ABSTRACT

Although poetry constituted an important component in Chinese new literature of Malaya and Singapore during the pre-war (1919-1942), little scholarly work has been done on this genre. This deficiency is caused either by the limited use of first-hand materials or one-sided perspective that tends to oversimplify the issues under consideration. As a result, there has been no new breakthrough in the studies of Chinese new poetry in pre-war Malaya and Singapore.

This dissertation aims at filling this gap by focusing on the continuities and transformations of Chinese poetry in pre-war Malaya and Singapore. It makes extensive use of primary sources that have been rarely used before. These materials are composed of Chinese newspaper supplements and magazines, most of which are located in the Central Library of the National University of Singapore.

In addition to the Introductory and Concluding chapters, this dissertation is organized into three main sections. The introduction explains the objectives, approaches, and significance of this study. The first section consists of two chapters and is concerned with the background and development of Chinese poetry. Chapter 1 is a brief description about the social background and literary condition under which Chinese poetry developed. Chapter 2 outlines the evolution of Chinese poetry during the pre-war period.

Section 2 focuses on the mentality of the poets. Chapter 3 to 5 examine different poets’ concerns and ideals, attitudes toward their hometowns and families, romantic love and friendship.
Section 3 is mainly concerned with the development and characteristics of the poetic forms. Chapter 6 to 10 analyse the changes and developments of Free Verse, Prose Poem, Folk Lyric, Rhymed Poem, Short Poem and Pictographic Poem during the pre-war period. It is hoped that this analysis would help a better understanding on the complex relationship between Chinese poetry in Malaya and Singapore and traditional and modern poetry from Mainland China, the West, and Pantun Malayu.