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A bridge between people
- Librarians' perspective on a Chinese public library

Madelene Falkenström



HÖGSKOLAN I BORÅS
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Författare: Madelene Falkenström

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Handledare: Åsa Söderlind

Abstract: This Bachelor's thesis is the result of participation in a minor field study at Hangzhou Public Library in China. The function and role of the public library and its librarians are discussed through the views and perspectives of the librarians. Seven librarians were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The results were analyzed with the help of *The four-spaces model*, which was developed to advocate and strengthen the role of the public library and culture as a sustainable and social development. The results are also of interest as there is a lack of non-western perspectives in Swedish LIS research and education.

The results reveal varied uses of the library in terms of the four spaces model. Hangzhou public library is similar in many ways to the Swedish and the Anglo-Scandinavian library sector. However, there are also distinct differences, for instance there is greater emphasis on the librarian's role as tutor and on the library as an educational institution. The informants expressed mixed feelings towards the future. On the one hand, they believe that the role of the traditional librarian will continue. On the other hand, this belief clashes somewhat with their belief that the public library will become more of a performative and inspirational space. In general, it can be said that the librarians' views of their role and of the functions of the public library are complex and, in some cases, in collision with each other.

Nyckelord: synsätt, folkbibliotek, bibliotekarieroll, Kina, MFS.

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1. Introduction

This study is a result of a field-study made possible by the Sida scholarship-program Minor field studies (MFS)¹. In the late 2013 I received the opportunity to go abroad and went to China, in the spring of 2014, to study the Hangzhou Public Library and its librarians. In this study I will discuss different approaches and attitudes towards the public library, its librarians and users. I believe this understanding may help us better understand the Chinese library sector, a knowledge I think is lacking in Scandinavian Library and Information Science. My hopes is that it also promotes and advocates a link between culture and development, to strengthen the role for the public library and culture as a sustainable and social development, as well as open up for a discussion on social inclusion.

Public libraries have for a long time been seen as places of knowledge and lifelong learning and its role as such has also been emphasized. For example, the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) declares that public libraries are “[...] a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare” and that it is “The local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups”. However, as new technology emerges and information becomes more easily accessible the future role and function of the library has been questioned and widely discussed – from various viewpoints.

Anna Kåring Wagman argues that there is need for a discussion and reflection on the profession and the library’s content and the role it can play regarding its users and, in a wider context, society; that this understanding can create a better perception and purpose for the libraries and its librarians which in the end would also benefit the users (2008, p.31). In this study I wish to discuss the role of the public library from the perspective of public librarians, more specifically librarians from Hangzhou Public Library, China’s first fee-free and *barrier-free* public library. Barrier-free refers to permitting access to all citizens, regardless of social status.

Barriers which result in social exclusion go against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights concerning Article 19 which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression [...] to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” and Article 27; “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community [...] to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” which embodies the ethos of the public library and its services. That being said, this research is not meant to criticize but to open up to discussion which hopefully could be helpful and of interest for Chinese and non-Chinese LIS research and to strengthen the role of culture and the public library as a sustainable and social development. After all, as Jochumsen, Rasmussen and Skot-Hansen put it:

[...] the security of future welfare and progress depends on a population that is able to act in a globalized and post-industrial society by turning information into knowledge and knowledge into creativity and, not least, into innovation. Thus, the library is seen as an important actor in this endeavor. (The four spaces – a new model for the public library, 2012, p.591)

While it is not the focus of this thesis, it is also interesting to study a public library in a

¹ Programkontoret (2014). *Minor Field Studies, MFS*. <http://www.programkontoret.se/sv/Program-och-stipendier/Program-A---O/Minor-Field-Studies/> [2014-04-16]

society where heavy censorship laws are currently being enforced. Censorship also creates barriers but Hangzhou Public Library, like all libraries and institutions worldwide, accommodate themselves to the society they exist in, as well as its laws. *Barrier-free* then becomes what is made possible in terms of the society's rules.

1.1 Background

Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang province in eastern China and has a population of about 2 million people². As a sub-provincial city it has a estimated population of 8.8 million people, with the jurisdiction of 8 districts, 3 county-level cities and 2 counties. The city is one of China's most popular destination for tourists and is renowned for its historical and cultural heritage as well as its natural scenery. Most notable is the West Lake which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site³. Hangzhou has several universities, such as Zhejiang University which also invites international students. The Zhejiang University Library (ZUL) is one of the oldest university libraries in China.

Hangzhou Public Library was founded in 1958 but the new building, which this study focuses on, opened its doors in 2008 and was then China's first fee-free and barrier-free public library. Compared to other libraries that also have canceled fees, Hangzhou Public Library has also gotten rid of deposits for book borrowing and given the users more access to the library's facilities. It is also obvious that since this change was implemented the library has received more users and the lending rate has risen drastically (Shanghai Daily, 2010; Hangzhou Public Library Homepage [2013]).

Even though there are libraries that have followed Hangzhou by opening up more and offering services free of charge there are still many public libraries that do not, especially in the poorer counties in the west. Looking at some of the previous research one of the reasons is funds, or rather the lack thereof (Chu, Jingli, 1994). The financial and political situations are of course also important factors that influence the way public libraries operate. This is emphasized by the fact that it wasn't until 2011 that a policy was released by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance of the Chinese central government requiring public libraries in China to open freely to the public (Xin, Jianxiong, Jinmin, 2013, p.4).

1.2 Aim and research questions

With this thesis I wish to study the librarians view on the library's role in society and their own role as librarians. The research in Scandinavian LIS seldom examine or feature non-western perspectives. I believe this will give insight to a Chinese public library and its role in the Chinese society. In my discussion I hope to promote and advocate a link between culture and development – to strengthen the role for the public library and culture as a sustainable and social development – as well as open up to a discussion of social inclusion.

Research questions

The following question and sub-questions have been used to fulfil the aim:

- What does the function of public libraries and being a public librarian represent

² Nationalencyklopedin (2014). Hangzhou, <http://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/hangzhou> [2014-11-12]

³ Hangzhou.gov.cn (2014). *General situation*. <http://eng.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zpd/English/AboutHangZhou/index.shtml> [2014-11-12]

for librarians at Hangzhou Public Library?

- What according to the librarians is the public library's role in society?
- How do the librarians view their own profession and their role in society?

These questions will be addressed by interviewing librarians at Hangzhou Public Library.

2. Literature review

The following texts are all written from western (Anglo-Scandinavian) perspectives and it should also be noted that there are no texts about Chinese libraries. At the time it was difficult to find recent resources regarding public libraries in China, especially from a Chinese or non-western perspective. While residing in China it was also problematic finding material because of the restrictions I found myself in, that is to say, not knowing the Chinese language or having the access to resources which I would have had while residing in Sweden. However, I believe the texts are relevant to my study since I also wish to discuss the contrasts and similarities between Chinese and Swedish perspectives.

The review has been divided into two parts which relates to the research questions. *The Public Library* presents the public library's role. The review ends with *the role of the librarian*, where the aspect of the user is included.

2.1 The Public Library

In the study *Use of library space and the library as a place* the Norwegian researchers Ragnar Audunson and Svanhild Aabø observe the use of the library space and services and discusses how the overall societal goals of the library and the local community are obtained (2012, p.138). They looked at the library use in the context of *high-intensive* versus *low-intensive* meeting places, public spheres and the library as a *first, second* and *third* space.

The study was conducted by using in-depth observations and interviews with patrons in three library branches in Oslo. Audunson and Aabø ask themselves what users are doing during their visits in the library. With the combined methods they want to provide a deeper knowledge of how users take their local library, its facilities and services, into use. The observations were open, non-participatory and unobtrusive with the aim to observe activities with focus on social activities. The interviews, which was short and informal in nature, were used to establish context and purpose to the users use of the library (2012, p.142).

A high-intensive meeting place is where one lives out one's primary interest, meaning they visit the library in order to live out their own interests, either by themselves or with others who share the same values. A low-intensive meeting place, on the other hand, is somewhere one is exposed to complexity and diversity of values and people (ibid. p.140). The researchers also ask themselves if the observed libraries constitute of a *first, second* or *third* place, as coined by Oldenburg (1991). The first place is seen as an extension of the home, the second of work while the third place is a communal arena with a low threshold and seen as important in building community and social capital (Aabø & Audunson, 2012, p.141).

The researchers observed that there was no single answer to all their questions regarding the public libraries which they studied. They concluded that the library was

both a high-intensive and low-intensive place and were an extension of all three different spaces depending where and what the users were doing, and were seen as floating between different spheres and roles. They found the public library to be a place of variety as the use and users are diverse and as such there are not many areas in society that exist with such a variety of participation (ibid. p.148).

The similarities and differences between users', politicians' and librarians' views of the public library is discussed in Ragnar Audunson study *Folkbibliotekenes rolle i en digital framtid: Publikums, politikernes og bibliotekarenes bilder* (2001). The study took place in Norway and the participants were practised librarians working in Norwegian public libraries, representatives from municipal executive boards and citizens above the age of 15. Audunson inquires if the library and librarians are needed because of the changes and advance made in information- and communications technology (ICT), new formats of media and Internet enable people to access information in a way that the library can't compete with. With this in mind he finds it reasonable to presume that different groups have differing views on what direction should be taken with regards to the future (ibid. p.207). With the help of Andersson and Skot-Hansens models he has created four views – or roles – of discussion:

The first one is the *Education library* in which the users, politicians and librarians agreed that the public library first and foremost should serve pupils and students in coherence to education, as well as people who partake in lifelong learning. However, the users prioritized reading for leisure rather than lifelong learning (ibid. p.213). An interesting discovery was that a higher percentage of the citizens thought services towards old and sick people should be prioritized while not many politicians and librarians felt the same. The politicians and librarians, however, felt stronger towards services focused on education (ibid. p.214).

The second view focuses on the public library as an *accommodator of culture* and should promote democracy, equality and knowledge. Here Audunson noted that the users are more instrumentally orientated and that they are more concerned with the libraries role as intermediaries of leisure reading than the librarians (ibid. p.216ff). In *the library as a complex institution* it is concluded that the library is too complex to be classified and belonging under just one service area. Having to chose from service areas such as education, healthcare, central administration, sports, leisure and culture (ibid. p.218f).

The fourth view discusses *demand and quality*, which Audunson believes affect most public institutions. The public wanted more acquisition based on demand than the other two groups. Regardless of group, the youngest informants felt that demand was the determining factor. According to the results, the traditional attitudes towards the profession and the library seem to be declining, even with the professionally educated librarians (ibid. p.220f).

Audunson concludes that the public, politicians and librarians are unanimous in the belief that the public library is still needed in the ICT-society, despite new advanced technology. It is also evident that the librarian is not only needed as an *information navigator* but also as a *intermediary of culture*. His closing remarks state that for the public libraries to survive they need to prove their relevance for the younger users; they are more sceptical towards the library and believe its importance will be less in the future than the older generation (ibid. p.222f).

The American researcher Richard Rubins overall account of LIS in *Foundations of Library and Information Science* (2010) presents seven values and ethics of library and information science. The values of most interest for this study are, as he calls them,

the values of: *Service, Reading and the book is important* and *The Public Good*.

The first value, *Service*, he argues has more underlying purpose in libraries and information science than most other professions and institutions (ibid. p.405f), of bringing knowledge, serving and being the betterment of people and society as a whole. However, he discusses the worry for libraries in today's economy, as they are more often pressured to act as businesses. A businesses-oriented approach, he argues, could change the nature of library service as it could lead to only serving users who are easier to satisfy and neglecting those difficult to serve. Although he notes that many libraries have despite the adoption of a more business like practice maintained the fundamental value of service (ibid. p.406f).

Rubin also presents the five laws of library science proposed by the librarian and Professor S.R. Ranganathan (1963), where he advocates that people from all social environments are entitled to library service and that the foundation of library use is education for all. He also felt that the library should emphasize on well-written and well-illustrated materials and that promoting and marketing its services would be of benefit to the users (Rubin, 2010, p.407ff). Gorman (1995) developed five new laws to Ranganathan's work by focusing, for example, on the aspects of respecting all forms of knowledge and that the library should not worry that new forms of communication will replace print; that they should rather exploit these new forms to benefit their own services. He also underlines that libraries should "honour the past and create the future" by protecting historical records, since the past serves as a guide to the future (Rubin, 2010, p.409f).

The second value of *Reading and the Book Are Important* is quite self-explanatory, but here he also contemplates the advantages of the book and that by its combining features it is still, and probably also in the future, will rival that of other electronic technology. The book is claimed to stimulate more active intellectual involvement and lead to better understanding, discovery and growth in our lives. A large part of the world of information also becomes inaccessible to those who cannot read and therefore the library continues to stress the importance of the book and reading, even as other formats popularize the media (ibid. p.410f). The value of *The Public Good* has several implications:

First, it assumes that people and society as a whole are changed and, in the long run, improved by ideas [...] Second, the notion of the public good recognizes people's right to enjoy life and that the library has a role in promoting entertainment and pleasure [...] The third implication of the public good is that LIS professionals place service to the community above personal interest [...] to actively reach out to those who would benefit from library services, regardless of age or economic status. (ibid. p.412)

2.2 The role of the librarian

Wagman discusses the role of the librarian and the profession in *Bibliotekarien och professionen – en forskningsöversikt*. She believes that one of the reasons why it is so difficult to pinpoint what a librarian does is because of the strong connection towards the physical library, that working at the library defines their profession and occupation rather than their work assignments (2008, p.7). Wagman mentions the American librarian and researcher Michael Winter who emphasized the librarian's role of someone who serves as a link between society's public institutions and the public – that they are

an intermediate link between the users and public knowledge. The public library is not only meant to structure and provide information, it is also supposed to provide the citizens with access to as much information as possible (Wagman, 2008, p.9).

She also reviews how librarianship and the profession have changed historically and discusses whether it has changed at all. Some believe that the only change the new technology has brought is the tools, that work is and always will be the same regardless of the method. Others hope that the connection to new technology will raise the profession since society view jobs that include technology as more respectful (ibid. p.18).

In the article *Librarianship and the claiming of new roles* Ina Fourie, an associate professor in information science, questions why librarians do not seem to be able to prepare in time with new IT development even though they are quite well aware of what should be done in regards of keeping up with new technology and its changes (2004, p.63). She believes that the profession needs to find ways in which to claim its role and actively prepare for the future roles (ibid. p.64).

Fourie reflects on different roles and skills envisioned for the future by looking at other literature, for example the cultural role of the librarians, and asks if cultural promotion only means the promotion of reading or if it has taken a new meaning, such as encouraging different forms of recreation, like using the internet. She also assess that the library's role to provide space will still be important in the electronic age despite the move from the physical library to the virtual library. Another role is negotiating on behalf for the users by "[...] taking care of information needs of the poor and to act as a information advocate within organizations or communities" (ibid. p.67).

Information retrieval and researching are also seen to still be central to the role of librarians, despite the constant threat and worry of disintermediation ("cutting out the middle-man", in this case, the librarian) as the users can access and search by themselves. Fourie believes it to be even more fundamental with the growing demand for information seeking by ordinary citizens on a daily basis (ibid. p.68).

Rubin (2010) also discusses the role of the librarians. He argues that the librarians educational role will still remain strong as libraries have a close relationship with learning, reading and literacy (ibid. p.110). He also argues that many believe that schools aren't performing their roles effectively and that the perception of librarians as an advocate for life-long learning can secure the library's place in the future. Regarding the informational role, Rubin mentions a survey from 2001 which reported that while most of the roles librarians considered significant would persist, for example instructing the user in navigating the web and reference work and evaluating and organizing information, only creating e-resources and establishing digital archiving were seen as increasing in importance in the future (ibid. p.111).

As an extension of the informational, role evaluating information is seen as very important. Rubin motivates this with the prediction Rice (1989) made that librarians' role in consulting, teaching and advising users in search of information, particularly since the progressing increase in digital data, would become more important and that such activities therefore would be the essential reason people would continue to visit the library. He means that because of this users will feel lost in the sea of information and expect the help from the librarians on the reliability and value on various sources in which the librarian will become, and as Debons (1985) described it, as an "information intermediary" (Rubin, 2010, p.112).

In terms of the first value of Library and Information science – service – Rubin states, with the help of Winter (1988), that American librarianship emerged as one of the

service-oriented professions, similar to that of nursing, teaching and medicine, as a reaction to the profit-centered, entrepreneurial excess of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. Since then service has been one of the fundamental foundations of librarianship regardless of library and information institution or occupation involved. He quotes another researcher (Fink 1991) who says that the librarian does not react with irritation when approached by a user, “[...] but delight at another chance to help someone pick his or her way through our beloved maze” and that their service is seen as a good and noble cause (ibid. p.406). Rubin also advocates that while finding information has always been part of LIS professionals role it also has larger purposes, that of humanistic and democratic values and of helping and teaching people, hence stating that there will be a conflict between the emphasis on more technical and electronic information access and traditional needs (ibid. p.118f).

In a study from 2005, *Speaking of users*, Åse Hedemark and Jenny Hedman examine user discourses by analysing sixty-two articles from three established Swedish library journals. They investigate how users are categorised and what that implies. The authors then discuss consequences for the relation between the interest of the public library and the users by using a model of four phases, which revealed four user discourses. The *general education discourse* contains a way of looking at the user as someone in need of education, fostering and upbringing. Here they problematize the democratic idea behind the library as an educational institution stating that it is a bit of an illusion, that it risk becoming fostering and controlling rather than of bringing democracy to common people. They found distinctions between quality and entertainment literature which they believe could lead to a patronizing attitude towards the user, and that the users risk being seen as incapacitated and culturally undeveloped.

The user as someone in need of guidance, superintendence and education is defined in *the pedagogical discourse*. The authors stress that even though they consider information seeking and learning as important aspects, the user's own experience, recreation and expression are not less important, since one of the consequences could lead to over-emphasis of the utilitarian function of the library. The authors conclude their study by stressing the importance of reflection of librarians attitudes towards the users. The *information technology discourse* and *information management discourse* was also revealed but will not be examined further in this study.

3. Theory

The section presents *the four space-model* and is concluded with how it was used as an analytical tool.

3.1 The four spaces – a new model for the public library

This model was developed by researchers Henrik Jochumsen, Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Dorte Skot-Hansens in connection with the Committee on the Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society work for the Danish minister of culture. The background for the model's development was the discussion of the public library's role in regards to the knowledge society and lifelong learning and how libraries could support the Danish globalization strategy in 2006. The model has since then been used in various ways, from a tool for planning, arranging, designing the public library to being a framework for discussing the importance of its existing and future role (2012, p.586f).

The four space-model presents four different aspects for the public library which in itself contains four overlapping spaces which relate to the content of the public library. The model proposes that the library should support the following goals as its overall objective:

- Experience
- Involvement
- Empowerment
- Innovation

While the aspects of experience and involvement rather concern the individuals perception, empowerment and innovation concern more societal goals. To achieve these aspects and goals the library should develop the following four different spaces:

Inspiration space – underpins experiences that transform our perception in a meaningful way and makes us want to try new experiences, which can be seen through story-telling, activities and design. The space especially supports the aspects of innovation and experience.

The authors argue that there is a need for rethinking of the library as a space for inspiration because of the increased demand for experiences in people's lives in regard of their self-development and consumption of culture. The public library therefore finds itself competing with stores and organizations as the so-called experience society expands (p.589f).

Learning space – offers people a free and unrestricted access to information and knowledge in which they can explore and gain more competence and possibilities. The authors emphasizes the library's strength where it is an informal environment and learning is seen as a dialogue-oriented process which focuses on the users' own experiences and their wish to define their own learning needs. It is however challenged by the experience-oriented learning, explained above, specifically by youths. The learning space can be conveyed through various activities, play, courses and areas in the library, for example study rooms (p.591).

Meeting space – especially underpin the goals of empowerment and involvement in which it offers an open and public space. The public library can be seen as a place between home and work and creates space for non-committal as organized meetings where people meet others, both alike and different from them. This is incorporated in the concept of the public library as a so called 'third place', traced back to the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999), where people from different ages, backgrounds – ethnical, educational, cultural etcetera – can meet on the same level. It is also seen through the role of the library as a 'low-intensive meeting place', presented by Audunson (2005), where people meet others with different values and interests than their own. (p.592)

Performative space – here the users can interact with one another and be inspired to create something new in the meeting of art and culture. This is can be made possible through access to interactive games, writing-, sound- and video, as well as offering support from professionals. In this way the performative space particularly supports involvement and innovation.

The authors discuss the dimensions of 'creation' and 'collection', first mentioned in *Confronting The Future* (Levien, 2011), of how each library needs to find a balance in how to best serve its patrons and community. They also insist that the library provides

spaces where people can partake in creation and co-creation so that it is still a relevant place for the generations of so called *digital natives*. According to Parley and Gassers (2008) definition, digital natives are born after the general introduction of digital technology, that is to say, after the late 1960s. The reason why the authors find it important to pinpoint their user abilities is because the digital natives consume as well as produce culture (p.593). The four spaces are not to be seen as separate but should support each other in order to support the library's objectives.

Jochumsen, Rasmussen and Skot-Hansen argue that the four-space model is too conservative and not innovating enough, that in an extensive usage of the model it will risk to limit instead of extend creative thinking and development of the public library. I agree with them but I still believe the model serves as a good departure in a discussion of the public library's role and future. As the authors point out, the model has been well implemented in Scandinavia and they believe the success is because the model shares the fundamental values from when the public libraries were built (p.595f). This is not something I think will change since, as mentioned, the values are fundamental and still important to both libraries and the society. The models spaces and ideas are easily open for interpretation and other aspects, which may be important in the future, can easily be included if needed.

More important is a reflection of the models usage in Chinese libraries or, in this case, Hangzhou Public library. Hangzhou public library has, after all, other conditions as well as a vastly different political and historical background than Scandinavian public libraries. Implementing the four spaces can prove difficult for some libraries in China (like in many other countries in the world) that do not have enough resources or financial support from the government. However, that does not exclude the use of the model to discuss how and what the library's services and facilities can be used for. Perhaps this can also help the discussion of the public libraries survival and future support and cooperation with other libraries or institutions, to help the libraries that are struggling.

4. Method

In this chapter I will first introduce the choice of method and later what procedures were taken. I will then present various considerations and limitations which I felt could affect the study. The section ends with a short introduction of the interviewees.

4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In this study I have chosen semi-structured interviews because the wording and order of the questions can be changed depending on the interviewee and what seems most appropriate at the time. The nature of this structure also allows the interviewer to omit or be allowed to ask additional questions based on the interviewees answers (Wildemuth, Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science, 2009, p233). It also helps overcome possible language barriers and to avoid subjects that could be considered sensitive – all depending on the informants which makes it possible to customize the interview guide. This method was of great help since the field in question, public libraries in China, was quite unfamiliar to me due to the limited amount of resources on the subject.

Everyone has their own understanding of how the world works, and rather than other interview methods, with semi-structured interviews the interviewer will be able to receive answers and data from the individual perspective of the informants (2009,

p233). Since the interview guide did not need to be structured, like that of a questionnaire or survey, I had three themes made: *The Public Library*, *The role of the librarian* and *The users* to help me in my later analysis but also for the interviewees to see a more apparent connection between the questions and the idea behind them, which I also hoped would help making it easier discussing them.

In making the interview guide I had in consideration the four types or styles of questions presented by Wildemuth, but which was proposed by Berg (2001). These consist of *essential questions*, *extra questions*, *throw-away questions* and *probing questions*, or *probes* (2009, p234). In doing the interviews I found the use of the extra questions, which allowed me to change the wording but also to check the reliability of the responses and to see if the informants answers were different depending on wording, and probes, the most useful.

4.2 Procedures

Each interview was designed to take about one hour, however because of the nature of the questions and a few language barriers most of the interviews took about one and a half hours to three hours.

I interviewed seven librarians working in the library, however I did not choose them myself since I preferred not to use an interpreter and therefore got help requiring those who could speak English from my contact person in the library. I did however have a few demands which were that I wished that the majority of them would work in different departments, since I believed the findings would be more representative of the library. I also requested that the librarians more or less and in various ways would deal with users during their day at work.

The interviews were recorded to help me organize the data but was to be confidential and only for personal use. This information was also sent to the interviewees as an attachment with details of the structure of the interview, purpose of the research as well as an outline of the interview guide per the librarians request. At the interviews I informed the informants about the study, that they were to be anonymous, that the data was to be held in my possession and only be used for my research. Recordings and field notes were taken during the interviews with the permission of the informants. The quotes used in this study are true to the interviewees own words, although at times some words have been inflected to match the structure of the sentences but otherwise changed or added words have been written into brackets.

The interview guide and its three sections helped in the following analysis of the data, that was made both during and after the transcribing as most of the transcribing was done after all the interviews were finished. The transcribing was made with the help of the recordings as well as the field-notes in which I had, to some extent, already started pre-coding by numbering the answers according to their themes. While transcribing I tried retelling their exact words as much as possible, mostly by using quotes. However, I summarized the subjects and parts I was unsure of if I wanted to include in the final draft. In this process I also started analysing and coding the answers which led to me adding my own interpretations and thoughts into the transcribing, these comments were however marked to distinguish it from the interviewees thoughts and answers.

When using this model as an analytical tool I have tried to identify the goals and spaces, as described by the authors, in the material and data generated by the interviews. Special focus has been directed to the four spaces as they incorporate the four aspects

(that is to say, the library as a space for: experience, involvement, empowerment and innovation). The discussion is therefore introduced with an overview of the four spaces seen in Hangzhou Public Library with the help of the interviews and own observations. I have then proposed problems as well as offer solutions further into the discussion of the research questions. These issues are not solely focused on Hangzhou Public Library but also in regards to public libraries in general so that it is possible to open up to a wider discussion.

4.3 Considerations and limitations

At first I had planned on using an interpreter regardless of the language spoken by the interviewees because I thought it might be more comfortable, for both of us, not to be restricted by possible language barriers. However, I did not consider that bringing an interpreter with me, while still having the interview in English, might be considered insulting. It also solves the problems I most likely would have had with an interpreter who is not familiar with library- and information science and its different terms and subjects. It also eliminates the middle hand and the social complications which might emerge when having a third party in the room. That being said, due to a misunderstanding two of the interviews had an interpreter, it seems that despite being efficient in English they felt insecure enough to acquire one. The interpreter was associated with the library but was not a librarian. Despite some difficulties and confusion I managed to work around since the interviewees did not really need interpretation.

The outline for the interviews that was sent by e-mail also presented as a solution to the potential problems with language barriers since it makes it possible for the interviewees to understand some of the questions and themes that were to be discussed. The interview questions used never directly touched any sensitive topics but in doing this study and performing the interviews I had in mind that I had to consider the possibilities of meeting unease when speaking of or touching the subject of censorship. China is ranked amongst the lowest in the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters without borders)⁴ and its censorship laws are heavily being questioned and criticised. Even in libraries, which advocate freedom of speech and information, there are material and information that have been censored or been classified as banned. While I value the importance of a critical discussion of censorship and its complications this study has not focused on this subject, neither did it intend to. I tried being as neutral as possible while discussing the topics and presenting the results. The researcher Britha Mikkelsen warns in her work *Methods for development work and research* about interpreting other societies and cultures with values of good and bad, right and wrong. However, that this should not be a problem as long as we are aware and accept the limitations of ethnocentric interpretations, which I hope I have in this study (2005, p327).

For the preparatory work a lot of facts were gathered from the library's official homepage. Since most of the library's information, both on the website and on different pamphlets and posters, was in Chinese I have been using translation tools online for short texts. I was also given information of the history and facts about the library from my contact person, some of which is presented in the introduction of the results.

⁴ en.rsfs.org

4.4 Interviewees

In presenting the informants I've wanted to inform the reader of aspects which I felt could influence the way they answered and therefore also the results and my analysis of it. The following names are pseudonyms:

Mei – Graduated in music abroad. Has worked in the Music Library for one year. She meets about 20-30 users on an everyday-basis and during activities, about 50-60 people.

Chen – Graduated in history. Has worked at Hangzhou public library for more than five years, first in the borrowing area and now with reference work in the Special collection department. Has also worked in Hangzhou Children's library, Hangzhou Public Library's sister library. He talks to at least 40 users everyday, on weekends more.

Ting – Graduated in Library science. Has worked at Hangzhou Public library nearly 10 months and is her first job. She works in the reading area and usually comes in contact with about 30 or more users daily, mostly answering questions and assisting them.

Li – Graduated from Library- and Information science. Has worked in the information production and communication department for five years. She provides digital library service and therefore never comes in contact with the users face-to-face.

Hui – Majored in tourism. Has worked for four years with service work, for example borrowing, lending and taking care of the library card. Helps about 100 users on workdays and around 200 on weekends.

Feng – Graduated in economics. Has worked for four months and is responsible for the activities. For example planning and contacting professors and lecturers. Sometimes helps out in the borrowing and lending area when needed. Comes in contact with 30 users or more during an activity, around six users in other situations.

Xui Li – Graduated in media and culture analysis abroad. Has worked for more than one year at the library and is responsible for coordinating the cultural activities. She only comes in direct contact with the users during the weekends, about a hundred users.

5. Presentation of results

The result is divided into different sections in hopes to structure the content and more directly link it with the interviews and earlier research. The chapter starts with an introduction of the library, which was combined by information acquired through my contact person and my own observations, followed by the interviewees perception of the Hangzhou Public Library and other Chinese libraries. It then continues with the interviewees views toward the role of *the public library* and eventually the role of *public librarians*, where the aspects of the *users* are included. These sections have their own subheadings which I found emphasized further themes and subjects of interest for discussion. However, the last subheading, the one entitled *The Future*, is an additional one in regards to the overall themes since I found it incorporated aspects of all of them.

Introduction to Hangzhou Public Library

Hangzhou Public Library is located in the Citizen Center, where there is also a youth and children's development centre and a exhibition hall for city planning, in Qianjiang CBD by the Qiantang river. The building covers 20,210 m², with an area of 43,680 m² in total. The area surrounding the library is newly developed and offers walking distance to the International Conference Center, the Hangzhou Grand Theatre, Bolang Cultural Town and the City balcony which overlooks the river. The library building

consists of one basement and four floors. It provides 2,200 reading seats and about 90% of the total space (nearly 40,000 m²) is for library users. The library is divided into four areas, which includes a hall area, a reading area, a communication area and a leisure area. The overall interior design is a combination of Chinese classical style and European style. Many of the rooms are spacious and open, but offer seclusion by making so-called rooms in the rooms themselves, as well as places for serendipity.

The library has three departments: the Literature lending and reading centre, the Special subject literature centre and the Cultural activity department. There are also three branches: the Music library, the City life branch and the Children's library. Among the activities offered in the different branches are lectures, Do-it-yourself-activities, screenings, discussion groups, lessons, exhibitions, performances etcetera, with focus on various subjects such as health, finance, art, literature, cooking and education. The library also houses a lecture hall, an exhibition hall, readers' discussion areas, research rooms, classrooms, bookstores, coffee shops and a tea house.⁵

5.1 Hangzhou Public Library and Chinese libraries

Most of the informants thought that all public libraries have the same goal and are fundamentally the same but that there are some distinct differences. Most of them expressed that perhaps their library was a bit better at what they do compared to other public libraries in China. Ting recalls her first visit to Hangzhou Public Library:

When I came to this library I was struck by the people here because some kind of books I think some professor might borrow it but when I came here [Hangzhou Public Library] but I found some old people or students might borrow or read it.

Ting felt that the users are more diverse at Hangzhou Public Library and that academic people, who in her hometown would rather go to the university or academic libraries, would instead go to their public library to borrow books. The public library in her hometown was rather small and people usually went there to read books or newspaper and nothing else, whilst at Hangzhou Public Library she feels it is different.

A factor that Chen believes has changed for the profession of librarianship is that the leadership for public libraries in general has become younger and more professional. "Young leadership means that [they] can accept new knowledge, outlooks and the future more easily – they can reform more easily [...] get rid of old traditional bad rules easily".

Xui Li believes that it was probably their library that inspired other Chinese libraries to be as open and allow beggars as they have. They get a lot of visitors from other libraries in China, many whom she says have been moved and impressed by Hangzhou Public Library. Xui Li thinks that compared to some other public libraries that has a lot of glass and elevators, which she feels is more like a shopping mall, Hangzhou Public Library is more homelike and like a study room. She thinks it is more relaxed and offers more to do.

One thing Chen thinks makes a big difference in Hangzhou Public Library is its staff and librarians – many whom have studied abroad – who are younger, more service-minded and have more passion for the work and users. He makes comparisons with some other smaller county libraries which have less resources and fewer staff who are also older. He means that they view the role as a librarian in a very traditional way in

⁵ Information acquired through observations and personal communication via email and interviews, March-April 2014.

which they mostly stay behind their desks, have no patience for the users and mostly think they are bothersome.

Another distinction is how the informants view public libraries in other countries. Li believes that the public library's role in society is a bit different internationally from China, that other public libraries are more open, easy to use, friendlier and offer more diverse services to the users – “[...] that their level is higher”. She thinks that is something they need to improve on and something they should learn from non-Chinese libraries. Although she believes their regular service in the physical library is a lot more satisfactory than the ones online. Ting has similar feelings but also deems that libraries in general should get better at going abroad and look to other libraries internationally. Mei explains her view on the difference by telling about her time abroad, in the UK:

[...] the environment is different and the staff, for example, I remember I wanted to borrow a book [...] I'm a foreigner so I didn't know how to search or how to use the research facility so I asked the staff [...] a girl helped me – take me there and to here, find books, research information – it was very nice. I think in China, in public libraries [...] not all the staff have the patience to help the reader.

Mei continues by saying that Chinese librarians will usually just redirect or refer the readers to the material, book or whatever they're looking for. She thinks that librarians must love their work and use these experiences to become a better librarian and “[...] try my best to help everyone”.

Xui Li believes that a problem in Chinese public libraries is that very few know what librarians do and consider it to be nothing more than managing books and being a deskjob. In contrast she says that in for example Britain they are much better at showing users what they can do to help them, for example with posters and fliers.

Chen brings up censorship in libraries and that all countries have some restrictions but in different degrees. He does not think that the censorship or limitations has limited their library that much but he thinks that Chinese libraries overall could be more or less limited by this. However he is positive about the future and hopes that the restrictions towards online services and information created by censorship will loosen as he says that “[There's] no excuse for the people to not get information freely”.

5.1.2 The users

During the interviews it was discussed which groups or users who need the public library and its services the most. A majority of the informants answered elderly people but some also thought the younger users and students. The reason why this was, regardless of which groups they chose, was very similar; because of free time. Hui and Ting both talk about old people, especially those who also bring their grandchildren with them.

They have more time and don't need to go to work. Maybe they send their grandchildren to school and they come for reading and in the afternoon they pick [them up] and send them home and then they come back for reading [again] [...] the other reason may be that their [children] go to work and they feel lonely at home [...] they come here for making friends.

Hui has a similar reasoning: “the old people and the children [...] because old people

have a lot of time and the children with the parents love picture and story books”. She think the library is a good place for them to go to for this, that they can offer them material which they perhaps can't afford or get by themselves.

Xui Li also think elderly people have the most use of public libraries because they have time to enjoy the kind of services the libraries offer. At the same time she explains why she believes the “younger generation”, as she calls them, should use the public libraries more:

[...] they don't have time to come to the library and they also spend much time online and there are many resources there and they can access everything [by themselves] [...] to them the public library is something that can be absent [...] unnecessary since they think they can get everything online that the libraries offer [...] so public libraries for them is just a place [to study] and I don't think they pay much attention to the cultural content they could get.

They do try to attract these younger people by offering certain activities about, for example, entrance exams, studies and stress-related issues. Unfortunately however, they usually do not have time to attend anyway. Both Ting and Mei agrees that younger people would rather use the internet and online services, not connected to the library, than the public library's services.

Xui Li is not the only one who believes the young users are missing out, Mei believes it is them, including the students, that have the most use of public libraries because “They have more free time than us who work so they [have more of a reason] to visit the library – to learn”. However, she also think they are part of the groups and individuals who should use the public libraries and its services but is not. Mei identified these groups as graduate students and people who work. She, and two others, specifically mentions young people who have jobs and a lot of free time. The reason, they gather, why young people would rather do something else than visit libraries is because they do not see a reason to.

Ting does not think that there are any groups who never visit the library and would be in need of it. Although she comments that some students who becomes volunteers usually only do it for educational benefits and perhaps not because they enjoy being in the library. She thinks the older volunteers enjoy the experience and appreciates the work more than the younger does.

Li and Feng are the only ones with very different perceptions of who has the most use of public libraries. Li says that “Common people [...] who don't have enough resources or books” that can't afford the kind of books or services the public library offer. Feng believes it to be researchers and parents and their children, because the public library is a convenient place for them to go and that they can offer something special for them.

5.2 The public library – its role and purpose

All of the informants are clear that the public libraries, including their own, are meant for everyone – regardless of position, education or background. Chen explains that he sees it as “second gift” in society, in which he means the first gift for the citizens is salary while the second gift includes schools, hospitals and libraries. He means that these things are important for there to be justice and fairness in society; that rich and political men have a lot of influence and power in society and so public libraries can be a resource for common people to improve their lives, and also for those who cannot

afford the kind of services the library offers by themselves.

For me Public library means [...] [dis]interested organization which is only for the benefit for the citizens. It's a place to make the people – citizens, including people from other regions, other countries to come here to enjoy and find what they want [...] books and knowledge especially.

The public library is also not only seen as a place of continued learning it is also a place for people to learn new skills, knowledge and to attain sources of information and material they might otherwise not be able to afford. Mei feels the professional staff can provide these kinds of opportunities for those who cannot go to or learn in school. The librarian's role then also serves as tutors.

It's [public libraries] open to everyone. It's an important role. Some people maybe due to different reasons cannot get to [go] to university or to school, like economic reasons, so they come here. We have lectures, lessons, saloons. It's the same in school, I think, we have staff who graduate [from] university.

Xui Li on the other hand talks of the public library as a bridge or a platform which links people together in various ways.

[...] if we only pay attention to the books, I think public libraries link the great minds – I mean the dead writers or people with the living. If we pay attention to the current situation, like in Hangzhou Public Library, it just links people from different kinds of work – like during one activity people get to know each other and public libraries is a place to meet and share information and knowledge.

5.2.2 The library as a place for everyone

Homeless people and beggars often come to the Hangzhou Public library, where most of them spend time at the Music Library watching movies, TV or by relaxing in the sofas. Mei, who works at the Music Library, also mentions “junkmen” (people who have no job or home) as a common user group. She thinks the library is good place for them and mentions that it is a great opportunity for them to listen to different kinds of music, for example classic music, which they would not be able to do elsewhere. She does however find their visits a bit problematic concerning the other users.

We have sofas, tables where they can watch a movie, can have a seat [...] so maybe it's a place for them. But on the other hand I think it's not good for libraries when other people come when they [see] the beggars [...] but they [the other users who are not beggars] can come a second time, they can come again.

Ting does not think the homeless and beggars presence is a big problem in the library anymore, she believes most of the other users have gotten used to the homeless or simply do not care and that only a few would have preferred to forbid the homeless access to the library.

Xui Li recalls when Hangzhou Public Library made the announcement about allowing beggars into the library while she was studying in Britain. She was surprised because she was used to the idea that public libraries were supposed to be open for everyone. Later she explains that she believes the reason why it became such a big topic

and well-known was because of how the director spoke and handled the issue and the critique, that what he said was very emotional and moving – that it struck a chord about justice and equality.

5.2.3 The library as a place for learning

Mei describes the public libraries as a lifelong education where you continue to learn and that “[...] public library is a learning society. We [can] graduate from university but if we want to continue to learn [...] for me, I can continue to learn more [at public libraries]”. This learning is not only for the users, Hui talk about the services and activities as something they – both the librarians and users – all learn from. Li says that it is important for librarians to keep learning and improving in their profession and that the public library means knowledge and that public libraries incorporates that it is never too late to learn.

Chen also talks about education but in a more specific and different way, in which “The purpose of a public library is to improve people – [for them to] gain knowledge”. He means that gaining knowledge is not only achieved by reading books, it is gained through different forms like for example meeting others and seeking information.

He is not the only one who believes that the public library’s role is to help the users and citizens. Some of them emphasize different kinds of services which they think are most important, Ting for example thinks that “Information seeking is the most important service because recently users get lost in the sea of information and our library can arrange that for the readers”. Li also think the users need their help with information seeking. She thinks it has become even harder for people today to find what they want by themselves, particularly Chinese users who, she believes, are not very information literate.

Xui Li explains that: “[...] because everything is online doesn't mean people can distinguish right from wrong [...] we should guide them”. She explains this by commenting that some people only spend time online by playing games or reading gossip sites and that the librarians should guide them to what is worth their attention. She thinks it hard to say exactly what is worth paying attention to and that it is really not her place to make that distinction. However she thinks it should be a mix of these things, that people should look beyond what they already know and consume media that is different from what they are used to.

Li adds that the public library's goal is to help people to enjoy and solve problems with reading but adds that it is not only a place for reading, it is also a multicultural place for communication, meeting new people and studying. Feng agrees that the book, reading and learning is very important and that this function is even more crucial today than before. Activities are a service which is to be esteemed and something he believes enriches user’s lives.

I think the library has four functions. The first one is to protect the cultural legacy, the second is spread the knowledge [...] the third is develop people’s intelligence, because people can learn here and the forth is [...] colorful life [...] our library is the center of activities so people will join the activities and their lives will be more colorful.

Xui Li, being responsible for many activities, also thinks that as librarians they have a big impact on peoples life and learning:

I think public libraries are no longer just a place for information, it's about experience, just like the activities. We can get information and knowledge online but it's totally different if we have people around us, we learn the knowledge [...] can have a discussion about it.

Ting has a similar opinion, that the public library is a place full of books, for relaxing and for making friends. The other important aspect of public libraries, she says, is that they can offer activities which the users can participate in and get more knowledge and get to know each other better. All the informants argue that public libraries are a place for both education and socializing, Feng thinks that it is especially important for children:

[...] because libraries ha[ve] a special area for children and they can meet other children so they can play together. It's also a place to learn something. If you're a parent you can find some books about education, so it's convenient.

5.2.4 The library as an alternative to commercialism

Some of the librarians spoke about the difference between commercial services and the public libraries. Xui Li believes they are not the same since libraries do not have a commercial agenda behind their services like companies and that they may not have the same quality. "Public libraries cannot do commercial things or anything related to commercial [work] [...] libraries [are] the only place which keeps the commercial away, and we should keep it that way". Nearly all the informants believe their library and libraries, in general, need to work more with marketing, but which they believe is completely different from what commercial institutions have. Xui Li explains it as "we meet the demand but we also pick something to show [...] we want to guide them", to show them something they would otherwise not be able to watch or experience elsewhere.

Hui takes the topic a bit further and does not think their activities should be related to business since she points out that the nature of public libraries is for the public to come to the library to enjoy their time so "[...] they [the users] shouldn't have to deal with that".

Xui Li thinks that the library and it is librarians should provide something different for their users, something that is not mainstream or has a lot of marketing sponsoring it. She says that they want to know of the users wishes and suggestions but it is not always they can fulfil or take them into account. For example, when the library has screenings they often show alternative films but unfortunately it is not very popular. The users tell them that the reason the activities does not have a lot of participants is because they would rather watch Hollywood movies.

We know that if we play Hollywood movies we can have more [in the] audience, have more users [coming to the activities] but it is not right [...] we think it is a very difficult problem to deal with in public libraries. We want to have many users but we have to let them know their demand is sometimes wrong or partially wrong.

She means that, for example, cinemas show these kinds of films for profit, that is why they want to show other kinds of films even if they know it is not popular.

Sometimes we have activities that we know they don't want, that before the activity we know that only a few will come to it but we just want to offer and let them know about this and learn to appreciate these kind of movies, not only Hollywood movies.

She says that of course they are a bit disappointed when people don't come to the activities but that she thinks that giving the users the opportunity to watch these kinds of films is a first step and that there will be more people attending in the long run. For Mei it is very important to popularize music which the Music Library can help by giving singing lessons, lyric-making, composing and other services and activities that they offer. She also says that their services and lessons offer the opportunity to learn more about music for those who may not have the means to go to school or study music the way she has.

Not everyone has the opportunity to listen to music, like classical music [...] in China we like Chinese folk music, so how to get [them to listen to] the American, European or classical music? [...] so it's our work to popularize music to citizens – to the readers.

So her goal is also to help users appreciate other genres of music.

5.2.5 Promoting books and reading

Mei believes that “[...] in the future the digital library will be important [...] everyone, the younger [people] will use the internet for reading” but that the books are important as well, historically. She believes the public library needs to and will be developing the digital part of the library but at the same time they have to advocate the book and reading. She also points out that some people can't afford computers or other technology to make it possible to download or read online.

Ting mentions that the library is a great place for serendipity; to find something by chance and discover something new, that it is a great opportunity for all users. She is very fond of books and reading and tells me about one of the activities which is meant to promote reading. In this activity the lecturer recommends books with the help of picture-cards. The lecturer then recommends a book depending on what the users have to say these cards. She also wants to get better at bibliotherapy, with an activity they call “*reading healing*” which she holds with the help of a professor, “[...] so that I might help people with mental questions [...] I want to be a bridge for connecting people and the professors and knowledge”.

Li also believes that reading services are still very important in the public library, she expresses it as a sort of “*knowledge navigation*”. She says that it does not matter in what kind of form it is and that it is “[...] important to cultivate the reader's interest in reading”. Li is also of the opinion that the public library's services should only be related to reading and knowledge, for example she says that sport are not a good activity here. However, knowledge comes in many forms so if it regards gaining some sort of reading or learning she thinks it is part of their services and goal. Feng's goal as a librarian also involves the physical book, he wishes to help more people read since he thinks that there are still many people who do not have any opportunities to read and learn at school.

“Libraries are supposed to provide classical literature but not the best-sellers”.

With this Xui Li means that they should provide different kind of media and literature that the users usually would not find or “consume”. She also thinks the physical books are very important in the library. For example, she thinks that Amazon and Google have done a great job with eBooks and with sharing information and that digital eBooks are a great concept. However, she believes that the paper book still has an important place in libraries because of the old generation who are more used to it and prefer to read at the library. She thinks that even though eBooks are popular and many people download books here in China there are still many who prefer the paper book, that it is another kind of feeling reading than an eBook.

Good and bad literature

To Hui the most important service is the provision of books. Even though computers and technology are important and have a place in today’s everyday life, the physical book is still very important and maybe more so than before. Not all books are equally important though, according to Hui it depends on the author and publisher but they should also respond to the readers’ interest. However, she says that; “[...] some love stories are not good [...] they are borrowed a lot of times but the content is not good”. Although it does not necessarily mean that she thinks the books are bad or good per se, just that their content are sometimes very similar and therefore their quality can be discussed.

Feng thinks that literature about, for example, pornography, anti-government, anti-social and anti-human subjects are to be considered bad. Novels, especially romance novels, are frequently borrowed at their library however he adds that; “I don’t think they are good literature because they are just fictions which are far away from our life. Only the masterpieces can be defined as good” and that whether literature is good or not shouldn’t simply be judged by how many readers like it.

5.3 The role of the public librarian - The servant and the friend

When asked how a public librarian should act, Mei answers: “They should not act as a librarian”, to which she explains:

[Public librarians] should act and be like the tutor, the friend – to help and guide them [the users] and not to manage or tell them 'you should do that or not do that' [...] of course they should have the knowledge [...] but the most important [thing] is to be patient, help and guide them.

She explains that a librarian should do the traditional work but with readers they should act as tutors, and adds that “If you love the work you love the readers”.

To Li the most important aspect is “[...] to have a warm, friendly heart [...] [to] make friends with them [the users]”. She thinks education is essential for the job but that being warm and friendly to the user is more important, which she believes the users of Hangzhou Public Library wants more of as well. She also thinks their online service needs to be friendlier, as in being more user-friendly and offer more information about activities and things that could be of interest to the users.

Feng thinks that a public librarian should be polite and always try their best to help the users: “When readers ask me to find a book I should find it no matter how busy I am [...] If I can't help them myself I can ask my colleagues”, so he will always try to find a way.

Xui Li thinks that people perceive their job as similar to a job in government,

that it is very stable, not stressful and that many consider it as a secure but boring job because of the stereotypes some people have of them. Some believe the library is only a place to borrow books and that the librarians only sit behind a desk managing books. She comments that some people even ask if they sell books in the library but adds that those kind of people are usually not regular visitors. Later Xui Li adds that she is a bit uncertain if she would call herself a public librarian, only in context of working in the library but not regarding her work assignments. This leads her to usually say that she works in the library but not that she is a public librarian.

Chen says that some readers think that because “[...] we [the readers] pay the government, the government pays for you” which makes them believe that they can order the librarians, or staff in the library, around. He says that they are required to find the books for the users but not to do anything else, like carrying the books around for the user’s convenience. He jokes a bit that there may be people in society that feel like they aren’t respected and that they then perhaps takes that out on the librarians.

Xui Li continues by saying that users have high expectations of the librarians “Since [public libraries] are not commercial and provide things for free so the staff is supposed to be patient, they should meet every demand of the users. And sometimes I think they demand too much of the library because of what the public libraries stand for – free, equal, open-access”, that they think there is no limitations and that they believe they are always in the right; “The library is for everyone and they are everyone”. At least that is how she feels about some of the users of Hangzhou Public library.

Xui Li says that she often doesn’t know how to handle these sorts of situations and that she usually feels in the wrong, that she should be more patient. She also feels that sometimes she should do more than needed to help the users and most of the time she does just that, something that is not really part of her job, just because she works in a public library where they are supposed to help people. “I have the right to tell them it might not be good for them but I don’t have the right to say no”.

Ting have similar feelings, she thinks a public librarian cannot say no to the users and that they should always help to try solve the problem. If it is not possible to do so by herself she will ask someone or take their phone number and come back with the answer later, so she takes her role as librarian home sometimes. Even if she cannot help them directly she thinks they should tell them how to get help in other places which may help them better.

Ting also mentions that some users see her as a servant and some call her “waiter”. The first time this happened she got very confused but lately she does not mind that much because:

[...] some users don't know the chores of our librarians, what they see is that I act like [a sort of] robot – just pass the books they need and put them back on the shelves – just manage books, that's all they know.

Both Hui and Feng have more positive experiences, Hui thinks the readers opinion of them and their job is very good and Feng says some of the users shows appreciation when he helps them so he believes they understand their work. Even so, when I brought up that some of the other librarians experienced being treated as servants or someone who only manages books, Hui comments that they get used to it and that it is not very common, that most users are respectful towards them.

Mei has both positive and negative experiences of the users. On one hand she feels that the users believe they can help and are not afraid to ask the librarians

questions, on the other hand she thinks that some users might not feel respect towards them, for example when a user tries to steal CDs or materials from the library but does not seem to care about the librarians presence or what they might say. She especially thinks this is the case for women, that they do not have the same status as librarians as men do.

The user - someone who knows a lot yet very little

Even though the public library and its librarians do a lot more than managing books the interviewees found that the users know very little about their job and what they could help with. The interviewees think that the users have demands and wishes that they might already have and offer them.

Ting says they need to prove and show the users that they are more than just waiters since that is usually how they perceive the librarians as. She wishes that in the future they – Hangzhou Public Library and other public libraries – together will find a way to introduce the library and librarians so that the users might understand them better. Li expresses that they should have more active guidance in showing what the library has to offer and that the public libraries need to get better at marketing and in finding more ways to attract the users. Ting has similar feelings and thinks it helps if the librarians try to show more interest in the user and what they want.

Feng mentions that they have posters outside the building, have information and notices up on the official website and social media and seem to think that could be enough. Chen does not think that their online service is very popular, as they do not get a lot of questions directly to the library's online service which he thinks is a shame. He also mentions that people rather go online than ask the libraries directly. “The readers and the citizens don't know they can ask the questions to the city library [...] they believe in the internet so they ask the questions like this [for example “Ask”]”. In contrast to the perception that the users know very little about the public libraries Xui Li mentions that she thinks of the library as a sort of Wiki⁶ where you share information and knowledge with one another since everyone have different kind of experience and knowledge that is valuable.

A helping hand

Helping the users is considered an important aspect and a big part of being a librarian for the interviewees. Hui, for example, thinks this is the most important service they can offer but does not think it is part of their role as a librarian to help the users with 'everything' – that is to say something not concerning the library or their services. Feng is more open to the idea of helping with other matters, for example more personal issues not connected to the library or its services, but only if he does not have other things to do.

According to Chen users usually do not want help with finding something “usually people don't come and ask to find something – find a book – they maybe want to kill time [...] just to [be able to] stay here and waste time” and adds “They are maybe just interested in the air conditioning [...] during the summer when the temperature is very high we know that some people don't want to use the air conditioner in their home so they stay here”. He says it is often that people ask questions simply for the reason so that they will be able to stay in the library's facilities longer. Some users stay from opening- to closing time, brings supper with them and even sleeps at the library.

⁶ A web application which allows people to add, modify, or delete content in collaboration with others (Wikipedia 2014).

Although Chen also mentions that perhaps the users have a bit too much faith in the librarians, that even though they could easily find the answers by themselves they would rather go directly to them. He thinks it is a problem that they would put more faith in them than themselves, or “their own two eyes”. But even though he finds it boring answering these kind of repetitive, easy questions he says that “[...] then I remember it's my job and I need to make them [the users] satisfied and answer their questions”. Chen never tries to correct them or try to teach them how to search by themselves because he “[...] wants to be a patient person so I'd like to answer the question again”. Some of the interviewees expressed that as librarians, they should help as much as they can and that they sometimes felt obligated to do more than perhaps is necessary.

5.4 The future - An institution of possibilities versus “the death of the library”

Xui Li says that since libraries have become different from before and no longer just offer information and books, they are now a cultural place and like some of the other interviewees she says that there are simply things you cannot do or find on the web. For example being a meeting place, offering activities, material and resources and offer help and guidance they would not be able to get anywhere else – especially for free. She believes this to be true in the future as well.

Most of the interviewed thinks that reference work and information seeking is the most important service a public library can offer which Ting explains with “[...] because recently users get lost in the sea of information and our library can arrange that in order for the readers”. Also, both Xui Li and Ling believe that the users need help in distinguishing information and maybe even more so in the future. Another important factor is that these services are provided for free which Mei points out that in China “[...] a lot of the digital information need money [...] but I can come to the library – it's free!”.

A few of them, for example Feng and Mei, emphasize the importance of reference work linked to physical material that is not available in any other form, such with historical value, which is also important for the future. Xui Li thinks reference work is the core of the public library, the most essential service, but that activities are also an important part. “The activities make the library into another kind of place, another platform but the core of the library is still the reference”. She thinks maybe activities will take a bigger part in libraries but that reference work is a service which cannot be replaced.

Ting believes that book borrowing and return services will become a very small part of the library as more people prefer to read books on their phones or iPads but that it will become a better place for relaxing, meeting others, studying and a place to ask for advice. Both Feng and Hui expressed very positive thoughts about the future, that there will be challenges for public libraries but nothing to threaten their survival. In fact, Hui states that the more they have to compete with other institutions or services, for example the internet, the more opportunities they will have. Xui Li also talked about new possibilities but in a slightly different way. She speculates that maybe there will be less staff in library the future, that the public libraries will consist of mostly volunteers – that is, the readers themselves.

In the future [...] I think maybe that the jobs I do, being responsible for the activities, maybe someday I will be replaced by a group or team of volunteers and

the whole library is just a place for volunteers, just like Wikipedia, people share knowledge and information with each other and no one is the staff of the library.

Since she says that now with the users being potential volunteers they provide services to each other by sharing what they have and know to others. However she still believes there has to be professional librarians, those who have specific knowledge and expertise, for example reference librarians, but that there will not be a need for librarians like her, which she believes can be easily replaced. This also means she believes librarianship will go back to being more traditional in nature which she thinks would be a positive change.

For Chen the future looks dire and mentions the “death of the library”, that “The library won't need so much staff [...] because of the machines, computers and the readers can do the lending by themselves”. And believes he probably have to leave the public library eventually since he thinks that machines and computers can do some tasks, for example reference work, a lot better and more efficient than the staff. But like Xui Li he thinks that there will still be professionals who are experts at certain things working in the library. In contrast he believes that the academic-, university- and collage libraries in China will reform and thrive in the future since they at the moment are not always open for the public. However, on a more positive note, he adds that these libraries are their “enemies” and that it will hopefully help them reform to offer better and different kind of services that perhaps can be seen as (of now) not being the task of public libraries which was not possible before.

6. Discussion

The chapter begins with the four spaces in Hangzhou Public Library. Next section focuses on discussing the librarians view on the public library, the third section on their role as librarians and towards the users, and ultimately, about the future.

6.1 The four spaces in Hangzhou Public Library

Inspiration space – Later in this chapter I will argue that the inspiration space, as well as the performative space, are seen as secondary aspects of Hangzhou Public Library. Of course, that does not mean it excludes any of the aspects of these spaces. Design can be seen as incorporating experience; the overall design of the main building of Hangzhou public library is expressed as being cosy, homelike and compared to a study-room. Some areas have a more distinct Chinese classical style however, which adds a slightly luxurious feeling and suits the surrounding environment of the area. The library is located near the river along with other impressive and modern buildings, most of them affiliated with culture (for example, a concert hall). While the area could be considered a bit secluded from the older, more famous city centre by the lake (at least it could be considered such during the time of the interviews, which was lamented by some of the interviewees, since the library's surrounding area was still in construction), I will argue that the newer and more modern location can act as an inspiration in itself. Spending time in a developing environment, both culturally and figuratively, can make people feel like they are part of the changes and the developments of their city. Even by just visiting those areas or simply witnessing it. I believe this to be especially important for vulnerable or marginalised groups that otherwise could feel left behind and excluded from the rest of society. The public library, being part of such a place, welcoming everyone and showing signs of low-intensity such as this one would surely inspire its

users and others as well.

Learning space - Many of the librarians at Hangzhou Public Library mention that the public library is a place for lifelong learning, not only for those who already have an education but also for those who might not have received one at all. So the library is not only a place for helping already enrolled students it is also a place to learn something new, an opportunity for people, who might not have the means for “real” education. While the educational system might have failed some people, the library offers lectures, discussion groups and access to material and knowledge to continue to learn regardless of status or background – and most importantly, that it is free for them to pursue. Out of all the spaces, the learning space is the space I found the interviewees advocated the most. Apart from the most obvious aspects of learning found in a library (such as books, computers, learning materials etcetera), Hangzhou public library has a lot of areas and rooms for study, both for low-intensity and high-intensity needs. The learning space is also evident in their focus on activities and their attitudes towards them, especially considering some of the librarians believes that it is a continued learning opportunity for both the users and themselves.

Meeting space – The library as a meeting place, where people can discuss and meet others with different values, backgrounds and interests than their own, is a big part of the library. From what the informants told me their users use it in various ways; some use it as an extension of their work (students), while others use it as an extension of their home (elderly, children, families). However, it is also a third place where the users change roles depending where and what they are doing. The most prominent example is when people change roles from being a participant to a lecturer. One of the librarians explicitly expressed that she found their library to have a more diverse user group than other public libraries in China. Here people with different intentions and from different backgrounds are exposed to one another in a way that indicates low-intensity as well as high-intensity.

Performative space – The most obvious examples of this space is the library’s provision of exhibitions, performances, classes and lectures. The City centre offers performative space for youths in the form of Do-it-yourself-activities and workshops. The music library also offers an opportunity to create and perform with different lessons. The library could also be seen as performative in the way it enables the roles to be reversed, as mentioned above, where the user can become a lecturer or a driving force in an activity and the librarian or lecturer becomes the participant.

6.2 The library as a place for learning – librarians as teachers

Rubin (2010) discusses the negative effects that could happen when libraries start to act more like businesses. Perhaps that is the reason why librarians, including those in this study, focus so much on education and on offering something different. The educational and pedagogical discourse can be seen through the opinion that some of the users suggestions (about activities, films etcetera) does not fit into the library’s objectives in which they wish to educate the users. While both the educational and pedagogical discourses are also relevant in a Swedish context, Swedish libraries seem to put more emphasis on traits from the information management discourse, such as focusing on the demands of the users. The librarians at Hangzhou Public Library, on the other hand, seem to want to stay far away from business-oriented practices and see it as part of their responsibility to offer the public something different and thought-provoking. Nevertheless, like Hedemark and Hedman (2005) points out, it might be seen as a bit

patronizing or send the opposite message of what the public library wish to represent. Although, if focusing too much on wanting more visitors it could easily end with starting to serve those who are easier to satisfy and therefore neglect other users, who might have special needs and might need the library's service more (Rubin 2010), in this case the homeless and those with no or little education. That being said the homeless in Hangzhou does not seem to *want* more than a place to stay, at least by the librarians statements, that of course does not mean *more* should not be offered. A library that does not have visitors is a bad library but is as bad if it only follow trends.

The discussion of “good versus bad” – both in the morally and qualitatively sense – is often contradicting itself, like in the case of the discourses previously mentioned. While librarians appear to have very strong feelings towards these two notions they seem to find it difficult in pinpointing what they ultimately mean, and more importantly, what qualifies as good and bad literature. Then, the question is, what do they mean? It is understandable that there is a wish to emphasize on well-written and well-illustrated materials, which has been one of the values of librarianship (Rubin 2010). As mentioned earlier, emphasis also lies on education. In the end however, the answers and reasoning appear to be of a more personal nature, what applies to them or their position as librarians. It was therefore not surprising that it took a bit of probing for them to clarify what it was that they actually meant when they spoke of good versus bad and right versus wrong.

The Hangzhou public librarians express a strong emphasis on advocating the book and the importance of reading despite the fact that new formats are being popularized (Rubin 2010). However, as much as it is important to value the physical book, a bigger focus on electronic books might make it possible to reach out to young people and attract new users. Advocating for reading and knowledge in different forms and formats are important since I believe there is still some disdain regarding eBooks and other “untraditional” formats in general. Besides, one of the librarians points out that despite the physical books superior features the library has limited space and electronic material solves that problem.

When speaking of the role of the librarian the informant’s appraisal of its importance is very apparent. Although, while the majority of the interviewees are positive about the future there are still a few of them who seem to have differing opinions on this subject. For example, a few expressed that they could easily be replaced, either by machines or by others more suited for the role. Although the latter possibility was seen as promising change by the librarian who mentioned it. This leads me to question the actual role and work of the librarian. Both Kåring (2008) and Fourie (2004) stress the role of seeking and supplying information but what about the concepts of the four spaces? The spaces and the idea of them incorporate services which I believe the public library’s facilities and services should offer but the question is exactly *who* should supply these services? More specifically, where does the librarians role and work fit into in these spaces?

The role in the learning space is quite self-evident, notably in regards to Hangzhou's librarians who expresses keen interest and import on teaching and different forms of learning. But what about librarians place in the more performative and experience/inspiration related spaces – is it as one of the informants said, that the roles in which the librarians have no special expertise could easily be replaced? Should the librarian only focus on the informational aspects of the job, such as reference, which by the by was considered the most important service by the informants – and judging by literature (Rubin 2010; Fourie 2004) and LIS education – or should the social and

cultural arenas be as important? Also, if the librarian is to focus on information navigation, are the performative and inspiration spaces to be left for the users to build and shape? What about the information navigation itself? The library was seen as still needing to reserve material for historical gains, but if it is to be less of a place for books and reading is the librarian's job then to mainly help people consult and navigate information that is found outside of the public library?

As much as I believe in the importance of supplying and distributing information to citizens, in particular those in vulnerable positions, and to even the levels between them and the government, corporations etcetera (Kåring 2008), I also believe that the cultural and social spectrum of what the public library is – and could become – is of equal import. I believe this to be especially true for regions or countries where information and services might not always be freely accessible and open to all. In these areas a meeting space (Jochumsen, Rasmussen, Skot-Hansen 2012) – a place to spend time, participate in activities, no matter how small or 'insignificant', the possibility to meet others, similar or completely different to you – is very important. In this sense, the library can offer so much more than information and materials as it can also contribute to social inclusion. Fortunately, the aspect of the cultural role and the library as a meeting place, inspiration and performative space seem to already have been established with the librarians at Hangzhou Public library.

6.3 The role of librarians

While they regard their role as librarians as important, in aspects of teaching the users, guiding them and being their friend, it clashes with their perception of how they are being perceived by the users and society. The same could be said in Sweden although perhaps not to the same extent. A majority of the librarians at Hangzhou feel there is a high expectation of them and, as a few of them mention, this could be because of the perception users have of them as someone who is paid to serve the public. The perception with Swedish users seem to be more connected with librarians association with the physical library (Kåring, 2008) and, from personal experience, even more so with paper books. This view was mentioned by the informants as well but what stood out to me was their perception of being treated as servants or seen as robots. While not all of them used these expressions or talked about this issue to the same extent, many seemed to still understand or sympathize with that feeling.

While they had a lot to say about their role as librarians in general, talking about attributes and behaviours that are closely linked to the fundamental values of LIS, they were not as positive about their own contribution; personally but especially as a Chinese librarians. The librarians had more good things to say about their library but the overall views of being a Chinese librarian were mostly entirely negative. Perhaps one reason is, which some of them explained earlier, that there are still differences between libraries in China, that some libraries do not have enough resources or staff, are not as open and does not seem to incorporate the meeting place or of being low-intensive. From the discussions with the informants, and my own comprehension of Chinese public libraries, the public library field appear to be quite young in China. That is to say, at least in comparison to Swedish or American libraries. Perhaps it is then not very surprising that a lot of the librarians have an overall educational and pedagogical view towards their services.

The informants overall view of librarianship is that it has not changed that much in recent years and that it probably will not as much in the future either. Although most

of them thought these issues was a difficult subject, some explained that as society and technology change so does the profession – like everything else. In a sense, these views agree with Kårings (2008) assessments. The fact that reference work was considered more important than other services and to be the most likely to survive and stay the same in the future is interesting due to the premonition of the librarian who actually worked with references. That is to say, the librarian who had the bleakest thoughts of the future believed his job could be easily replaced by machines while the others saw that role as being somewhat irreplaceable. This adds a complexity in the role of the librarians which I will explore further in section 6.4.

The users

The user is seen as a complex group with different dimensions. The majority of the librarians expressed that the user has more to offer than just being a participant – they create and bring knowledge to others, both the other users and the librarians. One of them even believed that in the future they might be more involved in the library by replacing some of the staff. But at the same time the users are seen as a group which needs to be taught and guided – especially concerning information seeking – that the librarians can help them find something worth their attention, and in a way cultivate them. Since there is such a vast ocean of information the users need help, and according to some of the informants now more than ever. Just like Fourie (2004) claim that despite the constant worry of disintermediation, as the users can access and search on their own, there is still a need for those who can organize all the information and material that becomes available. Their reasoning for this is also in accordance to what the literature (Rubin 2010, Kåring 2008 etc.) says; that the librarian will play a bigger role in advising and consulting users in their search of information.

There seems to be some similarities with Audunsons (2001) study, where the librarians thought life-long learning and education was more important whereas the citizens felt stronger for leisure reading. This could be seen in some of the informant's thoughts about commercial works and their role as tutors. Though whilst the informants feel more strongly about services towards elderly people, the librarians in the study didn't. The reason why youths are seen as a rather problematic or difficult user group might be because the informants main focus is the library as a learning and meeting space and that the experience/inspiration and performative space is seen as secondary goal. This is something I believe the majority of all public libraries struggle with, that they do not offer enough access and room for the users to initiate own creativity which I think is of particular interest and import if the public library wishes to still be a central part in society in the future. According to Audunsons (2001) study a very high percentage of young citizens believed the library to be of less importance in the future and he therefore urged the libraries to prove their worth to them. Today's young users belong to the generations of “digital natives”, they are brought up with consuming and to use that for producing. Therefore I believe that in pinpointing these user abilities and offering access to services and activities that cater to them, it is possible to prove this worth to younger users as well as being able to reach out to more people. Another reason might be that a high percentage of young people might, as some of the interviewees explained it, not know about their services and activities and that a lot of people still have an “outdated” view about the library and the librarians. Again, a bigger focus on marketing and more services on trying to reach out to the users could contribute to help eliminate these negative stereotypes and to also help bolster the role

of the librarians and their profession.

There seems to be a sort of pride in using the term 'everyone', like with the interviewees, when speaking of users but by using it you easily lump users together. The users suddenly become one collective group and perhaps the groups or individuals which needs more help or assistance in society, especially the more vulnerable groups, become invisible in the search to “apply to all” where the majority might be users not in need of special or extra services. This also ties into what was earlier discussed about business-oriented models.

Some of the interviewees seemed to have a bit difficulty when having to pinpoint certain groups and even when they did it could still be considered quite vague, for example 'young people' and 'old people'. However, I do not believe this to be a solely negative aspect, rather, I see it to be a natural response to the nature of the library. Because of this I believe the lines between people become blurred, just like Aabø and Audunson (2012) concludes in their observational study, that people in the library are not categorized but are all library users – people become more equal, not only between the users themselves but also for the librarians.

6.4 The future

The literature and the librarians in this study both press that the information role in which they advise, consult the users will still be important in the future as information and data increases in both amount, formats and access. Some of these issues have already been discussed in 6.3 about the role of librarians and the users. But will this always be true? I am not implying that the information role is not important, or that it will diminish in its worth, but like with everything else people's skills and abilities progress and users will become better at handling and sorting through it. After all, what use is it focusing on teaching and consulting about information if it is not used or learned? Of course, not only libraries have this knowledge; schools and other educational institutions does as well (however, it might not always be for free or attainable for all). As Audunson (2001) concludes, the future is in need of both an information navigator *and* an intermediary of culture. As much as the intermediary role of information, both in the sense of helping people find what they are looking for as well as mediating between the public and institutions (Kåring 2008), and giving access to material and information equally and to groups who otherwise would perhaps never be able to obtain them as easily, the library's and librarians role to offer spaces (as explained by the four spaces model), I believe, is as important. It will contribute to the community in a way that it provides an arena where people and individuals from different backgrounds and values can meet and where activities and services, offered for free and equally, opens up for social inclusion and belonging for everyone – whether they belong to vulnerable groups or not. It is on this front – the social front and the librarians role as intermediaries of culture – that I believe public libraries can learn more from each other. Despite some of the informants modesty and low perception of themselves and Chinese libraries, I have witnessed and experienced innovative thinking, ideas and use of the four spaces at Hangzhou Public Library that I definitely think Swedish public libraries could benefit from. For example, most of the informants does not have a education in Library and Information science but still hold important positions which I personally would classify as intermediaries of culture. While the cultural and social roles are beginning to be more discussed and grow in importance there still seem to be a lot more focus on reference work and information navigation in

the Swedish LIS-sector, at least in terms of my own experience of LIS-education. Of course, I am quite certain Chinese LIS is not exempt of this problem either, especially by going by the interviews in this study. However, I have not heard some of the informants ideas and viewpoints before.

6.5 Conclusions

The library is seen as a place with several implications; it is a space in which people can spend time enjoying and learning, by the help of the librarians or by themselves and amongst one another. The biggest focus is however at lifelong learning and to teach people about different kinds of culture and media, particularly the kind that they perhaps would not come across elsewhere. Knowledge is seen as coming in different forms, not only written, as a big focus and emphasis is put on activities and the library as a meeting place. There are mixed feelings towards the future; while one predicted the death of the library other were more positive, that while the physical books might have a smaller part in the service they would instead offer a better place to spend time at with even more activities and lectures.

While the library is for everyone, regardless of status and background, there is a emphasis on user groups in terms of old and young people, the latter seen as a bit problematic. Overall the users is a complex group who is viewed as needing guidance and help while at the same time having the potential to offer the library, the other users and librarians alike, something in return. The librarians role is thus as a tutor but acting as a friend towards the users were seen as important, sometimes to the extent that they felt like they were doing more to aid the users than necessary, due to what they felt was part of the role but also what others expected from it. This lead them to have quite high expectations of themselves, particularly as they also compared their services and behaviour towards the users to those abroad.

While they believe that librarians will still maintain a more traditional role in the future, in which they advocate books and reading, it seems to be dispersing as they describe the library to become more of a performative and inspiration space. But as reference work is believed to be one of the most important services in the future, as well as now, it brings up a question of what role, or rather what place, the librarian has in these spaces. The public library's and the librarian's roles and functions are complex as it consists of several implications and concepts, which sometimes collides with one another. Like Audunsons study (2001) show, the public library is seen to belong to more than just one area and even though it rose similarly to other service-orientated professions (Rubin 2010) it is an institution like no other; after all, not many other places in society could be described as contributing to "a colourful life", being seen as a gift, a bridge that links people together or being compared to Wikipedia – with all the attributes that comes with it; free, equal and barrier-free. That is also why it is important to keep it that way and to advocate its importance and place in society, especially where it is needed the most, where there are barriers in society as well as in life.

6.6 The use of method and theory

I found semi-structured interviews to be perfect for the circumstances I was in and this study as, mentioned in chapter 4, I did not know any Chinese languages and since the interviews were in English, which is neither my native tongue or the informants, it helped immensely to be able to rephrase or ask additional questions with the assistance of the interview guide. However, if I had more resources I would have used an

additional or mixed method (see 6.6 *Future research*). My use of theory, or rather the analytical tool, was more difficult as I had a different approach to it in the beginning of the research since I struggled with the direction of the study. Had the use of the theory been more clear to me in the beginning I indubitably would have used an additional method.

6.7 *Future research*

For future research I would complement this study with observations and possibly also include the users by making a survey to make it more user-focused. A complementary study could also be done by making a comparison to other public libraries in China, of course with full understanding of the different conditions each county and library has.

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Attachments

Interview guide

Questions about the interviewee:

- 1.) How long have you worked here at Hangzhou Public Library and what are your work assignment?
- 2.) Have you worked in other libraries? If the answer is yes: Which ones?
- 3.) What is your educational background?
- 4.) How many users do you usually come in contact with during an average day at work? And what is the nature of that contact? (that is to say, speak to assist or help users)

Questions:

Clarifications:

Users = people who come to visit and/or use the services and spaces of the public library.

- **What term or expression do you use** (for those who visit and/or use the services of the public library)?

The Public Library(s)

- **How would you describe the change which Hangzhou Public has had in recent years?**

(For example, since the new building opened, since the library announced that homeless and beggars are welcomed into the library as well etc)

- **What, according to you, is a public library? What is its role in society?**
- **Who do you think the public library is for?**
- **Do you think there is a difference between some public libraries (in this city, nationally, internationally)? Why/why not?**
- **What do you think makes Hangzhou Public Library different from other public libraries? (in China, the city, province?)**
- **What do you think Hangzhou Public Library can get better at? What can public libraries in general get better at?**
- **What do you think is the most important service(s) a public library can offer?**

- **Do you think there are services a public library should not offer?**
- **How do you think the future looks like for public libraries?**
(Positive/negative thoughts?)
- **Do you think public libraries can keep up with the current information stream and development with people being able to seek and access almost everything online and by themselves?** (Have public libraries, as a place for information and books, become redundant/otiose or not as important anymore in society as they used to?)

Librarianship

- **Could you briefly describe a normal day at work?**
- **What made you become a public librarian?**
- **What do you think it means to be a public librarian?** (What do you usually tell people when they ask what a public librarian does?)
- **How do you think a public librarian should act and be like?**
- **How do you think a public librarian should not act and be like?**
- **What do you think the most important aspect of being a public librarian is?**
- **What is your goal as a public librarian?** (What do you aspire to be like? Is there something you would like to improve as a professional?)
- **What kind of education or courses that concern users have you received from Hangzhou Public Library?** (Information seeking, reference interviews etc)
- **Do you think the profession of librarianship has changed in recent years? If so, how?**
(How was it when you first started or aspired to become a librarian? Is it different from 5 years ago?)
- **How do you think the users, both those whom you have and have not met, perceive you as a public librarian?** (How do you think people see you as a librarian?)

Users

- **Who are the visitors of Hangzhou Public Library?**
- **Has there been a change in who visit the library in recent years, and if so why do you think that is?**
- **What do people do when they come to Hangzhou Public Library?** (Where do the users go and what do they do when they enter the library?)
- **Could you briefly tell me about a specific situation in which you come in contact with a user during your work?**

- **Who are usually the users you come in contact with?** For ex. Students, senior citizens etc.
- **What are the most common questions that you get from users and what do you help users with the most?**
- **Have you ever helped a user with something you considered unusual, and if so how did you handle that situation?** (Something that you have never encountered/dealt with before as a public librarian/at work)
- **How do you handle disturbances or other difficult situations caused/created by users and visitors?**
- **Have you ever felt like there are questions or situations that you as a public librarian could not help the users with? And if so, how did you handle that situation?**
- **Which groups or individuals do you think usually visit the library most often but do not use the public library's facilities and services** (that is to say people who **do not** loan, read books, make use of computers etc)?
- **Which groups or individuals do you think usually make use of the public library's facilities and services** (that is to say people who **do** loan, read books, make use of computers etc)?
- **Who do you think have the most use of public libraries? And why do you think that?** (are there groups or individuals that have more need than others for a place and institution like the public libraries?)
- **Are there groups or individuals who never or very seldom use or visit Hangzhou Public Library or public libraries in general that you think should? And how do you try to reach out to them?** (Are there any programs or services for this purpose?)
- **What kind of activities or services does Hangzhou Public Library offer?** (Are there any activities or services aimed at certain groups of people, individuals or users?)
- **Have you noticed any demands or wishes that the users might have about Hangzhou Public Library or public libraries in general?**