**Bow Yee Tong Association**

**P.O. Box 1090, Kaneohe, HI 96744-1090**

**Mission:** As a benevolent society, the Bow Yee Tong (1) provides scholarships to students; (2) sponsors activities to promote culture and fellowship; (3) donates to and participates in community projects.

**History:** Beginning in the 1800s, first the sandalwood, then the whaling, then the sugar industries brought waves of Chinese to Hawai‘i as contract laborers. With the growth of the Chinese population, people began to band together in mutual aid associations to provide social and recreational outlets, encourage fellowship, provide lodging for fellow travelers, and care for elders and the sick. Thus emerged the Chinese societies and clubhouses throughout the Islands.

Some Chinese migrants eventually moved to work on rice plantations scattered over the windward side of Oahu. There were originally two Chinese societies in Kaneohe. One society, known as Chung Hing Society, was founded by the Hakka people. It was originally located on William Henry Road and later moved to Lilipuna Road. A second society, known as the Bow Yee Tong, was founded as a Hoong Moon society by the Punti people in 1903, on a parcel of land leased in Heeia off the Kamehameha Highway. Later, the Bow Yee Tong purchased the land and had its ownership recorded on September 4, 1920.

Wong Fat, Chang Lum Kin, Wong Loy, Wong See Yuen, Yim Hoon Wai, Yim Ah Lin, Lee Dau, and Chun Fo Sau were some of the founders of the Bow Yee Tong. Some current members are second, third, or fourth generation descendants of the founders.

The original Bow Yee Tong was a mutual aid society for Chinese agricultural workers. Its clubhouse facilitated fellowship and social gatherings. The two-story clubhouse building was also known as the “Goong See.” There were four rooms on each floor. Two rooms on the second floor contained one god and altar in each. A large or main altar located in the center between the two rooms was dedicated to Kwan Dai (Guandi 關帝), the god of war and patron saint of fraternal loyalty. The remaining rooms on both floors were for storing religious and social articles. The main room on the first floor was used for social gatherings.

There was an adjacent communal housing building, the “Lau Yun Fong,” and a kitchen facility, that provided lodging and care for transients, guests, and the aged. Finally, there was a one-room house, the “Tai Pung Fong,” with its big door (the “Dai Moon”) facing the mountains, which was used to accommodate dying members prior to his departure from this world.

In the 1930s, a Chinese language school called the Koon Yick School was established on the first floor. The school lasted about ten years until 1941, when World War II disrupted the operations of the school.

The Chung Hing Society and the Bow Yee Tong were consolidated in 1933 under the latter’s name. The Bow Yee Tong was incorporated under the laws of the Territory of Hawaii in May 1947. The meaning its name is as follows: “Bow (bao 保)” means “to treasure”; this word is homophonic with the character “bow (bao保)” meaning “to protect, to care for,” and all of
these meanings have melded in the minds of the members; “Yee (yi 義)” means “justice” or “righteousness”; and “Tong (tang 廉)” means “hall”—thus: “The Hall where Justice is Preserved.”

In 1966, a shopping center was proposed for an area including the Bow Yee Tong property, and developer Thomas McCormack approached the Society about a land exchange. The legal negotiations for this exchange took years; before its conclusion, on January 13, 1970, a storm that ravaged Oahu damaged the Bow Yee Tong building beyond repair. The Executive Board immediately called a special meeting, which decided that the society building was unsafe for people to use as a place for worship, and voted to have the shrine removed. The task of sanctifying the temple god, Kwan Dai, and subsequent removal of the shrine, was accomplished through a formal ceremony performed by the Kwock On Society, also known as Ket On Society, in March, 1970. By these rituals, the gods were properly returned to heaven.

Finally, on March 31, 1970, the land swap negotiations were concluded, with the Bow Yee Tong acquiring 34,000 square feet of land on Lilipuna Road in exchange for its original property. The Association subsequently leased the Lilipuna Road property to a developer, who built residential condominiums on it. Recently, Bow Yee Tong sold the property.

Since the 1970s, the Bow Yee Tong has been holding its regular meetings at the Kaneohe Library. Although the Association no longer has a meeting hall, it has achieved a higher goal in the Kaneohe community. It now participates in community services such as the annual community Christmas parade, scholarship awards, and donations to charitable institutions. Although the direction of Bow Yee Tong activities has changed over the years, one primary goal remains: to preserve Chinese traditions and values.

**Activities**  The Bow Yee Tong participates in the Kaneohe Hoolaulea and other Kaneohe community projects, provides annual scholarships to two Castle High School Seniors, and makes donations to various charitable institutions, including the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa Library’s China Collection, and the Palolo Chinese Home.

**Membership:** Membership is for life. At one time, inductees went through a whole night’s initiation. In 1968, this was changed to a simpler ceremony known as “Sip Top.” Now, all new members are simply sworn in by the president. In the beginning, the membership of the Bow Yee Tong, similar to that of other Hoong Moon societies, was restricted to men only, even at festival dinners.

The Bow Yee Tong reformed first in the late 1960s, when women were permitted to attend dinners, and then again in 1972, when women were finally allowed to become members. The current roster stands at 125, which is the maximum imposed by our by-laws. If there were space, membership would be open to any person age 16 years and above, of good standing and character in the community, regardless of race or creed.

**Association presidents**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>President</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979–91</td>
<td>Alfred M.H. Chang</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992-95</td>
<td>William Chang</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>Gordon Wong</td>
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<td>1998–01</td>
<td>Audrey Choy</td>
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<td>2002–pres.</td>
<td>Nolan Wong</td>
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