ABSTRACT

There have been many different types of Chinese associations that sprouted up in Singapore over the years. Generally, these associations serve as spiritual sustenance for early Chinese immigrants in Singapore by keeping in close contact with their homelands in China. Thau Yong Amateur Musical Association is a rather special one that once dwelled in traditional Chinese folk music and drama, respectively known as Waijiangyue (also widely known as Ruyue or Hanyue) and Waijiangxi (also known as Hanju). The prefix Waijiang implies that this genre of music and drama did not originate from the Teochew districts of China, but it was revered as having a high level of cultural value and highly popular among the Teochews. The homegrown Teochew music did not even radiate this charisma.

Composed largely of Teochews, Thau Yong Amateur Musical Association started off 72 years ago, mainly indulging in Waijiangyue and Waijiangxi activities. Pioneers of the association had originally wanted a simple place to play music for leisure, but having formed a musical association meant many things later. The association and its medium (in this case, Waijiangyue) served numerous functions in the Singapore Chinese society. Apart from being provided a proper pastime and satisfying the members’ passion for the music, this music put its fans in favourable light of being refined and cultured. Through music and drama, the association raised funds for the war-torn China in the late 1930s and 1940s, and at the same time, created a homely ambience to its members – mostly Chinese immigrants whose families were still back in China.
In the late 1940s through the 1950s, political changes in China and Singapore affected the Chinese society. Coincidentally, *Waijiangxi* began to slowly lose its charm among the Teochews during this period of time. On the other hand, Teochew Wayang became increasingly popular. In 1962, the association then switched to performing Teochew Wayang. The relationship between the association and the music seemed to have mutated ever since. Today, although *Waijiangyue* is still being practiced among some of the old members, its meanings and functions are never the same as before.

This thesis attempts to look back into how the association and its music had worked together to serve its purpose in the Singapore Chinese society and how the relationship between them evolved through time and changes. What the relationship has turned into today and the functions that both still serve are looked into as well. Through the functions and changes in the relationship, this thesis seeks to understand the changes and development of the Singapore Chinese society better. Due to the lack of written records on the activities of the association, this thesis will be based largely upon oral history interviews and fieldwork observation.