Abstract

The date of Liezi (列子) has been a controversial issue. Ever since the Song dynasty, it has been generally recognized by scholars that Liezi is not a pre-Qin text. However, some scholars still refute this assertion and claim that Liezi is of pre-Qin origin. This thesis is mainly an attempt to reexamine the issue of origin from the perspective of historical syntax.

In the introductory chapter, a brief literature review on the controversy over the date of Liezi, and the aim of this thesis are given. The methodology adopted in this thesis is also discussed.

In the second chapter, linguistic evidence supporting the claim of a late date is canvassed. Our investigation points to three distinctive categories of evidence: (1) linguistic features which are never found in pre-Qin texts; (2) features found in both pre-Qin and late texts, but with a difference in grammatical function; (3) features found in both pre-Qin texts and late texts, but the frequency of their occurrences is tremendously different.

In the third chapter, with the support of linguistic evidence provided by other scholars, the occurrence frequency of the linguistic evidence in Liezi is presented, and the patterns of distribution are analysed.

In conclusion, our study provides compelling evidence suggesting that Liezi is basically a post-Qin composition, but with portions possibly borrowed or drawn from other sources in pre-Qin.