Translator's Preface

Despite the fact that at the present time modern inventions are bringing the world into closer and closer physical relation, the truth remains that serious intellectual barriers still exist to prevent mutual understanding between nations and peoples. Now, as so often in the history of the world, the development of mental contacts lags behind that of physical ones, and this at a time when the very existence of these rapid methods of communication makes a sympathetic understanding of other peoples all the more imperative.

Only too often it is still possible to find even notable western scholars making such statements as: "The Dark Ages in Europe brought the world to its lowest cultural level," quite oblivious to the fact that at that very period one of the most brilliant flowerings of human culture was taking place in China under the T'ang dynasty, and that the world's first printed book was produced in that country in the ninth century. Too many of us in the West still possess the viewpoint described by the Chinese Taoist philosopher, Chuang Tzu, as that of the well-frog, who could see only the little circle of sky above his well, and imagined this to be the whole world. For too many of us the cultural heritage of Greece and Rome is still the world, at a time when comparative studies of other civilizations are more needed than ever before, not only for gaining an understanding of these alien cultures, but also for the understanding of our own culture, which to-day stands in serious need of an impartial evaluation.

It is for such reasons that the present translation is offered, in the hope that it will show to the West how a Chinese scholar, who has had the advantage of western training, views the philosophy of his own country. The book is a translation of the first volume of the two volume work, Chung-kuo Che-hsüeh Shih 中國哲學史 (A History of Chinese Philosophy), by Dr. Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭, Ph.D. of Columbia University, and at the present time Professor of Philosophy at the National Tsing Hua University, Peiping. This first volume covers what is perhaps the most brilliant period of Chinese philosophy, extending from its earliest beginnings down to about 100 B.C., when Confucianism became orthodox. Of all works written on the subject, this one is certainly the most complete, and in many ways, it is hoped, one of the best. The second volume of the Chinese edition, not yet translated, continues the history of Chinese philosophy from this point down to the present day.

It will be noticed that the author, to a large degree, uses the method of direct quotation from original sources. This makes of his