

Chinese American Librarians in American Research Libraries: A Profile

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ABSTRACT: This study endeavors to establish a profile of Chinese American librarians working in Association of Research Libraries (ARL) university libraries in the United States. A questionnaire was emailed on November 16, 2016 to 236 Chinese American librarians identified by their names from the websites of 100 research libraries in the United States. 88 Chinese American librarians responded to the survey. The findings of the study show that: 78% of Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries were born outside of the United States, 72% are female, 56% received their bachelor's degree in China, 46% are subject librarians, half of them have been promoted in their current libraries, 65% serve on national committees, and 95% are satisfied with their current job.

I. Introduction

According to American Research Libraries (ARL) 2014-2015 *Annual Salary Survey* data, there were 8,909 professionals working in ARL libraries in the United States, of which 1,294 were ethnic minorities. Within the ethnic group, Asian professionals accounted for 593, followed by Black (401), Hispanic (266), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (34).

Minority librarianship is a topic that has attracted the attention of the profession. In their book *Where Are All the Librarians of Color? The Experiences of People of Color in Academia*, Hankins and Juarez “invited librarians of color from the academic community to reflect on their experiences with retention, job satisfaction, and tenure process” (Hoyer, 2016). They looked at “the history of librarians of color in academia, as well as the obstacles, roles, and leadership opportunities, and tenure process for those who endure” (Hankins & Juarez, 2016, p. 3).

“To better understand the state of ethnic and racial representation in academic and research libraries,” Chang analyzed “longitudinal diversity statistics from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in order to provide a longitudinal and up-to-date view of demographic patterns and development in academic and research libraries” (Chang, 2013, p. 182). She observed a lack

of progress in recruiting librarians of color in the workforce. She stated that in order to meet the challenges of the changing student demographics in U.S. higher education in the twenty-first century, it is vital that academic and research libraries be more proactive in recruiting a workforce as ethnically and culturally diverse as the users they serve (Chang, 2013).

There were three surveys conducted to investigate the status and characteristics of Chinese American librarians in the United States (Li, 1979; Yang, 1996; Lian and Xiong, 2008b). Those surveys were sent to the members of Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA). However, there are many Chinese American librarians who are not members of CALA, especially those working in the ARL university libraries.

This study aims to establish a profile of Chinese American librarians working in the ARL university libraries in the United States and to fill the gap in the literature.

II. Literature Review

Ibraheem and Devine conducted a study to “identify and clarify issues related to the employment in academic settings of African librarians who have relocated to the United States” (Ibraheem & Devine, 2013, p. 288). They reported that African librarians working in American academic libraries have generally been professionally successful. It also appears that they are established within their institutions and possess a diverse collective skill set comprising practical experience in administration, technical services, public services, and instruction (Ibraheem & Devine, 2013, p. 301).

Le explored the leadership aspirations of Asian American academic librarians in the United States. He found a significant number of Asian American academic librarians aspiring to become senior academic library leaders/administrators. They want to become “change agents” to influence library and education policies (Le, 2016).

There are a few studies focused solely on Chinese American librarians. Liu reviewed the brief history of Chinese Americans in the United States and their contributions to librarianship. She identified several pioneers and key figures of Chinese American librarians with their accomplishments. She concluded that “Chinese American librarians have overcome many difficulties and eventually been recognized as an indispensable part of the workforce in the library and information science profession” (Liu, 2000, p. 135).

Chen also shared several success stories of Chinese American librarians who have overcome hurdles like cultural, language and other barriers and successfully hold positions in professional organizations at all levels, including leadership positions such as library directors and deans of library schools. “They have played a significant role in contributing to librarianship in general” (Chen, 2012, p. 21).

Lian and Xiong shared their findings of Chinese American librarians and emphasized the importance to study Chinese American librarians in the 21st century. They documented some strategies Chinese American librarians have adopted to meet the challenges and barriers they face (Lian and Xiong, 2008a).

III. Objective of the Study

This study targets specifically the group of Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States. The objective of the study is two-fold: to establish a profile for this group and to fill the gap in the literature. The following questions were used in the survey to gather the data:

- Which area of library operation do most Chinese American librarians work in ARL libraries?
- What is the career mobility and progression for Chinese American librarians in ARL libraries?
- How active are Chinese American librarians in their service at all levels in ARL libraries?
- What are Chinese American librarians' leadership opportunity and career advancement ambition in ARL libraries?
- Are Chinese American librarians satisfied with their jobs in ARL libraries?
- What challenges do Chinese American librarians face in their current ARL library positions?

IV. Research Methodology

There are 124 ARL libraries. For this study, the authors decided to exclude 16 Canadian ARL members, and 8 non-university U.S. libraries, namely, Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institution, National Library of Medicine, National Archives and Records Administration, National Agricultural Library, New York State Library, New York Public Library, and Boston Public Library. The remaining 100 ARL university libraries in the United States were the survey population.

The employee directory on the website of the 100 U.S. ARL university libraries were searched to identify a total of 236 Chinese American librarians based on their last names. Understandably, some Chinese American librarians may have been missed with this method due to inter-racial marriage.

Qualtrics survey software was used to build the questionnaire and analyze the data.

The first email invitation, with a link to the survey, was sent on November 16, 2016 to all 236 "identified" Chinese American librarians working in U.S. ARL university libraries.

Five email recipients immediately declared that they did not fit in the targeted population category. Two are married to Chinese men and the other three are Koreans. This reduced the total survey population to 231.

The first survey invitation generated 39 responses. Two weeks later, an email reminder was sent and the responses were increased to 79. On December 14, 2016, the second reminder were sent, which yielded a final total of 88 responses.

V. Survey Findings

1. Demographic and Education

As shown in *Figure 1*, the majority (78%) of the respondents were born outside of the United States (i.e., 60% in mainland China, 14% in Taiwan, and 4% in Hong Kong.) However, 19% were born in the United States. In comparison, Yang's 1996 survey reported that only 3.8% of the respondents were born in the USA while Lian and Xiong's 2008 profile update found that 12% of the survey respondents were American born Chinese. This new finding further affirms that more and more American-born Chinese or second-generation Chinese Americans have chosen library profession as their career.

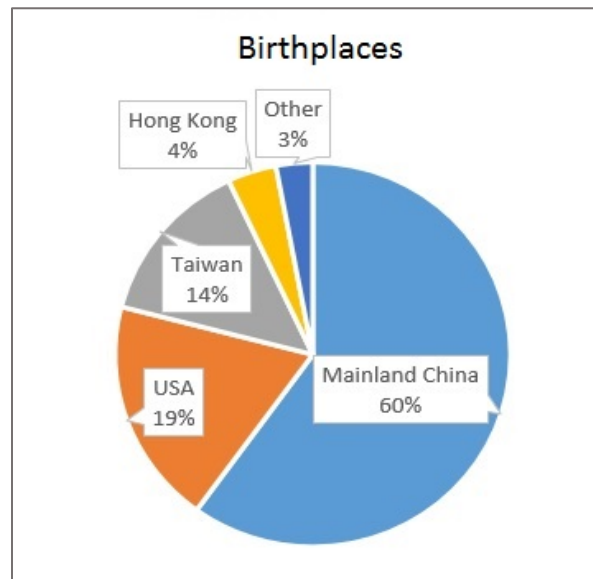


Figure 1. Birthplaces

It is common knowledge that library profession is a female dominated field. It is no surprise that 72% of the respondents are female. However, this number is 10% less than that of Yang's report in 1996 and 3% less than that of Ruan and Xiong's update in 2008. This might suggest that there are more male Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States than in other types of libraries.

Figure 2 shows the age groups of the respondents in the current study as compared to earlier reports. Though respondents over the age of 50 still represent the largest percentage (38%) in this study, this figure is significantly lower than 55% in Yang’s 1996 report and 43% in Lian and Xiong’s 2008 update. The current finding shows that 27% of the participants are in their 30s, which is an increase from that of Yang’s 1996 report (20%) and Lian and Xiong’s 2008 update (17%).

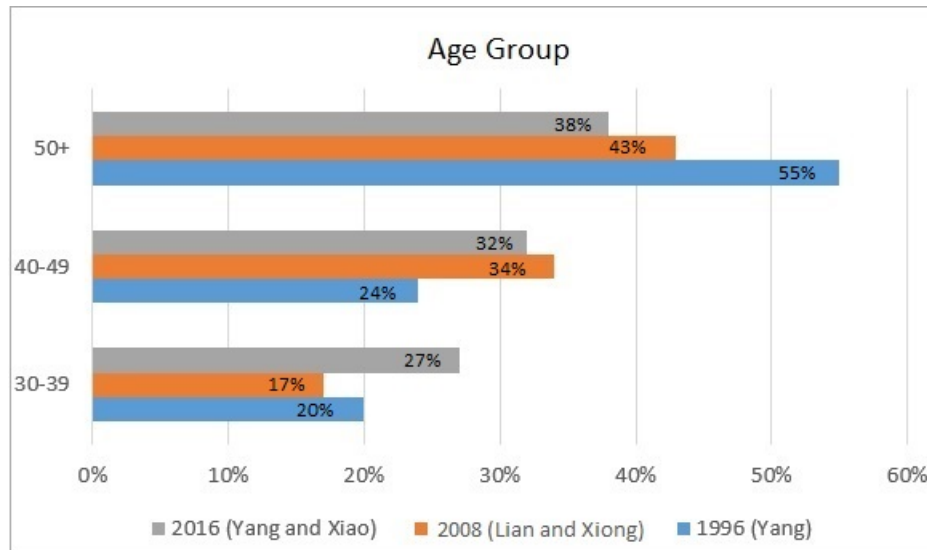


Figure 2. Age Group

Close to half (44%) of the respondents had an undergraduate major in humanities, 23% in social sciences, business, and education, and 9% in library and information science. Another 24% of the respondents majored in science and engineering, up from 18% in Yang’s 1996 report and 6% in Lian and Xiong’s 2008 update.

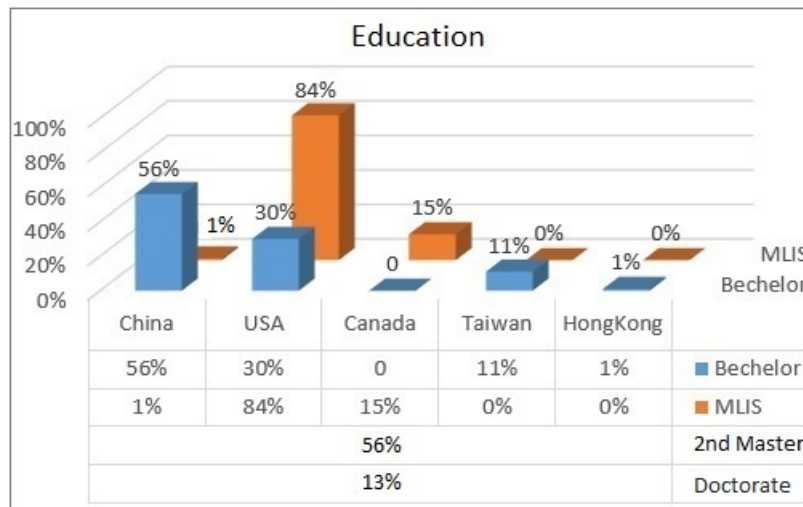


Figure 3. Education Degree Levels

Figure 3 above shows where the respondents received their bachelor’s and master’s degrees from.

The last two rows of the table show the percentage of the respondents who have a second master's degree or a doctoral degree. Over half (56%) of the respondents received their bachelor's degree in China while 30% of the respondents obtained their undergraduate education in USA.

It is not surprising to report that all but one received their Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree in North America (84% in USA, 15% in Canada, and 1% in China), because all ARL libraries require their professional librarians to have a master's degree from an ALA-accredited institution (or international equivalent).

More than half (56%) of the respondents have a second master's degree, a number that is almost 20% higher than that (37%) in Yang's 1996 report.

Table 1. Second Master's Degrees

Discipline	Percentage
Social Sciences (including Education / Business / Law)	24%
Humanities	16%
Science and Technology	16%

Table 1 is a breakdown of the respondents with a second master's degree as shown in *Figure 3*.

24% of the survey participants have a master's degree in social sciences, business and education, and 16% in humanities. Noticeably, there is a drastic increase for Chinese American librarians with a second master's degree in science and engineering (16%) as compared to only 2% in Yang's 1996 report.

Besides, the respondents with a doctoral degree is 13% as compared to 7% in Yang's 1996 report and 6% in Lian and Xiong's 2008 update. Of the 11 (13%) of the respondents, four have a doctoral degree in humanities and social sciences, two in library and information science, two in engineering, one in science and two have a Juris Doctor degree.

2. Library Work Experience and Professional Service Commitment

Figure 4 shows the years of professional library work experience of the respondents.

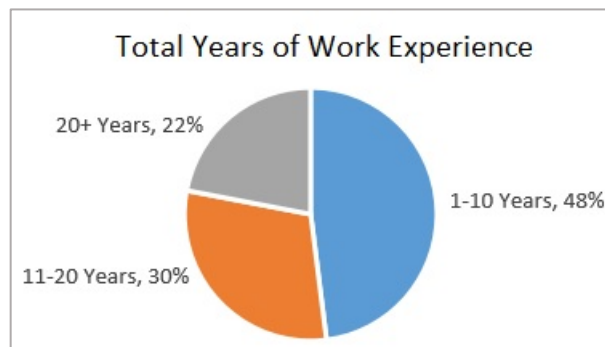


Figure 4. Library Work Experience

Lian and Xiong have previously noted that Chinese American librarians “tend to stay with the same employer” (Lian and Xiong 2008b, p. 7). This was reflected once again in this current study. More than one-third (38%) of the respondents have never changed jobs. However, there are still a quarter of the respondents who have changed their jobs more than three times. Of those who have worked in more than one library in their career, 55% of them worked in an ARL library, 43% in a non-ARL library, 20% in a public library, 18% in a special library, another 18% in a medical science library and 11% in a law library.

It is encouraging to report that one Chinese American librarian is now the dean in an ARL university library in the United States. Eight respondents are assistant or associate deans, or director of special collections, or director of East Asian library. This translates to 10% the respondents being senior library administrators. Of the nine senior library administrators, six were born in mainland China, two in the US, and one in Taiwan. However, the percentage of senior library administrators from the survey participants stays almost the same as from the studies reported (10% in the current survey, 11% in Lian and Xiong’s 2008 update, 10% in Yang’s 1996 report, and 10% in Li’s survey). This suggests that the “glass ceiling” has yet to be broken.

Table 2. Work Responsibility

Type of Job	Percentage
Subject Specialist	46%
Scholarly Communication /e-Resources /Systems /Data Service /Digital Curation	23%
Cataloging/Metadata	11%
Interlibrary Loan, Special Collection/Archive, Media, GIS	10%
Administration	10%
Access service/Acquisition	0%
Total	100%

In Yang’s 1996 study, 27% of the respondents indicated that their job responsibility was in cataloging. *Table 2* shows that only 11% of the respondents cited their work responsibility as cataloging/metadata. The majority (46%) of the respondents are subject librarians, whose responsibilities cover a wide spectrum from collection development to instruction, learning and outreach, department liaison, and reference. 23% of the respondents reported that their responsibilities lie in one of the following area: data service, digital curation, electronic resources, systems, and scholarly communication. Another 10% work in interlibrary loan/document delivery, special collection/archive, assessment, digital media, and GIS. It is interesting to note that no respondents of this study indicated that their responsibility is either in acquisition or access services.

In the earlier surveys by Yang (1996) and Lian and Xiong (2008b), they asked about participants’ promotion in their entire library career. This study focuses on the promotion in the participants’ current libraries. It is gratifying to report that half of the respondents have been promoted in their current library and that 30% of them are or were a department head of their current library.

An overwhelming majority (78%) of the respondents were not thinking to find a job somewhere else. This further affirms Lian and Xiong's assertion that Chinese American librarians "tend to remain at one place of employment for an extended time." (Lian and Xiong 2008b, p. 7)

Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States are active in service at all levels. 87% of the respondents served on their local library committees, 65% on national committees, 49% on university committees, 44% either on regional or state committees, and 23% on international committees. Of the committees served, more than two-thirds of the respondents were chairs of a committee. Only five respondents admitted that they have never served on any committees in their career.

On a different note, the survey revealed that Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States are not active in the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA). Only 11% of the respondents are current CALA members. Another 11% of the respondents are not even aware of the existence of CALA. This reaffirms the authors' conviction that only using the *CALA Membership Directory* to conduct a profile survey of Chinese American librarians will overlook a group of Chinese American librarians who are non-CALA members.

3. Career Aspiration and Fulfillment

The authors are curious to further probe Chinese American librarians' desire to be library deans. This ambition was expressed firmly by only two participants, who were both born in mainland China, and one of the two respondents holds an assistant/associate dean position currently. Nevertheless, 34% of the respondents would consider this challenge, but more than half (63%) simply replied that they are not interested in this role.

It is not a surprise to learn that the vast majority (89%) of Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States have not applied for any major leadership development programs, such as ARL Leadership and Career Development Program (LCDP), Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, and ALA Leadership Institute.

However, 20% of the respondents indicated that they will apply for leadership programs in future. Besides, there were five respondents who did apply to those leadership programs and they were all accepted. Of the five, one is a current dean, two are in associate/assistant dean roles, and another two are middle managers. This finding corroborates Neely's observation that attending leadership programs, such as the ARL's LCDP, significantly increases the chance of attaining higher level position (Neely, 2009).

Regarding the respondents' perceived career aspiration fulfillment, the majority (83%) of the respondents felt that they have somewhat (63%) or definitely (20%) fulfilled their career aspiration. These numbers are higher than reported by Lian and Xiong in 2008. On the other hand, 17% of

the respondents admitted that they have not achieved their career aspirations. In comparison, Lian and Xiong reported that only 8% of their respondents were absolutely not satisfied with their career progress and that 19% remained neutral to this question, neither agreeing nor disagreeing (Lian and Xiong, 2008b).

4. Job Satisfaction and Challenges

An overwhelming majority (95%) of the respondents were either somewhat (55%) or definitely (40%) satisfied with their current job. This number is 34% higher than that in Lian and Xiong's 2008 report (2008a). In the current survey, only three respondents were not satisfied with their jobs at all. One has been a librarian for less than 5 years, another between 6-10 years, and the other between 16-20 years.

Answering the question of whether the participants would still choose a career in library science if they had to start all over again, one-third (33%) of the respondents affirmed that they would for sure, a little over half (55%) expressed a "maybe" sentiment, and 12% honestly gave a flat "no".

A list of possible challenges that Chinese American librarians might face in their jobs was presented to the survey participants. *Table 3* shows what percentages the respondents are facing such challenges.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by the Respondents

Challenges	% of Respondents
Not fully utilize my strength	30%
Lack of opportunity for advancement	30%
Lack of time for skill development	25%
Work-life balance	25%
Keeping up with technological changes	19%
Lack of a mentor for guidance	19%
Lack of support from library administration	19%
Lack of effective networking with colleagues in the field	16%
Bypassed for leadership positions in the library	11%
Culture barrier	11%
Lack of support from my supervisor	11%
My achievements not valued in the same manner as my colleagues	9%
Racism and isolation from colleagues	6%
Language barrier to communicate effectively	6%

VI. Conclusion

At the time of this reporting, 12 ARL university libraries in the United States do not have a professional Chinese American librarian on board. Harvard University has the most Chinese

American librarians at 12, followed by University of California, Berkeley at 9. University of California, Los Angeles, University of California, Irvine, and Rice University each has 7 professional Chinese American librarians.

The findings of the study indicate that this is a younger group with more advanced educational degrees in other subjects as compared to earlier studies.

The findings also show that more Chinese American librarians serve as subject specialists than other areas of library work. New areas of library and information science, such as scholarly communication, e-resources, data service, digital curation, and systems also have Chinese American librarians' representation.

Career-wise, the majority of Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States feel that they are happy with their current jobs and have fulfilled or somewhat fulfilled their career aspirations. However, there is an obvious lack of interest in ALA leadership institute or other similar career advancement programs for academic librarians. Seeking a senior library administrator position is not a career goal for the majority of the respondents. Only a few respondents may look for another library job in the next five years.

The main career challenges perceived by the respondents include barriers preventing them from fully utilizing their strengths, scarcity of opportunity in moving up to a higher position, lack of time to further develop skills in order to keep up with technological changes, and the difficulty of maintaining a healthy work-life balance. However, ethnicity and language factors do not seem to be viewed as a major concern or challenge by the respondents.

Service-wise, the findings indicate that Chinese American librarians working in ARL university libraries in the United States are active in committee services at all levels, ranging from international to local. On the other hand, they seem to have overlooked the Chinese American Libraries Association (CALA). Only one-tenth of the respondents are current members of CALA.

Since 1979, four survey-based studies, including this one, have been conducted on Chinese American librarians, roughly one study every 10-15 years. This pattern indicates that there has been a collective consciousness about this ethnic group. More importantly, there has been continuous efforts to track and update their profile. This current study is another effort to track their status.

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

Demographic Information:

- 1. I was born in**
China USA Hong Kong Taiwan Other (please specify)
- 2. I am**
Male Female
- 3. My age range is**
Under 30 30-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 51-55 56-60 61-69 over 70

Education Information:

- 4. My undergraduate major was in**
Humanities Social Sciences Sciences Business Engineering
Education Library & Information Science Other (please specify)
- 5. I received my Bachelor's degree in**
China USA Hong Kong Taiwan Other (please specify)
- 6. I received my Master of Library and Information Science in**
USA China Hong Kong Taiwan Other (please specify)
- 7. I have a second Master's degree or professional degree in**
Humanities Social Sciences Sciences Business Engineering
Education Library & Information Science Medicine Law
N/A
- 8. I have a Doctoral degree in**
Library and Information Science Another Discipline (please specify) N/A

Library Work Information:

- 9. I have been a professional librarian in the USA for**
Less than 2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years
21-25 years 26-30 years Over 30 years
- 10. Since my initial hiring as a librarian, I have changed libraries**
0 time 1 time 2 times 3 times 4 or more times

11. I have worked in other libraries before (Check all that apply)

No ARL library Non ARL academic library Public Library Special Library Law
Library Medical Science Library

12. I have worked in this library as a professional librarian for

Less than 2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21-25
years 26-30 years Over 30 years

13. My current library position is in (check all that apply)

Access Service Administration as an Assistant/Associate Dean Administration as a Dean
Acquisition Cataloging/Metadata Collection Development Data Service
Digital Curation Repository Electronic Resources Instruction Learning and Outreach
Reference Resource Sharing Scholarly Communication Systems
Special Collection/Archive Map/GIS Services Patent Services Government
Document Other (please specify)

14. I currently work in (check only one)

The main library
Chinese/East Asian branch library
Law library
Medical Science library
Other subject specific library (please specify)

15. I used to work in a different department/unit of this library (check all that apply)

Access Service Administration as an Assistant/Associate Dean Administration as a Dean
Acquisition Cataloging/Metadata Collection Development Data Service
Digital Repository Electronic Resources Instruction Learning and Outreach
Reference Resource Sharing Scholarly Communication Systems
Special Collection/Archive Other (specify) Have not changed

16. I have been promoted in this library since I started working here.

Yes No

17. I am/was a department/unit head of this library.

Yes No

18. I will look for another library job within

1 year 2-3 years 4-5 years Not really

Professional Service Commitment Information

19. I have served on the following committees. (check all that apply).

Library committee(s)

University committee(s)
State committee(s)
Regional committee(s)
National committee(s)
International committee(s)
Not applicable

20. I am/was a chair of the following committees. (check all that apply).

Library committee(s)
University committee(s)
State committee(s)
Regional committee(s)
National committee(s)
International committee(s)
Not applicable

21. I am a member of the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA).

Yes
Yes, I also serve on CALA committee(s)
No
I was but not now
Not aware of this organization

Career Advancement Aspiration Information

22. I applied for the following leadership development programs. (Check all that apply).

ALA Leadership Institute
ARL Leadership Fellows Program
ARL Leadership & Career Development Program
Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians
State sponsored leadership program
Other (Please specify)
No

23. I was accepted to the following leadership development programs. (Check all that apply).

ALA Leadership Institute
ARL Leadership Fellows Program
ARL Leadership & Career Development Program
Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians
State sponsored leadership program
No

24. I will apply for the following leadership development programs. (Check all that apply).

ALA Leadership Institute

ARL Leadership Fellows Program
ARL Leadership & Career Development Program
Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians
State sponsored leadership program
No

25. I sought or will seek a library dean position

Yes Maybe Not interested

26. I feel that I have fulfilled my career aspiration.

Yes Somewhat No

Job Satisfaction and Challenges Information

27. I am satisfied with my current job.

Yes Somewhat No

28. The challenges that I face in my current job are (Check all that apply)

Bypassed for leadership position in the library
Culture barrier
Effective networking with colleagues in the field
Keeping up with technological change
Lack of a mentor for guidance
Lack of opportunity for advancement
Lack of support and buy-in from my staff
Lack of support for professional development
Lack of support from library administration
Lack of support from my supervisor
Lack of time for skill development
Language barrier to communicate effectively
My achievements not valued in the same manner as my colleagues
Not fully utilize my strength in the organization
Racism and isolation from my colleagues
Work life balance
Other (Please specify)
None

29. I would still choose a career in librarianship if I had to start all over again.

Yes Maybe
No (please specify why not)

30. Please offer your advice to other Chinese American librarians on how to be successful working in an ARL library.

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