

MEDIA RELEASE

Asian Civilisations Museum Receives S\$5 million Gift For Expansion Of Its China Gallery

Donation from Hong Leong Foundation is the single largest cash donation that the museum has received to date

[7 April 2009, SINGAPORE] Chinese culture will get a significant boost with the planned expansion of the Asian Civilisations Museum's China Gallery. The museum has received a \$5 million gift from Hong Leong Foundation for the project – the largest cash donation made to the museum to date. The donation will cover part of the cost of the expansion of the museum's Chinese gallery and acquisition of artefacts for the collection.

“We are truly delighted with this generous donation from Hong Leong Foundation,” said Dr Kenson Kwok, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum. “While there is currently an embargo on building projects under the government agencies, with this donation will enable us to start on design work and costing studies. This is the single largest cash donation to the ACM to date.”

This donation marks the second time that Hong Leong Foundation has given to the ACM. In 2001, Hong Leong Foundation gave S\$2.8 million for the establishment of the ACM's China gallery, which is named after Hong Leong Group's founder, the late Mr Kwek Hong Png.

“In a challenging economic climate, donations play an even greater role in helping to further the arts,” said Dr Kwok. “While some may feel the arts should take a back seat to the economy right now, we believe that it is through the arts and culture that people can gain inspiration and encouragement in bleak times.”



This second donation of S\$5 million in funds is part of Hong Leong Foundation's ongoing efforts to promote the understanding and appreciation of Chinese art and culture. Established in 1980, Hong Leong Foundation is the charity arm of the Hong Leong Group, which is dedicated to the philanthropic causes of the Group, including the arts, education and welfare.

With the expansion, the museum has plans to revamp the current China gallery display. One of the highlights of the redesigned space will be an area dedicated to the arts of Fujian. Highlights would include regional specialties from Fujian such as *longyan* wood furniture and the museum's collection of *blanc de chine* porcelain from Dehua - one of the best in the world.

Fujian or Hokkien culture is especially meaningful for the Group, as the Group's founder, the late Kwek Hong Png, hailed from the region. Born in 1913 in the Tung Ann (Tongan) district of Fujian, Mr Kwek struck out on his own at the tender age of 16, and came to Singapore to build his fortune.

"Usually when people think of Hokkien, they think about the food or the language," said Mr Kwek Leng Beng, son of the elder Kwek, and Executive Chairman of the Hong Leong Group. "But Fujian is also about fine art and rich culture. We want to bring this aspect closer to Singaporeans through this project."

The Hokkiens are the largest Chinese dialect group in Singapore, constituting around 40% of the Chinese Singaporean population. They originated from the southern parts of the Fujian province, including Xiamen, Zhangzhou and Quanzhou. The early Hokkiens were key to Singapore's development into a regional trading hub, being actively involved in the early trading at the Singapore River.

“In uncertain times, remembering the toil of our forefathers can not only be a source of inspiration, but encouragement as well,” said Mr Kwek. “Heritage is a part of our society that cannot be forgotten. By working with the Asian Civilisations Museum, we hope to be able to inform and educate future generations about the roots of our forefathers.”

###

Media Contacts

Asian Civilisations Museum

Jennifer Quong

Manager, Marketing and Corporate Communications

Tel : (65) 6332 7991

Mobile: (65) 9231 6130

Fax : (65) 6883 0732

Email : jennifer_quong@nhb.gov.sg

Natasha Ross

Assistant Manager, Marketing and Corporate Communications

Tel : (65) 6332 4410

Fax : (65) 6883 0732

Email : natasha_ross@nhb.gov.sg

Hong Leong Foundation

Tania Tan

Assistant Manager, Group Corporate Affairs

Hong Leong Group

Tel : (65) 6428 9306

Fax : (65) 6534 3060

Email : taniatan@cdl.com.sg

Website: www.acm.org.sg

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.

**Address**

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

Museum Front Desk : (65) 6332 7798

Public Programmes Hotline: (65) 6332 3284

Opening Hours

Mondays : 1pm – 7pm

Tuesdays – Sundays : 9am – 7pm (to 9pm on Fridays)

ANNEX

About the Asian Civilisations Museum – Where Asian Cultures Come Alive!



Located by the historic Singapore River, the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) traces the cultural roots of modern Singaporeans. A descendent of the Raffles Museum, it features a diverse collection from Southeast Asia, South Asia, China and the Islamic World of West Asia. Gallery displays are complemented by interactive hosts and multimedia displays.

In addition, the Singapore River Gallery tells the moving story of immigrants who lived and worked on the Singapore River, the source of Singapore's rich multiculturalism.

The first and only museum in the region with a focus on Asian cultures, the ACM also presents a programme of changing special exhibitions throughout the year.

For more information, please visit <http://www.acm.org.sg>.

About Hong Leong Foundation

Established by the Hong Leong Group in 1980, the Hong Leong Foundation was set up to execute the Group's philosophy of giving back to society – a belief handed down by our founder, the late Kwek Hong Png, who felt that success should be shared.

Throughout the years, the Foundation has made significant contributions to the advancement of education, sports, theatre, drama, music, dance and the arts. The Foundation has also made it a priority to help improve living standards and to relieve human suffering for the needy elderly and young, the sick and handicapped.

Some recent milestones include:

- 2001, Hong Leong foundation made a donation of \$2.8million for the expansion of the East Asia Gallery of the Asian Civilisations Museum, to help create greater awareness about Singapore's unique heritage and melting pot of cultures. The Kwek Hong Png gallery was named in honour of the Group's late founder.
- 2005, Hong Leong Foundation sponsored the inaugural Singapore Season in London, which included performances by the Singapore Dance Theatre, The Tang Quartet and the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. Local film makers also got a chance to showcase their work at the festival. The Foundation also sponsored the second Singapore Season in China in 2007.
- 2003, 2007, 2008: Hong Leong Foundation was awarded the Distinguished Patron of Arts award for donations to various arts groups.
- 2008: The Foundation committed an additional \$5million over three years to the ACM for the expansion of the museum's galleries.

As part of its unwavering commitment to charity, the Foundation also gives to needy, including those who are under the Public Assistance/Special Grant (PA/SG) Schemes. For example in 2008, some \$380,000 was distributed to over 3,600 of the less fortunate in the Foundation's annual year-end giveaway.

About Hong Leong Group

Hong Leong Group is one of Singapore's largest local private sector conglomerates engaged in a wide range of business in the Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America, with gross assets of over US\$20billion. The Group's five core businesses are property investment and development, hotel ownership and management, financial services, trade & industry and e-Business.

Hong Leong Group's main operating companies are City Developments Limited, Hong Leong Holdings Limited, Millennium & Copthorne Hotels plc, Hong Leong Finance Limited, Hong Leong Asia Ltd and CDL Hospitality Trusts.

About Kwek Hong Png

Mr. Kwek Hong Png was born in 1913, in the rural Tung Ann district of Fujian. At 16, his father asked him to go overseas to seek a living. After 10 days on a boat to Nanyang, which was crammed with sick people, Mr Kwek finally arrived in Singapore. He was quarantined for one week on St John's Island, with little food, before finally being released to the mainland.

After several months in Singapore, Mr Kwek's relative finally secured him an apprentice position in a store. He worked from 4am in the morning till midnight daily, doing odd jobs and pocketing just five dollars a month.

Over the next 11 years, Mr Kwek steadily worked his way up, earning the trust of his employer and bringing in profits, until 1940 when he took his savings of about \$7,000 and set up Hong Leong Company in a small shop on Beach Road selling hardware. He asked his three brothers to join him in running the business until 1942, when World War II began.

With great business acumen, Mr Kwek built his company in the most adverse of times – buying and selling raw materials like iron and steel to the Japanese army.

In 1948, Hong Leong Company Private Limited was formed, dealing in rubber and construction materials. After the war, major construction and rebuilding meant cement was in great demand, a business that proved highly profitable for Hong Leong. Even today, the cement business forms a major part of the Group's business under listed arm Hong Leong Asia Ltd.

In 1969, the company branched into property development with the establishment of Hong Leong Holdings. It also developed Grange Heights - Singapore's first condominium project. Two years later, Hong Leong bought then struggling property company City Developments Limited. From an eight-man outfit, CDL is now a global enterprise with over 10,000 employees. Hong Leong also moved into



the finance industry in the early 1960s, setting up Hong Leong Finance which is now listed on the Singapore stock exchange.

In the early 1970s, Mr Kwek converted an old apartment block in Dunearn Road into the Orchid Inn, marking his first foray into the hospitality business. Later, his elder son Kwek Leng Beng built up the hotel arm into a major international business, in the form of Millennium & Copthorne Hotels plc, which is listed on the London stock exchange. It now has 120 hotels in 17 countries.

Today, the Hong Leong Group encompasses international operations of more than 500 companies, including 10 listed companies with 40,000 staff. The companies cover a wide range of sectors - from property development to hotel ownership and management, to finance, and manufacturing and distribution of consumer products, diesel engines industrial and green packaging and building materials. The success of the Hong Leong Group today can be largely attributed to the strong foundation laid by its founder, Mr. Kwek Hong Png.

About the Kwek Hong Png China Gallery

The Kwek Hong Png China Gallery was inaugurated on 1 March 2003 with the Official Opening of the Asian Civilisations Museum. It is named after the founder of the Hong Leong Group, the late Mr Kwek Hong Png, who is considered as one of Singapore's early pioneers.

Gallery outline:



The path through the Kwek Hong Png China Gallery takes the winding form of the dragon, one of the most important symbols in Chinese culture. The Emperor was known as *tianzi*, the Son of Heaven. A sumptuous Dragon Robe, which embodies within it the majesty, power and status of the emperor, hangs near a collection of delicate imperial porcelains. Facing this is a display on ancestral worship and filial piety. In Chinese society, the patriarchal system, based on Confucianism, placed the father at the head of the family, just as the emperor was the head of state.

Great care was taken to respect and look after one's elders and ancestors. Many stories were written to eulogise exceptionally filial acts.

A route to social advancement was through one's prowess as a scholar. The term *literati*, with its suggestion of idle ease, does not reveal the hardship scholars endured to achieve their official rank. The rigorous system of imperial examinations ensured that only those prepared to persevere could ever hope to succeed. The paintings and calligraphy on display are the serene surface of the highly politicised and sometimes tragic lives of Chinese officials.

The export of ceramics was an important private trade for over a thousand years. Chinese ceramics were sought after around the world, and give an insight into how Chinese artisans and merchants adapted this product to suit the different tastes and requirements of their international trading partners.

A space that suggests a cave temple is the setting for Buddhist stone statues and reliefs, some dating back to the 7th century CE. Large Buddhist figures in wood and smaller ones in gilt bronze are placed together with contemporary Daoist objects, showing the continuity of religious expression in Chinese society.

The museum has a well-known collection of white Dehua porcelain. Also known as 'blanc de chine', these finely moulded pieces from the Ming and Qing periods were produced in Fujian province in southern China.

Current Fujian Highlights from the Asian Civilisations Museum



Guanyin with *meiping* (plum blossom vase)

Dehua, China

17th century

Ceramic

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum



Set of four hanging panels

Calligraphy by He Shaoqi (1799 – 1873)

Fujian, China

Late 18th to early 19th century

Blackwood with soapstone inlay

Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum