Sun Yat Sen School 中山學校
1238 Kaumualii Street, Honolulu, HI 96817
also c/o Elroy Chun, Tel: (808) 842-1878

**Mission:** To honor the wishes of founder Dr. Sun Yat Sen, that young Chinese people learn about their ancestral history, culture, and traditions, and gain facility in the Chinese language.

**History:** Sun Yat Sen studied in Hawai‘i as a boy, and returned here to enlist the help of overseas Chinese in fomenting revolution in China. He urged that young Chinese in Hawai‘i be educated in both Chinese and English so that they could eventually assist in the reconstruction of China. At his instigation, local community leaders began to fundraise to build a Chinese school.

The school was founded in 1909. In 1910, the erstwhile Japanese YMCA on Kukui Street was purchased and remodelled. On February 8, 1911, classes began for 100 students at what was then called the Wah Mun School (*Huawen Xuexiao* 華文學校 “Chinese Language School”). In December of 1915, the school graduated its first class; 23 students were awarded diplomas.

In 1922, the school was able to expand its facilities by building an auditorium/gymnasium.

After the death of Dr. Sun in 1925, the school was renamed in his honor. Since he had adopted the name Zhongshan (Nakayama 中山) in Japan, the institution that in 1927 was renamed the Sun Yat Sen School in English is the Chung Shan School (*Zhongshan Xuexiao* 中山學校) in Chinese.

In 1934, a decision by the board of directors to open a high school division led to the purchase of a lot on Queen Emma Street. Four years later this property was sold, and the proceeds used to construct a modern hollow tile, 20-classroom building and two administrative offices on the Kukui Street campus. This new building was completed and dedicated in 1939. Enrollment at this time had increased to 1,000 students.

In 1941, due to the pressures of World War II, all instruction in Chinese came to a halt in Hawai‘i. Sun Yatsen School did not reopen until March 1, 1948, when 387 students re-enrolled.
The first graduation since the reopening, and the 28th in the school’s history, was held in November, 1959. In the post-war era, however, the impulse among young people was to “be American,” so enrollment at the school never again regained its earlier levels.

When the Honolulu Redevelopment Agency condemned tracts of Chinatown in 1961, the school relocated to Kauluwela Elementary temporarily. It reopened a decade later in the new Chinese Cultural Plaza. The current Sun Yat Sen School facilities include one office, twelve classrooms, a large gymnasium for volleyball and basketball, an auditorium for community meetings, and kitchen space.

Activities The school offers nine classes for grades 1–9, inclusive. The lower grades have always had larger numbers of students. Although classes are offered in both Cantonese and Mandarin, most of the instruction is given in Cantonese: eight hours per week focus on Cantonese, and two hours per week on Mandarin. Instruction emphasizes Chinese history, culture, philosophy, singing, folk dancing and gongfu. Classes meet from 3:00–5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Enrollment and staffing The age ranges of the students is 6–18; enrollment currently hovers around 200 students. Most of the approximately 10 instructors on staff were educated in China.

School principals Wah Duck Young (September 27, 1914–April 14, 2001), who was born in Honolulu but was sent to Zhongshan at the age of 10 for formal schooling, became an ardent supporter of Chinese language education in Hawaii when he returned to Honolulu after having graduated from a normal college in China. A successful businessman, he also taught at the Sun Yatsen School and later became principal—a post he held for more than four decades, until his death. The current principal of the school is retired attorney Ronald C. Lee.

Right, top: children outside the school in 1911; middle: faculty in front of the school in 1933; bottom: the newly constructed facilities in 1939.

Sources: UCS publications, Sun Yatsen School fundraising brochure, correspondence with Ronald Lee and Maylani Chang.