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The Wu Wei (inaction) Thought of Daoism and its Influence on German Literature in the 1920s

The thought of *Wu Wei* (inaction) is an important part of Daoism. In the aspect of governing the country, it means that the monarch should not act rashly to reach the realm of “when you need do nothing, there is nothing you cannot do”. In terms of individual behaviour, it contains the thoughts of transcending opposites, conforming to the laws of nature and complying with *Dao*. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, a large number of Chinese classical works were continuously introduced into the German – speaking world through the translation and publication of the scholars such as Richard Wilhelm. Consequently, an “oriental fever” represented by Daoism swept through the German intelligentsia. From the perspective of acceptance, this paper will start by recounting the historical background and will then analyze the reasons for the absorption of the idea of inaction in German literary circles from three perspectives: a national cultural introspection after the defeat of Germany in the World War I, the impact of western industrial civilization on German culture, and the rise of expressionist literature. In the aspect of influence, this paper will look closely at select German literary works of the 1920s such as *The Magic Mountain* and *Steppenwolf* in order to explore the embodiment, integration and alienation of the idea of inaction in these works, and then discuss its influence on German literature of that time.