

As a Taiwanese American I have often felt stuck in the middle of two cultures. On one hand, my family, both here and in Taiwan, encourage me to embrace my Taiwanese roots. However, living in America, there is always pressure to assimilate, to let go of everything that makes me "different." For many, assimilation is a reality. Many first, second, and third generation immigrants are forced to give up their own identity, to conform to their peers. Fortunately, I always had support systems that kept me rooted in my Taiwanese heritage.

For almost all my life, I have been attending Washington DC Taiwanese School. Every Sunday, when I enter the halls of Cabin John Middle School, I am immersed in Taiwanese culture at every turn. Obviously, we spend a good amount of time learning the ins and outs of the Taiwanese and Mandarin languages. However, when I grow out of Taiwanese School, my first thoughts won't be of the hours spent studying vocab and doing practice worksheets. I won't look at my attempts to figure out Taiwanese tone circles or deciphering zhu-yin. I will remember the community of like-minded Taiwanese kids, all trying to figure out their own culture. I will remember the holiday dinners, lovingly cooked by all the uncles and aunties. I will remember the valued time spent with those *akofng* and *amar* at the tea table, as they spoiled me with Taiwanese snacks and candy, but most importantly, their wisdom. With my own grandparents living thousands of miles away, they became a significant source of care and nourishment. And when I was finally able to spend time with my real grandparents, these seemingly miniscule interactions prepared me.

In the summers, I spend two weeks volunteering at Dr. Liang Summer Camp. I help take care of the young campers, as well as housekeeping: sweeping the floors, washing dishes, and cooking when necessary. I see this as an opportunity to help foster the Taiwanese youth, and help them learn about the culture and customs, as well as sharing a healthy space for them to connect with similar individuals. My hope is that by doing this, I am erasing from their minds some of the doubts I had in myself. I hope to help them find comfort and pride in their Taiwanese heritage, and not have to struggle with the pressure to lose their "differentness" and assimilate to American culture. At the same time, the work I do strengthens my own connection to my Taiwanese background. As I knead *mantou* while everyone else plays outside, I think of my uncle's bakery, and how I would walk in as a child and be immediately engulfed in the aroma of various Taiwanese breads and cakes. Here, I would feel at home, despite being as far as I could possibly be from my house.

I am also a volunteer for FASCA, an organization of young Taiwanese ambassadors. As I work at an event presenting Taiwanese traditions, games, etc., I always take immense pride in being able to share my culture with others. I enjoy being able to educate the non-Taiwanese public on these matters that are so important to my peers, my family, and me. I find that by teaching others about Taiwanese culture, I am learning about myself and connecting myself to my family and ancestors.

As I get older, I look forward to further spreading my Taiwanese culture, as I pass on all my knowledge to my children and grandchildren. I hope to contribute to the steadily increasing Taiwanese awareness in America. I hope that one day, my future generations will be able to say

*with their chests that they are Taiwanese, and not have to worry about others not knowing where that is, or having to explain that it is its own country. I hope that future, non-Taiwanese generations will be able to say "Let's get Taiwanese food," the same way they currently do for any other culture.*

*Sometimes I walk through those halls of Taiwanese School, thinking about what fun my American friends must be having on a Sunday afternoon, while I will spend ninety minutes at a desk, writing down answers and listening to my teachers teach me a language I felt I already knew. However, as I look back and reflect, I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity I have been given. I could not ask for a better outlet for all my feelings about being Taiwanese, where I can handle any doubts and insecurities, while expressing my utmost pride and delight to be Taiwanese.*