

Annika Meng - TYAF Award Application

On April 8, 2003, my parents planted a small newly sprouted seedling that would eventually mature into a member of the Taiwanese American community that they cared so much for. I was this sapling, and ever since I was born I became instantly enveloped by Taiwanese culture, immersed in the overflow of delicious traditional Taiwanese foods and surrounded by the melodious tunes of various Taiwanese songs sung by my parents and grandparents. At home, my parents constantly spoke both Taiwanese and Mandarin to me, so that I would be able to communicate to my grandparents over our weekly phone calls and during our almost yearly visits to Taiwan. With this, my sprout began to grow, my roots weaving into the earth and grounding me with my Taiwanese identity.

With my own little sprout, I enrolled in Washington DC Taiwanese School at the mere age of one, where I was instantly absorbed by the magnificent forest of greenery created by other members of the Taiwanese community, providing me the opportunity to meet fellow growing sprouts like me, such as my now closest friends Mandy, Katherine, Maxine, Kaitlyn and Finna, all protected and cared for by the wiser and matured great oaks of the school and our community. At this school, I became more and more in touch with my Taiwanese self, dancing and singing to cute traditional Taiwanese songs that have still ingrained themselves to my brain today. To this day, there are still online videos of two year old me, singing and dancing to Taiwanese songs such as Toax Zuy Guu at the Mother's Day Party. As I grew older, I began learning how to read and write Taiwanese and Chinese at school and still attend both classes weekly at WDCTS.

As a member of our Taiwanese school, I am always active in our community, consistently taking responsibility by volunteering and participating whenever events are held, ranging from our yearly Lunar New Year's, Mother's Day, and Christmas parties. In addition, I have been volunteering yearly at the annual Mid Autumn Festival for 5 years straight, either setting up and running the ring toss station for kids, or selling traditional foods like aiyu ice drink and sausages to raise money for our school. Whenever our Taiwanese School community parents attend speeches and meetings, I am also given the responsibility to babysit and entertain their children upstairs. Furthermore, every year since 2014 when the WDCTS Dr. Liang Camp was established, I have been volunteering my summertime to take care of our younger Taiwanese kids, inclusive whether or not they attended Taiwanese School. At this camp, I assisted Ms. CC teaching our campers how to make traditional Taiwanese foods such as mantou, nian gao, red bean ice cream, and dou hua, and taught the science and chemistry behind those foods. With this, I was able to teach younger Taiwanese children about their own culture with my own experiences as a Taiwanese American. Like water to my now growing

tree, these opportunities to volunteer in my community not only continue to help me grow and develop as a person, but also provides me with the opportunity to branch out and give back to our Taiwanese community

The constant influences of my parents, my peers, and other succeeding members of our community have inspired me to pursue my own academic achievements as well. In middle school, I received the Presidential Service Award, presented to those completing the required SSL hours by eighth grade. In addition, I graduated middle school with a perfect 4.0 GPA and received both Honor Roll and the Straight A's award for all of middle school. Furthermore, I was inducted into the National Junior Honor Society from sixth to eighth grade, in which we were presented with opportunities of leadership and service to our communities by creating events such as food drives and arranging field trips. Currently I am still reaching out to my full potential, attending Richard Montgomery High School's International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, an advanced and rigorous course emphasizing a student's growth physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically. In this program, we are encouraged to reflect on the nature of knowledge, perform community service, and challenge ourselves mentally to complete independent research. Surrounded by a competitive environment of students who are all willing to learn and challenge themselves, I am motivated to learn more and work harder for achievements and success.

Outside of my academics, I enjoy both Music and Art, participating in the National Art Honor Society and an Honors Concert Choir at school. For both, my achievements have been awarded for. My art has now been displayed at school and I have won the Rho Phi Society Vocal Performance Scholarship. Additionally, I love playing volleyball, which I have been playing for 4 years. Recently, I have both played setter for Richard Montgomery junior varsity and libero for varsity Coed volleyball, in addition to club volleyball at Volleyball MD.

As I grow and mature as a member of the Taiwanese American community, I hope to continue to prosper and eventually flourish into a magnificent tree of my identity, rich in all aspects of Taiwanese culture, like the bountiful leaves on a tree, to grow with a thick trunk supported by my Taiwanese family, friends and mentors. I hope that my various branches and twigs will be able to reach outwards towards the Taiwanese community, intertwining with the spindling and bountiful branches of others. Our forest creating a canopy of verdant green, sheltering the smallest, fragile sprouts of new incoming members and future generations of Taiwanese Americans. Though I am still growing and developing, I hope that with my own exposure to our Taiwanese culture, I am able to contribute back to the community, and to pass down the culture that has so greatly influenced and intertwined with my own identity.