Seize the dragon's tail –
An Analytical Study of Laozi’s biography in Shiji

By Tianyu Fan

Abstract

The biography of Laozi in Shiji is considered to be one of the most important materials for Laozi study. By using the textual research method, previous studies prove that there are several contradictions inside the biography. Based on this, some scholars claim that there is no historical Laozi ever lived. However, this traditional textual interpretation often ignores the role played by the author of the biography Sima Qian. Because of lacking enough attention to the author, the interpretation of the text contains some misunderstanding. This thesis aims to fill this void by combining the author’s creative principles with the textual analysis, then find the reason why there are contradictions inside the text, and finally cast doubt on the dominant view that Laozi is only a legendary figure.