


Meet the first female Asian NY senator who is unifying Asian culture and celebrating diversity

By Amanda Saintina 
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This senator is helping unite Asian communities and celebrating diversity through dance in Southern Brooklyn

NEW YORK -- Being the first at anything is no small task. As the first Asian female to be elected to the state Senate, Iwen Chu takes it in stride. Before being inducted into the State Senate, she made it her mission to serve her community and uplift underrepresented voices. Now she represents the 17th district, which includes neighborhoods with a largely diverse Asian community like Sunset Park, Bensonhurst, Bath Beach, Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights and Kensington. Since being inducted in January 2023, her mission has not wavered.

Growing up in Taiwan, Senator Chu fell in love with the culture of Brooklyn during her trips to the United States. When she immigrated here at 27 years old, she set her sights on Brooklyn and planted her roots there. She has always had a passion for social issues and obtained a master's degree in sociology from Brooklyn College. In 2012, she began working for Assemblymember Peter Abbate. In this role, she noticed that there was not much Asian representation on the school and community boards. As someone who had emigrated herself, she understood how the language barrier was an obstacle for families.

"I want to be a part of the solution; that's always been my vision. Someone needs to do it, and I'm going to do it," says Chu.

As the representative of the 17th district, Senator Chu wanted to make a way for unity and give the community a sense of pride in their culture. This year, she hosted her 2nd annual AANHPI celebration to recognize the vast cultures of Asia through performances and dances. The event put a spotlight on the youth in the community, giving young people the opportunity to showcase talents and skills they're proud of.

The performances consisted of Xiangxi Miao drum dance (traditional Chinese drum dance), Lazgi (Uzbekistan folklore dance), Bharatanatyam (Indian lecture dance), taekwondo performances, and a Dunhuang dance (traditional Chinese dance). During the event, community sponsors and the late Don Lee were honored for their contributions to the Asian community.

Celebrations like these are Senator Chu's hope for decreasing stereotypes and discrimination against the Asian community, giving the youth pride in their heritage, and finding unification through differences.

"I would like to bring this crowd to everyone. They should see the Asian culture being celebrated. They should see their language being served by the state government. They should see their dance, culture, and history on stage, in the textbook curriculum, and when there's a holiday, they should be able to celebrate with everybody," says Chu.