

I grew up in Johor, Malaysia, in an environment grounded in multiculturalism and a deep belief that education is something communities build together. Being Malaysian Chinese, my upbringing was both linguistically and culturally layered. Since elementary school, my weekdays were spent in a Chinese-speaking environment, while my weekends took me across the border to Singapore for English enhancement classes. Moving constantly between Mandarin, Malay, and English contexts taught me to read situations closely and navigate unfamiliar intellectual spaces with confidence. Those early experiences with code-switching became the foundation of how I learn.

I attended Foon Yew Secondary School, an independent Chinese institution that receives no government funding and is sustained entirely through tuition and community fundraising. Its existence depends on the collective effort of parents, teachers, alumni, and students who believe in preserving Chinese-medium education in Malaysia. That reality shaped my earliest understanding that nothing in a learning community exists by default. If we wanted anything new, we organized resources ourselves. Being educated in a system maintained by its own community taught me to see problem-solving as a shared responsibility rather than an individual task. This mindset of being resourceful and disciplined has guided me ever since.

As I navigated through middle and high school, performance and leadership slowly became central to my identity. I gravitated toward theater and student-led fundraisers. I learned how to coordinate people with different temperaments, mediate conflicts, and guide a group toward a result that only emerges when everyone contributes fully. Theater taught me to communicate across differences; fundraising taught me how to mobilize a community with limited resources. Both shaped my belief that if you care about something, you participate in its survival.

When I moved to the United States alone for college, those instincts became essential. As an extrovert, I knew I needed to build a community that felt like home. I found it when I stumbled upon the Southern Wind Lion Dance team. Lion dance was a tradition that shaped every celebration throughout my childhood, so I was pleasantly surprised to see the sport being practiced here. Seeing it in the U.S. felt like encountering a piece of home across the world. I joined the team immediately, and over time became captain and coordinator. In this role, I am responsible not only for performing at the highest caliber, but also for training new recruits, managing logistics, and sustaining the organizational backbone of the team. Leading lion dance has been a form of cultural stewardship, requiring me to balance tradition with adaptation while coordinating a diverse team through high-pressure events, including performances for the U.S. Navy and Fox News.

These experiences shape the scholar I am becoming. I bring a perspective grounded in cultural resilience, multilingual thinking, and the belief that communities thrive when people invest in each other. At Stanford, I hope to contribute to a learning environment where scholarship is not just a solitary pursuit, but a collaborative act of building knowledge together.