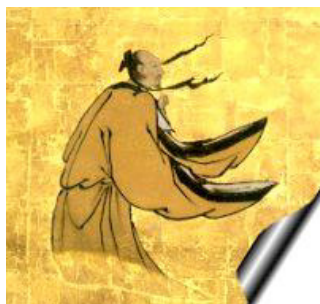


Liezi 列子

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Liezi 列子 - *Master Lie*¹, his real name being *Lie yukou* 列圉寇, is one of the most outstanding authors of the early philosophical Daoism.

Unfortunately, we have no biographical information on him. Allegedly, he lived during the *Warring States* period (*Zhan guo* 戰國 475-221 î.e.n.). Anyhow, in *Hanshu* 漢書 - *The Book of the Han Dynasty*, written by *Bangu* 班固 (32-92 e.n.), it is claimed that *Liezi* 列子 would have lived earlier than *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (369-286 î.e.n.)², since the latter mentioned him several times.

According to the homonymous treatise (chap. 1), *Liezi* 列子 had lived unknown for forty years in the state of 鄭 *Zheng*, after which he immigrated to the state of 衛 *Wei* due to famine; we also find this information in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑒 - *The Universal Mirror*³ of the *Transcendent Immortals Who Embodied the Dao in Successive Ages* [or *Chronological Order*]⁴. According to *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (chap. 7 *Ying diwang* 應帝王 - *On Monarchs*), it seems that he also died in the state of 鄭 *Zheng*.

Tradition acknowledges him as *Laozi* 老子's disciple, whereas *Guangyinzi* 關尹子, *Huqiuzi* 壺丘子, *Laoshangshi* 老商氏 and *Zhibogaozi* 支伯高子 are supposed to have been some of his masters and friends, who also trained him in the Daoist spirit.

The legend goes that, after nine years of initiation, *Liezi* 列子 could "ride the wind", which is a metaphorical way of expressing ecstatic condition, when the spirit detaches himself as if he were carried with the wind, and leaves the body liberated, inert and insensitive.

“夫列子御風而行，泠然善也，
旬有五日而反。”

« *Liezi could ride the wind, he could manage to rise in the cool air, but he came back after fifteen days.* »

Zhuangzi 莊子, cap. 1 - *Xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊 - *Easy Journeys*.

¹ 子 *zi* = *child* (𠃉 the image of a *swaddled baby with its hands free*), and in a wider sense *master* (title of respect), due to the fact that ancient emperors used to call scholars *sons*, in token of honor.

² *Zhuangzi* 莊子 - *Master Zhuang*, by his real name *Zhuangzhou* 莊周 - Daoist writer and philosopher.

³ *jian*, written 鑑 or 鑒 (graphic variants), originates in 𦉳 (𦉳 𦉳 𦉳) the image of a *man looking into a vessel full of water*, with the radical 金 *metal* added, meaning: *great basin, bronze mirror, to reflect the light, to reflect the image of something*, and by extension of the sense: *memorable act having a didactic value, history*.

⁴ biographical anthology of the Daoist saints, published by *Zhao daoyi* 趙道一 in 1294, and subsequently included in 道藏 *Daozang* - *The Scripture of Daoism*.

Spiritual journey is perceived as a result of man's identification with the universe, by means of putting biological rhythm in harmony with the natural rhythm.

“列子常在立春日乘風而遊八荒，
立秋日就反歸風穴。
風至則草木皆生，
去則草木皆落。”

« Usually, on the day of the Beginning of Spring, Liezi travelled by wind towards the eight horizons⁵, and, on the day of the Beginning of Autumn, he came back to the Wind Grotto. When the wind arrived, all the vegetation awoke to life, and when it left, all the vegetation withered away.»

Shuyiji 述異記 - Tales about Wonders.

Starting from *Zhuangzi* 莊子's phrase: “御風而行” *yufeng erxing*, lit. « to ride the wind and travel», where 御 *yu* = to drive a carriage, to control, by extension of the sense to ride, by homophony, it all resulted in writing the name of *Lie yukou* 列園寇 as 列御寇.

In *Lüshi chungqiu* 呂氏春秋 - Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals (chap. 17), a book written by the clients⁶ of *Lü buwei* 呂不韋 (?-235 î.e.n.)⁷ it is said that *Liezi* 列子 “貴虛” *guixu* « cherished⁸ emptiness⁹», with reference to the mental emptiness achieved by meditation. By means of this technique, the mind of the 真人 *zhenren* Perfect Man¹⁰ reflects

⁵ 荒 *huang* = waste, desolate, desert, 亡 devastation (亾 = 入 enter into a 凵 corner, a hiding place, to hide, to vanish, to die, to destroy; 入 got flattened into 亾) of 艸 (abbreviation of 草) plants caused by 川 floods. This phrase is meant to designate metaphorically far-away provinces, outskirts, considered to be inferior as against the noble 中 center.

⁶ *menke* 門客 - client (門 = gate, 客 = guest), social stratum that emerged by the end of the *Zhou* 周 dynasty, consisting of educated noblemen and poor wandering philosophers, hosted by high officials, merchants or mandarins who provided for them in exchange for the scholars' literary and artistic gifts.

⁷ merchant and statesman, minister of the last *Qin* 秦 prince, the founder of the empire - he managed to gather around him more than 3000 clients (*menke* 門客), for whom he had hired 10000 servants.

⁸ 貴 *gui* (貴) = valuable, noble, precious, important, to attach importance; originally 𠄎 two hands over the 土 earth, soil being the most valuable thing in an agricultural society, later the sign 貝 was added, meaning shell, and by extension of the sense coin, in order to emphasize the idea of value.

⁹ 虛 *xu* (虛) = empty, unoccupied, deficit, lack, 𠄎 two men searching for food in a place where 𠄎 the tiger passed.

¹⁰ 真 *zhen*, graphic variant of 真 = right, perfect, faultless, 直 (直) 十 ten 目 eyes looked from all 凵 angles and found no fault, so it can be placed on a 兀 table, by extension of the sense true, sincere, genuine. In the Daoist writings 十 was replaced by 匕, ancient form of 化 (化) *hua* = to change, to transform, symbolized by 亅 → 𠄎 → 人 → 亅 a man who stands - alive, beside 𠄎 → 𠄎 → 匕 a man who lays down - dead (ex.: *Zhuangzi* 莊子, chap. 22, § 5: “已化而生, 又化而死。” « One change and there is life, another change and there is death» or: « One change gave them life, another change kills them»), whence the extended meaning

reality like a mirror, without being influenced or altered by events and without even trying to anticipate them.

Many exegetes consider that his work is a compilation made by his disciples, and written after the master's death. The original version including twenty chapters (*pian* 篇)¹¹, was revised by *Liuxiang* 劉向 (c.77-6 î.e.n.)¹², who eliminated repetitions from the text and rearranged it into eight chapters.

The first reference to this eight-chapter version of the *Liezi* 列子's treatise is to be found in *Hanshu* 漢書 - *The book of the Han Dynasty*, vol. 30, chapter *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志 - *The History of Literature*:

“列子八篇。 «[The treatise] *Liezi*, [in] eight chapters,
名園寇， the name¹³ [of the author] *Yukou*,
先莊子， prior to *Zhuangzi*,
莊子稱之。” [since] *Zhuangzi* cites him.»

Hanshu 漢書 - *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志.

Thanks to the respect that *Liezi* 列子 enjoyed in the Daoist circles, during the reign of *Xuanzong* 玄宗 (712-756) of the *Tang* 唐 dynasty, he was honored with the title 沖虛真人 *Chongxu zhenren* - *Transcendent Master of Emptiness*, while his work was named 沖虛真經 *Chongxu zhenjing* - *The Treatise of the Transcendent Master of Emptiness*. Moreover, during *Xuanhe* 宣和 period (1119-1125) of the *Song* 宋 dynasty, he came to be named *Chongxu guanmiao zhenjun* 沖虛觀妙真君 - *Transcendent Sovereign of Emptiness and Sublime Contemplation*.



of transcendent; 真人 *zhen ren* = *perfect man, transcendent man, saint*.

¹¹ Chinese books are comprised of *juan* 卷 = *roll, volume, book, authentic writing* (in fact, originally, the Latin word *volumen* also meant something rolled) divided into *pian* 篇 or *zhang* 章 = *chapters* and *jie* 節 = *paragraphs*.

¹² *Liuxiang* 劉向 - poet, scholar, and exegete of the ancient Chinese writings.

¹³ in China, the name of a person consists of the *family name* - *xing* 姓, which is always placed before the other names, the *given name* - *ming* 名, received at one's birth, the *title* - *zi* 字, granted at the age of 20, together with the manliness' cap, and the *posthumous name* - *hui* 諱, awarded to famous people. In our case, *Lie* 列 is the *family name* (姓) and *Yukou* 園寇 is the *given name* (名).