

Achievements, Contributions, and Characteristics of Chinese American Librarians

Qi Chen
Argosy University, Chicago
United States
qchen@argosy.edu

ABSTRACT: Chinese American librarians are determined in following their dreams to succeed. They are strong, devoted, self-motivated, and persistent in providing library and information literacy to users of all cultures and to advance themselves professionally and personally. For more than half a century, quite a number of Chinese American Librarians have overcome hurdles like culture differences, language, and other barriers and emerged in leadership positions such as library directors and deans of library schools and held positions in professional organizations at all levels. They have played a significant role in contributing to librarianship in general and bringing a closer relationship between the librarians in the United States and China. They have earned respect from librarians of all cultures and enhanced the image of Chinese American librarians. This paper showcases a few Chinese American librarians from two generations of their characteristics, achievements, roles, and contributions in librarianship.

I. Introduction

According to Yang (1996), 96% of Chinese American librarians were born outside the United States, i.e., in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. They came to the United States to pursue college or graduate degrees. One-third of Chinese American librarians held a second master's degree, and one out of ten held a doctorate degree. About 47% of the Chinese American librarians worked in academic libraries, 31% in public libraries, and 14% in special libraries. 75% of the Chinese American librarians were in technical services and only 25% of them in public services such as reference and circulation. It was estimated that three-quarters of the Chinese American librarians held some level of managerial positions such as department head or branch manager.

In an earlier study by Li (1979, as cited in Liu, 2000), 72% of Chinese American librarians in academic libraries were working in Asian studies libraries. Their skills in another language made them assets to these special libraries. For the other 18% in academic libraries, less than 20% were in public services such as in reference and circulation while 80% of them in technical services like cataloging and acquisitions. The language barrier proved to be a big hurdle for Chinese American librarians to work on the frontline of mainstream libraries (Wei, 2009).

Chinese American librarians are determined in following their dream to success. They are strong, devoted, self-motivated, and persistent in providing information literacy to library users of all cultures and to advance themselves professionally and personally. For more than half a century, quite a number of Chinese American librarians have emerged in leadership positions in their

libraries such as library directors and deans of library schools and held positions in professional organizations at all levels. They have played a significant role in contributing to librarianship in general, brought a closer relationship between the librarians in the United States and that in China, and enhanced the image of Chinese American librarians.

II. Chinese American Librarian Pioneers

1. Dr. Tze-Chung Li

Known as the founder of the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA), Dr. Tze-Chung Li is highly respected and considered a pioneer in Chinese American librarianship and library education. Dr. Li is a librarian, a scholar, a professor and Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University, formerly known as Rosary College. Dr. Li was also a judge, a lawyer, and a government official. He is a kind, generous and respectful mentor for Chinese American librarians (Shen, Zhou, & Wei, 2004).

Dr. Li graduated from Shanghai Dongwu University in Law and became a judge in Taiwan soon after. In 1956, he came to Southern Methodist University to study law and received his MCL degree. In 1963, Dr. Li received his Ph.D. from the New School for Social Research in New York and his MLIS from Columbia University afterwards.

Dr. Li has three life principles: devotion, hard work, and enterprising spirit. Guided by these three principles, Dr. Li has overcome many hurdles in his career and demonstrated strength, wisdom, and vision. He started his teaching career in 1966 at the Graduate School of Library Science (GSLIS) at Rosary College, now Dominican University, and was appointed Dean of GSLIS in 1982. That was an unfavorable time because the economy was down and the library school enrollment was low. Dr. Li spent time looking into the curriculum and demands from libraries and librarians. Learning that some library administrators lack management and leadership skills, Dr. Li developed three training certificate programs for librarians in law, technical services, and library administrators. Seeing online resources were rapidly growing, Dr. Li opened and taught a series of courses, including online searching, applications for personal computers, online technology, telecommunication, and online reserve. Dr. Li also developed joint programs with other university libraries to offer certificates in public history, library science, and music, and exchange programs for working librarians in the United States and foreign countries. With his efforts, by the time he left the Dean's position in 1988, the student enrollment at GSLIS increased by 50% (Shen, Zhou, & Wei, 2004).

Dr. Warren M. Tsuneishi, former Director of the East Asian Library of the Library of Congress, once commented that it was a pride for Chinese American librarians that Dr. Li was the first Chinese American appointed as the Dean of a library school accredited by ALA. When Dr. Li was awarded the Distinguished Service Award in 1987 by the Chinese American Librarians Association, Thomas J. Galvin, the executive director of the ALA also praised Dr. Li's diligent teaching and his strong commitment to the library profession (Shen, Zhou, & Wei, 2004).

2. Dr. Dorothy Li

Dr. Dorothy Li, wife of Dr. Tze-Chung Li, is an amazing woman, too. Dorothy is not only a librarian, a lawyer, and a professor but also an advocator and a doer for promoting collaboration between China and the United States. Dorothy graduated from National Taiwan University School of Law and came to the United States in the early 1960s. After having raised two wonderful daughters, Dorothy went back to school and received her MALS and MBA degrees. She worked as a cataloger, a reference librarian, the director of Technical Services, an associate library director, and the library director at various public, academic, and special libraries (Qi Chen, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

During her almost 40-year library career, Dr. Dorothy Li's contributions to librarianship include the retrospective conversion of three major library automation systems. The first one was at the Oak Park Public Library System in Illinois. At that time, all materials needed to be manually entered into the system. Due to the tedious data entry and concerns of not being able to complete the project in time, some librarians suggested that all entries would include only last names and first initials. Dr. Li disagreed and pointed out that many people share the same last names and the same first initials. If data were entered that way, when people are searching for materials, the retrieval results could be very lengthy and inaccurate. She insisted that all records should be entered according to the standard. After many days and nights of long hours working, all data was entered and the project was completed in time (Qi Chen, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

When Dr. Dorothy Li was the associate director at the Joint library of the John Marshall Law School and Chicago Bar Association, she started implementing the second library automation system. Due to disagreement and conflicts in the administration, the project was suspended.

In 1987, Dr. Dorothy Li took the position of library director at Brooklyn Law School in New York where she started her third library automation project. With the experience gained at Oak Park Public Library and John Marshall Law School Library, the implementation went smoothly and was finished in time.

In 1992, Dr. Dorothy Li returned to John Marshall Law School as the library director. There, she took upon the unfinished automation project and completed it in six months.

Dr. Dorothy Li is passionate for what she does. She often tells people that one has to have passion for what one does. Once one is committed and set one's mind to it, one will succeed. Dr. Dorothy Li is a past president of CALA Midwest Chapter, an elected member of the Board of Directors of the Chinese American Professors Association, and a past president of the Asian-American law Librarians. She was also the president of Phi Tau Phi Scholastic Society - Mid America Chapter (Qi Chen, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

3. Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee

Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee has contributed tremendously to librarianship. Dr. Lee is a past president of CALA and has served as a delegate to the White House Conference on Library and Information

Services and a past president of CALA. He has served on many committees and received many awards from ALA, CALA, APALA, OCLC, and other library associations and universities. He is also a library consultant, an honorary professor, and a frequent speaker on the international arena.

Dr. Lee came to the United States to attend University of Pittsburgh in 1957. Like other Chinese students, Dr. Lee was looking for jobs in the library. According to Dr. Lee (Qi Chen, personal communication, May 30, 2010), when he was asked what he could do, he said that he could shelve books, fearing that his English was not good enough for him to work in the public services. Though only shelving books, Dr. Lee did his best and started to know the collection well. Soon, he became popular in the library because he could easily and quickly find materials faculty and students were looking for. Not long after, the library director made him a full time employee of the library.

Dr. Lee's responsibility soon evolved with materials selection and acquisition. He became the first librarian specializing in East Asian materials. Having finished his MLIS and Ph.D., Dr. Lee was promoted from the head of the special collections for African Materials at Duquesne University to Associate Director of the library at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, and then to the position of the director of the library a year later (Yang, 2011).

Dr. Lee is also a successful fundraiser. During his 21 years as the Dean of the University Libraries at Ohio University, he managed to raise \$8 million and received more than \$4 million in federal, state, and external funding. As noted by the Ohio University Provost Sharon Brehm (Sally Tseng, 2004, p.260), "Dr. Lee's achievement of the University Libraries is truly remarkable and stands as one of the most important accomplishments in the history of Ohio University." "He has served us all well by setting high standards of excellence and by establishing great expectations for the University Libraries well into the next century" (Sally Tseng, 2004, p.260).

Dr. Lee often says that there is no small job in the world. It does not matter what one does as long as one puts one's heart into it and does it well. From shelving books to designing the library in Thailand, from initiating the OhioLINK to raising millions of dollars, Dr. Lee devoted 100% of his time and energy, paying attention to every little detail to bring all tasks to a completion with high standards.

III. Expanding the Image: Emergence of a Younger Generation of Chinese American Librarians

Inspired by Dr. Lee, Dr. Li, Dr. Dorothy Li and many other Chinese American Librarian pioneers, a younger generation of Chinese American Librarians is rising into leadership positions.

1. Dr. Ling Hwey Jeng

Dr. Ling Hwey Jeng, director of the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University, is the first female Chinese American to serve as the school director there. Before taking the position, Dr. Jeng had taught at five different institutions first as an assistant professor and then as an associate professor. Dr. Jeng always believes that she has the ability to

lead and that she can make a difference and wants to make changes. When she was applying for the director of Library and Information Studies at Texas Women's University, they were looking for a tenured full professor. At that time, Dr. Jeng was only an associate professor. She convinced the University administration with her confidence and credentials that she was the person who could lead. The University not only accepted her but also offered her a tenured full professor position (Harvey, 2005, p. 3).

Dr. Jeng understands that it is not easy for a minority woman to be a leader. She knows that whatever she does, fails or succeeds, she will be seen as the entire minority group. Dr. Jeng does not let this bother her but is focused on doing a good job and setting high standards. In an interview with Aisha Harvey, when asked what role model she would like to set for younger generations, Dr. Jeng responded, "a role model is not an image or a person; it is a set of skills, expertise and attitudes." Rather than emulating a role model, "one must learn and pay attention to the characteristics, strength and capabilities of that particular person" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). That is what she did and how she learned and succeeded in her career. Dr. Jeng is also very active in ALA and other professional organizations. She is a president-elect candidate for Teacher-Librarian Association for 2012.

2. Dr. Qi Chen

Dr. Qi Chen started her library career 20 years ago upon finishing her Master's degree in Education. With her newfound degree in hand, she hoped to obtain the position of the assistant librarian at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology. After the interview, the library director called and told her that she was overqualified for the position because they were not looking for someone with a Master's degree. Dr. Chen was not disappointed. Instead, she told the director that she could volunteer at the library until they found a desired person. Hearing this, the director was surprised but excited and she immediately told her supervisor. Soon the news spread that a Chinese woman was volunteering at the library. Dr. Chen worked hard and showed her ability and reliability. A week later, the library director offered her the position of the assistant librarian.

Dr. Chen worked as an assistant librarian, reference librarian, and information specialist before becoming the library director in 1998. At that time, she was the only Asian female to hold managerial position at the school. She was strong, passionate, assertive and persistent about her job. During the past 14 years, she has built the library's first automation system, designed the school's first website, initiated an internal resources sharing program and received two grants from the State Library.

Dr. Chen never forgets her cultural root. At every Chinese holiday, she distributed related stories to students and faculty, brought traditional Chinese food to school, and decorated the libraries to celebrate these holidays. Her efforts were appreciated by the faculty, students, and school administration. Soon, they began to come to the library to share with her Chinese culture, Chinese food, and Chinese art crafts, etc. Many international students liked to come to her office to chat about their overseas' experiences.

Dr. Chen is now the area director of the Library of Argosy University. She is a past president of CALA Midwest Chapter, and chair of CALA's International Relations Committee. She has presented at several CALA's 21st Century seminars and TGAG (Think Globally Act Globally) programs in China and Taiwan.

IV. Innovation in International Librarianship and Information Exchange

Over his 35 years as a library science educator, Dr. Tze-Chung Li introduced library science to many international students and brought them to the United States. When he was the Dean of the GSLIS at Rosary College (i.e., Dominican University), he developed training programs for both American and international librarians and established an exchange program with the School of Library Science of Taiwan University for professors and students. His diversified curriculum at GSLIS drew many international students from Thailand, China, Taiwan, Japan, Turkey, and other countries. He taught thousands of students. When Dr. Li retired from Dominican University in 1999, the Dominican University awarded him with the title of Emeritus Professor and Dean Emeritus of the School of Library and Information Science in recognition of his contributions. In 2001, Dominican university also appointed Dr. Li as Chief of the Chinese Affairs Unit of the Business School (Shen, Zhou, & Wei, 2004).

Dr. Dorothy Li's contributions are not limited to librarianship. The John Marshall Law School where she was a library director is a pioneer in intellectual property (IP) education and offers broad selections of IP courses.

Since 1993, Dr. Dorothy Li started coordinating the Asian Alliance in Intellectual Property between the John Marshall Law School and the State Intellectual Property Office of China. At that time, there were controversies whether it was worthwhile to develop programs with "Communist China". Dr. Li disagreed. She pointed out that China is one of the largest and fastest growing countries in the world. China has gradually become one of the new and emerging leaders in leveling the world economy. Though China is still behind in intellectual property laws, helping China catch up in this area will not only benefit China and US but also the globalized economy as well. Dr. Li's idea convinced the decision-makers. Since then, Dr. Li has played many key roles in organizing programs, delivering lectures, and leading teams to several cities in China. So far, the Asian Alliance of John Marshall Law School has trained almost 800 Chinese law professionals. In 2004, the Asian Alliance program was also extended to Taiwan. In 2007, in appreciation of her continuing efforts in the project, the Chinese Government presented Dr. Li with the "Friendship Award," and in 2009, John Marshall Law School also awarded Dr. Li with an honorary Law Degree. Appointed by Mayor Daley of Chicago, Dr. Dorothy Li is now a member of the China Committee of the Chicago Sister Cities International Program (Qi Chen, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

Dr. Tze-Chung Li and Dr. Dorothy Li are big financial supporters to many schools and organizations. They have established The Li Educational Foundation in 1997, providing scholarships for Asian female students for the Master's degree in library information science, for special lectures in Chinese business and research in Chinese Law. They have donated to the Chinese school in Chicago and sponsored a Hope School in Hunan Province, China. Dr. Tze-Chung Li and Dr. Dorothy Li have given back all their lecture honoraria to institutions like

Eastern China Normal University, Beijing University, and Tainan Science and Technology University (Shen, Zhou, & Wei, 2004).

Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee's visionary talents were fully utilized when he was working on building the Library of Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand in 1968. Rather than building a traditional library, Dr. Lee proposed that the new library should be a library and information center where the resources are processed and converted to information stored in databases so that people can retrieve them both locally and remotely. Dr. Lee's ground-breaking concept of organizing and processing library materials at that time was new not only in Asia but also in the world. The easy and friendly retrieval system soon drew hundreds of researchers, scholars and students from across East Asia to the Library and Information Center (Yang, 2011).

Dr. Lee first visited China in 1982 when he was invited as a lecturer for a training program by Chinese Institute of Scientific Information and Canadian International Development Center. Since then, Dr. Lee visited China every year and initiated various programs to train Chinese librarians and implement joint projects between American and Chinese libraries. He spoke at research institutes, universities, and academic and public libraries. At the same time, Dr. Lee also introduced China to American librarians and libraries. In 1991, he organized an exchange program between library directors in China and Ohio institutions. Over the years, Dr. Lee has organized up to 10 international conferences in librarianship (Yang, 2011).

Being a key player in OhioLINK and a senior visiting consultant of OCLC, Dr. Lee travelled to several countries and regions in Asia, talking about digital libraries, library networks and resources sharing. With his efforts, OCLC has signed contracts with a number of university libraries in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Beijing University Libraries have developed their own library network (CALIS), following the model of OhioLINK. A revolution of digital library and resource sharing was, therefore, launched in China (Yang, 2011).

Dr. Shuyong Jiang is one of the younger generations of Chinese American librarians who have made a big contribution in promoting librarianship between China and US. Dr. Jiang is Chinese Studies Librarian of the Asian Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is also the director of the Think Globally Act Globally (TAGA) project, funded with a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, managing \$750,000 fund for librarian exchange programs between the United States and China. In order to ensure all projects were arranged properly, Dr. Jiang had many sleepless nights, talking with librarians and officials of the Library Society of China, coordinating traveling schedules, discussing training agendas, and planning resources sharing projects (Qi Chen, personal communication, June 10, 2011). After three years' arduous and continuous efforts, the program was successfully completed with 45 training programs in 15 cities and provinces. Forty-three Chinese library directors visited the United States and more than 50 Chinese American librarians and American librarians presented in the training program in China. It is estimated that about 2,565 Chinese librarians benefitted from this project (Yang, 2011).

As more library exchange programs have taken place and more Chinese Americans joined professional organizations and obtained leadership positions, more librarians of other ethnic groups have developed better understanding of China and are able to appreciate more of the

Chinese culture. Quite a few CALA members are American librarians. They visit China and speak to Chinese communities. They are happy and feel proud to be able to say a few Chinese words, enjoy Chinese art crafts and wear Chinese-styled clothes.

V. Nurturing a new generation of Chinese American Librarians

As Chinese American librarians, we find strength in our organizations, value professional recognitions and satisfied in seeing the continuity of Chinese American librarianship. Though retired, Dr. Tze-Chung Li and Dr. Dorothy Li continue to contribute their time, energy, knowledge, and expertise in caring for younger generations of Chinese American librarians. Every year whenever they can, they participate and present at the annual program of CALA Midwest Chapter. They often host gatherings at their residency, inviting over Chinese American librarians, library school students, and new librarians to the area.

Having reached his 80s, Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee has not stopped, either. For the past three years, he has been the evaluator of the TGAG project and traveled with the presenters to more than 15 provinces in China. He has carefully observed each presentation, written numerous detailed evaluation reports, and provided recommendations. Dr. Lee attends ALA and CALA annual programs whenever he can. Numerous Chinese American librarians have contacted him for advice when they encounter challenges at work and he is always available to them.

Following in their footsteps, the new generation of CALA leaders continue nurturing programs for young and new Chinese American librarians. Every year, CALA sponsors young members to attend the ALA Emerging Leaders Program. This program has trained a new generation of Chinese American librarian leaders. They are rising in their respective areas, acknowledged for their abilities and skills, and actively involved in CALA programs and committees. CALA is also the home for Chinese library students. Many student members have participated in presenting papers and projects at annual programs. Most of them are able to secure jobs after graduating from library schools.

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Note:

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Author:

Qi Chen, Director of Library Services, Argosy University, Chicago Campus Library, 225 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601, USA. Email: qchen@argosy.edu

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