



Perspective/Opinion

Growing Up Taiwanese, American and An Aspiring Physician

By Joyce H. Lee, MS, M2

I was born in Tainan, the Southern capital of Taiwan, or better known as the food and culture capital of the island. I grew up with three languages at home—Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English—thanks to my parents putting me in a Taiwanese day-time school and an American after-school program, both of which I diligently attended. When I moved to Los Angeles at eight years old, I thought that my upbringing would prepare me to fit in with the Americans because I spoke English fluently and understood the American culture. Yet, I was wrong.

Throughout my life, whenever I showed up to gatherings with new people, I would hear a broken record playing the question, “Where are you REALLY from?” Even though I eventually considered myself more American than Taiwanese after some time in the United States, I felt obligated to answer with the truth that I had been born and raised in Taiwan. I could never throw out the trump card that I, too, like them, was born in the United States despite my appearance. Following my response, I could not help but feel resigned and defeated because I had further substantiated people’s preconception that people who look like me are foreigners first. Since I moved to the United States, I struggled with my identity as a Taiwanese-born American because I did not feel like I completely belonged to either culture. Over the years, I had grown so weary of the question that I started to dread my “Asianness” and doubt my “Americanness”. I was in a cultural limbo—I wished that I had only one culture to which I truly belonged.

It was not until my freshman year at UC San Diego when I co-founded and co-led the pre-medical chapter of APAMSA (Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association) that I learned how to appreciate my identity as both Taiwanese and American, especially as someone who is pursuing medicine. After connecting with a number of AANHPI (Asian American/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) health care professionals, I learned about how my mixed identity is uniquely posited to address and reduce the health care disparities in the AANHPI diaspora. Over the next handful of years, in preparation for my future medical career, I continued to learn from health care professionals about bridging language and cultural divides, expanding health care access for the uninsured and the underinsured, and meeting the mental and physical health care needs of those who identify as part AANHPI.

When I finally matriculated at MCW as a student doctor, I vowed to not only uphold the oath of Hippocrates but also commit to the health and advocacy of the AANHPI population. Resultantly, I sought out my current positions as both the Co-President of our local chapter of APAMSA and the Co-Director of Region VI of National APAMSA in order to fulfill my commitments, alongside phenomenal individuals who share the same goals. Although I grew up conflicted about my identity, I have since accepted and embraced it—I am now proud to declare that I am Taiwanese, American, and an aspiring physician.

If you are interested in more information on APAMSA, sign up for our listserv at this Qualtrics link: https://mcwisc.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6gIUK9gIaQiWoCy.

Additionally, you can follow us on Instagram at [@apamsa.mcw](https://www.instagram.com/apamsa.mcw) and on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MCWAPAMSA> for our updates!

If you have any questions, feel free to email us at apamsa@mcw.edu.

Joyce H. Lee, MS, is a current second-year medical student at MCW. She holds a BS in Physiology and Neuroscience from UC San Diego and an MS in Bioethics from Columbia University. Her previous work experience includes being a Neuroscience Intern at J&J's Janssen Pharmaceuticals and a Research Data Associate researching Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) at NYU School of Medicine. She aspires to be a neuropsychiatrist, but she is open to many sub-specialties in neurology.