

Abstract

The following dissertation presents itself in the frame of a synopsis of the *Laozi* consisting of the Wang Bi edition, the two Mawangdui silk texts and the three Guodian bamboo texts. These differing text versions are individually translated into German and followed with comments. In addition, I also offer the older English translations of D.C. Lau and Wing-Tsit Chan—and in special cases some more translations. This method is intended to stimulate further thought about the meaning of single characters and even whole sentences, but also about the interpretation of grammatical structures. The commentation directly following the Chinese text versions and their translations refers to individual characters and/or whole phrases as well as to the social criticism that can be found in the *Laozi*; indeed, a major focus of this work is, on a detailed philological basis, the socially critical attitude characterizing the *Laozi*. The purpose of the following dissertation is to expose and illustrate the complexity and coherency of this social criticism. This is done through numerous cross-references within the *Laozi*, accentuating connections between attitudes and concepts in the *Laozi* formerly not established and through quotations from an ideologically partly related text, the *Zhuangzi* (approximately 4th/3rd century B.C.). In its final evaluation this dissertation shows that the scruples expressed in the *Laozi* against civilization and its directions of development and against a concentration on knowledge cannot automatically be regarded as naive from a „modern“ point of view.