A Study of Amateur Teochew Opera Groups in Singapore

Abstract

Most studies of traditional opera published in Chinese focus on the historical aspects of the genre. In those studies which deal mainly with the social and cultural aspects of Chinese communities have rarely been touched upon the phenomenon of organised music-making by amateur groups. Such studies on traditional Chinese opera or musical groups have yet to emerge as a major topic of interest, especially in the academic circles of the West. The aim of this Honours Thesis is therefore, to provide an exploratory and descriptive insight of the cultural life and social aspects of the Chinese community through the study of the role of amateur Teochew opera groups in Singapore.

Today many significant studies in ethnomusicology involve urban venues of music and musical culture because of the coming of the mass media and the immense impact of westernisation and modernisation upon the musical life of the world. The investigation carried out involves three phases. The first phase was the actual gathering of materials through carrying out a fieldwork study of 5 main amateur Teochew opera groups in Singapore. This fieldwork was conducted through face-to-face and telephone interviews and administering of survey forms. Data was collected in both written (fieldwork notes and surveys) and visual (photographs) forms. The second phase of investigation was the transcription, tabulation and analysis of the materials gathered. Lastly, the final phase was the interpretation of results obtained.
This study of the amateur Teochew opera groups shows the importance of the traditional operatic activities in constructing the identities of the Singaporean Chinese at different levels. Despite the immense impact of globalisation, local musical organisations survive by adapting modern technologies in their performance practices.