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Do You See What I See? Do You See Me?

**Disability in China: The Perceptions of Wheelchair Users and
Able-Bodied Citizens**

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APS 650: Capstone Project

Prof. Brian Komei Dempster

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Abstract

This paper explores the state and perception of wheelchair users in China. My research outlines various disability models by which we can measure China's level of effectiveness at providing access and services for its disabled population. In my analysis, I largely draw the conclusion that China is evolving out of a Charity state model into one which supports the rights of Chinese citizenry. There are many good laws in place in China, but they are not being enforced effectively at this point in time. There also seems to be a class division involved in the acceptance of educated disabled over un-educated disabled persons. Finally, different types of wheelchair users are defined and solutions for China are discussed. Using secondary sources along with videos and interviews, my research uses a mixed-methods approach that both offers a sound scholarly basis for my claims and compelling personal anecdotes and pathos. The findings in this essay are important as they relate to the lives of approximately 80 million Chinese citizens and their potential futures as well as the thousands of dollars of capital that can be generated by China's encouragement of disabled travelers to visit their country.

Keywords: access, disability, China laws and policy, wheelchair users

Introduction

I was born with a form of Muscular Dystrophy. I spent my early years in the stage often recognized now as an “invisible illness” but started using a cane in my twenties, then progressed to a walker and eventually ended up needing to use a wheelchair for my mobility needs. I am an avid traveler, with friends and family all over the world, and something I’ve run into over and over is a lack of information about the conditions of life for disabled people in other countries.

As a Master’s in Asia Pacific Studies student, it should be obvious that I have an interest in Asia; indeed, like many of my classmates, I hope to spend time in this region. It is important, however, for to me to understand the difficulties I may face as someone who could potentially take a job in Asia, or even go to visit my classmates and friends in their countries. From my experiences in America and Europe, I know that the perception of accessibility versus the actuality of accessibility varies depending on one’s need for access. So, in this paper, it is vital for me to look at how disabled citizens of Asian countries feel about the situation in their countries.

My research is driven by these questions:¹ What are the governments of Asia doing to address the fact that they are turning disabled citizens into tax-paying citizens? How are disabled citizens of Asia treated by the government, institutions and other citizens and, in turn, how do they perceive themselves and the societies they live in? What efforts have been made to address the gaps between abled and disabled citizens in these countries—through education, policies, and

¹ Parts of this paper will draw upon a paper I did earlier for Professor Berry’s Cultures of Asia class. APS 636 in Fall 2020.

other means? As the world becomes smaller, what is being done to address both the needs of disabled citizens in Asia and the disabled traveler who finds themselves in Asia? Parts of this paper will draw upon a paper I did earlier for Professor Berry's Cultures of Asia class.

A comparison will be drawn between the two perspectives—those who are disabled and those who are full-abled—and that comparison will be used to draw conclusions about the gaps between perceived and real accessibility. The paper will also define disability and accessibility in a modern context. The limited scope of this project and the researcher's limitations will be addressed and spaces and directions for further research will be considered and explored. On a personal level, I will compare the views of my able-bodied classmates and friends about their home countries with perspectives about disabled individuals from those countries. How much of a gap is there between what they see as accessible or not and what their lived experience on the ground is?

In truth, early on in this project I had to face that rather than try to cover all of Asia—an overwhelming and nearly impossible task in this time frame—I would instead hone in on a particular area. That way, my analysis could gain depth rather than skim over matters in a general, superficial manner. For now I ended up focusing on China, partially because it's the largest country in the world and partially because I will probably visit China one day. My fiancée of the past three years is a Chinese citizen I will of course be joining his family and have the opportunity to engage with them over the years.

In time, I hope to look at the situation in all of Asia and intend to do so in a future novel on the subject. For the purposes of this paper I focus on China with some analysis of Hong Kong as well.

Definitions and Determinations

One of the most important terms to understand and define for the purpose of this paper is “disability.” Throughout Asia and the rest of the world, disability is a broad category for persons who have some form of limitation. This limitation or limitations then prevents them from doing things that someone without the limitation can do or requires that they do things in a different manner than fully-abled persons. Some disabilities are minor, and some disabilities are major. Disabled people are found in every region.

For a more formal and helpful definition, I’d like to turn to the World Health Organization which states: “In the year 1996 WHO redefined the relationships between impairment, disability and handicap establishing that ‘impairment’ refers to organ level functions or structures, ‘disability’ refers to person-level limitations in physical and psycho-cognitive activities, and ‘handicap’ to social abilities or relations between the individual and society.”²

Whereas Japanese legal definitions stated; “a person with a disability as someone “whose daily life or life in society is substantially limited over the long term due to a physical disability, mental retardation, or mental disability.” (Shogaisha kihonho, the Disabled People’s Fundamental Law of 1993, Article 1.)³

This important distinction between “disability” and other terms and the Japanese definition both shed light on a key concept the disabled must face: limitations, whether physical, neurological or otherwise. By understanding this notion of limitations, we can turn to the United

² V. Sudesh, “NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO DEFINING DISABILITY,” *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 50, no. 2 (2008): 220–29.

³ Katharina Heyer, “From Welfare to Rights:: Disability Law and Activism in Japan,” in *Rights Enabled, The Disability Revolution, from the US, to Germany and Japan, to the United Nations* (University of Michigan Press, 2015), 123–66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.5946811.8>.

Nations' following policy statement, which emphasizes inclusion for all regardless of such limitations: "Disability-inclusive development is an essential condition for a sustainable future. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledging to leave no one behind in the global efforts to realize the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." ⁴

This notion of inclusion is integrated into some legal language. An example of such laws can be seen in India, which states that "...the criterion for classification of disability is the medical model of disability. By defining disability in an inclusive manner the Indian law has avoided considering of persons with disabilities as abnormal or inferior."⁵

The Cambridge Workshops on Universal Access and Assistive Technology (CWUAAT) has the following to say about accessibility and inclusive design,

"Barriers do not arise from impairments themselves, but instead, are erected by humans, who often have not considered a greater variation in sensory, cognitive and physical user capabilities."⁶ As we can see, the human element of perception cannot be underestimated in terms of how it shapes the culture and conditions we all live in, particular for those who are disabled.

⁴ "United Nations Enable," April 20, 2021, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/>.

⁵ Sudesh, "NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO DEFINING DISABILITY." 224.

⁶ Pat Langdon et al., eds., *Breaking Down Barriers: Usability, Accessibility and Inclusive Design*, 1st ed. 2018 Edition (Springer, 2018).

Models of Disability

Moving from definitions, we can now turn to the concept of models. The method by which I'm going to assess the progress of Asian countries - and in particular China - is with the Models of Disability. Although the ranks and definitions shift a little these are the ways in which disability consciousness in a country is often spoke of and how successful a country is in its treatment of the disabled. Also a country can be said to be inhabiting multiple modes of these Models, perhaps progressing or regressing depending upon policies, or perhaps situated in such a way that an earlier mode is partially active because of the culture of some or all of the people of the countries populace. By looking at this continuum, we can better gauge how China and other countries are doing with issues of disability

First there was the Natural Model. This is how people often behave in early stages of society towards those who are physically or mentally weaker. For examples, some abandoning babies outside for predators or only tolerate persons for as long as they're capable of keeping up with everyone else or provide something to the collective good. Women are tolerated longer only for their abilities to give birth.

Second came the Religious Model, in which disabilities were explained by some sort of mystic relationship with the cosmos, often times being the marks of 'Sin' or evil spirits. The populace wanted an explanation for why people were born with disabilities and this is what many societies used to explain why. We see this belief in the following quote:

“According to the traditional karmic theory of ancient India, it is unfortunate to have a disabled child and it is believed that it is God's way of punishing for the past sins.”⁷

⁷ Sudesh, "NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO DEFINING DISABILITY." 221.

Third came the Charity Model. This model often developed out of the religious Model as a way for the masses to practice good works, by caring for the unfortunate souls who were born with debilitating illnesses and deformities they proved to their leaders, society and the gods that they were morally upright people. Disabled people were seen as burdens on society and not so much as individuals. As such this approach:

“makes the disabled powerless individuals rather than empowering them. Employers will view disabled people as charitable cases.”⁸

The next three Models have times when they’re useful and most appropriate. The Rights Model, however is often considered the best.

The Medical Model emerged because many disabilities have been found to have genetic markers or specific symptoms, and there has been policy pressure to define disability by the medical situation of the individual. The problem with looking at disability through this lens, however, is that it marks the disabled individual as one who is abnormal and “sick.” As Sudesh states, “The individual with a disability is in the sick role under the medical model.”⁹ The presumption that the individual would be different or instantly “better” if the illness were cured erases the quality of their personhood while disabled. While some disabled persons wish for normality, some are happy living with the limitations they were born with. For better or worse, “. . . most disability policy issues have been regarded as health issues, and physicians have been regarded as the primary authorities in this policy area.”¹⁰

⁸ Sudesh, 221.

⁹ Sudesh, 221.

¹⁰ Sudesh, 221.

The Social Model, recognizes that disabled individuals are members of society and that they may need services in order to interact with society. The social model largely developed out of the need to re-acclimate soldiers returning from war times to citizen lifestyle again. Many social services were developed to help disabled individuals re-enter society and gain employment under this model. At the same time,

“... the limitations under this model arise from its failure to address the short-comings in the environment and social arrangements, and compel disabled people to depend upon state machineries and professionals for their participation in social life.”¹¹

Finally, the Disability Rights Model, is the most current advanced one. Under this model the disabled individual is a full citizen and deserves to engage with society as an equal in as many ways as possible. This is the model that pushes for accessible design in building standards and equal employment based on capabilities rather than some form of charity mindset.

“The disability rights model focuses on equality and non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, accessibility, breaking down barriers, equal participation and inclusion and private and public freedom.”¹²

With all these models in mind, we can now best assess the relative progress of various countries in the Asia Pacific. The closer to each country is to the Disability Rights Model, the more progressive they are. One complicated aspect of this measurement is the gap between the institutional supports, legislation and policies that support the disabled within a given country versus the realities of lived experience.

¹¹ Sudesh, 222-223.

¹² Sudesh, 223.

In the following section I look at the contents of several videos from China in which different people are interviewed about disability experiences. There is no standardized format to the information exchanged within these videos, so I will highlight the pieces which I find important in my descriptions of the content. The opinions for the most part are from disabled persons who describe the state of their situations within their countries. These will be compared and contrasted with interviews of able-bodied citizens from China and their opinions on the country's level of accessibility and general disability consciousness.

China: First in the World?

China is often seen as one of the best, most advanced countries in the world, a leading superpower.

At least that's the viewpoint since the CDPF (China's Disabled Persons Federation); was formed in 1988, established by Deng Pafung, son of Deng Xiaopeng. Pafung had become a paraplegic while escaping the Red Guards by jumping out of a building window.¹³ From 1988 to 2004 the CDPF enjoyed some level of dominance and power within the engine of the Chinese government and nearly 50 laws were passed for the betterment of disabled persons in China.¹⁴

¹³ "What Is Life like for Disabled People in China? – James Palmer | Aeon Essays," Aeon, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://aeon.co/essays/what-is-life-like-for-disabled-people-in-china>.

¹⁴ "Wcms_142315.Pdf," accessed April 6, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/--ilo-beijing/documents/publication/wcms_142315.pdf.

Statistically speaking China has in 1996 the census stated they had about 60 million disabled persons as per the Chinese definitions of disability.¹⁵ According to Wikipedia the UN estimates that number to be currently closer to 80 million people.¹⁶

The first video I looked at had a very supportive and positive view of China based solely on its laws and policies and the implied situation that those things would create.

Karen Fisher on China's Disability Services¹⁷

The first video examines the idea of policy and access in China and whether or not this has been successful. If we only watch this video, we get a positive impression that makes us think it would be easy for us to get around in China. This video was uploaded on the 26th of March of 2018, by CGTN America. The video has 1,092 views, 5 likes and the comments are turned off.

In this video, CGTN's Mike Walter interviews Professor Karen Fisher of the Social Policy Research Center of New South Wales on disability policy in China.

Prof. Fisher states that "China has good policies but uneven implementation of those policies across the country. So in richer areas the access and services for the disabled are quite advanced and even better than other countries like the US, however in poorer rural areas there may be no services available."¹⁸

¹⁵ "Disability Statistics in the People's Republic of China," accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/english/asia/resource/z00ap/003/z00ap00308.html>.

¹⁶ "Disability in China," in *Wikipedia*, January 31, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Disability_in_China&oldid=1003902962.

¹⁷ *Karen Fisher on China's Disability Services*, accessed October 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zigd2-2_TWSk&ab_channel=CGTNAmerica.

¹⁸ Prof. Fisher comments on the situation in China.

Prof. Fisher also points out that “much of the infrastructure of China is being built with accessibility in mind. Jobs are being created with the newer technologies and many disabled people are able to work online because of this.”¹⁹

While it is true that more access is being created, it is not clear how effective this has been. Prof. Fisher does well to acknowledge that China—like many places in the world—offers better services for those who can afford them as well as suffers from discrimination and stereotyping: areas in which China can improve.

Fisher’s comments, however, might lead us to believe that China is much further along in its progression on disability rights than it actually is. The information presented in this video implies that China is using a Disability Rights Model, but it has not been equally applied across the country as of yet. Fortunately, the professor does acknowledge that China still provides less access to some and in general stigmatizes the disabled, which is more common under the Religious or Charity Models of disability.

However, this view is incomplete and, as a consequence, can come across as misguided and inaccurate. As I’ll show through videos and other sources, many Chinese people still perceive the disabled as a burden on their society and that the laws do not go far enough to actively protect the interests of disabled individuals.

The next several videos look at what the experience of living in suburban China and Hong Kong look like for wheelchair users. These are real experiences of real disabled Chinese persons. These testimonials and stories create a holistic portrait of the difficulties that the disabled face.

¹⁹ Prof. Fisher comments on the situation in China.

Finding a Career, and Love, as a Person with Disabilities in China²⁰

One thing that complicates Fisher's view is this video which shows the impact of disability on family, marriage, and relationships. Uploaded on the 27th of November 2019, by South China Morning Post channel, the video has 249,971 views, 2.6k likes and 247 comments. The video contains interviews of two disabled women from what appears to be a suburban Chinese area. Li is in a wheelchair, and she seems to have some sort of condition which has bent her spine. The other woman interviewed Lu appears to be able bodied but when she walks, she has an uncommon gait.

Li explains in the video that "her first husband was able-bodied and treated her poorly. She would have to beg him for enough money to feed herself and their daughter."²¹ Her second husband is in the video, he is also wheelchair bound, but the video doesn't include an interview of him. Li and Lu work in a factory answering questions for Taobao customers. The company hires many disabled workers. The video says the employer threw a joint wedding for all of its disabled employees. Lu got married to her able-bodied husband at this event.

While this does show the employer's sensitivity, that doesn't ameliorate the stereotypes she faces in everyday life. Lu explains that "her neighbors were dismissive of her marriage options."²² She tells about being set up with blind men and men who were mentally disabled. She is thankful for her husband and even though he is teased by other Chinese people for having a disabled wife, he says "he is happy to be married to Lu."²³

²⁰ *Finding a Career, and Love, as a Person with Disabilities in China*, accessed October 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G3XSa3aYmY&ab_channel=SouthChinaMorningPost.

²¹ Li speaking about the abuse she experienced at the hands of her first husband.

²² Lu speaking about her neighbors gossip.

²³ Lu's husband speaking on their marriage.

The video is set in suburban China. In this video Li talks about the situation with her first husband being abusive. In the video the claim is made that within China there is an expectation that disabled individuals should only marry their fellow disabled citizens. Here, from this video, we get a clearer picture of the deep and devastating consequences of discrimination. Those who are disabled are vulnerable to abuse and are not seen as “acceptable” marriage partners by the wider culture. The feeling from the stories of the women in this video gives us the feeling that China is still very much in a Charity model of disability.

Hong Kong by Wheelchair: A Different Perspective of Accessibility²⁴

While the Li video shows the stigmas surrounding marriage and relationships, another video shows the issues with accessibility in an urban setting. This video was uploaded on the 23rd of May of 2017 and it has 4,035 views, 30 likes and 9 comments. In this video there is a city wide challenge for people to borrow wheelchairs and attempt to commute to certain locations around the city. The charity running the event hopes to make more people aware of what accessibility is really like in Hong Kong.

In the video there are two wheelchair users traveling together; the lady in the manual wheelchair is a news presenter who is partially abled, and she is being shown around by a local Hong Konger who is using a power wheelchair.

They run into many problems. The roads are uneven and there aren't any slopes that allow for those in wheelchairs to get from the road to the sidewalk. The computer center does

²⁴ *Hong Kong by Wheelchair: A Different Perspective on Our City's Accessibility*, accessed October 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3gYL1MNqLc&ab_channel=PARALIFE.

have a disabled lift but it's hidden behind five fire doors which don't have disability buttons on them.

The Hong Kong resident, Kevin Cheng, points out that he “doesn't consider himself brave for dealing with these obstacles, rather that he simply needs to, in order to continue with his daily life.”²⁵

While Hong Kong is a very modern city its concept of accessibility is very limited at least from what we see in the video. As the video was in part the idea of the wheelchair user who is in the footage, Mr. Kevin Cheng, it is implied that this particular scene is indicative of daily life for a wheelchair user in Hong Kong. The video is evidence that Hong Kong does not appear to be particularly welcoming to the wheelchair user. There are attempts made at accessibility but they're often placed in secondary out of the way locations hidden away from the view of the general public. This is closer to a Charity model in the sense that what accessibility that has been granted hasn't been well planned and comes more as a secondary concept to the primary function of locations. Accessibility, instead of being an initial part of design, it comes as an afterthought.

Robotic Bed Converts into a Wheelchair at the Press of a Button²⁶

This video uploaded the 25th of August, 2017 shows how a wheelchair can be made out of a bed for users with limited mobility. The video, uploaded by New China TV, is in a show room, possibly at a wheelchair conference, and the people showcasing the wheelchair are focused on how it can help people move between home and hospital; it seems, however, that they

²⁵ Kevin Cheng denies being brave for traveling around in a wheelchair.

²⁶ China news, *Robotic Bed Converts into Wheelchair with Press of a Button*, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjElhuxMgXQ&ab_channel=NewChinaTV.

haven't considered the possibility or likelihood that the wheelchair user may wish to visit other locations with this wheelchair. This video seems to largely be based on a Medical Model of thinking in which the problem of disability is approached as a condition that requires basic medical care but with little or no thought to an individuals' social or environmental needs.

Touching Commercial:²⁷ Walk Again

Whether in regards to family, relationships or access, media representations tend to perpetuate the stereotypes about the disabled in various ways. One video that influences how the Chinese view wheelchairs is a supposedly "touching" commercial for rice. The video was uploaded the 2nd of February 2012, and it has 133,991 views, 1.4k likes and 20 dislikes.

In this commercial the father and son have a strained relationship. In part about how much the son is eating without contributing to the family. Because of this the Son character is angry and goes off to work. Apparently is careless, the son falls and becomes paralyzed from the waist down. In the show the father is very angry with the son, but he puts him on his back and drags him across the lawn barefoot repeatedly until one day the son stands up, moves out of his wheelchair and rejoins the family.

This video shows how Chinese view disability as something tragic that needs to be overcome. I find it telling that even though he returned home the family treats him only as their son when he stands and walks into the dining room as if he hadn't been living with them for possibly weeks or months before that time. This is still very much a Charity model, with echoes of the Religious model as well as there seems to be a storyline about how the bad son deserved to

²⁷ Twokyne, *Touching Commercial (Walk Again)*, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GscdWBFiUV0&ab_channel=twokyne.

get hurt and how he should be thankful for his harsh father's love, which he endured and that allowed him to walk all over again. This creates a condescending tone. During the entire time the young man is disabled, he puts no real effort in for himself and seems despondent and withdrawn from life as if he weren't a person in those moments.

Interviews with Chinese Classmates and Their Experience and Perceptions of Wheelchairs and Disability:

In order to gain further evidence for my arguments, I interviewed three of my peers about their experiences growing up around China and Hong Kong. There were two female and one male participant. All of the interviewees are classmates and graduate students in the Master's of Asian Pacific Studies program at the University of San Francisco alongside me. A larger demographic may have given different and more encompassing results, but as my Chinese skills are still poor and the scope of this project is limited, I approached those who I knew that I could effectively interact with. Two of my participants are Han Chinese and one of the females is an American Born Chinese with Taiwanese family connections. This individual spent her younger years as an ABC living in mainland China for her education and only later returning to America.

I asked my classmates a series of questions and I feel that they answered honestly, although some of their answers may have been more polite or had changed in some way by the fact they were being asked by their wheelchair-bound classmate.

The first question centered on the education of disabled persons. Neither of the female participants remembered growing up with any disabled classmates but they couldn't say if they

were separated intentionally or not. However one implied that members of their family had moved from Taiwan to the US to provide a better situation for their disabled child. The male individual also couldn't remember seeing any disabled peers until he was in college in Hong Kong, he did remember that the school there made accommodations for his blind classmate.

The next question I asked was about whether or not they had experienced disability themselves. The two girls had never experienced anything they considered a disability. The male participant had experienced a two week period of his leg being hurt as a child and related how he'd had classmates help carry him during that time. I found it interesting that he hadn't used crutches or a wheelchair temporarily but perhaps they weren't available or his injury wasn't that serious.

The third question I asked was their opinion on the Paralympics and whether or not they had an impact on China and its attitude towards disabled people. The female participants thought that their might be some benefit from the event, such as raising public awareness, the male participant didn't have an opinion.

The fourth question that I asked was whether or not the participants felt I'd be able to visit them in their family homes in China or if we'd have to meet in a public place. Both female participants assured me that I could visit them at home, and the male participant was considerate enough to question whether or not I could use a normal taxi as he didn't feel his hometown had many if any wheelchair taxis. All of my classmates, other than one, have never seen me use a manual wheelchair so this was a fair question.

The next question I asked was one I was personally curious about but all three insisted that they couldn't remember thinking anything in particular once they realized one of their

classmates was a wheelchair-bound individual. The acceptance of my participation and something one of the female participants had said early on about education implied to me that there may be less prejudice against disabled people in China than it may initially appear. Rather it seems that there are broader prejudices against the uneducated and unemployed; this often includes the disabled but not because they are disabled. A high value is placed on the individual's ability to work and produce for the common good. Disabled persons who can escape their starting position by gaining education and employment are more accepted than those who struggle to gain education and employment.

An element of classism may be showing its face here in this situation. It's interesting to me that some of the prejudice shown in the one video would be mitigated if the women had been educated and in part because they were working. This has been my personal experience with my fiancée and his family, in that they find it easier to accept my situation because I am smart and I am pursuing work in a field the Chinese highly respect, education. It also seems that my peers accepted my being in graduate school as if I had already earned their respect by being present, it is not known if they would have interacted differently with me had I been a random stranger introduced through public meetings or in some other way.

Several of the questions I had dealt with adopting or having disabled children and or marrying a disabled partner. In asking these questions I found a partial flaw, in the sense that my chosen participants have a high level of education. Two of three didn't want to get married at all and the third was certain her family would disapprove of a disabled spouse. Only one of the participants wanted children and they weren't certain but assumed they would love their child even if it was disabled.

Finally, I asked my classmates where they felt China was and where it was going in regards to disability. They all agreed that progress was being made insofar as physical accessibility but that the feelings of the populace themselves was lagging behind largely from lack of exposure to disabled people. That assessment reinforced what I had gleaned from analyzing the various videos, including Prof. Fisher's statements.

States of Ability for Wheelchair Users

When we see the videos and hear the comments from these interviewees about stigma, stereotypes and lack of access it is not hard to see why when we see policies that are flawed and ineffective, and why cities are designed with poor access. A large problem is that people don't see the complexity and layers of what it means to be a wheelchair user. When one thinks of wheelchair users there are words that come to mind, but sometimes the mind plays tricks and convinces a person that all wheelchair users have similar range of ability. This is not true and in fact often causes harm when designing things for wheelchair users as well as harm from misperceptions by the general public. There is a gap between reality and perception, a gap between the laws that exist but the access that's created for us; lack of viable employment opportunities and physical access to buildings.

In order to create more effective policies and for the general public to understand our experience, we must make key distinctions. There are 3 main types of wheelchair users, Paraplegic, Quadriplegic, and those with weakened motor function.

Paraplegic persons are those with the loss of half of their body, and typically we see this in top usable bottom unusable format, but how far up or down a paraplegic's usability and flexibility ranges from person to person. Some can still regain seating in their chair after a fall

and some can't for example. Also some can walk with braces and some can't. There is a big range of function even within the world of paraplegics.

Quadriplegic, typically means one has experienced the full loss of the use of all limbs. How much the Quad person can do for themselves often depends on how much facial and core strength they have. These days there are many technologies that Quads can use to be able to function in society.

The group of wheelchair users I belong to, however, is those with impaired motor function. This is the broadest of categories and also the one most likely to be filled occasionally by temporarily disabled individuals. Some or all motor function is impaired, making it necessary to depend on a wheelchair for mobility. Conditions may be persistent where wheelchair use is a daily thing, or it could be temporary or it could even come in phases. It may even be that the wheelchair user is using the wheelchair as a fatigue fighting tool and can accommodate some situations by standing or walking short distances, but they still rely on the wheelchair as their primary mode of transportation. It is often people in this position who get called out on social media as 'fakers'. This is unfair as it is entirely possible that the person is simply using their abilities sparingly around whatever health condition has them reliant on a wheelchair as a mobility tool.

I would also like to point out that loss of mobility often means a loss in calories burned, and many people who use wheelchairs suffer from weight gain. It is entirely possible that the obese person you observe in public in a wheelchair had or has some other underlying health condition which pushed them into needing a mobility aide and it is unfair to assume that it's only a weight control issue. This is not to say that weight can't be managed, but rather that it is more difficult than you may initially think and may be outside of reasonable expectations for an

individual who is simply trying to focus on their basic health and happiness. I include this to explain the reason that larger electric wheelchairs or toilets may be needed for the public's use.

Another term that needs to be defined is: "transferring." Transferring when referring to wheelchair users is the term most commonly used to describe repositioning the user from one stable position to another stable position, such as from bed to chair, or chair to toilet. Some wheelchair users can make these transitions on their own and refer to their ability to self-transfer. Others can only make some of these transfers, and still others are reliant on outside aide to be moved from one place to another place, but may achieve more freedom once attached to their mobility device. The degree to which one can self-transfer directly impacts the degree to which you are reliant on others for care. Transfers from one place to another done with as little outside aide as possible is the goal of most wheelchair users' rehabilitation programs. There are some articles which can be used as aides to ease transferring, such as slide boards, which create temporary ramps between surfaces.

I include these definitions to give an insight into the complexity of what is required for creating equal access. One of the flaws with the ADA and other systems is that it often grasps for a one size fits all approach. What I have shown here is that there are multiple approaches a country must take to help disabled wheelchair persons towards into dealing with their access problems. Doing the bare minimum as many places do is almost always never enough to help the vast majority of disabled wheelchair users.

Solutions for Better Access: Items and Things of Note for Wheelchair

Use in Public

As China and other countries look to improve accessibility, it will help to have concrete ideas that can be implemented. If you are able bodied you probably miss or do not consciously note the aids that are in place for wheelchair users. Nor do you probably know that many of these things were standardized under the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards that have largely been used universally since the act was put into place. It is vital that policymakers and everyday citizens in China and elsewhere are more informed about the following items so that policies can be effective and the general public is aware of their importance.

Actuators: these are the buttons placed on doors to open them up for persons who cannot otherwise open the door and safely travel through it at the same time. They're supposed to be placed close enough to the door a person can move through it during the time that the door is opened, but not so close that the person is blocked from the opening by pressing the button. This may sound obvious but in practice I've seen both problems arise because of poor placement. For example the actuator being placed at the end of a ramp but the door closes before the wheelchair user could reasonably reach the top.

Dropped curbs: these are curbs which are slanted down to the road level. When placed correctly, there is a gradual decline down from the sidewalk to road and in most cases they are required to be marked by some sort of signaling paint color. In many states and countries it is considered illegal to park in front of a dropped curb. The most common place you will find a dropped curb is at the corner of two streets, but larger buildings also usually have an area near their access points with dropped curbs. China has these in some larger more internationally visited cities like parts of Beijing and Macao but they're missing in many other cities.

Grab bars: commonly found in toilets grab bars are the steel bars placed for the use of disabled and elderly persons to help them push or pull themselves off the toilet. Grab bars are

also found in public showers and are a good addition to any shower really when it comes to personal safety. What you may not realize however is that there are specific heights and ratios that the ADA has in place for the proper placement of these bars and that in many cases in public spaces the bars have been installed for the convenience of the property owner and not according to ADA guidelines. Similarly in China the rules are followed only so far as they are enforced and in many places no toilets let alone grab bars are available.

Ramps: again, these are put in place for the enablement of people with poor physical coordination or ability to access spaces. What is still evolving is the understanding of the people who build ramps onto buildings is the need for certain degree of slant to be most accommodating for the wheelchair users. The appropriate slant, width and heights of ramps are all available under ADA guidelines, but many places feel that adding any ramp is “good enough”. There have been reports of ramps in China put in place for the Para Olympics which actually don’t lead anywhere but were rather an appropriation of government funds.

Conclusion

After looking at all of the evidence and viewpoints, we can see that China is in transition. China is a powerful nation and has the intention and ability to be able to support its disabled population. Through examining the definition of disability, it becomes apparent that China is moving in a positive direction but still has a ways to go. In the video with Dr. Fisher she provides hopeful signs, which include adopting all sorts of laws and governance that gives access and a better quality of life for to the disabled population of China.

Unfortunately for the disabled of China, China is the world's largest population. That means while good intentions are being showcased by the laws, the practice of those laws is being restrained by the sheer size and diversity of the population that needs the services. As such, the culture and society of China needs to be examined. If they are willing to accept disabled persons who contribute to society, then surely they could do more to improve access to services and education which will show that they value their fellow Chinese citizens.

China as the manufacturer of most of the world's wheelchairs, has the opportunity to utilize some of that production for its own populace. Also, as China grows, the impact of its new laws will allow the country to save tax monies as more and more disabled individuals are either freed up to become tax paying citizens themselves, or the family members who are responsible for their care now become freed up to safely return to work.

Like others in my situation, while I might be able to travel within China, at this point it would not be an easy under-taking. Perhaps in the future I could easily plan to spend my tourists dollars in the country in that birthed the man I'm in love with. Perhaps by then the people of China will not find our relationship so odd. We can be seen as an inter-abled and international couple.

China can use the methods described in this paper to better adapt its cities not only for the benefits of those who live there but also for the use of disabled travelers. This is a smart investment for the future by a country that will soon be filled with the elderly people of the Boomer generation. They will want to spend their tourist dollars but will find that they need amenities like ramps and actuators as their citizens' aging bodies will not be as able to move around as when they were younger. The countries that reshape their cities to accommodate the elderly and disabled populations of the world will serve as an excellent model for access and

inclusion while also experiencing economic benefits. China is in a position to turn its country into a tourist mecca if it will just to become more wheelchair and elderly friendly. This will need to be accompanied by an important mind shift: the disabled deserve full access and rights to be who they are, to go where they would like to go, and to be welcomed in the process.

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