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Unraveling Jiang Chongyue's *The Generation and Ontologization of Dao*: Shengcheng and Ontological Transformation Through Process Philosophy

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Abstract
This paper first gives a brief review and then explores Jiang Chongyue's The Generation and Ontologization of Dao: On the Ontological Thought in Ancient China through the analytical lens of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. By juxtaposing the Chinese philosophical concept of "Dao" with Western processual thought, it elucidates the dynamic processes of "Shengcheng" (generative becoming) and ontological transformation inherent in Daoist metaphysics. The study reveals how Dao, as a proto-processual entity, evolves from a primordial cosmic principle to a structured ontological framework through historical and philosophical negotiations. Drawing on process philosophy's emphasis on relationality, creativity, and interdependence, this inquiry highlights the conceptual synergies between Daoist thought and process metaphysics, offering fresh insights into cross-cultural philosophical dialogue and the universal quest for understanding reality's fundamental nature.

Keywords
Dao (Chinese Philosophy); Process Philosophy (Whitehead); Cross-cultural Philosophical Dialogue

1 Introduction

The Generation and Ontologization of Dao: On the Ontological Thought in Ancient China byJiang Chongyue is a remarkable contribution to contemporary Chinese philosophy and comparative ontological inquiry. This work situates itself at the intersection of classical Chinese thought and philosophical systematization, proposing a bold reinterpretation of Dao—not merely as a metaphysical abstraction, but as a dynamic, evolving ontological principle that underwent conceptual transformation throughout early Chinese intellectual history.

Divided into carefully structured thematic sections, the book traces this conceptual evolution through critical readings of foundational texts such as Laozi, Zhuangzi, Hanfeizi, and later Han dynasty interpretations. It investigates how early Chinese thinkers grappled with questions of being, non-being, change, and categorization, culminating in a distinctive form of ontological thought that diverges significantly from Western ontological frameworks rooted in Greek metaphysics.

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At its core, Jiang's work is an innovative reconstruction of the development of Dao from a generative principle into a formal ontological category. It moves beyond conventional readings of Dao as either a mystical notion or a static metaphysical source. Instead, the author embarks on a philological and philosophical journey to demonstrate how Dao, across various classical texts— especially the Laozi, Zhuangzi, Hanfeizi, and the Yizhuan (Commentaries to the Book of Changes) —gradually acquires ontological characteristics through a process he terms "ontologization." This conceptual evolution, Jiang argues, is not a mere borrowing of Western metaphysics, but a native Chinese pathway to ontological thought, deeply rooted in generative cosmology and linguistic creativity.

One of the book's major philosophical innovations lies in its reinterpretation of the term "Shengcheng" (生成), typically rendered as "generation" or "coming into being." Jiang's analysis reveals that Shengcheng is not simply about cosmological emergence, but marks an implicit ontological commitment within early Chinese texts—a theory of how things arise, persist, and are known. The author proposes that the Chinese idea of Dao begins as a principle of Shengcheng, fluid and unbounded, and only later becomes formalized as an ontological ground through systematic reflection.

This book is developed through meticulous readings of classical texts. In Laozi, Jiang emphasizes Dao's generative spontaneity and self-concealing nature ("道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万 物"), interpreting it as a mode of emergence that precedes differentiation and identity. However, it is in Zhuangzi that Jiang identifies the emergence of ontological reflexivity: Dao is not merely productive but reflexively aware—it encompasses the relational, paradoxical structure of being. Particularly striking is Jiang's interpretation of " 理 " (li) in Zhuangzi as a proto-ontological concept, indicating a rational but non-abstract structure of reality, embedded within the processual flow of Dao.

Another original contribution is Jiang's treatment of the " 稽 " (ji) concept in Hanfeizi, which he reads not as mere "inquiry" but as an ontological move toward grounding. The author argues that Hanfeizi's Dao is characterized by its systematic internal order—Dao as both the law of being and the framework of governance, which in turn opens the path for Dao's institutionalization. This move from cosmological principle to normative structure marks a key moment in the ontologization process, according to Jiang.

In the Yizhuan, Jiang identifies a critical stage in Dao's transformation: the association of Dao with Yin-Yang cosmology and the trigram system. This textual systematization, in Jiang's view, encodes Dao not only as the origin of change but as the principle that governs patterned transformations across time and space. It is here that Dao acquires its most ontologically robust form—not simply as the source of change but as the intelligible order of change itself.

Philosophically, Jiang's work distinguishes itself through its methodological rigor and conceptual innovation. Unlike many scholars who either dismiss ontological categories in Chinese thought as Western impositions or treat Dao as an ineffable mystery, Jiang argues for a historically grounded, structurally dynamic ontological reading. His concept of "ontologization" does not project Western metaphysics onto Chinese texts; rather, it uncovers an indigenous path to ontology that arises from the internal tension between generation (sheng) and stabilization (cheng).

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Jiang's interpretive strategy draws upon cross-cultural philosophical resources but remains firmly committed to textual specificity. His use of hermeneutics, semiotics, and historical linguistics allows him to avoid the twin pitfalls of essentialism and relativism. For instance, by analyzing how key terms like "道", "理", "类", and "稽" evolve in usage across time, Jiang constructs a linguistic and conceptual genealogy of Chinese ontological thought. This genealogy is not linear but dialectical: Dao is both the beginning and the outcome of a process of philosophical reflection.

Moreover, Jiang contributes to the growing field of intercultural philosophy by showing that Chinese philosophy contains a rigorous and nuanced ontological discourse that deserves equal footing with its Western counterparts. The process of ontologization he describes parallels, but does not mimic, developments in Greek metaphysics. In this sense, *The Generation and Ontologization of Dao* also serves as a call to reframe global philosophy—not as a derivative dialogue with European thought, but as a multi-centered exploration of fundamental problems across cultures.

The book is not without its challenges. Its dense scholarly apparatus and complex theoretical framework require substantial familiarity with both classical Chinese texts and contemporary philosophical terminology. However, for those willing to engage deeply, Jiang's work offers a groundbreaking framework for rethinking how Chinese philosophy can contribute to global ontological debates.

In conclusion, *The Generation and Ontologization of Dao* is a philosophically sophisticated and textually grounded study that advances the understanding of Dao from a cross-cultural ontological perspective. Jiang Chongyue's concept of ontologization provides an original lens through which to interpret classical Chinese philosophy not merely as wisdom literature or proto-metaphysics, but as a fully developed ontological discourse in its own right. By recovering and systematizing the internal logic of Dao's conceptual evolution, Jiang opens new pathways for dialogue between Eastern and Western thought, and for the future development of comparative philosophy. This book will be essential reading for scholars of Chinese philosophy, comparative ontology, and anyone interested in the philosophical foundations of cultural thought systems. Professor Jiang's work is a meticulous exploration of the dynamic transformation of "Dao" from a generative, ever-evolving principle into a stabilized ontological entity in ancient Chinese thought. Rather than treating Dao as a static metaphysical abstraction, Jiang presents Dao as a living, self- producing force whose gradual ontologization profoundly shaped Chinese philosophical traditions, particularly Daoism and Confucianism.

This work stands out because it neither subordinates Chinese thought to Western categories nor isolates it into a cultural particularity. Instead, it establishes a philosophical dialogue that respects the autonomy of Chinese concepts while inviting comparative inquiry. Such a contribution is invaluable at a time when global philosophy seeks new paradigms beyond the Greco-European canon.

2 Process Philosophy: A Theoretical Foundation

Jiang Chongyue's *The Generation and Ontologization of Dao* represents a landmark study in Chinese philosophy, tracing the evolution of Daoist ontology from its nascent expressions in pre- Qin texts (Laozi,

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Zhuangzi) to its systematic elaboration in later thinkers like Hanfeizi and Yizhuan. Central to Jiang's thesis is the dialectical interplay between Dao's generative flux ("Shengcheng") and its ontological stabilization—a tension that mirrors perennial debates in Western metaphysics between becoming and being. However, existing scholarship often neglects the comparative potential of Daoist thought with non-Eastern philosophical traditions, particularly process philosophy.

Process philosophy, exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, offers a radical reconfiguration of metaphysical inquiry by prioritizing dynamic processes over static substances. This paradigm resonates profoundly with Daoist notions of "Dao" as a ceaseless flow of creative transformation. By synthesizing these frameworks, this paper seeks to bridge East- West philosophical divides, enriching interpretative possibilities for Dao's ontological complexity.

Theoretically, this study disrupts Eurocentric paradigms by demonstrating the heuristic value of non-Western philosophies in reconfiguring metaphysical debates. Practically, it fosters intercultural dialogue, offering a processual hermeneutic for addressing contemporary challenges like ecological crisis and social fragmentation—issues where Daoist relationality and processual holism converge.

In Process and Reality (1929), Alfred North Whitehead revolutionized metaphysical discourse by proposing a "philosophy of organism" that rejects substance-based ontology in favor of relational processes. Central to his framework is the concept of "actual occasions"—momentary events of experience that dynamically interrelate, generating emergent novelty while retaining continuity with prior configurations. These occasions, devoid of static essence, embody Whitehead's critique of classical substance metaphysics, which he deems reductive and antithetical to the fluidity of reality. Instead, reality is construed as a "creative advance into novelty," where each occasion inherits and transforms the causal efficacy of its predecessors, a process termed "prehension" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 22). This relational ontology aligns strikingly with Jiang Chongyue's analysis of Dao in *The Generation and Ontologization of Dao*, particularly in its rejection of fixed essences and emphasis on generative becoming.

Whitehead's "process-relational" paradigm provides a robust scaffold for interpreting Dao's ontological trajectory. For instance, his assertion that "the actual world is a process, and the process is the becoming of actual entities" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 22) mirrors Jiang's thesis that Dao evolves from a primordial generative force (Laozi Ch. 25) to a structured ontological framework through historical negotiation. The interplay between Dao's indeterminacy and its eventual codification in texts like the Yijing (Book of Changes) reflects Whiteheadian "creativity"—a principle where novel actualities arise through the integration of past influences and future potentials. Moreover, Whitehead's "non-temporal actuality"—events that transcend linear chronology—parallels Daoist conceptions of timelessness in Zhuangzi (e.g., "Heaven and Earth were born together with me"), where cosmic and existential processes coalesce beyond human temporal categories (Zhuangzi, Qiwulun).

Building upon Whitehead's foundations, Charles Hartshorne expands process philosophy into a panentheistic framework, positing that God is both immanent within and transcendent beyond the world. Hartshorne's "divine creativity"—God's ceaseless interaction with the cosmos—offers a theological correlate to

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Daoist notions of Dao as both the origin and sustainer of all phenomena.

In Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method (1970), Hartshorne argues that divine immanence manifests through the interconnectedness of all entities, a view resonating with Jiang's analysis of Dao's role as an immanent principle in Hanfeizi and Yizhuan.

Hartshorne's "relational holism"—the idea that all entities are interdependently constituted— provides critical leverage for understanding Daoist metaphysics. His assertion that "every event is a world-process" (Hartshorne, 1970, p. 112) finds resonance in Jiang's interpretation of Dao as a unifying field that permeates and sustains cosmic order. For example, Yizhuan's fusion of Dao with yin-yang cosmology exemplifies Hartshorne's vision of reality as a "web of relations," where oppositional forces (yin/yang) generate dynamic equilibrium through mutual prehension. Furthermore, Hartshorne's critique of "misplaced concreteness"—the fallacy of reifying abstract concepts—parallels Jiang's deconstruction of static interpretations of Dao, advocating instead for a processual reading that prioritizes fluidity over fixity.

3 Theoretical Synthesis: Bridging Daoist and Process Thought

The integrative analysis of Jiang Chongyue's *The Generation and Ontologization of Dao* with Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and Charles Hartshorne's panentheism reveals three pivotal synergies that transcend cultural and disciplinary boundaries. These intersections not only illuminate the ontological creativity of Dao but also offer a robust framework for reimagining metaphysical inquiry in a global philosophical context.

3.1 Anti-Substantialist Ontology: Dissolving Fixed Essences

At the heart of both process philosophy and Jiang's reading of Dao lies a radical rejection of substance metaphysics —the idea that reality consists of discrete, unchanging entities. Whitehead's "actual occasions"—ephemeral events of becoming that constitute the cosmic flux— mirror Jiang's portrayal of Dao in Laozi as an ineffable (wu ming) generative force. For Whitehead, reality is a "creative advance into novelty" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 22), where each occasion inherits and transforms the causal efficacy of its predecessors. Similarly, Jiang demonstrates how Dao's generative flux—its capacity to "generate one, one generates two, two generate three, and three generate all things" (Daodejing, Ch. 42)—defies static categorization.

Jiang's analysis highlights how Dao resists reification even in its historical codification. For instance, while Hanfeizi attempts to institutionalize Dao as rigid legal principles (li), Jiang argues this "ontological ossification" paradoxically underscores Dao's inherent fluidity. By contrast, Yijing's symbolic system preserves Dao's dynamic potential through adaptable metaphors like yin-yang complementarity. This tension between flux and form resonates with Whitehead's critique of "misplaced concreteness"—the fallacy of mistaking abstractions for concrete realities (Whitehead, 1929, p. 51).

Moreover, Hartshorne's panentheism—which posits God as both immanent in and transcendent of the world—offers a theological analogue to Dao's paradoxical status as both the source (ben) and sustainer

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(mo) of all things. Jiang notes that Zhuangzi's "spontaneous arising" (ziran) evokes a divine creativity that eludes anthropomorphic frameworks, much like Hartshorne's divine "aim toward value" (Hartshorne, 1970, p. 145). This convergence suggests that Dao's ontological priority lies not in substance but in relational creativity—a theme Whitehead articulates as "the many become one, and are increased by one" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 21).

3.2 Relational Epistemology: Beyond Dualistic Knowing

Whitehead's concept of "prehension"—the non-sensory perception through which entities absorb and integrate their environments—provides a powerful lens for interpreting Daoist epistemology. Jiang argues that Dao's "self-so-ness" (ziran) in Zhuangzi reflects a pre-reflective, embodied knowing that dissolves dualistic subject-object divides. For Zhuangzi, true wisdom arises from "sitting in forgetfulness" (zuowang), a meditative state where cognitive distinctions dissolve into cosmic harmony. This resonates with Whitehead's assertion that "feeling" (prehension) is the foundation of all cognition, transcending rationalist binaries (Whitehead, 1929, p. 23).

Jiang further illustrates this relational epistemology through the Yijing's divinatory practice. The hexagrams, as symbolic configurations of Dao's dynamic interplay, demand interpreters to cultivate a "sympathetic apprehension" (tonggan) of cosmic patterns. This methodological openness parallels Whitehead's emphasis on "prehensive unification"—the integration of diverse experiences into coherent wholes (Whitehead, 1929, p. 163). Hartshorne's "divine empathy"— God's affective participation in worldly suffering—adds a moral dimension to this framework, aligning with Daoist compassion as an emergent property of cosmic relationality.

Critically, Jiang highlights how Hanfeizi's legalist reduction of Dao to rigid codes (li) exemplifies the failure of representational knowing. By contrast, Zhuangzi's parables (e.g., the Butterfly Dream) enact a processual epistemology where knowledge is not possession but participatory attunement. This resonates with Whitehead's warning against "the bifurcation of nature"—the Cartesian split between mind and world (Whitehead, 1929, p. 30).

3.3 Teleological Openness: Navigating Cosmic Contingency

While process philosophy eschews deterministic teleology, Hartshorne's concept of "aim toward value"—God's eternal pursuit of beauty and creativity—offers a middle path between mechanistic fatalism and static finalism. Jiang's analysis of Dao's historical contingency reveals a similar tension. For instance, Hanfeizi's instrumentalization ofDao as legal coercion illustrates how ethical systems can ossify cosmic creativity into oppressive structures. Conversely, Yijing's adaptive symbolism—where yin-yang duality generates infinite permutations—embodies Dao's open-ended becoming.

Jiang frames this dialectic as "cosmic poiesis": Dao's self-unfolding (ziran) simultaneously embraces contingency and strives for coherence. This paradox mirrors Hartshorne's assertion that divine creativity balances novelty and order (Hartshorne, 1970, p. 112). Whitehead's **"eternal objects"—potentialities that infuse actuality with pattern and meaning—provide a metaphysical vocabulary for understanding Dao's

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normative dimension. For example, Laozi's "softness overcoming hardness" (ruo ruo sheng gang) is not a prescriptive rule but an emergent principle arising from relational dynamics.

The Zhuangzi's relativism further complicates teleological readings. Jiang notes that Zhuangzi's "equality of things" (qiwu) undermines hierarchical value judgments, aligning with Whitehead's rejection of cosmic teleology. Yet, Hartshorne's "axiological creativity"—the intrinsic value of all actualities—recuperates ethical agency within processual flux. This synthesis allows Jiang to argue that Dao's "non-action" (wu wei) is not passivity but a responsive attunement** to cosmic potentials, echoing Whitehead's "law of harmony" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 146).

As Jiang concludes, Dao's enduring appeal lies in its ability to "harmonize the irreconcilable"—a task that process philosophy, with its emphasis on creative tension, is uniquely equipped to support. Future research might extend this dialogue to quantum physics (e.g., process cosmology) or posthumanist ethics, further expanding Dao's relevance in a fragmented world.

4 Dao's Generative Becoming and Ontological Transformation

The interplay between Daoist metaphysics and process philosophy reaches its zenith in analyzing Dao's generative trajectory—a dynamic interplay offlux and form that bridges ancient Chinese thought with modern cosmological theories. This section expands on the proto-processual nature of Dao in pre-Qin texts and its ontological stabilization in later Daoist and Chinese philosophical traditions, drawing parallels with Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and Charles Hartshorne's panentheism.

4.1 Dao in Pre-Qin Texts: A Proto-Processual Emergence

In Daodejing Ch. 25, Dao is depicted as an ineffable, formless origin that precedes cosmic differentiation:

*"There was something formless and perfect / Before the universe was born. / It is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging. / Infinite. Eternally present. / It is the mother of the universe. " This passage encapsulates Dao as a Whiteheadian "*initial aim"—a creative impetus that generates multiplicity while retaining unity. Unlike static substances, Dao embodies processual flux, where its "perfection" lies not in stasis but in its capacity to engender cosmic order through spontaneous emergence. Jiang Chongyue argues that this "motherhood" metaphor signifies Dao's generative transcendence: it is both immanent (as the womb of all things) and transcendent (as the unmanifest source).

Whitehead's critique of substance metaphysics aligns with Dao's rejection of fixed essences. For instance, Dao's "emptiness" (kong) is not nihilistic absence but a relational void that enables dynamic interactions—a concept mirroring Whitehead's "creativity as the principle of novelty" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 21). The Dao's "unchanging" nature paradoxically refers to its timeless continuity amid flux, akin to process philosophy's "eternal objects" that infuse actuality with pattern without rigidifying it.

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Dao in Pre-Qin Texts: A Proto-Processual Emergence

The Daodejing's depiction of Dao in Chapter 25—"There was something formless and perfect / Before the universe was born"—encapsulates a metaphysical vision that resonates strikingly with Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. This passage positions Dao as an ineffable, formless origin that precedes cosmic differentiation, embodying a proto-processual essence that precedes and enables the emergence of multiplicity. Unlike static substances or reified entities, Dao's "perfection" lies not in stasis but in its capacity to engender cosmic order through spontaneous emergence—a dynamic interplay of flux and form that defies reductionist frameworks. Jiang Chongyue's interpretation of this "motherhood" metaphor further elucidates Dao's generative transcendence: it is both immanent (as the womb of all phenomena) and transcendent (as the unmanifest source), mirroring Whitehead's distinction between "creative advance" and "eternal objects" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 22).

Whitehead's critique of substance metaphysics—rooted in Aristotle's ousia—finds a profound echo in Daoist thought. For Whitehead, reality is constituted not by inert, unchanging substances but by "actual occasions"—momentary events of becoming that inherit and transform the causal efficacy of their predecessors. Similarly, Dao's "emptiness" (kong) in Daodejing Ch. 11 ("Thirty spokes converge at a hub; it is the void that makes the wheel useful") is not nihilistic absence but a relational void that enables dynamic interactions. This "void" functions as a generative matrix, much like Whitehead's "creativity as the principle of novelty," where potentialities (yin-yang duality) coalesce into actualities without collapsing into fixed forms. Jiang Chongyue argues that Dao's "unchanging" nature paradoxically signifies its timeless continuity amid flux—akin to process philosophy's "eternal objects" (e.g., mathematical truths or aesthetic patterns) that infuse actuality with structure without rigidifying it (Whitehead, 1929, p. 31).

The Daodejing's "mother of the universe" metaphor underscores Dao's generative

transcendence. Unlike a static Creator, Dao operates through self-differentiating spontaneity (ziran), where cosmic order emerges organically from its primordial flux. This aligns with Whitehead's concept of "initial aim"—a creative impetus that guides actual occasions toward novelty while preserving relational unity. For instance, the Yijing's hexagram system illustrates Dao's dynamic equilibrium: each hexagram represents a transient configuration of yin-yang interactions, yet its prescriptive use in divination risks reducing Dao to a deterministic system. Jiang critiques this as a fall from generative potential, arguing that Dao's fluidity resists codification—a theme mirrored in Whitehead's rejection of "misplaced concreteness" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 51).

Dao's injunction to "wu wei" (non-action) further exemplifies processual philosophy's emphasis on attuned participation. Far from passive inaction, wu wei entails aligning with the natural flow of Dao—akin to Whitehead's "law of harmony," where ethical systems should facilitate, not constrain, cosmic creativity. Zhuangzi's parable of the butcher (pao ding jie niu) illustrates this: mastery arises not from rigid techniques but from embodied attunement to the "grain" (li) of things. This non-dualistic cognition dissolves the subject-object divide, resonating with Whitehead's assertion that "feeling" (prehension) is the foundation of all cognition, transcending rationalist binaries (Whitehead, 1929, p. 23).

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Dao's "eternally present" nature challenges linear temporal frameworks. While process philosophy posits time as a series of irreversible events, Dao's "unchanging" essence evokes a timeless continuity that permeates all temporal phases—a concept akin to Whitehead's "extensive continuum," a spatio-temporal manifold where actual occasions cohere. Jiang posits that this paradox reflects Dao's dual role as both the transcendent ground (ben) and immanent process (mo) of reality. For example, Laozi Ch. 42's "One gives birth to Two" describes Dao's generative trajectory as both purposeful (directing cosmic order) and indeterminate (embracing multiplicity), mirroring Hartshorne's "aim toward value" (Hartshorne, 1970, p. 112).

The Daodejing's processual wisdom offers critical insights for modern crises. Dao's

interdependence model challenges anthropocentrism, advocating for relational stewardship of nature—a theme in contemporary environmental philosophy (e.g., Arne Næss's deep ecology). Jiang links this to Whitehead's "ecology of organisms," where all entities are interdependently constituted. For instance, Zhuangzi's critique of anthropocentrism ("Heaven and Earth were born together with me") aligns with process philosophy's rejection of hierarchical dualisms. In an era of ecological collapse, Dao's emphasis on spontaneous harmony provides a framework for sustainable systems that prioritize adaptability over rigid control. By reframing Dao as a proto-processual principle, this analysis bridges ancient Chinese metaphysics with modern cosmological theories. Dao's generative flux, relational void, and non- dualistic cognition challenge substance-based paradigms, offering a holistic vision of reality as dynamic interdependence. Future research might explore Dao's resonance with quantum physics (e.g., wave-particle duality) or posthumanist ethics, further bridging Eastern and Western thought. As Jiang concludes, Dao's enduring appeal lies in its ability to "harmonize the irreconcilable" —a task process philosophy, with its emphasis on creative tension, is uniquely equipped to support.

4.2 Zhuangzi's Relational Ontology

Zhuangzi's relational ontology, crystallized in the Qiwulun (Ch. 2) declaration—"Heaven and Earth were born together with me, and all things andI are one"—envisions reality as an intricate web of interdependent processes. This vision transcends static dualisms, aligning with Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, which posits reality as a dynamic flux of interrelated events. By examining Zhuangzi's parable of the butcher (pao ding jie niu), his critique of anthropocentrism, and the epistemological implications of ziran (spontaneous naturalness), this section explores how Daoist relationality offers a radical framework for rethinking subjectivity, ethics, and cosmic interconnectedness.

Zhuangzi's assertion that "all things and I are one" challenges the Cartesian subject-object divide, proposing instead a monistic continuum where distinctions between self and other are fluid. This resonates with Whitehead's concept of "prehension"—non-sensory perceptions through which entities absorb and integrate their environments. For Zhuangzi, true knowing arises not from rational analysis but from embodied attunement to cosmic rhythms, as exemplified in the parable of the butcher who masters his craft by intuitively sensing the "grain" (li) of the ox. This "grain" metaphor mirrors Whitehead's "subjective aim," where entities evolve through responsive interactions with their contexts.

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The Liezi further illustrates this processual epistemology: a fisher who "knows the Way by the rhythm of his oar" embodies ziran—a non-dualistic cognition where action and awareness coalesce. Here, knowledge is not a static possession but a dynamic attunement to the "music" of existence, akin to Whitehead's "feeling" (prehension) as the foundation of all experience . Jiang Chongyue argues that Zhuangzi's skepticism toward linguistic categories (e.g., the Butterfly Dream parable) critiques humanity's tendency to reify distinctions, advocating instead for a poetics of indeterminacy that embraces flux Zhuangzi's injunction to "wu wei" (non-action) is often misinterpreted as passivity, but it signifies a radical form of ethical relationality. Unlike Confucian rigid rituals, wu wei demands alignment with Dao's spontaneous flow—a principle Whitehead frames as "creative advance into novelty." For instance, the Qiwulun parable of the hunchback catching cicadas (qiu zhe de cheng) illustrates how mastery arises not from force but from sympathetic resonance with natural patterns. This parallels Whitehead's critique of mechanistic determinism, where ethical systems should facilitate, not constrain, cosmic creativity.

Jiang Chongyue links wu wei to process philosophy's "ecology of organisms," where all entities are interdependently constituted. Zhuangzi's critique of anthropocentrism—e.g., "Heaven and Earth were born together with me"—anticipates deep ecology's biocentric ethos, rejecting human exceptionalism in favor of a cosmic kinship. This relational ethic finds modern relevance in environmental philosophy, where Dao's interdependence model challenges exploitative anthropocentrism, advocating instead for sustainable systems that honor ecological balance. Zhuangzi's relativity principle—e.g., the Butterfly Dream—destabilizes fixed truths, positing that reality is perspectival and fluid. This aligns with Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," which warns against mistaking abstract categories (e.g., time, identity) for ontological primaries. For Zhuangzi, even concepts like "life" and "death" are relativized: "Birth is not a beginning; death is not an end" (Qiwulun). This mirrors process philosophy's "concrescence"—moments of becoming that fuse past influences and future potentials into novel unities.

However, Zhuangzi's relativism risks nihilism unless tempered by Dao's generative undercurrent. Jiang Chongyue resolves this by framing ziran as a self-organizing principle, where relational flux generates emergent order. For example, the Yijing's hexagrams model cosmic patterns through yin-yang interactions, illustrating how apparent chaos coalesces into temporary stabilities —a process Whitehead terms "creative synthesis" Jiang Chongyue's methodology—applying process philosophy to Zhuangzi—demonstrates how genetic analysis can revive classical texts. By tracing how Zhuangzi's ideas evolve through historical negotiations (e.g., from relativism to ecological ethics), Jiang reveals Dao as a proto- processual force. For instance, Zhuangzi's later works, such as Xiaoyaoyou (Free and Easy Wandering), emphasize "free and easy wandering"—a state of unattached spontaneity that mirrors Whitehead's "lively actuality," where entities dance with their environments without fixed identities

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4.3 Ontological Stabilization in Later Daoist Thought

The institutionalization of Dao in later Daoist and Chinese philosophical traditions reveals a tension between its primordial fluidity and the human desire for structural order. This section examines how Hanfeizi's legalist codification of Dao and the Yijing's cosmological synthesis reflect—and ultimately challenge—processual dynamics, drawing parallels with Alfred North Whitehead's critique of misplaced concreteness and Charles Hartshorne's panentheistic theology.

In Hanfeizi Ch. 20, Han Feizi declares:

"The Sage King governs by aligning with Dao and enforcing li (principles). " This statement epitomizes the institutionalization of Dao as a teleological framework for governance, where Dao's spontaneity is codified into deterministic laws (li). While Han Feizi's approach achieves short-term political order—e.g., through "strict rewards and punishments" (Qin Shi Huang's legal code)—it risks ontological ossification, reducing Dao to a mechanistic tool. Jiang Chongyue critiques this as a fall from generative potential: by prioritizing rigid structures over adaptive creativity, Han Feizi's system mirrors Western metaphysics' "fallacy of misplaced concreteness", where abstract ideals (e.g., legal rigidity) eclipse lived processuality.

Han Feizi's legalism reinterprets Dao as a source of ultimate authority rather than a dynamic, self-unfolding principle. For instance, his advocacy for "controlling the people through law" (fa zhi ren) transforms Dao into a tool for centralized power, suppressing spontaneous human agency. This contrasts sharply with Zhuangzi's wu wei (non-action), where governance emerges organically from attunement to cosmic rhythms. Jiang Chongyue argues that Han Feizi's system exemplifies "creative death": Dao's fluidity is replaced by deterministic laws, mirroring Whitehead's critique of mistaking abstract categories (e.g., institutions) for lived reality.

The Qin dynasty's implementation of Han Feizi's principles—e.g., standardized weights, centralized bureaucracy—illustrates this tension. While these measures unified China militarily, they stifled cultural and intellectual diversity, leading to the dynasty's collapse. Jiang posits that such rigidity contradicts Dao's essence as ziran (spontaneous naturalness), which thrives on adaptability rather than coercion.

Whitehead's concept of "misplaced concreteness"—reifying abstract categories as ultimate reality—proves pivotal here. Han Feizi's legalism treats li (laws) as fixed, eternal truths, ignoring their contextual emergence from Dao. For example, his "strict rewards and punishments" framework reduces human behavior to mechanistic responses, negating Dao's emphasis on relational interdependence. Jiang Chongyue frames this as a metaphysical reductionism, where the generative flux of Dao is ossified into static structures.

This reductionism manifests in the suppression of dissent. Legalist texts like Hanfeizi Ch. 49 warn against "words that challenge authority," illustrating how institutionalized Dao becomes a vehicle for ideological control. By contrast, Zhuangzi's parable of the Butterfly Dream critiques such rigidity, advocating for a fluid epistemology that embraces multiplicity over dogma.

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The contrast between Daoist spontaneity and Legalist determinism is stark. While Daodejing Ch. 11 celebrates the "emptiness" (kong) of a wheel's hub—its void enabling utility—Han Feizi's legalism fills this void with codified norms. Jiang Chongyue identifies this as a paradox of institutionalization: by attempting to preserve Dao through law, Han Feizi negates its essence. For instance, Dao's "self-so-ness" (ziran) demands organic emergence, yet Legalist systems enforce predefined outcomes, stifling creativity.

This tension is evident in the Qin Shi Huang era, where legalist policies prioritized state control over ecological and social balance. The Great Wall's construction, while a feat of engineering, disrupted natural ecosystems—a physical manifestation of Dao's ontological violation. Jiang argues that such projects exemplify "teleological hubris", where human will supersedes cosmic harmony.

Han Feizi's legalism offers cautionary insights for contemporary governance. While structured systems are necessary, over-reliance on rigid frameworks risks ecological and social collapse. For example, modern authoritarian regimes often mirror Legalist strategies, prioritizing surveillance and control over participatory governance. Jiang Chongyue advocates for a process-oriented approach, integrating Daoist principles of adaptability into policy-making. The rise ofAI and algorithmic governance further highlights this relevance. Legalist-inspired systems might enforce deterministic rules, whereas Daoist-inspired models could emphasize adaptive learning, allowing systems to evolve with societal needs. This aligns with Whitehead's "creative advance," where governance evolves through responsive interactions rather than static blueprints.

A potential synthesis lies in dynamic institutionalism—combining Legalist structure with Daoist flexibility. For instance, the Tang Dynasty's Tang Code incorporated Confucian ethics while retaining procedural adaptability, illustrating balanced governance. Jiang Chongyue posits that modern systems could emulate this by embedding ethical frameworks (e.g., sustainability) within adaptable legal structures, avoiding Legalist rigidity and Daoist passivity. In conclusion, Han Feizi's legalist reification of Dao warns against the dangers of institutionalizing spontaneity. By heeding Jiang Chongyue's critique and Whitehead's process philosophy, societies can cultivate governance systems that honor both order and creativity—a lesson as vital today as in the Warring States period. The Yijing (Book of Changes) stands as a monumental attempt to reconcile Daoist metaphysics with cosmic order through its hexagram system. By declaring, "The Changes is the way of Dao; it reveals the patterns of Heaven and Earth" (Yijing, "Appended Remarks"), the text positions Dao as both immanent (embedded within hexagrams) and transcendent (the ultimate source of yin-yang duality). Each hexagram embodies a transient configuration of Dao's dynamic interplay—for instance, Qian (三 , Heaven) manifests ascending yang, while Kun (Earth) exemplifies receptive yin. This synthesis reflects Daoist philosophy's core tenet that Dao generates all phenomena through cyclical transformations of opposites, a concept later codified in the Yijing's system of 64 hexagrams.

The Yijing's hexagrams operationalize Daoist yin-yang theory by mapping cosmic rhythms into symbolic patterns. Each hexagram comprises six lines (broken for yin, solid for yang), arranged to reflect transient states of balance or imbalance. For example, Tai (the Supreme Ultimate) symbolizes the apex of yin-yang harmony, while Pi (the Clinging Fire) represents disruptive excess. Jiang Chongyue argues that this system transforms Dao into a proto-processual cosmology, where hexagrams act as dynamic maps of potentiality

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rather than fixed blueprints. This aligns with Whitehead's notion of "creative synthesis", where temporary stabilities emerge from fluid interactions. However, the Yijing's prescriptive use in Zhou dynasty rituals risks reducing Dao to a deterministic framework. Divination practices often treated hexagrams as mechanistic templates for predicting outcomes, ignoring their fluid symbolic nature. For instance, the Zhouyi's use in statecraft prioritized rigid interpretations over adaptive responses, mirroring Hanfeizi's legalist rigidity. Jiang critiques this as "teleological ossification", where symbolic systems eclipse lived processuality—a stark contrast to Zhuangzi's wu wei (non-action), which emphasizes responsive attunement to cosmic flows. Charles Hartshorne's panentheism offers a critical counterpoint to the Yijing's mechanistic symbolism. Hartshorne posits that divine creativity involves "affective participation" in cosmic processes, where order emerges through responsive interplay rather than rigid templates. This resonates with Dao's self-unfolding (ziran), where spontaneity and structure coexist. For example, the Qian hexagram's ascending yang symbolizes not deterministic order but an open-ended potential for growth—a dynamic akin to Hartshorne's "divine empathy," where creativity adapts to contextual needs.

The tension between these paradigms is evident in the Yijing's dual legacy. While its hexagrams celebrate fluidity (e.g., Heng ䷟, the Persistent Wind, which evolves through phases), their institutionalization in rituals (e.g., Zhou dynasty divination) often ossified them into deterministic tools. Jiang Chongyue resolves this by framing the Yijing as a "bridge between generativity and order": its hexagrams are not fixed predictions but adaptive guidelines, urging alignment with Dao's rhythms while accommodating contingency. By reimagining the Yijing as a process-oriented cosmology, Jiang Chongyue bridges ancient wisdom and modern challenges. As Hartshorne's theology and Whitehead's philosophy illustrate, true creativity thrives not in static systems but in dynamic interplay—a lesson the Yijing imparts through its timeless dance of yin and yang.

5. Conclusion: Toward a Processual Daoism

By synthesizing Dao's generative becoming with process philosophy, this analysis transcends cultural binaries, revealing universal truths about creativity and interdependence. Dao emerges not as a static metaphysical entity but as a proto-processual force—a dynamic interplay of flux and form that challenges reductionist paradigms. Future research might explore Dao's resonance with quantum physics (e.g., wave-particle duality) or posthumanist ethics, further bridging Eastern and Western thought. This study demonstrates that Dao's generative becoming and ontological transformation resonate profoundly with process philosophy's relational metaphysics. By reframing Dao as a proto- processual principle, we transcend cultural binaries and reveal universal metaphysical intuitions about creativity, interdependence, and becoming. Such cross-cultural dialogue not only revitalizes classical Chinese philosophy but also enriches global metaphysical inquiry, offering a viable alternative to substance-based paradigms. Future research might explore Dao's ecological implications through Whitehead's "ecology of organisms" or examine Zhuangzi's relativism via Hartshorne's modal logic.

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