



# OUR HEARTS IN AMERICA

## A Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

The Youth Workshop is a small collection of essays, articles, poems, and short stories written by high school students of the Thousand Oaks Chinese School community. Each CCCA Journal includes a section reserved for the youth to share their talents and abilities to express their views of the world.

The theme for Spring 2008 is titled “Our Hearts in America” to express our personalities and perspectives as Chinese students living in the United States. As many citizens in this country are concentrating on choosing the right candidate for President, many of us are still trying to adjust to life in America as an Asian American. Each of us is unique in our own distinctive way, yet we are all united.

I would like to give a big “thank you” to all who submitted their essays to the youth workshop. I appreciate your commitment even with school priorities and responsibilities on your shoulders. Your wonderful effort is very much appreciated!

Sincerely,  
Vivian Shih  
Editor in Chief, Youth Workshop

### Staff Writers:

Shirley Wu,

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Yuyi 余懿

## Perspective By Shirley Wu

As Chinese Americans, we are one culture within another. We are two separate entities forcibly united, the collision sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse.

As such, we conflict. One culture tells us to respect our elders, yet the other ridicules the idea, valuing the vibrancy of youth. One is deeply conscientious, almost strictly careful in its planning of life; the other lives in the now, in the pop culture of instant gratification. So which do we listen to?

More often than not, we choose the latter. After all, we live in this society of adventurers, of thrill seekers, of Freud's Thanatos – it is only natural that we should succumb to the pressures of our surroundings. And so we brush away the other side of us, the Chinese side, rejecting it as typically uncool.

But why can we not be proud of our other side? Why can we not stand up for that other side, the oppressed and the restrained? *We can, if we simply change our perspective.*

### From the Other Side

*You scorn me for my conscience, my cowardice, my inability to act in the most controversial of situations.*

*Well, I scorn you, for your misdirected bravery, for your so-called adventurousness, for your inexplicable stupidity.*

*You say that I should come out of my bubble, that I should take a chance and feel the beautiful in life.*

*Well, I say that you should come into my bubble, and see what's beautiful in it.*

*Because what I think is beautiful is different from your beautiful; don't exclude me because my views are different from yours.*

*You say that the feeling of dancing in the rain is exhilarating.*

*I say that I would rather not catch pneumonia, the stupid bed-ridden. I say that the rainbow after the rain is even more beautiful, and physically safe.*

*You say that the adrenaline rush while skydiving is amazing.*

*I say that's preposterous, you might as well be charged with a rhino. I say that the view from down here, of the sky and the bird chirping in the tree is just as beautiful.*

*Don't scorn me, society, because my beautiful is different from yours.*

*Don't hate me, society, because my views are different from yours.*

*Don't push upon me your beliefs, because neither of ours are right.*





## An Oriental Taste of the Melting Pot By Goldie Shih

The United States is traditionally thought of as the country where freedom rings and where people of all races, religions, and countries are blended together in a melting pot in which they can seek new opportunities and a better way of life.

The earliest Asians to immigrate in large numbers to the United States were the Chinese. At first, many Chinese led sufficient lives and had no reason to leave their homeland. However, after the two opium wars and a huge rebellion, the Chinese still living in China were facing mass poverty and destruction.

In some areas of Asia, although few, people living in the home country still face poverty and live in poor conditions. The Chinese government had suppressed their peoples' freedom of speech with internet repression in the past, and they unjustly persecuted and imprison people by simply using the internet to criticize their government by calling for democracy or exposing abuse of human rights. Luckily, many improvements have been made and these have conditions encouraged many Chinese immigrants to move to the United States in order to find more opportunities for their life.

After hearing about the "Gold Mountain" in California from merchants and sailors, many opportunity-seeking Asians left China to begin a new life in California. They came as laborers to work in the railroad and mining industries. Laborers who had accustomed to living in poor conditions in China were willing to sign up for prepaid long-term labor contracts in the U.S., though many gave the money they earned to their family leaving no money for themselves whatsoever.

Nowadays, Asians are considered intelligent, studious, and accomplished beings, rather than unworthy people useful solely for labor.

The Chinese were victims of harsh racial discrimination and xenophobia. They were opposed by white Americans so harshly that even the U.S. Congress passed a Chinese Exclusion Act, forbidding Chinese to immigrate for ten years and denied citizenship to even those who had already settled in the country. Some states even enforced discriminatory laws, which made life even harder for the immigrants by making it extremely difficult to find land or work. A majority of the anti-Asian-American laws were not fully overturned until the dawn of the modern American civil rights movement.

Today, discrimination against Chinese has greatly lessened and Asian-Americans make up more than one-fifth of the United States population, adding a distinct oriental taste to the melting pot.



## Hearts of America

By Karen Tsai

In my everyday high school life at Westlake, I go to school, complete classwork, and finish homework. However, this usually tedious and repetitive cycle of teenage life can change with every friend I see at school. Meeting new people, making friends, and hanging out with unique and amusing individuals are encounters wonderful enough to brighten each new day.

Every morning, my first period at school is Acadeca, or Academic Decathlon. This class happens to have a great variety of people. Acadeca is always a lot of fun and it consists of sophomores, juniors, seniors, sundry GPAs, outgoing personalities, immature actions, plenty of randomness, and lots of studying. Following a common stereotype, the majority our classmates are studious Asians, who occupy half the room and dazzle everyone with their wisdom.



After managing to stay awake through a dull math class, I go to chamber orchestra. Our orchestra also has an odd variety of people, with an all guy cello and bass section and mostly female Asians in the violin and viola sections. Many in this orchestra class love music and are in other music groups such as band, choir, and outside symphony orchestras. However, despite the differences in age, backgrounds, and personalities, orchestra brings us together to create music and many laughs everyday.

In French class, our slightly peculiar French teacher greets us every morning with “Bonjour, tout le monde. Comment ça va?” After replying “Ça va bien, et vous?”, we continue on with our journey to learn the French language and culture. This classroom is where we students have the opportunity to gather knowledge about a foreign country and foreign people. Each interesting day in French class ends with the customary “Au revoir, Madame”, after which I wander back out into a world of conversion factors and stoichiometry. As soon as the lunch bell rings, the chairs are put up and everyone hurries to leave Chemistry.

Going to a different club every day of the week enables me to participate in many activities and spend time with different people. I can spend my lunchtime studying for a test, listening to debates, chatting with friends, contributing to charities, or playing chess.

My three favorite classes this year are my electives, Acadeca, Chamber Orchestra, and French, and they all have a diverse combination of individuals. These classes are comprised of different kinds of people, all with unique characters, brought together by a common interest. Whether it is academics, music, or foreign language, my classmates of different backgrounds, ages, and demeanors can come together at school to learn and make friends. Common interests connect us to one another, like the varied collection of people who have come together from countries around the world with a similar vision of America to create a country with diversity unlike any other place.



## The Middle Road By Phillip Shao

The “middle road” is neither grand  
Nor nobler, nor more temperate.  
The inexpensive trail at hand  
Is trodden black and desperate

With broken men and sullied dreams.  
So finding me upon this way,  
Which rotten and neglected seems,  
I push along, but look away

And see a path beneath the trees  
That springs alive like nature’s soul  
And wanders freely as the breeze.



But well, I will not pay the toll.  
The yonder sylvan path, I know,  
Is far more scenic and more glad  
To give its wanderers a go  
With countless wonders to be had.  
I’d walk a night or two sublime,  
And see true beauty all around.  
But as with all there’d come a time,  
To reach its end and turn around

And walk back to its verdant start  
With not a step advanced or lost  
I’d give a sigh, and then depart  
While cursing on my wasted cost.

Nay.

I’ll look about that distant touring green  
As though, by now, I’d walked it over thrice.  
I shall not mope upon the sights unseen,  
And know instead that “middle roads”  
suffice.

## We are Beautiful By Vivian Shih

As a former student at Thousand Oaks Chinese School, I have met many who share with me the thrills of experiencing life as the first generation of their families to grow up in an American society. I hopped through my early years of elementary school considered the epitome of an Asian daughter, sharing my family’s culture through report assignments and dressing up on Chinese New Year to pass out fortune cookies to my classmates. As I grew older and began to make my own friends, my Asian genes became a confusing aspect of my personality and my own Asian identity was unknown to me, lost within the American society surrounding me.  
SO WHERE DO I STAND?

Are we looked upon solely as representations of Asia, as another replica, not as our own person? Do we stand as white-washed Asian-Americans living our days in the United States constantly circling trails in our minds?

It is an obstacle to comprehend all that society expects from us. We must master the English language thoroughly, yet still excel at writing and speaking Chinese, the language within our blood, perfectly.

How can somebody be two people at once!

You are only one person. I am only one person.

In my own personal observations, I have realized two paths a typical America Born Asian will take. Some students may care solely about the education and not the races of the people surrounding them, but as students begin looking for suitable colleges for their career preparation, race diversity becomes a factor many are starting to consider. Depending on the preferable comfort zone, Asian scholars will either choose a school with Asians occupying the majority of the student body or a school with few Asian students occupying the campus. At Westlake High School, oriental students stereotypically tend to socialize with each other—and only within each other (and lunch time cliques and groups support the stereotypical generalization). It is in our nature to feel comfortable around people who share the same ethnic background.

On the other hand, some America Born Asians have felt out of place among fellow Asians. During my childhood, I got along with my extended family members but only managed to make a couple of Asian friends. I didn't know who I was in either of the communities. If I am Asian, why do I feel awkward around my peers? Why don't they talk to me? If they are not Asian, how do I help them comprehend certain "unusual" habits I possess?

I have finally grown to accept both sides of my character, Asian and American. My friends consist of both Asian and of people of other and I can confide in either with my trust. I have two best friends: Brooke, whose family originates from numerous European countries, and Tiffany, whose family is from Taiwan. With my American friends, I share with them the beauty of my heritage and with my Chinese friends, I can easily share stories and have them understand my feelings entirely.



The amalgam of Asian and American personalities is a trait many of us take for granted. Do not drown in your pride, but do not abandon your heritage either. It is beautiful. Share your beauty with the world.

## Being Asian Being Chinese

By Derek Wang

Being Chinese and being Asian are distinctly different. A square is always a rectangle, but a rectangle isn't always a square. Schools, society, and our peers label us simply as Asian, just one big group of people who have black hair, somewhat dark skin, and small eyes. But we're not just Asian, we are Chinese and Taiwanese, and the only way they'll ever know is if we tell them. We aren't Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or even Indian or Russian. Asia is too big of a continent, which is why the word Asian is too vague to describe us. People should be able to recognize the differences between Chinese people and Korean people, but that will never happen if we allow people to just call us Asian.



Most people can't even tell who belongs to what race. Try it yourself at [www.alllookslike.com](http://www.alllookslike.com), where you can take a quiz consisting of pictures of various people and you have to guess who belongs to what race. It's quite harder than you think, so don't be angry the next time one of your friends doesn't know that you're Chinese. Instead, you should tell him straight off you're Chinese instead of letting him assume you're just Asian.

Be proud of being Chinese. Obviously, we can be proud of our Asian brothers and sisters as well, but remember our culture is different from theirs. Don't let them assume we're all the same and we should not let ourselves assume we're all the same. It may be more convenient to say you're Asian, but that's like a Frenchman saying he's European. I will bet you a baguette he'll say he's French and not European. So, next time you get back an A on a test, and all your friends say it's because you're Asian, tell them, "No! It's because I'm Chinese."

## 历史

By Yuyi

我姓史, 历史的史, 所以从小到大我都对历史有一个特殊的爱好。历史是我们的祖先曾经走过的脚步也记录了我们以前犯过的错误, 因此我们应该用历史当我们的地图跨进未来。在美国上学, 我常常在历史课上学欧洲和美国历史, 很少能够接触中国历史 – 这就是在美国长大的一个不足之处。我们中国人民又不是没有一个悠久辉煌的历史, 可是我们在美国长大的孩子从不接触我们四千七百年的历史。我以前修欧洲史的时候经常觉得很羡慕我的同学因为他们正在学他们先辈的历史, 找寻他们自己的根, 而我只是在听他们的故事。当我学到一点中国历史以后, 我才觉得心里更踏实了因为我现在也知道我自己的根了。知道我的根我就可以更加了解我自己, 我的家长, 和我的未来。我会接受历史的教训和记住我们的先辈的成功和悲伤, 像汉武帝打败匈奴和南京大屠杀, ... 这些历史事件呈现在眼前, 给我知识和启发。这些知识是我的一部分因为我继承了这些知识, 是她们把我带到今天然后再指引我走向未来。

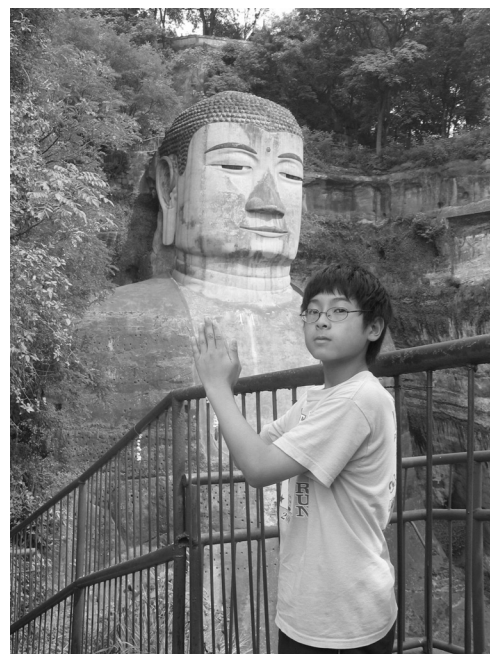
## 中国之行

By Yuyi

今年暑假, 我们全家一起到中国度假。我们先到达广州, 停留一周, 探望我的外公、外婆。广州很热闹繁忙, 街上车水马龙, 人来人往, 夜晚到处灯火通明, 一片繁华景象。我和弟弟每天一大早去吃丰富的广东式早茶和点心, 接着就去东湖公园游泳、划船、钓鱼。下午去逛电子商店、买游戏机、和室内运动打球。晚上妈妈的亲朋热情地设丰盛的晚宴欢迎我们, 天天感觉象过感恩节般热闹。

第二周, 我们一家人飞往闻名中外的风景名胜区九寨沟。九寨沟位于中国四川省。黄龙机场海拔超过 10,000 尺, 我们的飞机一降落, 弟弟就有高山反应、头昏。我们先到九寨天堂休息。第二天, 我们前往黄龙, 中国最高的风景名胜区之一。我们坐缆车到山顶 (海拔超过 14,400 尺), 游览了“人间瑶池”——争艳池、迎宾彩池、滩流、雪山、峡谷、古寺等景点。五颜六色的彩池, 像一条金色巨龙身上的鳞片, 奇幻的色彩闪闪发亮, 非

常美丽和迷人！第三天我弟弟习惯了，没有高山反应了。我们尽情地游览九寨沟风景区两天。九寨沟(海拔 6,000-9,000 尺)有很多吸引人的景色：五彩池、珍珠滩。五花海、熊猫海、草海、长海、诺日郎瀑布、天鹅海、芳草海、箭竹海、卧龙海、火花海、芦苇滩、老虎海等。奇丽的水景、千颜万色的彩池、五光十色的湖泊、壮观的瀑布、美丽的高山、我感觉就象在神奇的童话世界里！第五天，我们飞回成都。司机陪我们一家去乐山，观看世界第一大佛，乐山大佛(大佛高 213 尺)。当地导游很细心地向我和弟弟讲解了 2 小时的佛教文化和乐山风景，但我们还是不太明白！傍晚我们去峨眉山。第六天一早，司机直接送我们上主峰金顶(9,231 尺)。我们看到了四大奇观中的两大奇观：日出和云海，但没看到佛光和圣灯！下午参观万年寺、白龙洞、清音阁。晚上返回成都逛步行街。第七天，我们参观了都江堰，游览了很多成都市区重要景点，观赏了川剧变脸秀。一周饱尝真正的四川小吃美食。



第三周，我们一家飞往风景名胜地杭州。杭州是我外公的故乡。我觉得西湖比中文书上讲的还要美。风景如一幅迷人的油画。我们特别参观了很多建筑：桥梁、人造湖、园林、市政府大楼，商务大厦。收获不小。

第四周，我们一家从杭州开车到中国第一大城市-上海。上海是典型的国际化繁华商业大都市。上海的变化使我大开眼界。

第五周，我们一家开心地返回美国！我爱中国！



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對編輯，採訪，寫作有興趣的同學，  
請向林瑛瑛 818-889-8998 報名

The "Youth Workshop" is a special section dedicated to youth only. This section is contributed and edited by young writers, and reflects our younger generation's understanding of Chinese culture and history. Those who are interested in contributing to this section by writing up in Chinese and English or by participating in editing are encouraged to apply to Ms. Yingying Wu, our editor and coach in charge of the "Youth Workshop". Phone: 818-889-8998, Email: busybusy168@sbcgloabal.com.



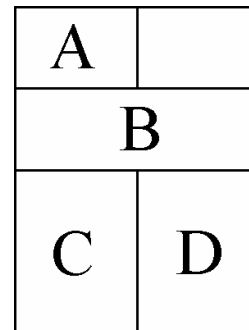


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