



Undergraduate assignment feedback form
(to be completed by marker)

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<i>Module Code: SICH3011</i> <i>Module title: Lexicology and Grammar of Classical Chinese</i>	<i>Student number: 2503069</i>
<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	
<i>Marker's signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Provisional mark:</i> NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

AI Acknowledgement

☒ I have not used AI in my assignment

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

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Introduction to the Polysemy of the Chinese Term Wen 文

Module code: SICH3011

Module tutor: Professor Liu, Ya-Fen

Student: Ying Xiao

Student ID number: 2503069

Date: November 18, 2025



contents

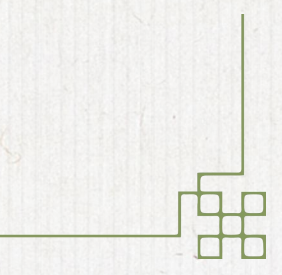
1. Preface

2. Character shape and original meaning

3. Meaning Analysis

4. Historical changes

5. Conclusion



Part 1: Preface

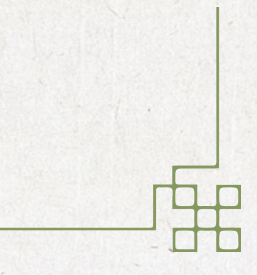
Motivation

文

**"Wen" appeared as early as the Shang Dynasty.
It is a concept that was frequently used in ancient China
and has a relatively wide range of applications.**



Part 2: Character shape and original meaning

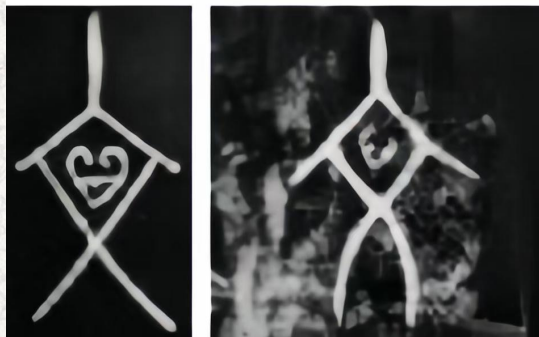


Evolution of character shapes



Oracle Bone
Script

1600BCE



Bronzeware Script



Small Seal
Script



Clerical Script



Regular Script

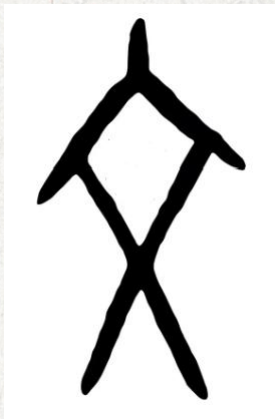
25CE

Time

<https://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk>[accessed 14 November 2025]

<https://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/yanbian>[accessed 14 November 2025]

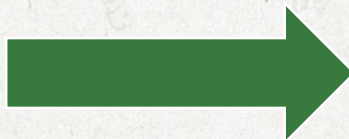
Pictograph



people



patterns



<https://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk>[accessed 14 November 2025]

<https://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/yanbian>[accessed 14 November 2025]

Original Meaning

物相雜，故曰文。

——《周易系辭》



the interweaving of
colors

赤與青謂之文，赤與白謂之章。

——《周禮冬官考工記》

http://www.kaom.net/book_hanyudacidian.php[accessed 14 November 2025]

Lv Youren 呂友仁, Zhouli yizhu 周禮譯注 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhougujichubanshe, 2004) p. 590.

Original Meaning

文，錯畫也。象交文。
——《說文解字》



the interweaving of
patterns

Original Meaning

文 "Wen" is "color-interlaced patterns"
or "patterns with interlaced colors or lines".



Part 3: Meaning Analysis

The original meaning of "Wen"



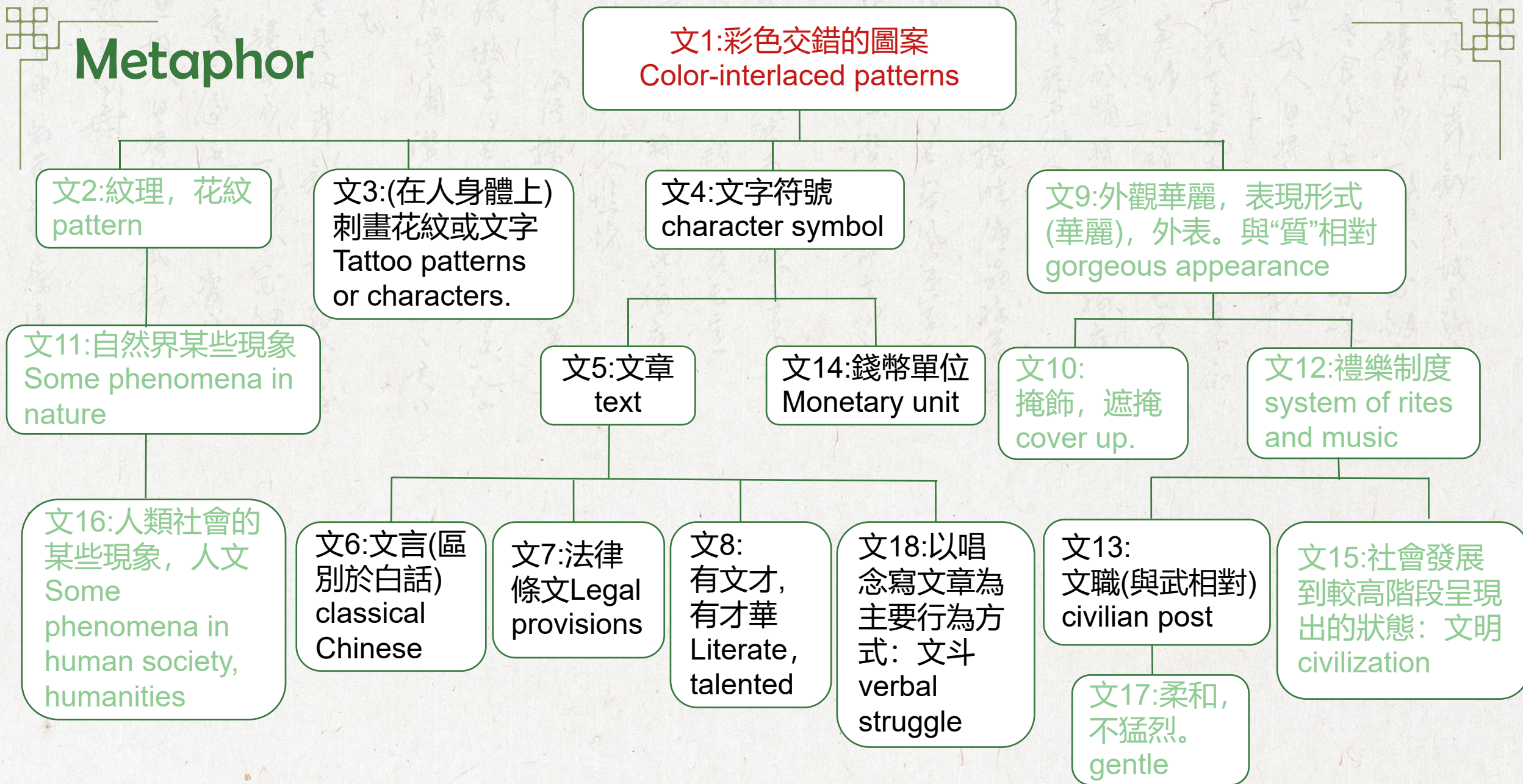
metaphor

metonymy

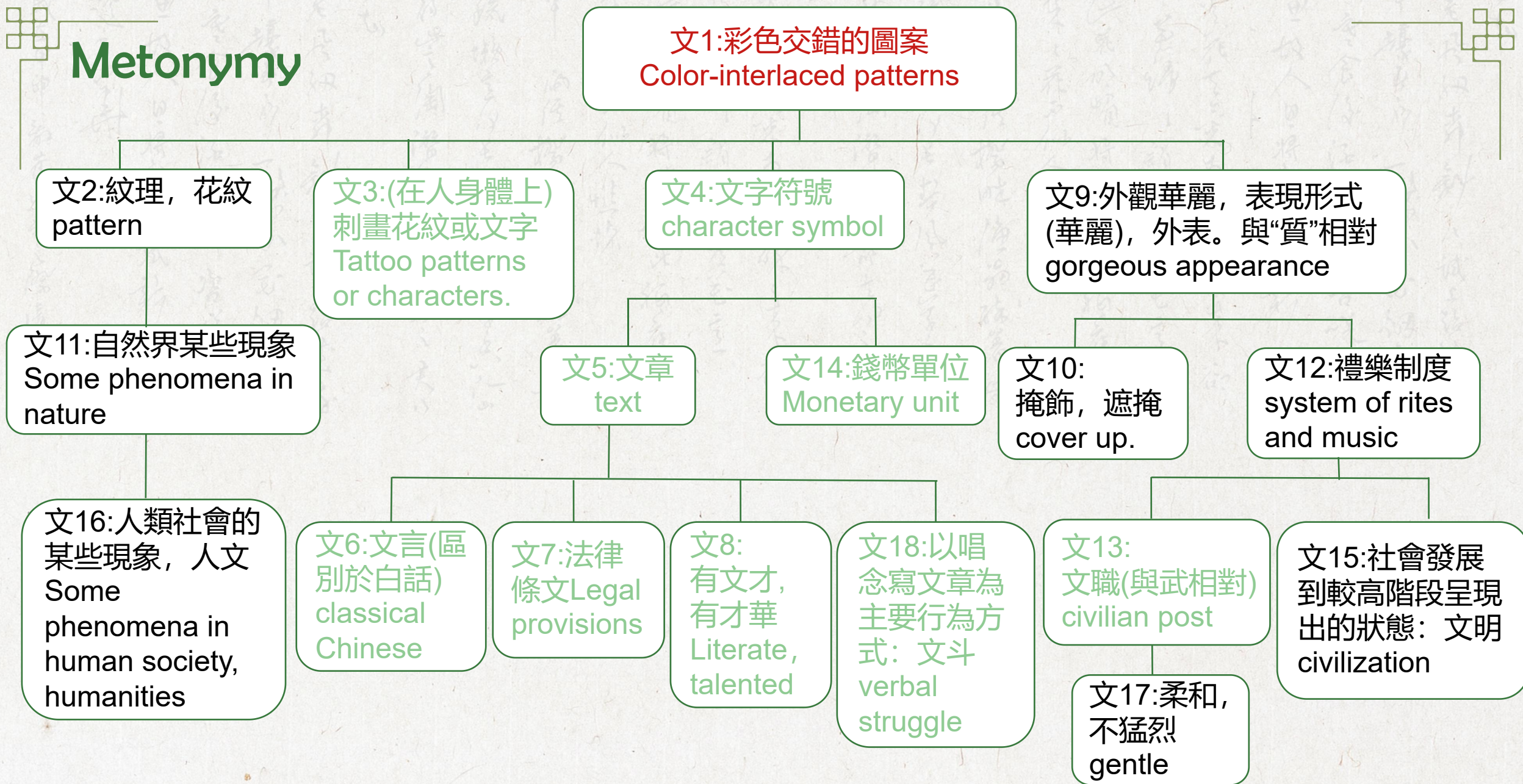
[wénㄨㄣˊ] [《廣韻》無分切，平文，微。]

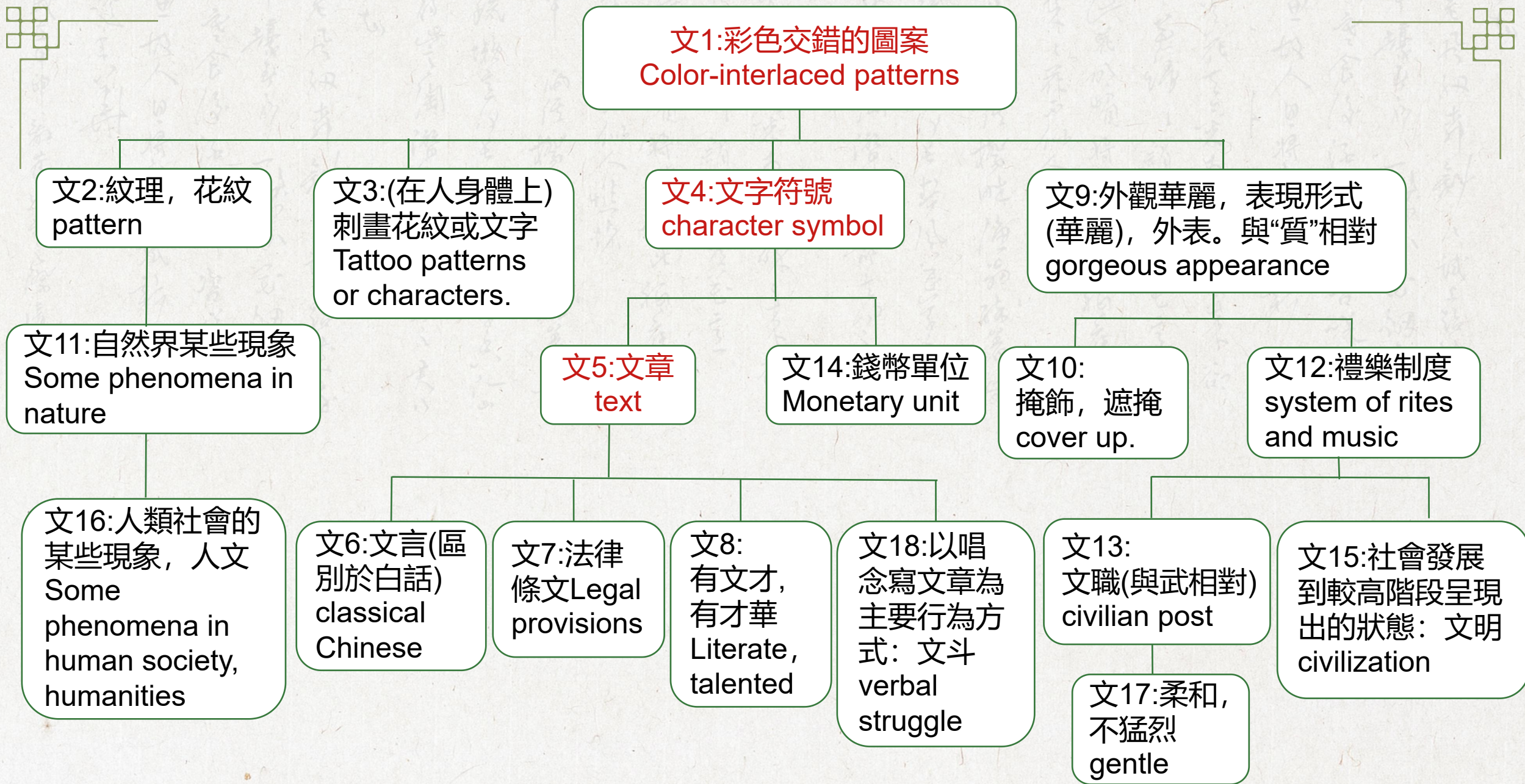
1. 彩色交錯。亦指彩色交錯的圖形。《易·繫辭下》：“物相雜，故曰文。”韓康伯注：“剛柔交錯，玄黃錯雜。”《禮記·樂記》：“五色成文而不亂。”清王夫之《讀四書大全說·論語·泰伯篇十二》：“異色成彩之謂文，一色昭著之謂章。”
2. 紋理；花紋。《左傳·隱公元年》：“仲子生而有文在其手。”《史記·平準書》：“故白金三品，其一曰重八兩，圓之，其文龍。”北魏酈道元《水經注·河水二》：“縣有龍泉，出允街谷，泉眼之中，水文成交龍。”唐李嶠《寶劍篇》：“背上名為萬年字，胸前點作七星文。”
3. 字，文字。《左傳·昭公元年》：“於文皿蟲為蠱。”杜預注：“文，字也。”唐張九齡《敕歲初處公》：“我玄元皇帝著《道德經》五千文，明乎真宗，致於妙用。”梁啟超《愛國論》：“<香港>堂中生徒，并漢文而不能通焉。”
4. 謂刺畫文字或花紋。唐元稹《永福寺石壁法華經記》：“予觀僧之徒所以經於石，文於碑，蓋欲相與為不朽計。”宋吳曾《能改齋漫者·記事二》：“司馬文正公言：‘契丹之法……民為盜者，一犯文其腕為賊字，再犯文其臂，三犯文其肘，四犯文其肩，五犯則斬。’”《水滸傳》第十一回：“高俅這賊坑陷了我這一場，文了面。”《明史·郭子興傳》：“太祖手書子興事跡，命太常丞張來儀文其碑。”
5. 文章。《漢書·賈誼傳》：“以能誦詩書屬文，稱於郡中。”唐杜甫《春日憶李白》詩：“何時一尊酒，重與細論文。”宋王安石《上張太博書》之一：“夫文者，言乎志者也。”魯迅《兩地書·致許廣平十二》：“例如玄同之文，即頗汪洋，而少含蓄。”
6. 南北朝時，專指韻文。與散文相對。《宋書·顏竣傳》：“太祖問延之：‘卿諸子誰有卿風？’對曰：‘竣得臣筆，測得臣文。’”南朝梁劉勰《文心雕龍·總術》：“今之常言，有文有筆，以為無韻者筆也，有韻者文也。”
7. 撰寫文章。唐元稹《永福寺石壁法華經記》：“其一碑，僧之徒思得名聲人文其事以自廣。”金王若虛《太一三代度師蕭公墓表》：“四代師字公弼……俾予文之。”元劉祁《歸潛志》卷六：“麻知幾九疇與之善，使子和論說其術，因為文之。”
8. 文辭，詞句。《國語·楚語上》：“若是而不從，動而不悛，則文詠物以行之。”韋昭注：“文，文辭也……謂文辭風託事物以動行也。”唐柳宗元《非〈國語〉上·荀息》：“吾言《春秋》之情，而子徵其文，不亦外乎？”清惲敬《讀〈張耳陳餘列傳〉》：“古之作史者，辯於物，析於事，慎於文。”

Metaphor



Metonymy





Metonymy

故說詩者，不以文害辭，不以辭害志。
——《孟子·萬章上》

→ character symbol

文，錯畫也。象交文。
——《說文解字》

→ interlaced drawings

↑ metonymy

Metonymy

有威讓之令，有文告之辭。

——《國語》



Text

Part 4: Historical changes

Zhou Dynasty

Northern and Southern Dynasties



the understanding of “wen” is
gradually becoming clear

《論語・學而》「行有餘力，則以學文。」 → the six classical skill

《論語・顏淵》「君子質而已矣，何以文為。」 → gorgeous

《孝武本記》「上鄉儒術，招賢良，趙編、
五藏等以文 學為公卿。」 → literature

Tang Dynasty

Ancient Prose Movement

Song Dynasty

The concept of "wen" became confused

Song Dynasty

Modern Time

The stage from confusion to clarity

Part 5: Conclusion

THANK YOU

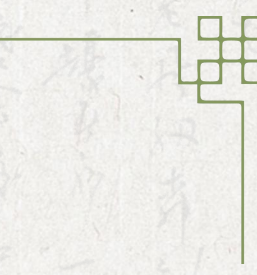


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“文”之溯源及含義變遷, Yulin shifan xueyuan
xuebao 玉林師範學院學報, (2002), (p. 55-57)



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