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Published in Chinese Librarianship: An International Electronic Journal, #25, June 1, 2008
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Recommended Citation
Lian, Ruan and Xiong, Jian Anna, "Career Choices and Career Advancement: Chinese American Librarians in the 21st Century" (2008). *Articles.* Paper 24.
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Career Choices and Advancement: Chinese American Librarians in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT: There is an increasing need to understand Chinese American librarians as one of the largest ethnic librarian groups in American library communities and a renewed interest to demonstrate a critical role they play in the Library and Information Science profession. This paper documents some strategies Chinese American librarians have adopted to meet the challenges and barriers they face. It is hoped that this study will encourage Chinese American librarians to develop methods for analyzing their careers so as to reach higher career goals.

I. Introduction

There is a strong desire for Chinese American librarians, one of the largest ethnic librarian groups in American library communities, to break the status quo (Tan, 1998, 2004) so they can climb the career ladders to reach their full potential. For example, the theme of the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) Midwest Chapter 2005 Annual Conference was "What Makes a Successful Chinese American Librarian: Positioning Ourselves for the Future" (http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/projects/resources/calamw/annual2005). However, little systematic research has been done in this area. This study aims at filling a research gap. It depicts the current profile of Chinese American librarians, documents some strategies they have adopted, and shares lessons learned. It is also intended to help Chinese American librarians' professional development by enhancing understanding of and further building the knowledge base of Chinese American librarianship in the 21st Century. It is hoped that this study will encourage Chinese American librarians to develop methods for analyzing their careers and for broadening opportunities to help them reach higher career goals.

II. Literature Review

Changing population demographics in the latter years of the 20th century are major topics discussed in the professional literature of education and librarianship (Chadley, 1992, Howland, 1999), and "we continue to be in the midst of a deep demographic shift" (Davis & Hall, 2006). In 1991, racial and ethic minorities comprised only 9% or 344 of the 4,032 graduates who received the American Library Association (ALA) accredited MLS degree. In 2001, they accounted for less than 13% or 504 of the 4,109 MLS degree awarded, an increase that fails woefully to reflect the combined 152% growth increase experienced by these populations between 1990 and 2000 (ALISE Library and Information Education Statistical Report/U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Similar to most other types of organizations and business entities, the professional library staff are becoming somewhat more diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, lifestyle choices, creed, and socioeconomic background (Howland, 1999). However, the data show that librarianship, in

general, continues to be a profession dominated by white females. Librarianship has not become any more ethnically diversified than those professions that are traditionally dominated by white males such as law, medicine, engineering, and architecture (Howland, 1999). Diversity initiatives on college and university campuses and within the ALA have raised awareness of the under-representation of minority librarians as a continuing human resources concern (Brewer, 1997). Diversity and multiculturalism are not being implemented effectively in the field of library and information science (McCook, 1993). The concept of diversity remains highly complex, emotionally charged, and multifaceted (Miller, 1994). Articles, interviews, statistics, and forecast assumptions in library management literature discuss the challenge of building the most knowledgeable, skilled, and diverse profession possible, but much of the literature emphasizes the difficulty library with which schools encounter when trying to recruit academically strong and ethnically diverse students (Howland, 1999).

There are major theories of occupational choices, including trait and factor theory, Roe's need theory, Bordin's psychoanalytical theory, Holland's typology, and Krumboltz and Associates' social learning theory. Some researchers have formulated a comprehensive theory of career development by explaining the sequence of stages and tasks related to initial and subsequent occupational choices and by tying these to certain life stages. Others also tried to explain how work as a life role meshes with other life roles.

With the increasing diversity in American labor market, occupational choice and career development for minorities become more interesting and important issues for research. However, research on career issues for minorities has been described as limited and sparse (Walsh, et al., 2000). Most current theories and approaches of career development and occupational choices are based on a white Eurocentric perspective (Leong, 1995a). Parmer (2004) criticizes the lack of relevance of many career development theories to Blacks and other minorities. Existing career development theories provide few theoretical guidelines for research on minorities. (Betz & Titzgerald, 1995; Leong, 1995a, 1995b).

Some scholars reviewed the empirical literature regarding the career development of ethnic and racial minorities and made suggestions to revise some of the major theories of occupational choices and career development (Arbona, 1995; Brown, 1995; Johnson et al., 1995; Leong & Serifica, 1995). Other scholars designed research to study different aspects of minority groups with an attempt to identify valid factors in occupational choices and career development for these groups. Research can be found on the impact of social-economic status, traditional cultural background and culture assimilation, ethnic identity, personality, individuality, independence, and gender on minorities' career decision- making, aspiration, perception of barriers, career goals, strategies, and career satisfaction. Many of such studies are done on Asian-American college students or youth (Atkinson & Matthews, 1995; Gloria & Hird, 1999; Henderson & Chan, 2005; Leung et. al., 1994; Luzzo, 1993; Mau & Kopischke, 2001; Perrone & Alexander, 2001; Swartz-Kulstad & Martin, 1999). A few studies can be found on Chinese students (Miller & Yang, 1997; Winnie Ma & Yeh, 2005).

However, the suggestions and research findings are mainly helpful to career counselors and researchers. The research is not mature, nor comprehensive enough to either revise or form new theories, nor provide guidance to minorities in making career choices (Brown, 2002). Therefore,

until new theories are developed, the first-hand practical experience collected through surveys, as in this study, and interviews shared through articles, presentations, or other means, among different minority groups will continue to provide important direct guidance to each distinctive minority group for making career choices and developing careers.

Chinese American librarians have made great contributions to the profession with years of professional endeavor (Liu, 2000). However, few systematic studies of this group appear in the literature. Only three studies examined the status and characteristics of Chinese American librarians in the United States: Li's survey (1979) as the first profile study of Chinese American librarians in the 1970s; Yang's (1996) job survey among CALA members; and Liu's (2000) review article on the brief history of Chinese Americans in the United States and their contributions to librarianship.

III. Method and Data Collection

Building on the two previous profile studies by T. C. Li (1979) and Z. Y. Yang (1996), the authors have designed and developed a survey instrument. Changes were made to the earlier study questionnaires in order to tailor them to Chinese American librarians in the 21st century. The previous studies were expanded with additional questions to identify barriers and challenges Chinese American librarians face and to find out how they handled them, what solutions they have discovered and formed, and what lessons can be learned.

In this study, approval for the use of human subjects was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The Illinois Fire Service Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign provided strong in-house and financial support to maintain a team of Chinese graduate students and volunteers to assist with data collection.

CALA's current members were the target survey population. The survey began with a random selection to ensure the quality and validity of data collection. The graduate and volunteer students used the-mail addresses listed in the 2004/2005 *CALA Membership Directory* to send out the survey and followed up with those who did not respond to the initial e-mail. Out of four hundred and eighty-seven valid e-mail addresses, one hundred and twenty-six responded to the survey and their responses were used for data analysis. The response rate is twenty-four percent.

IV. Findings and Discussion

1. Career Choices and Career Advancement

Questions related to career choices and career advancement were in Part II of the survey.

The respondents were asked why they chose library and information science as a career (IIQ16). The majority of the respondents (n=64) attributed it to the fact that their undergraduate major was library science. Twenty-four said that their original major was not very practical, and it would be difficult to find a job in that field. Twenty-one believed that the library profession is a promising profession. Thirteen cited all the reasons listed on the survey, such as interest in working in a library, previous work as a library assistant/clerk, life experience, enjoyment

working with the public, interest in information management, passion for the profession, former professor's recommendation, and so forth. Fifty-four percent of the respondents (n=68) indicated that it was personal interest that influenced their career choices. The number is lower than that in the 1996 survey. Thirty-three percent of the respondents (n=41) said that it was a practical opportunity. The number is lower than that in the 1996 survey. Over half, fifty-nine of the respondents, believe the library profession is very valuable, twenty-five percent valuable, and five percent with no strong opinion. However, only seventeen percent of the respondents stated that they chose this career because of its value. Value does not seem to be the primary reason for Chinese Americans to choose the library and information profession as a career, but rather for personal interest, followed by practical reasons. This finding does not seem to support Brown's value theory - work values, social relationship values, and cultural values.

As shown in Figure 1, forty percent of the respondents (n=51) said that they would be interested in a different position at their current organizations if such positions were available and if they were qualified. But for some reason, forty-seven percent (n=58) would decline the opportunity (IIQ21).

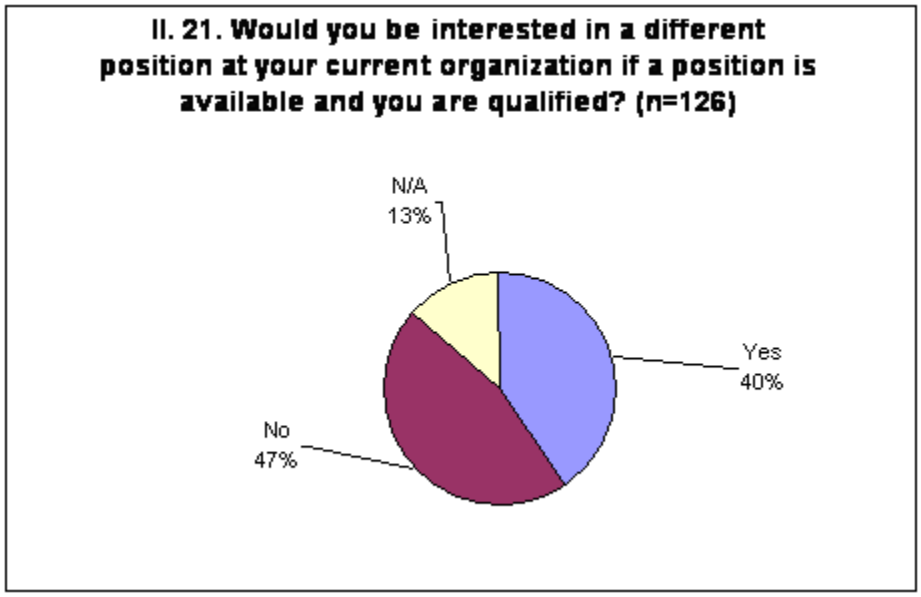

Figure 1. Different position opportunity at current organization

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents (n=48) have held a different position at their current organizations. Forty-nine percent of the respondents (n=62) have not held a different position, as shown in Figure 2 (IIQ22). This indicates some position changes of the respondents' career within the current organization.

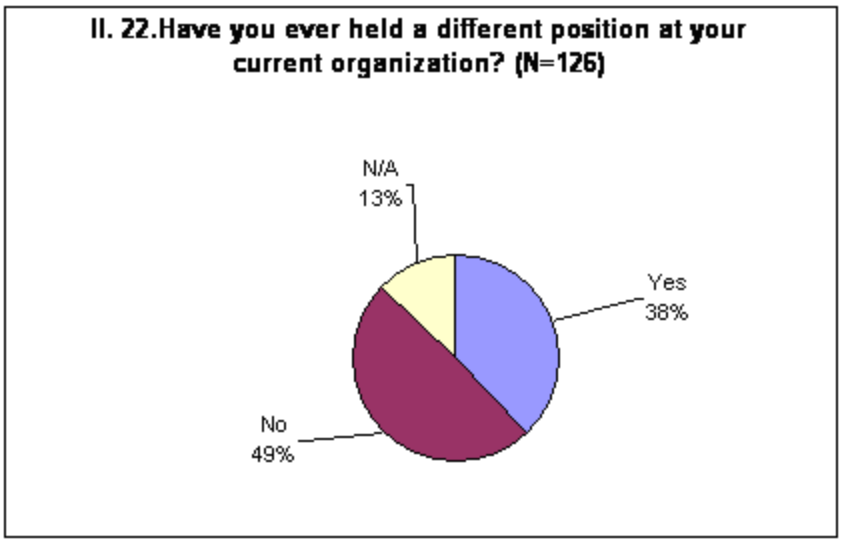

Figure 2. Different position held at current organization

In the past twelve months, thirty-three percent of the respondents (n=42) were positive about internal job openings that were the same as or higher than their current job for which they were qualified (regardless of whether they are interested or not). However, fifty-four percent of the respondents (n=67) showed no interest at all (IIQ34) and seventy percent of the respondents (n=89) have not made a job change recently as shown in Figure 3. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents (n=36) agreed strongly that they were satisfied with the way their careers have progressed since they began working for their current employers. Almost a third (32%) of the respondents (n=42) agreed with the statement. Nineteen percent of them (n=24) neither agreed nor disagreed. Six percent of them (n=7) disagreed, and two percent (n=2) disagreed strongly (IIQ51). In other words, sixty-one percent of the respondents (n=78) were satisfied with the development of their careers. The findings indicate that a majority of the respondents seemed to be satisfied with their current jobs, but the percentage is lower than that of ten years ago.

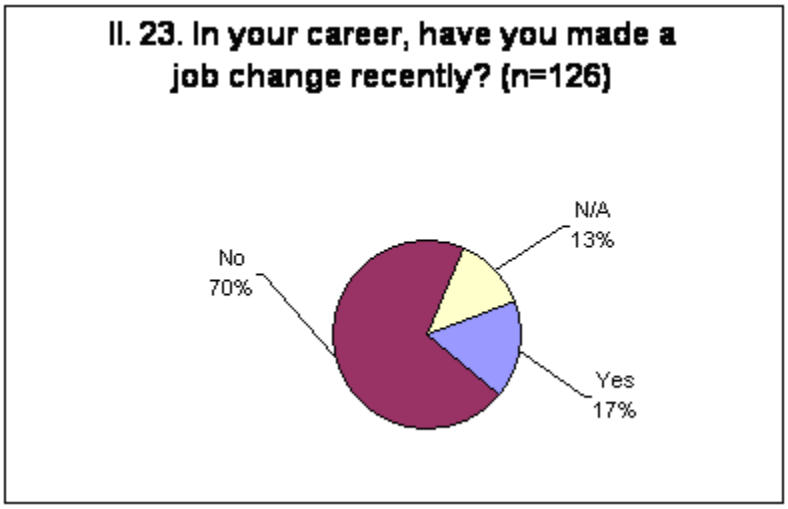

Figure 3. Recent career changes

Only seventeen percent of the respondents (n=21) have had their job descriptions or skill sets required for their work changed over the last five years (IIQ24), a majority of the respondents (70%, n=89) had no change as shown in Figure 4.

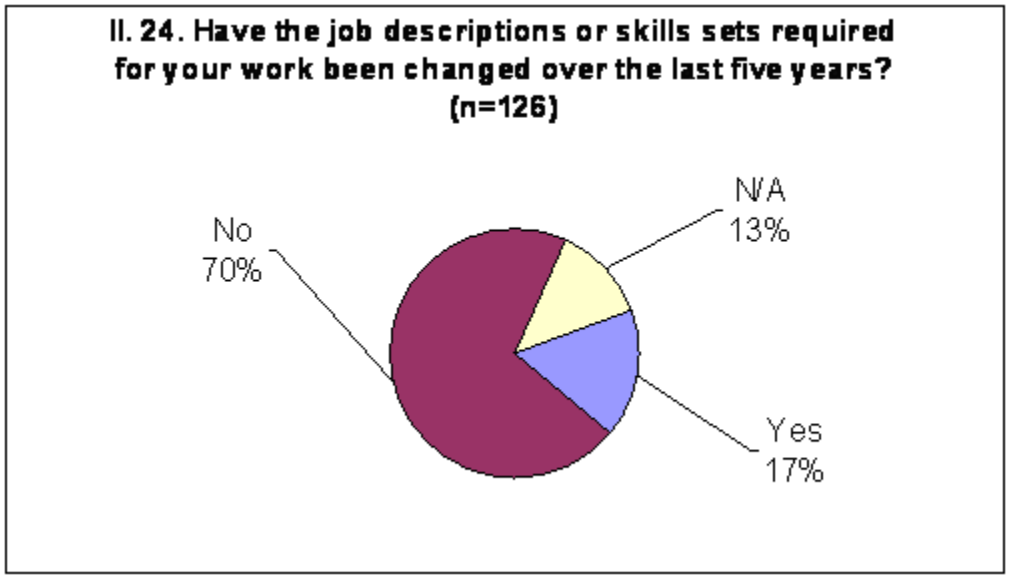

Figure 4. Job descriptions or skills sets

The following table presents important skill sets that seventy-four respondents cited. Three skills, namely knowledge management (35), administration and leadership (33), and database management (31), are quoted as the most important skill sets (IIQ25).

Skill	Number of People
Knowledge Management	35
Administration and Leadership	33
Database management	31
Educational qualification	13
Web content management	12
Years of experience	9
Web development	6
Taxonomy creation	3
IT	1
From reference to IT	1
Architectural- and construction-related	1
Job description changed due to position changed	1
Managing change	1
Needs more training to get enough CEU in 5 years	1

Cataloging expertise	1
Other	1

Table 1: Important skill sets

Regarding their career advancement, forty-five percent of the respondents (n=56) said that a formal professional education is very important. In comparison, twenty-nine percent (n=36) regarded professional work experience as important, ten percent (n=13) neutral, and three percent (n=4) not important (IIQ26) (see Figure 5).

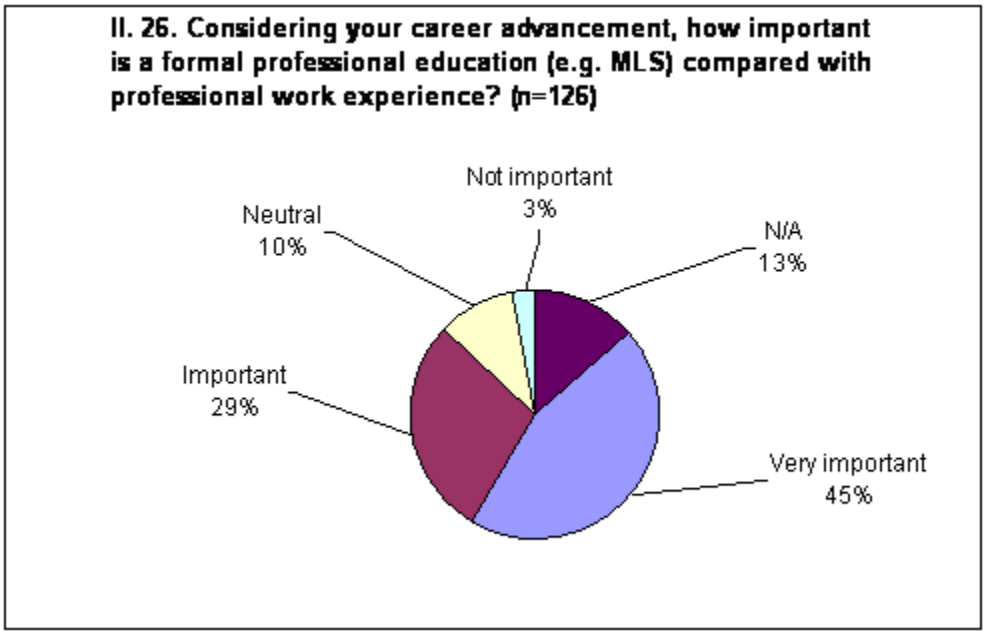

Figure 5. Importance of formal professional education in career development

When asked if they are currently gaining valuable skills that will make them more marketable as their career progresses, twenty-seven percent of the respondents (n=34) agreed strongly, thirty-four percent (n=44) agreed, twenty-one percent (n=26) neither agreed nor disagreed, and five percent (n=6) disagreed (IIQ50). It is encouraging to see that more than half of the respondents (63%, n=80) have been promoted in their career. However, twenty-four percent of them (n=30) did not get a promotion (IIQ27a), as shown in Figure 5. The finding suggests that Chinese American librarians have fewer chances of promotion now than that in 1996 when Yang did her study. Yang's findings were that eighty-three percent of the respondents had been promoted in their careers. The percentage of top level positions – directors, associate directors, assistant directors, co-directors, deans – stays almost the same (11% in the current survey and 10% in Li's survey), showing almost no improvement. However, before a conclusion is drawn that it continues to be very difficult for Chinese American librarians to break through the glass ceiling to reach the higher and highest positions in the profession, further research is needed.

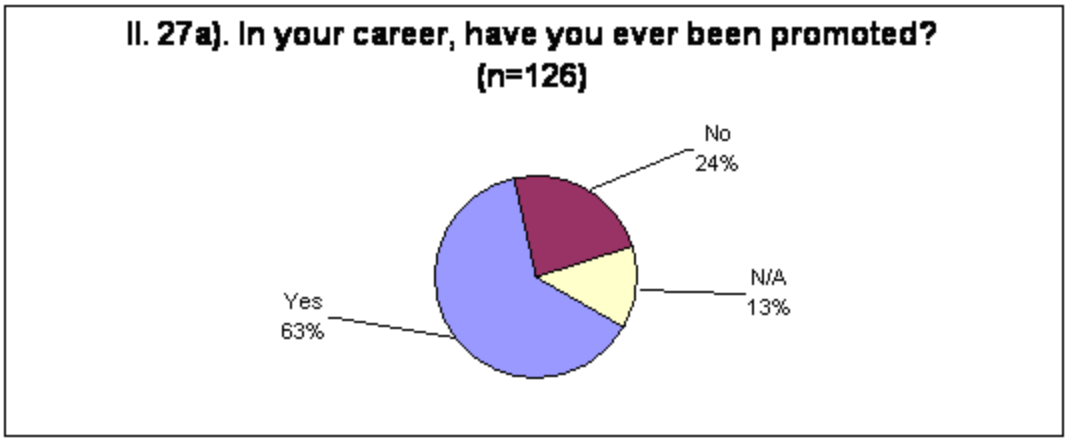

Figure 6. Job promotion

Thirty respondents who answered "no" in Question 27a) proceeded to answer 27b). Eighty percent of the respondents (n=24) said that they have not been offered a promotion that they declined. Only one percent (n=1) has been offered a promotion that he/she declined, as shown in Figure 7.

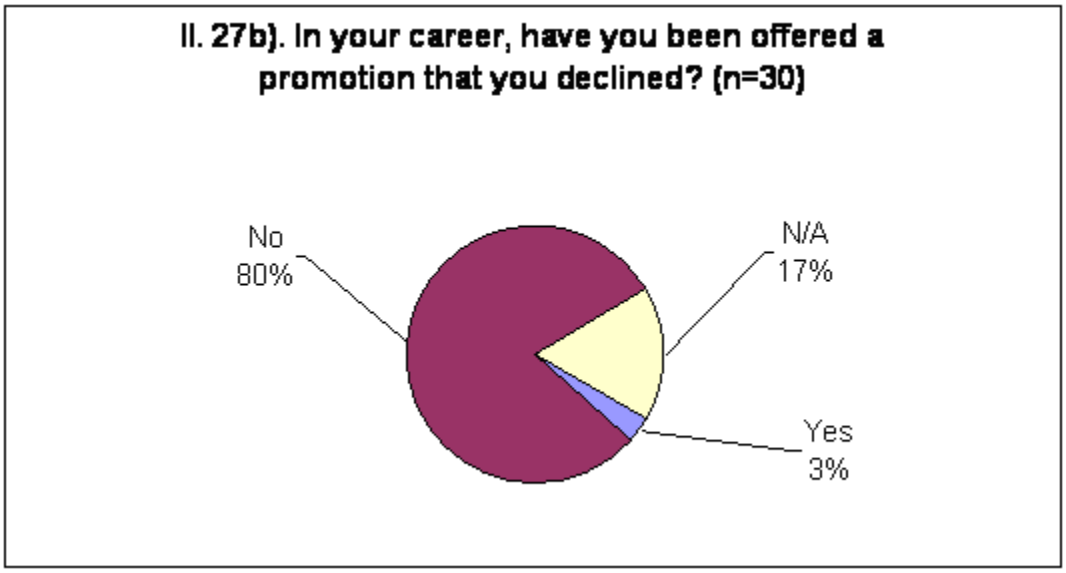

Figure 7. Promotion opportunities

Only ten percent of the respondents (n=12) have been offered a lateral job change that they declined. Eighty percent of them (n=92) said they did not decline the change (IIQ28) as shown in Figure 8.

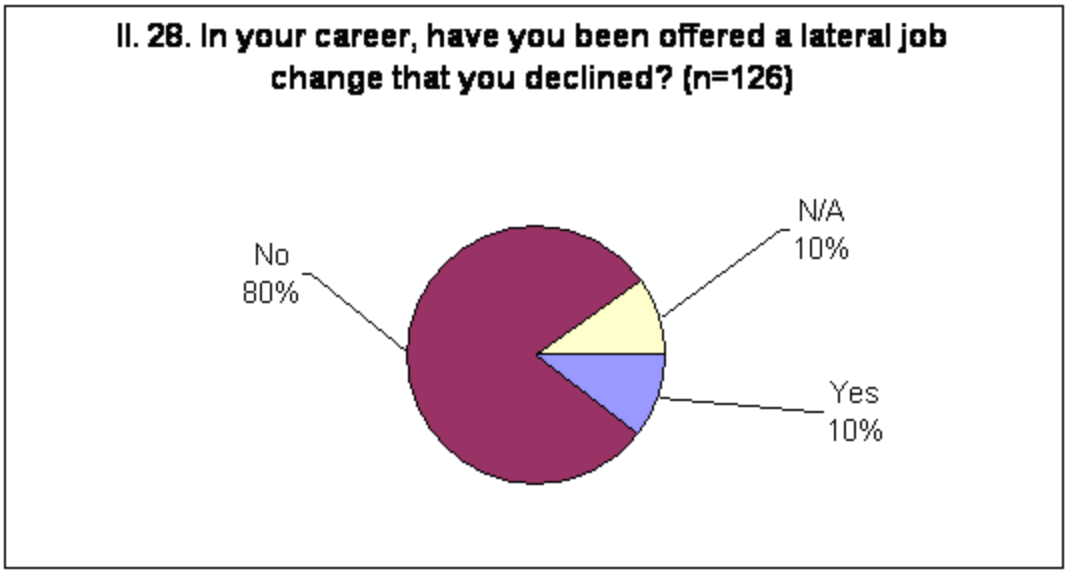

Figure 8. Declined lateral job change

Besides promotion or lateral job changes, thirty-eight percent of the respondents (n=48) have had their official job titles changed to reflect their additional responsibilities. Forty-eight percent of the respondents (n=60) said they had not had their job title changed to reflect added responsibilities (IIQ29), as shown in Figure 9.

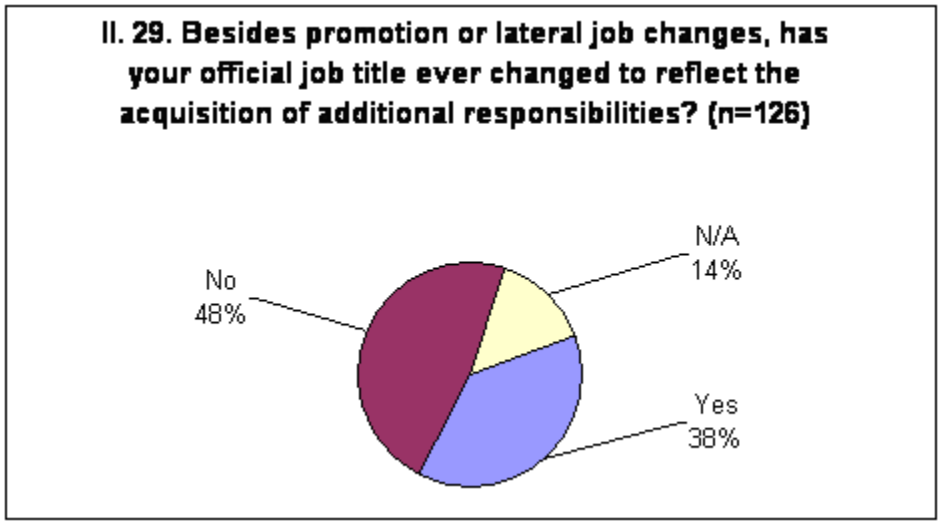

Figure 9. Change of respondents' official job title

Besides promotion or lateral job changes, more than half of the respondents (53%, n=67) have had their responsibilities increased significantly while their job title remained the same, as shown in Figure 9 (IIQ30).

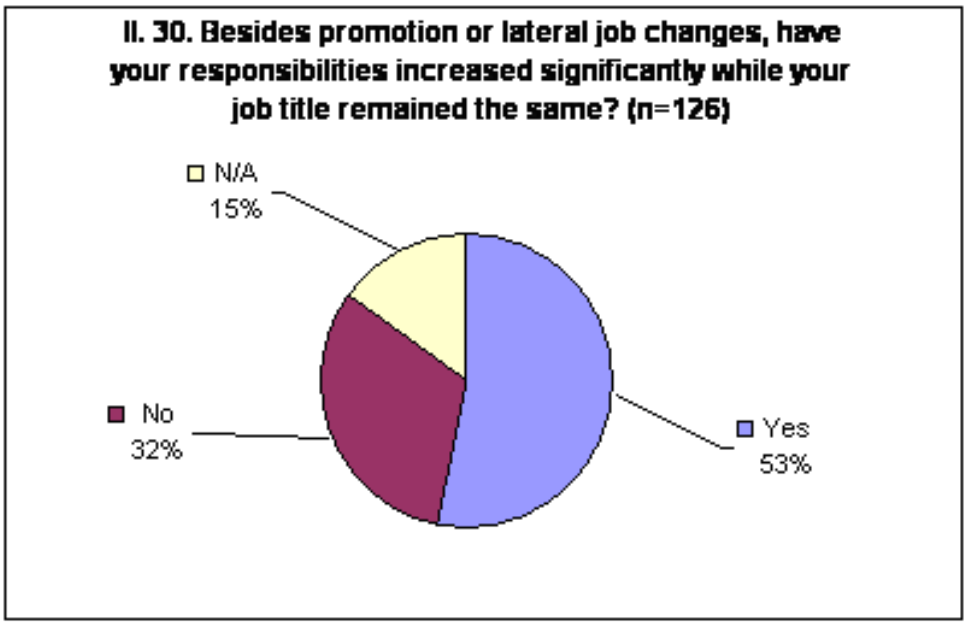

Figure 10. No change of job title with additional responsibilities

In spite of a significant increase in responsibilities, sixty-six percent of the respondents (n=82) did not seek an official job title change to get a promotion. Only twenty-one percent (n=27) said they did seek a title change, as shown in Figure 10 (IIQ31). It seems that Chinese American Librarians tend to passively accept additional responsibilities without asking for corresponding recognition. This seems to be typical Chinese behavior and might be partially explained in the traditional Confucius teaching that one should be obedient, humble, and tolerant. These qualities are not necessarily weaknesses but might not be suitable in the Western society for individuals seeking recognition and promotion.

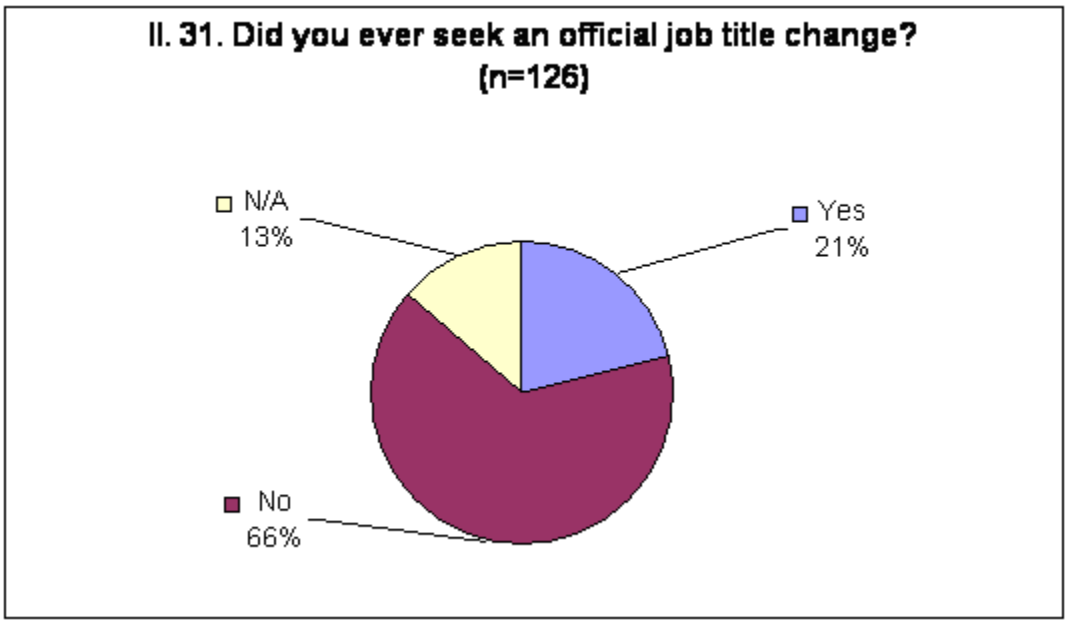

Figure 11. Sought an official job title change

In the twelve months preceding their participation in the study, the supervisors or managers of thirty-two percent (n=40) talked to them about their career plans and goals. However, the supervisors or managers of fifty-five percent (n=59) did not talk to them (IIQ32).

Also, in the twelve months preceding the survey, the supervisors or managers of only twelve percent (n=15) encouraged them to apply for or to consider an internal job change (IIQ33). Seventy-five percent (n=94) did not. It seems that half of the Chinese American librarians had relatively infrequent direct communications with their supervisors or managers on career development.

Nine percent (n=11) of the respondents strongly agreed that there are career advancement opportunities for them in their current place of employment. Another twenty-five percent (n=31) agreed with the statement, thirty percent (n=39) neither agreed nor disagreed, sixteen percent (n=20) disagreed, and seven percent (n=9) disagreed strongly (IIQ52).

Sixteen percent (n=20) agreed strongly that they are currently in a position to influence important policy or strategy decisions in their organizations. An additional twenty-eight percent (n=36) agreed with the statement, fifteen percent (n=19) disagreed, twenty-four percent (n=30) neither agreed nor disagreed, and four percent (n=5) disagreed strongly (IIQ53).

Seventeen percent of the respondents (n=22) agreed strongly that in the foreseeable future they could be in a position to influence important policies or strategy decisions in their organizations. Twenty-one percent (n=26) agreed with the statement, twenty-seven percent (n=34) neither agreed nor disagreed, fifteen percent (n=19) disagreed, and seven percent (n=9) disagreed strongly (IIQ54). The findings indicate that Chinese American librarians, in general, feel lack of opportunities to advance to higher level positions.

There were three questions (Question 46a, 46b, 46c) asking the respondents how likely they were to stay in their current organization for one year, five years and ten years. The number of those who are very likely to stay declined as the number of years increased: fifty-one percent (n=64) of the respondents said that they would be very likely to stay at their current organizations for a year, thirty-three (n=42) for five years, and twenty-three (n=29) for ten years. The percentage of the respondents who were uncertain of staying in their current organization also increased as the number of years increased: two percent at one year to seventeen percent at ten years, as shown in Figure 12.

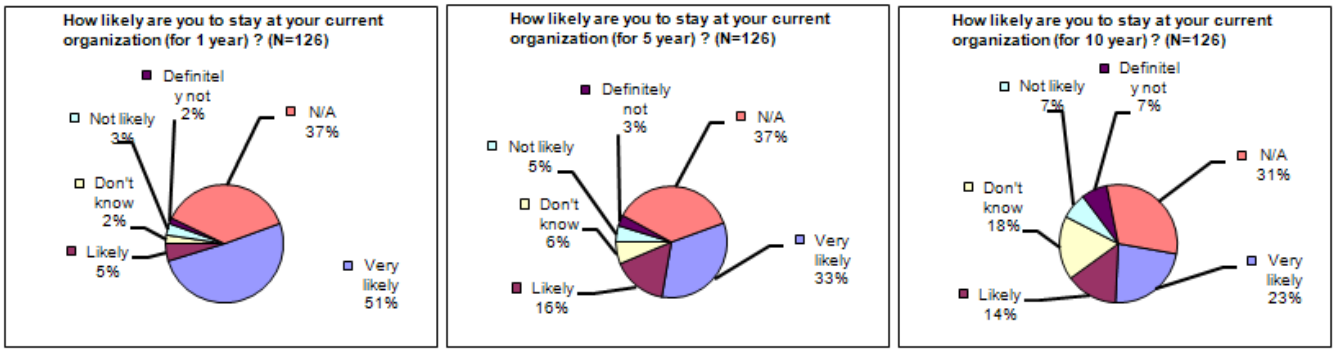

Figure 12. Likelihood to stay at current organization from one year to ten years

In Question 48, the respondents were asked to give reasons why they were not likely to remain with their current employer for any of the time frames (one, or five, or ten years). A majority of the respondents (78%, n=99) did not offer any answer. Reasons cited by those who said they were not likely to stay with their current employers were retirement (11%, n=14), and personal reasons (e.g., school, family, relocation, and health) (3%, n=4). More interesting work opportunities elsewhere and dissatisfaction with employer for reason other than advancement opportunities account for two percent (n=3). One percent of the respondents (n=1) mentioned better salary or benefits available elsewhere and dissatisfaction with advancement opportunities with their current employers. Compared to Yang's study, this survey reveals that a lower percentage of Chinese American librarians reported that they are satisfied with their jobs. In spite of this, their mobility seems to be even lower. The percentage of people who have changed their jobs more than twice is much lower. There was also a much greater percentage that never changed jobs. The main reason the respondents gave for leaving their current library is retirement. Dissatisfaction with employers, family reasons, career advancement, or better salary was not common reasons for leaving their current library.

To sum up, the survey shows that Chinese American librarians tend to settle down at a library soon after graduation. Then most of them choose to stay for 10 years or longer until they retire. There is lack of parallel or vertical or geographical moves. It seems that having a stable job is most important to the majority of Chinese American librarians. They tend to feel satisfied and continue to be a good worker and meet libraries' requirements without asking for reward. They will give little effort to seeking job changes internally or externally, or asking for a change in job titles due to increased responsibilities, or talking to supervisors about career advancement, or seeking mentors. This decision to stay at the same job is not much affected by desires to get a bigger salary, better benefits, or move up to a higher position. The findings suggest that it is important to further study and attempt to identify possible motivation for Chinese American librarians to make more effort to move up and break the glass ceiling. Otherwise, if only a few people are interested in pursuing leadership positions, the whole percentage of Chinese American librarians in leadership positions will not be increased.

A majority of the respondents (73%, n=92) would encourage other persons, including other Chinese Americans, to enter the library field (IIQ49). An overwhelming amount of support and enthusiasm for the profession was expressed in the survey responses. Thirty-one percent of the

respondents (n=39) agreed strongly that they should reflect their Chinese cultural heritage in their work places. Another twenty-eight percent (n=35) agreed with the statement, twenty-three percent (n=29) neither agreed nor disagreed, four percent (n=5) disagreed and two percent (n=3) disagreed strongly (IIQ55).

2. Professional Development, Associations and Committees

In the past twelve months, seventy-four percent of the respondents (n=108) said that their organizations have arranged for or paid them to attend training events, which contributed to their career development. Fourteen percent (n=21) of them did not receive such support (IIQ35).

In Question 45, forty-eight percent of the respondents (n=64) said that their employers partially paid for expenses associated with professional conferences, workshops or activities. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents (n=37) said their employers fully paid for expenses and only ten percent of the respondents (n=14) said that their organizations did not. The findings indicate that most organizations have been supportive of the respondents' professional development activities. Of those who belonged to any association, sixty-six percent paid the membership fees themselves. Seventy-five percent of the employers paid fully or partially for the expenses associated with professional conferences. The survey suggested that most Chinese American librarians have a position that requires them to pay the membership fee by themselves, and they are willing to pay it to be part of one or more national or state professional associations. The survey results also reveal that the majority of Chinese American librarians work in a library that is able and willing to provide partial (48%, n=64) or even full (27%, n=37) financial support for them to attend professional conferences.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents (n=67) said that they were aware of a mentoring program in their organizations. Thirty-four percent of them (n=43) said that they did not know about it (IIQ36). Forty-six percent of the respondents (n=58) said that they would participate in the mentoring program if they knew about it. Thirty-eight percent of them (n=48) showed no interest.

In almost all professions, and certainly in librarianship, the formation of a mentoring relationship has been shown to be one of the most significant factors contributing to retention, promotion, and long-term success. The professional literature is rich with articles about the benefits of mentoring programs (Howland, 1999). It is worth further investigation on what role the mentoring program has played in helping Chinese American librarians' career development.

In Question 39, the respondents (n=126) were asked to which professional associations they belong. Most belong to one or more professional associations. The larger percentage of the respondents participates at the national rather than the state level. The top three associations they belong to are: the American Library Association (ALA, n=77), the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA, n=66), and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, n=21).

In Question 40, the respondents reported that sixty-six percent (n=83) pay the professional association dues themselves. Nineteen percent (n=24) indicated that their employers helped pay their professional association dues.

In Question 41, the results reveal that the majority of the respondents belong to one or more national associations. The respondents (n=126) reported that they were involved in the committees of the following two national library associations: the Chinese American Librarians Association (31%, n=39) and the American Library Association (ALA, 26%, n=33).

In response to Question 42, sixty percent of the respondents (n=75) reported that they were not involved in the state library associations and committees. Only twenty-seven percent of them (n=34) were involved.

In Question 43, a majority of the respondents (72%, n=90) said that they were not council members or elected officials of ALA or other national library associations. Only fourteen percent (n=18) said they were.

In Question 44, ten percent (n=12) responded that they were a council member or elected official of a state library association.

The data from all the four questions indicate that a majority of Chinese American librarians were not actively involved in the state or national library association committees. Ravindra N. Sharma, Director of Libraries, University of Evansville, Evansville, Indiana, and president of Asian-Pacifica American Librarians Association (APALA), observed a similar phenomenon that few Asian/Pacific Americans have been appointed or elected to committees or offices in ALA and its divisions, the Special Libraries Association (SLA), or other professional organizations (McCook, 1993). The findings are contrary to what Yang (1996) suggested that Chinese American librarians were active in professional organizations at the national or state levels. As Liu (1994) pointed out, librarians have an obligation to guide and encourage more young people of color to attend ALA-accredited library schools to improve their qualifications, to learn about American librarianship, and to improve their chances for advancement.

3. Challenges and Barriers

Okocha's research identified the following factors as seriously impeding minorities' career development: unequal education opportunities, the psychological impact and limitations caused by discrimination, the lack of appropriate career development theory as guidance, prototype perceptions about minorities, and white centered career development consultancy (Okocha, 2000).

According to Liu's article, the challenges and barriers that Chinese American librarians face in the workplace are influenced by their cultural background, their method of communication, and their value system (Liu, 2000). Yang's survey results showed that cultural background differences and communication were top challenges and/or barriers to Chinese American librarians (Yang, 1996).

The current survey questions expanded Yang's on Chinese American librarians' career barriers by adding the factors of cultural background difference, comprehensive understanding, oral communication and written communication. In addition, two new factors, leadership and information technology skills, were included. Under "Other" field, the survey allowed the participants to specify their perceived barriers and challenges not listed in the survey.

For some reason, twenty-seven percent of the respondents (n=35) did not respond to this question. One even expressed "no interest". According to the responses received, 3.9% of the respondents (n=5) reported that they had no problem at all, which is a lower percentage than that in Yang's survey reported ten years ago. However, the majority of the respondents revealed that they face the following challenges and/or barriers at their jobs:

Barrier 1: Cultural background difference

Thirty-three percent of the respondents (n=42) indicated that cultural background difference is a challenge to their current job in the library, the same as revealed in Yang's study. The study findings further show that there are no geographical differences in Chinese American librarians' experiences of this barrier on the East or West Coast, or in the middle of the United States. The finding reveals that despite years of discussion, training, and other efforts to increase cultural diversity, many Chinese American librarians still do not feel comfortable to deal with cultural background differences. It is continuously regarded as the largest barrier to the career advancement of Chinese American librarians.

Barrier 2: Leadership

Besides cultural background differences, 22.2% of the respondents (n=28) reported that it is challenging for them to demonstrate leadership at their current jobs. There also seems to be a gender difference because among the twenty-eight respondents, only one is male. Showing leadership on the job seems to be more challenging for female Chinese American librarians.

Barrier 3: Communications

In Yang's study, communication with supervisors and patrons was a major barrier to Chinese American librarians. The current survey study indicates that communication, not limited to that with supervisors and patrons, continues to be a major barrier to Chinese American librarians. A total of 17.5% of the respondents (n=22) reported barriers in comprehensive understanding, 16.7% (n=21) in oral communication, and 10.3% (n=13) in written communication. These barriers are reported by Chinese American librarians both born in and outside the United States, which means that the barriers are not simply language issues.

Barrier 4: Information technology skills

A low percentage of the respondents (10.3%, n=13) reported that mastering information technology skills is challenging. Information technology is an important ever-changing aspect of librarianship. Keeping up with information technology becomes increasingly important. The

findings indicate that a majority of Chinese American librarians seems confident about their information technology skills.

Barrier 5: Others

In addition, the respondents have identified other barriers, such as politics, boss' delayed retirement, children, and race. Surprisingly, only one respondent indicated clearly that race is a barrier, in contrast with 37 respondents (23.6%) in the 1996 survey and approximately 21% in a 2002 study by Goto and Takeuchi. In the open comments, the survey participants rarely identified race as an issue to Chinese American librarians' career. More studies need to be conducted to examine this issue.

Future studies can also investigate how barriers affect Chinese American librarians and how study findings can help Chinese American librarians determine how to gain access to a full range of careers commensurate with their abilities and to equitable opportunities for career development and advancement.

4. Strategies to Handle Barriers and Challenges

To answer the question on how to be a successful Chinese American librarian in the American society, Liu (2000) suggested that a Chinese American must examine his or her personal service philosophy, career expectations in terms of peer recognition, and adjust one's social consciousness and ethical viewpoints. Frequent and open communication with peers is a key in solving many misunderstandings. Chinese American librarians can enrich librarianship with their own cultural heritage.

Two open-ended questions were designed to allow the respondents to share how they have handled challenges and barriers with solutions and approaches they discovered and formed, as well as the lessons that can be learned from their careers and at their workplaces (IIQ57). They were also asked to share their success stories and the specific achievements that helped them advance their careers (IIQ58).

Responses to the two questions were enthusiastic and positive. A certain sense of pride in their accomplishments came through in the written comments. Typical words used to describe their success included, "hard work," "persistence", and "leadership." A few respondents expressed discomfort with the obstacles they have faced. Some offered and commented on specific approaches they took to deal with difficult decisions about their career advancement. Others had negative experiences involving limited opportunities and exposure, and one had poor relations with supervisors. Overall, a majority of the respondents indicated that they enjoy the career they have built.

The shared strategies, suggestions and experiences dealing with challenges and barriers can be an inspiration for Chinese American librarians. The responses are documented and summarized as follows:

Setting high goals and reaching them with self-confidence and perseverance are keys for Chinese American librarians to be successful and to be leaders in the American library profession.

Maintaining a good job performance at the current library position no matter what the circumstances are is important. Negative experiences, such as lack of opportunities and poor relations with supervisors, are sometimes unavoidable. But the respondents suggested that Chinese Americans should continue performing well at their job, even if they are not satisfied in their current position and plan for a job change.

Working hard is another strategy that the respondents have adopted. Chinese American librarians are characterized by their diligence, as Wu (1979) and Tan (1998) described. One of the respondents cautioned that Chinese American librarians should not just work hard. There are many other factors important to Chinese American librarians' careers.

Cultural background differences continue to be regarded as the number one barrier to Chinese American librarians. Zuniga, Skaruppa and Powell (2000) suggest that acculturation and career advancement were related. Cultural resistance impedes advancement, whereas an appreciation of different cultural influences has a positive effect on career goals. The current survey respondents expressed pride in their own culture while appreciating different cultures. Many respondents have had positive experiences because of their Chinese cultural background, which makes them stand out. As Liu (1994) described in her article, Chinese American librarians' Asian/Chinese language, culture and knowledge have made remarkable contributions to the development of East Asian collections, to cataloging and classification, library automation, library services for diverse communities, library education and research, national libraries, and information and technology policy in America. The majority of the respondents in this study agree or strongly agree that they should reflect their Chinese cultural heritage in the work place, regardless of the type of libraries. The respondents suggested that, while it is important to appreciate one's own culture in the workplace, it is equally important to spend time studying and gaining knowledge about different cultures. Special attention should be paid to the following:

- What makes the cultures different?
- How do different races communicate?
- Why does miscommunication sometimes occur? Which words or phrases may offend certain people?
- How are the individual's merits understood in different cultures? How to be accepted and appreciated at workplace in another culture? What are regarded as unacceptable attitudes or behaviors that should be avoided?

As Liu (1994) pointed out, "bridges must be built to help the general American public to understand Chinese Americans." The respondents suggested that library-wide activities, such as culture appreciation days and presentations about one's own culture at an existing library diversity event, be organized. The goal of these efforts should be an increased sensitivity to different cultures.

The respondents stated repeatedly that Chinese American librarians need to conscientiously adjust their attitudes of being quiet, humble, and obedient, which are often resulted from

traditional Confucius teaching. These attitudes can be misunderstood and viewed as lack of motivation, lack of creativity, or lack of communication skills. The respondents suggested a cultivation of traits such as making oneself more outgoing, more open and direct about opinions, and more participatory by offering ideas. These traits are valued in the Western culture, and seem necessary for Chinese American librarians to develop if they want to be considered for leaders' positions.

The respondents recognized that keeping a positive attitude is important for handling frustration in the workplace and a key to success. Most respondents have experienced frustration when encountering with barriers. Tan pointed out that handling frustration and failure to be promoted to leadership positions in the profession present a challenge to Chinese American librarians because of their culture and childhood training (Tan, 1998).

The survey respondents offered the following personal practical strategies for handling negative attitudes.

- Do reflect on criticism and determine if it is constructive or just a complaint. Refrain from thinking in a negative way.
- Do not take criticism personally.
- Do not respond to criticism with harsh words. Everybody has weaknesses.
- Do not allow challenges to affect one's job performance.
- Do not waste time in complaining and dealing with frustration.
- Do remember that sometimes it is beyond one's control to make changes no matter how much effort one makes.
- Work hard but remember that one's achievements may or may not win support from supervisors and colleagues. Do not be surprised and discouraged when this happens.
- Do remember things are changing. If it is not working in one way, try another.

The respondents suggested that it is important for Chinese American librarians not to be isolated. Active participation in library projects, professional conferences, workshops as well as other activities, is strongly recommended. The respondents suggested that one become a "team worker," even a "party-goer," in order to create opportunities to learn from each other and to improve communication by sharing knowledge, experience, and skills. In the United States, such efforts are highly respected and appreciated. The respondents also suggested that it is wise to pay respect and give generous support to library colleagues when networking and collaborating. This is a great way to help gain support at the same time.

When the respondents talk about sharing knowledge and skills, they do not mean only library knowledge and computer skills, but knowledge about different cultures, local rules, library development trends, and so forth. Common ways to stay ahead of changes and develop valuable skills and experiences include attending library workshops and participating in various library projects. Not only does participating in workshops and projects help Chinese librarians improve their work performance, it also gives them a chance to stand out and increase their opportunities to show their leadership potential.

Filing a grievance is a time consuming and daunting effort, as the respondents discovered. Sometimes it did work, but most respondents preferred seeking other solutions through conversation and negotiation, and by gaining support through networking. The respondents believe that changes might come gradually. Some may choose to change jobs since the work environment varies from library to library.

The respondents indicated that having a library mentor is very helpful when there is a good working relationship between the mentors and the mentees. Good mentoring can help mentees advance in their careers at a faster pace.

The respondents reported that having good communication skills is very important for good performance on the job and for advancement to leadership positions. Good communication is closely associated with the ability to comprehend. Lack of comprehension and communication was identified as major barriers. The respondents found that good communication and comprehension require continuous effort. The issue is not just language. Cultural differences should also be taken into consideration. The respondents suggested some practical ways to improve comprehension and communication, such as talking to colleagues, watching TV and movies, reading meeting protocols, practicing comments before meetings in order to make points accurately and concisely, and getting input on written documents before submitting them. All these will help improve the language aspect of communication. Library networking and collaboration might also contribute directly to the improvement of library communications.

In general, all the strategies documented and summarized above have impact on each other. The comments and suggestions made by the respondents demonstrate Chinese American librarians' positive spirit and determination to meet challenges and overcome barriers to be outstanding performers and great assets to the library profession.

V. Significance

This study has potential significance for the field of Chinese American librarianship and diversity in library communities in general. Evaluation of Chinese American librarianship to address barriers and challenges they face needs to be done systematically. The study provides firsthand and in-depth insights into Chinese American librarians. It helps discover and document successful and effective strategies Chinese American librarians have taken and developed.

Although individuals and specific minority groups have different experiences and cultural values, diverse populations face some common career-related issues. Their career choices may be restricted by socialization, access to guidance and assessment, societal and self-stereotypes, isolation from networks, and early schooling experiences. Barriers to career development may include lack of feedback or mentors, discrimination in promotion/transfer, tokenism, hostility, plateaus, less access to training, perceived isolation, stress, or self-imposed performance pressure (Walsh et al., 2001).

The study findings can be used as tangible examples to help promote Chinese American librarianship and the library and information science profession to those who are not aware of them. The study may help show that Chinese American librarians could consider different

approaches to evaluate and develop their careers and that the library profession needs to pay more attention to professional development in this group. The study may help library schools that will prepare minority students with the skills necessary to perform effectively in the library and information science profession. The research results may help library and information science Chinese students as well as Chinese librarians to better fit into American libraries. It may help them expand their job choices, embrace a higher and broader vision of working as minority librarians in America, and thus facilitate the integration of Chinese librarians into the American library communities.

The benefits of diversity to a library's organizational structure are myriad: better decision making; greater sensitivity, creativity, and innovation; more astute collection development practices; and more successful delivery of services to different types of patrons (Cox, 1991).

VI. Conclusion

This article emphasizes the importance of studying Chinese American librarians in the 21st century. The survey findings demonstrate that Chinese American librarians are valuable members in library and information science fields. The barriers and challenges faced by Chinese American librarians need ongoing measurement and studies. More questions remain to be answered. Have the concept of career development and its many facets adequately addressed the career needs of Chinese American librarians based on their work history? More specifically, has the field of career development been examined in light of the cultural context and lifestyle of Chinese Americans? Have issues identified from a holistic perspective of Chinese Americans consistent with race and classes across the life span and context? New, collaborative, and more holistic research approaches may be required to identify appropriate career practices strategies and resources. New approaches and ways of thinking will be needed if the library profession hopes to empower young people to live and work in this new era. Current models do not necessarily meet the needs of Chinese American youth and adults. A knowledge gap still exists concerning what makes good policies for the increasingly diverse populations and cultures. Chinese American librarians should establish mechanisms to identify issues and share practices that deal more effectively with the challenges and barriers they face.

The workforce in all types of libraries is becoming more diverse, reflecting a decade of unprecedented demographic change in the American population and meeting the needs of ethnically diverse user communities. People are increasingly responsible for their work, career planning and development (Blair, 2000). Looking to the future, the library profession predicts that a large number of librarians, including library leaders, will retire as they reach retirement age (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004). There is an urgent need for the library profession to attract young ethnic minorities to the profession and to retain and develop those already there.

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Acknowledgement: The authors would like to thank Professor Linda C. Smith and Pauline Cochrane for their suggestions, and students, Xiuling Nie and Jin Xiang, and volunteers, Jing Shi and Suzhen Chen for their assistance. The authors would also like to thank CALA (Chinese American Librarians Association) for the Sally C. Tseng Professional Development Grant award and the Illinois Fire Service Institute for needed financial support for the study.