

For immediate release

## A NEW BEGINNING FOR SINGAPORE BOOK COUNCIL AS IT TURNS 50

Five decades of promoting SingLit

SINGAPORE, 17 May 2018 – The Singapore Book Council (SBC) embarks on a new beginning as it celebrates the milestone of turning 50 this year. Formerly known as the National Book Development Council of Singapore, the charity now has a new name and a new Executive Director at the helm. It is set to forge ahead with renewed vigour and focus.

The established arts leader William Phuan has succeeded the long-serving R Ramachandran as the ED, and brings with him a wealth of experience managing arts organisations including The Arts House, The Select Centre and the New York Asian American International Film Festival. Says William: “It is not happenstance that SBC is where it is today. It has weathered many challenges facing the books industry and the nonprofit sector over the decades – and is still facing them. I feel very privileged to be able to stand on the shoulders of veterans like Mr Rama and build on what they have achieved so far, and take the entire organisation forward.”

SBC will roll out a series of celebratory events from August to December, casting the spotlight on Singapore writers and Singapore literature, or SingLit, in all its four languages. William says: “Since our humble beginnings in 1968, we have been tirelessly promoting and developing local writing and writers. From festivals like the previous Festival of Books and Asian Festival of Children’s Content to National Reading Month and #BuySingLit movement, as well as the Singapore Literature Prize and other awards that we give out, we have been the champion and advocate of SingLit for the past 50 years.”

Some of the celebratory highlights include:

- 6 Aug 2018 Singapore Literature Prize Awards Ceremony

The top literary prize in Singapore is given out once every two years. Established in 1992, it is the only award in the world that is given out to writers writing in any of the four languages – Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil. For the first time in the award’s history, to celebrate SBC’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the ceremony will be open to the public (via free registration). The shortlist will be announced in mid-June.

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- 6 – 8 Sept 2018 Asian Festival of Children’s Content

The premier festival in the region for writers, illustrators, translators, publishers and industry professionals working with Asian children’s books, AFCC will mark the theme “Imagine-Asia” with Singapore as the Country of Focus. Award-winning writer Suchen Christine Lim will give the Children’s Lecture, while we pay tribute to the pioneer illustrator Kwan Shan Mei with an exhibition of her iconic books.

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- 8 Sept 2018 Singapore Night and SBC’s Birthday Gala

SBC will celebrate the Singapore Country of Focus Night and our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday with a special gala dinner, as well as a prize giving ceremony for two awards, the Hedwig Anuar Book Award and Scholastic Asian Book Award.

- 6 Oct 2018 Book Launch: 情系狮城：五十年新华诗文选 (Qing Xi Shi Cheng/ Emotional bonds with Singapore: An anthology of Chinese poems and proeses in the first fifty years post-independence)  
One hundred and twenty-nine local Chinese writers have come together to pen poetry and essays about Singapore, as a birthday publication to SBC.

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- 2 – 11 Nov 2018 Singapore Writers Festival  
SBC will launch a Singapore Literature Prize Commemorative Book at SWF to honour all the past SLP winners, including the winners from 2018.
- 19 Dec 2018 SBC's Community Birthday Celebration  
SBC will mark its actual birthday with a community celebration with its neighbours at the Goodman Arts Centre, and the literary arts community.

More details about these events will be sent out later.

In addition to all these events, SBC will also ramp up the training courses under its Academy arm. There will be a full calendar of workshops and masterclasses focusing on writing, editing, translation, pitching and even using the AR and VR technology for storytelling. Says William: "One of our main thrusts is to strengthen our training for writers and all literary arts practitioners. It's not only to help them develop their craft, and also their understanding of the practical side of the industry, like pitching and negotiating contracts."

SBC moved into its new home at Goodman Arts Centre in September last year. The space comes equipped with a classroom and a Writers Lounge, in which writers are welcome to use it free of charge. There are plans to offer residency for local writers at SBC as well.



The Writers Lounge at SBC.

“We are moving forward with a renewed team and gusto. The changes will bring about a refreshed outlook, and we hope to better serve the community,” says Ms Claire Chiang, Chairperson of SBC, co-founder of Banyan Tree Holdings. “I am delighted to be part of the journey with SBC.”



The team at SBC.



For media related enquiries, please contact:

Elizabeth Chew | [elizabeth@bookcouncil.sg](mailto:elizabeth@bookcouncil.sg) | +65 6342 5121

Marketing & Outreach Director

ANNEX I: About Singapore Book Council

Singapore Book Council (SBC) is a charity founded in 1968. Its vision is to Build Our Imagine-nation by developing creativity, imagination and original thought through writing, reading, illustrating and storytelling. Its mission is to fulfil this vision by developing the literary art sector through books and literary art events, workshops, and awards. Its focus is Asian content, content creation, translation, rights, markets and training.

SBC is currently chaired by Ms Claire Chiang, co-founder of Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts.

SBC supports the community at all levels, from language programmes and books for children, to aspiring individuals and professionals like writers, illustrators, storytellers and relevant industry partners by providing a platform to learn, network and collaborate. It also organises events to foster professional and community engagement like the annual Asian Festival of Children's Content and All In! Young Writers Festival, and grants prestigious awards, like the Singapore Literature Prize, to recognise and encourage excellence. Finally, SBC offers publishing-related and literary arts-focused courses and workshops to enhance skills and encourage lifelong learning through its academy.

SBC aims to become a hub for Asian content for the world, encouraging stories to be created and told across platforms. Through telling our own stories by writing or illustrations, it promotes understanding, impacts legacy and connects Asia with the world.

Because it all starts with a story.

## ANNEX II: History of Singapore Book Council

Singapore Book Council (SBC) can trace its origins to the inaugural UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) Meeting of Experts on Book Production and Distribution in Asia held in Tokyo, Japan, in May 1966, during which a proposal was made to establish national book development councils across Asia.

In the mid-1960s, the UNESCO continued to hold a series of regional meetings in Asia, Africa, the Arab States and Latin America to assess long-term book needs, and to assist in working out national policies and strategies to overcome book hunger. It was at these meetings that UNESCO further encouraged the formation of national book development councils to play a key role in promoting and coordinating all areas of book development activity in harmony with overall national development.

On 19 December 1968, SBC was finally registered as the National Book Development Council of Singapore, a non-profit, charitable organisation, and was formally inaugurated on 13 February 1969 by the then Minister for Culture, Mr Jek Yeun Thong, with 12 members representing government and non-government educational, cultural, publishing, printing, library and bookselling associations and institutions. Its place of business then was designated at the National Library, and was born with official government blessing and given government support through ad hoc grants for specific projects.

Today, SBC continues to grow and cultivate Singapore's books and local literary arts scene by organising a variety of festivals, programmes and projects, and managing its own training arm. As a long-time advocate of Asian children's literature and storytelling, it has also helmed the premier regional Asian Festival of Children's Content since 2010.

Milestones:

- 1968 – 1992: During this initial period, SBC set its sights on promoting reading and improving literacy skills by way of initiatives such as the Festival of Books and Book Fair, and the National Reading Month. It was also concerned with the progress and development of good library services in Singapore in its early years.
- 1992 – 2000: To nurture local literary talent, SBC launched Singapore’s top literary award, the Singapore Literature Prize in 1992. The award was initially aimed to promote Singapore literary works in English, but its scope has since expanded to include works in Malay, Chinese and Tamil as well as non-fiction works.
- 2000 – today: SBC has now expanded its portfolio to be the organiser of 6 literary awards and 3 festivals including the premier Asian Festival of Children’s Content. It continues to cultivate and nurture budding writers, illustrators, publishers and educators by offering them training via their Academy. SBC also provides advice and consultation services via its Writers Lounge, and promotes Singapore literary talents and their works by sending them to international events such as the London Book Fair, Frankfurt Book Fair, and the New Delhi World Book Fair.



ANNEX III: About William Phuan



William Phuan is the Executive Director of the Singapore Book Council, a nonprofit in Singapore that aims to promote and develop Singapore content and literary arts. William has more than 20 years of experience working in various art and creative industries sectors, including journalism, arts policy and film curation in both the US and Singapore.

William was the co-founder of The Select Centre, a Singapore-based nonprofit that advances translation and intercultural communication in the region. Its key programmes included the TranslateSingapore festival, Translator Lab workshops and Literary Gateway, an initiative that connects Singapore with its Southeast Asian neighbours.

Prior to founding The Select Centre, William was the Director of The Arts House at the Old Parliament from 2009 to 2015. He oversaw The Arts House, which was turned from the former Parliament House in 2004 into an arts centre that focuses on writing, writers and ideas.

Programmes that William initiated at The Arts House included the Singapore International Translation Symposium; Singapore Writers Festival Fringe; Singapore Creative Writing



Residency; Sing Lit 101; Cita Malay Literary and Culture series; Silver Writing; and Text in the City, a nationwide app-based campaign to promote Singapore poetry.

William spent seven years in New York as the Programme Director of the New York Asian American International Film Festival. He co-founded ContemporAsian at the Museum of Modern Art, a monthly film series that showcased independent films from Asia. At MoMA, William also curated a retrospective of the late Malaysian filmmaker Yasmin Ahmad, as well as Bright Stars, Big Cities: Chinese Cinema's First Golden Era, 1922-1937 in December 2005 to celebrate the centennial of Chinese cinema.

William has sat on various panels, including the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) Electronic Media & Film Panel; and National Arts Council Singapore Panel for Cultural Medallion Award and Young Artist Award (Literary Arts).

William graduated with a degree in Communication Studies from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore, and a Masters in Cinema Studies from New York University. William has lectured at Nanyang Technological University, Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts on film and arts management.