Zhu Xi’s writings and recorded conversations constitute hundreds of chapters. In translating Zhu Xi into English, the translator must make choices. My choice here has been relatively easy. In “classifying” Zhu Xi’s conversations in the *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*, editor Li Jingde dedicated the first thirteen chapters to conversations explaining Zhu’s general philosophical system. Readers there are introduced to his metaphysics of principle (*lì*), psychophysical stuff (*qì*), spirit beings (*guìshén* 鬼神), human nature (*xìng* 性), mind-heart (*xīn* 心), and emotions (*qīng* 情); and to his program of self-cultivation—that is, the curriculum that Confucians should follow to attain moral perfection. These chapters, to my mind, constitute the best overview of Zhu Xi’s basic and most enduring philosophical teachings, and selections from them form the basis of this present volume. Occasionally, I supplement them with passages from the *Collected Works of Zhu Xi* and from Zhu’s commentaries on the Confucian Classics.

Li Jingde’s 1270 publication of the *Classified Conversations* was based on six earlier published collections of conversations recorded by Zhu’s disciples. In categorizing the 140 chapters of conversations into twenty-six general topics, he adopted the organization
of Huang Shiyi’s 黃士毅 (fl. 1196–1219) earlier collection of Zhu Xi’s conversations, published in 1215. The principle of organization in Li’s text thus is thematic, with no regard for chronology. As a consequence, a comment on human nature made in 1184, let’s say, may follow one made in 1196, yet precede one made in 1178. Each passage in the *Classified Conversations* lists the student-recorder’s name, and because the preface to Li’s volume provides the years each student studied under Zhu, we can roughly date the passages. Li himself sees no real benefit to providing approximate dates for each passage; neither do I. My selections from the thirteen chapters are presented largely in the order they appear in Li’s text, though I do infrequently move a passage from its original spot to another one if its philosophical significance is more clearly highlighted there. Chapter and page number indicating the location in the Chinese text are given for each passage.

Passages in the *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu* take a few different forms. The most common, perhaps, is the teaching or saying by Zhu Xi. In these, there is no mention of an interlocutor. Presumably, these were sayings taken down during or after a lecture by Zhu or during or after a conversation with him. Then there is the “conversation” with Zhu, in which typically an unnamed questioner poses a question and Zhu Xi responds. Last, there is the conversation in which multiple pupils are present, and the original question posed to Zhu is followed up by further questions. Usually, the questioner’s name is not recorded. The passage merely says, “someone asked.” When the name is recorded, I identify the questioner in a footnote only when he is a person of some note.

Because this is a record of teachings, Zhu typically would be addressing an audience of one or more particular students. We should assume that Zhu, like Confucius in the *Analects*, tailored his remarks to the particular student or group of students with whom he was speaking. His teachings here, then, are what we
might call “perspectival,” which is to say his response to questions about “reverential attentiveness” or “selfish desires,” for example, might be different on different occasions, depending on Zhu’s sense of the particular audience and its needs. Some apparent differences or inconsistencies should be expected.

In citing from the works of the Cheng brothers, Zhu sometimes specifies which of the two brothers, Hao or Yi, made the remark. At other times, though, he attributes the remark to “Master Cheng” without specifying the brother. In some instances, it may be that he does not know which brother is the author because the original records available to him provided no indication; in other cases it may be that, in his view, the remark reflects an idea held strongly by both brothers and that “Master Cheng” refers collectively to the brothers Cheng.

I follow the standard practice of providing characters for Chinese terms and names on their first occurrence. I have included a “Glossary of Key Terms” at the back of the book for reference.

As a record of conversations, the language in the Collected Conversations is considerably more vernacular and less stylized than what we find in Zhu Xi’s Collected Literary Works and commentaries on the Classics. This results in occasional difficulty, at least for this translator. At times, the language can be highly idiomatic, drawing on what are perhaps local expressions, and, in any event, not always readily intelligible. Then there are words like “this” and “that,” and “here” and “there,” whose referents are sometimes unclear because we do not see the gestures that accompanied the words. Nor can a record of conversations always capture the tone and inflection of voice that suggests irony, sarcasm, affirmation, criticism, and the like. These particular challenges aside, I do try to convey in the translation the more leisurely and colloquial tone of Zhu’s teachings here.

I base the translation on the Zhonghua shuju edition of the Zhuzi yulei published in 1986; I also consulted the Chuanjing tang
Notes on the Text and Translation

The references that appear at the end of each translated passage are to the Zhonghua shuju edition, simply because it is the most widely available and commonly cited edition of the text. So, taking 9.152 as an example: 9 refers to the chapter or *juan* 卷 number, and 152 to the page number. I have consulted earlier translations found in *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Wing-tsit Chan; *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary; *Zhu Xi: Selected Writing*, edited by Philip Ivanhoe; and *Shushi gorui* 朱子語類 [Classified conversations of Master Zhu], edited by Morohashi Testuji 諸橋轍次 and Yasuoka Masuhiro 安岡正篤. I have previously translated some of the passages here in *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from Master Chu, Arranged Topically* and in various articles; while I consulted them, I was eager to read the text with a fresh set of eyes and what Zhu called an “open mind.”
Zhu Xi