The Future Role of Chinese American Librarians from the Viewpoint of a National Library Program Planner

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Since my topic is quite broad, I shall focus on three major points. First, the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and its work and accomplishments. Second, how the Commission's policies, as well as other government programs, affect the role of Chinese American librarians. And, third, the ways in which the role of Chinese American librarians can be strengthened and vitalized. To begin with, as the only Asian—or rather the only minority—member on the Commission, I feel extremely obligated and anxious to share with you information concerning the Commission. And you, as my colleagues, my constituents, and my friends with the same roots, are fully entitled to this kind of information.

The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, established as a permanent independent agency by Congress under Public Law 91-345, is charged with developing and recommending plans for the most effective use of the nation's library and information resources, and advising the President and the Congress on policies in the area of library and information services. Since its establishment in 1970, NCLIS has endeavored to fulfill its charge in two general directions: to support all categorical fund programs for libraries, and to

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propose for implementation a National Program of Library and Information Services. In terms of categorical aid programs, NCLIS has strongly endorsed the renewal of all library acts, including LSCA, HEA, ESEA Title IV, the Medical Library Assistance Act, and the National Library of Medicine Program. Many times NCLIS has testified before Congress in support of library programs and services. As far as the National Program of Library and Information Services is concerned, it is built on the ideal that every individual in the United States should be provided with equal opportunity of access to that part of the total information resource which will satisfy the individual's educational, working, cultural and leisure time needs and interests regardless of the individual's location, social or physical condition, or level of intellectual achievement. This ideal is based on a set of assumptions. First, that the total library and information resource in the U.S. is a national resource which should, in the public interest, be developed, strengthened, organized, and made available to the maximum degree possible. Second, that all the people of the U.S. have the right, according to their individual needs, to realistic and convenient access to this national resource for their personal enrichment and achievement, thus facilitating the process of society. Third, that with the help of new technology and with national resolve, the disparate and discrete collections of recorded information in the U.S. can become, in due course, an integrated nationwide network. Fourth, that the rights and interests of authors, publishers, and other providers of information be recognized in the National Program in ways which maintain their economic and competitive viability. Fifth, that legislation devised for the coherent development of library and information services will not undermine constitutionally-protected rights of personal privacy and intellectual freedom and will preserve local, state, and regional autonomy. In order to provide a framework for its quest for the ideal stated, the Commission has established the following program objectives:

1. Ensure that basic minimums of library and information
services adequate to meet the needs of all local communities are satisfied.

2. Provide adequate special services to special constituencies, including the unserved.

3. Strengthen existing statewide resources and systems.

4. Ensure basic and continuing education of personnel essential to the implementation of a National Program.

5. Coordinate existing federal programs of library and information services.

6. Encourage the private sector to become an active partner in the development of the National Program.

7. Establish a focus of federal responsibility charged with implementing the national network and coordinating the National Program under the policy guidance of the Commission.

8. Plan, develop, and implement a nationwide network of library and information service.

Since the National Program is considered as the Commission's key endeavor most of our projects and activities emphasize the application of existing resources in ways that will implement and further the National Program. NCLIS has put most of its energies and efforts into the areas of library funding, bibliographical control, continuing education and copyright and photocopying. Studies conducted include the impact of federal funding on public libraries, an inventory of national library needs, the role of the Library of Congress in a national network, and bibliographical control of non-print data. A number of task forces were formed to plan and develop such projects as a national periodical center, the role of school libraries in the national network program, American National Standards Committee Z39, and computer protocols. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement, as a result of the Commission's long-time efforts, is the outcome of the White House Conference on Libraries & Information Services. I shall refer to this again later.
As the top agency responsible for the nation’s library and information services, NCLIS has done everything in the best interests of the nation’s library and information community. No doubt, the public has high expectations of NCLIS. NCLIS in return, has established excellent communication with the library community, working closely with nationwide library organizations such as ALA, the Urban Library Council, ASIS, AECT, and SLA, as well as related associations. It has also taken a leading role in supporting other national library agencies such as L.C. the Office of Library and Learning Resources in the Office of Education, and the National Library of Medicine.

There has been good cooperation between NCLIS and federal government agencies such as OE, NAL, and NSF. Thanks to the library community, we have had strong support with respect to the Commission’s National Program and other Projects. NCLIS has been held in high esteem.

Now, let’s take a brief look at the evolution of the ethnic and cultural minorities and attitudes toward them. These attitudes can be characterized as:

1. Assimilation: An appropriate goal for minority groups is to seek to shed their former heritage and take on the new and better American heritage.

2. The melting pot: Each cultural group brings something new to the society and melts into a homogeneous mass. Different cultural values should blend harmoniously to form the values of the new American culture.

3. Cultural Pluralism: Each cultural group has an important heritage which should be understood, encouraged, and actively preserved. Living creatures cannot be “melted down.” Diversity, differentiation, and cultural “cross fertilization” are cornerstones for building a higher level of American humanity.

4. Separatism: The cultural differences are best dealt with by creating nations within nations. This attitude has been
fostered by majorities seeking to contain "undesirable" elements, and advocated by minorities as a defense mechanism to retain integrity in the face or adversity.

The Chinese Americans, a major ethnic group in the 10 percent Asian American population, are spread out all over the United States, but are found primarily in such states as California, New York, Hawaii, Illinois, and Arizona. In California there is an estimated Chinese population of 300,000. The 1970 census shows that 26 percent of the nation’s Chinese American population hold a bachelor’s degree, and one of every 100 Chinese Americans holds a Ph.D. However, only .04 percent of Chinese Americans are professional librarians.

What has been done to help cultural minorities in the nation? In 1965, Congress passed the Higher Education Act. In 1972, Congress provided for the establishment of the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, as HEA was extended. It is a shame to learn that this program will soon be eliminated. Libraries have played an important part in helping immigrants to learn the English language and to develop skills designed to help them fit in with the cultural mainstream. Under the Bilingual Education Act, which appropriates millions of dollars to schools and adult education, libraries have benefited a lot as well. The cultural needs of minorities attracted attention from private institutions and library associations. The Library School of Kent State University has initiated a special program for the study of ethnic publications. In recent years, many special interest groups have emerged in ALA. These include the Black Caucus, AALA, CALA, the Jewish Librarians Caucus, Spanish Librarians Association, and the Italian Librarian Caucus. ALA’s Office for Library Service to the Disadvantaged, which coordinates the activities of these groups, is conducting a survey of several thousand libraries to determine details of programs serving cultural minorities. Hundreds of ethnic directories and bibliographies have been published by private institutions.

I regret to say that the National Commission has not been
able to address itself to this issue to any great extent. The only ethnic minority which has attracted the Commission's attention is the American Indian. Two years ago, as a result of testimony of the Southwest regional hearing, many inadequacies were found in library services on American Indian reservations. Since then, a Committee has been appointed by the Chairman, some studies of the library needs of American Indians have been conducted, visits have been made Indian reservations, and - best of all - a special White House Conference on Libraries will be held for the reservation Indians. This marks the Commission's first attempt to help cultural minorities. Recently, due to my continuous and strong urge to heed the library and information needs of ethnic minorities, a Committee of cultural minorities, handicapped, and other special constituencies was finally appointed.

In my opinion, the future outlook for Chinese American librarians is pretty rosy. Chinese American librarians are characterized by their intelligence, diligence, and ability to assimilate American culture. Outstanding performers in the profession, they have tremendous upward mobility. Many are in managerial positions. I can justify this statement by naming the heads and directors who are present. Chinese American librarians will have a vital role to play in the National Program. Because of their bilingual and bicultural background, they will serve as effective catalysts to library users and non-users in the Asian minority. Chinese American librarians especially those who have science and technology backgrounds, can contribute much to the implementation of the national library network which is the core of the National Program. Those who are on library school faculties may take the initiative of getting involved in the CLENE Program, a Commission-sponsored continuing education on library. By meeting these challenges, Chinese American librarians will help achieve the goals of the National Program. Based on their strengths and natural characteristics, Chinese American librarians should be fully capable of taking an active part in the National Program on Library and Informa-
tion Services.

The Carter administration's proposal of a separate cabinet-level Department of Education makes thrilling news. If this becomes a reality, our OLLR will automatically be upgraded. Hopefully, the new Office of Library & Learning Resources will report directly to the Secretary of Education with adequate authority and autonomy. The new Department of Education will have a lot of impact on the education profession, and will give a boost to the morale of professional librarians.

In order for Chinese American librarians to remain in the mainstream of librarianship, as well as to strengthen their role in the National Program, we need to take the following urgent actions.

1. Make ourselves visible and heard. Let's change from being withdrawn to being vocal, from being passive to being active, and from talk to action. Get involved in the activities (including politicking) of professional organizations. There is a Chinese American librarian serving on the recently-established California State Ethnic Task Force of Library Services. The White House Conference, an open forum, would make an excellent opportunity for Chinese librarians to express their views. I urge you to participate actively in either the state conference or the National Conference. In the state Conference of Hawaii, Chinese Americans were well represented. Quite a few of the Chinese delegates to the State Conference have even been nominated as delegates to attend the National Conference in 1979.

2. Explore job opportunities. Most of our professional librarians are in public or academic libraries. Very few are in school libraries, special libraries, or the information industry. We need to have representation in all types of libraries, or else we will not be identifiable. At least we can advise the new breed of Chinese American librarians to seek employment in all types of libraries.

3. Keep abreast of trends in librarianship. Today the field is moving toward automation, on-line retrieval, and information
networking programs. We need not only to pick up knowledge of modern technology, but also to keep our eyes open for funds available for new types of library services. If we don’t catch up with the trends, we will be phased out.

4. Reflect our cultural heritage in our profession. Whether or not your job is related to your ethnic culture, you should consider it your obligation to expose the public and your patrons to that culture. It is especially important for those working directly or indirectly with bilingual/bicultural collections and programs to become aware of available funds so that an ethnic program can be built or developed. As information conveyors, we have the responsibility of introducing our cultural heritage to library users.

5. Don’t isolate ourselves. We need to work as a group rather than as individuals. Many of us are good individual performers but lousy group performers. The time has come for us to work as a united front, and to work with groups that have interests in common with ours. That means we should work with Chinese librarians’ groups elsewhere in the country, with the Asian American Librarians Association, or even with other ethnic librarians’ groups. By working as a large group we shall have power. With a united front, we shall be able to make the best use of existing legislation such as Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employment.

In closing, let’s believe in our own worth, be proud of our cultural heritage, and look forward to a bright prospect. Chinese American librarians will not only have a vital role to play in the implementation of the National Program of Library & Information Services, but will also constitute a great asset to the library profession,