Association of Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos
夏威夷越南湛江華人聯誼會

Mission: The original mission was to help Chinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos settle in Hawaii. Help came in the form of cultural assimilation, language assistance, employment opportunities, living arrangements and perhaps most importantly, helping to contact 'lost' relatives. The association's current mission is more directed at furthering its members' interests in their professional pursuits, as well as keeping the younger generations in touch with their cultural heritage.

History: The association was started in April, 1975 by the first refugees who arrived in Hawaii from Indochina. All of these first generation members shared the common story of coming to Hawaii with virtually nothing to their name and thus having to build their lives anew. In the early years, the impetus to form the association was based upon two main practicalities. The first concerned the fact that most of the Chinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos did not speak English upon their arrival and that cultural assimilation was recognized as an essential part of their survival in Hawaii. The second concerned the importance of trying to locate 'lost' relatives of the refugees, as families often did not end up in the same city, state, or even country. Therefore, the association formed in order to settle the refugees into their new lives, as well as to try and help them contact their relatives. Originally, the association members would meet anywhere they could in order to share information. This often meant gathering under trees in the parks near Chinatown or in the Chinese cultural plaza. This trend continued until the early eighties, whereupon the status of newcomers changed from refugees to immigrants. As membership and resources grew, the association became more established in the community and by 1985 had moved into an office located on North King Street. On June 1, 2003, the association held a grand opening for its new society building at 900 Maunakea Street.
**Activities** The activities for the association are quite varied, ranging from community work to organizing festive gatherings. These include an annual New Years banquet attended by up to 1,000 members; fundraising, including a donation of $10,000 to rebuild the Palolo Chinese Home; supporting and organizing activities in Chinatown including parades and the food stands; helping older people in the Chinese community as well as other Chinese associations; and purchasing more than 500 spaces through Borthwick Mortuary on the grounds of the Valley of Temples, to resell to members at half the market price. Internally, the Association organizes a group of volunteers that cares for elderly members and, upon request, performs traditional funeral ceremonies. Another program collects donations from members to award to 15-20 school children each year, for their academic achievements.

**Membership:** The association is a non-profit organization that requires its members to be ethnically Chinese, as well as from Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos. Roughly 60% of the members are from Vietnam, 10% from Cambodia and 30% from Laos. Members are predominantly business people, farmers and shopowners in Chinatown. There is a $10 annual membership fee. A monthly donation is requested, with the actual amount left to the discretion of the donor. Approximately 800 households are registered members, but including dependents, total numbers involved in the association are in the vicinity of 3-4,000 individuals.

**Association presidents**

1981-82  Ly Trieu Tong  
1983-84  Tran Thu  
1985-92  Ted Li  
1993-96  You Soukaseum  
1997-98  Ly Trieu Tong  
1999-02  Hae Viengkhou  
2003-  Thomas Sum