

From ‘Awe-Inspiringly Beautiful’ to ‘Patterns in Conventionalized Behavior’: The Historical Development of the Metacultural Concept of *Wén* in Pre-Qín China

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Earlier studies of the term *wén* 文 in pre-Qín texts do not fully explain the relationship between its basic meaning ‘(decorative) pattern’ and its more abstract meanings ‘moral refinement’ and ‘tradition of conventionalized behavior’. In contrast, I argue that, when used as an epithet describing individuals in pre-Zhànguó texts, *wén* meant something like ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’, rather than ‘accomplished’ or ‘cultured’ as proposed in earlier studies and translations. Wearing clothes embroidered with ‘rank indicating emblems’ (*wén*) and possessing ‘decorated’ (*wén*) accoutrements signaling authority were the prerogatives of members of the high nobility. It was not an acquired property. The meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ derived from ‘decorative pattern’ through metaphorical extension. This analysis of *wén* helps us avoid the anachronistic moral interpretations (e.g., ‘cultured’, ‘accomplished’, ‘civil’) often found in traditional commentaries and in modern translations of pre-Zhànguó texts, and improves our understanding of the role played by physical appearance in the construction of social hierarchies in the pre-Zhànguó period. In contrast, in Zhànguó-period texts such as the *Zuǒzhàn*, *wén* was reanalyzed in moral terms, thereby giving rise to adjectival uses referring to ‘morally refined’ (*wén*) ‘noble men’ (*jūnzǐ* 君子). In the *Lúnyǔ*, adjectival *wén* in the sense ‘morally refined’ is applied to dynasties (*Lúnyǔ* 3.14). Nominalized versions of adjectival *wén* then give rise to even more abstract uses referring to the ‘moral refinement’ of the Zhōu, that is, the ideal ‘patterns of social mores and conventionalized practices established by the former kings’, as in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5. Such uses of *wén* are often translated into English as *culture*. However, since the words *culture* and *wén* derive metaphorically from different basic meanings, i.e., ‘growing/cultivating’ and ‘decorating/applying an external pattern’, respectively, and since they refer to different, language- and tradition-specific concepts of ‘conventionalized behavior’ or ‘culture’, such translations are often infelicitous or misleading.

INTRODUCTION

The word *wén* 文 as it occurs in pre-Qín texts has been given a bewildering number of different translations, ranging from ‘decorative pattern’, ‘ornament’, ‘embroidered emblem’, ‘sign’, ‘graph’, ‘writing’, ‘text’, ‘literature’, ‘principle’, ‘culture’, ‘cultured’, to ‘civilization’ and ‘civil’, just to name a few.¹ While the term *wén* does indeed have many different contextual meanings, additional layers of confusion have been added by the lingering tendencies in the traditional commentarial tradition to project Zhànguó-period meanings into pre-Zhànguó

1. Italics indicate linguistic expressions. Single quotation marks ‘ ’ refer to concepts or meanings of terms.

times. This paper aims to dispel some of this confusion by tracing the historical stages in the development of uses of *wén* to refer to language-specific conceptualizations of ‘culture’ as ‘ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior’ from Western Zhōu (1045–771 BCE) to the end of the Zhànguó period (481–221 BCE).

Most studies of *wén* published in English mention that *wén* can be translated as ‘culture’. Indeed, the quasi-equivalence of *wén* and the English word *culture* has become a widely accepted factoid in the secondary literature on pre-Qín thought and society. One of the most frequently cited instances of *wén* translated as ‘culture’ is *Lúnyǔ* 論語 9.5.

子畏於匡，曰：文王既沒，文不在茲乎？天之將喪斯文也，後死者不得與於斯文也；天之未喪斯文也，匡人其如予乎？²

When the Master was threatened in Kuāng, he said: After King Wén had died, did *wén* not remain here? If Heaven was going to destroy this *wén* (*sī wén*), those of us dying after [King Wén] would never have been able to participate in this *wén*. And since Heaven has not yet destroyed this *wén*, what can the people of Kuāng do to me?

Most English translators of the *Lúnyǔ* since Lyall’s translation from 1909 render *wén* as ‘culture’ in this passage.³ Arthur Waley’s sweeping claim that “*wén* means something like our own word culture and served many of the same purposes” seems to have exerted great influence on the way this term is translated into English.⁴

Assuming semantic equivalence between the Old Chinese word *wén* and the Modern English word *culture* is problematic. As observed by Martin Kern, Peter Bol’s translation of the expression *sī wén* 斯文 in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5 as “this culture of ours” may be appropriate for Táng and Sòng times.⁵ Whether it correctly translates the meaning of *sī wén* in pre-Qín times is an open question which has so far eluded scholarly attention. In this paper I outline an answer to this question by providing an analysis of the different stages in the chronological development of *wén* in order to address to what extent it is used to refer to pre-Qín conceptualizations of ‘culture’.⁶

2. *Lúnyǔ* 9.5, *Lúnyǔ jǐshì* 論語集釋, ed. Chéng Shùdé 程樹德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 576–79. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Some commentaries emend 畏 to 圍 ‘(to be) surround(ed)’. According to William Baxter, p.c., 畏 *wèi* and 圍 *wéi* were too different phonologically to be mutually interchangeable. Hence in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5 the graph 畏 refers to the word 畏 *wèi* ‘(to be) threaten(ed)’.

3. Leonard Arthur Lyall, *The Sayings of Confucius* (London: Longmans, 1909), 54. See also the study of *wén* in translations of the *Lúnyǔ* in Uffe Bergeton, “From Pattern to ‘Culture’?: Emergence and Transformations of Metacultural *Wén*” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Michigan, 2013), 152–235.

4. Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), 40.

5. Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of ‘Wen’ in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 87 (2000): 51–52 n. 26, referring to Peter Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*: Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992).

6. Previous studies have focused on other aspects of the term. Chow Tse-tung (“Ancient Chinese Views on Literature, the Tao and Their Relationship,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews [CLEAR]* 1 [1979]: 1–29) centers his analysis of *wén* on its uses in expressions referring to ‘writing’ and ‘literature’. Martin Kern (“Historical Transitions of ‘Wen’ in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 87 [2000]) focuses on the use of the term *wénzhāng* to refer to “written textual compositions.” David Schaberg (*A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2001]) focuses on the uses of *wén* in the *Zuǒzhuan* 左傳 to refer to rhetorically patterned speech (*wén cí* 文辭). Krzysztof Gawlikowski (“The Concept of Two Fundamental Social Principles: Wen and Wu in Chinese Classical Thought,” Part I, *Annali* 47.4 [1987]: 397–433 and Part II, *Annali* 48.1 [1988]: 35–62) analyzes the *wén-wǔ* ‘civil-martial’ dichotomy. Lothar von Falkenhausen (“The Concept of *Wen* in the Ancient Chinese Ancestral Cult,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews [CLEAR]* 18 [1996]: 1–22) analyzes the use of *wén* in inscriptions as a positive epithet in Western Zhōu Bronze. Shirakawa Shizuka 白川 静 (*Zhōngguó gǔdài wénhuà* 中國古代文化 [Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1983]) briefly touches on different attitudes towards the concept of *wén* in pre-Qín works. Péng Yàfēi 彭亞非 (“Xiān Qín lùn ‘wén’ sān zhòng yào’ì” 先秦論“

In order to avoid the hermeneutical problems related to using the modern Anglophone category of ‘culture’ to study pre-Qín texts, I will analyze the use of *wén* referring to ‘ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior’, such as *Lúnyǔ* 9.5, as a metacultural term. Greg Urban’s theory of metaculture, which has served as inspiration for the notion of ‘metacultural terms’ proposed here, defines metaculture as the reflexive process of culture commenting on itself, or “culture that is about culture.”⁷ For example, a book review is a concrete manifestation of metaculture since it is a cultural entity which comments on or evaluates another cultural product (i.e., the book under review). In this paper, I use the term *metacultural terms* to refer to language-specific expressions, such as the English word *culture* and Old Chinese *wén*, that refer to tradition-specific conceptualizations of ‘(sets) of conventionalized behaviors’.

The coining of words is a process of prepackaging reality into discrete tradition-specific concepts associated with language-specific terms. Two of the most prominent meanings of the modern English metacultural term *culture* are (i) the nineteenth-century notion of ‘high culture’ defined as the universally valid values and practices of human civilization, popularized by Matthew Arnold (1869) among others,⁸ and (ii) the anthropological concept of ‘culture’ defined as the set of transmitted practices of a specific group, as per Tylor (1871).⁹ Rather than being neutral and universally applicable analytical categories, these parochial concepts of ‘culture’ emerged in particular historical contexts and represent collectively shared conceptualizations of specific groups of people with particular agendas in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain and North America.

Similarly, metacultural *wén* is a language-specific term for a tradition-specific concept of ‘ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior’ which differs in important ways from Modern English notions of ‘culture’. One of the advantages of the theory of metacultural terms proposed here is that it allows us to engage in comparative study of metacultural concepts and trace historical changes in conceptual frameworks through changes in language-specific metacultural terms, without having to rely on the modern English metacultural concept of ‘culture’, which is, after all, no less parochial and language-specific than the Old Chinese term *wén*.

Since exhaustive study of *wén* in the entire pre-Qín corpus is not feasible in a single article, I focus on tracing the development of metacultural uses of *wén* in the *Shijing* 詩經, the *Zuozhuan*, the *Lúnyǔ*, and the *Xúnzǐ* 荀子. I use these four texts for two reasons. First, each of them contains enough instances of the term *wén* to reconstruct a coherent theory of its uses and meanings. Second, these texts can be seen as representing the intellectual milieus

文”三重意义, *Wén shǐ zhé* 1996.5: 41–45) discusses three main concepts of *wén* in the pre-Qín period. Martin J. Powers (*Pattern and Person: Ornament, Society, and Self in Classical China* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2006]) discusses *wén* in the context of his analysis of the role of patterns in the construction of personhood. Finally, Liú Shàoqǐn 刘绍瑾 (“Zhōudài lǐzhì de ‘wén’ huà yǔ Rǔjiā měixué de wénzhì guān” 周代礼制的“文”化与儒家美学的文质观, *Wényì yánjiū* 2010.6: 40–48) analyzes the role of *wén* in pre-Qín theories of aesthetics.

7. Urban, *Metaculture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2001), 281 n. 4.

8. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1869). Arnold (1822–1888) played a key role in the popularization of a concept of ‘culture’ that refers to the refinement of the mind, tastes, and manners through “acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world”; see his *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (Boston: Osgood, 1873), xiii. “The best” tradition is the one Western Europe had inherited from ancient Greece and Rome, which in his view was superior to the traditions of the rest of the world.

9. While a precursor of the use of the term culture in this sense appeared in Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: J. Murray, 1871), it did not gain currency beyond academic circles before the popular introductions to the anthropological study of cultures by Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead, among others, in the early twentieth century; see Tomoko Masuzawa, “Culture,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. M. Taylor (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 70–93.

of three different periods: (i) the *Shījīng* (ca. tenth to sixth century BCE), (ii) the *Zuǒzhuan* (late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE) and the *Lúnyǔ* (fifth to fourth centuries BCE),¹⁰ and (iii) the *Xúnzǐ* (third century BCE).¹¹ To mitigate the problems related to the dating of received texts, recently discovered manuscripts will also be discussed.

This paper contributes to our understanding of the term *wén* in two ways. First, in section 1, I argue that metacultural uses of *wén* did not exist in texts from before the Zhànguó period. I also propose that pre-Zhànguó uses of *wén* referring to positive attributes of individuals of noble or royal birth meant ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’, rather than ‘accomplished’ or ‘cultured’, and that they derive from the basic meaning ‘decorative pattern’ through regular historical processes of metaphorical extension and abstraction. That is, pre-Zhànguó uses of the term referred to physical appearance rather than acquired moral traits. The analysis proposed here thereby offers new insight into the social importance of externally visible beauty in early Zhōu society. Second, in section 2, I show that, as far as we can tell from our sources, metacultural uses of *wén* referring to the abstract concept of ‘ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior’ (e.g., *Lúnyǔ* 9.5 discussed above) emerged in the Zhànguó period.¹² This process can be broken down in three steps. First the pre-Zhànguó adjectival meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ became reinterpreted in moral terms and started to refer to ‘morally refined’ individuals. Second, adjectival *wén* in the meaning ‘morally refined’ started to be used to describe whole dynasties. Third, *wén* started to be used as a noun referring to the abstract concept of ‘ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior’ of an entire dynasty or of social practices in general. By providing a chronology of these changes, I avoid the anachronistic interpretations of *wén* proposed in the commentarial tradition which continue to influence the contemporary translations of the term in pre-Zhànguó texts.

1. FROM DECORATED OBJECT TO ‘DECORATED’ PERSON: THE ‘AWE-INSPIRINGLY BEAUTIFUL’ APPEARANCE OF THE PRE-ZHÀNGUO NOBLEMAN

Metacultural uses of the term *wén* are not attested in pre-Zhànguó texts.¹³ The three main attested uses are (a) as a word referring to concrete ‘decorative patterns’ on physical objects, (b) as a word referring to rank-indicating embroidered ‘emblems’ on garments and flags, and (c) as a word meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ used in expressions referring to ancestors and in posthumous titles. In this section, I briefly describe these uses of *wén* and argue that (b) derives from (a) and (c) derives from (b).

Wén occurs in the basic meaning ‘decorative pattern’ in a few passages in the pre-Zhànguó corpus. A typical example is the poem “Xiǎo Róng” 小戎 (Máo 128) in the *Shījīng*, which contains a description of war chariots which, among other attributes, have ‘patterned-decorated

10. Parts of the *Lúnyǔ* were composed after the fourth century BCE. This paper focuses on the parts which can be argued to date from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

11. To be sure, other Zhànguó-period texts, such as the *Hánfēizǐ* 韓非子 and the *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 呂氏春秋 and so forth, could have been chosen as well. But some of these either discuss *wén* polemically, or use the term less consistently.

12. My claim that abstract uses of *wén* as a metacultural concept emerged in the Zhànguó period does not imply that I assume that people in the earlier period were unable to think in abstract concepts. In other words, this paper studies the historical development of specific word meanings, not the general evolution of human cognitive abilities.

13. Beyond the pre-Zhànguó parts of the *Shījīng*, the *Shàngshū* 尚書, the *Chūnqiū* 春秋, and the *Zhōuyì* 周易, the pre-Zhànguó texts analyzed here also includes the oracle-bone and bronze inscriptions in the CHANT database (<http://www.chant.org/>).

(*wén*) floor-mats' (*wén yīn* 文茵).¹⁴ The *Shì míng* 釋名, a lexicographic work from the Eastern Hàn, defines *wényīn* as “made from tiger skin and having patterned colorings” 文采.¹⁵

The use of the word *wén* to refer to ‘rank-indicating emblems’—which consisted of ‘embroidered patterns’—derives directly from the basic meaning ‘decorative pattern’. Máo 177 contains a description of ‘woven’ (*zhī* 織) ‘patterned markings’ (*wén*) on flags: “[the flags] have woven pattern-emblems (*wén*) and bird insignia and the white banners were brilliant” 織文鳥章，白旆央央.¹⁶ Thus, here ‘emblems’ (*wén*) refer to a special kind of institutionalized embroidered ‘decorative pattern’ (*wén*).¹⁷

I suggest that the use of *wén* to refer to rank-marking decorative patterns on emblems gave rise to the use of *wén* to refer to people of high rank—who would have carried status-indicating emblems (*wén*) on their robes—as ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ through metaphorical extension. A similar metaphorical extension from a word referring to physical decorations to a more abstract term referring to high rank is exemplified by English term *decorated*, as in *McArthur is a highly decorated officer*. Máo 299 contains a passage which provides support for the reading of *wén* as ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ in the pre-Zhànguó period.

穆穆魯侯、敬明其德。敬慎威儀、維民之則。允文允武、昭假烈祖。¹⁸

Solemn, solemn is the Marquis of Lǔ, respectfully bright [is] his charismatic power. Respectful and careful, having awe-inspiring dignity (*wēi*) and deportment, he is a model to the people.

Truly awe-inspiringly beautiful (*wén*)! Truly martial! He shines upon his resplendent ancestors.

Here the ruler of Lǔ is described as being “respectful and careful, having awe-inspiring dignity (*wēi*) and deportment” in parallel with his attributes of being “truly awe-inspiringly beautiful (*wén*)” and “truly martial.” This juxtaposition of *wén* and *wēi* ‘dignified, imposing, awe-inspiring’ indicates that these terms have compatible and thus potentially overlapping meanings.

In addition to being ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’, members of the royal family or high nobility were often described as having a beautiful external appearance, being dressed in beautiful robes, and being equipped with beautifully fashioned and decorated objects. The following passage from Máo 55 illustrates the impressively beautiful external appearance of the ‘lord’ (*jūnzǐ*) that indicates his social status and authority and inspires awe and respect in the beholder.¹⁹

有匪君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。瑟兮僞兮，赫兮咺兮。有匪君子，充耳琇瑩。會弁如星。．．．有匪君子，如金如錫，如圭如璧。寬兮綽兮。²⁰

Elegant²¹ is the lord, he is as if cut, as if polished; as if carved, as if ground. How bright, how beautiful, how majestic, how splendid! Elegant is the lord, his ears are [decorated with] jewels and precious stones. His fastened cap is bright like stars. . . . Elegant is the lord, like bronze, like tin, like a jade tablet, like a jade disc. How magnanimous, how generous!

14. Máo 128, *Shí sān jīng zhù shū* 十三經注疏 (SSJZS) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980): 370. I refer to poems in the *Shījīng* by their number in the Máo edition.

15. *Shì míng shūzhèng bǔ* 釋名疏證補, ed. Wáng Xiānqiān 王先謙 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 254.

16. Máo 299, SSJZS 425. According to Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (127–200), here “*zhī* refers to a woven emblem” 織徽織也, see SSJZS 425.

17. The term *zhāng* 章, which often occurs in juxtaposition with *wén* referring to ‘emblem(s)’, refers to ‘rank-indicating insignia’.

18. Máo 299, SSJZS 611.

19. While Máo 55 does not contain the word *wén*, it illustrates how important having an imposing external appearance was for the construction of social status in the pre-Zhànguó period.

20. Máo 55, SSJZS 321, translation inspired by Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), 37.

21. Following Axel Schuessler, *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1987), 160, I read *fěi* 匪 as *fěi* 斐 ‘elegant, ornate’.

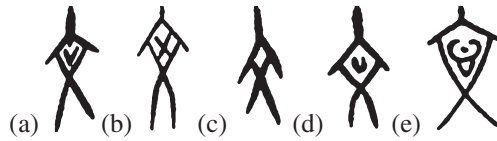


Figure 1. *Wén* 文 in oracle bone and bronze inscriptions.²²

By describing the physical beauty of the lord and his accessories and comparing him to precious metals and jade artifacts, this passage indicates that physical appearance played an important role in the construction of social hierarchies in the pre-Zhànguó period in ways that seem alien from a modern perspective. The beholder knows that the lord is the lord because he is physically beautiful as a polished piece of jade and because he wears robes with ‘emblems’ (*wén*) and is equipped with rank-indicating accoutrements, all of which makes him ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ (*wén*). When the term *wén* is used to describe individuals in the pre-Zhànguó corpus, it thus refers to the external appearance of members of the ruling elite. The preoccupation with physical beauty and the social importance of being ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ in pre-Zhànguó Zhōu society seems to have been overlooked in previous studies of the term *wén*. In contrast, I propose that pre-Zhànguó uses of *wén* to describe people refer to the property of being ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ by having externally visible concrete markers of status and authority.

Indications that in pre-Warring States times the word *wén* was interpreted in aesthetic rather than ethical terms may be found in the earliest forms of the graph <文>. The literature on early Chinese paleography contains numerous attempts at reconstructing the etymology of the word *wén* by identifying semantic components in the early forms of the graph in Shāng oracle bone inscriptions (OBI), see (a)–(c) in figure 1, and Western Zhōu bronze inscriptions (BI), see (d)–(e).

Since the basic meaning of the word *wén* is ‘(decorative) pattern’, it is not surprising that many paleographic accounts of the meaning of the graph involve the meaning ‘pattern’ in one way or another. The *Shuōwén* suggests that <文> means ‘crisscrossed lines’ (*cuò huà* 錯畫). Based on the assumption that early forms of the graph look like a ‘big person/man’ with something added on the torso, Jì Xùshēng suggests that its original meaning may have been ‘a human body with intercrossing patterns’.²³ Thus, as also discussed by Shirakawa Shizuka, ‘tattoo, tattooed’ (*wén shēn* 紋身, lit. ‘decorated body’) may have been an early meaning of this word.²⁴ Being tattooed, or otherwise ‘decorated’, may have contributed to making a person appear ‘awe-inspiringly (beautiful)’.²⁵

While paleographic studies of graphs may sometimes be useful, in many cases they provide little more than qualified guesses about how the shape and structure of graphs may, or may not, inform hypotheses about the meanings of the words they were used to write.

22. Jì Xùshēng 季旭昇, *Shuōwén xīn zhèng* 說文新證 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2010), 731. See also Lǐ Zōngkūn 李宗焜, *Jiǎgǔwén zìbiān* 甲骨文字編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 1292.

23. *Ibid.*, 732. See also the conveniently collected paleographic studies of <文> in *Gǔwénzì gūlín biānzhuān wěiyuánhuì* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999).

24. Shirakawa Shizuka, *Kanji no sekai* 漢字世界 (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1976), 29–32.

25. An imposingly beautiful appearance may inspire a range of different feelings other than awe, e.g., envy or intimacy. However, since external appearance of individuals (as well as monumental architecture and precious objects such as bronzes) served an important role in the construction of social hierarchies, ‘awe’, ‘deference’, or ‘respect’ best capture the feelings the ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ (*wén*) appearance of a ruler or nobleman was intended to generate.

Nevertheless, the idea that the early forms of the graph <文> shown in figure 1 resemble a ‘pattern-decorated person’ is compatible with the lexicalization process proposed here. The analysis of pre-Zhànguó *wén* as meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ when used as an epithet also finds support in the entry for the term in Xú Zhōngshū’s 徐中舒 2006 *Dictionary of Oracle Bone Inscriptions*, which defines *wén* as meaning ‘beautiful’ and states that “it is used as a positive appellation when prefixed to royal names.”²⁶

The use of *wén* in expressions referring to ancestors and posthumous titles accounts for the great majority of all pre-Zhànguó occurrences of *wén* in the meaning ‘awe-inspiring’. Examples of *wén* used as a positive adjective modifying expressions referring to ancestors include ‘awe-inspiring [late] father’ (*wén kǎo* 文考) and ‘awe-inspiring ancestor’ (*wén zǔ* 文祖). Posthumous titles are name-like appellations given to high status individuals after their death.²⁷ They are composed of a descriptive term, e.g., *wén* 文 ‘awe-inspiring’, *wǔ* 武 ‘martial’, *chéng* 成 ‘successful’, and so forth, modifying an expression referring to either (i) a title, e.g., *wáng* 王 ‘king’, *gōng* 公 ‘ruler, duke’, etc., (ii) a noun indicating family seniority, e.g., *bó* 伯 ‘senior (uncle)’, *shū* 叔 ‘junior (uncle)’, etc., or (iii) the term *zǐ* 子 ‘son, prince, master’.²⁸ As observed by Lothar von Falkenhausen, the contexts in which these expressions occur in bronze inscriptions—which seldom amount to more than a laconic dedication “to our awe-inspiring [late] father”—do not allow us to determine the exact meaning of *wén*. Von Falkenhausen therefore tentatively adopts ‘accomplished’ as a stopgap translation.²⁹

Although I agree with von Falkenhausen that we should be careful not to presume to know exactly what *wén* means, I suggest that ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ is a better *faute de mieux* translation than ‘accomplished’.³⁰ The translation ‘accomplished’ obscures the semantic link between the basic meaning of *wén* as ‘externally visible decorative pattern’ and its derived uses to describe the externally visible ‘decorative patterns’—on the ‘emblems’ (*wén*) on garments and the ‘decorated’ (*wén*) accoutrements—of a high status ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ (*wén*) ancestor or deceased ruler. As mentioned above, this metaphorical use of *wén* is akin to the modern English use of the adjective *decorated* to refer to military rank. That is, just as the medals and honors physically carried by a ‘decorated soldier’ indicate his rank and status, so do also the physical appearance of a Zhōu king or aristocrat—that is, his or her embroidered clothes, carved jade objects, and so forth—constitute the external ‘decoration’ (*wén*) that indicates awe-inspiring dignity (*wēi*) and authority. However, unlike a ‘decorated soldier’, the high status of the Zhōu royal family and high nobility derived more from birthrights than from ‘accomplishments’. The quality of being *wén* was not due to an accumulation of

26. Xú Zhōngshū, *Jiǎgǔwén zìdiǎn* 甲骨文字典 (Chengdu: Sichun cishu chubanshe, 2006), 996.

27. The origin of the system of posthumous names (*shì fǎ* 謚法) is controversial; see Wāng Shòukuān 汪受寬, *Shì fǎ yánjiū* 謚法研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995). According to the “Shì fǎ jiě” 謚法解 (‘Explanation of the system of posthumous names’) chapter in the *Yì Zhōu shū* 逸周書, the Duke of Zhōu established it in the eleventh century BCE; see *Yì Zhōu shū huìxiào jízhù* 逸周書彙校集注, ed. Huáng Huáixìn 黃懷信, Zhāng Mǎoróng 張懋鎔, and Tián Xùdōng 田旭東 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 618–707. In more recent times, Wáng Guówéi 王國維 (*Guāntáng jīlín* 觀堂集林, 4 vols. [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987], 895–96) places the origin of the *shì fǎ* system in the mid-Western Zhōu period. Guō Mòruò 郭沫若 (*Jīnwén cóngkǎo* 金文叢考, 3 vols. [Beijing: Kexue, 1954], 89a–101b) dates it to the Zhànguó period. Following von Falkenhausen, “The Concept of *Wen*,” I assume that an incipient system existed in the late Shāng and further developed in the Western Zhōu period.

28. This list of terms which can be modified by *wén* is based on von Falkenhausen, “The Concept of *Wen*.”

29. *Ibid.*, 3.

30. Von Falkenhausen’s excellent 1996 study establishes that the uses of *wén* in pre-Zhànguó posthumous names did not have the “moralizing dimension” later acquired in texts such as the *Zuǒzhuàn* and the *Lúnyǔ*. Von Falkenhausen also explicitly states that his translation of *wén* as “accomplished” is only a “stopgap” translation.

deeds (and even less the result of a long process of moral edification), but rather a function of who one *was*, i.e., one's social status as manifested in visible markers of status and wealth.

The translations of *wén* as 'accomplished' and 'cultured' appear to derive from the tendency in much of the Chinese exegetical tradition to project later 'moralizing' interpretations of *wén* as 'morally refined' into pre-Zhànguó texts. The translation of *wén* as 'accomplished' in early Chinese texts goes back to nineteenth-century translators such as James Legge (1815–1897). Since Legge produced his translations with the help of Chinese scholars, it is highly plausible that his translation of *wén* was inspired by the Chinese commentarial tradition in which *wén* is often assumed to mean 'acquired moral refinement'. As argued below, this was indeed one of the meanings of the term in Zhànguó-period texts such as the *Lúnyǔ* and the *Xúnzǐ*. Translating *wén* as '(morally) accomplished'—as Legge indeed does—is thus justified in these texts. However, as translations of *wén* in pre-Zhànguó texts, 'accomplished' and 'cultured' are anachronistic.

Although little or no evidence in pre-Zhànguó texts supports interpreting *wén* in abstract metacultural or moralizing terms, such anachronistic interpretations still abound. Let us first consider the occurrence of the expression *wén dé* 文德 'awe-inspiring charismatic power' in the last stanza of Máo 262: "Bright, bright is the Son of Heaven. His good reputation is endless. By displaying his awe-inspiring charismatic power (*wén dé*), he ruled the states of the four quarters" 明明天子、令聞不已、矢其文德、洽此四國.³¹ From the preceding stanzas of this poem, which describe the Son of Heaven's military might and his successes in suppressing enemies and securing his domain, we learn about a military official Hǔ, who was rewarded for his efforts on the battlefield. In return, as described in the stanza quoted above, he extols the 'awe-inspiring charismatic power' of the Son of Heaven. Given the emphasis on military exploits in this poem, Karlgren's translation of *wéndé* as 'fine virtue' is somewhat awkward.³² Waley's translation as 'power of governance' is also problematic since it is difficult to justify translating *wén* as 'governance'.³³ Legge's translation of *wéndé* as 'civil virtue' also bears the imprint of anachronistic interpretations inspired by the commentarial tradition, which projects Zhànguó-period metacultural meanings of *wén* into the Western Zhōu period.³⁴ The translation of *wén* as 'awe-inspiringly beautiful' proposed here thus represents an improvement over previous interpretations since it is grounded in an analysis of the social importance of external appearance in Western Zhōu times. It also has the added benefit of being based on the meaning of *wén* in posthumous titles and descriptions of ancestors.

The definition of *wéndé* in Xiàng Xī's 向熹 *Shijing Dictionary* is a typical example of the Chinese commentarial tradition imposing later abstract meanings of *wéndé* onto pre-Zhànguó texts: "*Wéndé* refers to using the transformative teachings of rites and music to engage in the governing of the state. It is used in contrast to 'military accomplishments'."³⁵ The problem with this definition is that there is no evidence for interpreting the expression *wéndé* to refer to 'ruling through charismatic virtue and moral education' before the

31. Máo 262, *SSJZS* 574.

32. Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, 234.

33. Arthur Waley, *The Books of Songs* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1996, cited after rpt.), 281.

34. See James Legge, *The She King* (London: Trubner, 1876), 344. According to Qū Wànli 屈萬里 (*Xiān Qín wénshǐ zīliào kǎobiàn* 先秦文史資料考辨 [Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1983], 334), Máo 262 was composed during the reign of King Xuān of Zhōu (r. 827/25–782).

35. Xiàng Xī, *Shijing cidian* 詩經詞典 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 485.

Zhànguó period.³⁶ As argued here, the contrast between ruling through ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) and ‘military prowess’ (*wǔ*) also does not predate the Zhànguó period.³⁷ Although he does not list his sources, the editor of the *Shījīng Dictionary* most likely got the inspiration for his anachronistic definition either directly or indirectly from the Chinese commentarial tradition, which often projects Zhànguó, or even later, concepts into the pre-Zhànguó period.

In sum, *wén* in pre-Zhànguó texts meant something quite different from the English words *cultured*, *civil*, and *accomplished*. First, it was only noblemen (or noblewomen) who were described as *wén*—either during their lifetime or as ancestors—in expressions such as *wén kao* ‘awe-inspiring [late] father’ and posthumous titles such as *Wén Gōng* ‘awe-inspiring [late] Duke’. Reserved for people of aristocratic descent, it was not an acquired feature but rather an inherited privilege. It thus differs from the English word *cultured*, which refers to a trait acquired through study or training. Second, the word *wén*—which in its most basic meaning refers to ‘decorative patterns’—is much more grounded in the physical appearance of the person described (his clothes, accoutrements, etc.) than the English word *cultured*. Thus, while taking certain uses of *wén* to mean ‘beautiful’ seems quite justified, as argued above, it is hard to think of any contexts in which the word *cultured* can mean ‘beautiful’ in its most basic sense. Third, the meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ is certainly not readily associated with the English word *culture(d)*. While I might be in awe of someone’s culture—in the nineteenth-century senses of refinement of manners (which may include the way he or she dresses) and thought—this is still quite different from the awe that a Western Zhōu ruler or noblemen, wearing ‘emblems’ (*wén*) and standing on his beautifully ‘decorated’ (*wén*) chariot, would inspire in someone at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

2. EMERGENCE OF METACULTURAL WÉN IN THE ZHÀNGUÓ PERIOD

While older meanings, such as ‘pattern-decorated’ and ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’, continue into the Zhànguó period, the term *wén* undergoes a reinterpretation and is increasingly used to refer to the externally observable patterns in the appearance and behavior of the morally edified individual. The pre-Zhànguó uses of *wén* in the sense ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ refer to the externally observable appearance of the people at the top of the social hierarchy. In contrast, the Zhànguó uses of *wén* in the sense ‘morally perfected’ refers to the charismatic appearance of the people at the top of a moral hierarchy. This reanalysis of the term *wén* happens in parallel with a reanalysis of the term *jūnzǐ* 君子. The term *jūnzǐ* is composed of the words *jūn* ‘lord’ and *zǐ* ‘son’ and literally means ‘the lord’s son’. In a more extended meaning it refers to ‘noblemen’ as members of the ruling elite and hereditary nobility in general. Around the beginning of the Zhànguó period the term also came to be used in an extended meaning to refer to ‘noble men’ in the sense of people who are morally superior, regardless of whether they are of noble birth or not.³⁸

Metacultural uses of *wén* as a noun referring to the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’, such as those in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5 discussed above, emerged at around the same time as

36. A late Zhànguó-period occurrence of *wéndé* meaning ‘morally refined virtue’ is found in *Lúnyǔ* 16.1, where the ruler is advised to make distant peoples submit by “cultivating his moral virtue” 修文德; see *Lúnyǔ jǐshì*, 1137. For the dating of *Lúnyǔ* 16, see n. 50.

37. Gawlikowski proposes that abstract uses of *wén* only developed at the end of the Spring and Autumn period. See Gawlikowski, “Wen and Wu in Chinese Classical Thought,” 55–56.

38. For that shift in meaning see Scott W. Morton, “The Confucian Concept of Man: The Original Formulation,” *Philosophy East and West* 21.1 (1971): 69–77.

(or slightly after) the reinterpretation of *wén* from ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ to ‘having the appearance of a morally perfected person’ in the Zhànguó period. This development can first be traced in the *Zuǒzhuàn*, where both meanings are equally present. In the *Lúnyǔ* the moral readings are more prominent. Finally, in the *Xúnzǐ* ‘morally perfected’ has become the dominant meaning of adjectival *wén* used to describe individuals, and uses of *wén* as a noun referring to the ‘(ideal) patterns of conventionalized behavior’ have become fully established in the collectively shared vocabulary of the Zhōu literary elite.

2.1 The *Zuǒzhuàn*: The Beginnings of Moral Interpretations of *wén*

The *Zuǒzhuàn*, the bulk of which I assume to have been composed in the period from the late fifth to the late fourth century BCE, represents a later intellectual milieu than that of the *Shījīng* and contains some of the earliest evidence of a reinterpretation of *wén* in moral terms.³⁹ Adjectival uses of *wén* in the *Zuǒzhuàn* often retain the older pre-Zhànguó meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’, while at the same time developing new interpretations in moral terms.

That *wén* could still mean something akin to ‘beautiful’ at the time of the *Zuǒzhuàn* is supported by passages which juxtapose *wén* and expressions meaning ‘elegant’ and ‘beautiful’. Xiāng 31.10 describes how people were selected for government offices. Someone called Zǐ Tàishū is described as being selected because he was ‘beautiful, elegant, and *wén*’ (*měi xiù ér wén* 美秀而文).⁴⁰ This description indicates that the property of being *wén* was compatible with and potentially overlapped with the property of being ‘beautiful’ (*měi*). Thus, at the time of the composition of the material in the *Zuǒzhuàn*, the word *wén* retained the ability to refer to a ‘beautiful’ external appearance that it had in the pre-Zhànguó period.

The *Zuǒzhuàn* also provides support for the hypothesis that *wén* could mean ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’. In Xiāng 31.13 we learn that during a visit to the state of Chǔ, Běigōng Wénzǐ 北宮文子 observed that the chief minister of Chǔ was beginning to behave like the ruler of a state. Nevertheless, Běigōng Wénzǐ concluded from the chief minister’s lack of ‘dignity and deportment’ (*wēi yí* 威儀) that he would not succeed in his schemes. To prove his point Běigōng Wénzǐ expounds on the qualities necessary for being the ruler of a state. To give his arguments scriptural support, he quotes a passage from Máo 299, which describes the ruler of Lǚ as “respectful and careful about maintaining his awe-inspiring dignity and deportment, a model to the people.” Although he only quotes this line, we know from the discussion of Máo 299 above that it also describes the ruler of Lǚ as being “truly awe-inspiringly beautiful (*wén*) and truly martial.” By citing Máo 299, which juxtaposes *wén* and *wēi*, Běigōng Wénzǐ is thus implying that he assumes both ‘dignity and deportment’ (*wēi yí*) and ‘awe-inspiring beauty’ (*wén*) to be necessary attributes of a true ruler. Běigōng Wénzǐ further elaborates on these attributes in a way that connects *wén* even more explicitly to the properties of having ‘awe-inspiring dignity’ (*wēi*) and being held in awe (*wèi* 畏).

39. The dating of the *Zuǒzhuàn* is controversial. According to Schaberg (*A Patterned Past*), parts of the text must have been composed and added quite late. However, based on lexical and grammatical usage patterns I date the composition of the bulk of the content of the *Zuǒzhuàn* to the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE. See Anne Cheng, “Ch’un ch’iu 春秋, Kung yang 公羊, Ku liang 穀梁 and Tso chuan 左傳,” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 67–76; Yáng Bójùn 楊伯峻, “Zuǒzhuàn chéngshū niándài lùnshù” 左傳成書年代論述, *Wenshi* 1979.6: 65–75; and Bernhard Karlgren, “On the Authenticity and Nature of the Tso Chuan,” *Göteborgs Högscolas Årsskrift* 32 (1926): 1–65.

40. Zuǒ, Xiāng 31.1, *Chūnqiū Zuǒzhuàn zhù* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yáng Bójùn 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghu shuju, 1990): 1191.

文王伐崇，再駕而降為臣，蠻夷帥服，可謂畏之。... 文王之行，至今為法，可謂象之。有威儀也。故君子在位可畏，... 動作有文，言語有章，以臨其下，謂之有威儀也。⁴¹

King Wén led a military campaign against Chóng. The second time he drove [his chariots] there he made [them] surrender and become his subjects; and the Mán-Yí⁴² generals submitted. This can be called standing in awe (*wèi* 畏) of him. . . . Till this day the acts of King Wén are a model. This is what is called emulating him. King Wén had awe-inspiring dignity (*wēi* 威) and deportment (*yí* 儀). Thus when a nobleman (/noble man), while in office, is held in awe (*wèi*); . . . and when his movements and stirrings have *wén* and his utterances and sayings have ‘decorative flourishes’ (*zhāng* 章) and he uses these things to oversee his underlings, this is called to have awe-inspiring dignity and deportment (*wēi yí*).

In Běigōng Wénzǐ’s description of the ‘awe-inspiring dignity and deportment’ (*wēiyí*) of the ruler the words *wèi* ‘awe, fear’ and *wēi* ‘awe-inspiring dignity’ are connected to *wén* in two respects.⁴³ First, King Wén’s (文) actions are held up as a model (*fǎ* 法) for awe-inspiring behavior (e.g., subjugating the restive Mán-Yí groups). As witnessed by *Lúnyǔ* 9.5 discussed above, King Wén comes to be associated with metacultural *wén* in the Zhànguó period. Běigōng Wénzǐ thus mentions King Wén to illustrate that his actions which inspired ‘awe’ (*wèi*) are examples of him being *wén* ‘awe-inspiring’, both in a moral sense and from the point of view of his physical appearance and actions.⁴⁴

Second, Běigōng Wénzǐ’s summary of the behavior and attributes of the nobleman/noble man (*jūnzǐ*) starts by saying that “the *jūnzǐ*, when in office, is held in awe (*wèi*).” Toward the end of the list of attributes of the *jūnzǐ*, Běigōng Wénzǐ includes a description of his “movements and stirrings” as having *wén*. Běigōng Wénzǐ concludes by stating that these attributes are “that by which he oversees his underlings” and thus amounts to what “is called having awe-inspiring dignity (*wēi*) and deportment.” This passage thus contains the most explicit connection between being ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’/‘morally refined’ (*wén*) and being ‘awe-inspiringly dignified’ (*wēi*) in the entire pre-Qín corpus.

In addition to the older meaning ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’, other *Zuǒzhàn* passages show that *wén* can refer to both external appearance *and* moral attributes. In the passage from Huán 2.2 quoted below, Zāng Āibó, a Lǚ official, remonstrates with Duke Huán (r. 711–694) for transgressing ritual propriety by looting the ritual vessels of the state of Gào and placing them in the Grand Temple of the state of Lǚ. Zāng Āibó uses the opportunity to lecture Duke Huán on the proper behavior and appearance of a ruler and the importance of his ‘displaying his charismatic power’ (*zhāo dé* 昭德). In his description of the ideal ruler Zāng Āibó links the ruler’s property of inspiring apprehension and fear (*jiè jù* 戒懼) to his ‘awe-inspiring beauty’ (*wén*) displayed by his emblems and to his virtues recorded in his ‘decorated’ (*wén*) objects:

41. *Zuǒ*, Xiāng 31.13, *Chūnqiū Zuǒzhàn zhù*, 1193–95.

42. *Mán* 蠻 and *Yí* 夷 refer to non-Zhōu peoples.

43. The Old Chinese words ‘awe-inspiring dignity; (natural) authority’ (*wēi* 威) and ‘to fear’ (*wèi* 畏) derive from the same root *ʔuj. The graph <威> is not found in excavated documents, which use the graph <畏> to write both *ʔuj and *ʔuj-s. Baxter and Sagart reconstruct the Old Chinese word which is written with the graph <威> in received versions of pre-Qín texts as *ʔuj (> *wēi*) and the word written with <畏> as *ʔuj-s (> *wèi*); see William Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese A New Reconstruction* (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 101. The -s suffix here indicates a transitive verbal meaning. *ʔuj-s (> *wèi*) was a verb meaning ‘to fear; to frighten; threaten’ and *ʔuj (> *wēi*) was a noun ‘fright; fear’, or an adjective ‘frightening; awe-inspiring’.

44. Besides *Lúnyǔ* 9.5, King Wén is also explicitly linked to the ‘virtue of being *wén*’ in the “Jǐfǎ” 祭法 chapter of the *Lǐjī*: “King Wén governed through *wén*” 文王以文治 (*SSJZS*, 1590). For the relationship between King Wén and *wén* (esp. the compound *wéncí* 文辭), see also Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 81–86.

君人者，將昭德塞違，以臨照百官... 故昭令德以示子孫... 火、龍、黼、黻，昭其文也... 夫德，儉而有度... 文物以紀之，聲明以發之，以臨照百官。百官於是乎戒懼而不敢易紀律。⁴⁵

He who rules people displays his ‘charismatic power/moral virtues’ (*dé*) and obstructs transgressions so that he may thereby shine on the hundred officers from above... Hence, he displays his great ‘charismatic power /moral virtues’ (*dé*) in order to show it to his sons and grandsons... As for the flames, dragons, and the *fǔ* and *fú* designs on embroideries, these display his *wén*... As for his charismatic power (*dé*), and his property of being frugal and measured... decorated (*wén*) objects are used to record them. [These properties] are manifested in sound and brightly displayed so that they shine on the many officials from above. Consequently, the many officials are struck with apprehension and fear, and do not dare to change the rules and statutes.

The first occurrence of *wén* refers to the ‘awe-inspiring beauty’ of the ruler expressed by the embroidered status-indicating emblems, i.e., the flame and dragon patterns and the *fǔ fú* designs found on his garments, flags, and banners.⁴⁶ This occurrence of *wén* is thus comparable to the occurrence of the term to refer to “woven patterns (*wén*) and bird insignia (*zhāng*)” in Máo 177 discussed above. Note also the similarities between Zāng Āibó’s description of the ideal ruler and the description found in Máo 55 discussed in section 1 above. Both passages emphasize the dashing external appearance of the ruler, detailing his garments and various accoutrements on himself, his chariots, and horses. Thus, this *Zuǒzhàn* passage reflects a society in which physical appearance is still closely connected to status and authority.

Unlike the passage from Máo 55, Zāng Āibó does interpret some of the physical objects and qualities as signs of moral virtues (德). In contrast, in Máo 55 the ‘lord’ (*jūnzǐ*) simply is ‘beautiful’ and ‘awe-inspiring’. The end of the passage from Huán 2.2 quoted above summarizes the link between ‘inner power’ (*dé*) and virtues of ‘frugality’ (*jiǎn*) and ‘measure’ (*dù*) by stating that they are externally manifested/expressed in ‘patterned accoutrements’ (*wén wù* 文物). In the *Zuǒzhàn* the ruler’s external appearance thus serves the double purpose of being visually ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ while at the same time indicating his ‘moral virtues’ (*dé*) of ‘frugality’ (*jiǎn* 儉) and appropriate sense of ‘measure’ (*dù* 度).⁴⁷

Though *wén* begins to be interpreted ethically, it still retains the aesthetic connotations of its basic meaning of ‘(externally visible) decorative pattern’. In Huán 2.2 discussed above, *wén* refers to the fire and dragon emblems (*wén*) on garments and ‘decorated accoutrements’ (*wén wù*). In Xiāng 31.13, also discussed above, *wén* describes the “movements and stirrings” (*dòng zuò*) of the *jūnzǐ* as well as his property of having awe-inspiring dignity and deportment’ (*wēi yí*). Xi 24.1 adds to this picture by describing words as the ‘external decoration’ (*wén*) of a person: “Utterances are the ‘decoration’ (*wén*) of a person. When a person is about to go into reclusion, what is the use of decorating (*wén*) oneself? That would be seeking ostentatious display.”⁴⁸ Uttered by Jiè Zhī Tuī 介之推 to explain why he will not plead his case with Duke Wén of Jin, who has neglected to reward him for his loyal service during the long years of the duke’s exile, this statement indicates that in the *Zuǒzhàn* *wén* is the externally observable expression “in clothing, accoutrements, gestures, and words” of a person’s inner worth and dignity.⁴⁹

45. Zuǒ, Huán 2.2, *Chūnqiū Zuǒzhàn zhù*, 86–89.

46. Martin Powers (“The Figure in the Carpet: Reflections on the Discourse of Ornament in Zhou China,” *Monumenta Serica* 43 [1995]: 223) translates *fǔfú* 黼黻 as “noble designs” and suggests that it refers to patterns “in which figure and ground are reversible.”

47. In the pre-Zhànguó period *dé* referred to externally observable ‘charismatic power’. Like *jūnzǐ* and *wén*, the word *dé* is reanalyzed in the Zhànguó period when it started to be analyzed in moral terms as ‘moral virtue’.

48. Zuǒ, Xi 24.1 *Chūnqiū Zuǒzhàn zhù*, 418–19.

49. See Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 64.

2.2 The Emergence of Metacultural wén in the Lúnyǔ

The *Lúnyǔ* discusses the moral interpretation of *wén* more explicitly than the *Zuǒzhuàn*.⁵⁰ In the *Lúnyǔ wén*, understood as ‘moral refinement’, is first and foremost viewed as an acquired attribute of the ‘noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*). In it we also find some of the earliest metacultural uses of *wén* as a noun referring to the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behaviors’. Since the term *jūnzǐ* now also refers to non-noble individuals (i.e., ‘noble men’ in the moral sense of the term), the property of being *wén* is no longer a prerogative of the hereditary nobility but can be acquired even by non-nobles providing that they engage in the proper edification process, which consists in imitating the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (*wén*). In the *Lúnyǔ*, *wén* is therefore no longer understood exclusively in terms of physical appearance as ‘awe-inspiring beauty’, as in the pre-Zhànguó period, but is increasingly conceptualized in moral terms.

In *Lúnyǔ* 5.15, Kǒngzǐ and his followers explicitly discuss the motivation for the use of *wén* in posthumous titles in moral terms.⁵¹

子貢問曰：孔文子何以謂之文也？子曰：敏而好學，不恥下問，是以謂之文也。⁵²
Zigong asked, “What is the reason Kǒng Wénzǐ is [posthumously] called *Wén*?” The Master replied, “He was diligent and fond of learning. And he did not consider it shameful to ask those below him. This is the reason why he is [posthumously] called *Wén*.”

After his death around 484 BCE, Kǒng Yǔ 孔圉, a minister at the Wei court, was given the posthumous title Kǒng Wénzǐ 孔文子. Zigong’s question why Kǒng Yǔ was honored with this title is probably motivated by his knowledge of Kǒng Yǔ’s rather mixed record. Being part of the eulogizing lore following the death of a high-status individual, many (but not all) posthumous titles are positive terms such as *wén* ‘awe-inspiring’, *líng* 靈 ‘potent’, and *huì* 惠 ‘wise’. Such highly positive titles were often less reflective of the carriers’ true mettle than of the power and influence of their family and supporters. Kǒngzǐ justifies Kǒng Yǔ’s posthumous title by citing positive traits such as being hard working, humble, and studious. Although Kǒng Yǔ may have been far from perfect, at least he possessed enough positive traits to be called ‘morally decorated/refined’ (*wén*). *Lúnyǔ* 5.15 thus illustrates a new use of *wén* in the meaning ‘morally refined’ not seen before the Zhànguó period.

In the Zhànguó period being *wén* in the moral sense began to be considered an acquired property. *Lúnyǔ* 1.15 contains a metaphorical interpretation of the line “as if cut, as if

50. The material in the *Lúnyǔ* (*LY*) was composed over the span of several centuries from the beginning of the Zhànguó period down to the third century BCE. It can be divided roughly by century as follows: (i) *LY* 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 composed in the fifth century BCE, (ii) *LY* 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 composed in the fourth century, and (iii) *LY* 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 composed in the third century BCE or later. The passages from the *Lúnyǔ* discussed in this paper are all from groups (i) or (ii) and thus represent the intellectual milieu of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. See Bruce Brooks and Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997); Anne Cheng, “*Lun yü* 論語,” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 313–23; John Makeham, “The Formation of *Lunyu* as a Book,” *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996): 1–24; and Qū Wànlǐ, *Xiān Qín wénshǐ zǐliào*, 382–89.

51. The “*Shì fǎ jiě*” chapter in the *Yì Zhōu shū* discusses the use of *wén* in posthumous titles in moral terms: “Someone whose Way and virtue is broad and thick may be called *wén*; someone who has studied assiduously and been fond of asking questions may be called *wén*; someone who has been kind and gracious in caring for the people may be called *wén*; someone who has had sympathy with the people and graciously performed the rites may be called *wén*” 道德博厚曰文，學勤好問曰文，慈惠愛民曰文，愍民惠禮曰文 (*Yì Zhōu shū huìxiào jízhù*, 635–37). The *Yì Zhōu shū* was probably composed in the Zhànguó period or early Hàn times; see Edward Shaughnessy, “*I Chou shu* 逸周書,” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 229–33.

52. *Lúnyǔ* 1.15, *Lúnyǔ jíshì*, 325.

polished, as if carved, as if ground” from Máo 55, which implies that the ‘moral decoration/refinement’ of a noble man is acquired through a slow process of moral edification.

子貢問曰：貧而無諂，富而無驕，何如？子曰：可也。未若貧而樂道、富而好禮者也。子貢曰：《詩》云：『如切如磋，如琢如磨』，其斯之謂與？⁵³

Zìgòng asked, “being poor but not fawning, wealthy but not arrogant. What do you think of this?” The Master said, “That is acceptable, but it is not as good as being poor but still finding joy in the Way, or being wealthy but still being fond of the rites.” Zìgòng said, “A poem says, as if cut, as if polished; as if carved, as if ground. Is what you just said not an example of what is expressed in this line?”

The main purpose of *Lúnyǔ* 1.15 is to describe the ‘moral refinement’ of the ‘(morally) noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*) as consisting in having acquired certain moral traits such as being “observant of the rites” and “delighting in the Way” rather than “obsequious” and “arrogant.” The fact that *Lúnyǔ* 1.15 quotes from Máo 55 provides us with an opportunity to compare the semantic shift of *wén*, from ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ in pre-Zhànguó times, as illustrated by Máo 55 discussed in section 1, to ‘morally refined’ in the Zhànguó period as illustrated in *Lúnyǔ* 1.15. As persuasively argued by Edward Slingerland, the passage from Máo 55 “as if cut, as if polished; as if carved, as if ground” is used metaphorically in *Lúnyǔ* 1.15 to refer to the process of edification.⁵⁴ Just as the decorative patterns (*wén*) on a jade vessel are applied externally, so is also the ‘decoration/moral refinement’ (*wén*) of the noble man (*jūnzǐ*) acquired through imitation of an external tradition of ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (i.e., the *sī wén* referred to in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5).

Further support for the analysis of *wén* as an acquired attribute is found in *Lúnyǔ* 14.12, where *wén* is used as a transitive verb meaning ‘to pattern’ or ‘to decorate’: “If someone who possesses Zāng Wǔzhōng’s wisdom, Gōngchuò’s freedom from desire . . . is *wén*’ed (‘refined’) through ritual and music, then he can be considered a perfected person.”⁵⁵ Here Kǒngzǐ describes the ‘perfected man’ (*chéng rén* 成人). In addition to possessing certain inner qualities (i.e., wisdom and freedom from desires) as raw material, he needs to undergo further refinement or decoration (*wén*) through the ‘rites and music’ (*lǐ yuè* 禮樂). Only then will he achieve the balance of ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) and ‘native substance’ (*zhì* 質) that is required of the ‘noble man’ in *Lúnyǔ* 6.18.⁵⁶

By opening up the possibility that ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) can be acquired, *Lúnyǔ* 1.15 and 14.12 imply that it is possible for persons of non-noble background to become ‘morally refined’ (*wén*) through the proper edification process. Thus, for example, the passage from *Lúnyǔ* 14.12 quoted above does not assume that the ‘perfected person’ has to be of noble birth. Since *wén* is explicitly mentioned as part of the curriculum taught by Kǒngzǐ,⁵⁷ and since several of his students, such as Yán Huí,⁵⁸ were of non-noble origin, it is clear that

53. *Lúnyǔ* 1.15, *Lúnyǔ jíshì*, 54–56, translation partially inspired by Edward Slingerland, *Analects* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 6–7.

54. Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 53.

55. *Lúnyǔ* 14.12, *Lúnyǔ jíshì*, 969: 若臧武仲之知，公綽之不欲 . . . 文之以禮樂，亦可以為成人矣。

56. See *Lúnyǔ* 6.18, *Lúnyǔ jíshì*, 400: “When *wén* and native substance are balanced, then you are a noble man” 文質彬彬，然後君子。For the contrast between *wén* and *zhì* see Kim-Chong Chong, “The Aesthetic Moral Personality: *Li*, *Yi*, *Wen*, and *Chih* in the *Analects*,” *Monumenta Serica* 46 (1998): 69–90.

57. See *Lúnyǔ* 7.25, *Lúnyǔ jíshì*, 486: “The Master used four things to teach: *wén*, behavior, loyalty, and trust” 子以四教：文、行、忠、信。

58. See *Lúnyǔ* 9.11, *Lúnyǔ jíshì*, 593–95: “Yán Huí, sighing, said, . . . the Master . . . has broadened me with *wén* and restrained me with the rites” 顏淵喟然歎曰 . . . 夫子 . . . 博我以文，約我以禮。

the edification process through which one acquires *wén* was not confined to people of noble birth.⁵⁹

The reinterpretation of adjectival uses of *wén* from ‘displaying awe-inspiring external marks of social status and authority’ to ‘displaying the external appearance and charisma of moral perfection’ was an important step in the development of metacultural uses of *wén* as a noun referring to ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (as in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5). After this semantic shift had taken place, the new meaning of *wén* as ‘displaying the external appearance of moral perfection’ could now be applied to entire dynasties.⁶⁰ Thus, while adjectival *wén* refers to the ‘moral refinement’ of a person in *Lúnyǔ* 5.15, in *Lúnyǔ* 3.14 Kǒngzǐ uses it to describe the Zhōu dynasty:

子曰：周監於二代，郁郁乎文哉！吾從周。⁶¹

The Master said, “As for the Zhōu, when viewed on the background of the two [preceding] dynasties [i.e., the Xià and the Shāng], how splendid! How morally refined (*wén*) indeed! I follow the [the ways of the] Zhōu.”⁶²

In this passage Kǒngzǐ sets apart the Zhōu as being the greatest and morally most perfected, i.e., the most *wén*, of the three dynasties. *Lúnyǔ* 9.5 contains another example of *wén* referring to the ‘refinement of the tradition’ passed down from the revered founding kings of the Zhōu. Since *Lúnyǔ* 3.14 and 9.5 are statements explicitly referring to and commenting on the tradition of the Zhōu, these occurrences of the term *wén* constitute the first cases in the texts that we have of what I refer to here as metacultural *wén*.

2.3 *Wén in Recently Discovered Texts*

Recently discovered manuscript texts confirm that metacultural uses of *wén* date back to the fourth century BCE, as suggested by the above analysis of *wén* in received texts such as the *Lúnyǔ* and the *Zuǒzhuàn*. Some of the earliest uses of *wén* and *wǔ* to refer to contrasting principles of governance are found in the recently discovered Shanghai Museum bamboo manuscripts and the *Zuǒzhuàn*. Strip 5 of the “Tiānzi jiàn zhōu” 天子建州 manuscript, which was likely composed in the fourth century BCE, contains a passage which explicitly contrasts *wén* and *wǔ*.

文陰而武陽，信文得吏，信武得田。文德治，武德伐，文生武殺。

Wén is *yīn* and *wǔ* is *yáng*. If one is trusted in *wén*, then one will obtain officials; if one is trusted in *wǔ*, then one will obtain fields. Morally refined (*wén*) charismatic power [is used to] rule/govern; martial (*wǔ*) charismatic power [is used to] attack [militarily]. *Wén* gives birth and *wǔ* kills.⁶³

59. In contrast, in the pre-Zhànguó corpus, the term *jūnzǐ* consistently refers to ‘rulers/lords’ or aristocratic ‘noblemen’. The pre-Zhànguó corpus contains no clear examples of the term *jūnzǐ* used exclusively in the Zhànguó sense of ‘morally refined gentleman (regardless of birth)’. There are no pre-Zhànguó instances of *jūnzǐ* referring to men of non-noble birth.

60. In *Zuǒ*, Xiāng 8.3 ‘awe-inspiring charismatic power’ (*wéndé* 文德) is described as something which a state (*guó* 國) can either have or lack: “There is no greater disaster than if a small state is without *wéndé* but still [wants to] have military achievements” 小國無文德而有武功，禍莫大焉 (*Zuǒ*, Xiāng 8.3, *Chūnqiū Zuǒzhuàn zhù*, 956).

61. *Lúnyǔ* 3.14, *Lúnyǔ jǐshì*, 182.

62. In this passage *wén* can also be translated as a noun, i.e., “How splendid [its] *wén* indeed!”

63. See *Shànghǎi bówùguǎn cáng zhànguó Chǔ zhúshū* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, vols. 1–9, ed. Mǎ Chéngyuán 馬承源 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001–12). Though *wén* does occur in the recently discovered texts known as the *Qīnghuá* manuscripts, none of these occurrences contradicts the analysis presented here. See *Qīnghuá dàxué cáng zhànguó zhújiǎn* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 vols. 1–3, ed. Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2010–13).

The explicit associations of *wén* and *wǔ* with other pairs of contrasting concepts such as governing (*zhì* 治) versus attacking (*fá* 伐), and ‘giving birth/life’ (*shēng* 生) versus ‘killing’ (*shā* 殺), in this passage have parallels in late Zhànguó and Western Hàn texts and seem to anticipate the association of *wén* with rewards and *wǔ* with punishments found in the *Hánfēizǐ*.⁶⁴

The graph *wén* <文> occurs several times in the Guōdiàn manuscripts, but always in names, such as King Wén. However, as observed by Scott Cook, in the “Human Nature Comes Via Mandate” Guōdiàn text, the graph <覺> is used to write the word *wén* in the verbal meaning ‘to refine’, much as in the passage from *Lúnyǔ* 14.12 discussed above.⁶⁵

詩書禮樂其始出皆生於人。 . . . 聖人比其類而論會之 . . . 體其義而節覺(文)之。

The Odes, Documents, Ritual, and Music all in their beginnings arose from mankind. . . . The sages compared their types and arranged and assembled them; . . . gave embodiment to their propriety and provided it with regularity and refined pattern.⁶⁶

2.4 Metacultural *wén* in the *Xúnzǐ*: Ideal Patterns of Conventionalized Behavior

There is general agreement that most of the *Xúnzǐ* was composed in the third century BCE.⁶⁷ Since it also has a well-developed theory of *wén*, it is the perfect work for illustrating the last phase in the development of metacultural uses of this term in the pre-Qín period. In many ways the *Xúnzǐ* represents late Zhànguó-period developments of earlier uses of *wén* found in the *Lúnyǔ* and the *Zuǒzhuàn*. First, the *Xúnzǐ* defines the *wén* of the ‘noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*) in even more explicitly moral terms than these two earlier works.

君子 . . . 辯而不爭 . . . 堅彊而不暴 . . . 恭敬謹慎而容。夫是之謂至文。⁶⁸

The noble man (*jūnzǐ*) . . . debates, but does not compete. . . . He is hard and strong, but not violent. . . . He is respectful, reverent, attentive and cautious, but still generous. Indeed, this is what is called [being] utmost *wén*.

This passage from the *Xúnzǐ* leaves no doubt that the *wén* of the ‘noble man’ consists in having a set of moral qualities which are observable in his behavior and demeanor.⁶⁹ In contrast to the *Shījīng* and the *Zuǒzhuàn*, having a ‘beautiful’ (*měi*) or ‘awe-inspiring’ (*wēi*) external appearance is no longer necessary for being a ‘morally refined’ (*wén*) ‘noble man’.⁷⁰

64. For the association of the *wén-wǔ* pair with the changing seasons and the *yīn-yang* pair see also Robin McNeal, *Conquer and Govern* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai‘i Press, 2012).

65. Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2012), 711.

66. Cook, *Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 709–12. See also *Guōdiàn Chǔmù zhújiǎn* 郭店楚墓竹簡, ed. Jīngmén shì bówùguǎn (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998).

67. Needless to say this does not preclude later interpolations, or even the possibility of entire chapters dating from the Qin or early Han periods. See John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988), 105–28, and Michael Loewe, “Hsün tzu 荀子,” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 178–88.

68. *Xúnzǐ* 3.4, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě* 荀子集解, ed. Wáng Xiānqiān 王先謙 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988): 40–41.

69. Masayuki Sato 佐藤將之 (*Xúnzǐ lǐzhì sīxiǎng de yuānyuán yǔ zhànguó zhūzi zhī yánjiū* 荀子禮治思想的淵源與戰國諸子之研究 [Táiběi: Guólí Táiwān dàxué chūbǎn zhōngxīn, 2013], 229) also interprets *wén* in this passage as “elegant and refined speech and actions” 文雅的言行.

70. In spite of the fact that the *Xúnzǐ* most often uses *wén* to refer to the ‘moral refinement’ of the ‘noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*), it also uses the term in the older sense to refer to the important social function of the ‘beautiful’ and ‘awe-inspiring’ appearance of the ruler: “The former kings and sages . . . knew that if those who were rulers of men and superiors did not make [themselves] beautiful (*měi*) and did not decorate (*shì*) [themselves], then they would not be able to unify the people; . . . that if they were not awe-inspiring (*wēi*) and strong, then they would not be able to

As in the *Lúnyǔ*, the *wén* of the noble man is an acquired trait which is accessible to anyone who is willing to undergo the necessary edification process. While the *Lúnyǔ* does not formulate its theory of moral education explicitly, the *Xúnzǐ* spells out the implications of using crafts metaphors to describe the process of acquiring *wén*:⁷¹

人之於文學也，猶玉之於琢磨也。《詩》曰：「如切如磋，如琢如磨。」謂學問也。和之璧，井里之厥也，玉人琢之，為天子寶。子贛、季路，故鄙人也，被文學，服禮義，為天下列士。⁷²

Pattern (*wén*) imitation (*xué*) is to a person what polishing and grinding are to jade. A poem says, “As if cut, as if polished; as if carved, as if ground.” This refers to imitating and inquiring. As for Hé’s jade disc and the Jǐnglǐ stone, after jade specialists polished them, then they became treasures of all under Heaven.⁷³ As Zǐgòng⁷⁴ and Jì Lù—who were men of lowly backgrounds—donned pattern (*wén*) imitation and dressed in the rites and duty, then they became illustrious retainer-officials⁷⁵ for all under Heaven.

This crafts metaphor shows that the *Xúnzǐ* views the edification process as a slow process of fashioning the moral mettle of the individual through ‘imitation of the ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (*wénxué* 文學),⁷⁶ which are preserved in the tradition of government institutions and social mores from the early Zhōu. Using Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor, this crafts metaphor can be analyzed as follows:⁷⁷ The physical process of jade carving provides the structuring source domain for the conceptualization of moral edification. First, just as raw jade does not have the teleological potential to turn into beautifully carved objects on its own, the implication is that human beings also do not have innate knowledge of normative values that would allow them to turn into sages on their own. Second, in the same way that raw rocks containing jade appear crude and unappealing at first glance, the potential worth of people of humble origins (such as Zǐgòng and Jì Lù) also cannot easily be judged from appearances. Third, by cutting and carving it, the jade carver

prevent aggression and conquer ferocious enemies. Hence, . . . [one] must chisel and polish [stones], [and one] must carve and inlay [metals], and emblems (*wén*) and insignia (*zhāng*) must have *fū fú* designs in order to fill the eyes [of their subjects]” 先王聖人 . . . 知夫為人主上者，不美不飾之不足以一民也 . . . 不威不強之不足以禁暴勝悍也。故 . . . 必將銅琢刻鏤，黼黻文章，以塞其目 (*Xúnzǐ* 10.9, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 185). The description of the ruler as ‘awe-inspiring’ and ‘beautiful’ in this passage resembles the use of *wén* in the *Zuǒzhuàn* passage from Xiāng 31.10 discussed above. Only by ‘decorating’ and making himself ‘beautiful’ can the ruler unify the entire realm under heaven (*tiān xià*). The ruler’s impressive emblems (*wén*) and insignia play a central role in this process by ‘filling the eyes [of his subjects]’. Not surprisingly, the authors of the *Xúnzǐ* use this older meaning of *wén* when describing the ancient kings.

71. For the use of crafts metaphors in the *Lúnyǔ* and the *Xúnzǐ*, see also chapters 2–7 in Slingerland, *Effortless Action*.

72. *Xúnzǐ* 27.84, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 508.

73. Following Wáng Niànsūn 王念孫, <天子> is emended to <天下>; see *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 508.

74. The text writes the name Zǐgòng 子貢 as Zǐgàn 子贛. For simplicity, I use Zǐgòng in the translation.

75. The term *shì* 士 is notoriously difficult to translate. For lack of a better word, I use ‘retainer-officials’ as a stopgap translation.

76. The exact meaning of the expression *wénxué* 文學 is controversial. Much confusion has been generated by projecting later meanings into the pre-Qín period. Although the term means something like ‘literature’ or ‘literary studies’ in later periods, I agree with Martin Kern (“Historical Transitions of ‘Wen’”) that such readings are anachronistic in pre-Qín texts. As discussed here, rather than referring narrowly to texts, pre-Qín uses of *wén* in the expression *wénxué* refer more broadly to the social and moral ‘patterns’ (be they in sacrifice, rites, music), of which the body of classical texts (the *Shū* and the *Shī*) are but a small part. For a different analysis of *wénxué*, see Chow, “Ancient Chinese Views on Literature,” 1–29. For an excellent study of the concept of *wén* in medieval to modern China, see Pablo Ariel Bliststein, “From ‘Ornament’ to ‘Literature’: An Uncertain Substitution in Nineteenth-Twentieth Century China,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 28.1 (2016): 222–72.

77. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

can turn an unassuming rock into a treasured gem. Similarly, since people do not have the innate resources to transform themselves on their own, the implication is that they need to learn about the ‘ideal patterns of normative values’ (*wén*) from an external tradition under the guidance of a teacher or mentor. Through this process even ‘lowly people’ (*bǐ rén*) are able to become morally refined retainer-officials known everywhere under Heaven. In sum, although not spelled out in the original passage, the implications furnished by the source domain (i.e., jade carving) allow us to infer that the authors assume the carved patterns on the jade object to correspond to the ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) of the ‘noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*).⁷⁸

By using the exact same phrase ‘as if cut, as if polished; as if carved, as if ground’ from *Shījīng* 55 as the one also quoted by Zīgòng in *Lúnyǔ* 1.15 discussed above, the *Xúnzǐ* explicitly anchors its theory of moral education in the virtue ethics of the *Lúnyǔ*. In sum, the acquisition of ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) through a long edification process based on the imitation of the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ of the early Zhōu was seen as a necessary prerequisite for office-holding in both the *Lúnyǔ* and the *Xúnzǐ*.

Now let us turn to nominal uses of *wén* referring to metacultural concepts. As in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5, where Kǒngzǐ refers to the tradition of the early Zhōu as ‘this *wén*’ (*sī wén*), the *Xúnzǐ* also contains nominal uses of *wén* referring to the metacultural concept of ‘ideal patterns in transmitted practices’. Thus *Xúnzǐ* 19.11 explicitly describes how the former kings established the ‘ideal prescriptive patterns’ (*wén*) of sacrificial rites in order to help the mourners control and channel their emotions in socially appropriate ways.

故先王案為之立文 . . . 故曰：祭者 . . . 忠信愛敬之至矣，禮節文貌之盛矣。⁷⁹

The former kings consequently established the ideal patterns (*wén*) for these situations . . .

Therefore I say: As for sacrifice . . . it is the [manifestation] of utmost loyalty, trust, caring, and respect; [it is] the perfection of the rites and restraint and of refined (*wén*) appearance.

Interestingly, this passage uses the term *wén* both to refer to the metacultural concept of the ideal prescriptive ‘patterns’ for the conventional practices of mourning rites established by the former kings, and to refer to the ‘morally refined’ appearance (*mào* 貌) of the person following these practices appropriately. In other words, *wén* is used to refer both to the physically observable dignified appearance of an individual, and to the less directly observable ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior.

In another passage, the *Xúnzǐ* describes how the former kings made (*wéi* 為) the ‘ideal patterns’ for music. “Sounds and music penetrate deep into people, and their transformation of people is swift. Therefore the former kings diligently made ‘ideal patterns’ (*wén*) for [sounds and music]” 夫聲樂之入人也深，其化人也速，故先王謹為之文。⁸⁰ The implication, spelled out in the continuation of this passage, is that the ideal musical patterns (*wén*) of the former kings ensured centered and balanced music which made the people behave correctly and thereby prevented disorder. Thus, without the ideal patterns (*wén*) made by the sages, music as a tool for governing the people would be much less efficacious.

Seeing the former kings as responsible for establishing the ‘correct patterns’ of sacrificial practice and music, the *Xúnzǐ* develops a theory of kingship which includes ‘perfecting’ (*chéng* 成) the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (*wén*), in order to display it to all under heaven:

78. This analysis of crafts metaphors in the *Xúnzǐ* is based on chapter 7 in Slingerland, *Effortless Action*.

79. *Xúnzǐ* 19.11, *Xúnzǐ jíjiě*, 375.

80. *Xúnzǐ* 20.2, *Xúnzǐ jíjiě*, 380.

王者...致賢而能以救不肖，致彊而能以寬弱，戰必能殆之而羞與之鬥，委然成文，以示之天下，而暴國安自化矣。⁸¹

The king... is the most worthy and is thereby able to save the unworthy. He is the strongest and is thereby able to be broadminded toward the weak. If he engages in warfare then he will necessarily destroy [his enemy] but he still considers it shameful to fight with anyone. Indeed, he perfects *wén* in order to display it to all under heaven so that aggressive states will be at peace and transform themselves.

This passage describes how the ruler can pacify potential enemies by perfecting *wén*, understood either as his own ‘moral refinement’ or as the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’. That *wén* still refers to externally observable patterns is indicated by the fact that it must be displayed (*shì* 示). The transformative power of the display of ‘patterned moral perfection’ *wén* is also emphasized in *Xúnzǐ* 14.6, which states that “if those above are *wén*, then those below will be peaceful” 上文下安.⁸² These passages thus indicate that metacultural *wén* was mainly conceived of as a property of the ruler and ruling elite (‘those above’), rather than as something that the masses should strive for. In this respect it differs significantly from the modern English concept of ‘culture’.

In the *Xúnzǐ*, the social function of *wén* as a form of transformative communication between high and low is intimately linked to the rites (*lǐ* 禮). Thus according to the *Xúnzǐ*, the “rites... use [distinctions between] noble and base to create patterns (*wén*) [of social distinction]” 禮者... 以貴賤為文.⁸³ In a different passage, the *Xúnzǐ* elaborates on this theme by describing how the former kings made ‘emblems and insignia’ (*wénzhāng*) as well as elaborately decorated status objects such as carved jades, metal inlay, and embroidered garments only “to distinguish the noble from the base and nothing more, and not to strive for ostentatious display” 以辨貴賤而已，不求其觀.⁸⁴ In this passage, ‘emblems (*wén*) and insignia (*wénzhāng*)’ are thus one of the physical manifestations of the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (*wén*) instituted by the former kings to create social order by establishing a social hierarchy.⁸⁵

As observed by Sato Masayuki, several passages in the *Xúnzǐ* thus reveal that *wén* and rites stand in a close relationship to each other.⁸⁶ In a concrete sense, *wén* ‘emblems’ and *wénzhāng* ‘insignia’ as signs of social status are the overt manifestations of the hierarchical relations encoded in the rites. On a more abstract level, *wén* can also be used to refer to

81. *Xúnzǐ* 7.1, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 108.

82. *Xúnzǐ* 14.6, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 263. Compare this contrast between ‘those above’ (*shàng*), who have *wén*, and ‘those below’ (*xià*), who are in ‘awe’ (*wèi*) of and are governed by the dignified (*wēi*) *wén* appearance of their superiors, with the passage from *Zuǒzhuàn* Xiāng 31.13 discussed in section 2.1.

83. *Xúnzǐ* 19.3, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 357. The same description of the relationship between *wén* and *lǐ* is found in *Xúnzǐ* 27.45, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 497.

84. *Xúnzǐ* 10.1, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 357. The last phrase “[The former kings] did not [thereby] strive for ostentatious display” 不求其觀 was most likely added to preempt criticism from followers of the *Hánfēizǐ* and the *Mòzǐ*, which are full of critical remarks about what they considered to be the wasteful practices of Rǔ rites (*lǐ*) and *wén* practices. The most explicit criticism of the Rǔ concept of *wén* is *Hánfēizǐ* 49: “The Rǔ throws the government models (*fǎ*) into disarray through *wén*” 儒以文亂法; see *Hánfēizǐ* 49, *Hánfēizǐ jǐjiě* 韓非子集解, ed. Wáng Xiānshèn 王先慎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 449. This passage also indicates that the *Hánfēizǐ* assumes *wén* to be associated with the Rǔ. For more discussion of the diversity of attitudes towards the metacultural concept of *wén* in the pre-Qín period, see Bergeton, *From Pattern to ‘Culture’?*, 92–124.

85. See also *Zuǒ*, *Yin* 5.1: “Display emblems and insignia (*wénzhāng*) to clarify the distinction between noble and base.” Dù Yù’s commentary to this passage specifies that *wénzhāng* refers to chariots, clothes, banners, and flags. As we have seen in many of the passages discussed here, marks of status and rank were often manifested as decorations (*wén*) on items such as these.

86. Sato, *Xúnzǐ lǐzhì sīxiǎng*, 227–33.

the ideal ‘prescriptive patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (*wén*) which the former kings established to regulate practices such as music and mourning sacrifices. The ‘Way of the noble man’ 君子之道 can therefore be equated with striving to achieve the ‘refined patterning of rites and duty’ 禮義之文.⁸⁷ Another passage describes rites as the ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) which must be applied to native human nature in order to make people ‘elegant’ (yǎ 雅) ‘noble men’ (*jūnzǐ*) and save them from becoming like birds and beasts:

此夫文而不采者與？...君子所敬而小人不者與？性不得則若禽獸，性得之則甚雅似者與？匹夫隆之則為聖人...者與？請歸之禮。⁸⁸

Is this a thing which is ‘patterned/decorated’ (*wén*), but not [overly] variegated? . . . Is this a thing which the noble man (*jūnzǐ*) respects, but the petty person does not? Is this a thing, which if inborn nature does not acquire it, then one becomes like the birds and the beasts; and if inborn nature does acquire it, then one will be extremely elegant (yǎ)? Is this a thing that if an ordinary man makes it flourish then he will become a sage? . . . I beg to categorize this under the term “rites” (*lǐ*).

Beyond establishing that the rites are the ideal ‘patterned decoration’ of human nature, this passage also clearly shows that *wén* is the ‘moral refinement’ that, if acquired through implementation of the rites, can make an ‘ordinary man’ (*pǐfū* 匹夫) into a ‘noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*), or even a sage (聖人 *shèng rén*).⁸⁹

In sum, the passages from the *Xúnzǐ* analyzed above illustrate four meanings that the term *wén* had in the late Zhànguó period:⁹⁰ (i) the already somewhat archaic meaning of ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ (*wén*) referring to the imposing appearance of the ruler, (ii) the ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) of a ‘noble man’ (*jūnzǐ*) who is trained in the ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’ (*wén*) of the early Zhōu period, (iii) the ‘moral refinement’ (*wén*) of an entire society embodying the social mores and traditions of the early Zhōu period, and (iv) metacultural concepts such as the ‘ideal patterns of the conventionalized practices’ established by the former kings.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a genealogy of the metacultural concept of *wén*, which has been neglected in the otherwise vast literature on the term. I argue that pre-Zhànguó uses of *wén* referring to positive attributes of individuals of noble birth mean something like ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ and that they derive from the basic meaning ‘decorative pattern’ through regular diachronic processes of metaphorical extension and abstraction. Possessing a beautiful and awe-inspiring appearance was not conceived of as an acquired property. Wearing clothes embroidered with rank indicating emblems (*wén*) and being equipped with lavishly decorated (*wén*) accoutrements signaling ‘dignity’ and ‘authority’ (*wēi*) were the prerogative of members of the royal family and high nobility, i.e., the *jūnzǐ* in the aristocratic sense of ‘noblemen’. Pre-Zhànguó uses of *wén* referred to having an ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ physical appearance, rather than to acquired moral traits. This analysis of *wén* helps us avoid the anachronistic interpretations of *wén* in moral terms often found in the traditional commentarial tradition and improves our understanding of the role played by physical appearance in the construction of pre-Zhànguó social hierarchies.

87. *Xúnzǐ* 19.4, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 359.

88. *Xúnzǐ* 26.1, *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 472–73.

89. Another direct equation of *wén* and *lǐ* can be found in *Xúnzǐ* 13.7, which states that the “good person” 仁 “takes rites and duty as his [externally visible] decorative patterns (*wén*)” 禮義以為文; see *Xúnzǐ jǐjiě*, 256.

90. Obviously, the term *wén* was also used in a host of other senses, e.g., ‘written graph’, ‘tattoo’, and ‘striped (tiger)’.

In the *Zuǒzhuàn*, *wén* in the sense ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ begins to be reanalyzed in moral terms, thereby giving rise to the new adjectival uses referring to the ‘moral refinement’ of the noble man. This development happens at the same time as the reinterpretation of *jūnzǐ* from ‘nobleman’ to ‘noble man’ in the sense of morally edified person. Nevertheless, at this time *wén* is still often associated with having an ‘awe-inspiring’ (*wēi*) and ‘beautiful’ (*měi*) appearance.

In the *Lúnyǔ* metacultural and moral uses of *wén* dominate. Adjectival *wén* in the sense ‘morally refined’ becomes applied to dynasties (*Lúnyǔ* 3.14). Nominalized versions of such uses of *wén* then gives rise to metacultural *wén* referring to the ‘moral refinement’ of the Zhōu, e.g., the ideal ‘patterns of social mores and conventionalized practices established by the former kings’ in *Lúnyǔ* 9.5.

The *Xúnzǐ* defines *wén* explicitly as acquired ‘moral refinement’ which can be obtained even by people of lowly background. It is also in the *Xúnzǐ* that nominal *wén* used to refer to the ‘ideal conventional patterns’ of transmitted practices such as music and sacrifice is first mentioned explicitly as having been established by the former kings.

In contrast to previous analyses, this paper provides explicit hypotheses about the lexicalization of the different meanings of *wén* that account for how they all derived from the same basic meaning: ‘(decorative) pattern’ > ‘decorated’ (lit.) > ‘decorated’ (metaph.) = ‘high-rank’ > ‘morally refined’ > ‘ideal patterns of conventionalized behavior’. This analysis also allows us to see how intimately linked the concept of *wén* was to external visibility. In the pre-Zhànguó period one was ‘awe-inspiringly beautiful’ (*wén*) if one bore the externally visible signs of nobility (e.g., decorated [*wén*] objects and accoutrements). In the Zhànguó one could be ‘morally refined’ (*wén*) by behaving and adopting the demeanor of a morally superior gentleman. In both cases, external visibility was more important than any translation of *wén* as ‘accomplished’, ‘cultured’, or ‘civil’ would suggest.

Finally, let us return to the question of translation. Translating *wén* in pre-Zhànguó texts as ‘culture/cultured’ or ‘civilization/civil’ is clearly anachronistic. At that time members of the royal family and noblemen dressed in clothes with emblems (*wén*) and insignia and used decorated (*wén*) implements in order to display their authority (*wēi*) and status, and thereby awe (*wèi*) underlings into submission and obedience.

Although *wén* does develop metacultural uses in Zhànguó texts, translating it as ‘culture’ and ‘cultured’ is still problematic. The Old Chinese word *wén* and Modern English *culture* have different etymological origins which continue to inform their uses and meanings. As shown above, metacultural uses of Old Chinese *wén* ultimately derive from the basic meaning ‘decorative patterns’ produced by painting, carving, or embroidering. Thus, as shown by the carving metaphor discussed above, the ‘decorative patterns’ (*wén*) of moral perfection are applied to the noble man (*jūnzǐ*) from the outside rather than being the result of a process of growing or cultivating. In contrast, the English word *culture* derives from a word meaning ‘to grow or cultivate [plants and crops]’. And it still retains these connotations when used to refer to the ‘culture of a gentleman’, which is acquired through a long process of cultivation and nurturing of certain qualities through education and moral discipline.

As aptly phrased by Tessa Morris-Suzuki, the modern English word *culture* is heavily “burdened by the karma of previous incarnations.”⁹¹ The modern English concepts of

91. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “The Invention and Reinvention of ‘Japanese Culture,’” *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.3 (1995): 762. For a comprehensive study of the concept of *bun* 文 in Japanese thought, see also Lín Sǎoyáng 林少陽, *Wén yǔ Riběn xuéshù sixiǎng: Hàn zì quan 1700–1990* 文與日本學術思想：漢字圈 1700–1990 (Běijīng: Zhōngyāng biānyì chūbǎnshè, 2012).

'culture' referring to (i) universal 'high culture' and (ii) the anthropological notion of 'sets of conventionalized behaviors of specific groups' are both concepts that developed in Europe and the United States in the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The complex profusion of technical definitions of *culture* in anthropological theories as well as numerous different meanings in colloquial usage makes the use of the term in the study of premodern societies especially precarious. Therefore, rather than dealing with the hermeneutical problems caused by using a language-specific parochial metacultural term such as English *culture* as an analytical category in studies of pre-Qín conceptualizations of metaculture, it is better to try to reconstruct the meaning of a language-specific metacultural term such as *wén* based on how it is used in the pre-Qín texts themselves.