

# PAGODA COMMUNITY CENTRE



STUDENT CASE STUDY

# OVERVIEW

The Pagoda Community Centre has been at the centre of the Liverpool Chinese community since it was conceived in the early 1980s. The Inner City Partnership Programme of 1978 supported this venture to create a combined Nursery and Advice Centre for the local Chinese community.

A partnership between Merseyside Chinese Community Services, Liverpool Education Department, Liverpool City Architect, it was spearheaded by artist and community organiser Brian Tai Shen Wang. Today community activity continues with a focus on arts for the Chinese community and beyond. However funding cuts means the building does not have the council support it once did.

THIS YOUTH AND CULTURAL CENTRE WAS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN PROMOTING CHINESE CULTURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. IT HOUSES PAGODA ARTS, A CHAIRTY PROMOTING CHINESE CULTURE TO A WIDE AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY.



# ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES



The Prince and Princess of Wales opened the £228,000 pagoda-style building during their visit to Liverpool on April 2 1982. The yin and yang main entrance was part of the original design and remains to this day.

The inscription on the wall of the building states: 'This community will strive for prosperity, harmony, and the aspiration for future multi-racial integration and understanding of all peoples'.

The building on Henry Street in central Liverpool is sunken, in that access is by stairs leading down. A recent application to Arts Council to renovate the building sees plans from local architects elevate and shift the entrance onto an adjoining the street, increasing visibility.

# COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

Liverpool is home to the oldest Chinese community in Europe. Liverpool's docks welcomed Chinese sailors from the early 19th century.

According to 2009 estimates, 1.1% of Liverpool's population are of Chinese ethnicity (5,000 people) though it's estimated that the actual number could be 5 times this. The 2001 census showed 1,542 Liverpoolians were born in China and 1,228 in Hong Kong.

Today the Chinese population in Liverpool is much smaller than it was in the mid-20th century, due to many moving to Manchester and Birmingham for economic reasons.

We met Zi Lan Liao, musician and manager at the centre. She tells us about her father Mr Li, who travelled to the UK with her when she was 12 years old. He was the local Chinese Cultural Officer and established the Chinese Youth Orchestra which became based at the centre. Brian Tai-Shen Wang was the driving force behind supporting the Chinese community in becoming more established in the city and building the Pagoda Community Centre.



# USE

HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?

## PRESENT

The Centre has provided social and cultural support since it opened and continues to do so. It has long been the base for the leading Chinese Youth Orchestra and is managed by Pagoda Arts to provide high quality and unique musical experience for young people and improve people's understanding of Chinese culture. The centre has been the base for this organisation, and that has formed the basis for an application to the Arts Council to convert the building into an Arts Centre.



## FUTURE

Pagoda Arts is focusing on how they can expand further in the future, providing a healthy and nurturing environment for the local community, as well as continuing their teaching of Chinese music and performance.

# REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIERSE ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

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Many communities felt supported in 70s and 80s Britain with the political drive for multiculturalism. The Pagoda Community centre was a result of one of these funding initiatives and, at the time, it was viewed as a new concept for an all embracing community service which we see in places like the Bromley-by-Bow Centre today. When communities suffer from funding cuts, we see a strong voice become diminished.

“We desperately need money to keep (the Centre) going. The council fund are still letting us use the space, but they are in negotiation to give the centre to us. But, if they choose to stop funding the centre, we would need to look for an extra £30k just for the overheads. If we don't find it, that would mean we lose the space and lose the use of it. And we open six days a week.”

Zi Lan Lao



# QUOTES

A need to serve the community is very present, and care needs to be taken with how communities are supported to be resilient. How do we become more aware of hard work being remunerated and mental and physical health front of mind? When service is front and centre, how do heritage and built environment professionals become a part of this energy?

“The more I got involved with running the centre, the more I saw how important it is to have it. I mean, before I was just involved the music side, the cultural side too, so I just came in when I wanted! And at the weekend I didn't actually see how it was needed. But now, I experience first-hand every day how we help people.”

Zi Lan Lao

