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在好些艺术工作者和社区义工眼中，国务资政兼社会政策统筹部长尚达曼的夫人，是个充满悲悯和睿智的人物。
作风低调的夫人珍-藤木 (Jane Yumiko Itogi) 是执业律师，当过10年新加坡美术馆董事会主席。
熟悉她的人都知道，珍-藤木10多年前已热心推动在监狱传授专业艺术课程，也风雨不改地在社区帮助面临困难的画民。
从未接受专访的夫人，这回难得对本报记者侃侃而谈，但她始终不愿把焦点放在个人，而是不断推举身边的义工团队，并把焦点放在社区艺术，希望自发起人借艺术、学习接纳差异、谦卑聆听、成为有用的人，并借此重寻自我的价值。



这个色彩斑斓的陶器，是金怀奇2007年在狱中参加“艺术治疗”的作品。最近他重返海洋，写下南洋的故事。

她让艺术改变囚犯



珍-藤木亲切友善，但非常低调，希望鼓励更多人借喝茶来接纳差异、学会分享。



珍-藤木与她形容的义工“三大台柱”——金怀奇(左二)、曹伟明(右二)和陈克港(右一)。

▲这个精致的茶碗用新加坡的陶土制成，所有色彩都是自然色，包括灰棕的自然陶印。

▲国务资政兼社会政策统筹部长尚达曼(左二)与夫人珍-藤木，仔细欣赏新加坡陶器制作的茶具和陶器。

▶200多人参与的“赏茶雅集”，让天猛公益基金会荣获新加坡纪录大全颁发“最大型泡茶仪式”奖项。

一个际遇发掘才华 基金会老人变陶艺家

本月1日，一个风和日丽的星期六傍晚，在北桥山麓天猛公路的假日洋房，200多名来自社会各阶层的各族男女老少，端坐在偕同着森林的露天庭院的一排排长桌边，准备一起喝茶。
雪白桌布上摆放着全套茶具、热水壶，还有胡姬花点缀；小茶包分别装着三种新加坡南洋茶(采用新旧乌龙茶叶堆叠，结合南来香气和闽北茶回甘的独特拼堆)。在75名义工的协助下，大伙儿学习正式的泡茶法，随着茶音缭绕，许多人都微笑着跟初见的陌生人捧杯“破冰”，微凉空气中弥漫着一阵暖意。

这场别开生面的“赏茶雅集”，是为了庆祝新加坡开埠200周年，以及推广艺术家参与的公益基金会成立10周年的“两喜同庆双喜”重点活动。在主办尚达曼见证下，基金会荣获新加坡纪录大全颁发“最大型泡茶仪式”奖项。

据本报了解，200多名茶士年龄介乎九岁到85岁，包括本地华、巫、印和欧四大种族，多国佳节也受邀共襄盛举，与公众打成一片，感觉既本土又国际化。

这个社区艺术活动的另一重点是“怀奇星洲素土展”。展示陶艺家金怀奇(39岁)用“本地泥土”陶造的一系列茶具。金怀奇曾是私企老总，10年前三次入狱，也曾当“天猛公益基金会”义工，如今展展200多副茶具，捐出一半收益回馈恩情。

配合浓浓南洋风，穿著短袖上衣的主办尚达曼致辞时看了多个例子，表示许多人都是因为认真看待人生际遇给予的机会，从中发展出才华和兴趣。

“如果没有监狱里的艺术计划，怀奇不会认为自己可以成为陶艺家，但他有艺术家的才华，并且发挥出来。他算是在监狱。因此怀奇的故事告诉我们——不应因一个人的背景来判断他，总要给人机会去发展或证明他自己也不知道的才华。这样我们将不断收获惊喜，并继续彼此造就。”

尚达曼真情流露 囚犯竟哭出来了

当天随文夫尚达曼出席活动的珍-藤木，一袭紫色旗袍，亲切跟公众和艺术家聊天，离开前还邀社区义工搭他和丈夫的顺风车离开。

珍-藤木不多谈自己和家人，但根据公开的资料，65岁的珍-藤木出生于日本，六岁时随日本父亲和家族母亲来新加坡，在英国留学时因修读马来文课认识尚达曼。两人婚后育有三儿一女，目前年龄介乎23岁到28岁，女儿是老二，四兄妹从幼稚园起就学华文，都取了优雅的花名。珍-藤木平日常以马来语和潮州话与朋友沟通。

珍-藤木当了10年新加坡艺术馆藏董事主席，去年才卸任。她难得接受专访，强调希望借此推动社区艺术，也为艺术家和义工打气。

不过，她重申别把焦点放在她身上，还特意邀请她形容为“三大台柱”的同伴们一同面对记者。谈到在监狱推动艺术教育的来

龙去脉，珍-藤木透露，早在2006年她受邀为监狱诗歌创作当我到那时，就深深被触动。
“当时我要把诗翻译成四种语言，让囚犯当众念出来。当第一个囚犯读出淡米尔文创作的英文翻译，谈到心底对家人的愧疚时，我内心无比感动，眼泪不禁流下，脸上的妆都化开了。我很难为情，转头向监狱官借纸巾，没想到大家也在哭。当时我就感到监狱充满希望。”



陈克港(左)说，金怀奇的茶碗看来古拙简朴，艺术性胜过一旁色彩斑斓的“艺术治疗”作品。

与画家合力推动 监狱专业艺术课程

2005年，珍-藤木在国家艺术理事会的威尼斯双年展特邀委员会结识了长期关心囚犯的抽象画家陈克港(60岁)，大家认同应加强监狱的艺术治疗，并进一步开办专业艺术课程，培训囚犯拥有更多一项谋生技能。

“我相信艺术能帮助囚犯，一来不浪费时光，二来可纾解困境面对自我。虽然当时我还没当艺术馆藏董事主席，但我发现艺术是另一个美丽新世界的，那些被认定是失败者的人，可以根据自己对自己的判断来重建自我和寻找自我价值。我问一个经常进出监狱的囚犯，参与艺术对你的意义是什么？他说这是我这辈子第一次把一件事从头做到尾。艺术让他有掌控权，让他控制创作过程并判断何时完成，因为艺术创作者能判断过程是否已完整表达他想要的信息。”

陈克港受访时说，2007年认识夫人时，他注意监狱有提供艺术治疗，但他主张进行认真的训练，并说服拉萨尔艺术“入狱课程”。

“要进去上课很麻烦，得换证件，通过七

进门，花两小时才得以进入。但我很开心拉萨尔艺术学院肯进去，我也去找钱和找书，在监狱建了艺术图书馆，最终也在夫人和时任教育部长尚达曼的支持下，在监狱开办教育部的艺术文凭课程。

监狱署是在2007年开办视觉艺术中心 (Visual Arts Hub)，即将释放的囚犯完成基础课程后，还可进一步申请参加约三个月的课程，学习制作陶器和绘画。得知开办以来，已有约800名囚犯参加基础艺术课程。

通过社区和艺术 助边缘人释囚入社会

2008年，珍-藤木到植物园园管一个鼓励囚犯的真诚运动艺术展，遇到出狱不久的前私企老总金怀奇示范拉陶，知道他也达会拉帮一带后，便邀请他与尚达曼会面以探讨该当义工，尚达曼随后邀请他在接洽选民活动帮忙，想办法帮社区里有私企背景或家底的人过来。

陈怀奇，珍-藤木每周与金怀奇联络，甚至一天几次，她对金怀奇密切联系边缘青少年、无时无刻想着帮助他们，留下了深刻印象。

高达曼也请开木工厂的社区领袖曹伟明(57岁)当金怀奇的导师，曹伟明后决定聘用金怀奇当工人。珍-藤木微笑说：“伟明真心接纳怀奇，还把家里的胡姬花交给怀奇，请他帮忙照顾他的狗。”

曹伟明认为，释囚已服刑，大家不应再给他们套上枷锁，以免他们走回头路。“我们要帮助他们打破恶性循环，通过教育提升，赚取稳定收入。”

金怀奇说：“我听过师父陈克港说，他1976年中学时期曾通过体育来辅导边缘少年，所以在写艺术毕业论文时就获得灵感，与其找材料做艺术，不如把入当材料，教他们踢球、打球，这也算是一种真实的、一直在变化的艺术。”

喝茶让人记住现在

三年前，金怀奇成为全职陶艺师，在获得良师益友帮助后，他期待自己学习他们那样，通过艺术帮助别人。“每当我边缘少年没钱跟学校外出、缺钱做护照出国，我都叫他们来我家做陶器，一小时八块钱，放上网卖出他们自己的作品后，我也把钱全部给他们。”

金怀奇也打趣说，过去陈克港鼓励他用新加坡泥土做陶器，”当时我一直逼着喝茶，过后我才明白茶的哲学，原来喝茶让人记住现在，静下心来做得更好，吸香却让人忘记现在。过去学到的一切，如今都派上用场了。我最近到监狱，带领囚犯上10堂泡茶课程，从茶道分人生体会。”

他透露，这些年通过艺术和社区服务，他从当丈夫夫妇、曹伟明和陈克港身上学到分享的艺术。“我读大学时，他们都曾私下给我生活费，我都说‘等我有钱了还你’，但他们都答说‘等我有钱了，你去帮助别人’。所以我在有钱就尽量帮人，有机会就教别人。我领悟到，所学的和拥有的一切，都不是自己的，是要分享出去的。”

艺术是接纳差异 不判断多聆听

在“幕后”推动艺术多年，珍-藤木对艺术的价值有着独特的看法。

她10多年前与陈克港连动拉萨尔艺术学院在监狱开办专业艺术课程后，发现每当她到监狱跟从事艺术创作的囚犯交流时，总有些好监官会过来观察和聆听。

“监狱官们对眼前所见印象深刻。连他们自己也对那些艺术课程产生兴趣，因为他们感到囚犯们的人生正在转变，不只是有一些改变。他们开始能表达爱，甚至可以跟自己的真我联系 (in touch with themselves)。许多人都不知道如何跟我相处，所以无法活出自己的信念。但我想艺术能帮助他们。”

对天猛公益基金会推动的“艺术家帮助艺术家”和社区艺术理念，珍-藤木如此评论：“囚犯需要艺术，监狱需要艺术，我们所有都不需要艺术。因为艺术让我们接纳差异、不了解的事，以及向来害怕和不喜欢的事物，但借艺术，我们发现自己可以超越这些文化力量，去承认更深层的事物。”

记者听说她在艺术圈和社区扶的好些事迹，想进一步了了解时，她如此回应说：“我感觉如果义工要帮忙释囚或任何迷失的人，我们必须愿意仔细聆听，不以过去的失败论断人，愿意陪他走过低谷。只有陪伴同行才能让他迷失的人找到自己，也让我们重新认识他人。怀奇这样的信念是重要而真实的——当你帮助弱势或被认定是失败者的人，你其实不只是在帮助他，更是帮助他成为能帮助别人的，让沮丧和失去希望的人体会，原来他们在别人的人生中是有用的，如此他们就能寻找到自我。”

说到这里，夫人似乎想起许多人与事，停顿几秒后，哽咽擦泪。



200多名茶士包括曹伟明和曹伟明太太陈佩敬、陈克港夫妇、陈怀奇夫妇，打成一片。



▲雪白桌布上摆放着全套茶具、热水壶，还有胡姬花点缀；小茶包分别装着三种新加坡南洋茶。(温伟中摄)

▶谈到要多聆听，陪迷失的人走过低谷并重新寻找自我，珍-藤木触动落泪。

She uses art to transform the lives of convicts – An exclusive interview with Mrs Tharman

To many arts practitioners and community volunteers, Ms Jane Yumiko Ittogi, the wife of Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, is someone who exudes compassion and wisdom.

Ms Ittogi has always kept a low profile. She is a practising lawyer and was also the Chair of the Board of Directors at the Singapore Art Museum.

People familiar with Ms Ittogi will know that she has long been a keen advocate for organising professional art courses in the prisons, and is also tireless in her efforts to help residents in the community who are in distress.

Speaking candidly in this exclusive interview, Ms Ittogi shared more about her passions. Reluctant to be the only person in the spotlight, she was quick to point out other key figures within the arts community, relentlessly praising them, and shifting the focus onto the art itself within the community. She hopes the medium can be an inspiration for others to accept differences, listen with humility, acquire valuable skills and rediscover their self-worth.

Talent-spotted by chance, gang headman becomes a pottery artist

On 1 September 2019, more than 200 individuals from different ethnicities and walks of life congregated at a black-and-white bungalow along Temenggong Road, which is halfway up Mount Faber. They sat around rows of long tables in an open-air courtyard that was bordering a tropical forest, looking forward to a tea-drinking session.

Placed upon white tablecloths were tea sets, orchids and kettles that held a special brew made from three types of leaves from the Singapore Nanyang variety. It contained a unique blend of old and new Oolong, infused with the fragrance of southern Fujian leaves, and the sweet aftertaste of northern Fujian leaves.

With the help of 75 volunteers, the group learnt the proper techniques of tea-brewing. The fragrance of tea wafted through the air, and many broke the ice with strangers by raising their teacups and toasting one another with heart-warming smiles.

This unusual tea-appreciation gathering was organised to commemorate not only the Singapore Bicentennial, but also the 10th anniversary Temenggong Artists-In-Residence – a charity that aims to inculcate art appreciation, art education and art collection in Singapore.

With Mr Tharman as guest-of-honour and witness, Temenggong Artists-In-Residence was conferred an award by the Singapore Book of Records for holding the largest tea-brewing ceremony to date. There were about 200 tea enthusiasts in attendance, aged between nine to 35, and included a mix of locals and envoys from several countries. The atmosphere felt both homely and cosmopolitan as the guests mingled easily with one another.

Launched on that very same evening was an exhibition that showcased 200 tea sets that were made by pottery artist, Kim Whye Kee. The 39-year-old was a former gang headman who had been sent to jail thrice over ten years. Having benefitted from Temenggong Artists-In-Residence's programme, he wanted to pay the kindness forward and half of the proceeds from the sale of displayed tea sets will be donated.

In keeping with the Nanyang theme, Mr Tharman turned up in a short-sleeved batik shirt. In his speech, he gave several examples of individuals who had developed interests and talents after seizing opportunities that came their way.

In his opening address, he mentioned: "If not for the art programme in the prisons, Whye Kee would not have imagined himself a pottery artist. Even when he was doing time, it was evident that he possessed artistic talent. His story tells us that we should not judge a person based on their background.

"We ought to give others a chance to develop talents which they may not know exist and are waiting to be discovered. This way, we will keep surprising ourselves and enabling others to succeed."

Mrs Tharman moved to tears by candour of convicts

Ms Ittogi, who accompanied Mr Tharman to the event, dressed in a purple nonya kebaya. She chatted warmly with the artists and members of the public.

According to public sources, Ms Ittogi seldom talks about herself or her family, though research revealed that the 65-year-old was born in Japan and came to Singapore at the age of six with her Japanese father and Chinese mother. She met Mr Tharman in a Malay language class when she was studying in the United Kingdom. They have three sons and a daughter, aged 23 to 28, with the daughter being the youngest.

Ms Ittogi chaired the board of the Singapore Art Museum for ten years before stepping down last year. It took a good amount of persuasion before she agreed to give an interview, and wanted the spotlight to be on community art and the people behind them. She even invited three key figures from the evening's event to join her in the interview, describing them as her pillars of support.

As early as 2006, Ms Ittogi was already championing for arts education to be introduced in the prisons. She recalled one particular event, when she served as a judge for their poem-writing contest: “Back then, I requested for the poems to be translated so that all present could understand the words. As the first convict recited the English translation of his Tamil poem, he described the deep-seated guilt he felt towards his family.

“I was incredibly touched and could not help shedding tears. My makeup was ruined and I had to ask the prison warden for some tissue. It was so embarrassing but to my surprise, everyone else was crying too. It was then I thought there was plenty of hope to be found in the prisons.”

Working with artists to establish professional art courses in the prisons

In 2005, Ms Ittogi got to know abstract ink painter, Henri Chen Kezhan, when she sat on the National Arts Council’s Venice Biennale selection committee. Henri had been interested in the welfare of convicts for many years, and shared her belief that the art therapy programme at the prisons could be improved so that convicts could acquire an additional life skill.

“I believe that through art, convicts can learn not only to pass their time meaningfully, but to also face themselves in a sincere manner. Art is a window to a beautiful new world, wherein those deemed as failures can rebuild themselves and find self-worth according to their own measure of beauty,” Ms Ittogi explained.

“I once asked a habitual offender what his art practice meant to him. He said it was the first time in his life that he saw something to completion. Art allowed him to call the shots by controlling the process of creation, determining the moment when a work was complete, and the message it conveyed,” she continued.

After his meeting with Ms Ittogi, Henri worked to persuade LASALLE College of the Arts to conduct professional art courses in the prisons for convicts. Recounting, he said: “Teaching in the prisons is very cumbersome. To access the classrooms alone, one has to exchange his/her identity document and go through seven doors. It is a process that takes up to two hours.

“I was therefore thrilled when LASALLE was willing to partner with us. On my part, I sourced for funding and books to set up an arts library within the prisons. With the support of Ms Ittogi and Mr Tharman, who was then-Minister for Education, accredited art diploma courses were finally introduced in the prisons.”

The Singapore Prison Service established the Visual Arts Hub in 2007. Convicts who have completed basic art training and are about to finish serving their sentence can apply to attend a three-month course specialising in

pottery and drawing. Since its inception, the basic art course has trained about 800 convicts.

Helping ex-convicts reintegrate into society through art

In 2008, Ms Ittogi was introduced to Kim Whye Kee when she attended an art exhibition organised by the Yellow Ribbon Project. The former gang headman had just finished serving his sentence and was demonstrating the art of pottery. After learning that Whye Kee lived in Taman Jurong, Ms Ittogi invited him to meet Mr Tharman to discuss becoming a volunteer in the constituency's Meet-the-People sessions, where he can assist in cases involving individuals from troubled backgrounds.

During that period, Ms Ittogi communicated with Whye Kee almost every day, and was deeply impressed by his constant effort to keep in touch and help at-risk youths.

Mr Tharman was equally moved, and asked community leader and woodwork factory-owner, Patrick Chan, to mentor Whye Kee. Patrick went one step further and subsequently employed Whye Kee, even going so far as to entrust Whye Kee with his house keys so that the latter could let himself in and look after Patrick's dog.

"At that time, Whye Kee needed funds to pay for his living expenses and his education at LASALLE. It wasn't much but I'd regularly invite him to my home for a meal. He was more like a guardian to us, and we are like family," Patrick said. He believes that since ex-convicts have already served their sentence in prison, society should avoid putting new shackles on them.

"We have to help them break the vicious circle, and one way to do this is to give them opportunities to upgrade themselves through education, so that they can then earn a stable income," he explained. For the past ten years, Patrick has employed many ex-convicts in his factories and businesses.

Henri is also a friend to Whye Kee, giving the latter free lessons in sketching and other foundational art skills. He also sponsored a semester of Whye Kee's education at LASALLE in 2009.

"Henri once told me that when he was a secondary school student in 1976, he counselled at-risk youths by engaging them through sports. This inspired my graduation thesis, in which I delved into how comradeship can help troubled individuals to heal," Whye Kee shared.

In 2010, inspired by his many supporters and with the help of Mr Tharman, Whye Kee partnered fellow ex-convict Darren Tan, who is now a practising lawyer, to set up Beacon of Life – a support group for persons with similar pasts. Two years later, they founded the Beacon of Life Academy and

became mentors to at-risk youths. Soccer features as a main programme of the Academy, and Whye Kee have on many occasions rented out soccer fields and hired coaches to train the youths.

Tea-drinking helps one remember the present

Wbye Kee established himself as a full-time pottery artist three years ago. Having received help from others, he now aspires to follow in their footsteps and assist others through art. "Whenever at-risk youths are unable to participate in school trips due to a lack of funds, I would invite them to my studio to do work on a clay object for \$8 an hour. I would then put up their creations for sale and pass the entire proceeds to them," he explained.

"Henri was the one that introduced me to tea-drinking, and it took me a while to understand the philosophy behind tea. In essence, tea-drinking actually helps one to remember to be in the present because it has a calming effect. Drugs, on the other hand, makes one forget the present as it is a form of escapism. I wanted to share what I've learnt, so I visited the prisons and took convicts through a tea-brewing course."

Wbye Kee further divulged his spirit to share was inspired by Ms Ittogi, Mr Tharman, Patrick and Henri. "When I lacked the funds to pay for my tertiary education, they helped with my living expenses in whatever way they could, and I told them I would repay them when I had the means.

"However, all of them replied that I should pay it forward instead. Therefore now, whenever my finances permit, I will do my best to help and teach others. I have come to realise that my experiences are not mine alone, and are meant to be shared."

Art is about accepting differences, and listening without judgement

After many years of promoting the arts, Ms Ittogi has formed a unique view about its value. Since working with Henri and LASALLE ten years ago to establish professional art courses in prisons, she realised that the number of wardens sitting in on classes have grown.

"The wardens were impressed by what they'd observed. They could feel and notice the transformation happening with the convicts – how individuals who had no idea how to coexist could slowly express love and get in touch with their inner selves. This is how art can help us."

On the various initiatives by Temenggong Artists-In-Residence, Ms Ittogi further added: "Convicts need art, prison wardens need art, all of us need art. The reason is that art helps us to accept differences, and understand things we fear and dislike.

“I feel that to genuinely help someone who has lost their way, we have to be willing to listen without judgement, and be prepared to accompany them through their lows. It is only through our company that people who have strayed the furthest can find themselves back again. Moreover, it allows us to see others in a new light.”

Overcome with emotion, after recalling the many stories of people she had met, Ms Ittogi ended by saying: “When you help someone who is disadvantaged, labelled as a failure or is despondent at their situation, you are actually enabling them to become somebody who can help others. In helping them see that they can impact the lives of others positively, they will then be able to find themselves.”