



Creating a Forum for Library Professionals: A Case Study of CALA Canada Chapter

Lei Jin, Guoying Liu, and Wei Zhang

Abstract:

This paper examines the establishment, growth, achievements, and future planning of the CALA Canada Chapter. Since its inception in June 2018, the Chapter has experienced significant growth, with the number of members doubling, and the number of life members also doubling. Currently there are a total of thirty members in the Chapter, comprising ten life members, eight overseas members, and seven student members, with the majority residing or working in Ontario. The Chapter has achieved notable milestones, including the organization of successful events such as conferences, workshops, and networking sessions. The Chapter has also contributed to the development of the library profession in Canada, particularly by promoting diversity and inclusivity. Looking forward, the Chapter plans to expand its reach and increase its membership by promoting itself in other regions of the country. The Chapter aims to continue providing valuable resources, programs, and opportunities for its members to enhance their professional development and foster collaboration. Through these efforts, the Canada Chapter aims to play an essential role in advancing the library profession in Canada and promoting its growth and innovation.

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Creating a Forum for Library Professionals: A Case Study of CALA Canada Chapter

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the establishment, growth, achievements, and future planning of the CALA Canada Chapter. Since its inception in June 2018, the Chapter has experienced significant growth, with the number of members doubling, and the number of life members also doubling. Currently there are a total of thirty members in the Chapter, comprising ten life members, eight overseas members, and seven student members, with the majority residing or working in Ontario. The Chapter has achieved notable milestones, including the organization of successful events such as conferences, workshops, and networking sessions. The Chapter has also contributed to the development of the library profession in Canada, particularly by promoting diversity and inclusivity. Looking forward, the Chapter plans to expand its reach and increase its membership by promoting itself in other regions of the country. The Chapter aims to continue providing valuable resources, programs, and opportunities for its members to enhance their professional development and foster collaboration. Through these efforts, the Canada Chapter aims to play an essential role in advancing the library profession in Canada and promoting its growth and innovation.

Keywords: Leadership, Chinese American Librarians Association, CALA Canada Chapter, Library Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

The presence of Chinese librarians and other library professionals in Canada is growing, yet the channels for this group to connect professionally remain limited. The Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) provides a platform for Chinese librarians to connect, network, and collaborate across North America. Even though Chinese librarians in Canada are active in CALA, participating in research awards, emerging leaders programs, and chairing committees, the number of Canadian memberships in CALA remains low. The lack of chapter opportunities and local connections can hinder the growth and engagement of Canadian members within CALA. In this

paper, we argue that the establishment of a Canada Chapter within CALA was necessary to better serve and engage with Chinese librarians and library professionals in Canada, and explore the challenges during the process, and highlight some of the achievements and activities since its inception.

LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS, CALA AND THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE

The literature on the importance of professional organizations in the development of librarianship is abundant. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978, p. 23) defines that “organizations are collections of individual efforts that are coordinated to achieve things that could not be achieved through individual action alone.” Library associations have been playing such a crucial role in the development and growth of librarianship. They offer a wide range of benefits, including networking opportunities, professional development, advocacy, and support services. The Chinese American Librarian Association, with its 50-year history, strives to achieve these goals and offers these values to its members, as stated by its objectives (Calabrochure_2021_en.Pdf, n.d.):

- To enhance communication among Chinese American librarians as well as between Chinese American librarians and other librarians;
- To serve as a forum for discussions of mutual problems and professional concerns among Chinese American librarians;
- To promote Sino-American librarianship and library services, and the development of Chinese American librarianship and service;
- To provide a vehicle whereby Chinese American librarians may cooperate with other organizations.

Meanwhile in Canada, the number of individuals who are in the profession of library and information science has been increasing. According to the 2016 Census data from Statistics Canada, the Chinese librarian population in Canada is estimated to be around 410, including library school students of Chinese descent. On the other hand, the number of Canadian members in CALA is not growing proportionally. From 2013-2015, only nine CALA members were from Canada, accounting for 1.79% of the total membership.

According to Garrison and Cramer (2021), memberships in many library organizations are declining as “increasingly librarians are foregoing formal organizational memberships to instead connect, learn, and network with each other in new and innovative ways.” The challenges for engaging with professional organization, as observed from focus groups conducted by Frank (1997), include the absence of sufficient financial support, the considerable amount of time required, as well the pressure of navigating complex organizations. One librarian in the survey pointed out that “it is very difficult to ‘figure out’ associations such as ALA or SLA.” The authors, two of whom are long-time CALA members, share the same feelings for CALA. With its large body and primarily US-based regional chapters, it is very challenging for Canadian library professionals to engage with CALA more effectively.

Nonetheless, there is a gap for Canadian Chinese librarians to connect and network professionally within the Canadian context. While there is an increasing number of racialized library organizations or groups in Canada, such as the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada

network, their impact and reach may be constrained. Goldman (2014) supports the significance of participating in state and regional associations, highlighting the advantages that come with it. These benefits consist of reasonable expenses, reduced travel distances to attend workshops and conferences, greater access to networking opportunities, and simpler access to leadership positions. Thus, the inception of CALA Canada Chapter is the response to the needs of this distinct group of library professionals.

PATHWAYS TO THE CALA CANADA CHAPTER

Conception

Canadian Chinese librarians have been increasingly involved in the activities of CALA since 2008, and have made significant contributions to its various committees and initiatives. In the early years, there was only one member from Canada serving on a CALA committee, but the number increased over time, and Canadian members started to play more important roles, co-chairing or chairing committees and leading task forces (CALA, 2023). In 2015, one member from Canada was elected to the At-large Board of Directors, and another member was selected to deliver a theme speech to the 21st Century Librarian Seminar in China (CALA, 2023a; Huang, 2014).

One notable achievement of Canadian Chinese librarians was the creation of the *International Journal of Librarianship* for CALA, a new open access, peer-reviewed journal that launched in 2016 (Ren et al., 2017). Two Canadian Chinese librarians, Guoying Liu and Qing Zou, took the lead in this initiative and served on the core Editorial Team, with Liu as the inaugural Editor-In-Chief and Zou as the webmaster (Liu and Wang, 2017). They invited and supported many library professionals in Canada to contribute to the journal as authors, peer reviewers, or editors. One of the articles published in the journal, co-authored by four professionals at Ryerson University (name changed to Toronto Metropolitan University in 2022), was included as a further reading resource in the NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Library Edition, and its first author was recognized as one of the Movers & Shakers 2019 – Innovators by the *Library Journal* (Becker et al., 2017; Fialkoff, 2019; Liu and Wang, 2018). This journal has deepened the collaboration among Chinese librarians in Canada, the United States, and other countries, and helped advocate for the Chinese librarianship within the library profession.

Despite the growing involvement of Canadian Chinese librarians in CALA, there was no chapter representing their interests and needs. In response, Guoying Liu, Lei Jin and other Chinese librarians in Canada established a partnership to create a new chapter of CALA in 2018. This initiative drew support from a group of professionals, particularly academic librarians in Ontario and other provinces. To ensure compliance with CALA's Bylaws and Constitution, they consulted with CALA leaders and existing members in Canada. The establishment of this new chapter not only reflects the distinct environment of Canadian librarianship but also strengthens the connections between CALA and Canadian library professionals (Liu, 2018, p.1).

Petition and Discussion

In accordance with CALA Bylaws, a petition was initiated to establish a Canada Chapter of CALA. The petition was signed by twelve individuals, including one library school student at the University of Toronto, one information professional at WeDiscovery Technology Inc., and ten academic librarians from Lakehead University, McGill University, Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), the University of British Columbia, the University of Manitoba, and the University of Windsor. The group urged the CALA Executive Committee and CALA Board of Directors to consider creating a Canada Chapter to promote Chinese librarianship and library services in Canada, enhance communication among Chinese librarians in Canada, and provide a venue for cooperation with other CALA Chapters and Canadian, provincial, and international library associations.

On June 14, 2018, the petition was submitted to the CALA Executive Committee (EC), and the CALA President welcomed it, recognizing the benefits of such a chapter. Since this was the first time CALA was considering a chapter outside of the United States, the EC sought consultation from an attorney to ensure that there would be no negative impact on CALA's tax and legal statuses (L. Yang, personal communication, June 14, 2018). The attorney confirmed that the Canada Chapter was permissible as long as its finances were managed within the U.S. Following that, CALA Board discussed the petition through online meetings and emails. One issue that arose was whether Canadian members should continue to pay the previously established "Overseas" membership fee of \$15 or be charged the same as U.S. members, which was \$35 per year. The Board decided to keep the current fee for Canadian members since it should be determined by where the member works or resides. The establishment of the chapter should benefit Canadian members. The membership categories were defined similarly to ALA's membership setup for international members from Canada. One Board member suggested that the Canada Chapter explore future collaboration opportunities with SLA Chapters based in Canada and seek to include more public librarians in the Chapter. The Board approved the establishment of the Canada Chapter through online voting, making it the first CALA chapter outside of the United States. The Board anticipated that more chapters could arise from this one in the future if membership grows to support more local needs. CALA members who are Canadians in the U.S. may also join this Chapter in the future (Y. Zhang, R. Pun, et al., personal communication, September 4-10, 2018).

Inception and Expansion

On October 3, 2018, the Canada Chapter of the CALA held its inaugural board meeting, during which the board members were officially established. The Board had seven members, including the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Webmaster, Events Planner, and Secretary. Their primary goal was to create a community for CALA members in Canada and to recruit more members from the country (Liu, 2019).

During the meeting, the Board decided to adopt the CALA bylaws and extend the first board's term to two years to ensure the new Chapter was well-established before the next board takes over. They also established communication channels, including a website, a listserv hosted at the University of Manitoba, and a WeChat group for board members.

To promote the establishment of the Canada Chapter, the Board planned to reach out to existing library schools in Canada, attend library conferences, and distribute promotional materials. Their short-term action plans included announcing the establishment of the new Chapter, recruiting current librarians with and without a Chinese background, and reaching out to library school students to encourage membership. The Chapter also planned to establish programs for membership retention, such as mentorship initiatives and online webinars (Liu, 2019).

The Canada Chapter collaborated with the Ontario Library Association (OLA), Canada's largest library association, to host annual activities in conjunction with OLA's annual Super Conference. The planning process included sending out a Call for Proposals, inviting keynote speakers, arranging logistics, and more. The first Chapter event was held on January 30-31, 2020, along with the OLA Super Conference, with the primary goal of promoting the Chapter and recruiting new members. The event was a success, with the opening meetup of the "Chinese American Librarians Association: Canadian Chapter Meetup" held in the OLA Super Conference Unconference Centre on the first day, and the following hybrid annual conference held at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) Library (OLA Super Conference, 2020). The success of this event has motivated the Canada Chapter to continue to organize annual events in collaboration with OLA and Canadian institutions, and to explore opportunities for collaboration with other organizations in Canada and other CALA Chapters.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Annual Conferences

The inaugural annual conference was held on January 31, 2020, right on the eve of a global pandemic that was about to unfold. The half-day conference was well attended with both in-person and remote participants. It brought together more than 50 participants (30 onsite, 20 virtual) with various cultural backgrounds to discuss a wide range of topics. This conference is co-sponsored by CALA and Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) Library. Talia Chung, University Librarian of University of Ottawa, shared her personal journey to becoming senior library administrator. Her perseverance in overcoming the many hurdles and challenges from being an immigrant, visible minority, as well as a working mom, had undoubtedly inspired many with a similar cultural background in their own pursuit of personal and professional fulfillment. Talia's keynote talk was followed by the report and analysis from the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada Network Mentorship Program, the personal experience of professional development, a thorough review of current Chinese Canadian bibliography, and illuminating and practical tips on dealing with political diversities in our daily lives. There were also professional research projects shared among the group - from collaboration with IT staff, workflow management during staffing crisis, the introduction of the International Group of Ex Libris User Group, as well as the development of a web Geographic Information System (GIS) learning module. These thought-provoking presentations provided attendees opportunities to share, exchange, and engage in ideas and best practices that have a positive impact on the professional and career development of librarians (Jin and Liu, 2020).

The following annual conference events in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 were all being held virtually with participants joining from across North America. Keynote speakers included Greg Eow, Jack Leong, and Linda Zhang. Each speaker focused on topics such as Diversity,

Inclusivity, Equity and Respect: Centering Core Values in Collections and Collaborations, personal journey to senior management as well as preserving and reimagining Chinatown project. Presentations shared in these conferences covered a variety of topics, ranging from COVID-19 related challenges and best practices, developments on the EDI front, GIS and social justice, pedagogical reflections, as well as technical solutions to collection development, among others.

The presentations from the first three conferences have been homogeneous to some degree, with all the presenters from academic libraries, and only one librarian from outside of Canada. However, a more diverse conference was delivered in 2023, with 30% of topics were on or by specialized libraries, and 44% of the presenters from outside of Canada.

These annual gatherings, in person or virtual, provided us opportunities to share and reflect on the many challenges and successes during the previous year and felt a constant need to find serenity and sanity to counterbalance uncertain and anxious moments, while being immigrants, being minorities, being Asian. Finding any resolution is never the goal but it is our wish to be more self-conscious of these sentiments, identify roots of the issue and hopefully land on refreshed perspectives and change it around with small actions in our everyday lives.

Membership Growth

As of March 16, 2023, the Canada Chapter has a total of thirty members, comprising ten life members, eight overseas members, and seven student members. Figure 1 provides a visual breakdown of the membership distribution. Since its establishment in June 2018, the Canada Chapter has experienced significant growth, with the number of Canadian members doubling, and that of life members also doubling.

Figure 2 indicates that over half of the current members (20 out of 30) joined the Chapter after 2019. It is worth noting that the majority of the Chapter's members reside or work in Ontario, as shown in Figure 3. To expand its membership and increase its reach across Canada, the Chapter needs to undertake measures to promote itself in other regions of the country.

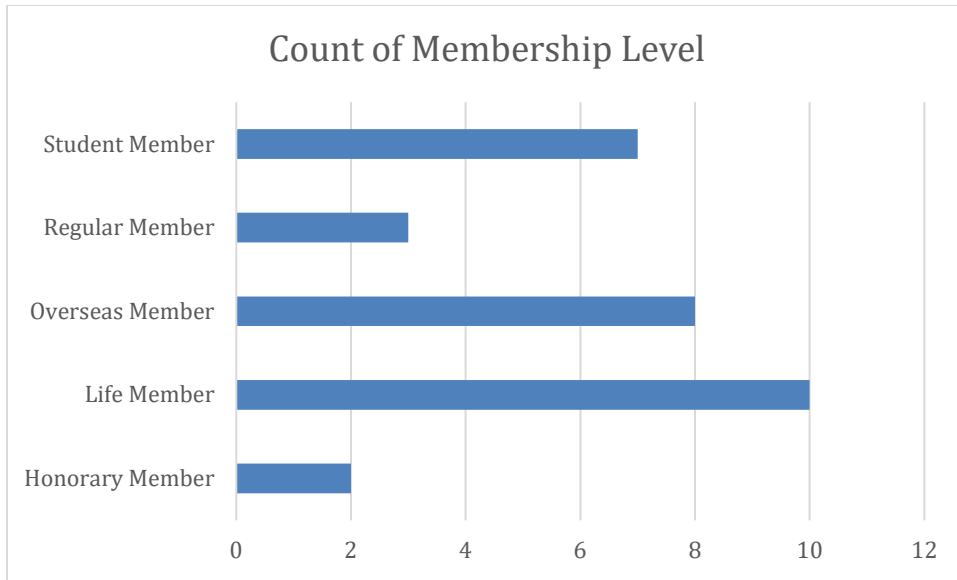


Figure 1. Number of members by membership level

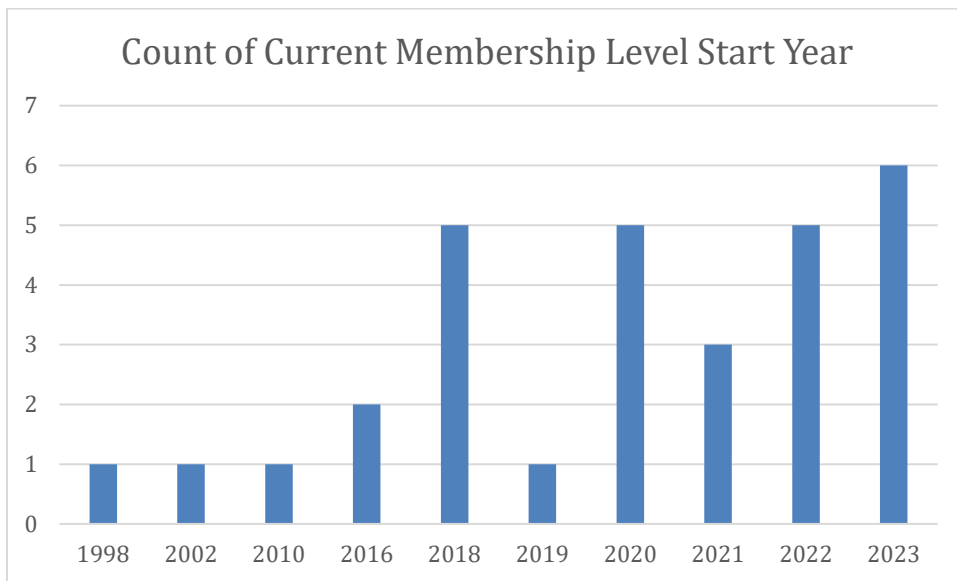


Figure 2. Number of members by current membership level start year

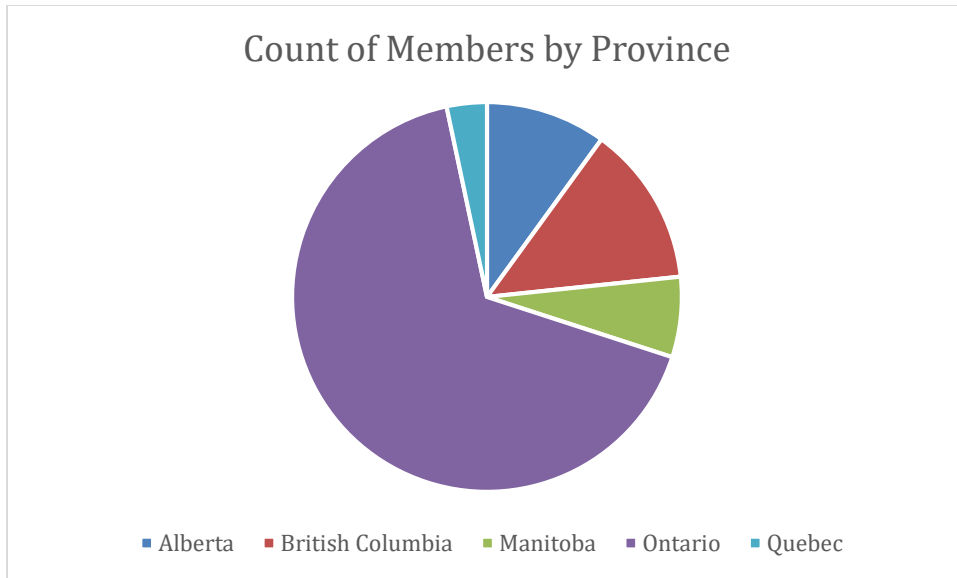


Figure 3. Members by Province

Canadian Members’ Contribution to CALA

Since the establishment of the Chapter in 2018, there has been a noticeable increase in the involvement of Canadian members in CALA, as shown in Figure 4. In the most current year, 2022-2023, three Canadians are serving on the CALA Board of Directors, including one member on the CALA Executive Committee as the Incoming Vice President/President Elect for 2024-2025 (CALA, 2023a). This marks the first time a non-U.S. member has been elected as the President since CALA was founded in 1973. Additionally, a Canadian member is currently running for the position of President for the 2025-2026 term.

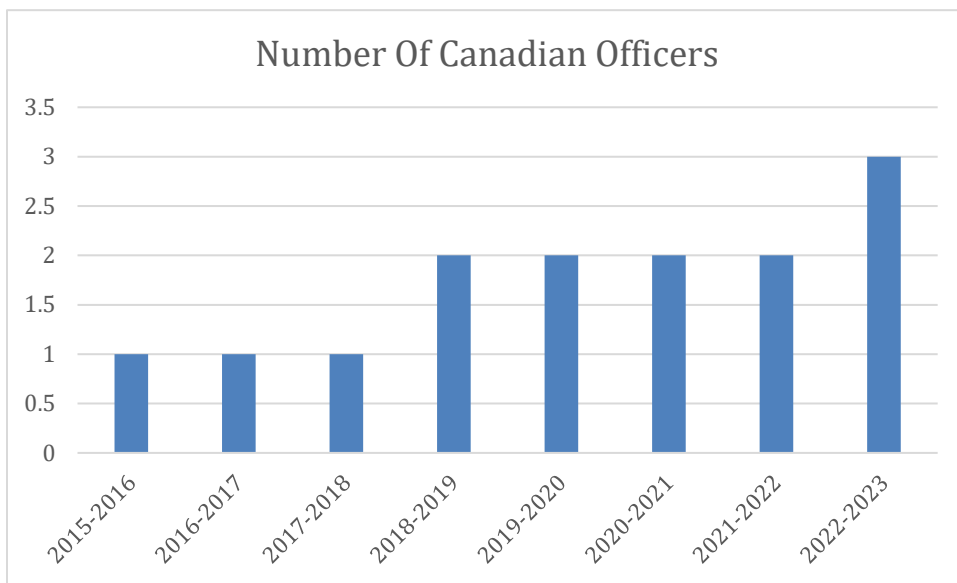


Figure 4. Number of Canadian Officers by Year

Canadian members have made significant contributions to CALA, with an increasing number of members receiving awards, grants and honors since the establishment of the Canada Chapter in 2018. Notable awards include the Distinguished Service Award in 2020, the Jing Liao Award for Best Research in 2022, and the Sheila Suen Lai Research Grant in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, Canadian members have received the President's Recognition Award at least five times since 2019 (CALA, 2023b).

The CALA Canada Chapter has also played a significant role in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the library profession in Canada. Canadian members of the Chapter were invited to share their views and first-hand experiences with students and communities of Asian backgrounds on EDI (Cho, Bolefski, Tellis, Jin, & Kumaran, 2022) and the University of Windsor's Second Annual Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization (EDID) Week (University of Windsor, 2023). These activities have helped to raise awareness and advance conversations around EDI issues in the Canadian library community.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) currently consists of eight chapters: Greater Mid-Atlantic (GMA), Midwest Chapter (MW), Northeast Chapter (NE), Northern California Chapter (NCA), Southern California Chapter (SCA), Southeast Chapter (SE), Southwest Chapter (SW) and Canada Chapter (About, n.d.), each catering to specific geographical regions within the United States. Being the youngest and the first chapter to be established outside the U.S., CALA Canada encounters a set of distinct challenges. Therefore, CALA Canada recognizes the significance of collaboration and partnerships in amplifying its impact and advancing the library profession on a broader scale. Moving forward, CALA Canada will actively foster collaboration with other library organizations and institutions, forging strategic partnerships that will enhance its reach and influence. Through strategic partnerships, CALA Canada can pool resources, share knowledge, and collaborate on projects that have a far-reaching impact. Joint initiatives such as conferences, workshops, and research endeavors can promote professional development, foster engagement, and address common challenges faced by library professionals worldwide. Collaborative efforts also enable the sharing of best practices, innovation, and expertise, ultimately benefiting library professionals and patrons nationwide.

Like other volunteer-based organizations, CALA Canada faces the challenge of ensuring consistent and dedicated participation from its members. We need to foster a strong sense of purpose and motivation among our members, as they may have other personal and professional commitments that compete for their time and attention. Effective communication, regular engagement, and recognition of volunteers' contributions are crucial to maintain their long-term involvement.

CALA Canada Board also needs to address the challenge of managing a diverse group of members with varying levels of expertise and experience. Members may come from different educational backgrounds and professional fields within the library sector. Providing training opportunities and mentorship programs can help ensure that members have the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute effectively to CALA's initiatives.

Recruiting and retaining a diverse and dedicated member base is crucial for CALA Canada's growth and sustainability. CALA Canada needs to implement effective recruitment strategies that align with its mission and target the Chinese Canadian library community. By actively reaching out to potential members and promoting the benefits and opportunities of joining the Chapter, it can expand its membership base and attract individuals who will contribute to its collective mission. Outreach efforts should include partnerships with library schools, professional associations, and community organizations. Engaging with potential members through social media, networking events, and conferences can help raise awareness about CALA's initiatives and attract individuals who are passionate about promoting Chinese American librarianship.

Expanding CALA Canada's current reach geographically or across different projects may present challenges in terms of maintaining consistent collaboration and coordination. Implementing effective communication channels, such as virtual meetings and collaborative platforms, will be vital in keeping volunteers connected and aligned with CALA's mission and goals. Regular updates, newsletters, and knowledge-sharing sessions can help foster a sense of community among volunteers working on various initiatives under the CALA umbrella.

In the United States, several library associations have been established to address racial diversity, including the American Indian Library Association, Black Caucus American Library Association, and the National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, among others. Conversely, there are currently limited comparable associations or chapters focusing on racialized librarians in Canada (Associations in Canada for Information Professionals, n.d.). Nevertheless, it is anticipated that the accomplishments of CALA Canada can act as a catalyst, inspiring the formation of additional associations or chapters dedicated to supporting racialized librarians within Canada to boost the promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the establishment of CALA Canada has proven to be a timely and crucial response to the needs of Chinese Canadian library professionals. Since its inception in 2018, remarkable progress has been made, leading to notable accomplishments. The annual conferences have successfully drawn presenters and attendees from across Canada and the United States, facilitating knowledge sharing and fostering collaboration among professionals in the field. Furthermore, membership within the Canada Chapter has witnessed a substantial increase, with more individuals actively participating in CALA committees and receiving well-deserved recognition for their outstanding contributions.

Moreover, CALA Canada serves as an invaluable platform for promoting Chinese heritage and culture, while simultaneously playing a pivotal role in advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion within the library community. By embracing diversity and actively addressing the unique challenges faced by Chinese Canadian library professionals, CALA Canada has effectively fostered a supportive and inclusive environment for its members.

Nevertheless, the growth of CALA Canada is not without its challenges. Encouraging consistent participation and engagement from its geographically dispersed members remains a priority, as sustained involvement is vital for the Chapter's success and longevity. Additionally,

the diverse range of expertise and experience among its members necessitates careful management and coordination to ensure that all perspectives are valued and effectively utilized.

To ensure continued growth and sustainability, the Canada Chapter must also develop an effective recruitment strategy. Furthermore, the Canada Chapter should strive to expand its reach geographically, extending its influence beyond its current boundaries, and actively seeking collaborations with other library organizations and institutions to tap into a diverse pool of expertise, perspectives, and resources.

To conclude, while CALA Canada has achieved remarkable progress and made significant contributions to the Chinese Canadian library professional community, there are ongoing challenges that require attention and strategic planning. By addressing these challenges head-on, the Chapter can continue to grow, adapt, and thrive, ensuring its enduring impact in supporting its members, promoting Chinese heritage and culture, and advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion within the library profession.

Acknowledgement

The Inaugural Board of CALA Canada Chapter

Guoying Liu (President)

Lei Jin (Vice President)

Haiyun Cao

Cordelia Tang (Secretary)

Fangmin Wang (Event planning)

Wei Xuan (Webmaster)

Jason Zou (Treasurer)

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About the Authors

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Wei Zhang is E-Resources & Collection Analysis Librarian at McMaster University Library, and currently Vice President of CALA Canada Chapter. She focuses on collection development and assessment, e-resources management and access, and equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization in libraries.