ABSTRACT

Teochew Music clubs had been around Singapore since the early Twentieth century. The first of its kind, Er Woo Amateur Musical and Dramatic Association, was founded in 1912, and by 1935, there were altogether four Teochew musical clubs serving the Teochew community. Today, only two of the four musical clubs remained, and musical activities had undergone transformation to cater to the needs of the new generation of Teochew people in Singapore.

Few studies had been made on Teochew amateur musical clubs (which was known as ‘ruyueshe’) in Singapore which inherited its form from Teochew China. Although these musical clubs were patronised by Teochew people, their core musical activities had concentrated on Hanju (or Waijiang Xi in Teochew Colloquial term), which was also known as ‘ruyue’ in Teochew China, meaning ‘music of the literati’. When ‘ruyueshe’ were brought to Singapore in the early twentieth century, it immediately caught the eyes of Teochew merchants in Singapore. They not only actively used it as a place for cultural activities, networking and entertainment, but later used it as a charitable ground to raise relive funds for disaster and war-stricken places in China with Hanju performances. But in 1960s, Teochew music clubs lost its old charm among the new generations of Teochew people in Singapore and thus, have to change its activities to Teochew opera to attract them. This thesis uses Er Woo Amateur Musical and Dramatic Association as a case study, aiming to study the social and cultural identity of different generations of Teochew people in Singapore, from the early twentieth century to mid twentieth (1960s).

As few written records on Er Woo Amateur Musical and Dramatic Association were available, empirical data and theoretical framework of this study were based largely on oral history interviews with active members from the music clubs, fieldwork observation and extant found in the music clubs.

This thesis begins by tracing the historical development of Er Woo Amateur Musical and Dramatic Association and the social background of the founders. Discussions were then focused on the members’ composition, musical activities, Confucian worship, and geopolitical of the association. And finally, the role played by Er Woo Amateur Musical and Dramatic Association in Singapore Teochew community in different historical period was also looked into.