

personalities

Serving Chinatown— Judy Yung

[San Francisco, Calif.] When Judy Yung was appointed head librarian at San Francisco's Chinatown branch last year, the (American) cultural revolution took another little leap forward. For Judy, now twenty-seven, was not only the first Chinese-speaking head librarian to serve Chinatown, she was also, incredibly enough, the first person of Chinese extraction ever to hold that post.

Born and raised in Chinatown, she learned to speak Toisanese ("sort of a hillbilly Chinese dialect") at home, where her upbringing was strictly traditional. She thinks it was Chinese-style family life—"where we were geared toward finding a good, safe, respectable job"—that made her choose library work.

Paradoxically, library work brought her into contact with a broader cross-section of people than she'd ever encountered in her sheltered youth—which, in turn, has caused Judy to explore other lifestyles and "to try to break away from the traditional Chinese life that was laid out for me."

She's still exploring, seeking the best of both Western and Chinese culture, she says. Trying to "balance" the two in her own life. "My ideal, I guess," she smiles, "is if it feels right, do it. But I know I'll never abandon the Chinese ways entirely. The languages I speak—that will always be part of me."

Her languages are Toisanese, Cantonese (Chinatown's prevailing dialect, learned at Chinese school) and Mandarin (learned at San Francisco State University, where she earned her B.A. in 1967). The latter, the formal language of China, is to become the official mainland language in three years, with all other dialects ruled out. It is vitally useful for a Chinatown librarian to be able to speak China's language during a time when the community's interest in Mao's China is thriving.

One of the most important parts of her job, the way Judy sees it, is knowing what the community's day-by-day interests are, and the best way she's found to keep tuned in is by working with a community paper called *East/West*, where her column, "Chi-Am Corner," appears biweekly. The column deals with "what I've learned growing up in Chinatown."

She hasn't written about library edu-

cation in her column. Who but librarians would be interested? Yet her comments concerning, for instance, her year at U. of California, Berkeley, earning her M.L.S. could scarcely be more caustic.

"It was," Judy says straightforwardly, "the most boring year I ever spent." The problem was that the year was devoted to honing and refining skills she already



Judy Yung—"to provide the people with information" in Chinatown.

possessed, having gotten her first job in the San Francisco Public Library in 1964.

"It could have been worthwhile," Judy says, "if they spent more time on innovative library services, on how to relate to the community you're supposed to serve, on evaluating the needs of your community. That kind of education could help produce librarians who'd know how to make libraries important to the people they serve.

"They should teach public relations so librarians would at least learn how to talk to people. I mean, I've seen so many librarians who just completely turn people off. It's a shame.

"Librarians are going to have to get out of their fortresses and talk with people about what the library has to offer. With literate middle-class whites becoming a minority in cities like San Francisco, the library now has an added responsibility to the disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, illiterate and semiliterate, the institutionalized, and the aged. The public library must start hiring minorities and socially conscious people who can best understand and meet the needs of these people."

That's what Judy is trying to do at the Chinatown branch, where:

—A Chinese-language collection of 5,000 titles has been amassed.

—Not just Judy, but the better share of the staff are bilingual.

—The Chinese-American collection is heavy on titles dealing with every phase of Chinese culture, and the phonorecord collection is strong on Chinese language, music, and songs.

—Signs directing people in use of the branch are in Chinese and English. (A Chinese sign for the front of the building has been proposed, though the present one's strictly English.)

—There is strong emphasis on materials useful to immigrants seeking citizenship and jobs.

—A Chinatown information file is being assembled, consisting of pamphlets, newspaper articles, magazines, with notices of upcoming events posted on the bulletin boards, and an up-to-date file of community organizations is maintained for referral and contact purposes.

Most popular works presently are the Mainland China periodicals, *China Reconstructs* and *China Pictorial*, plus biographies of Mao and Chou. "There's more open-mindedness in Chinatown now toward the mainland," Judy explains. "Regardless of their politics, people of Chinese origin are proud of China's new status in the world. Many still regard China as home and have a deep curiosity about what's been going on there since they left."

Despite her commitment to community involvement, Judy Yung takes care not to take sides on political ideology, nor to create an impression that her branch is somehow aligned with one side or another in Chinatown's complex substructure.

"We're here to provide the people with information," she says. "And anything that gets in the way of that—by keeping one segment or another of the community out of the library—would mean that we weren't doing our job."

Deaths

Stith M. Cain, director of libraries at the University of Wisconsin, White-water, died February 10.

Donald Coney, librarian of the University of California, Berkeley, from 1945 until his retirement in 1968, died February 10. During his tenure as librarian, the library grew from approximately 1,300,000 volumes to more than 3 million, and the library staff doubled in size under his leadership. Ray Swank, friend and colleague of Donald Coney, wrote about him on his death: "He did more for the Berkeley libraries than anyone else has ever done, and few at Berkeley have given so much to the general educational, cultural, and physical welfare of the university." **al**