

Alika Ting

The All-Embracing Global Patchwork Quilt

Vibrantly colored lights, red paper lanterns, and multifarious smells drifting into the humid summer air; there is no place like the *yè shì*, or night market, in Taipei. Vendors selling everything from phone cases to grilled chicken hearts line the bustling street on either side. The mere sound of crispy dumplings and juicy fried chicken sizzling in the stalls is enough to make my mouth water. The sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of Taipei, never fail to provide me with an utmost sense of comfort. Never will I forget the long, hot nights of my childhood spent swatting away mosquitos, holding my nose at the unmistakable smell of stinky tofu, and sipping bubble milk tea from flimsy plastic cups. I have always associated Taiwanese cuisine with warmth and nostalgia; comfort food never fails to evoke tender childhood memories, which is why it has become such a fundamental part of my cultural identity.

In 2016, my family moved back to the United States. Despite my excitement to see America again, a feeling of uncertainty crept into the back of my mind as I boarded the plane at Taoyuan International Airport. Although I missed everything about California, including my old friends whom I had not seen since elementary school, I was nervous about how I would cope without the things that were most familiar to me. I feared that I would become preoccupied with homesickness for Taiwan, thus missing out on opportunities to assimilate back into American customs. Yet, I was also terrified of losing my own culture in an attempt to conform to a different one.

I spent my first year in California trying to immerse myself back into American traditions, but I found the process impossible to do without encountering aspects of my own culture; I was surprised to find that it had become trendy in California to drink bubble tea and eat spicy hot pot. My family and I found restaurants which served our favorite dim sum and Taiwanese beef noodles, and my friends and I enjoyed going to the Asian supermarket on weekends for snacks and candy. Even at school, the lunch tables became a place where my friends and I would share a variety of multicultural snacks, from Italian wedding cookies to Japanese mochi with sweet red bean. It quickly became clear that taking on a new culture does not entail forgetting or losing your own. In the same way, adhering to familiar traditions does not inhibit your capacity for new experiences.

This multicultural mindset is the reason why I live swaddled in a colorful patchwork of different tastes and textures; every new experience is a square sewn into my continuously expanding quilt of knowledge. Moving to such a diverse and accepting community has allowed me to cultivate an open-minded outlook on life, celebrate my heritage, and appreciate the many cultures that influence my daily life.

In such a diverse society, it is our culture that gives us a sense of belonging and community while simultaneously providing us with individuality and uniqueness. No, America is nothing like Taiwan. Not even close, and I am grateful for it. These distinctions do not divide us; in fact, they bring us closer together while teaching us to cherish our unique identities. They are the reason why every culture we experience and celebrate as a society is a marvelous contribution to the all-embracing global patchwork quilt.