Abstract

As a branch of the World Chinese literature, Singapore Chinese poetry has been playing a key role in representing the island nation through continuous, versatile expressions of the feelings and thoughts of its people. The success of such representation comes not only from the conscious endeavours of each individual poet, but also from the team efforts of the May Poetic Society, the one and only official poetic organization since Singapore attained its independence from Malaysia in 1965. As such, it is important to study the development of the May Poetic Society if one wishes to better understand the development of Singapore Chinese poetry. Regrettably, there is not much attention paid to exploring the subject so far. To fill this gap, a critical and systematic research is needed. Thus comes this thesis.

This thesis begins with an introductory chapter that outlines the objectives and methodology of research. Basically, my investigation focuses on the poet-members and various publications of the May Poetic Society, relying heavily on resources like reports and news cuttings of the Society and its members. In order to obtain more information, I personally interviewed eight core-members of the Society and compiled detailed reports of these interviews.
The second chapter first offers an overview of the development of Malaya and Malaysian Chinese literature, since it is herein where Singapore Chinese poetry find its origin. It then describes in details the establishment of the May poetic Society, its aims, membership, major publications such as the 33 issues of *May Poetic Magazine* and a series of 22 monographs, as well as activities it organised over the past 24 years, which include Poetry’s Night, seminars on poetry, and recitation of works.

I devote the first part of the third chapter to discussing the debate between supporters of two literary camps, Realism and Modernism, during the 1960s, for it was under such circumstance that the latter established the May Poetic Society. I then spend the second part surveying the poetics of the members, which, though is diverse with their exploration of a wide range of themes, can be generally described as one of Modernism. Of the 23 members, 5 representative ones are discussed here.

Chapter Four proceeds to study the problems facing the May Poetic Society after a period of active participation during the 1980s. These include difficulty in finding new blood, sustained financial pressure, hostile environment for poetic writing, as well as decreased individual productivity because of ageing. Suggested solutions to these problems by the interviewed members are enumerated before the chapter ends.
In the final chapter, I conclude that the May Poetic Society holds an important place in the history of Singapore Chinese poetry. The Society comprises members who form the core of the Chinese poetic circle of Singapore. They are the major poets who produced most of the influential works in the past 20 years. The Society also provided better opportunity and space for the Singapore Chinese poets to publish their works, and made them available to other parts of the world. Singapore Chinese poetry would not have come to such a flourishing state if not for the existence of the May Poetic Society.