

冯友兰
——著
赵复三译

中国哲学简史

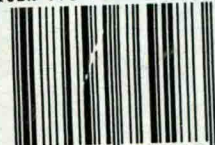
英文版

FUNG YU-LAN

A Short History of
Chinese Philosophy



ISBN 978-7-5447-6927-3



9 787544 769273 >

凤凰出版传媒网: www.ppm.cn

定价: 118.00元

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中国哲学简史 英文版

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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

中国哲学简史 / 冯友兰著; 赵复三译. —南京:
译林出版社, 2017.11
ISBN 978-7-5447-6927-3

I.①中… II.①冯… ②赵… III.①哲学史—中国—汉、英
IV.①B2

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2017) 第 099576 号

中国哲学简史 冯友兰 / 著 赵复三 / 译

责任编辑 许 昆
装帧设计 胡 彦
校 对 梅 娟
责任印制 董 虎

出版发行 译林出版社
地 址 南京市湖南路 1 号 A 楼
邮 箱 yilin@yilin.com
网 址 www.yilin.com
市场热线 025-86633278
排 版 南京展望文化发展有限公司
印 刷 江苏凤凰新华印务有限公司
开 本 889 毫米 × 1194 毫米 1/32
印 张 24.625
插 页 8
版 次 2017 年 11 月第 1 版 2017 年 11 月第 1 次印刷
书 号 ISBN 978-7-5447-6927-3
定 价 118.00 元

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译林版图书若有印装错误可向出版社调换, 质量热线: 025-83658316

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

A SHORT history of any subject should not simply be an abridgement of a larger one. It should be a picture complete in itself, rather than a mere inventory of names and "isms." To achieve this, the author should, as a Chinese expression says, "have the whole history in his mind." Only then can he give the reader an adequate and well-rounded account within his chosen limited scope.

According to Chinese historiography, a good historian must have wide scholarship in order to master all his materials, sound judgment to make proper selection of them, and literary talent in order to tell his story in an interesting way. In writing a short history, intended for a general public, the author certainly has less chance to display his scholarship, but he needs more selective judgment and literary talent than he would for writing a longer and strictly scholarly work.

In preparing this work, I have tried to use my best judgment in selecting what I consider important and relevant from materials which I have mastered. I was very fortunate, however, to have as editor Dr. Derk Bodde, who has used his literary talent to make the style of the book interesting, readable, and comprehensible to the Western reader. He has also made

suggestions regarding the selection and arrangement of the material.

Being a short history, this book serves as no more than an introduction to the study of Chinese philosophy. If the reader wishes to know more about the subject, I would refer him to my larger work, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. The first volume of this has been translated by Dr. Bodde, and he is now translating the second one; also to my more recent work, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Mr. E. R. Hughes of Oxford University. Both works are mentioned in the bibliography compiled by Dr. Bodde at the end of the present book. Acknowledgements are due to both Dr. Bodde and Mr. Hughes, from whose books I have borrowed some translations of the Chinese texts appearing herein.

In publishing this book, I welcome the opportunity of expressing my thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation for the grant which made it possible for me to come from China to the University of Pennsylvania as Visiting Professor during the year 1946-47, and which resulted in the writing of this book. Also, I wish to thank my colleagues and students in the Department of Oriental Studies for their cooperation and encouragement, and especially Dr. Bodde, Associate Professor of Chinese. I am likewise grateful to Dr. A. W. Hummel, Chief of the Asiatic Division, Library of Congress, for his encouragement and help in making arrangements for the publication of the book.¹

FUNG YU-LAN

June, 1947
University of Pennsylvania

¹ Dr. Bodde is now Professor of Chinese at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Hummel has become Chief Emeritus at the Library of Congress.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SPIRIT OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

THE place which philosophy has occupied in Chinese civilization has been comparable to that of religion in other civilizations. In China, philosophy has been every educated person's concern. In the old days, if a man were educated at all, the first education he received was in philosophy. When children went to school, the *Four Books*, which consist of the *Confucian Analects*, the *Book of Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, were the first ones they were taught to read. The *Four Books* were the most important texts of Neo-Confucianist philosophy. Sometimes when the children were just beginning to learn the characters, they were given a sort of textbook to read. This was known as the *Three Characters Classic*, and was so called because each sentence in the book consisted of three characters arranged so that when recited they produced a rhythmic effect, and thus helped the children to memorize them more easily. This book was in reality a primer, and the very first statement in it is that "the nature of man is originally good." This is one of the fundamental ideas of Mencius' philosophy.

Place of Philosophy in Chinese Civilization

To the Westerner, who sees that the life of the Chinese people is permeated with Confucianism, it appears that Confucianism is a religion. As a matter of fact, however, Confucianism is no more a religion than, say, Platonism or Aristotelianism. It is true that the *Four Books* have been the Bible of the Chinese people, but in the *Four Books* there is no story of creation, and no mention of a heaven or hell.

Of course, the terms philosophy and religion are both ambiguous. Philosophy and religion may have entirely different meanings for different people. When men talk about philosophy or religion, they may have quite different ideas in their minds concerning them. For my part, what I call philosophy is systematic, reflective thinking on life. Every man, who has not yet died, is in life. But there are not many who think reflectively on life, and still fewer whose reflective thinking is systematic. A philosopher must philosophize; that is to say, he must think reflectively on life, and then express his thoughts systematically.

This kind of thinking is called reflective because it takes life as its object. The theory of life, the theory of the universe, and the theory of knowledge all emerge from this type of thinking. The theory of the universe arises because the universe is the background of life — the stage on which the drama of life takes place. The theory of knowledge emerges because thinking is itself knowledge. According to some philosophers of the West, in order to think, we must first find out what we can think; that is to say, before we start to think about life, we must first “think our thinking.”

Such theories are all the products of reflective thinking. The very concept of life, the very concept of the universe, and the very concept of knowledge are also the products of reflective thinking. No matter whether we think about life or whether we talk about it, we are all in the midst of it. And no matter whether we think or speak about the universe, we are all a part of it. Now, what the philosophers call the universe is not the same as what the physicists have in mind when they refer to it.

What the philosophers call the universe is *the totality of all that is*. It is equivalent to what the ancient Chinese philosopher, Hui Shih, called "The Great One," which is defined as "that which has nothing beyond." So everyone and everything must be considered part of the universe. When one thinks about the universe, one is thinking reflectively.

When we think about knowledge or speak about knowledge, this thinking and speaking are themselves knowledge. To use an expression of Aristotle, it is "thinking on thinking"; and this is reflective thinking. Here is the vicious circle which those philosophers follow who insist that before we think we must first think about our thinking; just as if we had another faculty with which we could think about thinking! As a matter of fact, the faculty with which we think about thinking is the very same faculty with which we think. If we are skeptical about the capacity of our thinking in regard to life and the universe, we have the same reason to be skeptical about the capacity of our thinking in regard to thinking.

Religion also has something to do with life. In the heart of every great religion there is a philosophy. In fact, every great religion is a philosophy with a certain amount of superstructure, which consists of superstitions, dogmas, rituals, and institutions. This is what I call religion.

If one understands the term religion in this sense, which does not really differ very much from common usage, one sees that Confucianism cannot be considered a religion. People have been accustomed to say that there were three religions in China: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. But Confucianism, as we have seen, is not a religion. As to Taoism, there is a distinction between Taoism as a philosophy, which is called *Tao chia* (the Taoist school), and the Taoist religion (*Tao chiao*). Their teachings are not only different; they are even contradictory. Taoism as a philosophy teaches the doctrine of following nature, while Taoism as a religion teaches the doctrine of working against nature. For instance, according to Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, life followed by death is the course of nature, and man should follow this natural course calmly. But the main teaching of the Taoist

religion is the principle and technique of how to avoid death, which is expressly working against nature. The Taoist religion has the spirit of science, which is the conquering of nature. If one is interested in the history of Chinese science, the writings of the religious Taoists will supply much information.

As to Buddhism, there is also the distinction between Buddhism as a philosophy, which is called *Fo hsüeh* (the Buddhist learning), and Buddhism as a religion, which is called *Fo chiao* (the Buddhist religion). To the educated Chinese, Buddhist philosophy is much more interesting than the Buddhist religion. It is quite common to see both Buddhist monks and Taoist monks simultaneously participating in Chinese funeral services. The Chinese people take even their religion philosophically.

At present it is known to many Westerners that the Chinese people have been less concerned with religion than other people are. For instance, in one of his articles, "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Chinese Culture,"¹ Professor Derk Bodde says: "They [the Chinese] are not a people for whom religious ideas and activities constitute an all-important and absorbing part of life.... It is ethics (especially Confucian ethics), and not religion (at least not religion of a formal, organized type), that provided the spiritual basis in Chinese civilization.... All of which, of course, marks a difference of fundamental importance between China and most other major civilizations, in which a church and a priesthood have played a dominant role."

In one sense this is quite true. But one may ask: Why is this so? If the craving for what is beyond the present actual world is not one of the innate desires of mankind, why is it a fact that for most people religious ideas and activities constitute an all-important and absorbing part of life? If that craving is one of the fundamental desires of man-kind, why should the Chinese people be an exception? When one says that it is ethics, not religion, that has provided the spiritual basis of Chinese

1 *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 62, No. 4, pp. 293-9. Reprinted in *China*, pp. 18-28 (H. F. MacNair, ed.), University of California Press, 1946.