



# Building an Audience for National Library Programmes

By Isaac Teo, Executive, INVENT

2005 marked another milestone in the history of the National Library, with the unveiling of the new National Library building. Housing the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library as well as the Central Lending Library, the new building has also played host to some of the most exciting programmes we have had to date.

Since July 2005, we have adopted a "Cover Story" approach in our thematic programming efforts. Using an iconic event, person or theme as a springboard, each Cover Story, usually lasting a month, included programmes on that theme as well as other related programmes. This has since given birth to a few major thematic series; "Istoria", "Zheng He and Maritime Asia" and "Knowledge Fortnight".

"Istoria" is the greek equivalent for the word "history", but also means story or tale. The "Istoria" series focused on the Singapore story and identity in conjunction with the nation's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, and included programmes exploring issues like tracing one's family history, as well as a critical re-examination of Singapore's ancient history. Tracing one's family history was the focus of Kevin and Percival Shepherdson, as they shared their experiences in a session on how a chance meeting in church sparked off a quest to discover who they were. An exhibition was also tied in to the talk, giving valuable insights and tools into how one could get started with tracing their family tree.

2005 also marked the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the legendary Ming dynasty admiral Zheng He's first of seven voyages to

South East Asia, and this was the theme we adopted to kick-start a series of related talks and events. Among the memorable panel discussions that we had in this series include the session paneled by Dr Kevin Tan, Dr Tan Ta Sen and Mr Chung Chee Kit, titled "Talking Zheng – What is the Zheng He phenomenon?" where they examined Zheng He as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and if the current surge in interest is only a passing fad, or if there were deep rooted reasons for this trend.

Knowledge is a major catalyst for possibilities in our creative economy today, and with this in mind, the "Knowledge Fortnight" series aimed to turbocharge aspirations and imaginations with a slew of programmes, such as the talk by Tan Loke Khoon, veteran trademark attorney/strategist and author of *Pirates of the Middle Kingdom*. He analysed and shared on the trademark regime of China and examined the practicalities of registration and enforcement using real-life case studies. We were also honoured to have Mr Peter Wiley of publishing house John Wiley and Sons and Mr Paul Saffo of the Institute for the Future speak on the future of books as a physical medium in this digital age.

The Directing Asia series saw the likes of acting superstar Jackie Chan and director Stanley Tong in a lively panel discussion touching on Asian Cinema, as well as experiences and thoughts on *The Myth*, Stanley Tong's latest film. In a similar fashion, director Stanley Kwan and popular actress Sammi Cheng were also invited to give insights in a panel discussion on the topic "Women in Cinema". Being

heavyweights in their own right, response to the sessions was overwhelming, attracting large numbers of people interested to understand more about Asian Cinema and the issues that affect it, and of course, to see their favourite stars. Other notables invited under the banner of this series include filmmakers Teddy Chan and Pan Nalin, who gave rich and informative talks on their experiences in filmmaking, and what drives them in their endeavour to produce great films.

Things were taking place on other fronts as well, as the National Library became a choice venue for book launches. The book launch of *A Life Less Ordinary* by ex-journalist Wong Kim Hoh, which began life as a series of columns in a local newspaper stood out, as people came to the launch to meet and hear from three special guests featured in the book. Local theatre group ETCeteras also launched 'Second Helping', the second volume of a compilation of their plays at the National Library, with renowned bilingual writer and *Lianhe Zaobao* columnist Li Lien-Feng and theatre critic Dr K.K Seet engaging in a dialogue session titled "What are we waiting for?".

The aim of expanding the learning capacity of Singaporeans is constantly on NLB's mind, and it is our desire that our programmes encourage Singaporeans to constantly think and desire to acquire knowledge. As 2006 begins, we look forward to providing quality programmes that will create positive experiences for Singaporeans, something that will be indelibly etched into their minds for time to come.