

Extracts From CCCA Scholarship Award

Jennifer Baranoff

Because of the availability of the Thousand Oaks Chinese School, I have been granted the opportunity to find out more about my cultural heritage and learn from the local Chinese community. I see my mixed roots as more of a blessing and less of a shortcoming; the areas of rich history I am connected to make my personal studies all the more complex and rich. I really have to thank the Chinese School for opening doors to my past. Not only have I been taught to read and write, communicate and express, I have been educated on the finer aspects of Asian culture: calligraphy, art, storytelling, and the martial arts.

The annual Chinese School performances at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza have been both informative and exciting; I was able to grow anxious backstage with my friends, see what the other students had prepared in a different realm of art onstage, and watch the adults execute the most beautiful movements of Chinese dance. I still remember the charged atmosphere of the shows, connecting the past and present together in one. It is truly remarkable when one can see the customs of one way of life thriving hundreds of generations later. Throughout my learning in public, private, and Chinese school, I have noticed that education is a beautiful thing and not one to be thrown aside casually. How little I know in the scope of things and how much more I have to learn about my Chinese ancestry; Chinese school has inspired me with all the more curiosity to pursue knowledge about my lineage in college and beyond. Whether I was learning a new chapter in the book, taking a quiz, competing for a writing award, or buying boba during break, I will never forget the time spent during those Saturday mornings.

Andrew Cheng

Since I can remember, I have been spending my Saturday mornings at Thousand Oaks Chinese School. I remember visiting every weekend from the adult school to when I started going to Chinese school at Redwood middle school and Thousand Oaks High School. Memories of learning, helping, and enjoying a different life than that offered my regular friends at school.

I have been attending Chinese school at T.O from the beginning of kindergarten. I have learned to listen, speak, read, and write Chinese to a level that is impossible to many American born Chinese children in today's world. From learning to just understand and read, to taking multiple choice tests, to writing full page essays, I have learned to communicate in a way that is only possible to my heritage.

Chinese school has also taught me the importance of friendship and community. Even though I don't have time for Chinese school every weekend now, I still talk to my friends and visit them as much as I can. The time spent in and out of class taught me to connect with my friends in the Chinese community and to be part of the Chinese community. I have become accustomed to seeing Chinese people and have grown close to all the Chinese people in T.O. Chinese School and out of T.O. Chinese School. Being Chinese is not just a title to me anymore; it's a key to community and heritage.

Chinese school is not just another learning facility for Chinese students, but a teaching facility of life style and heritage. I want to thank Thousand Oaks Chinese school because besides teaching me Chinese, it has also taught me a lifestyle in which I am about to incorporate Chinese into my daily life.

Susan Duan

“Lao Shi hao!” I greet the teacher with my classmates. For once, I am in my seat before the bell rings, even before the teacher walks in. I get out my books and pencils, ready to try and pay attention. Of course, my mind wanders. I think about my friend Nancy and her ever present boy troubles. I think of Mrs. Cima’s math test on Monday that I haven’t even started studying for. I think of the Backstreet Boys and how I like their new song.

Wow. It’s interesting looking back on my Chinese School days. It wasn’t always like that. I did pay attention on occasion. In fact, I even did my homework and studied for my tests. The thing that’s sad is, I never wanted to work myself—my parents always pushed me to it. Friday nights were reserved for the habitual “Why do you leave all of your Chinese homework for the night before?” talks. I grudgingly gave in and tried to learn the characters, but they didn’t stay learned for long.

I even got involved in activities at Chinese School: poetry recitations, writing contests, and the Chinese History Bee. The Bee is a Jeopardy-like quiz bowl where for years I learned idioms, philosophy, customs, and of course, history. These extracurriculars gave me a greater appreciation for the complexity of Chinese culture.

Since I stopped attending Chinese School in eleventh grade, what I remember most about it is not the characters I learned or the famous emperor’s contributions to society, but how much fun I had being there with my friends. Those friends have stayed friends long after Chinese School. For me, those Saturday mornings were as much about finding a place where I knew I belonged as they were about the schooling.

Julia C. Fong

Thousand Oaks Chinese School has helped to enrich my Chinese roots. All I knew before I went was first grade Chinese, but I left having more love and understanding of the Chinese culture. I remember the years I spent there vividly. In my first year during seventh grade, I was placed into Mrs. Zhou's reading and writing class, where the students were mostly around my age. I was then put into fourth grade, where I was the "big sister," two heads taller and four years older than everyone else. I felt like a Yao Ming among elementary kids, but I truly enjoyed getting to know many of them.

Although there were Friday night last-minute days of Chinese homework, I always tried my best. I brought craft materials for our class poster and helped to design the Chinese New Year poster. One year I was surprised to win the handwriting contest in my class. At the end of every year I was acknowledged for my hard work at the awards ceremony. I also tried my best in my third period Toastmasters speech class. I spoke about the importance and benefits of public speaking at the culmination ceremony with a handful of other adult and student speakers. I put my passion into Chinese school, which has been a joyful experience.

Evan Hou

Saturday morning, a time when you can wake up late and watch morning cartoons, was not the most ideal time for me. Catching up on my needed sleep on the car, I would roll onto the campus of Thousand Oaks High School still tired. Even though many students feel that Chinese School can be absolute torture, I think they will all in the end appreciate it the way I have. The parents and faculty, the friends, and the knowledge gained are invaluable.

The most important thing Chinese School taught me was to read and write. At first I thought, “Why should I bother to learn Chinese when I am surrounded by English speakers?”, but now that I am older I appreciate it so much. Being able to speak Chinese has helped me connect especially with my family and friends. Furthermore, being able to speak Chinese has set a strong bridge between myself and strangers. Learning a second language has opened another door in the world for me and the outside world.

At Chinese School, not only did I learn to speak and write Chinese fluently, but I also acquired many life long friendships. Being in class presented a special bond between students. This connection stemmed from our proud and rich heritage. Being part of the Chinese Community gives me a sense of security because the people in it welcome all fellow Chinese. I felt this way among my classmates whether we were reading stories in Chinese, playing ping-pong, or just taking a break from class. We all acted like we dreaded being there, but we all knew it was not that bad because of our friends.

Chinese school is a nexus for the community. I am forever grateful for the knowledge, memories, and friendships it has offered me. Throughout my life, I will remember the things I have learned here and I also hope to pass on the culture of Thousand Oaks Chinese School.

Jacqueline Jung

As a little girl, I always envied my friend’s beautiful blonde hair that glistened in the sunlight. I yearned for big pretty blue eyes with long eyelashes and fair skin. Being Chinese, I had straight black hair and brown eyes with miniscule eyelashes. Plus, I had to go to Chinese school every morning for 6 whole years meaning Chinese homework time on Friday night and no sleepovers with friends.

Now I can look back on those 6 years very fondly without a hint of resentment for having Chinese school, which lasted for much more than 2 hours every Saturday morning. I have grown up with many kids sharing the same experiences as me, many of whom I am still friends with. We would hang out together during recess and went to the same 3rd period of Chinese origami class where we folded paper cranes or hip-hop class and danced away to the music. Every year, my parents would sign me up for the annual Chinese track meet where I would do a minimum of 5 different races: father/daughter race, individual 100 meter and 400 meter relay just to mention a few. At the end of the day, I would come home, tired but happy, clutching to the medals I won earlier.

During my many years at the Thousand Oaks Chinese School, I slowly witnessed my own subtle metamorphosis from an unappreciative child to a thankful young adult. My former thoughts of embarrassment and dissatisfaction transformed into pride and contentment, which is reflected in the person I am today. I am proud of my Chinese heritage; I am awed by the rich cultural history, not just proud of the glamour on the surface, but I am proud of my Chinese roots that reached back many centuries.

Eileen Kwan

For nine straight years of Saturday mornings, I would wake up to my mother's shrill voice ringing in my ears, "Shang xue le. Kuai qi lai le!" The first groggy thought in my mind was always sarcastic, "Score! I get to go to school six days a week now. Whoopee. My life is now complete!" My mind would still be dormant and my attitude still bitter as I trudged into class exactly 5 minutes late -- Every. Saturday. Morning.

Here, at Chinese School, I found myself enriched and enlightened in areas that I never knew existed. In addition to the reading, speaking, and writing skills that I developed, I was also exposed to opportunities that broadened my knowledge of the culture: Chinese knotting, singing traditional Chinese songs, performing oriental dances, participating in track and field meets, going on enrichment field trips, and most importantly, the Chinese New Year performances. As a person that has always claimed her true passion to be in the performing arts, I feel I must give the most credit to my experience in the Chinese New Year performances. I feel the most educational and creative way to influence those who are intrigued by another culture's history and people is through the arts. For every dance that I choreograph or perform, for every song that I sing or play that I participate in, I hope to touch the heart and enlighten the mind of an audience member with a small sample of what I have learned in Chinese School. Other performance endeavors that I have taken on include representing my school in annual poem recital, speech, and calligraphy competitions. Though I myself did not feel even remotely qualified to participate, I still managed to earn a couple of titles to honor the school that has given me the chance to excel in areas that I never thought possible.

Diana Li

It was only minutes before the big annual Chinese New Year show, a display of talents by the local Chinese youth. This year our Chinese School class decided to perform a traditional Chinese opera. I was to be the one of the featured singers, a position I accepted with reluctance and subsequent guilt at my own disinclination.

I thought back to the Chinese knotting class I took two years ago. I had enrolled with such great expectations but soon found my interest waned after completing my first assignment: a butterfly, made entirely out of painstaking knots; the climax seemingly unworthy of the tedious process. All that remains of that class now is unfinished firecrackers and lanterns strewn on a tangled pile of red string, a reminder of my unfulfilled aspirations. The next year, I took an origami class, hoping once again to spark my interest in my heritage, but once again was disappointed at the triviality of folding colored squares into makeshift boats. A stack of oddly creased papers littering the inside of my drawer is the only tangible mark that fleeting interest left on my life. I realized that these courses, along with the dance class and the drawing class and the calligraphy class, had just been attempts on my part to ignite an internal flame: to unleash an enthusiasm for a culture that claims me only by birth and not by spirit.

Departing from my musings, I snapped back to reality. Before long, we were ushered onstage. As I took my mark, I made my Chinese New Year resolution: not to let this experience join those of my knotting and origami classes-to see past the mere knots and creases to instead those who have tied the same knots and folded the same creases before me. So as the curtains rose, I thought not of the words and notes of the song, but of the thousands of people who have sung this song, who have uttered the same words with true meaning, and whose spirit and legacy I relive: a harmony with the past.

Brittany Liyan Lin

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP! Beginning at the age of five, every Saturday morning the alarm blared. BEEP, BEEP, BEEP! This was the signal to roll out of bed, get dressed, and drive down to Chinese school. While all of my other school friends hugged their Scooby Doo sheets to their chins, snoozing away, I sat in a classroom and learned to read, write, and speak the Chinese language. Some Saturday mornings, I would pout my lips and drag my feet into the classroom, mad at my parents for making me come every weekend. But in the back of my mind, I was always grateful for the many opportunities that Chinese school had to offer.

Every year, my sisters and I participated in the annual public speaking contests. I still vividly remember the first one. I could feel my heart beating in my hands, and I felt like my chest was going to cave in. As my stomach was doing flip flops and my knees as well as my voice were shaking, I started reciting my speech. But as the years went by, I noticed that my stomach relaxed and my knees were able to hold my weight with ease. I stood in the front of the classroom and presented myself with confidence and skill.

Chinese school has empowered me to be the young lady that I am today. When I was young, I did not realize how much this Saturday morning tradition would affect who I became. With my dual culture background, I believe I have a broader view of the world than many of those around me. In school, we not only learned a thorough comprehension of the Chinese language but we also absorbed lessons in Chinese history, customs, and culture. As I look back, I appreciate the teachers so much more than I had ever known possible. Most of my teachers were also mothers with regular weekly jobs to attend to, but they spent long Friday evenings preparing their lessons for the next morning. This is not to say I was not one of those bratty kids, but I am genuinely grateful for what my teachers did for me. Hopefully I can go to college and pass what I have learned onto the next generation as my Chinese school teachers did for me.

Lydia Lo

Raised in a society where individuality and individual merit are valued over collective accomplishment, I have come to appreciate Chinese School as a place where, one day a week, I can be a part of a unique community. It goes without saying that I learned the basics of reading, writing and speaking Chinese during my many Saturdays spent there. But more importantly, it tempered my Americanization and offered a balance to the world I experienced on weekdays. Without Chinese School, I would not be as proud to be Chinese as I am today, and I would be without the dynamic community that has supported me for the past seventeen years.

Throughout my ten years at Thousand Oaks Chinese School, I've been privileged to have the opportunity to actively participate in the community. My first memories of Chinese School was participating in the poem recital competitions, and bawling in Arcadia when I didn't win a prize at the regional level. I've had happier memories too, of course. I remember the annual track meets with everyone screaming "jia you!" I remember rehearsing for the New Year performance and running around backstage—back then, it was a big deal to perform at the Civic Arts Plaza for little kids like me. As I grew up, I participated on the Chinese Jeopardy team, and also edited the student section of the CCCA newsletter.

Next September will be a bittersweet departure—I'll be moving on to bigger and better things, but I'll miss very much my extended family, in a sense. Chinese School has taught me to identify and interact with an amazing group of people, and I only hope I can make them proud.

Julia Liu

Chinese school has played an important role in shaping who I am today. Through its weekly lessons in Mandarin and supplemental culture activities, it taught me to love my heritage and my language, and to realize how unique the Chinese culture is. My memories of Chinese School go back to sixth grade, when I first enrolled. Worried from an earlier visit to China during which I faced the limitations of my fractured Mandarin, I knew that it was imperative that I learn more about the Chinese language and culture. I did not want to sever ties with my home country and become yet another Asian lost in the “American diversity.”

At Chinese School, I improved my oral and written Mandarin through conversations with my teacher and frequent essay writing. On future visits to China, I could communicate more effectively and read things that I previously could not understand. In addition, I formed a “Chinese School network” by meeting friends from other schools. We bonded over the strenuous Mandarin exercises assigned by our teacher and through extra-curricular activities, such as third period Chinese knotting and yearly Chinese New Year performances.

When high school became too busy for me to continue weekly lessons, I discontinued my Chinese education. However, I felt like I re-broke ties with my culture, so the next year, I ventured back to Chinese School as a volunteer. This year, I am a teacher’s aid for a fourth grade class. I feel that, after gaining so much from Chinese school, I should give some of what I have learned back to the current students.

Thinking back about Chinese School, I realize that I should have put more effort into my classes and toward securing a firmer connection with the Chinese culture. I hope to take Mandarin classes in college and to someday work between the United States and China. My experiences at Chinese School have influenced my interests and sense of identity, something that will remain with me forever.

Eric Nicholson

“Eric, hurry up, we’re going to be late,” screams my mom. “UGHH, do I have to go?” I reply. “I don’t feel like going to Chinese School.”

And this is how my Saturday mornings used to commence. My mom dragging my brother Ian and I out of bed to attend early morning class. I thought of how bored I would be, how I had no friends there except for my brother, and how bad I was at everything.

It took a while for me to warm up to the idea of going to extra school classes. However, I soon started to appreciate it. I started to enjoy writing Chinese characters, hearing traditional stories, and especially standing up in front of the class to recite stories, so I could earn some cute Pochacco stationary. Going to after school origami classes became a habitual action. I loved the precision and creativity that origami demands, and marveled in teaching my friends how to make flying cranes, balloons, ships, and jack-in-the-boxes.

One of the most rewarding experiences I had was competing for Thousand Oaks in the Chinese American Games. I ran youth track, so I excelled in the games. I competed to satisfy my thirst for winning, but also ran to help Thousand Oaks win the team title. When the meet announcers exclaimed Thousand Oaks won the title, we all ran on the track to celebrate and jog a victory lap. I felt pride in contributing to the overall success of the team.

During my participation in Chinese School, I built character, became educated in Chinese culture and history, and made many new friends. Now that I look back on it, I realize that I took the opportunity for granted and I am glad I braved those Saturday mornings to attend.

Jason Tung

If someone were to ask me what I believed was the most influential activity that I have ever participated in, I would not hesitate to tell them. I would probably consider Chinese school to be the most significant activity that has shaped who I am today. My closest friends, and much of my knowledge and history all stem back for more than a decade to Chinese school. Chinese school and I have had quite a long history. I started attending Chinese school back in 1st grade, during the "Redwood days." Brian Lu, Josh Chen, and I would "explore" the vast caverns and tunnels winding around under Redwood Middle School, all the while reading the random graffiti penned and marked on the walls. Then, after some parking disputes, TOCS had to relocate to its current home at Thousand Oaks High School. Here, the classes of '03, '04, and '05 terrorized the school and teachers for years. We became notorious after we ended up misbehaving so badly that we actually cracked a teacher, and sent her running out of the classroom. (If you're reading this, I'm sorry, and I still feel bad about it sometimes.)

Don't get me wrong; I learned a lot of Chinese during those years, but much of that information I have already long forgotten. However, the friendships I have made at Chinese school are still going strong. I'm sure that many of you students despise having to wake up early on weekends, but the information that you're being taught is actually very valuable. Sometimes, I really do wish that I would have studied harder in Chinese school, or at least learned enough to read more than just the basic words and numbers; and I know that many of my friends feel the same way. But if you don't want to go Chinese school for the education, go for the experience. You'll meet a ton of new people, make new friends, and learn some good study habits. Oh, and be sure to join the Chinese New Year Performances, even if you don't attend Chinese School anymore. Those performances are a great way to keep in touch with friends, and they provide good memories that will last a lifetime.

Nancy Wang

I am an incorrigible Chinese kung-fu television geek. I have been since a young child, when my dad read aloud from *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* for my bedtime stories, luring me into the turbulent world of jiang hu. It is simply irresistible—the duels more ballet than battle, the heavily symbolic games of Go, the idealized society where heroes roam the lands and only courage is esteemed higher than wit and wisdom. While these TV dramas heighten my appreciation for the Chinese culture, I would not have been able to appreciate such shows without my years at Chinese School.

Chinese School taught me so much more than reading and writing Chinese. Before I could fully comprehend the beauty of the language, I memorized and recited poetry for various competitions, that even today, the words “geng shang yi ceng lou” still echo in my mind. The handwriting competition pushed me to pen each word with care, reminding me that for the Chinese, writing is an art. I read popular myths and the parables behind the idioms through our weekly reading selection. In third period, my usually clumsy fingers weaved wonderfully complex Chinese knots. Finally, by participating in Chinese Jeopardy, I learned about everything from the origins of Chinese medicine to the deeper meanings of tea.

My training in Chinese has been very much like the martial arts training of those fictional wuxia heroes. Many admire my knowledge of the Chinese culture and language much like my admiration for those high kicks and sword skills. However, as all who are familiar with jiang hu knows, such fancy moves would not be possible without the years of diligent labor and redundant exercises. Even though those Saturday mornings could be arduous and long at times, they were my foundation, the ji chu for who I am.

顧泉

從小我的爸爸媽媽都叫我學中文。那時候我不知道我為什麼要花那麼多的時間和精力學中文。反正我們都住在美國，用不上中文。可是過了一段時間，我發現中文是一個很重要的東西。做一個中國人，會讀、寫、說中文是一個重要的方面。學會了中文，可以更加懂得中國的歷史和文化，可以對中國有更深的瞭解。

這幾年，我經常回中國，由於我會說中文，所以我每次回去可以玩得很開心。假如我不會說中文，我在中國的感覺就不會那麼好。我認識到會兩種語言還是方便，到了中國我可以看懂牌子，也可以和別人交談。除了回去，中文在美國也很有幫助。我最近考了 SAT 中文的考試，我所有的中文經驗在考試中都能用上，讓我考了個 800 分。那時候，我終於發現中文是個很有用的基礎。不管我進什麼專業，會中文總是一個好處。將來中國和美國的聯繫會越來越多，中國發展得越來越快，世界上五分之一的人口都說中文，怎麼能說學中文沒有用呢？

李涵

今年是我高中生活的最後一年，我將要去 UC BERKELEY，開始我新的大學生活，回想這些年來在千橡，特別是在千橡中文學校，我有很多很多的感觸。

我不到八歲來到美國，在剛開始一段時間，一直由我的奶奶在家教我中文，使我建立良好的中文基礎。十二歲那年，我進入千橡中文學校，雖然課程對我並不難，但我從老師那裡領悟到了中文系為的奧妙，使我更加喜愛這意味深長的語言，寫作不再是一件乏味困難的任務了，我的作文幾次登載在千橡通訊上，我也編輯了 2003 秋季的《青少年工作室》，為的就是分享我對中文的喜愛，在千橡中文學校期間，我有幸參加南加州及全美常識比賽，並取得南加州比賽的冠軍和全美比賽的第五名，通過常識比賽，我學到了許多不屬於“常識”的知識：中國古老獨特的歷史，含意深奧的文獻，奇妙豐富的文化，這些深深地吸引著我，使我受益終身。

我除了對中國文化有興趣以外，也從沒有忘記幫助他人學習中文，從十年級開始，我就開始當助教去幫助那些學習中文有困難的同學，同時我也為千橡中文學校小班編舞、教舞，為的是給這些活潑可愛的小孩們一個表演的機會，我自己也參加了新年晚會演出，我希望用我的舞姿和琴聲，使觀眾領悟到民族舞蹈獨特的風格和東方樂曲悅耳的旋律。

在中文學校的這幾年裡，我聚集了許多珍貴的記憶，也學到了寶貴的知識，千橡中文學校是我成長的地方，通過她，我變得更加成熟，更加有學問，更加有自信，雖然明年我將要去 UC BERKELEY，我不會忘記千橡中文學校帶給我的所有。

