



From Daoism's "Dao-De-Wuwei" to the cross-paradigm integration of modern organizational governance

Dr. Lung-Tan Lu

Department of Management, Fo Guang University, Taiwan

Abstract

Contemporary management theory is facing a profound paradigm crisis. In the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) era, the traditional management thinking rooted in instrumental rationality and control orientation can hardly adapt to the complexity and dynamics of organizational systems. This paper aims to reconstruct Daoist management philosophy, elevating it from a cultural metaphor to a theoretical system with internal consistency that can engage in dialogue with modern management science. Adopting a dual research approach of philosophical interpretation and theoretical synthesis, this study conducts a systematic analysis of the core concepts in the Tao Te Ching and engages in dialogue with contemporary organizational theory to construct a three-tier theoretical framework of "Dao-De-Wuwei". The research contributions are threefold: first, proposing an integrated framework of ontology (Dao), governance theory (De), and methodology (Wuwei) for Daoist management philosophy; second, supplementing the theoretical blind spots of Western management theory in terms of order generation, control boundaries, and human nature assumptions; third, providing a new paradigm for cross-cultural management theory and pioneering a path for the demystification and theorization of Eastern management thought.

Keywords: Daoist philosophy, daoist management, management theory, governance, leadership theory, trust, social capital

Introduction

Since the 20th century, management science, as an independent discipline, has been deeply influenced by scientific rationality and instrumental thinking. From Frederick Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* and Henri Fayol's *General Principles of Management* to the enduringly popular *Management by Objectives (MBO)*, *Key Performance Indicators (KPI)*, and *Balanced Scorecard (BSC)* in contemporary times, the core presupposition of modern management theory can be summarized as a tripartite structure of "control-prediction-performance". This structure assumes that managers can predict the outcomes of organizational behavior through precise design and control, and thereby achieve predetermined performance goals. However, this management rationality is facing severe challenges. The VUCA characteristics of the organizational environment—Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity—have rendered the linear prediction and control model increasingly ineffective. As Tsoukas and Chia (2002)^[20] noted, an organization is not a static entity but a continuously generative dynamic process (organizational becoming). Stacey (2011)^[17] also pointed out that from the perspective of complex responsive processes, the essence of organizational behavior is nonlinear and emergent, and cannot be fully designed or controlled by any single actor. A more critical reflection stems from the interrogation of instrumental rationality itself. Ghoshal and Moran (1996)^[7] incisively pointed out that some management theories are "bad for practice" because they reduce human nature to that of an opportunistic economic person and cast managers as roles that must implement strict control. Such theoretical presuppositions not only narrow the possibilities of management practice but also may self-fulfillingly induce opportunistic behavior among organizational members. In the quest to break through the limitations of the Western management paradigm, Eastern philosophical thought has

gradually gained attention. Daoist ideas, especially the concepts of "governance through non-interference" and "Dao follows nature" embodied in the *Tao Te Ching*, frequently appear in management literature and practical discourse. Nevertheless, academic interpretations of Daoist thought in management research still exhibit significant theoretical gaps. First, Daoist thought is mostly treated as a "cultural metaphor" or "leadership maxim" in management research, lacking systematic theoretical construction. Existing studies either simplify Daoist thought into several leadership principles (e.g., modesty, flexibility) or use it as an Eastern footnote to Western management theory, failing to reveal the internal logic of Daoist thought as a complete management philosophy. Lei's (2025)^[11] latest research points out that mainstream studies tend to simplify Daoism into an idealized leadership model, ignoring the paradoxical nature of "formlessness" in Daoist thought, thus missing its potential to fundamentally question mainstream leadership theory. Second, most existing research on "Eastern management" focuses on case descriptions or ethical supplementation, with insufficient theoretical integration. Some studies explore the inspiration of Daoist thought for business ethics (e.g., Lin, Ho & Lin, 2013)^[12], or investigate the connection between the management styles of Chinese entrepreneurs and Daoist thought (Xing & Sims, 2012)^[23], but few attempt to transform Daoist concepts into analytical categories that can dialogue with contemporary organizational theory. Although Bai and Roberts (2011)^[2] attempted to construct a Daoism-oriented model of leader traits, their analysis still remains at the level of leadership style and fails to touch on the deeper logic of organizational governance. Third, the core concept of "Wuwei" is often simplified as "laissez-faire" or "non-intervention" in management literature, which not only deviates from the original meaning of Daoist thought but also prevents its full theoretical potential from being realized. Chen (1989)^[5]

already pointed out that the philosophical connotation of Wuwei is "not acting arbitrarily" rather than "inaction", representing a higher level of practical wisdom. However, the appropriation of this concept in the management academia has often lost its rich theoretical implications.

Based on the above research problems and gaps, this paper aims to answer the following core questions:

1. Can Daoist thought constitute a management theory with internal consistency? In other words, do Daoist classics represented by the Tao Te Ching provide complete theoretical elements from ontological assumptions and governance principles to operational methods?
2. How can "Wuwei" be redefined as a governance rationality rather than passive inaction? This paper attempts to argue that Wuwei is not the absence of management capacity, but the self-restraint after an overabundance of management capacity, representing a higher-order governance logic.
3. How can Daoist management philosophy engage in systematic dialogue with modern organizational theory to form a cross-paradigm theoretical integration?

To answer these questions, this paper adopts a research strategy of philosophical interpretation and theoretical synthesis. On the one hand, it returns to the original Daoist classics to clarify concepts; on the other hand, it engages in dialogue with contemporary management theory to construct a three-tier theoretical model of "Dao-De-Wuwei".

Rational Premises and Limitations of Modern Management Theory

The epistemological origin of modern management theory can be traced back to the scientific rationality of the Enlightenment. Taylor's (1911) *Principles of Scientific Management* established the basic presupposition of "the manager as a designer": through precise analysis and standardized design of work processes, managers can find the "one best way" to maximize efficiency. This presupposition was systematized in Fayol's general management theory, which defined management as five functions: planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling, with control regarded as the endpoint and guarantee of the management process. Since the mid-20th century, the rise of Management by Objectives (MBO) has further strengthened the control paradigm. Although Drucker (1954) emphasized the importance of goal participation, its basic logic remains a closed loop of "setting goals - measuring performance - taking corrective actions". This logic has been fully developed in the performance management movement, with tools such as Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) transforming organizational activities into measurable, comparable, and intervenable objects, and the role of managers being positioned as "performance engineers". The philosophical foundation of this paradigm is instrumental rationality. A characteristic of instrumental rationality is that the rationality of an action depends on its effectiveness in achieving a predetermined goal, and the goal itself is regarded as given and unreflective. Within this framework, the relationship between managers and organizational members is essentially that of "designers" and "the designed"; the organization is understood as a machine that can be precisely controlled, rather than an organic growing community.

In the late 20th century, organizational theory experienced an important paradigm shift. The introduction of general system theory led scholars to realize that organizations are not closed mechanical systems, but open systems that continuously interact with the environment. Bertalanffy (1968) emphasized that an important characteristic of organic systems is "equifinality"—the same final state can be achieved through different initial conditions and paths, which challenges the linear causal presupposition in management control. Since the 1990s, complexity theory has exerted a profound influence on organizational research. Stacey (2011) ^[17] distinguished three logics of organizational management: the traditional management logic based on "determinate causality", the risk management logic based on "probabilistic prediction", and the uncertainty management logic applicable to complex situations. From the perspective of complex adaptive systems (CAS), an organization is a network composed of numerous actors who interact according to local rules, thereby emerging overall-level order and patterns. This order is neither the result of external design nor a product of random chaos, but an embodiment of "self-organization". On this basis, Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey (2007) ^[21] proposed the "complexity leadership theory", distinguishing three leadership functions: administrative leadership, adaptive leadership, and enabling leadership. The core task of adaptive leadership is not to control behavior, but to create conditions for the organization to emerge with innovation and adaptive capacity in a complex environment. This viewpoint marks the transformation of the manager's role from a "controller" to a "condition creator". Nonaka and Toyama's (2005) ^[15] theory of knowledge creation also reflects this shift. They emphasized that an enterprise is not a machine for information processing, but an "entity for knowledge creation". Through the construction of "ba (a shared context)", the subjective knowledge of organizational members can engage in mutual dialogue and integration, and then be objectified into organizational knowledge. In this process, the manager's task is not to "produce knowledge", but to "nurture an ecology for knowledge creation".

Although complex thinking and self-organization theory have opened up new horizons for management research, modern theory still has several unfinished aspects, and these theoretical gaps provide a space for the introduction of Daoist thought. First, the inadequate theoretical treatment of "adaptiveness". While contemporary theory acknowledges that organizations cannot be fully controlled, it often still understands "adaptation" as a passive response to the environment or regards "compliance" as a result of strategic choice. Daoist thought provides a deeper perspective: compliance is not a strategy, but a realization of the "Dao"—a fundamental respect for and compliance with the laws of world operation. This perspective can elevate the concept of "emergence" in complexity theory from a descriptive category to a normative principle. Second, the limited theoretical recognition of the value of "non-intervention"; although modern theory acknowledges that excessive control is harmful, it lacks a systematic theoretical elaboration on such issues as "when not to intervene" and "how not to intervene". Non-intervention is often regarded as a sign of "powerlessness" rather than an active management choice. Daoist thought of "Wuwei" can provide theoretical resources for this, redefining non-intervention as a higher-order governance rationality. Third,

the inadequate integration of ethics and governance; most contemporary research on corporate governance regards ethics as an external norm or a part of risk management, rather than an internal component of governance legitimacy. Although Hosmer (1995) [8] emphasized that trust is a key link connecting ethics and organizational performance, he lacks a systematic theory on how trust is generated from the daily practice of organizations. The Daoist concept of "De" can provide a new direction for thinking: trust and ethics are not norms added to governance mechanisms, but inherent qualities of governance practice itself. The development trajectory of modern management theory—from the control paradigm to complex thinking—has laid the theoretical legitimacy for the introduction of Daoist management philosophy. The exploration of "emergent order", "self-organization", and "adaptive leadership" in contemporary theory has a profound resonance and dialogue space with Daoism's understanding of "ziran", "Wuwei", and "Dao follows nature". However, to fully develop this dialogue, we first need to examine how existing research interprets Daoist thought and what limitations these interpretations have.

Daoist Thought in Management Research

1. Three Orientations

Reviewing the existing literature, the application of Daoist thought in management research can be roughly summarized into three orientations: cultural symbolism, leadership style theory, and ethical supplementation theory. The cultural symbolism orientation views Daoist philosophy as an Eastern cultural emblem which helps people understand how Chinese organizations operate through their unique cultural aspects. The Tao Te Ching verses which researchers use for their studies include "The highest good is like water" and "Governing a great nation is like cooking a small fish" which serve as cultural references to explain Chinese management features. Researchers who study Daoist thought and Confucian thought together present these philosophies as cultural elements which impact how Chinese business leaders develop their business strategies (Tan *et al.*, 2020) [19]. The orientation faces a major limitation because it reduces Daoist thought to basic cultural labels which prevent its deep philosophical meaning from being thoroughly investigated. The Chinese ideological tradition contains both Daoism and Confucianism yet these two systems maintain distinct beliefs about existence and they promote different values and follow different practical methods. The presentation of these two concepts as a shared "cultural background" hides the distinctiveness of Daoist thinking while blocking its complete theoretical potential from emerging.

The leadership style theory orientation works to convert Daoist principles into specific categories which describe how leaders behave. The research studies fall into two categories because they either investigate how Daoist philosophy influenced leader characteristics (Bai & Roberts, 2011) [2] or they study how Chinese managers apply "Wuwei" principles to their leadership approaches (Xing & Sims, 2012) [23]. The research conducted by Xing and Sims (2012) [23] through interviews with Chinese bank managers revealed that "Wuwei" shows itself through two main behaviors which include following natural development patterns and avoiding unnecessary leadership roles. The two behaviors represent leadership insight yet they could transform into a way to avoid taking

responsibility. Research scholars have started to develop models which explain how Daoist principles influence leadership methods during the past few years. The "Daoist understanding of mindful leadership" which Tan introduced in 2023 [18] teaches leaders to develop their ability to recognize present circumstances instead of following existing management systems. The research by Zu (2019) investigates "purpose-driven leadership" through Daoist principles which establish a philosophical base for leadership methods that support sustainable development. The leadership style theory allows Daoist principles to manifest as specific leadership actions yet it fails to show how Daoist philosophy affects organizational structure and institutional systems and governance patterns. The study of leadership style stands as a single element which does not reveal how Daoist philosophy reshapes organizational structures or institutional frameworks or governance systems. The research questions from Western leadership studies establish the boundaries which define how Daoist thought functions as a leadership style in the current study. The ethical supplementation theory orientation employs Daoist philosophy as a theoretical base which companies use to enhance their business ethics since Western management ethics concentrate too much on personal rights and utilitarian assessment. The research conducted by Ip (2013) showed how Daoist philosophy shapes business ethics through its core principles of naturalness and simplicity which create an ethical base to fight against consumerism while supporting basic operational methods. Lin, Ho and Lin (2013) [12] discovered that Daoist work values which include natural compliance and avoidance of competition lead to Chinese transformational leadership behavior according to their research. The orientation presents Daoist thought ethics through its work but it fails to recognize ethics as an essential element which should direct all management activities. The core principles of Daoist philosophy which include the cosmic operational law known as Dao and the practice of the Dao called De and the action that follows the Dao named Wuwei contain basic knowledge about how management operations function beyond what ethical standards cover.

The three orientations from above provide distinct value to their respective fields yet they share multiple theoretical restrictions which affect their work. The research field keeps its concepts separated because the first conceptual fragmentation. The Tao Te Ching receives selective treatment from scholars who study only specific concepts including "Wuwei" and "softness and weakness" but they lack a comprehensive understanding of Daoist philosophy. The core categories of Daoist philosophy—Dao, De, Wuwei, Ziran—form a natural system of concepts which cannot be treated as independent management principles for random selection. The result of conceptual fragmentation is that Daoist thought is cut into several isolated propositions, and its theoretical power as a complete worldview and practical philosophy cannot be fully realized.

The basic explanation of "Wuwei" fails to capture its true meaning. The concept of Wuwei stands as the primary focus of Daoist management studies which also encounters the highest number of incorrect interpretations. The common understanding of Wuwei links it to "laissez-faire" and "non-intervention" practices which distort the authentic meaning found in Daoist texts and restrict its theoretical value. According to Chen (1989) [5] Wuwei means people should

avoid purposeful actions which go against the natural order of things. The meaning of this term shows that people need to reach an advanced level of practical wisdom which enables them to decide when to take action and when to stay inactive while following proper procedures. The reduction of Wuwei to passive inaction uses Western agency concepts to analyze Daoist philosophy but it misses the actual practical system which Daoism operates under. The third theoretical level requires proper placement because it exists in the wrong position. The current research about Daoist thought approaches it through two perspectives which include management skills and leadership art but they fail to explore how it answers basic management theory questions about organizational order creation and control limits and human work relationship with organizations. The Western mainstream tradition differs from Daoist thought because it lacks the ontological presuppositions which include the Dao as a generative law and human nature presuppositions that view humans as part of nature and epistemological presuppositions which involve knowing when to stop and knowing the constant. The operational level stands as the incorrect theoretical position for Daoist thought because it exists beyond this level. The fourth stage requires establishing a regular conversation with current academic theories. The studies which exist today mention Daoist thought relationships with modern theory but they only show basic connections without developing a formal theoretical link. Both Daoist thought and complexity theory recognize that order emerges independently from human design but researchers have not yet studied their fundamental differences and similarities in terms of existence beliefs and theoretical structures and research goals. The Daoist principle of "De" exists in dialogue with modern governance theory concepts of trust and social capital but scholars have yet to create a formal theoretical framework for this relationship.

The research field of Daoist management thought requires urgent theoretical redevelopment because the above analysis has identified this essential need. The reconstruction process needs to build upon existing research to develop Daoist thought into a complete management philosophy system which operates independently from its current use as cultural metaphor and leadership style and ethical supplementation. Two aspects of theoretical reconstruction become possible through this process. The original Daoist classics contain abundant theoretical material which scholars can use to study these texts. The 5,000-character Tao Te Ching exists outside modern management science because it presents a structured system which explains how the world functions and how humans behave and how societies should be managed through its teachings about "Dao", "De", "Wuwei", and "Ziran". The research questions along with theoretical insights from this thinking become subject to transformation through the process of philosophical interpretation. The field of contemporary organizational theory serves as a conversation partner which delivers essential conceptual tools to support this reconstruction process. The present theoretical approaches which include complexity theory and self-organization theory and process philosophy share fundamental similarities with Daoist philosophy as a collective system of knowledge. The academic world now understands Daoist philosophy better because this approach enables scholars to transform Daoist principles into practical theoretical

frameworks. The Dao functions as the fundamental operational principle which drives organizational systems so it becomes possible to study it with the order emergence concept from complex adaptive system theory. The governance style of "Wuwei" which represents non-intrusive leadership connects with modern governance theory through its relationship to enabling leadership and condition creation concepts. The paper will develop three following chapters which will establish the fundamental principles of Daoist management philosophy through Dao and De and Wuwei before performing their detailed comparison with contemporary management theory.

Dao: The Ontological Foundation of Management

The "Dao" is the highest category of Daoist philosophy and the fundamental starting point for understanding Daoist management thought. The opening chapter of the Tao Te Ching states: "The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name." This statement reveals the dual characteristics of the Dao: on the one hand, the Dao can be spoken and referred to; on the other hand, any speech and reference cannot exhaust the full connotation of the Dao. The Dao is both immanent in all things and transcendent of any specific stipulation. From the perspective of generative theory, the Dao is the origin and foundation of all things. "The Dao begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets all things" (Chapter 42) describes the process by which the Dao transforms into the universe. However, this "begetting" is not the "manufacturing" of artifacts by a craftsman, but "generation"—a continuous and endless creative process. All things do not exist independently from the Dao after being "created" by it, but always "act in accordance with the Dao" and "achieve completion by obtaining the Dao". From the perspective of law theory, the Dao is the internal order of cosmic operation. "Man follows the earth; the earth follows heaven; heaven follows the Dao; the Dao follows nature" (Chapter 25). Here, "nature (ziran)" does not refer to the natural world, but means "as it is in itself" and "as it originally is". The Dao takes "nature" as its law, meaning that the operation of the Dao has no external purpose or coercive force, but unfolds spontaneously according to its own nature. It can be inferred from this that the order embodied by the "Dao" is an internally generated order, rather than an externally imposed order. This view of order implies a fundamental questioning of control thinking. If the operation of all things in the universe has its internal laws, and these laws cannot be fully grasped or designed by any single actor, then the primary task of human action (including management action) is not to "design order", but to "identify laws" and "comply with laws". The Tao Te Ching states: "Knowing the constant is called enlightenment" (Chapter 16), where the "constant" refers to the unchanging law; acting arbitrarily without knowing the law will inevitably lead to disaster ("Not knowing the constant, one acts arbitrarily and meets with misfortune"). Modern management theory is deeply influenced by the worldview of Newtonian mechanics, tending to understand an organization as a machine composed of parts. The manager's task is to design the structure of the machine as an "engineer" and control the operation of the machine as an "operator". The Daoist view of organization is completely different: an organization is like an organism, a dynamic system that is constantly generating, changing, and

adapting. The order of an organization is not predetermined by an external designer, but emerges from the interaction of members. This viewpoint is highly consistent with Tsoukas and Chia's (2002) [20] theory of "organizational becoming". They argued that an organization should be understood as a process of continuous change rather than a static entity; stability and order are not the normal state of an organization, but a temporary state that needs to be constantly "achieved". Daoist thought provides a deeper philosophical foundation for this process perspective: change is not an accidental state of an organization, but its inherent state; stability is not a negation of change, but a special form of change. If an organization is a dynamically generative system whose operation follows internal laws (the Dao), then the core competence of managers is not "control", but "identification" and "compliance". The Tao Te Ching's statement that "Knowing the constant is called enlightenment" emphasizes the understanding of laws. The "knowing" here is not theoretical abstract knowledge, but practical realization—managers need to perceive the context, rhythm, and laws of organizational operation in specific situations. Weick's (1995) [22] theory of "sensemaking" can engage in dialogue with this. Weick pointed out that organizational members do not passively receive environmental information, but actively construct an understanding of the environment; an important task of managers is to guide this sensemaking process and help the organization form a shared understanding of its own situation. Daoist thought can supplement the dimension of "compliance" to the sensemaking theory: the purpose of sensemaking is not to "control" the situation, but to "understand" it so as to act in accordance with the trend. Daoism's emphasis on "nature" means that the true order is not the result of artificial design, but a product of spontaneous emergence. The Tao Te Ching uses the metaphor of "The uncarved block is split into vessels" (Chapter 28) to describe the generation of order: a whole piece of wood (the uncarved block) is processed into various vessels, but the function of the vessels comes from the inherent quality of the wood itself, not the form imposed on the wood. Similarly, the order of an organization should respect the nature and interaction laws of organizational members, rather than imposing external design on members. This viewpoint echoes the concept of "emergent order" in complexity theory. Stacey (2011) [17] emphasized that in complex responsive processes, the overall pattern of an organization is not the result of anyone's design, but an emergent product of countless local interactions. The manager's task is not to "create" this pattern, but to participate in it and guide its development direction in the participation.

The dialogue between Daoist thought and complexity theory can be carried out from the following aspects. The Dao and Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS): Complex adaptive system theory emphasizes that a system is composed of numerous actors who interact according to local rules, thereby emerging overall-level order. This viewpoint has a profound resonance with Daoism's understanding of the "Dao": the Dao is not a ruler transcending all things, but a generative law immanent in all things; the overall order is not imposed by external forces, but emerges from local interactions. Cai (2022) [4] cited the views of Han scholars and pointed out that the "correlative thinking" of Chinese thought understands the world as an organic whole of

interconnection, which forms a contrast with the Western thinking mode of "binary choice". The Dao and Process Philosophy: Process philosophy holds that the essence of reality is process rather than substance, and change is fundamental while stability is derivative. This viewpoint is highly consistent with the ontological theory of "generativism" in Daoism. Barbalet (2014) [3] pointed out that the Tao Te Ching can be regarded as a classic text of process philosophy, and its description of the "Dao" foreshadows many core propositions of contemporary process thinking. The Dao and Ecological Organizational Theory: Ecological organizational theory emphasizes the interdependent relationship between an organization and the environment, and the survival and development of an organization depend on its degree of adaptation to the environment. Daoist thought provides a deeper perspective on this: an organization and the environment are not in a subject-object relationship, but an organic whole of mutual penetration and mutual constitution. Managers should cultivate an overall thinking of "the unity of man and nature", regarding the organization as a part of a larger ecosystem rather than a control center independent of the environment. Based on the above dialogue, we can say that as the ontological foundation of management theory, the core contribution of the "Dao" is to transform the understanding of organizations from the "machine" paradigm to the "ecological" paradigm. Under this paradigm, the core proposition of management is no longer "how to control", but "how to comply"—how to identify the internal laws of organizational operation and how to guide organizational development on the premise of respecting the laws.

De: The Practical Form of Dao and the Basis for Governance

In Daoist philosophy, "De" and the "Dao" form an inseparable whole. Chapter 51 of the Tao Te Ching states: "The Dao begets them; De nourishes them; things form them; circumstances complete them. Therefore all things honor the Dao and value De." The Dao generates all things, and De nourishes all things; the Dao is the origin of the existence of all things, and De is the internal foundation of the existence of all things. From the perspective of management theory, "De" can be understood as "the practical form of the Dao in organizational governance"—the laws of organizational operation (the Dao) must be implemented in specific governance practices (De) to produce actual management effects. The specific connotation of "De" can be understood from the following aspects:

First, etymologically, "De" is interlinked with "attainment (de)". De is the inherent nature that all things obtain from the Dao, and the embodiment of the Dao in specific things. For an organization, De means the "essential duty" of the organization—the internal stipulation that makes an organization what it is. The primary task of management practice is to help the organization "attain its essential duty" and fully realize its inherent potential. Second, Chapter 59 of the Tao Te Ching states: "There is no better way to govern people and serve heaven than to be frugal. Only by being frugal can one be early in compliance; early compliance is called heavily accumulating De; heavily accumulating De means being invincible in all things." "Frugality (se)" does not mean stinginess, but cherishing

and preserving. By cherishing energy and not acting arbitrarily, an organization can accumulate "De"—a deep-seated governance capacity. Here, "De" is not moral preaching, but the accumulation of practical wisdom, an internal force obtained by the organization in the long-term process of complying with the laws. Third, Chapter 54 of the Tao Te Ching states: "Cultivate it in oneself, and one's De becomes genuine; cultivate it in the family, and one's De becomes abundant; cultivate it in the community, and one's De becomes lasting; cultivate it in the state, and one's De becomes prosperous; cultivate it in the world, and one's De becomes universal." The practice of De has a diffusion effect: starting from personal cultivation, it gradually expands to the family, community, state, and even the world. In the organizational context, this means that the moral conduct of governors will influence the entire organization through demonstration effects, forming a positive cycle.

Transforming the concept of "De" into the language of contemporary organizational theory can engage in dialogue with trust research and social capital theory. De as the foundation of institutional trust. Hosmer (1995) [8] pointed out in his review of organizational trust research that trust is a multi-level concept involving different levels such as individual psychology, interpersonal relationships, and social institutions. From a Daoist perspective, "De" is the deep foundation of trust: when organizational members perceive that the behavior of governors conforms to the "Dao"—i.e., respecting the laws, not acting arbitrarily, and treating others sincerely—they will place trust in the governors. This trust is not interest-based trust based on calculation, nor procedural trust based on institutions, but "moral trust" based on an overall perception of the governor's character. De as the generation mechanism of social capital. Social capital theory emphasizes that the competitive advantage of an organization comes not only from physical capital and human capital but also from trust, networks, and norms among members (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The Daoist concept of "De" provides a unique perspective on the generation of social capital: social capital is not a resource that can be "produced", but a product that is naturally "accumulated" in daily practice. When governors continuously demonstrate "De"—modesty, tolerance, compliance, non-competition—cooperation networks among organizational members will form naturally, and shared norms will emerge in interaction. De and the psychological contract. Psychological contract theory emphasizes that there are unspoken mutual expectations between organizational members and the organization, and the fulfillment of these expectations profoundly affects the attitudes and behaviors of members (Rousseau, 1995) [8]. The Daoist concept of "De" can provide a new perspective for psychological contract research: the "De" of governors is manifested in sensitivity to and respect for the inherent needs of members, which helps to form a healthy psychological contract. When members perceive that governors "take the people's hearts as their own hearts" (Chapter 49 of the Tao Te Ching), they are more likely to internalize organizational goals as personal goals.

The development trajectory of contemporary governance theory—from "government" to "governance", from "control" to "trust"—provides a dialogue space for the Daoist concept of "De". In recent years, corporate

governance research has paid increasing attention to the ethical dimension. Scholars have realized that good governance cannot rely solely on external laws and internal controls, but also needs the internal support of ethical values. The Daoist concept of "De" can provide unique theoretical resources for ethical governance: it emphasizes that ethics is not a norm added to governance, but an inherent quality of governance practice itself. In other words, the legitimacy of governance comes not only from compliance but also from the governors' realization and practice of the "Dao". Contemporary theory has increasingly recognized that in a complex environment, trust-based management is more effective than control-based management. Trust can reduce transaction costs, promote knowledge sharing, and enhance organizational flexibility. The Daoist concept of "De" provides a philosophical foundation for trust-based management: trust is not a mechanism that can be "designed", but a natural response of organizational members to the "moral conduct (De)" of governors. If a governor wants to build a trust-based organization, he must first "cultivate De"—cultivate his own capacity for modesty, sincerity, and compliance. From a more macro perspective, the concept of "De" touches on the fundamental issue of governance legitimacy. Where does the legitimacy of organizational governance come from? The modern mainstream viewpoint justifies legitimacy either from efficiency (improving performance) or from procedure (following rules). Daoist thought provides another way of thinking: the legitimacy of governance comes from the governor's compliance with the "Dao"—when governance practice respects the internal laws of organizational operation and the inherent needs of organizational members, governance has a deep-seated legitimacy. This legitimacy is neither an appendage of efficiency nor a product of procedure, but comes from the internal consistency between governance and the laws. Transforming "De" into the language of modern governance theory, we can say that De is the deep foundation of institutional trust and governance legitimacy. Institutional trust not only requires procedural design but also the moral practice of governors; governance legitimacy not only requires performance proof but also the internal consistency between governance and the laws. In this sense, "De" is an intermediary link connecting the "Dao" (ontological laws) and "Wuwei" (governance practice), and an indispensable theoretical element of Daoist management philosophy.

Wuwei: The Methodology of Governance as Non-Intrusive Action

"Wuwei" is the most iconic and most often misunderstood concept in Daoist thought. Clarifying the philosophical connotation of Wuwei is a prerequisite for transforming it into a management theory concept. First, Wuwei is not inaction, but not acting arbitrarily. The Tao Te Ching mentions "Wuwei" in many places, but its context never refers to passive "doing nothing". Chapter 63 states: "Act with non-action; conduct affairs with non-interference; taste the tasteless." Here, "act with non-action" means "acting with an attitude of non-action", not "inaction". Chapter 37 states: "The Dao is always non-action, yet there is nothing it does not accomplish." The Dao never acts arbitrarily, but there is nothing that is not the accomplishment of the Dao. It is clear that Wuwei and "action" are not opposites, but a higher level of "action". Second, Wuwei is not acting

forcibly against the nature of things. What is "acting arbitrarily"? Acting arbitrarily is acting that violates the internal laws of things and imposes external will. Chapter 29 of the Tao Te Ching states: "The world is a sacred vessel; it cannot be acted upon, cannot be held onto. Those who act upon it ruin it; those who hold onto it lose it." The world (including organizations) is an organic whole (a sacred vessel), which cannot be forcibly shaped (acted upon) or firmly controlled (held onto). If a governor attempts to impose his personal will on the organization, he will inevitably face failure. Third, Wuwei is acting in compliance with the laws. The positive connotation of Wuwei is "compliance"—acting in accordance with the internal laws of things. Chapter 8 of the Tao Te Ching uses water as a metaphor: "The highest good is like water. Water benefits all things without contending, and dwells in the places that all people despise, so it is close to the Dao." The behavior of water seems weak, yet it can "benefit all things"—producing enormous positive effects. The secret of water lies in compliance: flowing in accordance with the terrain, moving in accordance with potential energy. The Wuwei of governors is to act in accordance with the laws of organizational operation like water. Chen's (1989) [5] classic analysis of Wuwei points out that Wuwei includes three levels: not acting before things (not acting ahead of the development of things), not forcing things to act (not compelling things to act against their nature), and not acting for personal gain (not acting for one's own selfish interests). These three "nots" essentially point to a profound practical wisdom: knowing when to move and when to stay still, knowing how to act in accordance with the trend and how to guide the situation to one's advantage.

Placing the concept of Wuwei in the context of contemporary organizational theory can engage in in-depth dialogue with self-organization theory. The logic of self-organization: The core proposition of self-organization theory is that under appropriate conditions, a system can spontaneously form order without external control. This phenomenon exists extensively in natural systems (e.g., flocking of birds, migration of fish schools) and social systems (e.g., market transactions, network collaboration). The key conditions for self-organization include the autonomy of actors, the rules of local interaction, and the existence of feedback mechanisms. Wuwei as the governance logic of self-organization: From a Daoist perspective, self-organization is not "no management needed", but requires a governance logic different from traditional control—the logic of Wuwei. When governors can practice "Wuwei", i.e., not arbitrarily interfering with the independent operation of the organization, the potential of self-organization can be fully released. In other words, Wuwei is the condition for self-organization: excessive control will stifle self-organization, while appropriate "non-intervention" provides space for self-organization. Stacey (2011) [17] emphasized in his discussion of complex responsive processes that the manager's task is not to "control" the process, but to "participate" in it and influence the direction of the process in the participation. This viewpoint is highly consistent with the thought of Wuwei: the governor is not a controller standing outside the system, but a participant within the system; the effect of governance does not come from coercive force, but from sensitive participation in the process. Enabling leadership and Wuwei: The "enabling leadership" proposed by Uhl-Bien *et*

al. (2007) [21] emphasizes that the task of leaders is to create conditions for the organization to spontaneously adapt and innovate. This leadership model has a profound resonance with the thought of Wuwei: enabling leaders do not directly solve problems, but create an environment where problems can be solved; they do not command actions, but nurture the conditions where actions can occur. This is exactly the modern embodiment of "governing through non-interference yet accomplishing everything"—seemingly doing nothing, yet accomplishing everything.

In traditional management thinking, managers often prove their existential value through "intervention": solving problems, making decisions, and commanding actions. Intervention is equated with management, and non-intervention is regarded as irresponsibility or lack of capacity. Daoist thought puts forward a profound reflection on this: true management capacity is manifested in knowing when not to intervene and being able to restrain the urge to intervene. The term "overabundance of management capacity" here is not derogatory, but refers to the fact that managers possess sufficient knowledge, experience, and power to intervene in organizational operations at any time. However, precisely because of the ability to intervene, it is even more necessary to be alert to the side effects of intervention—undermining the autonomy of the organization, stifling the creativity of members, and creating dependence and passivity. The self-restraint of Wuwei is to voluntarily restrict the urge to intervene on the basis of a profound understanding of the laws of organizational operation, leaving space for the independent operation of the organization. This viewpoint echoes concepts such as "light-touch management" and "empowerment" in contemporary governance theory. When discussing the knowledge-creating company, Nonaka and Toyama (2005) [15] emphasized that managers should construct "ba"—a shared space where knowledge can be shared, created, and accumulated—rather than directly controlling the process of knowledge creation. Here, "constructing ba" is the embodiment of Wuwei: creating conditions, not controlling the process.

Transforming Wuwei into the language of management practice can be summarized into the following principles:

Principle 1: Knowing when to stop. Chapter 32 of the Tao Te Ching states: "Knowing when to stop keeps one out of danger." Knowing when to stop can avoid danger. In management practice, knowing when to stop means recognizing the boundaries of intervention—knowing which areas need intervention and which areas should be kept at a distance; knowing when to act and when to observe calmly.

Principle 2: Acting in accordance with the trend. Chapter 68 of the Tao Te Ching states: "The good warrior does not rage; the good conqueror does not fight; the good employer of people places himself below them." Those who are good at acting do not rely on emotions or force, but comply with the situation and borrow strength. In management practice, acting in accordance with the trend means identifying the context and motivation of organizational development, and acting in accordance with the trend rather than against it.

Principle 3: Non-competition. Chapter 81 of the Tao Te Ching states: "The way of the sage is to act without contending." Acting yet not contending for merit. In

management practice, non-competition means attributing success to organizational members, institutional design, and timing conditions, rather than to personal wisdom. This is both an ethical attitude and a governance wisdom—governors who do not contend are more likely to win the trust and investment of organizational members.

Principle 4: Being nameless. Chapter 32 of the Tao Te Ching states: "The Dao is always nameless." The Dao has no fixed name, because a name will limit the understanding of the Dao. In management practice, being nameless means not sticking to a fixed model, not clinging to a single method, but flexibly adjusting according to specific situations. True governance wisdom is "formless"—it cannot be simplified into an operation manual, but only experienced and inherited in practice.

The Three-Tier Structure of Daoist Management Philosophy

Synthesizing the above analysis, this paper proposes a three-tier theoretical model of Daoist management philosophy, including the ontological level, governance level, and operational level, corresponding to the three core categories of the "Dao", "De", and "Wuwei" respectively.

- 1. Ontological level:** the Dao. This level answers the fundamental question of management: what is an organization? Where does order come from? The Dao perspective understands an organization as a dynamically generative system and order as a product of emergence rather than design. The primary task of management is not to control behavior, but to identify and comply with the laws.
- 2. Governance level:** De. This level answers the question of governance legitimacy: why is an organization worthy of trust? What is the foundation of governance? The De perspective understands trust as an inherent quality of governance practice and governance legitimacy as a product consistent with the laws. Institutional trust is not designed, but the result of governors "accumulating De" in long-term practice.
- 3. Operational level:** Wuwei. This level answers the practical questions of management: how to act? How to make decisions? The Wuwei perspective understands management action as "not acting arbitrarily"—on the basis of a profound understanding of the laws, restraining the urge to intervene, and acting in accordance with the trend and guiding the situation to one's advantage. Wuwei is not a lack of capacity, but the self-restraint after an overabundance of capacity.

There is an internal connection between the three levels: the Dao, as the ontological foundation, defines the direction and boundaries of governance; De, as the practical form of the Dao, transforms ontological commitments into the ethical foundation of governance; Wuwei, as the specific principle of governance, embodies the compliance with the Dao and the practice of De. The three form a complete theoretical structure of "ontology-ethics-methodology".

Comparing the three-tier structure of Daoist management philosophy with Western mainstream management theory can more clearly highlight its theoretical contributions. First, Comparison of organizational views; Western mainstream

theory has long understood organizations through the "machine" metaphor, emphasizing design, control, and efficiency. Although recent complexity theory has shifted to the "organism" or "ecosystem" metaphor, the discussion on organizational ontology is still inadequate. The Daoist concept of the "Dao" provides a thorough process ontology: an organization is not a static entity, but a continuously generative process; order is not a pre-designed structure, but a product of emergence. This ontology can provide a philosophical foundation for complexity theory, making its understanding of organizations more theoretically in-depth. Second, Comparison of governance views; Western governance theory mostly explores governance issues from the perspectives of institutional design (e.g., corporate governance structure), incentive mechanisms (e.g., agency theory), and normative constraints (e.g., compliance management). The Daoist concept of "De" shifts the focus of governance from external institutions to the inherent qualities and practices of governors. This does not deny the importance of institutions, but emphasizes that institutions will become empty shells without the support of moral conduct. Contemporary trust research has increasingly recognized this aspect, but a systematic theory has not yet been formed. Daoist thought can provide rich theoretical resources for this. Third, Comparison of action views; Western management theory's understanding of action is deeply influenced by instrumental rationality: action is a means to achieve goals, and effective action is action that can maximize the degree of goal achievement. The Daoist concept of "Wuwei" proposes a different logic of action: the effectiveness of action does not lie in its intensity or frequency, but in its consistency with the laws. Sometimes "inaction" is more effective than "action" because it leaves space for the independent operation of the system. This view of action has important enlightenment significance for management practice in contemporary complex situations. Daoist management philosophy is not a universal theory applicable everywhere, and its application requires specific conditions and has clear boundaries. Applicability conditions:

First, the effective operation of Daoist management philosophy presupposes that organizational members have a considerable degree of autonomy and a sense of responsibility. If members are completely passive and wait for instructions, then "Wuwei" may degenerate into "anarchy". Therefore, the Daoist management model is more applicable to situations with highly autonomous members such as knowledge-based organizations and innovative teams. Second, for highly standardized and predictable tasks, the traditional control model may still be effective. The advantage of the Daoist model lies in dealing with complexity and uncertainty—when tasks cannot be pre-designed and the environment changes rapidly, the value of "compliance" and "emergence" becomes prominent. Third, Wuwei is not laissez-faire, but self-restraint after an overabundance of capacity. This requires governors to have profound practical wisdom and self-cultivation—being able to identify the laws, restrain impulses, and act in accordance with the trend. The maturity of governors is a key variable for the success of the Daoist management model.

Implications for Cross-Cultural Management Theory

The theoretical construction of Daoist management philosophy has important supplementary significance for the

global management knowledge system. First, Supplementing the blind spots of mainstream theory. As mentioned above, under the influence of instrumental rationality, Western mainstream management theory has an in-depth discussion on control, design, efficiency and other aspects, but relatively neglects compliance, non-intervention, self-organization and other aspects. Daoist management philosophy can supplement these theoretical blind spots and make the management knowledge system more comprehensive. Lei (2025) [11] pointed out that the unique contribution of Daoist thought lies in its "paradoxical" nature—it challenges our fundamental understanding of leadership, organization, and action, forcing us to face up to the presuppositions and boundaries of mainstream theory. Second, Providing different research questions. Different cultural traditions raise different questions. The research questions of Western management theory stem from factory management since the Industrial Revolution, focusing on efficiency, control, and growth. Daoist thought, on the other hand, stems from an overall reflection on natural and social order, and its research questions revolve around propositions such as "how to comply with the laws", "how not to act arbitrarily", and "how to live in harmony with nature". In the context where issues such as contemporary sustainable development and ecological crisis are becoming increasingly important, the research questions of Daoism are showing unique contemporary value. Third, Enriching the cultural resources for theoretical construction. The development of management theory needs the nourishment of diverse cultural resources. For a long time, the management knowledge system has been mainly shaped by Western experience and Western thought, and the contributions of other cultures have either been ignored or marginalized. The theoretical construction of Daoist management philosophy is an attempt to integrate Eastern thought into the global management knowledge system. This is not to replace the West with the East, but to create a richer and more inclusive theoretical vision through dialogue and integration.

The theoretical construction of this paper has methodological enlightenment for "Eastern management" research. Eastern management research often faces the risk of "instrumentalization"—regarding Eastern thought as a supplement or footnote to Western theory to provide Eastern answers to Western questions. This paper argues that Eastern management research should first respect the own research questions and theoretical logic of Eastern thought, and on this basis, engage in equal dialogue with Western theory. Daoist thought is not a management tool, but a complete philosophy about the world, humans, and action; its theoretical contribution does not lie in providing several "management skills", but in proposing different management ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Another trap of Eastern management research is "mystification"—rendering Eastern thought as mysterious and ineffable wisdom. This paper argues that Eastern thought can and should be theoretically constructed in rigorous academic language. The methods of philosophical interpretation and theoretical synthesis can transform the core concepts of Daoism into analyzable and dialogical theoretical categories, enabling them to enter the mainstream academic discourse. This is not a "disenchantment" of Eastern thought, but a demonstration of its theoretical power in academic language. The research practice of this paper shows that cross-cultural theoretical

integration can adopt the following steps: first, return to the original classics to clarify the philosophical connotation of core concepts; second, identify the internal connections between concepts and construct a conceptual system; third, engage in dialogue with contemporary theory to find resonance and differences; fourth, transform concepts into theoretical categories and propose operational propositions; fifth, reflect on the applicable boundaries and conditions of the theory. This methodological path can provide a reference for other Eastern management research (e.g., Confucian management, Buddhist management).

Conclusions

The research paper seeks to develop a theoretical framework which uses Daoist management principles to create a system that enables communication between contemporary management research and traditional Daoist concepts. The research develops a theoretical framework which links Dao and De and Wuwei through a systematic dialogue between Dao De Jing concepts and current organizational theories. The research establishes three levels of theory which connect Dao to De to Wuwei through their respective roles as ontological base and governance system and operational method in management science. The main arguments can be summarized as follows:

Daoist philosophy contains all the essential elements to create a management theory which functions as an independent complete system. The three fundamental categories of Dao and De and Wuwei serve to answer management questions about existence and control systems and operational methods through their natural connection as a single theoretical framework. The concept of Wuwei needs to transform into an advanced system of governance rationality because it should not represent mere inactive behavior. Wuwei represents "non-willful action" which means we stop our natural reaction to take control because we understand how things work at their core so we let the organization operate independently. Wuwei represents not a lack of managerial ability but instead the practice of holding back when you possess more than enough managerial strength. The Daoist management philosophy contains essential elements which unite with modern organizational theories through their shared principles with complexity theory and self-organization theory. The theoretical framework connects Dao with complex adaptive systems through its association with De and social capital and Wuwei and enabling leadership. The global management knowledge system finds its complementary value in Daoist management philosophy because it solves three main problems which include adaptability and non-intervention and ethical governance integration that mainstream theoretical frameworks cannot solve.

This study has the following limitations. The study focuses on particular textual analysis methods which limit its research scope. The paper builds its Daoist management philosophy through Dao De Jing study while it only uses limited references to other Daoist texts including Zhuangzi. The various Daoist texts present their relevant concepts in different ways which researchers should investigate by studying more texts. Scientists have established their initial theoretical ideas yet they continue to develop more advanced understanding of these concepts. The paper introduces a three-level theoretical framework which serves as an initial framework development. The internal logic of

each level plus the mechanisms which connect these levels need further development and improvement. The study lacks enough data to verify its research findings because no actual testing has been performed. The paper presents theoretical concepts which have not received any actual testing. Researchers need to study how Daoist management philosophy operates in real organizations through case studies and questionnaire surveys to understand its operational mechanisms and contingency conditions (OpenAI, 2023).

Based on the above limitations, future research can proceed in the following directions. Organizations need to study how Daoist management philosophy appears in their operations through qualitative research methods which include participant observation and in-depth interviews. Researchers can create measurement instruments which will allow them to measure the numerical relationships between the three-level system of "Dao---De---Wuwei" and different elements which include organizational success and employee happiness and innovative abilities. The relationship between Daoist management philosophy and institutional design needs further study according to the second research direction. The practice of Wuwei receives special attention from Daoist philosophy but does its implementation need particular organizational arrangements to function properly? What architectural features should institutions contain which would support the practice of "Wuwei"? The research needs to perform detailed investigations which will combine institutional theory with other relevant academic frameworks. Organizations can study Daoist management philosophy through analysis of its principles which also exist in Confucian management and Buddhist management and Western virtue ethics. The distinct nature of Daoist philosophy becomes more obvious when we study its relationship with fundamental concepts which exist throughout human culture. The research will investigate how Daoist management principles transform into functional tools which serve management education and leadership development programs and organizational change initiatives. The process of bringing Daoist philosophy into modern management practice requires developers to create particular methods which enable this transition.

The traditional Chinese philosophy of Daoist management offers valuable organizational guidance through its philosophical principles which need further research to understand their application in modern complex management environments. The current research provides a baseline for future studies which will address its existing flaws while working to develop a more complete system of Daoist management philosophy. The organization needs to build a strong connection between its core values and Western management concepts while it should unite academic theory with actual operational work to let Daoist management philosophy guide contemporary business operations and introduce Chinese wisdom into worldwide management theory development and implementation.

References

- Ames RT, Hall DL. *Dao De Jing: A philosophical translation*. Ballantine, 2003.
- Bai X, Roberts W. Taoism and its model of traits of successful leaders. *Journal of Management Development*,2011:30(7/8):724–739. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711111150236>
- Barbalet J. Laozi's Daodejing (6th century BC). In: Helin J, Hernes T, Hjorth D, Holt R, editors. *The Oxford handbook of process philosophy and organization studies*. Oxford University Press, 2014, 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199669356.013.0002>
- Cai JM. On the enlightenment of Chinese "Dao" to Western management science. *Journal of Leadership Science*,2022:(12下):72–75.
- Chen EM. The meaning of wu-wei in Lao Tzu. *Philosophy East and West*,1989:39(3):285–296. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1399377>
- Feng HX. Laozi's management philosophy and its modern application. *Journal of Humanities of National Central University*,1997:15:123–171.
- Ghoshal S, Moran P. Bad for practice: A critique of the transaction cost theory. *Academy of Management Review*,1996:21(1):13–47. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1996.9602161563>
- Hosmer LT. Trust: The connecting link between organizational theory and philosophical ethics. *Academy of Management Review*,1995:20(2):379–403. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9507312923>
- Ip PK. Daoism and business ethics. In: Luetge C, editor. *Handbook of the philosophical foundations of business ethics*. Springer, 2013, 943–959. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1494-6_66
- Laozi. *Dao De Jing*. Lau DC, translator. Penguin Classics, 2018.
- Lei W. Daoist philosophy and leadership: A reappraisal. *Leadership*,2025:21(4):265–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427150251341738>
- Lin LH, Ho YL, Lin WHE. Confucian and Taoist work values: An exploratory study of the Chinese transformational leadership behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*,2013:113(1):91–103. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1284-8>
- Moeller HG. *Daoism explained: From the dream of the butterfly to the fishnet allegory*. Open Court, 2004.
- Moeller HG. Basic aspects of daoist philosophy. *International Communication of Chinese Culture*,2015:2(2):99–107. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40636-015-0018-5>
- Nonaka I, Toyama R. The theory of the knowledge-creating firm: Subjectivity, objectivity and synthesis. *Organization Studies*,2005:26(3):419–436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605050876>
- OpenAI. ChatGPT (Mar 14 version) [Large language model]. OpenAI, 2023. <https://chat.openai.com/chat>
- Stacey RD. *Strategic management and organisational dynamics: The challenge of complexity*. Pearson, 2011.
- Tan C. A Daoist understanding of mindful leadership. *Leadership*,2023:19(3):275–289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427150231164419>
- Tan LB, Xie JY, Chen YR. A study on the influence of traditional Chinese culture on contemporary management practice. *Chinese Journal of Management*,2020:17(12):1751–1759. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1672-884x.2020.12.002>
- Tsoukas H, Chia R. On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*,2002:13(5):567–582. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.5.567.7818>

21. Uhl-Bien M, Marion R, McKelvey B. Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *The Leadership Quarterly*,2007;18(4):298–318.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.002>
22. Weick KE. *Sensemaking in organizations*. Sage, 1995.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452239347>
23. Xing Y, Sims D. Leadership, Daoist Wu Wei and reflexivity: Flow, self-protection and excuse in Chinese bank managers' leadership practice. *Management Learning*,2012;43(1):97–112.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507611409655>
24. Zu L. Purpose-driven leadership for sustainable business: From the perspective of Taoism. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*,2019;4(1):1–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-018-0041-z>