



(From left) Law student Shambhavi Raut, 26; sisters Soong Jia Ying, 10, and Soong Jia Xian, seven; and Mr Ang Kwang Hua, 63, holding samples of Chinese calligraphy at the People's Association headquarters in Jalan Besar yesterday. They have been participating in the N Cube National Chinese Calligraphy Competition, with the final round to be held tomorrow. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

## Law student didn't know Mandarin but was drawn to calligraphy

Malavika Menon

A cultural exchange to China in 2014 ignited Ms Shambhavi Raut's interest in Chinese calligraphy.

Despite not knowing Mandarin, Ms Raut found herself drawn to the elegant brush strokes and literary meanings of the art form.

The postgraduate law student at the National University of Singapore (NUS) joined its Chinese Calligraphy Club last year.

The 26-year-old is one of more than 600 participants in the ongoing N Cube National Chinese Calligraphy Competition, organised by PassionArts and Braddell Heights Community Centre in partnership with NUS, Nanyang Technological University and Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Ms Raut said that while staying

with a local family during her immersion programme in Changchun, she would sit next to a senior member of the family and observe his brush strokes as he practised calligraphy at home.

"At that time, I had no knowledge of Mandarin and found it difficult to communicate. The first time I put brush to paper, it was a mess," she said.

"But ever since I joined the calligraphy club, my peers have been very supportive, translating the teacher's instructions, so I can keep pace with the class. They encouraged me to take part in this competition, which has been a challenging but valuable experience."

The theme for this year's competition is Inkception, where participants use their creativity to express hopes for the new year and motivate Singaporeans to look forward to a prosperous new year

LINKING UP WITH OTHERS

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**MR DANIEL YIP**, deputy director of the community arts and culture division at the People's Association.

through the form of words.

The competition, which opened for mail-in submissions in January, has received 642 entries.

Two of the youngest participants are sisters Soong Jia Ying, 10 and Soong Jia Xian, seven.

Having grown up watching their grandfather practise calligraphy, both girls love the art form.

Jia Ying, a pupil from Raffles Girls' Primary School, was encouraged by her teacher to take part in the competition. "I was initially nervous to take part, but when my sister joined me in support, I felt very excited. We might not win, but it's a great experience," she said.

Mr Daniel Yip, deputy director of the community arts and culture division at the People's Association, said the competition is an opportunity to bring the traditional art form closer to the community amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Finalists will participate in the final round of the competition over Zoom tomorrow and the winners will be announced on March 27.

There are four categories: primary school; secondary school; junior college and polytechnic; and public. Members of the Chinese Calligraphy Society of Singapore are judging the competition.

The final winning artworks will be exhibited at Braddell Heights CC and the three partner tertiary institutions next month.

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