



PRESS RELEASE

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FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM AND PERANAKAN MUSEUM RETIRES AFTER 18 YEARS OF SERVICE

28 December 2009 – Dr Kenson Kwok, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) and the Peranakan Museum (TPM), will retire on 31 December 2009. Mr Michael Koh, Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board (NHB), will cover his responsibilities and duties at the two museums temporarily before his successor is announced.

2 Said Dr Kwok, 60: “It has been a tremendous challenge and privilege to be given the task of establishing two new museums for Singapore. I pay tribute to my colleagues, some of whom have been with me from the beginning of this adventure, for their years of hard work. With an artefact from the ACM collection being shown in the V&A Museum's current Maharaja exhibition in London, and overseas exhibitions lined up for next year, we are on the threshold of an exciting new phase in ACM's development.”

3 During his tenure with NHB, Dr Kwok has contributed tremendously to the development of the ACM, overseeing the planning, renovation and set-up of its first wing at Armenian Street which opened in 1997, as well as the completion of its present building at Empress Place which opened its doors in 2003. Locally curated shows have also been well-received by audiences at home and abroad such as *On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia* which sparked off much scholarship and interest in Buddhism in Singapore. Many of the ACM's exhibitions have also attracted record visitorship and considerable media coverage such as 2005's *Journey of Faith: Art and History from the Vatican Collections* which saw more than 130,000 visitors, and the more recent *The Kangxi Emperor: Treasures from the Forbidden City* which attracted close to 165,000 visitors.

4 Building on its reputation for outstanding gallery displays and exhibitions, the ACM established NHB's first Research and Publications Unit to research on Asian archaeology, art history and material culture, as well as to strengthen the museum's position as a centre for Asian studies. Under Dr Kwok's stewardship, the ACM has achieved the reputation of being one of the most highly regarded museums in Singapore and the region. It has also received extensive coverage in both local and international publications such as International Herald Tribune and Newsweek which described ACM as “the best museum in town, with an innovative presentation of Asian artefacts and customs”.

5 Besides the ACM, Dr Kwok has also led the development of TPM which showcases more than 1,200 artefacts from both the national and private collections –

the most comprehensive Peranakan collection on display in the world. Launched in 2008, the museum scored a record visitorship of 260,000 in its first year and has proved a hit among the Peranakan community. Come 2010, TPM will also travel iconic Peranakan artefacts from its collection to the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris – the French national museum of non-Western cultures. This is the first time that a Singapore museum is presenting an exhibition in a major museum in Europe.

6 For his good work done internationally and close ties with foreign counterparts, Dr Kwok was awarded the *Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur* – the highest decoration in France – by the French government in 2006 as well as the *Chevalier de l'Ordre National des Arts et des Lettres* in 2004. Closer to home, Dr Kwok was also awarded the Public Administration Medal (Silver) in 2004.

7 Said Professor Tommy Koh, Chairman of NHB: “Dr Kwok’s hard work and efforts have earned the ACM and TPM much international recognition with numerous visits by royalty, presidents and prime ministers from all over the world. His active involvement in cultivating important donors and collectors of Asian artefacts has also resulted in significant donations and loans to NHB.”

8 In paying tribute to Dr Kwok, Chief Executive Officer of NHB Mr Michael Koh said he has left an indelible mark on Singapore’s museum scene: “He has made tremendous contributions to the local museum industry over the past 18 years – establishing both the ACM and TPM.”

9 NHB expresses its deep appreciation for Dr Kwok’s tireless contributions since February 1992 and wishes him all the best for the future.

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About the 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 collaborative partnerships with both private and public sector counterparts. NHB leverages on state-of-the-art technology and refreshing new approaches to make heritage more dynamic, alive and exciting for different audiences. 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 the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum's mission is to explore and present the cultures and civilisations of Asia, so as to promote awareness and appreciation of the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans and their links to Southeast Asia and the World. The Asian Civilisations Museum first began its operations at Armenian Street in 1997, which closed at end-2005, and re-opened on 25 April 2008 as the Peranakan Museum. The ACM’s flagship at the historic Empress Place Building opened on 2 March 2003.

About the Peranakan Museum

The Peranakan Museum explores the culture of Peranakan communities in the former Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang and their links with other communities in Southeast Asia. It is a boutique museum with the finest and most comprehensive collection of Peranakan artefacts in the world. Three floors of permanent galleries illustrate important rituals, practices and the material culture of the Peranakans, as well as how this unique fusion culture is viewed today. The Peranakan Museum provides an enjoyable and educational experience for all, with intricate displays innovatively presented in ten galleries, children's interactives and special merchandising in two shops. Two temporary exhibition galleries will present a programme of special exhibitions throughout the year.

For more information, please contact:

Ms Sylvia Goh
Assistant Manager, Corporate Communications
National Heritage Board
DID: 6332 4485
Fax: 6334 3054
Email: sylvia_goh@nhb.gov.sg

Mr David Miller
Assistant Director, Corporate Communications
National Heritage Board
DID: 6332 3962
Fax: 6334 3054
Email: david_miller@nhb.gov.sg

National Archives of Singapore