

## LEFT PERIPHERY AND FEATURE CHECKING OF WH-QUESTIONS IN *TAO TE CHING*

MA DAOSHAN

Department of English Language, Tianjin Polytechnic University, Tianjin, China

### ABSTRACT

The author of this paper deals with wh-questions in the three most popular versions of *Tao Te Ching* from the perspective of cartographic theory and checking theory. The topography of CP in the left periphery of wh-questions in *Tao Te Ching* only partly supports Rizzi's split CP hypothesis with some slight difference as shown in the following hierarchical order: Force Topic Interrogation Focus IP. Feature checking of [+wh] feature in wh-questions obeys the Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis, while [+Foc] feature checking requires the object wh-word to move to the front of the verb or the preposition, and [+Top] feature checking also requires the relevant constituents to move to the spec TopP position to check off the strong [+Top] feature of the head. The interaction of interrogation, focus and topic is in need of further research.

**KEYWORDS:** Left Periphery, Feature Checking, *Tao Te Ching*

### INTRODUCTION

Among the numerous versions of *Tao Te Ching*, the most academically significant versions are the bamboo slips version, the silk manuscripts version and the handed-down classic version (Ma, 2016: 230). In the bamboo slips version, there are 12 wh-questions without question particles affixed at the end of the sentences (Ma, 2016: 231; 2017: 39). While in the silk manuscripts version, among the 22 wh-questions found in the book, 7 of them carry affix question particles and 17 of them don't (Ma, 2016:232). What's more, in the handed-down traditional version, only five among the 26 wh-questions in the book carry affix question particles (Ma, 2016:232-234). The wh-questions in *Tao Te Ching* exhibit different syntactic properties of focus, topic and wh-feature attraction in the position of CP. In this paper, the author will investigate on the topography of left periphery in CP based on the cartography theory.

### LEFT PERIPHERY

The topography of left periphery in CP is first proposed by Rizzi (1997, 1999, 2004:242), and according to his theory, the cartographic order of topic and focus in the position of CP is shown as follows:

1. Force Topic\* Focus Mod\* Topic\* FIN IP

Besides focus and topic, wh-words can also be found in or raised to the spec position of CP. The cartographic order of interrogation, topic and focus in CP layer can thus be illustrated as in the following (Rizzi, 1999):

2. Force Topic\* Int Topic\* Focus Mod\* Topic\* FIN IP

Rizzi (2001) thinks that the CP system should follow the hierarchical order of the (3) when he realizes that in Italian the complementizer "se" (also called a polarity item) can be used to introduce an embedded yes-no question.

3. Force Topic\* Int Topic\* Focus Topic\* FIN IP

In (3), the hierarchical order of CP is not quite different from Rizzi (1997, 1999, 2004).

In accordance with the above mentioned cartographic theory, the study of left periphery in Chinese shows that topic and focus in Chinese also exhibit certain hierarchical order. The structure of Chinese left periphery in CP goes as follows:

4. About topic › hanging topic › left dislocation topic › lian-focus › IP (qtd. in Cheung, 2014: 424)

Based on the split CP hypothesis proposed by Rizzi (1997, 1999, 2004), Tsai (2008:107) put up the following topography of adverbial wh-words in the left periphery of Chinese sentences:

5. Force Topic\* Int Topic\* Focus Mod\* Topic\* FIN [<sub>TP</sub>Tense Mod\* [<sub>VP</sub>

zenme zenme weishenme modal wei(-le)sheme

weishenme zenme(-yang)

Left periphery vP periphery

According to the split CP hypothesis, the force of wh-questions reveals wh-interrogative force, which we indicate it as [+wh]. In the bamboo slips version of *Tao Te Ching*, the following wh-questions can be illustrated as in (8-9) by Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis (Ma, 2004; 2006: 108; 2014: 19; 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b) as in (10):

6. He wei chong rui? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book B)

What call favor humiliation?

“What is favor or humiliation?”

7. He wei gui da huan ruo shen? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book B)

What mean treasure great illness like body

“What does it mean by treasuring great illness as you do your body?”

8. [<sub>CP</sub>[+wh]<sub>i</sub> hei wei chong rui?]

9. [<sub>CP</sub>[+wh]<sub>i</sub> hei wei gui da huan ruo shen?]

10. Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis

In null specifier type of languages (Ma, 2001), the interrogative head with weak interrogative feature, located at the end of the interrogative sentence, which is attached to by the affix question particle “ne”/ “ma” or the rising tone Q in modern Chinese, and “ye” / “zai” / “hu” or the rising tone Q, attracts the interrogative feature of the wh-word or the interrogative construction to move to spec CP position so that the interrogative feature is checked and thus the sentences can be interpreted as interrogative sentences.

In (8-9) the [+wh] force is located hierarchically before the wh-word “he” (“what” in English). Similar examples can also be found in the silk manuscripts version as in (11-19) and in the handed-down classic version of *Tao Te Ching* as in (20-29). The above mentioned 9 examples in the silk manuscripts version and the 10 examples in the handed-down

classic version of *Tao Te Ching* also show that the [+wh] force is located hierarchically before the wh-word.

11. fu he gu ye? (*Te Ching*)

Oh what reason PART.

“Oh, what’s the reason?”

12. he gu ye? (*Te Ching*)

What reason PART.

“What’s the reason?”

13. naihe yi sha zhi ye? (*Te Ching*)

How with frighten it PART.

“Why are you afraid of it?”

14. shu neng you yu er you yi qu feng yu tian zhe hu? (*Te Ching*)

Who can have abundance and have with make offering to universe PART. PART.

“Who can make offerings to the universe with the abundance of life he has?”

15. shu zhi qi ji? (*Te Ching*)

Who know it’s extreme

“Who knows its extreme?”

16. he wei chong rui ruo jing? (*Tao Ching*)

What mean favor humiliation like surprise

“What does it mean by no surprise at favor or humiliation?”

17. he wei gui da huan ruo shen? (*Tao Ching*)

What mean treasure great illness like body

“What does it mean by treasuring great illness as you do your body?”

18. shu wei ci? (*Tao Ching*)

Who do this

“Who does it?”

19. yan ke yi wei shan? (*Te Ching*)

How can with do good

“How can you do good with it?”

20. he wei gui da huan ruo shen? (Chapter 13)

What mean treasure great illness like body

“What does it mean by treasuring great illness as you do your body?”

21. he wei chong rui ruo jing? (Chapter 13)

What mean favor humiliation like surprise

“What does it mean by no surprise at favor or humiliation?”

22. shu neng an yi jiu? (Chapter 15)

Who can quiet with long?

“Who can keep quiet for long?”

23. shu neng zhuo yi zhi? (Chapter 15)

Who can chaos with stop?

“Who can stop the chaos?”

24. shu wei ci zhe? (Chapter 23)

Who do this PART.

“Who does this?”

25. naihe yi wancheng zhi zhu, er yi shen qing tianxia? (Chapter 26)

Why with all of Lord but with body lighten world

“Why does the Lord of all take his body more precious than the world?”

26. fu he gu? (Chapter 50)

Oh what reason

“What’s the reason?”

27. shu zhi ci ji? (Chapter 58)

Who know this extreme

“Who knows the extreme of this?”

28. shu gan? (Chapter 74)

Who dare

“Who dares?”

29. shu neng you yu yi feng tianxia? (Chapter 77)

Who can have abundance to serve world

“Who can serve the world with his abundance?”

Chinese, as a topic-prominent language, tends to put topics in front of the sentences, which is also popularly read in *Tao Te Ching*. In the following sentences from the bamboo slips, the small clause before the main clause can be considered as given information, which serves as a topic in the sentence. Following (10), in (30-34) the weak [+wh] head feature attracts the [+wh] feature of the wh-word in the main clause to raise alone to spec CP, the sentence can be interpreted as a wh-question. If this is on the right track, sentence (30) can be illustrated as (35).

30. gu da dao fei, an you renyi? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book C)

Ancient great law abandoned how exist benevolence

“How can benevolence exist when the ancient great law is abandoned?”

31. liuqin bu he, an you xiaoci? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book C)

Kinship not harmonious how exist filial-piety

“How can the filial piety exist without harmonious kinship?”

32. bang jia hunluan, an you zheng chen? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book C)

State family dizzy how exist upright official

“How can upright officials exist if the state and the family are dizzy?”

33. wei yu e, xiangqu ji he? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book B)

Respect and disgust difference how much

“What is the difference between respect and disgust?”

34. mei e, xiangqu he ruo? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book B)

Beauty ugliness difference what like

“What is the difference between beauty and ugliness?”

35. [<sub>CP</sub> [+wh]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TopP</sub> gu dadao fei, ani you renyi?]<sub>i</sub>]

In (35) the interrogative force [+wh] precedes the topic as shown in the above examples. This is also the case in the examples of (36-37) in the silk manuscripts and in the examples of (38-43) in the handed-down classic version of *Tao Te Ching*.

36. wei yu e, qi xiangqu ji he? (*Tao Ching*)

Respect and disgust its difference how much

“What is the difference between respect and disgust?”

37. mei yu e, qi xiangqu he ruo? (*Tao Ching*)

Beauty and ugliness its difference what like

“What is the difference between beauty and ugliness?”

38. shan zhi yu e, xiangqu ruo he? (Chapter 20)

Kindness it and evil difference like what

“What is the difference between kindness and evil?”

39. wei zhi yu e, xiangqu jihe? (Chapter 20)

Respect it and disgust difference how much

“What is the difference between respect and disgust?”

40. ren zhi bu shan, he qi zhi you? (Chapter 62)

People it not kind what discard it have

“What loss does it have if people are not kindhearted?”

41. tian zhi suo e, shei zhi qi gu? (Chapter 73)

Universe it of disgust who know its reason

“Who knows the reason that it is disgusted by the universe?”

42. min bu wei si, naihe yi si ju zhi? (Chapter 74)

People not frighten death how with death frighten them

“If people are not afraid of death, how can you frighten them with death?”

43. bao yuan yi de, anhe yi wei shan? (Chapter 79)

Treat complaints with virtue how with do good

“If complaints are treated with virtue, how does good be done?”

As for the topography of topic and wh-words, a topic always occurs before a wh-word in the sentence as shown in the examples (44-46) from the bamboo slips of Tao Te Ching. These examples can also be read in the silk manuscripts and the handed-down classic version. (44) can be represented as (47).

44. ming yu shen shu qin? (Bamboo Slips of Tao Te Ching Book A)

Fame and body who dear

“Which is dearer, fame or body?”

45. shen yu huo shu duo? (Bamboo Slips of Tao Te Ching Book A)

Body and goods who more

“Which is more, body or goods?”

46. de yu wang shu bing? (Bamboo Slips of Tao Te Ching Book A)

Gain and loss who harmful

“Which is more harmful, gain or loss?”

47. [<sub>CP</sub> [+wh]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TopP</sub> ming yu shen, shui qin?]]

The other 2 sentences in the bamboo slips also exhibit similar results. In (48), the small clause can be functioned as a relative clause. In (49), the subject “wu” (“I” in English) is raised from spec VP to spec CP and thus can also be considered as a topic, which is shown in (50). Sentence (49) can also be found in the silk manuscripts and in the handed-down classic version of *Tao Te Ching* except for that there is a question particle affixed to the sentence at the end of it.

48. ji wu wu shen, huo he huan? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book B)

And I no body or what illness

“If I have no body, what illness do I have?”

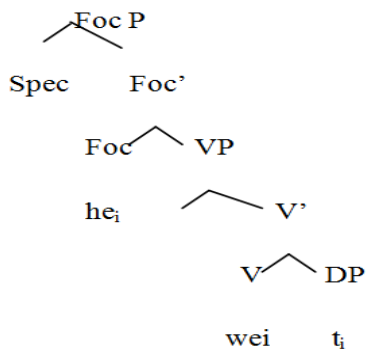
49. wu he yi zhi tianxia zhi ran? (Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* Book B)

I what with know universe of this

“How do I know that the universe is like this?”

50. [CP [+wh]<sub>i</sub> [TopP wuj, hei yi tj zhi tianxia zhi ran?]]

Ma (2017) also claims that the overt movement of the object wh-word in the Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* is due to focus feature checking requirement (Ma, 2017: 42). Object shift is caused by emphasis of the object, which is raised to the front position of the verb or preposition. Thus the accusative wh-word becomes the focus of the sentence. In the examples of (6-13), (16-17) and (20-21), the wh-word “he” (“what” in English) moves overtly to the front position of the verb, triggered by the strong focus feature in the specifier of the Focus phrase. The focus phrase is located in the head position of the left periphery structure in the Chinese sentence. (6-13) can be illustrated in the tree diagram of (51) (Ma, 2017: 42).



51.

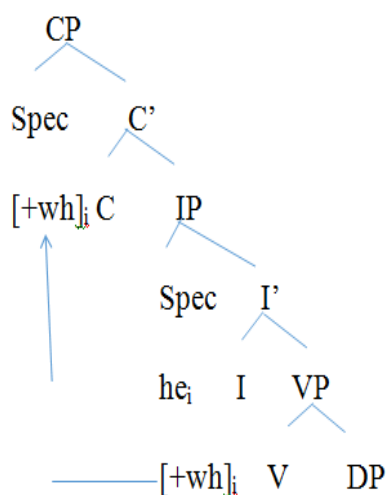
Focus movement is also shown in (50). The wh-word “he” (“what” in English) moves overtly to the front position of the preposition, triggered by the strong focus feature in the specifier of the Focus phrase. As illustrated from the above analysis, the wh-questions in the three well-known versions of *Tao Te Ching* support part of Rizzi’s split CP hypothesis. The split CP layer of the wh-questions in *Tao Te Ching* can be summarized as in (52):

52. Force TopicInt FocusIP

**FEATURE CHECKING**

Examples (6-7) and (11-29) are wh-questions with wh-words at the initial position of the sentence. In light of (10), the [+wh] feature at the head of C in Chinese is weak and cannot attract the wh-word to raise, instead the [+wh] feature of

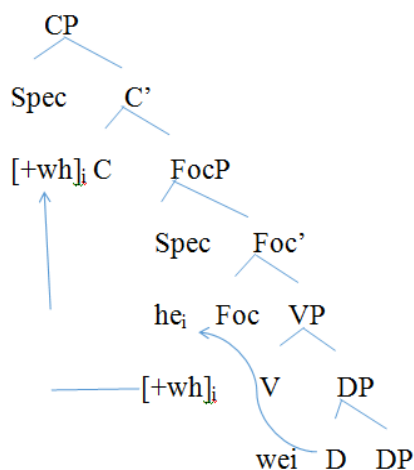
C attracts the [+wh] feature of the wh-word to raise alone. When the [+wh] feature of the wh-word moves to the spec of CP position, the head [+wh] feature of C is checked and the derivation converges. The sentence is well formed. Example (6) is represented as in (53):



53.

wei chongrui

However, (53) is not the whole story. As shown in (51), the object shifted wh-word “he” (“what” in English) moves overtly to the front position of the verb, triggered by the strong focus feature in the head position of the Focus phrase. The strong [+Foc] head feature is checked when the object wh-word is attracted and moved to the specifier position of FocP. And thus the strong head [+Foc] feature can be checked and the derivation converges. The sentence is grammatical as shown in (54).

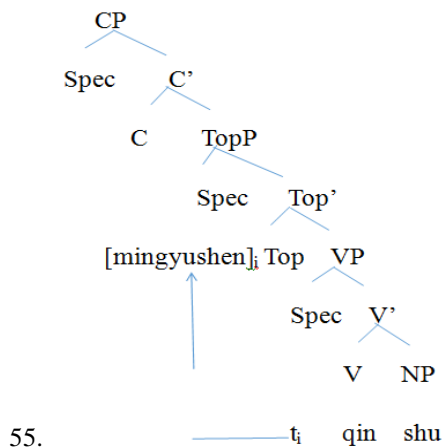


54.

t<sub>i</sub> chongrui

Sentence (7) and sentences (11-29) can be accounted for in the similar way as in (54). Up till now, we have dealt with two kinds of feature checking: wh-feature attraction and focus movement. The third kind of feature checking is the topic feature checking. The topical structure represented in (47) can be illustrated in the tree diagram of (55):

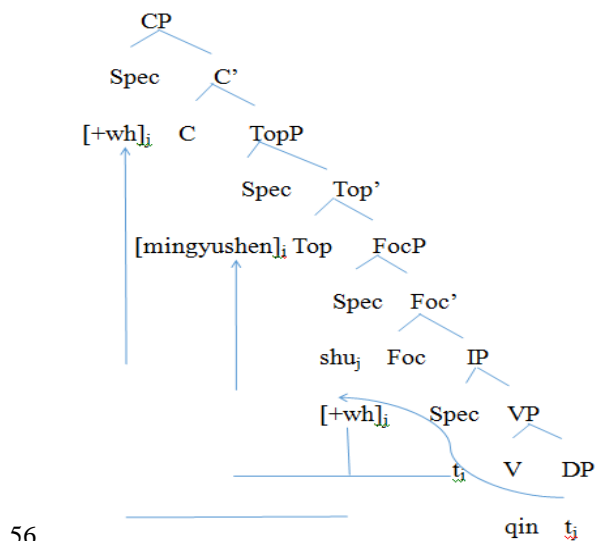




55.

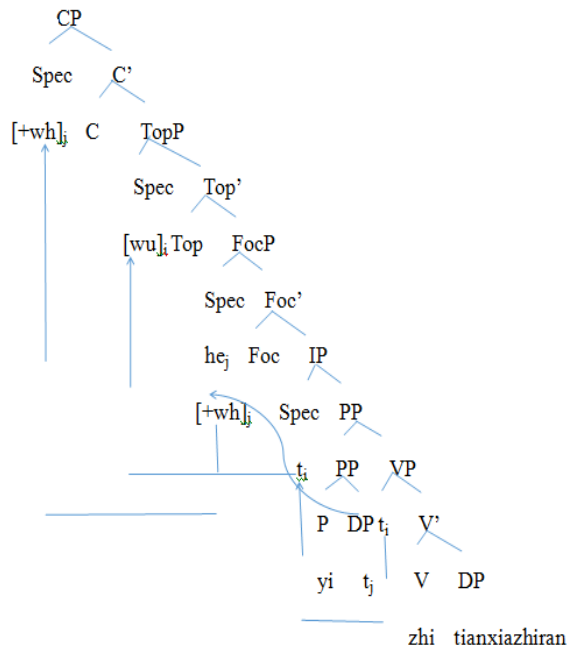
In (55), according to the VP shell hypothesis, the subject “mingyushen” is base generated in Spec VP, as the head [+Top] feature of the Top head is strong, the NP “mingyushen” must be moved to the Spec TopP to check off the strong head feature. The [+Top] feature of the NP “mingyushen” agrees with the strong head [+Top] feature of the Top, the derivation converges and the sentence is grammatical. Sentences (30-43) also can be interpreted in one way or the other as topic structures in Chinese, and some of the topics in these sentences are base generated in spec TopP, while others are base generated elsewhere but moved to spec TopP position. Therefore in sentences (30-43) the head [+Top] feature can be checked by the spec [+Top] feature and the sentences are grammatical, similar to the checking process in (55).

But (55) is only part of the story. The subject “mingyushen” first moves to the spec of IP and then moves on to the spec of TopP in a cyclic way, and in (56) we omit the first step and move the subject from spec IP to spec TopP. The object “shu” (“who” in English) first is attracted and pied-piped to the Spec FocP to check off the strong [+Foc] feature of the head Foc in FocP. When the object is shifted to the front position of the verb, the focus feature of the head agrees with the focus feature of the shifted object. And then the weak head feature [+wh] of head C in CP attracts the [+wh] feature of the wh-word to move to the spec position of the CP to check off the weak head feature [+wh] of head C in CP. When the [+wh] feature of the wh-word raises into the spec CP position, the [+wh] feature of the wh-word agrees with the weak head feature [+wh] of head C in CP, and thus the derivation converges and the sentence is grammatical as shown in (56).



56.

And the structure represented in (50) also follows the derivation shown in the tree diagram of (57).



57.

zhi tianxiashiran

In (57) the subject “wu” is base generated in spec VP position and then move up to the spec IP position, and as the head of TopP carries a strong [+Top] feature, the subject raises up cyclically to the spec of TopP to check off the strong [+Top] feature of the head Top. The [+Top] feature of the subject “wu” agrees with the strong [+Top] feature of the head Top, and the derivation converges. The object of the preposition “yi” is attracted and moved up to spec FocP position to check the strong [+Foc] feature of the head Foc. And when the object is shifted to the front of the preposition, the [+Foc] feature of the object agrees with the strong [+Foc] feature of the head Foc. The head feature [+wh] of C in CP is weak and can only attract the [+wh] feature of the object to move alone to the spec CP position. And when the [+wh] feature of the object raises to the spec CP position, the [+wh] feature of the object agrees with the weak head feature [+wh] of C, and thus the derivation converges and the sentence is grammatical.

Form the tree diagram of (56) and (57), the topography of CP layer in archaic Chinese *Tao Te Ching* supports our summary of (52), rewritten as (58) below for convenience, which is slightly different from Rizzi (1997, 1999, 2004) as rewritten in (59) as well as Rizzi (2001) rewritten as in (60) :

58. Force TopicInt FocusIP

59. Force Topic\* Int Topic\* Focus Mod\* Topic\* FIN IP

60. Force Topic\* Int Topic\* Focus Topic\* FIN IP

## CONCLUSIONS

The topography of left periphery in the Chinese classic philosophical work *Tao Te Ching* is lightly different from that in Italian written by Rizzi (1997, 1999, 2004) and Rizzi (2001). The author first illustrates that in *Tao Te Ching*, according to the Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis (Ma, 2004; 2006: 108; 2014: 19; 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b), the [+wh] feature of the wh-word in sentences (6-7) and sentences (11-29) is attracted to move to the spec CP position for the requirement that the weak [+wh] feature of the head C must be checked. When the [+wh] feature of the wh-word is raised to the spec CP position, the weak [+wh] feature of the head C agrees with the [+wh] feature of the wh-

word, and thus the sentence is grammatical. In the process of derivation, the interrogative force is indicated by the [+wh] feature of the wh-word in the spec CP position, and this interrogative force is invariably ordered before the wh-word. Secondly, as illustrated in sentences (30-43) the interrogative force precedes the topic and in sentences (44-46) and (48-49) the topic precedes the wh-word. The subject base generated in spec VP first moves to spec IP for the checking of its nominative case and then attracts to spec TopP for the requirement to check the strong [+Top] feature of the head Top. This movement is also triggered by the feature checking need of the strong head feature. Thirdly, the strong head feature of [+Foc] also requires the object wh-word to move up to spec FocP position to check off the strong head feature of [+Foc]. Once the object wh-word moves to spec FocP position and the strong head feature of [+Foc] is checked, the [+wh] feature of the shifted object wh-word is attracted by the weak head feature of the head C to move to the spec CP position to check off the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. This being done, the derivation of the sentence converges and the sentence is grammatical.

There are also some weak points in the paper. The topography of the archaic Chinese is not carefully investigated in the three versions of *Tao Te Ching*. For example, can the topics occur repeatedly in the position between Force and Interrogation? Is there any modality in the three versions of *Tao Te Ching*? Secondly, in some sentences the topics are cases of movement as shown in the paper, and there are also some sentences in which the topics might be base generated in spec TopP position, and due to space limitations this language phenomenon is not discussed. Thirdly, the interaction of topic, focus and interrogation should have been dealt with in details. All these questions we'll leave for another paper to study.

## REFERENCE

1. Badan, Linda, and Francesca Del Gobbo. On the syntax of topic and focus in Chinese [A]. in Mapping the Left Periphery[C]. ed. Paola Benincà, and Nicola Munar, 63-90. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
2. Benincà, Paola. The position of topic and focus in left periphery [A]. in Current Studies in Italian Syntax: Essays Offered to Lorenzo Renzi[C]. ed. Guglielmo Cinque, and Giampaolo Salvi, 39-64. Amsterdam: Elsevier-North Holland. 2001.
3. Cheung, Candice C. H. Wh-fronting and the left periphery in Mandarin [J]. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 2014(23):393-431.
4. Cinque, Guglielmo, and Luigi Rizzi. The cartography of syntactic structures [A]. in Studies in Linguistics: CISCL Working Papers on Language and Cognition, vol.2[C]. ed. Vincenzo Moscati, 43-59. Siena: Università Degli Studi Di Siena. 2008.
5. Del Gobbo, Francesca, and Linda Badan. On the left periphery of Chinese [Z]. Paper presented at IACL-15 and NACCL-19, Columbia University, New York. 2007.
6. Ma, Daoshan. The Types of Natural Languages from the Perspective of Generative Studies of Wh-questions [J]. *Contemporary Research in Modern Chinese*, 2001. (3) : 23~37.
7. Ma, Daoshan. The Syntactic Interrogativeness of the Particle “Ne”[Z]. (IACL-12)& (ISCL-2) , Tianjin: 2004-6-18-20.
8. Ma, Daoshan. On the Syntactic Proof of the Interrogative Particle “Ne” [J]. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 2006. (12):100-112.
9. Ma, Daoshan. The Translation of Interrogative Sentences in Laozi and Its Typological Significance [J]. *Theoretical Linguistic Studies*, 2008.(2):101-108.

10. Ma, Daoshan. A Syntactic Study of the Interrogative Sentences and Its Typological Significance in the Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung [J]. *Journal of Beijing International Studies University*, 2014(10) : 14-23.
11. Ma, Daoshan. *The Syntactic Studies of Interrogative Sentences in the West and Their Deficiencies* [M]. Guangzhou: World Book Publishing Co. Ltd. 2015.
12. Ma, Daoshan. *An Outline of English and Chinese Syntax* [M]. Guangzhou: World Book Publishing Co. Ltd. 2016a.
13. Ma, Daoshan. The Distribution and Feature Checking of Interrogative Sentences in *Tao Te Ching* [J]. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 2016b.4 (6): 230-236.
14. Ma, Daoshan. Feature Attraction of Wh-questions in the Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching*. *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature (IMPACT: IJRHAL)* 5(1): 9-50.2017a.
15. Ma, Daoshan. Wh-Feature Attraction and Affix Particles in *Tao Te Ching*. *IJRDO: Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*. Forthcoming. 2017b.
16. Rizzi, Luigi. The fine structure of the left periphery [A]. in *Elements of Grammar*[C]. ed. L. Haegeman, 281-338. Dordrecht: Kluwer. 1997.
17. Rizzi, Luigi. On the position “interrogative” in the left periphery of the clause[Z]. Ms. Università Di Dena. 1999.
18. Rizzi, Luigi. Locality and the left periphery [A]. in *Structures and Beyond: the Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, vol.3[C]. ed. Adriana Belletti, 223-251. New York: Oxford University Press. 2004.
19. Tsai, W.-T. Dylan. Left periphery and how-why alternations [J]. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 2008(17): 83-115.