Social inclusion and public libraries: Is the ability to empathise an essential attribute for community librarians to better serve their ethnic minority users? A case study of Highfield Library and its Chinese community

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Abstract

This exploratory study investigates the role of empathy in cultivating the public library as a social inclusive environment. The aim of the dissertation is to verify if the ability to empathize is an essential attributes for professional librarians to serve ethnic minorities. Highfield library, one of the Sheffield public library, is chosen as the case study as it lies in the heart of the Chinese community.

Three groups of participants, non-Chinese librarians, Chinese librarians and Chinese users were invited to participate in the interviews. Librarians were asked with ten to twenty questions concerning their interaction with Chinese users and experience of attending culture awareness training prgramme. Their own perception on the ability to empathize and opinions on the essentialness of such ability have also been explored. Chinese users were asked to recount and comment on their experience with both non-Chinese and Chinese librarians.

Results reveal that having direct contact with Chinese users exerts a positive impact on librarians to develop empathetic skill. Although librarians have rated themselves quite high in such ability, most of them admitted that language is a significant obstacle to apply empathetic skill while serving Chinese users. Language is also crucial factor for Chinese users' preference of librarian when need serving.

Content

Chapter 1 Introduction

United Kingdom has shared the trend with other countries in the rest of the world; it has become a more and more diverse society. Its citizens have come from 'a wide range of national, cultural, racial and religious backgrounds and mixtures' (*Multicultural Britain* 2001). Former Prime Minister Tony Blair has once acknowledged the value of this particular ethnic diversity by giving the following response to the report 'Ethnic Minorities in the Labour Market': 'Britain has become a much more ethnically-diverse country. This has brought widespread benefits to the nation's culture, economy and society' (*Ethnic Minorities in the Labour Market: Reaction to the Report*, 2007).

Despite the great value of ethnic diversity, social exclusion is still one of the major social problems in British society. Ethnic minorities' citizens have been facing obstacles in engaging in the mainstream society. The government has been making a lot of initiatives. For example, Tony Blare has created the Social Exclusion Unit when he came to power in 1997 which this could be seen as a big step forward in combating social exclusion (*Social Exclusion Task Force Key Facts*, 2007).

It is hoped that social exclusion could be tackled in all aspects of life so that ethnic minorities' citizens could lead a better life in United Kingdom. Cultural sector is one of the areas that has been putting a lot effort into. Among all organizations, public library is believed to be a significant agent in tackling social exclusion as it is usually placed at the heart of the community. No other organizations are better placed as public library that could have engaged people from all walks of lives. The DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund established in 1997 was one of the evidences that the Government demonstrated its determination in addressing the issue.

In 1999, Department for Media, Culture and Sport has made a directional publication. The report 'Libraries for all: social inclusion in public library' has confirmed the value of public library in promoting social inclusion. Following this publication, a large-scale study 'Open for All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion' was carried out in 2000. It was a research accessing the capacity of public library in facilitating social inclusion. The purpose of the study was to exploring possible ways of public libraries in providing more accessible services to disadvantaged groups in the society. Many suggestions and recommendations have been made in the final report discussing what

could be done to transforming public library into a more inclusive environment for disadvantaged groups.

This comprehensive study has made a certain number of recommendations to the public library. These suggested measures are intended to improve services provided by public library in the context of social inclusion in particular. However, the focus of the study has been put on the accessing the services provided. Development and implementation of projects that have been associated with social inclusion strategies are extensively examined. The problem is: tackling social exclusion does not only depend on the quantity and quality of relevant services. It also involves interpersonal aspect that should not be neglected. That is the how these services are delivered by public librarians. Therefore, the competence of public librarians in delivering the services would largely affect the effectiveness of the projects.

During the first lesson of the MA course, the professor has identified library profession with three aspects: knowledge, skills, and attitudes or personal attributes. It is believed that both knowledge and skills could be made an improvement with practices, experiences or training. Personal attributes reflect one's personality and ways of thinking which is harder to change.

Empathy is a personal attribute that has been usually discussed in applying in medical and educational setting. Empathy has a positive impact on facilitating effective communication between medical staff and patients and between teacher and students. It is believed to be beneficial to library setting. The purpose of the research was to explore the role of empathy in creating a social inclusive library environment. This helps to examine the potential advantages of applying empathy in library service delivery to ethnic minorities' users.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Approach

2.1.1 Qualitative approach

The dissertation is going to be proceeded with a qualitative approach as it is more appropriate to study social relations (Flick, 2006). Simply speaking, quantitative and qualitative research approaches are differentiated from each other between their focus on quantity and quality (Berg, 1995). Quantity refers to amount, while quality refers to 'meanings, concepts and definitions of things' (Berg, 1995). Empathy, being the major component of the study, is a psychological skill that depends on the respondents' personal experience and perspective. A scholar who is in favour of qualitative approach asserted that 'certain experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers' (Berg, 1995).

By adopting a qualitative research approach, 'data which is flexible and sensitive to the social context could be produced' (Mason, 2002). The key concept of the study – 'the ability to empathize' is an abstract idea. It is also a subjective matter that may vary from one person to another. Therefore, qualitative research approach is desirable in this case to take a closer look on the effect of empathy on library service delivery. By adopting this approach, 'a deeper understanding of this social phenomenon' could be obtained (Silverman, 2001). This could be achieved by exploring the personal experience of different groups of stakeholders of public library. Librarians' self perception of 'the ability of empathize' and library users viewpoint would then be explored.

2.1.2 Case study approach

Case study approach is chosen to carry out the dissertation. It is often used as 'an exploratory investigation' (Hamel et al., 1993). The case study approach is desirable for the dissertation project as the psychological skill – 'the ability to empathize' is a rather new concept in the field of librarianship.

Case study approach is also believed to be in harmony with qualitative approach. The characteristics of qualitative approach, which are describing, understanding and explaining, could be fully elaborated by studying a particular case. It is because 'such a study is best able to describe and understand the case under investigation' (Hamel et al., 1993).

Since the case constructs the main body of the study, it has to be chosen with care. A suitable case could help to meet the objectives of the study. Highfield library is seen as a desirable case as it contains all of the elements that the study needs. It is a public library that situated in the heart of Chinese community. The librarians, both Chinese and British librarians, naturally would have a relative frequent contact with Chinese users. Hence, their use of empathy to serve Chinese users could be explored. Also, a comparison could be made between Chinese and British librarians' ability to empathize and its effect on service delivery effectiveness. This could then provide an in-depth view on the research topic.

The advantage of case study approach is to 'retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics' of certain subject matter by acquiring a wealth of data in which other research approach could not provide (Yin, 2003). This certainly serves as a sound base for further research.

2.1.3 Deductive approach

A deductive approach is used when the researcher wants to verify a particular hypothesis. In this research, two hypotheses have been made. Data are collected to prove or disprove such beliefs.

Firstly, due to the value of empathy in medical and educational field, it is hypothesized that empathy is also at a profound importance in library profession. The ability to empathize is believed to be an essential attribute for public librarians to serve the users. By exploring the opinions of public librarians themselves, it would then become clear if this is true to library profession. Secondly, it has been reviewed that empathy might be under the influence of culture. There might be a higher degree of empathy between people with the same ethnic background. This hypothesis will be

testified by comparing the difference of British and Chinese librarians' experience and self-perception. Chinese library users' viewpoint will be served as evidence to this comparison.

It is relatively easy for the researcher to become bias when deductive approach is adopted. There are two ways of to avoid having assumptions. The first one is to carry out an extensive literature review. Researcher could gain a more balanced view by investigating past researches' results. The experience and study approach of other researchers could serve as a reminder when the researcher is interpreting the result. The second way is to collect data from different group of participants. A balance set of samples help to generate results that are more similar to the actual social phenomenon.

2.2 Data collection methods

2.2.1 Literature Review

An extensive review of literature was carried out at the beginning of the study and will be conducted throughout the study. It is an inevitable step of every research because of its great helpfulness. Researchers could 'gain some knowledge of ideas of others interested in a particular research question' (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001). By reviewing and examining relevant studies, one could 'learn from the errors of others and avoid pitfalls' (Robinson, 2006).

Journal articles were mainly searched in the 'Emerald management reviews' database as it is the largest pool of librarianship journals. There are a considerable number of materials studying ethnic minorities and their use of library service. However, articles that have been focused on Chinese community are rather limited.

Empathy related articles have to be searched in different databases that focus on other subject areas such as psychology, social work and education. For example, 'Scopus' is used very often. It is a multi-disciplinary database in which many useful search results concerning empathy are yielded.

A large number of Government reports have been examined and most of them could be accessed through the Internet. National statistics across UK concerning ethnic

minorities' population have been studied too. These data could be obtained from the National Statistics Online. Bibliography is listed completely at the end of the article for further research.

After obtaining basic ideas of the study topic, two other methods of data collection will be used to explore the hand-on experience of current librarians and library users. There two methods are interview and focus group.

2.2.2 Interview

Interview is seen as the most commonly used method in research. It is useful in eliciting 'people's views, understanding, interpretations and experiences' towards certain social incident or concept (Mason, 2002). The purpose of conducting interviews is based on the researchers' 'interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman, 1991). Hence, it is an appropriate method for this research. It is hoped that both librarians and Chinese users could share their experiences on the interaction between the groups. Their viewpoints and personal feelings towards the use of empathy could then be investigated by examining those experiences. This helps to increase the depth and the dimension of the research question (Mason, 2002).

Four British librarians will be asked to invite to participate in the interviews. These targeted interviewees have to be front-line staffs as they are believed to have more frequent contacts with Chinese users. This is vital as the personal contact with the library users is the main study area. In the end, three British librarians and one African Caribbean have been invited in the actual study. Having an ethnic minority librarian would be an asset to the study. This might help to produce a more balanced set of result. This research topic could be investigated with another cultural perspective. Also, these non-Chinese librarians are from different age group and with different level of experience. This balanced sample may help to enrich the result and raise many interesting points for discussion.

There are two Chinese librarians working in Highfield Library. Unfortunately, only one of them has participated in the study. This Chinese librarian has worked for the

Sheffield public library for a long time. Also, apart from counter service, he is also involved in many administration tasks. He might be able to share viewpoints which are different from front-line staff. Therefore, his sharing is certainly worth presenting.

A semi- structured model, also know as semi-standardized interview, of interviewing has been used. This model contains 'a number of predetermined questions or special topics' (Berg, 1995). Interviewees are asked to answer these questions 'in a systematic and consistent order' (Berg, 1995). However, interviewer could probe for more information whenever needed. This model has the advantage of maintaining both the focus and the flexibility of the research at the same time. The student could ask follow-up questions to facilitate interviewees' further elaboration.

2.2.3 Focus group

Focus group is an ideal method for an explanatory research. It is because it provide 'a means for exploring the ways potential respondents talk about objects and events' (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). This method is found to be suitable as the use of empathy is a brand-new concept in library professions. Chinese library users' perception on this particular idea is not predictable. Therefore, focus group serves as an effective occasion for Chinese library users to express their opinions freely without any limitations. Their answer would not be framed within several predetermined closed-end answers in a survey. As stated by a social science researcher, focus group is useful in a way that it 'allows individuals to respond in their own words' (Morgan, 1993).

Focus group has an advantage of 'placing people in natural, read-life situations' (Krueger, 1994). Participants might tend to express more about their feelings under this relaxing atmosphere. Also, focus group is valuable in providing a communication platform for targeted participants. Chinese library users are given a chance to share their own experience of interacting with librarians. By comparing and integrating their viewpoints, the potential value of empathetic skills of librarian could be evaluated.

Four to six Chinese library users of Highfield library will be invited to participate in the focus group. This particular size of the group is desirable as it allows the equal sharing of insights among all participants (Krueger, 1994). Through sharing and listening,

participants are more able to 'articulate their motivations, feelings, attitudes, and opinions' in a focus group (Morgan, 1993). In another words, group discussion would stimulate awareness so that participants could provide more data that are needed for the research. This helps to probe more in-depth data that an interview could not provide (Krueger, 1994).

2.2.4 Triangulation

Triangulation is defined as 'the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon' (Amaratunga et al., 2001). Its main purpose is to confirm and complete data set (Breitmayer et al., 1993). There are five categories of triangulation which are data, investigator, theoretical, methodological and analysis. In this research, triangulation in data source and data collection methods is adopted.

First of all, data triangulation means multiple data sources are obtained in order to provide different angles of perceiving a certain situation (Begley, 1996). Librarians' effectiveness in using empathetic skills is evaluated by both librarians themselves and library users. Librarians' self awareness on how effective they serve users is critical. As the same time, user's perception is also a significant indicator. No matter these two sets of data are consistent or not, it would be an interesting starting point to investigate.

Secondly, triangulation in data collection methods is adopted. Since different data collection methods have their own strength and weakness, adopting two or more methods could balance off the limitation that one particular method might bring. This enhances the validity of the research.

2.3 Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis will be used as the method of analyzing all collected data. Interviews and focus group will be tape-recorded and transcribed. Data with a written form allows the researcher to analyze more readily by. Also, the researcher could refer to the source whenever is needed to check for accuracy (Seidman, 1991).

Simply speaking, content analysis means 'textual investigation' (Silverman, 2001). The data will be summarized, categorized and interpreted according to themes (Flick, 2006). Themes will be derived by observing patterns of the verbatim of participants of the research. They are then studied and compared in a systematic way. Data will be analyzed with reference to the aims and objectives of the research. Its aim is to extract the most relevant information to the research topic.

2.4 Limitation

4.4.1 Ethnicity in interviewing

Interview involves the communication of two people, the interviewer and the interviewee. Culture plays a role in the effectiveness of such communication. It has been pointed out that interviewing a person with different ethnic background would hamper the results of the interview. It is because the researcher is 'potentially lacking a detailed knowledge or appreciation of particular cultural, and ethnic factors and can be considered a social intruder' (Abbas, 2006). Because of this lack of culture awareness, the interviewer may not get the whole picture of the studied social phenomenon from the interviewee. In this research, British librarians will be asked to share their experiences of interacting with Chinese users. Since the interviewer will be of Chinese background, British librarians may feel cautious and do not reveal their true feeling towards these experiences. They might intend to give a polite answer which would not offend the Chinese interviewer.

On the other hand, there is also advantage in interviewing across ethnicity. The interview itself could help raising participants'' awareness in the research topic. Andersen, a White researcher, had done a research on political economy of African American in which Black women were the targeted interviewees. Throughout the process of the study, a participant has thanked Andersen that the research had given his family an opportunity to talk about his racial history (Stanfield and Dennis, 1993). It is hoped that this positive effect could happen in this research too. Librarian should come to aware that

social skill such as the ability to empathize could be an essential attribute for the profession.

2.4.2 Interviewing skills

The effectiveness of data collection methods such as interview and focus group largely depends on the competence of the interviewer or the moderator. It has been described that 'interviewing is an art' (Seidman, 1991). Interviewer's amount of experience in conducting interviews and personal characteristics would exert an effect on how the effective the interview will be (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). In another words, the professional skills of the researcher as an interviewer would affect the quality and quantity of the collected data. The student has acquired a social work degree in Hong Kong in which it might be an asset to the research. Having equipped with different kinds of communication techniques, she might be able to probe relevant and appropriate questions to extract useful information. Also the student understands the importance of establishing a harmonious relationship with the interviewees. She could engage well with the interviewees and certainly this could enhance the effectiveness of the interviews.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Social inclusion and public library

In recent years, social inclusion has caught the attention of many political leaders around the world. The interpretation and definitions derived by academics or politicians may vary according to different socio-economic areas. According to a British organization, Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion, has defined social inclusion as 'the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life' (*Social Inclusion*, 2002). In 2004, European Commission has published a report on social inclusion which gave a fuller picture of social inclusion by furthering explaining what aspects are included if citizens could fulfill their potential.

> The process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live.
> (*Joint report on social inclusion 2004*, 2004)

As it can be seen in this definition, a citizen is socially included if he or she could share the same opportunities as others economically, socially and culturally. In the same report, it has been suggested that public library has a crucial role in engaging all excluded groups into the community (*Joint report on social inclusion 2004*, 2004). It is because public library has advantages of being local and having a vast amount of users. It is a public service that has frequent and direct contact to the community. Therefore, no other public service is better positioned as public library to cultivating a social inclusion environment than public library. Earlier in 2000, the British government has already recognized that public library's significance in combating social exclusion. Department for Culture, Media and Sport has produced an indicative guideline to public library. Chris Smith, the Culture Secretary, stated in the foreword that 'the

Government wants libraries to be at the very heart of the communities they serve' (*Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries,* 1999).

Social excluded groups should be targeted before initiatives could be carried out and made effective. In the past, poverty was seen as the main reason of being disadvantaged. As time went by, the British government officials came to aware that poverty is no longer able to explain the complexity and magnitude of the social problems. Therefore, the concept of disadvantaged groups has been broadened (Train et al., 2000). Many more factors have been taken into account when considering social inclusion. In the *Libraries for all* guideline, 'those at risk of social disadvantage or marginalisation, particularly by virtue of the area they live in; their disability or age, racial or ethnic origin' are also considered as disadvantaged group (*Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries,* 1999).

3.2 Ethnic minorities in UK and in Sheffield

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, ethnic minority is defined as 'a national or racial group living in a country or area which contains a larger group of people of a different race or nationality' (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2007). In the Queen's golden jubilee speech, she had addressed to the Parliament that British has become 'a richly multicultural and multifaith society since 1952' (*Full text of the Queen's Jubilee speech*, 2002). There is no doubt that Britain is becoming more and more diversified in terms of ethnic origins. Publications by the Office for National Statistics serve as strong evidence.

Results of the 2005 national population statistic showed that about 4.6 million people are from minority ethnic groups in United Kingdom. This has constructed 7.9% of the population. These ethnic groups included Asian, Blacks, Chinese and others. Among these ethnic groups, Asians and Blacks are the dominant groups which have already taken up 75.1%. Chinese is the third largest group although its 5.3% share is very small compared to the Asians and Blacks. However, Chinese community has been expanding rapidly. In a summary report published by the National Statistics, it has been explicitly

stated that there is a significant rise of Chinese population over the past ten years. The proportion has increased 0.1% (*People & Migration - Archived in Dec 2005*, 2004).

Based on the 2001 Census Topic Reports prepared by the Sheffield City Council (*Sheffield 2001 Census Topic Reports: Ethnic Origin*, 2003), it is not difficult to see that the population pattern of Sheffield in particular resembles the UK population pattern. White British is no doubt the largest ethnic group. Asian ad Blacks are the largest minority ethnic groups. Chinese is the third largest minority ethnic group which constructs 0.4% of the total population of Sheffield.

3.3 Public library services provided to ethnic minorities groups

It has been twenty years since public library plays a role in political agenda to help tackling social exclusion. A number of recommendations have been made and implemented. The results varied (Muddiman, 2000). It seemed that ethnic minorities' information needs has not caught much attention at that time. In 2000, Department for Media Culture and Sport has commenced a policy research project on reviewing 'the context of social exclusion and the nature of the problems facing public libraries and other public institutions' (Muddiman et al., 2000). A large scale initiative, People's Network has been implemented since then. However, it aims at helping those who lack internet access. Despite the influx of ethnic minorities, policy recommendations have failed to target at this group to cater their needs at a national strategic level.

Nevertheless, a number of works have been done at a local level to meet the needs of ethnic minorities' library users. According to a report released by Sheffield City Council, there are five aspects to be considered in providing service to BME (Black and minority ethnic) communities (Dutch, 2007). The first one is publicity of library service in communities' language. For example: Library opening time and cultural awareness packs are translated into Chinese and other languages. The second aspect is the organizing cultural awareness training course for library staff. Although these two aspects are not direct services, it is vital in breaking down the language barrier. The third aspect is the provision of materials in community languages. The fourth aspect is form

partnership with community organization in coordinating cultural activities. The fifth aspect is employing minority ethnic staff.

3.4 Empathy

There are numerous literatures studying empathy. It is generally defined as 'the ability to see another person's world through their eyes' (Aldridge and Rigby, 2001). It also involves the deep understanding of others' emotions, thoughts and body movements to full extent (Aldridge and Rigby, 2001). It is a crucial component of all helping professions such as psychiatrists, counsellor, social worker, physicians, nurses, etc. It helps to create a mutual relationship with a feeling of genuineness, trust and confidence. Empathy is sometimes misunderstood as sympathy. Empathy could be distinguished by 'the presence of cognitive activity' (Dyche and Zayas, 2004). Empathy has been identified as the ability to 'reach reaches for an understanding of the others feeling while maintaining a clear perception of the boundary between self and other' (Dyche and Zayas, 2004). A balance has to be reached between emotions and cognitive thinking.

It has been argued that empathy is 'a core skill which applies to all helping functions' (Shulman, 1979). Public librarian is certainly counted as a helping profession. Public library has long been regarded as the heart of the community. It has also been seen as one of the key institutions to tackle social inclusion. Therefore, there is a need to study how essential it is for public librarians to be able to apply empathic skills while serving the users especially to ethnic minority users.

3.4.1 Empathy and communication

Empathy has long been seen as an important component of communication. As Hardee has stated, 'empathy is a powerful communication skill' (Hardee, 2003). It has been found out that empathy involved attentive listening and appropriate responding. This apparently is the essence of communication since its ultimate goal is to deliver a piece of information from a speaker to a listener. Careful listening and giving appropriate

responds facilitate a more effective communication. Hence, one's ability to demonstrate empathy certainly facilitates the process of communication.

Communication is under strong social influence. It has been asserted that 'communication is a social process' (Hartley, 1999). In another words, an effective process of communication is subject to many social aspects. For example: physical environment, social environment, social norms and cultural norms, etc. Among these factors, cultural factor has been considered as one of the most influential one. It is powerful in the way that being unconscious. 'The culture in which a person is nurtures and socialized influence the way he or she presents messages, and helps him or her shape appropriate communication behaviours, such as listening, speaking, silence, distance, and body language' (Zhang, 2006). Therefore, it is logical to believe that communication is more effective between two people with the same ethnic background. It is because they are under the influence of the same culture and are restrained by the same set of social norms.

3.4.2 Empathy and culture

As shown in the previous section, empathy is a vital part of communication. Therefore, it is believed that the ability to empathize is also subject to cultural factor. 'Culture runs through people's relationships, giving messages that shape perceptions, attributions, and judgments, ideas of self and other'(LeBaron, 2003) . With have a better understanding on one's ways of thinking, one tends to have a higher ability to show empathy if he or she is facing a person with the same ethnic background.

Ethnocultural empathy is used to described the use of empathy in a cross-cultural context (Wang et al., 2003). The term 'cultural empathy' is also used. It is defined as 'deepening of the human empathic response to permit a sense of mutuality and understanding across the great differences in value and expectation that cross-cultural interchange often involves' (Dyche and Zayas, 2004). In another words, it is a skill to bridge the gap between two people with different ethnic backgrounds.

As Wang (2003) has proposed, this culturally specific empathy could be identified with three components. The first one is intellectual empathy which refers to 'the ability to

understand an ethnically different person's thinking or feeling' (Wang et al., 2003). The second component is empathic emotions which refer to showing the same level of attention to people who are with the same and different ethnic background (Wang et al., 2003). The third component is the communicative empathy which refers to the ability to express empathic thoughts and feeling (Wang et al., 2003).

3.4.3 Empathy in other professions

Empathy is seen as an essential skill in many professions. It is considered as a valuable attribute for many areas such as counselling, social work, medical setting and educational setting. For instance, in most key psychology and social work text books, empathy has been mentioned very frequently. Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has also set the cultivation of empathy as a learning objective (Hojat et al., 2002). Empathy is certainly beneficial to interpersonal relationships. It fosters effective communication and hence gaining a better understanding within a relationship.

Since the ability to empathize is subject to cultural factor, it is argued that there would be a greater level of empathy between two people with the same ethnic origin. This effectiveness is believed to have positive impact on service delivery in particular. Research has been carried out and evidence could be found in both medical and educational settings. There has been initiative to match clinicians and mental health patients with the(Ziguras et al., 2003) same ethnic background in Australia. The study revealed that there is a better service use outcome with ethnic minorities' patients that have been matched with a bilingual clinician (Ziguras et al., 2003). This may due to the patients feel at ease to express their feeling to someone they believe there is a better understanding. Ethnic similarity has also benefit tutor-tutee relationship. The similarity helps to create 'a more relaxed and co-operative atmosphere' (Fresko and Chen, 1989). This then has a 'positive and direct impact upon perceived tutoring effectiveness' (Fresko and Chen, 1989). In light of the benefit of ethnic similarity shown in other professions, it seems that this could happen in library setting.

Ethnic minorities' librarians may be better placed to serve that particular group of users. It may due to the removal of the language barriers. Another reason may be due to

the willingness of ethnic minorities' users to express their information needs to librarians that have the same background as themselves. Therefore, it is hypothesized that librarian could better serve the users who have the same ethnic background. For instance, Chinese librarian might be at better placed to serve Chinese users. If not, having a high cultural awareness is also desirable. For instance, it has been recommended that academic librarian should take staff training specifying in foreign language and culture (Zhang, 2006).

3.4.4 Empathy and librarianship

Empathy is a rather new concept in the field of librarianship. Hence, there are very limited materials on librarians' use of empathic skills. Nevertheless, some researchers still believed the need of developing this particular skill for librarians. On a career website, an assistant librarian expressed that 'empathy is one of the psychological skills that a librarian must work to improve' (Nikolova, 2004). It is believed to be essential as this could improve the quality of service provided. In order to show one is empathetic, one must listen very carefully to other needs. Nikolova (2004) suggested that attentive listening can enhance the effectiveness of the conversation which leads to a better reference interview. She also argues that empathy is a skill that could be learned rather than an innate gift (Nikolova, 2004).

In another article, a freelance librarian has also written the importance of developing social skills. She commented that one should 'learn to understand and translate other people's though structures and needs' (Burghardt and Grunwald, 2001). This is particularly useful for information discussion. Librarian is at a better place to handle a wide variety of enquiries.

The importance of empathy can also be seen from a scientific measurement of a library's service quality. The LibQUAL is a new diagnostic tool offered by Association of Research Libraries to track library's users' opinions of service quality (*LibQUAL+(TM)* 2007). In this evaluation model, empathy is one the five measuring components. It is described as 'the caring, individualized attention the firm provides to its customers'

(Cook et al., 2001). Within the scaling table, empathy is also described as to what extent a librarian show his or her responsiveness, assurance, reliability (Cook et al., 2001).

Chapter 4 Aims & Objectives

4.1 Aims

To investigate if

- Librarians' ability to empathize could help to make library a more social inclusive environment for ethnic minority users
- Librarians find it easier to show empathy to users with the same ethnic background as themselves
- The application of empathetic skill helps librarians to deliver library service more effectively especially to ethnic minorities
- Librarian's believe the ability to empathize is an essential attribute while serving ethnic minority users

4.2 Objectives

To explore

- Chinese librarians's ability in empathizing Chinese users and their effectiveness
- Non-Chinese librarians's ability in empathizing Chinese users and their effectiveness
- The degree of empathy in facilitating librarians to understand the information needs of Chinese users so that to enhance the
- The role of empathy in facilitating effective communication between librarians and Chinese users
- Librarians' belief in the importance of empathy in delivering library service to Chinese library users
- Chinese library users' perspective of both Chinese and non-Chinese librarians' use of empathy and its effectiveness

Chapter 5 Ethics Consideration

Since the research involves human participants, there are several measures to ensure the research is carried out according to the code of ethics. Only competent potential participants are invited to participate in the study. Potential participants who are invited to attend an interview or a focus group will be given an information sheet about the details of the research. Contact details of the student and the supervisor are provided so that these potential participants could make any enquires at any stage of the research. The aims, objectives and process of the research are explained very clearly both in written form in the information sheet and verbally before any interviews and focus group start.

It is up to the targeted participants to decide whether they would like to take part or not. Potential participants who have agreed to take part will be asked to sign a consent form before the research could actually commence. They will be given a copy of the consent form after signing.

Throughout the process of the research, the participants could withdraw at anytime whenever they wish to do so. They do not need to provide any explanations. Moreover, they could also refuse to answer any questions that are regarded as sensitive and uncomfortable.

The issue of confidentiality and anonymity are ensured to up hold very strictly throughout the project. All data collected will only be accessed by the supervisor and the student. The participants will be referred to by number or alphabet, and their recorded data linked to in this way for safety. This makes the participants could not be identified easily. Both the whole process of the interview and the focus group will be recorded as the primary data of the study. It will then be transcribed and analyzed. All recorded data such as tapes or digital files will be destroyed once the research has been completed and assessed.

Chapter 6 Results

Three groups of participants, non-Chinese librarians, Chinese librarians and Chinese users have been interviewed. Their interviews' results are presented in three separate sections.

6.1 Non-Chinese Librarians' interview results

6.1.1 Interpretation and understanding on empathy

All of the non-Chinese librarians have heard of the word 'empathy' and have shown a certain level of understanding on the meaning of the word. However, they are not very sure of the meaning and none of them could give an accurate and comprehensive account of the word.

> Yes, I understand that it means if I empathies with you that I can understand you and what you are thinking. I am aware what you…Yes, and I understand and agree with what stage you are at.
>
> **B1**

> Understanding. I think. Awareness. Knowing the difference and to know the needs of your community base.
>
> **B4**

> Compassion and understanding. That's what I felt, the ability to know these things.
>
> **B3**

One of them has mixed the word 'empathy' with 'sympathy'.

Yes. Empathy is where you sympathies with someone, or sort of empathies with their culture…… that kind of thing.

B2

6.1.2 Frequency of contact with Chinese library users

Since Highfield library lies in the heart of Chinese community, all of the librarians have frequent contact with Chinese users.

Yes, very much so I would say.

B1

We got a lot of them. We come downstairs and we also got a few Chinese children upstairs. So, quite a few, really.

B2

Yes. From time to time.

B3

Yes. Highfield is in the heart of Chinese community. I do serve them regularly.

B4

6.1.3 Degree of interest and channels in understanding Chinese culture

All librarians have shown interest in understanding Chinese culture both at work and at personal life. They would seek such opportunities through different channels such as participating cultural events, interaction with Chinese librarians and Chinese users.

There is the Chinese community centre down the road that we visited from time to time. I have been to Chinese New

Year Celebration. And I must admit probably through talking to May as well as the general public.

If they (Chinese community) have anything happening down there, we have gone down to see when we are being invited. And we have gone to see what they are doing if there is a special celebration or special opening ceremony.

B1

My boss, the other library that I am working in is Chinese. He tells me about Hong Kong quite a lot and stuff like that. Yes. Tommy. He told us quite a lot about it (Hong Kong). And there is also May who works here. I went to school with her kids as well.

B2

There is a big cultural event during the New Year. I will ask them what they are doing and what events are taking placed.

B3

When I have time, you know we have one of the managers, he is from Chinese background, when he comes upstairs, I would talk to him about the culture of Chinese. I am interested in Chinese culture anyway.

B4

6.1.4 Degree of initiative in understanding Chinese user's library service needs

Only one of the librarians has taken the imitative to ask Chinese users' reading interest. It was in an indirect way in asking Chinese librarian.

Yeah, I find it quite interesting enough. I ask May about what the (Chinese) books are about and stuff like that, so (it's) quite interesting really.

B2

Due to the nature of job and time limitation, non-Chinese librarians usually leave the task of understanding Chinese user's library service needs such as exploring popular fiction choice to Chinese librarians.

That would be largely done by Tommy primarily…It is only through asking people what they like and what they would like to see that these changes are come about.

B1

No. Not to know their fiction choice. It's quite busy at the counter. Given that I am not at the position to order or buy Chinese books. It is really busy at the counter and I would not have time to ask them.

Because there are other people who are responsible to buy the Chinese books for the Chinese community such as C1. We would talk to the Chinese librarian. We would talk to C2 and to know about what people read. C2 in many ways is the main contact to understand what Chinese community wants. She has such opportunity.

B4

6.1.5 Degree of initiative in meeting Chinese user's library service needs

Non-Chinese librarians have tried their best in meeting Chinese user's library service needs. They would notify the users there are new books or magazines or newspaper available.

> If we have been buying new books, we have put up a display telling what books we have got, what new books are coming and ask people if they are happy with the choices. Sometime we have a list of books that are available and tell people would you like to pick the books that you like.
>
> You know, we have tried as far as possible. I think having doing that; we did start buying more romance stories, because the romance stories are very popular. The magazines as well, I think, we have started buying more magazines because the magazines are also very popular.
>
> In the summer sometimes…I always make a point of telling lots of Chinese readers that come in that they can now take more books. It is because I know they would take them and read them. I would actively tell them there are new books.
> **B1**

6.1.6 Impression on Chinese users

Most of the librarians have a good impression of Chinese users. Very often, Chinese users are described as polite. They are quite and love reading.

But on the whole, I do find the Chinese people very polite and very helpful. And they…it is such a generalization. They do always seem…they love to read, they love reading.

They are all very polite. They read a lot of books. They must books rather than watching the television. They must do. To read the amount of books

B1

I reckon the Chinese users generally know what they want and they just get the Chinese fiction.

B2

They are very polite. They just come here and to use the library. By all the meanings of the library, which are taking books, sometimes sitting beside their children. They can talk. They are fine, they are polite.

B4

One librarian noticed that Chinese people have a strong sense in maintaining their own culture.

It seems to me from I have spoke to Chinese people that they do actively try and maintain the culture and try to maintain the language.

B1

6.1.7 Problems arise when serving Chinese users

All non-Chinese librarians asserted that language is the main barrier in serving Chinese users.

Language is a big stumbling block. Yes. Language does make things difficult.

B1

There are some Chinese users that come in and join the library that really don't speak English very well or at all…Because when I work, it is quite difficult to communicate who doesn't speak very good English.

B2

Language is a problem. It takes more time really. It also depends on how busy we are. Sometimes things get difficult at busy times. You have to explain more on complicated aspects, for example which books are outstanding. That is the main problem I feel.

B3

But the problem is quite often they don't speak English. That's a problem.

B4

Such language problem is believed to be more serious when serving older Chinese users. On the other hand, communication is not a problem when serving Chinese users with good English skills or children.

The children they do speak. They are better than the parents. I can see that the first generation or second generation or third or whatever, you know, the older one sounds a bit slower, or may be a bit shy even just to talk. But when the children are with them, they always speak for them…the

children are better…The children they speak, they are good
in communicating in English.

B3

I think the biggest problem is language. It is especially to
the older generation. There is a communication problem.

B4

6.1.8 Ways of coping the problem arise

Since language is the main barrier in communication, non-Chinese usually choose to
speak more slowly to enhance the communication. Body language is also another
technique.

Yes to a certainly extent. I would try, possibly I would try a
little bit harder to make sure they understand what I am
saying. If they don't, I have said from time to time, I will
make note of this and I would ask a colleague and get back
to him/her on that. So yes, I think you do try a little harder
sometimes. If you are not sure that people fully understand
what you might be saying. For example, I would speak
more slowly. I mean it does help sometime if you speak a
bit more slowly.

B1

I think I would speak more slowly. I sort of try to like point
at things more, to use body language.

B2

6.1.9 Self-perception on the ability to empathize

All non-Chinese librarians believed they are quite competent in applying empathy skills. Some of them rate themselves quite high.

> I do always try making an effort to empathies that everything is happening in the local area. You have got to try to put yourself in their position and imagine what you would feel like walking through the door into a strange place and asking question in a language that properly not your first language. So you know it is not easy. You should try and understand how these people might be feeling no matter what culture they come from.
> **B1**

> Probably quite good I would say. I know it can be hard to come in to communicate with people and stuff like that. I won't say that I know everything but I think I know quite a bit about it.
> **B2**

> I try my best, 8 may be. I would not say 10, because I don't know all the languages. If I know all the languages, I would use any language. I don't mind.
> **B3**

> On a good day, 8 or 9. So I think I have a good degree of understanding on what the users might need.
> **B4**

One of them has admitted their ability to empathize would depend on situation.

On a bad day 4. It would depend on the situation, for example how good the Chinese users could speak English. Sometimes.

B4

The opportunity and experience in interacting with people from other ethnic background or with special needs is considered to be the main reason why librarians believe they are competent in applying empathy skills.

I think experience helps a lot… it is a learning process, a continue learning process. And I think we all improve over the years. I am sure I am better. I know I am better.

B1

I think it is because I have the opportunity to interact with Chinese librarians. And just talk to different people. Like the little girl that comes to the children library. I talk to her quite a lot. She comes from Hong Kong and tells me about it.

B2

I did a bit of social working before I came to the library with special children…The experience in doing social work helps me a lot in developing this ability.

B3

We got other organizations such as Jews or asylum seekers organization to work with outside the library. So I think I have a good degree of understanding on what the users might need.

B4

<u>6.1.10 Incidents that shown non-Chinese librarians have applied empathetic skills</u>

All non-Chinese librarians agreed that the ability to empathize does help them to deliver library service in a more effective way, although the degree might different. All of them could share with an incident how they apply empathy and find it helpful.

> The adventure books can come and they follow on up to sometimes ten volumes in one series. So if people come to the counter and they say number 4 is missing. They really want to read them in order. It is not easy for me, but I will try hard to find where it is through our English cataloguing system. It is a two way thing. I have to say 'Do you think this is the one or this looks like the one? Yes, it should be there. Or someone else has got it. Can I order it for you and then get it for you?
> **B1**

> A man called Mr. Hamit came in with his son. And he had done some sort of research in library books and those are story books. And if you did not know, like about Muslim culture how strict they can be, and then you will just think he was just being awful. Actually in his culture, it was not acceptable to read stories. And he did not like his son to go on the internet and stuff like that until he gets to a certain age because the things he might see on the internet.

> If for example, a Muslim person, you have to be careful what you wear in the library. Because of their religious views, you don't want to offend them in anyway by wearing like something too revealing.
> **B2**

A group of children come in. Two of them are loud and noisy. You ask those two to go out. Some of the staffs would ask all of them to go out which is really not fair. It is because the other one did not really do anything. They are just together. They came with them. So that is one thing. The other thing is even when they did something not right, naughty, you do not have to come too hard, harsh and sharp on them. You have to talk to them a little bit. They might listen to you and then you know you win. You want them to be here. You want them to come to the library. You do not want them to stay away from the library.

B3

We told the (Chinese) users that we provide dual language information service when they first join the library. We told them we have a Chinese speaking librarian and got quite good stock here.

B4

6.1.11 Perception on the importance of empathetic skills to a community librarian

All non-Chinese librarians believed that empathetic skills are essential

Yes. I would say so. Definitely.

B1

It's very helpful because if you don't know anything about any other culture, then I don't think you are going to be able to understand their needs that well. I think you need to have some idea of different people's background. Now

even includes Polish people because we are getting a lot of Polish people in the minute. If you knew only about British people, you would not get very far really.

B2

Yes. It is absolutely essential especially in this area. There is a big mixture of people.

B4

A non-Chinese librarian has pointed out that this ability is essential not only when serving users, but also interacting with other library staff.

[The ability to empathize is also essential] to the staff as well. We have problems with the staff as well. We are at different age, different thinking, you know, all that kind of things, old school, new school.

B3

6.1.12 Perception on the value of Chinese librarians

Chinese librarians are seen as a great value to library service as they serve as a bridge between the Chinese users and non-Chinese librarians.

And of course, we have C2. And I would say she is one of the biggest assets we have got here. She makes life a lot easier. Some people do come in and specifically ask for C2 because it is easier for them to explain what they want.

Before C2 works here, we did have a group of Chinese people who work here. They always have been very useful and very good at the job. They have also helped us to

understand that thing. So it is not just that they can speak to the Chinese community but they can help us to understand.

B1

In a way yes. Because especially of the language barrier. Because C2 can explain things to the Chinese. Quite often one come in and wanted to be served by C2. Quite a lot of them know what day she works here. So, they come in to see her. I think if they do speak good English and I don't think it is very important. C2 is very useful here.

B2

If we have language problem, we have C2 and C1. We can always give them a phone.

B4

6.1.13 Librarians' experience in cultural awareness training programme

Not all librarians have attended a cultural awareness training programme since they have joined the Sheffield library service. Only one of the British librarians has attended such training and she agreed it was very helpful to grasp a basic understanding of the cultures that were mentioned.

It is about the culture and a little bit of history, just to make you understand how the people arrive here, what people are like. Very small, simple, but it's very helpful. It provides a general understanding.

B1

6.2 Chinese Librarians' interview results

Due to availability, only one Chinese librarian is able to participate in this study. Nevertheless, his viewpoints worth to be put down as reference.

6.2.1 Understanding and interpretation of empathy

Chinese librarian seemed to have a clear and comprehensive understanding on the word empathy.

> Empathy means you understand someone, but you remain calm and you can help him/her to get along with the problem. You remain neutral.

He could even distinguish the difference from the 'sympathy' which many people have mixed up with.

> One gets more involved. In another words, if someone got a problem and you sympathies, you were emotionally troubled by that problem too.

6.2.2 Frequency of contact with Chinese library users

C1 does not have frequent contact with the Chinese users in the library. He usually meets the coordinators of the organizations in the community to promote Sheffield library services.

> The Chinese people whom I usually meet are not the users of the library. The people I meet are the coordinators of various community organizations. I would introduce library service through them to the community.

6.2.3 Degree of initiative in understanding Chinese users' background

Due to cultural customs, C1 does not seek to know user's background in a very direct way as this may cause misunderstanding.

> I would be very cautious about this. The Chinese community which is staying in a foreign country is usually very small. If I want to explore more about someone's background, he or she might misunderstand my intention.

> In the end, I would be very careful about this, about showing the interest of understanding others. It is because not everybody is happy to let others know his or her own background.

Also, he avoids doing so at work. If the situation is allowed, he would talk more in depth with the users outside the library.

> Usually I would not do so at work. I would avoid exploring their background. Through personal contact outside the library, say for example when I meet them on Sunday in a restaurant, we would chat.

> When I am working, I usually focus on the business matter and meet my clients' needs.

C1 cherishes the opportunity to chat with the users and understand them more if the users take the initiative to start the conversations. He is keen in building the rapport.

If he is the one who started the conversation, telling me that he comes from Singapore and has been staying here for about 20 years, then I would chat with him telling him that I have been staying here for about 30 years.

But sometimes the library users would talk about his background; for example, he told me he would like to read a Singapore newspaper. Then I would share my experience from Hong Kong.

6.2.4 Degree of initiative in understanding Chinese user's library service needs

C1 does have the opportunity to ask for Chinese users' feedback or opinions on their library service needs but not very often.

Just before every Chinese New Year, I buy new Chinese books. During the celebration activity, I would ask the Chinese users if they like the new books. If they do not, I would ask them what choices they like. I would try to order them later. Also, if they have any other special needs, they could tell me. I would explore their needs… I would ask them what they need in terms of library service, but not always.

Also, he avoids asking direct questions to avoid confusion. It is because Chinese users might have mentioned something that is not really necessary.

I would avoid asking them directly what their needs are. It is because direct questions might encourage them to mention some services they do not really need. They might

only say so because I have asked them directly. This therefore might confuse me. I might not be able to distinguish their real needs. For example, they have raised five or six points, but I would not know which one is more pressing. Therefore, I would not ask them in a direct way.

6.2.5 Advantages and disadvantages of similar cultural background in providing services

C1 believes that culture similarity helps him to understand users reading interest so that he would purchase these materials for the Chinese users.

> According to my experience, it is true that it is easier to anticipate the needs of Chinese users that British users…I would know what kinds of magazines are very popular obviously. Then, I know magazine is such a popular material that there is such a high demand on that. In sum, I think the similar background does help me to better understand their information needs.

On the other hand, C1 believes that such similarity may bring disadvantage too. Librarian may make assumptions.

> This similarity made me have a presumption. You would make assumptions before others telling what they really want.

6.2.6 Difference between Chinese users and non-Chinese users when providing library services

C1 expressed that he has been providing the same service to both Chinese and non-Chinese library users. Users' ethnicity is not relevant when considering how to serve them in the library.

> No matter where they come from, I would provide the same service…Generally speaking, there is no big difference between serving a Chinese user and a British user or other ethnic minority user. I think what I am doing is more or less the same.

Still, there are differences in the way how he greeted the users and the languages he chose to speak to the users because of the users' ethnicity.

> British users have their own way of greeting. Usually, they talk about weather. For example they would say: It's raining again, it's it? Somewhere has a serious flooding problem. On the other hand, Chinese users usually ask of if there is any new stock added to the Chinese collection.

6.2.7 Choice of language in communicating with Chinese users

C1 noticed that language is a communication issue when serving Chinese users. Usually, he would make the decision depending on the users.

> For a Chinese user, he or she could choose to communicate with me either in English or in Chinese…Normally, I would wait for them to start the conversation…Then, if they speak to me in Chinese, I would reply them in Chinese.

And if they speak to me in English, I would reply them in English… I try to adopt their way of communication. If a Chinese user feels more comfortable to communicate in English, of course I can accommodate his or her habit.

However, he prefers to communicate in English since he felt that this helps to break down the barrier between Chinese users and non-Chinese librarians.

Although we can speak two languages, I tend to speak in English if it is appropriate to do so in a certain situation at work. It is because both Chinese users and British librarians would be at the same pace and know what I am doing if I speak in English. This helps to break down the barrier between Chinese users and British librarians.

If I take the initiative to speak in Cantonese, I think I have brought up a barrier between Chinese users and British librarians. Although Chinese users understand what I am saying, British librarians then do not understand what I am doing with the Chinese users. Then, they may feel lonely, left out or isolated. Therefore, if a Chinese user could speak English, I am very happy to communicate with him or her in English. In this case, all parties including me, Chinese users and my colleague, are at the same level. This is the best for us.

6.2.8 Self-perception on the ability to empathize

C1 believed they are quite competent in applying empathy skills. He has rated himself quite high.

> 7-8, I would say.

He is able to recount an incident showing that how he had applied such ability to understand Chinese user.

> Most Chinese elderly come from a deprived area. Usually, they speak in a very loud voice. Most elderly tend to speak in a very loud voice even when they are in the library. It was due to their original place of living. They need to speak very loudly when they are staying outside to make sure they are heard. And I know this reason. Therefore, I know this is their normal way of talking. However, for those who were grown up in city or for people from other culture, they may wonder why Chinese people speak so loudly in the library. They may be curious about this. Therefore, I usually mention this example in the culture awareness training programme. This helps other librarians to understand more about Chinese users. They do not mean to be rude. It is just their normal way to talking.

6.2.9 Perception on the importance of empathetic skill to a community librarian

C1 agreed that empathetic skill is an essential attribute for a community librarian as it helps one to be more sensitive in understanding users' needs.

If you know more about somebody, you would have a better understanding on his or her needs in some way…It helps in a certain way. Very often, users might not tell you what they want in a very direct way. The ability to empathize allows me to become more sensitive, like a detective, so as to explore what users need better. This ability is beneficial to librarian as a profession.

6.2.10 Librarians' experience in cultural awareness training programme

C1 has attended cultural awareness training course. At the same time he is responsible to deliver this course to non-Chinese library staff.

I am one of the ethnic minorities' librarians who have to provide such training. At the same time, I have also attended the courses that are provided by other ethnic minorities' librarians. For example, Pakistan, Bangladesh and African Caribbean.

6.2.11 Value of cultural awareness training course in developing the ability to empathize

C1 pointed out that cultural awareness training course has already helped library staff to develop the ability to empathize although this has been mentioned explicitly.

I think the cultural awareness training course itself already provides training to librarians to develop their ability to empathize. Empathy is about knowing other's situation so as to make a better situation. For example, when I attend my colleague's training course, I gather the information from him. Then I learn how to interact with that particular ethnic minority based on the information.

6.2.12 Suggestion in organizing cultural awareness training course to develop empathetic skill

C1 asserted that empathetic skill is essential when serving all users, not only to ethnic minorities. Therefore empathetic skill should be mentioned in an induction course for all new library staff.

> I think empathy should not be mentioned in the cultural awareness training course. Rather, it should be mentioned in a general library induction course. It is because empathy applies to all people.

> This induction would then be an ideal opportunity to mention 'empathy could help you to better serve a customer'. It applies to everybody.

C1 worried that there would be a negative effect if empathetic skill is mentioned in cultural awareness training course only.

> Otherwise, there would be a linkage between empathy and ethnic minorities. Such linkage may exert a burden on librarians when they serve the ethnic minorities. It is because they may think they need to do something extra.

6.3 Chinese users' interview results

6.3.1 Understanding and interpretation of empathy

Not all of the Chinese users have heard of the word 'empathy', it is especially the case for older people. For those who know this word, their interpretation of 'empathy' is understanding and perceive things from other points of view.

> No. I have not heard of this word. I am too old to know these kinds of new terms. I guess it's about knowing and understanding….something like this.
> **U1**

> Yes. It means you understand the situation that other people are facing, and try to put yourself in the same situation and try to perceive things from that point of view.
> **U2**

> I think it means you care about somebody and understand his or her feeling.
> **U3**

> No. I do not know what it means.
> **U4**

6.3.2 Frequency of contact with librarians in Highfield library

Despite all of the Chinese users visit the library regularly, most of them do not speak to the librarians very often. Librarians usually say 'Hello' or 'Good morning' to the Chinese users and the Chinese users would only speak to the librarians when they need help.

I visit the library almost everyday. The librarians here are all very nice. They all greet me in the morning. I usually ask them for the latest newspaper and magazines…Actually, it is not necessary to talk to them very often.

U1

Yes. But very seldom. I would greet them but never say too much. They are quite busy at the counter sometimes. The thing is that I do not have a need to talk to them, unless I could not find what I want.

U2

Yes. But not very frequent. Although I visit the library almost everyday, I actually do not always speak to them, unless there is such a need.

U3

Yes. I do speak to them but not always. All librarians are very friendly. They greet me everyday when I come through the door.

U4

6.3.3 Content of conversation between librarians and Chinese users

Most of the Chinese users talked to librarians about library service. They make enquiries such as applying library card, searching a book or asking for new magazines and newspaper.

I usually ask them for the latest newspaper and magazines.

U1

I usually talk to the library staff only if I need help on library service. For example, applying for a library card or seek help on looking for books or other library items. When I first joined the library, I did not know how to access to the internet in the library with the new username and password. I have asked a librarian for help. She was very friendly and showed me how to do it.

U2

It's all about library service and they are very brief conversation. They are all related to library service enquires. Sometimes, I would ask if there are any new Chinese books or when the library would buy Chinese books. For example: I would ask have any latest magazines arrived yet.

U3

It is just about library service. I ask them to issue the books for me or where the newspaper is placed.

U4

One Chinese user has sought help from Chinese librarian for matters other than library service. Since he does not speak English, he always asks the Chinese librarian to do translation for him.

Usually, I would ask the Chinese librarian to do translation for me. I live with my wife and both of us could not read and write English. Chinese librarian's English standard is really good. I would ask her to read the letters or other documents for us. For example, we are not sure and even have no ideas where the letters are send from. We could not

tell if they are important or just an advertisement or leaflet. We would ask the librarian to help us. Chinese librarian has really helped us a lot in handling the bills. She has really made our lives easier.

U1

6.3.4 Tendency in speaking to British librarians and Chinese librarians

Chinese users who do not speak English tend to speak to Chinese librarians. It is because of the language barrier. Only Chinese librarian could understand what they are saying.

Yes. I think I tend to speak to Chinese librarian more often. Language is definitely one of the reasons. I don't speak English at all. I could not communicate with the British librarians even if I want to.

U1

Chinese librarian. It is because I do not speak English. I need Chinese librarian to help me with certain things like finding the book I want to read.

U4

For those whose English standard is good enough to communicate, they did not see there is a difference. However, both of them tend to speak to British librarians more often. It is not because they want to, it just happens that British librarians are free when they need the service.

It's the same actually. Probably British librarians. But it's not because they are more active or friendly or I prefer to talk to them. It is just because there are obviously more British librarians than Chinese librarians.

U2

I tend to speak to British librarians more often. Chinese librarian seems to be very busy at all times. It seems to me that British librarians are not that busy. I think it is because Chinese librarian has to serve old people more often. Since the old people have difficulties in communicating in English. It is normal that she serves them first.

U3

6.3.5 Perception on the initiative of British librarians and Chinese librarians

Chinese users have different point of view when considering British librarians and Chinese librarians' initiative. Two users shared that there is no difference between two groups of librarians.

I think all of them are very nice. They are very helpful and proactive in helping me to use the library service. B1 is a very experienced librarian. She would try to tell me the latest news of the library even she could not speak Chinese. For example, she would give me a notice telling me the library's opening hours during Christmas or Easter holiday. And C2 is helpful too. She would ask me if I need any help on reading letters.

U1

I don't see there is a difference between the two. It really depends who are on duty. Both of them serve me in the same way. They would both answer my question. It depends on who is working in the counter at that moment.

U2

One user observed that Chinese librarian has taken the initiative to talk to her.

> Chinese librarian. But we talk about daily lives not library
> service. But that's very seldom. Only when there is such an
> opportunity, when both of us have time.
> **U3**

On the other hand, another user shared that British librarians show concern in her needs.

> British librarian. They seem to be more active in showing
> their concern in what I need. They would ask me: Do you
> need any help? They care about me. I think British people
> pay more attention to the needs of old people and show
> respect.
> **U4**

6.3.6 Non-Chinese and Chinese librarians' understanding and meeting Chinese users' needs

Chinese users have different opinions on which group of librarians have a better understanding on their needs. Two out of four Chinese users believed their needs are better anticipated by Chinese librarians. They found it easier to express what they need and therefore Chinese librarian could provide the service accordingly. Since British librarians do not speak Chinese, there would be misunderstanding during the communication.

> I think a Chinese librarian would understand my needs
> better. It is because we speak the same language. There is
> certainly no problem in communication. If a British
> librarian serves me, there may be some mistakes arise. For

example, he or she might misunderstand that I would like to issue the books out. But actually I want to return the books. I find it difficult to explain this to a British librarian. However, a Chinese librarian could understand me when I simply say 'Return' in Chinese.

U1

Chinese librarian (is better). I do not speak English. When I talk to the Chinese librarian, I can express what I want fairly easily, without any problem in communication. Although British librarian has tried very hard to listen to me, there is still a language barrier.

U4

On the other hand, one Chinese user believed that British librarians are more efficient in meeting her needs since she needs English materials. Chinese librarian does not respond as quickly as British librarians.

I would say British librarians are more efficient in helping me in using the library service. Usually, I look for English books or other materials. It seems to me that British librarians are more familiar with these library resources. They could often tell where these materials are places or who the authors are. They could answer my enquiries more quickly. For Chinese librarians, although they could find what I want at last, their responses are slower when compared to British librarians. May be it is because English is not their first language. They might need more time on that.

U2

Another user believed that there is not a difference between two groups of librarians.

> I do not think there is a difference. I think it is because what I need is very simple and straight forward. I know this library quite well. For the books, newspaper, or magazines, I can find my way around very easily. I do not have a high expectation on librarians to carry very complicated tasks for me.
> **U4**

6.3.7 Preference of the group of librarian when need serving

Three out of four Chinese users prefer to be served by Chinese librarians. Language is the main reason. They feel easier to express their needs to someone who speak the same language as they do.

> Of course a Chinese librarian would be better. We speak the same language. She could understand me, and I could understand her too. The communication is certainly better. I can ask questions more freely. I can ask where the newspaper and magazines are placed. Also, I would ask whether the latest newspaper or magazines are ready to be issued out yet.
> **U1**

> Chinese librarian. Sometimes, I would like to know if there are any new Chinese books on literature. When I talk to a British librarian, I do not know how to tell him or her that I want to read books on Chinese literature. I only know how to say 'Chinese books' in English. British librarians do not

the difference since I cannot describe the categories very specifically very well.

U4

Another user preferred Chinese librarian since the lack of language barrier makes her feel like home.

I would say Chinese librarians since we come from the same place. We speak the same language. This makes me feel like home.

U3

On the other hand, one user preferred to be served by British librarians since she believed that British librarians are more professional than Chinese librarian in Britain.

I think a British librarian is probably better. It seems to be me that a British librarian appears to be more professional than a Chinese librarian.

U2

6.3.8 Suggestion on improving public library service in general

Two Chinese users suggested that Highfield library should increase the Chinese collection. Both of them thought that there are not enough Chinese books for the Chinese community.

I think the library should expend the Chinese collection. I think the main role of library is to provide resources and book is certainly one of the most important aspects. Librarian is helpful in a way that he could help me to find a certain item. However, this does not happen very frequently.

What I need most from the library is its resources. If there are not enough books, the library has not really fulfilled its role.

U2

The library should buy more Chinese books, especially on China politics and Chinese literature.

U4

Two other Chinese users seem to be satisfied with the existing service. They did not any suggestions.

No Actually, I have no idea to this.

U1

No. I think I have got what I want.

U3

Chapter 7 Discussion

After reviewing the viewpoints of three groups of interviewees - British librarians, Chinese librarian and Chinese users, several key points have been identified and chosen for discussion.

7.1 The value of experience on the ability to empathize

Interview results with non-Chinese librarians showed that experience in interacting with Chinese people is helpful in developing the ability to empathize. Experience could be obtained through formal and informal occasions.

Since Highfield library is situated at the heart of the Chinese community, apparently there is frequent contact between librarians and Chinese users. As all librarians accounted that they have been serving Chinese users from time to time. The more frequent the librarians have contact with the people, the more they know more about the culture. This facilitates their understanding in the culture and therefore develops the ability to empathize. Also, this frequent contact allows the librarians to aware what the Chinese users usually need and their habit of using the library resources. All interviewed librarians noticed that newspaper and magazines are the most popular materials. Moreover, librarians get to know that old Chinese users tend to have weaker English skills. They would either ask the Chinese librarian to serve the user or try their best to make themselves understood. This shows that experience in interacting with Chinese users does help librarian to serve the Chinese users more effectively. The experience has equipped them with certain coping methods so that they might embrace the difficulty more readily.

Other than inside the library, librarians reported that they also have contact with Chinese people outside the library. They have also participated in the celebration activities or social gathering activities. Through these informal contacts, librarians learnt more about the custom of Chinese culture. This might enhance their awareness in cultural difference and become more sensitive to such difference. Some librarians shared that they would seek advice from Chinese librarian whenever they meet a problem in serving Chinese users. This shows that librarians have shown an interest to develop their understanding other culture.

To sum up, having a contact with Chinese people seems to be a positive way to develop the ability to empathize. Through such a personal contact, non-Chinese librarians could develop an understanding on Chinese users. It is true when both cultures and library needs are considered.

7.2 Negative factors for librarians to show empathy

By reviewing non-Chinese librarians' interview results, it is not difficult to see that language is a big stumbling block for them to communicate with the Chinese users. Most of them have noticed that this problem is more profound with the older generation. As it has been studied in the literature review, empathy is a part of communication. There should be at least a minimum level of communication in order empathetic skill could take effect. Therefore, it could be derived that language barrier is a big stumbling block for librarians to apply empathetic skill too. Similar to what the Chinese librarian has mentioned in his interview, one could only empathize another person if there is an engagement between them.

Time constrain is also another negative factor. Librarians do not have an opportunity to show empathy to a certain user if he or she simply issues or returns a book. Some of the librarians revealed that there is a shortage of staff in Sheffield public library service. Librarians could get very busy at the counter and obviously they are not able to chat any longer with users in this situation.

Last but not least, Chinese users' expectation or attitude towards the librarians may discourage librarians to show empathy. Results show that they are not very keen on chatting with the librarians. Some of them may feel shy and some of them may simply feel that this is not necessary. All they need is the resources (mostly newspaper and magazines) in the library; they would not talk to the librarians unless there is such a need.

7.3 The value of a Chinese librarian

According to both British librarians and Chinese users, Chinese librarian is a great asset to a public library especially to one which is situated in the heart of a Chinese community like Highfield library. Both British librarians and Chinese users are benefited with the presence of a Chinese librarian.

British librarians shared that they learnt a lot from Chinese librarian. They have improved in their way of interacting with Chinese users. Whenever they meet any problems, they could ask for Chinese librarian for assistance. Even Chinese librarian is not present at that particular moment; British librarian could discuss the situation with Chinese librarians later and ask for their advice.

As for Chinese users, Chinese librarian is essential since they are of great help when there is communication problem. Sometimes, even when British librarians have tried hard to understand Chinese users' needs, there is still a huge language barrier in communication. This is where Chinese librarian is useful. Chinese users' needs or enquiry could be immediately understood and this could to help to avoid the feeling of frustration and hindered their willingness in using the public library. This is especially true when the older generation of Chinese users is concerned. As British librarians have noticed, older people experienced more difficulties in expressing their needs because of their limited English standard. One interview with a Chinese user also showed that Chinese librarian is not merely a librarian to him. Chinese librarian has also been providing help in translating English letters. In another words, Chinese librarian has taken up a role in supporting Chinese people in adapting the foreign environment.

Chinese librarian does not only prove their value in providing library service to Chinese community only, they have also exerted a positive impact on facilitating cultural understanding. Apart from Chinese users, Chinese librarian also serves as a vital channel for non-Chinese librarians to get to know more about Chinese culture. According to British librarians, they get to know more about this particular culture through chatting with Chinese librarian. In essence, Chinese librarian is a great asset for public library service. They serve as a bridge between Chinese users and non-Chinese librarians.

7.4 General impression on Chinese users

The results of the interviews with British librarians indicated that they have a good impression on Chinese users in general. Based on the frequent contact with Chinese users in Highfield library, British librarians commented that Chinese users are very polite and have a keen interest in reading. Chinese users are often described as a quite group of

users with very simple request when library service is concerned. The most usual enquiry has been found out to be asking for new magazines and newspaper.

Their viewpoints hinted that Chinese users might see the library is just a place for borrowing library materials such as newspaper, magazines and books. They keep to themselves as a group. They might not see the library as a community centre to socialize with other people. This seems to reveal that Chinese users have not put a huge demand on library service. They are not a difficult ethnic group to serve and their needs seemed to be easily satisfied. Interview results with Chinese users have confirmed British librarians' belief. Their library service needs are simply asking for newspaper and magazines.

Although it seems to be a satisfying situation in which most Chinese users needs have been well catered, public library should have more to offer other than just fulfilling its function as a book warehouse. If public library is advocated to be a social inclusive environment, more should be done to promote this function other than just issuing books out. Organizing reading group is one of the examples. There have not been any similar activities organized for Chinese users. Chinese users especially the older generation might need such a platform to socialize.

Chapter 8 Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusion

This study was designed to explore librarians' perception on the essentialness of the ability to empathize when serving ethnic minorities. Before the interview took place, several objectives have been set. These objectives are now examined again so as to conclude the study.

➢ Chinese librarians' ability in empathizing Chinese users and their effectiveness

Chinese librarian believed the same background as Chinese users allowed him to have a deeper understanding in their needs. Therefore, he is at a better position to empathize Chinese users.

➢ British librarians' ability in empathizing Chinese users and their effectiveness

All British librarians perceive themselves being competent in applying empathetic skills and this does not only applies to Chinese users. Most of them could recount incidents showing that how they apply such skills. However, such incidents have not happened very often to Chinese users. Librarians noticed that Chinese users only have very brief conversation with them. Therefore, there were not so many occasions that librarians need to empathize Chinese users.

➢ The degree of empathy in facilitating librarians to understand the information needs of Chinese users

It was concluded that non-Chinese librarians are not active in seeking to understand the information needs of Chinese user. It is because a Chinese librarian has already been designated to carry the task. They feel that they are not at such a position to do so. Chinese librarian on the other hand is more active in doing so. It is because exploring Chinese users' information needs is part of their job. Usually, he asks for Chinese users' feedback on the new stock and desire on other items.

➢ The role of empathy in facilitating effective communication between librarians and Chinese users

It has been found out that empathy did play a role in facilitating more effective communication between librarian and Chinese users. Librarians recognized that some Chinese users experience difficulty in communicating in English. They have shown patience while interacting with Chinese users. They have tried their best to understand the users and made themselves understood.

➢ Both Chinese and British librarians' belief in the importance of empathy in delivering library service to Chinese library users

Two groups of librarians agree that empathy is an essential attribute to serve ethnic minority users. It is because difference cultures have their own customs and traditions. This would affect users' approach in using the public library. Empathy encourages them to embrace such difference and take the initiative to understand their users.

➢ Chinese library users' perspective of both Chinese and British librarians' use of empathy and its effectiveness

Chinese users seem not to have a clear idea on the word 'empathy'. Nevertheless, they have presented different opinions when accounting their interaction with British librarians and Chinese librarians. Users with good English speaking skills have not met any difficulties when being served by British librarians. However, Chinese users still incline to be served by Chinese librarian. Language is the main reason here as they feel easier and more comfortable to express their needs in Chinese.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Recommendation for current practice

This study has confirmed that librarians' belief in the importance of the ability to empathize in serving ethnic minorities. Therefore, recommendations have been made to library school and public libraries so as to strengthen the development of social skills for professional librarians.

➤ Library school

- Social skills training should be integrated to the current library school curriculum. Library is all about service in which human interaction is inevitable. Librarians' social skill therefore is an essential attribute in providing quality service to library users. Apart from professional knowledge and skills, library school students should also develop an appropriate attitude in providing professional library services.

- In light of the increasing diversified society, it is significant to provide diversity awareness training to librarianship students. Most diversity or cultural awareness training are now considered as continuous professional development. However, it seems a bit too late to get a basic understanding after a librarian has engaged in the career. One should be equipped with basic knowledge and sought continuous improvement through work experience.

- International students who are studying in library school are a great asset to promote cultural awareness within the library setting. The current curriculum should encourage sharing of. This allows local students to adapt to a ethnic diverse environment as early as they are in library school.

➤ Public library

- Hiring ethnic minorities' librarian is absolutely essential especially in the area that has a large number of ethnic minorities. Not only they are at a tremendous help on overcoming the language barrier, they serve as a role of culture ambassador to introduce the culture to British society. British librarians, still being the dominant groups of librarian in the public library system, therefore have an opportunity to have direct contact with other

cultures. They might be able to cope the challenges better when serving ethnic minorities' library users.

- Public library should take a more proactive role in encouraging the Chinese community to further utilize the library. Apart from tangible resources provided at the moment, intangible aspect of the library such as being a social centre should be promoted. For example, reader development activities such as organizing a reading group could encourage Chinese users to interact with the people in the community. This helps to strengthen the image of the public library as a social inclusive place.

- Polish culture should be introduced in the culture awareness training programme. Public librarians have noticed that the number of Polish immigrants has been increasing at a rapid rate. The content of training programmes therefore should catch up the change of the demographic of library users and stay relevant to the contemporary society.

- Public library should seek to establish partnership with the organizations that also serve ethnic minorities. Activities should be organized so that librarians have opportunities to meet ethnic minorities in a less formal setting. This helps to establish a more harmonious relationship. Also,

- Public library should develop a monitoring system to track the training programmes taken by new staff. This helps to confirm all necessary training programmes are delivered at the initial stage of employment.

- Social skills such as empathetic skill should be mentioned in the induction course for all new library staff first entering the field. These skills are essential attributes for librarians they help to facilitate more effective

communication with users. Mentioning the topic serves as reminder so that librarians become awareness to develop these skills along the career.

8.2.2 Recommendation for further research

This exploratory study aimed to find out the value of empathy skills in serving ethnic minorities. There are still numerous areas worth further and deeper exploration.

- This study has put the focus on Chinese culture. Because of the diversity of British society, other cultures such as Indian or African Caribbean are needed to explore too. Different set of results might be yielded.

- This study has shown that language barrier is a stumbling block to the ability to apply empathetic skills. Further researches that focus on this study area should avoid such obstacles. For example, ethnic minorities' participants chosen should be competent in communicating in English. This then help to distinguish the effect of empathetic skills on delivering library service.

Word Count: 15427

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Appendixes

Interview guideline

<u>Non-Chinese librarian</u>

Personal information:
1) Gender
2) Age group
Under 20 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60 or above
3) Highest educational qualification

Part A
Have you ever heard the word 'empathy'?
Could you please explain it in your own words?

Part B

When you interact with Chinese users, do you seek any opportunities to show your interest in understanding their culture?
(will give an example if interviewees need further guidance:
For example: During Chinese New year, would you ask Chinese users questions to know about this festival's custom?)

Do you seek opportunities to speak with Chinese users to explore their views about library service?
(will ask for specific areas after the interviewees have given an answer:
- range of collections
- fiction reading interest
- reading group needs, feedback)

Would you find it easier to anticipate the needs of British users than Chinese users, or would it make no difference?
Can you please explain your answer?

How relevant is a user's ethnic background to you when considering how to serve them in the library?

How do you feel when you are serving a Chinese user?

How would you rate your ability to empathize, out of 10?
Can you please explain your answer?

Part C

How helpful do you think this ability to empathize is to you as a community librarian?
Any specific example that you can share with me that show this ability has play a part in your work?

Do you think this ability is an essential attribute for a community librarian?

Do you think that a Chinese librarian is better placed than you, as a non-Chinese librarian, to serve Chinese users?
Can you please explain your answer?

Are there any particular issues you have noted, either in your work or your colleagues' work, with Chinese users?

Part D

Have you ever taken any cultural awareness training programmes?
Would you please tell me what was the focus of these programmes?
How beneficial is this type of programmein terms of facilitating your understanding of other cultures or beliefs or ways of thinking?
(especially to Chinese culture, if Chinese culture has been mentioned)

Have these training programmes ever touched on 'the ability to empathize'?
Do you think these training programmes have developed your ability to empathize with Chinese patrons?

Do you think 'empathy training' is a topic which should be included in these training programmes?
Please explain how you think that empathy training could be delivered

Chinese librarian

Personal information:
1) Gender
2) Age group
   Under 20 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60 or above
3) Highest educational qualification
4) From: China/HK/Taiwan/Others (Malaysia, Singapore)

Part A

Have you ever heard the word 'empathy'?
Could you please explain it in your own words?

Part B

When you interact with Chinese users, do you seek any opportunities to show your interest in understanding their culture?
(will give an example if interviewees need further guidance:
For example: During Chinese New year, would you ask Chinese users questions to know about this festival's custom?)

Do you seek opportunities to speak with Chinese users to explore their views about library service?
(will ask for specific areas after the interviewees have given an answer:
- range of collections
- fiction reading interest
- reading group needs, feedback)

Do you think it is easier for you anticipate the needs of Chinese users than British users?
Can you please explain your answer?

Would you feel more comfortable when you are serving a Chinese user than other users?
Can you please explain your answer?

How would you rate yourself in the ability to empathize, out of 10?
Can you please explain your answer?

Part C

How helpful to you is the ability to empathize as a community librarian?

Any specific example that you can share with me that show this ability has play a part in your work?

Do you think this ability is an essential attribute for a community librarian?

Do you think that yourself as a Chinese librarian is better placed than a UK librarian to serve Chinese users?
Can you please explain your answer?

Part D

Have you ever taken any cultural awareness training programmes?
Would you please tell me what was the focus of these programmes?
How beneficial is this type of programmein terms of facilitating your understanding of other cultures or beliefs or ways of thinking?

Have these training programmes ever touched on 'the ability to empathize'?
Do you think these training programmes have developed your ability to empathize with Chinese patrons?

Do you think 'empathy training' is a topic which should be included in these training programmes?
Please explain how you think that empathy training could be delivered

Chinese user

Personal information:
1) Gender
2) Age group:
   Under 20 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60 or above
3) From: China/HK/Taiwan/Others(Malaysia, Singapore)

Part A
Have you ever heard the word 'empathy'?
Could you please explain it in your own words?

Part B

Do you have any opportunities to speak to the librarians in Highfield Library?

What do you tend to talk to library staff about? Is it library service related or is it just a general chat? Could you please give me an example?

Would you say that you speak to Chinese or British librarians more frequently when you use the public library service?

Do you feel that Chinese or British librarians tend to be more active in seeking opportunities to speak to you, or would you say that there is no difference between the two?

Do you find that your needs are better understood by Chinese librarians or British librarians, or does it make no difference who serves you?
Could you please give me some examples?

Would you prefer to be served by a Chinese librarian or a British librarian, or would it make no difference to you?
Could you please explain your answer?

Do you have any suggestions on how library staff and the library service in general could improve so that you are better served when you use Sheffield Libraries?

Sample of an interview transcript

Chinese user U1

Interviewer:
Have you ever heard the word 'empathy'? Could you please explain it in your own words?

No. I am sorry. I have not heard of this word. I am too old to know these kinds of new terms. I guess it's about knowing and understanding….something like this.

Interviewer:
Do you have any opportunities to speak to the librarians in Highfield Library?

Yes. Quite often. Actually I visit the library almost everyday. I come here to read the newspaper and the magazines. The librarians here are all very nice. They all greet me in the morning. I usually ask them for the latest newspaper and magazines.

Interviewer:
What do you tend to talk to library staff about? Is it library service related or is it just a general chat? Could you please give me an example?

Usually, I would ask the Chinese librarian to do translation for me. I live with my wife and both of us could not read and write English. Miss Lee's English standard is really good. I would ask her to read the letters or other documents for us. For example, we are not sure and even have no ideas where the letters are send from. We could not tell if they are important or just an advertisement or leaflet. We would ask the librarian to help us. Miss Lee has really helped us a lot in handling the bills. She has really made our lives easier.

Interviewer:
Would you say that you speak to Chinese or British librarians more frequently when you use the public library service?

Yes. I think I tend to speak to Chinese librarian more often. Language is definitely one of the reasons. I don't speak English at all. I could not communicate with the British librarians even if I want to.

Interviewer:
Do you feel that Chinese or British librarians tend to be more active in seeking opportunities to speak to you, or would you say that there is no difference between the two?

I think all of them are very nice. They are very helpful and proactive in helping me to use the library service. Jean is a very experienced librarian. She would try to tell me the latest news of the library even she could not speak Chinese. For example, she would give

me a notice telling me the library's opening hours during Christmas or Easter holiday. And May is helpful too. She would ask me if I need any help on reading letters. Actually, it is not necessary to talk to them very often. I really enjoy reading newspaper, enjoying the quite moment. Sometimes, I would ask Miss Lee helping me with reading letters. Otherwise, there is not such a need to speak to them.

Interviewer:
Do you find that your needs are better understood by Chinese librarians or British librarians, or does it make no difference who serves you? Could you please give me some examples?

I think a Chinese librarian would understand my needs better. It is because we speak the same language. There is certainly no problem in communication. If a British librarian serves me, there may be some mistakes arise. For example, he/she might misunderstand that I would like to issue the books out. But actually I want to return the books. I find it difficult to explain this to a British librarian. However, a Chinese librarian could understand me when I simply say 'Return' in Chinese.
However, I do speak to British librarians if Miss Lee is not here. I know the vocabulary 'newspaper'. When I speak of this word, the British librarians immediately know what I want and give it to me.

Interviewer:
Would you prefer to be served by a Chinese librarian or a British librarian, or would it make no difference to you? Could you please explain your answer?

Of course a Chinese librarian would be better. We speak the same language. She could understand me, and I could understand her too. The communication is certainly better. I can ask questions more freely. I can ask where the newspaper and magazines are placed. Also, I would ask whether the latest newspaper or magazines are ready to be issued out yet.

Interviewer:
Do you have any suggestions on how library staff and the library service in general could improve so that you are better served when you use Sheffield Libraries?

Hahaha…. No Actually, I have no idea to this.