

# Chapter 11

## Access to Higher Education for People with Disabilities: A Chinese Perspective

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter focuses on a series of related questions centered on access issue for people with disabilities in Chinese higher education: what is the representation for people with disabilities in Chinese higher education? What factors contribute to the impediment of access for higher education for people with disabilities? What educational legislation exist that provide educational guidelines for people with disabilities? What cultural traditions underlie the lack of educational attainment for people with disabilities in China?*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In China, people with disabilities are visible and invisible at the same time. Visible in the sense that they are subjects of attention and discussion when spotted in “unexpected” public locations; invisible in the sense that the need for social participation of people with disabilities is generally neglected by the public (Tinklin, Riddell, & Wilson, 2004; Barnes, 2007). This invisibility extends to the education sector. In the discussion of factors causing educational inequality, disability/ability is seldom mentioned or studied in China.

Higher education is nowadays regarded as a prerequisite for success in the labor market in the era of knowledge society. China underwent a great expansion of higher education enrollment from 1999 to 2005, and it is increasingly crucial for young people to obtain higher education credentials. The long tradition of valuing education as a way for social mobility also greatly affects Chinese way of thinking

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1213-5.ch011

and investing in education. Higher education attainment significantly determines chances for better employment opportunities and higher income. While admitted students into Chinese higher education reached the total number of 7.2 million in 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2015), people with disabilities as a population is being left behind. Compared to the admitted millions to higher education in 2012, a number of 8,363 people with disabilities were admitted in 2012 (China's Disabled Persons Federation, 2015). In the National Education Development Annual Report released in 2015 by the Ministry of Education, special education is still categorized together with pre-school education. There was no data in regards to people with disabilities in higher education throughout the Report.

Various barriers persist, impeding the educational attainment for people with disabilities. Not much research has been done to look into the higher education access for this population in China. To fill the gap in literature, this article aims to examine the issue of higher education access for people with disabilities. The article focuses on a series of related questions centered on issues of access for people with disabilities in higher education: What is the representation of people with disabilities in Chinese higher education? What factors contribute to the impediment of access for this population? What educational legislations exist that provide educational guidelines for people with disabilities? What cultural traditions underlie the lack of educational attainment for them?

As guidance for answering these questions, the article uses three frameworks: inclusive education, education as a basic human right, and social model and medical model for defining disability. The article starts with the definition and theoretical frameworks. Then it moves to examine the access to elementary and secondary education for children with disabilities. This is followed by attempts to analyze the context of Chinese higher education, specifically the expansion of university enrollment starting in 1999. The ensuing section of the article looks at the College Entrance Examination (CEE), Physical Examination policies, and the role these policies play in affecting the fairness of the higher education access. Finally, the barriers that impede the access to higher education for people with disabilities are examined. The article concludes with reflections and policy recommendations.

## **DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND**

To start with, let us look at the definitions for disability. In Oxford Dictionary, "disability" is defined as "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities" or "a disadvantage or handicap, especially one imposed or recognized by the law". In the Chinese Law on the Protection of Disabled Persons (LPDP, 1990), people with disabilities are referred to as "*Can Ji Ren*", meaning "people who suffer from abnormalities of loss of a certain organ or function, psychologically or physiologically, or in anatomical structure and has lost wholly or in part the ability to perform an activity in the way considered normal." "*Can Ji Ren*" as the Chinese definition of people with disabilities refers to those with visual, hearing, speech or physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, multiple disabilities and/or other disabilities.

In this article, the authors will use the Chinese phrase "*Can Ji Ren*" as an interchangeable term to refer to people with disabilities. Here, "*Can Ji*" means disability or disabled, and "*Ren*" means person or people. Together "*Can Ji Ren*" means disabled people or people with disabilities. The major organization for "*Can Ji Ren*" in China is the China's Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF), established in 1988 by Deng Pufang, the son of a powerful political leader—Deng Xiaoping. The logo for the organization

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