

Scholarship Essay

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November 29, 2025

Growing up as a half Jamaican, half Taiwanese American in Calvert County, Maryland, where only about one percent of the population is Asian, meant that my culture was something I constantly had to explain, defend, or hide. When I brought traditional lunches to school or celebrated holidays like Lunar New Year and Winter Solstice, I was often met with confused stares or comments about my “smelly food.” For a long time, I begged my mom for Lunchables just to seem normal. I started to believe that there was something wrong with being Taiwanese.

Everything shifted when I began attending the Washington DC Taiwanese School. For the first time, I was surrounded by people who understood my culture and celebrated it. I quickly fell in love with the community, and whenever I fell in love with a community, I would try to give back as much as possible. I helped my mom run cultural booths like rice painting and jump rope demonstrations in Taiwan Fun, participated in field days, sold t-shirts at Fiesta Asia, served food at community events at Lunar New Year, Winter Solstice, and Mother’s Day, joined a dragon boat team, and helped run the bamboo dance booth. Through these experiences, I learned about Taiwanese foods, traditions, holidays, history, and art. I explored recipes at home, practiced using the abacus, and constantly searched for more ways to stay connected.

The pandemic cut that chapter short. I suddenly lost the weekly immersion that kept me grounded in my identity. As high school became busier, I drifted from my cultural roots. The isolation of the pandemic led me to seek out leadership opportunities, but I soon realized that true fulfillment lay not in the title, but in connecting my efforts back to the passion the Taiwanese School had ignited. It was not until my sophomore year that I realized something important. I did not need to be inside a Taiwanese space to honor or serve my community. I could bring Taiwanese culture with me into places where it rarely appears.

Since then, I have made it my mission to integrate Taiwanese culture into every part of my school life. In my theatre program, as Head of Set Construction and Design, I created backdrops inspired by Liu Guosong, blending traditional Taiwanese aesthetics with modern art. As a member of the Math Honor Society, I planned an abacus workshop for children at a county-wide math festival to show them a new perspective on math while introducing them to Taiwanese heritage. In my Music Honor Society, I researched and presented Taiwanese instruments such as the zither and proposed a fundraising project to bring these

instruments into our school ensemble. Through student government, I helped organize a culture night featuring Taiwanese dance, art, and history.

By sharing my culture with students who may have never encountered it otherwise, I discovered a new way of serving the Taiwanese American community. It is a form of service rooted in visibility, pride, and education. I once believed that you needed to be surrounded by your own community to express your identity. I have now learned that spreading Taiwanese culture into spaces where it is underrepresented is one of the most meaningful ways I can contribute.

The Washington DC Taiwanese School gave me the foundation to understand and appreciate my heritage. Leaving it taught me how to carry that culture forward and share it with others. In doing so, I have grown not only as a Taiwanese American, but as someone who understands the power of cultural connection and the responsibility of passing it on.