

Editorial**Editorial: Special Issue on China and Disability**

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The publication of this special issue of *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal* on China and Disability comes at a time when this field is facing three realities in relation to China. First, there has been change and advancement not only in disability rights awareness raising, but also in disability policy and practice on the ground. Second, it is increasingly important to explore how these developments influence the lives of people with disabilities and society. Third, there is a need to promote idea exchange, understanding, and engagement between China and other parts of the world on disability studies and its implications. With these views in mind, we offer the articles included in this issue to our readers.

Disability continues to be a strongly stigmatized trait and identity in Chinese society. It has been dominantly treated as a medical issue to be fixed to become so-called “normal” or an individual tragedy to be pitied. Changes have taken place to address attitudinal issues. However, a dilemma between disability rights advocates’ fight against the negative clinical connotation of the Chinese term of disability and slow popular acceptance of requested change persists. Non-disabled people in Chinese language are referred to as “健全人” or “正

常/普通人”，which literally translates to “healthy and wholesome people” or “regular/normal people”, while disabled people are commonly referred to as “残疾人,” meaning “disabled and diseased people.” Such views and language use, engrained in system construction and service delivery, have created barriers to people with disabilities in multifaced realms, including education, employment, healthcare, housing, epidemic and emergency responses, legal justice, right to parenthood, etc. Disabled people with additional marginalized identities (e.g., women, sexual minorities, rural residents) experience multiple discrimination in their lives. For more than a decade, those in the disability community and their allies have been addressing this problem through pursuing a shift to a social and human rights model of disabilities.

Meanwhile, there has been a more dynamic process of disability law and policy development at home in China in the past 15 years or so since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities went into force in China in September 2008. The most recent example is the Law on the Construction of a Barrier-Free Environment, effective September 1, 2023. A daunting task of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations and their allies is to make concerted efforts to contribute to the effective implementation of such laws for valued outcomes and equal participation of persons with disabilities.

Social and cultural changes for disability inclusion take a winding and prolonged journey. It is even more challenging for the general public to understand that segregation and exclusion affect the whole society with long-lasting consequences. As disability rights movement participants, observers, and scholars with disabilities born and reared in China, the guest editors are deeply aware of the lived experiences and concerns of persons with disabilities and their families. We are keen to join such efforts, and, through this platform and

opportunity, promote a fuller understanding of the complexities of disability issues in China and expand the thinking and potential actions of readers regarding roles they may play in times of change.

This issue is one small piece in the larger collective efforts to advance disability rights and justice globally. Utilizing different research methodologies, the articles in this special issue delve into multiple topics of disability issues in China, from inclusive education, community living, disability embodied experience, to disability history and more. We hope this collection will shed light on multiple issues concerning disability and people affected by disability in China, and moreover spark meaningful conversations about disability rights within and beyond China. Brief overviews of the articles in this special issue follow.

Xu et al. uses a participatory action research approach to examine barriers faced by Chinese people with disabilities and seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially their participation in and access to healthcare, employment, and community living. Twenty-two members with lived experiences actively participated in the process of a priority mapping focus group and presented their action results at a town hall meeting. Another article by Xiong et al. adopts an intersectional focus on disability and gender and provides a timely examination of the media representation of Chinese women with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a legal perspective, Huang's article examines the key elements of "community" that empower persons with disabilities to live and participate and be included in community. Huang provides a critical evaluation of the "community residence/placement" of persons with disabilities in China and points out the distance from actual personal independence, autonomy, and community inclusiveness. Jin, a lawyer with blindness in China, critically analyzes multiple layers of discrimination people with disabilities experience

in China and proposes a series of legislative recommendations for lawmakers and policymakers. Based on insightful observations, Jin also advocates for the urgency to empower people with disabilities so they may safeguard their own rights.

Cai et al. uses a case study method to examine the experience of college students with visual impairments in China, especially the barriers they face in higher education. The article offers a much-needed synthesis of the trajectory of higher education for people with visual impairments, filling an important gap in the disability studies and disability history in China. It unravels the systematic barriers that students with visual impairments face in college, from independent living, academics engagement and pursuit, to full inclusion in extracurricular life and activities. An article by McCabe et al. also examines inclusive education issues, especially the gap between policy and practice. Their study analyzes how eleven Chinese parents experienced inclusive education opportunities for their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities.

Shi et al.'s article examines the past, present, and future of the hukou system and its impact on Chinese migrant workers' social mobility especially those with disabilities in the labor market. Hukou system in China is not only a household registration system and a means of evaluating migratory patterns, but also a signifier of social status and identity, as well as a determinant of access to employment opportunities and social mobility. Based on evidence from qualitative interviews, the article suggests that the system confers additional disadvantages on disabled people.

Two articles in this issue provide important accounts of China's disability history. Analyzing official disability magazines, Di argues that China's disability mass organization in the 1980s curated deliberate space for persons with disabilities to publicly express grievances, among which labor and employment were central concerns. This history shows


that intensified bureaucratization marginalized persons with disabilities within the very institution that was meant to serve them. Based on historical literature and archive on Chinese Deaf Community, Wan's article provides an original historical review of the emergence of deaf education in late-imperial and Republican China and its role in the later formation of a cross-class deaf community in the 1930s during the war crisis.

Two other articles in this issue explore caregivers/parents' experiences and perspectives. Wu's article describes a mix-method study examining how caregivers of children with disabilities from two different regions in mainland China experience rehabilitation services. The study reveals noticeable differences between two regions regarding participants' perceptions of rehabilitation and the impact of regional, cultural, and social economic factors. It organizes the findings of caregivers' experiences in five themes: being different, feeling vulnerable, being resilient, valuing kindness and support, and accepting disability. Article by Hui et al. analyzes qualitative interviews of sixteen parents of children with autism. Using Bourdieu's Social Capital framework, the authors provide insights into how "guanxi" works in parents' efforts in getting their children with autism into regular schools in China. Findings of the study suggest that a parent's use of social capital surpasses explicit national policies as an effective strategy for garnering adequate services for their children.

Quesada's piece follows a critical phenomenological approach to analyze and interpret the experience of people with visual and hearing disabilities based on over a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai. Through close examination and analysis of two individual cases, the article proposes a carnal politics of disability as an alternative to the social model to understand how disabled people's experience could contribute to rethinking

the conceptualization of mental health crisis and more.

We want to conclude by expressing our warm appreciation and deep gratitude to Mengxi Cai, currently seven and half years old, who contributes her painting to us for the cover of this special issue. She is the daughter of Cong Cai and Jia Xiao, both with visual impairments and widely recognized disability rights leaders and advocates in China and beyond. Her painting's colorful and dancing figures with disabilities, the subjects of their own rights, forming the Chinese character of disability “残”, make a present, organic and genuine statement of disability in her eyes based on her lived experience with visually impaired parents. It is a future worth striving for.

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