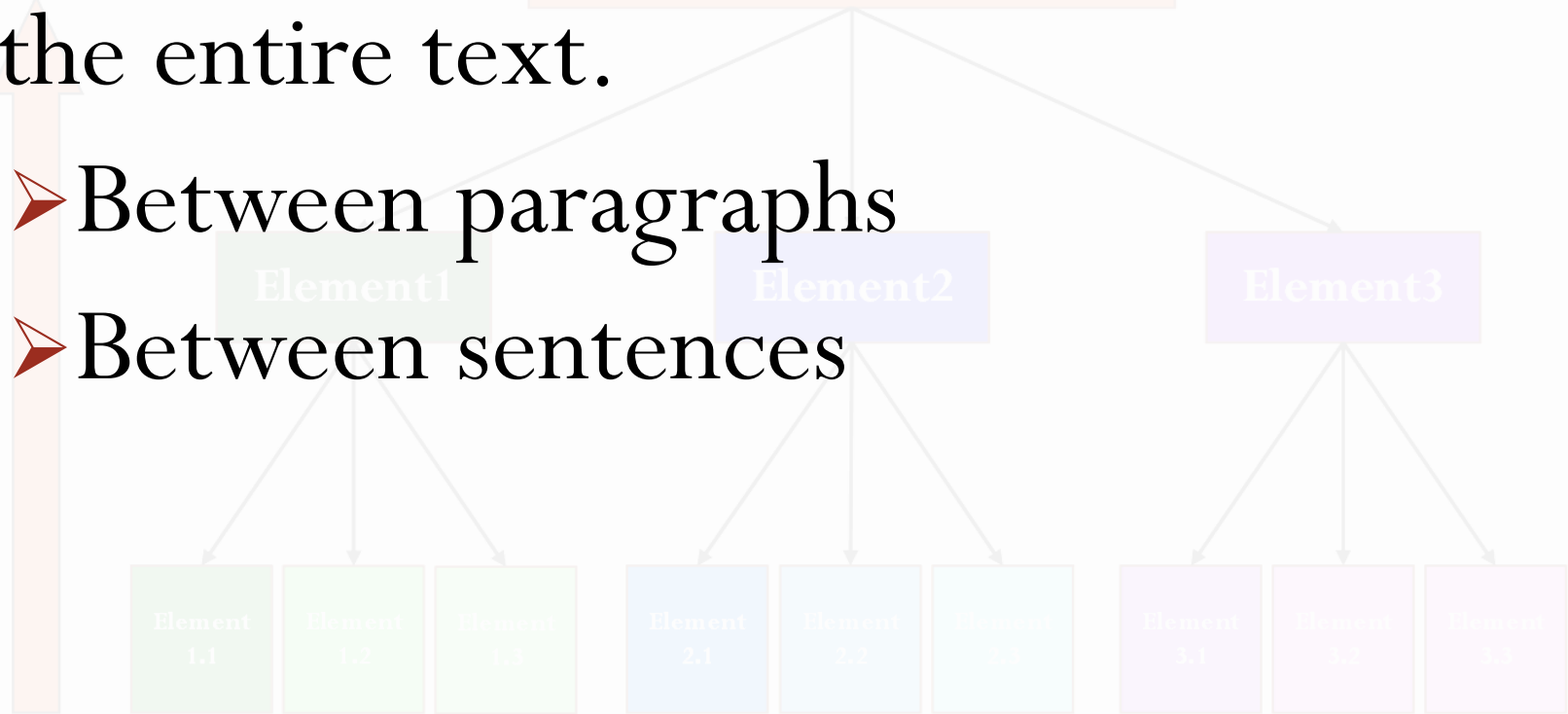
The Pyramid Structure – Caution



The Pyramid Structure

- The pyramid structure runs through the entire text.

- Between paragraphs
- Between sentences



The Pyramid Structure — Core Spirit

- The pyramid structure is guided by the core principle of **resolving doubts**.
- The so-called “doubts” do not necessarily appear in the form of interrogative sentences.
- Whenever a new concept is introduced, unless it is universally known, it is equivalent to a question that requires an answer and must be explained according to the pyramid model.
- Every statement must be substantiated, avoiding writing that appears “abrupt or disjointed.”
- This is the essence of writing techniques. No matter how profound the knowledge, if the writing is disorganised, lacks coherence, or is logically unclear, it may well be a waste of paper and ink—better left unwritten.

How to improve this passage

- “*Sun Tzu’s Art of War* is an ancient military philosophy written by Sun Wu of the State of Qi. Despite being millennia old, a detailed study of its discussions on supply logistics and the interplay between conventional and unconventional tactics reveals remarkable parallels with Michael Porter’s theories of coordination and market strategy. The two complement each other, allowing ancient wisdom to be applied in modern contexts.”

Which concept in this passage requires additional explanation for non-economics specialised readers?

Example

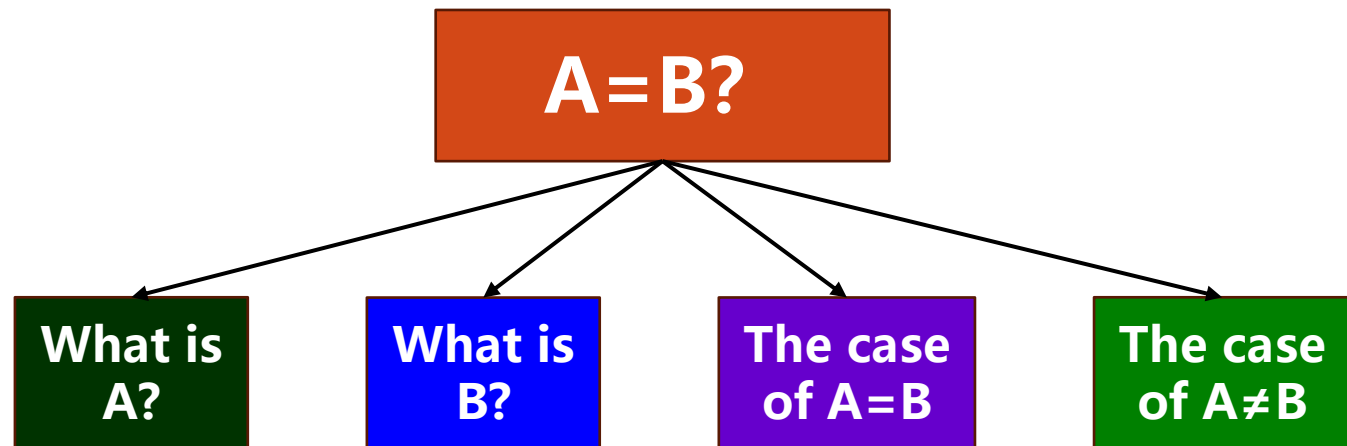
Dong Zhongshu's Response to Emperor Wu of Han's Policy Inquiry

Dong's Response to Emperor Wu's Policy Inquiry

- Emperor Wu of Han asked: “The teachings of the sage Three Sovereigns originated differently, yet all had their shortcomings. Some say the Dao (the Way) remains unchanged over time—is this meaning not divergent?”
- Emperor Wu's policy inquiry is a classic example of a thesis proposal.

Dong's Response to Emperor Wu's Policy Inquiry

- The key to Emperor Wu's inquiry:
 - “Is this meaning not divergent?”
 - What is the difference between A and B?
- Mind structure:



Dong's Response to Emperor Wu's Policy Inquiry

- “A” represents the “Theory of the Eternal Dao”
- “B ” represents “The teachings of the Three Sovereigns differ and each has its shortcomings”
- “A = B ” signifies “The two statements are not contradictory ”
 - Governing methods may differ, but the Dao remains unchanged.
- “A ≠ B ” signifies “The two statements are contradictory ”
 - Governing methods differ, and the Dao itself has changed.

How did Dong decompose Emperor Wu's Inquiry?

“Is this meaning not divergent?”

**The theory of
the eternal
Dao**

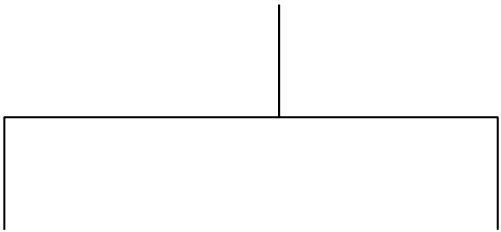
**The teachings of the
Three Sovereigns
differ and each has its
shortcomings**

**Different
governing
methods, but
the same Dao**

**Both governing
methods and the
Dao changed**

How did Dong decompose “A”

A: The theory of the eternal Dao

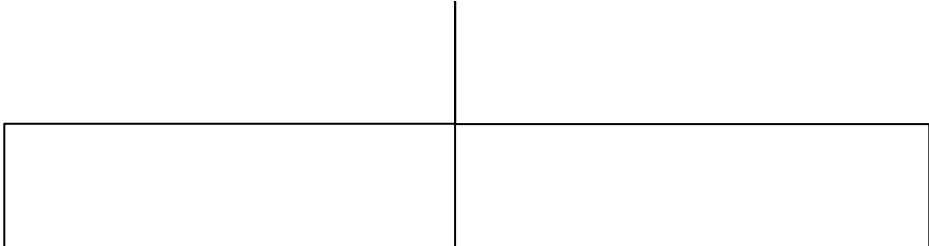


**The unwearying cycle
of return is called the
Dao.**

**The Dao
originates
from Heaven.**

How did Dong decompose “B”

**B: The teachings of the Three Sovereigns differ
and each has its shortcomings**



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graph TD; B[B: The teachings of the Three Sovereigns differ and each has its shortcomings] --- Zhou[The Zhou dynasty emphasized culture]; B --- Shang[The Shang dynasty revered the divine]; B --- Xia[The Xia dynasty valued loyalty];
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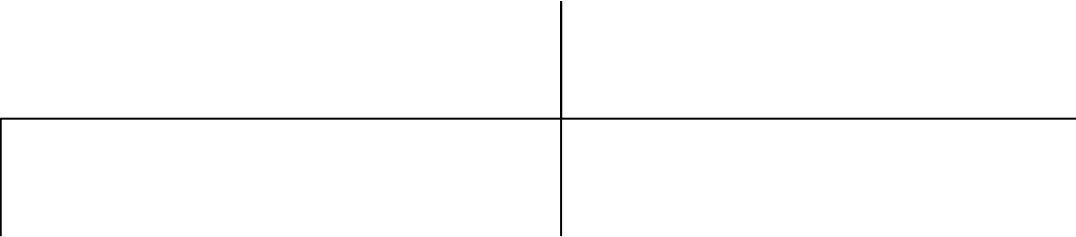
The Zhou dynasty
emphasized culture

The Shang
dynasty
revered the
divine

The Xia dynasty
valued loyalty

How did Dong decompose “A=B”

A=B: Governing methods may differ, but the Dao remains unchanged



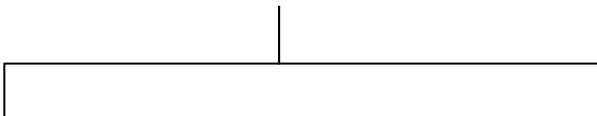
Shun reformed the calendar and altered ceremonial colors, complying with the Mandate of Heaven and following the Dao of Yao

Yu succeeded Shun, and Shun succeeded Yao. The three sages inherited and upheld the same Dao

A true ruler may change the name of the system, but never alters the essence of the Dao

How did Dong decompose “A≠B”

A≠B: Governing methods differ, and the Dao itself has changed



The Xia Dynasty was lost in an age of chaos; the Shang modified its Dao to meet the needs of its time.

The Shang Dynasty was lost in an age of chaos; The Zhou modified its Dao to address the failures it inherited.

Dong's Conclusion

- “Those who inherit an era of order follow the same Dao; those who inherit an era of chaos adapt the Dao.”
 - The Daos of the Three Sovereigns are not contradictory—they were merely adjusted to remedy outdated practices and adapt to changing circumstances.
- To resolve Emperor Wu's confusion:
 - $A = B$, meaning the two statements are not in conflict.
- Integrating practicality to offer a recommendation:
 - “Now that the Han Dynasty has succeeded a period of great turmoil, it would be appropriate to moderately reduce the excessive refinement of the Zhou and adopt the loyalty exemplified by the Xia.”