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SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE (MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION), AT THE PRESENTATION OF A LIMITED EDITION OF IMPERIAL CHINESE BRONZE REPLICAS AT ISKANDAR ROOM, NATIONAL MUSEUM ART GALLERY ON THURSDAY, 4 MAY 1989 AT 6.30 PM

I am happy to receive, on behalf of the National Museum, a set of 32 pieces of limited edition of Imperial Chinese Bronze Replicas presented by Bowater Singapore Ltd. I understand only 50 sets are made by the Company of which 45 sets will be available for sale worldwide at £50,000 per set.

Reproduced with great accuracy from originals in the private collection of the Qing Emperor, Guang Xu (1875-1908), these exquisite replicas of classic bronze types from the Shang to the Tang periods (1600 BC - AD 906) are made by arrangement with the Palace Museum, Beijing, in a specially designed foundary constructed within the walls of the Forbidden City. These full-scale replicas show the roots of many patterns which have passed into the Chinese decorative repertoire, adopted for different materials by later craftsman.

While many Singaporeans are aware that the National Museum functions as a premier repository and exhibition venue for collections relating to our history and culture, few realise that yet another important function of the Museum is that of an important resource and informal educational facility. Through the years, it has consistently catered to the needs of students and researchers seeking both information and a greater understanding of the material culture of this region.

In the collection of the Museum are objects which serve as study as well as display items. For study purposes, conscientiously and accurately replicated pieces in fact possess an obvious advantage over original ones: while original bronze pieces dating back over 3,000 years are too fragile to be handled, well-executed reproductions of ancient bronzes can be handled and examined at close range, contributing to a better appreciation of these forms.

It is in this context that the donation of 32 bronzes displayed in this room is particularly valuable to the National Museum. The bronzes represent the fruits of dedicated research and strict adherence to the casting methods traditionally employed for Chinese bronze vessels. Each piece reveals an astonishing fidelity to the colour and patination of the ancient bronzes, formerly in the Imperial Collection of Emperor Guang Xu.

These are among the many reasons why the bronzes are welcome additions to the Museum's reference collection of Chinese art.

In recent years, corporate sponsors have played an increasingly prominent role in the Singapore cultural scene. Like other cultural institutions which are not geared towards profit-making, the National Museum has gained much from the support and contributions of such benefactors to enhance its collections.

Since 1985, when the Minister for Finance agreed to allow tax relief for donations to the National Museum, corporate sponsors have come to the aid of the Museum, providing generous grants for artefacts which the Museum would otherwise not be able to own.

The first donation under the scheme consisted of a grant of \$50,000 by Goldman Sachs & Co for the purchase of three major paintings by Singapore artists. In 1987, Trans Island Bus Service (Pte) Ltd and other public supporters of the arts contributed a total of \$120,000 for the purchase of the sculpture "Living World" by Ju Ming, which is installed at the entrance to the Museum. Last year, Philips Petroleum (Singapore) Ltd offered a grant of \$100,000 for the purchase of Chinese ceramics and bronze. Foundations like the Lee and Shaw Foundations have been consistent benefactors. In 1985, Lee Foundation gave \$100,000 for the purchase of paintings and since 1986, the Shaw Foundation has given four grants totalling \$625,000 to enrich the collection of Chinese ceramics.

Today's donation of 32 bronzes by Bowater Singapore Ltd is unique, as it represents a recognition by the Company of the important educational role of the Museum and its reference collections. Its gift has extended the range of Chinese bronzes that can be viewed at the Museum, by means of fastidiously made reproductions where originals cannot be made available.

I would like to thank Bowater Singapore Ltd for these valuable donations. I hope that this commendable public-spirited example of Bowater Singapore Ltd will encourage donations from more companies to the National Museum.

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