

Aoi Takahara

Whenever someone asks me to tell me more about myself, I often contemplate because, while it's such a simple question, there is so much depth to it that I can just answer in a short amount of time. I would often answer that I'm a daughter, an older sister, a student, etc. Yet, I want to give a significant answer because I know I'm more than just a few nouns. But when I think about it, I'm just an invisible dot on earth. What I mean by that is that nobody will ever be able to identify myself or others if they see Earth from outer space.

Over time, I've learned that nobody really cares who you are. However, it was important for me to understand even a bit of my background and where my ancestors came from because I'm an Asian American who's been whitewashed. My father, Philip, was raised in Washington for the majority of his life, which is one of the whitest and coldest states I've ever been to. And I never got to know much about him because he wasn't present in much of my life. I've always lived with my mother, who was raised in Japan. Throughout these past few years, I've come to the conclusion that I was half Chinese and half Japanese.

Because I attended a school with mostly Asian students, I was often bullied because my mom was not the type to celebrate Japanese culture, and I knew nothing about my father's side. I didn't have a bento box, and I had no idea what anime was, so I was always left out. I felt unidentified. So, I tried watching anime and making lunches other than PB&J, but it was just way too overwhelming because of my lack of understanding of Japanese culture. I was somewhat embarrassed. For many years, I just ate alone and disregarded anything about my heritage.

In eighth grade, I took a Japanese class at my high school. Immersing myself in the language and culture allowed me to connect with a part of my heritage that had always felt distant. I got to taste so many different foods, attend field trips to Japanese festivals, learn so much vocabulary, and even pick up some basic cooking skills. This journey of discovery not only helped me understand my Japanese roots but also gave me a sense of belonging that I had been missing. I even made new friends who shared similar backgrounds, which made me realize that many of us were finding our identities in unique ways. This experience taught me that my identity isn't just defined by my ancestry or labels from others, but by my own efforts to understand and embrace the fact that I am a blend of cultures, shaped by my experiences and choices. While I may be an invisible dot from space, up close, I am a complex individual with a combination of influences that make me who I am.