

CET Taiwan, Fall 2025 | Rachel LeMay

Privacy & Sharing: "I am OK with CET using this piece along with my name and photo in a public manner (on flyers, CET website, etc.)"

Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece? "Heritage students"

A Personal and Linguistic Journey in Taiwan

I decided to study abroad in Taiwan for two main reasons: to become more proficient in Chinese and to feel closer to my Taiwanese heritage. On a practical level, learning Chinese as a second language felt meaningful for my future. I grew up in Southern California, where there is a large Asian American population, and I aspire to become a physician. Having the ability to communicate in a second language, especially one that is among the most spoken languages in the United States, felt like a valuable skill that could help me better serve diverse patient populations down the line, or in any profession, really. Even without considering my background, these reasons alone would have been enough to motivate me to study abroad and learn Chinese.

However, as a mixed-race person who is half Taiwanese, my desire to study in Taiwan ran much deeper than that. I had always felt a sense of embarrassment about not being fluent, or even proficient, in Chinese at this point in my life. Growing up, I often measured my connection to my Taiwanese identity through my language ability, and when I fell short of my expectations, I internalized it as a personal failing rather than a reflection of circumstance. When the opportunity to study abroad in Taiwan presented itself, it felt like something I needed to do, not just academically, but personally.

The CET program gave me the space and structure to begin bridging that gap. Being immersed in the language and culture allowed me to grow closer to my heritage in a way that had never felt accessible before. As my Chinese improved, I felt myself becoming more connected to my family, my history, and my own sense of self. This experience pushed me to reflect more intentionally on my identity and values, and what it means to belong to more than one culture.

One of the most rewarding parts of my time in Taiwan was seeing tangible progress in my language skills. I could directly observe how what I learned in the classroom translated into everyday interactions, whether that was ordering food, navigating public transportation, and holding conversations that would have felt too intimidating at the start of the program. That sense of progress was incredibly motivating and affirming and gave me a real sense of confidence in an area where I previously had very little.

As I return to the United States, I hope to carry this mindset with me. I want to continue practicing Chinese in real-world settings and maintain the confidence I gained from immersion. More importantly, I leave Taiwan with a stronger understanding of myself and a deeper appreciation for the role that language and culture play in shaping identity. Studying abroad was not just about learning Chinese; it was about reconnecting with a part of myself that I had long kept at a distance, and beginning a process that I know will continue well beyond this experience.