

The Missing Bubble

By Ryan Teng

It was a yellow house with a basketball hoop over the garage. The accents were mainly brown and the front door ominously stood facing the end of a cul-de-sac. Although the *feng shui* book had warned against a door facing oncoming traffic, my parents had chosen this house based on other qualifications. My older sister and I could often be found in the backyard playing on the swing set underneath the vine-entrapped veranda while my mother would have tea time with her friends. In Rowland Heights, there was always gossip circling the “aunts” as they would chit-chat in Mandarin and Taiwanese about things that I could care less for at the age of five. All of my pre-pubescent life was spent surrounded by Chinese friends and culture, which led me to become extremely comfortable with my bi-culturality. However, at the age of six, my father received an enormous boost to his salary and we picked up our life and moved to Yorba Linda in Orange County.

Born and raised in Taiwan, my father has always claimed to be Taiwanese in blood and spirit. My mother disagrees since his parents were both from China and were not a part of the first wave that left China originally. With her ancestors dating from the initial migration from China to Taiwan, my mother revels in being associated with anything non-Chinese. In my honest opinion, the truest blood of Taiwan lives within the Aborigines who had lived there before the politics and civilization had affected the island, but that’s another story entirely. All in all, I consider myself a full-blooded Taiwanese, which I distinctly differentiate from being Chinese.

Moving to Yorba Linda proved to be a world of difference in comparison to the microcosm of Chinese influence in Rowland Heights. Predominantly a middle to upper-class Caucasian neighborhood, Yorba Linda holds one Chinese restaurant, making Chinese culture basically obsolete. My point is, although I had Asian friends from Yorba Linda, the mixed atmosphere where Chinese culture was no longer at the forefront was a bit of a reality shock to me. Everyone in the family adapted to the new setting, but my parents made it clear to never forget our Taiwanese roots.

China-Taiwan tension has escalated as China has threatened to fire missiles at the island in hopes of scaring Taiwan to join the nation as it grows as a world power. However, Taiwan under the presidency of Chen Shui-Bian has declared independence and refuses to unite with China. Devoted to this cause, my mother reads the news religiously and is consistently on the computer typing letters to President Bush in faith that the U.S. will grow a backbone and face China and defend Taiwan. It has been proven by various studies that a child's political orientation is almost always a result of his/her parents' stance. Maybe that's the reason I'm a staunch Republican who passionately believes in Taiwanese independence as well. Regardless of the justification, I have and will continue to challenge any argument that claims that Taiwan belongs to China.

When I began taking standardized tests in junior high school, the section I hated to bubble in was the basic information page. It was tedious and it always asked questions for testing purposes such as ethnicity and household income. Ethnicity was divided into four simple categories: Caucasian, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Other. There was no debate about what to bubble in, and my pencil blackened the circle next to Asian/Pacific Islander. But just like all

things in the transition from junior high to high school, decisions got harder. Being a “model minority,” my mother forced me to take the SAT as a freshman in high school. I sat down at a table which I shared with four other students, all of them Asian, who looked much older than I did. As we made our way through the information page, I lazily bubbled in the usual suspects and nervously anticipated the test. Once again, the ethnicity question popped up and I boringly looked for Asian/Pacific Islander. But, it wasn’t there. Instead there were at least fifteen blank circles, ranging from Vietnamese to Indian. Calmly, I looked for Taiwanese, but the choice was nonexistent. For a split second, I debated on whether to bubble in Chinese but opted in the end to choose “Other.” After the test, I realized I couldn’t recall a single question on the test besides the ethnicity one.

Usually, I’m a passive-aggressive person who would moan and whine about the lack of a Taiwanese option but would be too courageous to do something about it. But, something set me off this time, and I wrote a letter to the College Board in regards to the issue. With the help of my mother’s networking I managed to gain a huge amount of support from various groups. After two months of continuous emails and phone calls, the College Board agreed to see into changing the format.

As a junior in high school, I walked into the SAT testing room with eager expectancy. As I looked at the page I would normally dread, my eyes raced to the ethnicity section, where I proudly saw the option, Taiwanese in bold print with its own bubble. To be honest, as small as that blank circle was, the amount of people who filled in that day must have felt some sense of accomplishment as I did. It wasn’t a feat of unimaginable proportions, but it was at least a start.

There are a few weekends a year I dedicate to protesting with my mother for Taiwanese independence. Each time, I feel that the strides we are making cause the amount of support we get to grow. Despite what I may do in the future, I will always have some time to rally for independence until we succeed. It's a great burden to carry, but I have no stronger passion than the one I do for Taiwan. Hopefully, I will live to see Taiwan officially and completely free from China's grasp in hopes that the democracy of Taiwan will continue to thrive for years upon years.