

PREFACE

The original stimulus to study Triad ritual and mythology came from my last minute participation in a panel on the Triads at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Asian Studies in New Orleans in April 1991. The other members of this panel were David Ownby, Dian Murray, Mary Heidhues-Somers and Jean DeBernardi, and I have greatly profited from my discussions with them both in New Orleans and at other later meetings. Since then, I have worked intermittently on the present book, in addition to working on other projects which will also be submitted for publication in the near future. Most of the research for, and writing of, this book was carried out between February 1991 until the end of January 1994, as a Research Fellow of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences and working at the Sinological Institute of Leiden University, the Netherlands. The final version of this book was completed at the Sinologisches Seminar of Heidelberg University, Germany, during the second half of 1996, with some final additions in late March 1997 (mainly contained in the appendix to Chapter Nine) in order to take into account three recent Chinese publications with new interpretations and potentially important new sources.

The Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences has funded my frequent research trips abroad in a most generous manner. These included two months of very intense fieldwork (spread over three visits in the summer of 1992 and early 1993) in Southern China (Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Xiamen and Quanzhou regions in Southern Fujian). During these trips, I was able to attend scores of rituals and festivals, in order to build up a better feeling for, and comprehension of, the local religious and cultural context in which Triad lore once operated. Back in the Netherlands, I had the good fortune to witness various rituals performed by Overseas Chinese from the Cantonese cultural region. In the summer of 1991 I had the opportunity to share, for almost two months, in some of the daily life and ritual activities of the priests of two Buddhist temples in Tôkyô (including my former teacher at Kyûshû University, Professor Kawakatsu Mamoru). I wish to thank them

and all those wonderful people of Southern China for welcoming me into their religious world.

The assistance of Robin Ruizendaal (then of Leiden University), a student of Minnan society in southern Fujian and Taiwan with many years of local fieldwork experience, and his friends enabled me to use my short stays in China in a most fruitful way. In addition he also allowed me full usage of his extensive video footage on local rituals and festivals. Our intensive discussions in China and back in Leiden over the years have contributed in many ways to the understanding that I have reached in this book.

I wish to thank my (former) students and (former) colleagues at the Universities of Leiden and Heidelberg for many stimulating conversations over the last few years, especially Roel Jansen, Alexander Mayer and Rint Sybesma. Rudolf Wagner has twice come up with invaluable new materials concerning the Triads at a point when I was about to send this manuscript to a publisher. Among those who have read parts or all of one of the earlier versions of this book, I am especially grateful to Valerie Hansen of Yale University, Pauline Millington Ward of Dublin, Jens Tappe of Heidelberg University and Maria Huber of München University for their critical contributions. Among the many librarians who have assisted me in my bibliographical researches, I wish to thank especially all members of the library staffs of the Sinological Institute in Leiden (led by Joyce Wu) and the Sinologisches Seminar in Heidelberg (led by Thomas Hahn and, then, Annette Specht), Martin Heijdra of the Gest Library of Princeton University, Frances Wood of the British Library, and the staff of the Palace Museum Archives in Taipei. I have received additional financial support from Heidelberg University and the “Studiefonds Alle Negen” (a lineage organization in good Chinese fashion) for the final editing of my manuscript. Further intellectual and bibliographical debts have been indicated in my annotations.

I wish to dedicate this book to my family (Bibeth, Ken and Merijn) and its latest addition (Laurens), without whom life would be much less fun (although also considerably less exhausting). Guarding my computer, disks and other materials necessary for writing a book from the incessant attacks of our smaller children has not always been an easy task, in which I have been greatly assisted by Bibeth. Despite her ill health she has borne bravely with my scholarly

obsessions. If this book can count at all as a meritorious act gathering up some positive karma for me, I wish to transfer its merits to her as a minor contribution to her health. Of course, I am fully responsible for all mistakes, inconsistencies and omissions that still remain.

Heidelberg, April/November 1997