

Preface

This volume contains translations of a variety of essays and letters by the Qing-dynasty philosopher Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801). The selections were made with the aim of presenting a set of writings focused on Zhang's ideas concerning ethics and in particular the ethical dimensions of history, though of course this requires presenting material that represents Zhang's more general views as well, especially those on the nature and writing of history. The Appendix contains translations of two essays and a letter, all by the Tang-dynasty litterateur Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824); these served as models and goads for three similar works by Zhang, which can be found among the earlier selections. In each case, Zhang disagreed with Han Yu and presented his own writings as correctives to these earlier, well-known works. The Introduction to this volume contains a brief description of Zhang's life and ethical philosophy, as well as short introductions to each of his essays and letters contained in this volume. The short introductions to the various selections fill out and extend the earlier sketch of Zhang's ethical philosophy. The introduction is not intended to provide a complete account of Zhang's philosophy or even his ethics; its aim is to present some of the primary themes and arguments that inform Zhang's writings in order to set the stage for the translations that follow. Readers are encouraged to pursue further study of Zhang and his philosophy, beginning with the readings found in the notes.