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THE MAIL CAN WAIT: Lee Toy Kin, manager of store at 32 Mott Street, looks over mail sent there by Chinese, to be picked up when the people addressed happen along.

CHINATOWN'S MAIL SURE, IF NOT SWIFT

Casual Delivery System Is
Used for New (Dragon)
Year Greeting Cards

By GAY TALESE

Possibly nobody in New York complains less when the mail is late, or is influenced less by the Zip Code, than those who live along Mott Street in Chinatown.

A letter mailed today from one side of Mott Street to the other may go unopened for a month, a year, two years or more. This is so because the Chinese, products of a culture that took an unhurried view of life, still follow an ancient tradition when it comes to addressing letters.

If they are uncertain of the home address of the person they're writing to, they will mail the letter instead to a shop on Mott Street. The assumption is that, sooner or later, the addressee will be shopping along Mott Street, will wander into the store, will leaf through the old letters piled up there, and will find the letter.

New Year Begins

The people of Chinatown have such faith in the system that yesterday — which was New Year's Eve, according to the Chinese lunar calendar, and which was marked by firecracker explosions along Mott Street to celebrate the incoming Year of the Dragon—they sent hundreds of holiday greeting cards to each other in care of Mott Street stores.

Mrs. Grace Mok, who had received some mail earlier in the morning at her Chatham Square apartment, discovered two additional letters for her in Quong Yuen Shing's shop at 32 Mott, and then found three more letters at Sam Kee's tailor shop at 36 Mott.

One of the letters sent to the tailor shop was an invitation to a wedding that took place three months ago.

"Oh, it's old Chinese custom, old Chinese custom," said Lee Toy Kin, 69-year-old manager of the shop at 32 Mott Street.

Mails Get Through

"Some of these letters here are for people who are dead," he said.

Stacked behind him were about 300 letters. One, from the Brite-Site Optical Company of 125 Canal Street, urged Tom Chung to get a new pair of glasses—three years ago.

"I see you have a letter here for Danny Wong," said Peter Lee, flipping through the pile to see if there was anything for Peter Lee (there wasn't).

"Oh yes, Danny Wong used to live along Mott Street," somebody in the store said.

"Yes," Mr. Lee said, "I saw him here five years ago."

"Where's he now?" somebody asked.

"Honolulu," said Mr. Lee. "He married a girl in Honolulu."

"No, he's in Seattle," corrected the manager, adding, "He'll be back, don't worry."

"Yeah, he'll be back," agreed Mr. Lee, putting aside the four-year-old New Year's greeting card addressed to Daniel Wong, c/o 32 Mott Street, New York, New York.