

AATF Scholarship Personal Essay by Irena Huang

In a world where 60% of the population is Asian, the many unique aspects of Asian culture are starting to prominently shine through. Whether the topic is nutrition, entertainment, politics, or the arts, I find myself being deeply affected and positively changed through various experiences. As an American-born Chinese teenager, I couldn't be prouder of my culture or the culture of surrounding Asian countries for the massive landmarks they have contributed to society. Connecting to my roots has helped me develop an unbeatable basic technique in the greatest manner possible, especially in the context of physical strength and musical ability.

At eight years old, I started my journey as a traditional Chinese dance performer. The colorful costumes and extensive use of props excited me, and propelled my continued pursuit in the art of body movement. The venues we performed at allowed me to discover the tons of people who enjoy experiencing Asian culture, and I very much enjoyed seeing the expressions of awe and wonder on the faces of the audience. Moreover, along with ballet lessons, my dance technique assisted me in excelling in athletics throughout middle school and high school. I like to think that the training for grand jeté leaps during dance class aided my jumping abilities, leading to three successful seasons of basketball and one fantastic season of volleyball. Now that I'm in high school, I participate in competitive volleyball and have build up the immense desire to come out ranking first.

Another fascinating discovery of Asian arts occurred to me in seventh grade. I watched my first Chinese TV show and was immediately hooked into the entertainment industry of Asia. By watching Chinese and Taiwanese films, I greatly improved my fluency in speaking and reading Mandarin. Chinese pop culture was an utterly jaw-dropping discovery for me; I absolutely fell in love with Chinese songs, dating from the 90's era to the present. I at once

realized the beauty of Asian languages and proceeded to sing along to the songs, improving my language skills once again. I also have an interest in Korean pop culture, and greatly admire the talented singers and their vocal abilities. These two cultures and languages influenced me in starting to experiment with my own voice, discovering an above average vocal talent. Now, I have begun performing at volunteer venues such as senior citizen homes and children care centers, as well as planning to participate in a charity benefit concert in 2014. Because Asian arts influenced this hidden hobby to become exposed, I would love to take part in performing Chinese or Korean songs too at future shows or cultural events. My primary instrument is the piano, and I have completed the Certificate of Merit levels seven through nine, earning nine with the highest prestige of branch honors, and I am currently working on level ten advanced. Aside from piano, I taught myself how to play guitar and violin as well. In the future, I hope to obtain more opportunities to showcase my musical side for the AATF establishment.

In terms of academics, the Asian culture has taught me to be studious, patient, and hardworking. Coincidentally, these virtues are similar to some aspects of traditional dance as well. As I become educated in the challenging Troy High School, my high grades often surprised me, especially in my freshman year. As a tenth-grader now, I experienced numerous obstacles and challenges when I made the decision to take on one more honors class. Even though my GPA dipped slightly, the value of the knowledge taught to me is still quality. My ultimate dream is to attend a university well-known for its excellence in relaying information, where I can major in legal services and political science. All in all, the widespread variety of Asian arts has helped me in numerous ways, and I will continue to develop my talents and hobbies into the future.