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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Mr Lee Yock Suan, 22 May 2000, 7 pm

Singapore Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR LEE YOCK SUAN, MINISTER FOR INFORMATION & THE ARTS AND MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, AT THE LAUNCH OF "THE SELECTED POEMS OF PAN SHOU" ON 22 MAY 2000 AT 7.00PM AT SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

I am pleased to be here this evening to commemorate the achievements of Singapore's foremost calligrapher and poet, the late Pan Shou, and to launch a special publication of his poems which have been translated for younger readers.

2 The artistic achievements of Pan Shou and his contributions to Singapore's literary and cultural scene are well known. Not only was he an outstanding calligrapher with a beautifully distinctive style, he was also a great poet, whose reflections on life and history flowed effortlessly and with great depth of feeling from his brush.

3 Pan Shou has been honoured many times both at home and abroad for his achievements. He was a Cultural Medallion winner in 1986 and the first calligrapher and poet in Singapore to have been awarded the Meritorious Service

Medal by the President in 1994. Today, his works are appreciated not only through publications and exhibitions, they can be seen all over Singapore – from the masthead of the *Lianhe Zaobao* to the inscriptions on our public buildings and monuments.

4 In 1997, BG George Yeo then Minister for Information and the Arts, felt that many Singaporeans would not be able to grasp the full meaning of Pan Shou's poetry because of his classical style and use of traditional Chinese characters. The National Arts Council and *Lianhe Zaobao* therefore agreed to jointly publish the *Selected Poems of Pan Shou* with translations in modern Chinese and English. In doing so, Pan Shou's writings would be accessible to all Singaporeans, particularly our younger readers.

5 The poems that have been selected contain a distinct local flavour but the themes are contemporary and enduring. Each poem is reproduced in traditional Chinese accompanied with *hanyu pinyin* annotations as well as translations in *baihuawen* and English. A school student or anyone interested in his poems can therefore enjoy his words without having to repeatedly refer to a dictionary. The process of reading, learning and understanding the meaning and spirit of Pan Shou's poetry should be a natural and enjoyable journey.

6 When we speak of Chinese classical poetry, historical figures such as Li Bai come to our minds. Yet, in our midst, we had a poet whose works are greatly admired by scholars and poets in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Taiwanese Liu Taixi once praised Pan Shou's original use of rhyme, saying that he was able to achieve something which "no one in the past had ever thought of"

7 The British and Americans have their poets laureates whose works are taught and read widely. Some of our students are able to quote from Wordsworth or Tennyson. We need to create our own cultural heroes – heroes whom future generations of Singapore can be proud of and be inspired by. Their works should live in the collective memory of our people. I hope that our secondary schools and junior colleges will help us in encouraging a sense of respect and appreciation for the works of Singaporean artists amongst our students.

8 Today, I also take great pleasure in naming an orchid hybrid after the late

Pan Shou in commemoration of his lifetime achievements and contributions to the cultural life of Singapore. This is the first time in which an orchid hybrid has been named after a Singapore artist. The National Parks Board has specially selected a hybrid with distinct glossy maroon petals to represent Pan Shou's endless variety of brush strokes, which used to flow as if they had a life of their own. I hope the calligraphy and poetry of Pan Shou will live on in the hearts and minds of Singaporeans.

National Archives of Singapore