

## **WH-FEATURE ATTRACTION AND AFFIX PARTICLES IN TAO TE CHING**

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**Abstract:**

In this paper, the wh-questions in the bamboo slips, the silk manuscripts and the handed-down traditional version of *Tao Te Ching* are described respectively, and the syntactic features of the wh-questions can be accounted for by the Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis. The author, in light of the syntactic behavior of the question particles in the three versions of *Tao Te Ching*, comes up to the conclusion that question particles are sentential affixes in nature, and as a result, the Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis is finally revised.

**Keywords:** *Tao Te Ching*, Wh-feature attraction, affix, particles

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## Introduction

Although there are too many versions of *Tao Te Ching* in the Chinese history, the handed-down ancient classic version, the silk manuscripts and the bamboo slips are among three of the most popular versions (Ma, 2016: 230). The earliest unearthed version of *Tao Te Ching* is the bamboo slips found in the Chu Dynastic Tomb at Guodian, in which there are 12 wh-questions without any question particles at the end of the sentences (Ma, 2016: 231; 2017: 39). However, in the silk manuscripts of *Tao Te Ching*, there are 22 wh-questions, five of which are found to carry the question particle “ye” at the end of the sentences, one of which the question particle “zai” and one of which the question particle “hu” at the end of the sentence, while a majority of the wh-questions do not carry any particles at the end of the sentences. What’s more, in the traditional handed-down version 27 wh-questions are found, five of which carry question particles “hu” or “zai” at the end of them, in four of which the wh-words are located at the end or in the middle of the sentences with no question particles, and in 11 of which the wh-words are positioned initially in the front of the sentences (Ma, 2016: 232-234). The differences of the distribution of wh-questions and the optional choice of question particles in the different versions of *Tao Te Ching* require a further explanation of wh-feature checking. And in the following parts we will deal with wh-feature attraction and left periphery of wh-questions in the above-mentioned three most popular versions of *Tao Te Ching*.

## 1. Wh-feature Attraction

### 1.1 In the Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching*

In the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching*, there are altogether 12 interrogative sentences, all of which are wh-questions without any question particles at the end of the sentences (Ma, 2017).

(1) 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?”

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

Kinship not harmonious how exist filial-peity

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

(3) 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?”

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

Respect and pretermission difference how much

“What is the difference between respect and pretermission?”

(5) 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?”

(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) 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?”

(9) 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?”

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

Fame and body who dear

“Which is dearer, fame or body?”

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

Body and goods who more

“Which is more, body or goods?”

(12) 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?”

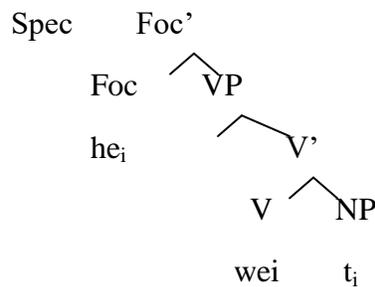
Aoun & Li (1993a, 1993b) proposes that in modern Chinese wh-questions, the interrogative force of the wh-word as an indefinite is licensed by the interrogative operator. The question particle “ne” at the end of the sentence as a wh-operator binds the wh-word and forms an operator variable relationship. As is pointed out by Ma (2017), following Aoun & Li’s solution (1993a, 1993b), as there is no question particle in the wh-question in the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching*, there will be no wh-operator in the sentence, and therefore the sentence cannot be understood as wh-question. Therefore, Aoun & Li’s approach fails to account for the wh-questions in the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching*.

If a null wh-operator is base generated in the spec of CP, and the wh-feature agrees with the wh-feature of the head (Tsai, 1994; Shi, 1994; Wu, 2005 etc.), the sentence as a wh-question in the examples above converges. It seems that even if there is no wh-word in the sentence, the sentence can be still interpreted as a wh-question. As Ma (2017) states, this is on the wrong track, and it seems to be cycling proof that if the sentence is a wh-question, then in Chinese there must be a null wh-operator in spec of CP, and if a null wh-operator is base-generated in spec of CP, the sentence must be a wh-question. So unselective binding hypothesis (Tsai, 1994; Shi, 1994; Wu, 2005 etc.) does not really work in the interpretation of archaic Chinese wh-questions (Ma, 2017: 43).

Ma (2017) also claims that the overt movement of the object wh-word in the Bamboo Slips of *Tao Te Ching* is strongly against the LF movement hypothesis of Huang (1982a, 1982b). LF

movement of Chinese wh-words in wh-questions does not hold in archaic Chinese (Ma, 2017: 42). The wh-words in (5-9) are cases of overt movement, but not that of covert LF-movement. The overt movement in (5-9) is not necessarily triggered by wh-feature checking requirement. In fact, object shift in archaic Chinese might be due to focus feature checking requirement. Object shift is caused by emphasis of the object, which is raised to the front position of the verb. Thus the accusative wh-word becomes the focus of the sentence. In (3-9), 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. (6-7) can be illustrated in the tree diagram of (13) (Ma, 2017: 42).

(13)  $Foc \bar{R}$



The object shift in sentences (1-3) is also triggered by the strong focus feature, as illustrated in the following semantic representations:

(14) [gu da dao fei, an<sub>i</sub> you ren<sub>i</sub> t<sub>i</sub> ?] (Ma, 2017: 42)

(15) [liuqin bu he, an<sub>i</sub> you xiaoci t<sub>i</sub> ?] (Ma, 2017: 42)

(16) [bang jia hunluan, an<sub>i</sub> you zheng chen t<sub>i</sub> ?]

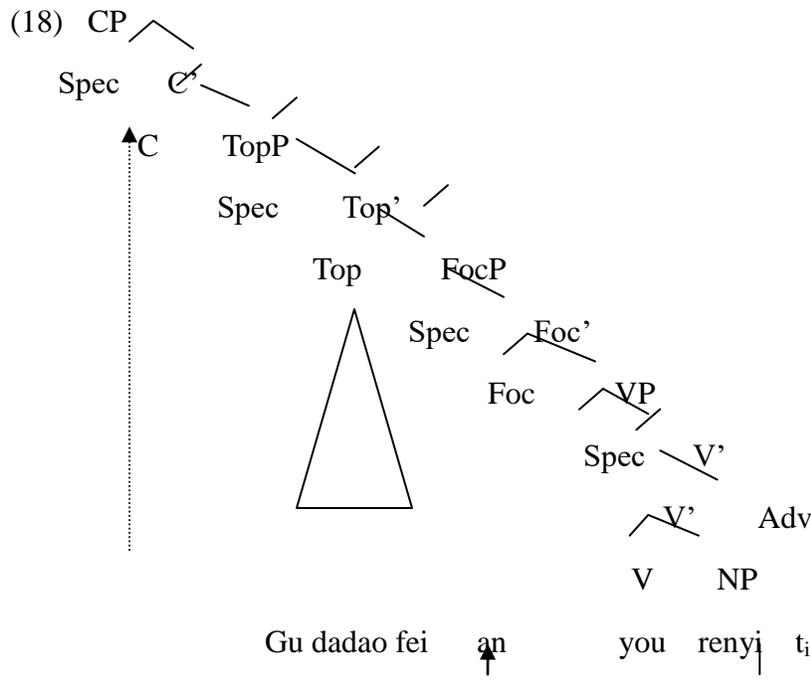
Neither unselective binding nor LF-movement works in the interpretation of wh-questions in the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching*. Consequently, enlightened by Chomsky (1995), Frampton (1997) and Cheng (2000), Ma (2017) proposes the Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis (Ma, 2004; 2006: 108; 2014: 19; 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2017) for the explanation of wh-questions in

Chinese.

(17) 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 represented as the functional 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.

According to (17), sentence (1) can be illustrated as in the tree diagram of (18):



[+wh] .....

In (18), the wh-word “an” (“how” in English) is moved overtly from adv position to Foc position to check the strong focus feature of the FocP. The emphatic focus is filled by the wh-word and the derivation of FocP converges. The next derivation is the feature movement of the [+wh]

feature from focus position to the Spec CP position to check the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. As the [+wh] feature of the head C is weak, the feature movement of the [+wh] feature from focus position is not pied-piped by the morphological [+wh] feature of the word “an”. Thus the derivation converges and the sentence can be interpreted as a wh-question.

## 1.2 In the Silk Manuscripts of *Tao Te Ching*

As it is counted, there are 22 wh-questions in the silk manuscripts of *Tao Te Ching*, five of which carry the question particle “ye” at the end of the sentences (19-23), one of which the question particle “zai” at the end of the sentence (24), one of which the question particle “hu” at the end of the sentence (25), and 15 of which don’t carry any particles at the end of the sentences (26-40) (Ma, 2016b).

(19) fu he gu ye? (*Te Ching*)

Oh what reason PART.

“Oh, what’s the reason?”

(20) he gu ye? (*Te Ching*)

What reason PART.

“What’s the reason?”

(21) wu he yi zhi qi ran ye? (*Te Ching*)

I what with know it this PART.

“How do I know it’s like this?”

(22) gu zhi suoyi gui ci zhe he ye? (*Te Ching*)

Ancient of why treasure this PART. what PART.

“Why do ancient people treasure it like this?”

(23) naihe yi sha zhi ye? (*Te Ching*)

How with frighten it PART.

“Why are you afraid of it?”

(24) wu he yi zhi tianxia zhi ran zai? (*Te Ching*)

I what with know universe of this PART.

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

(25) 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?”

(26) ming yu shen shu qin? (*Te Ching*)

Fame and body who dear

“Which is dearer, fame or body?”

(27) shen yu huo shu duo? (*Te Ching*)

Body and goods who more

“Which is more, body or goods?”

(28) de yu wang shu bing? (*Te Ching*)

Gain and loss who harmful

“Which is more harmful, gain or loss?”

(29) shu zhi qi ji? (*Te Ching*)

Who know its extreme

“Who knows its extreme?”

(30) ren zhi bu shan ye, he qi zhi you? (*Te Ching*)

People of no kindness Part. what loss it have

“What loss does it have if people are not kind-hearted?”

(31) tian zhi suo e, shu zhi qi gu? (*Te Ching*)

Universe of Passive disgust who know its reason

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

(32) yan ke yi wei shan? (*Te Ching*)

How can with do good

“How can you do good with it?”

(33) 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?”

(34) 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?”

(35) ji wu wu shen, you he huan? (*Tao Ching*)

And I no body have what illness

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

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

Respect and pretermission its difference how much

“What is the difference between respect and pretermission?”

(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) wu he yi zhi zhongfu zhi ran? (*Tao Ching*)

I what with know everything it this

“How do I know everything like this?”

(39) shu wei ci? (*Tao Ching*)

Who do this

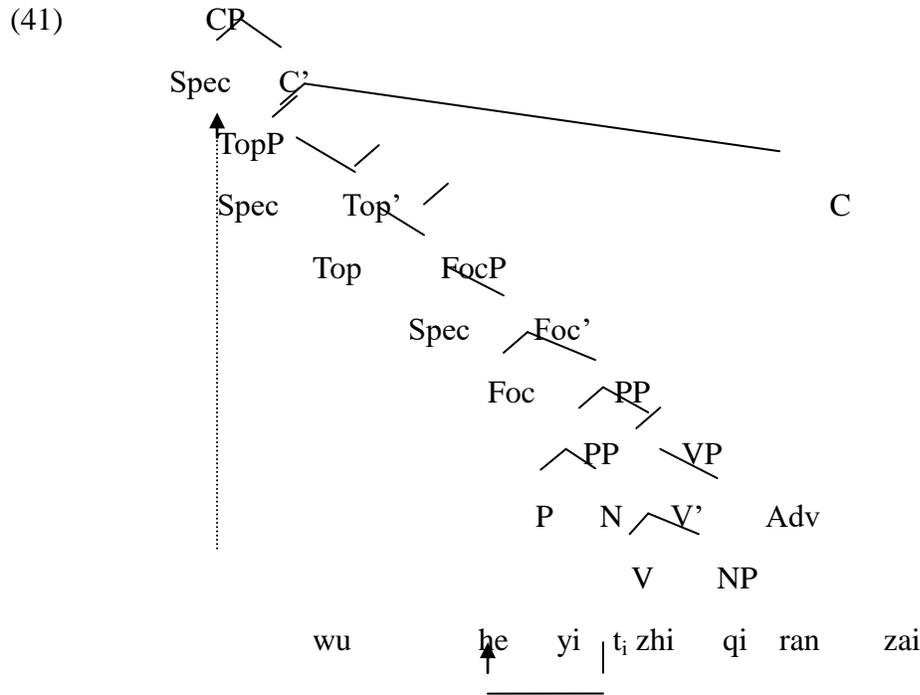
“Who does it?”

(40) ruo he yi wancheng zhi wang, er yi shen qing yu tianxia? (*Tao Ching*)

Like what with all of Lord but with body lighten for world

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

In light of (17), sentence (21) can be illustrated in the tree diagram as in (41):



[+wh]

In (41), the wh-word “he” (“what” in English) is moved overtly from N position of PP to Foc position of FocP to check the strong focus feature of the FocP. And then the [+wh] feature of the wh-word “he” moves alone to the Spec CP position to check the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. The weak [+wh] feature of the head C as realized in the phonetic form by the question particle “zai” does not attract the morphological feature of the whole wh-word “he” to move along with its [+wh] feature, and thus the morphological feature of the whole wh-word “he” is left behind, and the derivation converges. The sentence can be interpreted as a wh-question.

### 1.3 In the Handed-down Traditional Version of *Tao Te Ching*

There are 26 wh-questions in the handed-down classics of *Tao Te Ching*. Among them, in 10 sentences the wh-words are located in the initial position, which are used as the subjects of the sentences (42-51), in five sentences the wh-words are located with the question particles “zai” or “hu” at the end of the sentences (52-56), in four sentences the wh-words are located at the end or in the middle of the sentences without the question particles(57-60), and in seven sentences at the

beginning of the sentences there are topics or topic phrases (61-67) (Ma, 2016b).

(42) 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?”

(43) 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?”

(44) shu neng an yi jiu? (Chapter 15)

Who can quiet with long

“Who can keep quiet for long?”

(45) shu neng zhuo yi zhi? (Chapter 15)

Who can chaos with stop

“Who can stop the chaos?”

(46) shu wei ci zhe? (Chapter 23)

Who do this PART.

“Who does this?”

(47) 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?”

(48) fu he gu? (Chapter 50)

Oh what reason

“What’s the reason?”

(49) shu zhi ci ji? (Chapter 58)

Who know this extreme

“Who knows the extreme of this?”

(50) shu gan? (Chapter 74)

Who dare

“Who dares?”

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

Who can have abundance to serve world

“Who can serve the world with his abundance?”

(52) wu he yi zhi zhong fu zhi zhuang zai (Chapter 21)

I what with know every creature of situation PART.

“How do I know the situation of everything?”

(53) gu zhi suowei qu er quan zhe, qi xu yan zai? (Chapter 22)

Ancient of so-called yield and merit PART. isn't empty talk PART.

“Isn't the so-called yielding merit in ancient time empty talk?”

(54) tiandi shang bu neng jiu, er kuang yu ren hu? (Chapter 23)

Universe even not can long and moreover in human PART.

“Even the universe can't last long, to say anything of human beings?”

(55) wu he yi zhi tianxia ran zai? (Chapter 54)

I what with know world this PART.

“How do I know the universe like this?”

(56) wu he yi zhi qi ran zai? (Chapter 57)

I what with know it this PART.

“How do I know it like this?”

(57) ming yu shen shu qin? (Chapter 44)

Fame and body who dear

“Which is dearer, fame or body?”

(58) shen yu huo shu duo? (Chapter 44)

Body and goods who more

“Which is more, body or goods?”

(59) de yu wang shu bing? (Chapter 44)

Gain and loss who harmful

“Which is more harmful, gain or loss?”

(60) gu zhi suoyi gui ci dao zhe he? (Chapter 62)

Ancient of why treasure this law PART. what

“That’s why ancient people treasure this law?”

(61) ji wu wu shen, wu you he huan? (Chapter 13)

And I no body I have what illness

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

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

Kindness it and evil difference like what

“What is the difference between kindness and evil?”

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

Respect it and pretermission difference how much

“What is the difference between respect and pretermission?”

(64) 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?”

(65) 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?”

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

People not frighten death how with death frighten them

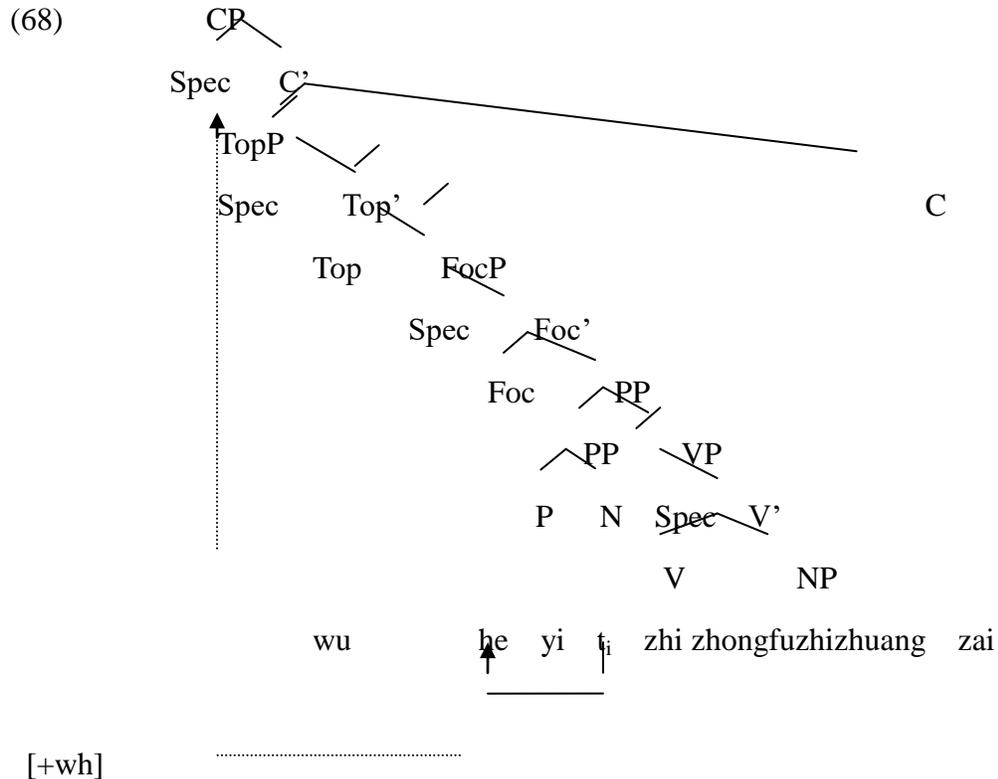
“If people are not afraid of death, how can you frighten them with death?”

(67) 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?”

Take (52) for example, the tree diagram of the sentence can be drawn as follows in accordance with (17):



In (68), the wh-word “he” (“what” in English) is moved overtly from N position of PP to Foc position of FocP to check the strong focus feature of the FocP. The [+wh] feature of the wh-word “he” moves alone to the Spec CP position to check the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. The weak [+wh] feature of the head C as realized in the phonetic form by the question particle “zai” does not attract the morphological feature of the whole wh-word “he” to pied-pipe with its [+wh] feature, and thus the morphological feature of the whole wh-word “he” is left in situ, and the sentence can be interpreted as a wh-question. The derivation converges.

## 2. Affix Particles

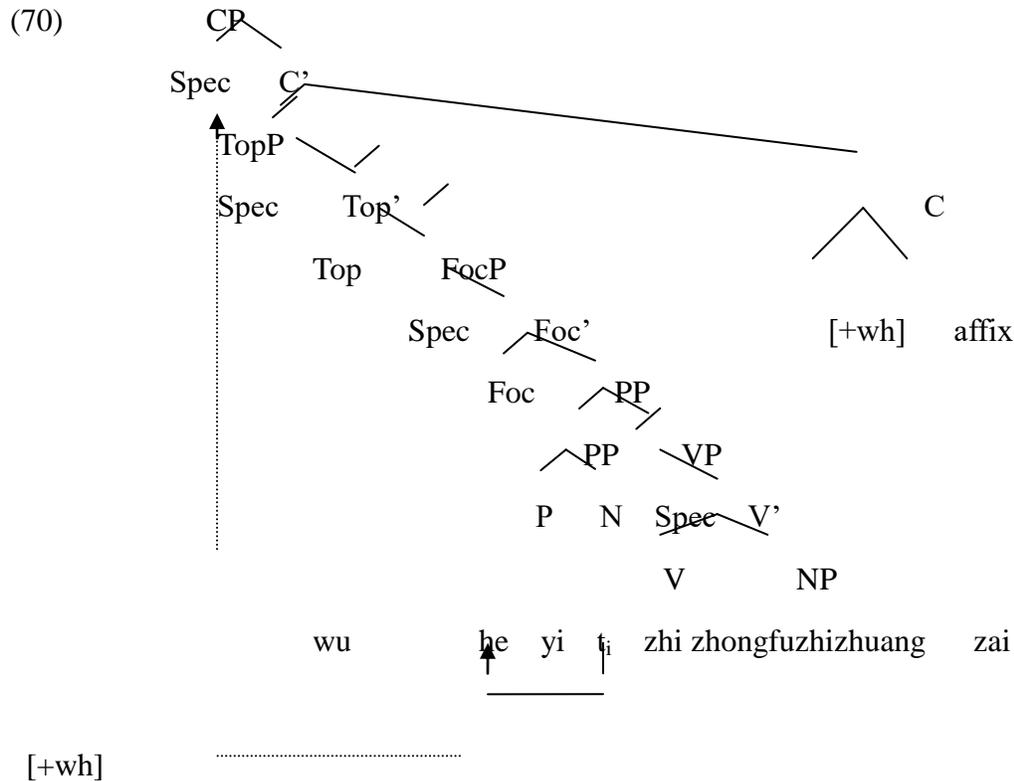
In Section 1, we have already mentioned that in the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching*, there are 12 wh-questions without question particles at the end of the sentences. This shows that question particles do not carry a significant role in the explanation of wh-questions. Without question particles, the 12 sentences in the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching* are interpreted as wh-questions without any question. Thus, we claim that question particles are only sentential affixes in nature

attached to the end of the sentence, which do not carry any interrogative force or value, but the whole construction assigns the sentence interrogative force. The question particles are attached to the end of the sentences probably for the need of phonetic requirement. Chinese affix question particles are the products of syntax phonology interface. If this assumption is on the right track, then (17) can be rewritten as (69):

(69) 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 in archaic Chinese, 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.

According to (69), the tree diagram of (68) can be rewritten as (70):



In (70), the question particle “zai” attaches itself to the weak [+wh] head feature of C, and the wh-word “he” (“what” in English) is moved overtly from N position of PP to Foc position of FocP to check the strong focus feature of the FocP. The [+wh] feature of the wh-word “he” moves alone to the Spec CP position to check the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. The weak [+wh] feature of the head C as realized in the phonetic form by the question particle “zai” does not attract the morphological feature of the whole wh-word “he” to pied-pipe with its [+wh] feature, and thus the morphological feature of the whole wh-word “he” is left in situ, and the sentence can be interpreted as a wh-question.

### **Conclusion**

The description of the wh-questions in the bamboo slips, the silk manuscripts and the handed-down classic version of *Tao Te Ching* provides evidence that LF-movement and unselective binding do not work in the interpretation of the derivation of wh-questions in the three different versions of *Tao Te Ching*. The wh-feature of the wh-word can be attracted to the spec CP position by the weak head wh-feature of the head C in archaic Chinese. The Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis works well enough in the interpretation of the derivation of wh-questions in the three different versions of *Tao Te Ching*. Based on the syntactic behavior of the question particles in the wh-questions in *Tao Te Ching*, question particles can be regarded as sentential affixes attached to the end of the sentences for phonetic requirement. And consequently, the Interrogative Feature Attraction Hypothesis is revised.

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