Abstract

This Academic Exercise is a study of the evolution and development of the Chinese Ritual of Adulthood. It looks into the evolving rituals practised by the Chinese and their changes in function since Ancient China.

Earliest information on ancient adulthood rites and customs is recorded in the Yili (仪礼), Liji (礼记) and Jiali (家礼). Research works from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong will be consulted in this thesis. Studies in rituals practised in Singapore are based on oral interviews conducted by myself and the transcripts of oral interviews conducted by members of the National Archives.

The Ritual of Adulthood is considered as one of the four important moments of a person’s life besides birth, marriage and death. However, due to the evolution of time, the Ritual of Adulthood is no longer practised by the Chinese in present China. In Singapore, the Ritual of Adulthood has never been practised by the Chinese until the Singapore Chong De Association revived the tradition in May 1997. Before that, there were only some family rites with similar functions practised by the Teochews in Singapore.

Besides comparing the rites of the traditional and modern adulthood rituals, this thesis also provides the answers to the mysteries behind the sudden reappearance of this traditional ritual in Singapore and its disappearance in China. The findings of this thesis will help to shed light on the perpetuation of Chinese traditions, as they have sought to uncover the question of how a tradition develops and eventually dies out.