

Chinese Canadian Librarians: Leadership Roles and Career Barriers

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ABSTRACT

Based on the data from the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada Network (ViMLoC) 2021 Survey, this research examined the leadership roles held by Chinese Canadian librarians and their perceptions of inclusivity of work climate, job satisfaction, and race as a career barrier. Their encounters with racial microaggressions and mentorship experience were also explored. Of the 38 respondents, 79% (n=30) were in non-management positions. 82% (n=31) felt very satisfied or satisfied with their jobs; however, their work climate was not found to be inclusive to all respondents. 87% (n=33) indicated that race was a barrier to their career. Fisher's exact tests were run to compare the management group and non-management group. The results showed that those in management positions were less satisfied with their jobs and less likely to feel free to express their views openly. They experienced various forms of racial microaggressions. Nearly half of the respondents sought mentoring support and two-thirds of them found mentorship extremely helpful or very helpful. To increase representation in librarianship, library school students and first-generation immigrants of Chinese descent need to be inspired to enter librarianship and reach higher professional goals. Chinese librarians would benefit from leadership programs tailored to minority librarians in Canada.

Keywords: Chinese Librarian, Career Barrier, Diversity, Leadership, Microaggression

INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the librarians who identify as Chinese in Canada (referred to as "Chinese Canadian librarians"). They fall within the category of "visible minority librarians," which is an accepted term used for "librarians of colour" or "racial minority librarians" in this country. Visible minorities refer to "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Government of Canada, 2021). As racial minority librarians are underrepresented in the profession, various efforts have been made to increase diversity in Canadian librarianship, including library school enrolment diversification, diversity-related training opportunities, mentorship programs, targeted hiring of minority librarians, and financial support. Despite some progress, racial minority librarians still account for a small proportion of the librarian population. Among the very limited studies that involve Canadian racial minority librarians, Chinese has been consistently reported as the largest ethnic group (CAPAL, 2016, 2019; Kandiuk, 2014; Kumaran & Cai, 2015). Racism and microaggressions against Chinese Canadians have been documented (Lou et al., 2022; Stanley, 2011). Anecdotally, Chinese Canadian librarians have experienced

barriers in employment and career advancement (Cho, 2014; Li, 2014). However, there is a lack of in-depth research focused on this group.

This research analyzed the leadership roles held by Chinese Canadian librarians and their perceptions of inclusivity of work climate, job satisfaction, and race as a career barrier. Their experiences of racial microaggressions and seeking mentorship support were also investigated. The findings will help Chinese Canadian librarians to understand their positions in the library leadership landscape and racial challenges faced in their career. The results will also help libraries and professional associations identify the needs of this group of librarians and develop initiatives to support them to reach higher professional goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The author conducted a literature review to ascertain the existence of any research on the profile, workplace experiences, leadership, and career barriers of Chinese Canadian librarians. Only two book chapters were found. The literature review was expanded to include materials on Canadian racial minority librarians. A few studies on Chinese American librarians were also worth inclusion as they provided valuable insights.

Representation in Canadian Librarianship

Kumaran and Cai (2015) conducted the first national survey in 2013 on behalf of the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada Network (ViMLoC), which identified 120 visible minority librarians. The figure increased by 35% to 162 in the ViMLoC 2021 Survey (Li et al., 2022). Concerning academic librarians only, visible minorities went up from 9% in 2016 to 10% in 2018 according to the census data from Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL, 2016, 2019). Although the aforementioned surveys were different in survey scope and data collection period, they consistently reported that Chinese was the largest ethnic group among visible minorities. For instance, Chinese librarians accounted for 36% (n=43) and 24% (n=38) in the ViMLoC 2013 Survey and ViMLoC 2021 Survey, respectively. In Kandiuk's (2014) survey of Canadian academic librarians, 40% (n=21) identified as Chinese. In the 2016 Canadian Census, 410 (39%) out of the 1,055 visible minority librarians were Chinese (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Diversity in Leadership

There has been a lack of racial minorities in leadership roles in the library world. In the 8R's Canadian Library Human Resource Individual Survey, visible minorities comprised 7% of the professional librarian labour force, and 4% of the librarians in senior administrator roles (Ingles et al., 2005). Their gap with Caucasian peers in leadership persisted. In Kandiuk (2014), only 10.5% of the minority librarians worked in administration, compared to 20.9% of respondents who did not identify as Aboriginal or visible minority. This racial gap was also noted in the "Diversity Census and Inclusion Survey Insight Report" for CARL libraries, where 83.3% of senior leader positions were filled by White persons, compared to 14.4% by racialized persons (CCDI Consulting, 2022).

A few studies on Chinese librarians in the United States provide great insights into their leadership status. In a survey of 157 Chinese American librarians, Yang (1996) analyzed their perspectives of job satisfaction, career promotion, and racial barriers to career advancement. The results showed that approximately 75% of the respondents were in managerial positions, with 48.4% in middle management positions, 17.8% in senior management positions, and the remaining 10.2% as deans or directors. Regarding career advancement, 83% of the respondents received promotion in their career, while 11.5% had to seek new jobs due to lack of career advancement opportunities. Building on the questionnaire used in Yang's (1996) study, Ruan and Xiong (2008) surveyed 162 Chinese American librarians about their career choice and career advancement. Additional questions were also included to identify barriers these librarians faced and their coping strategies. The results suggested that 63% of the respondents were promoted in their careers, significantly lower than 83% in Yang (1996). The percentage of top-level positions they held had almost no improvement over a decade, at 11% in Ruan and Xiong (2008) and 10.2% in Yang (1996). These findings were echoed in Liu (2000), which reported that most with management responsibilities remained at the middle administrative level, and very few reached top administrative library positions. Similarly, Tan (2004) lamented the scarcity of leadership positions held by Chinese American librarians. Although many librarians excelled in job performance, few held commanding positions in major institutions.

Workplace Experiences

The inclusivity and diversity of work climate play a role in one's perception of job satisfaction and desire for career advancement. Visible minority academic librarians in Kandiuk's (2014) survey reported on their perceptions of the climate in the department and/or in the library outside the department within their institutions. A significant number of respondents indicated that they were unable to speak their mind and express their views openly. They were not or only somewhat treated with respect and accepted as an equal member, and did not feel or only somewhat felt that their knowledge and work contributions were valued by colleagues. Based on the 8R's 2013 Institutional Survey findings, 41% of the libraries surveyed indicated that racial discrimination was a barrier to minorities' representation in Canadian librarianship to a moderate/great extent (DeLong et al., 2015).

Racial microaggressions are subtle, hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults directed toward people of colour, whether intentional or unintentional. As racism and discrimination become more subtle and invisible, the issue of racial microaggressions in librarianship has been increasingly discussed (Alabi, 2015, 2018; Dalton et al., 2018; Prieto-Gutiérrez & Colmenero-Ruiz, 2023; Swanson et al., 2018). A majority of studies are in the American context while only two studies involve librarians working in Canadian academic libraries. Alwan et al. (2018) surveyed American and Canadian academic librarians about their experiences of status-based microaggressions while interacting with teaching faculty in the context of information literacy instruction. The results revealed that racial minorities tended to experience assumptions of inferiority at a higher rate than non-minorities. Dee Winn (2022), a Black female librarian, experienced racial and gendered discrimination in Canadian academic libraries. Microaggressions against her increased after she earned a management position.

Career Barriers

Racial minority librarians may face different challenges to succeed in their career. Kumaran's (2012) book *Leadership in Libraries: A Focus on Ethnic-Minority Librarians* focused on first generation or immigrant minority librarians. In her perspective, culture, profession, and gender could define leadership. This group of librarians need to be aware of different leadership styles and improve their skills in language, communication, critical thinking, human relations, and time management, among others. In another study, Kumaran (2015) stressed the importance of including visible minority librarians in the succession planning process. She identified the challenges faced by visible minority librarians in pursuing leadership positions, including lack of mentorship support, experiences of tokenism and racism, and lack of training. In managers' perspectives, minority librarians faced challenges in communication, customer service, knowledge regarding the Canadian work environment, and accepting feedback properly (Kumaran & Cai, 2015).

Only two book chapters addressed the barriers faced by Chinese Canadian librarians entering the library profession. Allan Cho (2014), a Canadian-born Chinese librarian, faced challenges of misperceptions and biases. Lillian Li (2014), born in China, described her personal journey into librarianship in China and then in Canada. She faced many challenges as a new immigrant: financial strain, cultural shock, redoing her library degree, job hunting, and finally settling into the new culture. Similarly, challenges faced by Chinese American librarians included cultural differences, demonstrations of leadership, communication, race, information technology skills, differing value systems, and others (e.g. politics, children) (Liu, 2000; Ruan & Xiong, 2008; Yang, 1996).

Mentoring Support

To overcome career barriers as racial minority librarians, mentoring support has been commonly cited as an important solution. For example, in the survey of visible minority librarians of Canada in 2013, respondents indicated that they would need a mentorship program to seek advice from other librarians with similar backgrounds (Kumaran & Cai, 2015). In the ViMLoC 2021 Survey, nearly 60% of the visible minority librarians received support from mentors, 54% of whom engaged in formal mentorship, and nearly half had a minority mentor (Li et al., 2022). In Kandiuk's (2014) study, 32% of visible minority librarians in academic libraries received mentoring support, with 22% participating in a formal mentorship program and 22% having a minority mentor. These studies reported that mentorship could help minorities gain encouragement, build a professional network, and address professional concerns due to minority identities.

For Chinese librarians in Canada, Cho (2014) and Li (2014) highlighted the benefits of mentorship. This holds true among Chinese librarians in the United States. Good mentoring could help mentees advance in their careers at a faster pace (Ruan & Xiong, 2008). Mentorship support through the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) mentorship program was perceived to be helpful. Minority mentors could better assist mentees because the lack of linguistic and cultural barriers between them allowed for clearer communication (Ruan & Liu, 2017). Other strategies that were considered important for Chinese librarians to be successful in their jobs and as leaders were also discussed. For instance, Liu (2000) suggested that they must "examine his/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” (p. 113).

METHOD

This research used the data from the ViMLoC 2021 Survey (Li et al., 2021), which was conducted to investigate the changes in the library landscape regarding Canadian visible minority librarians since the initial survey in 2013 (Kumaran & Cai, 2015). After a research ethics review was approved in the respective researchers’ institutions, a questionnaire was created in English using Qualtrics XM and translated to French. The surveys were open between January and March 2021. 162 visible minority librarians completed the survey. Of the 159 respondents who answered the question about ethnic identity, 38 librarians identified as Chinese. For the purpose of this research, four librarians with a mixed White and Chinese identity were not included. Survey questions covered their demographics, education, and employment conditions. The demographics section asked questions about ethnicity, age, gender identity, disability status, and generation. The employment section consisted of one question about their current management position, three questions about the inclusivity of their work climate, ten questions about their experiences of racial microaggressions, one question about their perception of race as a career barrier, one question about job satisfaction, and three questions about mentoring support. Responses to these questions formed the basis of the present research.

This study examined first the management positions held by the Chinese Canadian librarians and how their positions were distributed by their demographic characteristics. Given the small sample, the author was concerned that these respondents might be identifiable based on their demographics. Hence, the respondents in supervisor, middle management, and senior administrator roles were combined into the “management” group. Those in non-management positions formed the “non-management” group. These two groups were then compared regarding their perceptions of job satisfaction, inclusivity of work climate, and race as a career barrier. Because 20% or more of the cells in the contingency tables had expected counts of less than five, Fisher’s exact tests were run rather than chi-square tests (Kim, 2017). When the test involved more than two-row by two-column contingency tables, the Freeman-Halton Extension of the Fisher’s exact test was employed (Ibraheem & Devine, 2013). Moreover, this study examined Chinese Canadian librarians’ experiences of microaggressions. There were 10 items in the racial microaggressions scale, which were mostly adapted from Alabi (2015). Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of experience using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. The author calculated a microaggression composite score for each respondent, with a higher score indicating a higher frequency of encounter with stated microaggressions. STATA 13 was used for all data analyses.

RESULTS

Management Positions

As shown in Figure 1, of the 38 Chinese Canadian librarians, 79% (n=30) were in non-management positions, 13%

(n=5) were supervisors, and 5% (n=2) were in middle management positions (e.g. branch head, department head). Only one respondent was a senior administrator (e.g. head/chief librarian or director, deputy/assistant head/chief librarian or director).

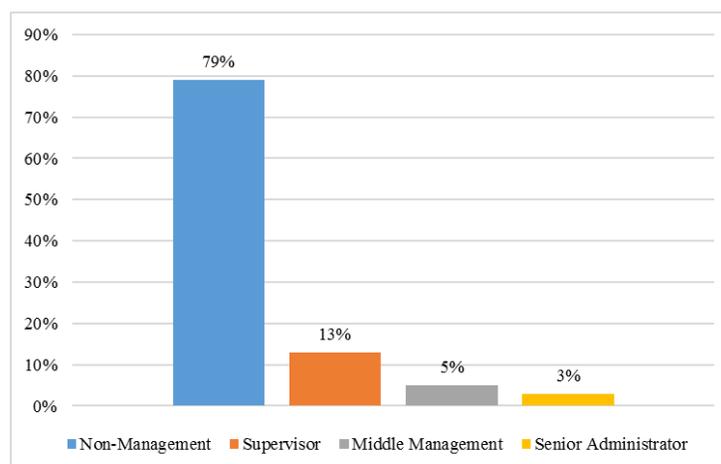


Figure 1. Management Positions Held by Chinese Canadian Librarians (N=38)

Chinese Canadian librarians in the non-management group and management group were broken down based on their personal characteristics (age, gender, disability status, generation) and employment characteristics (years of experience as a librarian, library type, in a full-time position or not, in a permanent position or not) (Table 1). An overwhelming majority of those aged 35 and less did not take on any leadership roles. Six librarians aged 36-55 and one librarian over age of 55 held management positions. Eight females but none of the males were in management positions. One librarian with a disability and seven librarians without a disability were in management positions. Regarding generation status, first generation minorities refer to those who were born elsewhere and moved to Canada at some point during their lives. By comparison, second generation minorities were born in Canada to one or more immigrant parents (Statistics Canada, 2021). In this survey, third and later generation was offered as a response option, but nobody selected it. A higher percentage of first-generation librarians took on managerial roles compared to second generation librarians. Librarians with more than 10 years of experience were more likely to be in managerial roles. More academic librarians were in management positions compared to public librarians. A majority of the respondents were working full time or in permanent positions; however, only a small fraction held managerial positions. Despite these differences, Fisher's exact tests indicated that differing demographic characteristics did not significantly correlate to a position in management.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics (N=38)

| Indicator | Category | Non-Management | | Management | |
|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----|------------|----|
| | | n | % | n | % |
| Age | 35 and less | 14 | 93% | 1 | 7% |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----|------|---|------|
| | 36-55 | 16 | 73% | 6 | 27% |
| | 55+ | 0 | 0% | 1 | 100% |
| Gender Identity | Female | 27 | 77% | 8 | 23% |
| | Male | 2 | 100% | 0 | 0% |
| | Other or Prefer not to answer | 0 | 0% | 1 | 100% |
| Disability | Yes | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% |
| | No | 27 | 79% | 7 | 21% |
| Generation | First | 16 | 70% | 7 | 30% |
| | Second | 14 | 93% | 1 | 7% |
| Librarian Experience | 0-5 | 11 | 92% | 1 | 8% |
| | 6-10 | 10 | 91% | 1 | 9% |
| | 11-15 | 2 | 40% | 3 | 60% |
| | 16-20 | 4 | 67% | 2 | 33% |
| | 21-25 | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% |
| Library Type | Academic | 17 | 74% | 6 | 26% |
| | Public | 11 | 92% | 1 | 8% |
| | Special | 0 | 0% | 1 | 100% |
| | Other | 2 | 100% | 0 | 0% |
| Full Time Position | Yes | 29 | 78% | 8 | 22% |
| | No | 1 | 100% | 0 | 0% |
| Permanent Position | Yes | 26 | 76% | 8 | 24% |
| | No | 4 | 100% | 0 | 0% |

Job Satisfaction

Respondents were asked “Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job?” The author collapsed the five response categories into three: “Very satisfied” and “Satisfied” formed one single category; “Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied” formed another, and “Dissatisfied” and “Very dissatisfied” were combined to make a third group.

A majority of respondents (82%, n=31) felt very satisfied or satisfied, 16% (n=6) felt neutral, and 3% (n=1) felt dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Respondents in management and non-management positions differed significantly in their perceptions of job satisfaction ($p = .025$). The non-management group (90%, n=27) was more likely to feel very satisfied or satisfied compared to the management group (50%, n=4), whereas the management group (50%, n=4) were more

likely to be neutral or feel dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their job compared to the non-management group (10%, n=3) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Perceptions of Job Satisfaction by Management Position (N=38)

Inclusivity of Work Climate

Respondents described their experience with respect to three statements concerning the inclusivity of their work climate. These questions were adapted from Kandiuk (2014). The author collapsed the five responses into three groups: “Strongly agree” and “Agree” formed one single group, “Neither agree or disagree” became another, and “Strongly disagree” and “Disagree” were pooled to make a third group. For each question, the responses from librarians in management positions and non-management positions were separated and compared using Fisher’s exact test (Table 2). Regarding the first two statements, in each case, 13% (n=5) of the respondents had a neutral attitude or disagreed with the statement. The non-management group was more likely to agree with the statement than the management group; however, the difference was not significant in Fisher’s exact tests. For the third statement, “I feel free to speak my mind and express my views openly amongst colleagues in my department,” 37% (n=14) of respondents were opposed or neutral. This finding mirrors that of Kandiuk (2014), where 38% of respondents somewhat felt or did not feel free to express views openly among colleagues, and that of Damasco and Hodges (2012), where 31.7% felt they could not freely voice their opinions at their library. A higher percentage of librarians in non-management positions strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, whereas those in management positions were more opposed or neutral. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($p = .010$).

Table 2. Perceptions of Inclusive Work Climate (N=38)

| Question | Percent | Responses | P Value |
|---|---------|-----------|---------|
| 1. I am treated with respect and accepted as an equal member by colleagues in my department. | | | |
| <i>All Respondents</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 87% | 33 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 8% | 3 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 5% | 2 | |
| <i>Respondents in non-management positions</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 94% | 28 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 3% | 1 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 3% | 1 | .075 |
| <i>Respondents in management positions</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 62% | 5 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 25% | 2 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 13% | 1 | |
| 2. My knowledge and work contributions are valued by colleagues in my department. | | | |
| <i>All Respondents</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 87% | 33 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 13% | 5 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 0% | 0 | |
| <i>Respondents in non-management positions</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 93% | 28 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 7% | 2 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 0% | 0 | .053 |

| | | | |
|---|-----|----|------|
| <i>Respondents in management positions</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 62% | 5 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 38% | 3 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 0% | 0 | |
| 3. I feel free to speak my mind and express my views openly amongst colleagues in my department. | | | |
| <i>All Respondents</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 63% | 24 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 24% | 9 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 13% | 5 | |
| <i>Respondents in non-management positions</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 74% | 22 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 13% | 4 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 13% | 4 | |
| | | | .010 |
| <i>Respondents in management positions</i> | | | |
| Strongly agree or agree | 25% | 2 | |
| Neither agree or disagree | 62% | 5 | |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 13% | 1 | |

Race as a Career Barrier

Respondents shared their perceptions regarding to what extent race was a barrier to their library career aspirations. There were six response options from “not at all” to “to a very great extent.” Overall, 13% (n=5) selected “not at all”. In other words, 87% (n=33) of the respondents thought that race was a career barrier to different degrees. Four respondents (21%) indicated “to a great extent” and no one indicated “to a very great extent.” Figure 3 illustrated a comparison between the management and non-management group. 84% (n=25) of the librarians in non-management positions versus 50% (n=4) of those in management positions indicated “to a small extent,” “to some extent,” or “to a moderate extent.” Meanwhile, race was perceived as a career barrier to a great extent among 38% (n=3) of the librarians in management positions compared to just 3% (n=1) of those in non-management positions. Nevertheless, the result of Fisher’s exact test suggested that the differences between the two groups were not statistically significant ($p = .118$).

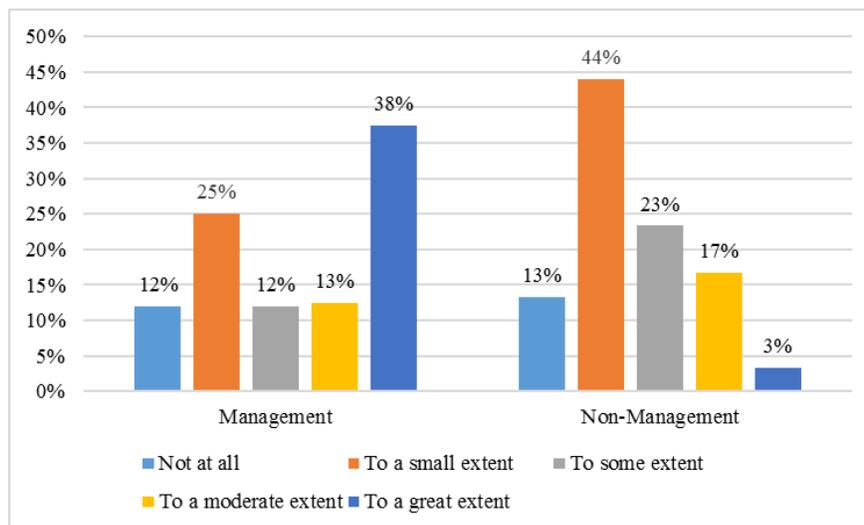


Figure 3. Perceptions of Race as a Career Barrier by Management Position (N=38)

Racial Microaggressions

Respondents rated the frequency with which they encountered 10 racial microaggressions on a 5-point scale, with a possible range of 10-50. The microaggression composite scores for Chinese Canadian librarians ranged between 10 and 37 with a median score of 19. The average composite score was 21. Table 3 provided the numbers of librarians who experienced various types of microaggression with different frequencies. Of the 34 respondents, five (15%) never or rarely encountered any microaggressions, suggesting that 85% experienced at least one stated microaggression. Two respondents experienced all of the 10 indicated microaggressions either sometimes, often, or always. Meanwhile, 65% (n=22) did not always or often encounter any microaggression, meaning that they might experience them with a lower frequency (sometimes or rarely). By extension, 35% (n=12) always or often encountered at least one stated microaggression. One respondent even indicated that they always or often experienced six types of microaggressions.

Table 3. Occurrence of Racial Microaggressions (N=34)

| Total Numbers of Microaggression | Number of Respondents who Experienced Microaggressions | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------|
| | Never or Rarely | Sometimes | Often or Always |
| 0 | 2 | 5 | 22 |
| 1 | 1 | 10 | 3 |
| 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 3 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| 4 | 2 | 6 | 1 |

| | | | |
|----|----|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| 7 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 |

To examine how frequently these librarians experienced each type of microaggression, the author calculated and compared their response mean scores ranging from 1.49 to 2.58 (Table 4), with a higher score indicating encounter with a microaggression more often. The most frequently reported microaggression was “I was told that people of all racial groups face the same barriers in employment or promotion.” The least frequently reported microaggression was “I was told that I was hired because of my race.”

Table 4. Comparing Mean Scores for Experiences of Each Racial Microaggression

| Microaggression | Mean | Responses |
|--|------|-----------|
| I was told that people of all racial groups face the same barriers in employment or promotion. | 2.58 | 36 |
| A colleague assumed that I would have a lower English proficiency because of my race. | 2.35 | 37 |
| I was told that I was overly sensitive about issues of race. | 2.34 | 35 |
| I was told that all people in my racial group are all the same. | 2.31 | 35 |
| I was told that people should not think about race anymore. | 2.17 | 36 |
| My opinion was ignored in a group discussion because of my race. | 2.11 | 37 |
| I was told that people of colour do not experience racism anymore. | 2.08 | 36 |
| A colleague showed surprise at my professional success because of my race. | 1.89 | 37 |
| A colleague claimed that he/she felt threatened because of my race. | 1.50 | 36 |
| I was told that I was hired because of my race. | 1.49 | 37 |

The respondents also submitted additional comments through the open-ended text box in the survey about their experiences that might not align with the stated microaggressions. They noted that they felt they were being stereotyped because of race. They experienced unequal treatment when faced with the same situation as a White colleague. A couple of respondents felt excluded as they were generically lumped into a “you people” category or perceived as foreigners. They also experienced being mistaken for another colleague of the same race or other Asians on more

than one occasion. They were perceived to represent all people of colour, and were expected to know everything about China/the Chinese when a relevant topic came up in a conversation or project. Intersectionality of gender and race also influenced how a person was treated. Two respondents indicated that their microaggression experiences involved sexual harassments. They were also expected to be subservient in a patriarchal work environment. When seeking leadership opportunities, two respondents noted double standards when they applied for a management position, allowing for easier justification for choosing non-minority candidates. One respondent was frustrated about having always been discouraged from going into management due to race.

Mentorship Experience

Respondents were asked if they had ever sought support from a mentor during their career. Of the 38 respondents, nearly a half (47%, $n=18$) responded with “Yes.” 10 respondents participated in formal mentorship programs offered within their work organization, or by library associations such as the British Columbia Library Association, Ontario Library Association, and ViMLoC. A comparison between the two groups by management position showed that 63% ($n=5$) of the librarians in management positions received mentorship support compared to 43% ($n=13$) of those in non-management positions (Figure 4). However, the difference between the two groups was not significant in Fisher’s exact test ($P = .438$). Of the 18 respondents who sought mentoring support, 12 (67%) indicated it was “extremely helpful” or “very helpful,” four (22%) indicated “moderately helpful,” one “slightly helpful,” and one “not at all helpful.” 11 respondents were assisted by a minority mentor; eight of them found mentorship extremely helpful or very helpful, two “moderately helpful,” and one “slightly helpful.” One respondent noted that it was hard to approach minority senior leaders:

There were very few people of colour in senior administrative roles, and those who were tended to be quite shy about occupying the limelight and were unlikely to call attention to their racial or cultural identity. As a result, I never felt that I could approach those individuals for advice. The visible minority mentors that I have had have tended to be peer mentors, often colleagues I have sought out for peer support because I know that they have similarly experienced racial or gender discrimination in the workplace.

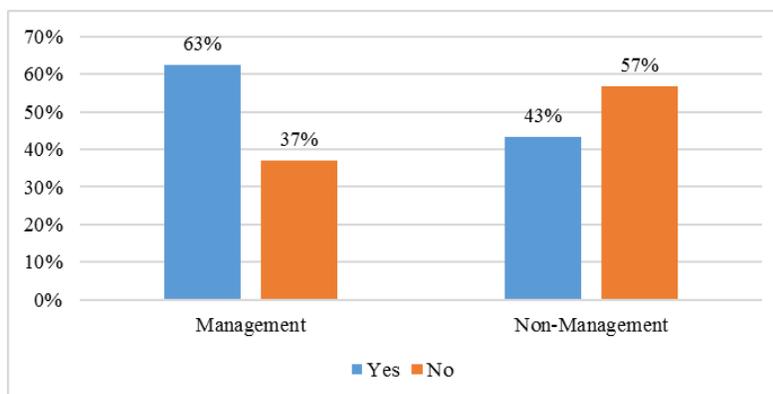


Figure 4. Seeking Mentoring Support by Management Position (N=38)

DISCUSSION

The results from this research identified a big gap for Chinese Canadian librarians in terms of taking up leadership opportunities. 79% of the respondents were not in any managerial positions. This could be due to several reasons. First, as a couple of respondents noted, the lack of minorities in leadership positions led some Chinese librarians to feel discouraged about applying for higher management positions. Second, race or ethnic background could have deterred them from moving up. 87% (n=33) of the Chinese Canadian librarians in this paper reported that race has been a career barrier, in contrast with 23.6% (n=37) of the Chinese American librarians in Yang (1996) and only one respondent in Ruan and Xiong (2008). Third, some might have less motivation to move up the career ladder. 82% of the respondents felt very satisfied or satisfied with their current jobs, close to 81% in Yang (1996), and higher than 61% in Ruan and Xiong (2008). Motivation for career advancement was not asked in the ViMLoC 2021 Survey, but previous research revealed that Chinese librarians in the United States desired a stable job, tended to feel satisfied with their jobs, and made little effort to seek job changes (Ruan & Xiong, 2008). Further research is needed to look into Chinese librarians in Canada as to whether they lack interest in career advancement.

The work climate was not found to be inclusive to all respondents. Particularly, 37% of the Chinese Canadian librarians did not explicitly agree with the statement that they felt free to speak their mind and express their views openly amongst colleagues. Those in management positions were less satisfied with their jobs and less likely to feel free to express their views openly. Although it was not possible to explain the differences based on the survey data, this finding warrants attention. Moving up to management positions requires qualifications, courage, and effort; however, if negative work experience persists in managerial roles, the librarians may choose to step down. This will decrease representation of Chinese librarians in the leadership landscape, which, in turn, will dampen the desire of Chinese and other ethnic minority librarians to pursue leadership opportunities.

It was also unfortunate that 85% of the respondents confronted at least one stated microaggression. In some situations, respondents noted that they had difficulty knowing whether the microaggressions were related to race as some were not outright verbal. As a result, they tended to rate the incidents with a lower frequency in the survey (i.e. “rarely, “never”). Therefore, the percentage of respondents who encountered microaggressions might be higher than actually captured. Although it is important to stand up against racial microaggressions, it is not easy to do so. As stated by the respondents, when confronted with microaggressions, their concerns and experiences were dismissed by library leadership; the victims performed a lot of emotional labour to fit in with the workplace culture by themselves. These microaggressive behaviours caused mental stress, demeaned their personal worth, and constituted a barrier to their professional success.

Despite being the largest ethnic group among racial minorities, Chinese librarians account for a small proportion in the librarian population in Canada. To increase representation, it is imperative to encourage more people of Chinese descent to earn a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) or equivalent degree and enter librarianship. Students enrolled in the accredited programs can apply for scholarships such as the ALA (n.d.) Spectrum Scholarship, CALA’s (n.d.) Scholarship of Library and Information Science, the Sheila Suen Lai Scholarship of Library and Information Science, and Lisa Zhao Scholarship. It is equally important to inspire

first generation Chinese immigrants to enter librarianship and pursue leadership roles. First generation immigrants face additional cultural challenges compared with second and later generation who have assimilated into the culture of the country in which they were born (Kumaran, 2012). Findings from this research indicated that first generation librarians had a higher rate of taking on management positions than second generation librarians. This would be inspiring to those who are new to Canada and wondering if there is any chance of becoming a librarian and moving up their career ladder. Li (2014)'s story is a great manifestation of this possibility. One librarian in this research study also described her experience that conveyed a positive message: "As a first-generation immigrant, I always feel insecure about my level of French. I had doubts about the job prospect and it hurt my self-confidence. On the other hand, with my current job, my managers and colleagues make me realize my value as a professional with kindness and confidence in myself. Yes, sometimes I make small mistakes, but that doesn't detract from the quality of what I say. As a result, I feel comfortable expressing myself with my accent, with occasional small mistakes, etc. In this caring and respectful environment, I perfect my French and other professional skills with pleasure."

Seeking mentoring guidance and participating in leadership programs are important for minority librarians to build leadership skills. Ruan and Liu (2017) alongside this paper showed that assistance from minority mentors was found beneficial especially due to similar ethnic background and less cultural barriers between the mentoring pair. Therefore, library school students or librarians of Chinese descent can apply to the mentorship programs offered by ViMLoC or CALA to seek leadership advice or guidance from minority mentors. In addition, professional associations in the United States such as the Association of Research Libraries (ARL, n.d.) have developed leadership programs for racial minority librarians. Although the American programs accept Canadian applicants, those successfully accepted account for just a tiny portion of the whole minority librarian population in Canada. Some libraries have offered their own leadership programs, but without a focus on ethnic-minority librarians (Kumaran, 2015). Hence, libraries and professional associations need to develop leadership programs for racial minority librarians in Canada. If possible, these programs need to consider the unique needs of librarians from various ethnic backgrounds and support them to reach their full leadership potential.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

First, this research analyzed 38 Chinese Canadian librarians, representing nearly 10% of the total Chinese librarian population (410) in Canada based on the 2016 Census data (Statistics Canada, 2018). The analysis resulting from this study may not reflect the complete picture of all Chinese librarians in Canada. In addition, some of the non-significant findings from this research need to be corroborated if a larger dataset is available in the future.

Second, to protect privacy in the small-sized sample, the author grouped management positions (supervisors, middle management, senior administrators) into the "management" category. Hence, it was not possible to analyze the differences between respondents in each position.

Third, this study used data from the ViMLoC 2021 Survey, which was intended to examine the changes of visible minority librarians in their demographics, education, and employment situation since the ViMLoC 2013 Survey. Although the questions covered in the survey provided

invaluable information about Chinese Canadian librarians, there were limitations with the data. For instance, no questions were asked about their motivations for career advancement, or the strategies they have adopted other than seeking mentoring support to overcome the barriers throughout their career. Future qualitative research can seek to examine more in-depth the struggles faced by Chinese librarians and to address the aforementioned questions.

CONCLUSION

Chinese Canadian librarians were the largest ethnic group among the minorities. However, their representation in management positions did not exhibit the same pattern. The scarcity of leadership positions held by Chinese Canadian librarians could be due to various reasons. This research revealed that a considerable number of librarians did not feel free to voice their opinions in the workplace. They suffered racial microaggressions in different forms and to different degrees. Some librarians did not feel satisfied with their jobs. An overwhelming majority indicated that race was a career barrier. All these factors could hurt their self-esteem, lower their morale, and diminish their desire to pursue leadership positions. To increase representation in librarianship, library school students and first-generation immigrants of Chinese background need to be inspired to enter librarianship. To achieve greater professional success, Chinese librarians in Canada can benefit from mentoring support and leadership programs tailored to minority librarians developed by professional associations or libraries.

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