Connecting S’poreans to their Chinese heritage

Prof. Zhou thoughts young people here may find it beneficial to rediscover their roots, as many do not know how their forebears came out of China, and remitted money to support families and build their hometowns.

“Knowing this would help them connect to their cultural roots as well as bridge the generational gap, by making them more appreciative of what their parents and grandparents have done for the family.”

It would enrich their cultural sensitivity and help them expand their career horizon into China.

Prof. Zhou hopes to translate into English, Chinese-language writings about quociaoing by scholars in China which cover topics such as how the Chinese bypassed the Chinese Exclusion Act, a US federal law in 1882 to bar Chinese workers from entry; remittances of early Chinese immigrants in the US to their hometowns in Guangdong; and overseas Chinese newsletters by which Chinese immigrants connected to families back home.

The centre is also translating a book on Chinese migration and resettlement in Malaysia and Singapore by the late Shanghai-born cartoonist, scholar and ink painter Huang Yao, who settled in Malaya in 1956.

The English edition of his 1967 work, Ma Xin Hua Ren Zhi or The History of Chinese People in Malaya and Singapore, is scheduled for completion by September this year, with a $45,000 gift from the Huang Yao Foundation.

Besides translation, Prof Zhou plans to tap NTU faculty for expertise to create a bilingual robot for the centre’s museum that appeals to pre-schoolers, and convert its library collection of early Chinese textbooks into digital form, to stimulate research on Chinese identity and language teaching.