



Media Release

Embargoed until 5 May, 3pm

FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

[5 May 2008] After 16 years of distinguished service with the National Heritage Board (NHB) including 14 years as the Director of Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), Dr Kenson Kwok, 58, has decided to retire by the end of 2008. This will allow him to spend more time with family members as well as to pursue his own interests.

Said Mr Michael Koh, Chief Executive Officer of NHB: "Members of NHB's Board, management and staff join me in thanking Dr Kenson Kwok for his many years of dedicated service and significant contributions. As the founding director of ACM, Kenson played a tremendous role in guiding it through the years to become a widely acclaimed museum of international stature. He has put ACM on the museum map of the world."

"During his tenure, Kenson spearheaded the development of three different museums and brought in blockbuster exhibitions such as *Alamkara: 5000 years of India*, *Eternal Egypt: Treasures from the British Museum* and the recent *On The Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia*. Kenson's contribution has raised the profile of Asian arts and culture in Singapore and beyond."

Dr Kwok first joined the museum service as a Senior Curator in 1992. He was then immediately tasked to set up ACM as part of an ambitious plan to establish a group of national museums in Singapore. In 1994, he was made Director of the ACM. His mission then was to set up a museum that would trace the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans. With a small group of staff and a modest construction and acquisition budget, he embarked on a programme to garner local and international support for the new institution.

The efforts of the initial team culminated in the opening of the first wing of the ACM in 1997 at the old Tao Nan School at Armenian Street. The museum was known for its high quality displays of Chinese artefacts in the 4,000 square metre former school building. It was opened by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who is now the Prime Minister of Singapore.

The second wing of ACM was launched in 2003 with the 14,300 square metres Empress Place Building – a colonial structure on the banks of the historic Singapore River. Also known as its flagship museum, ACM, Empress Place was officially opened by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in March 2003. Covering 5,000 years of Asian history and culture, the museum features 10 galleries with displays on Southeast Asia, China, West Asia and South Asia. Dr Kwok, an architect by training, was heavily involved in the conversion of both of these national monuments.

During his tenure as Director of ACM, Dr Kwok helmed the development of the museum's collection, its expansion into new collection areas (South Asian and Islamic), as well as its exhibition programme. These have all brought the museum a reputation for quality. The ACM has received widespread critical acclaim both internationally and locally for its small yet exquisite pan-Asian collection presented in a subtle yet innovative manner.

Over the years, Dr Kwok was also actively involved in facilitating cash and artefact donations amounting to over \$32 million, and long-term loans to the value of over \$137 million. These often involved him working personally with donors and collectors. With the museum's new facilities and growing public interest, annual visitorship has increased from 80,000 in 1997 to over 500,000 visitors in 2007.

The publishing programme of ACM has also been one of its quiet successes, with 19 reference publications produced since 1991. Dr Kwok's deep personal interest in Chinese ceramics has led him to research the Hickley collection of *Dehua* porcelain which was given to the ACM in 2000. He was also one of the distinguished contributors to the catalogue of the Hickley Collection published in 2002.

Dr Kwok was also the driving force behind the establishment of the Peranakan Museum, which is Singapore's newest museum. This was officially opened by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 26 April in the refurbished Armenian Street building where the first wing of ACM once stood.

Said Ms Priscylla Shaw, Chairman of ACM: "Dr Kwok will be very much missed at ACM as its Director, by Board Members, staff and volunteers alike. ACM and its Board are deeply grateful to Dr Kwok for his years of dedication, and values the time that they have worked together not only on exhibitions but also on all the other facets of museum life such as acquisitions, programmes, publications, development, and special events such as ACM's Fund-raising Galas. The new Peranakan Museum is the third museum that Dr Kwok has set up, a rare achievement for any museum director. The Board wishes Dr Kwok a happy and fulfilling retirement after Directorship of ACM." (A full statement from the ACM Board can be found at Annex A).

For his efforts in raising the profile of Asian arts and culture, Dr Kwok was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Silver) (2004), *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* (2004), and *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur* (2006). The latter two accolades were presented by the French government.

To recognise his many contributions, NHB intends to appoint Dr Kwok as Director Emeritus after his retirement. In this capacity, he will continue to assist in furthering ACM's and NHB's interests.

An international executive search has been initiated to find Dr Kwok's successor. Dr Kwok has kindly agreed to remain in his post until the end of 2008. This will allow NHB time to recruit a worthy successor and time for the future director to adjust to the hefty responsibilities which comes with the position.

NHB expresses its deep gratitude to Dr Kwok for his many years of service and wishes him all the best in his retirement years.

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 collaborative partnerships with both private and people 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).

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MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM BOARD

Dr Kenson Kwok announces his decision to retire as Director

Dr Kenson Kwok's name has for the last 14 years been synonymous with the Asian Civilisations Museum, as its Founding Director. As Founding Director, Dr Kwok has overseen the growth of the ACM from scratch to the landmark museum at Empress Place that it is today.

Blockbuster exhibitions like *Alamkara: 5000 Years of India*, *Eternal Egypt*, *Sari to Sarong*, *Journey of Faith: Art and History from the Vatican Collections*, *Power Dressing*, *Hidden Faces* and *Mystery Men: Finds from China's Lost Age*, were some of Dr Kwok's hits with both Singaporeans and visitors alike.

The Frank and Pamela Hickley Dehua Collection, the Edmond Chin Southeast Asian Gold Collection, and the Tan Tsze Chor Collection of Chinese paintings, seals and rare books, are some of the ACM's most precious gifts from donors, received during Dr Kwok's tenure.

For the Board, Dr Kwok's retirement comes slightly early, but it accepts Dr Kwok's reasons to step down as Director at the end of this year. Dr Kwok will remain at his post until the end of the year to allow time for a worthy successor to be found.

ACM and its Board are deeply grateful to Dr Kwok for his years of dedication, and values the time that they have worked together not only on exhibitions but also on all the other facets of museum life like acquisitions, publications, development, events and presently, on the opening of the new Peranakan Museum too. The Board wishes Dr Kwok a happy and fulfilling retirement after Directorship of ACM. However, retirement from his present post does not mean departure from the ACM. Dr Kwok will be assuming the position of Director Emeritus, and the ACM and Dr Kwok can look forward to many more years of his contributions through his eye for beauty, and his diplomacy with donors, lenders and sponsors. In addition, Dr Kwok will be advising on publishing projects at the ACM, to build up the scholarship of ACM.