

1-2018

The Life and Legacy of Dr. Lois Mai Chan in the LIS Field

Janet H. Clarke
janet.clarke@stonybrook.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/library_articles



Part of the [Asian American Studies Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Clarke, Janet H., "The Life and Legacy of Dr. Lois Mai Chan in the LIS Field" (2018). *Library Faculty Publications*. 24.
https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/library_articles/24

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu.

- Offer a number of incentives that indicate professional commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Consider:
 - Employee benefits
 - Staff development and support
 - Advancement opportunities (career track and participation in larger structure)
 - Mentoring and coaching (formal and informal)
 - Tuition reimbursement
 - Competitive salaries
 - Sabbaticals
 - Bilingual or bicultural pay differential or value of multicultural experience
 - Job exchange
 - Encouragement and support to participate on organizational committees and professional associations
 - Residency programs
 - Internships and fellowships
 - Librarian trainee programs
 - Flex time
 - Administrative leave
 - Telecommuting

Editors: Thank you for speaking with us. One last question: What do you think are some of the most important issues in librarianship today?

Patty: These are the things I think about:

- How to engage a local and national process to re-value the library as a community good;
- The need to think about librarianship as a profession, not just a job;
- Diversification of funding as a norm;
- Whether we can supply sufficient positions for the number of MLIS graduates; and
- Change as the new normal.

Chapter Forty-Three

The Life and Legacy of Dr. Lois Mai Chan in the LIS Field

Interview with Raymond Pun and Monnee Tong

Janet Hyunju Clarke

Janet: You both were ALA Emerging Leaders in 2014. What was it about and how did you get it started?

Ray: We were both part of the project sponsored by the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA). I remember meeting some of the CALA leaders to talk about this project in our meetings. ALA Emerging Leaders was a really interesting program because it allowed us to work with professionals from other institutions on a specific project that could support the library association. Being Chinese American, I thought it was an interesting project to capture the voices of Chinese American librarians who are prominent in the field. At the time, I was working at NYU Shanghai in the People's Republic of China, so I was the "global" outlier and had to make my schedule work for this project when all of my teammates were scattered in the United States. It was thrilling to make this project "international" in this context.

Monnee: It all started at ALA Midwinter, where we were able to meet the other ALA Emerging Leaders and CALA leaders. I was new to CALA and did not know much about the organization yet (you can read more about CALA in chapter 4 of this book). We went over the project's details and goals, and also got to know one another since we would be working from different corners of the United States (and in Ray's case, the world!). Our objective was to produce a video about Dr. Lois Mai Chan, best known for her expertise in cataloging and classification. As a fellow Chinese American

woman, I was excited to honor Dr. Chan and her contributions to library science. There aren't that many Asian American library leaders, so it was my pleasure to work on a project that highlighted her accomplishments and commitment to the library community.

Janet: Have you ever met Dr. Lois Mai Chan in person? What was the experience like with this project?

Monnee: I wish I had met her! My copy of *Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction* from library school looks well-loved—it's filled with dog-eared pages and sticky notes. Dr. Chan lived in Kentucky, where she taught for forty years at the University of Kentucky School of Library and Information Science (SLIS.) Because I was in San Diego, I never had the opportunity to meet her, but we spoke on the phone to coordinate the video. And, thanks to the great staff at the University of Kentucky SLIS who helped film Dr. Chan and her colleagues, we could create the video remotely.

Ray: I've only read some of her works during library school, particularly the textbook that we had to use in a cataloging class. I remember looking her up one day because I thought it was interesting to see an Asian American author in the field. When I found out that she was based in Kentucky, I was impressed and thought maybe I would meet her in the future someday. Unfortunately, I never got the chance, but we interacted indirectly via e-mail and it was nice to be in touch with her. I felt the project was a great way to test my own communication and project management skills: how often do we want to communicate, are there any resources we can consider, what are our deadlines, and what kind of creative components can we integrate into our project? It was indeed a team effort and it was helpful to hear and see how others think and approach the project.

Janet: What are your thoughts on oral history in the digital age, particularly for our field?

Ray: Oral history can be such an important historical resource to record one's experience/perspective. I think you may have read in this book that there are librarians working to capture the voices and oral histories of Asian American communities: it's so important to demonstrate Asian American resilience, progress, and creativity—from their struggles to triumphs. Similar to storytelling, I think oral history can be so insightful. This project demonstrated to us that librarians are people and people have some interesting and complex lives. I've done some oral history projects before, like interviewing veterans for a New York Public Library oral history project and they have been an enriching experience for the interviewer, interviewee, and listeners out there.

Monnee: Like Ray, I think oral history is important and a wonderful way to document people's voices, perspectives, and stories. Librarians are in a perfect position to help capture these stories! I am a fan of the organization StoryCorps, in which people interview each other and share their stories online through audio and animations. They set up story booths in a variety of places, such as the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and Grand Central Terminal in New York City, so that people could spontaneously share their stories. They now have a StoryCorps app to make sharing even more accessible. With tools like this app, it's only going to get easier to record and share our stories with the world so that we can learn from one another and understand each other better.

Janet: What was the response to this video project documenting Dr. Chan's life? What kind of legacy do you think Dr. Chan had on library school students?

Monnee: When I started the project, most of my colleagues who had gone to library school knew Dr. Chan's name—her name is synonymous with being the authority on cataloging and classification. One of my favorite parts of the video is when Dr. Chan says that her students' success is her success, that their achievements are the biggest reward. I think her answer is telling of how much she enjoyed making a positive difference in people's lives. She was a beloved mentor and colleague, and I have no doubt that library students are going to continue to learn from Dr. Chan's work.

Ray: Her impact was tremendous. I think people forget that cataloging professors can be so influential, too. I envy those students who were able to take her classes because it sounded like she was such a great mentor, teacher, and scholar and that she knew her "stuff" and was willing to provide opportunities to her students who were interested in cataloging and those who are not, as well. I remember hearing that Dr. Chan enjoyed the video and her family members did as well. I felt like we fulfilled that aspect of the project—and I am sure Dr. Chan had high standards, too.

Janet: What did you enjoy doing the most during this video project? If others wanted to do something similar, what would you recommend?

Ray: I enjoyed the fact that I was able to develop important connections with my teammates. I think the ALA Emerging Leader program can do an amazing job in fostering new relationships and learning opportunities. I enjoyed discussing how to turn this video project into a reality. I would say for those who are interested in making an oral history-based video project, plan ahead because things can change. I think we were very fortunate to have captured Dr. Chan's narration before she passed away. I would encourage others to

start small, maybe a podcast series where it's just audio and a few questions to get it started. It can be really fun and engaging.

Monnee: My skill level in video editing prior to this project was nonexistent, so I enjoyed learning iMovie and editing all the footage to come up with a cohesive story about Dr. Chan's professional life. Producing a tangible product that can be informative and enjoyable for others is rewarding. If I can do it, so can you! Because I had bare-bones skills, I played around with the program on my own, watched tutorials online, and spent the time to review my work. Playing around with video or audio would be my best recommendation—try recording something fun and editing that first. You could interview a colleague, record yourself doing a book talk, tell a story by drawing on a whiteboard; it could be anything that would be fun and just for you. iMovie (an Apple product) is a great beginner's editing program, and if you really get into it, you can "graduate" to Adobe Premiere or Final Cut Pro.

Janet: Thanks for speaking with me about this project. One last question—It's been over two years since you both did the project. How has the ALA Emerging Leaders project supported your career journey as Asian American librarians today?

Monnee: ALA Emerging Leaders opened up a new world for me. Before the program, I did not know much about supporting the profession on a national level, and Emerging Leaders opened that door for me so I could see what was possible. The program also gave me an opportunity to meet other librarians and network, which informs my career—chances are, if I have an idea for a project at my home library, another librarian has already accomplished it, so I don't have to reinvent the wheel. And if no one has accomplished it, well, you find partners who can help you create something new and wonderful for libraries and their communities.

Ray: I think Asian American library school students/librarians and archivists should take advantage of this program. It's not just a resume builder but an important activity to experience: you work on a project in one year with people you may not have worked with before. It may not be easy; but it may not be impossible, either. It's a growing experience to learn and develop your skills as a professional. I also feel much more connected to CALA because of this work and how some of the CALA members were so supportive: Sai Deng and the late CALA past-president Lisa Zhao. Two years after the project, I feel the experience has given me confidence to work on other projects with my collaborators—like this edited volume that includes Monnee Tong, my partner in crime for the ALA Emerging Leaders project!

Lois Mai Chan's video project on YouTube: <http://bit.ly/2pS9zWf>

BIOGRAPHY OF DR. LOIS MAI CHAN

Dr. Chan was a Chinese American name widely recognized in the library profession for her outstanding contributions to cataloging and classification. Dr. Chan was a professor at the School of Library and Information Science of the University of Kentucky. She was presented the Margaret Mann Citation for outstanding achievements in cataloging and classification through her publications and participation in professional cataloging associations. Among her numerous publications, several textbooks with their updated editions are extensively used in library schools, such as *A Guide to the Library of Congress Classification*, *Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction*, *Dewey Decimal Classification: A Practical Guide*, and *Library of Congress Subject Headings: Principles and Application*. Her textbooks are highly praised as "models of clarity and precision, furnishing important analyses and explanations of basic concepts for students." And her contributions "have enriched the study and teaching of cataloging and classification."