Library Service to the Chinese-American Community

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I

A primary goal of public libraries is service to all. In recent years attempts have been made to fulfill this goal by providing special services to all minority groups. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the public library is fulfilling this goal in regard to service to the Chinese-American community, with special reference to Chicago.

For the purposes of this paper the term "Chinese American" will refer to Americans of Chinese ancestry, whether native or foreign-born. Also, the term "Asian American" will designate the grouping of Americans of Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese ancestry. "Asian American" is a relatively new term which gained recent acceptance in the literature. According to Paul Wong, the term was adopted in order to allow presumed ethnicity to achieve political identity and group solidarity.1 Lingchi Wang explains:

While historical and oftentimes derogatory terms like "Orientals," "Asiatic," and "Mongolians" were used as catch-all labels for all peoples from Asia, the new term "Asian American" not only rejected all traditional stereotypes but also declared a new collective identity and recognized the common origin (Asia) and destiny of Asians in America.2

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As of the 1970 census, these are fewer than a half million Chinese Americans in this country’s total population of over 200 million. In view of this, why is there interest in serving the Chinese? Many social changes have occurred in the past decade. The civil rights movement of the 1960s raised the consciousness of Americans and led to the emergence of the Asian–American movement. Many Americans hold distorted views of Chinese and other Asian Americans. American institutions must be sensitive to changing viewpoints and learn to adapt accordingly.

It was often assumed that once immigrants were assimilated into American society, they would be able to use the library as it existed. Leonard B. Borman states: “It was commonly assumed, until recent years, that immigrant groups coming to American would eventually assimilate, that they would disappear into some mainstream of American culture.” Borman believes that this goal of encouraging ethnic groups to disappear, assimilate, and Americanize is no longer accepted by social scientists, and is rejected by many American ethnic groups. But Chinese and the other Asian Americans cannot disappear and assimilate entirely. Francis L. K. Hsu cautions that complete Americanization is impossible. He states: “This is not merely because Chinese (and other Asians) are as a whole physically distinguishable form whites.... But even when racial differences are absent,... the Chinese identity has not disappeared. If Chinese Americans retain their cultural identity, especially their language, it is obvious that they will require special services not offered by the average public library.

So what role does the library play in the lives of Chinese Americans? Daniel Bell states: “In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of ethnic identification as the basis for effective political action in widely divergent societies.” In the promotion of positive political action, knowledge is a very important tool. According to Joshua I. Smith in his introduction to Library and Information Services to Special Groups, the library, as a powerful knowledge base, is essential to those groups struggling for a place in American society. There is
now the need to define exactly what services are meaningful and how they can fulfill the desire of every group to participate in the larger system, while retaining their own identity. For a long time, the public library has given limited special service, or none at all, to Chinese Americans. They have the right, along with other minority groups, to demand meaningful services that meet their information needs.

While there has been increased study of programs of service to minority groups in the past decade, this has not been true for Chinese Americans. This lack of information on programs for the Chinese-American community may possibly indicate the absence of such programs. In order to plan for better library services, current service must be examined. The scope here is limited to the study of public library services.

Some study of library service to Asian Americans has already been done. The Asian American Librarians Caucus (AALC) did a survey of library service to Asian Americans. The AALC adopted the proposal by Dr. Tze-chung Li for this survey and created an Ad Hoc Committee charged with investigating and reporting on the library needs and use of Asian Americans, and the extent of library services provided to them. In October 1976 the Committee sent questionnaires to thirty-nine selected public libraries which were assumed to serve a considerable number of Asian Americans. Approximately 75 percent of the libraries responded to the questionnaires.6

In the survey report, the Committee made several observations. Reasons for the small amount of material in Asian languages were well-identified. One of the obvious reasons was the budget. Only seven libraries allocated funds for Asian materials, and the amounts ranged from less than one percent to a surprisingly high 13.5 percent. (The library reporting the 13.5 percent budget was the recipient of an government grant for service to the Asian community.) Secondly, one library commented that there might be a lack of need for Asian materials. Thirdly, perhaps due to the lack of demand, there seemed to be no policy for or formal approach to the selection
and acquisition of Asian materials. Though materials in Asian languages constituted a small amount of the collection, nearly all libraries had materials in English for Asian Americans. And, finally, the relationship between the population served and the need for branch libraries was not clear. Most libraries did not have special programs for or services to Asian Americans.

The committee stated, on the basis of the survey, that library resources and library services were quantitatively lower than they should be, in view of the ratio between Asian Americans and other Americans. Much improvement is needed in the field of library services. They noted, however, that adequacy of library resources and services depended primarily upon the needs and demands of users, and they recommended further study to assess those needs and demands before judging the quality of library services and resources. They concluded that, in general, the library response to the needs of Asian Americans seemed to be positive.

According to Tsuen-hsuin Tsien, "The incorporation of East Asian materials in branches of public libraries is a new trend primarily for providing materials in vernacular languages to minority groups in the local community." The extent of branch service in supplying Chinese-language materials to the Chinese community is presently limited. Prior to sending questionnaires to public libraries, I was aware of special branch library service only in San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. To find out whether this service existed in other public library systems, I queried about twenty public libraries, sending two questionnaires directly to San Francisco and New York branch libraries. The libraries chosen were based on the 1970 census information which indicated where there were large concentrations of Chinese. Because the Chinese in the United States are settled in large urban areas my inquiries centered on large metropolitan public library systems.

Out of the twenty questionnaires sent, seven were answered by main public libraries. The responses from the Oakland
Public Library and the Seattle Public Library indicated further branch service for the Chinese community, and I later received responses from those branches. The two branch libraries in San Francisco and New York also responded. There were no responses from the remaining libraries.

From the few responses to the questionnaire, several characteristics stand out. Books constitute the majority of Chinese-language materials. These books are primarily fiction and are chosen for leisure reading. It should be noted that some of these collections only started within the past five years. Some libraries reported no plans for their Chinese-language collections; some reported few or no staff members to handle their Chinese collections. Budget restrictions were most often given as the reason for lack of service.

In cities where a large percentage of Chinese are concentrated in one area, the Chinese-language collection is most often housed and staffed by the community branch, while small deposit collections are in the main libraries and other branches. In cities where the Chinese population is dispersed, the collections tend to be housed and staffed in the main branch with small deposit collections in various branches.

Although the matter was not raised in the questionnaires, several libraries reported problems in obtaining reliable suppliers of Chinese-language materials, and in cataloging the materials.

One library reported from Hawaii. Considering the size of the Chinese population, that library’s service is limited. But, because the Chinese in Hawaii are different from those on the mainland United States, service to groups in Hawaii will have to be considered a separate area of inquiry.

II

What is being done in branch libraries to serve the Chinese-American community? The following sections will summarize some of the services offered in specific branches.
The Chinatown Branch of the San Francisco Public Library gives the most extensive service in an area which has the largest concentration of Chinese. The Chinatown Branch serves approximately 63,200 Chinese. The Chinese collection of this branch dates back to 1968, when it was started under community pressure. The collection was opened to the public in 1970. The following information was supplied by the questionnaire and by a report from the branch librarian, Stella Chan.

According to Stella Chan, the Chinese collection accounts for one-third of the total circulation of the library and one-half of the total adult circulation. The users include people of all ages and varying social and educational backgrounds. Chinese fiction is the most popular. For new immigrants learning English, the collection has a selection of bilingual dictionaries, bilingual fiction and non-fiction, and books for the study of the English language. Bilingual citizenship books are also provided for those preparing to take the naturalization tests for U.S. citizenship. The reference section for the Chinese collection contains the usual standard dictionaries and specialized encyclopedias, as well as relevant materials, like the Hong Kong Annual Report, the Chinatown Business Directory, and the General Catalog of Books Published in the Republic of China. Patrons and librarians make full use of these reference aids.

During the first years of the Chinese book collection, a committee of ten persons from the Chinese community took care of selecting titles. They are credited with building the core collection under the coordination of the first bilingual librarian, Judy Yung. When Stella Chan began selecting Chinese books for the Chinese collection in late 1971, selection was put back in the hands of the library. She and Vivian Chan, another adult librarian who is also proficient in written Chinese, handle the selection of books for the Chinese collection.

Ordering is done from foreign book dealers in Hong Kong and Taiwan who regularly send catalogs of new titles. Through Hong Kong dealers, the librarians obtain books published in
China. They also visit local Chinese bookstores, and read reviews in Chinese periodicals. Although it requires more work and time, buying abroad is preferred because books are much cheaper overseas and also because local bookstores carry only a limited selection.

Hard-cover books receive full cataloging in the main library’s cataloging department. All paperbacks are handled at the branch. Over 95 percent of acquisitions are paperbacks, which cause drain on staff time and energy. To save time they adopted a simplified system of cataloging. The call number consists of a broad Dewey class number without any Cutter number. A copy number is assigned consecutively as books are added to the collection. A combination of the Dewey class number and the copy number therefore produces a unique combination which identifies a particular title.

All popular fiction paperbacks and the majority of nonfiction paperbacks which are considered of lasting value are Perma-bound. Author, title, and shelf list cards with Chinese and transliteration are provided for all Perma-bound titles. No subject cards are in the catalog. To compensate for the weakness, the shelflist is located next to the author-title catalogue and serves as a substitute subject catalog. Since transliteration is done according to the Mandarin pronunciation and most of the patrons are Cantonese-speaking, using the author-title catalog is difficult. To alleviate this problem, guide cards are provided throughout the catalog. Guide cards are also provided for each broad Dewey class, as well as relevant subclasses, in the shelflist used as a subject catalog.

Up to now concentration has been on building the book collection. There are also Chinese newspaper and periodical collection, which include four foreign dailies and five local Chinese newspapers. Chinese records are also very popular. Because most older residents of Chinatown do not or cannot read, Chinese records are the only type of library material they are able to enjoy.

Since the presence of Chinese materials has attracted in-
creasing numbers of Chinese-speaking patrons to the branch, Chinese has to be spoken at all levels of library service. Nearly everyone on the staff is bilingual, and service is provided in Cantonese, Taishanese, and Mandarin, as well as in English. Chinese is spoken at the circulation desk and in reference, reader’s advisory, and referral services. Publicity for library programs, and announcements, are prepared in English and Chinese and disseminated through the English and Chinese media.

In planning library programs, the librarians try to select topics of Chinese interest. They have bilingual slide talks on China and the Chinese in the U. S., bilingual workshops, such as on Chinese chess and dough sculpture, and concerts of Chinese music. For several years there have been monthly programs for the benefit of Chinese-speaking senior citizens. And working within San Francisco’s Book Bridge Project, a bilingual volunteer is now bring Chinese books to a Chinese-speaking shut-in.

The Chinatown Branch in San Francisco is open about forty-nine hours a week; twice a week it is open until nine o’clock in the evening. The heaviest hours of use are between three-thirty and five-thirty in the afternoon on weekdays and for most of the day on Saturdays.

The Chinese collection makes up about one-third of the library’s book collection. Expansion is continuing in all subject areas. There are small deposits of Chinese materials in seven other branches, and a small collection at the main library. Future plans are to get more of everything—staff, budget, space for the public and the staff, programs, books and records, and community outreach and involvement.

In nearby Oakland, the Oakland Public Library has been expanding its services to non-English-speaking groups in recent years. It opened the Asian Community Library, a two-year federal project that began in 1976. It provides library materials in Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese, as well as English, for people of all ages to borrow free of charge. It
serves an estimated population of 11,335 Chinese and has a sizeable Chinese book collection and record collection; current holdings are estimated at 10,000 volumes, 300 records, and 235 cassette tapes. The Chinese collection is a general popular collection covering fiction and all general non-fiction areas. The library is open Monday through Saturday for about forty-seven hours per week, and it is open until eight o'clock in the evening twice a week. The staff for the Chinese collection consists of one librarian (an American-born Chinese having ten years of Chinese school), one consultant (a librarian born in China), and three part-time library aides (also bilingual). Through 1978, it plans to build up a core collection, including reference and basic fiction and non-fiction titles. There are plans subsequently to add new titles and replacements insofar as money allows.

The library prints a brochure in English and in Chinese that boasts of an Asian-American collection of English-language books on Asian-American history and the culture of the Asian countries, supplemented by a vertical file of newspaper clippings and pamphlets. Materials in this area are also available for children. Also available for loan is a special collection of records, cassettes, films, filmstrips, and slides on Asia and Asian Americans. For those who prefer to listen to records and cassettes in the library, there are audiovisual carrels with turntables and cassette players. An additional service of the Asian Community Library is the Asian bookmobile which makes over twenty stops in the Asian communities each month. The bookmobile carries books and magazines in Asian languages and in English, and is always accompanied by a bilingual staff.

On the East Coast in New York City the oldest library with a Chinese-language book collection is the Chatham Square Branch of the New York Public Library. The branch has been located at 33 East Broadway since its opening in 1903. At the southern end of Chinatown, a block and a half east of Chatham Square itself, between Catherine and Market Streets, it is also convenient to the Knickerbocker and Al Smith housing projects and the Civic Center area. The branch building, designed with
a pillared façade by McKim, Mead & White, has three stories.

The Chinese-language book collection was inaugurated in 1911 and now contains over 1,000 hardbound and 25,000 paperback books for adults. Popular and classical library writings are in heavy demand, as are books on cooking and language instruction. The branch also has a sizeable collection of English-language books on China.

The almost 30,000 books (English and Chinese) on the shelves are equally divided between works for children and those for teenagers and adults. The children's room, on the second level of the building, contains books in Chinese, Spanish, and Italian; there are also Spanish and Italian works in the adult collections. The branch subscribes to seventeen magazines for children and sixty for adults. (One-quarter of the latter are in Chinese.) There are separate record collections for children and adults, the latter including instruction in English for Chinese speakers.

This branch is currently open fewer hours than any library responding to the questionnaire: only thirty-four hours a week, divided among five days (closed Friday and Sunday). Its heaviest use is on weekdays from three to five o'clock in the afternoon and on Saturdays, from twelve-thirty to two-thirty in the afternoon. The staff includes three full-time professionals, two of whom are bilingual. There are five full-time non-professionals, including two bilingual clerks. Of the four part-time pages, all are bilingual.

There are a few programs for children and adults. For children only, there are regular film programs, Head Start visits, school classes, and special programs. At present the only programs for adults are specially arranged. According to the library's brochure, there are free library activities: for children, the branch offers storytelling hours once a week, picture book hours on Saturdays, reading aloud daily during school vacations, and children's films twice a month; for adults there is a regular film series, as well as frequent exhibits of paintings and photographs by local residents,
There is a certain degree of community involvement in this branch library. The Friends of the Library, early one year, held a bake sale; the proceeds of this event, according to Virginia Swift, the branch librarian, were to be applied to new equipment for the library. Also, working with a local graphic arts group, the staff can publicize library activities with posters and leaflets.

The Seward Park Branch also has Chinese-language material. The Donnell Library contains a Chinese-language book collection, a number of works on Chinese art, and recordings of Chinese music. The Mid-Manhattan Library has a small selection of English-Chinese instruction records.

Elsewhere, in the New England area, the Boston Public Library is starting to build a collection of Chinese-language materials. This effort, according to Y. T. Feng, is still in the preliminary stage. The collection of 3,000 volumes is housed on open shelves in the central library for circulation. The scope of the collection is broad. The main emphasis is on the humanities, including art and music, but there is a sampling of works in the social sciences and science and technology. Almost all of the titles are written in the vernacular, although there is a “fairly good-sized collection” of children’s books maintained with other foreign-language works for children. Branches in various parts of Boston are encouraged to tap this central collection; those which serve a significant number of Chinese-reading residents do regularly maintain small deposits of Chinese-language materials. The collection is composed primarily of books, and the books are not yet fully cataloged; they are broadly classed by subject.

In Washington, the Seattle Public Library, serving a Chinese population of approximately 7,000, has a collection of 700 volumes in Chinese, covering all major subject areas except the pure sciences. At the moment there is one cataloger and one librarian for selection; the part-time efforts of each are set aside for this collection. Continued gradual expansion and promotion among the communities served is hoped for, as is
the rotation of additional small collections from the central library to branch libraries. The Beacon Hill Branch, which serves 2,000 Chinese in a population of 95,000, has a small collection of 100 volumes and carries some periodicals and newspapers in Chinese.

In Canada, there is a great deal of work being done with multilingual communities. One branch reports its work with a Chinese-speaking community. The description of the activities of the Riverdale Branch of the Toronto Public Library is taken from a paper presented at the IFLA Worldwide Seminar by Kay Kishibe.10

In 1973 the Toronto Public Library responded to a Chinese-speaking community's request for library service. A deputation of Chinese-speaking citizens claiming to represent the 8,000 Chinese of the area petitioned the Toronto Public Library Board to establish a collection of Chinese books in one of the branch libraries. After a series of meetings with library staff, the demands were outlined as follows: books were to be for adults and children, and the collection was to be placed in the Riverdale Branch. The target collection size was 4,000 and—in contrast to the "literary" collection of the Languages Center—the delegation asked for popular titles in the vernacular. Also, the group wanted a catalog in Chinese characters, because transliterated headings on the catalog cards at the Language Centre were meaningless to them. Five months later a collection of 1,042 adult books and 347 children's books was made available to the public. A catalog using Chinese characters to meet the requirements of the citizens was also developed. Currently the collection at the Riverdale Branch stands at 2,058 volumes for adults and 2,684 for children. Use of the branch increased greatly after the establishment of the Chinese collection, because the Chinese-speaking patrons turned out to be good users of the regular English books, too. Success at this branch led to demand in other parts of the city, and other branches developed collections.

The librarian, Kaye Kishibe, outlined the basic problems
of book selection, acquisition of materials, bibliographical control, book processing, and public service. As the Toronto Public Library had librarians that were educated in Hong Kong and Canada for both adults and children, the major problem in acquisition was finding reliable sources of Chinese materials and getting these sources to understand the library’s orders and requirements.

A number of problems came from creating a catalog in Chinese characters. The general format of the catalog card was retained with entries in English and Chinese characters. Dewey Decimal Classification entries were used, but there was an initial problem in the Cutting. Since the main entry is in Chinese characters, the classification numbers could not be Cuttered by letters as is done with other books. This led to a special code in which each classification number was assigned a code of more than three digits. The last two digits stood for the title and the remaining digits to the left stood for the author. This device had the advantages of not being dependent on language and of keeping works by an author together on the shelf. Further, having Chinese characters in the headings raised the problem of how to arrange the cards. The simple stroke-count arrangement was adopted. Finally, catalog cards were reproduced by the copyflow process of the Xerox Corporation and by cutting stencils.

The problem in processing Chinese books stemmed from the fact that staff members who were unfamiliar with script handled the books and had to make sure which was the title page and which side was up, and match the cards to the proper books. The transliterated main entry on the catalog cards provided quick reference for the latter. Another problem was that the equipment of the department was not geared to print Chinese characters. For circulation control a special type of book card was designed which carried the classification number, the title code, the accession number, and the transliteration of the main entry.

In the area of public service, the branch has a Chinese-
speaking librarian in charge of children's room and sub-professional Chinese-speaking staff in the adult room. There are a few student helpers who are Chinese. This insures that, at any time, there is someone to deal with Chinese-speaking patrons. The collection is advertised and some users travel to it from the suburbs. The emphasis is on popular materials. The neighborhood residents are mostly newly-arrived immigrants who worked during the day and want something light to read in the evening. In addition to handling library matters, the librarian often act as a community worker and discuss a wide variety of matters with users.

III

The remainder of this paper deals in some depth with the Chinatown Branch of the Chicago Public Library. Much of the information presented was obtained from interviews with the branch head, Mrs. Audrey Meyer, in 1975, and the branch librarian, Mrs. Susan Teng, in 1977.

Prior to the establishment of the Chinatown Branch of the Chicago Public Library, the area was served by a bookmobile for ten years. This bookmobile came once a week on Thursdays between noon and eight o'clock in the evening. It carried around 3,500 volumes for adults and children. Although the materials were all in English, this bookmobile was heavily used.

In 1969, members of the community, represented by various groups, joined to request branch library service. Dr. Tze-chung Li, the President of the Chinese-American Educational Foundation, was elected Liaison Officer. Other representatives were: You Mow Mui, President of the Chicago Lodge of the Chinese-American Citizens Alliance; Thomas Y. Fu, Editor, Chicago Office of the China Times; Mrs. Paul Lee, Principal of the Bai-Duk Chinese Language School; Rev. Thoms J. Bauer of the St. Therese Chinese Catholic Mission; Sang Wong, President of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association; John Ing, President of the Chinese-American Civic Council; Sister
Elizabeth Lee, Principal of the St. Therese School; Rev. Joseph Fook-Sing Yim of the Chinese Christian Union Church; and Edmond E. Walsh, Principal of Haines Elementary School. In a letter of 6 September 1969 to Dr. Alex Ladenson, then Acting Chief Librarian of the Chicago Public Library, they stated: "If branch library service were to be instituted in the community, it is hoped that it would be of a bi-lingual nature in order to serve all residents of the area. Chinese librarians, trained at American library schools, will be available to assist the CPL staff in translation work as well as cataloguing and selection.... We realize the demands are made on limited resources, but we feel that our community, which has existed in the same area since around 1912, deserves a branch library service of a high, professional, bi-lingual nature."

The branch did not materialize until 1972. The major problem causing the delay was finding a location for the library.

A member of the Chinese-American Civic Council owned a launderette which he offered to rent to the public library. He offered the property with the first year’s rent free of charge. It took about a year to renovate the site.

The Chinatown Branch had its official opening on 29 April 1972. At the time of its opening, it boasted a collection of 15,000 books, which included 230 books in Chinese, a donation of the National Central Library in Taiwan. Initially it was open from 1:00 to 9:00 P.M. on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, and from nine to five-thirty on Wednesday and Saturday, for a total of forty-nine hours a week.

For the first two months, the circulation figures were very high. On the first day, some 1,500 volumes were circulated. There was a registration of ninety-two persons: sixty-one were juvenile; fifteen were senior; one was young adult; and fifteen were adult readers. For the entire week, there was a total circulation of 2,989 and registration of 231 persons. Most of the initial users were children, the circulation being 80 percent among children and 20 percent among adults. The only Chinese-language books available were those 238 volumes
that were the gift of the National Central Library in Taiwan. There was no initial budget for Chinese books. There was, however, a slow increase in adult use. In 1973 the adult use was 16 percent and children, 84 percent. In 1974 the adult use was 24 percent and the children was 76 percent. A grant of $300 was made for the purchase of Chinese books. The rest of the collection was made from the stock book list by the book selection committee of the central library. The branch owns a filmstrip projector and filmstrips. It borrows other equipment from the King Branch. It has a small collection of records for circulation, but there is no provision for using them in the branch itself.

The Chinatown Branch is located in a storefront building. The lower front section of the building and the entrance are done in red tile. There are two display windows, one for juvenile displays and the other for adults. The interior walls are paneled. The floor is covered with white tile. The branch is extremely small; both the children's collection and the adult collection are shelved in the same reading room. There are seven tables in the reading room. Six of these have four chairs each. The seventh table has stools around it and is used by younger children. This furniture, the circulation desk, the catalog, and the copy machine completely fill the room. The paperback books are on peg-board racks. The work space behind the main desk is no more than two feet wide.

There is a combination staff-and work-room in the rear of the building. The vertical files are kept there because there is no space for them in the reading room. A supply cabinet, the shelflist file (which sits on a small work table), a dinette set, two kitchen cabinets, and a range top-sink-refrigerator unit are kept there. Shelving for extra books runs along two walls. Beyond this area is an enclosed back porch. A large metal storage cabinet and twenty-five folding chairs are kept there. Space is at a premium throughout the branch.11

In the years 1972-76 the head librarian was Mrs. Audrey Meyer, a full-time, nonprofessional librarian. She was not Chine-
sespeaking, but was helpful and sympathetic to the needs of the Chinese-speaking users. Assisting her was Mrs. Lenore Kao, a library associate, who spoke the Mandarin dialect. Three parttime workers performed clerical and paging duties. During those years there were few activities at the branch. From Mrs. Meyer’s observation, however, the library became a community center. The adult group came to read the newspapers. There were occasional movie programs in the evening for children and adults, and orientations during the day for school groups. In the summer, there were craft programs.

Mrs. Susan Teng took over the post of branch librarian from Mrs. Meyer in September, 1976. (She left the position at the end of 1977.) She was a bilingual (in the Mandarin dialect) professional librarian. Her assistant was Mrs. Wang, a library associate who held a library degree from a non-accredited library school. At that time there were two part-time non-professionals. There was no children’s librarian. Now there are two full-time professional librarians, Mrs. Olivia Chen, the branch head, and Mr. Richard Israel. Mrs. Chen is of Chinese ancestry and Mr. Israel has a Chinese-language background in Mandarin.

The Chinese collection has between 2,000 and 3,000 books. The library receives six Chinese-language newspapers and about sixty-six periodicals. There is a general collection of 273 record and 70 filmstrips and movies. The budget for Chinese-language materials is approximately 30 percent of the total branch budget for adults. The Chinese collection concentrates on books for leisure reading, but includes books in all general subject areas. There is also a small collection of Children’s books in Chinese.

The recreational and educational materials in Chinese and English have the highest circulation. Due to the increase in Chinese-language materials, there has been an increase in adult use. The adult use is about 55 percent (30 percent of the materials circulating in Chinese). A number of the patrons are referred from other branches and suburban libraries. The
exact hours during which the library is open have varied throughout the years, but the total remains forty-nine hours a week, including two evenings.

The library has an author-title-subject card catalog arranged in alphabetical order. There is no cataloging of Chinese books by Chinese characters. The transliteration is done according to the Wade-Giles system for Mandarin pronunciation. Cataloging of books is done at the central library. There is often a long period before new books are cataloged and actually reach the shelf.

Activities of the library have been limited. This is due to the fact that this branch is a small storefront library. A special program would take up the entire room for a period of time, so this restricts the setting up of such programs. (During the program, other patrons would not be able to use the library.)

When Mrs. Teng was librarian. She had hopes of increasing service. She wanted to increase the scope of the collection in Chinese and in English. She wanted to have the library in a larger space with separate areas for adults and children, and a children's librarian to develop the children's collection in Chinese and English. Also, she wanted to develop a better reference collection in both Chinese and English. Because the staff was small she was unable to go out into the community. At present, interaction between the community and the library is minimal. The local community organizations are conservative and tend to be passive in their support of the library. Mrs. Teng favored a program of greater community outreach but did not see this as possible then.

An attempt was made to find out the reaction of users to the branch. Although the details concerning the format and distribution of the questionnaire are not known to me, the summary, as reported in a newsletter, provides some information on the users of the library. Late in 1974 the Midwest Chinese-American Librarians Association (now the Chinese-American Librarians Association) conducted a survey on library
use of the Chicago Public Library Chinatown Branch. A total of 60 responses were received. Of these 60, more than two-thirds were from students with an average age of 18 years.

The majority of those responding came to the library for general reading. The next-highest percentage came to obtain material or information on a subject and for class assignments and course related needs. The most popular programs were the movies and the reference service. One-third felt that no additional services were needed. One-fifth felt that the books in the Chinese language were sufficient; one-third felt that they were insufficient. Over one-third did not respond to this question on Chinese materials. Fiction was cited as the most popular type of book read, followed by humanities, social sciences, and technology.\(^\text{12}\)

In past years, members of the community have expressed dissatisfaction with the service of the Chinatown Branch. In an interview in 1973, Quinn Fong, President of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Chicago, stated:\(^\text{13}\)

What we would very much like to see as a reality is to build a three-story structure which would house the Chinatown Public library and serve as a cultural center. We feel that the present library is inadequate in meeting the needs of the community. The present Chinatown library is too small and the number of books too limited. We would like to see a library big and broad enough to meet the needs of college students.... Before we can do any building, we have to have 100 percent assurance that the city will lease the building for their library. How else can we meet the mortgage and other expenses?

In 1974 the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (also known as the Chinese Community Center) took action to request the relocation of the branch. In a letter 14 March 1974, it was proposed to build a structure in an empty lot owned by the Center across the street from its headquarters on 250 West 22nd Place. The library responded with the
reply: "Because the present lease will not expire until September 30, 1977, we must defer action on your proposal to construct a building at 250 West 22nd Place which would be leased to the library.... We would suggest that you hold this proposal in abeyance for about two years, at which time we can take it under consideration."14 As of now, no further plans have been made in regard to relocating the branch in larger quarters.

It should be noted that the Chinese collection of the Chicago Public Library's Chinatown Branch is the principal collection in the Chinese vernacular in the Chicago area for the public.15 None of the other branches have any Chinese-language materials, and the foreign-language department of the central library has only a collection of fifty volumes which is not expanding. A larger Chinatown library with expanded services and facilities would serve not only the Chinatown Chinese, but also those living in other parts of metropolitan Chicago who frequently go to Chinatown to shop and visit relatives.

IV

The library services offered to the Chinese community in Chicago are a traditional fare, with only the addition of a small Chinese-language collection. The programs and services devised and presented on behalf of Chinese Americans are patterned on traditional library practice. In the Chinatown branch this standard fare is presented in a small, cramped space.

Obvious recommendations are more collection development, more programs, more staff, and a larger space. Before all this is done, however, the library should evaluate the present collection and activities and find out how they compare with its original goals and with the needs of the community.

It is pointed out in the library literature that goals and objectives, on which both long-and short-range planning are based, cannot be clearly established for any library without thorough knowledge of the community. In this branch there
does not appear to be much community analysis or any real community involvement. This library was established in response to a surface demand without any further examination of the real needs of the area. In the interview with Mrs. Teng it was evident that there was a lack of information about the community other than from the clipping file and from the people coming into the library. She did not live in the community; often tied to the library during the day to perform library duties, she was unable to go out into the community. Allie Beth Martin has pointed out in her article on community study that a library cannot be a living, growing, and changing force in the community it serves unless community study and analysis is an ongoing management activity. Martin further pointed out that "analyzing the community is not a simple process of determining the number of people, their gross characteristics, educational levels, economic levels, and racial composition. This information is basic, but effective community analysis involves more."16

Once the community wants and needs are more clearly understood, this will provide some direction for planning the development of the Chinese-language collection, staff, and space. In the area of development of the Chinese-language collection, it can be seen from the early years of the collection that the public library’s selection and acquisition were tentative and haphazard at best. Out of the 15,000 books in the initial circulating collection, only 200 were in Chinese, gifts selected by the National Central Library in Taiwan. The library did not have an initial budget for the selection and purchase of books in Chinese. Later, when $300 was allotted to buy books in Chinese, there was no real policy in selection, so that the library ended up buying some materials in which its Chinese-reading population had little or no interest. There is now a regular budget allotted for the Chinese-language works selected by the branch librarian. Community analysis would help to point out any possible deficiencies in the collection in terms of community needs. Also, in the development of the collection, the use of non-print materials should not be ignored. It
may be found that there are segments of the Chinese community whose needs are better met with non-print materials. Some of the strategies for use of various media as discussed by Robert P. Haro in his article on library use of media with the disadvantaged should be considered.

As for staffing the branch, it would be difficult to say that the addition of mere numbers would be meaningful in a library of this size. Further, while the library staff is bilingual, not all speak the language of the streets and the local community, which is primarily a sub-dialect of Cantonese, the language of the majority of the Chinese in this area. This may have an effect on library services and programs. The hiring of community aides to act as liaison between the community and the library may prove valuable for this branch. The literature on library service to minority groups points out the need for a staff that interacts with the community. Don Roberts suggests that librarians who have done the most are the ones who are willing to “hit the streets and hustle.” If the librarian cannot do this, then the staff should include community aides. He states: “If the librarian—hustler is unwilling to live in the community and to take the risks of real personal involvement and unusual hours, then community aides should be used instead. Community aides must be a part of any location or delivery system which hopes to succeed because community people must be on the staff anyway.”

The present site is generally agreed to be too small for the collection itself, as well as for use by all the patrons wanting to use the library. Also, there is no space for library programs without disrupting regular library service. The ideal set-up would be to house the adult and children’s collections in separate areas and to have another room for special activities. For this neighborhood, however, suitable locations are hard to find and once found would take a long time to build or renovate. The public library and the community should continue to work together to solve this problem of relocation, but it is one that may have no solution. In the meantime, the library
might consider using space in other locations for special programs.

Robert P. Haro makes some points about service to Mexican Americans that may apply to Chinese Americans. He believes that a library service program to the community that does not take into account its differences in culture and attitudes will be destined to failure. He states: "If what librarians desire is a bilingual and bicultural approach to servicing these communities, then they must address themselves to the contents of their collections and services that reflect both biculturalism and bilingualism." He proposes the following approach:

On contemplating better programs to Mexican Americans, libraries should have secured and conducted their own dependable profiles.... As a second step, the reading habits, information-seeking behavior and library attitudes of these communities, and especially of the pressure groups, should be carefully identified and researched. Administrators should discover ways to penetrate these communities with channels of communication that could be kept reasonably free of misinformation and irrelevancies. Furthermore, libraries need direct contact with local leaders, and once they have been identified, guidance on how to avoid the frictions with and between them.

Adopting this sort of approach may well lead to establishing better and more meaningful programs for Chinese Americans.

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Library service to Chinese Americans does exist in a variety of programs in different parts of the country. It is extensive and responsive in some communities; it is limited and unresponsive in others. Public libraries have usually served Chinese-speaking and Chinese-reading populations with traditional collections and activities. A few of these libraries began service with Chinese-language collections in the vernacular only
within the last ten years. This may be indicative of the responsiveness of public libraries to the tide of social change. It may also be indicative of the community awareness of its needs and rights. Many of these Chinese collections started as a result of community pressure.

Most of the collections have concentrated on books. There collections have the purpose of serving as recreation for the community. Most libraries have limited service in other media, such as records, tapes, and film. Much of this is due to lack of money. Most libraries do not have the money for the equipment, staff, and maintenance of audiovisual materials. But there may be many in those communities who need non-print materials more than printed ones. Some libraries, such as the Asian Community Library in Oakland, seem to be working towards meeting this need.

Cataloging is a process that causes problems for all the libraries with Chinese-language materials. Each has tried to solve the problem in ways suited to their libraries in Chinese characters. In libraries where this was done, however, it took a great deal of staff time and effort and required additional funds to produce results. A majority of libraries are unwilling or lack the capacity to go that far for a collection in a foreign language. Most libraries catalog the Chinese books using a transliteration of Mandarin pronunciation. For a Chinese population that is primarily Cantonese-speaking, this is almost meaningless. Also, if the library's staff speaks primarily Mandarin, this may be a barrier to serving the community. There are differences between speakers of the different dialects; these differences may affect the relationship between potential users and the library.

The budget presents a major problem for all libraries attempting to serve the Chinese-American community. Many library systems provide limited budgets for community outreach; in some cases, money for such purposes is nonexistent. The budget is most often cited as the main problem in hiring adequate staff, building and servicing adequate collections, and
responding to community needs.

Also, libraries, in providing Chinese materials for a particular community, often ignore the potential users of the collection in other parts of the city or suburbs. Libraries still do little to publicize their collections and services. Community involvement is often lacking.

Canadian libraries have found their solution in the establishment of the Multilingual Bibloservice of the National Library in which selection, processing, the collection itself, and promotion and publicity come from a central source. Here the central source undertakes the main expense. In Canada, however, the responsibility of providing library services to its ethnic populations is now the responsibility of the federal government. This is not the case in the United States. It is possible, though, for American public libraries to learn from Canadian libraries serving ethnic populations, so Canadian multilingual library programs should be observed.

Finally, it is observed that there is very little intercommunication and cooperation among libraries serving Chinese Americans. This often means that libraries have to struggle with their problems on their own and many have to start from scratch. Better communication with libraries already doing work in this area would ease the endeavor and, perhaps, save libraries from making mistakes already made in the past. Of course, a program that is successful in one community will not necessarily be successful in others and, in the end, the nature of the community served should always determine the final program. But increased intercommunication can only aid in the planning processes. There is also the untapped resource of cooperation with academic and other libraries. Public library service to Chinese Americans is most prevalent in urban areas, and many of these urban areas have universities with library collections of East Asian materials. Cooperation with university libraries may help in extending services to Chinese Americans and in solving some of the technical problems involved.

Further research is needed in the area of service to Chinese
and other Americans. It is hoped that the information presented here will shed some light on this long-neglected area. As interest grows in service to Asian Americans, intercommunication among these groups in various parts of the country may also grow. Library systems should be encouraged to reach out to serve non-English-speaking groups hitherto unserved by public libraries. In the end, this would greatly aid the process of improving services for all groups.

References


11. Chicago Public Library Branch visit report, January 1975. (Typewritten.)


14. Letter from Alex Ladenson to Quinn Fong, 4 March 1974.

15. The Chinese collection at the University of Chicago holds over 200,000 volumes and is available for research and reference use. The library does not circulate works to the public. The collection's scope is scholarly, in contrast with that of the public library, which is meant for leisure reading.


