

Headline: Asian Americans find community in music, sport and academics

11/7/2022

By Karina Kumar

One way the growing population of Asian students at the University of Texas is making their voices heard is through song. And sports. And academics.

The Asian population in Texas has grown by over 600,000 since 2010 and continues to rise. With this number increasing, Asian students at UT said they wanted to find communities where they could be themselves and embrace their identity as Asian Americans.

“I wanted to find a community at UT that kind of gave me a sense of home away from home,” said Sindhu Vasudevan, a UT public health sophomore and a director of a South Asian fusion singing group on campus.

Vasudevan said Hum A Capella helps her to connect with her South Asian culture through music.

“Music is, in my opinion, one of the greatest forms of expression, and honestly, sometimes conveys a lot more than what words cannot,” she said.

Being yourself is easier when you have a community to be a part of, Vasudevan said.

“That's one of [Hum's] biggest values: being ourselves and being able to express ourselves however we feel like it,” Vasudevan said.

UT junior Joseph Park said his organization – Asian Business Students Association – gave him the place to be himself.

He said since the people in his organization generally have similar backgrounds, they give Asian students a place where they “feel more accepted and included without having to try and be different.”

Park said being an officer and leader in his organization helps him become a “bigger part of the larger Asian community,” specifically with those outside his social circle.

Park said he sees a lot of traditions carried out through Asian organizations on campus.

He said after moving away from his home in Houston, he doesn't get to experience his culture. He said, for instance, he missed Houston's Korean festivals.

“You don't get exposed to certain cultural things anymore,” Park said.

But, Park said UT's Asian organizations give students a place to embrace their culture even when they're away from home.

"I know a lot of orgs place at least some degree of emphasis on culture," he said.

Asian communities and organizations at UT also educate others on Asian cultures, said Wynne Yang, a first-year UT graduate student.

"It gives people outside of the community a chance to learn about it and experience culture and make new friends," she said.

Yang is the alumni outreach officer for Texas Wushu. She said joining wushu – a form of Chinese martial arts – was her way of embracing her culture.

"It gives you a small bite of how sport has developed through Chinese culture," Yang said.

Yang said, in organizations like hers, the members are just being a part of the community in whatever way they can.

"We're just people doing people things," she said.

Yang said most people do not recognize wushu, and it has to be compared to kung fu for people to understand what it is.

"It's like I sorta have to add an addendum to it," Yang said.

An older gentleman once asked Yang if wushu compared to Indian yoga and if they worshipped gods with their sport.

People get "mixed up" when trying to understand the sport, and sometimes even the culture, she said.

On the contrary, Vasudevan said she feels students at UT tend to respect other's cultures well.

"The good part about UT is that we have so much diversity," Vasudevan said. "I honestly find that, in Austin especially, people are a little bit more aware of other cultures and their traditions and they seem to respect it a little bit more."