Abstract

Together with Chinese schools and Chinese newspapers, voluntary association is one of the three major pillars of Chinese communities. Upon Singapore's independence, the education system was unified under the Ministry of Education (MOE) while newspaper closely reflect views of the government. Interestingly, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI), being the largest and most influential business cum occupational voluntary or civic association ever since its establishment in 1906, although devoid of political influences, is still able and allowed to maintain a certain level of distinctiveness and acts as a bridge between the government, business people and Chinese community at large.

Though individual studies based on the Chinese community and its leaders before Singapore's painful and unwanted independence in 1965 abound, there is a dearth of intensive and analytical examination of Chinese civic associations and their relations to the changing external environment in post-independence.

The purpose of this thesis is to study analytically the structure, leadership, roles and functions of SCCCI as a civic association from 1965 till the present, the means by which it influences the majority of the population and how international, societal changes have modified it.

This is definitely a worthwhile topic to be dealt upon as very little research has been done before. As such, in the process of writing this thesis, I rely mostly on primary sources: SCCCI commemorative magazines; economic magazines; directories of council members; articles from local newspapers and magazines regarding SCCCI and its directors' activities, speeches; National Archives's microfilms on SCCCI committee meeting minutes. Secondary sources on the history of Singapore, its economic, cultural, political and social changes and the Chinese community are yet another source of reference. In addition, I have consulted and conducted interviews with Mr Foong Choon Hon, SCCCI Senior Director of Culture and Community Affairs, and Mr Chan Yen Teng, head of administrative of Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations.

It is hoped that this thesis will help de-mystify the simple assumption that a strong government in modern days necessarily results in weak civil associations and serve to sparkle some interest among researchers to further their studies.