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DISABLED BUT USEFUL: BLINDNESS AND THE MAKING OF MODERN CHINA, 1900-1945

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CHAO WANG

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ABSTRACT

Blindness---a bodily impairment that disables---challenges the basic assumption of a useful person in modern society. In the early twentieth century, being useful meant, among other things, the ability to work productively and participate in national life through reading and writing in a common language. This able-bodied conception of citizenship marked a radical departure from the traditional understanding of membership and belonging to the community. The old notion of blindness as an embodied qualification of livelihoods in music and fortunetelling was reconceived by the modernizing state as a marker of cultural and economic deficiency of the nation. From the last decade of the Qing dynasty to the end of the Nationalist War of Resistance against Japan in 1945, new approaches to social welfare aspired to transform the blind from "disabled and useless" (*canfei* 殘廢) outsiders to contributing insiders of society and the nation.

For the blind, this process of becoming "useful" brought drastic consequences to their community and was often achieved at the cost of depriving and reconfiguring their livelihoods. This dissertation focuses on Guangzhou and Chengdu, two cities where the fate of blind communities was closely tied to the expansion and innovation of social welfare by modern reformers and traditional elites. Beginning in 1920s Guangzhou, a series of modernist campaigns to reform social customs caused the removal of blind men and women from self-sufficient communities of fortunetelling and entertainment and undermined their social status as a minority working class. Responding to the subsistence crisis, reformers first collaborated with Christian missionaries on educating blind singers and fortunetellers to become literate in Braille, and then expanded the relief capacity of government poorhouses to take in blind beggars and train them to

do handicrafts in sheltered workshops. In the welfare state's conception of disabled citizenship, blindness became a radical symbol of productivity based on the exclusion of the aged and physically handicapped people who were *too* disabled to work. This top-down approach to social welfare, which used disability as a justification of coercive labor extraction, contrasted the horizontal view of social welfare as a means of fostering livelihood.

Between 1920s and 1940s, Confucian elites in Chengdu continued to uphold traditional values of charity and its role in coping with family incapacity and social dislocation caused by war. Focusing on Chengdu's largest charity hall, I show that the gentry effort to train blind boys as cultured musicians and encourage the reciprocity of care between elderly and disabled residents contributed to making disability a moral symbol of community belonging. This Confucian model of social welfare later coalesced with the welfare state model during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), when the physical suffering of the nation pushed the boundary of able-bodied citizenship beyond the GMD understanding of productivity and refashioned an ethic of care for the national community. By measuring the impact of different social welfare approaches to blindness and disability, this study contributes to understanding changing notions of citizenship and belonging from the interplay between state and civil society.

INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 1929, Huang Liang Shi and Guo Shi, two blind women from the Western Suburb 西關 (Xiguan) in Guangzhou, submitted a petition letter to the local police department on behalf of the Hall of Moral Goodness (Houde Tang 厚德堂), a quasi-familial music guild that adopted young blind girls and trained them to become blind songstresses (*guji* 瞽姬). This professional identity, which formed around the final years of the Qing dynasty when blind women established a reputation for their skillful singing in the teahouse theatre, gradually faded with the rise of sighted and visually appealing female entertainers in the 1920s. As a result, unemployed *guji* began to sing on the street, and it was widely believed that some also engaged in prostitution due to the coercion of their foster mothers. The letter mentioned above appeared in a moment when the police crackdown on the *guji* household and the detention of blind girls in the Municipal Poorhouse (Pinmin Jiaoyangyuan 貧民教養院) brought fatal consequences to the blind community. The two blind women, one aged 78 and the other 45, were presumably the heads of the household who stood out to defend their precarious livelihood and petitioned for the release of fourteen blind girls. In the letter, they described their household as a skilled community where the young and aged relied on each other and shared a common cause of achieving economic sufficiency. Moreover, the petitioners criticized the official attempt to subject members of the blind community to "compulsory labor training" (*qiangpo xiyi* 強迫習

藝), arguing that it deviated from the party-state's principle of "shelter and rehabilitation" (*shourong jiaoyang* 收容教養) and was detrimental to the livelihood of disabled people.[1]

This one-page letter, now stored at the Guangzhou Municipal Archive, appeared first in the police record and was then referred to Mayor Lin Yungai 林雲陔 (1881-1948), who inquired about the condition of Li Hezhu and other blind girls detained in the poorhouse. In a reply, the superintendent of the poorhouse reported that the fourteen blind inmates formerly eked out a living by singing on the streets had now reformed themselves by learning to read Braille and make simple handicrafts such as toothbrush. None of them were "self-sufficient" (*ziji* 自給) before they were taken in.[2] The special attention given to a group of blind women reflected a crucial moment of transition for one of the most vulnerable members of the urban community in the early twentieth century. The voice of blind people claiming their livelihood and belonging to the professional community was intertwined with the reformer's call for social welfare measures aimed at transforming the disabled into useful members of society.

This dissertation situates the urban lives of blind people in the context of changing communal and institutional responses to disability in Republican-era China. In the early twentieth century, being "disabled and useless" (*canfei* 殘廢) was not only a personal tragedy but was also seen as a symptom of society's backward cultural beliefs and economic dependency. Taking a journey through the experiences of blind occupational communities as they intersected with entertainment culture, philanthropic activism, municipal reform and welfare legislation, this study explores questions such as how bodily impairment enabled community inclusion and

[1] "Soubu saorao liubi zhuduo, lianken chahe xunling gonganju xianxing zhizhi yimian nuebi" (搜捕騷擾流弊諸多, 聯懇查核訓令公安局先行制止以免虐逼), (May 11, 1929), Guangzhou Municipal Archive (GMA), file 4-1-2-161-3-5.

[2] "Pinmin jiaoyangyuan chengfu duiyu jujie guji shi zhuyi shencha yimian jikou dengyou" (貧民教養院呈復對於拘解瞽姬時注意審查以免籍口等由), GMA-4-1-2-161-3-13.

caused social marginalization, as well as how the institutionalization of *canfei* as a social welfare category created new demarcations of social citizenship.

My main argument is that from the last decade of the Qing dynasty to the end of the Nationalist War of Resistance against Japan in 1945, new approaches to social welfare aspired to transform the blind from disabled outsiders into contributing insiders of society and the nation. Reformers and intellectuals endeavored to abolish backward social customs that enslaved the body and labor of blind people to entertainment and fortunetelling. Ultimately they hoped to replace the old notion of blindness as an embodied qualification of livelihood with a new conception of social welfare that enabled the blind to read, write and work productively as their sighted counterparts. This able-bodied conception of disabled citizenship justified the exclusion of blind people from self-regulated communities and their reintegration into welfare institutions. Various forces joined in the process of articulating "usefulness" for the blind: Christian missionaries introduced Braille to the blind as a way of achieving self-redemption; Confucian philanthropists cultivated musical skills among blind children and turned them into moral agents of the community; provincial bureaucrats and Guomindang (GMD) cadres combined literacy with productivity in their attempt to tackle blindness as a physical cause of poverty. These transformative agendas redrew the boundary between the welfare state, philanthropic organizations, and the most vulnerable members of society.

For the blind, this process of becoming "useful" brought drastic consequences to their community and was often achieved at the cost of depriving and reconfiguring their livelihood. This dissertation focuses on Guangzhou and Chengdu, two cities where the fate of blind communities was closely tied to the expansion and innovation of social welfare measures undertaken by modern reformers and traditional elites. The two locales present a sharp contrast

both in the gendered distribution of service labor among the blind and in the reception to foreign influence. Guangzhou was the first treaty port opened to foreign trade, and the rise of commercial theatres in the last decade of the Qing dynasty, which primarily catered to merchant groups, contributed to the professionalization of blind women as singers and blind men as fortunetellers. In contrast, inland Chengdu had a predominantly traditional influence over urban culture and gentry sponsorship of blind men as storytellers and musicians.

The gendered consumption patterns of urban entertainment also corresponded to different styles of managing disability. Beginning in 1920s Guangzhou, a series of modernist campaigns to reform social customs caused the disintegration of blind men and women from self-sufficient communities of fortunetelling and entertainment and undermined their social status as a minority working class. Responding to the livelihood problem, reformers first collaborated with Christian missionaries in educating blind singers and fortunetellers to become literate in Braille, and then expanded the relief capacity of government poorhouses to take in blind beggars and train them to do handicrafts in sheltered workshops. In the welfare state's conception of disabled citizenship, blindness became a radical symbol of productivity based on the exclusion of the aged and physically handicapped people who were *too* disabled to work. This top-down approach to social welfare, which used disability as a justification for coercive labor extraction, contrasted the horizontal view of social welfare as a means of fostering livelihood. Between 1920s and 1940s, Confucian elites in Chengdu continued to uphold traditional values of charity and its role in coping with family incapacity and social dislocation caused by war. Focusing on Chengdu's largest charity hall, I show that the gentry effort to train blind boys as cultured musicians and encourage the reciprocity of care between elderly and disabled residents contributed to making disability a moral symbol of community belonging. This Confucian model of social welfare later

coalesced with the welfare state model during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), when the physical suffering of the nation pushed the boundary of able-bodied citizenship beyond the GMD understanding of productivity and refashioned an ethic of care for the national community. By measuring the impact of different social welfare approaches to blindness and disability, my dissertation contributes to understanding changing notions of citizenship and belonging from the interplay between state and civil society.

These findings about the lives of blind people amid different waves of philanthropic activism are gleaned from archival materials of professional, governmental and charitable organizations that have been previously overlooked by researchers. In Guangzhou, the municipal poorhouse, first established in 1928 by GMD's Social Affairs Bureau, contained administrative files about the Department for the Blind and Mute (Mangyagu 盲啞股) that reported on matters of receiving and rehabilitating former blind songstresses, fortunetellers and beggars. It also received letters pleading for the release of former members of occupational communities, such as the one from a *guji* household. The Chengdu Municipal Archive preserved documents about the Hall of Spreading Mercy (Cihuitang 慈惠堂), a gentry-run charitable organization established in 1924 as a key relief organ that housed and supported orphans, blind children, elderly and disabled widows and widowers. In particular, the Institute for the Education of Blind Boys (Gutong Jiaoyangsuo 瞽童教養所), which specialized in training blind boys as dulcimer musicians, contained letters written from parents applying for admission on behalf of their blind children, as well as records showing the instruction of blind boys and their employment in Cihuitang's performing troupes after graduation.

A wide range of published materials augment the link between the blind and professional culture and provide a view, which balanced that of government agencies and private charity. Oral

history records published by *Wenshi Ziliao* 文史資料 on retired blind songstresses in Guangzhou allow me to reconstruct the social career of blind women and their belonging to a music community. Autobiographical accounts from blind individuals who studied in missionary schools and teachers of special education help measure the extent of foreign influence over the management of blindness and disability. Likewise, local newspapers and journals, academic sociological surveys and police investigations illustrate the contested notions of livelihood and belonging for the blind, portraying their struggle in the process of moving between family, community and the state. Taken together, these materials shed new light on multiple facets of social and institutional experiences of blind people and expand the definition of able-bodied citizenship by incorporating non-normative bodies in realms of work and welfare.

Writing Disability into Chinese History: A Local Perspective

Disability has long been an academic interest primarily in the study of western countries. Followed by the Euro-American emphasis on theorizing disability as an analytical concept for understanding common oppression shared by people with physical, sensory, and mental impairments, scholars working in the discipline of sociology began to introduce the "social model" of disability as a way to counter the dominant mode of medicalization that locates the "problem" of disability within the individual.[3] The social model, by contrast, radically conceptualizes disability as rooted in the structural failure to address problems of exclusion and discrimination of people with impairments.[4] Disability, in parallel to premises of race and gender,

[3] Colin Barnes, "Theories of Disability and the Origins of the Oppression of Disabled People in Western Society," in Barton, L. (ed), *Disability & Society: Emerging Issues and Insights* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1996), 43-60.
[4] Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

is socially constructed. It further implies a liberating agenda that challenges the oppressive and reductive assumptions of the disabled and the use of disability as a justification of inequality.[5]

But whether or not people with particular impairments, such as the blind, deaf-mute and those with mental health issues consider their experiences as relevant to the social model of disability remains a question. Scholars have depicted communities that distinguished themselves by linguistic and cultural traits rather than experiences of disablement, such as Deaf signers in America and Japan.[6] Ethnographic studies in non-western countries have grappled with local perceptions of disability as shaped by belief systems and socio-economic practices of liminal personhood.[7] Until recently, scholarly attentions have been paid to the historical formation of disability as a constitutive element of professional culture in East Asia. The link between blindness and musicality, for example, has been explored in the context of artistic guilds in traditional Japan.[8] The rights and obligations of disabled professionals also contributed to understanding the management of poverty and the status order in Tokugawa Japan.[9] This new research direction, which situates disability at the intersection of working-class history and the history of social welfare and local governance, has informed my research in the urban lives of blind people as they transitioned from occupational to welfare communities in the early twentieth century.

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[5] For two representative studies of disability's intersection with race and gender in the American context, see Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Feminist Disability Studies," *Signs*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2005), 1575; Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, ed., *The New Disability History* (NYU Press, 2001), 33-57.

[6] Harlan Lane, "Constructions of Deafness," *Disability & Society*, Vol. 10 (2) (1995), 171-189; Karen Nakamura, *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity* (Cornell University Press, 2006).

[7] Ida Nicolaisen, "Persons and Nonpersons: Disability and Personhood among the Punan Bah of Central Borneo," in Susan R. Whyte and Benedicte Ingstad, ed., *Disability and Culture* (University of California Press, 1995), 38-55.

[8] Gerald Groemer, *Goze: Women, Musical Performance, and Visual Disability in Traditional Japan* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[9] Maren Ehlers, *Give and Take Poverty and the Status Order in Early Modern Japan* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), Chapter 4.

In China, historically informed studies of disability have taken a path that centers on the body as a location for understanding the formation of biomedical categories and their social impact. The sociologist Emma V. Stone was the first to trace a "macro-level construction" of discourses about disability and national development in the realm of government policy from late imperial to post-socialist China. She argues that the Chinese state simultaneously normalized the fit and healthy body as a precondition of national progress and erased the negative image of disability by adopting eugenics policies.[10] In his book *Bodies of Difference*, the anthropologist Matthew Kohrman considers the term *canji* 残疾 as central to the official construction of a biologically rooted identity through the Disabled Person's Federation in Reform-era China.[11] The medicalization of disability in the 1980s started from the CCP's banishment of the old term *canfei*, which linked disability to the concept of "uselessness." Informed by the transitional moment from state socialism to market economy, both Stone and Kohrman juxtapose disability with the rise of able-bodied nationalism through discourses of biomedicine, sexology, social Darwinism and physical culture.[12] This constructivist approach, however, has created a gap in the understanding of disability as social experience and the various ways in which categories work through institutions and cause discrimination, devaluation and disempowerment among people with bodily impairments.

[10] Emma V. Stone, "Reforming Disability in China: A Study in Disability and Development," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of East Asian Studies and School for Sociology and Social Policy, (University of Leeds, 1998), 272-274.
[11] Matthew Kohrman, *Bodies of Difference: Experiences of Disability and Institutional Advocacy in the Making of Modern China* (University of California Press, 2005), 2-3.
[12] For a summary of works on gender and sexuality that are relevant to the medical construction of disability, see Susan Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 100-102. On the rise of Eugenics and its conception of defective bodies, see Frank Dikotter, *Imperfect Conceptions Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects, and Eugenics in China* (Columbia University Press, 1998). On bodily fitness and physical culture in the Republic and PRC, see Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (University of California Press, 2004).

In sharp contrast to previous writings about disability in China, my work scrutinizes the socio-economic term for disability: *canfei*. Doing so enables me to address the vulnerability of and caring for the disabled rather than viewing the positive erasure of disability as a testimony to the triumph of modern science and medicine. Instead of making general assumptions about the experience of disabled people, I wish to tell a story about blindness by asking the following questions: what it meant to be a member of the blind community, how blindness intersected with changing perceptions of livelihood and belonging, as well as how institutions sought to manage the blind as a group of disabled poor in the context of modernizing social welfare.

My dissertation also employs local perspectives to complement the top-down analysis of disability as a construction of the welfare state, as exemplified by Deborah Stone's study of pension systems for the disabled in Europe and North America.[13] Focusing on Guangzhou and Chengdu, where different modes of urbanization and exposure to western influence manifested in coastal and inland China during the early twentieth century, this dissertation sets a first goal of uncovering the dynamics of interaction between urban elites and the community of blind and disabled people.

Mary Rankin and William Rowe, two eminent China historians, have argued that philanthropic activism among local elites in Zhejiang and Hankou extended the power and protection of urban communities from a declining central government after the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864).[14]

Into the early Republic, Michael Tsin's study of Guangzhou has shown the continued influence of merchant elites in claiming political representation to society during the rise of

[13] Deborah A. Stone, *The Disabled State* (Temple University Press, 1986).
[14] Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); William Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984) and *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

nationalism.[15] Kristin Stapleton's study of Chengdu, on the other hand, has argued for the leading role of late-Qing bureaucrats in reforming the poor under the premise of civilizing society.[16] Expanding the time frames of Tsin and Stapleton, my findings show that in pre-1937 Guangzhou, western-influenced GMD social welfare administration replaced private charity and expanded the reach of the state to take custody of unemployed blind singers, fortunetellers, and beggars as targets of rehabilitation.[17] In Chengdu, I show that from 1920s to 1940s, Confucian charity surpassed the extent of official poor relief by fashioning a moralizing agenda aimed at cultivating livelihood among blind children and encouraging mutual aid among elderly and disabled poor. Taken together, the two cities presented a contrast not only in the management of blindness and disability but also in the reaction to foreignism and the reconfiguration of tradition.

My second goal for this study is to situate the labor/disability dichotomy in the recent literature on poverty and the urban underclass in order to enrich our understanding of social citizenship. Republican-era social policy criminalized all able-bodied poor for their idleness and sought to transform them into productive members of society. Enforcing this rationale of productivism, as Janet Chen has argued, required the state to cope with the indigent as "moving targets," as unemployed itinerants, beggars, refugees and slum dwellers.[18] Those who deviated from the state ideal of modernity were considered "useless," according to Zwia Lipkin, and their livelihoods were gradually taken over by reformers under the dictate of "keeping up appearances"

[15] Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
[16] Kristen Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[17] This argument for an interventionist welfare state in 1930s Guangzhou is first raised in Alfred H. Y. Lin, "Warlord, Social Welfare and Philanthropy: The Case of Guangzhou under Chen Jitang, 1929-1936," *Modern China* 30, 2 (2004): 151-198.
[18] Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 7.

of the city.[19] My finding about the professional disintegration among blind singers and fortunetellers in Guangzhou confirms Liplin's observations of the reformist attack on backward social customs. It also connects the livelihood problem for the disabled to Chen's argument for the state's active intervention and relocation of the urban poor for the purpose of harnessing their productive labor. In particular, I show that policies toward blind singers changed from legitimizing their occupational status to prohibiting them from singing in the street as a result of the declining teahouse sponsorship. The livelihood crises among blind occupational communities further justified the GMD government's detention and rehabilitation of all the disabled poor.

By recovering the professional lives of blind singers and fortunetellers, I seek to provide a counter-balance to narrations of blind individuals as passive recipients of philanthropy and subjects of urban reform. David Strand's *Rickshaw Beijing* offers an exemplary case study of the working life of rickshaw men as it intersected with rising political activism and claims upon urban citizenship in 1920s Beijing.[20] Di Wang has portrayed the everyday life of ordinary city dwellers and their struggles over urban belonging as viewed from the street and teahouse.[21] Scholars of gender and women's history have paid special attentions to urban entertainment as a realm that both enabled women to pursue an income-earning career and contributed to their vulnerabilities to kidnapping, trafficking and sexual consumption.[22] Building on this body of scholarship, my work further expands the notion of who counts as a worker by incorporating

[19] Zwia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: "Social Problems" and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 8.
[20] David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
[21] Di Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space, Urban Commoners, and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); *The Teahouse Small Business, Everyday Culture, and Public Politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Stanford University Press, 2008).
[22] For notable works on prostitutes and actresses, see Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (University of California Press, 1997); Weikun Cheng, *City of Working Women: Life, Space, and Social Control in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing* (UC Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2011).

non-normative bodies into labor history. It brings insights from a recent trend in disability history that examines the boundaries of work as shaped by bodily variability and the precarity of working environment.[23]

"Disabled but Useful": How the Blind Transformed the Moral Imagination of the Chinese Welfare State

This dissertation focuses on social welfare approaches to transform the blind into disabled but useful citizens from the final years of the Qing dynasty to the end of the Nationalist War against Japan in 1945. Through analyzing two cities, it raises new questions about changing perceptions of blindness as an embodied qualification of livelihood and belonging to the community as well as elite responses to create new criteria of social citizenship for the disabled poor. The chapters proceed in a chronological manner and could be read in two different ways. The first narrates a familiar trajectory of how an interventionist welfare state, originating in Guangzhou's municipal governance in 1921, gradually took over the occupational space of blind and disabled people in its attempt to abolish backward customs and shape a productive work ethic against the notion of *canfei*. The second narrative shows the continuity of blindness as a justification of rights to livelihood as articulated by professional communities and urban elites. This vision coalesced with GMD social welfare during wartime Chengdu and expanded the parameter of disabled citizenship beyond a narrow conception of productivity.

Chapter 1, "The Social Life of the Blind Songstress," uncovers the working experience of the blind songstress in late-Qing Guangzhou as introduction to the traditional perception of blindness as a collective property owned by occupational communities. Besides emphasizing the

[23] Sarah F. Rose, "Crippled" Hands: Disability in Labor and Working-Class History," *Labor* 2, 1 (March 2005), 27–54; *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

function of professional households in adopting and training blind girls to be singers and entertainers patronized by wealthy families, it also shows that the expansion of teahouse theatres since the 1910s marked a change in the way blind women were valued in the gendered consumerist environment. I argue that the teahouse not only elevated the professional status of blind women by combining charity with consumption but also reinforced their sexual vulnerability.

Chapter 2, "Disability and Changing Ideas of Social Inclusion," traces the decline of blind songstresses at the teahouse after the arrival of sighted songstresses, former brothel singers who were forced out of the business due to increased fiscal regulation of the sex trade after Guangzhou became a municipality in 1921. The unfolding of the process showcased the state's deployment of financial and administrative apparatuses to deepen its control over an expansive market of entertainment while forcibly placing the unemployed and sexually promiscuous blind women into state custody. The coercive measures of police arrest and welfare institutionalization threatened to undermine the old model of community aid while at the same time encountered organized resistance from blind singers. By the end of 1920s, the fate of blind singers represented how blindness changed from being a qualification of professional inclusion to a mandate of charitable inclusion.

Social marginalization also meant the creation of new qualifications for people with disabilities so that they could become "useful," and this lay at the core of social welfare conceptions of disability. Chapter 3, "Enlightening the Blind: Missionaries, Blind Converts, and Braille Literacy," begins by showing a brief episode of missionary endeavor to rescue blind singing girls in the early Republic, arguing that they became a subject of humanitarian intervention before the state was fully capable of reforming a social custom. It then uses the

biographical accounts of two blind Chinese converts to illustrate the missionary effort to invent and implement Chinese Braille in Christian schools for the blind. The two stories shed lights on the religious model of literacy, arguing that the indigenization of Braille allowed missionaries to invent blindness as an intellectual deficiency that could be compensated by the ability to read by touch.

This missionary approach to educate the blind as a means of religious redemption was later supplanted by a secularist trend of indigenizing special education and the restoration of occupational identity for the blind. Chapter 4, "Moralizing the Blind: Disabled Community and Confucian Charity, 1924-1945," illustrates the role of Confucian philanthropists in turning disability into a social obligation to practice care. It shows how gentry managers of Cihuitang, Chengdu's largest charitable organization, responded to family incapacity to care for blind children by training them to become dulcimer singers and dispatching them in music troupes that performed morality songs to the urban community. Cihuitang also managed to keep the community model of eldercare for aged and disabled residents based on the practice of mutual aid.

The persistence of a Confucian welfare community in Chengdu counter-balances the welfare state's totalizing vision of making *canfei* a radical symbol of exclusion for unproductive members of society. Chapter 5, "Transforming the Blind: Disabled Citizenship and the Chinese Welfare State, 1928-1937," returns to Guangzhou to illustrate the GMD ideal of making disabled but useful citizens. The reformist warlord Chen Jitang built a provincial welfare state upon a decade of experimentation by the GMD. Working together with his most trusted ally Lin Yungai, whom we have encountered in the beginning in the context of handling petitions from the blind songstress, Chen not only brought private charity firmly under the control of the Social Affairs

Bureau but also initiated large-scale removal of beggars from the street and reintegrated them into the Guangzhou Municipal Poorhouse. The training of blind inmates to work in assembly lines and to read citizenship manuals in braille reflected the welfare state's management of poverty against a broader spectrum of bodily diversity. The blind who became one of the working poor were symbols of the welfare state's appropriation of disability in expanding the physical definition of productivity.

Meanwhile, the welfare state's crackdown on disabled occupational communities triggered a new wave of organized resistance from blind fortunetellers, who not only defended their family status against homeless beggars but also used *canfei* to claim their rights to livelihood. The popular claim of disability as community belonging thus revealed the limited reach of the welfare state.

Chapter One

The Social Life of the Blind Songstress

Chinese society has traditionally understood blindness as more than a personal tragedy. Bodies with sensory, physical and mental impairments were perceived to undermine the integrity of a family and hence a lineage system. The inability to fulfill productive and reproductive demands of the household through marriage and physical labor thus led to the exclusion of people with impairments from the Confucian family and the structural result of what sociologist Emma V. Stone calls "diminished personhood."[1] But the socio-familial rejection to people with impairments also coexisted with other forms of responses, and some were less exclusive than others. Apart from the condemnable practice of female infanticide, abandonment of children with impairments was not entirely a decision made out of despair. It was not uncommon to see destitute parents selling their blind children into specific occupations in order to keep them alive as subjects of servitude and apprenticeship. As the historian Johanna Ransmeier argues, an expanded scope of transactions in service labor from late Qing to the Republic alongside legal prohibitions on human trafficking indicated the growth of a reproductive economy.[2] If selling a family member into slavery, concubinage and prostitution was a rational decision made in times of economic hardship, then disability reinforced the tendency to seek alternative forms of inclusion.

Blind people have been historically placed in a broad spectrum of occupational statuses, from kept singers and entertainers to itinerant storytellers and fortunetellers. These various social roles fulfilled by blind women and men by no means held them equal to the sighted majority or

[1] Emma V. Stone, "Reforming Disability in China: A Study of Disability and Development," Ph.D. Dissertation (UK: University of Leeds, 1998), 71.
[2] Johanna Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 12.

helped eliminate the stigma attached to blindness. But they did contribute to organizing blindness as a shared property of skilled communities. This means that while blindness disables one from doing physical labor that requires hand-eye coordination, it also reorganizes the focus of attention with non-visual faculties, especially hearing and speaking. Aural and oral capacities thus enabled blind individuals to succeed in the performing world and encouraged them to form professional identities in the service sector alongside their sighted peers. The social career of a blind person began in the early childhood: blind boys to become musicians and fortunetellers; blind girls to be trained as singers and entertainers. Parents and relatives sold their blind children as adopted heirs of veteran blind professionals who either led itinerant performing troupes in the marketplace or owned private training guilds in urban neighborhoods. Through creating fictive families, the blind not only found inclusion based on shared experiences of impairment but also established themselves as a minority working class.

This chapter uncovers the little-known world of blind professionals by focusing on the blind songstress (*guji* 瞽姬) in the southern city of Guangzhou (Canton) during late Qing and early Republican period. *Guji* occupied a special place in the urban life of early twentieth-century Guangzhou. These were women who became blind at an early age and were sent by their parents to be raised and trained under the tutelage of a foster mother, the elderly former *guji* who ran professional households in neighborhoods adjacent to business centers. Once they have reached a level of proficiency in singing, young blind girls started selling songs on the street as a way of begging. The good-looking ones were invited to sing at parties or employed in teahouses and restaurants as professional entertainers. The household of *guji* also played a central role in shaping the professional identity of blind women. They offered specialized trainings of

Cantonese narrative songs, string instruments, and exquisite dressing styles that promoted the socioeconomic status of blind women in the public sphere of entertainment.

In the past, a number of studies have pointed out that the expansion of urban workplaces in early twentieth-century China opened new venues for women to pursue modern identities. These include early works on factory girls and more recent studies on prostitutes, female dancers and actresses in spheres of urban entertainment.[3] In her recent book, Angelina Chin locates female singers and waitresses in a hierarchy of gendered identities that aligned with the modern rhetoric of "women's emancipation," and considers blind women as antithetical to this gendered transformation.[4] But against the reformist perception of blindness as contributing to the disablement of women's agency was the popular acceptance of blind women as capable entertainers. This betrays the changing notion of disability that intersected with a gendered service labor. In order to resolve this apparent contradiction, I apply a disability-centered analysis of the life course of blind singers as they moved across families, professional communities and diversified urban spaces. I argue that blindness became a contested notion of social inclusion based on the changing social status of an occupational community.

This chapter begins by situating blind women in the local history of Cantonese opera during late Imperial and Republican China. The first section discusses the functioning of private training organizations, known locally as the *tang* 堂, in developing the professional identity of *guji*. The second section focuses on adoption as a chosen kinship strategy among blind women,

[3] See Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford University Press, 1986); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (University of California Press, 1997); Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals and Entertainment Culture 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Andrew David Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics 1919–1954* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2010); Weikun Cheng, *City of Working Women: Life, Space, and Social Control in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing* (UC Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2011).

[4] Angelina Chin, *Bound to Emancipate: Working Women and Urban Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century China and Hong Kong* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), Chapter 4.

and further examines the role of *tang* in supporting a broader network of professional integration that stretched across urban and rural areas of the Pearl River Delta. The third section highlights the rise of commercial sponsorship of *guji* following the establishment of the Republic and traces changing social perceptions of *guji* in the public sphere. It shows that the expansion of teahouse theaters since the 1910s shaped a particular form of gendered disabled labor in wider social transactions. The chapter ends by depicting the changing visual illustrations of *guji* from the pictorial press as introduction to the emerging social responses to the commodification of a disability.

1. The Blind in Cantonese Singing Culture: From Late Qing to the Early Republic

Blind women in Guangdong had long been associated with the performance of Cantonese opera. The local tradition of pure singing (*qingchang* 清唱) emphasized voice over body movement and the blind were considered fit for the art. This golden period, which began around 1862 and lasted until the 1920s, characterized the artistic creativity and social adaptability of blind women.[5] *Guji* who performed in teahouses and restaurants had secured patrons who were willing to come everyday to listen to romantic stories in Cantonese ballads for as long as two years.[6] As an occupational community, *guji* lived in professional households, or the *tang*, which resembled private training schools (*keban* 科班) of Peking opera with strict teacher-disciple relationship. Blind girls who entered the *tang* through adoption received strict training in singing

[5] This professional decline will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 2. Li Tian 黎田 and Xie Weiguo 謝偉國, *Yuequ* 粵曲 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2008), 66.
[6] Lucy Ching, *One of the Lucky Ones* (Gulliver Books, 1980), 20.

classical tales in Cantonese dialect playing string instruments.[7] The *tang* thus monopolized a specific type of musical performance patronized by the urban leisure class. Its organizational structure will be discussed in the next section.

Records of blind women as professional singers appeared as early as 1851, when the Qing scholar Chen Huiyan 陳徽言 (?-1857) reported during his visit to Guangzhou that a number of blind people made a living on the street. According to him, "blind men often wandered idly as beggars and fortunetellers, whereas blind women became sing-song girls by learning to play *pipa* 琵琶, clapper songs, *tanci* 彈詞, and variety songs." In an evening, Chen observed that "a blind girl was dressed in fancy costume and guided by an old woman who carried a lantern and walked around the alley to solicit business. Upon calling by a guest, they will perform until dawn." Singing also provided some blind women an access to social respectability. As Chen commented, "[T]hose with superior voices were invited into wealthy households to sing for a high price and were even offered to sit on a mat while performing. Hence the poor and homeless blind took singing as a career."[8] Blind singers in Cantonese-speaking region stemmed from a longer tradition of household entertainment in the richest Jiangnan region (nowadays Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces) during the Qing dynasty. Not only did *guji* borrow the practice of *tanci* from Jiangnan, a form of storytelling performed to secluded women in wealthy households.[9] They also integrated popular genres of the Lingnan region to adapt and respond to folk practices and musical tastes. Because of specialized household services, blind women gained better social recognition than their male counterparts. Their close

[7] Chen Zhuoying 陳卓瑩, "Jiefang qian Guangzhou yueyue yiren de hangbang zuzhi jiqi jiuge neimu" (解放前粵樂藝人的行幫組織及其糾葛內幕), *Guangdong wenshi ziliao*, vol. 53 (1987): 27.
[8] Chen Huiyan 陳徽言, *Nanyue youji* 南越遊記 (1851), 1: 11a-b.
[9] Zhou Wei 周巍, *Jiyi yu xingbie: wanqing yilai de Jiangnan nü tanci yanjiu* 技藝與性別：晚清以來的江南女彈詞研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe, 2010).

relationship with wealthy patrons and connoisseurs also contributed to later career developments in the popular sphere of entertainment. Late Qing commentaries further remarked on the distinctive place *guji* held in Cantonese customs, such as the recognition of their virtuosity in singing wooden-fish songs and playing the dulcimer.[10] The literati's recognition of blind people in local singing culture hence reflected the growth of a professional community.

Towards the Republican period, social changes brought by reformers and revolutionaries contributed to the decline of the Eight Timbre Troupe (*Bayinban* 八音班), the biggest music guild that specialized in ritual music for imperial events and religious festivals. After the 1911 Revolution, a new regime based on the alliance between military bureaucrats and wealthy merchants aimed to delegitimize the imperial authority through the confiscation of temples and shrines, replacing "superstitious" activities with "enlightened" customs. As a result, former ritual musicians from the *bayin* troupe reorganized themselves into six independent guilds. Male musicians stepped down from the role of leading players at religious festivals and took up jobs as accompanists for female singers, among which the blind and sighted occupied separate spaces of entertainment. *Guji* worked in teahouses, restaurants, and gambling spots, while sighted singing girls performed at brothels.[11] Due to the lifted ban on women's engagement in public activities and the expansion of popular theatres, Guangzhou in this period witnessed the similar rise of female entertainers in pleasure venues of big urban centers like Shanghai, Tianjin and Beijing.

Guji first appeared in commercial theatres in the early 1910s, a time of rapid expansion of urban entertainment and loose social control under the nascent warlord regime. A group of theatre aficionados (*wanjia* 玩家) who had been former patrons of *guji* experienced economic

[10] Xu Ke 徐珂, "Mangmei tanchang" (盲妹彈唱), in *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔, vol. 36 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1917), 28.
[11] Zhu Shi 朱十, Su Wenbing 蘇文炳 et al., "Guangzhou yuehang" (廣州樂行), *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 廣州文史資料 Vol. 2 (1964): 128.

hardship as their families went into decline after the Revolution. Unable to hold private banquets, these former profligates started to gather at pleasure quarters and earned some money as amateur musicians. These men later became music workers (*yuegong* 樂工) for higher-class *guji* and established a guild in cooperation with the *tang*.[12] Another group that specialized in seeking employment opportunities for *guji* was known as brokers (*baojia* 包家). According to the recollection of a former *bayin* member, a gambler named Wu Jiu who had good connections with managers of gambling dens came up with the idea of using *guji* to attract customers. The novel appearance of *guji* soon brought profits to the gambling business, and Wu later became a well-known broker who introduced *guji* to sing in commercial theatres. Wu took a *guji* as his concubine and made a fortune by hiring blind girls trained at her *tang*.[13] Within a short period of ten years, this combined training and brokerage helped transform a disabled minority group into a professional community in the entertainment sector of Guangzhou. During the process of expanding workplace, however, *guji*'s increased visibility also produced suspicions and criticisms over the respectability of the blind community. These entangled narratives of community survival and commodification will be the focus of later sections.

The social career of *guji* in the late Qing and early years of the Republic reflected the professionalization of blind women in a regional culture of singing that accommodated bodily differences. The early stage of pure singing that valorized techniques of vocalization might explain the continued acceptance of blind singers and the absence of acting. This period also witnessed the development of commercial theatres following the decline of ritual music and the redistribution of musical labor in a gendered entertainment environment. The increased recognition of blind women as desirable entertainers in Republican-era society triggered the

[12] Ibid., 136.
[13] Su Wenbing 蘇文炳, *Hongchen wangshi* 紅塵往事 (Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2005), 35-37.

expansion of professional households among blind women and their connection to an evolving network of commercial brokerage and sponsorship. Before examining how disability intersected with a particular form of gendered labor in the urban workplace, the next section will look closely at the role of the *tang* in shaping the professional identity of blind women.

2. The Growth of A Blind Occupational Community

From the Qing dynasty to the Republican period, Guangzhou was known as a southern metropolis that attracted one of the country's most vibrant communities of merchants and revolutionaries. Located in the heartland of the Pearl River Delta, the city was the first to open an inland marketing network to foreign trade since 1757. Between 1900 and 1921, the population of Guangzhou grew from around 600,000 to 788,000, pushing the city to expand its size beyond the confine of the former Qing administrative boundary. [14] The urban space expanded outside the walled city, which was located in the northern bank of the Pearl River, to its western and southern suburbs. Xiguan 西關 (Western District) had become the city's commercial center and the most congested residential area since the late Qing. The last official census before the Xinhai Revolution indicated that the district held about forty percent of the city's total population.[15] After the Revolution, the urban business continued to flourish due to the influx of migrant workers from surrounding rural areas. Many itinerant opera troupes and music workers who previously performed in surrounding villages and market towns flushed into the provincial capital at the turn of the century, contributing to the formation of a regional theater of Cantonese

[14] Edward Rhoads, "Merchant Associations in Canton", in Mark Elvin & G. William Skiner (eds.), *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 97.
[15] By 1909, Guangzhou had a total population of 552,309, which included 355,689 (64.4%) males and 196,620 (35.6%) females. The population in Xiguan was 233,144, ranked the highest population density (40%) among all the districts. See *Guangdong jingwu gongsuo dierci tongjishu* 廣東警務公所第二次統計書 (1909), 144-146.

opera. Through the assistance of urban guilds, newly arrived performers quickly occupied specialized niches of entertainment under the patronage of merchants and militarists. Perhaps the most important change during this period was the expansion of commercial theatres and female performers. According to Wing Cheng Ng, Xiguan witnessed a boom of popular theaters with relative affordability and the adoption of local Cantonese dialect suited for working-class urbanities. In addition, the reappearance of female troupes and actresses replaced the dominance of all-male troupes and offered lower-class women new working opportunities in teahouses and other entertaining quarters.[16] Both changes, as shown next, affected the career experience of blind women as they stepped into the expanding sphere of mass entertainment.

The social background that had driven young girls to become entertainers was hard to trace, both due to the scarcity of documentation and the shifting career paths one took in the precarious urban environment. Weikun Cheng's study of actresses in early twentieth century Tianjin and Beijing shows that prostitutes sometimes shifted to a stage career as a form of advertising. Professional female entertainers, however, underwent long and strict apprenticeship. Some girls were trained by theatre owners and rich actors who bought them from traffickers and impoverished families, while others learned from private teachers at home.[17] It was commonly believed that poverty was the chief factor that drove parents to send their girls to itinerant opera troupes in order to make a living.

Blind entertainers came from more diversified backgrounds than sighted ones, since disability limited families' choices due to the scarcity of social resources for disabled people. In Guangzhou, popular belief held that a girl born blind was destined to become a songstress through adoption into the *tang*. Even in well-to-do families, parents who kept a blind girl at

[16] Wing Chung Ng, *The Rise of Cantonese Opera* (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 32-38; 88-93.
[17] Weikun Cheng, "The Challenge of the Actresses: Female Performers and Cultural Alternatives in Early Twentieth Century Beijing and Tianjin," *Modern China* 22, no. 2 (1996): 204-205.

home would be scolded by elders due to the economic burden placed on other members of the lineage.[18] Wen Lirong 溫麗蓉 (1904-?), a blind woman who lived her life as a blind songstress in Republican-era Guangzhou, told about the fate of blind children during an interview in May 18, 1963. When she was blinded at the age of six, Wen Lirong heard rumors that some parents poisoned their blind children or abandoned them on the street. She mentioned the example of a blind boy named He Xiping whose father considered him useless and threatened to put him inside a basket and throw him into the river. The boy was frightened and attempted to escape several times until he met a blind man who taught him to play *erhu* and do fortunetelling. It was ironic that the cruel father later relied on his son's support until his death.[19] Although Wen Lirong said that she felt horrified hearing the rumor, what strikes the reader about the story of the blind boy was the way in which society had prepared for a disabled person to find a way out.

The growth of urban *tang* contributed to new conditions of social inclusion at the turn of the century Guangzhou. Differing from sighted entertainers, whose transformation into stars alleviated them from poverty and helped them acquire a certain degree of autonomy, becoming a *guji* meant for blind women to form intimate bounds of sisterhood and obey the rules of the household. Blindness was thus considered not only an individual plight but also a shared property of the community that supported every member's development of a professional identity. This alternative conception of integration, as we will see, reflected a more ingrained subsistence ethics based on the justification of disability as a common livelihood.

[18] Ching, *One of the Lucky Ones*, 20.

[19] Chen Binghan 陳炳翰 of the Guangzhou municipal office conducted the original interview during the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s political campaign to reform popular art and literature for mass education. The transcript includes six main sections of Wen Lirong's life as a blind singer: family background, adoption into the blind guild, entering and exiting a career as *guji*, performance experience and hardships. See Wen Lirong 溫麗蓉, "Guangzhou Shiniang" (廣州師娘), *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 廣州文史資料, vol. 9 (1963): 2.

2.1 The Professional Household of *Guji*

The professional life of *guji* began with the time when she entered a *tang*. These clandestine *guji* households were distributed across major districts of Guangzhou. The most famous ones were found in the Chentang area located in southern Xiguan and north of Shamian. Chenji, a residential quarter on what is nowadays Qingping Road, was popularly known as the "blind girl's alley" (*mangmei xiang* 盲妹巷) because it was inhabited by forty households of *guji*.[20] The neighborhood held a special place in the urban economy due to its location: to its east was the business center on the Thirteen Hong Street, which brought foreign merchants and indigenous tradesmen from Shamian and other southern ports. To its west was the brothel district of southern Chentang. North of the neighborhood saw the concentration of teahouses and restaurants frequented by local patrons. According to the memoir of Su Wenbing, a former musician who used to work with blind songstresses during the 1920s, the neighborhood of Chenji saw the rise of two earliest music guilds. The Puxian Tang 普賢堂, which trained Su as a percussionist (*zhangban* 掌板) for Cantonese opera, was a guild founded by a group of former theater aficionados who came to the music profession. Within a walking distance of just ten more steps to its west stood the Qilan Tang 綺蘭堂, the largest household of blind songstresses in Guangzhou. Before the existence of the former in 1918, amateur musicians had established a close relationship with the *guji* household through professional exchanges. Su Wenbing remembered that when he was an apprentice, he often saw blind singers practicing together with sighted musicians. Over time, the two *tang* had formed a partnership in the training blind girls. In the heyday of their business, hundreds of *guji* were hired in the surrounding business quarters.[21]

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[20] Su Wenbing 蘇文炳, "Jiu shehui Guangzhou yitiao mangmei jie" (舊社會廣州一條盲妹巷) *Yangcheng xiecai* 羊城擷采 (Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1994), 147.
[21] Su Wenbing, *Hongchen wangshi*, 23-25.

This community was the one that raised Wen Lirong to become a *guji*. She remembered entering the Qilan Tang at the age of seven (around 1907). The founder of the Tang, Xueji 雪姬, was by then in her nineties and had recruited four generations of blind girls. Until the early 1910s, there had been a dozen of similar training institutes of *guji* opened in the city's most vibrant commercial centers. Notable ones also included the Guilan Tang at the Caoji quarter of northern Xiguan, and the Lüyang Ju and Lishui Fang on the Guanlian Street of the western inner city. There were also small *tangs* scattered along the Dongdi 東堤 (Eastern Bund) and in the district south of the Pearl River. The *tang* was not a single institution, but an assembly of many quasi-familial organizations formed according to strict teacher-disciple relationships among blind entertainers. The generational hierarchy served first as a distinction of one's professional status in the community. Students of the same cohort (*ban* 班) were assigned with stage names sharing the same character. Lirong was adopted and trained by Runqiao 潤喬, who belonged to the third generation of the "Run" 潤 character. During her apprenticeship, Lirong was instructed to follow the rule of studying. For example, she should refer to the hostess Xueji as great grandmother-teacher (*shitai* 師太) and the teacher of her foster mother grandmother-teacher (*shipo* 師婆). In daily life, she was supposed to call her own adopter-teacher mother (*niang* 娘) and her teacher's colleagues as aunt (*guma* 姑媽). [22] Therefore the status order of the Tang was based on a twofold practice of fictive filial kinship. While adoption created a family relationship for blind girls to seek care and protection, training guaranteed a mentorship for her career development.

The adoption of blind girls as entertainers happened on two occasions: abandoned blind girls, such as those found on streets, did not require a proof of adoption. Those sent by their parents or relatives to the Tang needed a written contract, which stipulated that the blind girl

[22] Wen Lirong, "Guangzhou Shiniang," 2-3.

(usually under ten) be raised and owned by the foster mother once they "entered the career" (*chushen* 出身) as a *guji*. When reaching a marriageable age (around eighteen), they could apply for "exiting the career" (*tuishen* 退身) as adopted songstresses with a negotiated amount of money returned to the madam. During her career, a successful teahouse-singing *guji* could earn as much as 10 *yuan* a day and 200 *yuan* a month for twenty days of work. There were usually twenty girls who worked regularly and contributed to the monthly income of the Hall.[23]

Besides those employed in the business, there were also the owner and instructors of older generations who were responsible for teaching newly adopted girls and managing the household. The labor invested in training was considerable, since blind girls needed to learn a variety of skills from different instructors who specialized in singing and playing music instruments. This meant that in addition to mastering vocalization styles for three major role types (*sheng, dan, jing* 生旦淨), a *guji* had to acquire a basic knowledge of playing stringed instruments in the absence of accompanists. Instruction was based primarily on oral transmission, in which a blind student memorized opera scripts only by listening and repeating after her teacher. Reciting operatic dialogues was the first thing to do before one could understand the complexities of singing style. Similarly, the blind relied only on touch when learning to play the instrument. Manner was another crucial element in training. Xueji, the hostess, was remembered as a strict disciplinarian who often moved around the house to correct the posture of students by touching their shoulders. They were taught to behave elegantly when entering and existing a theatre, as well as standing and sitting during a performance in order to become a pleasure in the eyes of others. A songstress who was considered less attractive in appearance could still be distinguished by her voice, her mastery of singing and bodily decorum, according to Wen

[23] Ibid., 5-6.

Lirong's account.[24] The description showed that the blind songstress understood the art as demonstrative of her beauty and sexuality, and blindness was a crucial part of the self-construction. This gendered perception of blindness will be explored later in the performing context.

The challenge that blindness brought to the training process could only be surmised given the limit of textual evidence. But one should not overemphasize it, since the difficulties mentioned by Wen Lirong, such as little attention being paid to the explanation of songs due to the lack of written literacy among the blind that were common to the training of sighted singers. The prevalent illiteracy among performers of Peking Opera, according to Joshua Goldstein, brought criticisms to the acting community in the 1920s, when opera schools began to establish separate institutes that offered primary education for guild members.[25]

Education for the blind, on the contrary, only received institutional anchors outside of the blind performing community as practices of charity. Before the modern state ventured to promote the general literacy of blind people, Christian missionaries took a first step toward building special schools that sheltered poor blind children and developed native systems of Chinese Braille (Chapter 3). But the number of blind people housed in missionary institutions was much smaller compared to those integrated in professional training guilds, not to mention the popular distrust of missionary charity. In 1912, a Christian school for the blind in Guangzhou was involved in the reception of blind girls formerly trained as *guji* according to the instruction of local police. As we will see in later chapters, the idea of belonging to a music community grew in tension with the modern perception of blind women as victims of unenlightened social customs.

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[24] Ibid., 3-4.
[25] Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (University of California Press, 2007), 226.

2.2 Rural Organizations of *Guji* in Pearl River Delta

Meanwhile, records of oral history illustrate the spread of similar organizations in market towns and major trade routes along the Pearl River Delta. In general, they were smaller in size and less concentrated than urban *tangs*, as a madam kept only two blind girls on average and no more than five in a household. In addition, blind singers in the countryside occupied less regulated workplaces such as boats, wine shops and cheap hostels, where many customers came by river and stayed temporary for business. River transportation and waterborne trade thus played an important role in shaping an informal network based on the procurement and transaction of a special kind of female labor. Like their urban counterparts, rural blind women also formed professional households in response to the local demand of entertaining labor.

The Pearl River Delta featured the earliest growth of inland trade in service labor. The urban linkage between Foshan 佛山 and Guangzhou contributed to the formation of a regional theater through the exchange of itinerant troupes and artistic guilds between the two locales.[26] Foshan township, which lies about twenty miles southwest of Guangzhou, held a native community of blind songstresses since the late Qing period. They mainly engaged in customary services, such as performing ritual music in weddings and funerals, and entertained guests with ballad songs in family banquets and other settings. Foshan's *guji* enjoyed a higher ritual status than *bayin* groups in the context of local celebrations. Some renowned figures, such as Guimei 桂妹, appeared in folktales as prestigious figures similar to local martial artists. She once performed "Baoyu Weeping at Daiyu's Bier" (*Baoyu kuling* 寶玉哭靈) on a public theatre, and her voice was described like "beads falling on a jade plate and apes crying loudly," which

[26] Ng, *The Rise of Cantonese Opera*, Chapter 1.

captivated hundreds of audience at a time.[27] The popularity of *guji* helped sustain the development of a professional community. During the 1930s, there were about ten *tangs* and over several hundred members. Upon receiving an invitation, the *tang* would organize, based on the occasion, a singing troupe of four to five *guji* and a sighted male accompanist to lead the troupe while playing woodwind instruments to collect money along the way. Household performance usually lasted from seven to ten in the evening, and the payment was about 8 to 10 *yuan*, a rate similar to the *tangs* in Guanghzou. This sum of money was supposed to be submitted to the hostess, and only a small amount was given to *guji* monthly or spent on their clothing. Besides singing, Foshan's *guji* community also performed manual labor in the *tang*. Many practiced spinning yarn and weaving baskets as a compensation for the lack of employment opportunities. Yet manual work was not rewarded but considered only as a household responsibility. Zuan Gu 鑽姑 and Yin Hao 銀好 were two famous *guji* in Foshan who rose to fame due to prominent voice quality and specialized singing skills, but aging had caused their voice to degenerate. Their declining popularity led the hostess to stop hiring them to sing and demanded that they do physical labor to help maintain the household. Later they were forced to leave the *tang* and to sing on the street.[28] Oral history tends to treat the example as representative of the tragic fate of *guji* who would inevitably end up helplessly on the street. But the prospect that a *guji* would stand out by her virtuosity in singing explained the proliferation of the *tang* as a profit-seeking institution based on the principle of mutual aid. As a *guji* grew older and received less chance to perform in public, she would pick up domestic responsibilities in caring for younger blind girls and preparing them for better skills that could bring fortune to the household.

[27] Woshi Shanren 我是山人, *Yongchun quanwang Zan xiansheng* 詠春拳王贊先生 (Hong Kong: Nanfeng chubanshe, 1900), 21-22.
[28] Zhu Zhefu 朱哲夫, "Jiu Foshan de liangzhong minjian yiren" (舊佛山的兩種民間藝人), *Foshan wenshi ziliao* 佛山文史資料 vol. 13 (1994): 167.

Meanwhile, similar organizations of *guji* continued to spread along the waterways. Sanshui County 三水 (now an urban district of Foshan), located in the Northwestern corner of the Pearl River Delta, was known for the exportation of married women to Southeast Asia as workers in textile factories and rubber plantations.[29] Local families also sent young girls to work as domestic servants and special service works. In Xinan Township 西南, a *guji* community emerged in response to the demand of travelling merchants. People walking by the river would recognize their peddling for service from the high-pitched voice "fish to sell" coming from the boat. Like in other rural areas, the size of *guji* in Xinan was fairly small, with a number of no more than ten per households.[30] But as a professional group, *guji* enjoyed high social visibility as they appeared on streets, riverbanks and other public venues. These are also precarious workplaces that tend to reinforce the vulnerability of blind women, who often become targets of robbery and sexual harassment. Local people observed *guji* communicating in a jargon that was unintelligible to outsiders.[31] This might be seen as a form of self-protection in response to the challenging social environment. In the mid 1930s, it was discovered by the local government that the *guji* community in Xinan turned to underground sex service.[32] Despite being unable to offer secure employment and physical protection of its members, professional households set up in the river town of Sanshui continued to function as a subsistence mechanism for blind entertainers during economic hardship.

Wuzhou 梧州 was another area that had a rural-based *guji* community. Located in eastern Guangxi bordering Guangdong province, it is directly connected to the Foshan-Guangzhou urban

[29] Kelvin E. Y. Low, *Remembering the Samsui Women Migration and Social Memory in Singapore and China* (University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 3.
[30] Huang Shanying 黃善瑩, "Xinan mangmei xiang" (西南盲妹巷), in *Jindai zhongguo jianghu miwen* 近代中國江湖秘聞 (Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1997), 504-505.
[31] Ibid., 506.
[32] "Xinan quzhu maiyin guü" (西南驅逐賣淫瞽女), *Huazu Ribao* 華字日報 (HZRB) (Feburary 24, 1936).

area through the West River system. Due to commodity chains that had developed in response to local wholesale rice markets over centuries,[33] it is reasonable to assume that this trade route also intersected with labor trafficking. As a Cantonese-speaking region, Wuzhou also saw the development of *bayin* troupes after the ban of Cantonese opera in the late Qing and the emergence of *guji* around the Guangxu era (1875-1908).[34] Local officials, merchants and gentry were major patrons of *guji* at the time. According to the memory of former *guji* in the area, their professional organization could be traced to 1871, when a residential quarter for blind singers was established in Cangwu County northeast of Wuzhou. It started when the local *baojia* instructed constable Zhong Kai 鐘楷 to build several shelter houses for the blind and homeless and organized them to solicit donations from the neighborhood. The blind initially made a living as beggars before a group of veteran entertainers pledged to move in as adopters of younger blind girls. Constable Zhong agreed to their request to raise and train the blind as *guji*, and set himself in charge of supervising the business. Interestingly, we see in Wuzhou that a *guji* community formed on the basis of a relief home. The official sponsorship of the professionalization among former blind inmates of the poorhouse contributed to the persistent belief of blindness as a qualification for community inclusion.

Wuzhou's *guji* became a more organized profession in the early Republican period. Starting in their teens, trained *guji* would be dispatched in groups to market towns along the banks of the West River. Local people would easily recognize the arrival of them on the street and by the river when they heard the sound of bamboo clappers, a signal for their service of singing and back massage. *Guji* stayed at home and practiced massage in the day and went out in the evening to work on boats and in hostels. They could sing a wide range of songs including

[33] Robert Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 192.
[34] "Yuequ" (粵曲), in *Zhongguo quyi zhi Guangxi juan* 中國曲藝之廣西卷 (Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2009), 372.

ballads, Cantonese narrative songs and southern tones, and the customer would pay for the song based on the ability of the singer to match her tones with rhythms knocked out by the listener's hands. Their service was very cheap, with a set amount of only 1-2.5 *jiao* (i.e. 0.1-0.25 *yuan*) per song and 2 *jiao* for a half-hour massage.[35] This income rate was less than one tenth of the price set in urban areas such as Foshan and Guangzhou. Due to the absence of commercial forms of sponsorship, Wuzhou's *guji* community was unable to develop into sizable *tangs*. Some who reached adulthood were sold to boat keepers as kept entertainers or married into a fisherman's family.[36] Since fishing people of southern China were known as one of the outcast communities that also resorted to entertainment and prostitution for a living, it was not uncommon to see *guji* being assimilated into boat-dwelling groups in places where they held significant presence in the local economy.[37]

Ou Sanmei 歐三妹, a former *guji* from Wuzhou, said in an interview that due to the low income earned from singing and massage, many of them turned to prostitution. Oral records tend to blame the foster mother for pressuring young *guji* to sell sex, but evidence also reveals that coercion happened more frequently in the workplace. "We were often extorted by the boat keeper (*tingpo* 艇婆) to provide sex service in the disguise of massage. If we don't do it, she will scold us and wouldn't allow us to come back to her boat," says Ou in the interview. There were also "horse pullers" (*lama* 拉马), or hostel pimps who hired *guji* to do massage. If she acted too

[35] Ou Sanmei 歐三妹, Luo Ermei 羅二妹, Huang Caiqun 黃彩群, "Jiushehui Wuzhou mangmei de kunan" (舊社會梧州盲妹的苦難), *Guangxi wenshi ziliao xuanji* 廣西文史資料選集 vol. 11 (1981): 132.
[36] Ibid., 136-137.
[37] According to a 1932 investigation by the sociologist Chen Xujing 陳序經, there were between one to two millions of Boat People (*Danmin*) in Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian, and the number in Guangdong was about one tenth of the population. Cited in Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination and Emancipation in Late Imperial China* (Brill, 1996), 132.

seriously in front of the customer and refuses to comply with his sexual demands, she would risk losing the job.[38]

Personal recollections also stress the exploitation among *guji* themselves. They depict foster mothers as chief oppressors who raised blind girls only for profit and forced them into prostitution when they could not earn enough money by singing. Such understanding is not without its grain of truth, but it forecloses the possibility to understand the subsistence ethic of a disabled community. As an intermediary form of indentured female labor, *guji* resembled the "young *pipa* players" (*pipa tsai* 琵琶仔) of the Pearl River Delta who stood between girls sold as household servants (*mui tsai* 妹仔) and prostitutes.[39] According to Maria Jaschok, these sold entertainers served both as a source of income for the owner and her adopted daughter, and "the boundaries between outright exploitation, emotional dependence, servitude and filial submission are especially fluid."[40] *Guji* further interrogates the symptomatic regime of exploitation by showing that disability was a driving factor of integration. Adoption was a chosen strategy to bind an outside woman into the household on the promise of turning disability into a survival mechanism. Despite its hierarchical and exploitative implications, the *guji* community supplemented the function of familial care and the absence of effective social welfare systems in tackling the problem of livelihood for a disabled population. The *tang* not only provided veteran *guji* a way to free herself from the exploitation of the system but also promised the kept ones a better chance to leave the system through marriage or redeeming herself than ending up starving on the street.

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[38] Ou Sanmei, et al., "Jiushehui Wuzhou mangmei de kunan," 133-135.

[39] But also note the difference of workplaces. *Pipa tsai* refers to girls around 11 or 12 who were purchased by brothel keepers as singers. Although her duty was only to sing and entertain at dinner parties and it was rare for her to engage in sex service, she would turn into a full-fledged prostitute after 15. See Luo Liming 羅澧銘, *Tangxi huayue hen* 塘西花月痕 (Hong Kong: Liji chuban gongsi, 1963), vol. 2, 40-44.

[40] See Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers, ed., *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape* (Zed Books, 1994), 12.

The issue of prostitution compels the reader to view *guji* as an oppressive form of female labor, since blindness reinforces the idea of the female body as expendable and compromises a woman's ability to resist sexual coercion in the workplace. Reformers in the early twentieth century began to associate blindness in the working context as a form of bodily vulnerability that undermined women's ability to claim occupational status (Chapter 2). But this shift in the perception of blindness as a humanitarian concern only took slowly to convince society that *guji* was no longer a suitable career for blind women. We should be reminded that blindness, which was traditionally considered as an embedded form of professional inclusion, continued to shape a sense of belonging among women of lesser means. As we will see next, the informal and low-end service market in rural and suburban areas of the Pearl River Delta set apart from Guangzhou's hierarchical distinction of entertaining labor. The exposure of *guji* in a wider spectrum of workplaces also corresponded to evolving perceptions of disability.

3. Expanding Workplaces: From Households to Teahouses

This section focuses on the evolving public image of *guji* during late Qing and Republican period. It traces a general change in the social career of *guji* from the workplace, demonstrating that the former pattern of household performance became replaced by more routine and regulated forms of commercial sponsorship. The entrance of *guji* in public venues of entertainment also caused the stratification within the profession, as those who performed at commercial theatres in teahouses and restaurants achieved a degree of respectability by their superior skills and the fashioning a gendered image of disability on the singing stage. The increased commodification of disability, while facilitated the vertical integration of the

profession, also contributed to exacerbating the situation of lower-class *guji* who were constantly faced by the pressure of selling sex for a living.

3.1 Private Patronage in Late Qing and early Republican Guangzhou

In late Qing Guangzhou, the image of *guji* mainly appeared in the writings of literati, who viewed their household performance as a crucial aspect of Cantonese custom. A bamboo-branch poem printed in 1877 offers a vivid description of *guji* singing at a wedding ceremony: "A bride is married to the neighbor's family, with guests filling up the feast table. While in-laws are talking privately, the guests all join the blind songstress by accompanying her singing."[41] This poetry not only shows the popularity of *guji* at the time, but also provides the usage of *shiniang* 師娘 (master blind songstress) to distinguish a high-profile entertainment form. Besides major ceremonial events, *guji* were also invited to sing at popular festivals as a local way of celebration. The late Qing and early Republican folklorist Hu Pu'an 胡樸安 recorded that during the Qi Qiao Festival 乞巧節, which was mainly observed by maidens who pray for intelligence and dexterity, rich families in Guangzhou would "invite relatives and friends over and call *guji* in to sing throughout the night. Small households would follow the custom to bless their girls."[42] The important ritual function played by *guji* also captured the attention of foreign travellers. John H. Gray, a British missionary who was stationed in Guangzhou during the 1870s, wrote a letter to his mother on a wedding ceremony he attended at the invitation of "Mr. Howqua 浩官," the son of the well-known Chinese Hong merchant Wu Bingjian 伍秉鑒 whose family business

[41] Yinxiangge zhuren 吟香閣主人, *Yangcheng zhuzhici* 羊城竹枝詞 (1877), Reprinted in Lei Mengshui et al., (ed.), *Zhonghua zhuzhici quanbian* 中華竹枝詞全編 (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1997), Vol. 4, 3009.
[42] Hu Pu'an 胡樸安, "Guangzhou suishi ji" (廣州歲時記), in *Zhonghua quanguo fengsu zhi* 中華全國風俗志, (Shanghai shudian, 1923), 44.

played a major role in the foreign trade.[43] In the letter, Gray mentioned that "[T]he only thing worthy of note was that a blind singing woman sang all dinner time to the accompaniment of two stringed instrument." Besides mentioning its theme as "some celebrated hero or heroine of bygone ages," he was struck by the long duration of the song and the difficulty he had in distinguishing its melody other than "the whole singing was in a high falsetto."[44] After dinner, the guests were asked to follow the wedded couple to the bride's room. To his surprise, "the blind female singer now came into the bride's sitting-room with her guitar, and a blind man accompanied her, holding a stringed instrument."[45]

Gray's observation revealed interesting details about *guji* in the context of household performance. The fact that the *guji* was invited by the respected merchant family to sing both at the wedding dinner and in the private chamber of a bride suggested a degree of respectability she gained from engaging in customary practices. *Guji* was also known for her expertise on the southern tone (*nanyin* 南音), a genre of narrative songs in Cantonese opera that expresses tender feelings between romantic couples, according to ethnomusicologist Bell Yung.[46] *Guji* had an inherited lyric books known as the Eight Opera Scripts (*Bada quben* 八大曲本), a Qing-era collection that contained eight epic songs adapted from classical tales.[47] Those who could master all the songs from the lyric book acquired the name of "the master blind songstress who rides the sedan chair" (*dajiao shiniang* 大轎師娘). According to a former theatregoer and connoisseur, these *guji* were usually trained in famous *tang* and had the most expensive voice price, which only wealthy households could afford. Their performance appealed not only to male aficionados

[43] For a history of the Howqua (aka. Houqua) family in Canton's foreign trade, see John D. Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[44] John H. Gray, *Fourteen Months in Canton* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880) 272.
[45] Ibid., 273.
[46] Bell Yung, *Cantonese Opera: Performance as Creative Process* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144.
[47] Ye Chunsheng 葉春生, *Lingnan suwenxue jianshi* 嶺南俗文學簡史 (Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 376.

but also to elite women with good education. Unlike lower-class *guji* who walked with a guide, the mastersinger enjoyed the privilege of riding a sedan chair and had one or two attendants who carried her smoking pipe and teacup. Upon her arrival at the household, she would be carried on the back of a servant and passed through the sitting room all the way to the lady's inner chamber.[48]

Besides catering to the taste of elite patrons, *guji*'s rise to fame also suggested the increasing commodification of blind women in the early Republican era. In her interview, Wen Lirong told that when she started to be employed around twelve (circa 1916), the foster mother provided her a set of expensive equipment. These included the instrument, a nicely designed costume and some expensive jewelry. On a regular performance, she wore a set of golden bracelets, a gold necklace and four rings with one made of gold. The total cost of her outfit was about 1000 *yuan*. Besides, she was also paid with 20 *yuan* a month to cover the expenses of her spending on cosmetics, food and medicine. She used to ride in a sedan chair and was followed by attendants who carried a sitting mat, a towel and a teacup. The *tang* served her Beiqi red dates soup, which is good for the throat, and offered dim sum snacks when she returned late at night after a performance.[49] These fancy decorations and careful treatments all served as markers of her superior status as a respected songstress trained in one of the famous *guji* housholds of Guangzhou. "Only a few (*guji*) were treated better than me, and most of them were below me," said Wen Lirong, whose identification suggested that she had a clear sense of her standing in the household as well as the measurement of her value.[50]

Given the significant amount of capital invested in a well-trained *guji*, one can get a sense of how expensive her buy-out price might be at the time. Normally a *guji* could quit the Tang

[48] Luo Liming 羅澧銘, *Guqu tan* 顧曲談 (Hong Kong: Xingdao ribao, 1958), 35-36.
[49] Wen Lirong, 4-5.
[50] Ibid., 5.

when reaching eighteen by paying a withdrawal price of about 1000 *yuan*. Most did it through marriage, and the chance relied on the ability of a *guji* in developing a good relationship with her foster mother. Since high-class *guji* were treated as luxury items to be entertained and owned as concubines, the *tang* would raise the body price (*shenjia* 身價) of a good-looking *guji* and claimed a high deposit before a male patron was able to redeem her. In some cases, a trained *guji* could also be "transferred" (*zhuanrang* 轉讓) to a female buyer when she just started the career. Cuiyan 翠燕 was a *guji* from the Qilan Tang who was known for her specialty in singing the falsetto voice (*zihou* 子喉).[51] When she was fourteen, Madame Zhu from Xiguan favored her singing skills and wanted to keep her as a singer in the household as a form of luxury consumption. After negotiating with the foster mother, Cuiyan was redeemed with a body price of 800 *yuan*, which is higher than the average transfer price of 500 *yuan*.[52] The details rendered in Lirong's account illustrate the development of urban Tangs in early Republican Guangzhou, when the persistence of private patronage and the increased public exposure of *guji* turned disability into a commoditized form of labor. Unlike *guji* households found in rural townships that functioned primarily as a survival mechanism for the blind, urban *tang* expanded on the basis of calculated investment and evaluation of the disabled body in relation to criteria of singing skill, age and appearance. Judging from the owner's material investment, sales, and transfer of a *guji*, as well as the frequent involvement of patrons in the traffic of disabled female labor, the system of combined adoption and private patronage was transactional in nature. As a result of this structure, the *tang* system continued to function in a later period when commercial sponsorship prevailed in the business of entertainment.

[51] Luo Liming, *Guqu tan*, 37.
[52] Wen Lirong, 5.

3.2 The Rise of Teahouse-Singing *Guji* in Early Republican-era Guangzhou

The rise of *guji* in public was closely related to the development of teahouses in Republican-era Guangzhou. As a major form of commercial sponsorship, the teahouse offered a routine and regulated working environment for blind women known popularly as the singing stage (*getan* 歌壇). The stage was a wooden platform set on one side of the ground floor of a teahouse. On top of it was a tea table that stood between two chairs. Two blind singers sat on each side of the table and faced the audience when they performed. Sometimes a small orchestra would sit across the performers to accompany their singing. The names of each *guji* would be written on a blackboard in the form of an advertisement that says "A renowned *guji* XX is invited to perform Cantonese opera." Hiring *guji* turned out to be a profitable business, as it not only helped raise the price of tea but also attracted new customers to come to the teahouse.[53]

The introduction of the singing stage was a commercial strategy to revive the tea-drinking business. In an article that reviewed the history of teahouses in Guangzhou, the author illustrated three stages of its development: In the late Qing period, the teahouse was primarily a place for lower class people, such as porters and other day laborers who gathered to take a rest while eating and chatting. Its unsanitary condition and the lower quality of food kept wealthy people away. From roughly 1908 until 1916, the teahouse had entered a phase of transformation under the urban construction of the Republican government. The widening of roads and the opening of shops and large department stores pushed the teahouse to innovate. Its function now ranged from providing a cheap sip of tea to offering a variety of high-quality dim sums to be

[53] Chen Zhuoying 陳卓瑩, "Shitan guangdong quyi yuanliu" (試探廣東曲藝源流), *Guangdong wenshi ziliao jingbian: minguo shiqi wenhua pian* 廣東文史資料精編：民國時期文化篇, vol.4 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1979), 190.

served on newly built upper floors. The period between 1917 and 1936 featured a new stage of competition, as managers of the teahouse introduced commercial theatres besides the regular services of food and drink.[54]

The development of teahouses was a microcosm of changing urban life. Concentrated in commercial districts of Xiguan and Changdi, the "bourgeois-style" teahouse gradually replaced "commoner-oriented" teashops found on streets of Guangzhou in the late Qing period.[55] Local people understood the hierarchical divide of the teahouse as a distinction of urban taste. Both the size and the service provided by the teahouse served as class markers among a heterogeneous group of urban consumers. According to an experienced teahouse goer, Guangzhou's teahouses were mainly divided into three levels in its development. The "two-penny house" (*erli guan* 二厘館), named after its cheapest price of tea, mainly served coolies and lower-class laborers. The middle and upper-level tea balconies (*chalou* 茶樓) usually had three or four floors, and the higher the better quality of service. On the upper floors, freshly made snacks were stored within a glass container located beside the balcony seats for easy display and hygienic concerns. The later invention of the teahouse chamber (*chashi* 茶室) further brought entertainment activities such as playing chess and listening to Cantonese opera to cater for a leisure class.[56]

The expansion of teahouse theatres in the 1910s was also a response to the scarcity of opera theatres (*xiyuan* 戲院) in Guangzhou. This was due to the inconvenience caused by both the rotation system of opera troupes as well as the spatial constraints of the city. Because most troupes were rural based and performed only in areas within short-distance, they came to

[54] A Xiang 阿翔, "Niannian lai guangzhou chalou jinhua xiaoshi" (廿年來廣州茶樓進化小史), *Guangzhou minguo ribao* 廣州民國日報 (GMR) (May 13, 1926).
[55] For a history of popularized teahouses in inland China, see Di Wang, *The Teahouse: Small Business, Everyday Culture, and Public Politics in Chengdu* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 16.
[56] Zhao Guixi 招桂熙, "Guangzhou de chalou" (廣州的茶樓), *Renyan zhoukan* 人言周刊 vol. 1 no. 7 (1934): 136-137.

Guangzhou only for a temporary stay and then moved to the next rural spot. In addition, theatregoers lived outside the city gate found it hard to sit for a complete performance due to the restriction of access set in different districts at different times. Therefore it triggered the idea of hosting a singing stage inside the teahouse to meet the popular demand. After the practice of singing by blind women gained popularity in gambling and opium-smoking places, a few managers of the teahouse began to hire them to perform on stage. The four earliest teahouses that employed *guji* include Mingzhen, Zhengnan, Shunchang and Chuyi, which were located in the south of Xiguan and along the bund of Changdi. According to a newspaper report, the business flourished at the hands of opportunists who started to purchase and rent *guji* from all over the city a decade earlier, and used them to stimulate the growth of teahouses. The promotion of *guji* soon attracted a great number of customers to come, and further led to the competition among teahouses. It was thus not surprising to see that "the demand for *guji* exceeded the supply, and their living standard had been raised by the high singing price."[57] Between 1923 and 1938, over 40 teahouses in Guangzhou opened singing stages.[58] A city guidebook in 1926 listed 91 teahouses and their locations in Guangzhou. These include both "tea chambers" (*chashi* 茶室) and "tea homes" (*chaju* 茶局). The former, which only opened in the early morning and late evening, specialized in food and drinks. The latter, which opened all day and set a lower price of tea than the former, relied mainly on providing extra entertainment services, such as hiring *guji* to sing, in order to collect additional fees.[59] Performance schedules of *guji* at teahouse theatres also appeared in local newspapers at the time, and the records provided information about their age and native origins. They showed that most *guji* came from nearby districts of Nanhai, Panyu,

[57] "Guji shenghuo zhi diaocha" (瞽姬生活之調查), *Guangdong qunbao* 廣東群報 (GDQB) (June 23, 1921).
[58] Chen Zhuoying, "Shitan guangdong quyi yuanliu," 420-421, 423.
[59] Liu Zaisu 劉再蘇, *Guangzhou kuailan* 廣州快覽 (Shijie shuju, 1926), 102.

and Shunde, and a few came from distant areas such as Foshan and Qingyuan. Their age range was between 16 to 36, and the average age was 20.[60] This information showed that teahouse-singing *guji* were older than brothel singers, who stopped singing by the age of fifteen.[61] Although most *guji* started to be employed around twelve, their age of retirement varied a lot. Some exited the *tang* as early as eighteen through marrying a husband or finding a patron who were willing to buy her out as a concubine or kept entertainer, while others kept working for the *tang* in their fourties. There were still some who chose to become a host or co-instructors of the *tang* after retiring from singing.[62] The flexibility of choice, however, was conditioned by the earning ability of a blind woman. It appeared that the higher income a *guji* could get from a teahouse-singing career the greater chance she could improve her status by opting out of the household system.

In order to promote the singing stage as a high profile entertainment, teahouse managers offered famous blind singers the elegant title *shiniang*.[63] Some also covered the expense of their travel with the sedan chairs, which was counted as a part of their earning. The time for daily performance was between 12 to 4 in the afternoon, and the evening show lasted from 7 to 11. The average payment was between 3 and 4 *yuan* per show in the day and 5 to 6 *yuan* at night. Employers usually required a *guji* to work consecutively for six days in a month, and then transfer her to a distant teahouse to continue perform for another six days as a way to attract new customers. The rotation system helped raise the reputation of a few blind singers by introducing

[60] Wang Xiaona 王曉娜, "Qingmo minguo qianqi Guangzhou guji yanjiu" (清末民國前期廣州瞽姬研究), Master's Thesis, Jinan University, Guangzhou, (2010), 14.
[61] Luo Liming, *Tangxi huayue hen*, 41.
[62] Wen Lirong, 6; Zhu Zhefu 朱哲夫, "Wushi nianlai foshan wenyi shiye huodong gaikuang" (五十年來佛山文藝事業活動概況) *Foshan wenshi ziliao* 佛山文史資料 5 (1985), 47.
[63] Su Wenbing, *Hongchen wangshi*, 36-37.

competition in the profession.[64] At the height of business, tickets for the evening show were sold out quickly despite the raised price of tea. There were fans chasing after the famous *guji* across the Pearl River just to listen to a song. Those with superior skills and good looks achieved unprecedented popularity. "In the past *guji* were treated cheaply as leftover oranges on the street," as described by a local observer, "but now they were carried by chairs and invited to sing on the stage."[65] Although the observation intended to convey a sense of drastic change in *guji*'s social respectability, its description of the singing stage looked not so different from the older form of invited household performance.

A major change caused by the expansion of commercial sponsorship, however, was the creation of class distinctions within the *guji* community and the gendering of disabled female labor. This phenomenon was succinctly captured in a journalistic report in 1922, in which the author categorized *guji* into a four-tier hierarchy of teahouse entertainment. The top-level *guji* had the best voice and most elegant dressing, and they only performed at night for wealthy partons of big teahouses and restaurants. Those of the secondary tier had a lower voice price of 8 *yuan* per night show and they also worked in teahouses during the day. The third group was generally older and less attractive but had good singing skill. They appeared in teahouses during lunchtime and earned 6 *yuan* per show. They also got invitations from local households to sing at dinner parties for a payment between 2 to 3 *yuan.* At the fourth level were blind women aged between fourteen and fifty. Since they had neither beauty nor distinguishing voice to secure teahouse sponsorship, they had to eke out a living by selling songs on the street. According to the author, those who belonged to the lowest end of the spectrum constituted about half of the *guji*

[64] Wen Lirong, 7.
[65] Chajing 茶經, "Chang guji shidai zhi chalou" (唱瞽姬時代之茶樓), GMR (August 14, 1925).

population, which was around 200 at the time.[66] This survey clearly illustrated that teahouse sponsorship contributed to stratifying *guji* according to age, appearance and singing skills. Although the voice was still a determining factor of professional competence, as I will show below, blind women came to be viewed with gendered assumptions of the singing stage.

3.3 Gendering Blindness on the Singing Stage

The exposure of blind women on the singing stage further complicated the gendered aspect of Republican-era theatres. From the perspective of genre, blind women on the performing stage tended to conform to, rather than challenge, the gender norms set by traditional music due to concerns for survival and professional success. As noted in an oral record, "In the age of the *shiniang*, folk entertainment was mainly dominated by traditional genres such as the eight opera scripts. Its content, lyrics, vocalization styles and tones remained unchanged for a long time. In this way the profession sustained itself through generations of inheritance based on the combination of teaching and adoption (*jiaoyang heyi* 教養合一).[67] Famous songs such as *Daiyu Burying Flowers* (*Daiyu zanghua* 黛玉葬花) featured the classical romance of the inner chamber in eight sections, and a complete performance would last for more than ten hours. In order to suit the taste of a local audience, blind performers incorporated Cantonese dialect to the scripts and reduced its spoken parts to emphasize singing.[68] This domination of traditional genres on the performing stage, however, did not exclude blind women from embodying modern values

[66] "Yue guji zhi feiren shenghuo" (粵瞽姬之非人生活), *Minguo ribao* 民國日報 (December 18, 1922).
[67] Xiong Feiying 熊飛影 et.al., "Guangzhou nüling" (廣州女伶), *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 廣州文史資料 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1963), Vol.9, 24-25.
[68] Li Jing 李靜, *Yuequ: Yizhong wenhua de shengcheng yu jiyi* 粵曲：一種文化的生成與記憶 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2014), 23-24.

through singing, as some evidence suggested that lower-class *guji* tended to perform new genres that reflected the themes of current affairs.[69]

In the context of performance, the body of *guji* challenged the visual norm of ideal femininity due to its impaired appearance. Such was indicated from a comment about the peculiar phenomenon of *guji* wearing sunglasses despite their blindness. The writer speculated that "wearing sunglasses could help cover the defect (of losing eye contact) while it disguised their emotions."[70] In fact, sunglasses did less to hide than expose blindness in front of the viewer, whose fancying of "disguised emotions" of the blind songstress further indicated the ever-present male gaze. But what distinguishes disability from a feminine body as an object of looking? Rosemarie Garland-Thomson raises a distinction, which holds that "[F]eminization prompts the gaze (towards the female body) and increases a woman's cultural capital while disability reduces it and prompts the stare (of what is wrong about the body)."[71] The blind singer's decorative practices could thus be read as a self-construction aiming to avoid the disruption of the male gaze due to her disability. But understanding blindness based on physical appearance risks being simplistic in the performing context, in which blindness is part and parcel to the bodily practice of singing that is "culturally gendered as feminine." As the literary historian Judith Zeitlin argues, "To perform a song was to submit oneself to the gaze as well as the ears of another, and there was a perpetual tendency for the audience to conflate the physical beauty of the singer with the acoustic beauty of the song."[72] Hence the feminine voice of *guji* was echoed through the audience's imagination of what lay behind the appearance of blindness. Perhaps due to this

[69] Ibid., 50-51.
[70] "Guji de yanjing wenti" (瞽姬的眼鏡問題), *Gongshang ribao* 工商日報 (GSRB) (April 3, 1926).
[71] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 28.
[72] Judith Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh': The Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China," in Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (ed.), *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 79-80.

special form of aesthetic appreciation, teahouse goers referred to the beauty of *guji*'s singing as "mysterious attraction" (*miwei* 密味).[73] This ambiguous depiction of a special sensibility among listeners of *guji* pointed to the intersection of disability aesthetics with a gendered consumption environment. It also seemed that *guji* were desirable to male consumers precisely because they were blind. Disability in this case enhanced femininity and attractted the male gaze.

The gendering of *guji* was a means to commodify their disability. During the 1920s, teahouses in Guangzhou experienced similar changes as those in Beijing and Shanghai. While old-style opera performances had been retained, the stage came to be a circumscribed space of representation aiming to deliver performances as commodity.[74] The commercial staging of *guji* confirmed the rise of a spectatorial regime by introducing gender codes specific to the representation of blindness in public. As a social space, the teahouse also facilitated the development of love affairs between *guji* and her patrons, as those with beautiful voice and appearance (*shengse jujia* 聲色俱佳) had a better chance of marrying out of the career.[75] The teahouse was also characterized by the constant breaking of class and gender boundaries. Social comments of the time captured the deviant behaviors of a teahouse-going public that threatened the respectability of high-class *guji*. A local newspaper reported a scandal that happened at the famous Yunlai Ge teahouse, where three male audiences, identified as members of the "society of *guji*'s friends" (*miyou gonghui* 密友公會), walked to the singing stage after the performance of a *guji* named Fulan and cuddled her to join their tea-drinking party. Irritated by their wayward behaviors, a waiter threw a cup of hot tea at the men and caused a commotion among the

[73] Chajing 茶經, "Chang nüling shidai zhi chalou" (唱女伶時代之茶樓), GMR （August 15, 1925).
[74] Joshua Goldstein, "From Teahouse to Playhouse: Theaters as Social Texts in Early-Twentieth-Century China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Aug., 2003): 775.
[75] "Cuhai mangfeng" (醋海盲風), *Minsheng ribao* 民生日報 (MSRB) (December 14, 1912).

crowd.[76] The reaction of teahouse waiters gestured toward a regulated singing space, but it also suggested that the idea of raising *guji*'s respectability belied the entrepreneurial attempt of teahouse managers at securing a group of patrons. Within about a decade of development, the commercial branding and staging of *guji* replaced an older form of private patronage as new public spaces of entertainment became available to urbanities. This burgeoning consumerism, however, also reinforced the vulnerability of a highly stratified disabled working group. While higher-class *guji* adopted gendered techniques to fit the visual norm of the stage, lower-class *guji* became increasingly associated with the danger of harassment and wayward behaviors on the street. As will be shown in the next section, the social visibility of blindness in a gendered consumerist environment also triggered elite reactions to *guji* as humanitarian problem.

4. Blindness in Public: Changing Representations of *Guji* in the Pictorial Press

The print press was another important cultural location of disability representation, in which the growing visibility of *guji* mirrored the changing sensibility of a reading public. Published since the late Qing, pictorial magazines (*huabao* 畫報) had reached a wide readership based on the portrayal of social phenomena that both raised curiosities and critiques over contemporary affairs. The image of *guji* first appeared in the Shanghai-based Dianshizhai Pictorial (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報) in 1891. The illustration, which characterized a scene of household performance (Figure 1.1), portrayed a well-dressed blind songstress who plays *pipa* in front of male guests. Several women of the household stand at the entrance of the room, lifting the curtain to watch the show. The commentary informed readers of the background

[76] "Chang guji changchu huolai" (唱瞽姬唱出禍來), GDQB (April 21, 1922).

of the singer, noting that she rose to fame early in her career and was later sold as a concubine to a wealthy patron. She was not happy with her secluded life, however, and later decided to return to her old profession although her beauty had faded away.

This representation of *guji* as a symbol of elite sentimentality, however, was later replaced by mundane observations of *guji*'s public appearance during the early Republican period. The *Shishi huabao* (Pictorial of Current Affairs 時事畫報), a social reformist magazine created in late Qing Guangzhou, presented the image of *guji* in the context of expanding workplaces. A drawing in 1912 captured the spectacle of a high-class *guji* who rides on a sedan

Figure 1.1: A Blind Songstress Plays A Song[77]

[77] "Guji duqu" (瞽姬度曲), *Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報 259 (1891). Republished by *Jiubao xinwen: qingmo minchu huabao zhong de guangzhou* 舊報新聞：清末民初畫報中的廣州 (Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2012), Vol. 2 (3 Volumes), 670. The collection has included 11 images of *guji* published between 1891 and 1912.

chair and is followed by fans on the road, and criticized it as "the unsightly *guji*" (*guji choutai* 瞽姬醜態). The comment aimed to reveal the absurdity of a crowd that chased an elderly *guji* who was in her fifties and still appeared flamboyantly in public. [78] While the image held evidence to the rising social status of high-class *guji* at the time, the author's objection to overt displays of blind entertainers suggested his reformist attitude towards a decadent social custom.

Republican-era pictorials also featured a number of visual representations of lower-class *guji* and their everyday interactions with a diverse group of working-class people. A drawing showed that a group of itinerant vendors invited *guji* to sing at the *huiguan*, a temporary lodging place for travellers from common native places. Usually the performance would last until dawn, and the clamorous sound of the gathering crowd often attracted nearby police to intervene.[79] Along with other illustrations that highlighted the appearance of *guji* in a broader spectrum of workplaces that ranged from teahouses and restaurants to hotels, opium dens and gambling spots, these pictorial representations simultaneously reflected the tendency of increased popular embracing of a marginal group and problems arising from unregulated urban environment. Specifically, pictorial writers held ambivalent attitudes toward the exposure of *guji* in the public sphere. They saw the expansion of commercial sponsorship as supportive to a disabled group while also being cognizant of those who took advantage of blind women by forcing them into prostitution. Published images of *guji* being harassed by lewd customers and undisciplined patrolmen illustrated a precarious working environment for blind singers.[80] Beginning in the 1910s, commentaries about *guji* began to notice that "[I]nferior ones (*xiacheng zhe* 下乘者) who sold songs to neighborhoods along the street frequently encountered sexual insults from

[78] "Guji choutai" (瞽姬醜態), *Shishi huabao* 時事畫報 (SSHB) 7 (1912). Cited in *Jiubao xinwen*, 779.
[79] "Jingbing zhifa" (警兵執法), SSHB 2 (1905). Cited in *Jiubao xinwen*,
[80] "Xunjing guaizhuang youjian" (巡警怪狀又見), SSHB (1906); "Xunjing zhi wenming ganshe" (巡警之文明干涉), SSHB (1906). Cited in *Jiubao xinwen*, 779.

passengers."[81] This observation pointed to the result of moral degeneracy caused by increased stratification among blind entertainers as well as the lack of state regulation. But we should be reminded that these representations did less to convey the fact of what happened to blind women than to view *guji* as a symbol of disability's changing status in an evolving culture of urban consumerism. Harboring a reformist undertone, pictorial writers intended to show that blindness became increasingly identified as a marker of *guji*'s vulnerability in public.

Besides faulting the wayward behavior of urban consumers, commentators also put blame on the *guji* community itself. An illustrated commentary (Figure 1.2) captured a scene in which a crowd of lascivious men chased a *guji* as she left the hostel after a night performance. The author depicted a miserable "world of the blind" (*mang shijie* 盲世界) in which blind girls were sometimes forced by the teacher to earn extra dollars with their body if they were not paid enough for singing. In an extreme case, the mistreated *guji* committed suicide out of despair.[82] The way that "evil madams" often appeared as one of the chief abusers of younger *guji* was very similar to what happened to prostitutes at the time.[83]

In their portrayal of the relationship between *guji* and their adoptors, pictorial writers began to establish the assumption that blind women were more vulnerable to domestic abuse and harassment in the workplace, because their disability worked as a proof that they were not autonomous agents and that their work in the profession was not a result of their free choice. What used to be a professional qualification now became a mandate for putting them into an exploitative institution.

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[81] "Fangda guangming" (放大光明), SSHB 1 (1912). Cited in *Jiubao xinwen*, 771.
[82] "Guji xunsi" (瞽姬尋死), SSHB 5 (1907). Cited in *Jiubao xinwen*, 733.
[83] Gail Hershetter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 219.

Figure 1.2: The World of the Blind[84]

An illustrated news published in 1912 told of a *guji* named Wu Xingmei 吳杏梅 who was found being chained to an iron weight of several dozen pounds near the memorial archway of Si Pailou 四牌樓. Upon questioning by the police, the blind girl said that it was her teacher who mistreated her. The next day a woman named Wu Lixiang 吳麗香 came to the local police department demanding Xingmei back. After investigating the case, the official found her teacher guilty of "forcible detention" (*juliu* 拘留) and ordered Xingmei to be sent to the Home of the Blind. "In Cantonese social customs (*fengsu* 風俗)," wrote the commentary, "the mistreatment of *guji* was a hundred times more cruel than prostitutes (虐待瞽姬之慘，百倍於妓)."[85] This case purported to show from the bureaucratic procedure that many *guji* households were in fact illegal,

[84] "Mang shijie" (盲世界), SSHB (1912).
[85] "Guji beinue zhi canan" (瞽姬被虐之慘), *Tuhua ribao* 圖畫日報 (1912).

and the fact that blind women were treated more harshly than prostitutes called for institutional solutions to a criminally inflected social custom.

Popular depictions of *guji* around the 1910s revealed the presence of blind women from domestic to public spheres. Images and writings published by the pictorial press created an urban spectatorship that rendered blind people socially visible. They also marked the changing status of a disabled group along the expansion of urban entertainment. In particular, the reformist commentaries showed how the exposure of blindness to different workplaces, from teahouses and playhouses to hostels and street corners, created the impression of vulnerability as blind girls stepped into a gendered environment of consumerism. These symbolic depictions of *guji* began to link the decline of a respectable profession to the rise of social problems caused by the commodification of a disability. Such impression, as will be discussed in the next chapter, ultimately evolved into a full-fledged discourse of humanitarianism aimed at reforming bad social customs.

Conclusion

The social career of *guji* illustrated the link between blindness and musicality among blind women during late Qing and Republican-era Guangzhou. The proliferation of quasi-familial training guilds among lower-class blind women exemplified a form of transactional family building in parallel to women and children sold as indentured servants and prostitutes.[86] But what distinguished the *guji* community from slavery and prostitution was that blind women were clearly invested in turning disability into a social property that marked the competency of one's skill and respectability. Those who stood on top of the profession as mastersingers could

[86] Ransmeier, *Sold People*.

earn a fairly high income that not only elevated their status in the household but also allowed them to opt out of the system. The commercialization of teahouse-singing beginning with the 1910s bolstered the earning potential of *guji* and lured parents to sell their blind daughters into the professional household. At the same time it also created dark hierarchies in the consumption of blind women that reformist elites hoped to eradicate under the imperative of humanitarianism (Chapter 2).

From records of personal recollections and the print press we encounter few examples of *guji* like Wen Lirong who managed to buy herself out and became self-employed. The most prevalent cases were those with mediocre singing skills and appearance being trapped into the household system as adopter-teachers themselves. Even worse, they became subjects of domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and forced prostitution as a result of market pressures. As blind women navigated the complex social, entertainment and policing environment of early twentieth-century China, they encountered new expectations and enforcements of proper female behaviors in the public sphere.[87] The exceptional public visibility of *guji* as victims of sexual exploitation confirmed the fluid boundaries between sex and entertainment works in the city.[88] More importantly, the gendering of *guji* on stage and in the public also clashed with ideas of vulnerability attached to the affective consumption of disability in the eyes of reformist intellectuals and officials. Depictions of *guji* from an emerging newspaper and periodical press in the last decades of the Qing and the early Republic conveyed changing perceptions of blindness from a bodily mark of women's professional status to a moral deficiency of the social body. The emergence of a critical discourse on prostituting *guji* reflected the anxiety of urban (male)

[87] Paul J. Bailey, "Women Behaving Badly: Crime, Transgressive Behavior and Gender in Early Twentieth Century China," *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 8.1(2006), 156–97.
[88] Weikun Cheng, "The Challenge of the Actresses: Female Performers and Cultural Alternatives in Early Twentieth Century Beijing and Tianjin," *Modern China* 22, no. 2 (1996): 197-233.

intellectuals towards the corruptive influence of bad social customs. As I will show in the next chapter, spectacles portraying lower-class blind singers as victims of abusive madams and prostitution reversed the social protocol that accepted singing as a legitimate work of blind women and rejected their performance of disability in public.

Chapter Two

Disability and Changing Ideas of Social Inclusion

In June 20, 1921, four months after Guangzhou established one of China's first municipal governments, the Finance Bureau released a letter submitted by a group of blind songstresses who petitioned to withdraw from the business. The representative Lin Zixian 林梓仙 spoke on behalf of the *guji* community that they felt it wsa "extremely difficult to sustain a livelihood with a disabled body (肢體殘廢，覓食維艱)."[1] What factors pressured blind women to quit the singing business out of despair? According to a newspaper report, "[S]ince the Finance Bureau had placed a license fee of 30 *yuan* per quarter on *guji* in public venues, many teahouses and restaurants stopped hiring them, and *guji*'s life was greatly affected."[2] Another comment added that the teahouse association in Guangzhou responded to the increased taxation by ending up hosting *guji* two months before the tax was implemented.[3] Instead, managers of teahouses started to recruit sighted songstresses, or *nüling* 女伶, as a substitute for the business.[4] A journalist even made an investigation showing that opportunistic traffickers who used to procure *guji* for the teahouse now started to look for sighted girls trained as singers to revive the business.[5]

The above information revealed that *guji* was no longer an exclusive source of teahouse entertainment in the 1920s. The fact that businessmen started to replace *guji* with *nüling* registered a crucial moment when the market response to financial regulation had devastating

[1] "Xunling caizhengju feng shengzhang ling chihe guji Lin Zixian deng chengqing zhunmian lingpai qudi duqu you" (訓令財政局奉省長令飭核瞽姬林梓仙等呈請准免領牌度曲由), *Guangzhou shizheng gongbao* 廣東市政公報 (GSG) (June 21, 1921), Guangzhou Municipal Archive (GMA)-Zi-Zheng-569-18-19.
[2] "Guji shenghuo yin zheng paizhao fei zhishou yingxiang" (瞽姬生活因征牌照費致受影響), *Huazi ribao* 華字日報 (HZRB) (June 20, 1921).
[3] "Chalou jiuguan duoyi tingchang guji" (茶樓酒館多已停唱瞽姬), HZRB (April 26, 1921).
[4] "Jinzhi chalou zhao guji *nüling* duqu" (禁止茶樓招瞽姬女伶度曲), HZRB (March 24, 1921).
[5] "Guji shenghuo zhi diaocha" (瞽姬生活之調查), *Guangdong qunbao* 廣東群報 (GDQB) (June 23, 1921).

consequences to the livelihood of blind women. But this explanation is far from satisfactory, because the state's attempt to raise the singing tax on *guji* meant that they still occupied many public venues. The quarterly registration fee of 30 *yuan* was not so much a burden for teahouse-singing *guji* who could earn as much as 10 *yuan* a day. Moreover, the popularity of *nüling* needs to be explained in relation to both the stage and the sex trade. Was it simply because they looked more attractive as sighted women? How did their arrival at the teahouse challenge the professional status of *guji* and the old notion of sponsoring the blind as a charitable act? To what extent the marginalization of *guji* was affected by shifting circumstances of the market as compared to state intervention?

This chapter begins by tracing the decline of teahouse-singing *guji*, and shows that the arrival of *nüling* was correlated with increased official regulations on the sex trade after Guangzhou became a municipality. Another aspect of change was in the social perception blind women following the decline of teahouse sponsorship in the 1920s. When unemployed *guji* made reference to their "disabled and useless" (*canfei* 殘廢) bodies, what did they hope to gain? Were they aiming to arouse public sympathy towards their endangered livelihood or implore the government to reduce taxes and protect their trade? Neither of these claims, however, was granted to the blind community. As I will show in this chapter, the GMD government increasingly viewed the *guji* community with suspicion due to their engagement in prostitution and began to respond to the intellectual tide of humanitarianism that held blind women as victims of the sex trade.

1. Shifted Sponsorship: *Guji* after the Ascendency of *Nüling*

How did *nüling*'s arrival to the singing stage affect the urban appreciation of *guji*? It is hard to answer this question empirically, but some evidence from popular commentaries did offer a clue to the changing sensibility of local teahouse goers who were involved in the transitional process. An article appeared in the *Guangzhou Daily* 廣州民國日報 in 1925 captured the transition from blind to sighted singers with regard to shifting bodily expressions. "Those who appreciated the subtlety of *guji*'s singing grew narrower as *nüling*, a group of former courtesans (*xiaoshu* 校書) from brothels in Chentang, came to grasp the attention of teahouse goers by demonstrating their attractive appearance (*sexiang shiren* 色相示人)."[6] Here the commentator, by describing a sexually appealing group of newcomers to the performing stage, lamented the decline of the refined taste for teahouse singing. The background of *nüling* as former prostitutes also reflected that the professional transition had taken a more complicated route.

The initial appearance of *nüling* took place around 1918, when several retired singers from the famous brothel districts of Chentang and Dongdi stepped onto the teahouse theatre to offer free performances of Cantonese opera besides the regular show of *guji*. A woman named Lin Yanyu 林燕玉 was the first to make such attempt. Some commentators retrospectively attributed the success of sighted singers to the attraction won by their ability to make eye contact with the audience while singing, and considered it a natural advantage over blind singers.[7] This assumption of able-bodied appearance, however, oversimplified the social conditions that

[6] Chajing 茶經, "Chang nüling shidai zhi chalou" (唱女伶時代之茶樓), *Guangzhou minguo ribao* 廣東民國日報 (GMR) (August 15, 1925).
[7] Su Wenbing 蘇文炳, *Hongchen wangshi* 紅塵往事 (Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2005), 39.

contributed to the decline of *guji*. A series of performance records published in local newspapers showed that teahouse-singing *guji* still dominated the performing stage after the appearance of *nüling*. An investigation in September 1919 showed that *guji* enjoyed a predominant presence in 12 major teahouses of the city. Only once did a notice of *nüling* appear in the schedule.[8] Even as late as 1925, when *nüling* were registered with official license, *guji* still appeared on the list of teahouse performance, which further indicated that the transition did not happen as quickly as expected.[9] On the other hand, *nüling*'s background as brothel singers did not necessarily imply that they were more sexualized than *guji*. As mentioned in oral history, brothel singers were not supposed to play music at the dining table, and it was rare for them to engage in sex service before they turned 15.[10] For those who left brothels to sing at the teahouse, their age was generally older than blind singers. When Lin Yanyu made her premier performance at the Chuyi teahouse, she was already in her fifties. Another sighted woman named Zhuo Keqing 卓可卿 who later showed up on the stage was around 40.[11] Therefore the decline of *guji* in the 1920s was not, as suggested by previous scholars, a simple result of changing aesthetic standards driven by popular demands.[12]

I argue that the shift of consumed preference towards fully sighted *nüling* pointed to social changes behind the symptomatic triumph of able-bodiedness. *Guji*'s loss of monopoly over the singing stage registered a broader transformation in the workplace that characterized the

[8] The record of September 8, 1919 included a note which wrote, "Ms. Lin (probably Lin Yanyu) was arranged aid a performance [of guji]" (*jiacha lin nüshi zhuqing* 加插林女士助興). "Ge chalou yanchang guji zhi diaocha lu" (各茶樓演唱髻姬之調查錄), *Guohua bao* 國華報 (GHB) (September 4-10, 1919).
[9] "Chalou yanchang nüling lu" (茶樓演唱女伶錄), (November 17, 1925).
[10] Chen Zhuoying 陳卓瑩, "Shitan guangdong quyi yuanliu" (試探廣東曲藝源流), *Guangdong wenshi ziliao jingbian* 廣東文史資料精編, vol.4 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1979): 421-422.
[11] Xiong Feiying 熊飛影, et.al, "Guangzhou nüling" (廣州女伶) *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 廣州文史資料, vol.9 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1963): 14.
[12] See, for example, Li Tian 黎田, Xie Weiguo 謝偉國, *Yuequ* 粵曲 (Guangong renmin chubanshe, 2008), 34; Angelina Chin, *Bound to Emancipate: Working Women and Urban Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century China and Hong Kong* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 104-105.

flow of female labor between the entertainment sector and the sex market. With the growing number of *nüling* who came from a diverse background, from redeemed prostitutes to girls from poor families, teahouse-singing *guji* gradually fell out of favor, and some were even pressured to sell sex for a living. This process, which happened slowly and discontinuously due to shifting political circumstances, should also be understood as a tendency of market change in response to the state's growing interference with informal and unregulated activities that involved the commodification of a disabled form of female labor. The changing labor market of entertainment in the 1920s was an inflection point of a longer period of state intervention of prostitution that is to be discussed as follows.

1.1 The Economic Condition of *Guji* Before and After the Arrival of *Nüling*

The influx of female labor from brothels to commercial theatres had been closely related to the history of anti-prostitution movement in Guangzhou. Ever since the establishment of a revolutionary government in 1912, General Chen Jiongming 陳炯明 (1878-1933) ordered to shut down all the brothels immediately upon taking office. Subsequently it had pushed many licensed prostitutes out of the city to find employment opportunities. This short period of suspension turned out to be a great opportunity for *guji* to improve their marketability. As a local observer noted, "[I]n the past, *guji* used to make money by selling songs…But since the ban on prostitution, brothel goers had instead turned to *guji* for entertainment. Recently the number of *guji* grew rapidly as they began to put fancy clothes and decorated themselves with fashionable hairstyles and fresh flowers. Some even wore sunglasses to appear modern and liberal. Idle men bade for the invitation of *guji* to sing and paid three times more than before."[13] The depiction of

[13] "Fengliu hebi zai qiubo" (風流何必在秋波), *Minsheng ribao* 民生日報 (MSRB) (September 11, 1912).

gendered consumerism suggested the initial professionalization of *guji*. By fashioning their gendered appearance to suit the taste of male customers, blind women successfully gained popularity as desirable entertainers.

The ban on prostitution was lifted a year later after General Chen Jiongming was thrown out of power by Long Jiguang 龍濟光, the rival military figure from Guangxi who was affiliated with the Beiyang warlord Yuan Shikai 袁世凱. Although the sex market slowly recovered during the period from 1914 to 1921, increased revenue extraction through the means of heavy taxation led to the shrinking of licensed brothels. Besides funding the military, the prostitution tax was used for the expense of public administration. Since 1918, it had been earmarked for handicraft industry and later for education and road construction.[14] General Chen's return to power in 1921 further brought regulated prostitution to a close by aligning with abolitionists. But General Chen and Mayor Sun Ke 孫科 (1891-1973), son of Sun Yat-sen, also had reservations about the fiscal loss of prostitution tax revenues and thus decided on the gradual elimination of prostitution. According to Elizabeth Remick, in the succeeding period of GMD rule (1923-1927), the municipal government carried out more consistent policies on banning prostitution, but local officials never got very close to abolishing it.[15]

The deepening of official regulation under shifting warlord regimes had exacerbated the difficult condition of prostitutes. Take the example of a 5-*yuan* income of a licensed prostitute by serving a meal for the customer: 1.4 *yuan* was taken out as the "flower banquet tax" (*huayan juan* 花筵捐), while another 60 cents was extracted for military spending, 40 cents for educational use, 30 cents for public infrastructure, and 20 cents for handicraft industry. After

[14] Peng Jianxin 彭建新, "Minguo Guangzhou shiduan shixu de jinchang" (民國廣州時斷時續的禁娼), *Minguo chunqiu* 民國春秋, no.5 (1997), 47.
[15] Elizabeth Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China* (Stanford University Press, 2014), 135-136.

being squeezed by the madam, what actually left for the prostitute was less than 1 *yuan*. A rough calculation of the monthly expense for a prostitute suggested that they could barely make ends meet.[16] According to official records, the after-tax income for prostitutes from all three levels of regulated brothels was less than 40% of the payment by customers.[17]

Before the arrival of *nüling*, *guji* who worked in urban teahouses got better wages than licensed prostitutes. As discussed in Chapter 1, the first decade of the Republic saw the peak of *guji*'s economic status in major commercial theatres of the city, and high demand for *guji* in teahouses further stimulated the expansion of the *tangs*. On average, a regularly employed *guji* in the singing stage earned an income of about 10 *yuan* for two shows a day. As mentioned before, the income of *guji* was not taxed before 1921, and the license fee of 30 *yuan* a quarter was not as great a burden for high-ranking *guji* who sang at the teahouse.

The better payment at commercial theatres, however, had driven many brothel singers to quit their job and change their professional identity. According to oral records of former *nüling*, their average earnings at the teahouse were between 5 to 10 *yuan* for major roles and 2 to 5 *yuan* for minor roles in a show.[18] Their rise as a professional group probably began after 1924, when the Finance Bureau agreed to the request of businessmen to register *nüling* with an official license that cost 30 *yuan* per month. Although the singing tax for *nüling* was three times more than the amount paid by *guji*, singing in the teahouse was a more decent job than working in brothels. Between 1918 and 1930, the number of *nüling* in Guangzhou had increased

[16] *Dazhong ribao* 大眾日報 (January 15; June 12, 1935).
[17] The percentages of after-tax income for prostitutes from high, middle and lower-class brothels were respectively 38.63%, 31.25% and 18.60%. See GMR (June 29, 1929).
[18] Xiong Feiying et.al, "Guangzhou nüling," 15.

significantly from around 50 to 200, and had reached 300 by 1936.[19] The influx of *nüling* took place at a time when *guji* still appeared on the singing stage, although they were gradually in decline due to the shifted patronage. In 1927, 204 registered *guji* were reported from an investigation carried by the municipal police, and a total number between 700 and 800 was estimated by the leader of a women's organization.[20]

Nüling's entry into commercial theatres ended *guji*'s monopoly, a form of state-sanctioned commercial patronage based on the combination of charity and consumption. Journalist accounts captured the transformation of the singing stage before and after *nüling* gained popularity. A teahouse goer commented on the pleasurable activities of "listening to *guji* and watching *nüling*" (聽瞽姬，看女伶), which indicated that blind singers were still distinguished by their voice despite the emphasis of the male gaze. [21] It is important to recognize the coexistence of two professional groups during a period of perceived decline of *guji*. As shown in oral records, *nüling* initially performed old-type opera songs together with *guji*, and their daily payment was only 1.4 *yuan*. The two groups later collaborated on blending classical Cantonese opera genres with local folk songs, and added modern lyrics selected from popular literature of the time.[22] As *nüling* came to embody the modern style of singing, *guji* slowly retreated from the stage. The last *guji* to sing at teahouse theatres was Guimei, who stepped down from the stage in 1927.[23] The same year when the historian Gu Jiegang visited Guangzhou, he took notes of an experience of listening to Cantonese opera sang by a *guji* named Xue Qing at

[19] The period between 1927 and 1936 witnessed the dominance of *nüling*, which was about a decade after their entry to commercial theatres. See Xiong et.al, 15; Wu Su, Huang Yuqiong, Luo Zhiwei, Huang xiaohua, "Guangzhou *nüling* buyi," *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cungao xuanbian*, Vol.6 (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2008), 243-244.
[20] "Shiqu nei guji renshu zhi diaocha" (市區內瞽姬人數之調查), GMR (May 23, 1927); "Deng Huifang wei guji qingming" (鄧惠芳為瞽姬請命), GMR (May 12, 1927).
[21] "Yincha" (飲茶), GMR (July 18, 1925).
[22] Wu Su et.al, "Guangzhou nüling buyi," 244.
[23] Su Wenbing, 41.

his friend's place. In his diary, Gu wrote on the eye-catching scene of blind girls wearing sunglasses and standing on a side of the Huiai Street with hired guides next to them.[24] It showed that during a time of decline, many *guji* resorted to the old form of call-in performance for a living.

Toward the end of the 1920s, many *guji* were driven out of teahouse theatres as *nüling* took up major roles on the stage. As a newspaper report in 1930 wrote, "[W]hen *guji* went in decline, many [sighted] girls learned to sing opera for gaining material prosperity. Brothel madams also seized the opportunity to force child prostitutes (*chuji* 雛妓) to study music for the appeal of customers." The author further reported on an investigation of private workshops that trained *nüling*. Interestingly, the majority of teachers were former *bayin* musicians who opened classes in places close to the residential halls of *guji*, such as Chenji and Niuru qiao in Xiguan. The model of training *nüling*, however, differed significantly from that of *guji* since it did not include adoption, but only teaching. Students could either sign a contract that lasted for a year and a half to two years, or attend classes on a regular basis and pay for the songs they have learned. The minimum instruction fee for a song was 10 *yuan* per person and subjected to change based on its length and difficulty.[25]

The training model for *nüling* was thus intrinsically profit-driven. Its organizational pattern contrasted with the professional household of *guji* that transmitted skills through established fictive kinship ties. Although in a few cases the teacher could still adopt *nüling* and made money out of it, this relationship would not last long especially when the singer established a reputation on the performing stage. Because the *nüling* model emphasized the separation of training from adoption (*yangjiao fenli* 養教分離), it served the purpose of self-promotion based

[24] *Gu Jiegang riji* 顧頡剛日記, vol. 2 (Lianjing chuban, 2007), 42.
[25] "Yihu yanxing qudi zhi benshi geling zhizaosuo" (宜乎嚴行取締之本市歌伶製造所) (GPB) (May 31, 1930).

on innovation in music genres and singing styles.[26] Mo Zhi and Luo Song were two of the earliest instructors of *nüling*. Their former experience as music workers helped train the first group of sighted women as professional singers. Among them the good-looking ones ended up singing at the teahouse while others found working opportunities in lower-class entertainment quarters such as opium houses and gambling spots. There were still many who joined itinerant troupes and performed in the countryside.[27] The flow of *nüling* in the market of entertainment was thus diverse, and intra-group competitions were more common than pressures from outside. In addition to professional instructors, there were also lay people who had little formal training in opera singing but nonetheless set up private training institutes to make a profit. The prospect of becoming stars lured lower-class families to send their girls to be schooled as singers, and this trend gradually surpassed those transferred from brothels.

The model of paid instruction and the diversity of employment opportunities help explain *nüling*'s better adaptation to a changing market of entertainment. The economic condition of *guji*, on the other hand, was depicted as increasingly worsened by the influx of *nüling*. What this meant was not simply that *nüling* were better suited to the new aesthetic criteria, but also a redistribution of female labor in the entertainment sector. According to a journalistic report, the market promotion of *nüling* reflected a change from hiring redeemed brothel girls to women from good families (*liangjia funü* 良家婦女). This further stimulated the trafficking of women as professional songstresses.[28] The preference of women with respectable background indicated a strategy of the teahouse to maintain a high-profile entertainment form in addition to the patronage of *guji*. The brokerage of sighted women as singers was also a response to the shortage of blind singers, as mentioned in the beginning. Evidence from oral history confirmed that some

[26] Xiong Feiying, et.al, 20.
[27] Su Wenbing, 42.
[28] "Guji shenghuo zhi diaocha" (瞽姬生活之調查), GDQB (June 23, 1921).

of the professional brokers of *guji* later turned to the business of hiring *nüling*.[29] In order to better understand how the reconfiguration of the singing stage created pressures for blind women to withdraw from business and even forced some into the sex trade, it is necessary to review the fiscal policy of Republican-era Guangzhou as introduction to the professional disintegration of a blind occupational community.

1.2 Fiscal Regulation of *Guji* From Late Qing to the Early Republic

Guangzhou's rapid urbanization since the last decade of the Qing had triggered the expansion of numerous enclaves of teahouses, brothels, smoking dens and gambling spots from the mainland area of Xiguan all the way to the bank of Changdi. These pleasure venues hosted a large number of female entertainers, including prostitutes, brothel singers and blind songstresses. As early as 1898, a late-Qing official estimated that Guangzhou had over ten thousand women working as prostitutes, and between two and three thousand blind women had been raised and kept as singers.[30] Concrete figures of professional entertainers began to appear after Guangzhou launched a modern police force in 1903 and put it in operation in 1906. According to the census conducted by the Police Bureau in 1909, there were 2521 registered prostitutes found in 169 brothels across the city. The total number of registered *guji* was 339, in which 197 were aged above 16 and 142 below. The investigation further distinguished *guji* according to their residential status. 262 were labeled as "supported by their family" (*ziyang* 自養) and 77 as "subsist by adoption" (*jiyang* 寄養).[31] The distinction in the method of raising blind girls

[29] Wu Su et.al, 244-245.
[30] Li Yingjue 李應珏, *Guangdong bianlan* 廣東便覽 [1898], in *Qingdai gaochao ben sanbian*, vol. 146 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2010), 368.
[31] *Guangdong jingwu gongsuo tongji shu* 廣東警務公所統計書 (1909), 197-199.

reflected that the imperial government considered *guji* as an occupation-based group formed on the principle of communal aid.

This differed from the official regulation of prostitution as a profit-driven business and a major contribution to the provincial budget. After the 1911 Revolution, the growing entertainment sector became a major source of revenue extraction for funding the warlord regimes. The Republican government ordered police stations to investigate the number of unlicensed prostitutes within local precincts and set up tax collection offices in the brothel district of Chentang. But it was not until 1921 that *guji* became a target of fiscal regulation under the GMD municipal office. In April that year, the Finance Bureau issued a singing tax on licensed *guji* as a regular form of entertainment tax. It stipulated that all *guji* working in public venues should register with a license that cost 30 *yuan* per quarter, and the fee to be earmarked for the funding of local orphanages.[32] This suggested that the employment of *guji* was no longer an activity managed by merchants and brokers. Rather, it became a fiscal concern of the state to count and regulate a special form of service labor for the purpose of extending state protection over the livelihood of a disabled working class.

The decision to place all *guji* under the supervision of the municipal government occurred after the city was recaptured by General Chen Jiongming in the fall of 1920 and an independent municipality was soon formed under the leadership of Mayor Sun Ke in January 1921. Municipal taxes were the first and foremost policy for the new government, which needed to exert control over fiscal and institutional system independent from the provincial treasury. The largest income source was the house tax and the second largest was prostitution. According to Elizabeth Remick, the prostitution tax made up about 30% of the total revenue in 1921 and 21%

[32] "Xunling caizhengju weiyuanhui yijue ge yingye changsuo yanchang guji dingshou paizhaofei an" (訓令財政局委員會議決各營業場所演唱瞽姬定收牌照費案), GSG (April 7, 1921), GMA-Zi-Zheng-569-8-2.

in 1922, while it declined to 10% in the second half the 1920s due to the growth by leaps and bounds of the budget.[33] The license fee paid by *guji*, however, only constituted a very small percentage of the city revenue. It belonged to the entertainment tax collected primarily from opera houses, cinemas, performing arts venues and ballrooms. In the fiscal year 1922, the opera house tax, which ranked top in the entertainment tax, was about 2.5% of the total revenue. The singing tax placed on *guji* only made up less than 1% of surtaxes collected in teahouses and restaurants.[34] Despite their minor contribution to the municipal budget, *guji* was the only professional group among the disabled that received official recognition. The blind who worked as fortunetellers and beggars did not appear to the state as distinct occupational communities until the 1930s, when official investigations carried out during the reforms of popular religion and vagrancy found that the vast majority of the two groups were blind and disabled (Chapter 5).

Moreover, the regulation of *guji* was symbolically central to the municipal administration of social welfare. Beginning in August 1921, the Finance Bureau held merchants of teahouses, restaurants and hostels responsible for the collection of license fees from *guji*. The government announced to the public that licensing of *guji* was a matter "related to charitable deeds" (*guanxi shanju* 關係善舉) since the money was earmarked for the operation of the foundling home.[35] Thus the official rationale of turning the taxable income of *guji* into a source of welfare provision further revealed the interest of municipal authorities in keeping the commercial patronage of a disabled group while placing it firmly under the watch of the state.

[33] Elizabeth Remick, *Regulating Prostitution*, 123-124.
[34] *Guangzhou shizheng gongbao huikan* 廣州市政公報匯刊 (Guangzhou: 1922), 55-57. See also *Guangzhou shi zhi* 廣州市志財政稅務志, Vol. 9, Part 2 (Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 1999), 12-15.
[35] "Caizheng bugao: shinei chalou jiuguan ludian ji gonggong yule changsuo yanchang guji xufu benju qingling paizhao shizhun yanchang" (財政佈告：市內茶樓酒館旅店及公共娛樂場所演唱瞽姬須赴本局請領牌照始准演唱), GSG (August 16, 1921), GMA-Zi-Zheng-570-26-19.

The fiscal regulation of *guji* intersected with a changing commercial environment in which owners of teahouses and restaurants began to hire *nüling*. Initially, the government objected to the request made by some businessmen for employing *nüling* at teahouses. As local authorities stated in a reply, "[B]ecause *guji* have no other choice than singing songs for a living, the government made little intervention of their livelihood out of sympathy for their disability (*canfei wugao* 殘廢無告)…As for *nüling*, who are not disabled people and have been regularly employed in theatres, it is inappropriate to debase yourself [by emulating the career of *guji*]." The government further refuted their claim to distinguish themselves from brothel singers (*geji*), and held their presence in the teahouse as equally "harmful to the social custom" (*shehui fengsu zhihai* 社會風俗之害).[36] The unwillingness of the government to grant sighted women the access to teahouse theatres can be partly explained from its charitable concern for the disabled, since lifting the restriction on *nüling* would end *guji*'s monopoly over the singing stage. Another reason, as indicated from the official response, was the fear of contaminating public morals. Here it was the connotation of *nüling*'s former identity as brothel singers that led the state to view them with suspicion.

In practice, however, the official concern for social customs had little impact on commercial behaviors. As local newspapers reported, greedy merchants often secretly hired *nüling* to sing at the teahouse without getting permission from the government, and many of them were discovered by the police to employ *nüling* under the cover of *guji*'s license.[37] Some restaurant managers even expanded their scope of employment to include sighted women from other provinces, which, according to the Finance Bureau, "significantly hindered the source of

[36] "Buzhun nüling zai chalou duqu zhi piling" (不准女伶在茶樓度曲之批令), HZRB (May 31, 1921).
[37] "Chaju haochang nüling zhe zhuyi" (茶局好唱女伶者注意), HZRB (November 23, 1922).

revenue."[38] Responding to the increase of unlicensed activities, the state later issued an order to punish disobedient merchants who introduced new businesses under the disguise of *guji* with a fine up to 120 *yuan*.[39] But this had little check on the growth of entertainment activities. The Finance Bureau, worried about the loss of a revenue source, softened its stance towards market demands. It was first seen from the government's decision to lift the ban on *nüling* as a result of negotiation with a group of merchants. In January 1924, business representatives of ten major teahouses in the city made a joint request to register *nüling* with an official license. They proposed to submit a license fee of 60 *yuan* per quarter for a trial period of one year. Moreover, the letter proposed to earmark the singing tax for military expenses.[40] Later the Finance Bureau replied with an agreement to the request but raised the license fee to 30 *yuan* per month, and ordered all teahouses that hosted *nüling* to pay for the amount of six months in advance.[41] The Bureau also published a rule on the special license granted to *nüling* with a sanctioned period of two quarters and business hours from 9 to 11.[42]

The government's withdrawal from previous objection was a decision made by weighing its moral obligation against the fiscal gain. In terms of revenue collection, local authorities sensed the rapid development of *nüling* and the revenue they generated in the entertainment sector. It was also a time of when Chen Jiongming was thrown out of power due to his betrayal of Sun Yat-sen, and the GMD after its return to Guangzhou, desperately needed to fund its military campaign against Chen and to reestablish its fiscal power. The low license fee paid by

[38] "Zhizhi waisheng funü zai chalou duqu" (制止外省婦女在茶樓度曲), HZRB (April 3, 1922).
[39] "Guangzhou shi changyan guji shoutuo xi weizhang guize" (廣州市唱演瞽姬手托戲違章規則), GSG (May, 1924), GMA-Zi-Zheng-2051-5.
[40] "Caizhengju chengbao pi yunlaige deng shijia jiaona fei qingchang nüling you" (財政局呈報批雲來閣等十家繳納費清唱女伶由), GSG (January, 1924), GMA-Zi-Zheng-573-113-60.
[41] "Caizhengju bugao qingchang nüling zhuojia yuexiang you" (財政局佈告清唱女伶酌加月餉由), GSG (June 11, 1924), GMA-Zi-Zheng-573-134-35.
[42] "Guangzhou shi tezhun qingchang nüling paizhao zhangze" (廣州市特准清唱女伶牌照章則), GSG (May, 1924), GMA-Zi-Zheng-2051-5.

guji was perhaps another reason for the lack of official resistance. It was reported that only around 250 registered *guji* who paid their license for the first three months. The acceptance of *nüling* as a legitimate career ended the monopoly of *guji* and a charitable form of commercial sponsorship by the end of the 1920s.

Although the fiscal concern was lurking behind the state's regulation of *guji*, a more urgent concern was that *guji* came to be seen as victims of prostitution as they lost their sponsorship. The official regulation of *guji* gradually shifted from exerting fiscal control to banning the profession out of moral scruples about *guji*'s engagement in sex work. This change, as I will show next, was triggered by an intellectual tide of humanitarianism that linked *guji* to social customs, commodification and the sex trade.

2. From Stigma to Social Problem: *Guji* and the Rise of Humanitarian Sentiment

The moment when the *guji* appeared as a victim of her chosen career signified the rise of humanitarian sentiment in the public sphere. As early as the mid 1910s, intellectuals began to associate blindness with problems of women's sexuality in the context of local customs. The first strand of critique was seen by discussions on the cause of *guji*'s blindness. The literatus Xu Ke 徐珂 (1869-1928) recorded that not all *guji* were born with blindness. The foster mother would select the good-looking ones and blind them through rubbing their eyes. They were thus kept as singers until being sold into concubinage for a high price.[43] Similar descriptions of *guji* as an intended disablement of the female body appeared in elite commentaries as an "evil custom" (*e'su* 惡俗). The literary critic Jin Yimou noted the cruelty of the madam who "used drugs to

[43] Xu Ke 徐珂, "Mangmei tanchang" (盲妹彈唱), in *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔, vol. 36 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1917), 28.

induce blindness in order to keep girls from running away." Jin also speculated that blindness turned girls into docile servants by depriving them of their ability to choose customers based on one's appearance.[44] Criticisms over the inhumane treatment of women as *guji* further gained momentum through the circulation of popular fiction that took "social customs" (*fengsu* 風俗) as its theme. In 1918, a short essay entitled "blind singing girls" (*mangmei* 盲妹) appeared in the reformist magazine *Xiaoshuo congbao* (Fiction Collection 小說叢報). In it, the author traced the origin of keeping blind girls as entertainers since the Qing dynasty, when many women in Guangdong fell victims to leprosy, and people blinded them to mark their contagiousness and then taught them to play music for a living. As *guji* gained popularity, the economic prospect had lured ignorant families to blind their own daughters as a way to enter the career. [45] Here the tragic fate of blind girls could be read as a metaphor for the corrupting of social customs. Although it was hard to determine the truth of this explanation, it served to reinforce the notion of blindness as a deliberate cause of human cruelty.

The victimization narrative also pointed to a more perplexing legacy of medical thinking placed on the imagination of blindness and the female body. As described by Angela Leung, Ming and Qing-era doctors and amateurs in medicine saw women in Guangdong as particularly vulnerable to leprosy and its induced blindness because of their cosmic receptiveness to the miasmatic southern environment. Moreover, the contagiousness of leprosy was closely related to prostitution.[46] Interestingly, this line of reasoning continued to shape Republican-era social perceptions of blind women as vulnerable and precarious. As indicated above, the fear of leprosy served to rationalize the practice of blinding as a way of marking contagious bodies, and it was

[44] Jin Yanyi 金燕翼 (Yimou 翼謀), Xianglian shihua 香奩詩話 (Shanghai : Guangyi shuju, 1915), 19a-b.
[45] Qinglin 慶林, "Mangmei" (盲妹), *Xiaoshuo congbao* 小說叢報, vol. 4, 6 (1918), 1.
[46] Angela Ki-Che Leung, *Leprosy in China: A History* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 120; 121-122.

further used to perpetuate the myth of healthy girls being blinded as a result of commodification.[47] The medical construction of blindness as a marker of disease also influenced how ordinary people interacted with blind people. As shown in oral records, *guji* sometimes encountered bodily discrimination when performing at households. "Everyone knows that blindness is not contagious," said Wen Lirong in her interview, "but people often treated us as lepers. When invited to sing at someone's home, we were not allowed to sit on chairs and drink with teacups. It seems as if things touched by us were toxic."[48] Although speaking in the context of forced disclosure of personal trauma, Lirong's account inadvertently pointed to the persistent stigma attached to the blind songstress.

Earlier discussions about the social practice of disablement thus combined notions of a bodily stigma with the moral decay caused by increased commodification of blindness. But they did not challenge the occupational legitimacy of *guji* until their later metamorphosis into a new strand of criticism over blindness as a problem of women's sexuality. A critic once mentioned the practice of "stewing marine worms" (*dun hechong* 燉禾蟲), an expression in Cantonese dialect that employed a local dish as the visual metaphor of having sex with a blind songstress. In the article, the author first explained the practice of blinding girls into singers as a decision made by their buyers, who were ambiguously depicted as elderly women who kept blind singers for a living. Then the article turned to discuss why some engaged in prostitution. These "marine worms," according to the writer, were older *guji* who became unpopular in the singing stage and were forced to sell sex for a living, and they became carriers of venereal diseases due to

[47] Similar comments appeared as late as the 1930s, when writers invoked leprosy to warn urbanities the danger of having sexual intercourse with blind women as well as blaming the practice of blinding healthy women into the profession. See Mengjue 夢覺, "Mangmei zhi zhengpa shengya" (盲妹之箏琶生涯), *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 1932, July, 2.
[48] Wen Lirong, "Guangzhou shiniang," *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao*, vol. 9 (1963), 11.

blindness.[49] This comment significantly enriched earlier critiques by linking the human cause of blindness to an exploitative system of adoption, and it further tied the stigma of blindness to polluted female sexuality. The unappealing metaphor of having sex with blind songstresses also became a popular sarcasm about the abnormal sexual appetite of Guangzhou people.[50] Some newspapers paired the phrase with images showing a *guji* being led by her guide as a way to call the reader's attention to a deviant social practice.[51]

There were other articles that used realistic depictions of *guji* to convince the reader of the truth behind the metaphor. One article mentioned specific locations where people could look for *guji* selling sex. Lining up on the street at night, they were easily identified by a passerby as the guide carried a lantern besides, and one could see from afar that these blind women wore deep blue sunglasses and were well dressed. After negotiating a price, the customer would take her to a nearby hostel. The payment of their services was calculated based on time, and it ranged from 0.3 to 6 *yuan*.[52] Some observers estimated the earning of sex work to be less than 1 yuan and saw *guji*'s life as even worse than lower-class prostitutes. The only way to prevent *guji* from engaging in prostitution, according to one author, was through social relief (*shehui jiuji* 社會救濟).[53] These meticulously documented figures and the seeming construction of "eye-witness accounts," however, should not be taken as mere facts but rather as subjective reactions to *guji*'s falling prey to the sex market as a result of people's ignorance and unsympathetic treatment of the blind. More importantly, these metaphorical and realistic portrayals of *guji* frequently invoked the term "brutal inhumanness" (*canwu rendao* 慘無人道) to raise public awareness of

[49] Laoxin 勞心, "Guangzhou de mangji" (廣州的盲妹), *Renyan zhoukan* 人言周刊 1, 45 (1934), 927.
[50] Roanna Cheung has examined the metaphor as part of a satirical trope in Republican-era short stories that took concubinage and prostitution as their themes of social critique. See Roanna Yuk-Heng Cheung, "Embodying Modernity: Humor, Gender Politics, and Popular Culture in Republican Guangzhou" (PhD Diss., UCLA, 2016), 181.
[51] "Dun hechong" (燉禾蟲), *Zhujiang* 珠江 16 (1928), 20.
[52] Gupeng, "Guangzhou mangmei" (廣州盲妹), *Shanghai bao* 1935, Feb, 8.
[53] Zhi Da 志達, "Guji de shenghuo" (瞽姬的生活), GMR (Dec. 26-28, 1931).

the intolerable cruelty. The women's magazine *Linglong* called *guji* a "special class of women" (*teshu jieji de funu* 特殊階級的婦女) being oppressed by society's indifference to the plight of the disabled.[54] The deviant sexual labor of *guji* was also interpreted by a leftist writer as a product of the Capitalist commodity economy that forestalled the existence of "human compassion" (*renlei di tongqing* 人類底同情).[55] The evolving humanitarian critiques ultimately aimed at questioning the legitimacy of a disabled working class.

From the 1910s to 1930s, the emergence of a humanitarian discourse surrounding *guji* changed from tracing the cause of blindness as a stigma attached to the female body to revealing the social problem of *guji* as victims of prostitution. Although these commentaries in the news media did not share a common solution to the problem of blindness in relation to issues of enslavement, commodification and sexual exploitation, their circulation helped trigger public awareness of *guji* as an embedded form of social inequality. The persistence of victim narrative once triggered the government to investigate the family background of blind girls who had been adopted as singers, but officials found no evidence that their blindness was intentionally caused.[56] Compared to its previous function to shape a discourse of humanitarianism, the recirculation of the victimization narrative demonstrated the popular recognition of the urgency to reform *guji*. As I will show below, it was the public anxiety over *guji*'s falling prey to the sex trade that led the state to carry out full-fledged intervention.

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[54] Li Yaofang 李耀芳, "Guji-yizhong teshu jieji de funu" (瞽姬一種特殊階級的婦女) *Linglong* 玲瓏 3, 15 (1933), 640.
[55] Yao Yinzhong 姚寅仲, "Guangzhou di mangmei" (廣州底盲妹), *Funu shenghuo* 婦女生活 1, 3 (1935), 119-120. See also Huang Wan 黃頑, "Mangmei" (盲妹) *Chunse* 春色 3, 11 (1937), 18.
[56] "Shiting zhuyi guji shenshi" (市廳注意瞽姬身世), HZRB (May 14, 1921).

3. Tainted Profession: *Guji* during Anti-Prostitution Campaign: 1923-1929

With the shifted commercial sponsorship, the problem of immoral conduct began to capture the attention of the government. Before *nüling* were given official license, the government held ambivalent attitudes toward redeemed brothel singers, whose conversion did not free them from the assumption of promiscuity that threatened social morals. This was evident from a letter submitted by local people who petitioned to "ban *nüling* from singing and reform public morals" (禁唱女伶，以端風化).[57] But the fact that some *guji* turned to prostitution as a result of economic pressure was seen by the state as more detrimental to the public order. As early as 1923, shortly after the GMD reestablished its rule of Guangdong, the provincial government received a letter submitted by the Central Party Committee calling to "ban *guji* from singing and selling sex" and "to restore social morals in the cause of humanitarianism."[58] Three days later, Mayor Sun Ke issued an order on the urgency to ban *guji* from selling sex. This was published after Mayor Sun received a report from the Public Health Bureau on the discovery of syphilis in a medical examination of blind singers. "Because they [*guji*] were blind and hence unable to distinguish if someone has contracted leprosy and syphilis," wrote the report, "they got infected from having sex and then transmitted the disease to others."[59] The concern of public health surely alarmed the government to *guji*'s bodily vulnerability, if not her moral disgrace.

In May 1924, local police reported on an arrest of about 80 *guji* selling sex in lower-class hostels, and 19 among them were captured during a night arrest in hostels near Rongyang and

[57] "Nüling yizu gonghui" (女伶已組工會), HZRB (April 18, 1924).
[58] "Yanjin guji maichang maiyin zhi niyi" (嚴禁瞽姬賣唱賣淫之擬議), GMR (June 23, 1923).
[59] "Xunling gonganju ju weishengju chengqing yanjia qudi guji you" (訓令公安局據衛生局呈請嚴加取締瞽姬由), GSG (June 26, 1923), GMA-Zi-Zheng-572-80-30.

Jingyuan Streets.[60] In January 1926, after an increasing number of *guji* formerly engaged in indoor performances had been discovered to commit prostitution out of living pressures, the municipal government launched a systematic effort to prohibit *guji* from engaging in prostitution.[61] The government also ordered the Bureau of Education to work with local charity groups on planning a rescue home for blind singers, and instructed the arrested ones to be temporarily sent to the Home of the Blind.[62] Recognizing the harm these *guji* prostitutes had brought to the moral order, the Police Bureau submitted a letter in August 1926 to the government asking to revoke the license of *guji* in hopes of eliminating the problem from its source. Upon consulting with the Finance Bureau, however, the proposal for banning *guji* was rejected out of the concern for its reduction of city revenues. Instead, the state issued a new regulation on the practice of *guji.* Besides the compulsory registration and display of license in public venues, it also specified the numbers and hours of performance, recommending no more than two singing *guji* for an evening show that lasted until midnight. The police was further instructed to immediately arrest those who stayed in hostels and accosted customers on the street.[63]

The hesitance of local authorities to enforce a complete ban on *guji* was also due to the lack of an available institution to house a large number of rescued blind women. In June 1927, when a full-scale police arrest was underway, the plan to establish a reformatory for *guji* only started to be discussed in terms of deciding on a location and seeking for instructors who had experience in special education. "Because the total number of *guji* was reported to be over 500,"

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[60] "Nahuo dabang maiyin guji" (拿獲大幫賣淫瞽姬), *Xianxiang bao* 現象報 (May 21, 1924).
[61] "Ling gonganju shinei duqu mangmei yangcong chajin" (令公安局市內度曲盲妹嚴從查禁), GSG (January 12, 1926), GMA-Zi-Zheng-577-214-30.
[62] "Shiting shefa anzhi guji" (市廳設法安置瞽姬), GMR (January 13, 1926).
[63] "Gongan caizheng liangju tiyi qudi yanchang guji jianze an" (公安財政兩局提議取締演唱瞽姬簡則案), GSG (August 20, 1926), GMA-Zi-Zheng-578-230-19, 27.

according to a report, "it is hard to turn them in unless there is a spacious location."[64] In response to the problem, the government ordered the Fangbian Hospital 方便醫院, a renowned charity hall run by wealthy merchants, to clear half of its building space for the temporary housing of *guji*.[65] This order, however, encountered a funding problem. After the Bureaus of Education and Public Health requested the government for total amount of 4000 *yuan* to be spent on the operation and maintenance of the *guji* reformatory,[66] the Finance Bureau refused to pay immediately on the ground that the temporary expense should be listed in a separate budget waiting to be fulfilled.[67] A government official later recommended that the license fee of *nüling* be earmarked for the education of *guji*.[68] Due to the lack of housing and financial constraints, local police had to release a number of arrested *guji* back to singing.[69] This process of negotiating a space for the education of fallen *guji*, as will be discussed later, featured the municipality's management of disability through reconfiguring social welfare.

The phenomenon of *guji* secretly committing prostitution received wider public attention through a series of police investigation. The head of the Police Department reported that among 204 registered *guji* in the city, there were several dozens arrested for prostitution. The pressure of selling sex, according to the report, both came from the exploitation of the madam and the difficulty of living as singers. "Such disabled blind persons (殘廢無告之盲人)," wrote the police chief, "truly deserved public sympathy and protection by social morals and humanitarianism."[70]

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[64] "Choushe guji jiaoyang yuan zhi jinxing" (籌設瞽姬教養院之進行), HZRB (June 1, 1927).
[65] "Guangzhou shi gongan ju xianni choushe guangzhou guji shourong suo" (廣州市公安局現擬籌設廣州瞽姬收容所), HZRB (June 16, 1927).
[66] "Kaiban gunü jiaoyangyuan linshi fei an" (開辦瞽女教養院臨時費案), GSG (March 7, 1928).
[67] "Ling jiaoyu ju guangyu gunü jiaoyangyuan linshi fei ying xianbian yusuan zaixing hefa you" (令教育局關於瞽女教養院臨時費應先編預算再行核發由), GSG (May 4, 1928), GMA-Zi-Zheng-580-292.
[68] "Nizheng nüling paizhao fei chong jiaoyangyuan jingfei an" (擬征女伶牌照費充教養院經費案), GSG (June 4, 1928), GMA-Zi-Zheng-581-295-24.
[69] "Shourong guji an" (收容瞽姬案), GSG (February 25, 1928), GMA-Zi-Zheng-580-285-47.
[70] Ibid.

The municipal government also used the case as an opportunity to reform social customs. In 1928, after the GMD established the Nanjing Government, the succeeding Mayor Lin Yungai 林雲陔 (1881-1948) issued a statement to Guangzhou people on the official resolution of rescuing degraded *guji*. As Mayor Lin spoke, "[C]onsidering the absence of rescue homes for *guji*, it was urgent to restrict the madams from coercing *guji* into prostitution."[71] Couched in the language of humanitarianism and social morals (*rendao fenghua* 人道風化), the new regime's decision to place all practicing *guji* within state custody revealed its aim to destroy the system of adoption, which reproduced blind girls as vulnerable subjects of commoditized sex labor.

The official intolerance of *guji* turning into a debased profession (*jianye* 賤業) also showed how, during the late 1920s, the professional decline of *guji* created a legitimate reason for the state to enforce systematic regulations over occupational communities of blind people. This move to transform *guji* into a target of reforming social customs was different from the regulation of prostitution. This was evident from the fact that the arrested *guji* were initially detained in the Municipal Poorhouse (Pinmin jiaoyangyuan 貧民教養院) along with beggars and elderly disabled people, rather than the police-run institute of rescued prostitute.[72] According to a police order issued in 1929, blind girls who appeared on the street after midnight with music instruments were all considered unable to support themselves and should be brought to the Poorhouse. Those who were discovered selling sex should be immediately placed in detention.[73] Following the arrest, the state began to take new measures aimed at persuading society that it took good care of rescued *guji*. The imperative of rectifying their moral degeneracy, as I will

[71] "Lin shizhang zeji guji" (林市長澤及瞽姬), GPB (Feb. 21, 1928).
[72] "Linshi shourongsuo zanshi shourong pinmin zhangcheng caoan" (臨時收容所暫時收容貧民章程草案), GSG (November, 1928), GMA-Zi-Zheng-581-304-43, 44.
[73] "Gonganju qudi shinei guji" (公安局取締市內瞽姬), GMR (Nov. 3. 1929).

show next, further compounded the state's burden when taking new measures of reeducating the blind with proper skills.

4. *Guji* Became "Disabled": Welfare Institutionalization in the 1920s

As discussed in the previous section, the municipal government in the 1920s became increasingly concerned with the moral panic among urban intellectuals as derived from *guji*'s involvement with prostitution. Even though the number of arrested *guji* was less than a hundred, the social impression that disabled women were turned into sex labor had far-reaching consequences for the management of blindness. Street-singing *guji* became suspicious elements of moral contamination and public nuisance due to their engagement with unregulated sex work. This rationale, however, contrasted with the official opinion of non-disabled prostitutes who were perceived as a legitimate source of tax income, with the scope of registration expanding in the mid-1920s to include prostitutes working outside brothels. This suggested that local officials were able to regulate *guji* not solely on the moral ground of anti-prostitution but also on the premise that rehabilitation facilities exemplified the logic of state protection against vulnerabilities caused by private forms of exploitation.

The process in which *guji* became reclassified as the disabled marked a significant change in the official conception of social welfare. As early as 1921, a member of the GMD party submitted a proposal to the provincial assembly of Guangdong reporting on the inhumane practice of *guji*'s employers purchasing young girls from poor families and blinding them to make profits. The municipal government soon instructed the Police Bureau to investigate the matter. Although no evidence was found regarding the alleged abuse, the lack of supervision

over the blind brought official attentions closer to the issue of *guji* as a proof of insufficient welfare provision from the state. As indicated by their reply, municipal officials began to realize that many blind people had to support themselves by learning and selling songs "because the government has yet to establish relief facilities aimed at receiving disabled people." They further reasoned that such means of livelihoods (*mousheng zhilu* 謀生之路) should be banned "once welfare organizations for blind and mute were in place."[74] The government's intention to disassociate *guji* from the routine practice of singing in order to prohibit coercive sex work hence resonated with a broader scope of welfare provision towards disabled people.

In a subsequent proposal to establish the Reformatory for the Blind Songstress (Guji Jiaoyangyuan 瞽姬教養院), the Bureau of Education raised the point that reforming *guji* was an important step towards extending welfare to all the disabled so as to protect them from moral degradation. To this end, the Education Bureau invited local philanthropic elites, including the head of a missionary school for the blind, Mary W. Niles, and directors for Chinese-style charities, to draft a plan for the *guji* reformatory. Initially it proposed that a supervisory committee be constituted by representatives selected from benevolent halls (*shantang* 善堂) which would be responsible for raising funds for the reformatory. A maximum number of 250 inmates were advised for undergoing a three-year training program on literacy, which included classes on Chinese Braille, arithmetic and music; as well as handworks, such as making woven furniture and doing massage.[75] Later in a revised plan, the accommodation was increased to 300 while the training period was reduced to one and a half years. Besides the compulsory training of former *guji*, the reformatory also recommended that blind girls of good families (*liangjia gunü*

[74] "Gonganju chengbao tianjing qunxun yuexiushan bing yanfang nuedai guji you" (公安局呈報添警逡巡越秀山並嚴防虐待瞽姬由), GSG (May 9, 1921), GMA-Zi-Zheng-569-11-1, 13.
[75] "Jiaoyuju tiyi sheli guji jiaoyangyuan yijianshu" (教育局提議設立瞽姬教養院意見書), (October 13, 1926), GMA-4-1-1-183-3-1.

良家瞽女) who were aged between 7 and 15 be enrolled in lessons that taught the blind to read and write and work productively.[76]

The design of the *guji* reformatory thus exemplified a modernist approach to the education of blind people. It drew from the missionary method of enlightening the blind with literacy, using that to justify the moral authority of the state. The idea of reforming social custom through modern education extended from the *guji* community to a general populace of blind and disabled people who were now expected to be reintegrated into society as persons capable of doing work commonly seen as fit for the sighted. This able-bodied conception of social welfare marked a radical departure from the traditional logic of charity, which primarily responded to the poor who lacked family support, namely "widowers, widows, orphans, the childless and disabled (*guan gua gu du feiji* 鰥寡孤獨廢疾)."[77] Differing from the imperial promotion of ethical models such as female chastity to uphold the orthodoxy of the Confucian family and loyalty to the emperor,[78] the *guji* reformatory characterized the effort of the modern state to revitalize the concept of "teaching and cultivating" (*jiaoyang* 教養) for the purpose of dealing with social marginalization that stemmed from bodily impairments. Blindness also became a modern imperative for the state to regulate private mechanisms of inclusion due to their insufficiency in coping with an urban and industrial economy. The incorporation of disability as a social welfare category was a crucial factor in expanding state control over the most vulnerable members of society (Chapter 5).

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[76] "Xiuzheng guangzhoushi shili gunü jiaoyangyuan zhangcheng" (修正廣州市市立瞽女教養院章程), GSG, vol. 298 (1928), 17-19.
[77] According to Fuma Susumu, the official policy of poor relief preceded the emergence of private charity in the late Ming as a token of imperial benevolence. See Fuma Susumu, *Zhongguo Shanhui shantang Shi yanjiu* (Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005), 33.
[78] Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (University of California Press, 2005), 35-36.

Meanwhile, the official scheme of turning *guji* into a model group of disabled welfare recipients relied on the influence of social elites. Beginning in the 1920s, the new municipality took on more responsibility in the regulation of *guji* through deepening fiscal control and extending welfare provision for the blind. In their attempt to construct a reformatory for blind women, municipal officials enlisted the support of philanthropic elites in fundraising and institutional management. Because many charitable institutions run by wealthy merchants since the late Qing continued to function and adapt to a changing urban environment, their role as exemplars of local traditions served to advance a modernizing social welfare project. The Fangbian Hospital, founded by local merchant philanthropists in 1894, characterized the success of private charity in its effort to shelter the homeless and distribute medicine for the poor during the plague epidemic that struck Guangdong in the 1890s.[79] The official selection of the Hospital as a host for rescued *guji* demonstrated the state's intention to harness its reputation for managing a comprehensive social welfare program.

The process of state interference with the charitable sector in Guangzhou started in 1926, when Mayor Sun Ke launched the Committee of Social Welfare (Cishan shiye weiyuanhui 慈善事業委員會) for the purpose of "investigating, reforming and reconstructing" preexisting charitable organizations. The Committee mainly consisted of members from the Association of Philanthropic Corps (Shantuan zonghui 善團總會) who were also leaders of the Canton merchant guilds, including famous businessmen Liang Peiji 梁培基 and Hu Songtang 胡頌堂. It also featured the supervision by high-level GMD officials who served as heads of the Bureaus of Education, Public Health and Municipal Police.[80] This combination enabled local officials to

[79] Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 27-28.
[80] "Cishan shiye weiyuanhui chengli xiaoshi" (慈善事業委員會成立小史), GMA-4-01-2-24.

exert greater influence over the public sphere through economizing resources. For example, the Police Bureau was able to extract 20 thousand yuan from a realty investment of the Guangren Charity Hall (Guangren shantang 廣仁善堂) for the purpose of building a jail.[81] In his ambitious plan to reform and expand social welfare facilities, Sun Ke argued that over half of the funding should be subsidized by charitable properties (*shanchan* 善產).[82] In May 1927, the Public Health Bureau (Weishengju 衛生局) issued an order to reform the Fangbian Hospital by investigating its budget on clinical treatment and public hygiene, as well as burial services. Later a proposal to takeover the entire Hospital was submitted during a meeting of municipal officials on the ground of its reported mismanagement.[83]

Not surprisingly, such a regulatory push to place private assets under official control encountered immediate resistance from philanthropic elites. In July 1927, managers of the Fangbian Hospital submitted a signed petition on behalf of 80 households of the local neighborhood against the confiscation of charitable property. They advocated keeping the Hospital for the needy poor in northern and eastern corners of the city who had been relying on free medical treatment and proper burial for a long time.[84] This strategic deployment of popular support pushed the government to step back and reconsider its plan to reform the Hospital into a temporary reformatory for blind women while maintaining its older function to provide for the homeless and indigent. The lack of funding for the renovation of the Hospital, as indicated from a following response, constituted yet another challenge to the official promise of "rescuing *guji*

[81] "Cishan shiye weiyuanhui huiyi ji" (慈善事業委員會會議記), GMR (February 22, 1927).
[82] "Benshi cishan shiye zhi xin jihua" (本市慈善事業之新計劃), GMR (November 20, 1926).
[83] "Weisheng ju diaocha Fangbian yiyuan jibi zhi chengfu" (衛生局調查方便醫院積弊之呈復), GMR (May 11-13, 1927).
[84] "Guangzhou shi cishan shiye weiyuanhui di sanshi ci huiyi yishilu" (廣州市慈善事業委員會第三十次會議議事書), GMA-4-1-1-183-3-2.

while benefiting the poor" (救瞽姬而惠貧民).[85] The plan to build a reformatory for rescued *guji* was suspended until September 1929 when a new planning committee was assembled to engage in fundraising, but no progress was reported thereafter.[86]

Meanwhile, the state, in realizing the financial difficulty to meet the demand for an enlarged scope of welfare coverage, decided to place *guji* into the Municipal Poorhouse (Shili Pinmin Jiaoyangyuan 市立貧民教養院). [87] The detention of former *guji* in the poorhouse represented the combination of poor relief with the reform of social customs, a new objective undertaken by the Social Affairs Bureau (Shehuiju 社會局) during the 1930s (Chapter 5). An early draft on the temporary detention of the indigent listed "prostituting *guji*" (*maiyin guji* 賣淫瞽姬) under the Department of Blind and Mute (*Mangya gu* 盲啞股) and specified that those who were unwilling to be taken into state custody must have the proof of guarantors claiming that they would not engage in sex work.[88] Beneath the logic of punishment was a process of forced separation of many blind people from their previous attachment to professional communities and the creation of a subdivision of the "disabled poor," who were expected to follow a general scheme of productivism aimed at reducing social dependency.[89] Interestingly, these "homeless *guji*" (*wuyi guji* 無依瞽姬) resembled beggars who should perform compulsory work for the purpose of getting rid of their idleness.

Rescued *guji* who entered the poorhouse had choices of either specializing in music or learning to assemble toothbrush and wrapping threads. It was expected that those who were not

[85] "Gongan ju weisheng ju chengfu guanyu sheli gunu jiaoyangyuan yijian" (公安局衛生局呈復關於設立瞽女教養院意見), GMA-4-1-1-183-3-5.
[86] "Guji fuyin" (瞽女福音), GMR (October 28, 1929).
[87] "Shiting lingchi shourong shinei guji" (市廳令飭收容市內瞽姬), GMR (October 16, 1928).
[88] "Linshi shourongsuo zanshi shourong pinmin zhangcheng caoan" (臨時收容所暫時收容貧民章程草案), GSG (November, 1928), GMA-Zi-Zheng-581-304-43-44.
[89] Janet Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

suitable for singing could still make a living by a craft.[90] The poorhouse later opened a singing workshop for *guji* and hired two composers to revise old-style songs.[91] In its attempt to moralize the image of blind singers, the Poorhouse later promoted singing troupes led by blind boys and girls to perform at major teahouses, where a group of 8 could earn 7 *yuan* a day, a salary unlikely to make them self-sufficient but which served as a token of respectability.[92] It was reported that blind inmates trained in the music workshop also participated in public events, such as educational exhibitions held in parks. During a national ceremony for the birth of Sun Yat-sen, blind performing troupes from the Poorhouse were seen to wear uniforms and parade through the city.[93] This reflected the state's attempt to propagate the ideal of transforming the blind into equal members of the national community through education. The poorhouse thus not only intended to include blind singers as welfare dependents protected by the state but also served to extend the message of reforming social customs back to society through the blind themselves.

5. Organized Resistance From the *Guji* Community

The official regulation of prostituting *guji* showed how blindness was understood not merely as a sign of physical vulnerability but also as a disabling factor to the detriment of public morals. But the state did not offer a perfect solution to the problem. This was partly due to the limited financial capacity in funding new welfare facilities. But a more immediate problem was that by taking the blind into custody, the state also contributed to their unemployment and hence

[90] "Pinjiaoyuan zuijin zhi jinxing" (貧民教養院最近之進行), GMR (April 8, 1929).
[91] "Pinjiaoyuan sheli guji yangchengsuo" (貧民教養院設立瞽姬養成所), GMR (May 31, 1929).
[92] "Pinjiaoyuan guji denglou duqu" (貧教院瞽姬登樓度曲), GMR (February 19, 1930); "Pinjiaoyuan guji fendui duqu" (貧教院瞽姬分隊度曲), HZRB (April 23, 1930).
[93] "Pinjiaoyuan yinyue xuanchuan dui zongli danri xunxing biaoyan" (貧教院音樂宣傳隊總理誕日巡行表演), GMR (November 9, 1929).

the inability to provide for their own families. This last section will illustrate a brief episode of organized resistance among the blind songstress during the late 1920s, showing how they used disability to justify their rights to livelihood against the moral charges of prostitution.

On July 8, 1927, a crowd of several hundred *guji* and their guides assembled in front of the district police of Dongdi petitioning for the release of a group of *guji* who had been arrested in a night raid due to their suspicious activities at a brothel district.[94] This was the first time when the *guji* community filed open resistance against the state's criminalization of their profession as "detrimental to public morals" (有傷風化), a term that was often used in the Republican period to convey legal thinking about sexual misconduct.[95] Since it happened shortly after the local government decided to build a reformatory for rescued *guji*, members of the community felt compelled to stand out and protect their trade from being threatened by the accusation of prostitution. The crowding of the police station finally thwarted local officials to accede to the demand of protesters.

On May 11, 1929, two senior blind representatives of the Houde Tang submitted a letter to the Police Department protesting against an unnoticed intrusion into the household. In it, Huang Liang Shi and Guo Shi, two hostesses the *tang* whom we have first encountered in the introductory section of this dissertation, claimed that married *guji* lived with her husband while the young and unmarried stayed with the elderly *guji* like "flesh and bones of a family (*jiaren gurou* 家人骨肉)."[96] By invoking the idea of the family and the moral principle of mutual aid,

[94] "Guji danao jingshu" (瞽姬大鬧警署), HZRB (July 11, 1927).
[95] For the rise of an official discourse of public morals in 1930s Guangzhou, see Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, Chapter 5.
[96] "Soubu saorao liubi zhuduo, lianken chahe xunling gonganju xianxing zhizhi yimian nuebi" (搜捕騷擾流弊諸多, 聯懇查核訓令公安局先行制止以免虐逼), (May 11, 1929), GMA-4-1-2-161-3-5.

the letter tried to defend the respectability of the household against charges of mistreatment and prostitution that gradually tainted the profession.

Another argument made in the letter was about the economic status of *guji*. It described the adopted blind girls as "sufficiently employed in singing" and contrasted the group with blind and elderly poor who "have no skills to support themselves and hence need to be sheltered." This further reflected the unwillingness of blind singers in submitting themselves to social welfare, which "forced (the blind) into labor training" (*qiangpo xiyi* 強迫習藝). The letter also resorted to the GMD's principle of improving people's livelihood during a period of political tutelage, and asked for the lenient treatment of the disabled (*feiji zhimin* 廢疾之民).[97] Hence the written plea offered a counter-argument to *guji*'s perceived vulnerability on the ground of collective self-sufficiency and indicated the potential harm brought by the state's coercive attempt to turn them into recipients of welfare.

Facing a defiant *guji* community, local police took a step back by claiming that they did not sanction house arrest and noted that only street-singing *guji* were targeted for intervention.[98] Then the government replied to the *guji* petitioners by explaining the living condition inside the reformatory. It mentioned that rescued blind girls were properly cared for, as each of them was provided with a bed, a straw mattress, a four-pound blanket made of wool and two meals a day. In doing so the government aimed to dissuade relatives from claiming them back and disseminating rumors about the mistreatment of *guji* in the reformatory. The report also emphasized that the blind were "taught skills according to their ability" (按其能力，授其藝術)," which meant that those capable of singing were given music lessons while others could learn how to make simple handicrafts. All blind inmates had to take literacy classes offered by hired

[97] Ibid.
[98] "Guji daibiao qing mian ruwu soubu" (瞽姬代表請免入屋搜捕), GMR (May 14, 1929).

instructors from the missionary-run Ming Sum School.[99] In showing that the blind could be educated with reading and working abilities, the government hoped to convince the wider public that it served to improve the general welfare for the blind community.

The official rejection of the moral claims raised by the *guji* household not only echoed the social concern for a tainted profession but also offered an institutional solution to a bad social custom. Doing so enabled the state to protect blind singers from mistreatment and forced prostitution without depriving them of their occupational rights. As shown from its decision to allow reformed *guji* to return to singing, the state did acknowledge their occupational rights only if they were freed from the enslavement of the household system. But creating a new "home" at the Poorhouse did not solve the problem of livelihood, as owners of the household either kept their business underground or looked for excuses of unauthorized intrusion. After all, prostituting *guji* ceased to become a problem when there was no sexual promiscuity visible on the street.

Conclusion

The municipal regulation of social welfare in the 1920s launched the beginning of a systematic reintegration of occupation-based blind communities into society as members of the disabled poor. The unfolding of the process showcased the state's deployment of financial and administrative apparatuses to deepen its control over an expansive market of entertainment while placing the unemployed and deviant *guji* into state custody, often by force. While a broadened scope of arrest helped circumscribe the activities of traffickers and underground sex sales which took place in lower-class hostels, it also encountered organized resistance from the *guji*

[99] "Pinjiaoyuan daiyu liuyuan guji zhi shiqing" (貧教院待遇留院瞽姬之情形), GMR (May 25, 1929).

community. Even when the state was able to send rescued *guji* into the poorhouse, this only served to curtail the appearance of street-singing *guji* but did not root out the embedded form of exploitation, as some evil madams coerced *guji* to sell sex within the household after the heightened wave of police arrest.[100]

Nonetheless, the official crackdown and incarceration of prostituting *guji* greatly affected the already endangered niches of community self-help and contributed to the decline of urban Tangs. The fate of *guji* was further associated with a depressed urban economy. In 1934, a local observer described that over half of the *guji* around the city were turned in to the Poorhouse, and the rest of them, about 400 in total, were forced to make a living by singing at the riverbank. The drastic change of their living condition, according to the author, was also due to the rise of *nüling*.[101] The marginalization of *guji* from commercial theaters seemed to be a longer process following the initial influx of *nüling* in the early 1920s, as it continued after the Japanese army occupied Guangzhou in 1938. According to a Japanese sojourner, "the beautiful appearance of the Chinese goze (*guji* in Japanese) is no longer seen in teahouses and restaurants. Deserted by the foster mother, what left to be seen were blind girls carrying *pipa* and begging along the street at night."[102]

The history of professional disintegration among blind singers was intertwined with the GMD regulation of social customs. We have seen in this chapter that socioeconomic concerns for the wellbeing of the *guji* community also shaped the state's attitudes toward other members of the disabled poor. This pointed to a longer process of developing social welfare measures

[100] "Guji beipo mimi maiyin" (瞽姬被迫秘密賣淫), GMR (July 18, 1929); "Chentang fenju qudi guji" (陳塘分局取締瞽姬), *Yuehua bao* 粵華報 (February 6, 1930).
[101] "Minsheng qiaocui zhong zhi mianshi guji shenghuo" (民生憔悴中之棉市瞽姬生活), *Gongshang wanbao* 工商晚報 (January 16, 1934).
[102] Han Murayama (村山はん), Wang Jitang (trans.), "Guangzhou suoji" (廣州瑣記) (1939), in *Yangcheng jingu* 羊城今古 (Guangzhou chubanshe, 1999).

aimed at transforming the disabled into useful citizens (Chapter 5). But pursuing a linear development of a welfare state model risks obscuring the various forces that shaped state behavior and the articulation of "usefulness" for the blind. We have encountered in Guangzhou that both native philanthropists and foreign missionaries responded to the change in the entertainment market and pressures on *guji* by extending the reach of welfare facilities to their occupational community. But how and why Christian and Confucian charity each conceived the blind as a distinct group of the disabled worthy of education remains to be explored. Therefore, before I bring a narrative trajectory of the welfare state to full circle, it is necessary to take a journey into the urban lives of blind people as they intersected with various forms of private charity.

Chapter Three

Enlightening the Blind: Missionaries, Blind Converts and Braille Literacy in China

The previous two chapters have shown that in the early twentieth century, a segment of the blind population that formerly belonged to occupational communities began to experience significant transformations in urban belonging through interactions with the market of entertainment and a modernizing government. The fate of the blind songstress in Guangzhou reflected a broader trend of marginalization due to the community's incapacity to guarantee economic sufficiency and respectability for blind women. Moreover, the blind began to occupy the moral imagination of what qualified a disabled person to become a member of the modern society. The state ideal of reforming backward social customs through education called for institutional protection of blind girls as objects of charity rather than consumption. Yet the intention to take the blind into welfare facilities also compounded the state's burden in reconfiguring livelihoods for the unemployed, unskilled, as well as the troubling lot of "disabled and useless" (*canfei* 殘廢) persons.

Before the modern state could fulfill the welfare provision for the blind, foreign charity had taken bold steps toward tackling blindness as a physical and intellectual deficiency. British and American missionaries (esp. under Protestant denominations) who arrived in China's treaty ports during the Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) became influential in realms of medicine and education. Through establishing modern hospitals, schools and orphanages, missionaries fashioned themselves as welfare providers for the sick and disabled poor. They perceived their goal of engaging in social services as countering the old customs that hamper the mind and body

of Chinese people and to demonstrate the superiority of Christian belief.[1] This fundamentally differed from the effort of native philanthropists who conceived of doing charity as a way to restore the moral integrity of the family and community. By setting up Confucian-style benevolent halls (*shantang* 善堂) for chaste widows, orphans, elderly and disabled poor, local elites were invested in honoring the virtue of the benefactor and protecting social customs.

The two charity models differ in several ways. First, The operation of missionary institutions reflected a more open attitude towards welfare recipients. Differing from kinship-based mutual aid societies or Confucian-style benevolent halls that categorically excluded people based on moral failings, missionary charity embraced both Christians and non-Christians.[2] Moreover, the transcendental claims to religious salvation motivated missionaries to hold strongly redemptive attitudes towards their chosen objects of care. They considered blind, deaf and insane people among those of lesser means as worthy of education and distinguished their approaches to bodily sufferings from native charity that only addressed basic needs of the poor.

The two institutional forces coexisted in Republican-era China in diversified regions across coastal and inland China, and had various impacts on the lives of blind and disabled urban communities. Extending from previous explorations of the community model, Chapters 3 and 4 locate the individual and collective experiences of blindness in distinctive realms of Christian and Confucian charity, highlighting the role of both foreign and indigenous actors in articulating new meanings of social belonging for the blind and disabled in China.

One of the chief factors that explained the institutional power of Christian organizations (esp. those established by American missionaries) was their combination of proselytization with

[1] Gerald H. Choa, *"Heal the Sick" was Their Motto: The Protestant Medical Missionaries in China* (Chinese University Press, 1990), 189.
[2] Robert P. Weller, et.al, *Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 72, 101.

social reform. Relying on an international network of fundraising, Christian philanthropy was able to establish footholds in local communities by contributing to the modernizing agenda of reformers and attending to the physical suffering and economic hardship of the lower classes as a means of religious conversion.[3] In particular, Christian schools played a key role in facilitating Republican-era progressive social movements such as anti-footbinding campaigns and the promotion of women's education. Leading Christian social service agencies such as the YMCA also cooperated with urban elites in promoting hygiene, physical education and mass literacy for workers and peasants.[4] Missionaries were also among the first to advocate special education for those with sensory impairments, such as the blind, deaf and mute, as part of their effort to counter illiteracy and abolish traditional customs that constrained the social mobility of disabled people and rendered them as antithetical to the modern ideal of enlightenment.

The missionary invention of Braille literacy for the Chinese blind, which is the focus of this chapter, set a model of what Prasenjit Duara has called "religious citizenship," namely "practices and ideas of subject-formation whereby citizens and religious subjects are created."[5] This chapter will show that the missionary promotion of Braille contributed to religious integration among the blind through practicing embodied reading. The indigenization of Braille also demonstrated a significant change in the way blind people formerly kept by families and professional organizations became reintegrated into Christian schools to receive education. I will use personal narratives drawn from memoirs and biographies to illustrate divergent paths of self-

[3] For example, see Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927* (Yale University Press, 2001).
[4] On YMCA's urban reform programs, see Shirley Garrett, *Social Reformers in Urban China: The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); On YMCA's involvement with rural reconstruction, see Kate Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[5] Prasenjit Duara, "Religion and Citizenship in China and the Diaspora," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (University of California Press, 2008), 46.

transformation during the process whereby blind individuals grappled with the meaning of acquiring Braille literacy.

1. A Humanitarian Mission: Christian Charity for the Blind in China

In pre-modern China, welfare provision for the disabled was primarily the obligation of families and kinship communities. In theory, state-funded poorhouses were mainly responsible for restoring the integration of homeless poor and maintaining the stability of imperial rule during crises of famine and natural disaster. In practice, however, the regular shortage in relief funds from the government demanded private donations from local gentry or wealthy families. The expansion of charity halls during late Ming and Qing period corresponded to the decline of official poor relief and the increase of degree purchasing among gentry philanthropists by the late nineteenth century. Poor relief in late imperial China therefore assumed the primary function of social control and moral edification rather than responding to humanitarian concerns.

The failure to address the needs of the poor further entrenched the problem of dependency. According to Hanchao Lu, the inadequate capacity of poorhouses caused many inmates to form begging guilds outside relief organs across the country.[6] A significant number of regular beggars were aged and disabled people whose incapacities were insufficiently addressed by the government and private charity. Desperate parents either sold or gave away young and disabled people, in particular those with sensory impairments, to itinerant entertainers as apprentices. In most cases, their living conditions were hardly better than beggars.

Foreign visitors who came to China during the late 19th and early 20th centuries wrote about the disabled poor from the perspective of humanitarianism. Rather than viewing disability

[6] Hanchao Lu, *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 93-96.

as merely an individual misfortune, Christian missionaries attributed the cause of disability either to ineffective medical treatments or to a lack of welfare provision by the Chinese government and social elites. In particular, medical missionaries found the problem of blindness to be especially worrying, as many who suffered from eye diseases could not afford to see a doctor, and some became blind as a result of false medical treatment. Official records showed that by February 1836 the number of blind persons in Guangzhou had reached around 4750. Missionaries estimated that this number was less than half of the local population with eye diseases.[7]

On November 4th 1835, the American Presbyterian missionary Peter Parker (1804-1888) opened the first Western-style ophthalmic clinic located in the southern suburb of Guangzhou near the Pearl River. The clinic later became the well-known Canton Hospital (aka. Canton Pok Tsai Hospital 廣州博濟醫院) where Sun Yat-sen studied medicine in his early years. Like many missionary doctors at the time, Parker considered the practice of Western medicine to be a way of demonstrating the healing power of Christianity. He was once asked to perform an eye surgery for a 16-year-old boy who had been blind for ten years due to staphyloma, an ulcer that caused the eyeball to protrude abnormally. Seeing the recovery of his nephew's impaired vision after the removal of the ulcer, the boy's uncle wrote a poem praising Parker's knife-holding hand that "opened the ways to sacred light."[8] Creating visual evidence of surgical cures was critical in Parker's effort to turn medicine into an evangelizing device. This was evident from his commissioned Chinese painter Lam Qua who painted oil portraits of patients. According to art historian Ari Heinrich, the illustration of external ailments such as cataracts, tumors and other

[7] Peter Parker, "Ophthalmic Hospital at Canton: first quarterly report, from the 4th of November 1835 to the 4th of February 1836," *Chinese Repository* 4, 10 (1836), 461.
[8] Peter Parker, "Ophthalmic Hospital at Canton: seventh report, being that for the term ending on the 31st of December, 1837," *Chinese Repository* 6, 9 (1837), 440-441.

physical deformities served as "testimonies" of the healing potential of Western medicine and its pathological construction of the Chinese people.[9]

Besides offering medical treatment to Chinese patients, missionaries also worked to alleviate the social condition of disabled people who became impoverished as a result of insufficient relief mechanism. The best-known observations of native charity works among western readers were found in the writing of John G. Kerr (1824-1901), the American medical missionary who arrived in Guangzhou in 1854 and served as the second superintendent of the Canton Hospital for 45 years. In 1873, Kerr reported after visiting five relief organs established by the Chinese government, which included two shelters for old men and women, a home for the blind, a leprosarium and a foundling hall. To his dismay, Kerr discovered that native charity exhibited no "higher motives" of humanitarianism except for the "avarice" of the administration. He noted that the foundling home was a place where female infants abandoned by their parents were received and cared for only for the purpose of selling them into slavery, as indentured servants, child brides and prostitutes.[10] Very few blind people lived in the sheltered home, since over half of the space was uninhabitable, and they had to rely on begging in order to compensate for the lack of provision from the government.[11]

Kerr's skepticism about the genuine motivation of native charity reflected the illusion held by missionaries towards the effectiveness of the western model of asylum, a self-contained system of incarceration that intended to reform deviance through scientific measures. This belief in the utility of western science in fulfilling humanitarian purposes was closely connected to the aspiration of Chinese reformers in coping with a new global order. As the historian Emily Baum

[9] Ari Larissa Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body Between China and the West* (Duke University Press, 2008), 52.
[10] John G. Kerr, "The Native Benevolent Institutions of Canton," *China Review* 2 (September/October 1873), 91.
[11] Ibid.,

has inferred from Kerr's psychiatric hospital in Guangzhou, the decision of local authorities on placing the insane under foreign care showcased a political concern for meeting modern demands of civilized nations.[12] The welfare provision for the disabled poor further extended the medical focus to a broader conception of social reform. As I will show below, missionary educators, in their collaboration with local authorities on freeing blind girls from professional households, established blindness as a symbol of cultural deficiency in social customs.

1.1 Rescuing the Blind from Social Customs: the Ming Sum School in Guangzhou

Mary W. Niles (1854-1933) mentioned that her idea of opening a school for the blind in Guangzhou began during the time she worked at the Canton Hospital, beginning in 1882. Although she was mainly in charge of the women's ward, Niles became interested in learning about the experiences of disabled people through Kerr, who was preparing to build a mental hospital. She mentioned an encounter with six blind beggars during a half-hour's walk in an afternoon along the bank of the Pearl River. Kerr also accompanied Niles that day and offered the beggars a few cash to let them come into the hospital yard and took a photo of them lining up in front of a building (Figure 2.1). The group of blind beggars included three women in the front and three men behind. Each of them was holding a bamboo cane in their right hands. Their bare feet and padded clothes were perhaps telling signs of their belonging to a local begging guild. To the right side of the picture was Kerr himself standing at the corner and watching the beggars. The contrast between the genteel appearance of a Western missionary and blind Chinese beggars reflected the racial hierarchy that informed Kerr's humanitarian intervention. Like his predecessor Peter Parker who considered blind patients as testimonial subjects for the efficacy of

[12] Emily Baum, *The Invention of Madness: State, Society, and the Insane in Modern China* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 42.

Figure 2.1: John G. Kerr and Chinese Blind Beggars[13]

Western medicine, Kerr also sought in the bodies of blind beggars for a justification of Christian charity in improving the social condition of blind people.

Missionaries held the belief that disability was not simply a physical cause of poverty but also an embedded practice manifesting the unenlightened cultural beliefs of Chinese people. Niles said that she was especially saddened by the fact that many blind girls in Guangzhou were kept as slave singers for the entertainment of male customers. She did not mention in her writings about whether or not she encountered blind singers before they were brought into Christian charity by local police, as will be discussed later. Her impression that blind women were suppressed by Chinese customs could therefore be understood as a nod to the government's attempt to carry out customary reforms in cooperation with missionaries.

[13] Peter Parker Collection, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library, Yale University.

Niles was once able to "rescue" a blind girl from their collective fate of singing. In 1889, she received an infant girl who was brought by her parents to the Canton Hospital for the treatment of the eyes. After a medical examination, Niles asked the parents if they would still like to support their daughter if her vision could not be restored, and the reply was no since "there was nothing but to give her to a mistress of singing girls."[14] Out of sympathy, Niles adopted the blind girl and later brought four other blind girls to a day school opened by Martha Kerr, wife of John Kerr, to receive education in Cantonese Braille and to learn knitting and weaving.[15] Beginning in 1906, a permanent school building was erected on 2.5 acres of land set in the Fangcun neighborhood of southwestern Guangzhou. The land was purchased with the help of the missionary society and donations from local benefactors. Niles first named the school with the phrase "lighting the heart," which later came to be known in Cantonese as the Ming Sum School for the Blind (*Mingxin gumu xuexiao* 明心瞽目學校, hereafter MSSB).[16]

Since the beginning of the Republic in 1911, the social careers of blind people began to change as the dreadful condition of blind singing girls had already caught the attention of local officials. The plan for rescuing blind slave girls was ordered by the head of police Chen Jinghua 陳景華 (1863-1913) as soon as he came into office. In June 1912, a local newspaper reported that the Police Department ordered each precinct to investigate the number of music guilds for the blind songstress (*guji guan* 瞽姬館) and discovered that some blind girls were whipped by the foster mother if they did not meet the criteria of singing during a training session. The article commented that "such mistreatment was an outright violation of humanitarianism" (似此虐待,

[14] Mary W. Niles, *A Sketch of the Light-Giving School for Blind Girls, Canton* (Shanghai: the American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1905), 2.
[15] Mary W. Niles, "Blind girls in Canton, China," *The Mentor* 2, 9 (November 1892), 350-351.
[16] Niles used the translation of "light giving" to refer to the name of her school. Here I adopt a literal translation of the Chinese term. *Ming Sum School for the Blind, 50th Anniversary Report, 1889-1939* (Hong Kong: The Standard Press, 1939), 14.

殊乖人道主義).[17] Two months later, local news followed up on the intervention and reported that local police had begun to take identified blind singers to a nearby office to make photographic records,[18] and then sent those under 11 to the MSSB. It was expected that blind girls "be properly educated in order to avoid the bitterness of mistreatment and to open up [new] ways of livelihood (施以教養，避免虐待之苦，並開謀生之路)."[19] A Chinese pictorial praised the joint efforts by local police and missionaries in receiving blind girls and "bringing great light" (*fangda guangming* 放大光明) to the Chinese blind.[20]

Niles mentioned in a report to the board of the Presbyterian mission that she received a request from the police chief Chen Jinghua who asked her to receive blind girls used or trained as singers for education. It was reported that 150 of the registered blind singers were aged under 10 and another 150 were between 10 and 16. However, the number of rescued blind girls turned out to be only 70 after the police arrest on August 8th 1912. Niles speculated that their masters must have hidden them before the arrest. Niles at first felt hesitated to train the rescued girls who were "schooled in begging and vice" alongside other blind students at the School. She wrote to the Chen that the girls needed to be educated separately in order to be distinguished from blind children sent from good families. Niles recognized the prevalent belief in selling blind girls as indentured singers. "Even if the girls could be taught an honest and self-supporting trade," as Niles reasoned, "the old custom with reference to girls held them in its tyrannical grasp."[21] Her

[17] "Guji huoke zaijian tianri" (瞽姬或可再見天日), *Minsheng ribao* 民生日報 (MSRB) (Jun. 26, 1912).
[18] "Mangmei yingxiang" (盲妹影相), MSRB (Aug. 9, 1912)
[19] "Mangmei zaijian tianri" (盲妹再見天日), MSRB (Aug. 9, 1912).
[20] "Fangda guangming" (放大光明), *Shishi huabao* 時事畫報 (1912).
[21] Mary W. Niles, "The Schools for the Blind," in *Reports of the Missionary and Benevolent Boards and Committees to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1916), 180-181.

opinion about the social vulnerability of blind girls as a result of unenlightened social custom thus echoed the official attempt to remove blind girls from the enslavement of the household.

The cooperation between missionaries and the local police force brought forth a new model of educational inclusion in place of the earlier model of professional inclusion. The compulsory education of former blind singers showcased the official attempt to deploy the language of humanitarianism in reforming social customs. This political intention was echoed clearly by the missionaries. As Niles wrote in a pamphlet explaining the educational agenda of Christian missionaries, "[W]e feel our most important work is to train our pupils for self-supporting professions…and to arouse in parents and the general community a feeling of responsibility for training and making the blind useful."[22] Here the notion of "usefulness" referred not only to the imperative of making blind people work decently but also to change public attitudes toward their potential of intellectual development. The educability of blind children was measured by a new set of skills taught in the School, which included handicraft works such as sewing and knitting, blind massage, as well as the ability to read Cantonese Braille so as to gain accesses to higher knowledge. This understanding of inclusion marked an important departure from native charity since it required the blind to behave according to the expectation of a broader non-disabled community where they became evidence of hope and progress.

With the funding from the local government, Niles established a new department for the education of the rescued blind girls. It was named "rectifying the heart," or the Ching Sum School in Cantonese (*Zhengxin Xuexiao* 正心學校). This name was a nice pair to the Ming Sum School, but to Chinese readers, it also suggested an explicit moral message for a special group of blind people who used to deviate from the right path. Now they gave up their old career and

[22] Mary W. Niles, *Among the Blind in China* (Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, 1916), 8.

Figure 2.2: Rescued Blind Girls in the Ming Sum School for the Blind[23]

became reformed by proper education. In the pamphlet that introduced this new group of blind students, Niles included several pictures taken after their enrollment.

The front cover (Figure 2.2) illustrated a cohort of rescued blind girls who stood in front of the school building while holding hands. Each of them was dressed properly with clean clothes and faced the camera with a tranquil look. This image powerfully conveyed to the audience that the slave girls had been "morally rectified" through missionary education, and they could further help to dispel the prejudices held by the public and to showcase to society their value of education in breaking away from the constraints of old social customs.

This brief episode of humanitarian intervention ended abruptly in 1913 following the untimely death of the police chief Chen Jinghua and Guangzhou's decline into military combat among different warlord factions. Beginning in 1921, the goal of expanding welfare coverage for the blind and disabled people again became part of the social policy of the new municipal regime. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the growing reception of blind people in state-run welfare facilities was achieved by the Party's supervision and control of private charity. The Nationalists were cautious about the infiltration of Christian influence through philanthropy but the

[23] Ibid., Front cover.

insufficient funding also forced local officials to collaborate with missionaries during the period of economic depression. In Spring 1936, the Ming Sum School took in 60 blind singing girls formerly held in detention by the local police,[24] and still more came to the School for refuge following the Japanese occupation of Guangzhou in 1938, as the war drove increasing numbers of families to give up caring for the blind.

The educational model of missionary schools for the blind featured a combination of literacy and industrial training. Niles learned Braille herself, worked out its adaptation to the Cantonese language and hired a few Chinese assistants to help with the translation of textbooks and Bible reading for blind students. Nearly all of the early graduates were dispatched to teach other blind boys and girls schooled in local missionary schools in the nearby countryside. By 1916, there were around 600 blind children who received an education in Christian schools in southern China and most of them were graduates of the Ming Sum School.[25] Later the School began to implement a six-year curriculum that taught Chinese language, history, music, geography, society, nature, physical education and government. It also offered practical training courses on handicraft, piano, family administration, massage and acupuncture. [26] It was hoped that after graduation these blind students could continue their education in middle schools alongside sighted students and become useful by earning a livelihood with suitable skills.

Between 1889 and 1939, a total number of 506 blind students were enrolled in the School. 128 girls and 32 boys graduated during the years from 1908 to 1939. Among the female graduates, 57 found employments in schools, hospitals, and churches in the city and countryside.

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[24] Alice Margaret Carpenter, "Light through Work in Canton, China: Ming Sum School for the Blind (1889-1937), M.A. Thesis, Harvard University (January 1937), 24-25.
[25] Niles, *Among the Blind in China*, 13.
[26] " The Graduate Roster and History of Ming Sum School for the Blind, 1908-1928," File 430, Catalogue 1, Record Group 92, Guangdong Provincial Archives (GPA). Cited in Guangqiu Xu, *American Doctors in Canton: Modernization in China, 1835-1935* (Transaction Publishers, 2011), 207.

30 were hired in the industrial sector, 4 became professional masseurs at hospitals and 3 did housework for a living. The rest were either married or remained unemployed at home. In addition to the 160 graduates, there were also more than half of the students who only stayed at the School for a temporary period and dropped off. We don't know the whereabouts of these blind children, but it was noted from the registrar's office that some blind boys returned to begging in their home villages.[27] The statistics of job placement showed that the primary goal of educating the blind was to prepare them for the enrollment in higher-level education. Doing so enabled the blind to be further integrated in schools for non-disabled people. As shown from the record, there were eight female blind students who graduated from the Union Normal School in Canton with seeing girls by 1934.[28] On the other hand, the training of productive skills helped some but not all in securing a job, and those who returned into begging and fortunetelling posed challenges to the educational model. For missionaries, the improvement of blind people's welfare relied on the social acceptance of them as equally educable and literate as the seeing majority. But there were only a few educated individuals whose self-transformation helped define the meaning of Christian charity. This emphasis on literacy created a new definition of "usefulness" for the blind and disabled, to which we now turn.

1.2 Lucy Ching: "One of the Lucky Ones"

The story that I am going to tell in this section is based on the personal experience of a blind woman who struggled to become educated and to overcome the prejudice that Chinese society held towards disabled people. In many ways the early life of Ching Man-fai 程文輝 (1936-2011) bore witness to the hardship as well as the prospect of blind individuals who lived

[27] *Ming Sum School for the Blind, 50th Anniversary Report,* 96.
[28] Ibid., 97.

in a changing society during the Republican period. Although born to a wealthy family in Guangzhou, Lucy Ching (as she was known by her readers) had learned to live with her blindness beyond the protected home. With the companionship and emotional support from her maid Ah Wor 阿和, Ching had managed to get through three crucial stages of her life: her struggle with the fear of becoming a blind singer, her pursuit of Braille education and her conversion to Christianity. Ching's memoir thus offered a unique perspective to understand the role of education in countering traditional beliefs and developing the intellectual capacity of blind individuals. In what follows, I will focus on the three episodes of Ching's experience with blindness with supplementary details from the historical context. Her personal narrative will also serve as a thread that ties together many issues raised above.

Lucy Ching regarded herself as "one of the lucky ones" since her parents did not abandon her after she became blind at the age of six months. In Cantonese society, one of the deep-seated beliefs was that people with eye diseases suffered from the invasion of demonic spirits, which could be released by piercing the eyes with needles or rub them in order to let go of the evil spirits. The treatment was widely accepted by local people that even someone as educated as Ching's parents adopted it. According to her maid Ah Wor, it was during a family visit to the countryside that Ching's mother noticed redness in her eyes and took her to a local doctor, who prescribed a lotion made of herbs to be applied to the eyes. It caused her eyes to swell and then begin to bleed. Her parents rushed back to Guangzhou and brought her to see a doctor practicing Western medicine. But it was too late to restore the damage caused to the optic nerve, and she was pronounced blind. The doctor asked her parents to not lose hope, since "blindness did not mean uselessness," said the doctor.[29] Ching wrote this in her retrospective

[29] Lucy Ching, *One of the Lucky Ones* (Gulliver Books, 1980), 25-26.

account in order to depict a transformative experience for the blind through education. This path, as I will show next, set Ching apart from the common experience of blind women at the time.

Ching first learned about social attitudes toward blind people through her encounter with people outside of her home. She once begged Ah Wor to take her out for a walk and ran into a group of amahs, the maids of other households who gossiped about her. One of them asked Ah Wor if the blind girl was a *mang mui* 盲妹, which referred to sold blind girls who lived as street singers and professional entertainers. Ah Wor replied seriously that this blind girl was not a *mang mui* but a daughter of a respected family.[30] In Cantonese dialect, to be called a *mui* meant for a woman who had debased herself as a result of being sold by her parents into indentured servitude. The most well known example was the *mui tsai* 妹仔 (slave girl) system in the Pearl River Delta. It referred to the transaction of unwanted girls between poor and wealthy families based on a written contract that specified the amount of payment attributed to the sale. The sold girl would become unpaid labor in the household until she reached a marriageable age when the owner was expected to find her a husband. Experiences of the system varied, but it was generally believed that most of the female victims suffered from harsh treatment and a few were able to escape by resorting to rescue homes.[31]

Ching came to know a *mui tsai* who was brought to her family by her sixth uncle. Her name was Ah Yung, then 15 years old. Along with her came a written document from her birth parents who gave up their rights to the daughter's future by selling her ownership to the employer. Ching mentioned that her uncle presented the slave girl as a gift to her parents in return for their financial support. It was at that moment when she came to realize how people

[30] Ibid., 24.
[31] For a social history of *mui tsai*, see Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bond Servants: The Social History of a Chinese Custom* (Zed Books, 1988). For a testimony from a victim of the system of child slavery, see Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers, *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude, and Escape* (Zed Books, 1994), 108-121.

identified her blindness in a similar way as Ah Yung's miserable condition of being sold as a slave girl. Ching became frightened of the idea that she too would be sold one day. She had a reason to fear, because she remembered how her grandmother once asked her parents why they had kept a blind girl for years rather than giving her to a blind instructor who would teach her to sing and beg in the streets.[32] It was an unstated fact that if parents chose to keep a blind child in the family then all the siblings should be responsible to offer support. Even for a well-to-do family like Ching's, blindness was still perceived as a dependency on the whole lineage. The prevalent belief in seeking alternative means of inclusion enabled by the labor of blind people was thus weighed against poverty.

Ching only had a vague idea of what life would be like for a blind girl who became a singer until she met one on the street. This happened after her family moved to Hong Kong following the Japanese occupation of Guangzhou in October 1938. Ching's family was among the five hundred thousand refugees who fled on the eve of the Japanese takeover and then witnessed the fall of the British colony to the Imperial Japanese Army in December 1941. Life was hard after their arrival to Hong Kong with crowded housing conditions and the shortage of resources.[33] It was during a Chinese new year when Ching went out with Ah Wor for a usual walk and heard the familiar calling of *mang mui*, but this time she was surprised by a female voice answering the request for singing. Then was the sound of wooden clogs and tapping from the bamboo stick of a blind street singer, who sang one song and asked for thirty cents. Ah Wor told Ching that some amahs tricked the poor blind girl by not paying her after three songs. The girl began to cry, saying that her instructor would beat her if she did not earn enough. Ching approached the blind girl with kindness and asked why her mistress treated her badly as she

[32] Ching, 36, 38-40.
[33] John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 116.

herself was blind too. The reply was that most madams had similar experiences and could only follow the rule of the system.[34] We don't know if the practice of keeping blind singers in professional households travelled from Guangzhou to Hong Kong after the war broke out, but its existence showed that there were few options for families besides sending their blind children into a career of street singing even after the system was criticized and later banned in Guangzhou during the 1930s (Chapter 2).

In Ching's view, the reason why parents frequently sought to turn blind children into indentured labor was not due to poverty alone. It was the lack of professional advice given to parents on how to cope with blindness. Since parents got little support from the government or sympathy from society, according to Ching, their helplessness often developed into an active aversion to keeping the blind child.[35] Christian missionaries were among the first to raise public awareness of blindness as an educational issue, but their influence to ordinary Chinese families was significantly constrained by limited social resources to mobilize. Even for well-known schools like the MSSB that had cooperative relationships with the local government, the majority of their recruitment relied heavily on the influence of the local church.

Ching was lucky enough to have educated parents who were willing to raise her at home, but even so the idea of teaching a blind person to read and write was initially unthinkable to them. It was only by accident that Ching heard from the radio of educational methods for the blind in America and England and decided to explore it herself. She was eight at the time, when her elder brother, who was sixteen, had just gotten a license as a radio operator. Ching asked her brother to try contact someone to see if there was any way she could learn how to "read with fingers," as described on the radio. Three weeks after a call reached their home. It was from a doctor

[34] Ching, 60-61.
[35] Ibid., 19.

surnamed Du from Manila who said that he could offer help to the blind girl by writing to someone he knew in America. Two months later a package of reading materials in Braille arrived, and it was then that Ching began to explore a new knowledge by herself.[36] But since the textbook Ching received was in English Braille, she did not know how to type Mandarin or Cantonese into dots. For many years she taught herself basic spelling methods until later around ten when she had a chance studying with someone from a local missionary school in Guangzhou after the war.

The school Ching first attended was the Mo Kwong Home for Blind Girls, founded in 1909 by a group of American Baptist missionaries who were concerned with the plight of blind beggar girls and prostitutes. According to Ching, many of the students were adult women who entered as children and became permanent residents later. This limited the housing capacity for the institute to thirty inmates, and by the time she arrived the school was already full. Moved by her eagerness to learn Cantonese Braille, the superintendent eventually agreed to send one of the blind inmates to her home as a residential instructor.[37] Ching thus had little knowledge about the institutional life at the school. The only impression she got was from chatting with her teacher, who told her that most of the female residents like herself were abandoned by their parents on the streets and were later found by missionaries. Most of them stayed for more than ten years and had taken care of themselves by learning to wash and iron their clothes. Hand knitting was the only work residents could do to support themselves. Besides this, all their time was devoted to transcribing portions of the Bible into Cantonese Braille using hand frames. The brightest students, like her teacher, were sent to the MSSB to learn Braille and came back to teach other students.[38] The exchanges of students showed that local missionary schools had maintained

[36] Ching, 12.
[37] Ibid., 50.
[38] Ibid.,

regular contacts in order to meet the requirements of teaching and management due to the shortage of subsidy during wartime.

The MSSB had three main divisions of teaching, which included education from kindergarten to junior high and an industrial department. The size of the Mo Kwong Home was fairly small, and since the residents were aged above 20, its structure resembled the industrial section of the Ming Sum School, where adult women were employed in knitting works. During the war it helped make clothes for refugees. In January 1939, the school reported a contribution of 115 pounds of wool distributed to refugee camps in Guangzhou.[39] Ching visited the Ming Sum School in 1947 through the introduction of her teacher. She learned that the school had a history of rescuing blind slave girls and helped accommodate former blind beggars taken by the police department. The superintendent, Ms. Schaeffer, told her that a few blind beggars brought in by the government would be paid with stipends to cover their housing, while the rescued girls had to be supported by donations as their families refused to pay.[40] This again confirmed the understanding that missionaries had been involved in the process of reforming the Chinese welfare system since the beginning of the Republic. After the wartime disruption, their institutional connections with the Nationalist government were restored. This not only helped missionaries garner support from local benefactors but also enabled them to expand religious influence to a broader spectrum of the local society. Besides attending to the plight of lower-class families, missionary schools also responded to the needs of individuals like Ching who considered education as a necessary step to personal fulfillment.

Ching's conversion to Christianity was an outcome of her own choice of education. She first heard of the church from her younger brother who was studying the Bible in his school.

[39] *Ming Sum School for the Blind, 50th Anniversary Report,* 89.
[40] Ching, 130.

Interestingly, this happened when Ching's teacher went back to the Mo Kwong Home after having completed her lessons in four to five months. Ching was attracted to the idea that everyone is included in the church and that Christian love has no distinction. Her earlier encounters with neighbors and a blind singing girl convinced her that traditional beliefs had little sympathy for the blind, and she hoped to be included in a community where she could be treated with kindness. During a visit to the church she met Ms. Mak who claimed to be a teacher of religious education at a local middle school. Sympathetic to her cause, teacher Mak asked Ching to pay a visit to her school and offered to help her enroll in a class at the school. Although there was no precedent of receiving a blind student at a school for sighted children, the school authorities were touched by Ching's determination to study and offered her a three-months trial period in a class of Junior one. This meant that she would study with students a grade higher than her and that she would take her own writing frame to transcribe the lesson into Braille.[41] The help of a stranger made Ching feel that she was included into the church community, where she learned to communicate with people without being ashamed of her blindness.

For the first time Ching was able to study alongside sighted students and become friends with some of them, especially those who offered her help in finding her way around campus. Yet it was also during her study at the school that Ching began to realize the difference for a blind person to live in a sighted community. This happened when she asked a friend of hers why people were afraid of the blind. To her surprise, the reply was that the eyes of the blind looked strange and frightening. For the first time Ching heard from a sighted person that her eyes were red and swollen, and always had tears running from them. Since then Ching was told to wear sunglasses to school and found that all the girls complimented her new look. This was the first

[41] Ching, 73.

time that she became aware of "the vital connection between appearance and social acceptance."[42]

The experience of staying within a sighted community changed how Ching perceived herself as a blind person. Wearing sunglasses could not disguise the fact that she was blind, nor could it eliminate discrimination against her impaired appearance. Like the popular reaction to the tapping sound of the cane as a sign of bad luck, the physical characteristics of blindness had strong associations with entrenched prejudices held toward the blind. There were ways to counter the stigma attached to blindness. The blind who led careers in music and fortunetelling invested in turning embodied differences into professional identity. These activities, as I will show later, gradually appeared in conflict with the modern ideal that emphasized on broadening educational possibilities for the blind.

Ching's experience in pursuing an education was driven by a desire to change her fate of becoming one of the singing girls and to demonstrate her ability to study together with sighted people. Her learning experience was also different from the blind who lived in missionary institutions as members of a religious community. Ching identified herself as a Christian because of a shared belief in the usefulness of gaining an education. With this pursuit of higher knowledge she was able to counter traditional beliefs held by her family and local society and to take a step beyond the common careers of blind people.

[42] Ching, 98.

2. Braille Education as Religious Integration

The rise of Christian schools for the blind since the late nineteenth century provided an institutional model of social integration based on the advocacy of Braille literacy. This idea also gained traction among a few Chinese reformers. Wu Tingfang 伍廷芳 (1842-1922), a late-Qing ambassador to the United States and later Minister of Foreign Affairs during the early Republic, urged that China be "awakened and followed the examples of missionaries in helping the blind."[43] What Wu referred to was Institute for the Chinese Blind in Shanghai, which was established in 1912 by the English missionary John Fryer (1839-1928). Although Fryer was better known as a translator of Western scientific and technical manuals at the imperial print house of Jiangnan Arsenal, he became actively involved in doing philanthropic work for the Chinese blind during his retirement years at the Oriental Institute in California. The idea of opening a school for the blind emerged during his meeting with Huang Yanpei 黃炎培 (1878-1965), a renowned Chinese educator who visited America in 1915. Huang wrote in his memoir that he was told by Fryer that special education was still lacking in China's modern school system, which left many blind and disabled people in a pitiful state. He was also asked by Fryer to take his son, George B. Fryer, back to China to start a school for Chinese blind boys.[44] Later, the press reported a donation of 70,000 silver taels in honor of John Fryer and the formation of a board of directors that consisted of both foreign and Chinese members, such as Wu and Huang.[45]

Fryer held the belief that in the long run the state should assume the chief responsibility of caring for blind and disabled citizens. In the last year of the Qing Empire, Fryer published a

[43] *North China Daily News* (March 20, 1916).
[44] Huang Yanpei 黃炎培, *Bashi nian lai* (八十年來) (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1982), 74.
[45] "Institution for the Chinese Blind," *The North China Herald* (March 25, 1916).

book on methods of instructing blind people. In its preface, he explained to Chinese readers that blindness was a misfortune, but it was more unfortunate to let the blind "indulge in idleness and become useless in the world" (迷盲百事，幾成天地之廢人). A modern state was thus obliged to make the blind useful by "enabling [them] to earn a living with their hands or to read and gain a satisfied heart" (能操作以糊口，或知读而快心).[46] The rhetorical framing of usefulness pointed to the role of modern philanthropy in helping the blind to become self-sufficient and educated. It was further shown by a public exhibition of special education in Shanghai. Blind boys taught in Fryer's school demonstrated excellent abilities in music and sports and even excelled sighted people in activities such as piano playing and acrobatics. According to a local newspaper, this proved the statement that "nobody was born to be useless" (世無天然之廢物).[47]

But the idea of enlightening the blind with knowledge remained largely foreign to the Chinese public. John Fryer once told an American audience that the idea of teaching blind people to read and write was considered absurd in China and little support was provided by the government. He estimated that China had about 1 million blind people out of a population of 400 million—a rate was even higher than India's, which was 1 in 500. The majority of blind persons lived as beggars, fortunetellers and singers, while the lucky ones relied on the support from nearest relatives. Like his missionary predecessors, Fryer believed that the philanthropic tradition of China failed to respond to the problem of disability. In particular, he observed that "[T]he mental and spiritual condition of the blind seem never to have been taken into serious consideration, nor any means employed by which they can be taught to earn a living in a refined and independent manner and with self-respect."[48] It was this deplorable condition of the disabled

[46] John Fryer, "Zongsuo" (總說), in *Jiaoyu guren lifa lun* 教育瞽人理法論 (Shanghai, 1912), 1.
[47] "Mangtong xuexiao tonglehui ji" (盲童學校同樂會記), *Shenbao* 申報 (April, 1920).
[48] John Fryer, "The Education of the Chinese Blind," Unpublished Manuscript, 1915.

poor that lingered in the minds of many Westerners, among whom a few British and American missionaries began to systematically introduce Braille to the Chinese blind beginning in the late 1870s. Before 1912, six Christian schools for the blind were established in Beijing, Hankou, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Mukden (now Shenyang), and Shanghai.[49] Fryer thus showed to the Chinese public that Christian charity filled a gap in the way Chinese society understood disability through educational practices.

The Chinese translation of Fryer's speech was later published by the journal Chinese Educational Circles (*Zhonghua jiaoyujie* 中華教育界).[50] A few Chinese intellectuals echoed the view of missionaries by advocating for the inclusion of special education in modern social welfare system. The historian Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), for example, summarized the function of traditional charity as "provision" (*yang* 養) rather than "education" (*jiao* 教). This not only caused the disabled to become useless by "consuming" (*fenli* 分利) without "producing" (*shengli* 生利) but also deprived them of personal being (*ren'ge* 人格).[51] Gu's emphasis on the educability of blind and disabled people as a prerequisite condition to their social citizenship echoed the words of the late-Qing thinker Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929). In his "Treatise on the New Citizen" (*Xinmin shuo* 新民說), published between 1902 and 1904, Liang considered the infirm and disabled persons as a special class of consumers whose impairments were inadequately attended to by the government. His belief that even the disabled could be restored to productivity was informed by the example of public schools in Europe and America that

[49] The earliest documentation of private schools for the Chinese blind could be traced to the mid 1830s, when Mary Gutzlaff opened the first boarding school for the blind in Macau. See Michael Miles, "Blind and sighted pioneer teachers in 19th century China and India," accessed Dec. 12, 2019 online via link: https://www.independentliving.org/files/miles201104Pioneer-Teach-Blind_v2.pdf

[50] Yan Zhen 嚴楨, trans., "Mangtong jiaoyu lun" (盲童教育論), *Zhonghua jiaoyujie* 中華教育界 9 (1913), 15-20.

[51] Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "Beiping longya xuexiao tekan xu" (北平聾啞學校特刊序), in Gu Dingqian, et, al., *Zhongguo teshu jiaoyushi ziliaoxuan*, Vol. 2 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 1203.

trained the blind and mute to support themselves by a craft.[52] The inclusion of the disabled as productive citizens implied the compulsory exclusion of them from engaging in begging, fortunetelling and singing. From a humanitarian perspective, while works of this kind could keep a minimum standard of living for the disabled, they contributed to their social degradation by subjecting them to charity and rendering them as non-productive communities.

Liang and Gu represented a tendency of liberal intellectuals whose understanding of social citizenship was based on the combination of humanitarianism and the nationalist quest for productivity. They viewed disability as an essential deficiency of the social body that needed to be compensated by new educational methods imported from Western countries. Starting in the 1920s, Chinese educators became aware of the dominating role of missionaries in the field of special education. An official survey showed that by 1934, there were 39 schools for the blind and a total enrollment of 1128 blind students. Of this 28 were affiliated to the Christian church, 6 received private donation and 5 were government-funded. Another 1008 blind inmates were housed in charitable institutions ran by missionaries and native philanthropists.[53] As a teacher of special education argued, the discipline should not be considered simply as a charity nor should it be bound to religious authorities.[54] The educational reformer Shu Xincheng 舒新成 (1893-1960) also noted the insufficient number of state or private schools that served to include blind, deaf-mute, crippled people or those of low intelligence as Republican citizens.[55] Their call to institutionalize a national model of special education (*teshu jiaoyu* 特殊教育) stripped of the

[52] Liang Qichao, "Lun shengli fenli" (論生利分利), *Xinmin Congbao* 新民叢報 (October 31, 1902), 11a.
[53] "Quanguo mangya xuexiao zhi xiaocha" (全國盲啞學校之調查), *Shehui diaocha yu tongji* 社會調查與統計 Vol. 4, 12 (1934), 5.
[54] Zhou Yutong 周予同, "Zhongguo teshu jiaoyu wenti" (中國特殊教育問題), *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育雜誌, Vol., 14 (1922), 4.
[55] Shu Xincheng 舒新成, *Jiaoyu tonglun* 教育通論 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1927), 127.

religious framing of Christianity highlighted a shift in the understanding of disability from a discourse of humanitarianism to one that contributed to envisioning able-bodied citizenship.

Although the written sources concerning the schooling of blind people are relatively scarce compared to those published by Westerners, they still mark the existence of an indigenous discourse that highlighted the necessity of integrating the disabled outsiders into a new society through educational measures. Before I expand on the native conception of special education in the next chapter, I will first illustrate how this discourse departed from more than a decade of missionaries' experimentation with Braille education, which was imbued with the religious conception of literacy as developed in early Christian schools for the blind.

2.1 Indigenizing Braille: William H. Murray and the Numeral Type

How was Braille literacy introduced in late 19th-century China and what aspects of the lives of blind people changed as a result of it? At this time, "special education" was not in the Chinese vocabulary, and the "need" to teach the blind to read and write was not apparent to the Chinese public; this makes it important for us to figure out assumptions behind the educational project of missionaries back then. This section will demonstrate from an early example of institutional promotion of Braille for blind mandarin speakers in North China. The indigenization of Braille reflected the formation of a physical and ideological infrastructure through the missionary investment in teaching the Chinese blind, printing literacy primers and disseminating Christian knowledge. This didactic process will be balanced by the social experience of blind converts who actively reconstituted the meaning of literacy beyond the institutional context.

In Western countries, early attempts to create learning opportunities for children with sensory impairments in "special" schools was intended as an act of relief rather than education.

The reason why blind, deaf and dumb children in England first received learning privileges from the state, according to John T. Hall, was because "[U]nder the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, parents seeking relief in respect of such children did not suffer disenfranchisement, the political-social penalty imposed on all other recipients of relief at the time."[56] British philanthropic institutions were convinced that literacy offered the best means of consolation for the blind and printing religious scriptures in Braille was crucial for integrating an "alien race" within the realm of Christendom.[57] The same message was preached abroad through western colonial expansion, which led to the drastic increase of Protestant missionaries in China after the Opium War in 1842.

William Hill Murray (1843-1911), a Scottish Presbyterian missionary, established the first School for the Blind in Beijing in 1874. Murray was born in Glasgow to a family of blacksmith. When he was nine years old, he became accidentally injured when working at his father's sawmill and got his left arm torn off by a circular saw. According to his biographer Constance Gordon-Cumming (1837-1924), Murray's handicap stimulated his diligence in working first as a post carrier and then a colporteur of the National Bible Society at Scotland (NBSS). His seven-year apprenticeship as a bookseller at home finally prepared him for a mission to China in 1871, when he first arrived in the northern treaty port of Chefoo (now Yantai), Shandong province. There he learned about 2,000 Chinese characters in four months and became familiar with local dialects through travelling in local towns and villages where native churches were built. In 1873, the NBSS sent Murray to the imperial capital of Beijing, where he began to sell books to temple goers, students who took the imperial exams at Confucian halls and local residents who came to the marketplace. The densely crowded streets of

[56] John T. Hall, *Social Devaluation and Special Education: The Right to Full Inclusion and an Honest Statement* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1997), 18.
[57] John Oliphant, "Touching the Light: the Invention of Literacy for the Blind," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, 2 (2008): 76.

Beijing left Murray a deep impression of blind beggars who "mingle in every crowd…in gangs of eight or ten, each guided by a man in front of him, while the leader feels his way with a long stick—a most literal illustration of the blind leading the blind."[58] In a report to the board of Presbyterian missionaries, Murray said that his interest in helping the blind first developed when a blind man approached him on the street asking for a page of the Bible. Struck by the request from someone who cannot see, Murray asked what he would do with it. The blind man replied that someone would read it to him.[59] The fact that there was not yet a method of reading for the blind in China inspired Murray to take action. His earlier experience in bookselling in Glasgow drew his attention to prayer books printed in English Braille for the blind. Intrigued by the idea of reading by touch, Murray taught himself Braille and decided to work out a tactile-phonetic system for the Chinese language.[60]

For missionaries, adapting the Braille method (*modu zifa* 摩讀字法) made of a six-dot embossed type (*tuzi* 凸字) was especially difficult concerning the multiple tones of a Chinese character and the variation of dialects spoken in different regions. In the Mandarin-speaking regions of North China, Murray's invention of the "numeral type" was the earliest effort to numerically render all 408 Mandarin syllables in Braille. John Fryer described this method to his Chinese readers as follows,

> "From number one to four hundred and eight, each number marks a syllable, and each syllable represented [phonetically] a Chinese character. In order to write a Chinese word [in Braille], the blind first retrieves the number corresponding to its syllable, and then types the number into embossed dots."[61]

[58] Constance Gordon-Cumming, *The Inventor of the Numeral-type for China* (Downy and Co., 1898), 11-15; 16.
[59] William H. Murray, "Peking Mission to the Chinese Blind," in Donald MacGillivray, ed., *A century o f Protestant missions in China (1897-1907)* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1907), 585.
[60] Constance Gordon-Cumming, *Wonderings in China*, (W. Blackwood and sons, 1900), 419.
[61] Fryer, "Beijing cheng guyuan shuolue" (北京城瞽院說畧), in *Jiaoyu guren lifa lun*, 2.

This meant in practice that when hearing a Chinese pronunciation (ài 愛), the blind should immediately locate the number (2) in a chart that represented the syllable (Ai), and then translates the number into a Braille pattern (⠆). Murray's syllabic Braille had obvious limits for beginners. Since it used only numbers rather than a Braille alphabet to spell a syllable by the combination of initials and finals, the method relied heavily on the memorization of the mnemonic chart, which usually took at least one to two months. Moreover, the method could not be adopted for instruction in southern regions such as Fujian and Guangdong, where the syllables are twice as many as in Mandarin. [62] Between 1888-1889, David Hill (1840-1896), a British Wesleyan Methodist stationed in Hankou, invented an alphabetic system of Braille based on the principle of phonetic spelling and used it in his Hankow School for the Blind. The method was later adopted in Amy Oxley's Lingguang School for the Blind in Fuzhou and Mary Niles' Ming Sum School in Guangzhou.[63] It was not until 1890 that missionary educators of the blind convened at the second General Missionary Conference in Shanghai and decided to adopt the "alphabetic method" in preference to Murray's "numerical method" as championed by the NBSS. In 1913, British and American missionaries met to discuss the formal procedure to standardize seven local variants of Chinese Braille into the Union Braille System based on the phonetic spelling of 54 syllables of the mandarin Chinese.[64] In practice, four different systems of Chinese

[62] For a typical criticism of Murray's system, see William Campbell, *The Blind in China: A Criticism of Miss C.F. Gordon-Cumming's Advocacy of the Murray Non-Alphabetic Method* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1897), 1–3.
[63] The "alphabet system" was made of 44 Braille letters, including 20 initial and 18 final consonant sounds, 5 tonal markers and 1 exchange marker. This method later became the prototype for mainstream blind education until 1940s. See G. A. Clayton, "Work Among the Blind," *The Chinese Recorder*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (May, 1909): 249.
[64] See "A Union System of Braille for Chinese Blind," *China Mission Year Book* (1914), p. 329.

Braille continued to be used for instruction in schools in north, central and southern parts of China during the Republican period.[65]

As the earliest attempt to indigenize Braille, Murray's method emphasized the role of numbers in mediating sounds and scripts. Murray once mentioned that his Chinese helpers recommended the *fanqie* 反切 principle that wrote a syllable by combining the initial and final consonants of two Chinese characters.[66] But his decision to keep "numeral spelling" was aimed at showing the gradation of sounds in alphabetical order without breaking the original Chinese character into phonemes. Moreover, the advocates of Murray's method were convinced that the use of numbers appealed to both blind and seeing people who were illiterate and could shared this writing system easier than schemes that used the Roman alphabet.[67] Thus it indicated a strong desire for missionaries to replace any phonemic spelling in Chinese or Roman letters and to develop alternative methods of communication for lower class people. According to the historian Elizabeth Kaske, this appeal to phonetic symbols pointed to the hostile attitude held by missionaries toward Chinese characters, which appeared as an instrument of suppression and kept people away from Christian faith.[68] In what follows, I will show that this radical vision of creating alternative literacy for the blind further justified the power of Christianity by claiming that it could transform the blind into literate and faithful members of the religious community.

[65] According to a report on Braille codes by the Ministry of Education in Nanjing, the four systems are 1) Ku Shou Tung Wen (Murray's method) used in north and northeast China; 2) Wu Fang Yung Yin (Hill's method) used in central China; 3) Ke Hua Sin Mu Ke Ming used in Guangdong and Guangxi; 4) Sin Mu Ke Ming (Union Braille) used in most parts of China. See Lieut., Sir Clutha Mackenzie and Dr. W. S. Flowers, *Blindness in China: Report to the Government of China* (Publisher unknown, 1949), 140.
[66] William H. Murray, "School for the Chinese Blind, Peking," *The Chinese Recorder* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1897), 186.
[67] S. M. Russell, "Advantages of Mr. Murray's System," in Gordon-Cumming, *The Inventor*, 180.
[68] Elizabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education* (Brill, 2008), 58.

2.2 Braille Learning in the Beijing School for the Blind

This section aims to reconstruct Braille learning at the Beijing School for the Blind (*Beijing Xungu Xuetang* 北京訓瞽學堂, hereafter BSB). It shows how Murray and his advocates conceived the function of Braille as cultivating a tactile-phonetic environment through scriptural reading, printing and music performance in the BSB. This vision of institutional planning served the goal of conversion and the formation of a religious community among blind students, whose ability to demonstrate "literacy" through reading the Bible by touch evinced the redemptive power of Christian education.

During her first visit to the BSB on June 5th 1879, Gordon-Cumming met four blind students who had already grasped the numeral type with the help of Murray's two native assistants. These blind pupils were former beggars found and brought in to the School by Murray himself when working daily as a colporteur on the street of Beijing. Gordon-Cumming observed that the memories of these blind Chinese were quite retentive, with only a few who had trouble grasping the mnemonic chart. The brightest among the blind could master the numerical system in a period between six weeks to a month. "This is a most important point," she said, "for in Murray's simple system the pupil acquires simultaneously the power of reading and writing, and the latter is so rapid that a good pupil writes on an average twenty-two words per minutes."[69] As Murray reported at the Shanghai conference, he once compared a blind pupil's reading speed (13.5 min.) of three chapters from the *Epistle to the Romans* in Braille to his own reading of a translated Chinese version, and found the time required for the two were about the same.[70] For missionaries, the accelerated pace of punching the brass type was equal to the amazement of witnessing the word of God being turned into print. Hence the ability to read by touch served as

[69] Gordon-Cumming, *Inventor*, 22-3.
[70] General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China (Shanghai, 1890), 304.

a visual testimony for the redemptive function of Braille in restoring blind people's access to Christian teaching.

The didactic function of Braille was more directly conveyed in a typical classroom, where students sat next to each other in front of a Braille text prepared for a lesson. This allowed the instructor to examine the speed of their reading by watching the movement of their fingers. The American sociologist Sidney D. Gamble (1890-1968) visited the Hill-Murray Institute (former BSB) between September 1918 and December 1919 and took a picture (Figure 2.3) of a newly built model lecture hall for the blind, which showed what a reading class for the blind looked like at the time. The person standing behind the blind pupils was probably a native assistant who gave instructions to the blind as they read out loud and recited a text in Braille.

The same pedagogy was found in music lessons. According to a report, singing hymns with the assistance of Braille was an extension from the reading process, as the two methods were well integrated into the numerical system since its design. The most common way of group reading and singing worked like this: While one [blind pupil] reads, the other follows with his finger on the Gospel in the raised Braille Type and so checks any mistake in pronunciation.[71] The design of a classroom for Braille learning was intended to create a sense of uniformity as expressed in the disciplined movement of the hand and the way it spelled the meaning of a religious text. Braille thus became a ritual language that embodied the Christian understanding of literacy as a means of salvation for the blind whose mental and spiritual functions were restored.

Printing Braille on the stereotype was an exercise that both satisfied the demand for instruction and the need to reduce the cost of letter prints. Blind students who had mastered the system of numeral type were employed to work on making embossed scriptures. By 1881, the blind school had manually stereotyped the first seven chapters of the *Gospel of Matthew* for the

[71] Annual reports and quarterly records (1894), National Bible Society of Scotland (NBSS), 42.

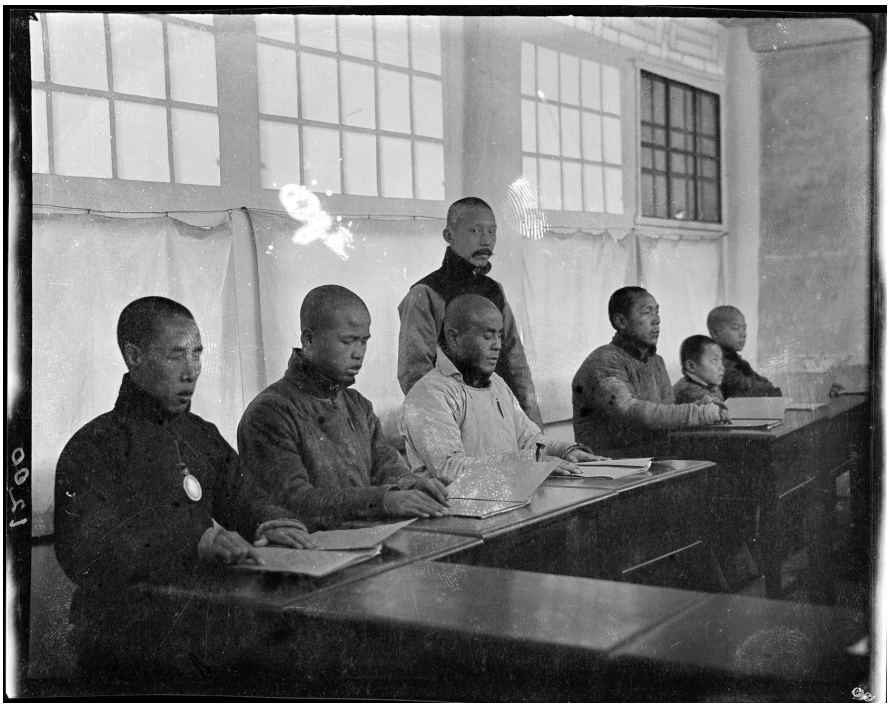

Figure 2.3: A Braille Reading Class at the Model Lecture Hall for the Blind[72]

use of instructing the blind.[73] Printing at the beginning was quite laborious due to the lack of machinery. The pupils embossed copies by hand and stitched the sheets together. In 1883, Samuel Dyer, an agent at Shanghai for the British and Foreign Bible Society, visited the school in April and became immediately interested in Murray's work. Back then Dyer was famously known as a typographer for creating a steel typeface of Chinese characters for printing to replace traditional wood blocks.[74] During Dyer's visit to the BSB, Murray showed him to a writing class in which blind pupils were doing typing according to dictation, and then they were asked to read out loud a paragraph of the Bible from stereotyped version. Dyer also watched the blind sing hymns and play the harmonium. He was asked by Murray whether the Bible Society would help

[72] Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Accessed December 28, 2019 https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r3zg6gm5v
[73] Annual reports and quarterly records (1881), National Bible Society of Scotland (NBSS), 29.
[74] For more details regarding this missionary effort to innovate the Chinese printing system, see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (UBC Press, 2011).

in printing the Scriptures for the blind to read in numeral type. Later in August that year a reply was received, and the Society granted the permission to print the *Gospel of Mark* and its Braille version with supplies of the necessary materials. According to Gordon-Cumming, this helped establish a print workshop in the school and improved the work of the blind by teaching them how to emboss these scriptures and prepare the books.[75] As Murray's work became widely known, overseas support soon arrived. The American publisher J. W. Smith provided for the School an outfit for embossed printing, typewriters, and other apparatus. The improved machinery, according to Murray's supporter in America, made printing a regular feature of the schoolwork. Due to great demand for Braille scriptures and textbooks, blind students in the BSB were busily engaged in making stereotype plates, reading proof, and binding.[76]

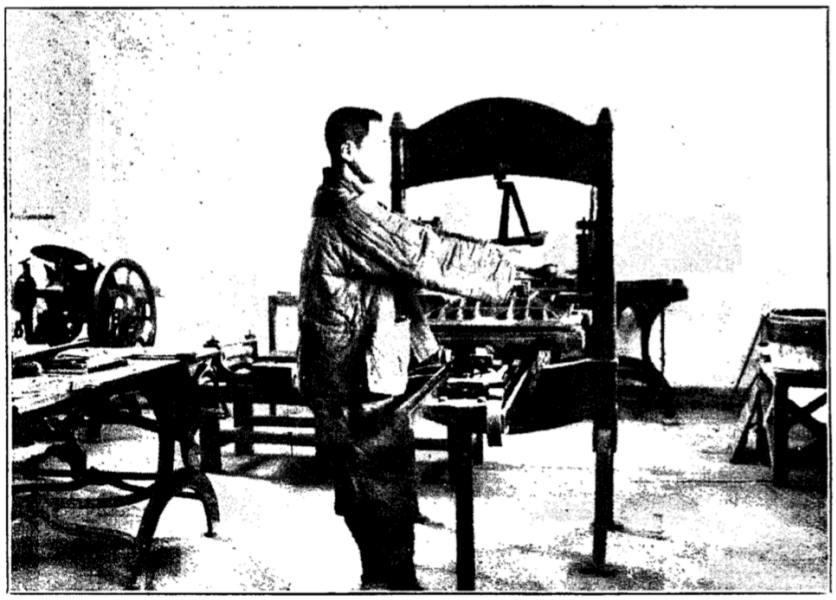

Figure 2.4: A Blind Person Working with A Braille Typewriter[77]

Murray saw Braille stereotyping as a natural outcome of his numeral-type, which, as compared to any kinds of phonetic spelling, delivered more controllable patterns and was easy to

[75] Gordon-Cumming, *Inventor*, 29.
[76] Adelia M. Hoyt, *Reading and Writing Made Easy for the Blind in China: A Brief Sketch of Rev. W. H. Murray and his Work for the Blind in Pekin* (Pelton & King, 1901), 10.
[77] *Annual Report of The Hill-Murray Institute for the Blind*, (1925), 10.

proofread with numbers.[78] In order to improve the efficiency of the printing process, Murray designed a loom-like Braille typewriter for saving the manual labor of the blind. The image (Figure 2.4) found in a later report from the Hill-Murray Institute may not be reflective of the identical typewriter described by Murray himself, but its shape bears similarity to the above description. The purpose of the design was to free the left hand from holding the mallet and to better facilitate the moving type. By using the feet to control the rhythm of the mallet, which was held in a fixed position above the table, the blind person could concentrate on moving the type at the same pace with the feet peddling the treadle. The orchestrated movement of hands and feet corresponded to the bodily position of the blind stereotyper who was facing the table. When his hands were left free to handle the type and to guide the writing of Braille letters with his finger, the blind person was in an operational state similar to a person working with a sewing machine. As Gordon-Cumming observed, the blind could do the printing accurately and rapidly through Murray's invention of an "ingenious mechanical contrivance." "With this new invention, any one of the students could print as many pages of the Braille type as three blind Englishmen could in the same amount of time. A Chinese lad could easily complete ten pages a day, whereas an Englishman working with a hand frame thought three pages was a good day's work."[79] One could also imagine the importance of coordination between a blind person who typed and another who read in numbers corresponding to the words from a text. The act of punching the type by dictation was a familiar work in the reading class, and the requirement of unified movement reflected the constitution of rhythmic patterns—an interface between blind bodies and the tactile-phonetic environment.

[78] "Murray's System," in *The 13th Annual Report of the Hill-Murray Institute* (1916).
[79] Gordon-Cumming, *Wonderings in China* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1888), 425.

The above information only offered sketchy descriptions of Braille learning at the BSB. Mostly documented by its advocates, these records are better understood as depictions of an infrastructure of religious education that worked through the design of embodied learning, spatial arrangement and printing process. All of these were aimed at impressing its audience, namely sponsors, visitors and the foreign press the function of an indigenized Braille system in fulfilling the goal of uniting Christian uplift with social service.

Teaching Braille later attracted the attention of local philanthropists, both Chinese and foreign, to build a public school for the blind. According to Sidney Gamble who visited Beijing in 1918, the first public school for the blind opened in 1917, six years after the death of William Murray. Its founder E. G. Hillier, himself blind, was the manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in Beijing. The school was funded by a group of his Chinese and foreign friends. It taught ethics, Chinese literature, arithmetic and handicraft. The school had an enrollment of 14 students in 1917 as compared to 38 students at Murray's BSB by the year of 1916.[80] The merchant-sponsored school for the blind emphasized providing supplementary training in practical skills. Gamble took a picture (Figure 2.5) showing that blind male students were employed in making rattan chairs at a workshop inside the public school.

Industrial work was also a component of education in missionary schools for the blind, but in those institutions it was only considered as a last resort for students who had no talent for the pursuit of religious work and higher education. The BSB was known for training blind

[80] The enrollment records of the BSB under Murray's management (1897-1911) were scattered. The lowest I found was 15 in 1899 and highest was about 50 in 1908.

Figure 2.5: A Rattan Workshop for the Blind[81]

evangelists for church services, while blind students graduated from David Hill's School in Hankou became successful organists, musicians and teachers. The blind in Fuzhou's Ling Guang School worked in brass bands and piano tuning. A blind student who used to study in Fryer's Shanghai School told that a group of twelve full-time workers with total blindness could earn as much as 5000 dollars every year which afforded them a reasonable living.[82] To a large degree, Christian missionaries and foreign philanthropists who invested in the education of blind people did not conform to a unified policy. They were part of the situation in which new institutional approaches to blindness reflected the diversity of geographical locations as well as the segment of the population that a given institution served. In what follows, I will discuss how Braille

[81] Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Accessed December 28, 2019 https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r3np1wx6q
[82] Homer S. Wong, "The Work Done by and for the Blind in China," *The China Critic* (April 2, 1936): 16.

instruction in the BSB shaped the religious career of a blind convert through his involvement in preaching Christianity to a Chinese audience.

3. Embodying Braille: The Religious Career of A Blind Convert

This section attempts to measure the social impact of the missionary invention of Braille by focusing on the experience of a blind convert who graduated from the BSB and became a preacher. Rather than treating Braille simply as a didactic tool of Christianity, I hope to uncover the communicative assumptions of Braille from missionary writings that tracked the career of a blind student.

To be sure, the blind who learned to read and write in Braille were a small portion of the total population in China. According to an article written in 1936 by Homer S. Wong 王湘元 (1910-?), a blind scholar who held a college degree in law and music, there were no more than 3000 blind people who had received Braille education and somewhat over 1000 were still at school. Moreover, the enrollment of blind girls was twice the number of blind boys. "Most blind boys who could earn a living do not care to learn Braille," said Wong, who also thought that Braille learning at his time was limited to the role of "housing the blind in institutions for exhibition and in order to solicit contributions."[83] This reflected a certain degree of anxiety towards the prospect of blind graduates from Braille schools. Wong was worried about the practical use of Braille, which neither seemed to make the blind more self-sufficient nor to have taken them too far from older practices of singing and fortunetelling. He mentioned that even some who studied Braille for years were tempted to take up a business in fortunetelling simply

[83] Homer S. Wong, "The Work Done by and for the Blind in China," 14.

because of money. There were about 3000 fortunetellers in Shanghai who earned a wage from 30 to 500 silver dollars a month. Blind Wu, a well-known fortuneteller who had his own office on Nanjing Road could earn an income of 1200 dollars a month.[84] This meant that even the lowest earning of a fortuneteller was better than an unskilled factory worker at the time.[85]

Wong was certainly right in pointing out that professional careers for the blind were still accepted by Chinese society as a tradition, and the fact that knowing Braille did not give the blind any privilege in finding employment. But relying entirely on the practical constraints of Braille from the institutional perspective, his critique missed the point of how literacy was understood from the perspective of communication, especially when the message it aimed to convey was religious. If the function of Braille was no more than an exhibitive tool within the institution, then it made little sense for missionaries to promote it eagerly by sending out Braille readers to work in the field. In what follows, I will first show from the case of a blind convert how Braille worked in practice as a symbol of preaching that mediated the ritual encounters between missionaries and Chinese converts.

3.1 Blind Chang: "The Apostle of Manchuria"

In her biography of William Murray, Gordon-Cumming mentioned that in spring 1897 Murray received a letter written in Braille from a former student of his named Chang Sen 常森 (?-1900), a blind convert from Manchuria who studied Braille at the BSB for three months and went back to preach in his hometown. "Blind Chang" (as he was called in missionary accounts) described that upon his return home he had "brought the Holy Word of God to all the crowds

[84] Ibid., 13.
[85] In the 1930s, the wage rate for an unskilled factory labor was 20 dollars a month, and a skilled labor working in the silk weaving industry could earn about 50 dollars a month. Social Affairs Bureau, *Wage Rates in Shanghai* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935), 60. Cited in Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (University of California Press, 2004), 249.

who assembled to see a blind man reading with the tips of his fingers."[86] This event was later recaptured in a missionary's field report that Chang sat outside a temple in the market town where his reading had gathered a crowd of four or five, and those who listened could not read Chinese characters. Among them a man surnamed Liang got excited when seeing a blind man reading and asked for a prayer book. Next Sunday Liang attended the church and then led members of his family to conversion.[87] This account depicted the practical use of Braille in the mission field where blind converts could become powerful figures who preached to the illiterate people of China. In particular, missionaries believed that Braille would help spread Christianity in a country that "venerated the power of reading." This was an initial goal that Murray had had when he conceived the system of the numeral type as a medium for blind and illiterate sighted people to communicate. [88] He had also experimented with new techniques that maintained distant contacts with his blind students when they were dispatched to preach outside the school. For example, Murray invented a special envelope that helped secure the information written in embossed letters. In order to keep the embossed type in a Braille letter from being crushed during the process of mailing, he made a tube-shaped envelop from wasted tin jars and attached a paper jacket for writing the mailing address.[89] But an obvious problem with the design was that Braille documents were not readable by literate people with sight, and hence it created further barriers of communication. The assumption that replacing Chinese characters with Braille could sharply reduce the rate of illiteracy was not workable in a society known for its refined written tradition. Moreover, it risked the danger of turning Braille into a symbol of superstition rather than enlightenment. As Murray told his biographer, he once heard that neighbors talked about a

[86] Gordon-Cumming, *The Inventor*, 79.
[87] Popular Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1906), 71.
[88] Gordon-Cumming, *Work for the Blind in China*, 29.
[89] Gordon-Cumming, *Inventor*, 43-44.

blind girl reading a page of Braille with her fingers as a sign of witchcraft.[90] This resembled the popular belief in the mysterious power of a blind medium to summon a spirit from the earth by tapping the ground with a walking cane. For this reason, according to Ching, things attached to the blind were something to be feared by sighted people and created social distance.[91]

We don't know if missionaries were aware of the indigenous perception of blindness, but by training the blind as scripture readers they contributed to a similar rationale to that of the folk tradition. In other words, because Christian schools considered teaching Braille as a means of fostering religious integration rather than social integration, the blind who read Braille only became a "medium" within the Christian community. As I will show next, the story of Chang as told mainly through missionary sources created a discursive space for understanding the practice of reading Braille as simultaneously an embodied articulation of Christian identity for the blind and a symbol of exclusion from the local community.

A memoir by the medical missionary Dugald Christie (1855-1936) provides the first known account of Chang's conversion. In 1886, Christie found Chang at the door of the Mukden Hospital, pleading for a cure for his impaired eyesight. Chang claimed to have walked from the village of Taiping Gou 20 miles north of Fengtian (nowadays Shenyang), and had sold all his belongings in order to pay for his journey. Moved by this, Christie received Chang and examined his eyes. Unfortunately, he found that "the eyes were incurable, and only a little glimmer of light being restored by surgery."[92] This unsatisfactory attempt of medical healing did not stop the missionary doctor from pursuing a case of conversion. Christie thought that if Chang could be taught to read and write, the religious message would be imparted to a blind man who had already felt a calling from God.

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[90] Ibid., 55.
[91] Ching, 21.
[92] Dugald Christie, *Thirty Years in Moukden, 1883-1913* (Constable Limited, 1914), 76-9.

Later, the medical missionary John Dudgeon (1837-1901) who was stationed in Beijing recommended Chang for study at Murray's school. Dudgeon was convinced that the medical and educational works of the "blind mission" were crucial for the success in spreading the Gospel in North China.[93] Rosalind Goforth, one of Chang's biographers, commented on this decision rhetorically. "[H]ad it not been for the instruction given to Blind Chang during the two visits made to the BSB, where he learned to both read and write, the Bible would have been to him a sealed book."[94] Murray also recalled that after Chang paid his first visit to the BSB in 1886, he was impressed by the speed of the blind man's learning. Grasping the numeral system usually required a lengthy period of memorization, but for Chang it only took about three months to master the art of reading and writing in Braille, and he was even able to teach the beginners. Upon his graduation, Chang was given several volumes of the Bible that had been stereotyped by the blind students and a new writing-frame for his work of preaching back home. It was not until the autumn of 1892 that Chang returned to the school for further instruction, and by that time he had led to the conversion of 300 people in Manchuria.[95]

A picture (Figure 2.6) taken by the time of Chang's return showed the blind man dressed in a scholarly manner and sitting on a chair, holding an unfolded book. Standing next to him was his guide boy, who served as a devoted companion in Chang's daily itinerant preaching. Chang's right-hand finger was touching on a page of the scripture showing his ability to read and write. The image attempted to showcase the blind convert as a literate person whose appearance somehow resembled that of a Chinese scholar. More importantly, Chang's blindness could hardly be recognized from the picture, in sharp contrast to the earlier photograph of blind-

[93] John Dudgeon, "The Peking Blind Mission," in *The Chinese Recorder* (Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1896): 270-4.
[94] Rosalind Goforth, *Missionary Martyr of Manchuria* (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1929), 42.
[95] Gordon-Cumming, *The Inventor*, 84.

Figure 2.6: Chang, The Blind Apostle of Manchuria[96]

beggars taken by missionaries in Guangzhou. Instead, the posture of a reader served to disassociate blindness from negative connotations of poverty and ignorance.

But there are several problems about the photo. First, since Chang was not looking at the book but only pointing to it with his finger, the image clearly establishes him as an atypical reader. We also cannot tell from the picture whether or not the book has Braille or any written characters in it. If the book cannot in fact be read and only serves as a prop for the photo, then it fails to support the idea of transforming the blind into literate members of society. By implication, this also undermines the goal of missionaries in countering prevalent beliefs that associated blind people with superstition. If, on the other hand, the book has Braille printed on it and was intended to be a proof for Chang's mastery of literacy, then it serves to de-familiarize the Chinese perception of a learned person and further contributes to the exclusion of blind people by introducing a foreign object. In either way, this picture reveals the ambiguity of an

[96] Ibid., 75.

enlightened project and a gap in the missionary conception of the social utility of an invented literacy for the blind.

According to a missionary report from Taiping Gou, Chang's knowledge of Braille and his avid preaching had inspired over 500 people to convert into Christian faith by 1895.[97] The surprising result of conversion in a remote village with little church influence both excited missionaries and troubled them. This was due to Chang's former background as a follower of the Hun Yuen 混元 ("Primal Chaos"), a sectarian belief that mixed Buddhism with native Daoist practices. According to James Inglis, a later biographer, most of Chang's early converts had connections to the sect through forming secret societies. They met in preaching halls attached to private houses and chanted prayers to the Maitreya Buddha. Inglis once received a prayer book from a former sectarian and was surprised to find out the resemblance of their chanting to what had been practiced in the local church.[98] This created a difficult situation for missionaries who worried about the potential distortion of Christian teaching.

Sectarians had been historically viewed by the imperial state as rebellious elements and suffered from official persecution. In the last decades of the Qing, western imperialism created new conditions for many "hidden sects" to be aligned with Christian forces. The historian Joseph Esherick noted that a considerable number of sectarian-turned-Christians in the 1890s sought protection from missionaries who enjoyed important immunities under China's post-Opium war treaties with foreign powers. In order to establish a foothold in the local community, missionaries often appointed "an influential man who had formerly been the leader of one of the forbidden

[97] James Webster, "Account by the Rev James Webster of Conversions to Christianity effected by a Recently converted Blind Man at Tai-Ping-Kow," in Note E of Appendix to Sr. Henry E. James, *The Long White Mountain, or A Journey in Manchuria* (Longmas Green, 1892).
[98] James W. Inglis, *Blind Chang: The Manchurian Martyr* (United Free Church of Scotland, Foreign Mission Office, 1901), 10-11.

sects to serve as lay leader of the new Christian community in his locality."[99] Chang was such a person. He used his influence as a former sectarian leader to attract a number of followers after he converted to Christianity. According to his biographer, Chang did not always stick to the standard interpretation of Christianity but relied on his own judgment of the religious text and his ability to demonstrate to people how he could read the Bible by touch.[100] In this way Chang was able to appropriate the ideology of Braille literacy for the purpose of recruiting followers under his own charge and to elevate his social status in the local community.

On the other hand, the mentioned characteristics of Chang reflected the broader transition with regard to Christian influence in Northeast China. Reports from the Scottish Presbyterian Church showed that since 1886, the year that Chang was converted, the Gospel travelled quickly northwards and eastwards. "Though joined to some eccentricities," wrote the report, "Chang had brought in converts over wide regions."[101] The Scottish missionary John Ross (1842-1915) held a sympathetic view of Chinese converts who lived "in almost inaccessible ledges of higher mountains" of Manchuria, and whose newfound belief in Christianity had to go through native forms of mysticism.[102] This by no means suggested that Christian missionaries made compromises with native beliefs. Rather, they were aware of the vast networks of heterodox sects, and considered them not entirely hostile to the mission of bringing true belief to the Chinese. As the story of Chang showed, missionaries' connections with the local congregations were mediated through their encounter with Chang as they hoped to impart Christian teaching through his personal influence.

[99] Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (University of California Press, 1987), 87.
[100] Inglis, *Blind Chang*, 13-14.
[101] Donald MacGillivray, *A Century of Protestant Missions in China (1807-1907)* (American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1907), 207.
[102] John Ross, *Mission Methods in Manchuria* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 10.

This connection lasted even after Chang was killed during the Boxer Rebellion in the summer of 1900. Chang fell victim to the wave of native anti-Christian agitation that originated from Shandong and spread quickly to the Beijing and northeast to Manchuria. The death of Chang was repeatedly told in missionary accounts as an act of martyrdom, as he protected many other Chinese Christians from being killed by the Boxers.[103] After the suppression of the Boxers, Qing authorities built a stele for Chang under the instruction of the indemnity contract signed with the Presbyterian Church in Manchuria.[104] Erected in 1903, the stele memorialized Chang's sacrifice to the church in the official language of the Chinese government. The content of it was reproduced in a county gazetteer by the local magistrate. It offered a biographical narrative of Chang that emphasized his transformation from a knight-errant (*youxia* 遊俠), who did not care about learning to a pioneer savior of the world (*jiushi xianfeng* 救世先鋒). Chang's conversion was described as a key moment that awakened him to the knowledge of Jesus and made him "blind in the eye but not in the heart" (盲於目而不忙於心).[105] The rhetorical language clearly portrayed Chang as a blind vagabond-turned-scholar whose heroic sacrifice for his fellow Christian converts was a proof of his transformation into a saint. Chang's early involvement with sectarianism was only suggested by mentioning his previous ignorance to the word of God and saying that his newfound belief saved him from going astray. The experience of blindness testified not only physical affliction but also served to mediate his self-transformation into a faithful believer of Christianity. The stele version of Chang's biography also added to the

[103] See Phyllis M. Higgs, *Blind Chang: A Missionary Drama* (London Missionary Society, 1920). Rosalind Goforth, Blind Chang, *Blind Chang, Missionary Martyr of Manchuria* (Toronto : Evangelical Publishers, 1929?).
[104] "Jilin yesu jiaoan hetong 吉林耶穌教案合同 [Dec. 1902]," in *Dongbei yihetuan dangan shiliao* 東北義和團檔案史料 (Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1981), 429-30.
[105] "Chang Sen Xiansheng Jinianbei" 常森先生紀念碑, in *Hailong xianzhi* 海龍縣志 (1937), Vol. 18, 20.

missionary accounts an important witness: the Qing state. The blind convert was no longer seen as a stranger in his own land but a "savior" of his countrymen.

The many versions of Chang's biographical accounts illustrated a complex picture of Christian salvation through the religious transformation of a blind man. The life course of Chang was divided into three stages: conversion, preaching and martyrdom. Each of them employed Chang's blindness as a metaphor that affirmed the efficacy of religious power. First, medical healing did not cure his physical blindness but awakened him to the Christian faith. Second, Chang's acquisition of Braille enabled him to become a scriptural reader. Finally, Chang's heroic death transformed him into a Christian martyr and won him the recognition by the state as a moral exemplar of the local community.

To be sure, Chang did not present himself in his own voice. Our knowledge of him was mostly gained from missionary writers whose depictions of the blind man were better understood as reflections of a broader institutional agenda aimed at including the Chinese blind as members of the Christian community. But this does not exclude the possibility that missionaries were aware of Chang's physical experience with blindness and thought about how to deal with it. The narration of Braille in Chang's story was a testimony both to the ideological goal of proselytization and a constructed vision of self-transformation. It was through the embodied and imaginative practices of "reading" that missionaries and converts were mutually constituted as members of the Christian community.

Chang's story, which was set in an early stage of indigenizing Braille in North China, witnessed the fermentation of alternative visions of community for the blind. In contrast to earlier ideas of belonging to occupational groups that were essentially driven by economic demand, Christian missionaries invented new qualifications that enabled the blind to become as

intellectually competent as the sighted majority. Against the prejudice that local beliefs held against blindness, which constrained the blind to marginal social roles, missionaries aimed to create new methods of communication for blind persons in order to articulate physical and spiritual belonging. Lucy Ching's experience illustrates the role of missionary education in countering traditional attitudes toward the blind and facilitating their integration with non-disabled people. But it remains the fact that many blind graduates from Christian schools still faced the difficulty of leading an independent career. The problem of economic sufficiency called for new approaches to reform missionary schools in the hands of Chinese educators, which we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Conclusion

During the late 19th and early 20th century, western missionaries had pioneered in the realm of education for blind people in China. Christian charity started as a humanitarian mission that aimed to tackle the inadequacies of traditional charity and the social problems caused by the improper treatment of the blind and disabled. New systems of Chinese Braille were introduced through the mediation of the religious framework that centered on mental and spiritual improvement for the blind. In Christian schools for the blind, the association between literacy and the Christian ideology of salvation both worked through the institutional design of pedagogy, print and productive works and via preaching activities of blind converts. The lack of social acceptance of Braille, however, did not reduce its efficacy in promoting the social status of blind individuals. As shown from personal narratives, the acquisition of Braille enabled blind individuals to become members of the Christian community where they achieved self-

transformation from old customs and beliefs. The two cases point to the function of Christian education as mediating new identities and forms of inclusion in society.

Meanwhile, Chinese intellectuals also began to link special education to an inclusive vision of a national community to which the disabled also belonged. But the practical constraints of Braille literacy forestalled the development of state and private run schools for the blind. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the model of Christian charity initiated a larger transition in the way Chinese educators of the blind sought to break away from the religious framework of Braille literacy as they turned to collaborate with traditional elites on innovating Confucian charity.

Chapter Four

Moralizing the Blind: Disabled Community and Confucian Charity, 1924-1945

On April 4th 1925, the Chengdu-based newspaper *Citizen's Daily* (Guomin Gongbao 國民公報) reported that General Yang Sen 楊森 (1884-1977), then military governor of Sichuan Province, granted the use of the Jiangdu Temple (River God Temple) as a classroom for 22 blind boys who had been taught by Christian missionaries to read and write in braille over the past three years in the provincial capital. The news described the General's decision as an "act of benevolence" (*shanju* 善舉) that would "turn the useless into useful" (*hua wuyoong wei youyong* 化無用為有用).[1] Adding to General Yang's sponsorship of a novel charity program was his direct attack on popular customs. Before the temple was turned over to foreign operation, Yang ordered all the religious statutes to be moved to the Institute of Popular Education (Tongsu jiaoyuguan 通俗教育館, IPE), an indigenous social service agency modeled after the YMCA. According to a missionary observer, the scene of sixty coolies carrying a dozen bronze idols through the streets "occasioned some talk but no objections to the mandate of the all-powerful Director-General."[2]

In his brief sixteen-month reign over Chengdu, Yang Sen established an image of a progressive militarist who was eager to transform the city in fundamental ways. According to historian Kristin Stapleton, the source of Yang Sen's reform programs came from both the New Policies initiative in the 1900s and a rising tide of city administration heralded by competing

[1] "Jiangdu miao ban mangya xiao" (江瀆廟辦盲啞校), *Guomin gongbao* (GMGB) 國民公報 (April 4, 1925).
[2] "School for the Blind," *West China Missionary News* (WCMN), v. 27, no. 6 (June, 1925), 37.

"national" governments in the early 1920s.[3] A preface to the yearbook of 1928 retrospectively attributed the beginning of modern city planning to General Yang Sen who had brought inland West China to the level of urban development in Beijing and Guangzhou.[4] The city built a modern police system and a municipal office in the style of the Beiyang government in the north, while it also looked towards novel examples set by the Nationalist government from the coastal south in carrying out a systematic plan for urban reconstruction. This included the expansion of relief facilities for the poor and disabled as well as progressive activities to train a modern citizenry in realms of mass literacy, physical training, hygiene and social customs. Like other reform-minded militarists of his time, Yang Sen shared the modernist vision of local state building. His proposal for a "New Sichuan" resembled Chen Jiongming's approach to self-governance in Guangdong province at the time.

However, Yang's forceful execution of many reform programs was at the expense of public feelings, such as his destructive campaigns to widen the streets and paving roads for the transportation of army supplies.[5] His attack on folk beliefs and his enthusiasm for Western-style public welfare, as will be shown later, also caused tensions with supporters of traditional culture. Even his close ally Lu Zuofu 盧作孚 (1893-1962), a well-known shipping industrialist who founded a museum in the Popular Education Institute for the promotion of modern knowledge in science, technology and hygiene, attempted to preserve the popular ritual of the River God by placing his spirit tablet back to the temple after the property was handed to missionaries.[6]

In his attempt to craft a capable leadership mixed with care and control, Yang Sen distinguished himself from Chengdu's traditional elites, or the "five elders and seven sages"

[3] Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 229-230.
[4] Chengdushi shizheng jianjian 成都市市政年鑒 (CDSZNJ) (Chengdu: Chengdu shizheng gongsuo, 1928), 5.
[5] "Yang duban dui jianlu zhi yandiao" (楊督辦對建路之演調), GMGB (April 25, 1924).
[6] "Baoquan jiangdumiao sidian" (保全江瀆廟祀典), GMGB (May 21, 1925).

(*wulao qixian* 五老七賢) as known to local people. This generic title represented a group of late Qing degree holders who continued to exert wide influence over the management of public life in Chengdu during the Republican period. Xu Zixiu 徐子休 (1862-1936), a prominent leader of the city's elders, was perhaps the first person that expressed dissatisfaction with Yang's policy. Several days after Yang Sen's army marched into Chengdu, Xu wrote to the governor's office asking for the protection of the Confucius Temple. Xu complained about the increased vandalism following the military occupation of the city and thought that the removal of wall bricks for the construction of public parks was a bad idea. Only making people respect the sacred teaching of Confucius, as Xu argued, would bring about "the transformation of the people and good social customs" (*huamin chengsu* 化民成俗)"[7] The letter was signed by leading Confucian scholars of the Dacheng Association (Dachenghui 大成會), a society that Xu founded in 1920 for the purpose of reviving classical learning. The association successfully persuaded the government to issue a reminder to lower-ranking officials on the matter of repairing Confucian properties.[8] Xu's advice to the government suggested a conservative culture at work during the tumultuous decades of military governance.

Starting in the mid 1920s, Chengdu's city administration was sharply divided by radical modernizers and adamant traditionalists. The former group included reformist officials, progressive intellectuals and foreign missionaries who hoped to emulate the model of urban reconstruction in coastal cities like Guangzhou, Shanghai and Tianjin. Their reform effort, however, was countered by a group of conservative cultural leaders of the city, namely Confucian gentry who had dominant influence over spheres of philanthropy and education.

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[7] "Baohu wenmiao zhi shengshu ling" (保護文廟之省署令), GMGB (February 29, 1924).
[8] "ing ge daoxian renzhen baohu wenmiao han" (令各道縣認真保護文廟案), *Dachenghui conglu* 大成會叢錄 (DCHCL), vol. 5 (Chengdu: Changfu gongsi, 1924), 63.

These two groups held different views about the qualification of urban belonging both for ordinary people and for those lived on margins of the city. From 1924 onward, conflict between the two forces in managing community-based social welfare for the blind and disabled presented a contrast to the nascent formation of a welfare state in Guangzhou from 1928 to 1937 (Chapter 5). Later cooperation between the two forces during the Nationalist War of Resistance (1937-1945), as this chapter will show, demonstrated the convergence between modern and traditional forces in compensating for the lack of state provision.

Confucian Elites and Social Welfare in Chengdu

The concept of "social welfare" (*shehui fuli* 社會福利) originally referred to the state's obligation to implement a social policy aimed at removing the causes of poverty rather than alleviating its symptoms through the traditional models such as dispensaries.[9] It gained wide currency through the writing of Chinese intellectuals trained in the modern disciplines of sociology and social work in China's Christian colleges. The imperative of turning poor relief into an active administration of manpower for supplying the industrialized work force later became a hallmark of the Nationalist government's social policy during the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937). In coastal cities this featured the increased political centralization in both central and provincial regimes. When the Nationalist army left Guangzhou, the next warlord, Chen Jitang, inherited a municipal infrastructure that had been in place for nearly a decade. In the 1930s, Chen was able to consolidate a regional welfare state through placing relief organizations

[9] Chen Xuxian 陳續先, *Shehui jiuji xingzheng* 社會救濟行政 (Chongqing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1943), 7-14.

for the elderly, sick and disabled, as well as the working masses and returned emigrants firmly in the hands of government authority.[10]

Chengdu presented a different situation in the administration of social welfare. This was partly due to the sudden military defeat of Yang Sen in the summer of 1925, which brought his inchoate experiments of urban reconstruction and planning to an end. Subsequently, General Luo Zezhou captured the city and became the succeeding director-general. Unlike Yang, Luo maintained minimal intervention of public welfare by delegating local gentry and merchants to manage the Board of Relief and Rehabilitation (Jiuxu shiye dongshihui 救恤事業董事會). First established in 1922, the Board served as a central philanthropic committee for the reorganization of late Qing relief institutes, which included an orphanage, a widows' reformatory, a poorhouse and a home for the elderly and disabled.[11] This governmental endorsement of gentry leadership laid the bureaucratic foundation for a Confucian model of social welfare that lasted until the end of 1940s.

Yin Changling 尹昌齡 (1869-1943), the founding director of the Board, was one of the city's sages. Born in Chengdu, Yin earned the highest *jinshi* 進士 (advanced scholar) degree and later served as the prefect of Xi'an. After the 1911 Revolution, he returned to Sichuan to join the Republican government. After resigning from office in 1923, Yin accepted the invitation to chair the Board. Within two years he restored the operation of former reformatories under the name of Cihuitang 慈惠堂 (Hall of Spreading Mercy), one of the oldest relief institute established by

[10] Alfred H. Y. Lin. "Warlord, Social Welfare and Philanthropy: The Case of Guangzhou under Chen Jitang, 1929-1936," *Modern China* 30, 2 (2004): 153-154.
[11] CDSZNJ, 542.

Qing officials in the 18th century.[12] Beginning in 1924, an embryonic form of Confucian social welfare took shape in Chengdu.

This chapter will continue to trace changing measures aimed at educating the blind by focusing on Cihuitang and its model of Confucian charity. The first part documents the revival of Confucian academies and charitable schools in the aftermath of military conflict among warlords during the 1920s. In particular, I will show how gentry elders, through instructing Chengdu's young elites, as well as homeless and disabled children, laid the moral foundation of Confucian charity.

The second part pays special attention to the training of blind boys (*gutong* 瞽童) as professional musicians. I will use the Cihuitang archive to reconstruct a collective career of these blind boys who joined gentry-sponsored performing troupes after their graduation and found employment in urban venues of entertainment. Their reintegration in society as cultured entertainers further contributed to the dissemination of Confucian moral teaching in the public sphere.

The third part of the chapter introduces a different, self-consciously "modern" model of charity, epitomized by the school for the blind to which Yang Sen allocated the River God temple in the anecdote that began this chapter. Though this approach was first sponsored by missionaries in Chengdu, and was somewhat antagonistic to the kinds of efforts supported by the Cihuitang, leading gentry did not necessarily reject it; indeed Cihuitang eventually combined some elements that came from these reformers with its own methods. Thus, this section first illustrates differences between gentry and missionary approaches to working with the blind, comparing the institutional life of blind children in Cihuitang with those taught in missionary

[12] Huang Zhiquan 黃稚荃, "Yin Changling zhuan" (尹昌齡傳), in Zhou Kaiqing 周開慶, ed., *Minguo Sichuan renwu zhuanji* 民國四川人物傳記 (Shangwu yinshuguan, 1966), 274-275.

schools. It then shows how these two models of charity began to coalesce in the 1930s due to the growing influence of Chinese teachers in foreign schools for the blind and their indigenization of special education.

During wartime Chengdu (1937-1945), as shown in this chapter's fourth part, traditional and modernizing elites rallied under the GMD campaign for "saving the blind," which combined medical prevention with the rehabilitation of blind people. With the help of teachers in special education and social workers from universities, gentry managers of Cihuitang were able to incorporate braille and handicraft training for blind boys in order to meet the national demand for making "disabled but useful" (*suican bufei* 雖殘不廢) citizens. On the other hand, Cihuitang continued to promote community aid among the aged and disabled poor who failed to work and care for themselves. The collective experience of this marginalized disabled community therefore provides an example of the lasting influence of Confucian charity, which remained importance despite the growth of a welfare state during the war, operating both outside state agencies and in partnership with them.

1. The Realm of Confucian Charity in Pre-War Chengdu, 1917-1937

During the period from 1917 to 1937, Sichuan province entered a period of regional warfare among native-born militarists and a growing tendency of local governance and reconstruction. It started as an uprising among Sichuan troops against the occupation of Yunnan and Guizhou armies since the spring of 1916, when southern warlords allied with Sun Yat-sen attempted to overthrow Yuan Shikai following his announcement to restore the monarchy. In 1919, two years after the occupied forces was expelled from Chengdu, General Liu Cunhou of

the Sichuan army established the System of Defense Districts (*Fangqu zhi* 防區制), which marked the beginning of regional autonomy under the allied power of local militarists. Later when Chengdu established its first municipal government in 1928, this system played a crucial role in maintaining the precarious balance among four warlords who enjoyed the *de facto* autonomy from the central government in Nanjing. It was not until 1935, when Jiang Jieshi extended his power into Sichuan on the ground of fighting Communist guerrilla forces, that the system formally ended, paving the road to provincial reunification after the victory of the warlord Liu Xiang over his rivals and his alliance with the Nationalist government in Nanjing.[13]

Before that point, provincial administration tended to follow the pattern of "military-gentry coalition" which, according to historian Jerome Chen, derived from the fact that the appointment of civil officials within counties and districts was in the hands of the military. Local gentry who had connections to military authorities through lineage, native place, common background in education and army service were usually selected to office.[14] This position, which considered warlordism as an extension of the power of social elites, revealed the semi-official nature of Cihuitang and its function of maintaining public order through benevolent action. In practice, we also find situations where the two forces were in tension. The example of Yang Sen's short-lived reform programs held evidence to the negative effect of ignoring public opinion and the interest of traditional elites. Confucian elites in Chengdu also used their personal reputation and institutional resource to defend the charitable sector from the extractive measure of work relief under progressive militarists.

[13] Zhou Kaiqing 周開慶, "Chuanzheng tongyihua zhi tuijin" (川政統一化之推進), *Sichuan wenxian* 四川文獻, vol. 85 (1969), 13.
[14] Jerome Ch'en, *The Military-Gentry Coalition: China Under Warlords* (Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Center on Modern East Asia, 1979), 30.

As arbitrators of public good, gentry elders were among the first to take responsibility for restoring social order in the aftermath of regional warfare. An official survey showed that between 1921 and 1937, there were 46 registered benevolent associations (*shantuan* 善團) with the sponsorship of wealthy merchants and the gentry leadership of Chengdu's neighborhoods.[15] Among these 20 were established in 1932, when another civil war between Liu Xiang and Liu Wenhui broke out on the streets of Chengdu and resulted in many deaths and catastrophic damages to civilian property. Then a severe drought compounded by the civil war brought a great famine to Sichuan in 1936, during which up to 5 million people were killed by starvation. The year witnessed the formation of 10 new charitable organizations in response to the enormous number of vagrants swarming into the capital. Gentry and merchant elites thus played a crucial role in cementing official power in the absence of sufficient funding and effective management of disasters.

In normal times, Confucian philanthropists took regular care of the poor by distributing rice and coins to helpless beggars and famine refugees coming from surrounding counties during the end-of-year charitable giving.[16] They also provided shelter, medicine and proper burial for the elderly and disabled. A 1939 survey of Chengdu's philanthropic organizations reported 10 facilities of "indoor relief" (*yuannei jiuji* 院內救濟), which aimed at receiving the poor who had no family to support. Among the 15 relief facilities mentioned in the survey, 7 were affiliated to the Cihuitang. These included a foundling home, a kindergarten, an elementary school, a match factory and workhouse that trained and employed widows and children from poor families, a school for blind children and a home for the elderly and disabled. The number of inmates in

[15] "Chengdushi zhijie zhidao zhi renmin tuanti diaochabiao" (成都市直接指導之人民團體調查報告), *Chengdushi zhengfu zhoubao* 成都市政府週報 1, 5 (Feb. 4, 1939), 16-17.
[16] "Pinmin daosheng suo qianmi" (貧民到省索錢米), GMGB (January 31, 1924).

these organizations was 2126, or over 60% of the total population of charity recipients housed and supported by public welfare facilities.[17]

Cihuitang's provision for people of different age, physical and economic condition well exceeded the scope of governmental aid, which mainly focused on the compulsory detention and training of vagrants in two workhouses established in the era of late-Qing Reform. The gentry management of poverty was based on the voluntary enrollment in educational and vocational training programs. Its emphasis on improving social mobility and livelihoods also differed from the religious model of special education set by missionaries. In what follows, I will focus on the development of Cihuitang in the 1920s and 1930s, showing how gentry managers delivered the moral function of Confucian caregiving to different groups of the urban poor.

1.1 Confucian Academies and Charity Schools in Chengdu

During the spring and summer of 1917, warfare between Sichuan and Guizhou forces broke out in Chengdu's streets and alleys, resulting in the killing of many civilians and the destruction of their homes. During the height of this military combat, many inhabitants were forced to seek temporary shelter. Wu Yu 吳虞 (1872-1949), a famous advocate for the New Culture Movement in Chengdu, wrote in his diary that his whole family had to run away from the living quarters due to a fire set by the retreating Guizhou troops near the city gate that extended to the door of his neighbor's across the street. Finally they were able to pass the military checkpoints and moved into the Confucius Temple, where Wu spent a sleepless night

[17] In addition, 47 charitable organizations were further specified by their services of public dispensary: 37 offered medicine, 39 provided burial services, 44 distributed rice and cash, 41 supported widows, 21 helped preserving housing property, 25 funded charity schools, 41 ran money lending activities. See Ma Bining 馬必寧, "Chengdushi cishan jiguan diaocha" (成都市慈善機關調查), *Chengdushi zhengfu zhoubao* 成都市政府週報 2, 5 (Sep. 30, 1939), 6-8.

with other civilian refugees and took the chance to express his criticism of Confucian thought.[18] In fact, Wu had been expelled from Chengdu's scholarly community due to his incendiary writings against filial piety and status hierarchy just few years ago, and the sudden outbreak of the war made his life even harder. Wu's resentment of Confucian values in Chengdu was thus compounded by his anger and distrust toward the militarists. In 1921, Wu finally left Chengdu to teach at Peking University at the invitation of Chen Duxiu, who helped published Wu's articles in his *New Youth* magazine and steered him into the tide of student activism. As an intellectual dissenter, Wu Yu's experience in Chengdu stood in contrast to those lived by the city's elders who had more vested interests in applying the conventional wisdom of Confucianism to native affairs.

Xu Zixiu, whom we have already encountered, was a classmate of Wu in the Zunjing Academy 遵經書院, a school established by the late-Qing reformist official Zhang Zhidong in order to revive classical learning. Xu earned the provincial *juren* 舉人 (elevated person) degree but his plan to serve in the Qing government was affected by the abortive constitutional reform led by Kang Youwei 康有為 in 1898 and the Boxer Uprising. Later Xu returned to Chengdu to found the Zemu Academy, a private school that emulated Kang's Wanmu Academy in Guangzhou. There Xu taught classical and historical scholarship to many outstanding Sichuan youth and planted the seed of revolutionary ideas.[19] One of his most famous students was Dai Jitao 戴季陶 (1891-1949), who later became the ideologue of the Guomindang (GMD) party and helped Jiang Jieshi to launch the Confucian-inspired New-Life Movement. After the 1911 Revolution, Xu was put in charge of the Sichuan Educational Association, a gentry-led advisory

[18] Wu Yu 吳虞, *Wuyu riji* 吳虞日記, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), 322-323.
[19] Liu Zijian 劉子健, "Xu Zixiu xiansheng zhuan" (徐子休先生傳), *Xin sichuan yuekan* 新四川月刊 1, 2 (1939), 45-46.

body to the provincial government. Xu used this platform to invite many prominent scholars versed in classical studies to get on board with his educational project for the revival of ethical conduct in the time of political disorder and social decay. In 1920, Xu and his fellow elders and sages formed a society in the name of Dacheng 大成, which stood for the honorary title of Confucius. As mentioned earlier, Xu was able to protect the Confucius Temple from being destroyed after filing a signed petition to the military leaders.

In 1923, the local government, in response to Xu's request, granted the association a former Manchu property to be renovated into a Confucian academy.[20] The aim of the school, according to Xu's inaugural address to the students, was to remake society by rectifying one's mind and material pursuits. Xu stressed the integration of Confucius moral discipline with the devotion to social goods, and hoped that students would take part in the development of industrial enterprises after their graduation.[21] The traditionalist approach to education was reflected in the spatial design of the school. A sagely hall (*shengdian* 聖殿) of Confucius was located in the center of the campus facing north, and on both sides of it were two department buildings for primary and junior high students. The hall, which enshrined the tablets of Confucius, Mencius and the Song-dynasty Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi, opened in the early morning and late afternoon for incense burning. During ceremonial events, the students were asked to kneel in front of the hall and recited the school motto. According to former graduates, the academy mainly relied on donations by wealthy merchants and politicians. The warlord Liu Xiang even had his son enrolled as a student.[22] This in part explained the growth of a social

[20] "Benhui qing boyong guanchan jianli shengtang han" (本會請撥用官產簡歷聖堂案), DCHCL 1 (1923), 2-3.
[21] Xu Zixiu 徐子休, "Dacheng Zhongxuexiao kaixue jiangyan" (大成中學校開學講演), DCHCL 3 (1923), 1-2.
[22] Su Shutian 蘇樹田, Zhu Zhiyan 朱之彥, "Xu xiulao he Dacheng Xuexiao de yiwen" (徐休老和大成學校的逸聞), *Shaocheng wenshi ziliao* 少城文史資料 7 (1995), 114-115.

network of Chengdu's young elites who came from well-to-do families, received conservative education and took up influential positions in the public sector.

The Dacheng Association also leveraged the printing press for social influence. Its major publication, the *Dacheng Collection* (Dachenghui conglu 大成會叢錄), served to publish the essays, commentaries and public speeches written and delivered by members of the association. Lecture notes were also included for the purpose of circulation among students of the academy. These included topics on the five ethical codes of self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身) and historical reflections on social order and disorder (*zhiluan* 治亂). In a class, Xu mentioned that people were living in a chaotic time because those in power did not practice benevolence (*ren* 仁). This not only caused the elderly and weak to be desperate but also prevented the able-bodied from contributing to the nation.[23] It was only against one's self-interest that public morals (*gongde* 公德) could be established and maintained, as Xu said to his students.[24] The emphasis on benevolent actions as a link between the individual's moral uplift and social betterment was fundamental to the Confucian understanding of humanity. Yin Changling, who was also a member of the school board, taught in a class that discussed good conscience and behavior. Yin explained that benevolence to the people (*renmin* 仁民) should derive from one's obligation to care for his parents and family. Overturning this order, as Yin argued, would go against the principle of intimacy and render one's claim to "have compassion for all people and things" (*minbao wuyu* 民胞物與) dubious.[25] Thus the Confucian practice of caregiving, as an extension of kin-based mechanisms of assistance, served to uphold the integrity of the traditional family structure.

[23] Xu Zixiu, "Shuo ren" (說仁), DCHCL 6 (1924), 8.
[24] Xu Zixiu, "Gongde lun" (公德論), DCHCL 5 (1924), 7.
[25] Yin Changling 尹昌齡, "Suohou zhe bo suobo zhe hou yi" (所厚者薄所薄者厚議) DCHCL 1 (1923), 5-6.

The lectures were delivered in a context when radical intellectuals and student activists around the country openly attacked the Chinese patriarchy. There were young people from inland Sichuan who were drawn to the progressive New Culture Movement. In 1923, Ba Jin, the novelist known for his critique of the Confucian family, left Chengdu to study in Shanghai at the age of nineteen. As a student of Wu Yu, Ba Jin's choice of pursuing western-style education distanced him from the influence of elders and sages. In his novel *Family*, Ba Jin simply portrayed them as reactionaries.[26] Chengdu's gentry community clearly felt the imperative of safeguarding traditional values through reviving classical education and connecting their association to people who shared a similar agenda. For example, articles written by members of the Confucian Religion Society (Kongjiao hui 孔教會), an organization launched by Kang Youwei and his followers for the promotion of Confucianism as a state religion during the early years of the Republic, were reprinted for the circulation among a local audience. One of the leaders of the society, Liu Ciyuan, warned parents of the danger in sending their children to modern schools where they would end up revolting against their family. He argued that only Confucian academies would teach offspring to become filial. Moreover, Liu and his colleagues held the view that a background of classical education was still an important qualification for civil service even after the study of Chinese classics was abolished in schools.[27] Their call for the restoration of "moral standard of the youth" (*qingnian daode* 青年道德) also reflected a growing reference to Confucianism within right-leaning intellectuals and politicians in China since the 1920s onward. This trend was more clearly observed in the evolution of the Nationalist ideology

[26] Kristin Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction: 1920s China and Ba Jin's Family* (Stanford University Press, 2016), 71.
[27] Liu Ciyuan 劉次源, "Jinggao zhuyou zidi zhe yi jiban kongjiao xuexiao yimian jiating geming" (敬告諸有子弟者宜急辦孔教學校以免家庭革命), DCHCL 2 (1923), 6.

during the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937).[28] Military leaders of the provincial governments, such as the Guangdong warlord Chen Jitang, associated the veneration of Confucius and canonical reading (*zunkong dujing* 尊孔讀經) with social policies geared toward reducing economic dependency (Chapter 5). This conservative turn to Confucianism under the Nationalists and their warlord allies largely stemmed from a desire to mitigate social conflict through education that promoted good citizenship.

In Chengdu, the gentry leadership in educational and charitable sectors featured non-coercive measures of social engineering. Confucian elites were in a better position to address the livelihood issues for people from the bottom of society. An example of this was the education of the lower class. In 1925, Yin Changling and his colleagues of the Cihuitang built the Peigen Charity School (Peigen Yixue 培根義學) to re-energize the principle of ethical conduct among children from poor families. Yin also wrote a letter to members of the Dacheng Association asking them to help collect donations for the new school. In his proposal, Yin lamented the fate of many children turning into drifters due to the lack of parental support and proper teaching, and as a result some of them became bad elements of society. "If people are bounded together as heaven and earth," asked Yin, "why is that the rich can have their sons educated as good persons while those from poor families end up becoming bad persons?"[29] Yin thus shifted the moral judgment of poverty to a discussion on social obligation, arguing that it was the rich who should take more responsibility in helping the poor and by doing so they would bring social harmony and material benefits to their offspring.

[28] Sébastien Billioud, "The Hidden Tradition: Confucianism and Its Metamorphoses in Modern and Contemporary China," in Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey, ed., *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-2015* (Brill, 2015), 772.
[29] Yin Changling 尹昌齡, "Peigen yixue mujuan qi" (培根義學募捐啓) DCHCL 9 (1925), 5.

Toward this end, Yin and his colleagues from the Cihuitang converted a part of the property into a residential school for poor and homeless children aged between eight and thirteen. Since its operation in 1924, the school had recruited ninety students who were assigned into three classes. The school hired private tutors to teach literary primers and basic arithmetic, and it was hoped that these children would find employments in industrial and commercial sectors after reaching adulthood. Within a year, the rising demand for enrolment pushed Yin to expand the size of instruction in the Temple of Duke Ding (Dinggong Ci 丁公祠) where it could host thirty to forty students.[30] Those who excelled in classical studies were selected to participate in a special class taught in the temple by Yin himself. These students were also required to read fundamental texts in Chinese medicine, which featured the training of a typical Confucian scholar. Through Yin's recommendation, some of the graduates served in the local government as clerks while others had placements in factories.[31] In addition to studying for their careers, students from the charity school also learned to appreciate the value of Confucian caregiving. During festivals, Yin took his students to visit the local temples and make donations such as clothes and shoes. In return, the students would enjoy the snacks prepared by temple residents.[32] Military generals, on recognizing the growing reputation of Confucian schools, further granted lands to Cihuitang for its expansion. Yin was able to rent some properties to tenants and shopkeepers and used the money to fund other charitable programs.[33] The operation of Confucian academies and charitable schools was thus connected to the working of a larger social welfare program aimed at addressing the livelihood problem of the lower social classes.

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[30] Ibid., 6.
[31] Wei Daozun 魏道尊, "Chengdu Cihuitang buyi" (成都慈惠堂補遺), *Chengdu wenshi ziliao xuanji* 成都文史資料選集 *6* (1984), 293-294.
[32] Ibid., 295.
[33] Tao Liangsheng 陶亮生, "Yin Zhongxi yu Cihuitang" (尹仲錫與慈惠堂), *Chengdu wenshi ziliao xuanji* 成都文史資料選集 3 (1982), 112.

Blindness, in particular, posed a major challenge to the conventional method of book learning in Confucian schools. In what follows, I will focus on how gentry philanthropists responded to disability by focusing on the education of blind children in Cihuitang.

2. Moralizing Blindness: Music Education for Blind Boys in Cihuitang

One of the distinct features of the Cihuitang was that it had a history of educating the blind. The earliest reference to this was found in the writing of Zhou Xun, a late-Qing official who compiled a handbook on local customs in Chengdu. In a section on charity work, Zhou wrote that "the Cihuitang specialized in receiving blind men (*guzhe* 瞽者) and teaching them to sing ballads and do fortunetelling and divination. [The blind] all stayed in the hall until they mastered an art that earned them a living."[34] Originally established as a residential music school, Cihuitang differed from the other two charity halls that housed and supported the aged and disabled people who could not work, as well as providing monthly stipends for chaste widows. It was better understood as an extension of the charitable school for poor and homeless children as seen from its effort to aid the development of professional careers for the blind.

The fact that blind people, as compared to people with other disabilities, enjoyed a special provision of vocational training from Confucian charity was due to the social acceptance of their professional status. Like their female counterparts in Guangzhou, Chengdu's blind male musicians and storytellers had long established their niches in the popular realm of entertainment. In his encyclopedic *Overview of Chengdu* (Chengdu Tonglan 成都通览), Fu Chongju illustrated a variety of musical practices employed by blind men. They were best known for playing the

[34] Zhou Xun 周詢, *Furong huajiulu* 芙蓉話舊錄 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1987 [1936]), vol. 3, 39.

hammered dulcimer (*yangqin* 洋琴), and the guide book listed 97 titles of popular dulcimer songs adapted from classical literature such as the *Favorite Concubine Drunk With Wine* (Guifei zuijiu 貴妃醉酒) and *Mulan Joins the Army* (Mulan Congjun 木蘭從軍). According to Fu, the blind held a monopoly over the performance of these songs and would raise colored lanterns when they performed in teahouses and at temple fairs. Sometimes they were also invited to perform at the homes of wealthy families.[35] A blind dulcimer player could earn as much as 600 *wen* of copper coins a day, which was six times more than carpenters and bricklayers. Blind drum singers (*daoqin* 道琴) and storytellers (*changshu* 唱書) who wondered along the streets only earned about 40 *wen* per song, which was equivalent to the amount paid to repair shoes. Moreover, these blind street singers had to compete with female *pipa* players and string musicians from Shaanxi.[36] The income disparity between the two groups of blind musicians was based primarily on instruments and performing contexts which, as I will show, factored in the education of blind boys from Cihuitang.

The division of labor among male singers in Chengdu also differed from the songstress in Guangzhou whose "body price" was measured by both voice and appearance (Chapter 1). This gender aspect also reflected different consuming patterns in inland Chengdu as compared to coastal Guangzhou. People often considered Chengdu's teahouses to be more popular-oriented than the ones that catered to a bourgeois clientele in the commercial district of Guangzhou. As Historian Di Wang has shown, even the rich people in Chengdu were fond of storytellers and went to ordinary teahouses just to watch their performance. The performance of dulcimer singing, due to its elegant melodies and lyrics, became popular among scholars and retired officials

[35] Fu Chongju 傅崇矩, *Chengdu tonglan* 成都通覽 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1987 [1909]), vol. 1, 292-293, 295.
[36] For a full list of prices for different kinds of crafts (*baigong jiamu* 百工價目), see Fu, ibid., 500-510.

during the late Qing and early Republic.[37] Gentry elders were among the respected patrons of local entertainers. Yin Changling also had a reputation for writing opera lyrics, and his best known work was *Sorrow for the Departed Swallow* (Liyan ai 離燕哀). Yin composed the script as a gift to the local opera troupe Sanqing hui 三庆会, and in return the troupe invited Yin to drink tea while advising the performance of its members. A former member of the troupe recalled that their frequent exchanges with gentry connoisseurs helped improve the "performing ethics" (*xide* 戏德), an important customary rule in the trade.[38]

It was also through the sponsorship of the cultural elites that blind dulcimer players established themselves as a prominent group of teahouse entertainers. In Chengdu, very few dulcimer singers could earn a name as Jia Shusan 賈樹三 (1894-1951), or Blind Jia as local people called him. Jia was born in a poor family in Chengdu and became blind when he was three. In order to make a living, Jia apprenticed himself to several street singers until he started to perform in lower-class teahouses and opium dens at fourteen. Jia's career took off as a result of his acquaintance with Tan Chuangzhi, an educator and newspaper editor who discovered Jia's talent and helped him understand the lyrics so as to bring out the emotions through singing. Tan also recommended Jia to perform at the well-known Jinchun Teahouse, where he became instantly famous after his debut. Later on, Jia received patronage from Yin Changling as well as influential militarists such as Feng Yuxiang.[39] Jia's success was by no means accidental, as local

[37] Di Wang, *The Teahouse: Small Business, Everyday Culture, and Public Politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 141-142.
[38] Zhou Mulian 周慕蓮, "Sanqing hui suoyi" (三庆会琐忆), in *Zhoumulian wutai yishu* 周慕莲舞台艺术 (Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1962), 167-168.
[39] Che Fu 车幅, "Zhuqin zhiwang Jia Xiazi" (竹琴之王賈瞎子), *Renwu zazhi* 人物雜誌 3, 4 (1949), 24-28.

people remembered his singing to carry the weight of moral lessons from traditional stories and the emotional power that stimulated his listeners during the war against Japan.[40]

Another group of blind dulcimer singers came from common institutional background. This was an occupational community of blind boys trained in Cihuitang who earned a reputation for their "hall-style dulcimer performance" (*tangpai yangqin* 堂派洋琴), a title in honor of Yin Changling's effort. Until 1950, the hall had opened 10 dulcimer classes that taught about 200 blind boys to become professional dulcimer players. Their singing style, which featured melodic ornamentation and the exquisite representation of inner activities of the characters, was a result of the integration of two established schools from the north and south of Chengdu.[41] In addition to their proficient skills, these blind graduates also exemplified the Confucian ideal of imparting moral education to members of the lower classes. A list of lyric books stored in the Cihuitang archive showed that blind children were taught to sing songs mostly adapted from history plays that intended to provide allegorical lessons to the public.[42] Similar to his support of the opera troupe, Yin considered blind children to be equally capable of transmitting moral messages to society and insisted that they were better included as members of professional groups.

When Yin Changling took over the management of Cihuitang in 1923, he found that there were only eight to nine blind boys sheltered in the hall as apprentices to a veteran blind musician. Due to the lack of funding for food and clothes, they had to go out everyday to do drum singing and fortunetelling on the streets. The master would take half of the money earned by his disciples and the amount was no more than a few hundred copper cash.[43] This new paper

[40] Wang, *The Teahouse*, 143.
[41] Jiang Shouwen 蔣守文, "Cihuitang yu tangpai yangqin" (慈惠堂與堂派洋琴), in Panjie, Yang Jiande, ed., *Jinjiang jiyi* 錦江記憶 (Xinhua chubanshe, 2008), 240-241.
[42] "Chengdu Cihuitang gutong suo guanyu fafang yangqin cishu de cheng" (成都慈惠堂瞽童所關於發放洋琴詞書的呈), Chengdu Municipal Archive (CMA), file 1-1-261-38.
[43] Minguo huayang xianzhi 民國華陽縣志 (HYXZ) (1934), vol. 36, 46.

currency, which was introduced after 1911, had larger denominations but reduced value due to the excessive minting of substandard copper coins under Sichuan warlords. For example, a 200 copper cash minted by Yang Sen in 1924 was only two *qian* (one-tenth of a Chinese ounce) more than a 50 cash copper coin minted in 1912.[44] This soon brought severe inflation as a result of the bad coins swamping the market, and it hit lower-class people especially hard. A foreign observer noted that sedan-chair carriers earned a daily wage between 600 to 1000 cash, and little was left after subtracting 300 or 400 cash per day for food.[45] This meant that many blind street singers would suffer from starvation when they failed to get customers to pay for their songs. To improve their condition, Yin decided to train the blind boys with the art of dulcimer singing so that they could have access to higher venues of entertainment such as the teahouse. As a patron of music himself, Yin was able to invite professional dulcimer players around the city to teach the blind boys.

According to a special issue published by Cihuitang in 1928, Yin hired two blind musicians from the market near the East Gate as residential instructors (*jiaoxi* 教習) of the newly opened Institute for the Education of Blind Boys (Gutong jiaoyangsuo 瞽童教養所). 40 blind students were enrolled in four classes that specialized in the training of different role types in the Sichuan opera. In the day they learned to memorize the lyrics and during the afternoon they practiced dulcimer singing. Besides the routine instruction, Yin also invited a group of lay musicians as supervisors (*jiancha yuan* 監察員) who met with the blind boys once a week to check on their progress.[46] Students of the same cohort (*ban* 班) were given a shared name character that distinguished their rank in the school. Yin named each class with a character from

[44] Sichuan shengzhi jinrongzhi 四川省志金融志 (Sichuan cishu chubanshe, 1996), 121.
[45] Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction*, 126.
[46] Chengdu Cihuitang Tekan 成都慈惠堂特刊 (1928) (CHTTK), 25.

Cihuitang's 16-character motto. According to oral history, there were 196 graduates between 1925 and 1949 who led a successful career as musicians. Some of the most famous dulcimer players, such as Zhang Tici and Hong Fengci, still maintained their shared character as a marker of their institutional identity.[47]

Blind boys schooled in Cihuitang had benefited from the interchange between musicians of different social backgrounds. Their supervisors were opera aficionados with high social standing who created their own style of dulcimer singing as distinct from blind performers of the marketplace. The blind boys who sat around listening were able to appreciate the emotional subtlety of the tones and then played out their own feelings about the music. After no more than a few years of training, the boys started to sing at private parties. Due to their blindness, they were also allowed to perform in front of young ladies in wealthy households. According to a local gazetteer in 1934, Cihuitang had trained 60 students as professional singers.[48] A regular show was performed by a group of seven blind boys all dressed in long gowns, which showcased the gentry sponsorship of an refined art form. The payment for hiring a band to perform between 9 am and 7 pm was 21 *chuan*/string of copper cash (1 *chuan* had 1000 copper coins), and half of the price was set for night shows.[49] In theory this meant that each blind boy could earn as much as 3000 cash/day, which was three times more than a coolie laborer at the time.

Besides spending a small part of the earning on purchasing clothes and instruments, as written in the school regulation, the rest would go into the savings account of each blind boy with the amount distributed according to the proficiency of skills. Blind boys could withdraw

[47] Li Zicong 李子聰, Kang Xianhong 康先洪, "Sichuan yangqin yishu yu zhuming yanchangjia Zhang Dazhang (Tici)" (四川揚琴藝術與著名演唱家張大章), *Jinjiang wenshi ziliao* 錦江文史資料 8 (Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2004), 417-418.
[48] HYXZ, 47.
[49] The regulation also specified that the employment fee was set in accordance with the silver price. See Cihuitang gutong jiaoyangsuo zhangcheng (1928?), CMA-1-1-49-12.

money from their account to deal with emergencies such as illness. In order to finance an independent career for the blind boys after their departure from the school, Yin deposited their savings into the account of Cihuitang in the local Bank of China for an interest rate set for a three-month period, and then rolled the interest back into the account to generate further profit. Upon leaving the school, the blind boy would be paid in cash all his savings in the account. Since the school granted a period of residence up to 16 years, most of them graduated within 4 years and continued to be employed as a member of the music troupe for over a decade. [50] Thus it was expected that the boys admitted to the school during their early teens could accumulate a good fortune after reaching adulthood.

The process of selection and admission of blind boys into the Cihuitang followed rigorous steps of recommendation, investigation and contracting. Parents and relatives needed to find a literate person of good social standing to refer an application to the Cihuitang. After receiving the recommendation, the superintendent of Cihuitang would dispatch a staff member to visit the applicant's home and to confirm the family's inability to support the blind boy. Applicants without immediate relatives should obtain a letter of guarantee (*baozhuang shu* 保狀書) with the signature of the guarantor and the approval of local *baojia* heads when living outside of Chengdu. A completed contract also required a separate report written on behalf of the blind boy stating that he "voluntarily submitted [himself] into" (*ziyuan touru* 自願投入) Cihuitang for the purpose of learning a skill. Followed by it was the stipulation of the residential period, treatment, reward and punishment of the blind boy during the time when he received vocational training.[51] We don't know if the blind boy was willing to be taken into custody by Cihuitang, and little information about the trustworthiness of guarantors was given besides the

[50] Ibid.
[51] CHTTK, 26.

residential address. But the contract did try to protect the interest of the applicant by promising food and housing as well as an income distributed to him after he acquired a skill.

2.1 Coping with Family Incapacity

A few written contracts stored in the Cihuitang archive gave some details about the backgrounds of families with blind children. One showed that a widow Feng Zhang Shi pleaded for help of her blind son due to the fact that she suffered from handicapped feet (*zushou canji* 足受殘疾) that prevented her from working.[52] Another reported an aged widow Zhou Zeng Shi, 64 *sui*, who was left with a blind grandson, 12 *sui*, after the death of her daughter-in-law. Her meager income from household weaving was insufficient to feed herself, let alone raising the blind boy. "I am one foot in the grave (*fengzhu cannian* 風燭殘年) but could not bear to see my grandson dying from starvation," said Zhou Zeng Shi in her letter.[53] After confirming the truth of their statements, the staff also inspected the health condition of the blind children before submitting a formal request for their admission to the managing board of Cihuitang.

There were also blind children referred from other institutional branches of Cihuitang. For example, the superintendent of the foundling home once recommended two abandoned blind girls for enrollment in a singing class since they could not read and work alongside other sighted girls.[54] It was not uncommon to find poor widows bringing their children into Cihuitang to get through the economic hardship. After the death of her husband, Li Yi Shi was left with a blind son and an infant daughter. In order to keep her children from starvation, Li Yi Shi begged the

[52] "Guanyu Cai jianshi fan shuangliu xian zhi Chengdu Cihuitang de baogao shu" (關於蔡監事返雙流縣致成都慈惠堂的報告書), CMA-1-1-263-29.
[53] "Guanyu Zhou Daogeng jiajing qingkuang zhi zongganshi de baogao" (關於周道庚家境情況致總幹事的報告), CMA-1-1-263-40.
[54] "Guanyu jiang Ye Yufang deng youtong songru Yuyingtang xuexi yangqin zhi Cihuitang lishizhang de cheng" (關於將葉玉芳等幼童送入育嬰堂學習洋琴致慈惠堂理事張的呈), CMA-1-1-247-23.

superintendent to refer her blind son to study the dulcimer while sending her daughter into the foundling home. She also agreed to work as a helper and use her monthly salary (i.e. 7 *sheng*/5.25 kg of rice) to pay for her daughter's meal.[55] The above cases illustrated different reasons for the family's incapacity to cope with blindness. On one end of the spectrum it was poverty driven by old age and family dissolution while on the other it was the loss of a male breadwinner that drove women and children to seek institutional support. In both scenarios, disability pushed the family beyond the limit of care and tied the subsistence claims from every members of the family to the promises of charity. In addition to being desperate, parents who chose for their younger ones a life within Cihuitang learned to take advantage of institutional resources in dealing with persistent forms of dependency.

Perhaps due to its social prestige and semi-official nature, Cihuitang enjoyed considerable autonomy in making arrangements for children from poverty-stricken families. It was in a time when urban households were under the close watch by the local police. Since its establishment in 1902, Chengdu's Western-style police department had imposed strict regulation on the sales of young children as maids and servants by insisting on the registration of all changes within a household.[56] In practice, however, the effectiveness of legal protection remained dubious. This was due to the fact that service labor took many familial forms, from professional households set close to the entertainment district to itinerant performing troupes at the marketplace. These were places that both enabled poor and disadvantaged members to survive on a specialized trade and allowed traffickers to constantly evade the law.[57] One of the goals undertaken by Cihuitang was to offer institutional protection for vulnerable members,

[55] "Chengdu Cihuitang gutongsuo song Cihuitang guanyu shouna gutong de cheng" (成都慈惠堂瞽童所送慈惠堂關於收納瞽童得呈), CMA-1-1-261-34.
[56] Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction*, 28.
[57] For a full interpretation of trafficking as constitutive to familial functions, see Johanna Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China* (Harvard University Press, 2017), Chapter 4.

especially women and children, so as to prevent them from falling victim to the exploitative market of human trafficking.

A local journalist reported in 1927 that a poor woman (*pinfu* 貧婦) surnamed Yan found a boy of two-month old deserted by his parents in a basket lying on a street near the Xinxiangzi. In order to rescue him from cold and hunger, woman Yan carried the infant to another woman who was infertile and wanted to adopt a son. But the next day the woman returned the boy to Yan on the ground that she had no milk to feed him. Yan then gave the boy to Cihuitang. After an examination, the nurse at the founding home discovered wounds around the boy's neck indicating that someone attempted to strangle him with thick threads.[58] Was this an act of despair by his parents? We don't know, but at least it showed that many people lacked the awareness of seeking institutional support. Even for a neighbor like Yan who kindly picked up the boy from the street, her immediate thought was to give him to another family. Newspapers at the time constantly warned against the abandonment of children on the streets or in the parks and advised destitute parents to send their children to Cihuitang.[59] The police also cooperated in searching for homeless children and finding them shelters. A case showed that a patrolman, upon discovering a blind vagrant boy in his precinct, immediately took the boy to Cihuitang without having further interference with the case.[60] These instances suggested that gentry philanthropists continued to play a major role in coping with the disintegration of families at a time when municipal authorities attempted to exert broader control of the homeless and poor.

[58] "Qihai hewei xiangxi hongxian" (棄孩何為項系紅線), GMGB (November 8, 1927).
[59] "Buyang ke song yuyingtang" (不養可送育嬰堂), GMGB (April 7, 1924).
[60] "Guanyu faxian mangtong qing Chengdu Cihuitang shourong" (關於發現盲童請成都慈惠堂收容), CMA-1-1-264-124.

2.2 Cihuitang and Governmental Workhouses

A major development in the Republican-era urban administration was to reform traditional methods of poor relief. The new emphasis was on the restoration of self-sufficiency against the tendency of pauperization through passive means of material provision. This social scientific understanding of poverty and the obligation of modern welfare facilities corresponded to an indigenous wave of anti-vagrancy movement launched by the late-Qing official Zhou Shanpei since 1903. In his 1910 report, the missionary O. L. Kilborn commended Zhou's effort in building a "beggar reformatory" (*qigai gongchang* 乞丐工廠)" that took in all beggars found inside the city gate for the training of a proper trade.[61] These workhouses, established before the fall of Qing, represented a major change in the state's management of poverty as a result of China's exposure to foreign ideas. Historian Janet Chen has shown that reformist officials and social elites in Beijing and Shanghai perceived the urban poor as a quintessential cause of national weakness and demanded their compulsory labor as a way of strengthening the nation.[62]

In Chengdu, progressive military leaders were more concerned with city governance than national salvation, and they deployed the workhouse model to further the end of establishing political legitimacy. In 1924, Yang Sen's administration made further efforts to restrict beggars from entering the city during the road-widening campaign.[63] A year later, the head of the municipal office, Wang Zuanxu 王纘緒 (1886-1960), explained to the public that the coercive removal of beggars from the city was aimed at establishing a healthy work ethic for the unemployed and homeless. "There is no reason to assume a person to be completely useless,"

[61] O. L. Kilborn, "The Modern City of Chengtu," *Acta Victoriana* (June, 1910), 523.
[62] Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton University Press, 2012), Chapter 1.
[63] "Chen Weixin zaini shuaxin shizheng: shouna qigai" (陳維新再擬刷新市政: 收納乞丐), GMGB (May 28, 1924); "Zai yanjin qigai rucheng" (再嚴禁乞丐入城), GMGB (December 25, 1924).

said Wang, "since even the disabled could work with partial functions of their body." Wang also urged the elderly poor to come to the Home for the Aged instead of begging on the street.[64] The fact that even old age and disability were no longer accepted as legitimate grounds for begging implied an expanded municipal control over basic livelihoods through rationalizing the use of relief funds.

Governmental workhouses in Chengdu were also created in response to the inadequacy of traditional charity in coping with mendicancy. The persistence of voluntary giving ran counter to the government's attempt to fight poverty. Wang's city office blamed the unrestrained almsgiving by petty philanthropists (*xiao cishanjia* 小慈善家), who "lured many lazy inmates to ran away from the workhouse and return to begging."[65] Those who escaped from the workhouse could still rely on a wide range of gentry and merchant-run philanthropic associations for the seasonal distribution of food, clothes, medicine and burial services. Newspaper reports from 1925 to 1927 showed that private charity continued to play an important role in saving lives from the street during the height of anti-begging campaign.[66]

Beggars who were brought into the workhouse by local police had little incentive to become productive since they were treated like criminals. A survey of 91 beggars from a workhouse in Chengdu showed that only two entered voluntarily due to starvation. The rest were all forced to quit their organized livelihood as a result of the government's response to urban reformist elites, who denounced beggars as "causing harm to the city's appearance" and "destroying public order." This intolerance for vagrancy, however, was further pushed back by

[64] "Shizheng suo quzhu qigai de yuanyin" (市政所驅逐乞丐的原因), GMGB (February 3, 1925).
[65] Ibid.
[66] See for example, "Yishoutang rexin cishan" (益壽堂熱心慈善), GMGB (May 21, 1924), "Zhengxintang diaocha pinmin" (正心堂調查貧民), (January 1, 1925), "Dachenghui sanfa dongzhen" (大成會散發冬賑), GMGB (January 18, 1925), "Cishanhui zhengli kugu" (慈善會整理枯骨), GMGB (March 6, 1927), "Xiaodetang songzhen shiyao" (孝德堂送診施藥), GMGB (May 17, 1927).

the tendency of recidivism due to the insufficient funding for the workhouse.[67] Thus the government's attempt to combine incarceration with labor service worked at best to offer a temporary solution to the problem of vagrancy in a period of economic recession.

In fact, Chengdu's beggars were not entirely desperate and lacking order. According to a local journalist, they had organized themselves in the City God Temple, where young and able-bodied beggars brought alms to the majority of elderly, sick and disabled who helped protect the turf. It was not until 1937 that the beggar den gradually disintegrated as a result of forced military conscription of all able-bodied males to fight the war against Japan. Then the rest of beggars, mostly women and children, began to appear in street corners and cried for help. There were also blind beggars sitting outside the teahouse doing fortunetelling.[68] Elderly and disabled beggars sought refuge in Cihuitang's Home for the Aged, which was organized in the structure of a village community. Official records showed that its housing capacity expanded from a number of 616 inmates in 1928 to 930 in 1935.[69] Gentry managers also cultivated the unused farmland granted by the government to provide vegetables and rice for aged and disabled widows and widowers in order to prevent them from begging on the street. As I will show in a later section, this community model of eldercare, which was based on the mutual aid between able-bodied and disabled men and women, played an even more important role during wartime Chengdu.

As a semi-official charitable organization, Cihuitang played an important role in mediating between philanthropic activism and work-based rehabilitation. The centralization of a host of charity halls not only allowed the most vulnerable groups among the urban poor to

[67] Tang Kexiu 唐克修, *Chengdushi zhi qigai* 成都市之乞丐 (A Study of Beggars in Chengdu), Bachelor's thesis, West China Union University (Chengdu: Huaxi xiehe daxue Shehuixue xi, 1938). In He Yimin, Yao Leye, ed., *Minguo shiqi shehui diaocha congbian Sichuan daxue juan* (Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), 291.
[68] Chen Xiong 陳雄, *Chengdu shehui texie* 成都社會特寫 (Chengdu: Yibaoshe, 1946), 2-4.
[69] CDSZNJ, 555; "Chengdu Cihuitang gaikuang" (成都慈惠堂概況), *Sichuan yuebao* 四川月報 7, 6 (1935), 203.

maximize their chance of survival during hard times but also generated new approaches to the problem of physical dependency. In addition to gentry and local officials, a third force that shaped the charitable sector of Chengdu was foreign elites. In what follows, I will first compare Cihuitang's approaches to blind people with foreign innovations in special education before placing it in relation to the aged and disabled. I will show that during the 1930s, Confucian philanthropists began to take up new initiatives in expanding traditional functions of poor relief as a response to foreign influence.

3. Cihuitang and Foreign Schools for the Blind in Chengdu

The foreign community in Chengdu earned a reputation for bringing modern education and innovating in public welfare during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The West China Union University (WCUU), which was built mainly by a group of Canadian Methodist missionaries who arrived in Chengdu in 1910, became a rare example of how Western-style education in science and medicine gained a foothold in the cultural sphere dominated by gentry elites. The Canadian missionary society reported in 1920 that they had opened six primary schools in the city with an average enrollment of more than two hundred students. But very few of the graduates eventually became Christians, according to the report, and it was difficult to arouse their interest in religious teaching besides adding some pages of the Bible to the curriculum.[70] More promising were the social programs headed by American missionaries that aimed at promoting mass literacy and vocational training for the lower class people. These activities were inspired by modern disciplines of sociology and social work and had attracted

[70] N. E. Bowles, "Chengtu," *Our West China Mission* (Toronto: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1920), 173.

many young people from elite families to survey the economic conditions of the city through the financial support of Christian organizations. Missionaries regarded the teaching of sociology as a roadmap of the social and cultural conditions where they were stationed and an instrument that validated their social reform agenda via the local church.[71]

In 1907, the American missionary Robert Service set up a local branch of the YMCA in Chengdu and befriended local authorities and gentry elders. His personal connection with urban elites helped expand foreign influence over the charitable sector in the 1920s. In particular, his wife Grace Service had a keen interest in the education of blind children. In 1918, she presented a survey on the living conditions of blind people in Chengdu in the Fortnightly Club and later got involved in the establishment of the School for the Blind. The Club then sponsored two blind boys to study at the Institute for the Chinese Blind in Shanghai in 1919. After her visit to the Shanghai school in 1920, Grace Service wrote in her diary that these trained blind children would "show the people in Sichuan what could be accomplished for those handicapped by loss of vision."[72] She considered the recruitment of blind children into the missionary school in Chengdu as a proof that the distant inland city was catching up with bigger and better-known schools in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Through the help of missionary societies, the Chengdu school acquired braille textbooks and other teaching materials and incorporated them in its public exhibition. In 1924, the school reported the visit by Yang Sen and his administration, as well as civic organizations that brought along students from the West Union University and members of the YMCA.[73]

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[71] Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, "From Europe to North America: The Development of Sociology in Twentieth-century China," in David S. Goodman, ed., *China and the West: Ideas and Activists* (Manchester University Press, 1990), 135.
[72] Grace Service, *Golden Inches: The China Memoir of Grace Service* (University of California Press, 1989), 228.
[73] "School for the Blind," *West China Missionary News*, v. 27, no. 3 (March, 1924), 37.

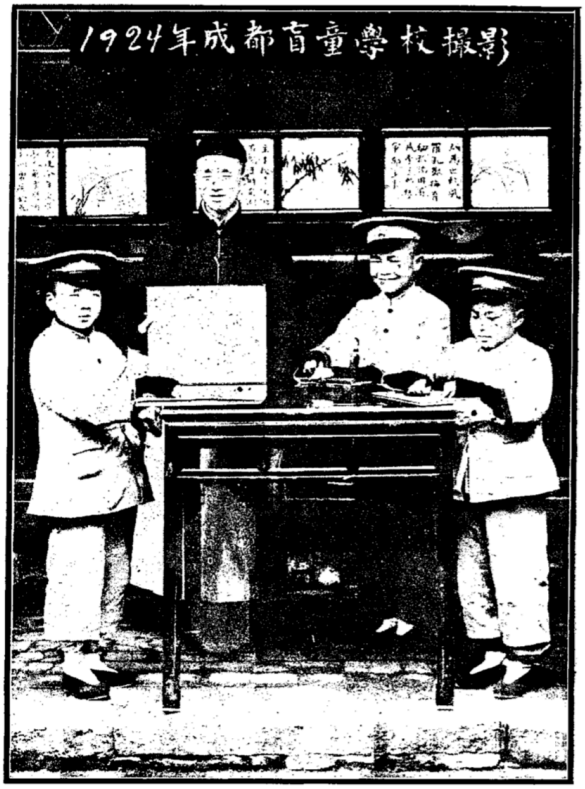

Figure 3.1: Christian School for the Blind in Chengdu[74]

Missionary educators were also careful in their advocacy of foreign innovations, and this was reflected in the way they handled the precarious balance between reformist officials and traditional elites. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, General Yang Sen gave missionaries a local temple to be used as a classroom for blind children out of his eagerness to showcase novelty, but his reform efforts were hardly appreciated by gentry elites in Chengdu. This tension was well observed by missionaries who responded with a balanced advertisement for the school. The front cover of a school handbook (Figure 3.1) presented a picture of three blind students dressed in army uniforms. One was holding an open page from an embossed book while the other two boys performed Braille reading. Standing behind them was a Chinese instructor who wore a melon-shaped hat and long gown, representing the typical style of a gentry scholar. The image was carefully chosen to showcase the government's caring and innovative

[74] Ibid., front cover.

leadership. The background decorations of painted bamboo and Chinese calligraphy also suggested that missionaries were consciously adapting their charitable practices to a neighborhood known for its enshrinement of Chinese tradition.

3.1 Yin Changling's Response to Missionaries

The missionary invention of Braille literacy also impressed gentry elites and motivated them to learn about special education. Yin Changling wrote in a report of Cihuitang that he had originally thought of running a school for blind boys according to the foreign model but found it hard to employ qualified instructors. More importantly, Yin was afraid that what was taught in foreign schools could not help the blind secure a livelihood.[75] Missionaries recognized the practical limit of their educational agenda as compared to the music school run by gentry philanthropists, but they also saw indigenous charity as not attending to the intellectual and spiritual improvement of the blind. As shown from a missionary survey, Chengdu people generally viewed blind musicians with respect due to their long-time investment in folk art. But the music played by the blind was secular and should be repurposed for Christian teaching, according to the author, who mentioned the achievement of the Shanghai school in training blind boys to sing hymns and explain to local people about Christianity in the streets.[76] The missionary's attempt to harness the music ability of blind people for proselytization indicated the difficulty in getting across religious messages from Christian schools. This was perhaps due to the fact that missionaries in Chengdu, as compared to those stationed in coastal cities, did not have many resources to allocate to the advancement of religious education. In comparison to what we have seen in Guangzhou, where progressive urban intellectuals and officials

[75] CHTTK, 24.
[76] Caroline Wellwood, "Some notes on Chinese Musical Instruments," WCMN (March, 1924), 15.

collaborated with Christian organizations in rescuing blind girls from the unfree labor regimes of singing and prostitution, Chengdu did not witness the growth of similar institutions. This was partly explained by the different consumption patterns of urban entertainment, as mentioned before, and the role gentry played in maintaining social customs.

More importantly, Chengdu's gentry elites were uninterested in the idea of redemption of the souls and refused to consider the blind as inherently deficient in their way of being human. Their attitudes toward people of vulnerability was informed by the Confucian doctrine of "teaching without discrimination" (*youjiao wulei* 有教無類), which emphasized the equal opportunity for learning that aided the development of one's potential. Yin Changling also stated that "teaching took precedence over material support" (*jiao zhongyu yang* 教重於養) and insisted on the mutual influence between virtue and work. To him, the definition of a useful person was whether or not he could earn a respectable living and in doing so became an honorable member of the community. The blind who lacked the means of subsistence were equally disadvantaged as the homeless poor and should be taught with a skill according to their abilities. Yin also considered the foreign method of Braille and handicraft training as worthy of emulation to the degree that they could help advance the social career of blind people.[77] Thus the Confucian approach to blindness and disability was rooted in the societal claims to self-sufficiency and the elite's obligation to protect the family and community. Unlike missionaries who attempted to redefine blindness through making transcendental claims to literacy and work ethic, gentry philanthropists focused on restoring the professional identity of blind people as embedded in social customs.

[77] CHTTK, 47-49.

But the Confucian belief in the material wellbeing of those who work hard and behave virtuously was not wholly rational. As Kristin Stapleton has inferred from Ba Jin's *Family*, most Chengdu people in the early twentieth century accepted the Buddhist conception of karma, or the retribution caused by one's behavior in the past or future lives, as a way to reconcile the "fate" (*ming* 命) of poverty and suffering.[78] The karmic understanding of misfortune also applied to the explanation of disability. The idea that blindness, deafness and insanity were signs of bad karma perpetuated in popular beliefs, and sometimes it was mixed with the Daoist interpretation of the invasion of evil spirits.[79] But contrary to the Buddhist and Daoist rejection of worldly value, Confucianists emphasized changing fate through virtuous action. Medical historian Angela Leung has observed from the case of leprosy that the nature of abominable diseases (*e'ji* 惡疾) as heavenly abandonment compelled the patient to act virtuously in order to honor his family, beginning with accepting their fate.[80] In a similar fashion, founders of Cihuitang believed that the blind who acquired the art of music could "compensate for the defect caused by the formation of heaven and earth" (*bu tiandi shengcheng zhi quexian* 補天地生成之缺陷).[81] Here blindness was conceived as an individual misfortune that had cosmological resonance. This understanding did not hold the blind person accountable for Buddhist karma or require him to seek Christian salvation. Rather, it insisted on the potential of the blind person to restore the impairment by claiming the ritual power of music. "Since using the blind to play music was an inherited ritual," said Yin, "they were best fitted for the art."[82] Yin's opinion echoed the Confucian belief in the moral redemption of disability performed in the mundane social order. In asking the blind to

[78] Stapleton, *Fact in Fiction*, 78, 116.
[79] Lucy Ching, *One of the Lucky Ones* (Gulliver Books, 1980), 25.
[80] Angela Ki-che Leung, *Leprosy in China: A History* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 64.
[81] Liu Xiyan 劉希顏, "Chengdu Cihuitang gutongsuo song Cihuitang guanyu xunlian gutong xuexi yangqin de cheng" (成都慈惠堂瞽童所送慈惠堂關於訓練瞽童學習揚琴的呈), CMA-1-1-261-28.
[82] HYXZ, 47.

compensate for their physical incompleteness by performing ritual obligations to the community, Confucian philanthropists hoped to counter the prevalent social stigma and facilitate the social inclusion of disabled members.

3.2 Social Surveys of Cihuitang and the Chinese-Foreign School for the Blind

Despite the different ideological approaches to the education of blind people, missionaries and Chinese elites were able to collaborate through new venues. In 1922, H. J. Openshaw of the American Baptist Mission invited the director of the Chengdu Red Cross Association Wang Ho Chin (Wang Hecen) to serve as a board member of the Christian school for the blind. A committee of Chinese directors was later formed to help raise funds. Openshaw reported in 1924 that half of the school's annual expenditure came from Chinese contributors.[83] In 1925, the school was renamed as the Chinese-Foreign School for the Blind and Mute (Zhongxi cishantuan mangya xuexiao 中西慈善團盲啞學校, CFSB), which was affiliated to the Chinese-Foreign Associated Charitable Society (Zhongxi zuhe cishanhui 中西組合慈善會, CFACS). A list of members of the society showed that 19 out of 30 were Chinese, which included the reformist official Chen Weixin, who brought the Mass Education movement to Chengdu and was a key advisor to Yang Sen. The co-founders of the society all received Christian education and were affiliated to the YMCA and the WCUU.[84] The involvement of reformist elites in the operation of foreign-style charity helped launch a native movement of special education in the 1930s. Another force that participated in this new wave of cooperation between foreign and Chinese educators was a group of young social scientists. They set out investigating the conditions of charitable institutions and used facts to advocate for better

[83] "School for the Blind," WCMN (March, 1924), 38.
[84] "Zhongxi zuhe cishanhui geceng huiyuan mingdan" (中西組合慈善會各層會員名單), CMA-4-2-8.

solutions to social problems. As I will show below, it was through their research that we could discern changes in the way Cihuitang responded to foreign methods of educating the blind and disabled.

How well did the two models of gentry and missionary charity work in resolving the problem of dependency for their recipients? This was the primary question that motivated Loh Jung Tsung (Luo Rongzong 羅榮宗), who then taught sociology at WCUU, to conduct a survey of nine charitable institutions in Chengdu. Loh was one of the young disciples of American sociology that found its way to China through Christian colleges and social organizations. Sidney Gamble and John Burgess's study on the economic conditions of Beijing introduced the social survey method to China during the early 1920s. Loh did his fieldwork in Chengdu during the spring and summer of 1930, when an indigenous social survey movement took a decided shift of focus from coastal to hinterland provinces.[85] This study, which was the earliest one I am able to find, was first published as a master's thesis to the department of sociology in the University of Southern California where Luo also pursued his doctoral degree. In this early work, Loh applied observation and interview methods to study the institutional life of 619 homeless, aged and disabled people in Chengdu's largest charitable sector. In particular, he was able to talk to blind children schooled in Cihuitang and the CFSB, and he did this through offering free physical examination for blind boys and arranging hospital visits for those with illness.[86]

The first step of Loh's research was to investigate the causes of dependency by classifying the inmates into different age and disability groups. He reported a total number of disabled inmates as 182, or 30% of all in his survey. Among them 54 were aged between sixty

[85] Yung-chen Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919-1949* (Cambridge University Press), 58.
[86] Rowland Loh Jung Tsung, *A Sociological Study of the Indoor Relief Institutions in Chengtu*, master's thesis, University of Southern California (May 1933), x.

and seventy-nine. These were homeless widows and widowers who stayed in Cihuitang's Home for the Aged. Disability due to old age was a primary factor that drove the homeless to find a shelter in charitable institutions.[87] In cases of younger inmates, disability was linked to the fractured condition of the family. Loh pointed out that among 318 children in the survey, 222 were fatherless and 10 were motherless. The absence of the breadwinner and parental care further pushed 88 families to send their blind boys to charity.[88] These orphaned blind boys were aged between eight to nineteen and they constituted 48.3% of all disabled inmates in the survey.[89] The overwhelming majority of 155 blind inmates as compared to those with other impairments, such as deaf-muteness and lameness, further led the author to conclude that blindness was "an outstanding cause of dependency."[90] Loh was right in pointing out that disability compounded the burden of aged people and orphans in submitting themselves to the custody of welfare facilities. But his finding about the high percentage of blindness could also be interpreted as a result of the institutional advocacy for special training programs, which exempted the blind from a general perception of disability as a double cause of dependency.

Loh further distinguished Chinese and foreign approaches to the education of blind children. He first noted the different admission criteria for blind children between the Cihuitang Institute for the Blind and the CFSB. While the former admitted only blind boys between the ages of eight to sixteen, the latter set a wider age range from ten to twenty and no gender restriction was applied. But unlike Cihuitang, which covered all the cost of living and training for its students, the missionary school required an applicant to secure a patron who was willing

[87] Ibid., 31.
[88] Ibid., 97.
[89] Ibid., 93.
[90] Table XXIII in the survey showed the distribution of physical impairments. In addition to 155 blind people, there were 8 deaf-mutes, 7 lame, 4 cripples, 2 deaf-blind, 1 deformed, 1 imbecile and 4 unclassified. See Ibid., 94.

to pay for the tuition.[91] Although the author did not mention in his survey how poor families might find a benefactor, it is not hard to imagine that the priority of such referral was given to church members. In comparison, Cihuitang held no restriction on the economic and religious backgrounds of prospective students and its promise to secure their employment after graduation had a broader appeal to the subsistence claims of society.

With regard to the curriculum, however, the CFSB offered a diverse range of courses for students enrolled in preliminary, lower and higher grades. Ideally in a full duration of eight years, the blind student began learning braille and arithmetic, and then had the option to take classes on hygiene, natural sciences, geography and history. Religious teaching was imparted through the daily practice of prayers and Sunday visits to the church. This arrangement weighted intellectual development over vocational training, which only included a class on chair caning. The author reported after a visit to the rattan workshop that the students only took handicrafts playfully and had not produced any finished products. The majority of students at the CFSB did not have a clear sense of career choice, except for one that expressed his wish to become a preacher but had not been able to find a position yet.[92]

By contrast, blind boys schooled in Cihuitang only took practical lessons on the use of music instruments, singing and the memorization of lyrics. Loh included a picture he took of the blind boys rehearsing an opera performance (Figure 3.2). The name of Cihuitang was written on a badge of the troupe for the purpose of demonstrating its gentry sponsorship. At the center of the troupe were five older boys who played different music instruments. The dulcimer player sat in the middle and on both sides of him were *erhu* and drum players. A group of ten younger boys lined up behind the band as dulcimer singers. There were two little boys standing beside the

[91] Ibid., 32-33.
[92] Ibid., 72, 80.

Figure 3.2: Blind Boys in A Dulcimer Performance in Cihuitang[93]

troupe who seemed to have just begun learning. All the boys who performed in the troupe wore long gowns and round hats, which showcased their professional identity as Confucian-style musicians. This image nicely captured the institutional promotion of blindness as a cultured form of expertise rather than a physical cause of dependency.

Cihuitang's emphasis on a blind boy's professional competence thus differed from that of the CFSB, where students had only a vague sense of what jobs to expect after graduation. Loh referred to the lack of occupational training in CFSB's model of elementary education as a limitation in the understanding of disability as an integral part of economic and social life. Citing his teacher G. B. Mangold's book *Social Pathology*, Loh argued that the "vocational needs" of the blind should be prioritized over intellectual training. But Cihuitang's instruction was also limited in scope, since it overlooked the importance of "industrial training," which referred to manual occupations such as broom making, rug weaving, sewing and massage.[94] Loh attributed

[93] Ibid., 96.
[94] Ibid., 112.

the narrow focus on music to the reigning conservatism among the administrators. Through participating in special meetings held by the Board of Chengdu Charitable Institutions, Loh found that all members of the board were Confucian gentry. Among a total number of 65 staff members, only 9 had received modern education.[95] During an interview, the author asked Director Yin Changling how he conceived of the goal for educating orphaned and disabled children. Yin replied that he only wished to support them to pursue a career according to their talents. "I am letting the bright go on with their studies," said Yin, "and putting the dull boys into workshops."[96] Yin's answer was informed by the age-old distinction between mental and manual labor as discussed in Mencius. Loh found this division to be inadequate as a principle of education in a changing society. In particular, he noted that basic qualifications such as physical health, good citizenship and social obligation were all lacking.[97] The able-bodied orphans as well as the blind and disabled should all be given a wider spectrum of educational choices. Loh's view was aimed at the comprehensive development of the individual rather than letting them conform to the dichotomy between intellectuals and the laboring classes. Indeed, the educational model of Cihuitang continued to perpetuate the cultural distinction by separating the able-bodied children who exceled in classical studies from mediocre and disabled children who had no schooling but only occupational training. Also, the fact that blind boys were only apprenticed to musicians and did not participate in workshops of woodprint carving, carpentry and tailoring reflected that traditional elites had yet to grapple with the idea of broadening the employment opportunities for disabled people.

Five years after Loh conducted his research, the WCUU sent another student of sociology to investigate the operation of charitable organizations in Chengdu. This time, the CFSB opened

[95] Ibid., 17.
[96] Ibid., 104.
[97] Ibid., 79.

a new department for the education of deaf-mutes since 1933, when a group of Chinese instructors returned from training in the first missionary school for deaf-mutes in Yantai, Shandong. In 1935, the school admitted 24 deaf-mute students in addition to 12 blind students. Deaf students were taught to read lips by observing the pronunciation of the instructor and using their fingers to sign for the phonetic alphabet. The school also reallocated its vocational training programs by teaching the blind to play piano and the deaf to make embroidery and rattan weaving. In comparison, Cihuitang had a bigger enrollment of 50 blind boys, but besides training the majority with dulcimer singing, gentry managers did not introduce handwork except for adding special lessons on fortunetelling and divination.[98] This finding confirmed a new tendency of native educators in taking the lead of expanding western-style special education to inland China. On the other hand, it also revealed the fact that Confucian charity gradually appeared "backward" and "unscientific" in the eyes of social surveyors. They did not wholly reject Cihuitang's goal of fostering livelihoods but criticized it for encouraging the blind to pursue superstitious activities that were harmful to the cultivation of good citizenship. As I will show below, it was the emergence of Chinese schools for blind and deaf children in Chengdu that finally helped extend the modern imperative of special education to the realm of Confucian charity.

3.3 The Rise of Chinese Schools for Blind and Deaf-Mute Children

The indigenous social survey movement during the early 1930s motivated Chengdu's young and progressive elites to overcome the limitation of Confucian charity by introducing new

[98] Feng Xianguang 馮獻光, *Chengdushi cishan tuanti de diaocha* 成都市慈善團體的調查 (A Study of Chengdu's Charitable Organization), Bachelor's thesis, West China Union University (Chengdu: Huaxi xiehe daxue Shehuixue xi, 1935). In He Yimin, Yao Leye, ed., *Minguo shiqi shehui diaocha congbian Sichuan daxue juan* (Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), 167.

educational methods for poor and disabled children. Luo Shufang 羅蜀芳 (1906-1994) was one of the forerunners in the promotion of Chinese schools for the education of blind and deaf children. Luo was born in a Chengdu family that had a reputation for making wooden mirror case. At the age of nine Luo started a year's *sishu* education before entering a western-style elementary school. But her study was soon interrupted by the regional warfare in 1917 and then the outburst of anti-foreignism following the Wanxian Incident in 1926, which forced her to quit a missionary-run women's school just one week before her graduation. Luo then got married when she was nineteen but only to find a sick husband who soon died of tuberculosis. Disheartened by the tragic fate of old-style marriage, Luo decided to pursue her education further in a teacher's college and then went to Beijing to study law. It was then when H. J. Openshaw, the head of CFSB, reached out to her about an opportunity to learn special education at the school for the deaf in Yantai and then return to teach in Chengdu. After careful deliberation, Luo accepted the position out of the empathy for blind and deaf children whose misfortune reminded Luo of her own struggle as a woman. As a Christian, she also believed that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."[99]

In the summer of 1932, Luo boarded a ship from Tianjin to Yantai. Upon her arrival, Anita E. Carter, the then headmaster of the school, received Luo and told her about the history of the school. Built in 1887 by Carter's aunt Annetta Mills, the school was the first to introduce the method of oralism in the education of deaf-mutes in China, following the ones established in France in 1772, Germany in 1778, America in 1818 and Japan in 1878.[100] Luo took lessons on

[99] Luo Shufang 羅蜀芳, "Yisheng xiangei mang longya shiye" (一生獻給盲聾啞事業) *Chengdu wenshi ziliao xuanji* 成都文史資料選集, vol. 26 (Chengdu: Chengdu chubanshe, 1992), 61-66.

[100] For a brief summary of the ascendency of oralism in deaf schools in Europe and North America, see Margret A. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration* (Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 188-204. For the spread of deaf schools in Japan and China, see Karen Nakamura, *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the*

Alexander Bell's method of visible speech, a system that used fingers to teach the deaf to recognize the physiological symbols of pronunciation. This "finger alphabet" was invented as a supplement for lip-reading. Beginning in the 1920s, the Yantai deaf school became a training base for Chinese instructors to spread the new method to other schools in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Fujian, Nanjing and Chengdu.[101]

After spending a year of training in Yantai, Luo finally graduated with a certificate of special education and returned to Chengdu to teach at CFSB. Back then the school was relocated again from the Jiangdumiao campus to Zhaozhongci Street near the East Gate of Chengdu in order to accommodate newly admitted deaf and mute students. By 1937, the enrollment had reached 50 students, with a teaching staff of 12.[102] 41 rooms were built on a six-acre land and the new campus reflected one of the earliest designs of an accessible learning environment. According to the floor plan (Figure 3.3), blind and deaf children had separate teaching and residential spaces divided by the red line. On the bottom left were classrooms and dormitories for the blind and their teachers located on the first and second floors of a H-shaped building. It was close to the canteen, bathroom, playground and a vegetable garden. Deaf and mute students studied in the area on the right and worked in a textile workshop in the middle, which was next to a music workshop for the blind. Luo remembered that all the buildings and pavements were barrier-free and movable doors were installed in every classroom for the convenience of blind students.[103]

Politics of Identity (Cornell University Press), 31-44; Alison Callaway, *Deaf Children in China* (Gallaudet University Press, 2000), 68-72.

[101] Luo, Ibid., 69.

[102] *Chengdushi zhi jiaoyu zhi* 成都市志教育志(Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2000), 639.

[103] Luo Shufang 羅蜀芳, "Congshi mang longya jiaoyu de jingli" (從事盲聾啞教育的經歷), *Zhonghua wenshi ziliaoku, wenhua jiaoyu bian* 中華文史資料庫文化教育編 (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1996), 958.

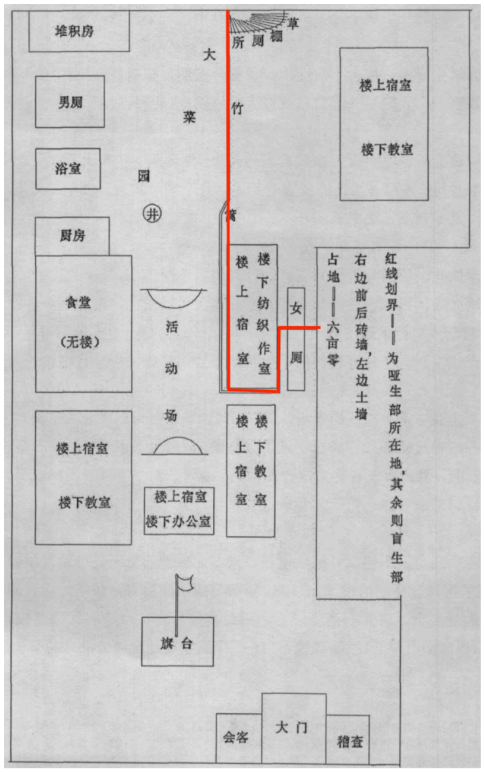

Figure 3.3: Physical layout of the Chinese-Foreign School for the Blind, Chengdu[104]

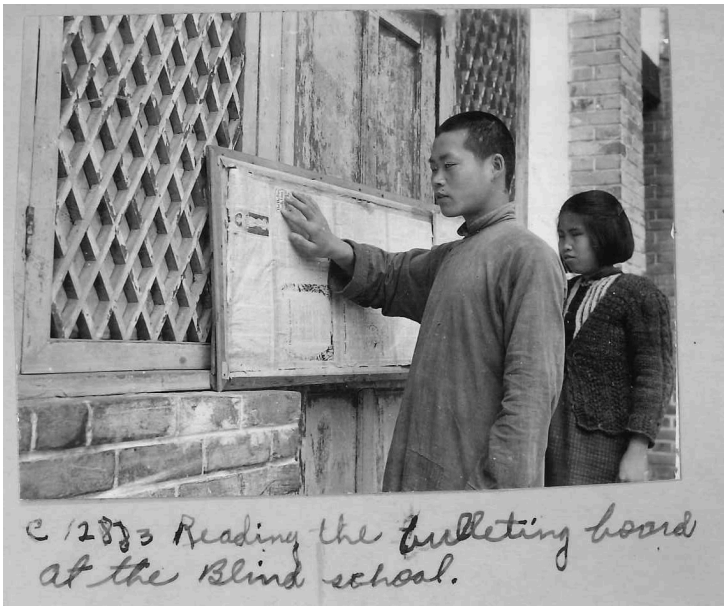

Figure 3.4: The Bulletin Board in Braille at the Chinese-Foreign School for the Blind[105]

[104] "Chengdushi sili mangya xiaoxue gaikuangshu" (成都市私立盲啞小學概況書), Sichuan Provincial Archives (SPA), file 050-429-4.

Instructors also modified their teaching methods according to different sensory conditions of the students. During her residence between 1933 and 1937, Luo had grappled with the internal diversity of both the deaf and blind communities in her teaching. Besides using the finger alphabet and sign language to communicate with students born deaf and mute, she emphasized pronunciation training for students who acquired deafness late and with minor impairment of the vocal cords.[106] Blind students had to first learn to navigate the campus space by memorizing the walking routes under the guidance of senior students. They were then taught to use hearing and touching to sense the shape and texture of materials, and some could even recognize the color of dyed clothes by smelling. Luo mentioned that blind students employed in the textile workshop learned to knit socks and sweaters while those at the rattan workshop were taught by hired craftsmen to weave baskets and chairs.[107] Luo and her colleagues also provided blind students with a broader access to information by transcribing local news into braille. In this way blind students at the CFSB could read daily news on the bulletin board as shown from the picture (Figure 3.4). In the music workshop, the blind learned to sing Chinese songs through transcribing what they heard from the radio into braille. Through expanding the scope of manual, intellectual and recreational activities for blind and deaf students, Chinese teachers attempted to reorient the aim of special education from religious to social utility.

But since the majority of blind students were sent from local orphanages and Christian churches, it was hard for CFSB to extend its services to local families. After conducting an investigation of registered households with blind children at the police department, Luo found

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[105] The exact year of the photo was missing, but according to Luo the project began in 1945 and ended in 1954. See picture "C12883 Reading the bulleting board at the Blind school," in Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, "Mission Photograph Album - China #20 page 0011," UMC Digital Galleries, accessed May 14, 2020, https://catalog.gcah.org/images/items/show/7344.
[106] Ibid., 959.
[107] Ibid., 967.

out that most parents couldn't afford the tuition and considered the education of blind people to be impractical. The popular distrust of special education was also rooted in the belief that missionary schools were an ideological apparatus of the Christian church. This, according to Luo, further constrained the ability of Chinese educators to fulfill the goal of advocating for equal opportunities in education and employment for disabled children in society.[108] After spending four years of teaching, Luo had the idea of running a private school for the deaf herself. She made this decision during an extremely difficult time when the outbreak of the anti-Japanese war in 1937 worsened the financial condition of CFSB and later forced it to shut down in 1939. It was not until 1942 that the school reopened and the board of trustees appointed Luo as the new president. Between 1938 and 1942, Luo also founded the Mingsheng Private School for the Deaf (Sili Mingsheng Longya Xuexiao 私立明聲聾啞學校) through the help of influential figures such as Zhang Lan 張瀾 (1872-1955), who served briefly as governor of Sichuan in 1920 and was later elected as chairman of the Chinese Democratic League in 1941. Zhang also became the director of Cihuitang after the death of Yin Changling in 1942. As a political activist during his youth, Zhang was more receptive to Western ideas of education and had served as the president of Chengdu University in 1928 after resigning from the government.

Zhang had a special interest in the education of disabled children because of his paraplegic son, who was enrolled in Cihuitang's charity school and studied together with able-bodied children.[109] It was through the education of his son that Zhang came to realize the importance of recognizing the intellectual potential of disabled persons in order to get rid of the older perception of them as naturally inferior and deserving of charity. After he took over the

[108] Luo Shufang, "Congshi manglong jiaoyu de jingli," 959.
[109] Li Huasong 李華松, "Zhang Lan yu Cihuitang" (張瀾與慈惠堂), *Chongqing wenshi ziliao* 重慶文史資料 (1993), 342.

management of Cihuitang, Zhang began to work closely with CFSB on introducing braille education to blind boys and further expanded the focus of vocational training from entertainment to productive labor. This change in understanding blindness, as I will show in the following section, took place during Cihuitang's development in wartime Chengdu.

4. Saving the Blind for the Nation: Cihuitang and Wartime Chengdu

In 1938, one year after the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), Chengdu came under the control of the GMD government after its retreat from Nanjing to the westernmost treaty-port city of Chongqing. By then, Jiang Jieshi had extended his power into Sichuan through launching a series of military campaigns for the extermination of Communist guerrilla forces. As a strategic location in the Great Rear Area (*Dahoufang* 大後方), Chengdu assumed an important role in safeguarding the wartime capital from the internal threat of Communism and helped in supplying material and human resources to fight Japan. In reality, the war had brought further economic hardship to Chengdu people who had just experienced a great famine in 1936. Besides coordinating with local philanthropic groups on the dispensary of food and clothes for famine victims flooded from the countryside, Cihuitang also expanded its sheltering capacity for the homeless poor from a set limit of 600 to 940 inmates until April 1937.[110] Soon after the war broke out, Cihuitang began to handle the temporary reception and transfer of an influx of 100 thousand refugees from southern Shaanxi.[111] Yin Changling, who then chaired the Provincial Relief Affairs Committee (Sheng zhenwu weiyuanhui 省賑務委員

[110] "Cihuitang renman weihuan" (慈惠堂人滿為患), Xinxin xinwen 新新新聞 (XXXW) (April 9, 1937).
[111] "Shannan nanmin ruchuan, zhenji dangju buzhu Cihuitang" (陝南難民入川賑濟當局補助慈惠堂), XXXW (May 3, 1939).

會), spoke during a meeting in August 1938 that under the wartime condition every citizen should abandon self-interest and practice good conscience to help others.[112] In linking the famine to an ongoing national crisis, Yin asked his fellow Chengdu natives to share the responsibility of caring for each other as a way to save the nation.

The idea of practicing mutual aid for national defense echoed the GMD's political imperative to end the long-time fragmentation of the province, which was brought up by Jiang as early as 1935 when he came to Sichuan to inspect the army. Back then, Jiang mentioned the urgency to "transform social customs" (*zhuanyi fengqi* 轉移風氣) by cultivating the spirit of "public" (*gong* 公).[113] In 1934, Jiang started the New Life Movement (Xinshenghuo yundong 新生活運動, NLM), which aimed to cement the link between individual bodies and national strength with a mixture of Confucian moral teaching, Christian social gospel and the fascist regimentation of everyday behaviors. The NLM's invocation of Confucianism as a natural ground for national cohesion, according to historian Maggie Clinton, aimed to foreclose the possibility of choosing alternative political paths.[114] In practice, The NLM concentrated most of its campaign effort during the first three years of operation on printing pamphlets, running school programs and public lectures, and organizing parades for disseminating ideas of propriety, hygiene and patriotism. By 1936, 20 provinces had established local NLM branches through cooperation between governmental agencies and local elites.[115]

Confucian elites in Chengdu welcomed this top-down effort to re-energize people with traditional values and modern lifestyles and helped propagate the message through the Dacheng

[112] "Yin Zhongxi nuhou buyaodang wangguonu" (尹仲錫怒吼不要當亡國奴), XXXW (August 8, 1937).
[113] Zhou Kaiqing, "Chuanzheng tongyihua zhi tuijin," 17.
[114] Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925-1937* (Duke University Press, 2017), 131-132.
[115] Samuel C. Chu, "The New Life Movement, 1934-1937," in *Researches in the Social Sciences in China*, ed., John E. Lane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 3.

Association. Xu Zixiu spoke highly of the NLM, which was also a brainchild of his student Dai Jitao, as a movement that fused the Western idea of self-reliance (*zili* 自立) with the traditional Chinese emphasis on ethical human relations (*renlun* 人倫).[116] Teachers of the Dacheng Academy also introduced NLM to the classroom through publishing their lecture notes on the relationship between Confucian morality and national survival.[117] After the death of Xu in 1936, Yin Changling continued to manage the association in accordance with the NLM's attempt to harness Confucianism for the ideological indoctrination of national unity bounded by virtuous behaviors and a common goal of fighting Japan.

On the other hand, the NLM also collaborated with Chengdu's modernizing elites on the implementation of social programs. During the war, the NLM shifted its focus from reforming urban lifestyles to alleviating physical suffering. The wartime relocation of governmental and civic agencies forced the Nationalist government to scrutinize the living condition of lower-class people who had been hit especially hard. GMD authorities began to realize that the human cost of war extended from military to civilian sectors. In particular, a growing number of soldiers were blinded due to the use of chemical weapons and many schoolchildren and refugees became blind as a result of infectious eye diseases. In 1942, Madame Jiang Jieshi (Song Meiling) launched the National Welfare Association for the Blind (*Zhongguo mangmin fuli xiehui* 中國盲民福利協會, NWAB) as part of the NLM's wartime campaign for "saving the blind" (*jiumang* 救盲). Madame Jiang asked her sister Song Ailing, wife of the GMD politician and banker Kung Hsiang-hsi, to serve as president of the NWAB and help with fundraising. In her speech on

[116] Xu Zixiu 徐子休, "Dacheng xuexiao tongxuehui chengli zhi yanshuo" (大成學校同學會成立之演說), DCHCL, vol. 47 (1934), 14-15.
[117] See for example, Liu Furen 劉復仁, "Xinshenghuo yundong zhi ganxiang" (新生活運動之感想), DCHCL, Vol. 48 (1934), 27-28; Huang Shouzhang 黃首章, "Aiguo shuo" (愛國說), DCHCL, Vol. 45 (1934), 14.

behalf of the NWAB, Song reported that China had 6.5 million blind people and 8700 war-blinded soldiers. The vast majority of civilians became blind due to the lack of medical treatment. More importantly, these people were so helpless that they did not even have skills to make a living.[118] In Chengdu, NWAB's mission was to facilitate the cooperation between public health experts from WCUU, which championed the prevention and control of disease-induced blindness, and social workers and teachers of special education.[119] Beginning in 1943, NWAB set up two outpatient centers in WCUU's Renji and Cunren Hospitals and offered free medical examination and treatment of eye diseases.[120] Cihuitang also responded actively to this initiative by sending infants from the foundling homes to receive examinations in order to detect the ones that could be treated.[121] By 1944, thirteen eye clinics were established in six cities under the Nationalist control and a total number of 29,633 patients, or 16.4% among them had their sight restored.[122] This demonstrated that the GMD government took no small effort to mobilize its limited medical resources for the prevention of blindness.

The other half of the NWAB's agenda, which focused on the rehabilitation of blind people through special education and vocational training, reflected the integration between native and foreign schools. An initial gain was the establishment of institutional cooperation between Cihuitang and Western-style universities which had relocated to Chengdu during the war. In particular, the department of social work at Yenching University in Chengdu worked with the succeeding director Zhang Lan in bringing student volunteers to teach blind boys to learn

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[118] Song Ailing 宋靄齡, "Xi Quanguo gejie juanzhu jiumang fangmang yundong" (希全國各界捐助救盲防盲運動), *Xinyun daobao* 新運導報 (1942): 43.
[119] Danni 淡霓, "Zhonguo mangmin fuli xiehui" (中國盲民福利協會), *Jia* 家 11 (1946), 21-22.
[120] "Zhongguo mangmin xingfu cujin weiyuanhui Chengdu fenhui guanyu wei yanke bingjia fuwu de gonggao" (中國盲民幸福促進會委員會成都分會關於為眼科病家服務的公告), CMA-4-1-9.
[121] "Guanyu mianfei dao zhiding didian zhenzhi yanbing zhi Zhongguo mangmin xingfu cujinhui de fuhan" (關於免費到指定地點診視眼病之中國盲民幸福粗集會的復函), CMA-1-1-263.
[122] The surveyed cities include Chongqing, Chengdu, Lanzhou, Neijiang, Pishan, and Guiyang. See "Eye Clinics," in *Report of the Institution for the Chinese Blind*, (Shanghai: 1945), 7.

modern knowledge and help them with career development.[123] These exchanges also produced more focused studies on blindness as compared to the earlier emphasis on poor relief.

He Yongming became interested in the welfare of blind people after taking a class with Wu Guobiao, who graduated from Columbia University with a master's degree in special education and returned to Chengdu to teach at CFSB and held part-time lectures at Yenching University. Like his colleague Luo Shufang, Wu represented a new generation of blind intellectuals who devoted themselves to educating society about the role of special education in shaping "disabled but useful" (*suican bufei* 雖殘不廢) individuals. The blind should not be simply viewed as targets of charity, according to Wu, but rather as citizens with equal rights to education and employment.[124] Inspired by Wu's teaching, He decided to investigate the training and working experience of blind boys at Cihuitang as a reference to the application of scientific methods in coping with the predicament faced by blind people.

Through the recommendation of NWAB, He was able to visit 50 blind boys at Cihuitang ten times during a three-month period. These blind boys, aged between 8 and 26, were apprenticed to different trades. 25 studied the most popular art of the hammered dulcimer, and the remaining students learned to perform drum singing, fortunetelling and shoemaking. The preference of choosing a particular skill was entirely based on economic considerations. A blind boy usually began by learning the dulcimer because it promised "a better way out" (*chulu hao* 出路好). By then, the dulcimer class had five instructors, and three were former graduates of Cihuitang with the same name character *Ci* 慈, which indicated that they belonged to the first

[123] "Mangmin shenghuo diaocha" (盲民生活調查), *Yanjing xinwen* 燕京新聞 (May 27, 1944).
[124] Wu Guobiao 吳國彪, "Mangmin fuli wenti" (盲民福利問題), lecture note (Spring 1944), cited in He Yongming 賀永銘, *Chengdushi mangcan jiaoyang jiguan diaocha* 成都市盲殘教養機關調查 (A Study of Educational Facilities for the Blind in Chengdu) Bachelor's thesis, West China Union University (Chengdu: Huaxi xiehe daxue Shehuixue xi, 1944). In He Yimin, Yao Leye, ed., *Minguo shiqi shehui diaocha congbian Sichuan daxue juan* (Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), 734.

cohort of the dulcimer class. Cihuitang paid the instructors a modest salary of 2000 yuan/month, which was the same amount of a day's performance in the teahouse. It was the prospect of having a successful career in teahouse theatres that lured younger ones to study the dulcimer. The class on drum singing was a secondary choice because it was hard to learn from scratch, and as a solo performance it also required the player to be more flexible in shifting between different role types in one song. Similarly, fortunetelling was a difficult art that required a lengthy period of study and practice, and the techniques of reading palms and bones by touch varied according to practitioners. Upon He's visit, Cihuitang decided to replace fortunetelling with shoemaking, which was easier for students to learn by following the steps as demonstrated by the instructor. But since most of the trained blind shoemakers could only make shoe soles instead of a complete product, it was hard to sell them at the market price.[125] Although these options of vocational training were open to all blind students, those who studied fortunetelling and shoemaking also took part-time classes on dulcimer playing in order to maximize their chance of earning a better income during their stay in Cihuitang. He reported that members of the dulcimer class had the opportunity of being invited by local families to perform at weddings and funerals. A dispatched troupe (*chuban* 出班) had six to eight performers who collectively earned between 6000 to 8000 *yuan* a day, and if they were lucky enough to be hired for night performance the salary could be as much as 14,000 *yuan*. After Cihuitang took out 20% of the income for collective saving, the remaining income was distributed to individual performers. Based on the payment records included in the survey, the income distribution for a 6000-yuan payment varied from 1.5% (90 *yuan*) to 11% (660 *yuan*) among thirteen performers, in which only four earned above 10%.[126] The gap of earning capacity reflected a rigid hierarchy based on the distinction of performing

[125] Ibid., He Yongming, 751.
[126] "Yangqinzu chuban choujin fenpeibiao" (揚琴組出班酬金分配表), in He Yongming, 752.

skills acquired from many years of training. Except for the highly talented ones, amateur players found it hard to stand out among their peers, not to mention that there were still unfortunate ones who risked becoming street singers after graduation.

In order to improve the efficiency of training, hall managers created the handicraft section in 1943 after purchasing five shoemaking machines, and hired a technician to teach the blind. In 1943, 17 students formerly enrolled in dulcimer and fortunetelling classes began to study at the shoemaking workshop, and after that Cihuitang ordered all newly admitted students to be employed in making straw shoes.[127] After a month's training, a blind apprentice could make 2 pairs of shoes a day with a payment of 20 *yuan*. By the end of 1943 the workshop had trained 10 skilled blind shoemakers who could produce 800 pairs a month.[128] With the incorporation of shoemaking, the majority of blind students were able to secure a basic income before they could gain a better prospect from learning music. The superintendent mentioned in a report that handicraft training would gradually replace music and fortunetelling since it allowed the blind to develop their working potential and contribute to society.[129]

Cihuitang's effort to reconfigure the priority of vocational training contributed to the modern imperative of turning the disabled into "productive citizens" (*shengli de guomin* 生利的國民). According to He, educating the blind rested on the assumption that they too could obtain "physical and mental wholeness" (*shenxin jianquan* 身心健全) by learning to read, write and work productively.[130] This understanding informed Cihuitang's decision to redirect its goal from training the blind to be self-sufficient to educating them to become socially useful. Beginning in

[127] "Guanyu chuangshe shougongxie caoxie ke zhi lishizhang de cheng" (關於創設手工鞋草鞋科致理事長的呈), CMA-1-1-263-45.
[128] "Guanyu chengli caoxie ke disixiang banfa zhi Cihuitang lishizhang de cheng" (關於成立草鞋科第四項辦法致慈惠堂理事長得呈), CMA-1-1-263-51.
[129] "Gutong jiaoyangsuo sigeyue gongzuo jihuabiao" (瞽童教養所四個月工作計劃表), CMA-1-1-263-4
[130] He, 756.

1943, Cihuitang worked closely with CFSB on the promotion of braille literacy. Luo Shufang sent a recruitment brochure to Cihuitang on June 30th notifying a quota of ten blind students to be admitted to CFSB.[131] Later, four out of ten blind boys from Cihuitang passed the entrance examination and received funding from both institutions.[132] A transcript of a blind boy from Cihuitang showed that after being transferred to CFSB in 1943, the student completed 4 years of elementary education and performed well in subjects such as arithmetic, hygiene and sports.[133] An enrollment record of 1947 showed that 120 deaf-mute and 60 blind students received special education in Chengdu, which constituted about 71% of all recruitment by four private schools for the deaf and blind in Sichuan province.[134] The graduation rate, however, was fairly low. As the only private school for the blind in Sichuan, CFSB reported 32 graduates between 1943 and 1949.[135] Despite this, having an educational experience did contribute to widening the employment opportunities for the blind. A survey in 1946 on the job placement of 16 members of NWAB showed that 7 engaged in handwork and agriculture, 5 pursued higher education, and 4 became musicians and fortunetellers.[136] Some blind graduates found new employment opportunities related to braille literacy, such as editing a braille magazine named Blind Monthly (*Mangren yuekan* 盲人月刊) and teaching blind soldiers in a rehabilitation camp built by the

[131] "Chengdushi jidujiao mangya xuexiao guanyu zhaoshou mangmu ertong de gonghan" (成都市基督教盲啞學校關於招收盲目兒童的公函), CMA-1-1-263.
[132] "Chengdushi jidujiao mangya xuexiao guanyu kenqing Chengdu Cihuitang danren Zhang Jiukai deng xuesheng yibufen shenghuofei zhi Cihuitang de han" (成都市基督教盲啞學校關於懇請成都慈惠堂擔任張久楷等學生一部分生活費致慈惠堂的函), CMA-1-1-93-73.
[133] "Chengdushi jidujiao mangya xuexiao guanyu hansong xuesheng Zhang Guojun chengji baogaodan de gonghan" (成都市基督教盲啞學校關於函送學生張國軍成績報告單的公函), CMA-1-1-264.
[134] The other two schools were located in Ziyang county and the city of Chongqing, and their recruitment numbers were respectively 34 and 37 deaf-mute students.
[135] Luo Shufang 羅蜀芳, "Chengdushi sili mangya xiaoxue jianshi (mangsheng bu)" (成都市私立盲啞小學檢視盲生部), SPA-050-429.
[136] "Chengdushi mangmin xiejinhui huiyuan minglu" (成都市盲民協進會會員名錄), CMA-93-2-286.

GMD government.[137] Director Zhang Lan also hired graduates from CFSB to organize a braille class in Cihuitang. According to a report in 1947, headmaster Luo Shufang referred her student Wang Guoyu, who also worked as a braille editor, to be a part-time instructor at Cihuitang. The class was held three times a week and with the attendance of 32 blind boys.[138] The inclusion of braille education in both governmental relief institutions and gentry-run charity demonstrated to society that blind people were equally educable as their sighted peers and they could also engage in meaningful careers and became good citizens of the nation.

5. Refashioning Care Work for the Aged and Disabled in Wartime Chengdu

One of the major challenges faced by the wartime government was to balance the goal of extracting labor potential from society with the obligation to care for members who failed to become productive. Whereas blind and disabled children were reconceived by the state as worthy of education, elderly and disabled widows and widowers (*canfei gulao* 殘廢孤老) remained "unproductive" and marginalized in the charitable sector. These people were first taken into the Pujitang 普濟堂 (Home of Universal Relief), an imperial poorhouse said to be established in the eighteenth century, until it was handed over to Cihuitang in 1923. By 1939, Pujitang housed 853 out of 895 aged and disabled inmates from all public relief facilities and about one fourth of all charity recipients in the city.[139] As the largest group of inmates of Cihuitang, the elderly and disabled men and women resided separately in a living quarter of 20-acre land. Located in South

[137] "Jiaoyu yu wenhua" (教育與文化), XXXW (July 7, 1948).
[138] "Gutong jiaoyangsuo sanshiliu niandu gongzuo baogao" (瞽童教養所三十六年度工作報告), CMA-1-1-16.
[139] Ma Bining, "Chengdushi cishan jiguan diaocha," 11.

Private Academy Street, the neighborhood was divided into 16 streets administered in the style of a village community led by headmen and residential tutors.

The war created a particular dire situation for people with old age and disability who were either abandoned by their family members or being forced to submit themselves to charity after becoming homeless due to unemployment and insufficient saving.[140] There were still a few members of military families whose sons had left them to serve in the army. An investigation in 1944 showed that twenty such inmates received stipends from the government as a way to compensate for the lack of provision by their children.[141] This further implied the limited capacity of the wartime government to cope with the shortage of caring labor. Through the recommendation of local policemen and *baojia* heads, these homeless elderly moved into Pujitang during their sixties and seventies and stayed for an average period between two to three years before their death. Nearly all of them had suffered from serious health conditions that prevented them from working independently. A sample survey of 500 inmates reported that 217 were disabled, among which 99 were blind and 65 had trouble moving. A comparison of employment activities of male inmates before and after their entry into Pujitang clearly illustrated the shift from agricultural, mechanic and handicraft works to street peddling and trash picking as a result of their ageing and weakened bodies.[142] A direct consequence of this was the insufficient food supply. Unlike other braches of Cihuitang that had meal plans for its inmates, Pujitang only offered rice and porridge two times a day, with an additional vegetable fee paid to those aged above seventy. The food shortage caught the attention of the GMD official Kung

[140] See, for example, "Wei guku wuyi qingyu jiuji shouyang shi zhi Pujitang de cheng" (為孤苦無依請予救濟收養事致普濟堂的呈), CMA-4-1-29-17. "Wei nianlao wuyi qingqiu rutang shourong zhi Pujitang de cheng" (為年老無依請求入堂收容致普濟堂的呈), CMA-4-1-29-14.

[141] "Chengdu Cihuitang suoshu Pujitang chuzheng junren jiashu diaochabiao" (成都慈惠堂所收普濟堂出征軍人家屬調查表), CMA-4-1-29-37.

[142] Li Jimou 李季謀, "Jieshao Chengdu Pujitang gulaoyuan yuanmin diaocha" (介紹成都普濟堂孤老院院民調查), *Shehui xingzheng yuekan* 社會行政月刊 1, 2 (1946), 10-11.

Hsiang-his during his visit to Pujitang in 1943, when he made a donation of a hundred thousand *yuan* as vegetable fund. Director Zhang Lan later deposited the money for a monthly profit to be distributed to each member.[143] But this was hardly enough to keep a sustainable life among the inmates, who had to seek mutual aid for the improvement of their living condition.

Managers of Pujitang started to introduce new programs since February 1943 as a response to the government's call to enforce frugality and raise productivity during the wartime NLM. It followed a procedure of investigating the number of inmates who were willing to participate in collective farming on a voluntary basis. A farming group of 20 persons worked on a 3-acre farm, and these workers shared the vegetables grown in their own fields and were encouraged to sell any extra amount for profit. Besides agricultural teams, Pujitang also established a work unit for cigarette rolling. A team was made up of 20 persons, which included 12 rollers and 8 sellers. Two sellers were provided with a wheelbarrow for carrying the products to the nearby market. A report showed that 450 out of 558 volunteered to work, and 278 of these inmates had only minor disabilities and could engage in handwork with good physical strength, eyesight and manual dexterity. Those with severe disabilities such as blindness were assigned to work in unskilled labor such as pulling the millstone to grind sesame oil and assembling matchboxes.[144] These production cooperatives, which aimed at creating self-sufficient communities, motivated elderly and disabled men and women to practice mutual aid by working with their body efficiently. It was a solution to extreme hardship and material scarcity during the war.

Another innovation of community life in Pujitang was the reconfiguration of care work among aged and disabled inmates. According to a report by a local journalist who visited

[143] "Cihuitang shehui fuwuchu chuxi baogao" (慈惠堂社會服務處出席報告), XXXW (November 15, 1943).
[144] "Chengdu Cihuitang jiuji jiguan nuli shengchan jihuabiao" (成都慈惠堂救濟機關努力生產計劃表), CMA-1-1-27-6.

Pujitang between 1943 and 1944, inmates who were too old and disabled to join the production teams and sales department were employed in different kinds of community services. These included institutional works that required little labor effort, such as boiling water, picking up letters from the mailroom, night watching and looking after common properties. The elderly blind contributed to public life by engaging in singing, storytelling and fortunetelling. Some were specialized in singing morality books (*chang shanshu* 唱善書) to provide religious consolation for members of the community. There were still inmates who listed their job as guiding the blind (*qian xiazi* 牽瞎子), a service that attended to the bodily vulnerabilities.[145] The reciprocity of care was thus reflected from the distribution of service labor among elderly and disabled inmates.

The residents also shared the obligation of healthcare for the community. In April 1944, the residential tutors convened a meeting with 24 residents to discuss a new proposal for opening a clinic inside the living quarter. According to the proposal, inmates with chronic illnesses found it hard to obtain medicine in pharmacies located outside of Pujitang, while those diagnosed with acute diseases by visiting doctors were unable to make further consultations until waiting for the next appointment. In order to solve the problems, the inmates recommended a lay practitioner of Chinese medicine who also lived in Pujitang, to serve as a community physician. The man surnamed Gong had stayed for ten years, and since his paralyzed feet prevented him from walking, Gong spent most of his time receiving patients in his dormitory for free. His medical advice helped many elderly inmates with chronic illnesses to gain a better recovery, and in return they pledged for turning Gong's residence into a community clinic in order to compensate for his

[145] Zhang Lüqian 張履謙, *Babai sishi ge ren* 八百四十個人 (Jinri xinwen chubanshe, 1946), 103-104.

lack of income due to the inability to work.[146] The proposal reflected that members of the Cihuitang actively looked for efficient ways to organize healthcare in response to the irregular medical provision from the institution. The case further illustrated how care work was reciprocated between the disabled and elderly sick based on the mutual recognition of particular vulnerabilities and needs. Until the end of the war, Pujitang exemplified the gentry's effort to promote a community model of eldercare for the aged, sick and disabled who lost their homes due to the war. Through practicing mutual aid, these members rediscovered a sense of belonging to the urban community. In addition to coping with economic hardship by engaging in collectivized labor production, they also broadened the meaning of livelihood based on mutual obligation and thus extended the boundary of institutional provision.

Conclusion

From 1924 to 1945, Confucian elites in Chengdu employed traditional measures of charity to safeguard the weakest members of Chengdu—women, children, aged and disabled people—when the city underwent the tumultuous decades reigned by warlord and Nationalist governments. Their aim was to defend traditional values of the family and community for the urban poor in the rapidly changing urban environment in inland China. The experience of blind and disabled people in this picture was particular instructive, since it testified to the shifting criteria of membership in Confucian and national communities.

We have discerned in 1920s Guangzhou a process of professional disintegration among blind songstresses who were forced to quit their careers in entertainment and popular religion

[146] "Guanyu tangnei nannu gupin renshu zengduo yu yaoqing yishi laitang jiuzhen de baogao" (關於堂內男女孤貧人數增多與邀請醫師來堂就診的報告), CMA-1-1-147-90.

due to the strong social and political antagonism to traditional customs (Chapter 2). In contrast, Chengdu's Confucian elites spoke on behalf of the city's time-honored social customs in the form of ritual and recreational activities. Yin Changling was personally involved in promoting Sichuan opera and wrote scripts for local performing troupes. Yin also used his reputation in the cultural sphere to invite famous musicians to teach blind children and introduced them to perform services in family ritual and educate the public in teahouses. In this way the blind were able to claim their occupational identity by becoming virtuous musicians. Differing from missionaries that saw the education of the blind as an essential means of achieving spiritual redemption (see Chapter 3), managers of Cihuitang materialized Confucian values of benevolence through turning charity recipients into moral agents of the community.

The Western influence of special education, which took on a secularist and nationalist tendency in the hands of Chinese elites, finally led Cihuitang to alter its criteria of moral education. In particular, the inclusion of braille and manual training during the war years shifted the traditional emphasis from virtue and competence to literacy and productivity and in so doing integrated the blind into the national community. On the other hand, Cihuitang also managed to keep the community model of social welfare for the aged and disabled people based on the reciprocity of care and obligation.

The persistence of a Confucian welfare community in Chengdu offered a horizontal vision of managing diversity, and it offered a counter-balance to the welfare state's totalizing vision of making disability a radical symbol of exclusion for unproductive members of society, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. This time I will turn back to Guangzhou to show how the problem of disability as a quintessential cause of economic dependency challenged the notion of

a narrowly defined productive citizenship and the institutional capacity of a provincial welfare state in coastal China.

Chapter Five

Transforming the Blind: Disabled Citizenship and the Chinese Welfare State, 1928-1937

From the return of the Nationalist rule in Guangzhou in 1921 to the outbreak of war with Japan in 1937, leaders of the municipality carried out wide-ranging programs aimed at reconstructing society to make it modern. Reconstruction not only meant to industrialize and internationalize the city through engineering its physical landscape but also the transformation of its people. Municipal officials strived to organize a "social body" by means of "systematic analysis, mobilization, and organization" of material and human resources.[1] After the Northern Expedition (1926-1928), competitive visions of social engineering emerged as a result of the shifting center of national politics. Jiang Jieshi's new Guomindang (GMD) government in Nanjing took coercive measures of street cleaning, such as removing beggars and prostitutes and regulating rickshaw pullers and hut dwellers. Their aim was to win the international recognition of an orderly and progressive national capital in China.[2]

Back then the leadership of the Guangdong provincial government quickly changed hands after key GMD figures, Li Jishen and Chen Mingshu, stepped down and threw themselves into national politics in Nanjing. Subsequently, the rise of General Chen Jitang 陳濟棠 (1890-1954) tipped the balance of regional politics by allying with the new Guangxi clique headed by Li Zongren and reigned over Guangdong independently from Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing regime. In April 1929, Chen replaced Li Jishen as the commander in chief of the Eighth Route Army and

[1] Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.
[2] Zwia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: "Social Problems" and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 14.

took control of all military forces in Guangdong. In May 1931, the provincial government declared an independent status from Nanjing and launched a modernizing project that took social welfare as its fundamental principle of improving "people's livelihood" (*minsheng* 民生).[3] It was under Chen's administration that the Guangzhou Municipal Poorhouse (Guangzhoushi Pinmin Jiaoyangyuan 廣州市貧民教養院), a central organization of municipal welfare, fully incorporated all Qing-era relief homes for the aged and disabled and expanded its size to include the city's unemployed and homeless poor in order to train them to become productive labor in the industrial sector. This marked a departure from his warlord predecessors (esp. the old Guangxi clique) who mainly fostered a consumer economy for the purpose of revenue extraction.

Chen Jitang's reform programs also reflected continuity from a decade of GMD social policy. This welfare state model was anchored in a gradual process of disintegration among former members of disabled occupational communities. Beginning in 1921, the combined factors of fiscal regulation and market competition forced a self-sufficient community of blind songstresses onto the margin of society and further propelled the GMD government to take blind girls into welfare facilities (Chapter 2). The reintegration of blind working women as charity recipients compounded the burden of Chen Jitang's regime to carry out a two-fold plan for the management of disability. First, it rested upon a redefinition of productivity according to the rationalization of labor potential among the unemployed and homeless poor. Second, it demanded a solution for the aged and disabled who either failed to meet the demand of work relief or were unwilling to submit their livelihood to welfare measures.

How to reconcile the two became the key issue in the municipal administration of social welfare during the 1930s. The Nationalist government, by promoting "active relief" (*jiji jiuji* 積

[3] Alfred H. Y. Lin. "Warlord, Social Welfare and Philanthropy: The Case of Guangzhou under Chen Jitang, 1929-1936," *Modern China* 30, 2 (2004): 163.

極救濟)—mandatory training in vocational skills in exchange for aid—aimed to gradually discourage the practice of almsgiving and reduce poverty. Republican-era social policy criminalized all able-bodied poor for their idleness and sought to transform them into productive members of society. Enforcing this rationale of productivism, as historian Janet Chen argues, required the state to cope with the indigent as "moving targets," as unemployed itinerants, beggars, refugees and slum dwellers.[4] But little has been said about how objects of "passive relief" (*xiaoji jiuji* 消極救濟), often conceived as people who became impoverished due to their incapacity to work, figured in the conceptual and practical scopes of productivism. According to the Ministry of Interior (Neizheng bu 內政部), an important goal of social relief work was "to educate the aged, weak (i.e. women and children), infirm and disabled" (*lao ruo can fei* 老弱廢疾) with proper skills."[5] This meant that the poor with physical impairments, among others who were previously considered as deserving of public funds now had to undergo scientific rehabilitation so as to become useful. This new definition of disabled citizenship reflected an important development in the conception of social policy that centered on the reconstruction of the body and labor as a key method of reducing economic dependency.

In what follows, I will examine how this corporeal rationale of welfare state building unfolded in a process of negotiation between the state and its most vulnerable members of society. From 1928 to 1930, as I will show in the first part, local GMD cadres in Guangzhou responded to Nanjing's call to reform social customs (*fengsu gaige* 風俗改革) by selecting fortunetelling and other superstitious activities as disruptive to the newly established political order. This attack on popular religion further triggered a subsistence crisis among blind

[4] Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 7.
[5] Neizheng bu 內政部, *Jiujishiye jihuashu* 救濟事業計劃書 (1929), 18.

fortunetellers and diviners who were forced to quit their career. In contrast to the failed attempt by the blind songstress to protect the moral foundation of their professional household, blind fortunetellers justified their religious practice by claiming their ritual authority based on popular belief and defending their role as welfare providers for their families.

The state's compromised effort to discourage the blind from participating in fortunetelling reflected an embedded problem of organized dependency among the disabled poor. In the second part of this chatper, I will trace a longer process of change with respect to administering poor relief from late Qing to Republican-era Guangzhou. The first section will illustrate how the imperial state responded to the gradual exclusion of blind people from the family and lineage by sheltering them in relief homes and allowing them to solicit alms from the public. As shown in the second section, this traditional management of the blind as members of the indigent was later replaced by modern attempts aimed at transforming them into the working poor. Since 1921, GMD officials sought to counter begging activities among the city's aged and disabled residents by relocating them from former relief homes to a centralized municipal poorhouse, where the blind were singled out for vocational training that helped integrate them in society. Before this plan was realized, however, the municipal government met resistance from the blind who protested against the demolition of their former residence, which had become a self-regulated begging community since the late Qing. But unlike blind fortunetellers who had a livelihood and family to support, the unwillingness of blind beggars to labor further disqualified them from being "deserving poor" in the eyes of the state.

It was not until Chen Jitang's coming to power that the relief capacity of the municipal poorhouse was fully achieved. As I will show in the third part, Chen's administration further collaborated with the local police to arrest all beggars and re-categorized them according to the

ability to engage in productive labor. In particular, adult blind beggars were employed at sheltered workshops and taught skills of making industrial handicrafts while young blind beggars were required to take classes in reading citizenship manuals printed in braille. Blindness also became a radical symbol of disabled citizenship based on the exclusion of the elderly and physically handicapped who were *too* disabled to work. The state's appropriation of disability in the anti-begging campaign thus revealed how older notions of community support were replaced by the quest for productivity in the national scheme of industrialization.

1. Negotiating Livelihood: Blind Fortunetellers During the Anti-Superstition Campaign

The official regulation of the ritual space in Guangzhou began as early as 1912. The new Republican government, in its attempt to establish popular sovereignty, ordered every neighborhood to cut its ritual expenditure on worshiping deities. Corresponding to the waning influence of divine rule (*shenquan* 神權) was the dissolution of former music guilds that monopolized the performance of ritual music in religious festivals.[6] As a result, some ritual musicians eked out a living by performing in family weddings and funerals while others entered the teahouse and restaurant as hired instrumentalists for the blind songstress, who quickly thrived in commercial theatres in the first decade of the Republic.[7] Followed by the decline of ritual music was the growth of a gendered consumption environment that contributed to the professionalization of blind women as singers and entertainers (Chapter 1). In comparison, blind men who specialized in fortunetelling and divination formed guild organizations near temples

[6] "Bayin hang zhi shiyun" (八音行之失運), *Minsheng ribao* 民生日報 (MSRB) (November 22, 1912).
[7] Zhu Shi 朱十, Su Wenbing 蘇文炳 et al., "Guangzhou yuehang" (廣州樂行), *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 廣州文史資料 Vol. 2 (1964), 131-132.

and shrines. They occupied a working environment distant from the commercial district where the blind songstresses established their careers. This gender division of labor within blind occupational communities later mapped onto the state's attempt to regulate ritual and recreational activities in distinct urban spaces.

Let us first take a brief overview of the guild structure of blind fortunetellers. Members of the fortunetelling guild conformed to the ritual order of popular religion, which featured the enshrinement of patron deities for the protection and regulation of their trade. Blind fortunetellers were known for their belonging to the Three Emperors Soceity (*Sanhuang hui* 三皇會), an organization that dated back at least to the Tang dynasty. Blind men entered the association through forging sworn brotherhood in front of the patron gods. They were also expected to follow a set of rules govering business affairs and ethical conducts within the self-regulated community.[8] The society also received imperial sponsorship during Ming and Qing periods, when local officials endowed the guild of the blind with training halls located near the city god temple (*chenghuang miao* 城隍廟) in order to harness the ritual power of blind storytellers and fortunetellers for the benefit of moral edification.[9] We have seen in Chengdu that the Cihuitang had a similar origin as a government funded training guild for blind men before it was managed by gentry elites (Chatper 4).

In their sociological study of urban life in Beijing between 1918 and 1919, Sidney Gamble and John Burgess witnessed an annual guild meeting of blind singers, storytellers and fortunetellers at a temple in the south city. The event, which lasted all day long, started with the ritual worshipping of the three deities and was followed by a business meeting among leaders of

[8] Zheng Jiewen 鄭杰文, "Xin faxian de *Sanhuang yixun* yu Tangdai guzhe huishe" (新發現的《三皇遺訓》與唐代瞽者會社), *Wenxian* 文獻 3 (2009), 42-51.
[9] Feng Lina 馮麗娜, *Mangren shuoshu de diaocha yu yanjiu* 盲人說書的調查與研究 (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2013), 201-202.

the guild. According to Gamble and Burgess, there were fourty eight senior members who formed an executive council that enforced regulations of the guild through court proceedings that resembled a magistrate's office. This jurisdictional autonomy, which had been granted to the blind community by the imperial government, remained largely in place after the founding of the Republic, except that the guild needed to follow police instructions on the punishment of offenders.[10]

In comparision to the quasi-family structure of blind female entertainers that placed every member in the domestic hierarchy, the fortunetelling guild shaped a public sphere for blind men through mapping the bureaucratic function of local officialdom onto the temple space. This also explains why, as will be shown later during the anti-superstition campaign, blind male fortunetellers had a clearer sense of autonomy with regard to their status in the community and were able to justify their self-sufficiency based on their role as heads of the family.

Blind fortunetellers in Guangzhou inhabited a ritual space similar to that of Beijing and other major cities until they appeared problematic to reformers. Li Zonghuang 李宗黃 (1888-1978), then deputy chairman of the Yunnan provincial government and a GMD party member, visited Guangzhou in 1922 and later turned his reflections into a book entitled *An Observation of New Guangdong* (*Xin Guangdong guancha ji* 新廣東觀察記). After praising Guangzhou's modernist urban planning and administration, Li concluded the book with a special note on the city god temple as a corner of backwardness, a place full of "superstitious elements" (*niugui sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神) as Li called it. During a visit, Li discovered altogether 120 fortunetelling stalls inside the temple, and found that many of the fortunetellers were "the blind and lame" (*guzhe bozhe* 瞽者跛者) who "resembled ghosts more than human" (三分像人七分像鬼). The

[10] Sidney D. Gamble and John S. Burgess, *Peking: A Social Survey* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), 171-174,

reason why the government tolerated these superstitious activities was simple: money. The annual taxation placed on fortunetellers could generate more than ten thousand *yuan* for the municipal revenue, and this amount was further earmarked for the educational expenses of local middle schools.[11] Although Li criticized local authorities for capitalizing on the ignorance of the masses, it seemed that the method of turning fortunetelling into a subject of fiscal governance was an act of expediency for the regulation of religious activities without altering the survival mechanism of blind people.

This minimal intervention in the urban ritual space was later abandoned in favor of a more thorough policy of banning superstitious practices. In October 1928, a year after Chiang Kai-shek established a new National government in Nanjing, the Ministry of the Interior issued an order on the abolition of four main occupations: divination (*bushi* 卜筮), physiognomy (*xingxiang* 星相), spirit mediation (*wuxi* 巫覡) and geomancy (*kanyu* 堪輿). The central government asked local GMD officials to instruct all said practitioners to change careers in a period of three months and to send those who cannot be properly employed to reform facilities.[12] On realizing the difficulty of enforcing a complete ban, the city council of Guangzhou responded with a strategic plan for the gradual elimination of superstitious activities after a process of registration. In March 1929, the Police Bureau released an order that forbade the employment of unlicensed fortunetellers.[13] This method in fact was a form of recognition rather than restriction. Part of the reason why municipal authorities felt hesitant to ban fortunetelling was perhaps due to their fiscal contribution to urban administration. The order took place during a time of political

[11] Li Zonghuang 李宗黃, *Xin Guangdong guancha ji* 新廣東觀察記 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922), 212.
[12] "Zhongyang feichu wubu xingxiang wuxi kanyu banfa" (中央廢除巫卜星相巫覡堪輿辦法), *Xianxiang bao* 現象報 (October 2, 1928).
[13] "Gonganju qudi xingbu xiangming zanxing guize" (公安局取締星卜相命暫行規則), *Guangzhou minguo ribao* 廣州民國日報 (GMR) (March 18, 1929).

transition, when Guangzhou was falling into the military command of General Chen Jitang after the resignation of former GMD leaders who headed their way to Nanjing. This shift of power once again brought city administration back on a track of localism, and its tension with Nanjing was shown first in the way two institutional forces, one focused on ideological campaigns and the other on social welfare provision, participated in the anti-superstition movement.

In July 1929, a group of Guangzhou-based GMD party members launched the Social Customs Reform Committee (Fengsu gaige weiyuanhui 風俗改革委員會, hereafter SCRC), a propagandist organ aimed at helping the provincial government to carry out Nanjing's policy. Besides its central mission of attacking popular religion, the SCRC also focused on the emancipation of women from backward customs, such as foot-binding, indentured servitude and prostitution.[14] Combining the publication of the *Journal of Reforming Social Customs* (*Fengsu gaige congkan* 風俗改革叢刊, JRSC)with the organization of public lectures, this party-led initiative on ideological reform vigorously pushed for a wave of radical enlightenment in the city. But many of its objectives, such as the eradication of idol worshipping and fortunetelling, went abortive due to the lack of governmental support, according to the chairman of the SCRC.[15] This further indicated a gap in dealing with superstition between the two sets of institutional apparatuses. For example, the worship of the weaving maid, a popular practice among young women who prayed for manual dexterity and marrying a loyal husband, was labeled by SCRC as superstitious and backward. In comparison, municipal authorities responded by replacing the weaving maid with a patron deity of the silkworm in order to call for the improvement of

[14] Fengsu gaige weiyuanhui 風俗改革委員會, *Fengsu gaige congkan* 風俗改革叢刊 (Guangzhou: Dangbu xuanchuanbu, 1930), 2-8.
[15] Ibid., 257.

sericulture during its recession in the early 1930s.[16] Thus the SCRC's effort to privilege the attack on idolatry to the detriment of local economy caused tension with the municipal government. At the same time, as I will show below, the campaign against fortunetelling triggered a wave of popular resistance to the ideological reform and further led to the dissolution of the SCRC after seven months of operation.

In September 1929, the Social Affairs Bureau (Shehuiju 社会局, hereafter SAB) was established to fulfill the role of combining the administration of poor relief with the reform of social customs. We have seen in the previous chapter how, during the anti-prostitution movement, the bureau weighted in to provide housing and education for blind singing girls in the poorhouse in order to cut off their attachment to the professional household (Chapter 2). This time the SAB adopted a similar strategy of removal and detention of fortunetellers in its attempt to exert broader control over the ritual life of city people. It first ordered the local police to survey the number of religious practitioners and then register them according to residence. An expected date for completing the registration was set to January 1, 1930.[17] The SAB further ordered the arrest of those who refused to change their career by the deadline.[18]

A perceived crisis of subsistence among disabled fortunetellers soon brought the campaign against superstition to a halt. As soon as the state promulgated the order banning fortunetelling and other related occupations, religious practitioners held an assembly in the City God Temple to discuss resistance strategies.[19] The guild of blind fortunetellers (*gumu hang* 瞽目行), in particular, organized a petition against the official attempt to deprive them of their

[16] Shuk-wah Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China: State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900-1937* (CUHK Press, 2011), 101.
[17] "Shehuiju zaixian bushi xingxiang yiqi gaiye" (社會局再限卜筮星相依期改業), GMR (November 5, 1929).
[18] "Jinjue xingxiang" (禁絕星相), GMR (November 16, 1929).
[19] "Chenghuang miao shushi wei fanwan zhaoji" (城隍廟術士為飯碗著急), Gongping bao 公評報 (GPB) (November 23, 1929).

livelihood under the banner of anti-superstition. On December 4, 1929, representatives of Nanhai and Panyu counties gathered in front of the municipal government to file a petition on behalf of Guangzhou's blind fortunetellers. Their petition letter claimed a total number of seven thousand blind people from the two districts; about half of them were men who employed in fortunetelling and a small number of women who worked as singers. Like the blind singers who argued for their professional competence in Cantonese folk music, blind fortunetellers also claimed their ritual expertise and further distinguished themselves from blind beggars who "had no skill and could not subsist on their own labor" (实无技艺之长，不能自食其力)."[20] This claim of self-sufficiency enabled blind fortunetellers to defend their occupational status in a language borrowed from the government's attack on urban vagrancy, a topic we will turn to in a later section. In order to strengthen their position, blind fortunetellers staked a second claim based on their disability, arguing that unlike sighted ones among them who could change into another career, the blind had no other choice but to rely on fortunetelling for a living. Making disability a justification of livelihood rather than a sign of dependency, blind fortunetellers effectively claimed a state of exception in the anti-superstition campaign and further compelled the state to reconsider their role as welfare providers of the family. "We blind people also have wives and children to feed, and if we lost our job, the wellbeing of our family could not be guaranteed," wrote the letter.[21] In comparison to blind women's claim of belonging to the professional household, marriage offered a stronger proof for blind men's family status and it explained why they refused to be taken into welfare facilities.

Municipal officials responded to the petition by ordering the police department to survey the number of blind and disabled religious practitioners and their living condition. A record of

[20] "Bushi xingxiang zhi gaiye wenti" (卜筮星相之改業問題), *Xianggang gongshang ribao* 香港工商日報 (XGR) (December 4, 1929).
[21] Ibid.

registered fortunetellers from four police precincts showed that among 908 practitioners, 495 (54.5%) had severe illnesses and physical handicaps and 349 (38.4%) were blind. An investigation of their employment backgrounds further showed that only 23 (2.5%) had formerly worked in realms of medicine, military affairs, manufacture, commerce, literature and horse training.[22] Guangzhou was not the only city that had a high percentage of blind fortunetellers. According to official surveys in Tianjin and Shanghai, two major industrial centers of north and south China, blind people contributed to 49.1% (306) and 42.3% (165) of all fortunetellers in the two cities.[23]

The majority of unskilled and the disabled members of the urban fortunetelling community not only challenged the reform of social customs but also the implementation of social welfare. Pressured by the significant number of unemployed people with disability who risked becoming homeless, the SAB issued a separate order exempting elderly and disabled fortunetellers from changing their career and registered them with special licenses.[24] At the same time the bureau worked with the municipal poorhouse on creating new accommodation for the blind, physically handicapped, and those who aged over fifty and cannot support themselves.[25] It was hoped that these members of the fortunetelling community would quit their career once their welfare provision was in place.

The standoff between the government and fortunetellers on the issue of livelihood triggered the SCRC to intervene. An article published by its journal explained to the public that the reason why blind and disabled people considered fortunetelling as the only occupation

[22] "Guangzhou shi bushi xingxiang wuxi kanyu tongjibiao" (廣州市卜筮星相巫覗堪輿統計表), *Mnisu* 民俗 81 (1929), 14-18.
[23] "Gonganju bushi xingxiang diaocha jieguo" (公安局卜筮星相調查結果), *Dagongbao* 大公報 (June 21, 1929); "Gailiang shehui fengxi shixiang" (改良社會風習事項), in *Shanghai tebieshi shehuiju yewu baogao* 上海特別是社會局業務報告 (1931), 297-298.
[24] "Shehuiju jiuji bushi xingxiang banfa" (社會局救濟卜筮星相辦法), GMR (December 6, 1929).
[25] "Feichu bushi xingxiang deng shishi banfa" (廢除卜筮星相等實施辦法), GPB (December 23, 1929).

available was because they failed to develop skills to cope with the social environment. The prevalence of "unskilled, sick and disabled people" (*wujineng he bingfei de ren* 無技能和病廢的人) reflected a deeper problem of "society's incompleteness" (*shehui de bujianquan* 社會的不健全), which should be addressed by new measures of social welfare, such as setting up training workshops and career development agencies for the unskilled, schools for the blind and deaf, and homes for the elderly and disabled.[26] The SCRC's call for the government's active intervention in disability as a social welfare issue reflected a bigger goal of defining livelihood according to individual's contribution to society. "Those who made a living by skills of deception and did not contribute to production were enemies of society," argued the author.[27] Radical reformers thus shifted their ideological critique of superstition to an emphasis on the state's obligation to broaden the employment opportunities for the disabled and make them useful to society. The question of disability thus opened a contested ground for claiming rights to livelihood between the fortunetelling community and an aspiring welfare state.

The SCRC's attempt to push forward the campaign, however, paralleled with new waves of popular resistance and ended up in the proliferation of superstitious activities. According to local news, many former practitioners went back to their business, and some neighboring regions such as Jiangmen and Foshan, witnessed an increase of such occupations.[28] In Qingyuan, blind fortunetellers set up stalls in front of the local poorhouse in order to stage a protest against the policy of turning them into charity recipients.[29] In Guangzhou, blind diviners were seen to

[26] "Bushi xingxiang zhe de jiuji wenti" (卜筮星相者的救濟問題), in, *Fengsu gaige congkan*, 225-226.
[27] Ibid., 224.
[28] "Bushi xingxiang fenfu gechu mousheng" (卜筮星相分赴各處謀生), GMR (January 10, 1930).
[29] "Qingyuan bushi xingxiang lianhe qingyuan" (清遠卜筮星相聯合請願), *Huazi ribao* 華子日報 (HZRB) (January, 1933).

reopen their business in the City God Temple after the deadline of changing their career.[30] This brief period of anti-superstition campaign stumbled upon the insufficiency of an ideological attack on superstition, but it also revealed the centrality of the livelihood question among the disabled who refused to submit their body and labor to the state.

The retreat of the state from the intervention of urban ritual in the late 1920s was not unique to Guangzhou. Rebecca Nedostup and Liang Hongming, in their study of petitions led by the association of blind diviners in Shanghai, argue that the dispossessed were able to legitimate their professional identity by absorbing the GMD's political ideology.[31] In comparison, Shuk-wah Poon considers the failure of Guangzhou's abolitionism as derived "not so much [from] the diviners' skillful use of the Nationalists' rhetoric as [from] the disunity of the municipal government."[32] My observation shows that the organized resistance among blind fortunetellers was an inflection point in the process of the local state's response to disability. Blind people's claim for belonging to the professional community was gradually replaced by the state's redefinition of their livelihood in a series of reforms against backward social customs. The idea of disability was first tied to blind women's sexual vulnerability and then to blind men's unenlightened minds and unproductive bodies. In what follows, I will trace a longer period of change in the way blind people's livelihood was fundamentally altered in the state's management of disability as a physical cause of poverty.

[30] "Chenghuang miao li xiangshi chongzhang qigu" (城隍廟里相士重張旗鼓), *Yuehua bao* 粵華報 (March 10, 1930).
[31] Rebecca Nedostup and Liang Hongming, "'Begging the Sages of the Party-State': Citizenship and Government in Transition in Nationalist China, 1927–1937," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 46, 9 (2001): 204.
[32] Poon, *Negotiating Religion*, 83.

2. Managing the Blind Poor in Late Qing and Early Republican Guangzhou

Blind people, along with the deaf, mute, and the physically handicapped, belonged to one of the four social categories of incapacity—"the infirm and disabled" (*canfei* 殘廢/*feiji* 廢疾)—and were generally considered as deserving of public aids. These weakest members of society were primarily the responsibility of families and kinship communities, but in the case of those bereft of family support, known traditionally as "widowers, widows, orphans, the childless and disabled without a provider" (*guan gua gu du feiji* 鰥寡孤獨廢疾), the blind were also eligible for the same relief as given to the indigent. This designation was first used to define the intended beneficiaries of the state-sponsored "poorhouse" (Yangjiyuan 養濟院) since the Song dynasty (960-1279), but the effort of the government to provide training for the blind to earn a livelihood was absent until the Ming official Lü Kun proposed to teach orphaned blind boys to become fortunetellers and girls to have weaving skills.[33] The Qing government did not carry out such programs or treat the blind and disabled differently from other members of the poor.

2.1 Organized Dependency in Late-Qing Poor Relief

In Qing-era Guangzhou, the management of poor and homeless blind and elderly people had fallen the scope of five charitable institutions under the official title of "Halls of Universal Relief" (Pujitang 普濟堂) since 1724. Located in the Eastern Suburb (*dongguan* 東關), they included the Home for Aged Men (Nan laorenyuan 男老人院), Home for Aged Women (Nü laorenyuan 女老人院), Leprosarium (Mafengyuan 麻風院), Foundling Home (Yuyingtang 育嬰

[33] However, there was little evidence showing the sustained implementation of Lü Kun's programs. See Fuma Susumu 夫馬進, *Zhongguo Shanhui shantang Shi yanjiu* 中國善會善堂史研究 (Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005), 63-65.

堂) and Home for the Blind (Gumuyuan 瞽目院) established by Zhang Zhidong when he served as the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi.[34] A new home for the blind was later established by Zhang's successor Tan Zhonglin but was soon converted into a military surveying office following the establishment of the Republic in 1912. The leprosarium and likely also the foundling home were placed under the supervision of the Public Health Bureau. Therefore it left only the homes for aged men, women and the blind intact and they were known as the Three Institutes for Universal Relief (Puji sanyuan 普濟三院, hereafter the "Three Institutes").[35]

The reason for establishing separate relief institutions for blind people was perhaps due to their significant expansion among "the homeless and the poor" (*gupin* 孤貧) in Nanhai and Panyu counties since the nineteenth century. According to the collection of provincial substatues, the two counties originally held 448 and 517 homeless blind persons who were provided for by the central government, with an additional 436 and 497 to be supported by the provincial government. The total number increased to 4828 by 1846. This had led to the reduction of cash distributed to every blind person from 1 *fen* to 5 *li* (i.e. 0.5 *fen*) per day. The burden of making up funding insufficiencies were placed on local officials who relied on collecting additional funds from gentry donations and government-owned lands.[36] Except for a small number of inmates who resided in the relief home, most registered blind persons received "outdoor relief," which meant that they were given money to buy food but were not provided with housing or any medical care besides those obtained from benevolent societies and public dispensaries. Since the quarterly distribution of relief money could barely pay off debts owed to shopkeepers, many

[34] John G. Kerr, "The Native Benevolent Institutions of Canton," *China Review* 2 (September/October 1873), 89.
[35] *Guangzhou nianjian* 廣州年鑒 (GZNJ) (Guangzhoushi shizhengfu, 1935), vol. 17, 1； Lee, *Modern Canton*, 85.
[36] Huang Enzheng 黃恩曾, comp., *Yuedong shengli xinzuan* 粵東省例新纂 (1846), vol. 2, 10a-b.

blind recipients engaged in begging to make a living. [37] The mismanagement of monetary aid further exacerbated the impoverishment of the blind. According to an investigation, the order of inspecting one's eyesight, age and appearance before registering with an identification tag (*gupai* 瞽牌) was not strictly followed, since local constables and county clerks who guaranteed blind applicants often colluded with the head of the blind (*gutou* 瞽頭) in falsely claiming and withholding tags after the death of a blind inmate. Many poor and homeless blind persons were hence unable to be enrolled after years of waiting.[38] The official administration of poor relief in Qing-era Guangzhou suggested that the blind were not given special attention as compared to the majority of the sighted poor. In upholding the belief that "the blind with brighter minds could earn a living by becoming fortunetellers while the lower ones had to beg for food,"[39] the imperial state considered disability as an individual rather than social responsibility. On the other hand, the fiscal limitation and administrative incapacity as revealed from relief practices contributed to entrenching the logic of impoverishment among disabled people.

Foreign missionaries who came to Guangzhou during the late nineteenth century often took a critical, although biased perspective on the role of the Chinese government in caring for the native blind communities. In his travelogue, John H. Gray recorded his visit to the home for the blind, which was located in Pak-Waang-Kai (Beihengjie 北横街) outside the east gate of the walled city. Gray described the site as "in a dilapidated condition" and "a great disgrace" to the local government. Walking through a narrow cottage lane one would find a small temple at the extreme end of the asylum, in which "the tutelage god of the blind" was seated. A native

[37] Raymond Lum, "Philanthropy and Public Welfare in Late Imperial China," Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University, 1985), 188-191.
[38] Anon., comp., *Yuedong li'an* 粵東例案 (Qianlong period), in *Qingdai gaochaoben* 清代稿鈔本 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2010), vol. 146, 501-503.
[39] Ibid., 501.

physician who sat inside the shrine gave medical advice to around 448 blind inmates. Many more blind pensioners who lived outdoor were "neglected and forgotten by the authorities" even though their total numbers increased over time to 884 and then to 1931 and finally reached at 2150. While Gray was under the impression that this ignorance came from the false belief in blindness as a retribution for sinful conduct, he also mentioned that the blind pensioners often suffered from exhortations by shopkeepers and dealers once they received additional alms from the government.[40] In another note, Gray also compared the relief for the blind with the provision for the aged. He observed that the asylum for the aged men and women had similar indoor temples occupied by deities that respectively served as symbol of official relief. "Kwan-te" (*Guandi* 關帝), or the god of war, offered to "protect the inmates" at the asylum for aged men while "Koon-Yam" (*Guanyin* 觀音), the goddess of mercy, "exercises a watchful care" over the aged women. Although relief funds for the aged and blind were all derived from the salt tax, a special license was given to aged men that "enabled them to undersell (salt to) the licensed dealers."[41] The blind were given no such privilege and the funds collected from the salt tax were so small that "they are compelled to beg from door to door," wrote Gray, who nicely captured a daily scene of the blind beggars from the perspective of an European observer:

> These blind creatures generally sally forth every morning on a begging expedition, in companies of six or seven. They walk in single file, each resting his right hand on the shoulder of the person in front of him. The leader of the file gropes his way with his stick. When they enter a shop they commence beating the small gongs which they carry, and sing a variety of songs pitched in a very high key…Only one company could occupy the shop at a time, and the longer it stays the less opportunity there is for others to make new demands. If the shopkeeper turns a deaf ear to the noise of the intruders, they increase their din, and intersperse their songs with remarks not at all complimentary. His [the shopkeeper] benevolence seldom exceeds a copper cash or a handful of unboiled rice. At the close of the

[40] John H. Gray, *Walks in the City of Canton* (Hong Kong, 1875; repr. San Francisco, 1974), 523-525.
[41] John H. Gray, *China: A History of the Laws, Manners, and Customs of the People* (Macmillan and Company, 1878), Vol. 2, 48.

> day these poor blind men may be seen wending their way back to the asylum with their wallets over their shoulders, scantly filled with the proceeds of the day's begging.[42]

Besides illustrating the lack of official consideration for the livelihood of blind inmates, the routine practice of begging also conveyed a form of organized dependency largely tolerated by the local government. Because blind people were generally considered as "the deserving poor," allowing them to solicit aid from the public was a cheap way of governance. As Raymond Lum suggests, the Qing state's decision not to distinguish the blind from the poor and homeless sighted served to maintain their access to nearly all forms of public aid, from state-run poorhouses to gentry-led benevolent halls and public dispensaries.[43] Gray's observation that "shopkeepers are obliged to minister the necessities of blind men" might reflect instruction from the local government.

Begging also enabled blind inmates to marry among themselves. "All the husbands and wives whom I saw in the asylum were blind," as Gray noted. Moreover, he remembered seeing the wedding of a blind bride who was born in the asylum and was surprised by the formality of her reception which took place in front of the tutelary deity of the blind.[44] Blind children born and raised in the asylum revealed the formation of a blind community of inmates. According to an investigation, some blind boys and girls supported by the foundling home were transferred, at the age of 16, to the homes of aged men and women. The blind, along with a few deaf and dumb persons, received the same rations as the elderly inmates in addition to a monthly allowance from the foundling home.[45] This further implied that these relief institutions, despite being seen as disorganized and ineffective by a European traveler, in fact fostered interdependency among

[42] Ibid., 49.
[43] Lum, "Philanthropy and Public Welfare in Late Imperial China," 191.
[44] Gray, *China*, 49.
[45] Kerr, "The Native Benevolent Institutions of Canton," 92.

blind, aged and disabled inmates through the operation of funds and the mediation of religious symbols.

2.2 The Blind in Early Republican-era Administration of Social Welfare

The transition from an older model of poor relief to a new regime of social welfare organized by the principle of eliminating dependency took place at the revolutionary heartland of Guangzhou. Following the establishment of the Republic, military authorities carried out plans to supervise or regulate preexisting relief institutes. Since the Three Institutes that continued to function during the period mainly consisted of the aged, blind and disabled, their conditions became the measurement of state action and the degrees to which it affected societal forms of assistance. The blind, in particular, were gradually incorporated in the expansion of state control first as subjects of reforming social customs (Chapter 1), and then as targets of fiscal and moral regulations, when their professional disintegration triggered the state to develop new welfare measures aimed at protecting blind women from the sexually predatory market (Chapter 2). Meanwhile, the state became increasingly concerned with the problem of administering social welfare effectively, namely how to balance the responsibility of caring for the aged, blind and disabled against the goal of discouraging the able-bodied indigent from relying on public funds.

The extended reach of the state in the realm of social relief reflected a broader vision of "social reconstruction" (*shehui gaizao* 社會改造) shared by leading reformists of the time. In his speech to the Guangdong Council of Education, Sun Yat-sen raised the point that "the government should return profits back to its people by taking an active role in public welfare so

as to reduce pain and increase happiness in society."[46] People's livelihood (*minsheng* 民生), one of the founding principles of the GMD party-state, conceived the role of the government as responsible for ensuring the welfare of the masses and political stability. Li Zonghuang commented on the government's lack of effective relief system during his visit to Guangzhou in 1921. Li pointed out that poverty was the most urgent issue in municipal administration worldwide, and in China this was manifested by the growth of unemployed vagrants (*wuye youmin* 無業遊民) as a result of war and political disturbance. He proposed that private charity, especially the "nine charity halls,"[47] should be supervised and instructed to offer training for unemployed people. In addition, the government should emulate the model of missionary schools that taught the blind and disabled to become "useful" by learning to read and making embroidery.[48] By highlighting the importance of state action to counter physical and economic dependency, GMD reformists were already planning for the transformation of its revolutionary base to a model of the "welfare state" before the Nanjing Decade.

From the beginning of municipal administration in the 1920s, the power of former philanthropic organizations went into decline as local authorities increased the supervision of the budget and operation of leading charity halls and at the same time undermined the influence of merchant groups over public welfare.[49] Following the attempt to convert part of the space of the Fangbian Hospital into a reformatory for blind women who were formerly engaged in singing, municipal officials also began planning for the reorganization of the Three Institutes that housed

[46] Sun Yat-sen 孫中山, "Sun dazongtong dui xuejie dayanjiang" (孫大總統對學界大演講), *Guangdongsheng jiaoyuhui zazhi* 廣東省教育會雜誌 1, 1 (1921): 111.
[47] The term *jiu shantang* 九善堂 was a common designation of local charitable organizations emerged during the last four decades of Qing administration in Guangzhou. Most of them had close connections to merchant associations and guilds. Quoted in Angela Ki-che Leung, "Charity, Medicine, and Religion: The Quest for Modernity in Canton," In Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely and John Lagerwey, ed., *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-2015* (Brill, 2016), 581.
[48] Li Zonghuang, 59-60, 72.
[49] Tsin, 112-113.

former aged and blind inmates. Due to the suspension of their allowance in 1919 by the Guangxi militarist Mo Rongxin 莫榮新 (1853-1930), the Three Institutes turned to the French Catholic mission for assistance.[50] Although they were reinstated with an allowance of 3,000 *yuan* per month after the overthrow of Mo, the homes for aged men, women and the blind were still under the leadership of Bishop Antoine Fourquet (1872-1952) until they fully returned to GMD's control in 1928.[51] According to a survey, there were altogether 1,350 aged and blind inmates, and the amount of relief money distributed to each person was only 2.2 *yuan* a month. Due to the insufficient pension, most of the aged and blind inmates who could walk chose to be self-employed in menial works, and more often they turned to begging for survival.[52] The failure to prevent impoverished members from flowing out of the Three Institutes would no doubt tarnish the reputation of the new regime and weaken its legitimacy. Therefore from 1921 onward, reforming the Three Institutes became a priority for the municipal administration. The period also witnessed a process of gradual transformation of relief functions through countering the residual influence of organized dependency.

The GMD's return to power first brought the funding and expense of the Three Institutes under the control of the Finance Bureau.[53] Later during the process of surveying charitable properties, a proposal for selling off the lands of the Three Institutes and rebuilding a new relief institute stirred up debates within the Provincial Assembly. According to a report, civic leaders in the assembly criticized the plan for "claiming the material source of clothing, food and shelter"

[50] Lee, 85.
[51] The Catholic mission in Guangzhou, which lasted until 1947, had coordinated with other Christian schools and hospitals that sheltered many needy persons during times of political instability, especially the period of Japanese occupation (1938-1945) where many inmates were proselytized. See *Guangzhou shizhi* 廣州市志 (Guangzhou chubanshe, 1996), vol. 19, 404-405.
[52] "Shinei pinmin jiguan banli zhuangkuang" (市內貧民機關辦理狀況), GMR (October 19, 1928).
[53] "Puji sanyuan gui shiting zhifei" (普濟三院歸市廳支費), HZRB (April 8, 1921).

from aged and blind people and causing them to become homeless.[54] This criticism, which employed three foundational elements in the GMD formula of improving people's livelihood, implied that the reformist experiment of social welfare had carried the danger of impoverishing the already vulnerable members since its conception.

Not surprisingly, the relocation plan brought anxieties to aged and blind inmates who had been suffering from many years of underfunding due to the increase of military expenses. Fearing the loss of their home, the aged and blind men and women decided to leave the relief homes and engage in a begging parade. It was reported that they formed in lines of ten and were led by a person who carried a squared white flag. They were seen begging and crying for help along the streets of the Western Suburb while asking for alms from shopkeepers and passers-by who were sympathetic to their cause.[55] In their written handouts, the representatives spoke to the public on behalf of 2000 aged and blind inmates, saying that due to the large arrears in the payments from the government, they were forced to raise money first by performing at theatres of the Western Suburb; they then appealed to the Catholic mission for their assistance.[56] Bishop Fourquet, who was still acting as the head of the Three Institutes, sent a letter to the municipal office requesting the permission of Catholic nuns to lead the aged and blind inmates in seeking public donations.[57] Their fundraising activities further spread to Hong Kong with the help of charitable organizations such as the Tung Wah Hospital.[58]

The pressure from the begging demonstration and the difficulty in reaching an agreement on immediate relocation made the municipal government reconsider its plan for the Three

[54] "Yulun duiyu bianmai eryuan de fenkai" (輿論對於變賣二院的憤慨), HZRB (May 24, 1923).
[55] "Sanyuan canfeiren yantu qiuzhen" (三院殘廢人沿途求賑), HZRB (February 14, 1925).
[56] "Puji sanyuan pinmin zhi huyu" (普濟三院貧民之呼籲), HZRB (February 20, 1925).
[57] "Shengling weichi puji sanyuan zhi pinmin" (省令維持普濟三院之貧民), HZRB (February 28, 1925).
[58] "Shengcheng pujiyuan laigang chouzhang" (省城普濟院來港籌賑), HZRB (March 24, 1925); "Puji sanyuan choukuan you donghua yiyuan daishou" (普濟三院籌款由東華醫院代收), HZRB (March 27, 1925).

Institutes. Mayor Sun Ke 孫科 (1891-1973) first proposed to establish a work-study school for the blind inmates within the Home of the Blind, and instructed the Finance Bureau to take out 2,500 *yuan* from the municipal tax on specialty drugs and an extra 200 *yuan* per month to finance the operation of the school. The idea of the school, as indicated by its original name, was to "benefit the blind" (*fugu* 福瞽) by teaching them basic manufacturing skills to become self-sufficient.[59] The determination of municipal authorities to change the old relief model was shown during the course of running the Municipal School for the Blind (Shili mangren xueyuan 市立盲人學院, hereafter MSB). Established on May 16, 1924, the MSB enrolled a small number of former blind inmates, mostly male, in classes that taught them to make brooms and acquire some basic education. The blind students were not provided with food but only employment at the workshop attached to the School with a monthly salary between 4 to 9 *yuan* depending on their proficiency. The workshop had about 40 regular blind employees and a monthly production outcome of 4,200 brooms, but only 1180 were sold to assigned institutions.[60]

This good intention to improve the welfare of blind people, however, was not recognized by its would-be beneficiaries. According to local news, a riot broke out in 1924 during the process of expanding the MSB. Former blind residents were reported to tear down recruitment posters of the school and interrupted workers at the construction site. The rioters further attacked several patrolmen who came to calm the situation until the arrival of armed police brought the violence under control.[61] Since the instigators were believed to have affiliations with the Catholic church, the government became increasingly suspicious of its role and accused Bishop Fourquet

[59] GZNJ, 2.
[60] "Shinei pinmin jiguan banli zhuangkuang."
[61] "Shijin mangren banxue" (示禁盲人辦學), HZRB (May 10, 1924).

of "deceiving and instigating" (*suohuo* 唆惑) the blind to disobey the official order.[62] This charge was not unfounded, since the Catholic mission mainly used the Three Institutes as means of proselytization, such as setting chapels inside the Home of the Blind (hereafter HOB).[63] The official distrust of foreign agents running relief institutions thus distinguished the GMD government from its predecessors who only exerted indirect control over charity, and showed that the new regime was very much invested in building its public image by modernizing the heritage of imperial benevolence.

Meanwhile, conflicts between the MSB and the HOB over the management of space continued to grow. In 1927, after the government decided to turn 40 sheltered units into classrooms, headmaster He Qifu brought local police to assist the eviction of former residents who were unwilling to move. It was reported on July 21 that hundreds of blind inmates, upon hearing the news, rushed to the school office and scratched the door with knives and sharp objects. The angry crowd removed some tiles from the wall before army officers came to suppress them and stayed to protect the MSB from further unrest.[64] On the same day, about 700 blind men and women marched again to the provincial government protesting against the decision to demolish the HOB. They carried fliers made with straw papers, which carried slogans such as "blind people will die without their home" (瞽目院亡瞽目人亡) and described themselves as would-be "homeless drifters" (*liuli shisuo* 流離失所). During the petition, three blind representatives submitted an appeal to the government listing the malpractices of headmaster He, who mistreated the blind by not allowing them to drink tap water installed at the Home and threatened to evict them by force. He was also accused of lying about the production

[62] GZNJ, 2; Guangzhoushi pinmin jiaoyangyuan zongwugu 廣州市貧民教養院總務股, *Guangzhou shi pinmin jiaoyangyuan tekan* 廣州市貧民教養院特刊 (PJYTK)(Guangzhou: Xinqiwen yinwuju, 1929), 3.
[63] "Shinei pinmin jiguan."
[64] "Paijing tanya gumuyuan fengchao" (派警彈壓瞽目院風潮), GPB (July 21, 1927).

outcome of the workshop for the blind in order to embezzle extra allowances.[65] The carefully chosen wording for the public demonstration as well as the proof of the headmaster's coercive action to remove former residents suggested that the whole event was planned out quite strategically. In their defense against the perceived threat of eviction, blind petitioners successfully pressured the government by employing the rhetoric of homelessness in asserting their entitlement to official protection.

Upon receiving the letter of petition from the provincial government, municipal authorities removed the headmaster from his position in order to pacify the protesters. They then targeted a group of illegal dwellers inside the HOB as scapegoats for instigating the blind inmates. After a collective investigation led by the Police Department and the Bureaus of Education and Public Health, a report on the incident was released to the press, which emphasized the role of 20 sighted hooligans (*kaiyan wulai* 開眼無賴) and their leader Jian Can in inciting the blind to stage a petition due to their fear of being evicted.[66] According to the report, these sighted intruders had been taking advantage of the blind inmates for a long time, forcing them to collaborate in running brothels, opium dens and gambling spots. In order to root out the bad influence, authorities immediately evicted the 20 hooligans and arrested their leaders for further interrogation. At the same time 12 sighted old men and 20 old women were handed over to the Home of the Aged. Sighted boys and girls were also delivered to local orphanages. All blind inmates were allowed to stay and those considered as fit for education were enrolled in the MSB.[67]

[65] "Gumuren juxing da qingyuan" (瞽目人舉行大請願), HZRB (July 21, 1927).
[66] "Weishengju zhengdun gumuyuan qingxing" (衛生局整頓瞽目院情形), HZRB (August, 4, 1927).
[67] "Chaihui gumuyuan an" (拆毀瞽目院案), *Guangzhou shizheng gongbao* 廣州市政公報 (GSG) (August, 8, 1927), GMA-Zi-Zheng-579-265-20.

The targeted removal of sighted residents and the reintegration of blind inmates for educational purposes reflected the state's attempt to transform the function of relief from fostering dependency to encouraging self-sufficiency. But in fact the condition of blind inmates were unlikely be improved within a short time. As the government admitted, the small allowance (i.e. 200 *yuan*/month) granted to the MSB could not train many inmates to make handicraft and it was even harder to sell their products. Official records showed that within a year of its operation, there were only 9 left at the MSB.[68] Moreover, the ban on illicit activities at the HOB may have also affected some blind inmates who collaborated with the sighted in making a living, although no further details were mentioned in the report about their living condition before and after the eviction of rioters.

During this episode of intensified agitation among blind inmates who sought to defend a self-regulated community against the government's attempt to change it into an educational facility, GMD reformers were caught in between the assertion of blind people of their entitlement to home and the right to beg for a living and the goal of reducing their organized dependency through new measures of social welfare. The decision to evict sighted dwellers and reintegrate blind inmates into the school was only a temporary solution. Yet it contributed to the disqualification of the blind and disabled as deserving poor and discouraged them from relying on begging. As I will show later, this vision of turning the disabled poor into contributing members of the nation became materialized during the reign of Chen Jitang.

[68] PJYTK, 4.

3. The Social Engineering of Disability in 1930s Guangzhou

This section traces the emerging language of disability (*canfei* 殘廢) in the Nationalist social welfare policy in the 1930s. I will first show how *canfei* was understood in relation to the state's definition of productivity and its exemplification in a model relief institute at the capital of Nanjing. In addition to the reintegration of former recipients of poor relief according to age, gender and disability, the municipal order to turn in beggars from the street presented a new feature in the scientific management of social welfare. Policy makers became gradually convinced by the sociological interpretation that beggars were a major problem in an industrialized economy and should be made productive. In Guangzhou, a provincial welfare state was established under a pro-Nationalist warlord regime, which promised a centralized organization of social welfare in which all bodies with labor potential were reconceived as workers for the nation. Even the blind were distinguished by their ability to engage in manual labor. This radical conception of productivism reflected a crucial development of the Nationalist social policy beyond the capital.

3.1 The Language of Disability in GMD Productivism

The practice of making the disabled as subjects of social welfare measures reflected an innovation of relief methods soon after the Nationalist party founded a new capital in Nanjing. In 1929, the Ministry of Interior promulgated a national plan for "social relief work" (*jiuji shiye* 社會救濟事業) that defined welfare recipients as "those who had psychological, physical and habitual differences and deficiencies," and envisioned the GMD's goal of building a welfare state as to accommodate such differences by establishing modern welfare facilities that taught

the aged, infirm or disabled appropriate skills. In particular, it mentioned the demand for training native instructors of the blind and mute to be dispatched to areas beyond Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing.[69] The idea that even the disabled could be educated contributed to the rhetoric of self-sufficiency by showing that people could compensate for deficient bodies by developing alternative literacy and skills. In 1929, a pamphlet entitled *Education for the Disabled* (*Canfei jiaoyu* 殘廢教育) appeared in an edited volume for the use of teachers' schools in China. In it, the author traced the development of education for the deaf-mute, blind and lame children in Europe and America, and regarded institutionalization as a necessary step towards making the disabled useful to society. According to the book, many blind children failed to achieve "self-help" (*zijiu* 自救) as a result of excessive dependence on their parents who were ignorant of the benefit of interaction with the outside world. The author listed the Western instruction of blind pupils through Braille, an embossed system of writing that enabled the practice of arithmetic, geometry and other visual equivalents by touch. Professional education, such as weaving and basketry, would aid the blind in obtaining their social value.[70] In 1929, private schools for the blind, deaf and mute were registered under the Education Bureau of the Nanjing government. Methods of special education, which were primarily taught in missionary schools, also became a component of instruction in state-run welfare facilities.

This emphasis on developing innovative relief methods in order to restore the working capacity of various individuals who were brought to the reformatory distinguished active relief from passive means of provision. Ke Xiangfeng 柯象峰, a professor of sociology at Jinling University in Nanjing, attributed the problem of poverty in China to the traditional practice of poor relief, which tended to reproduce dependency through the mere act of almsgiving. Modern

[69] *Jiujishiye jihuashu*, 6-7.
[70] Hua Linyi 華林一, *Canfei Jiaoyu* 殘廢教育 (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1929), 31-38.

welfare, argued Ke, should "unite compassion with science" so as to deliver the goal of "fostering and restoring productive ability among those who have lost it or temporarily lost the opportunity to produce."[71] Specifically, Ke mentioned the failure of traditional indoor relief due to the lack of differentiation and regulation of the poor and homeless, and whose seasonal influx and outflow contributed to increasing pauperization. The operation of the modern poorhouse should therefore base on targeting aged and disabled inmates and segregating them according to differences of sex, physical strength, health conditions and emotional propensities. "Productivism" (*laoyi zhuyi* 勞役主義) was also highlighted as an organizing principle aimed at enabling disabled inmates to do handicrafts and those with working ability to engage in collective farming.[72]

Ke's vision was first materialized in the Capital Relief Institute (Jingshi jiujiyuan 京市救濟院) built in the new national capital of Nanjing in 1929. The central GMD government took coercive measures of removing urban vagrants and turning them into compulsory laborers as a means of punishing their idleness. But the relief institute took no deliberate measures to make further distinctions in the labor potential of the inmates besides broad categories of gender, age and disability. This partly explained why compulsory labor training often contributed to low efficiency in production, as observed by the sociologist Yan Xinzhe. The most urgent issue, argued Yan, was to scientifically differentiate the poor and raise their working efficiency.[73]

As will be shown later, the case of Guangzhou presented the welfare state's active reconfiguration of the internal diversity of the poor by extending the rehabilitation of working capacity from able-bodied to disabled inmates. This attempt to turn disability into a category of

[71] Ke Xiangfeng 柯象峰, *Zhongguo pinqiong wenti* 中國貧窮問題 (Shanghai: Zhengzhong, 1935), 338-339.
[72] Ibid., 335-337.
[73] Yan Xinzhe 言心哲, "Wo duiyu Nanjing shili jiujiyuan zhi xiwang" (我對於南京市立救濟院之希望), in *Jingshi jiujiyuan shijiunian niankan* 京市救濟院十九年年刊 (JSJJY) (Nanjing: Wenhua yinwuju, 1931), 4-6.

exclusion among those who failed to work efficiently, as I will show next, was informed by observations by foreign and native social surveyors in their study of urban poverty.

3.2 The Problem of Disability in the "Begging Class"

How to distinguish the different manifestations of poverty among a wide range of lower-class working people became a thorny issue for a provincial state trying to carry out a systematic welfare policy. There were two groups of the urban underclass that deserved special attention: rickshaw men and beggars. The government sought to ameliorate the condition of the former "hard-working class" by reducing rental charges on rickshaws and earmarked the rickshaw tax for the construction of cheaper hostels for their families.[74] Although rickshaw pulling was often treated as an oppressive form of human labor from a humanitarian standpoint, the fact that it generated incomes for the able-bodied poor made the profession not so much a problem in the eyes of the state. As for the latter "unproductive class," which included many helpless individuals who were young, old, infirm and disabled, the state held strict policies on sheltering and training them at the municipal poorhouse. These were people who were often employed in the begging trade, but in fact their practices varied according to both physical and social differences.

The diversity of the Chinese begging class first became a sociological problem during sociology's introduction to China in the early twentieth century. In 1915, an American sociologist delivered a lecture on "China's lazy people" (*Zhongguo zhi duomin* 中國之墮民) during his visit to the Dongwu University in Suzhou. In it, he summarized three main categories of Chinese beggars: monk beggars, itinerant beggars and local beggars. The former two

[74] Ibid., 89.

characterized a broad spectrum of the vagrant population that were neither accommodated by the orthodox family system or temples due to the lack of religious endowments or the loss of economic support in result of disaster. Although their begging activities were sanctified by the popular belief in Buddhism and the sympathy towards mass suffering, they were equally viewed with suspicion due to the fact that most beggars have naturally "developed a habit of greediness and laziness" (*tanlan chengxing* 貪婪成性) as they drifted out from their native place.[75]

There were still people who turned to begging due to individual misfortunes, and disability was often the primary cause. Blind beggars and disabled beggars with injuries were two major subgroups of local beggars. These unfortunate people employed their disabilities to legitimate begging and knew how to display their sufferings in ways that compelled the passers-by to look pitifully at their injured bodies. Blind beggars could even be frightening when aligned with local villains, who served as their guide and cooperated with the blind in begging loudly at the doorstep. Local shopkeepers often prepared coins to appease the crowd and prevent them from interrupting business. Yet not all the blind joined the begging gang. "Those who played gongs and three-strings were the higher class among the blind and should be differentiated from beggars," said the author, who also noted that local begging groups identified themselves as poor people rather than beggars due to the fact that they had families to support.[76] This distinction was in fact hard to tell, but it implied from a sociological standpoint that begging tended to obscure the real problem of poverty as characterized by the practice of drifting (*liu* 流) that the state was unable to fully control.

In contrast, the various forms of begging as practiced by the disabled poor were indications of their social status in the locality, and their relationship with other begging groups

[75] Qing Xia, trans., "Zhongguo zhi duomin" (中國之墮民) *Dazhonghua zazhi* 大中華雜誌 vol. 1, no. 4 (1915), 5.
[76] Ibid., 8-10.

was structured in a way that helped maintained the local order. But the informal link between beggars and the public was severed as China entered the period of political reform when "the police finally replaced the role of beggar heads."[77] Similar observations were also included in large-scale social surveys, such as the one conducted by Gamble and Burgess on Beijing in the late 1910s, in which they witnessed the effort of the local police at breaking up the beggars guild within the walled city and threatening many of its members with fines or imprisonment. This nonetheless had caused a great number of beggars "with unsightly sores and deformities" to be "more insistent in their demands" outside the city gate.[78] This reflected a typical phenomenon which happened in the initial process of municipal reform. Like what Gamble and Burgess described in Beijing, Chengdu also witnessed the separation of the deserving poor from the lazy poor, as street cleaning pushed the disabled to claim begging rights after able-bodied ones were taken into the poorhouse by the local police (Chapter 4).

The complex relationship between beggars and an urbanizing China later received wider attentions from a group of Chinese sociologists who carried out investigations in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou. In 1932, a student of sociology at Lingnan University reported in his thesis that the number of local beggars in Guangzhou was estimated about 2357. This did not include the seasonal influx of beggars from other provinces, which had around three to four hundred members who were believed to have drifted from Shandong province. He further divided local beggars according to their street practices. The professional ones earned a living by performing martial arts, string music and folksongs. Those with blindness, deaf-muteness, lameness, leprosy, and injured hands and feet were known as "crippled beggars" (*cangai* 殘丐)

[77] "Zhongguo zhi duomin (xu)," *Dazhonghua zazhi* vol. 1, no. 6 (1915), 1.
[78] Sidney Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), 275-276.

who simply used disability as a begging tool.[79] Their practice of begging thus turned disability into a social expression of poverty that was at the core of social scientific concerns. Of the 500 beggars surveyed by the author, 311 had recognizable disabilities or diseases. This number was reported as three times more than the unhealthy members found in a study of 609 boat people in a village of southern Guangdong.[80] The comparison created an impression that begging contributed to the socialization of people with physical and mental defects, and they should be either prevented by the principle of Eugenics or treated with modern medicine.[81] This assumption of a healthy and economically sufficient population underpinned the author's main argument: while able-bodied beggars produced economic dependency by being lazy, disabled beggars contributed to entrenching the notion of a weak and deficient social body.

In their attempt to define begging as a social problem, Chinese sociologists ascribed many individual causes, such as disease and disability, to a reductive logic of deficiency in the population in order to undermine the public sympathy towards all kinds of begging activities. Their scholarly endeavors served as guiding tools for the municipal administration of social welfare in the 1930s.

4. A Provincial Welfare State under Chen Jitang's Reign

In April 1929, Chen Jitang became the military commander of Guangdong. With the military support of the New Guangxi Clique that rivaled Jiang Jieshi, Chen was finally able to govern the province independently from Nanjing in May 1931. But Chen's grasp of civil affairs

[79] Zhang Tianyou 張天佑, "Guangzhoushi qigai wenti de yanjiu" (廣州市乞丐問題的研究) (1932), in *Minguo shiqi shehui diaocha congbian* 民国时期社会调查丛编 (岭南大学中山大学卷) (Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), 304-305.
[80] Ibid., 325-326.
[81] Ibid., 336.

had not yet become firm, and it was not until March 1932 that he took full control of provincial, municipal and county-level administration with the help of his close ally Lin Yungai 林雲陔 (1881-1948).[82] Lin became mayor of Guangzhou in January 1928 and since then worked on a comprehensive plan to promote a centralized municipal relief organ, the Guangzhou Municipal Poorhouse (GMP), which incorporated all former Qing relief homes in November 1928. But it was after Chen's coming to power that this integrated social welfare machine was able to operate on full scale with the funding of a warlord regime. Chen Jitang's vision of state building, as Alfred Lin argues, was rooted in the belief that social welfare was the foundation of political stability and a means of obtaining total control over society.[83] Chen held a firm belief that all works of charity, whether initiated by the government or run by social elites, should be linked together so as to address the need of the widest populace.

In sharp contrast to what we have seen in Chengdu where Confucian gentry held predominant power in managing social welfare (Chapter 4), Chen Jitang's Guangzhou highlighted the incorporation of all private charity under official supervision. In Chen's view, the native tradition of philanthropy could not stand the test of modern social conditions without instruction from the state. Since the aim of charity halls was primarily moral edification but not social control, it must be incorporated into a broader conception of social welfare so as to fulfill the responsibility of improving people's livelihood and social stability. In particular, Chen was dissatisfied with the management of local charity organizations and thought that they were in decline as compared to foreign charity, which not only provided sufficient medical care for the

[82] Alfred Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime: The Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929-1936," *Modern China* 28, 2 (Apr., 2002), 182.
[83] Alfred Lin, 163-164.

poor but also created new relief methods for blind and deaf people.[84] The capacity of foreign actors to reach beyond the limited realms of native philanthropy embarrassed Chen and motivated him to reform social welfare. In 1934, Chen launched the Hall of Benevolent Care (Ren'ai Shantang 仁愛善堂), a central organization of charity halls in Guangzhou that intended to supervise the administration of philanthropy within the province. It was meant to carry out older functions of "almsgiving" (*bushi* 布施) and "edification" (*xuanhua* 宣化) within the oversight of the SAB and to reassert the "obligation of mutual aid" (*huzhu yiwu* 互助義務) from the perspective of the state.[85] The reinvigoration of traditional value helped strengthen the credibility of a warlord and extended the reach of his governance to civil spheres. In 1936, or less than two years of its operation, Chen further ordered the SAB to take over the management of the Hall as a step toward expanding the welfare state.

The expansion of a provincial welfare state began in 1933, when Lin Yungai remarked in the Three Year Plan of Guangdong that social relief work was a political imperative of provincial reconstruction. As Lin pointed out, the new government should not only protect the life and civil rights of refugees but also attend to the welfare of the elderly and disabled by establishing relief homes, as well as providing cheaper lodgings and hospitals for the unemployed population in both city and countryside.[86] The plan was drafted during the time of economic depression that struck South China, and the official estimation of homeless persons in Guangzhou was more than 2000. Edward Lee (Ping-jui Li) reported in *Modern Canton* that these were people who could not afford to rent an unfurnished room, and over half of them were coolies, and the rest were

[84] "Cishan shiye shi renlei yingyou de huzhu yiwu" (慈善事業是人類應有的互助義務), *Guangdong dangwu yuekan* 廣東黨務月刊, vol. 7-8 (1934), 10.
[85] "Guangdong Ren'ai Shantang zhangcheng" (廣東仁愛善堂章程), *Renai xunkan* 仁愛旬刊, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1935), 1-3.
[86] Lin Yungai 林雲陔, "Lin zhuxi baogao Guangdongshng sannian shizheng jihua gaiyao" (林主席報告廣東省三年市政計劃概要), *Guangdongsheng zhengfu gongbao* 廣東省政府公報, vol. 210 (1933), 7.

irregularly employed as beggars, rag pickers and peddlers. They were temporarily housed in the Common People's Hostel (Pingmingong 平民宮), an official relief organ set up for the "poverty-stricken manual laboring class."[87] Although this definition intended to distinguish a skilled labor force from the massive unemployed and unskilled population, the actual meaning pointed to an increasingly fluid social boundary between the lower working-class and the homeless poor. As shown next, the welfare state was clearly invested in reestablishing a work-based identity for the urban poor who had been recruited through welfare channels.

4.1 Disabled Beggars at the Guangzhou Municipal Poorhouse

Before Chen Jitang's coming to power, an initial effort to take the aged, blind and disabled beggars into state-run welfare facilities started in January 1928, when Lin Yungai took the mayor's office. Lin ordered the Police Department to carry out a comprehensive survey of the number of beggars appeared on the street, while instructing the Bureaus of Finance, Education, and Public Works to come up with a plan for receiving homeless and indigent members into a large-scale poorhouse within ten days. Lin saw this endeavor to "foster people's livelihood" (*yu minsheng* 裕民生) as an important step towards legitimizing Guangzhou as the revolutionary heartland in a period when the center of national politics shifted to Nanjing. More importantly, Lin framed the construction of a modern relief institute for the destitute and weak members of society according to the differences in age and ability. As he summarized, "[T]he young and able-bodied (*shaozhuang zhe* 少壯者) should be taught to read and make all kinds of handicrafts while the aged and disabled (*nianlao ji feiji zhe* 年老及廢疾者) should be provided

[87] Lee, *Modern Canton*, 89-90.

with food and shelter for the rest of their lives."[88] This distinction was further specified in a police investigation that reported a number of 684 beggars citywide according to four categories: the young and able-bodied (108), the old and weak (311), the crippled (151), the blind and mute (93), and the infant (22).[89] Since the majority of reported beggars were aged and disabled, they became the first group to be immediately sheltered in a temporary detention center operated by the Home of the Aged and the Home of the Blind.[90] Moreover, the government, in realizing that many of these beggars came from the Three Institutes, decided to reclassify the poor by merging all existing relief institutions into the GMP.

The initial phase emphasized turning all beggars into the detention center, in which two departments were named under the premise of classifying the poor according to their age and ability: the department of the aged (*laoren gu* 老人股) and the department of the blind and mute (*mangya gu* 盲啞股).[91] The government first instructed the Bureaus of Public Health and Education to handover the Three Institutes and the Municipal School for the Blind to the SAB. Then the blind students and those aged above sixty from the latter two institutions were transferred to the two departments, which reported a total number of 1393 inmates.[92] The preparation committee further suggested an increase of relief funds for all aged and blind inmates from 2 to 4 *yuan* a month so that they would not turn to begging out of starvation.[93]

Beginning in October 18, 1928, three new departments were formed to further distinguish beggars who were taken in by the local police. It was expected that a department of children

[88] "Shiting ni shourong youmin qigai" (市廳擬收容遊民乞丐), HZRB (May 26, 1928).
[89] "Guangzhoushi qigai tongjibiao" (廣州市乞丐統計表), (October 17, 1928), GMA-4-01-2-161-1-31.
[90] "Pinmin linshi shourongsuo dizhi" (貧民臨時收容所), GMR (September 12, 1928).
[91] "Pinmin jiaoyangyuan linshi shourongsuo banfa dagang" (貧民教養院臨時收容所辦法大綱), GMR (September 27, 1928).
[92] "Pinmin jiaoyangyuan choubei weiyuanhui chengbao choubei jingguo qingkuang you" (貧民教養院籌備委員會呈報籌備經過情況由), GMA-4-01-2-161-2-103.
[93] "Pinmin jiaoyangyuan choubei weiyuanhui jieshou puji sanyuan, mangren xueyuan, shili pinmin jiaoyangyuan an" (貧民教養院籌備委員會接收普濟三院、盲人學院、市立貧民教養院案), GMA-4-01-3-111-2.

would receive those who aged between six and twelve; a department of young and able-bodied persons would take in members of the poor who were aged between twelve and fifty; and a department of crippled persons (*canfei gu* 殘廢股) would house the physically handicapped. In particular, the latter two categories were respectively defined by their idleness (*daiduo* 怠惰) and physical deficiency (*zhiti canque* 肢體殘缺).[94] These subdivisions were created under the belief that poverty, often characterized by the "lack of self-sufficiency" (*buneng ziji* 不能自給), stemmed from problems related to both physical and social constraints. Thus the emphasis on the responsibility of the individual in caring and supporting for oneself suggested a shift in the management of poverty. Unlike the older method of poor relief, which primarily responded to the problem of deficient material accommodation for people outside of the family order, the new definition of social welfare aimed to bring a wide range of displaced individuals into state custody and divided them according to the causes of economic dependency.

According to official statistics gathered from November 1928 to June 1929, the total number of residents at the GMP increased from 2123 to 2542. Among the four main divisions, the aged persons constituted over half of the total population. The department of disabled persons had about 500 residents, in which the blind were the majority. Only around 400 inmates were able-bodied.[95] These were people who had fallen into begging due to unemployment, disease and bad habits. About half of the able-bodied poor had contracted syphilis or become addicted to smoking and drinking before entering the GMP. After receiving medical treatment and physical training, these people were assigned to workshops that focused on handicraft works. Since many of them worked previously as workers in the machine and textile factories or were

[94] "Guangzhoushi pinmin jiaoyangyuan linshi shourongsuo zuzhi dagang" (廣州市貧民教養院臨時收容所組織大綱), GMA-4-01-162-4-202.
[95] *Guangzhou shi zhengfu tongji nianjian* 廣州市政府統計年鑒 (Guangzhou shi zhengfu tongji gu, 1929), GMA-Zi-Zheng-2044, 210-211.

self-employed as tailors and peddlers, it was believed that they could be easily turned into productive force of the GMP.[96]

More importantly, the rehabilitation of working abilities among the poor also extended to 2000 aged, blind and crippled inmates who composed the majority of residents at the GMP. The physical differences of this diverse population were further illustrated in a page with printed images taken at the time of their entry into the GMP. As Figure 4.1 and 4.2 show, age and disability were two primary physical characteristics that distinguished the poor. While the aged were divided by gender, the disabled were further categorized by their ability to work properly. In particular, the image of a blind man was juxtaposed with an able-bodied man. The reflected that the GMP intended to impress the reader with the idea that visual impairments did not cause one to loss the ability to work by hands. By contrast, a man with a walking cane and an injured arm represented the "disabled poor" (*canfei pinmin* 殘廢貧民) who were unable to perform manual labor. This comparison of bodily differences was a clear proof that managers of the GMP attempted to define productivity against a selective understanding of disability.

A more radical experiment with productivism at the GMP is evident in the employment of 505 blind men and women in separate workshops. Taking broom-making as an example, the department of manual labor recruited blind men to work with broom handles and blind women to make broom heads, and the two groups collaborated in binding the two parts together. At the department of physical labor, 35 blind men and women worked as coolies in stores that provided ritual services outside the GMP. There were still around ten who worked in singing troupes organized by the music department that arranged performances at local parks.

[96] GZPJYTK,

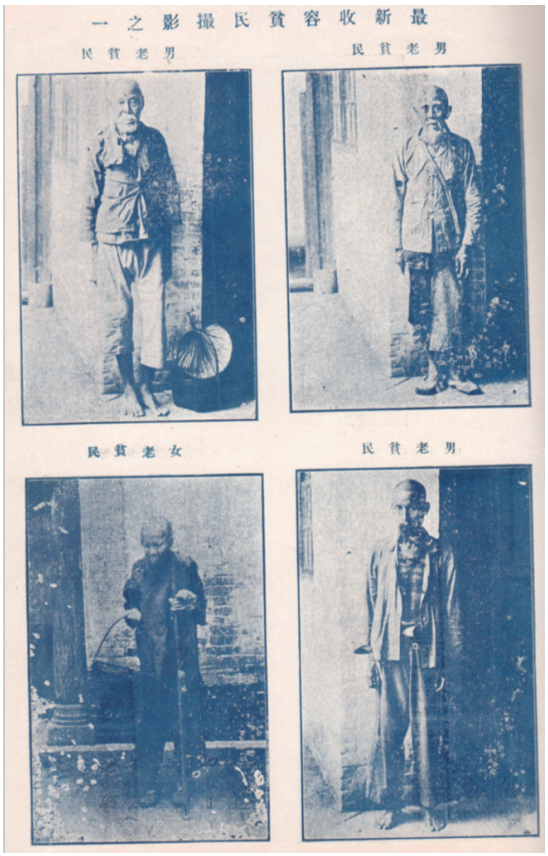

Figure 4.1: Photographs of the Aged Poor

Figure 4.2: Photographs of the Disabled Poor[97]

Figure 4.3: A Class of Braille Reading at the Guangzhou Municipal Poorhouse[98]

[97] Ibid., Illustration pages 14-15.

Moreover, the restoration of their productivity extended from simple handicraft to the compulsory education about knowledge in citizenship through manuals printed in Braille. It was reported that the GMP purchased Braille typewriters to print books on party ideology, national literature, hygiene and citizen lessons, and hired instructors to teach the blind to read them.[99] This program of literacy training for the blind, as captured in the picture included in the GMP's brochure (Figure 4.3), showed a continued effort to provide blind people with literacy training since they were involved in the moral reform movement in the 1920s (Chapter 2). Newly recruited blind beggars, along with a number of former blind songstresses who were arrested for selling sex, were expected to be educated as citizens of the nation.

The diversified labor training among the blind also reflected the state's management of poverty in response to a spectrum of bodily differences. Disability both justified the labor exclusion of nonproductive inmates and raised the "working poor" to citizenship status. This expanded physical definition of productivity was radically portrayed through the manual rehabilitation of blind inmates. As an exemplary group among the disabled, the blind were sufficiently integrated into craft lines that emphasized assembling works. A survey of handmade products showed that 80 blind and disabled inmates of the broom-making section contributed to 42.78% of all hand-made items, which was even higher than the rate of straw sandals produced by able-boded inmates as well as the percentage of woven products made by the aged inmates.[100] The head of the department for disabled persons reported that 350 blind men and women were fully capable of manual work and were taught to make brooms, straw sandals and rattan furniture. He further stated the goal of his department as to "extract greater productive forces from the

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[98] Ibid., Illustration page 12.
[99] GZPJYTK, 12-13.
[100] "Guangzhoushi pinmin jiaoyangyuan gongzuo chupin chengji nenglu bijiao tu" (廣州市貧民教養院工作出品成績能率比較圖), in GZPJYTK, 67.

average blind persons."[101] This confirmed the institutional assumption that productivity was not only measured against the amount of time and labor spent on a worker but also by the ability to maximize the labor potential among workers of different physical conditions. The high rate of productive outcome delivered by the blind broom makers suggested the transformative effect achieved among the disabled poor, who were previously seen as unfit to work.

The distribution of labor in the GMP hence reflected a different approach from Nanjing due to having a larger percentage of aged and disabled inmates. Visual and physical impairments became markers of poverty that demanded institutional resolution. Thus the work of poor relief not only responded to the demand of food and shelter but also conformed to a carefully executed rationale of productivism that turned beggars, refugees and other unemployed vagrants into new targets of economizing material and human resources for the benefit of the nation.[102] In practice, the scope of productivism as applied to the aged and disabled also implied a discriminating reorganization of labor among the poor. While former blind beggars and singers were seen as capable of performing different manual, physical and musical labor, the physically impaired were intentionally excluded from the scheme of work relief and they became the true symbol of dependency.

In 1933, the GMP had changed its name into the Guangzhou Relief Institute (Guangzhou shi jiujiyuan 廣州市立救濟院, hereafter GRI). The Institute also moved its center of vocational training to Shi Pai, which was on the outskirts of Guangzhou along the Canton-Kowloon Railway. The government also established 32 buildings in the new location that covered 4,000 mu of land. The primary reason for the expansion was to build a farm that would create jobs for

[101] "Pinmin jiaoyangyuan mangyagu zhuren Chen Yugong chengni zhengli ji shengchan jihua qingshi zunyou" (貧民教養院盲啞股主任陳愚公呈擬整理及生產計劃請示遵由), GMA-4-1-2-161-23.
[102] Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 90-96.

an increasing number of inmates. By 1935, the GRI had received 5130 homeless and poor people, among whom 2250 were able-bodied, 890 were disabled, 510 were aged men and 1480 were aged women. The majority of inmates were former beggars sent by the SAB, and the rest included unemployed overseas Chinese transferred from the Bureau of Civil Administration, those rescued by the Police Department from attempted suicide due to poverty, and a small number of homeless persons introduced by civic organizations.[103] The population of inmates in 1935 nearly doubled the number reported in 1929, which indicated the burden of accommodation and food supply. It was hoped that the newly built farm would not only secure part of the food supply for the inmates but also bring additional payments for about 2000 laborers in the field. Followed by the increase of agricultural activities among able-bodied inmates, the distribution of manual labor for the disabled also became more specified. For example, a weaving workshop was opened for the training of blind women to make knitted scarfs and vests. The size of the broom-making department was also expanded to accommodate more blind, mute and disabled workers. Another new feature was the carpentry workshop, which mainly hired returned overseas Chinese who had experience in making wooden furniture.[104] The continued effort to put workers of different physical conditions and working experiences in specialized assembling lines reflected a growing belief in the benefit of training functional working bodies for the industrialized workplace.

While the planning of a welfare industry shaped a diversified workforce within the GRI, it also had some practical constraints with regard to training and the outcome of production. After visiting the new location, Edward Lee noted that only the rattan, carpentry, and bamboo shops were in full operation, and the products were mostly sold to official institutions and public

[103] *Guangzhou shi jiujiyuan yuanwu gailan* 廣州市救濟院概覽 (GZJJYGL) (1935), 25.
[104] Ibid., 58-60.

schools. Inmates were employed in the workshops on a piecework basis and would leave the GRI when they became proficient in a skill.[105] Since the primary goal of vocational training was to develop self-sufficiency among the poor, it was difficult to generate profits from small handicrafts without bringing capital investments to expand the size of production and raise working efficiency through mechanization.

Another problem was the shortage of funding. Although the government issued a special fee for the education of the destitute poor and promised to collect an amount of 20,000 *yuan* from the municipal taxes on land, education and entertainment, the actual amount received by the GRI was less than half of the budget.[106] Starting from 1930, the GRI also took extra responsibilities in providing housing and food supply for a growing size of inmates that included thousands of unemployed people who previously worked as fortunetellers in Guangzhou and as coolie laborers returned from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and the increased expenditure on their regular provisions also made it difficult to enhance the overall quality of the productive sector. According to the budget record, the monthly stipend on food remained about 4 *yuan* per person from 1929 to 1935 while the total number of inmates grew from 2484 to 4530.[107] This showed a decline in housing condition at the GRI during the implementation of new measures of work relief.

On the other hand, not all the inmates were willing to be taken in and enrolled in the training program for up to three years. This was not only affected by the quality of provisioning but also by their attitudes toward social welfare measures. Local newspapers reported that starting from 1935, the SAB changed its criteria of forced detention from disabled beggars to all

[105] Lee, 87.
[106] "Fazhan pinmin jiaoyangyuan shishi puji jiaoyang yiwei pinmin erfumingshi shi" (發展貧民教養院實施普及教養以為貧民而符名实事), GMA4-1-2-2-142.
[107] "Pinjiaoyuan meiyue jingfei shouzhi tongji" (貧教院每月經費收支統計), GMR (October 27, 1929); GZJJYGL, 10.

the disabled spotted on the street.[108] This triggered a renewed wave of petition among blind fortunetellers. This time, the fortunetelling guild did not organize their members for street demonstration. Instead, as a journalist described, four representatives from a fortunetelling guild brought children with them to the municipal office, where they claimed that 200 members had families to support.[109] But the government did not grant their request to maintain their career on the ground that many lower-class fortunetellers turned to begging as they failed to get business.[110] The police later detained several leading blind fortunetellers in order to warn members of the fortunetelling guild that the profession was no longer acceptable. The government further announced that all who made a living by displaying their disabled bodies on the street should be treated like beggars and taken into custody.[111] Interestingly, the government did not raise the call to abolish superstition as GMD cadres had done earlier. Rather, the official crackdown on blind fortunetellers ended in the criminalization of disability as a contributing cause of poverty. By refuting disability as a justification of livelihood, the expanding welfare state sought to undermine the moral claims held by blind and disabled communities.

Conclusion

This chapter offers two intertwining narratives. One is about how GMD social policy gradually turned against the old notion that disability was an accepted reason for the poor to form self-regulated begging communities within the imperial model of relief homes. I have shown that

[108] "Shehuiju jiuji canfei gaimin song jiujiyua xiyi" (社會局救濟殘廢丐民送救濟院習藝), *Tianguang bao* (TGB) 天光報 (November 19, 1935); "Li Jiezhi shourong shinei canfei kuochong jiujiyuan" (李潔芝收容市內殘廢擴充救濟院), TGB (August 29, 1936).
[109] "Guren qingyuan weichi shenghuo" (瞽人請願維持生活), HGR (February 25, 1936).
[110] "Gaoji xiangshi qianwang ganggao xiaji xiangshi bianxiang yingye" (高級相士遷往港澳下級相士變相營業), HGR (August 26, 1936).
[111] "Jingchaju juqu gumu daibiao" (警察局拘去瞽目代表), HZRB (June 20, 1937).

GMD reformers, intellectuals and sociologists together contributed to a line of thinking that framed disability as a cause of urban poverty. In practice, however, the government made futile attempts to counter begging activities among disabled inmates who claimed entitlements to public assistance and residential status against homeless beggars. After the GMD moved to Nanjing, a plan for integrating private charity and reforming official relief facilities began to materialize. The Social Affairs Bureau in Guangzhou headed by Lin Yungai, worked with reformist warlord Chen Jitang toward building a provincial welfare state.

In contrast to the community-based social welfare in Chengdu, where gentry elites played a leading role in upholding moral principles of mutual aid (Chapter 4), Chen's administration not only brought private charity firmly under the control of the Social Affairs Bureau but also initiated large-scale removal of beggars from the street and reintegrated them into the Guangzhou Municipal Poorhouse. The training of blind inmates to work and to read citizenship manuals in braille reflected the welfare state's management of poverty against a broader spectrum of bodily diversity. The blind who became one of the working poor were symbols of the welfare state's appropriation of disability in expanding the physical definition of productivity.

This narrative arc of a growing welfare state at the expense of the autonomous charitable community is counter-balanced by a continuum of strategic resistance from disabled occupational groups. The welfare state's crackdown on fortunetelling triggered a series of petition from blind fortunetellers, who not only defended their family status against homeless beggars but also invoked disability as a legitimate claim to livelihood and belonging. But towards the end of the 1930s the space for justifying mutual dependency became gradually diminished due to the development of new institutional measures that focused on the rehabilitation of disabled bodies according to the command of industrialization.

Taken together, the two narratives portray disability as a contested notion of urban belonging in a process whereby the state extended its social responsibilities to previously unattended people as characterized by their physical differences. While the welfare state attempted to reclassify the blind as equally competent as their sighted peers by learning to read, write, and work productively for the nation, this vision was continuously challenged and negotiated by civil leaders of urban communities who sought to revive experienced inclusion enabled by the voluntary labor of blind people.

CONCLUSION

In May 1945, when the victory of the allied forces against the Fascist world war was on the horizon, Jiang Jieshi's Nationalist wartime government convened the Sixth National Congress and passed major welfare legislation based on the combination of three key aspects of post-war reconstruction: employment, social insurance and social relief. The problem of disability emerged as a threshold concern for the coordination of the three public sectors. According to the new plan, those who became physically and mentally disabled (*shenxin shangcan* 身心傷殘) during the war and lost partial working capacity should receive special training in order to subsist on their own labor (*zili gengsheng* 自力更生). A national social insurance program would cover the cost of rehabilitation for citizens with workplace injury, disability, old age, maternity and unemployment.[1] The Social Welfare Bureau also worked towards enhancing the cooperation between official relief agencies and civic organizations with specialized welfare provisions, such as educating people with blindness, deaf-muteness, as well as physical and mental deficiency.[2] This new legislative framework, which derived from the 1943 national mobilization law to "conserve and control human resources" (*renli jiezhi* 節制人力), marked the GMD's attempt to harness social welfare approaches to disability for the improvement of labor efficiency in the civilian sector.[3]

[1] Shehuibu 社會部, *Sida shehui gangling jiqi shishi banfa* 四大社會綱領及其實施辦法 (1946), 9-10.
[2] Shehuibu shehui fulisi 社會部社會福利司, *Shehui jiuji fagui jiyao* 社會救濟法規輯要 (1946), 15.
[3] The 1943 law first deployed the (dis)ability binary in demarcating new boundaries of service work within the military in order to preserve combat labor. According to the law, "[A]ll able-bodied men employed in conscripted works that require little or no labor cost, such as reception, guard, and storage, should be replaced with disabled veterans…in order to raise productivity and strengthen national defense." See "No. 629 ci baogao Junzhengbu daidian song rongyu junren fuwu jihua gangyao" (第 629 次報告軍政部代電送榮譽軍人服務計劃綱要) (January 2, 1943), Sichuan Provincial Archives (SPA) 41-6472.

The GMD's wartime welfare policy, which emphasized top-down mobilization of key social forces in support of the state, supplanted the pre-war model of the welfare state based on restricting and repressing civic mobilization.[4] We have seen how this decisive shift played out in contrasting ways of municipal responses to issues of unemployment and insufficient care among blind and disabled communities in Guangzhou and Chengdu. More broadly, we have discerned a trend of accelerated state intrusion into the old mechanism of community self-reliance alongside contestations between traditional and modern forms of charitable inclusion aimed at making disability a quintessential expression of social obligation rather than individual plight.

Far from being a fringe issue in Republican-era struggles over making urban citizens, a disability history of labor and charity narrates the search for a modern welfare state in early twentieth-century China. It reflects the enduring fascination with the idea of transforming *canfei* as a central component of urban reform, social engineering and national modernity well after the end of the war against Japan. By charting a crucial shift in the way blind people were valued based on their ability to participate in national life by reading Braille and working productively alongside sighted people rather than being a member of skilled communities, this study clarifies the formation of able-bodied citizenship through instituting social welfare measures. The duality of (dis)ability established the blind as a distinct group of welfare recipients who ought to overcome their perceived "uselessness"—the idea that blindness disqualifies one from engaging in independent work—in order to obtain full social citizenship.

But incorporating blind people into an able-bodied national community proved to be much more difficult than issuing new social policy. In their effort to extend state protection over the most vulnerable members of society, reformers and intellectuals got caught in a quagmire of

[4] Nara Dillon, *Radical Inequalities China's Revolutionary Welfare State in Comparative Perspective* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 85.

livelihood problems that hindered the implementation of modernist programs of education and labor transformation. Most importantly, blind men and women who were raised and employed in occupation-based communities as singers, musicians and fortunetellers did not identify themselves as disabled, nor did the sighted public view blindness negatively. Rather, Chinese society continued to accept the notion that blindness is an embodied qualification of professional cultures until around the 1920s, when market competition driven by a desire to commoditize the female body challenged the monopoly of blind women over stage performance because their bodies did not appear as attractive as sighted women. At the same time, the popular impression that blind women turned to prostitution as a substitute for singing compounded the state's burden to undermine the working status of the blind community while subjecting the blind to custodial care. The humanitarian and economic problems that disentitled blind women from having a career in music was parallel to the reformist attack on superstition, which exposed the vulnerability of blind men who found no other choice than engaging in fortunetelling.

These top-down initiatives to supplant community self-support with state custody, however, caused livelihood crises among blind singers and fortunetellers and drove them into organized resistance against becoming a member of the homeless and poor—a label that had criminal implications in the early twentieth century.[5] Meanwhile, these micro-histories of community survival as recounted in chapters 1, 2 and 5 registered a broader shift that took place in the welfare state's management of disability in the context of fighting urban poverty. Before 1937, GMD and "reformist" warlord regimes in Guangzhou made several attempts to reorganize poor relief by first subjecting charity recipients to labor training and then enlarging the scope to include vagrant beggars. The welfare state, through repressing grassroots mobilization among blind and disabled beggars, gradually pushed back against the imperial sanction of *canfei* as a

[5] Janet Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*.

legitimate claim for organized dependency and instituted it as a category in the construction of productivity. In training blind bodies to perform manual labor and acquire a citizen's knowledge from Braille textbooks, the welfare state expanded the definition of economic citizenship based on radical reconfigurations of disabled bodies according to able-bodied expectations.

An important lesson in the transition from community to welfare state model pertains to the intersectionality of disability, gender and class. This dissertation has shown that the reason that the able-bodied had for treating the blind as "disabled" was parallel to the patriarchal assumption of women's precarious status as workers. In the early twentieth century, lower-class women who earned an income as singers and entertainers were perceived as more vulnerable than men due to increased trafficking and sexual consumption in big cities.[6] The self-regulated mechanism of work-based inclusion for blind women, which emerged to cope with family incapacity, went into decline as it clashed with a gendered hierarchy of sighted women working in similar professions. Despite their skilled singing, blind women did not appear sufficiently feminine to the eyes of able-bodied (male) patrons, and their being displayed for consumption triggered the reformist call to abolish an inhumane custom and replace it with charitable inclusion. In comparison, blind male fortunetellers were able to stake a claim for their role as head of the household and their ability to care for family members, but their work was increasingly viewed by the state as superstitious and harmful to the cultivation of good citizenship.

In contrast to the gradual loss of working status among blind female singers and fortunetellers in Guangzhou, a professional culture of male singers and musicians survived in inland Chengdu due to the sponsorship of Confucian gentry. This speaks to the second lesson about the role of native charity in shaping economic and moral agency of disabled care recipients.

[6] See, for example, Weikun Cheng, *City of Working Women*.

Rather than treating the blind as a member of the disabled poor, gentry elites resorted to the cultural power associated with blindness in local customs and invested in training blind boys as storytellers and musicians who not only could earn an independent living but also spread Confucian teaching to the urban community. Gentry philanthropists fashioned themselves as protectors of an artistic community for the blind and actively sought out ways to make the able-bodied recognize the disabled as capable of being self-sufficient and practicing family values, such as earning an income in the performing troupe, keeping a habit of independent saving, and respecting elders and helping with younger ones in the quasi-familial structure of training. This conservative vision of moralizing the blind ran parallel to the gentry effort of opening charity schools for able-bodied children from poor families, in addition to managing orphanages and homes for widows, aged and disabled. The sustained growth of indigenous philanthropic activism contributed to a trend of creating "civilized" cities in the eyes of local officials.[7]

The attention to economic and moral uplift of the blind also set Confucianists apart from Christian missionaries who were a leading force in the promotion of modernist social welfare for the blind and disabled. The institutional advocacy of Braille in Christian schools of Guangzhou and Chengdu, as documented in chapters 3 and 4, created a model of religious inclusion in parallel to the ups and downs of community survival among blind professional groups. Missionaries shared with Chinese reformers the goal of attacking backward social customs but emphasized spiritual and intellectual development over material wellbeing. The Christian notion that Braille served as a means of proselytization and self-redemption for the blind deviated from the main concern held by Chinese educators toward justifying the social utility of a non-normative literacy. Missionaries stationed in treaty-port cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai found themselves in a better situation of cooperating with local elites through universities and

[7] Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*.

social service agencies than that of inland Chengdu. This could partly explained by a delay in the reception of western influence, especially social sciences, that had not been a key driver in modernizing social welfare until the wartime relocation of major educational institutions from coastal to hinterland regions.

Another chief reason was due to a contrast in state-society relations. The GMD welfare state, which originated in 1921 Guangzhou, relied on supports from Christian missionaries and non-Christian intellectuals in reforming social custom, managing poor relief and taming unofficial organizations. This trend of growing state intrusion in civil society was matched by an expanding scope of civic activism as epitomized by Confucian-style charity in Chengdu from 1924 to 1937, and later survived through collaborating with the GMD wartime government on welfare provisions for refugees and military families well after 1945.

A final lesson is about the outcome of various social welfare approaches to the problem of blindness and disability. I have argued that in both pre-war Guangzhou and wartime Chengdu, a hybridization process of educating the blind went on in governmental poorhouses and charitable institutions, in which Braille literacy and manual labor formed the basic criteria of disabled citizenship for the blind. The old focus on service labor survived in welfare communities affiliated to gentry charity, such as vocational schools for the blind and residential compound for aged, sick and disabled poor, although their management were subjected to increasing state intervention well after the end of the war.

This dissertation cannot serve as the definitive study of blind communities and the social policy towards disabled people in Republican-era China. Therefore I hope to end with a series of questions with the goal of advancing future scholarship on this topic. How many blind children born to sighted parents had to depart from their families at an early age in order to gain an

income-earning career? What about decisions made by blind parents if they had sighted children? How could disability tell us about Chinese family structure? Did the blind employed in a professional group, such as singers, musicians, fortunetellers and modern-day masseurs, appear the same to sighted people? How did the able-bodied perceive the internal diversity of blindness based on different kinds of works? How or did the blind speak to their peers—male and female—about attitudes they perceived from living and working in a sighted environment? How would this change our understanding of being "normal"? Did the blind who hadn't experienced living with other blind people in a community have an open attitude towards integrating with sighted people? What happened to a blind person's sense of self-fulfillment when he/she receives educational and labor training in particular charitable institutions—missionary schools, Confucian-style training institutes, and official poorhouses? How could we measure the impact of charity on the identity formation of blind and disabled people? Did the state recognition of the blind as potential citizens and able-bodied workers translate into positive languages against social prejudices held toward disabled people? How did the making of "disabled but useful" citizens correspond to the shift of macro-political setting in 1949?

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