

SOA NEWSLETTER

Society of Taiwanese
Americans
New England Chapter

New Beginnings

by Lily Chen

With a mixture of unbounded excitement (toned down with a little dread), I began this journey a little more than a year ago. Last March, I decided to start up a Taiwanese Young Professionals/Post-Collegiate Organization in New England on the advice of the 1993 NATWA (North America Taiwanese Women's Association) - Boston Chapter's president, Mrs. Chang. At that point, I convinced myself that it would be needed and was wondering how I was to begin treatment for this inadequacy in our Taiwanese community... little did I know... that this had been
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Oysters, potluck kick off New York's New Year

by Wayne Yang (SOTA-NY)

NEW YORK - Oysters were the order of the day as more than 30 people turned up for a mid-March dinner at Lai , a Flushing, NY restaurant that specializes in Taiwanese dishes. The ordering of Austin Shih (Woodside) was mighty, and the bah-won and oh-a jian felled many a NY and NJ member, as people pushed their chairs away from the table before the main courses were even finished. The NJ chapter brought out a seven-strong contingent, and Ula Hwang (NYU Med) and Jackson Pek (NYU Law) begged and pleaded with their NYU friends, getting their school to turn out about ten people. Many working people also braved the 45 minute subway trip from Grand Central Station to Flushing.

The night also featured karaoke. Vinny TTK (NJ) sang up a storm of Elvis songs, while the rest of the company churned Beatles songs throughout the night on a modicum of beer, a bit of 7-UP and lots of water. Karen Lin (Manhattan) braved the cultural barrier and sang a Taiwanese song about "Working Hard to Succeed," and Shaun Su even ventured one in Japanese. NY members are still debating whether anyone understood the song.

The NY chapter has also held a series of informal meetings, each with at least a dozen members in attendance. The meetings have included a housewarming party at the closet-sized, Upper East Side apartment of Wayne Yang, where a strong turnout of women medical students asked, "Why are Asian men intimidated by successful, intelligent Asian women?" In spite of the many bottles of wine, men like Dave Chen (Cornell Med) were, of course, stunned into silence. A potluck dinner at Shaun's apartment on the Lower East Side spurred intense discussion on the meaning of Taiwanese American Citizens League and the gradations of good curry. NY TACL President, Wen Liao, who undoubtedly is not claustrophobic, graciously attended both meetings. Felicia Lin (NJ), besides keeping core NY members in touch with each other via e-mail, has traveled back and forth from Hoboken to Flushing to represent SOTA at the TACL meetings.

Rex Chen (NYU Law) is among those cranking up a Taiwan study group, which would gather readings on Taiwan history, culture and politics for discussion. The New York chapter in June will also Launch Potato Sweet, an electronic journal for the Taiwanese American community that will be distributed via e-mail and the Internet. SOTA New York also in early April held a potluck dinner/planning meeting at the apartment of Chris Chen (Manhattan), in part to hash out the chapter's bylaws. On the slate for late May is a big dance pow wow.

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kicked around for an ump-teenth number of times by other concerned Taiwanese Americans. Ah, but what I didn't know... did help me. I, albeit blindly, proceeded to get this organization underway. I was fortunate enough to join forces with Sharon Chang (a fellow SOTA - New England officer), whose commitment and service to SOTA has been truly inspirational. Not knowing the amount of work that was needed to get this organization going was also a stroke of good luck. Later on when it was too far into the works to turn back, there were many a tired evening when Sharon and I felt ready to give up.

The first steps were the most difficult to achieve. In preparation for our initial meeting, Sharon and I had hashed out our main objective: to form a Taiwanese community ...reminiscent of the potluck dinners we have all grown up with. (I am delighted to see this strive to create and maintain a Taiwanese community continue on as a principle SOTA objective.) With an amazing show of support from Winston Yang (who also DJed our SOTA Xmas Dance) and Margaret Lin (SOTA-NY), Winston and Margaret drove up from NY to attend our fledgling group's birth. It was a small gathering of 15+ people. I'm sure everyone could tell we were wet behind the ears...that morning, I had taken a crash course with Sharon on the cute introduction games we all grin and bear, asinine as they are (i.e.: the infamous toilet paper game, etc.....).

The meeting was brief and we lost half the attendees that afternoon on our drive over to the next event, a canoe excursion along the Charles River. To this day, we still don't know what had happened to some of the missing people, but thankfully we intrigued a good number of people. We also caught the attention of one of the best sources for our members, our parents. We started receiving pleas from parents to include their sons and daughters onto our mailing list. Without the concerted efforts of our established members and many generous Taiwanese parents, SOTA-New England would not have survived those beginning weeks of development.

The SOTA-New England Chapter has thus far enjoyed: canoeing along the Charles River, a Martha's Vineyard excursion, apple picking at Honey Pot Hill Orchards, "Breaking the Silence" - Harvard Medical School's Asian American & Health Care Conference, the viewing of "The Puppetmaster" at the Museum of Fine Arts-Boston, Xmas Semi-Formal, a Potluck Dinner with NATWA and Harvard's and M.I.T.'s TASA, and most recently, the Museum of Science: "WhoDunit?" exhibit & the Omni theater "Sharks", as well as shared SOTA events: the SOTA-DC winter dance/TAC reunion, and the ITASA/SOTA Conference at Princeton University.

Looking to find more members as well as some helpful hints, Sharon and I trekked to the 1993's TAC/EC to announce our organization. We were greeted with enthusiasm and support, as well as the surprising news that we were not alone in our attempt to establish a Taiwanese Young Professionals/Post Collegiate Group. Phyllis Fung and other well-known members of the Taiwanese community had previously initiated similar ventures. We can learn much through the trials achieved before us.

The ITASA founders had also been noticing this lack of direction in Taiwanese Young Professionals/Post Collegiate people. Many former ITASA members have gone back to the ITASA conferences in lieu of having their own conference to attend. Therefore, interested former ITASA officers and members planned to put thoughts on a Taiwanese Young Professionals/Post Collegiate Organization into operation that TAC/EC. So through a series of fortunate events, SOTA was conceived that summer. At the present moment, we are established in various chapters along the East Coast and MidWest. Regional contacts to SOTA chapters are:

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note: all regions are in different phases of evolution

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During the last SOTA conference at Princeton, held in conjunction with the ITASA conference, SOTA has formed a preliminary list of SOTA objectives and a mission statement.

an excerpt of the March 3, 1994 email update:
by Cindy Yeh

I. OBJECTIVES OF SOTA

At the SOTA discussion workshop, the participants tried to outline SOTA's objectives and the methods of achieving those objectives. Here's what they generally concluded:

- a. To retain our cultural heritage through
 - language workshops/programs
 - lectures about Taiwan's history
 - discussions and hands-on workshops on the arts
 - education about Taiwanese customs
 - awareness of current issues (in Taiwan & USA)
- b. To build a community which would foster fellowship and mutual support
- c. To achieve societal empowerment

Much of the discussion included methods of achieving the goals (as in part a), but many people agreed that a succinct mission statement stating strictly the goals (as in part b and c) was necessary. Rolla Chuang has offered her version of a mission statement, and as it stands now, it reads:

The purpose of SOTA, the Society of Taiwanese Americans, is to build a strong, cohesive, and sustainable community for future generations of Taiwanese American which will encourage and strengthen the Taiwanese spirit, emphasize cooperation within the community and outreach to other organizations to achieve mutual empowerment, and be active in the larger American community.

by Rolla Chuang

One unresolved debate that surfaced was:

1. is SOTA an organization that will grow with the present post-graduate community to eventually become the new "TAA" in our later years?
2. OR should it focus solely on the post-graduate community, whose members will later leave SOTA and join TAA?

This issue will most likely continue to be discussed, particularly at the TAC/EC Conference at University of Delaware in July, 1994. If you have any other thoughts, please email them to Tim Chuang: coordinator of the email updates [SOTA-Chicago (708) 557-7364, chuang@ecfvax.el10.honeywell.com]

Currently we are in the throes of solidifying SOTA's national organization's structure, as well as the structure in the local "ground-roots" regional chapters. There will be a pre-TAC summit, tentatively held at SOTA-NY's pow-wow on the 21st of May...or on the 4th of June. Please contact your local SOTA representatives for further information.

Some of us have stronger convictions on certain SOTA related issues (for example: involvement in the politics of Taiwan, etc,...) that pull at SOTA's seams; yet, a common thread that links us together is our Taiwanese heritage. For now, let us look beyond our many individualistic differences in order to accelerate the critical laying of SOTA's foundations, so that there will exist an organization...SOTA...that will address these important issues. The pre-TAC summit will be an important time to iron out what we will be presenting to the TAC/EC conference (Program Director: Peilan Chiu, (215) 687-0732) in July. All SOTA officer positions have yet to be filled. Join us in the planning stages of SOTA, so that you may be an integral part of the formation of a Taiwanese community for you and your children.

On a personal note, I have recently become engaged to Leo Liang (for those of you I haven't been able to contact in person...my deepest apologies...it's been hectic) and I have begun to view the future in more concrete terms...I have hopes that SOTA will pave the way to bring an opportunity for my future family to be involved with our roots...Taiwan.

SOTA University 1993-1994 Bulletin

by Vincent Lai (SOTA-NJ)

for immediate release

Welcome to the SOTA Seminars in Stress Management for 1993-1994. If you don't have a job, or if you do have one and hate your boss, or if you're in school wishing you had a job and/or a boss you could just hate, we can help! Our lecture and practical series will advance your career, change your outlook on life, and freshen your breath all at once! This year's lineup of past seminars has already proven to be a rousing success. Here's what past students have said about our courses:

"Uh, huh-huh-huh-huh. These courses are so cool, huh-huh-huh-huh. They like, can get you chix and stuff, huh-huh-huh-huh. These courses kick ass! Huh-huh-huh-huh." "Yeah! Kick it! Kick it! Kick his ass! Heh-heh-heh-heh!!!!", B. Vis & B. Head.

"Two thumbs up! Go see it!", Syskull and Eeyburt.

"We loved 'em so much, we want to sign up for the whitewater banking, er, I mean rafting seminar!", Bill & Hillary.

The Physics of Ski Flight, by Eric "Mr. Downhill" Hsu, Director, Institute of Alpine Avionix. Eric will show you the proven techniques he has used to traipse down a black diamond slope at speeds 1486 mph and higher. Even with a pair of rental skis, he can show you that you too can catch all sorts of air! A damage waiver for your skis and a medical waiver for your body will be required as a prerequisite for registration. The SOTA Stress Management Seminar Series will not take responsibility for alpine or alcohol induced loss of cerebral matter, whether functioning or not.

The Physics of Falling Down by William Lin, Professor Emeritus. Dr. Lin will demonstrate the benefits of engaging the survival instinct on most winter wonderland surfaces. He will inspire you to go forth down that slope, and to skate around that rink, no matter how many times you do land on your glutes. Stop action photography has amazingly captured his techniques in motion and may be viewed upon request. He has hosted seminars this year at Wollman Rink at Central Park and Stratton Mountain, Vt.

The Physics of Friction, by Vincent Lai, Car Care Consultant. Mr. Lai will show how driving up a snow covered driveway hill using rather bald tires will cause you to:

slide down that driveway and into a ditch

let go of your dignity and call your friends over to help you out

wait in mile-long traffic that travels at a mile an hour

ski the whole mountain all day wondering where the hell are all those friends who helped you out before

miss the best part of the Playboy Ski Winterfest (he really regrets not having a Playmate auto graph. He also hasn't changed his tires as of this edition)

The House of Fashion, by Cindy Lin. She will show and prove to you that having a neck gaiter that matches your ski outfit will raise and enhance your standing within the ski community.

Home Improvement, by Steve ~~Vij~~ and Eugene Yuan. The hosts of the hit show "Taiwanese Tool Time" will show you how to make your ski chalet as hospitable as possible, using the latest advances in pyrotechnics (Fire! Fire!), winter materials management (Uh, like, where should I put this snow and stuff?), and fluids management (where's the beer, dude?). Time permitting, they will demonstrate second story safe rooftop skiing, without causing the roof to leak. Special guest appearances by the Taiwanese Tool Time Girls Julian Chien and Joy Hu.

Distinguished alumni attending our Wollman Rink (December 18, 1993) and our Stratton Mountain (January 21-23, 1994) seminars include:

Felicia Lin, Ula Huang, Chris Chen, James Wang, Sean Hsu, Austin Shih, Wen Wang, Victor Lin

So sign up early so you don't miss out. Upcoming events to be announced in the near future. He's got it, she's got it, at SOTA U!!!

SKIING AT STRATTON MOUNTAIN, VT

by Eric Hsu (SOTA-NJ)

A skiing trip was conceived at a meeting in the middle of November by the titular head of SOTA-NJ, William Lin of Cedar Grove. The date was set for mid January, and was for an entire weekend. Though the date was for January, a deposit was needed by the end of 1993. Eugene Yuan was asked to investigate possible places to ski, such as the Poconos in Pa, Vernon Valley - Great Gorge here in NJ, Hunter Mountain in NY, or a place in VT, either Killington or something similar.

Eugene went off, and in about two weeks, reported back with his results. The best place looked to be Stratton, VT, as special lift prices could be obtained, and a house for the SOTA members could also be arranged. The house that Eugene would reserve for us would cost about \$320 per night, but with at least 10 people signed up to go, the price of only \$32 per night was very reasonable. Invitations were sent to SOTA chapters in both NY and Massachusetts.

William then began delegating some tasks. Stephen Wu was to pick up the special lift tickets, while Cindy Lin was to arrange for food for about 10 people for two days. The food was to be for two breakfasts and two lunches, dinner to be taken care of individually.

The big day came, Friday, January 21. Everyone met at William's house, and set off for Vermont, about a 4 hour drive. We followed the NJ Parkway into NY, then followed the NY Thruway up to Albany, then went West till Stratton.

The house that Eugene had rented was enormous, with 4 bedrooms, six beds and a sofa bed. The house was fully furnished with VCR, TV and satellite, full kitchen, jacuzzi bath, everything a group needed.

The following day, we were awake by 6:30, ready to hit the slopes. William, Joy Hu, and Julian Chen all needed to take lessons, as they were but beginners. Stephen, Eugene, and Eric all headed for the intermediate and expert slopes. Cindy and Vincent Lai both did there own things.

The snow was wonderful, as it was but days after a big blizzard. Stratton had also received a few inches of accumulation. Powder, real powder, was there for the skiing. The only problem was that the wind was extremely harsh, contributing to a wind chill of -20 degrees, enough so that goggles and facemasks were needed while on the slopes. However, by midmorning, the sun had risen and the wind had slacked off, and the day was absolutely gorgeous. By the end of the day, everyone was exhausted, and instead of heading out to eat, we just stayed inside and ate what we could prepare.

Sunday was much the same, only minus the wind. We all skied together and posed for pictures, some people really hamming it up. Some pictures: William making snow angels after biffing it; Cindy grabbing for her hat while going horizontal; Vinnie eating snow on a double black; Stephen narrowly missing a tree; Eric actually getting tangled in a tree.

Some remarks: East Coast double black diamonds would barely qualify as black diamonds out West (Colorado and Utah); Its really packed on the East Coast with the number of people on line; If skiing Stratton, go to the Sun Bowl.

SOTA-DC CHAPTER NEWS

by Cindy Yeh (SOTA-DC)

The SOTA-DC chapter was started by Will Chen and Tom Huang after TAC/EC 1993, and it caters to Taiwanese Americans in the DC, Northern Virginia, and Maryland areas. Despite the relatively small number of core members, we've already sponsored several events. In the fall of 1993, SOTA-DC joined up with the Washington metropolitan area TAA for a Mid-Autumn Moon Festival dinner and a awards banquet honoring Representative Stephen Solarz and Professor Lung-Chu Chen. Most of the chapter's efforts were poured into the SOTA winter dance/TAC reunion, which was held in December 1993 and attracted over 150 people from all parts of the East Coast. On February 17, 1994, SOTA-DC also tapped into the FAPA sponsored showing of "A City of Sadness" at the Biograph Theatre in Georgetown to commemorate the 2-28 Massacre. There have even been a couple of informal SOTA ski trips. Plans for the future are in the works now, so we invite anyone with ideas to contribute them! Also, please contact Will Chen if anyone knows of Taiwanese Americans in the DC metropolitan area (we do extend out to Baltimore) who would be interested in SOTA-DC events.

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Preconceptions

by Shaun Su (SOTA-NY)

[The following was taken from *In America* * and is being used with permission of the authors]

It is not surprising to most of us that Taiwanese-Americans have been prejudiced in one way or another at some point in our lives in the United States. Let's face it, the human race still judges books largely by their covers. Although we cannot change the way others perceive those of us who are in the minority, it serves us well to be aware of it. More importantly, we should use the positive aspects to our advantage and proactively counteract the negative ones.

As a Taiwanese-American in this country, you may (or have already) encountered these types of people:

- Those with mostly positive preconception
- Those with a mostly negative preconception
- Those with roughly equal positive and negative preconception
- Those who really do not have any preconceptions about you at all

Table 1 lists the most frequent responses gathered from Americans when asked about their general impressions of Asians. Generally, unless they have spent some time in the Far East or are familiar with the subtle ethnic differences among the Asian countries, Americans make no distinction between Taiwanese-Americans and other Asian-Americans. You may not agree on several of these points, but do keep in mind that these represent actual responses from a sample of Americans. Very subtle attitudes unquestionably exist within a large segment of the American population and regional differences can be substantial and degree of urbanization can account for your personal experience.

Table 1: Preconceptions you may encounter as a Taiwanese American in the U.S. Taiwanese Americans are:

- very hard workers
- highly intelligent
- very dependable
- shy, mild mannered, and polite
- do not place a high priority on making much money
- not interested in advancement to high levels of corporate responsibility and management
- have great difficulty with communication
- will take any job offer because they are desperate to stay in the U.S.
- not very good at original or creative work
- lack good interpersonal skill
- the women work hard and are easily managed
- the men work hard but are stubborn

Like it or not, there will be some Americans who associate Taiwanese-Americans with several of the above traits. It has been observed that a higher level of education is correlated with a greater degree of tolerance, and although the level of education in the U.S. is rising, there are still too many out there who holds a prejudiced viewpoint. The subtle attitudes that work against you require active, subtle strategies to counteract. For example, the clothes you wear, the way you introduce yourself, how often you joke around with your colleagues, all may have un-anticipated effects that you will want to learn about.

This does not mean you should alter anything about your appearance, behavior, or attitude. Yet the more you learn about Americans, the more confident you will feel when you interact with them. If you have a confident attitude and have familiarized yourself with many of the uniquely American nuances, you will have two advantages: You know how to navigate through the American society just as effectively as any American and, you will simultaneously benefit from the positive perceptions our culture has established.

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Even for those of us who were born in the United States and have a good grasp of the American mentality, you could still be judged superficially and on more than your ability, experience, credentials, professional skills, and attitude. More often than not, dealing with people outside our daily contacts will bring out those preconceptions in others.

This piece may be of contrast to the others that you will be reading in this SOTA newsletter, but it was submitted in the hope that it serves as the foundation on which we can launch future discussions on this topic. We welcome future comments on this and its related topics. We should all share our trials in the United States as members of the Taiwanese-American minority and our fellow Taiwanese who are emigrating to the U.S. in greater numbers. At the graduate school level in 1993, Taiwanese made up the second largest group of foreign students. Furthermore, it is estimated by the year 2000, 40% of the population increase in the United States will be attributable to immigrants. If this were to occur, the cultural, professional, and academic landscape in America is sure to undergo dramatic change.

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A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE TAIWANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

by Rolla Chuang (SOTA-PA)

Annotated History of our People

The United States of America is a nation of immigrants. No group with the exception of the Native Americans can claim a greater right to the term and identity associated with this land over any other group. Taiwanese American is a descriptive term which denotes the history of our people as one among the multitudes of other identities that are part of this nation.

The history of Taiwanese Americans begins after reform of American immigration Laws in the 1950s. At this time, young, college-educated Taiwanese students were able to enter the country on the condition of pursuing Master's and/or Ph.D. degrees in American universities. These young students were able to organize themselves into TAIWANESE groups against much oppression and opposition by the Nationalist KMT government, who allied with the American FBI, spied on and suppressed any such activity. As students graduated with advanced degrees and found relatively stable professional jobs enabling them to remain in the United States, these organizations gradually moved from the college campuses into the general community. This was the seed of TAA - Taiwanese Association of America.

Who We Are

Today, we are the children of these Taiwanese students who made a life in America. Many of us grew up in the community of TAA. Since we had limited extended family within a few thousand miles of us, TAA was our extended family for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's at ubiquitous potluck dinners! Warm weather brought Easter egg hunts, picnics, volleyball and softball tournaments, track and field days - all within the community of the TAA. More important than the trivialities of these ordinary activities, however, the TAA community is the root of our Taiwanese identity. What many of us found after "leaving home" for college, was that we left a lot more than just our parents. We left our entire connection to the Taiwanese American community. ITASA was founded on the event of people like us going to college. It filled that void which affirms who we are: Taiwanese Americans.

What happens after we graduate from college? Because we are the first generation in America, again we find it necessary to create something ourselves. We face the most encompassing step of envisioning the future of our community. TAA knew they were going to love Taiwan, care for their own families and still were very concerned about friends and family in their homeland. ITASA knew they only needed to focus on college students. Our next step will not only address Taiwanese Americans who have graduated from college, it will also include those who have never attended college, the wives and husbands who may not BE Taiwanese American, their children, and their children.....

Defining Our Community

What being Taiwanese American means to us is an individual discovery. The "answer" will be different for each individual and no organization can attempt to come up with an all-encompassing answer for everyone. We are attempting to integrate diverse and often opposing value systems and customs. An individual will decide (continued on the next page)

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side how much to keep of Taiwanese and how much to adopt of American or new lifestyles in different blends. Taiwanese and American will mean different things to every individual. So how do we even come together into a community given such nebulous definition?

A common tie to Taiwan, common cultural values through our parents and relatives, distinct foods and using chopsticks, and a common external "America" environment are elements of our similar experiences. A common tie to Taiwan is shared with other descendants of Taiwanese people. Common cultural values, foods and chopsticks are shared with descendants of several other Asian countries. The idea of an external "American" environment bonds us together with all immigrant groups, and all groups not included in the specific definition of "American" such as people of color. When viewed in the global context, we are all citizens of an interconnected world that is struggling to balance its power and resources to feed, clothe, house, and organize its people. The effort of discovery, identity, and understanding joins us together as a community.

We are members of many communities: the global world, people of color, Asian Americans, and Taiwanese Americans. None of these communities are mutually exclusive. Yet when we define ourselves as a Taiwanese American community there is one crucial element that cannot be compromised without losing our reason for being. That crucial element is our connection to Taiwan. Without this element we may as well work within an Asian American community to address issues of Asians in politics, work with other communities of color to address institutional racism, support an international aid group to educate underdeveloped countries in sustainable agriculture..... All of these issues are relevant to a Taiwanese American, but the foundation of our existence as a Taiwanese American community is fundamentally rooted in our connection to TAIWAN. Cutting ourselves off from any further concern of this distant island where our parents or other relatives come from is cutting off our root. All living beings wither and die without their roots. At this moment while we are moving forward in defining the future of our Taiwanese American Community, let us not forget to include the most fundamental reason for our existence. Let us not forget to include education, awareness, and concern for that tiny, beautiful island in the Pacific: TAIWAN.

membership
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If you are interested in joining SOTA-NJ please fill out the following information
and send a check for \$20 payable to
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High Bridge, NJ 08829

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thank you for your contribution.

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