

Ritual is Theatre, Theatre is Ritual: Spirit Medium Worship. (2006).
Singapore: Wee Kim Wee Centre and SNP Reference.

“In this fascinating book, Margaret Chan demonstrates that spirit mediumship is a vibrant religious practice that is undergoing energetic renewal in contemporary Singapore. An accomplished actress herself, she explores the theme that ritual is theatre, and theatre is ritual.

The book richly documents the history and ritual background to spirit mediumship, but also its dramaturgical dimension, including music, movement, costumes, make-up, weapons, props and training. This book will of interest to the general reader and the specialist alike.” – Jean DeBernardi, Professor of Anthropology, The University of Alberta.

Tang-ki worship is a ‘living dinosaur’. The Minnan ritual-theatre features dramatic acts of self-mortification, and this blood-letting tells of primeval roots. The origins of *tang-ki* spirit medium worship lie in ancient pre-Chinese animism more than 5,000 years ago, but the practice is alive and ever evolving today.

Tang-ki worship is a signifying cultural performance of the Hokkien people, the largest community of the Chinese diaspora who live mainly in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, yet the worship has attracted scant scholarly attention largely because it is perceived by the educated as a superstitious practice of illiterates.

There are no sacred texts, nor canons, nor dogmas in *tang-ki* worship. Margaret’s investigation into *tang-ki* worship is seminal and reveals aspects of *tang-ki* worship that hitherto have never been recorded. These include; the drama and the history of *tang-ki* worship, the costumes, make-up, and props used in performance, the religious signification of *tang-ki* rituals, the notion of *tang-ki* training and the performance scripts used by *tang-kis*. The social dynamics of *tang-ki* worship as communal theatre is also discussed and a provocative hypothesis as to the religious nature of traditional Chinese theatre forms is argued. It is held that the very act of theatre, the taking on of an image by an actor, is a transmogrifying ritual where a mortal transforms into a god.

Margaret Chan’s *Ritual is Theatre, Theatre is Ritual* is a definitive work on *tang-ki* spirit medium worship.

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