

The Wisdom  
of China



# Liezi

## Rider on the Wind

Zheng Yumin



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS



*The Wisdom of China*

# Liezi

Rider on the Wind

Zheng Yumin



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

东方智慧：御风而行的列子：英文 / 郑宇民著；梁晓鹏译. —北京：外文出版社，2015.

ISBN 978-7-119-09759-6

I. ①东… II. ①郑… ②梁… III. ①道家—英文 ②《列子》—研究—英文 IV. ①B223.25

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2015) 第 271808 号

责任编辑 曾惠杰

英文翻译 梁晓鹏

英文审定 David Ferguson 李振国

装帧设计 柏拉图 + 创意机构

印刷监制 冯浩

## 东方智慧——御风而行的列子

作 者 郑宇民

出版人 徐步

出版发行 外文出版社有限责任公司

地 址 北京市西城区百万庄大街 24 号

邮政编码 100037

网 址 <http://www.flp.com.cn>

电子邮箱 [flp@cipg.org.cn](mailto:flp@cipg.org.cn)

电 话 008610-68320579 (总编室)

008610-68996177 (编辑部)

008610-68995852 (发行部)

008610-68996183 (投稿电话)

印 刷 北京飞达印刷有限责任公司

经 销 新华书店 / 外文书店

开 本 700mm×1000mm

印 张 14.5

字 数 150 千字

版 次 2015 年 12 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷

书 号 ISBN 978-7-119-09759-6

定 价 118 元

版权所有 侵权必究 如有印装问题本社负责调换 (电话: 68995960)

First Edition 2015

ISBN 978-7-119-09759-6

© Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd, Beijing, China, 2015

Published by Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

<http://www.flp.com.cn> E-mail: [flp@cipg.org.cn](mailto:flp@cipg.org.cn)

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

# Contents

I. Heaven's Revelations	1
1.1 The Origin of Heaven, Earth and Man: a Formula of Change	2
1.2 There Is Neither Life nor Death: Living Creatures Are Passers-by	5
1.3 Liezi on Evolution: Everything Changes by Nature	7
1.4 Where Has Man Gone?	12
1.5 I Experience Four Major Stages of Life, But Where Is "Me"?	16
1.6 Triple Pleasures of Life: Remaining Contented with Life, Dying a Natural Death and Self-Consoling	20
1.7 What Ears Was He Looking For?	22
1.8 Who Is to Be Laughed At, the Ancient or Our Contemporaries?	25
II. The Yellow Emperor	31
2.1 The Earliest Chinese Dream: the Yellow Emperor's Republic	32
2.2 Flexible Methods of Management Devoid of Partiality or Favor	35
2.3 Unintentional Shooting: the Willpower	37
2.4 The Tao of Shangqiu Kai: Faith and Trust	39
2.5 Holding a Tiger or Yielding To It: a Parable	44
2.6 Do as Waters Do	46
2.7 Whole-hearted Devotion Is the Most Important	48
2.8 Hovering Without Landing	51
2.9 A VIP's Awareness	53
2.10 Self-flattery Is Shameless Self-display	56
2.11 What Is Wrong with the Monkey-lover?	58
2.12 Perfect Virtue: Being Transfixed like a Wooden Rooster	60

III. King Mu of Zhou	63
3.1 The Royal Vision: a Switch Between Visualization and Imagination	64
3.2 Dream and Waking Are Both Human Life	70
3.3 The Bipartite Century of Life	73
3.4 To Be Forgetful Brings Inner Peace	76
3.5 Do Not Overplay the Card of Sentiment	79
IV. Confucius	81
4.1 What Makes a Sage?	82
4.2 Confucius' View of Talent	85
4.3 What Is Wrong with Long Shu?	87
4.4 Things Will Develop in the Opposite Direction When Being Pushed to Their Extremes	89
4.5 National Power: Put It to a Proper Use	91
4.6 Mere Growth of GDP Is Not True Development as a White Horse Is Not Horse	94
V. The Delving of King Tang	99
5.1 King Tang's First Question: Was There Existence in the Remote Antiquity?	100
5.2 Man's Role in the Macroscopic World	102
5.3 The World of Diversity That Materialism Approves	105
5.4 Different Are Their Appearance and Quality, But Their Adaptability Is the Same	107
5.5 The Foolish Old Man Is Not Foolish	110
5.6 Why Did Kuafu Chase After the Sun?	114
5.7 The Nature of Things	116
5.8 The Power of Balance	118
5.9 Mind and Body Are Inseparable	120
5.10 Where Does That Beautiful Voice Come From?	123
5.11 The Robot Without a Patent	126
5.12 Seeing What Is Coming From Insignificant Clue	130
5.13 The Soft Power of Social Administration	133

VI. Power versus Destiny	137
6.1 Destiny Is Beyond Defiance	138
6.2 The Friendship Between Guan Yiwu and Bao Shuya	142
6.3 To Be or Not to Be: a Matter of Course	148
6.4 Disease Is Not Determined by Man	150
6.5 Let Go If You Can	153
6.6 Doing Things But Not Knowing Why	155
6.7 Everyone Is Indispensable	158
6.8 Show No Fear Before Death and Forget Worry in Poverty	160
6.9 It Is a Good Reign That Never Ends	162
 VII. Yang Zhu	 165
7.1 What Is Life For?	166
7.2 It Will Not Do Without Money or Health	167
7.3 Accumulation of Wealth Is Building Up a Blockage	170
7.4 Self-reliance and Self-interest	173
7.5 Those Set to Accomplish Major Endeavors Would Not Get Distracted by Trivial Matters	177
7.6 Why Do People Get No Rest?	179
 VIII. Verification	 183
8.1 Implication of Shadow	184
8.2 Wealthy Are Those Who Follow the Tao	186
8.3 Keeping Your Willpower Is the Key	188
8.4 The Natural Order Is More Reliable	190
8.5 When Wealth Falls Within Your Reach, Do Not Try to Get It by Improper Means	191
8.6 Wisdom Lies in Seizing the Opportunity and Changing with the Times	193
8.7 When Interest Is Spotted Ahead, There Might Be Danger Behind	196
8.8 Motivation Plays a More Effective Part Than Monitoring	198
8.9 The Unsinkable Buoy: Unity of Devotion and Faith	200
8.10 The Noon Is But the Blink of an Eye	202

8.11	Strength Is Weakness and Weakness Strength	204
8.12	The Truly Benevolent Are Those Who Do Not Expect Karmic Reward	205
8.13	Opportunists May Eventually Lose	207
8.14	Identify the Essential and Avoid What Is Unnecessary	209
8.15	How to Neutralize the Three Ways That Cause Offence	212
8.16	Self-management for Survival	215
8.17	What to Do When Going Astray in a Complex Situation	217
8.18	The True Favor Is to Let It Live	220
8.19	Six Delusions of Man	222



# I

---

## *Heaven's Revelations*

---

## 1.1 The Origin of Heaven, Earth and Man: a Formula of Change

In the West, people believe in God; in China, there is the belief in Jade Emperor. But where do God and Jade Emperor come from? They are certainly born of their mothers. Since mothers can bear children, why should man be created by God? In the opinion of Liezi, Heaven, Earth, and man come from change. Everything in the Universe changes: it recycles with no return and reorganizes without reduction:

Master Liezi said, "In the past, the Sage accounted for all things of Heaven and Earth by the interaction of *Yin* and *Yang*. But where did Heaven and Earth come from, since forms are born out of the formless? It came from the Great Change, the Great Conception, the Great Beginning, and the Great Element. The Great Change was a state in which *Qi* was not yet formed; the Great Conception, a state in which *Qi* was being formed. The possession of form started in the Great Beginning and its qualities took shape in the Great Element. By now, *Qi* was a muddy whole with its forms and qualities and was therefore called Chaos. It could neither be seen nor heard nor touched; for this reason, it was also known as the Changeable. The Changeable became One. One became Seven. Seven became Nine. Nine was the upper limit and there-

fore returned to the very beginning. After that, the pure and light elements rose to form Heaven, the turbid and heavy elements sank to shape Earth, and the elements of *Yin* and *Yang* converged and created man. Therefore, there are such elements in the Universe from which all things spring up and grow.”

*Liezi*, 1.2

According to *Liezi*, Heaven and Earth, as carriers and containers, have their forms. The development of their forms went through five major periods in the long process: the accumulation of *Qi* in Great Change, the condensation of *Qi* in Great Conception, the birth of form in Great Beginning, the development of quality in Great Element, and the combination of *Qi*, form, and quality in Chaos with the mutual permeation and dependence of all things. The Chaos is characterized by change. It is formless, growing and multiplying without any boundary. The change goes from One via Seven to Nine and then restarts another cycle at One on a different level from the original. The clear and light elements gather and rise to form Heaven, the muddy and heavy elements gather and sink to form Earth, and what neutralizes in between shapes man.

In *Liezi*'s theory, human body is composed of various kinds of *Qi* — *the* clear, turbid, vigorous, healthy, evil, and harmonious. All things develop their forms by the accumulation of *Qi*, their quality by the accumulation of forms, their essence by the mutual accumulation of forms and qualities complemented with the vital energy of *Yin* and *Yang* in Heaven and Earth.

In the eyes of Liezi, Heaven, Earth and man came into being in a process of cyclic evolution involving the changes of *Yin* and *Yang*. The Chinese character 易 (*yi*, “change”) consists of the hieroglyphic form of the sun (representing *Yang*, the positive element) above and the moon (representing *Yin*, the negative element) below. Between the initial Great Change and the climactic Great Element are the continual Great Conception and the complex Great Beginning, run through by an unchangeable thread of change — different in time, degree, relevance, and pattern in different cases, conditions, and contexts.

## 1.2 There Is Neither Life Nor Death: Living Creatures Are Passers-by

Liezi set a scene near a roadside restaurant to demonstrate his philosophy of life: Man neither lives nor dies:

On his way to the State of Wei, Master Liezi took a rest by the roadside to have some food. He caught sight of a hundred-year-old skeleton, went over to pull out the weeds around it, and then remarked to Bai Feng, one of his disciples, "No one knows except the skeleton and me that spirit never lives nor dies. Does it really pay to be sad over the dead? Is it worthwhile at all for the living to be happy?" ...

*Liezi 1.4*

Liezi was by no means an anthropologist. The skeleton he noticed close to the restaurant was around one hundred years old, rather than the bones of a centenarian. His attendants were fearful at the sight, but Liezi was composed. He took this opportunity to lecture on his philosophy of life: There is no life or death. Look at this pile of bones. Does it mean death? No. His genes might still be active in his offspring. Now look at me. I am quite natural and I act naturally, but I am walking in his direction. Man is no more than a passer-by. Therefore, living beings are never born; the dead creatures never die. Life is



met by death while death is a continuation of life. They inherit and transform each other; therefore, there is no sharp line between life and death. For this reason, it is unnecessary to be unduly sad over death or over-delighted with life.

Here, Liezi emphasized the relationship between life and death, the implication of life, and the right attitude toward life. He distinguished between exogeneity, which leads inexorably to disappearance, and endogeneity, which necessarily lasts and becomes immortal. In his view, body form is merely the external phase of life instead of its totality, and life also contains spirit, belief, thought, feelings, love, benevolence, and the mechanism of heritage. Some people are alive in body but are actually dead because they do not get the truth of life, while others are dead in body but are actually alive because they enrich the implication of life. Therefore, the attitude toward life should be turned to the emphasis on this existence and inheritance without neglecting either shape-body or mind-body. It simply will not do to be sated with food and heavily made-up without being equipped with belief, benevolence, and moral support.

### 1.3 Liezi on Evolution: Everything Changes by Nature

Liezi is the Chinese counterpart of Charles Darwin. Separated by more than 2 millennia, both made careful and close observations and shared a common orientation in views: evolution. Interestingly, Darwin believed that human beings evolved from apes. But from what did the apes evolve? He offered no answer. He conducted frequent practical experiments. His last paper dealt with the relationship between earthworms and soil. And in order to study the sensory organs of the worm, he even played music to them and discovered ultimately that the creature is deaf but photosensitive. On the other hand, Liezi, a philosopher, lacking the ideal mode of research over 2,000 years ago, who depended solely on comprehension and his theory of Great Change, said:

... All species develop through their own mechanisms of change: frogs grow into quails and live close to water, accompanied by large crowds of aquatic plants. Away up, moss is generated where water and earth converge, and higher on land, they grow into plantains. Plantains grow in the dirt and out comes dark-footed grass whose root is overgrown with bombyx and whose leaves are transformed into butterflies. Butterflies metamorphose into moths under the oven and with the warmth there appear with a

fresh skin and a new name called Quduo. A long time afterwards they again metamorphose into birds called Qianyugu out of whose saliva come the parasites called Simi, which beget sour-sucking worms Yilu and then Huangkuang and again worms of Jiuyou followed by midges and firebugs. Sheep's liver turns into the red root of madder, horse's blood into wildfire, and human blood into will-o'-the-wisp. Snipes change into sparrow hawks and back through cuckoos. Swallows become clams; field mice become quails; rotten melons become fish; tough leeks become amaranth; old ewes become apes; and fish eggs become insects. Animals named Lei in the Danyuan mountains are self-fertile hermaphrodites. Lakeside birds called Yi become pregnant when their eyes meet. Tortoises called Dayao are female only; wasps named Zhifeng are solely male. One-sided lovers may reproduce without marriage: Jiang Yuan stepped on the huge footprint of a deity and gave birth to Houyi, the forefather of Zhou; a lady dreamed of an immortal and bore in mulberry trees Yi Yin, the famous minister of the early Shang. Dragonflies are born in wet surroundings and midges in sweet wines. Shootless adult bamboos with grass of Yangxi close around will soon beget worms of Qingning. The insects in turn produce leopards produce horses produce humans who eventually return to the great Nature. Everything comes from and goes back to the natural cycle of change.

*Liezi, 1.4*

Here Liezi demonstrates the origin, motivation, type and process of species. He starts from water which he believes to breed frogs and vast crowds of aquatic plants. Away from water moss grows on wet soil, and further up on the land, the ecosphere develops in different ways and various forms. He cites many examples of transformation and observes peculiar creatures and phenomena like parthenogenesis, bisexuality, and unusual manners of female conception. In his view, transformations occur in various forms and different ways within the panorama of great Nature.

Be careful not to fall into the trap of empiricism. How can frogs evolve into quails and horses into humans? Empirically speaking, this is a baffling statement. Were he conscious of our incomprehension, he would surely be offended. However, it should be pointed out that he differed from us in that the system of knowledge he possessed existed on a different level. What were the intentions behind his explanation? First of all, he intended to explain his theory of Great Change, a state in which *Qi* is unformed, Great Conception, a state in which it is being formed, Great Beginning, its possession of a form, and Great Element, its qualities take shape; the Changeable becomes One, One becomes Seven, and Seven becomes Nine. The proof he offered was based on the conception that the created must create and the changed must change, therefore, there are always creations and changes. He insisted on the important role *Qi* plays in making life and demonstrated that the various types of *Qi* — the clear, muddy, healthy, evil, neutral and vigorous, once coming together in harmony and balance, will comprise various forms of life. Though different in shape, these forms of life have one thing in common: