

Asian American Artists — Arise and Dare to Struggle!



Selected articles reprinted from *UNITY* newspaper 25¢

Throughout history, art and culture has reflected the social, economic and political framework of a society. In capitalist society, the dominant culture expresses the world view of the bourgeoisie — the ruling monopoly capitalist class. This culture promotes an ideology of individual genius above cooperative creation and judges art through the perverted values of the ruling class.

Alongside bourgeois culture runs a resilient strand of people's culture — a culture expressing the interests, concerns and struggles of the working masses and oppressed peoples. This culture gives voice, fire and soul to the aspirations of millions who seek an end to exploitation. As Chairman Mao wrote in Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, "Revolutionary literature and art are . . . indispensable cogs and wheels in the whole machine, an indispensable part of the entire revolutionary cause."

In this special pamphlet, UNITY is reprinting articles on art and cultural work in the Asian movement. Art and culture have always played an important role in shaping political consciousness and identity among Asian Americans. Art and culture has helped revive the true history of resistance and struggle and provided insights into Asian American's identity as oppressed nationality peoples in the U.S. Through these articles, we hope to stimulate greater interest in progressive art and cultural work and to deepen the ties between cultural workers and the progressive and revolutionary movement.

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APSU Art Collective forms in L.A.

“Artists arise and dare to struggle”

UNITY, Vol. 2, No. 15, July 27 - August 9, 1979

Los Angeles — “*Chilai! Kaiho! Makibaka!* Artists arise and dare to struggle!” This was the theme for the Asian/Pacific Student Union (APSU) Art Collective’s reception held July 7. Nearly 100 people attended the program.

A speaker for the art collective expressed the need to develop art and culture that can benefit the struggles of Asian and Pacific Islander peoples. “Art and culture can make the spirit visual, the soul audible, and our aspirations more comprehensible. But for centuries this society has been flooded with ‘art’ that has blurred the spirit, silenced our souls, and turned our aspirations into abstract illusions,” said the spokesperson.

“We can see this every day as commercial art is used to promote lifestyles that only the elite can afford, images reinforcing sexist ideas of women, and stereotypes distorting the experience of Asian and Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Chicanos and Native Americans.”

Many artists and musicians contributed to the program. There was an exhibition of graphics, paintings and silkscreen prints, as well as the films and photography of Visual Communications (an Asian American media group). Several musicians performed traditional Japanese music on the



Asian youth in front of their nearly completed mural in Los Angeles Chinatown. (UNITY photo)

koto and *shakuhachi*.

At the reception, members of the APSU Art Collective talked about their summer mural project with the Chinatown Progressive Association. The mural, which depicts the history of Chinese in America, involves local high-school students, and is an example of developing progressive cultural work.

For more information about the southern California APSU, write to the CSULA

ASU, Associated Students, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032. □

Carrying on Japanese cultural traditions

Little Tokyo Mochitsuki greets the new year

UNITY, Vol. 2, No. 7, January 12-25, 1979

Los Angeles — *Mochitsuki* (meaning "to make mochi") is traditionally a festive occasion when Japanese families and friends work together — cooking, pounding and shaping rice — to produce mochi, a sticky and doughy rice cake. The first annual Little Tokyo community Mochitsuki was celebrated on December 30, 1978.

At the event, a short speech was given on behalf of the sponsoring organizations. There was singing, music, and the program ended with a traditional folk dance — the *tankobushi* (coal miners' dance) — with everyone there joining in. In all, there were over 400 people taking part in this traditional Japanese New Year's event and festivities.

The Mochitsuki was sponsored by a broad range of community groups, with over 25 different organizations sponsoring or participating in this year's event. These groups included the Japanese Community Pioneer Center, Little Tokyo Peoples' Rights Organization (LTPRO), a number of Asian student organizations, Visual Communications, Japanese Welfare Rights Organization, Japanese American Citizens



Mrs. Itabashi, a Little Tokyo cultural instructor, turns mochi as a Nisei (second generation) pounds it with a kine (mallet). (UNITY photo)

League - Pacific Southwest District, Asian-American Drug Abuse Program, a host of other Pioneer Projects (senior citizens programs), and community and student organizations. The groups united around a common theme reflected in the three goals for the event: 1) To bring out the historic and cultural significance of the Mochitsuki; 2) To express people's commitment to defend and preserve Little Tokyo as the historic center of the Japanese American community; 3) To provide a time for the Japanese community to share concerns about housing, health services, and other issues affecting the lives of the people.

Origins of Mochitsuki

The Mochitsuki has its origins in the ancient Japanese rice festivals of the peasantry. *Mochi* was symbolic of the respect that Japanese peasants had for one of their most precious resources — rice.

Mochi was also symbolic of strength, endurance, longevity, unity and hopeful beginnings. Eating *mochi* at New Year's time represented the renewing of one's energies for the upcoming year's work by drawing upon the fruits of the past year's labor. It stood for the hope for a good harvest, and the hope that the family and community would stick together as well as the *mochi* does.

Cultural traditions preserved

The Mochitsuki continues to be celebrated in the Japanese American community here despite the decades of suppression of Japanese language and culture in this country.

The forced incarceration of the 110,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast during World War II hit hard at the cultural institutions and practices of the Japanese community. Japanese language schools and churches were closed, family-owned cultural artifacts were confiscated, and the practices of traditional Japanese festivals were disrupted. Japanese communities throughout the West Coast and Hawaii were dispersed.

Nonetheless, the Japanese American people, the Japanese churches in particular, continued to practice and maintain their culture and language. In the 1960's the struggle for Asian American Studies brought forth a further revival of interest in the history and culture of Japanese in America.

Unity of the community built

Most of the sponsoring community organizations of this year's Mochitsuki are involved in some way in the ongoing struggle for better social services, health services, and against cutbacks. Many are also involved in the struggle for more housing in Little Tokyo, and against the further destruction and dispersal of the Japanese community.

The Mochitsuki helped to build the kind of unity that will be necessary to take up these struggles in the coming new year. □

Anti-imperialist Filipino writer

Carlos Bulosan: “Every word is a weapon for freedom”

UNITY, Vol. 2, No. 14, July 13-26, 1979

Excerpted from “Our Heritage of Resistance and Struggle,” by E. San Juan, Jr. delivered at the first Asian/Pacific Heritage Week Celebration held at Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center, New York, New York, on May 6, 1979. E. San Juan is a professor of comparative literature at Brooklyn College, and a member of Sambayanan, and Friends of the Filipino People.

Our cultural heritage here, like that of the colonized third world peoples inside and outside the U.S., has largely been one of silence and ritualized self-denials. But slowly, Filipinos are refusing to accept the terms of surrender and acquiescence. We are supposed to be aliens, alienated and alienating, without the fabled talisman of “inalienable rights.” But we are beginning to affirm our collective identity in the process of struggle.

One Filipino worker has contributed to the articulation of our resurgent spirit. His name is Carlos Bulosan, author of *America is in the Heart* (a chronicle of the experience of the immigrant workers on the West



Carlos Bulosan

Coast) and of the revolutionary novel *The Power of the People*.

Born in the Philippines, Bulosan came to the U.S. in 1931, when the crisis of business and profit sharpened the internal and external contradictions of the exile's life. Summing up his ordeals from the thirties to the forties, Bulosan wrote it was “a crime to be a Filipino in this country. The terrible truth in America shatters the Filipinos’ dream of fraternity.” He confessed how “the nebulous qualities of the American dream” lead him to the point where he “was driven back to history.” He denounced the “false values of capitalism and the insidiousness of bourgeois prejudices.”

I Want the Wide American Earth

— Carlos Bulosan

*I say I want the wide American
earth . . .
I say to you, defenders of freedom,
builders of peace,
I say to you, democratic brothers,
comrades of love
Their judges lynch us, their police
hunt us;
Their armies and navies and airmen
terrorize us;
Their thugs and stoolies and murderers
kill us;
They take away bread from our
children;
They ravage our women;
They deny life to our elders.*

*But I say we have the truth
On our side, we have the future with us;
We have history in our hands,
our belligerent hands.
We are millions everywhere,
On seas and oceans and lands;
In air;
On water and all over this every earth.
We are millions working together.
We are building, creating, molding life.
We are shaping the shining structures
of love.
We are everywhere, we are everywhere.
We are there, when they sentence us
to prison for telling the truth;
We are there when they conscript us
to fight their wars;
We are there when they throw us in
concentration camps;*

*We are there when they come at dawn
with their guns.
We are there, and we say to them:
"You cannot frighten us with your bombs
and death;
You cannot drive us away from our
land with your hate and disease;
You cannot starve us with your
war program and high prices;
You cannot command us with your
nothing.
Because you are nothing;
You cannot put us all in your
padded jails;
You cannot snatch the dawn of life
from us!"
And we say to them:
"Remember, remember,
We shall no longer wear rags, eat stale
bread, live in darkness;
We shall no longer kneel on our knees
to your false gods;
We shall no longer beg you for a share
of life.
Remember, remember,
O remember in the deepest midnight of
your fear,
We shall emulate the wonder of
our women,
The ringing laughter of our children,
The strength and manhood of our men
With a true and honest and
powerful love!"
And we say to them:
"We are the creators of
a flowering race!"*

For Bulosan was a committed writer. He considered that "every word is a weapon for freedom." During World War II, in the fight against fascism, he wrote the essay "Freedom from Want" published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, March 1943: "We are not really free unless we use what we produce. So long as the fruit of our labor is denied us, so long will want manifest itself in a world of slaves."

After almost 80 years of "benevolent assimilation" and the blessings of "Manifest Destiny," close to a million Filipinos here suffer the highest unemployment rate (according to the 1970 government census); 40% of all employed Filipinos work in low-skilled, low-paying jobs; 40% of families in Honolulu and 30% in San Francisco live in substandard conditions. All the statistics point to the general truth that, as the International Institute of San Francisco puts it, Filipinos here remain "exploited, underemployed, unemployed and ill-housed."

Bulosan died in 1956. For many years, he participated actively in the organizing

campaign of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). And before his death, he defended the workers of the International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), Local 37, Seattle, Washington, from rabid McCarthyist attacks. He criticized "the vicious lies of the capitalist press and yellow journalism, the warmongering of big business, the race-hating hysteria of reactionary fascist organizations." He envisioned that amid the Cold War crisis of the system, "the old world is dying, but a new world is being born." In 1943, he urged the artists "to interpret the resistance against the enemy by linking it with the stirring political awakening of the people and those liberating progressive forces that call for a complete social consciousness."

In this spirit of illuminating the contradictions of our times, Bulosan wrote the poem entitled "I Want the Wide American Earth." Bulosan wrote it specifically to raise funds for the defense of Filipino labor organizers of ILWU Local 37. □

Asian American song writers

Making music for the people

UNITY, Vol. 2, No. 11, June 1-14, 1979

Asian American song writers are on the move, helping to inspire the people's struggle with their music. In San Francisco, UNITY spoke with Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo and Peter Horikoshi, and in New York with Charlie Chin — all creative song writers who have helped develop and popularize Asian American music. Their work points out the powerful and important role of progressive cultural work.



Asian American song writers and musicians at a San Francisco fund raiser for the Tule Lake Committee. From left to right: Peter Horikoshi, Phil Gotanda, Don Mar, Siu Wai Anderson. (UNITY photo)

UNITY: Can you describe how you became active in the Asian movement?

Peter: I got involved through Asian American Studies and the East Bay Japanese for Action, which worked with elderly Japanese-speaking people. I saw the need for such services and also wanted to seek

out my roots.

During that time, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the emergence of ethnic identity for Third World people was happening. It was all interconnected and had an effect on me.

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Expressions from Exile: 1942 - 1945

Japanese American Art
From the Concentration Camps



San Francisco — Art works of 17 different Japanese American artists were displayed in San Francisco's Nihonmachi on April 27-29, 1979. The exhibit included examples of folk arts and crafts, photography and traditional *sumi-e* (brush painting). All were created under the hard conditions of the World War II U.S. concentration camps. Because canvas was in short supply, artists used green Army duffle bags which they bleached white. Other artists collected rocks and shells and carved wood sculptures.

Many of the works expressed the suffering and anger of the Japanese who were forcibly removed from their homes to live in tarpaper shacks in the sweltering deserts or desolate mountain areas.

Art played a vital role in the camps because it was a creative outlet for thousands of internees. Today, these art works are lasting reminders of the strength and resistance of the Japanese people in the U.S.



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Robert: First I got involved in Asian Student Union activities and then worked in a health clinic in Sacramento's Asian community. The most stark reality of my political awakening was the night of the International Hotel eviction. It was a terrifying confrontation with "the man." I realized the brutal and blatant use of power by the controlling class. That night, I felt my conviction to the movement flare up strong.

UNITY: What are you trying to say through your music?

Peter: My songs talk of hope for the future, of past events that we can learn from, and some of the struggles in the communities, as we try to maintain some kind of control over our lives.

I guess my best song is "Hot August Morning." It expresses my feelings about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and they relate in both a distant and yet very close way to me as an Asian American.

Charlie: A lot of my work is involved in more of a historical thing, to lay a bedrock down. I want to provide that kind of perspective about our working on the railroads, and one I wrote recently about digging for gold — to say that there were Asians here 100 years ago.

UNITY: How do you see the development of cultural work in the movement?

Charlie: As a writer and as a musician, I have a responsibility to provide an alternative to somebody who's growing up. The artist's responsibility is to provide that

material — not by standing way out in the middle of someplace and thinking it all up in your head, but to try to investigate what are the things that people are touched by.

Robert: Our cultural work should reflect the people's lives, our environment and experiences. Big corporations push their ideas on people to enhance their profits. It's dehumanizing culture like disco music that promotes sexist ideas about love, instead of brotherly, sisterly love. My songs try to make a statement against these kinds of values.

UNITY: What kind of work are you doing now?

Peter: I'm in the midst of organizing the next Japantown Art and Media Workshop (JAM) song writers performance. I'm also trying to set up a new organization called the Asian American Music Organization (AAMO). This will encourage progressive cultural work, not commercially oriented music, help people to get copyrights and to present more music to the communities.

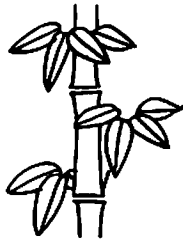
Robert: Right now, I'm mainly involved in trying to develop children's music, using the folklore of Asian countries. It's still in the research stage, but I hope to be able to perform at schools and daycare centers. I think it's important for children to have progressive culture. □

Bamboo

Emaj7 *Amaj7*
 bam - boo - blowin' in - the breeze -
Emaj7
 breeze - blow
Amaj7 *G#m* *C#m* *green*
 dan - cing leaves you may not stand like an oak but im
F#m *G#m* *Amaj7* *C7* *C#m* *C#7/b* *F#m* *G#m* *Amaj7* *C*
 sure that a lot of folk will a tree theres somethin' about the quiet strength in
C#m *C#7* *F#m* *G#m* *Am* *Emaj7*
 you something about the beauty of bamboo
Emaj7

*We are — somewhat like bamboo
 not like oak theres alot that we can do
 we may seem pretty small
 but the biggest gust of wind
 wont make us fall*

*ain't no need for people
 to be ten feet tall
 I'm proud to be like Bamboo —
 not like oak at all*



© 1977
 Music and lyrics by
 Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo

Fewer Dimes

— Peter
Yoshiro
Horikoshi

INTRO Bm7 Am7 Bm7 Am7 Bm7 Am7 Eo1

Can you repay one hundred ten thousand dimes? Suffered in the past now you
 Went to make them seem so small, do you really regret? You want us to forget,
 We cannot let the hijack again. In the water of forty two you
 moved our people east, to fruitless land, deserted lands to heartless disease. We
 had to leave our homes we had nowhere to go we left so all alone, wouldn't
 you cry? We fell so all alone wouldn't you? We were
 used to lose our once bright futures and all our hopes behind, ordered to era cin a te
 with three days time. What are you many debts we sold for fewer dimes. Fewer dimes.

Fewer Dimes, p.2

Issei have had to struggle since they arrived in this land. Nisei fought for something they couldn't
 fully understand. How were they to reveal what you try to conceal.
 This is how we feel, are you for real? This is how we feel, are you for real? We were
 forced to leave our once bright futures and all our hopes behind ordered to era cin a te
 with 3 days time. What are you years of labor we sold for fewer
 dimes fewer dimes, fewer dimes fewer dimes fewer dimes fewer dimes
 fewer dimes and future times.

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 Music and Lyrics by
 Peter Yoshiro Horikoshi
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UNITY interview

Siu Wai Anderson — an Asian woman song writer

UNITY, Vol. 2, No. 15, July 27 – August 9, 1979



Siu Wai Anderson singing at a CANE demonstration in San Francisco (UNITY photo)

Songs can light up any struggle, and with the growth of the Asian American movement, there has been a growth in progressive Asian American song writers and singers. Siu Wai Anderson is an Asian woman song writer well-known in the San Francisco Bay Area for her progressive music and community involvement.

Siu Wai has performed at numerous community and campus events. On June 26, 1979, she sang right on the picket line of a CANE (Committee Against Nihonmachi Evictions) demonstration in support of the 1531 Sutter Street tenants.

UNITY had the opportunity to interview Siu Wai Anderson and to reprint one of her own songs for our readers.

UNITY: Can you describe how you began to write and sing progressive music?

Siu Wai: I only really started writing my own songs about two years ago, but I've been into music all my life.

During college at Stanford, some friends and I formed a band and started playing at United Farm Workers (UFW) picket lines. I quit school and got pretty involved with organizing for the UFW boycott. It was hard to go back to school and study music. I couldn't sit still to practice seriously when there was so much happening.

UNITY: What are you trying to say with your music?

Siu Wai: I guess I sing for me, what is real for me — and real for others, too, I hope. My songs are about things you don't usually hear about — about the struggles of immigrant newcomers. Of the Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans -*ed.*) experience, women's struggles and discovering Asian identity. I want my music to reach and touch people, and maybe even change them a little as they listen.

As an Asian woman, I see myself as part of the Asian movement and the women's movement. I hope to encourage Asian song writers and women to step out and be heard, because I know there's a lot of incredible talent in our midst.

I think as women we need to become more aggressive and begin to see that we have choices we can make ourselves.

UNITY: Can you talk about some of your songs and why you wrote them?

Siu Wai: I guess I have two trademark songs: "Song for Two Mothers" and "Asian Skies."

"Song for Two Mothers" was written to the woman in China who gave birth to me probably against difficult odds. She was a waitress in Hong Kong, alone and very poor. I don't know much about her, but I admire her strength. It's also for my adoptive American mother, who has always been a source of comfort.

"Asian Skies" is a search for my past and my future. By reclaiming my original Chinese name, Siu Wai, I'm identifying myself as Asian.

Other favorites are "Warrior" — written for the immigrant brides who met disillusionment in this not-so-golden country. "Apoya Mitad del Cielo" — "Women Hold Up Half the Sky" is a tribute to the hardworking women in the revolution.

UNITY: How do you see combining art and politics?


Siu Wai: Well, as many musicians know, music is a powerful organizing tool, or can be. To me, music is a universal thing. It's something everybody can relate to. I think if the artistic quality is combined with the message, people will feel what you are saying and the politics will reach them.

Art and politics cannot be separated. The form and content are equally important in being able to communicate to your audience.

For myself, I try to use nice clear images, and I think it helps to give meaning to the ideas. I'm still learning, and becoming a political artist, drawing on life itself for material to write about. □


- I AM SOMEBODY -

CHORUS ~



You can't fool me with your sweet talk. Oh no from now on I'm gonna walk a free walk. With my
head held high and the light in my eyes 'cause I am somebody yes, I am somebo-dy.

VERSE ~



Pulled in - to your labor camp every-thing I owned rotted on my truck
you looked at me and your little eyes laughed, said I would make good money with a little bit of luck and...

(chorus)

2. On my knees or in your trees, pickin' oranges or cuttin' your grapes
I work fast and I break my back, my kids gotta live on what I make, and...

(chorus)

3. Funny how the money disappears, I know the taxes didn't take it all
My baby's got the flu and I don't know what to do - Your stealin' from me
puts me up against the wall, and...

(chorus)

4. We're all packed and we're ready to roll, speaking out against you has its price
You broke my body but you never got my soul, We're movin' on to build a
better life, and...

(chorus)

© 1978 Siu Wai Anderson
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New Asian American dramatic film

Hitohata: Raise the banner!

UNITY, Vol. 2, No. 17, Aug. 24 - Sept. 6, 1979

“Hitohata o ageru — raise a single banner. In old Japan, flags and banners were signs of great rank. Only samurai could carry them into battle. Hitohata means the poor must always struggle. They must fight to raise even a single banner.”

— Oda, an Issei railroad worker

Los Angeles — Visual Communications, a nonprofit, community-based media production company in Little Tokyo, has just completed *Hitohata — Raise the Banner*, a 30-minute dramatic color film on the Issei, the first generation of Japanese pioneers in the U.S. The film is a pilot project for a feature length film which will be shown on national television next year.

Hitohata chronicles the life of Oda, a fictional character drawn from the lives of thousands of Japanese immigrant workers who toiled in the mines, fields, railroads and cities. The film opens in Little Tokyo where Oda lives in an old residential hotel. There he befriends Linda, a Sansei (third generation Japanese American) waitress, and recounts his days as a railroad worker in the early 1900's.

The flashback sequence opens on an explosive note. Muto, a railroad worker who suffers from night blindness, has been struck by a train. Oda blames the accident on the company since night blindness is a temporary affliction caused by the meager

diet of flour and water soup.

Because Oda understands English, he overhears the Japanese foreman and the white boss plan to dispose of the crippled worker. Outraged, Oda confronts the foreman. Later, Oda steals some vegetables to share with fellow workers and to save them from permanent night blindness.

Although the film is a brief glimpse of the hardships faced by the Issei pioneers, it imparts the sense of comradeship and struggle which steeled their will to survive against national oppression. The story continues up to the present when Oda, now retired, faces eviction from his Little Tokyo hotel due to redevelopment.

Visual Communications' first dramatic film

Like many projects at Visual Communications (VC), *Hitohata* was put together with much care and dedication. Actors from the East West Players, musicians from the group Hiroshima, and Asian American and Third World film technicians all contributed extra time and effort.

Hitohata is the first dramatic film completed by VC and it joins an impressive array of historical documentaries, children's films, books, videotapes and slide shows produced since the group's formation in 1970.

“VC grew up as part of the Asian American movement,” said Bob Nakamura, one



The cast of Hitohata from left to right, top row: Shuichi Kuni, Tashi Yamaguchi, Takaeo Kitagawa, George Abe. Bottom Row: Roger Hampton, Yukio Shimoda, Miichiro Iida, Muko, Jay Tsukamoto, Hatsuo Uda, Jim Ishida, Sab Shimono. Taken on location at Bishop, California. (Visual Communications photo)

of the original members. “*Gidra* (an Asian movement newspaper), Amerasia Bookstore, and Hiroshima . . . we all supported each other.”

VC uses media to serve the community. They have collected over 200,000 photos documenting the life and history of Asian American and Pacific Islander peoples. These photos are used by community and student groups for slide shows, publications and exhibits. VC also offers student workshops on photography, and recently helped produce leaflets supporting the

Horikawa restaurant workers’ unionization struggle in Little Tokyo.

Groups like Visual Communications and projects like *Hitohata* show that progressive Asian American culture provides a vital link between the past and present. As Nakamura commented, “We want to show that our history is not disconnected from us — that what our ancestors did affects us today. In the same way, what we do now affects the future, so we have to do what’s in the best interests of the people.” □

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UNITY is a revolutionary newspaper published by the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist). With its comprehensive coverage of national news, the labor movement, the oppressed nationality peoples' struggles, international news, cultural reviews, sports and more, **UNITY** strives to provide a broad overview of current events and issues in the revolutionary movement.

UNITY publishes two biweekly editions, in English/Spanish and English/Chinese. Each issue of the English/Chinese edition contains a special one-page *Asian/Pacific Islander News Supplement* which features additional articles on Asian student and community news, and special articles on Asian American art, culture, history and identity.

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