

## Paddling Forward: A Journey of Culture and Community

Growing up in a mixed culture family, my experiences at the Washington DC Taiwanese school (WDCTS) has not only deepened my knowledge but also rooted me more firmly in Taiwanese culture. My connection to Taiwanese traditions began early. My 阿嬤 took care of me and my sister and surrounded us with language and tastes of Taiwan. But it wasn't until my family started attending WDCTS every Sunday that I truly felt part of a large community.

In 2015, I started my journey at WDCTS by enrolling in Mandarin classes. At WDCTS, you do not just learn the language, the school brings Taiwanese culture to life. I happily take part in all these fun events from Taiwan Fun, the Winter Solstice Celebration, to Taiwan Ancestor Day Potluck. As I entered middle school, I moved from participant to contributor. I volunteered at cultural events, ran stations at Taiwan Fun and Halloween parades, and helped manage microphones, sound boards, and projections for annual performances during the Winter Solstice and Mother's Day celebrations. These experiences taught me the importance of helping out to preserve cultural heritage.

My involvement grew further when I became a junior counselor at Dr. Liang's summer camp. Playing games and preparing food with the kids gave me a sense of responsibility and connection. Inspired by those experiences, I've spent the last couple of years serving as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for Mandarin classes. I created lesson plans and games like Kahoots and jeopardy to keep my students engaged in a fun and meaningful way. Helping the younger generation reminds me of my own journey just a few years earlier.

Music also became a bridge to Taiwanese culture for me. I have also been taking percussion class with Joe 老師 since 2019. Under his guidance and leadership, I have performed with the Chinese Chamber Orchestra of District of Columbia, playing many classic Taiwanese folk songs. Sharing these melodies with audiences is another powerful way of spreading Taiwanese culture.

One of my favorite Taiwanese culture events is the Dragon Boat Festival. I have been on the Belugas youth team since 7th grade, but the race continues to fascinate me. Since my first on water practice, I have been mesmerized by the thrilling spectacle of 20 synchronized paddlers powering a long, regal boat designed to resemble the mythical and fiery dragon. This requires everyone on the team to move in one synchronized motion, one after another, from the beginning until the end. Through this experience, I gained not only a deeper connection to my culture but also a profound appreciation for teamwork. As a Taiwanese community, we are like paddlers moving together, our Taiwanese American community thrives through shared effort and unity. Living in the United States, moments like these remind me that cultural traditions can transcend boundaries, weaving the threads of heritage into the fabric of our communities.

I am proud to be Taiwanese American. Every event, every performance, every shared moment has enriched my understanding of Taiwan and shaped my values. WDCTS has given me more

than language skills, it has given me a sense of belonging and a lifelong commitment to celebrating and preserving Taiwanese culture.