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Special and Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

The chapter offers a comprehensive examination of the way in which special and inclusive education has developed in China. An oft-ignored area in general studies on Chinese education, the chapter reveals why China's provision for children and young people with disabilities has developed in the way it has done in light of its particular historical, social, political and economic contexts. It also highlights why more attention needs to be paid to this area given the vast number of students involved, as well as the inevitable and striking intersections with important broader issues relating to economic inequality, social opportunity and human rights.

INTRODUCTION

According to China's Second National Sample Survey of Disabilities of 2006, 6.34 per cent of the Chinese population, an estimated 82.96 million people, were categorised as 'disabled'. Broken down into officially recognised categories, this amounted to 12.33 million people with a 'visual disability', 20.04 million with a 'hearing disability', 1.27 million with a 'speech disability', 24.12 million with a 'physical disability', 5.54 million with a 'learning disability', 6.14 million with a 'mental disability', and 13.52 million with 'multiple disabilities' (Office of the Second China National Sample Survey on Disability, 2007). Like disabled people the

world over, many of these people are known to live isolated and impoverished lives, where accessing essential basics, such as medical and welfare services, can be tremendously difficult, never mind education and employment opportunities (Campbell and Uren, 2011; Loyalka et al., 2014) .

Since the 1980s there has been growing academic interest in the way in which the Chinese state and its educators have attempted to address the needs of children and young people with disabilities. Drawing on this and other literature, this chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the development and directions of special and inclusive education in China. The first section provides an overview of the early history, particularly from the nineteenth century when the first modern-style establishments were set up. The second section moves on to look at key milestones following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the impact these have had in the development of the provision we see today. The final section examines current and future directions in light of the fact that China is now a signatory of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which specifically creates an obligation to provide education on an equal basis to non-disabled peers and within an inclusive system.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

Existing scholarship argues that it was not until the arrival of European and US missionaries in the late nineteenth century that particular attention began to be paid to the education of children and young people with disabilities. While this period did see many developments that would provide the basis for a more comprehensive programme of education, the underlying assumption in these studies is that disabled people prior to this were actively excluded from *any* form of education. Historians Lu and Inamori (1996) argue defensively against any inference that education for disabled people was a purely foreign import. While acknowledging that the vast majority of disabled people would not have received an education during this time (bearing in mind that the vast majority of non-disabled people would have received equally little to no schooling), their archival work reveals numerous instances of people with a range of disabilities receiving sufficient education to master a skilled trade, become learned scholars or rise to high rank within the imperial bureaucracy, long before the establishment of missionary-run institutions.

There is evidence to suggest that vocational schools offering musical training to people with visual impairments were established as early as the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC). People with other forms of impairment also appear to have had opportunities to undergo formal training for culturally significant occupations such as fortune telling and divination, all of which would have provided an income and degree of social standing (Lu and Inamori, 1996: 323-332, 337-339). Sources from the later imperial period show that, despite the enactment from time to time of certain policies prohibiting people with disabilities from progressing through the examination system, disabled children of educated or wealthy families could be taught at home (the norm for many children at the time) or attend clan or village-based academies, and thereby receive schooling identical to their peers (Lu and Inamori, 1996: 332-337). But, it was most likely the short-lived Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864 that provided first domestic attempts to provide more systematic education for disabled people. In line with its utopian social programme, the Taiping are said to have established ‘colleges for the lame, blind, deaf and mute’ where they could be taught ‘drums, music, reading and writing, arithmetic, and acrobatics, and would no longer be considered useless people’ (Lu and Inamori, 1996: 343).

Scottish Presbyterian pastor William Murray has been widely credited with setting up the foundations of China’s first modern-style school for blind students – the Elementary School for the Blind and Elderly in Beijing.¹ There, throughout the late 1870s, he had been experimenting with a Chinese form of Braille that he hoped would allow the blind boys he was teaching a way to access the Bible (Miles, 1998: 6). But while his achievements relating to Chinese Braille and the school – which still exists in the form of the Beijing Blind School and considered the leading centre for blind education in China – should be recognized, earlier missionaries had already been pioneering the education of disabled children and adults in private schools since the 1830s. Mary Gutzlaff’s residence in Macau, for example, is known to have had numerous blind boys and girls boarding for educational purposes as early as the mid-1830s, and four of her Chinese protégés were subsequently sent to study at the London Blind School in the 1840s (Miles, 1998).

¹ There is some confusion in secondary literature here, with various combinations of dates (1870, 1874, 1879...) and muddled names of founder (P.W. Moore, Pastor William Moore, William Moon, Moon Williams...), which Miles (1998: 6) attributes to translation to and from Chinese, among other reasons.

The first known formal school for blind and deaf students – the Enlightenment School – was set up in 1887 in Dengzhou (Tengchow), Shandong province, by US missionaries Charles and Annetta Mills. In 1898, the school moved to Yantai (then Chefoo or Chifu) and the school became known as the Chefoo School for the Deaf. The Mills reportedly pioneered a finger spelling method for Chinese and compiled what is understood to be the first textbook for deaf students in China (Entrican, 1905). Deaf graduates from the school, and some of their relatives, went on to found further schools over the next few decades, ensuring a lasting legacy for their work. Other notable events of this period include the founding of the David Hill School for the Blind in Hankou (Hankow) in 1884, where Paster J.F. Crossette is understood to have adapted Murray's system of Braille to the Hankou dialect. This was shortly followed by the establishment of a school for blind girls – the Ming Sam School for the Blind – in Guangzhou (Canton) in 1891 by Dr Mary Niles (Miles, 1998). Much of the work of these schools involved the adaptation of Braille to local dialects; it was not until 1913 that more formal moves were made to unify the seven local variants established by that point under a new 'Union System of Braille for Chinese Blind' (Miles, 1998).

It was during the early years of the new Republic of China (1912-1949) that the concept of segregated 'special education' (*teshu jiaoyu*) came to increasing prominence. It was also during this time that there were moves to decrease reliance upon foreign provision:

A special education system is designed for special types of people; for example, schools for the blind and deaf-mute², schools for cripples, and schools for those with low intelligence. Life is really hard for people who are born blind, deaf-mute, crippled or of low intelligence or come to be like this through injury in later life; but, they too are citizens of the Republic and the state should employ special methods to teach them so that they can fend for themselves. Although we already have such schools in China, most of them are run by foreigners! (Shu Xincheng, 1922, cited in Lu and Inamori, 1996: 350)

Other contemporary sources use the term 'education for cripples' (*canfei jiaoyu*) instead, and refer to four distinct types of education: 'education for deaf and dumb children,

² The Chinese uses the term 'mute' but this is used to refer more broadly to people who were deaf-mute.

education for blind children, education for lame children and education for children with low intelligence' (Hua Linyi, n.d., cited in Lu and Inamori, 1996: 350). These four categories would go on to form the backbone of future developments.

Republican era developments

The first home-grown institution to be established in the Republican era was a combined special school for blind and deaf students and training school for teachers in Nantong, Jiangsu, in 1916. There, students followed a primarily vocational education which covered skills such as sewing, woodwork and other handicrafts, but also gained some academic skills in subjects such as Chinese language and history (Piao and Ye, 1995). Later, in 1927, the Chinese government set up the Nanjing Municipal School for the Blind and Deaf, and this was followed several years later by other institutions, such as the Wushan School for the Deaf in Hangzhou in 1931. These schools reportedly took a more academic approach to the curriculum by mirroring mainstream school subjects where possible, thus allowing some school leavers able to progress on to higher education (Lytle, Johnson and Yang, 2005/6).

In 1929, a contemporary source lamenting lack of progress estimated that there were over one million blind and deaf people, who were served by just five schools for the deaf (three private, one state and one church establishment, with a combined enrolment of fewer than 300), and 30 schools for the blind (the vast majority church institutions, with a total enrolment of around 1000) (Lu and Inamori, 1996: 350). Such revelations stimulated Chinese academics to investigate European and US teaching methods, all of which came to influence developments over the coming decades. Despite burgeoning interest, the number of institutions in operation by the end of the Republic in 1949 was still extremely limited, as decades of political turmoil, invasion and civil war resulted in serious disruption to support and provision for disabled people across the country (Beijing Disability Projects Editorial Board, 2005). In 1949, there were calculated to be just 2380 students attending 42 schools for the blind and deaf, staffed by just 60 teachers (Lu and Inamori, 1996: 352). Yet, some of these establishments would later become leading centres for specialist provision post 1949.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The political stability that followed the founding of the PRC enabled the newly formed Chinese government to divert much-needed attention to the issues of education and social welfare (Beijing Disability Projects Editorial Board, 2005). In October 1951, with the announcement that ‘government at all levels should set up special schools for deaf-mute and blind children to teach children, young people and adults with physical impairments’, Premier Zhou Enlai’s ‘Decisions on the Reform of Education’ made the first moves to integrate education for disabled people into the national education system (Lu and Inamori, 1996: 353). Schools that had been operated by foreign organisations, religious or charitable groups were from thenceforth to be taken over, and made into the backbone of a state-run special education system (Deng et al., 2001).

Figure 1: Number of special schools and student population, selected years 1953-1973 (data compiled by Lewis et al., 1997)

Year	Blind schools	Deaf schools	Blind-deaf schools	Total student enrolment
1953	13	42	9	5,260
1963	9	163	71	18,029
1973	19	156	56	24,940

Despite this high-level commitment to development, very little detail is known about education during this period; and what we do know suggests that provision was hit and miss. According to the *China Education Yearbook 1949-1981*, the number of schools and enrolled students with disabilities increased dramatically in the first decades – 61 schools for the blind, deaf and blind-deaf with 5,260 enrolments by 1953, jumping to 243 schools with 18,029 enrolments by 1963 a decade later (see Figure 1). However, the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) would have particularly significant effects on the burgeoning disability programmes. Records of activity in Beijing from the time suggest that many of the organisations set up to research and implement support for disabled people were shut down or suspended for several years (Beijing Disability Projects Editorial Board, 2005: 37). Special education establishments stopped admitting students, resulting in a rise in illiteracy among disabled people (Beijing Disability Projects Editorial Board, 2005: 127).

Some estimates put the number of enrolments down to a mere 600 by 1976 (Deng et al., 2001: 291).

While political turmoil may be the reason behind the lack of any sustained development, prevailing understandings of disability and an increasing sense of individual subservience to the revolutionary cause worked equally to stifle purposeful development. Chinese scholars sent to the Soviet Union to learn about disability services had returned to imbue the newly emerging system of special education with Marxist understandings that linked academic performance to personal attitudes and environmental factors. Children were, according to Cleverley (1991: 256), still expected to ‘perform at a high level’ and contribute to the socialist revolution ‘in an all-round way’ despite any difficulties caused by impairments of one kind or another. Education was not designed to accommodate individual learning abilities, quite the reverse, and this may be one of the reasons behind the particularly sparse nature of schooling for children with cognitive and learning impairments during this time – just a single class set up at Beijing Number Two School for the Deaf in 1958, which was subsequently closed in 1971 due to the Cultural Revolution, and a special school set up in Dalian in 1959, which was closed just four years later due to financial and staffing shortages (Piao and Ye, 1995; Lewis et al., 1997).

Where specific attention was paid to ‘education’, it was more often than not focused on rehabilitation and cure, rather than academic education. This, it was thought, would enable the children to compensate for their ‘physiological and psychological defects’ and allow them to become productive labourers infused with a Socialist consciousness along with their peers (Deng et al., 2001: 290). With segregated residential establishments and the employment of intensive therapies, ‘education’ served to rehabilitate disabled students for productive working life. Newspapers, films and cartoons depicted stories of the often miraculous cures of students at special schools following experimental acupuncture and immersion in Mao Zedong Thought. In one such example – a short documentary-style film from 1969 entitled *A Song of Triumph for Chairman Mao’s Proletarian Line on Public Health* – 105 ‘deaf-mute’ pupils at a special school in Liaoning Province were reportedly cured through such methods and can be seen celebrating the conversion of their school from a special school into a ‘normal’ revolutionary unit.³

³ Available online at <http://www.morningsun.org/red/deafmute/deafmute.html>.

While it is easy to dismiss such stories as pure propaganda, they offer further evidence as to the segregated nature of schooling during this time, as well as its major objectives. What it hides, however, is the fact that the vast majority of disabled children received little to no formal schooling. Personal memoirs reveal that even disabled students who were more than capable of adapting to mainstream schooling were, more often than not, home-educated or self-taught (see, for example, the life story of Zhang Haidi, current President of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, discussed in Dauncey, 2013). Such cases were probably few and far between and the extent of illiteracy among disabled people at this time can only be guessed.

Reform-era changes

The opening up and reform of the late 1970s and early 1980s were to bring positive and profound changes to the lives of disabled people, many on the back of China's increasing engagement with global initiatives relating to disability. However, education-related activities occurring in the first years of reform mainly focused on re-opening institutions shut down during the Cultural Revolution. It was not until May 1985 and the National Conference on Education, which examined the current state and future development directions of the education system more broadly, that education for disabled children was considered in a more formal, albeit limited, manner. The subsequent reforms, encapsulated in the 'Compulsory Education Law' of 1986, aimed to enhance the quality of national education, principally through the implementation of a nine-year compulsory education programme. However, only one section of this new law – Article 19 – made specific reference to the education of disabled people: 'Local governments are to establish special schools (or classes) for children and young people who are blind, deaf or retarded' (National People's Congress, 1986). While this indicates that such provision continued to languish some way down the political agenda, greater attention was in desperate need. Statistics provided by Deng and Poon-McBrayer (2004) suggest that fewer than 6 per cent of disabled children were enrolled in school in 1988 and that 66.4 per cent of disabled people were illiterate (the percentage for those without disabilities at the same time was 22.6 per cent). Cleverley's statistics paint an even worse picture with an estimated less than 1 per cent in special classes in 1989 and most provision serving blind and deaf students in urban areas (1991: 256).

In acknowledgement of the fact that more work needed to be done, the first National Working Conference on Special Education was held in November 1989. One of the objectives emerging from its discussions was that China should aim to have most of its children with visual, hearing and cognitive disabilities attending school by the year 2000 (Cleverley, 1991: 257). Yet, despite these apparent steps forward, the fact that the new Compulsory Education Law only *encouraged* rather than strictly *mandated* that local governments set up special provision, left many without access to education. In addition, the peculiar narrowness of its scope – ‘children and young people who are blind, deaf or retarded’ – meant that children with other disabilities, particularly cognitive or behavioural disabilities, would be less well provided for as a consequence, despite the fact that such categories had been officially recognised in the first National Sample Survey of Disabilities of 1987 (China Disabled Persons’ Federation, 2007).

Further concretisation of the State’s commitment was to come, however, in 1990 with the passing of the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons (National People’s Congress, 1990). This law now mandated that all persons with disabilities should have equal rights equal to education, with governments at various levels required to make education of disabled persons a component of the state educational programme. The state would also commit itself to exempting disabled students from tuition fees, and sundry fees where possible. Article 19 particularly emphasized education according to physical abilities and psychological needs, so that mainstream educational institutions were to provide education for disabled persons ‘able to receive an ordinary education’ (Article 22), and special schools and special classes attached to mainstream schools were to cater for those considered unable to adapt to mainstream education (Article 23). Furthermore, students who met state admission requirements for ordinary senior middle schools, secondary polytechnic schools, technical schools and institutions of higher learning were not to be denied admission ‘because of their disabilities’ (Article 22).

These provisions were subsequently incorporated into the 1994 ‘Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities’, which would become the guiding framework for educational provision in China going forward (State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 1994). The Regulations also formally established a new commitment to the development of training, both for staff intended for special schools and classrooms, as well as for staff in mainstream schools who might encounter disabled children from that point on

(National People's Congress, 1990). Although a handful of training colleges – the first of which was the Nanjing Special Education Teacher Training College in 1985 – had been established prior to this, 34 similar colleges had been set up within a decade. Universities were also co-opted to provide training courses – Beijing Normal University had already opened its doors in 1986 to enrol 15 students onto its new special education programme, with four other normal universities in Shanghai, Wuhan, Chongqing and Xi'an swiftly following suit. Alongside these, regular teacher-training schools were also required to include special education courses in their training programmes (Deng and Poon-McBrayer, 2004). Slowly, but surely, the number of qualified teachers emerging from these various routes increased, more than tripling the total number of staff within a decade (see detailed statistics provided in Figure 2).

Special Schools and Classrooms

Since then, the plan has been to serve disabled children and young people considered suitable for school but unable to adapt into a mainstream classroom through a system of dedicated special schools and classrooms. To date, there have been four main types of government-run special schools offering segregated and sometimes distinct patterns of learning for children who are blind, deaf, blind and deaf, or who have cognitive impairments.⁴ The curriculum, as with any school in China, is centrally determined, although there has been some scope, albeit limited, for local adaptations where necessary. Class sizes are often much smaller than in mainstream education, being limited to around 10 to 14 students, and many students who live at a distance are able to take advantage of residential options where affordable (Lewis et al., 1997).

In schools for the blind, students follow a predominantly academic curriculum, supported by Braille and supplemented by additional subjects designed specifically to help develop basic mobility and orientation skills, as well as life skills. Similarly, in schools for the deaf, students follow as much of the national curriculum as possible, but here additional training is given in speech rehabilitation. Primarily, this is done so that the students can follow the classes, which are mainly conducted orally, with some finger writing, sign

⁴ Some special schools may serve mixed communities. Gao'an City Special School, studied by Shang and Fisher (2016: 139-144) is a primary school serving predominantly deaf children; but it also welcomes children with intellectual disabilities.

language, or other visual methods of content delivery (Lewis et al., 1997). Yet, it is also very much reflective of China's continued dependence upon the medical model of disability and its emphasis on cure and rehabilitation. This practice, however, has caused particular problems for deaf students, as the time dedicated to speech work hinders academic progress, and the gap between deaf students and their hearing peers only increases the longer they continue in education. Schools have been slowly moving towards increased use of 'signed Chinese'⁵ or Chinese Sign Language (CSL) (Callaway, 2000; Lytle et al., 2005/6); but this too has provided its own challenges due to the fact that many children don't learn CSL at home (usually because parents are hearing) (Shang and Fisher, 2016: 165-169), and the existence of local variations that have yet to be standardised (Lytle et al., 2005/6).

In schools catering for children with cognitive impairments, the curriculum is often split. Classes for those with a 'mild' impairment (IQ between 50 and 75) incorporate some core subjects such as general knowledge, Chinese language, mathematics, music and physical education and music, with additional classes in life skills (personal hygiene, job skills, etc.). Classes for those with more severe impairment (IQ between 35 and 55) tend to focus more on life skills, music, arts and crafts (Lewis et al., 1997). But life skills appear to have very much guided the curriculum for blind and deaf students too. In both types of school the curriculum diverges from the predominantly academic early years curriculum, to become increasingly 'vocational' in nature. Students, regardless of academic performance, are steered towards occupations deemed suited to their disabilities. For students with visual impairments, this has been massage and music, although this has been expanded in more recent years to include other skills, such as computing and foreign languages. For students with hearing impairments, this has traditionally been art, or more craft-orientated occupations, such as carpentry or tailoring (Lewis et al., 1997). Such channelling not only limits life choices, it also diminishes possibilities for progression to higher education.

Learning in Regular Classrooms

Despite these movements towards a segregated special education system, it was immediately clear that the complexity of China's education system and increasing demand

⁵ Unlike CSL, 'signed Chinese' is not considered a language in its own right, as it uses the same word order as Mandarin or Cantonese. It is often used simultaneously with spoken Chinese, hence the term 'bilingual education' used for such instruction (Lytle, Johnson and Yang, 2005/6).

for provision for children with additional needs meant that alternative solutions were required to bridge the gap if the country were to meet its compulsory education objectives. From as early as 1988, the China National Institute of Educational Research Special Education Center began experiments in selected areas with *suiban jiudu* – a halfway house to inclusion often translated as ‘learning in regular classrooms’.⁶ This was seen by the authorities as a viable solution to the fact that some children were unable to access special education classrooms due to cost or, more commonly rural and economically poor location (McCabe, 2003).

Experimental projects, some of which were sponsored by the United Nations and international NGOs, were set up in poorer counties. UNESCO’s Golden Key Project set up in Guangxi Province, for example, saw nearly 2000 children with visual impairments – only 500 of whom had been enrolled prior to 1994 – integrated into mainstream schools over a period of around two years (UNESCO, 1999). With individual support, the children aimed to follow the same curriculum as their peers. Integration in this way not only supported government efforts to provide primary education for students with disabilities at a time when the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991-95) was aiming for between 60 and 80 per cent enrolment in more developed areas, and 30 per cent in less developed areas, it also went some way to enhancing figures for school enrolment and retention across the board (Holdsworth, 1994). By 1994, ‘learning in regular classrooms’ was confirmed by the Ministry of Education as the key form of delivering compulsory education to disabled children and, according to state statistics reported by Deng and Poon-McBrayer (2004), the subsequent national roll-out of the programme resulted in an increase in school enrolment from 6 per cent to 60 per cent between 1987 and 1996, and saw the government appearing to reach its 80 per cent target in 2000 (more on this later).

However, this ‘halfway house’ has not been without its problems. One of the most striking issues is that little to no consideration was given, particularly in the early days, to the training of teachers or the provision of specialists, with most settings lacking staff with even the most basic knowledge of disability and how this might impact upon a child’s success in the classroom (McCabe, 2003). This has been exacerbated by the fact that average class sizes in China can range between 40 and 75 students, which severely limits

⁶ Other terms often used interchangeably are ‘integration’ (*yitihua jiaoyu*) and ‘inclusion’ (*quannaxing jiaoyu*).

opportunities for individual attention (McCabe, 2003). And so, while schools may be willing to integrate disabled children, a lack of resources and skilled staff has substantially limited what they do on a day-to-day basis (Shang and Fisher, 2016: 151-152).

Another major issue has been the fact that China's compulsory education system is built upon a universal curriculum with students – and by extension their teachers – evaluated through standardized testing. Making changes to such a system to allow for individualized education plans, for example, is not straightforward. One solution has been to allow students with disabilities not to take the tests (McCabe, 2003). However, while this may avoid any negative influence on the average scores for the class as a whole, this in itself is problematic as it potentially leaves the disabled students without the qualifications needed for progress to higher levels of education; it also further reinforces the notion that disabled students are fundamentally less academically capable than their non-disabled classmates. Despite this, 'learning in regular classrooms' has been acknowledged by some as having a 'profound impact', not least because it has helped the country move away from segregated education and has enhanced accessibility for many children who would not have had the opportunity to go to school otherwise (Deng et al., 2001: 292).

And official statistics on education for disabled children and young adults since the late 1970s appear to substantiate claims to a significant growth of opportunity (although some caution should be taken as such statistics are often rather vague and are frequently mutually contradictory – more on this later). China reports the addition of around 1708 new special schools between 1978 and 2014, and the addition of around 44,125 special educators over the same period, with most growth occurring in the 1990s (see Figure 2). The number of enrolments has seen similar levels of expansion with around 363,870 more students enrolled in study over the same period. Again, most of the increase here occurred in the 1990s, particularly the latter half of the decade, with some levelling off into the 2000s (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Number of special schools and teachers 1978-2014 (data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 1979-2015)

Year	Number of special schools	Number of teachers
1978	292	4,000

1980	292	5,000
1985	375	7,000
1990	746	14,000
1995	1,379	25,000
2000	1,539	32,000
2005	1,593	31,937
2006	1,605	33,396
2007	1,618	34,990
2008	1,640	36,306
2009	1,672	37,945
2010	1,706	39,650
2011	1,767	41,311
2012	1,853	43,697
2013	1,933	45,653
2014	2,000	48,125

* Data prior to 2005 is rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Figure 3: Number of students in special education 1978-2014 (data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 1979-2015)

Year	Number of new enrolments	Total student enrolment	Number of graduates
1978	6,000	31,000	3,000
1980	6,000	33,000	4,000
1990	16,000	72,000	5,000
1995	56,000	296,000	19,000
2000	53,000	378,000	43,000
2005	49,288	364,409	43,214
2006	49,838	362,946	45,187
2007	63,424	419,316	50,283
2008	62,409	417,440	52,035
2009	64,018	428,125	57,423
2010	64,869	425,613	58,941
2011	64,086	398,736	44,194
2012	65,699	378,751	48,590
2013	65,977	368,103	50,739

2014	70,713	394,870	49,032
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* Data prior to 2005 is rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Home and private provision

In addition to local government services, various local initiatives have also been emerging since the 1990s, some of which have been led by families of children who have been excluded from state-provided education. Some wealthier areas (for example, Tianjin, Beijing and Shanghai) have reportedly provided some free education delivered in the homes of children with disabilities (Shang and Fisher, 2016: 136); and other provinces are starting to follow suit (Asia Pacific News, 2016). For the most part, however, such services come at a cost. Shang and Fisher (2016: 142-144) examine one example of private provision, which serves dozens of deaf children. Without government funding, the school has been raising tuition fees from the parents (the annual tuition fee was over RMB 2,000, plus RMB 30 per month for board; reduced fees were available for families in extreme poverty), but is still reliant on donations from the local Disabled Persons' Federation. A lack of funds also prohibits the school from employing the most qualified teachers, which has limited the amount of academic content to the extent that it has become 'basically a therapy centre' (2016: 143). While some of these private institutions may well be filling a gap in the market, critics have pointed out that they often fall beyond the protections offered by legislation, resulting in substandard and unregulated provision that is often expensive and more in the interests of the provider than the disabled students (Hallett, 2015).

Higher education

Shang and Fisher's (2016: 132-133) analysis of the 2006 national sample survey shows that the disparity in educational attainment between children with and without disabilities becomes more extreme the higher up the education system. They found that no rural or urban child with a disability surveyed had attended higher education. What is more, they found that no urban girls with disabilities had even attended senior high or technical college (compared to around 16 per cent of urban girls without disabilities). As early as 1985, some universities and colleges created specific departments and degree courses for students with disabilities. Examples provided by Deng et al. (2001) include Shandong Binzhou Medical University's Department of Medicine, Tianjin Science and Engineering University's degree in

medicine for deaf students, and Changchun University's Special Education College, which has offered degrees in massage and music for blind students, arts for deaf students, and management for those with physical impairments. While data from 2008 to 2014 reveals a growth in enrolments in both mainstream and special higher education institutions (see Figure 4), enrolment in mainstream institutions remains constantly at around one fifth of that in special institutions, suggesting that mainstream education remains particularly inaccessible to many students.

Some of this is due to the issues mentioned earlier in relation to curricula differences, but it may also be put down to the persistence of standardized testing procedures at *gaokao* level, which either fail to offer students suitable accommodations or actively exclude them. It was only in 2014, for example, that Braille format was first permitted (China Higher Ed, 2014), although this breakthrough did not come without its own controversy as the first candidate failed the tests (Global Times, 2014). A survey carried out in 2004 amongst 100 disabled students at the aforementioned Special Education College of Changchun University illustrates this further by revealing some of the major barriers they faced. These included inappropriate or inadequate provision at primary and secondary school, financial constraints (including family poverty, and uneven access to scholarships and fee exemptions), admission discrimination, inaccessible environments and curricula once at university, and limited employment opportunities post-graduation (Aishang yinghua, 2011). It is clear that access to higher education remains a huge stumbling block in China's progress towards more accessible education for all.

Figure 4: Student enrolment in institutions of higher education (data from the China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2013-2015)

Year	Number in Mainstream Institutions	Number in Special Institutions
2008	6,273	1,032
2009	6,586	1,196
2010	7,674	1,057
2011	7,150	877
2012	7,229	1,134
2013	7,538	1,388

2014	7,864	1,678
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INTO THE POST-CRPD ERA

China's commitment to providing education for disabled children and young adults has been constantly reforming in line with academic and political developments, both domestic and foreign. In 2006, for example, revisions were made to the Law on Compulsory Education to make more explicit the expectation of local government to provide special schools and classes, made all the more explicit through the addition of a penalty clause (Article 57) (National People's Congress, 2006). However, it was not until 2008 – when China became one of the first signatories to the United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (CRPD) – that the country's commitment to providing education for disabled children and young people would come under international scrutiny. Under Article 24 of the CRPD, China undertook a specific obligation to not simply 'recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education', but also to 'ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning' such that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to see the full development of their potential and participate effectively in a free society (United Nations, 2008). China committed itself, therefore, to ensuring that all disabled students would receive appropriate and effective individualized support measures (including reasonable accommodations), that teaching would use of the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual students concerned (be that Braille, sign language or other alternative formats), and that all this would be delivered by trained specialists (United Nations, 2008).

While the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' 2012 initial follow-up report into China's compliance includes many positive findings – indeed, many of the obligations outlined above are already incorporated into existing legal commitments – China's failure to meet the obligation to provide inclusive education was specifically highlighted:

23. The Committee is concerned about the high number of special schools and the State party's policy of actively developing these schools. The Committee is especially worried that in practice only students with certain kinds of impairments (physical disabilities or mild visual disabilities) are able to attend mainstream education, while all other children with disabilities are forced to either enrol in a special school or drop out altogether.

The subsequent recommendations of the Committee remind China of the need to adhere to the notion of inclusion and recommend that the State 'reallocate resources from the special education system to promote the inclusive education in mainstream schools, so as to ensure that more children with disabilities can attend mainstream education' (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2012).

Barriers to education

Underlying this recommendation is the continuing concern that a high number of school-age children are still prevented from attending or are forced to drop out for reasons beyond their control. Official statistics reported by the China Disabled Persons' Federation suggest that around 90,000 children per year in recent years have been unable to attend school (see Figure 5). Other sources suggest that under-reporting of figures may mean that the actual number is much, much higher (Rong and Shi, 2001). Hallett (2015: 185) argues that even if we take the most conservative statistics presented by the Chinese government at face value, the figures suggest that only 33% of children with sensory, intellectual, mental or multiple disabilities are in attendance at school; a stark contrast to the 'nearly 80%' claimed in the report to the CRPD Committee. There are clearly many barriers remaining that are impeding further access to education, inclusive or otherwise.

Figure 5: Number of school-age children with disabilities unable to enter school (data from the China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2013-2015)

Year	Number of children
2012	90,960
2013	83,532
2014	85,107

Legal and institutional barriers

In a submission to the Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council, Human Rights Watch (2013) expressed concern that even the most recent 2013 amendments to the Regulations fail to stipulate sufficiently clearly that local governments and schools must provide 'reasonable accommodations' to help students access mainstream education in the first place, or prevent them dropping out unnecessarily once enrolled. There appears to be an urgent need to further tighten up relevant laws and regulations so as to avoid such loopholes and confusion. Wu (2013: 119-120) identifies numerous inconsistencies and omissions that have hampered implementation. Disability categorisation is a particular issue; for example, the Law on Compulsory Education speaks of only three categories of impairment ('blind, deaf and retarded'), but the Law on the Protection of Disabled Persons covers seven ('visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, speech disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental disabilities, multiple disabilities and other disabilities'). Another issue, argues Wu, might be that while principles and objectives may be generally sound, they remain too broad for effective implementation on the ground. Although a disabled child's right to 'learning in regular classrooms' is set out in law, for example, no detailed guidance is given to schools, who become fearful about how they are to meet those expectations (2013: 120-123).

Hallett (2011) also points out inconsistencies that have enabled institutions to effectively discriminate while still remaining faithful to the letter of the law. For example, although the revised Law on the Protection of Disabled People states that higher education institutions are not permitted to deny entry on the grounds of disability (National People's Congress, 1990), the 'Guidelines for Medical Testing of Students Applying to Mainstream Universities' (adopted in 2008) stipulate in great detail which courses may be followed by which kinds of disabled students: 'Those with impaired sense of smell, stutter, irregular gait, hunchback, facial scarring, facial blotches or psoriasis are not suited to studying education, public security, diplomacy, media, law, musical performance or performing arts' (Section 8); 'Those with squint, stutter or impaired sense of smell are not suited to study medicine' (Section 9) (Ministry of Education, 2008). While Hallett (2011) acknowledges the fact these

are only 'guidelines', they could easily be used in a discriminatory way to exclude students with certain disabilities from attending certain courses.

Other loopholes mean that even if students gain admission, they may be subject to discriminatory practices. As McCabe (2003: 17) points out, although the law mandates that students should be allowed in mainstream schools as long as their disability does not affect their 'performance', confusion may arise: 'The law does not specify what type of performance, but because it is important that students perform well on standardized tests, academic performance is important, and any behavioural difficulties that affect academic performance of an individual child or his or her peers are also cause for dismissal from the classroom.' This loophole has had, and continues to have, significant implications for those children with learning and behavioural disabilities.

Curricula and personnel barriers

Even where there is widespread acceptance for reform, China's very educational structure, with its heavy reliance upon competition and high-stakes public examinations, serves only to restrict the development of individualised curricula that would support such students (McLoughlin et al., 2005). Shang and Fisher (2016: 134) suggest that part of the problem also lies in the fact that there are no national criteria for the education of people with disabilities that allows for appropriate assessment of their achievements. Compounding this is the fact that provision continues to be guided to greater (special schooling) and lesser (inclusive schooling) degrees by stereotyping that is often impairment-specific and drawn from a mix of medical understandings and historical employment roles. For blind students this has resulted in a preponderance of 'blind massage' and music-related courses, based on the belief that blind people have greater auditory skills and are more touch sensitive. While this has led to the emergence of a large body of self-supporting blind masseurs (put at around 200,000 in 2006), this focus has restricted the development of more academic opportunities (Hallett, 2011). For deaf students, this has resulted in a preponderance of courses that require a visual orientation, based on the belief that deaf people have greater visual acuity (Mudgett-DeCaro and DeCaro, 2006). This well-meaning, but ultimately ill-informed, channelling of students severely restricts life choices and opportunities.

Building a sustainable level of better-paid educators trained in up-to-date techniques and theories is widely recognised as a key way for China to reduce educational

discrimination and progress towards accessible education for all. But, as Stratford and Ng acknowledge, this would inevitably be 'a costly business for a developing country' as it would require both the expansion of existing graduate training programs as well as the institution and development of new ones (2000: 12). With so few specialist higher education training institutions with special education courses currently, many teachers are graduates from secondary vocational schools aimed at training for special teachers, or are graduates from normal secondary schools or two-year colleges who transfer to work with disabled children (Pang and Richey, 2006). And this causes problems, not least when teachers have not been trained in the basic communicative methods of their students. A particularly prominent example here is the way in which hearing teachers are brought in to teach deaf students with little experience of sign language. With insufficient numbers of deaf teachers being trained at present, classroom communication difficulties are likely to continue for some time, argue Mudgett-DeCaro and DeCaro (2006).

Geographical barriers

Geographical location plays a significant factor in what type of educational provision is available. Lytle et al. (2005/6: 461) point out the vast range of differences: schools located in advanced economic development areas generally have much better facilities, more funding and more qualified teachers. Statistics analysed by Rong and Shi (2001) reveal that, with few exceptions, student enrolment dropped gradually, but significantly, between large metropolitan cities such as Beijing, and the least developed provinces (such as Gansu, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, and Tibet). Taken at face value, the statistics suggest that disabled children living in the least developed regions might be only one-third as likely to be enrolled in special education units and programmes as children who live in wealthier metropolitan regions. However, Rong and Shi also suggest that the under-reporting of disability in less-developed regions may mean that the disparity may be even greater than the statistics suggest.

Educational problems are known to be aggravated through the unfortunate combination of 'being a rural women, and handicapped, and a member of an ethnic minority group in addition to residing in rural less developed areas' (Rong and Shi, 2001: 116). To this list, we might also add the fact of being an orphan. As Hu and Szente (2009) observe, at a time when welfare institutions are still struggling to meet their children's basic

medical needs, access to compulsory education remains a luxury rather than a necessity for the most marginalised and vulnerable of children.

Family and social barriers

Many of the factors both driving and, paradoxically, inhibiting progress relating to education start with the family. Fear of disability and discrimination have traditionally put immense amounts of strain on the families of disabled children and have even meant that parents have been viewed as a 'problem' (Callaway, 2000: 105-114). The fact that many disabled children reside in rural areas where parents have often had little schooling themselves leaves them doubly disadvantaged – parents with agricultural backgrounds may question the value of educating a disabled child when even non-disabled children struggle to afford an education (Deng et al., 2001; Shang and Fisher, 2016: 156-157).

Pang and Richey (2006) and Callaway (2000), among others, highlight the reluctance and fear some parents may have in communicating with professionals and educators, let alone acting as an equal partner in their child's education decision-making process. Shang and Fisher (2016: 148-149) reveal a further barrier to educational access, namely the fact that not only did families often find it difficult to know *what* support their child was entitled to or what support was needed to make an education opportunity effective, many didn't even know *where* to find information about appropriate education and financial support. While issues such as this will improve as awareness and general levels of education increase, new types of relationships will need to be developed between parents and educators, and flexible ways of teaching and learning need to be explored (Holdsworth, 1994; McCabe, 2003; Callaway, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

China has made great strides towards providing educational opportunities for its disabled population, with many more children and young people in education than ever before. 'In the most positive cases,' suggest Shang and Fisher (2016: 158), 'local governments have adopted the intention of the central government policies for inclusive education and allocated resources to make that happen. In these cases children are attending their local school without additional cost, receiving support in the classroom to attain their learning capacity and engaged in social friendships in their local community'.

Yet, this is certainly not always the case and it is equally clear that China still faces immense challenges. Provision continues to be extremely variable – whether a student has access to education often depends upon the type and severity of their disability, their geographical location, and the attitudes and support of those around them. The historical emphasis on students with mild physical disabilities and sensory disabilities has meant that people with intellectual or behavioural disabilities are left somewhat out in the cold. Continuing discrimination at all levels appears to be symptomatic of both these broader societal attitudes towards disabled people as well as failings at the legislative level. When, argues Chen (1996), entrenched attitudes continue to doubt a disabled child's capacity to learn and assert that China, as a developing country, should prioritize education for so-called 'normal children', there will continue to be huge obstacles.

Progress to date, then, can perhaps be best described as reactive and pragmatic, rather than pioneering and comprehensive. Opening up to the outside world has resulted in increasing international influences, but the Chinese state has been ever-cautious, adopting and adapting foreign methods only when they are seen to work on the basis of the prevailing domestic environment (McCabe, 2003). New obligations under the CRPD to work towards providing equal access to education for all within an inclusive system, however, will mean that China will come under increasing pressure to meet international expectations. Whether the country can overcome the numerous remaining barriers to this as outlined in this chapter, only time will tell.

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