

Beep. Beep. I force myself to roll over and turn off the alarm. My head drops onto my pillow in exhaustion. It's Sunday, and I need more sleep, but — "AMANDA! GET UP!" — I need to go to school. Well, two schools to be more precise: Chinese and Taiwanese schools.

My parents were certain to include Taiwanese culture into my life sending me to language and culture schools starting as a toddler. I didn't really mind doing it as a kid in elementary school, but that changed once I got to middle school. Teachers began to decide that since students have two days off on the weekends that they could assign more homework. It became a real struggle to keep up with homework from three different schools. Although my grades in Chinese and Taiwanese school aren't as important as those of my regular school, I still felt that I needed to complete the assignments with just as much effort as the latter. However, I was bitter at the prospect of continuing to attend. I didn't use anything I learned there outside of my own house, and it felt as though I was just wasting not just my time but my parents' as well. This argument, luckily, was not enough to sway my parents into letting me quit.

Despite how bothersome attending these schools can be, they are worth the trouble. I know many people who have quit and lost most of their ability to use the language as a result. This fact terrifies me. To me, these languages are a critical part of my life, and it would be devastating if I were to lose them. Fortunately, I get a chance to practice and improve them every week at these schools. These schools allow me to connect with my cultural roots at a deeper level. They allow me to communicate with others I wouldn't have been able to otherwise. Especially since most children around me are Chinese American, and the few that are Taiwanese American do not know any Taiwanese. This sometimes makes me feel extremely isolated; however, Taiwanese school gives me a community that I can rely on. Although it is across state lines, it is still an amazing group of people that I can trust and relate to. It's like a giant extended family in many ways. Even though I only see the members once a week, I still feel as though I am a part of it.

In addition, Taiwanese school provides me a wonderful opportunity to immerse myself deeper into my cultural heritage. Writing calligraphy and playing night market games at events such as Taiwan Fun! are some of the most enjoyable moments of my life. I can forget about the stress that comes with school and just simply immerse myself into the culture.

Classroom instruction at Taiwanese School has evolved over the years; however, there has always been a focus on songs and conversation. It teaches ways to practically apply our skills in the real world. This especially came in handy when I last went to Taiwan. Although most of my interactions were in Mandarin, there were a few people who only spoke Taiwanese and most would sneak in sentences here and there. If I did not attend Taiwanese school I would be completely clueless as to what was happening. Although I still required some translation, I was usually able to comprehend the general gist of the conversation and reply appropriately.