

Jessica Liu

### My Taiwanese Background and Me

Growing up, people would regularly ask me what my ethnicity was. Whether it be at school or at a summer camp, I was asked if I was Korean or Chinese, and while I am considered Chinese politically, I would answer that I am Taiwanese American. Of course, few people actually knew where Taiwan was and I would have to explain to them that it was a tiny island nation off the East coast of China. In the back of my mind, I thought that people would know about it since nearly everyone has to pass a world geography class, but the number of times I have had to point out the leaf-shaped mass on a map has been astonishing.

I am very fortunate to have grown up in a very culturally diverse and accepting environment where different aspects of my culture which I practice aren't harshly judged or looked down upon as they may be in other areas of the country. However, one of the few aspects of Taiwanese culture that my classmates would be critical of was the food. I remember sharing certain Taiwanese dishes such as pig's tongue and heart in school and seeing my classmates reactions of disgust. As I grew older I learned not to take offense to the negative opinions regarding the food of my culture, but as an elementary and middle school kid who was trying to fit in I felt embarrassed and angry towards my classmates. I eventually realized that my classmates weren't disrespecting my culture, but that their reactions were just their genuine thoughts of the food I considered to be "normal."

In addition to food, people would constantly question why I was so quiet and reserved, which for me I saw as normal within the Taiwanese community. I was raised with the conception that being loud was associated with being rude, and that being quiet was respectful to others around me. Some of my teachers when I was little would be concerned over my subsequent shyness and would even discuss it with my parents during parent teacher conferences. And for the longest time, I was known as the "quiet girl" in my grade. As a result, people often misunderstood my quietness as being antisocial, and my suggestions and attempts to speak during group discussions or projects were often ignored. Eventually I became more talkative and social, but I still find it hard to believe the assumptions my classmates made of me simply because I was quiet.

Though this mentality is not exclusive to Taiwanese culture, the idea of working hard no matter what is something I grew up with and live by. Even if a project is small or trivial, I remind myself to give it a 110 percent of my effort. Another concept I became familiar with was the term “Asian Failing.” Growing up in the Taiwanese, and the Asian community in general, my mindset regarding my academics was that anything below a B was considered failing, which of course is not true. Up until high school, I would strictly base my success off of this concept. Although it pressured me to push myself above and beyond, it actually attributed to a relatively quick adjustment from middle school to high school.

Being a member of a relatively small cultural community, I find that there is scarce representation of Taiwanese culture in general, especially when it comes to ethnic festivals. In the future, I hope to spread Taiwanese culture and bring more representation of my heritage into whichever career I end up doing as well as help spread acknowledgement of Taiwanese culture within my local community. I also hope to not only bring more representation to the Taiwanese community, but to also help other smaller cultural communities have the same recognition as larger, more well known cultural communities in the country.

Over the years I have learned to embrace my Taiwanese heritage in a society that pressures people my age to fit in and have grown to realize that my Taiwanese background makes me different, in a good way, than most people. Regardless of people’s opinions of certain aspects of my culture, I will always be proud to say that I am Taiwanese American.