

New head for NTU Chinese Heritage Centre

China-born US don aims to make it a 'research centre of distinction'

By **LEONG WENG KAM**
SENIOR WRITER

A CHINA-BORN American sociologist who is an expert on Asian American studies will be the new director at the Chinese Heritage Centre in Nanyang Technological University (NTU) from next month.

Professor Zhou Min, 57, is the second woman and the fifth academic appointed to head the centre since it was founded by the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) in 1995 to promote the learning and understanding of ethnic Chinese communities from all over the world.

The new Tan Lark Sye Chair Professor of Sociology and head

of the sociology division at NTU's School of Humanities and Social Sciences since July, Professor Zhou is replacing Professor Leo Suryadinata, 72, who is retiring at the end of the month.

The centre's founding director, a woman, was Shanghai-born British writer Lynn Pan, who produced the ground-breaking Encyclopaedia Of The Chinese Overseas, both in English and Chinese, in 1998.

Ms Pan, author of books including Sons Of The Yellow Emperor and Tracing It Home, was succeeded by Johor-born Australian Professor Kee Pookong, a migration expert, in 1999.

Singapore historian Ng Chin Keong was the third director from 2002 till 2005.

Professor Leo, a prominent scholar on Chinese communities in South-east Asia, took over from him the following year.

Prof Zhou, who comes from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she is professor of Sociology and Asian American Studies, said she would take up her post on Nov 1, "a good day as it also marks the second anniversary of the Chinese Heritage Centre's move from SFCCA to NTU as an autonomous research centre in the university".

She said she joined NTU because of her passion for research on the Chinese diaspora and believes that the centre would offer her great opportunities.

On her plans, she said she hopes to make it "an international research centre of distinction" by building on the good work done before.

To do so, she said she would need to raise funds and the cen-

tre's current budget of \$600,000 annually must be doubled at least in the near future.

The centre, which occupies the historic Administration Building of the former Nanyang University, now part of the NTU campus in Jurong, has a library and a museum besides operating as a research institution.

It also publishes a journal on the Chinese overseas and other books, including those from the conferences it organised and the mammoth biographical dictionary South-east Asian Personalities Of Chinese Descent, released last year.

Professor K.K. Phua, 71, a Chinese Heritage Centre board member, said Prof Zhou, with her vast experience and good network of contacts, would do a good job.

He added: "Give her some time and she will have a good grasp of the local situation as well."

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