

PREFACE

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation, defended at the Rijksuniversiteit Leiden in 1993. Work on the dissertation started six years after I had left the learned environment of a university and entered upon a career in China business. Not long after completing the thesis, I returned to the fast-moving business world, and by the time this book appears in print, four more years will have been spent back in China.

Casting anxious glances at my watch while business 'windows of opportunity' open and close, it is good indeed to know that some things are timeless. They include my lasting appreciation for the intellectual training I received from Professors Wilt Idema and Erik Zürcher, of the Sinologisch Instituut in Leiden. Dr. Burchard Mansvelt Beck, also of the Sinologisch Instituut, bears the primary responsibility for having fired me with a love for early medieval Chinese studies. Jan Bouts, Martin Heijdra, Henri Kerlen, and J.S.A. van Oostveen always kept me on my *qui-vive*. As for others, the line between indebtedness and affectionate memory is blurred, and I am not sure I should in any way associate them with this publication.

It may not be amiss to express my thanks to the companies I have been working for in China. Janssen Pharmaceutica of Beerse, Belgium, supported part of my initial research; and, like my current employer Alcatel Câble France, put me in a position to witness a continuity in the attitudes that mark a Chinese individual's modulated loyalty to the political power of the day. Surprisingly many undertones in medieval Chinese prose find parallels in modern Chinese life. It has been exciting to discover how much one can derive from living here towards understanding how things were before. Speaking of continuity, my parents and my wife Wan Lin have been a source of moral support all along.

In the course of writing and revising the manuscript, I benefited from critical remarks by my supervisor, Wilt Idema; by Professor David R. Knechtges, of the University of Washington; and not least by Rita DeCoursey, whose meticulous editing corrected many an error and ironed out many an awkward phrase. For the final result, with all it contains in the way of imperfection, I alone am responsible.

Shanghai, summer 1997