PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

NAS LAUNCHES NANQIAO JIGONG: THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF NANYANG DRIVERS AND MECHANICS WHO RETURNED TO CHINA DURING THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR

Singapore, 20 October - What do drivers and mechanics have in common, besides being proficient in handling vehicles? In the case of many Nanyang Chinese who returned to China to serve as drivers and mechanics during the Sino-Japanese War in the late 1930s, it was a common love for their motherland that propelled them to give up higher-salaried jobs, the comforts of home and even their lives. Their heroic spirit of self-sacrifice played a pivotal role in China's war relief efforts.

The National Archives of Singapore (NAS), the State Archives Administration of China (SAAC) and the Yunnan Provincial Archives (YPA) proudly present this poignant story of the sacrifices made by the volunteers in this travelling exhibition, which previewed in Yunnan and launched in Beijing earlier this year. The Singapore leg of the exhibition will be launched on Tuesday, 20 October 2009 at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) Auditorium by Mr Baey Yam Keng, Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC and Deputy Chairman of MICA Government Parliamentary Committee.

Compared to the previous two launches in China, the exhibition in Singapore adds a local perspective to the story of the volunteers by giving the historical background of the overseas Chinese who responded in aid of China's defence. Drawing from hundreds of hours of its oral history interview recordings, NAS has incorporated personal accounts by local volunteers who survived the long road to China, making the exhibition much more humanly compelling. It will also feature quality displays of digitally restored and enhanced historical photographs taken during the war. In total, more than 300 historical photographs culled from more than two archives will be on display.

National Archives of Singapore

Signing of Agreements to Enhance Stronger Ties and Collaborations

The opening ceremony will also witness the signing of two agreements in archives cooperation, a further testament to NAS' strong ties with its Chinese counterparts and its local partners in the heritage scene:

(i) Collaborative Project Agreement on Oral History between NAS and YPA;
(ii) Archival Preservation Agreement between NAS and SCCCI.

The first agreement provides the platform for NAS to share its expertise in oral history methodology, which it has developed over the last 35 years, with its Yunnan counterpart. Based on best practices and standards adopted by international archival institutions, this methodology will help YPA to systematically document the history and oral traditions of the 25 indigenous minority tribes in Yunnan, many of whom have only a spoken language with no written form. The second agreement completes the preservation and conservation efforts undertaken by NAS for SCCCI's archival collection. It will see the transfer of 1,338 original records consisting of both paper and audio-visual records from the SCCCI to NAS' repositories, which offer the perfect environment for the protection of precious records – with the repositories' purpose-built stringent controls on temperature, humidity and chemical filtration[1] that meet international standards. Both agreements also demonstrate the trust and confidence that international and local institutions have on NAS' expertise in oral history and in the preservation and conservation of historical records.

The exhibition launch will also see Chinese and local donors, as well as oral history interviewees who have contributed their photographs and time in giving oral history interviews on the topic of Nanyang volunteers being honoured with Certificates of Appreciation. Two of the donors are descendants of the volunteers who are now living in China.

As the current chair of the Southeast Asian Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (SARBICA) and given its established links with archival institutions in this region, the NAS will promote and interest its Southeast Asian counterparts to travel the exhibition in the region. The NAS feels that the theme of the exhibition will be meaningful and connect to the audiences in these countries, given that some of the volunteers were recruited from within the region.

The exhibition is free and will be opened to the public until Sunday, 25 October 2009, from 9 am to 6 pm daily. It will be travelling thereon and available online at a later stage. For enquiries on the exhibition, please contact Mr Stanley Tan (DID: 63325640) or Ms Kwok Toi Chi (DID: 63327912) from National Archives of Singapore.

National Archives of Singapore

- *For details on the exhibition, agreements, partnership and donors/collectors/oral history interviewees, please refer to* ***Factsheet****.*

End

[1] To protect against air-pollution

Exhibition Details
Date : 20 October 2009 (Tuesday)
Time : 10.45 am to noon
Venue: Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Auditorium
47, Hill Street

About National Heritage Board
The National Heritage Board (NHB) champions the development and promotion of a vibrant cultural and heritage sector in Singapore. It makes heritage enriching, relevant and accessible to all through staging innovative programmes and forging partnerships. NHB leverages on technology and refreshing new approaches to make heritage more dynamic, alive and exciting. It also manages both national and public museums, the National Archives of Singapore, and the Heritage Conservation Centre. NHB was formed on 1 August 1993 as a statutory board under the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA).

About National Archives of Singapore
Established in 1968, the National Archives of Singapore (NAS) collects and manages the nation's public and private historical records, some of which date back to the 18th century. Within its wealth of documented heritage are records of key decisions, policies and legal obligations of the Singapore government, as well as the social experiences of our citizens. The archives holdings are preserved in two purpose built repositories with controlled environment for long term preservation. A total of 1.39 million archival records were accessed in Financial Year 2007. Besides collecting and housing historical material in various media such as text, photograph, film, video and audiotape, NAS also facilitates research and promotes public interest. NAS engages the public through travelling exhibitions, publications (both print and IT) and its award-winning portal called Access to Archives Online or "a2o" (www.a20.com.sg).

National Archives of Singapore

For media enquiries, please contact:

Jarrod Fernandez
Manager
Corporate Communications
National Heritage Board
DID: (65) 6332 3223
Mobile: 9831 0927
Email: jarrod_fernandez@nhb.gov.sg

Fact Sheet

"Nanqiao Jigong: The Extraordinary Story of Nanyang Drivers and Mechanics Who Returned to China During the Sino-Japanese War"

Part I : About the Exhibition
Part II : About the Two Agreements
PART III : About NAS' Partners
PART IV : About Donors, Collectors and Oral History Interviewees
PART V : About SARBICA

Part I: About the Exhibition

- **Where did the exhibition travel to prior to the launch in Singapore?**

Prior to travelling to Singapore[2], a preview of the exhibition was held in Kunming, Yunnan on 14 August 2009 and the China leg of the exhibition was officially launched in Beijing on 3 September 2009. The exhibition was well-received in Yunnan and in Beijing, with many visitors to the Yunnan exhibition[3] requesting for an extension to the exhibition dates.

- **How did the exhibition come about? What is NAS' contribution to the exhibition?**

The NAS and its Chinese counterpart, the SAAC, enjoy warm and close relations since the 1990s. This relationship was brought to a new level when both archival institutions decided to formally seal and declare their commitment to strengthen cooperation in archives management with the signing of a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) and Executive Programme in 2000[4]. The agreements led to many professional initiatives and exchanges between archivists from Singapore and China, including training attachments for archivists, conservation workshops and joint research projects, such as the use of iron gall ink to preserve historical manuscripts. The MOU has since been renewed several times, the latest being in July 2008, testifying to the continuation of strong ties between both archival institutions.

National Archives of Singapore

The exhibition marks the first of many collaborative efforts under the MOU signed in 2008. It brought together senior officials and archivists from the NAS and the YPA, which has rich holdings of historical materials relating to the exhibition theme. To complement the photographs and archival materials from the YPA, the NAS shared its own photograph collection and research on the topic that it has built over the years.

---

[2] The story of the China Relief Fund movement and the recruitment of volunteers began in the late 1930s in Singapore.
[3] The Yunnan preview lasted for three days.
[4] In 2000, the MOU and Executive Programme were signed between NHB (on behalf of NAS) and SAAC. Subsequent MOUs with SAAC were signed by NAS.

For the Singapore leg of the exhibition, the NAS has also tapped on its technical expertise and experience in mounting and travelling exhibitions. Old historical photographs that were taken during the war period with poor physical conditions were digitally enhanced to enable the story to be told in a more engaging manner. The NAS also drew from its rich holdings of more than 100 hours of oral history interview recordings on the topic and incorporated the personal accounts by local volunteer drivers and mechanics who survived the long road to China into the exhibition's storyline.

- **What is the significance of the exhibition?**

The exhibition demonstrates not only the close relationship that NAS enjoys with its Chinese counterpart, but also on how historical archives are being actively deployed to enable the public to better understand and be aware of the lesser-known parts of Singapore's history - without which, part of our past memories which link us to China will be lost to the public.

- **What does the exhibition showcase?**

The joint exhibition tells the extraordinary story of some 3,200 volunteers – many from Singapore and Malaya who, fired by patriotism, worked as truck drivers and vehicle mechanics along the 1,146-km Yunnan-Burma Road, which became a key supply route after the eastern seaboard of China fell to Japanese control in the late 1930s.

The exhibition is divided into three broad sections. A brief synopsis of each section is given as follows:

<u>Section I – Historical Setting</u>

By the 1930s, Japan made it part of its national policy to be "protector and leader of East Asia" via two fronts – "Northern Road" (Manchuria and Russia) and "Southern Road" (Southeast Asia). After occupying Manchuria and setting up the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932, Japanese imperialism reached fever pitch, leading to the Marco Polo Bridge incident on 7 July 1937 which marked the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

National Archives of Singapore

<u>Section II – China Relief Funds</u>

The outbreak of war led to rising patriotism among the overseas Chinese in Nanyang (Southeast Asia). In Singapore, community leaders like Tan Kah Kee helped set up the Singapore China Relief Fund Committee (SCRFC) on 15 August 1937 to collect donations for the Chinese war of resistance. The leadership of the SCRFC cut across *"bang*", or dialect group lines and also gained wide public support; rich and poor made donations ranging from thousands of dollars to mere cents, while students sold paper flowers and drama and music troupes put up performances to raise funds. A year later, Tan Kah Kee helped found the Southseas China Relief Fund Union (SCRFU), a body made up of representatives from British North Borneo, Burma, Cambodia, Dutch East

Indies, Hong Kong, Malaya, the Philippines, Sarawak, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam to coordinate fund-raising efforts across Nanyang.

Section III – Nanqiao Jigong: Volunteer Drivers and Mechanics from Nanyang

With most of its port cities like Shanghai and Amoy already under enemy control, the fall of Canton in October 1938 left China with its shipping routes almost completely cut off. With a new overland route from Lashio town of Burma to Kunming city of Yunnan, China opening soon, the Chinese government found itself in short supply of experienced drivers and mechanics to help transport key supplies to Chinese troops. Tan Kah Kee was contacted to send qualified personnel from Nanyang; eventually, some 3,200 volunteers in nine batches returned to China between February and August 1939. They underwent a month-long training in vehicle assembly and repair, but also basic military drills. Life was tough during their service – one volunteer revealed one-third of them eventually died in the line of duty.

- **Is this the first time that the Singapore public is viewing the materials presented at the exhibition?**

Some of these photographs being showcased have been made public as part of the larger exhibition on Japanese Occupation in NAS' World War II gallery, Memories at Old Ford Factory (MOFF). With the new material arising from the joint curation of the exhibition with the Chinese counterparts, NAS will be able to integrate these into MOFF and refresh the content. The online version of the exhibition will also allow more people to access and view the exhibition, regardless of where they are physically located.

- **Why is SCCCI chosen as the venue of the exhibition?**

In searching for a suitable venue for the exhibition, the NAS turned to its close partner in the local business and heritage scene, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI), which graciously offered its auditorium. The SCCCI is a most fitting venue – as 72 years ago, the SCCCI, through the late Mr Tan Kah Kee, played a significant role in rallying local and regional support for China during the Sino-Japanese war. In fact, being a key representative organisation of the local Chinese business community since 1906, the SCCCI is a significant record source of such community memories.

National Archives of Singapore

- **What are the highlights of the exhibition?**
  - ❖ Fundraising activities in Singapore for China's war of resistance.



Source: Ho Kwai Mun Collection, National Archives of Singapore

Women organised themselves into teams to sell flowers to raise funds.

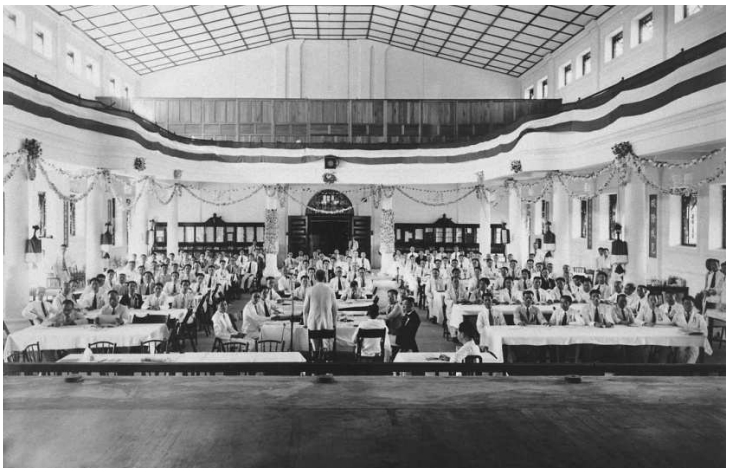


National Archives of Singapore

Source: Pek Cheng Chuan Collection, National Archives of Singapore

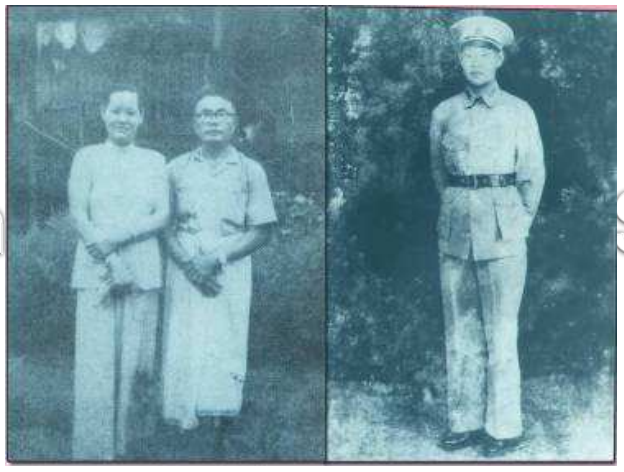
Sports games like badminton were organised to raise funds in support of the Chinese motherland.

- The historic Nanyang Conference on 10 Oct 1948 – over 180 delegates from the region converged at the Chinese High School and agreed to set up the Southseas China Relief Fund Union with Tan Kah Kee as Chairman.



Source: Lee Hin Ming Collection, National Archives of Singapore

- Box story on female volunteers, including Li Yuemei, who was praised as a "contemporary Hua Mulan" – in reference to the legendary Chinese woman who disguised herself as a man to join the army.



Nation Singapore

Source: Xiamen Overseas Chinese Museum

Li Yuemei in uniform, 1939 (right) and posing with her husband Yang Weiquan, a fellow volunteer who saved her life when her vehicle overturned (left).

- Volunteers' oral history accounts of their experience, including Pek Cheng Chuan's description of the harsh conditions suffered: *"In the three and a half years since we returned to China, we had never entered a room to sleep in quarters; only when we were ill did we sleep in a hospital bed. We had our luggage with us and we slept in the vehicle. There were munitions in the vehicle and we just spread our blankets and slept on them…"*



Source: Pek Cheng Chuan Collection, courtesy of Mrs Tang Yuh Ping

Commemorative group photo of Pek Cheng Chuan (first row, centre) with friends prior to his departure for China.

National Archives of Singapore



Source: National Archives of Singapore

Famous 12 curves of the Yunnan-Burma Road.



National Archives of Singapore

Source: Nanqiao Jigong Association

Convoy of trucks on the Yunnan-Burma Road.

Part II: About the Two Agreements

- **How did the agreement between the NAS and the YPA come about?**

It was through this joint exhibition with its Chinese counterpart that the NAS has identified many more opportunities for collaboration with the YPA, one of which is in the area of oral history methodology. Home to 25 indigenous minority tribes in China which account for close to 50 per cent of China's 56 minority tribes, the YPA faces the daunting challenge of preserving the culture and history of these tribes, some of which have only a spoken language with no written form. NAS is happy to share its expertise in oral history methodology which it has built over the years, based on international standards, to help document the history of the tribes in Yunnan. This would enable the long-held and rich traditions of the tribes to be systematically documented as spoken reminiscences, for the benefit of future generations. To seal this cooperation, the NAS and the YPA will be signing a Collaborative Project Agreement on Oral History during the launch of the exhibition in Singapore.

- **How did the agreement between the NAS and the SCCCI come about?**

The NAS has long recognised the important role played by the SCCCI in our nation's history and a significant record source of memories of the local Chinese community. As early as the 1970s, the SCCCI had entrusted NAS with the task to restore and conserve SCCCI's paper and audio-visual records given NAS' expertise in these areas. In 2007, NAS embarked on digitally preserving the information of these records to enable easy access. Today, to complete the preservation efforts, the NAS and SCCCI are moving towards the long-term preservation of 1,338 items consisting of both paper and audio-visual records in NAS' repositories, which offer the perfect environment for the protection of precious records with built-in stringent controls on temperature, humidity and chemical filtration[5] that meet international standards. This last phase of collaboration will be sealed in the archives preservation agreement which will be signed by NAS and SCCCI at the launch.

National Archives of Singapore

Part III: About NAS' Partners

- **State Archives Administration of China**

The State Archives Administration of China (SAAC) was set up on 1959. The SAAC has two main roles, namely:

- the administration and management of archival work for the whole of China
- the preservation and deployment of the central archives.

The SAAC is responsible for the overall planning, organisation and coordination of the operations of a unified archives system in China, as well as the supervision

[5] To protect against air-pollution

of archival work nationwide. In addition, it is responsible for the management of important archival records of the Chinese Communist Party and the central government departments for each historical period. The SAAC acquires, conserves and preserves records from the party and central government and provides access services to its archival holdings for all sectors of society. Its holdings include more than 800,000 files and 800,000 volumes of records, mainly from the 1919 May Fourth Movement onwards.

- **Yunnan Provincial Archives**

Established in 1959, the Yunnan Provincial Archives (YPA) is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of directives and policies on archives management laid down by the Chinese Communist Party and the central government. It is also responsible for the planning, coordination and management of archival work throughout the Yunnan Province. The YPA acquires records of archival significance from all sectors of society, conserves and preserves these records and advises government agencies, organisations and businesses in the Yunnan Province on records management practices. Yunnan is home to 25 minority tribes in China, the most number in a single province, and hence, the YPA has one of the most comprehensive holdings on minority tribes in China.

- **Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI)**

Established in 1906, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI) is an internationally renowned business organisation and the apex body of the Chinese business community in Singapore. It is the founder of the biennial World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention (WCEC) and the World Chinese Business Network (WCBN), a global online business portal (www.wcbn.com.sg). It plays a proactive role in representing the interests of the local business community and contributing to the economic, educational, cultural and community development in Singapore. In its continued drive for service excellence, the SCCCI has consistently maintained its ISO 9001-2000 certification standard in membership service since 1995.

National Archives of Singapore

The SCCCI has a membership network of about 131 trade associations and 4,000 corporate entities, including large financial and business organisations, multinational corporations, government-linked companies, small and medium enterprises from a wide spectrum of trades and industries. These members together provide vast resources and opportunities which enable the SCCCI to develop an influential global Chinese business network for business, education, culture and community development. In return, they share a strong sense of pride and identity together and benefit immensely from the SCCCI's membership services, facilities and activities.

Part IV: About Donors, Collectors and Oral History Interviewees

Ms Chen Da Ya 陈达娅 (Available for Interview)

Ms Chen Da Ya 陈达娅 is the daughter of the late Mr Chen Zhao Zao 陈昭藻. The late Mr Chen was born in 1900 in Hainan, China and came to Singapore in 1916. He joined as a volunteer driver and went to Kunming in 1939. He passed away in 1987.

Ms Chen was born 1961 in China. She co-wrote a book «再会吧南洋--海南南洋华侨机工回国抗战回忆» with Mr Chen Yong 陈勇.

Mr Chen Yong 陈勇 (Available for Interview)

Mr Chen Yong 陈勇 is the son of the late Mr Chen Bang Xing 陈邦兴and the nephew of Mr Wang Sui He 王绥和 (his maternal uncle). The late Mr Chen was born in 1912 in Hainan, China. He went to Malaya in 1925 and worked in Ford Factory. Later, he joined the 8th batch and went to Kunming in 1939. The late Mr Wang went to serve in Kunming in 1939. He passed away in 1970.

Mr Chen Yong was born in 1962 in China and wrote a book «再会吧南洋--海南南洋华侨机工回国抗战回忆» with Ms Chen Da Ya.

Mr Pek Cheng Chuan （白清泉)

Mr Thomas Pek – Grandson (Available for Interview)

Born in 1911, the late Mr Pek received primary education in China and began his career as a construction worker and motor mechanic in Amoy (1931-1932). He later came to Singapore in 1932 and worked as a chauffeur. In 1949, he founded Tai Hua Food Industries, a famous local soya bean sauce manufacturer which has become a household name.

The late Mr Pek donated some photographs to the NAS. He passed away in March 2005. His grandson, Mr Thomas Pek will attend the opening of the exhibition and is available for interview.

National Archives of Singapore

Mr Tan Chong Tee （陈崇智) (Available for Interview)

Born in 1916, Mr Tan attended the Kheng Cheng Primary School (his mother was the founder of the school) and later the National Arts School in China. He received military training in Chongqing. He began his career as a teacher (pre-war) and later became a businessman after the war. Mr Tan joined Tong Teck Books & Newspaper Association 同德书报社 and participated in many anti-Japanese activities such as boycotting Japanese goods and fund-raising after the second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937.

Mr Tan also reported to the late Mr Lim Bo Seng and helped to train MPAJA in shooting and bush-fighting in Bulit Segari. He also participated in Operation Gustavus to sabotage Japanese ships. He was captured by the Japanese in 1944 and spent the next 18 months in captivity. He wrote an autobiography to tell the heroic stories of Force 136.Mr Tan is also an avid badminton player and won a few championships in 1930s.

Mr Tham Sien Yen （谭显炎）
Ms Tham Yew Chin – Daughter (Available for Interview)

Born in Ipoh, Perak in 1918, Mr Tham Sien Yen first received military training in Chungking during the Sino-Japanese war. He was later recruited by the late Mr Lim Bo Seng and became a leading member of Force 136. After the war, Mr Tham retired from active military service and became a businessman.

Ms Tham (his daughter) also loaned NAS over 800 records for digital duplication.

The late Mr Tham passed away in September 2003. His daughter, Ms Tham Yew Chin will attend the opening of the exhibition.

Mr Ng Aik Huan (黄奕欢)
Mr Ng Eet Hiong – Son (Available for Interview)

Born in 1908, Mr Ng was a member of the China Relief Fund organization headed by the late Mr Tan Kah Kee. He was recruited by Mr Tan to recruit drivers and mechanics to deliver military supplies to Chungqing. Being a powerful orator he often went on propaganda missions to explain to people the significance of the China's war of resistance against Japan. He also participated in anti-Japanese boycott activities and took part in helping to raise money for the China Relief fund.

Mr Ng Aik Huan passed away in 1985. His son, Mr Ng Eet Hiong will attend the opening of the exhibition.

Mr Chiou Sin Min （邱新民）

Born in 1914, the late Mr Chiou received his education in Amoy University, China from 1932 to 1934. From 1948 to 1952, he was a senior teacher at Chung Cheng High School and became the principal of Chung Hwa Secondary School in Klang, Malaya from 1953 to 1957. From 1960 to 1966, he went on to become a lecturer at the Teachers Training College from 1967-1974 and the principal of Chung Cheng High School from 1967 to 1974. He retired in 1975.

National Archives of Singapore

The late Mr Chiou passed away in September 1995.

Mr Yein Pah Yuen (alias Bai Yan)　白言

Born in 1920, Mr Yein attained primary education in the early years. He joined a song and dance company and performed in Singapore and Malaya from 1937 to 1945. He also performed in ge-tai and nightclubs after the war in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Mr Yein was also an actor in the then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation from 1985 to 1995. He has retired since then.

Mr Lim Shao Bin
A local collector and history enthusiast who shared his personal collection with the NAS for the purpose of the exhibition.

Part V: About SARBICA

The Southeast Asian Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (SARBICA) was established in 1968 and was the first regional branch of the international Council on Archives. The main purpose of SARBICA is to foster professional relationship between archival institutions within the Southeast Asian Region. The primary voting members are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. To further strengthen the organisation, SARBICA introduced new non-voting membership categories to include more interested parties in 2009. National Archives of Australia was invited and become the first non-voting member in May 2009. The Yunnan Provincial Archives was also invited to join SARBICA on 8 Sep 09.

NAS assumed Chairmanship of SARBICA for 2008-2011, with Thailand as Vice-Chairman.

National Archives of Singapore