

Introduction

The *Liezi* 列子 is one of the three major Daoist classics traditionally presumed to date from the pre-Qin period. Its putative author, Lie Yukou 列禦寇, is placed second chronologically in the list of Daoist luminaries of the time — a time when the “hundred schools” flourished. The other two classics are, of course, the *Daodejing* 道德經 (*Laozi*) attributed to Lao Dan 老聃 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 attributed to Zhuang Zhou 莊周. Although there are doubts concerning all three men and the origins and make-up of their eponymous works, all three are listed in the catalogue of books prepared by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and his son, Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) during the Western (Former) Han dynasty and are also listed in the *Han Shu* 漢書, “Yiwen Zhu” by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) under “Daoists”.¹ After suffering relative neglect during the Han period due to the dominance of Confucianism, all three works enjoyed a reemergence in the Wei–Jin period (220–419) with the development of Neo-Daoism — that is, the Xuanxue or School of Profound Learning. It was at this time they acquired their first commentaries, multiple in the case of the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, single in the case of the *Liezi*. Among these, three became established as the definitive and enduring commentaries — on the *Daodejing* by Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), on the *Zhuangzi* by Guo Xiang 郭象 (250–312) and on the *Liezi* by Zhang Zhan 張湛 (fl. ca. 370). The three classics have followed a somewhat parallel course since then — apotheosis during the great flourishing of Daoism during the Tang dynasty, intense study and analysis during the philosophically rich Song dynasty, and close and valuable scrutiny, particularly by philologists of the *kaozheng* persuasion, during the Qing dynasty. The 19th and 20th centuries then saw a veritable explosion of interest in these Daoist classics, the very foundation of philosophical Daoism. This has resulted in a number of studies

¹ The “Yiwen Zhi” lists 37 works (993 *pian*) under Daoists; much of this material is no longer extant — see *Han Shu* 6, 1729–1732.

and analyses in China, other Asian countries and the West, including in the last several translations into European languages.

The *Liezi* may, however, be considered the last and least of these three works in that it was the last to come to its definitive form and the least in that it has had the fewest commentaries, studies and translations. Also, its creation has been the most contentious, although there are significant unanswered questions on the authorship, compilation and editing of the other two as well. Moreover, the *Liezi* has borne the burden of the pejorative epithet “forged” — even “deliberately forged” — doubts initially being raised by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) in his brief essay from the Tang period, and by Gao Sisun 高似孫 (1160–1220) in the Song period. These doubts have continued, even increased, to the present day, but not as a result of the emergence of any decisive new information; rather it has been through the use of intrinsically unreliable methods and unbridled speculation. Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 (1873–1929) essay, included in Appendix 2, is an example of the latter. Despite the negativity, the *Liezi* has clung tenaciously to its position as a true Daoist classic. Even Liu Zongyuan, the original “forgery theorist” as it were, has this to say about the *Liezi*: “Its literary style is similar to the *Zhuangzi* but more substantial and down-to-earth and few false notes are struck. How can we do away with such good literature?”²

In the West, the *Liezi* has drawn limited but significant attention. Detailed studies have come from the London SOAS in the persons of A. C. Graham, T. H. Barrett and June Won Seo. Graham also produced an excellent English translation in 1960. These studies have a strong forgery bias. However, a more recent book of wide-ranging essays, *Riding the Wind with Liezi*, takes a broader view. An example is the essay by May Sim in which she likens the *Liezi* to Epictetus’ *Encheiridion*, a handbook for life.³ While she finds the Stoic

² See Appendix 2.1.

³ May Sim, “Is the *Liezi* an *Encheiridion*?”, in *Riding the Wind with Liezi*, ed. Ronnie Littlejohn and Jeffrey Lippmann (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), pp. 51–76; Epictetus, *Encheiridion* (Dover Publications Ltd., 2004). Her article highlights the similarities between the doctrines of Lie Zi and the Greek and Roman Stoics. Developing the comparison with early Greek philosophy a little further, it is of interest to note that Lie Zi’s approximate contemporary, Yang Zhu, the man most referred to apart from Lie Zi himself, has been labelled an Epicurean, although this aspect of the comparison between the two men should not be pushed too far.

prescription differs from that of the *Liezi*, there is the same basic purpose. This purpose is reflected in Eva Wong's "hermeneutical translation" of the work, entitled *Lieh-Tzu: A Taoist Guide to Practical Living*,⁴ which very effectively captures the quotidian relevance of this work, expressing, as it does, quite profound thoughts and key philosophical issues in a straightforward and engaging manner. So, in fact, the tide may be turning, away from the narrow focus on the book's provenance towards the broader view of its significance as a component of the early Daoist trinity and a work we can take up today with interest and benefit, in both East and West.

Looking at the *Liezi* in this light, we have undertaken to provide a bilingual (Chinese-English) version of the *Liezi* including Zhang Zhan's seminal commentary in full. The Chinese text is accompanied by a moderate apparatus, focussing particularly on the Tang commentaries of Lu Chongxuan 盧重玄 (8th century) and Yin Jingshun 殷敬順 (9th century), the former predominantly philosophical, the latter largely philological. Also, selections from Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (ca. 1210–1273) clear and informative commentary have been added.⁵ In this brief introduction, we shall attempt to summarise what is known (or thought to be known!) of the man, Lie Yukou, himself and of the origins, structure and fate of his eponymous work. This is followed by several short sections giving the essential details of some important commentators and their commentaries, the main Chinese editions and notable translations. We then provide a synopsis of the eight chapters and their sections. The main text is preceded by the Prefaces of Liu Xiang and Zhang Zhan and followed by four appendices. The first appendix contains four other prefaces: those of Lu Chongxuan (8th century), Chen Jingyuan 陳景元 (d. after 1100), Lin Xiyi and Wang Jipei 汪繼培 (b. 1775). The second appendix contains four short essays on the *Liezi*: those of Liu Zongyuan, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), Gao Sisun and Liang Qichao.⁶ These additions were chosen to give some insight into the evolution of attitudes to the book

⁴ Eva Wong, *Lieh-Tzu: A Taoist Guide to Practical Living* (Boston: Shambala Press, 1995). Wong outlines her idea of "hermeneutical translation" on pp. 14–17.

⁵ See the SB entry under *Ch'ung-hsü chih-te chen-ching (Chüan-chai) k'ou-yi*, pp. 363–364 (Liu Ts'un-yan).

⁶ The first two of these represent the earliest writers to question the authenticity of the *Liezi* as a pre-Qin work, Zhu Xi comments briefly on the parallels with Buddhism, while the fourth is a modern essay on authenticity.

over the centuries, as well as some background to the various editions and commentaries.⁷

1. The Man and His Milieu

Lie Zi (Lie Yukou 列禦寇) is one of the more shadowy figures populating the early history of Chinese philosophy. In fact, so shadowy is he that Bodde, in his translation of Fung Yu-lan's magisterial *History of Chinese Philosophy*, appends the following footnote to the only mention of Lie Zi in that work: "[Lie Zi was] a Taoist philosopher, probably legendary, introduced by Chuang Tzu, and after whom a book called the *Lieh-tzu* has later been falsely attributed."⁸ However, on balance, there is probably enough evidence to support the view that he was an historical figure.⁹ The sources of evidence are threefold: (i) references to him in the *Liezi* itself; (ii) references to him in other pre-Wei–Jin works; (iii) Liu Xiang's *Bielu*. There is also the issue of his name and the absence of a biography in the *Shiji*. These matters will be considered in turn.

1.1. Passages in the *Liezi*

Lie Zi features in 24 of the 143 sections in the eponymous work, distributed through five of the eight chapters — he is not mentioned in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Dividing these 24 into four categories, there are eight that give information on him as a person. These will be summarised below. Of the others, seven describe an event or encounter involving him, five are expostulations on some matter, beginning "Lie Zi said", and four are final comments on a particular section.

The eight sections giving information on Lie Zi, the person, are as follows:

⁷ On this, see the article by T. H. Barrett, "Reading the *Liezi*: The First Thousand Years", in *Riding the Wind with Liezi*, ed. Littlejohn and Dippmann, pp. 15–30.

⁸ The footnote is in relation to the description of Lie Zi in *Zhuangzi* 1 — see Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 243.

⁹ In his *shu* (subcommentary) to the *Zhuangzi* 1, Cheng Xuanying writes that Lie Zi lived at the time of Duke Xu of Zheng (423–396 BCE) — see section 1.5.

(i) 1.1: Lie Zi's place of origin, his life and his main teacher. "Master Lie Zi lived at Putian¹⁰ in Zheng. For forty years he went unrecognised by the ruler and high officials of the state, who regarded him as one of the ordinary people. When the state suffered a famine, he resolved to move to Wei. His disciples said: "Master, you are going away without giving us a time for your return. May we, your disciples, venture to make a request of you? What, Master, were you going to teach us? Did you not hear the words of Huqiu Zilin?"

(ii) 2.3: Lie Zi also had Lao Shang as a teacher, Bo Gaozi as a friend and Yin Sheng as a student who goes to live with him. Lie Zi tells him what he learned from Lao Shang.

(iii) 2.5: Lie Zi learned archery from Bohun Wuren.

(iv) 2.13: Lie Zi takes the wizard Ji Xian with him to visit Huqiu Zilin so Ji might assess Master Hu. His several examinations cause Ji to become befuddled and flee, but also have profound effect on Lie Zi himself. "Afterwards, Lie Zi realised that he himself had not even begun to learn anything, and returned home. For three years, he didn't emerge. He became his wife's cook. He fed his pig as if he were feeding a person. He took no part in affairs. Carving and polishing, he returned to simplicity, clod-like, standing alone, cut off from all confusion, and he stayed in focus like this, unchanging until the end."

(v) 4.5: Lie Zi studied with Huqiu Zilin, had Bohun Maoren as a friend, lived in Nanguo and had numerous students himself.

(vi) 4.6: Lie Zi studied with Lao Shang.

(vii) 4.7: Lie Zi discussed his love of travel with Huqiu Zilin, after which he abandons this predilection.

(viii) 8.7: Lie Zi lived in poverty in Zheng but still rejected Ziyang's offer of grain.

¹⁰ ZWS's note on Putian reads as follows: 「鄭圃」：鄭國的圃田，又作「甫田」，地多晁澤，在今河南省中牟縣西南 (*Xinyi Liezi Duben*, p. 48, note 3).

1.2. References in Other Works

These are listed in presumed chronological order and briefly summarised. Where the same matter also appears in another of the works listed, this is indicated. Also, reference to an English translation, where available, is given. There are in all 17 references in seven works.

***Shizi* (1):** Section 10.2 — Lie Zi is described as “valuing emptiness” in a passage listing what six philosophers valued. Apart from Lie Zi, those listed are Mo Zi, Kong Zi, Tian Zi (Tian Pian), Huang Zi and Liao Zi. Fischer, pp. 102–103. Also in *Lü Shi Chunqiu*.

***Zhuangzi* (7):** (i) ZZ 1 — Lie Zi is described as riding the wind but still having that which he depended on. Watson, p. 32. (ii) ZZ 7 — The meeting of Lie Zi and Ji Xian with Huqiu Zilin. Watson, pp. 96–97. Also in *Huainanzi*. (iii) ZZ 18 — Lie Zi sees a hundred-year-old skull by the roadside and reflects on life and death. Watson, p. 195. (iv) ZZ 19 — Lie Zi discusses the Perfected Person with Guan Yin. Watson, pp. 198–199. (v) ZZ 21 — Lie Zi practises archery with Bohun Wuren. Watson, pp. 230–231. (vi) ZZ 28 — Lie Zi is living in poverty in Zheng but refuses an offer of food from Ziyang. Watson, pp. 313–314. (vii) ZZ 32 — Lie Zi discusses with Bohun Maoren his decision to abandon his journey to Qi. He fears that his favourable reception at food stalls along the way presages the likelihood of people burdening him by seeking his teaching. Watson, pp. 353–354.

***Hanfeizi* (1):** HFZ 46 — On the man from Song who spends three years carving a mulberry leaf from jade. Liao, vol. 1, p. 220. Also in *Huainanzi*.

***Huainanzi* (3):** (i) HNZ 7.8 — A brief reference to Lie Zi and Ji Xian meeting Huqiu Zilin. Major et al., p. 252. Also in *Zhuangzi*. (ii) HNZ 10.90 — On the principle of keeping to the rear (i.e. staying in the background). Major et al., p. 381. (iii) HNZ 20.4 — On the man from Song who spends three years carving a mulberry leaf from jade. Major et al., p. 798. Also in *Hanfeizi*.

***Lü Shi Chunqiu* (3):** (i) 9.4/2 — Lie Zi practises archery with Guan Yin. Knoblock and Riegel, p. 216. (ii) 16.2/3 — Lie Zi lives in poverty in Zheng. Knoblock and Riegel, p. 380. (iii) 17.7/1 — Lie Zi esteems emptiness. Knoblock and Riegel, p. 433.

Zhangguoce (1): 5/48 — Han’s envoy to Chu, Shiji, when asked by the King of Chu what his particular skills are, claims he has specialised in the teachings of Lie Zi, especially on the correctness of names. Crump, p. 277.

Xinxu (1): 7.9–10 — Lie Zi, living in poverty, refuses Ziyang’s proffered grain. SBCK vol. 17, Xinxu, pp. 42–43. Also in *Zhuangzi* and *Lü Shi Chunqiu*.

1.3. Liu Xiang’s *Bielu*

The issue of the authenticity of the entry on the *Liezi* in this work will be addressed in the discussion of the book. The statement pertaining to the man himself is taken from Zhang Zhan’s edition. “Lie Zi was from Zheng and lived at the same time as Duke Mu of Zheng (r. 628–606 BCE).¹¹ In fact, he was someone who possessed the Dao. His studies were based on Huang Di and Lao Zi who are termed Daoists. Daoists grasp what is important and have a firm hold on what is fundamental. They are pure and empty and do not act (have an understanding of *wu wei* / non-action).”¹²

1.4. His Name (Lie Yukou) and the Absence of a Biography in the *Shiji*

These are arguments which, although flimsy, are used against the reality of Lie Zi as a person. For example, June Won Seo writes: “Given the fact that the *Shiji*, which makes no mention of Lie Zi or any writings attributable to him, delivers a biography of Lao Zi, another historically problematic Daoist master, based on uncertain evidence, we should surmise that Lie Zi must not have been evaluated as an important person by Sima Qian. No other person in early China had the same surname as Lie Zi, and Lie Zi’s given name, Yukou, a phrase occurring frequently in the *Zhouyi* and meaning ‘obstructing bandits,’ is also unusual.” Seo, *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, p. 450. On these points, one has only to recall Mo Di 墨翟 (468–373 BCE) who had an equally unusual name and was also without a biography in the *Shiji*, although there is brief mention of him in *Shiji* 74.¹² Another case in point is Yang Zhu 楊朱 (440–360 BCE).

¹¹ This is one of the points Liu Zongyuan draws attention to in his short essay on authenticity — see Appendix 2.1.

¹² For variations in his given name, see Ian Johnston, *The Mozi: A Complete Translation* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2010), Introduction, p. xix.

1.5. Two Opinions, One Ancient and One Modern

(i) **Cheng Xuanying's note:**¹³ 姓列，名禦寇，鄭人也。與鄭繡公同時。師於壺丘子林，著書八卷，得風仙之道，乘風遊行，泠然輕舉，所以稱善也。

His family name was Lie and his given name Yukou. He was from Zheng. He lived at the same time as Duke Xu of Zheng (423–396 BCE) and was taught by Huqiu Zilin. He wrote a book in eight *juan* and attained the *dao* of a wind immortal, riding on the wind in his wanderings, lightly rising up, which is why he is designated skilful.

(ii) **Zhuang Wanshou's summary:**¹⁴ 那麼列子是怎樣的一個人呢？他名叫禦寇，隱居在鄭國，或許就是鄭國人。是什麼時代的人呢？大概是春秋時代的道家學者吧！戰國時代的文獻對他的記載已經很模糊了。

What sort of man was Lie Zi? His given name was Yukou and he lived as a recluse in Zheng. Perhaps he really was from the state of Zheng. When did he live? Probably he was a student of Daoism during the Spring and Autumn period. The record of him in writings of the Warring States period is blurred and confused.

1.6. His Milieu

Lie Zi, assumed to have been a real and historical person, cannot be reliably placed in a particular philosophical milieu. Nonetheless, a tentative picture can be drawn from the scanty and uncertain evidence we do have, while accepting its internal contradictions as first pointed out by Liu Zongyuan in the Tang period. Let us say, based on the anecdotes and dialogues that we have, and remembering that these are quite possibly apocryphal, and that the early literature has no qualms about reporting “trans-generational” discussions, two groups may be identified:

(i) **Predecessors:** These include Lao Zi, Confucius, Deng Xi and Mo Di, with whom he may have engaged through written works or by word of mouth with early disciples of the various schools.

¹³ Guo Qingfan, p. 19, *shu* 9 (Cheng Xuanying).

¹⁴ Zhuang Wanshou 莊萬壽, *Xinyi Liezi Duben* 新譯列子讀本 (Taipei, 1996), pp. 2–5 and p. 5 for the quote.

(ii) Contemporaries: These might include Guan Yin, Huqiu Zilin, Bohun Maoren and possibly Yang Zhu. In the first three cases, contact may have been direct, as the various anecdotes would have us believe. With the fourth, there are no dialogues between the two men in the *Liezi*, although there may have been contact by the written word or by word of mouth with disciples.

(iii) Early Successors: These include the notable philosophers of the 4th century — men such as Zhuang Zi, Shi Jiao, Mencius, Hui Shi and the Later Mohists. It is in the works of the first two that we find the first references to Lie Yukou, the man.

1.7. A Summary

Below we list what we take to be legitimate conclusions, in the context of early Chinese history, about the man Lie Yukou, based on the information documented, scanty though it undoubtedly is.

(i) Lie Zi was a real person despite the unusual name and lack of an official biography in the *Shiji* — more credible as such than Lao Dan and not very different from Zhuang Zhou.

(ii) He lived much of his life in Putian, a marshy region in the state of Zheng during the last part of the 5th and first part of the 4th centuries BCE.

(iii) For the most part, he lived unheralded and in penury as a Daoist scholar and teacher, although he did receive an offer of grain from the ruler, which he declined, just as Zhuang Zhou declined the offer of an official position while living in Lacquer Tree Gardens.

(iv) He had two named teachers, Huqiu Zilin and Lao Shang, about whom very little is known.

(v) His main philosophical predecessors were Lao Dan, Confucius, Deng Xi and Mo Di, all mentioned in his book, while Yang Zhu may have been a close contemporary.

(vi) Other associations were with Guan Yin, Bohun Maoren (a friend and teacher of archery) and Yan Hui (a disciple).