

I was born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1996, but grew up mainly in New York City. My life in New York was diverse, yet different. My mother was a housewife and raised both my brother and I. We spoke Mandarin at home and did not learn any English until we enrolled in public school. I walked into pre-school without speaking a speck of English. Other kids didn't understand what I was saying, and this confused me as well. At home, my mother and father spoke to my brother and I in Mandarin and Burmese which allowed us to be trilingual today. My mother in Burmese would always call me thami (ထမီ) daughter and called my brother thatha (ထာထာ), which meant son. It was something that gives me a personal connection to my Burmese tradition of kinship in the family.

I did not expect immigrating from Taiwan to New York would have given me such a different life overall. Since I was 10 years old, I would visit Taiwan every two years to visit my mother's family. Every year I returned, the more I become distant with the family, the language, the people, and its culture. Every year I went to Taiwan, the more I felt like a typical tourist. The more I learned and spoke English, the more I suffered in Mandarin. My brother and I mainly spoke English to each other, which made our Mandarin worse off. Despite that we are more comfortable with English, my mother and father continue to talk to us in Mandarin and Burmese.

Comparing my mother's and father's own life in Burma and Taiwan, my brother and I were very different. We grew up in New York City and had many mix of cultures and was very diverse. Growing up in Brooklyn and Staten Island, New York, I had mainly Caucasian friends, while my brother grew up having mainly Asian friends. It was very different for me. I was always the Asian of the group. It was very hard to connect with my friends, since I couldn't understand their way of life versus mine at home. On the other hand, my brother was always able to connect with his friends without having any barriers, since they were all similar. I thought that living where I am now, I am more able to connect with the people around me than if I am living in Taiwan and assimilate to their lifestyle. Looking back, it could have been very different if my parents did not immigrate to the United States. I could have grown up to be a very different person. I am very thankful for my mother and father's choice of embedding Mandarin and Burmese language into my everyday life. Culture and tradition can always remain as long as you, yourself do not lose sight of it.