

The Chinese Club of San Marino Building Committee – Dr. Hai Sou Chen

The Chinese Club Building: Looking to the Past, Looking to the Future

The Beginning:

In September of 1979, Jean Wang and Nori Wei (the Chinese Club's first President and the Chinese School's first Principal, respectively), along with a group of dedicated and passionate San Marino volunteers established the Chinese Club of San Marino. The Chinese Club was established to:

1. Transmit Chinese cultural heritage, traditions, and arts; provide Chinese language instruction, especially for youth of Chinese descent, so that they might become the pride of our communities.
2. Establish mutually beneficial relations with the San Marino community at-large, and facilitate integration into the community.

Growth and Development Period:

Past Presidents and Board Members, with fear and trembling, and through blood, sweat, and tears, garnered experience and laid the foundations of the club. In 1981, President Mark Chen threw himself into stabilizing the operations of the Chinese School, leaving the school with a surplus. It was in 1994 that President Eugene Sun demonstrated keen foresight in soliciting loans from community members (\$5000 each) and each board member (\$1,000). As a result, the Club finally had a building to call home, a place to hold meetings and events, and ultimately, to fulfill its mission. Building upon that, Joseph Chang, Club President and Chinese School Principal, with unmatched panache worked to acquire the Club's second building in 1997, giving the Chinese School teachers and administrators a space to work, and board members and consultants a space to interact, all the while accumulating a surplus of \$600,000 through the year 2000.

Transition Period:

About seven or eight years ago, the city of San Marino recommended that the Chinese Club building be renovated, given that the building spanned multiple addresses, had little exterior uniformity, and was not compatible aesthetically with neighboring buildings. In response, the Chinese Club hired architect Simon Lee, whose design passed the Design Review Committee and the Planning Commission. However, since nobody from the Chinese Club undertook the task of pushing construction through, the permits expired.

In recent years, the Chinese School's use of classrooms has been limited by the school district, and thus the learning environment quality for Chinese School students progressively deteriorated. In 2013, President Calvin Lo and the Board unanimously passed a resolution to undertake a rebuilding project, and, to that end, established a Building Committee and served as the committee head. The Chinese Club hired Chung Chen and Anthony Tam from the architecture firm Tam Studio to design a splendid and modern rebuild. The following year, President Tom Chang and the Building Committee spent day and night toiling to work out a finalized design for submission. Finally, in October of 2014, the designs were submitted to the city, and on February 25, 2015, after a public hearing, the entire Design Review Board approved the project. The night of the hearing, many public figures in the community, including members of the city council, City Club, Chamber of Commerce, and Rotary Club spoke in favor of the approval.