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Universal design and accessibility in Taipei City: Definitions, design, and the Disability Rights Movement

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Universal Design and Accessibility in Taipei City: Definitions, Design, and The Disability
Rights Movement

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Abstract

In Taiwan, the disability rights advocacy movement has existed since the 1980s. The lift of Martial law in 1987 allowed multiple social movements to flourish. Specifically, the disability rights movement adopted language developed by other global social movements, such as Universal Design. This social movement worked closely with the government to make effectual infrastructural change to institute accessibility in Taipei, the capital city. However, a close review of government objectives and initiatives in published works, and the goals and initiatives of disability advocate groups, reveals that there has been a shift in the definition of accessibility in the advocacy rights movement from infrastructural accessibility to social accessibility. This project is an analysis of the media and published works of the Taiwanese government in relation to universal design goals, and the same media from advocacy groups about their own goals and objectives for disability rights, outlining the definition gap and finding the true definition of social accessibility. The advocacy rights movement has shifted its view of accessibility to a fully liveable society in which disabled persons may thrive and have fully realized social rights, whereas the government of Taipei City still views accessibility as a right to accessible built infrastructure.

Introduction

It is the first week of July, the hottest month of the year in Taipei city, Taiwan. I stand in the heavy air conditioning of the Zhongshan MRT station with a classmate, waiting for a friend to meet us for lunch. The station bustles with life: the ebb and flow of the lunch rush resulting in crammed metro cars and long entrance lines. Teenage girls chatter and giggle with their friends as they enjoy the offtime of their short summer holiday. Business people talk on their phones; tourists stand, confused, in front of the MRT station maps, trying to make change for the trip. As I wait, I observe the movement of people through a space that is both familiar and unfamiliar to myself. The bustle of life and the chatter around me are usual, but the cleanliness and orderliness of movement and the direct attention placed on the accessibility accommodations in this public space was not like anything I had experienced in the United States.

The first thing that struck me about Taipei's Mass Rapid Transit system is the presence of priority seating. These dark blue or bright yellow seats are reserved specifically for four groups of people: the elderly, pregnant women, women with small children, and the injured or disabled. This idea of certain subsets of people being a priority for the MRT was so important that the leaders of the orientation for my trip played us a public service announcement for it. I was struck because this was the first time I had encountered an accessibility system that was so publicly popularized. Once I realized this, I began to notice other ease of access facilities I hadn't noticed before: elevators placed directly in front of the MRT depot, specifically designated bathrooms that are designated for the disabled, and signs everywhere with the universal wheelchair symbol. On the floor of the MRT station, there is a pathway made of tiles with raised circular bumps that puzzles me. My friend finally joins us for our lunch plans, and I remark to her about how accessible the MRT station seems. Smiling, she agrees, pointing to the tiles on the floor. "We try

to make it easy for disabled people to get places. These different tiles lead wheelchair users and the blind straight to the disabled entrance to the MRT.”

Over my one month spent traveling about the island, my observations of the disabled and impaired sometimes accessing not only the metro, but the bus system, led to more questions about access and the connotations of a universally designed city, which Taipei proclaims itself to be. Taipei’s World Design Capital website defines a universally designed city as “ an inclusively user-friendly city in which universal design can serve diverse users and everyone has an equal right to seek and benefit from universal design.” However, who decides what users to prioritize, and how do they define accessibility? How did the Taipei City government decide to make universal design an urban development goal? How did disabled persons advocate for this sort of urban design? How are stigmas against disabled populations conceptualized in this metropolis?

This essay is a result of my interest in universal design, accessibility, and how it came to be employed in Taiwan. After careful research, I have found that 1) the lift of martial law in Taiwan allowed for social movements to flourish, 2) that disability advocate groups adopted global language and worked closely with the government in Taiwan to implement physical accessibility in Taipei City, and 3) that now that physical accessibility has been mainstreamed as a governmental goal, advocate groups have shifted the definition of accessibility to mean livability, or the ability to thrive in their environment. Once exposed to global ideas of basic human rights and examples of disability policy elsewhere, the disability advocacy and rights movements in Taiwan were able to define accessibility as public built infrastructure that implements accessibility through physical accommodations such as wheelchair accessible ramps, prioritized seating on busses and metros, and barrier free public spaces. The government followed that definition, and currently uses that definition in its public literature. Now, the

disability advocacy rights movement understands accessibility as full social accessibility in which disabled persons are allowed to thrive rather than only survive.

A Review of Literature

How is the social identity of “disabled,” conceptualized and used contemporarily? In this section, I first discuss work done on disability from Sociological and Anthropological viewpoints, as well as the framework of stigma related to disability. I also review literature on social movements and how global social movements influence local social movements, which will ameliorate the understanding of how the disability rights movement formed and changed in Taiwan.

In his work on Disability Studies, Lennard J. Davis assesses that those who are disabled become a “problem,” because the system of normalcy in which they are constructed designates them as such. (Davis, 2013) Normalcy is a set of assumptions about how the average person should function in society that can lead to those who either cannot or choose not to function in that context becoming stigmatized.

There is much literature in Sociology on stigma and how it works against marginalized groups. American Sociologist Erving Goffman defines stigma as “Any physical or social attribute or sign that so devalues an actor’s social identity as to disqualify him or her from ‘full social acceptance.’” (Slattery, 2003) Stigma can also be defined as “undesired differentness.... That is heavily dependent on the social context and is to some extent arbitrarily defined.” (Coleman Brown, 2010, 179) Therefore, the types of stigma that one may face change accordingly when faced with a different social context. If understood as a relationship, those who are stigmatized are needed by those who are non-stigmatized in order to feel at peace within their cultural norms, in order to create a social hierarchy, and in order to feel superior to others.

However, stigma works in more nefarious ways when certain characteristics of the stigmatized are not easily changeable and more physically noticeable. Stigma becomes insidious when the social comparison becomes negatively nuanced, and causes the devaluation of people to a stereotype, rather than a human. In this manner, non-stigmatized people are allowed to socially discriminate against those that are stigmatized. Because the stigmatizer needs the stigmatized in order to maintain superiority, it is very difficult to change systems of stigmatization to work in favor of the stigmatized. Stigma also leads to fear in the stigmatizer: fear in the form of social unrest, rebellion, and norm upset. Fear contributes directly to discrimination, which is a dominant factor for mobilizing and forming social activist movements. (Coleman-Brown, 2010) This is especially pertinent to disability movements in Taiwan because of the public stigma experienced in Taiwan by disabled persons. Disabled persons in Taiwan were once thought to be private matters, hidden inside family quarters and kept out of public eye. This allowed society at large to ignore and mistreat disabled persons and their families. (Chang, 2009 & 2017)

Visual representation of disabled persons is also important to understanding how we construct social identities for them. In media presentation, disabled persons are often reduced to their stereotypes, which does not allow stigma to be challenged nor create an environment in which we can reimagine the construct of disability. Actual visual representation allows ideas around disability and ability to be redefined and rejected, connecting disabled persons to ideas of sleekness or modernity, instead of poverty or charity. (Garland-Thompson, 2005) Lack of visual representation of any form often leads designing spaces that ignore the needs of disabled persons. Designed spaces are not just spaces that exist without the interaction of the people that occupy them. Some spaces are designed in ways that reduce our understanding of others lived limitations, which happens when the relationship of the people using a space to the space itself is

not made explicit. (White, 2017) Public space can be designed with the needs of disabled persons in mind; however, ideas about space and included and excluded types make this difficult. Shared spaces are often insinuated to be welcome and inclusive, which correlates to institutions that create shared spaces as also being inclusive. However, intentions of inclusivity allow institutions to portray disabled persons as an absent, excludable type because they are imagined to be out of existence. (Price, 2017) This lack of representation in public space and in media creates an idea of an invisible yet present populace.

Anthropologists Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg put forth that the concept of disability is not simply the condition of the body, but also the social and cultural framework that disables minds and bodies from participating in the unspoken order of a society. (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013) Their work also frames the identity of “disabled” as transient- disability is not an identity with rigid parameters, allowing for entry and exit easier than other identities, like sexual orientation or race. (Ginsburg and Rapp, 2013) One can become disabled as they grow older, or be born with a disability that is “removed,” with surgery. One can be “abled,” for decades before age “dis-ables,” them. This is of particular importance in places where populations are experiencing aging populations. Because disability is transient, this often leads to the removal of rights from once able-bodied people. Especially in the United States, where independence and self-sufficiency are valued over all else, legal policy often ignores the rights to choice and fundamental needs, removing disabled persons from the democratic arena almost entirely. (Rapp and Ginsburg, 2001)

Medical anthropologists view bodies through three methods of analysis- the individual body, the social body, and the body politic. The body politic is of particular importance to the framing of disability advocacy. The body politic refers to the social and cultural perceptions of

bodies and control and power over them. There is a focus on what makes a body “politically correct,” enforcing ideas of what a body should be that lead to sometimes gross abominations of human anatomy, such as female foot binding in ancient China. The cultural question of who has control and power can be easily answered by looking at the politically correct body. In many societies, the “correct” body is fit, strong, and independent, moving through society without consistent aches or pains. In such societies, any other body is problematized and medicalized in ways that serve the state. (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987) A good example of this is maternal screening in Contemporary China (Zhu, 2013), in which mothers are encouraged by the state-produced programs to screen their fetuses for birth defects and disabilities and terminate their pregnancies if these defects show. Due to the “undesirability” and “Bad quality,” of disabled bodies, the state enacts ways to control the production and population of bodies.

Disability Advocacy in the United States has grappled with the extreme discrimination that causes social inequality and inaccessibility. Disabled persons must consistently deal with the social isolation that having a disability provides. If there is a small disabled community in a specific location, then the disabled are usually made into stories of tragedy and pity, especially in places where disability is considered charity. (Saxton, 2013) In the United States, this idea of a “burdensome” disabled person is entangled in issues such as selective abortion and eugenics, which seek to remove abnormality and disability in individuals. Disability is pathologized and medicalized in this context as a sufferable “disease,” that needs to be “Cured,” whilst advocacy groups dictate that the suffering that comes along with being disabled is the social isolation, exclusion, and lack of opportunity that the medical industry ignores in favor of escaping the “abnormal” body. (Lewis, 2013) This is similar to how disability movements in Taiwan grapple with the stigma against disabled persons. In Taiwan, disabled persons were seen as charity or

“burdensome,” for quite some time. (Tsai and Ho, 2010) This, coupled with the lack of infrastructure for disabled persons also led to the social isolation of disabled persons. (Chang, 2010)

Advocacy movements worldwide are influenced by global human rights movements, which are movements that are created by non-government entities that focus on human rights-based activism that resists societal oppression. Scholarship on social movements in sociology has outlined the fact that “the mobilization of social movements is driven by global influences [such as] universal models of economic liberalization and international migration.” (Almedia & Chase-Dunn, 2018, 190) This is specifically important in the context of global cities, which are influenced by globalization. Globalization can be imagined as a series of “scapes,” or imagined worlds through which ideas, capital, people, and technology move internationally. (Appudari, 2010) The movement of ideas is especially important because it allows ideas about collective action to move across international boundaries. For example, in Japan, global ideals of basic human rights led to minority groups actively organizing and advocating for social welfare. (Tsutsui, 2017) Studies in Ethiopia on their “Hands-Off Ethiopia” Movement in the 1930s demonstrate that the local movement against military conscription by colonizing powers became a global movement that united activists across borders with little to no national organization. (Fronczak, 2014)

This literature is pertinent to both understanding the perception of disabled persons in Taiwan at large and also understanding how the disability advocacy movement in Taiwan impacted government policy and the lives of disabled persons. The understanding of stigma and how it shapes the lives of disabled persons through both governmental and social actors is essential to the analysis I provide from published sources from the Taipei City government.

Transnational and Global Social movements and how they are constructed provide insight into the evolution of the Disability Movement in Taiwan. Understanding ideas around public space and how ideas of disabled persons are socially constructed in that space is integral to the analysis I put forth on the Taipei City Government initiative to make public space fully inclusive.

Research Methods and Results

For this project, I used two methods of data collection. While I was in Taiwan during the Summer of 2018, I spoke with two Taiwanese people about the state of universal design and disability law and benefits in the city. I gathered this data by recording voice notes after the conversations and transcribing them, then later coding them. I also draw on my own observations of disabled persons in public in Taipei City, in places like night markets, temples, pedestrian districts, and shopping malls. My second method was researching English translated archives from *Taiwan Today*, *Taiwan News*, and *Taipei Times*. I specifically searched for news articles ranging from the early 2000's to present. The articles I used had titles related to universal design and disability advocacy movements. I also studied the English resources from the City Government News and Tourism Bureau websites. I scoured print sources about universal design and accessibility goals both from the World Design Capital website and the Taipei City Management website. In total, I used seven news articles, three government publications from the Construction Management Department and the Department of Urban Development of Taipei City, and the goals, objectives, and images found on the Tourism Bureau Website and the Department of Foreign and Disabled Employment website. I also used the outline of projects from the World Design Capital Website. I used these sources to understand not only how the government provides accommodations to disabled persons, but also how the government and media sources talk about disabled persons as a minority and include them in goals and initiatives. In order to peruse the goals, initiatives, objectives, and campaigns for different advocate groups, I searched out the websites of several disability advocacy groups native to Taiwan. I used the websites of the Eden Social Welfare Foundation, the Taiwan Access for All Association (TAFAA), and the League of Welfare Organizations for the Disabled (LWOD). In all cases, if an

English website was an option, I coded the English version of that website. If an English site was not available, I allowed the Google Chrome browser to automatically translate the page for me. I also asked several acquaintances who read Traditional Mandarin and English to verify if the translations were overall accurate, and they agreed that they were. The TAFAA Website provided an English source, but also had a more extensive Mandarin Website that I spent time perusing.

Across the governmental sources, I searched for phrases and “buzzwords” that could provide an image of the governmental definition of accessibility and how universal design was a part of that image. I found that “accessibility” and “design,” were firmly linked together by finding accessibility referred to multiple times in sections or subsections of documents that outline design procedures and goals. I also found that creating a global, friendly city was a priority to city planning. These documents also outline the fact that the initiative of Taipei is to become a global city- defined as a city that is modern, accessible, livable, and sustainable. There was a slight difference in these plans the more recent they were. Pre-2011, there is less of an emphasis on disabled persons rights as a motivation for universal design. The use of “aging” population is used to provide reason for government initiatives of universal design and accessibility. In documents dated after 2011, the newest Disability Welfare Act is also mentioned as a reason for publicly providing accessible accommodations for disabled persons. Livability is mentioned across three sources: Taipei City in an Urban Development Context, the World Design Capital website, and the Construction Management Biennial. Livable cities consist of robust and complete neighborhoods, accessibility and sustainable mobility, a diverse and resilient local economy, vibrant public spaces, and affordability. These are all goals that are

consistent within government publications and websites. However, it is clear that Taipei City has not reached that goal, as it remains a current goal in the literature.

Overall, the sources that were provided publications by the government solidify the definition of accessibility as built infrastructure. Not only is this apparent in writing, but also in imagery. While the pictures in the Construction Management Biennial report, the World Design Capital website, and the Taipei MRT and Bus System website all provide images of offered accommodations, one out of 28 total images surveyed had an actual disabled person in them. The one that did not show the disabled person's face. This is in remarkable contrast to the Tourism Bureau website, which provides more than one image of a disabled person using accommodations per tourist site. The newspaper articles about Barrier Free movements and accessibility also had pictures of disabled persons.

These sources were directed towards a diverse audience; all of these sources were written in English, which insinuated that they were geared for an international audience. This emphasis on an international audience made sort of a spectacle of disability accommodations. While governmental sources reported accessibility as an urban planning issue, the language used insinuated that providing this infrastructure created a friendly, welcoming city. In contrast, newspaper articles called this idea into question, stating that full physical accessibility has not been attained in Taipei City itself, noting that international, disabled travelers should plan carefully and be selective about the places they visit. Though newspaper articles did showcase physical accommodations as an accomplishment, they also criticized the fact that accommodations were not as universal as some would hope.

The three advocacy groups whose webpages I surveyed feature the histories, goals, objectives, campaigns, and initiatives of each organization. Across those goals include accessible leisure travel, provision of adequate accommodations for the needier, and advocacy that is rights and protection focused. TAFAA gave particular attention to providing accommodations to the disabled, whereas LWOD and Eden focused more on direct governmental advocacy and job training. Goals such as education, training, and employment of disabled persons were listed on each website, and interest in research and furthering the welfare of social rights for disabled persons were clear.

These sources were either in Mandarin, or had links to English language sites. Considering this, it is clear that the intended audience for these sources were disabled persons and those seeking information on disabled persons in Taiwan or abroad. LWOD's website did not have any links to an English language website, so it's content is mainly directed towards Taiwanese citizens. In dealing with stigmas that exist in Taiwan, these sources portray disabled persons as persons who are useful, happy, and deserving of full realized rights.

In The Context Of Taiwan

Taiwan itself is a disputed island territory off of the southern coast of Mainland China. The island has experienced hundreds of years of colonialism by multiple powers; the Dutch, The Portuguese, the Japanese, and several different waves of Han Chinese have all made claim to the island, constricting indigenous populations and erasing their culture, not unlike occurrences in the United States. Early Portuguese settlers named the Island “The Isle of Formosa,” to which it was referred until the mid-twentieth century. The Portuguese and Dutch both established trade stops on the island, allowing Christian Missionaries to travel to the island to convert the indigenous populations to Christianity. Taiwan was also the site of waves of Chinese minority migrations; specifically, the Hakka people, whose language remains a primary dialect on the island. Chinese settlers tended to refer to the indigenous populations as “savages,” and had little to do with them. The Japanese Colonization in the late 1800’s ushered in an era of industrialization that also contributed to the erasure of both indigenous and Chinese culture on the island, specifically through colonialist policy. All families were required to have Japanese names, dress in the Japanese style, occupy Japanese style buildings, and enlist the men in the Japanese army. Indigenous populations were not allowed to participate in their religious rituals nor give each other ritual tattoos and were relocated from their traditional land into the higher mountainous areas that are often fraught with landslides and floods during monsoon season.

The Japanese era of imperialism and expansion would also cause major political shifts in the entire region of East Asia, including Taiwan. After Japan lost to the Allied Powers in 1945, Taiwan was ceded to the Nationalist Party of China, the government headed by Chiang Kai Shek, which was recognized internationally as the Chinese government. It was there to which

Nationalist government would flee after the Communist Revolution on the Mainland defeated them. Post WWII is also when martial law was mandated on the island. Martial law came into effect in May of 1949 and would last for over 38 years. There was very little movement for social rights groups during this time due to governmental suffocation of protests and anti-nationalist ideas. Martial law was lifted in 1987, and so began the era of political protest that would bring Taiwan to its current status as a liberal democracy.

It is in this historical context that we are able to fix the progression of the disability rights movements in Taiwan. Literature on Taiwan's progressive social movements pinpoint the lift of martial law as a definitive catalyst for the immense number of social and grassroots movements on the island. (Chang, 2007; Tsai & Ho, 2010) Nearly forty years of unaired grievances were suddenly given the freedom to be addressed in public. The voices of the disabled were also included in this public outcry. Before martial law was lifted in 1987, there had, in fact, been efforts among parents and disabled persons to mobilize organizations to advocate for educational rights, as the "Handicap Welfare Law," of 1981 did not protect the rights of disabled persons to education. However, creating advocacy and service groups for the disabled was difficult because of the restrictions of martial law. The martial government policy was that if a similar group had existed previously to the group trying to organize, that group could not become recognized by law and was illegal. Therefore, any chance to organize effectively outside of pre-existing groups was thwarted. Several caretaker and advocacy groups were denied recognition by the government, much to the chagrin of these groups. (Chang, 2007, 3-5)

The first of Taiwan's disability laws, The Handicap Law was considered an active farce. While it was the first law to outline the rights of disabled persons, it offered very little on direct action and policy. This is illustrated by a pivotal moment in 1982 called the "Feng Qiao

Incident,” The Feng Qiao Incident refers to the controversy that arose around the construction of a school for disabled children in the neighborhood of FengQiao. During the construction of the school, parents from the neighborhood went to great lengths to prevent the workers from actually doing their work, including sending death threats and vandalizing the property. Fears amongst those living in the community were that disabled children attending school would bring the value of their community down. This sparked outrage amongst the parents whose children would benefit from the construction of a state constructed school.

This singular incident provides a glimpse into the innate stigmas against disabled persons in Taiwan. Notable Taiwanese sociologist Heng Hao Chang believes that this stigma originates from not only Chinese language but also Confucian philosophy. Before WWII, the term for a disabled person in the Mandarin language was *canfei*; *can* meaning disabled or diseased, and *fei*, meaning useless. This idea of the “uselessness” of disabled persons is directly related to the Confucian ideal society, in which marginalized groups must be cared for and maintained, without having any intrinsic value or ability to independently thrive.

The Feng Qiao Incident was a mark in the transition of social welfare groups from a charity model to an advocacy model. Before social movements for advocacy began in the 1970’s and 80’s, most groups that provided care for disabled persons were religious organizations. Ancient Confucian and Taoist ideas of *mianzi* (face), *guanxi* (Harmonious relationships), and *xiaoshun* (Filial piety) come into play here. Because of the large Han Chinese population in Taiwan, in addition to the Japanese imperial colonization, the tendency was to cling to these beliefs. *Mianzi* (Face) can be conceptualized as a mask that one must put on in public to preserve the honor and *guanxi* (harmonious relationships) of one’s self and also one’s family. *Xiaoshun* (filial piety) is a key actor in this social scheme. Filial piety is deference to one’s elders,

especially one's father and mother. As Ruth Benedict mentions in her own work on Japan in the 20th century, in East Asian cultures that are collectivist, one's personal feelings are often disregarded in the face of the group's harmony, causing those who stick out to be "hammered down." (Benedict, 1940s) It is no different for disabled persons in this context. A disabled person in Taiwan during the period of martial law was considered a "hidden minority," (Chang, 2004) simply because they were considered "useless," and could not perform the necessary functions of filial piety. Parents themselves were held in disregard because disability is also seen as retribution for acts committed either by ancestors or even the parents themselves. (Tsai and Ho, 2010) This is also referred to as "Courtesy Stigma," which is the stigma gained by becoming a parent or a friend to someone who experiences blatant or explicit stigma. (Chang, 2007) Due to the relationship between the stigmatiser and the stigmatized, parents and other friends and family are also attached stigma, as the presence of the disabled, stigmatized person is seen as a punishment and used to make the stigmatiser feel superior.

It was clear that while The Handicap Law outlined rights to education, it did nothing to actually enact this right of disabled persons. Instead of setting up infrastructure for addressing these issues, the law only declared that disabled persons should have the right to education "in public schools or at home." (Chang, 2010) Because there was not a way to enforce public schools to allow disabled children to enroll, many parents kept their children at home and tried to provide what little education they could. (Chang, 2007) Another issue was that of the "Patriot Lottery," which was a lottery that the government sponsored in order to increase government revenue. Because there were few opportunities for work for disabled persons in the 1980's, selling lottery tickets was an occupation that many disabled persons chose in order to sustain themselves. Due to heavy gambling and crime related issues surrounding the lottery, the

government decided to shut down the lottery, effectively causing many disabled persons to lose their jobs overnight with no prior discussion. This was in the time before the Taiwanese government offered disability benefits to those unable to work. This, of course, motivated Eden and other activist groups to come together and form collective action in order to revise the law to protect the jobs of disabled persons. (Chang, 2010)

After the lift of Martial law, it was far easier for social movements to mobilize and hold protests and public demonstrations. In the three years after Martial Law was lifted, demonstrations and the unification of several disability advocate groups orchestrated new legislation that provided more in depth policy and a more definitive action plan, called the Disability Welfare Law of 1991. This was accomplished through the development of League of Welfare Organizations for the Disabled (LWOD). This organization, founded in the late 1980's, was a call to all disability advocacy groups to join together and collaborate with the government to ensure that the objectives of disabled rights advocates were heard.

This progression does not mean that the system is without problems. Until 2011, it was fully legal to deny disabled persons services for being disabled. This change was due to the "People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act" becoming law in that year. This act put forth infrastructure for enforcing these protections that was absent in the previous laws. (Chang, 2017) Also, with economies all over the world stagnating and accruing massive debt, the model of disability groups has progressed from an advocacy model to a service model, in which these groups must compete for the limited funding that the government has for providing accommodations to disabled persons. The government in Taiwan has instituted a policy of privately managed public facilities, which in turn leads to advocacy groups also becoming Non Profit Organizations (NPO) that provide services and accommodations. This has led to NPO's in

more urban, wealthier districts in Taiwan to be more successful in providing aid to people, and smaller NPO's to struggle to provide accommodations and services to those who are needier and perhaps more geographically isolated. (Chang, 2017)

It is in this context that I explore the objectives, initiatives, campaigns, and goals of both government organizations that work closely with disability advocates and disability advocate groups.

Chapter 1: Universal Design as a Matter of Built Infrastructure

Over the course of my research, I found that accessibility in Taipei City publications is primarily related to public infrastructure and design. This idea connotes that Universal Design is a fix-all solution that radically changes the lives of disabled persons through infrastructural improvements. Over the careful study of city government initiatives, objectives, and goals, I found that the global, infrastructural definition of Universal Design and Accessibility is widely used to paint a very friendly picture of Taipei City, encouraging international and domestic tourism and movement of bodies and capital. I also found that this language was historically influenced by the disability rights advocate movement.

Historically, the construction of Taipei City began in 1885. This was just a little over a decade before the Japanese colonized the island after China ceded it to Japan in 1895. This led to increased infrastructural change in the city due to many plans being passed in rapid succession for the “industrialization” of the city by the Japanese. When the city came under control of the Kuo Ming Tang Nationalist Government in 1945, the city was rededicated to becoming a modern city- industrially, culturally, economically, and internationally. The Urban Development Department and Construction Management Department both reflect these values in their published literature from 2005, 2011, 2013, and 2014. Modernity is a concept widely aspired to across their plans for renovation, construction, and development. An idea of a modern city is provided by the Urban Development Department: “a modern city needs not only the hardware that comes from a strong industrial and economic foundation but also the software of a sustainable development plan and innovative progress.” In essence, modern cities must be industrially and economically developed, as well as utilizing sustainable living methods and

continuously improving. Used here in the most recently published review in 2011, modernity is also used to connect to the idea of becoming globally renowned.

This sort of push for international recognition by showing how a society makes space for their minority groups by progressing infrastructurally is interesting primarily because it is used as a selling point. The Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, in fact, has an entire section on wheelchair accessible travel for the entire country, not only Taipei city. The Tourism Bureau goals specifically outline becoming a “friendly,” “sustainable,” tourist industry that encourages both international and domestic tourism, though neglects mentioning accessibility and disabled persons in key objectives in specific advertisement plans found in their archive. It is indirectly implied that accessibility is a key piece of the “friendly” puzzle, and therefore the objectives do not need to be explicit about these particular goals.

Across the governmental resources, universal design and barrier free living are described as for use by an aging population. The Construction Management Department mentions this concern three times in one source, specifically in the section about accessibility and how it pertains to a modern city. The Urban Development Department uses this phrase four times across two separate reports, also in the sections directly related to accessibility and universal design. It is also a point in several newspaper articles provided by the Taipei Times and the Taipei City government announcement pages. In the sources from the Urban Development Department and Construction Management Department, this concern is raised as a second reason to have accessibility accommodations, in tandem with the “requirements of the People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act.” However, in newspaper articles and other announcements, the problem of the aging society is mentioned without referring to the act, or any other legislation for that matter. This raises the question: is the aging “disabled” body the only acceptable “disabled,”

body in Taiwan? Aging populations are an issue across the world, especially in East Asian countries. Korea, Japan, and Taiwan all report statistically low birth rates; the populations in these countries are not birthing enough babies to replace the generation before them. Therefore, there are many more elderly people than can be cared for by the younger generation. In Taipei city, one can see that the elderly are clearly prioritized in the built infrastructure and accommodations for disabilities. On Taipei's Mass Rapid Transit website, there is emphasis put on the priority seating that is designated specifically for the elderly, mothers with children, the disabled, and pregnant women. There are prioritized seats like this on the busses as well. My observations on busses while in Taiwan were that these seats were occupied mostly by elderly people, along with many women with young children. I only witnessed a wheelchair loading onto a bus once, and it was done with very little fuss. I saw wheelchair users more often on the MRT, and also more in pedestrian zones of the city. On the MRT, priority zones were usually occupied by wheelchair users and the elderly more than small children and pregnant women.

The governmental city planning language buzzwords in this set of data were "Liveable," and "friendly." These two words were used repetitively in order to describe the actual built infrastructure of Taipei City. The implication of "liveable," mentioned in the World Design Capital website, implies a city in which people can live without barriers- leading into my next buzzword, Barrier free. This word is coded to talk about physical spaces that have no obstacles and are generally liveable and navigable to those who are disabled. The Urban Development Department describes livability as "a comfortable living environment," which includes ample space for pedestrians and bicyclists and the establishment of outdoor cafes in order to promote the "latent ambience" of Taipei city. The concept of livability also includes providing affordable housing for the population. Blueprints for universally designed apartments include renovation

plans for older apartments to make them more friendly to those who are in need of it. These apartment designs are single level, open plans, where movement is prioritized and there are no physical barriers that could prevent movement. “Barrier free” is also portrayed in this data set by pictures devoid of people- there is obvious intent to show what barrier free infrastructure looks like, but there are no pictures in the governmentally published files that show disabled people existing in a barrier-free environment. In all of the images published in the Construction management and Urban Development plans, out of 13 images portraying barrier free accommodations, one singular image portrays a wheelchair user using a stair lift- but the person in the wheelchair is facing away from the camera. This highlights the stigma in Chang’s work on disability, solidifying the fact that the government hasn’t quite become entirely inclusive of disabled persons, still condemning them to be a “hidden population.”

The Department of Urban Development and the Construction Management Department both showcase the accommodations and other projects that they have put into place for disabled persons. The imagery among these sources, though bright and colorful, is devoid of any disabled persons, with a clear focus on the specific infrastructural projects that are in the works, but not the people that they are designed to help. This extreme focus on built accommodations becomes especially clear when one peruses the World Design Capital website. The World Design Capital website outlines 16 development projects to improve the livability of Taipei City. The emphasis on design of public space is mentioned almost every other sentence. The website also outlines several design project initiatives that would provide education and funding to young thinkers and designers for their ideas to improve the city’s infrastructure.

Other barrier free projects in the city include the bus system, which provides abundant space for those in wheelchairs. This bus system was put in place starting in 2007, with a total of

357 busses hitting the streets between 2007 and 2009. This seems like a fairly large number, but is small compared to the current 2,858 city busses that are in use. Barrier free busses aren't just for traversing Taipei city- there are also Tour busses provided by the Tourism Bureau that are for use for tours specifically because they are wheelchair accessible. In fact, there is actually an entire section of the Tourism Bureau website that will find wheelchair accessible tourist locations and provide bus bookings for those tours.

The government of Taipei City, through initiatives, plans, reports, newspapers, and websites, paint a picture of a city that is liveable, friendly to all people, and barrier-free. Yet, it also portrays accommodations as empty, "unused" space, free of any people, but certainly there for people to use, if it's needed.

Here, the Taipei City Government has clearly defined accessibility as an issue of built infrastructure that can be used by a diverse general public. However, the focus of universal design is vague across these documents at worst, and specifically identifies the elderly as a key population in the consideration of implementing universal design at best. Accessibility here is simply the ease of travel, the ease of access to leisure, and the ease of access to participate in capital flow. It is the access to public facilities and means of transportation that allow the elderly and disabled persons to reach doctor's appointments and their means of employment. Though this is a step in a good direction to make society equitable, it does not remove other barriers that may "dis-able," a person.

Chapter 2: The Changing Definition of Accessibility

While we have seen what current language is used to speak about disabled persons in government terms and in the media, there is still much to be said about how advocate organizations have brought about and still continue to bring about social and legal change in Taiwan. What are these organizations, and what do they do? What are their policies, objectives, and goals? What do they consider accessibility to be? Here, I provide a review of three organizations, their histories, and their current goals, projects, and initiatives found on their websites, as well as a survey of the imagery and portrayal of disabled persons on these websites.

Eden, a Christian organization, was founded in 1982 by Ms. Liu Xia, a female wheelchair user who experienced firsthand the discrimination that the disabled face in Taiwan. She, herself, was once asked to leave an event because her presence would make the event host “look bad,” or, perhaps, lose face. This is a story I found once on the website, once in “Barrier-Free for All,” from Taiwan Today, and in a published history of disability advocate groups. This experience of blatant discrimination is key to the context of Taiwan, where, before the advocacy movement was in place, disabled persons were a hidden population. (Chang, 2010)

One of the main goals that the website says Eden is currently pursuing is the removal of societal barriers through love, which is clearly shown through the history of the group. This is related specifically to the organization’s Christian roots, through which “love conquers all,” however, the largest way that Eden shows this “love,” is through education and support for disabled persons. The organization started out as both a provider of practical skills for disabled persons and an advocacy group that worked towards the establishment of the rights of the

disabled in legislature. Eden, as an organization, was a pushing force behind lobbying for the universal design of the MRT of Taipei city. When the plans for the MRT were released in 1987, there were no plans for universal design in the capital, or in any of Taiwan. Eden held protests and put on exhibitions about universal design strategies in all corners of Taiwan, effectively influencing city governments to adopt such strategies. Eden's other projects include international accessibility surveys, during which they send their employees across Taiwan and the globe in order to discern whether certain tourism and travel accommodations are fully wheelchair accessible. Travel and leisure for the disabled are a priority for this foundation, as 5 pictures on the website display wheelchair users and amputees next to busses, on beaches, and in deserts, enjoying and appreciating the world around them. Pictures on Eden's Website and the other websites show disabled persons living specifically *in public*, a place where once they were not welcome or considered.

The League of Welfare Organizations for the Disabled, ROC (LWOD), is another advocacy group that promotes accessibility and rights for the disabled. Unlike Eden, it is an alliance of multiple advocacy groups, the first of its sort in Taiwan, that pushed disability rights laws in the late 1980's, culminating in the nation's first Disability Welfare Law in 1990. LWOD was specifically designed with policy making in mind. Whereas Eden itself is focused on providing accommodations and acts of service, as well as advocacy, LWOD's initiatives have been to advocate not only for the accessibility of public space but also the provisions for disability rights in the laws of the land. In 1997, LWOD was able to push revisions to the Disability Welfare Law. In 2011, LWOD was able to push another amendment to the Disability Welfare Law that prevented refusal of service to disabled persons. For example, airlines used to be able to legally refuse service and accommodations to disabled persons in Taiwan, even if they

had already purchased tickets for the flight. However, this is no longer the case. This amendment also dictated that the disabled ride the MRT and other public transportation at half price, and required public buildings devote 2 percent of their parking to disabled persons. Even though laws like this have been passed, it does not mean that the work is done. In 2017, LWOD participated in 203 meetings with government task forces to push better legislation for the disabled.

LWOD's website has a current news section where it releases information and news articles related to governmental amendments and issues, as well as an announcements page for disability related projects, such as initiatives to share children's books and stories that help children understand the difficulty of disability. These projects also point to the fact that more needs to be done to remove the social barriers that disabled persons may face. LWOD, as well as Eden, remind their constituents, and the government, that accessible infrastructure is only part of the solution, and that social accessibility requires rights to education, opportunity, employment, and protection from discrimination.

The final website that I review is that of the Taiwan Access for All Association (TAFAA). TAFAA was founded in 2004 with the intention of advocating for the disabled to live, learn, work, and enjoy an accessible life in their communities. They are a small non-profit that as of 2019 has 6 working staff. Their main services are wheelchair rentals and other services to low income households, as well as helping disabled persons find accessible means of travel. Originally, the founders intended to create a magazine devoted to wheelchair access. The magazine failed to sell, and was retired after only six issues. The secretary general of TAFAA says that this is due to several factors, the most important of which being that the front cover had people that looked "too happy," and "too attractive" to actually be disabled, giving an idea of

how the disabled are perceived in Taiwan. After the suspension of the magazine, TAFAA was founded and began to lobby for barrier free transportation to and from leisure sites.

What these three organizations have the most in common is their dedication to leisure travel for the disabled as well as their support for rights and protections. These groups acknowledge that there are many places that able bodied people can enjoy, but the disabled cannot see because they have no means of reaching them. Leisure is a human need, and some may argue that leisure is a human right. These disability activist groups certainly define leisure as a right for disabled persons. This is clearly stated on Eden's website, and also directly implied on TAFAA's website. These two organizations enact projects that connect disabled persons to accommodations in order to take vacation and visit tourist destinations, linking the opportunity to see and learn from these sites as equal to an abled person.

There is a clear contrast in governmental vs. advocacy group sources. For one, images from the MRT Website and publications from the Department of Urban planning and the Construction Management Department do not include pictures of disabled people, and instead focus on the infrastructural progressions that the government has planned or have already instituted. Images on advocacy websites include as many disabled people as possible and focus on all of the work that advocacy groups still need to do. The existence of disability advocacy groups that provide services for the disabled implies that there is still work to be done to make accessibility available and affordable for all people. From my analysis of rhetorical claims being made by both the government and advocacy groups, though the city government has made certain accommodations available by working with disability groups, these groups also see mobility and accessibility as something *more* than public transportation and public and private housing renovation. Accessibility is also about access to employment, to leisure, and to freedom

from discrimination. Because these needs have not been met, groups like Eden, LWOD, and TAFAA are all needed to remind the government that disabled people exist and should be protected.

Some interesting events I witnessed while in Taipei were a presence of wheelchair users that sell magazines, newspapers, and trinkets in night markets and in high pedestrian traffic areas. As a matter of fact, this experience was a summation of my own interactions with disabled persons in Taipei City. A friend of mine explained to me that these wheelchair users were given enough money by the government to buy a wheelchair, but not enough to provide a solid living. When I asked her why, she said it was because disabled people may feel ashamed that they cannot work in the way other people do, and so the government provides them with enough to get around and to purchase goods to sell so that these people can feel like they're earning their living. While this may or may not be true, as I only spoke to one person on the topic, it seemed particularly interesting to me that this sort of situation was possible. The Taipei City government does in fact have an office for Foreign and Disabled labor, which was founded in 2013 after the 2011 People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act was passed. This office reports that it is in charge of enforcing quotas and punishing violations of the Disability Rights Protection Act, as well as providing services and job training. The recent founding of this department makes it clear that there has been little time to track the effect it has had on the disabled population. It is also true that Taiwan provides National Health Insurance and also does provide disability benefits that are either a monthly settlement or a lump sum, according to the Bureau of Labor. While it is absolutely excellent that the Taiwanese government can provide lump sums for wheelchairs for disabled persons, there is also something to be said about the fact that poverty seems a bit inescapable for those same persons.

The focus of disability advocate groups on leisure travel, education, job training, and provision of accommodations to the needy indicates that the definition of accessibility differs from the definition put forth in government goals and initiatives. While public infrastructural accessibility is part of the puzzle, it is only one piece. Advocacy groups redefine accessibility, through imagery and language, as not only the ability to move from one's primary locus through public environments, but also as the ability to *thrive* in those environments. Advocacy groups also acknowledge the fact that thriving in the current environment is unattainable due to both governmental policy and public stigma. The rate of unemployment for disabled persons in Taiwan is 14.7%, which is almost triple the rate of the general population at 4.9%. Legislation to prevent discrimination against disabled persons and government initiatives to decrease the unemployment rate have only been made within the past ten years, and there is still much to be done.

Conclusion

Accessibility and Universal design in Taipei city and Taiwan at large is governmentally defined as an imperative need to redesign and rebuild public infrastructure in order to facilitate and draw in global capital flow, while disability groups draw attention to the fact that some barriers are intangible and deserve different attention and deconstruction. This sort of gap between government and constituent is common for groups that experience stigma within their contexts. Work done in the past 20 years and my experience in Taiwan reflect a presence of changing stigma, but one that still provides a significant barrier that can be too much for disabled persons to overcome. The message from advocate groups is clear- there is still much work to be done.

Disability advocacy groups in Taiwan operate not only as advocates but also as providers of accommodations and educators of both disabled persons and abled persons. In addition to physical accessibility, advocacy groups also define accessibility as the right to move throughout society with the same opportunities as those who are “abled,” which is modeled on international advocacy rights movements. This emphasis on equal rights and protections is recent and implies that the governmental definition of accessibility is not enough. The push to travel to new, tourist and leisure destinations is an important goal for these groups and goes a step beyond saying “A disabled person may now get around their own locality, there is nothing else to be done.” This goal outlines the importance of rights to not only movement, but to movement from one’s general locus into the greater sphere of society. This call for equality far surpasses the current governmental definition of accessibility.

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