

## TYAF Application

Growing up as a Taiwanese American meant spending much of my childhood trying to understand where I fit between two cultures. For a long time, I saw myself as more American. When someone asked me about my background, I would simply say I was from here, partly because many people didn't know what Taiwan was, and partly because I had never thought deeply about what being Taiwanese meant. That changed in the summer of 2023, when I returned to Taiwan after just finishing my freshman year of high school, no longer just experiencing it as a vacation spot, but as a place with history, culture, and meaning. Walking through night markets, speaking Mandarin with my grandparents, and seeing Taiwan's daily life helped me understand that my identity was not split between Taiwanese and American. Instead, I strived to become more Taiwanese than American. That experience made me want to reconnect more deeply with my heritage and give back to the community that shaped me.

The center of that community has always been the Washington DC Taiwanese School (WDCTS). I have been part of WDCTS since I was two years old, and it has been the foundation of my cultural upbringing. From learning Mandarin and Taiwanese to performing songs like 伊是咱的寶貝 during Mother's Day celebrations, the school created an environment where being Taiwanese American felt natural. As I grew older, I realized how much this community had meant to me. I want to cherish every moment of it while I'm still here. That understanding was what pushed me to step into roles where I could contribute in return.

One of the most meaningful ways I have been able to give back is through the Youth Dragon Boat Team. I became vice captain in 2024 and captain in 2025, leading more than twenty middle and high school students. Beyond learning how to paddle, call commands, or train for races, I learned how to motivate teammates, bond with others, and represent our school with pride during the annual dragon boat festival. Seeing younger paddlers grow in confidence and teamwork reminded me of how older students once encouraged me, not just in dragon boat, but in general. Being captain allowed me to help create that same supportive environment that had shaped my own experience.

Service also became a major part of my involvement at WDCTS. I began assisting with the school's chess club in middle school, supervising and teaching younger students. Later, I supported classroom teachers as a teaching assistant, helping to keep students engaged and comfortable with the language-learning

process. These interactions showed me how meaningful it is when older students make younger ones feel seen and supported.

Outside of WDCTS, I also represented Taiwanese culture through the Formosa Association of Student Cultural Ambassadors (FASCA) from 2022 to 2024. Through events such as the Bubble Tea Festival, Rockville Lantern Festival, and Potomac Day, I helped introduce Taiwanese traditions, food, and history to the public. These experiences taught me how cultural identity can be shared, not only within our own community but also with people who may know very little about Taiwan.

Every summer, I continued giving back by serving as a counselor at Dr. Liang's Summer Camp, a language and culture camp I once attended as a child. Guiding campers through activities, like making 饅頭, crafting paper umbrellas, cooking sushi, or playing traditional board games. Though not all of these activities are related to Taiwan, they still showed me the importance of maintaining this Taiwanese American community for the next generation.

Throughout middle and high school, I also took on supporting roles during holiday events such as Christmas, Lunar New Year, and Mother's Day performances. Whether I was serving food, setting up stages, or helping backstage. It didn't seem like much then, but looking back, I feel proud knowing I was contributing to events that brought families together and strengthened our community..

These experiences reflect how deeply the Taiwanese American community has shaped me. More importantly, they show my effort to give back in meaningful and lasting ways. What began as a search for identity became a commitment to service. Today, I carry a stronger sense of who I am: someone who grew up supported by such a vibrant and caring community, and someone who strives to support it in return.