

**GUŌ XIÀNG'S METAPHYSICAL THOUGHT:
FROM THE DEBATE OF "BEING AND NON-
BEING" TO "INWARD SAGE AND OUTWARD
KING"**

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
ABSTRAK	ix
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER 1 PRELIMINARY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Background	1
1.3 Problem Statement.....	4
1.4 Research Questions	8
1.5 Research Objectives	9
1.6 Literature Review	9
1.7 Theoretical Framework	21
1.8 Research Methodology	21
1.8.1 Research Design	22
1.8.2 Data Collection	22
1.8.3 Data Analysis	23
1.8.3(a) Literature Analysis.....	23
1.8.3(b) Historical Analysis.....	23
1.8.3(c) Comparative Analysis.....	24
1.8.3(d) Hermeneutic Analysis.....	24
1.8.3(e) Logical Reasoning	25
1.9 Research Limitation.....	26
1.10 Research Significance	27

1.11	Research Organization.....	29
CHAPTER 2 GUŌ XIÀNG AND THE MYSTICAL ATMOSPHERE IN WÈI-JÌN DYNASTY 31		
2.1	Introduction	31
2.2	Overview of Wèi-Jìn Xuánxué	32
2.2.1	The Emergence of Wèi-Jìn Xuánxué.....	33
2.2.1(a)	The Definition of <i>Xuán</i> and <i>Xuánxué</i>	34
2.2.1(b)	<i>Qīngtán</i> : The Direct Soil of <i>Xuánxué</i>	36
2.2.2	The Development Phases and Major Schools of Wèi-Jìn <i>Xuánxué</i>	39
2.2.2(a)	The First Stage of Development.....	40
2.2.2(b)	The Second Stage of Development.....	42
2.2.2(c)	The Third Stage of Development	43
2.2.2(d)	The Fourth Stage of Development.....	44
2.2.3	The Influence of Wèi-Jìn <i>Xuánxué</i> on Chinese Philosophy	46
2.3	Guō Xiàng and His <i>Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ</i>	48
2.3.1	Guō Xiàng: The Person	49
2.3.2	Cases of Different Editions of Guō Xiàng’s <i>Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ</i>	50
2.3.3	Guō Xiàng’s Basic Methodology in Annotating <i>Zhuāngzǐ</i>	55
2.3.3(a)	<i>Jiányán Chūyì</i> – Conveying Meanings through Metaphorical Language	55
2.3.3(b)	<i>Biànmíng Xǐlǐ</i> – Debates and Analyzing Concepts	57
2.3.4	The Historical Influence of Guō Xiàng’s <i>Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ</i>	59
2.4	Conclusion.....	60

CHAPTER 3 THE ONTOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF DÀO AND THE DEBATE ON BEING AND NON-BEING	63
3.1 Introduction	63
3.2 The Formation of Dào as Ontology.....	66
3.2.1 The Dào of Lǎozǐ.....	68
3.2.2 The Dào of Zhuāngzǐ.....	71
3.3 The Debate on Being and Non-Being in Neo-Daoism.....	75
3.3.1 The Exaltation of Non-Being	78
3.3.2 The Reverence of Being	85
3.3.3 The Theory of Independent Transformation of Guō Xiàng.....	90
3.4 Similarities and Differences between Guō Xiàng’s <i>Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ</i> and the <i>Zhuāngzǐ</i>	95
3.5 Conclusion.....	100
CHAPTER 4 BETWEEN BEING AND NON-BEING: TRANSCENDING THE REALM OF PROFOUND DARKNESS	103
4.1 Introduction	103
4.2 Independent Transformation: The Occurrence of Being	108
4.2.1 The Individuality of All Things	108
4.2.1(a) Each Entity Self-Creates	109
4.2.1(b) Each Entity Has Its Own Nature.....	118
4.2.2 The Transformation of All Things	131
4.2.2(a) Transformation Without Delay.....	131
4.2.2(b) The Fundamental Driving Force Behind the Movement and Transformation of All Things are <i>Qì</i>	140
4.3 <i>Xuán Míng</i> (Non-Being): The Realm of Independent Transformation	147
4.4 Conclusion.....	159

CHAPTER 5 THE INWARD SAGE AND OUTWARD KING ROAMING BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH 163

5.1	Introduction	163
5.2	<i>Nèi Shèng Wài Wáng</i> – Inward Sage and Outward King	167
5.2.1	The State of Inward Sage – Inward Contemplation	169
5.2.1(a)	<i>Míng Hé Zì Xìng</i> – Merging with Self Nature.....	170
5.2.1(b)	Action Without Intention or Effortless Action	181
5.2.2	The Way of the Outward King – Wandering in the World	187
5.2.2(a)	Harmonizing with the Transformation of Things.....	187
5.2.2(b)	Adapting to the Changes of the World	191
5.2.3	Inner and Outer Harmony in the Realm of Carefree Tranquility	195
5.3	<i>Míng Wáng Zhī Zhì</i> – The Ideal Model of Governance	203
5.3.1	<i>Míng Wáng Zhī Dé</i> – The Virtue of the Enlightened Ruler.....	204
5.3.2	<i>Shùn Shì Èr Zhì</i> – Governing by Following the Course of Things.....	211
5.3.2(a)	<i>Shùn Shì Zhī Xù</i> – Following the Order of the World	211
5.3.2(b)	<i>Shùn Mín Zhī Xìng</i> – Respecting the Nature of the People..	217
5.4	Conclusion.....	221

CHAPTER 6 A CRITICAL REVIEW OF GUŌ XIÀNG’S METAPHYSICAL THOUGHT 226

6.1	Introduction	226
6.2	Theoretical Contributions	230
6.2.1	The Unity of Being and Non-Being	230
6.2.2	The Spiritual Realm of <i>Míng Hé</i> (Harmonious Unity).....	234
6.2.3	The Influence on Zhāng Zhàn’s <i>Commentary on the Lièzǐ</i>	240
6.3	Limitations of the Theory	249
6.3.1	Entrapment in Mysticism.....	249

6.3.2	The Internal Contradiction of Inherent Nature	251
6.3.3	The Overly Idealistic <i>Míng Nèi Yóu Wài</i> (Inward Contemplation and Outward Engagement).....	256
6.4	Modern Significance and Implications.....	261
6.5	Conclusion.....	265
CHAPTER 7 CLOSURE		269
7.1	Recapitulation of the Main Findings	269
7.2	Research Implications	273
7.2.1	Theoretical Implications	273
7.2.2	Practical Implications	273
7.3	Future Research Recommendations	274
REFERENCES.....		278

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1 Comparative Analysis of Daoist and Neo-Daoist Debates on Being and Non-Being.....	90
Table 4.1 Transformation and Individuality of All Things in Guō Xiàng's Thought	147
Table 4.2 <i>Xuán Míng</i> and the Realm of Individuation in Guō Xiàng's Thought.	159
Table 5.1 Guō Xiàng's Ideal Model of Governance – The Unity of Sageliness and Kingliness	223
Table 7.1 The Relation Between Research Questions, Research Objectives, and Chapters	269

**PEMIKIRAN METAFIZIK GUŌ XIÀNG:
DARIPADA PERDEBATAN “WUJUD DAN BUKAN WUJUD” KEPADA
“PENDETA DALAMAN DAN RAJA LUARAN”**

ABSTRAK

Aliran *Xuánxué* Wèi-Jìn atau turut dikenali sebagai Taoisme Baharu atau Mazhab Pembelajaran Metafizik, merupakan aliran falsafah dominan pada zaman dinasti Wèi-Jìn (220-420 Masihi) dan mewakili satu aspek penting dalam sejarah falsafah Cina. Pergolakan politik dan perubahan sosial pada era tersebut mendorong para intelektual untuk mencari ketenangan rohani melalui renungan yang mendalam dan terpisah daripada dunia material. Wacana mereka tertumpu kepada tiga teks klasik: *Zhōuyì* (*Kitab Perubahan*), *Dào Dé Jīng* (*Kitab Tao dan Keluhurannya*), dan *Zhuāngzǐ* (*Kitab Guru Zhuāng*). Melalui pengasimilasian dan pengembangan konsep *Dào* dalam Taoisme, mereka membentuk tema-tema utama yang berpaksikan pemikiran Lǎozǐ dan Zhuāngzǐ bagi meneroka prinsip falsafah tertinggi tentang alam semesta, kehidupan manusia, serta hubungan antara manusia dengan semua kewujudan. Dalam kalangan intelektual Wèi-Jìn, Guō Xiàng merupakan seorang ahli falsafah terkemuka yang mencapai kemuncak pemikiran *Xuánxué* menerusi karyanya *Zhuāngzǐ Zhù* (*Syarah kepada Kitab Guru Zhuāng*). Dalam mengkaji konsep falsafah Guō Xiàng mengenai *Yǒu Wú* (Wujud dan Bukan Wujud) serta *Nèi Shèng Wài Wáng* (Pendeta Dalaman dan Raja Luaran), tesis ini menggariskan tiga objektif utama. Pertama, mengenal pasti suasana mistik pada era Wèi-Jìn dan pengaruhnya terhadap pemikiran falsafah Guō Xiàng. Kedua, menyelidiki pandangan Guō Xiàng mengenai evolusi ontologi *Dào* serta peranannya dalam perdebatan mengenai Wujud dan Bukan Wujud. Ketiga,

menganalisis secara kritikal pemikiran metafizik Guō Xiàng serta kesannya terhadap perkembangan falsafah Cina pada zaman berikutnya. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi pengumpulan data yang bergantung pada teks dan bahan sejarah yang berkait dengan Guō Xiàng dan intelektual sezamannya. Analisis data dilakukan melalui kaedah analisis teks, analisis perbandingan, hermeneutika, analisis sejarah dan penaakulan logik. Dengan menggunakan metodologi ini, analisis sistematik terhadap struktur teks *Syarah kepada Kitab Guru Zhuāng* oleh Guō Xiàng telah menghasilkan beberapa penemuan penting. Guō Xiàng menyepadukan dan mengubah pandangan falsafah asas *guì wú lùn* (penyokong Bukan Wujud) dan *chóng yǒu lùn* (penyokong Wujud) dalam usahanya untuk menyelesaikan perdebatan ontologi mengenai Wujud dan Bukan Wujud. Dengan mensintesiskan perspektif ini, beliau membentuk satu sistem kategori yang unik yang dikenali sebagai *dú huà lùn* (teori transformasi bebas), yang menjadi asas kepada kerangka metafiziknya. Selain itu, Guō Xiàng mentafsir semula hubungan antara Pendeta Dalaman dengan Raja Luaran. Dengan memperluaskan konsep Pendeta Dalaman melangkaui pemupukan diri secara individu, beliau berpendapat bahawa pencapaian moral bukan sekadar usaha peribadi, tetapi suatu manifestasi yang tidak dapat dielakkan daripada prinsip transformasi sejagat. Pada masa yang sama, beliau memberikan legitimasi kepada konsep Raja Luaran dengan menegaskan bahawa pemerintah harus mentadbir selaras dengan Dào, mengekalkan norma Konfusianisme (*míngjiào*) tanpa memberi paksaan luaran yang boleh mengganggu keharmonian alam tabii. Pemikiran metafiziknya akhirnya mempengaruhi *Syarah terhadap Guru Liè* oleh Zhāng Zhàn, sekali gus membentuk hala tuju perkembangan pemikiran metafizik dalam tradisi intelektual yang seterusnya.

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ABSTRACT

Wèi-Jin *Xuánxué*, also known as Neo-Daoism or Metaphysical Learning School, is the prevailing philosophical school during the Wèi-Jin dynasties (220-420 AD), represents a significant aspect of Chinese philosophical history. The political upheavals and societal transformations of that era compelled intellectuals to seek spiritual solace in the realm of profound and detached contemplation. They centered their discussions around three classical texts: the *Zhōuyì* (*Book of Changes*), the *Dào Dé Jīng*, and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. By continually absorbing and expanding upon Daoist concepts of “Dào,” they formulated the core theme, rooted in the thoughts of Lǎozǐ and Zhuāngzǐ, to explore the ultimate philosophical principles of the universe and human life, and the relationship between humans and all things. Among the intellectuals, Guō Xiàng, a prominent philosopher in the Wèi-Jin period, represented the pinnacle of Wèi-Jin *Xuánxué* with his work *Zhuāngzǐ Zhù* (*Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*). In examining Guō Xiàng’s philosophical concepts of “*Yǒu Wú*” (Being and Non-Being) and “*Nèi Shèng Wài Wáng*” (Inward Sage and Outward King), this thesis sets forth four primary research objectives. First, it aims to identify the mystical atmosphere of the Wèi-Jin dynasty and its influence on Guō Xiàng’s philosophical thought. Second, it seeks to investigate Guō Xiàng’s views on the ontological evolution of “Dào” and its role in the debate on “Being” and “Non-Being.” Third, it intends to critically analyze Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical thought and its impact on subsequent Chinese philosophical developments. The study employs a methodology

of data collection that relies on textual data from objective literature and historical materials relevant to Guō Xiàng and his contemporaries. Data analysis is conducted through textual analysis, comparative analysis, hermeneutics, historical analysis, and logical reasoning methods. Utilizing these methodologies, a systematic analysis of the textual structure of Guō Xiàng's *Commentary on the Zhuāngzǐ* has yielded several significant findings. Guō Xiàng integrates and transforms the fundamental philosophical viewpoints of the *guì wú lùn* (advocates of Non-Being) and the *chóng yǒu lùn* (advocates of Being), aiming to resolve the ontological debate of "Being" and "Non-Being." By synthesizing these perspectives, he constructs a unique categorical system called the *dú huà lùn* (theory of independent transformation), which serves as the foundation of his metaphysical framework. Additionally, Guō Xiàng reinterprets the relationship between "Sageliness Within" and "Kinglyness Without." Expanding the notion of "Sageliness Within" beyond individual self-cultivation, he argues that moral attainment is not merely a personal pursuit but an inevitable manifestation of the universal principle of transformation. At the same time, he legitimizes "Kinglyness Without" by asserting that rulers should govern in accordance with the Dào, upholding Confucian norms (*míngjiào*) without imposing external coercion that disrupts natural harmony. His metaphysical insights ultimately influenced Zhāng Zhàn's *Commentary on the Lièzǐ*, shaping the trajectory of metaphysical thought in subsequent intellectual traditions.

CHAPTER 1

PRELIMINARY

1.1 Introduction

The thesis generally discusses the philosophical categories of “*Yǒu*” (Being) and “*Wú*” (Non-Being), and the concept of the “*Nèi Shèng Wài Wáng*” (Inward Sage and Outward King) in Guō Xiàng’s *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*. The goal of this study, specifically, is to elucidate the fundamental reasons behind the emergence of Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical thought, dissect the internal logic of his views on the relationship between Being and Non-Being, and examine the limitations of his ideas. Additionally, it explores how Guō Xiàng harmonized Confucianism and Daoism and addressed the central themes of Wèi-Jin *Xuánxué*. To achieve this objective, this thesis study various ancient Chinese literature related to Guō Xiàng, attempting to dissect his metaphysical thought through detailed examination of these documents. The following sections in this chapter explain the motivation and methodology of this research. It will introduce the research topic, address the problem statement and the main research questions raised by this discourse. Furthermore, the chapter review previous studies on this topic. The literature review will clarify the issues this thesis aims to address and how it intends to do so.

1.2 Research Background

Wèi-Jin *Xuánxué*, or Neo-Daoism or Metaphysical Learning School, is a highly significant philosophical trend in the history of Chinese philosophy. It not only directly inherits the teachings of Lǎozǐ and Zhuāngzǐ but also provides an ideological source for Neo-Confucianism during the Sòng and Míng dynasties, marking the philosophical

starting point of Neo-Confucianism (Yang, 2010). Therefore, the development of Chinese philosophy during the Wèi-Jìn period represents a new and crucial stage. This era was characterized by dramatic social upheaval and turmoil, with profound changes occurring in political, economic, and cultural spheres. These changes created opportunities for the emergence of new ideological trends during the Wèi-Jìn period.

Before the Wèi-Jìn period, during the Han dynasty, Confucian thought was regarded as the sole orthodoxy, serving as a tool for political governance. However, the dominance of Confucianism led to cultural rigidity and political decay, with thought and culture becoming increasingly constrained. Intellectuals gradually began to question the Confucian system (Yu, 2015). By the end of the Eastern Han dynasty, the turbulent situation had a profound impact on society. The power struggles among warlords led to the disintegration of the feudal monarchy, shaking the long-standing values of Confucianism and prompting people to seek new spiritual support. The instability and chaos of society caused intellectuals to re-examine traditional Confucian values and search for new ideological paths.

Against this backdrop, Daoist thought gradually emerged and became a way for scholars to reassess the world. They esteemed the philosophy of Lǎozǐ and Zhuāngzǐ, focusing on the cosmos as the object of their studies, emphasizing the realm beyond language and reason, and valuing individual inner experience and insight. They regarded works such as the *Lǎozǐ* and the *Zhuāngzǐ* as important cultural classics. The term “*Xuánxué*” is derived from Lǎozǐ saying: “*xuán zhīyòu xuán, zhòng miào zhī mén,*” which can be translated as “mystery of mysteries, the gateway to all wonders.” *Xuánxué* in the Wèi-Jìn period was based on the tranquil and obscure philosophy of Lǎozǐ and Zhuāngzǐ, integrating the essence of Confucian thought. It focused on abstract theoretical exploration and possessed a strong speculative nature, making

Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* one of the most intellectually stimulating schools of thought in Chinese philosophy (Wang, 2006).

In the transition from Confucianism to Daoism, the rigidity of Confucian thought and social turmoil acted as driving forces. Intellectuals began to discard traditional Confucian classics, turning instead to more flexible and internally fulfilling systems of thought. This transformation was not a complete break but rather a process of reconstructing and integrating Confucian elements. The debate between “*míng jiào*” (ethical norms) and “*zìrán*” (naturalness) was the core theme of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* thought, reflecting the conflict between Confucian and Daoist philosophies (Ma, 2008). This intellectual dispute revolved around Confucian “ethical norms” and Daoist “naturalness,” creating an intense and profound philosophical dialogue.

Confucian “ethical norms” emphasized social order and moral ethics to maintain societal stability, but their rigidity and dogmatism were increasingly questioned during the Wèi-Jìn period. In contrast, Daoist “naturalness” advocated for aligning with nature, rejecting cumbersome rituals, and pursuing inner freedom. Daoism suggested that the natural order should be followed and that individuals should seek inner peace and authenticity, presenting a stark contrast to the orthodox Confucian ideals. Daoism proposed a more adaptable lifestyle.

During the Wèi-Jìn period, early metaphysicians like Hé Yàn and Wáng Bì attempted to integrate these two concepts, suggesting that “ethical norms” should arise from “naturalness”, reflecting the natural order. This effort to merge traditional Confucian and Daoist thoughts aimed to transcend their dichotomy. However, as time progressed, the debate between “ethical norms” and “naturalness” evolved into a fierce philosophical conflict. Mid-period metaphysicians such as Ruǎn Jí and Jī Kāng adopted a diametrically opposed stance, vehemently rejecting “ethical norms” and

advocating for “transcending ethical norms to follow naturalness.” This opposition was not only a critique of Confucian thought but also a resistance to the political tyranny of the time, representing intellectuals’ rebellion against a rigid system. Ultimately, as the Wèi-Jin period consolidated power, the debate between “ethical norms” and “naturalness” gradually subsided.

Later metaphysicians like Guō Xiàng proposed that “ethical norms are naturalness”, attempting to unify the two. This proposition marked the end of the “ethical norms” and “naturalness” debate during the Wèi-Jin period (Zhang, 2012). The outcome of the “ethical norms” and “naturalness” debate had a profound impact on Wèi-Jin *Xuánxué*. This philosophical contention not only reflected the social turmoil of the time but also laid the foundation for subsequent Chinese philosophical thought (Su, 2022). This period’s intellectual struggles left a distinctive mark on the history of Chinese philosophy, influencing ancient Chinese culture and thought profoundly.

1.3 Problem Statement

Wèi-Jin *Xuánxué*, as the prevailing intellectual trend during the Wèi-Jin periods (220-420 AD), constitute a significant thread in the history of Chinese philosophy, along with the pre-Qin philosophers, the Confucian classics of the Han dynasty, the Buddhist studies of the Sui and Tang dynasties, and the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties (Zhu, 2011). The Wèi-Jin era was a period of frequent political turmoil and social transformation in Chinese history. Prolonged warfare, brutal political struggles, and the decadent and monotonous lives of the aristocracy led to a sense of intellectual despondency among many members of the ruling class. Consequently, they endeavored to seek spiritual solace in the realm of metaphysical

contemplation. With the orthodox Confucian beliefs facing a severe crisis, the literati class sought out new spiritual abodes, giving rise to the flourishing of Neo-Daoist studies (Cao, 2006).

Scholars continuously assimilated the essence of Daoism regarding the *Dào* and nature and further developed it during the Wèi-Jìn period. The core of their discussions revolved around three classic texts: the *Zhōuyì* (*Book of Changes*), *Lǎozǐ* (*Dào Dé Jīng*), and *Zhuāngzǐ* (*Zhuāng Zhōu*), with a primary focus on the philosophy of Lǎozǐ and Zhuāngzǐ. Their exploration centered on the profound principles of the universe and human life, particularly the concept of Being and Non-Being (Tang, 2009). Through introspection and inner observation, these Wèi-Jìn literati investigated the relationship between individuals and all things, seeking the elevation and transcendence of individual nature and character.

Among the Wèi-Jìn literati, Guō Xiàng's Neo-Daoist thoughts represent the pinnacle of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* (Ma, 2009). In his *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*, he integrated and reformed the fundamental philosophical viewpoints of the Valuing of Non-Being and the Advocate of Being, endeavoring to address the contemporary themes of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué*. This effort culminated in his distinct and comprehensive categorical system known as the theory of independent transformation. He resolved the contradiction between Non-Being and being and unified the relationship between Being and Non-Being (Yang, 2010). The generation of all things is no longer confined to a singular category of Being or Non-Being but rather embraced within the all-encompassing concept of Unity in Diversity.

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no comprehensive attempt to seriously investigate, at a philosophical and conceptual level, the interplay of three essential concepts: Non-Being, Being, and independent transformation. Specifically, I

aim to explore how these concepts may lead to the cultivation of inner sageliness and outer kingliness, particularly through a close reading and interpretation of Guō Xiàng's work on the *Zhuāngzǐ*. While existing research has examined aspects of Guō Xiàng's thought, such as the concept of Non-Being in isolation or the philosophical implications of Being, few studies have concurrently addressed the intricate relationship between all three concepts. For instance, some scholars have focused on Guō Xiàng's interpretation of Non-Being as a means to understand the nature of existence.

However, they often overlook how this understanding interrelates with the notion of independent transformation and its practical implications for the cultivation of sageliness. Moreover, while works like Tang Yijie's studies delve into the historical and metaphysical contexts of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué*, they frequently fail to engage with the triadic relationship of these concepts as they relate to Guō Xiàng's philosophical framework. Similarly, Ziporyn's (2003) analysis of Guō Xiàng's thought tends to highlight individual aspects of his philosophy but does not synthesize these ideas into a cohesive understanding of how they collectively contribute to the ideals of "Inward Sage and Outward King". This gap indicates a need for a more nuanced analysis that integrates these three concepts through a detailed examination of Guō Xiàng's *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*. By doing so, this research aims to fill the void in the current literature and provide a deeper understanding of how these philosophical themes coalesce within the context of Wèi-Jìn metaphysics.

This thesis primarily focuses on the historical background of the Wèi-Jìn period and the core thematic context of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* – the debate over Being and Non-Being. It analyzes and discusses Guō Xiàng's ontological perspectives on the issue of Being and Non-Being within this unique historical backdrop of the Wèi-Jìn and

Southern and Northern Dynasties. By delving into the fundamental reasons behind the emergence of Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thoughts, the thesis explores the internal logic of his views on the relationship between Being and Non-Being, as well as the limitations of his ideas. Additionally, it examines how Guō Xiàng harmoniously integrated Confucianism and Daoism, providing a resolution to the contemporary thematic concerns of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué*. This includes the unification of moral teachings and the laws of nature, presenting the Enlightened Rule of Kingship based on the concept of *Nèi Shèng Wài Wáng*. This approach offers a reasonable solution for the prevailing political and governing ideologies of that time.

In the unique historical context of the Wèi-Jìn Northern and Southern Dynasties, this study on Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thought addresses several key issues. First, Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thought emerged amidst the turbulence of the Wèi-Jìn period. Exploring these contextual factors helps in understanding the uniqueness and complexity of Guō Xiàng's ideas. This raises the question: how did Guō Xiàng interpret the interdependence and transformation between Being and Non-Being? By analyzing Guō Xiàng's discourse in literary sources, we can uncover his profound philosophical insights and their significant role in philosophical discussions during the Wèi-Jìn period.

Secondly, the Wèi-Jìn period faced numerous societal and intellectual challenges, to which Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thought attempted to respond. This raises several issues: what specific solutions did he propose to address the spiritual and cultural needs of the time? How did he reconcile Confucian and Daoist thoughts and unify ethical norms with natural reason? Exploring these issues elucidates the uniqueness and innovativeness of Guō Xiàng's thought. Additionally, how did Guō Xiàng's doctrine of "Inward Sage and Outward King" provide a reasonable path for political governance

concepts of the time? How did this concept guide political practices then, and was this political philosophy effective in practical governance? By studying Guō Xiàng's political thought, we can enhance our understanding of its philosophical application in reality.

Finally, in addressing practical societal and political issues, what were the shortcomings of Guō Xiàng's ideas? How did these limitations affect the dissemination and acceptance of his thought? Exploring these questions contributes to a comprehensive assessment of the historical value and practical significance of Guō Xiàng's ideas. Thus, this thesis investigates Guō Xiàng's metaphysical and political thought within the turbulent context of the Wèi-Jìn Northern and Southern Dynasties, exploring his interpretations of the interdependence between Being and Non-Being, his reconciliatory efforts between Confucian and Daoist philosophies, and his doctrine of "Inward Sage and Outward King" as a guide for political governance, while critically assessing the limitations and practical impacts of his ideas on historical and philosophical discourse.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the problem statement and the issues raised, this thesis seeks to address these three main research questions:

1. What is the mystical atmosphere of the Wèi-Jìn dynasty that shaped Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas?
2. How do Guō Xiàng's views on the ontological evolution of Dào, and how do they engage with the debate on Being and Non-Being?

3. Why does Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical thought fit within the broader context of Wèi-Jin philosophical discourse, and impacted subsequent developments in Chinese philosophy?

1.5 Research Objectives

By conducting an extensive exploration of various literary works articulating Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical perspectives, this thesis aims on the following objectives.

1. To identify the mystical atmosphere of the Wèi-Jin dynasty and its influence on Guō Xiàng’s philosophical thought.
2. To investigate Guō Xiàng’s views on the ontological evolution of Dào and its role in the debate on Being and Non-Being.
3. To critically analyze Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical thought and its impact on later Chinese philosophical developments.

1.6 Literature Review

The philosophy of Daoism has always been a focal point of research for scholars worldwide, and as an essential branch of Daoist philosophy, Neo-Daoist has also been a key area of philosophical inquiry. This thesis focuses on the core theme of Being and Non-Being, centered on the relationship between Being and Non-Being. The aim is to identify the theoretical foundation of Guō Xiàng’s proposition of “Inward Sage and Outward King” – Enlightened Rule of Kingship – within Daoist Metaphysics. Building on his theory of independent transformation, the thesis provides a detailed analysis of Guō Xiàng’s perspective on “Inward Sage and Outward King,” thereby gaining a profound understanding of Guō Xiàng’s philosophical ideas concerning the relationship between Being and Non-Being. Certainly, conducting a comprehensive

review of all published research materials and scholarly works related to this topic is both impractical and unnecessary.

Firstly, it is essential to thoroughly examine Guō Xiàng's original text of *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* from the Qing dynasty, authored by Guō Qìngfān. The original texts of Guō Xiàng, compiled and organized by Guō Qìngfān during the Qing Dynasty (Guo, 2012). The focus should primarily be on Guō Xiàng's annotations of the seven inner chapters of *Zhuāngzǐ*, namely *Free and Easy Wandering*, *Equality of All Things*, *Nurturing Life*, *Mundane World*, *Virtue as Fulfillment*, *Great and Venerable Teacher*, and *Advising Emperors and Kings*, conducting in-depth reading and analysis. This will provide insight into Guō Xiàng's perspectives on concepts such as Being and Non-Being, unity in diversity, and the notion of leisurely wandering. Moreover, it will enable an understanding of how Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas establish a theoretical foundation for reconciling the Confucian ethical code and the way of nature, culminating in the proposal of the "Inward Sage and Outward King" as a method of harmonization. Within the seven inner chapters, each chapter expresses different content, but there is a common and overarching theme – the pursuit of the meaning of life and the spiritual quest. *Zhuāngzǐ* employs numerous allegorical stories to expound its philosophical ideas, and through Guō Xiàng's annotations, his own metaphysical thoughts are elaborated upon, with a focus on a comprehensive analysis of the concept of Being and Non-Being. This serves to articulate his vision of "Inward Sage and Outward King" as a governing philosophy. Moreover, it is essential to supplement the study by also delving into the fifteen outer chapters and the eleven miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* to gain a deeper understanding of Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas.

In addition, for a more comprehensive study of Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas, it is essential to conduct readings of Wáng Bì's primary work, *Commentary and Annotations on Lǎozǐ's Dào Dé Jīng* from the Wèi dynasty, as edited by Lóu Yǔliè (Wang, 2008). Moreover, exploring Ruǎn Jí collected works are also crucial (Ruan, 1978). By comparing and analyzing the thoughts of Guō Xiàng, Wáng Bì, Péi Wěi, and Ruǎn Jí, particularly regarding the debate on the issue of Being and Non-Being, the relationship between Confucian ethical code and the way of nature, and the value of Non-Being idea of Wáng Bì and the value of Being concept of Péi Wěi, one can reveal the close connections that influenced the formation of Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas. Through the study of the classical philosophers mentioned above, further analysis of Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thoughts can be conducted. Guō Xiàng's ontology begins with the rejection of the idea of Being arising from Non-Being in Lǎozǐ's *Dào Dé Jīng*. Although this starting point appears similar to Péi Wěi's value of Being concept, the fundamental direction of Guō Xiàng's theory is fundamentally different. In Guō Xiàng's view, all things are naturally self-generated. Non-Being neither gives rise to the existence of all things nor dominates and supports their existence; the transformations of things are the results of self-transformation. Represented by Hé Yàn and Wáng Bì, certain thinkers emphasize the rule of the way of nature over Confucian ethical code, arguing that Confucian ethical code are rooted in the way of nature. On the other hand, represented by Jī Kāng and Ruǎn Jí, some philosophers contend that Confucian ethical code does not conform to the way of nature. Guō Xiàng's *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* provides theoretical evidence for the compatibility of Confucian ethical code and the way of nature.

During my research, in addition to studying classical texts, I have also consulted contemporary scholars' works on Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas. For instance, in the

book *Guō Xiàng and Wèi-Jìn Xuánxué*, Tang Yijie (2000) categorizes the developmental stages of Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* into five periods: the Zhèngshǐ period, the Zhúlín period, the Yuánkāng period, the Eastern Jìn period, and the early Táng period of the revival of *Xuánxué*. In this work, Tang conducts in-depth comparative analyses of Guō Xiàng’s philosophical categories alongside those of Xiàng Xiù, Péi Wěi, and Wáng Bì. By meticulously dissecting Guō Xiàng’s philosophical ideas within these fixed philosophical categories, the uniqueness of Guō Xiàng’s Metaphysics is thoroughly explored. In contrast, this thesis focuses on Guō Xiàng’s theory of “Inward Sage and Outward King,” exploring its unique expression in the relationship between “Being and Non-Being.”

In his book, Wang Xiaoyi (2006, 2011) explores the life and academic achievements of both Xiàng Xiù and Guō Xiàng from the perspective of their integration with social politics and intellectual culture. By presenting the historical development of metaphysical trends during the Wèi-Jìn period, he paints a vivid picture of the six decades of changes in metaphysical thought during that time. In contrast, this thesis places greater emphasis on Guō Xiàng’s specific philosophical viewpoints and their in-depth analysis of the relationship between “Being and Non-Being.”

In the work *A Modern Interpretation of Guō Xiàng’s Individualistic Philosophy*, Wang Xiaoyi provides a comprehensive and systematic introduction to Guō Xiàng’s philosophical ideas. Importantly, he places a strong emphasis on individualism and offers a contemporary interpretation and evaluation from the perspective of modern individuals and modern philosophy. However, this thesis focuses on the issue of the “Being and Non-Being” relationship in Guō Xiàng’s work, exploring its unique

expression within the theory of “Inward Sage and Outward King,” rather than being confined to an individualistic framework.

In Wang Shumin’s (1978, 2007) work, he meticulously examines the thirty-three chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, including textual criticism, explanations, the philosophical system, and various issues related to the *Zhuāngzǐ*. This comprehensive analysis greatly assists in our rigorous study of the *Zhuāngzǐ* text. However, this thesis not only focuses on textual verification but also delves into how Guō Xiàng’s theory integrates with the relationship of “Being and Non-Being,” leading to more logically coherent conclusions.

Kang Zhongqian’s (2013) main structure revolves around using Zhuang Zhou’s *Zhuāngzǐ* and Guō Xiàng’s *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* as source materials for problem exploration and philosophical insights. Through comparative research and interpretation, he delves into various aspects, such as *Zhuāngzǐ*’s life, the authenticity and structure of *Zhuāngzǐ*, the authorship of Guō Xiàng’s *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*, and the emergence of Wèi-Jīn *Xuánxué*. The book specifically explores the philosophical ideas of *Zhuāngzǐ* and Guō Xiàng from four dimensions: *Zhuāngzǐ*’s leisurely wandering perspective versus Guō Xiàng’s “Inward Sage and Outward King” perspective, *Zhuāngzǐ*’s Dào discourse versus Guō Xiàng’s theory of independent transformation, *Zhuāngzǐ*’s unity of all thing’s argument versus Guō Xiàng’s mutual causation theory. In comparison, this thesis focuses more on an in-depth analysis of Guō Xiàng’s theory of “Inward Sage and Outward King” in relation to the concept of “Being and Non-Being,” emphasizing its logical position within the philosophical system.

Ren Jiyu (1963, 1979, 1983), as the chief editor of *History of Chinese Philosophy*, delves into the origins and development of philosophical thought from China’s slave

society to the Shang Dynasty. The book provides a comprehensive and systematic account of Chinese philosophy from the perspective of historical evolution, including a dedicated section on Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas. Although the book is comprehensive and systematic, this thesis particularly emphasizes Guō Xiàng's unique insights on the issue of "being and non-being" and the historical context that shaped his philosophical thought during the Wèi-Jin Dynasties.

In *A New History of Chinese Philosophy*, Feng Youlan (1983, 1986) bases his research on Marxism and conducts an independent study of Chinese philosophy and culture. The book's content structure revolves around the fundamental themes of commonalities and distinctions, generality and particularity, which run through the history of Chinese philosophy. It achieves a balanced and cohesive integration of extensive and precise scholarships and presents a rigorous yet lively account of the subject matter. Building on this foundation, this thesis focuses on Guō Xiàng's philosophical thought, particularly how the theory of "Inward Sage and Outward King" reconciles the relationship of "being and non-being," rather than merely providing a linear narration of historical developments.

Among Taiwanese scholars, Lin Congshun's (1981) work is a detailed analysis of the historical significance of Guō Xiàng Zhuang's annotations, Guō Xiàng's life and the ambiguities surrounding the annotations, the societal reasons behind the emergence of Guō Xiàng's annotations, and various philosophical concepts. Lin (1981) includes the leisurely wandering principle, the theory of self-generation, the unity of all things' perspective, and the discussions on traces and mysteries. This thesis will compare the lost writings of Xiuxiu with Guō Xiàng's commentary on the *Zhuāngzǐ*, exploring the ideological connections between the two.

Huang Shengping (2007) studied commences with an investigation into the authorship of *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* and Introduction to *Zhuāngzǐ*. Following the path of innate nature theory, the book offers a comprehensive analysis of Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas, examining the concepts of innate nature and innate nature theory. Building upon this foundation, the book explores Guō Xiàng's perspectives on spiritual artifacts, the profound and mysterious, leisurely wandering, the realm of the sage, as well as his views on moral teachings, political history, and philosophy. The main content of the thesis constitutes an analysis of the inherent contradictions within Guō Xiàng's philosophical system, and the inevitability of his philosophical system being replaced by the thought systems of later Buddhist scholars and finally concludes with an evaluation of Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas. This differs from the focus of this thesis, which will delve more deeply into the logical relationship between "Being and Non-Being" and "Inward Sage and Outward King."

In the book *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guō Xiàng* by American sinologist, Ziporyn (2003) primarily introduces the philosopher Guō Xiàng within the context of Neo-Daoism. The article mentions that until now, most English publications on Guō Xiàng have mainly regarded him as a commentator on *Zhuāngzǐ*. However, Ziporyn (2003) deduces Guō Xiàng's own philosophical stance, liberating his philosophical viewpoints from the role of "merely" a commentator. He successfully demonstrates the unique philosophical significance of Guō Xiàng. Ziporyn's research reveals that Guō Xiàng has his own distinct Neo-Daoist philosophy, which significantly differs from other Neo-Daoist (especially Wáng Bì) and traditional Daoist philosophies (as seen in the philosophical viewpoints of the *Dào Dé Jīng* and the *Zhuāngzǐ*). In contrast, this thesis places greater emphasis on Guō Xiàng 's specific

theoretical construction and his position within the metaphysics of the Wèi-Jìn dynasties.

In Liu Xiaogan's article (2006), "From Transcending Carefree to Sufficient Carefree: A Discussion on Guō Xiàng 's Interpretation of the *Zhuāngzǐ*," the transformation between Zhuāngzǐ's concept of "transcending carefree" and Guō Xiàng 's "sufficient carefree" is explored. The article emphasizes that Guō Xiàng deepens the understanding and interpretation of Zhuāngzǐ's thought through these methods, contributing to the development of metaphysics during the Wèi-Jìn dynasties. My thesis mainly focuses on Guō Xiàng 's theory of "Inward Sage and Outward King" and its debate with "Being and Non-Being," while Liu's article is more concerned with the intrinsic transformation of the carefree concept and interpretive methods.

Taiwanese scholar Jian Guangming's (2013) work, "The Reception and Commentary on Guō Xiàng's 'Zhuāngzǐ' by Song Dynasty Scholars," analyzes the evaluations of Guō Xiàng 's commentary during the Song Dynasty, discussing its influence and criticisms. The article points out that Guō Xiàng 's annotations held significant status in the academic world at the time, sparking criticism and controversy. My thesis focuses on Guō Xiàng's philosophical thought and its debate with "being and non-being," whereas Jian's article emphasizes the historical context of Guō Xiàng's reception and commentary, without delving deeply into the theoretical implications of his work.

In "Ontological Thought and Its Implications in Chinese Philosophy: An Interpretation of the Structure and Constructive Logic of 'Ontology' with Wèi-Jìn Metaphysics as an Example," Kang Zhongqian (2014) explores the ontological thought in Chinese philosophy, highlighting the unity of "nature and the Way" as a core philosophical issue. He underscores the importance of Wèi-Jìn metaphysics in

ontology, particularly the debate between Wáng Bì's "noble non-being" school and Péi Wěi and Guō Xiàng's "noble being" school, suggesting that this debate reflects the limitations of metaphysical thinking in Chinese philosophy. My thesis emphasizes the complexity and diversity of the Daoist debate on "being and non-being" in ontology, especially how the transition from Lǎozǐ and Zhuāngzǐ to the ontological issues in Wèi-Jīn metaphysics occurs. While you focus on the historical context and theoretical evolution in detail, Kang's article leans more towards summarizing and analyzing the theoretical framework of ontological thought.

Wang Haicheng's (2013) work, "Distinctions Among the Miscellaneous School, New Daoism, and Huang-Lao Daoism: A Discussion on the Development of Pre-Qin Daoism," primarily analyzes the evolution of Daoist schools, particularly the relationship between Huang-Lao Daoism and Lǎozǐ-Zhuāngzǐ Daoism. He points out that the development of pre-Qin Daoism is not linear but rather a multi-threaded process. Wang criticizes the view that considers "New Daoism" as an extension of Huang-Lao Daoism, arguing that this classification is inaccurate. My thesis explores deeper philosophical issues in the ontology of Wèi-Jīn metaphysics, such as the formation of "unique transformation theory" and its debate with "being and non-being," while Wang's article focuses more on the historical traces and classification of Daoism, lacking in-depth analysis of ontology.

Liu Lifu's (2003) work, "The Debate on 'Being' and 'Non-being' and the Ontological Issues in Wèi-Jīn Metaphysics," explores the debate on being and non-being within Wèi-Jīn metaphysics, suggesting that the philosophy of the "noble non-being" school possesses ontological speculative capabilities, while the "noble being" school remains at the level of cosmological generation. He indicates that the debate between the two is not on the same plane, emphasizing the confusion between ontology

and cosmology. My thesis enriches the discussion of the “debate on being and non-being” by providing a broader historical context, particularly in how Guō Xiàng ‘s “unique transformation theory” integrates the contradictions between the two schools. Although Liu’s article discusses ontology, it does not deeply explore Guō Xiàng’s philosophical contributions.

Kang Zhongqian (2003), in his work *The Debate on Being and Non-Being: A Reinterpretation of the Ontological Thought in Wèi-Jìn Metaphysics*, delves into the discussion of “Being and Non-Being” within Wèi-Jìn philosophy. He argues that this debate reflects the intellectuals’ pursuit of spirituality in the context of social turmoil. Kang systematically outlines the differing positions of scholars such as Wáng Bì and Péi Wěi, emphasizing the significance of Wèi-Jìn metaphysics in the history of Chinese philosophy. This thesis focuses on Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical thought and his concept of “Inward Sage and Outward King,” while Kang Zhongqian places greater emphasis on the debate of “Being and Non-Being.” Additionally, this thesis employs a more diverse methodology, including literature analysis, historical analysis, and hermeneutics, making the research more comprehensive.

Taiwanese scholar Jiang Longxiang’s (2009) work, “A Discussion on Xiàng Xiù’s Ontological Thought,” examines Xiàng Xiù’s views on ontology, particularly his understanding of “non-being” and “being” in his commentary on the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The article argues that Xiàng Xiù’s thought shares similarities with Wáng Bì’s concept of “noble non-being,” but he aligns more closely with Guō Xiàng ‘s views regarding the ontological issues of cosmic generation. By analyzing Xiàng Xiù’s texts, the author asserts that Xiàng Xiù’s ontological thought is not merely a continuation of Wáng Bì but reflects an independent understanding. My thesis emphasizes the complexity and developmental context of the “debate on being and non-being” in Wèi-Jìn

metaphysics, while Jiang's article concentrates on Xiàng Xiù's individual thoughts and his relationships with Wáng Bì and Guō Xiàng. My thesis provides a broader historical background and perspective on philosophical evolution, whereas Jiang's discussion is relatively limited to the textual analysis of Xiàng Xiù.

Stephan Roth (2022), in his article "On the Problem of Freedom of Will in Schopenhauer," analyzes Schopenhauer's views on free will, emphasizing the contradiction between his deterministic stance and the concept of free will. He explores how Schopenhauer understands human behavior through motives and roles, arguing that free will is nearly unattainable within Schopenhauer's framework. My thesis focuses on Guō Xiàng's debate on "being and non-being" and his denial of a creator, while Roth's article primarily revolves around the problem of free will and determinism in Schopenhauer's philosophy. My research examines the concept of "unique transformation" in the context of Chinese philosophy, whereas Roth analyzes the complexities of free will within the framework of Western philosophy.

In the article "A Brief Analysis of Guō Xiàng's 'Debate on Being and Non-being' and His Idea of 'No Creator'," Li Zhonghua (1984) argues that Guō Xiàng's philosophy belongs to the "noble being" school, emphasizing the dialectical relationship between "being" and "non-being" while denying the existence of a creator, asserting that all things arise and transform by themselves. My thesis delves into Guō Xiàng's concept of "unique transformation in the realm of the mysterious" and its philosophical implications, while Lǐ's article is more summarizing, focusing mainly on an overview and explanation of Guō Xiàng's thought.

Liang Tao (2015), in "Guō Xiàng's Metaphysical Interpretation of 'Inward Sage and Outward King'," analyzes how Guō Xiàng integrates the concept of "Inward Sage and Outward King" with metaphysical thought, exploring its influence on Zhuāngzǐ's

ideas. The article points out that Guō Xiàng not only inherits *Zhuāngzǐ*'s thought but also provides a metaphysical interpretation, emphasizing the unity of morality and nature. My work focuses on the relationship between Guō Xiàng's notion of "non-intention and non-action" and the interplay of inner and outer realms, whereas Liáng's article places greater emphasis on the practical applications of "Inward Sage and Outward King" in moral governance. My research highlights the mutual relationship between individual spiritual realms and social governance, while Liáng concentrates on the historical evolution and influence of the theory.

Based on the aforementioned literatures, throughout both Chinese and foreign scholarship, it is evident that Guō Xiàng's metaphysics has become a significant subject of study for modern scholars exploring Daoist and Neo-Daoist philosophies. Despite the existing research on Guō Xiàng covering many aspects, there are still gaps. In my thesis, I present new findings and insights into Guō Xiàng's metaphysical realm, which I will analyze and explore further. Therefore, in order to conduct a thorough analysis of the concepts of "Being and Non-Being" and "Inward Sage and Outward King," this study will rely on numerous literary sources. It will investigate the historical background of the Wèi-Jìn period, aiming to identify the reasons behind the emergence of Guō Xiàng's philosophical ideas.

With Guō Xiàng's philosophical work *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* as the central focus, the thesis will compare the fragments of Xiàng Xiù's writings (many scholars studying Xiàng Xiù have mentioned that some fragmented articles of Xiàng Xiù have been preserved) with Guō Xiàng's *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*, analyzing the connection between Xiàng Xiù and Guō Xiàng's ideas. Furthermore, the thesis will conduct a comparative study of the main thinkers during the Wèi-Jin period, including Wáng Bì, Hé Yàn, Péi Wěi, and Ruǎn Jí, to provide logical, detailed, and in-depth

analysis and exposition of the “Being and Non-Being” and “Inward Sage and Outward King” concepts within Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical thoughts.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The three major concepts—Non-Being, Being, and independent transformation, as well as the ideals of “Inward Sage and Outward King”—constitute the engaged theories that will be explored, applied, and critically discussed throughout this study.

Non-Being refers to the philosophical notion that encompasses the absence of fixed existence, suggesting that true essence lies beyond tangible realities. It serves as a foundational concept in Guō Xiàng’s thought, indicating a space for potentiality and transformation. Being, in contrast, signifies the state of existence and actualization, representing the manifestation of entities in the world. Guō Xiàng’s interpretation of Being emphasizes its dynamic nature, where existence is constantly shaped by its relationship to Non-Being.

Independent transformation is the process through which individual entities develop their unique characteristics and self-definition. In the context of Guō Xiàng’s philosophy, independent transformation is crucial for understanding how beings attain their inherent nature and navigate the world, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of “Inward Sage and Outward King.” Through the examination of these concepts, this study will provide a comprehensive analysis of their interconnections and implications within Guō Xiàng’s metaphysical framework.

1.8 Research Methodology

To derive reasonable, objective, and historically accurate conclusions, the research must be based on a specific methodology. This not only helps to understand how the study is conducted but also allows others to assess the validity of the method and the

research topic. Ensuring the scientific rigor and systematic approach of the research is essential. The following subsections describe the research design, data collection, and data analysis methods operated in this research.

1.8.1 Research Design

This research primarily conducts theoretical analysis and evaluation of Guō Xiàng’s work, *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*, focusing on the “Being” and “Non-Being” relation and the concept of “Inward Sage and Outward King,” while considering their historical and cultural background. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative research method. This means the focus is on collecting textual and narrative data rather than numerical data.

1.8.2 Data Collection

In this study, data collection is a critical component. To comprehensively explore Guō Xiàng’s metaphysics, particularly the concepts of “Being” and “Non-Being” and the philosophy of “Inward Sage and Outward King,” a wide range of relevant literature has been gathered from various sources. Initially, essential Chinese texts such as Guō Xiàng’s *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* and Wáng Bì’s *Commentary on Lǎozǐ*, along with modern research papers, were obtained through academic databases like CNKI, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Airti Library and by manually searching books and journals in libraries. Additionally, historical documents such as the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* and the *Book of Jin* were consulted at university libraries to understand the social context of the Wèi-Jin periods.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the materials, I drew upon works by respected scholars and articles from well-regarded journals, focusing on both classic literature and the latest research findings, and encompassing diverse perspectives. The

collected materials were systematically organized by theme, period, and author. After categorizing, EndNote reference management software was used for electronic management. By evaluating the content, methodology, and citations, high-quality and reliable sources were filtered out, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analysis and research.

1.8.3 Data Analysis

In the study of Chinese philosophy, relying on a single method can render the analysis less objective and credible. Therefore, a range of analytical methods is necessary. In this thesis, I employ literature analysis, comparative analysis, hermeneutic methods, historical analysis, and logical reasoning.

1.8.3(a) Literature Analysis

Based on objective texts and historical sources, gather relevant writings and records of various thinkers. Through systematic reading and interpretation of existing literature, distill key viewpoints to deeply understand the research issues (Walsh & Downe, 2005). This study centers on examining the original texts of the *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ* and integrates contemporary research findings to construct a framework. The literature analysis method facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical content of Wèi-Jin metaphysical figures like Guō Xiàng and Wáng Bì, clarifying the developmental trajectory of their philosophical viewpoints.

1.8.3(b) Historical Analysis

The historical analysis method reveals the evolution and influence of philosophical ideas by tracing their historical development (Tosh, 2015). When

studying Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thoughts, this method involves analyzing the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts of the Wèi-Jìn periods to understand how the metaphysical trend emerged. It aims to comprehend why Guō Xiàng's ideas of the "debate on Being and Non-Being" and the "Inward Sage and Outward King" arose and developed during this time.

1.8.3(c) Comparative Analysis

The comparative research method deepens understanding by identifying commonalities and differences through the comparison of various philosophical schools or thinkers (Frankenberg, 2010). When studying Wèi-Jìn metaphysics, this method contrasts Guō Xiàng's views with those of other renowned scholars like Wáng Bì on the "debate on Being and Non-Being." It also compares Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* with other philosophical schools, such as Confucianism and Daoism. Additionally, it examines the similarities and differences between Wèi-Jìn *Xuánxué* and later Sòng-Míng Neo-Confucianism, exploring the inheritance and development of these ideas.

1.8.3(d) Hermeneutic Analysis

The hermeneutic method emphasizes deep reading and interpretation of philosophical texts to uncover their profound meanings and internal logic (Porter & Robinson, 2011). In studying Guō Xiàng's metaphysical thoughts, this method involves detailed textual analysis of classical works such as the *Lǎozǐ*, the *Zhuāngzǐ*, and Guō Xiàng's *Commentary to the Zhuāngzǐ*. It seeks to uncover the deeper meanings of concepts like the "debate on Being and Non-Being" and the "Inward Sage and Outward King." By thoroughly interpreting these texts, the hermeneutic method aims to reveal their philosophical logic and conceptual frameworks.