

## Social Change and the Disability Rights Movement in Taiwan 1981-2002

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**Abstract:** This paper provides a historical overview of the disability rights movement in Taiwan from 1981 to 2002. It shows the major events in Taiwanese disability history, legislation, and development of disability rights organizations, with a focus on two influential advocacy associations: the Parents' Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PAPID) and the League of Enabling Associations (LEAs). It also demonstrates that the disability movement has developed in concert with Taiwan's democratic transition.

**Key Words:** disability rights, social movement, democratization

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\*\*\* Author's Note - Several Chinese Mandarin romanization systems are used in Taiwan. This paper follows the Hanyu Pinyin system. For particular names of organizations and for culturally specific languages, I include the traditional Chinese characters. For specific Taiwanese authors' names, this paper follows the romanization system used by the particular author (for more detail on romanization of Chinese Mandarin in Taiwan see <http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/2001/appendix8.htm>).

*“Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write” (Baynton, 2001, p. 52).*

### Introduction

Taiwan has been known for its “economic miracle,” “third wave democracy” and as an example of the new “Asian welfare paradigm.” Nevertheless, people with disabilities are the hidden minority in Asian society. They are “hidden” because of the absence of an environment that enables them to become visible in public. They are a hidden “minority” because people do not even consider them a minority. Social prejudices deny them basic rights as citizens. Physical barriers such as lack of access to public facilities “disable” them from sharing a “normal” social life in the community. People with disabilities usually are excluded from social life or even incarcerated in institutions. Their rights as citizens to be educated, to vote and to live in an accessible community are usually denied. The emergence and development of the disability rights movement has accompanied Taiwan's democratic transition over the past 25 years. This paper provides a historical overview of the major events in disability history, disability legislation, and disability rights organizations, with a focus on two influential advocacy associations: the Parents' Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (中華民國智障者家長協會, Zhong-hua-min-guo Zhi-zhang-zhe-jia-zhang Xie-hui, PAPID) and the League of Enabling Associations (殘障聯盟, Can-zhang-lian-meng, LEAs<sup>1</sup>).

Few studies have been done on the history of disability in Taiwan. This research therefore integrates secondary resources and interviews in order to reconstruct the history of the Taiwanese disability rights movement. The narrative I provide is a partial history, constructed on the basis of diverse sources and some interviews that I conducted in 2003. I used United Daily News Index to trace all newspaper articles related to disability rights from the 1980s to 2002. I also collected newsletters and magazines from various disability rights advocacy organizations. Other printed materials include autobiographies of disability rights activists, journal articles written in Mandarin, governmental reports and reports from NGOs. In addition, I interviewed 38 disability rights activists from various related NGOs, selected through snow-ball sampling from the list obtained from PAPID. The small number of selective interviews has a limited representational value, but the interviews are used mainly to provide personal views to supplement information drawn from secondary materials.

I start with a general introduction to disability issues in Taiwan. In the main body of this paper, I divide the history of the disability rights movement into three time periods: (1) The emergence of the movement (1981-1987); (2) The Alliance and Institutionalization of the Disability Rights Social Movement Organizations (1988-1992), and (3) Engaging in public policies (1993 to 2002)<sup>2</sup> (Ma, 1995; Hsieh 1997; and Hsiao & Sun 2000).

### The Language, Philosophy, and History of Disability Prior to 1980

Few historical studies focus on social perceptions of disability and attitudes toward disabled people in East Asian countries. Emma Stone (1999) analyzed Chinese writings and showed that the general term referring to people with disabilities is 殘廢, can-fei. This is a combination of two characters: “can” means “disability” and “fei” means “useless and worthless.” In other words, people with disabilities are linguistically marked as useless and worthless. After the 1980s people in China started to use “殘疾,” can-ji, to replace can-fei. “Ji” means illness. The meaning changed from defining people with disabilities as useless to defining disability as a medical condition (Stone, 1996, p. 136).

The semiotic transition in language took a different trajectory in contemporary Taiwan. In 1980 殘障 can-zhang, (disabled and impaired) was used in the first disability-related law, the Can-zhang Welfare Law. A 1997 revision of this law renamed can-zhang to 身心障礙者, shen-xin zhang-ai zhe, people with mental and physical disabilities, or zhang-ai zhe, people with disabilities. It adapted the “people first language” of international disability rights advocacy to add “zhe,” people. After years of disability rights advocacy, can-fei (disabled and useless) is seldom used in everyday life anymore. Can-zhang and zhang-ai zhe are now used interchangeably in Taiwan.

Defining disabled people as useless can also be found in Confucian philosophy. In *Li Chi (Book of Rites)* Li Yun, Section One, it suggests that in the ideal society, the Grand Union, (Da-Tong Shi-Jie) is realized:

“When the Grand course was pursued, a public and common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony... They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained. Males had their proper work, and

females had their homes” (Li Chi, Li Yun Section 1, p. 365, translated by Legge 1967).

In this ideal society (Grand Union), men work according to their abilities, women stay at home doing housework and the marginalized groups (widows, orphans and people with disabilities) are taken care of. It also presumes, however, that people with disabilities are not capable of taking care of themselves, and need to be “maintained” by others.

This discourse from *Li Chi* is constantly quoted in the Taiwanese disability rights movement in two different ways. First, it is used as a symbol of the cultural tradition that it is the government’s responsibility to take care of people with disabilities (Chiu, 1998). Second, Liu (1982) argues that it is also a charity paradigm. Traditional Chinese culture sees people with disabilities as useless and needing to be taken care of by society, and does not see that people with disabilities are capable of making a living by themselves. Liu argues that we have to show society that people with disabilities are not useless and are capable of working (1982, pp. 209-210).

Before the 1980s, people with disabilities received limited governmental support. The ideology of public policy assumed that families and good-will non-profit organizations (NPOs) were responsible for caring for and supporting people with disabilities. The government would intervene only when “their family cannot take care of them.”<sup>3</sup> Before 1981, institutions for people with disabilities were mostly private organizations, primarily in Northern Taiwan. The quality of service in these private institutions varied and some of them were questionable (Ma, 1995). As revealed by Humanity Magazine in 1986, the living condition in some of the poorly managed institutions could easily be identified as inhumane; the residents might be chained, and there were no public health facilities or any professional support (Yu, 1986). Needless to say, proper education and rehabilitation programs were not available.

The existence of these unregulated institutions from the 1970s to the 1980s was a result of rapid social changes in Taiwan over the preceding forty years. The family structure, which had played a primary care role for people with disabilities, changed rapidly during the process of industrialization. The nuclear family gradually replaced the traditional extended family structure. More and more mothers entered the job market and could no longer play the caretaker’s role for children with disabilities. As a result, private institutions, disregarding the quality of their service, emerged to meet the demand in the caretaker market (Sun, 2003).

In short, the lack of an enabling public infrastructure was a general phenomenon before the 1980s. Disability was mostly considered as a private issue. Since the 1980s, the disability rights movement emerged to seek recognition and to demand public support for people with disabilities.

### The Emergence of the Disability Rights Movement (1981-1987)

The United Nations proclaimed the “Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons” in 1975 and started to reframe disability issues as a human rights issue. In response to this new international trend regarding disability rights, the Taiwanese government passed the “Handicap Welfare Law” in 1981, which claimed to provide for the needs of people with disabilities and to protect their rights as equal citizens. Chiu (1998) points out that although individual rights are granted in the Constitution, the rights of citizens with disabilities were first written into law in 1981. This “Handicap” Welfare Law did not, however, bring the realization of disability rights. It

included no regulations and no concrete policies. In other words, it is a “handicapped”<sup>4</sup> law, referring to the fact that the law was not capable of doing anything. Although the first disability-related law did not function, the disability rights movement emerged in the early 1980s and turned a new page in the history of the struggle for disability rights in Taiwan.

### The Professional Disability Non-Profit Organizations

In the history of Taiwan’s disability rights movement, the involvement of Christian church organizations and disability related professionals played an important role, not only by providing services, but also by introducing progressive ideas to disability rights issues. For example, the Yu-Ren Developmental Center was founded in 1972<sup>5</sup> in Taipei and the Ren-Ai Developmental center was founded in 1975<sup>6</sup> in Hsin-chu. Both were sponsored by Catholic Church organizations. Several other associations also were founded in the early 1980s. For example, the Sunshine Social Welfare Foundation was founded on December 18, 1981 as the first non-profit social welfare organization to support facial injury and burn victims in Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> The First Children’s Developmental Center was founded in 1981 by several special education professionals to provide education to children with intellectual disabilities.

Liu Hsia (1942-2003)<sup>8</sup> could be considered the pioneer of self-advocacy of disabled people in Taiwan. Liu developed rheumatoid arthritis during the sixth grade of elementary school. She discontinued her formal education and educated herself at home. She started to publish articles in 1961 and published her first book, “The Song of Life,” (Sheng-zhi-gel) in 1977. The book was well-received and she became a well-known “wheelchair writer.” In 1982, she and a group of Christians co-founded the Eden Social Welfare Foundation to help improve the overall condition of people with disabilities.<sup>9</sup> The organization aimed to provide social service and spread the gospel.

According to Liu, the discrimination she experienced when she was young motivated her to found an organization to promote the rights of disabled people. She was denied entry to a public exhibition on “Economic Success” in Taiwan in 1971. The excuse from the organizer was not lack of accessibility, but that “there are important people visiting, it does not look good if there are ‘handicapped’ people around” (Liu, 2004, pp. 205-206). At that moment, she realized that the organizer not only discriminated against her as an individual, but against people with disabilities in general. She had to speak for disabled people. She stated, “At that time, I knew that [to speak out] is God’s calling and it is my obligation and mission” (Liu, 2004, p. 206).

The first priority of Eden is to provide job training for people with various disabilities. Liu argued that people with disabilities can work; it is just that Taiwanese society does not educate them thus excluding them from the workforce. “We (Eden Foundation) have to empower disabled people to work, and show society that people with disabilities are capable of working and can be independent from others” (Liu, 2004). Liu passed away in 2003. Eden has become the most prominent non-profit organization providing support for disabled people and continuously advocating disability rights in Taiwan.

The first attempt to establish a national association to improve the quality of care was made by Father Brendan O’Connell<sup>10</sup> (Ma, 1995). Father Brendan has a sister with Down syndrome and his parents are founding members of the ARC (Association for Retarded Citizens) in the United States. In the mid-1970s he came to Taiwan and saw the quality of care in private institutions as a problem. He recalls that “many institutions only provide a space for people with disabilities to stay and do not educate them. Those children need to be educated” (personal

communication, August 6, 2003). Thus, the Association for “Mental Retardation” (啟智協會 Qi-zhi xie-hui, AMR) was founded in 1983 and aimed to promote the quality and professionalism of the institutions.

During this period, the public and the government had a limited understanding of disability rights and the needs of people with disabilities. Even the establishment of a private special education center faced multiple obstacles. Tsao Ai-lan, one of the founders of the First Children Development Center (FCDC), recalls:

“First, the regulation of a special education school or institution makes it impossible to found a private special education school. As a result, we decided to start with a special education daycare center registered as a ‘training center.’ Second, the resources are limited and the demand is huge. We first found a basement with no windows and hired three or four social workers. There was quickly a long waiting list” (personal communication, July 30, 2003).

Besides the lack of financial resources and the strict governmental regulations, Tsao also points out that resistance from the community was one of the most difficult challenges. The “Feng-Qiao New Village” incident illustrates the existing social prejudice against disabled people.

#### Feng-Qiao Incident and Community Segregation

The Feng-Qiao incident is a case of community violence against a daycare center for children with intellectual disabilities. The incident started in 1982 when the FCDC decided to move to a larger facility in Feng-Qiao village, a residential community, because of the high demand for professional special education. However, when the residents of Feng-Qiao New Village realized that their new neighbor would be a daycare training center for children with developmental disabilities, strong resistance emerged from the residents’ association. The protest and negotiation lasted several months. The reactions from the community’s residents included disturbing the construction work, not allowing FCDC staff to enter the community, destroying the center’s facilities and even threatening the lives of the FCDC’s staff. Besides questioning the FCDC’s legal status, residents argued that children with intellectual disabilities would “destroy the community’s living environment” and “affect the normal development of children in the community” (Where is Home for Disabled Children, 1983, p. 3).

In response to the community’s strong resistance, seven parents’ representatives brought a petition with more than 500 signatures to the President, Chiang Ching-Kuo, and asked the government to protect the rights and well-being of their children and to address the needs of children with intellectual disabilities (Where is Home for Disabled Children, 1983, p. 3). It was the first documented parents’ collective public action for disability rights in Taiwan.

The violent reaction and the discriminatory language used against children with disabilities, as well as the parents’ political action, attracted media attention and the involvement of politicians. The incidents were widely reported in the media, including television stations and newspapers. The media exposure resulted in strong public sympathy and support. As a result, the Social Welfare Office of Taipei City stepped in and several well-known city council members got involved in the negotiation process. Finally, with strong public support and the intervention of government officials, FCDC moved into Feng-Qiao New Village on June 24, 1983.

The impact of the Feng-Qiao incident is significant in the disability rights movement in Taiwan. First, it drew public attention to the rights of children with disabilities, including the right to be educated and the right to be included in the community. Second, seminars and public forums addressing disability rights issues were held. Many NPOs such as the Sunshine Foundation, the FCDC and the Eden Foundation began to work together and organize public forums and workshops to discuss disability issues and to advocate for a non-discriminating environment (*I am a Human Being, Please Respect Me*, 1983, p. 7). In this process many new concepts were introduced to families with disabled members and to the public. Third, an unexpected result, recalled by Tsao, was the large amount of donations that went to FCDC, which resolved its major financial problem. Finally, the incident also reveals the lack of infrastructure and legal framework for persons with disabilities. The parents' petition became the first ever documented political action for disability rights and prompted the disability rights movement to promote disability legislation and welfare. It is also the first successful case of attempts to overcome the segregation of disabled people in Taiwan.

#### From Service to Advocacy: The Emergence of Parents' Associations and Disability Legislation

As in the early stages of the disability rights movement in the United States, parents' involvement plays an important role in Taiwan. According to Luo (1993), the first parents' attempt to organize for children with intellectual disabilities started in the early 1960s. The Taipei Association for "Mental Retardation" (Taipei qi-zhi xie-jin-hui) was founded in 1963. This association sponsored the Yang-Ming Adult Care Center for "Mentally Retarded" People in 1974. However, it was a service-oriented organization whose aim was neither advocacy activities nor grassroots movements (Luo, 1993, p. 153).

Some special education institutions also encouraged parents' involvement. Father Brendan points out that he learned that parents' involvement is usually an important part of any organization from the experience of the ARC. He encouraged parents' participation in AMR in the early 1980s. Similar parents' associations were also formed in different special public schools, although advocating for disability rights was not their primary concern. Parents' voices for the rights of people with disabilities had not yet been heard in the public sphere before the Feng-Qiao incident, even though they were already active in other ways.

The Feng-Qiao incident marked a turning point allowing parents to organize themselves for disability rights and to politicize disability rights issues. Tsao Ai-Lan suggests:

"After the Feng-Qiao incident, parents from the middle or southern parts of Taiwan came to us and wished they could send their children here for professional training. We (FCDC) kept expanding our program in order to accommodate these huge demands. However, we could never help all the children with intellectual disabilities in Taiwan. At some point, I realized that we needed a national system to support those children. In order to achieve this goal, social movement would be the necessary means. Thus, I started to organize parents into special education institutions for political action" (personal communication, July 30, 2003).

With the support of special education professionals and parent leaders, the Parents' Committee was founded under FCDC. They quickly connected with other parents' organizations, which already existed in some institutions, for instance, Yu-ren. In 1984 parent leaders such as Wang

Guang-Xu and Zong Jin-yi organized several parents' associations with a total of 500 parents with disabled children<sup>11</sup> and started a petition to revise the Special Education Law.

At that time the special education law allowed disabled children either to go to public school or to be educated at home. In practice, this meant that the state did not need to grant the right of education to children with disabilities. As a consequence of the insufficient infrastructure, the option "to be educated at home" just made most children with disabilities stay at home and deprived them of any chance to go to public school. Generally, the law excluded most children with disabilities from public school (Ma, 1995). The law was revised right after the petition was presented.

Under Martial law, civic organizations were under rigid governmental control. In the process of organizing for collective action, the parents faced various difficulties from the state. The first application to register as a non-profit organization was rejected by the government, because new organizations were not allowed to be established if a similar organization had existed before the revision of the Civic Organization (Ren-min tuan-ti) Law in 1989. The existence of the Association for "Mental Retardation" became an excuse for the government to hinder parents' efforts to organize themselves. However, the parents found a way to work with the system. They participated in the AMR as individual members and organized a parents' committee under AMR in 1986. AMR thus became an institutional foundation for the parents to further expand their grassroots movement.

The state's control over civil society can also be illustrated by showing its attempt to discourage individual organizers from participating in the movement. Zong Jin-yi, the founder of Hsin-lu, recalls, "Since I worked in the public service sector, I was warned of the potential consequence of losing my job. I was also told that they could make special arrangements for my child if I withdraw from the parents' organization" (personal communication, August 13, 2003). Nevertheless, these obstacles did not prevent parents from organizing themselves in a gradually liberalizing political environment.

In 1987, as a result of a series of protests and media attention, the Taiwan Provincial government organized a public forum for parents of children with intellectual disabilities. Parents from different areas of Taiwan were invited. After the public forum, those parents decided to publish a newsletter, "心路 Hsin-Lu,"<sup>12</sup> in 1987 under the AMR. The newsletter aimed to (a) communicate progressive concepts, (b) deliver the voices of the parents (to the government), and (c) work for the rights and welfare of people with disabilities. Following the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the revision of the civic organization law, the parents finally founded their own organization, registered as the non-profit civic organization "Hsin-lu Cultural and Education Foundation," by the end of that year.

During the process of forming a civic organization, a confrontation between the state and the civic organization became unavoidable. There was a huge gap between the state's rationale for, and parents' perception of, citizens' rights. The contestation of state regulations and contemporary ideas of citizens' rights can be illustrated by the parents' meeting with governmental officials. In their petition to the Department of Education in 1987, when parents of disabled children complained about the lack of educational resources for disabled children and demanded more governmental support, the government official, Deputy Young, replied, "According to the Constitution, if children did not go to school, their parents should be punished." Wu—a mother of a disabled child—immediately threw the question to Young, "Would you please count how many of our children do not go to school? We are willing to be punished,

if you can find a school for our children.” After this question, most parents there raised their hands. Young was shocked and speechless (Hsin-lu, 1997, p. 52).

This encounter sums up the situation. The state did not recognize the lack of infrastructure for disabled children. The parents began to demand the educational rights of citizens. It also signifies a transition era when citizens’ organizations began to use rights language to confront government officials.

In sum, if a social movement is defined as collective actions to promote social changes, the disability rights movement emerged in Taiwan from the early 1980s to 1987. During this period, Christian organizations and disability-related professionals not only provided services and funding but also espoused progressive ideas about the rights of people with disabilities. Parents began to advocate for their disabled children’s rights. The state discouraged the interconnection of social organizations and the self-organization of citizens’ advocacy groups under martial law.

#### The Alliance and Institutionalization of the Disability Rights Social Movement Organizations (1988-1992)

It is generally agreed that the mid-1980s was a critical transition period in Taiwan’s political history. The first opposition party—the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)—was formed in 1986 under the risk of a government crackdown. The end of martial law in 1987 signified a new era in Taiwan’s political history. Street protests were common - this period saw more than 2,000 street demonstrations, which stirred the deceptively placid surface of Taiwanese society. It was called the “suddenly awakened civil society” because social forces and societal dissatisfactions suddenly burst out after forty years of Martial law (Hsiao, 1996).

People with disabilities were not silent during this period. They founded disability rights organizations and organized demonstrations, not only for education, but also for work, for equal political rights and for an environment without discrimination. An umbrella organization, the League of Enabling Associations (LEAs), was founded in 1990. The national parents’ association was also founded in 1992 to cooperate with different parents’ groups and to promote disability-related research and legislation.

#### The League of Enabling Associations

Since the democratic transition in 1987, new demands and challenges have emerged in disability rights legislation and public policy. If the Feng-Qiao Incident triggered social concerns about the well-being of people with disabilities before 1987, the “patriot lottery”<sup>13</sup> incident in 1987 further contested the social understanding of the rights of people with disabilities, in particular in the workplace. The incident also engendered the alliance of people with various disabilities, the founding of the League of Enabling Associations.

The patriot lottery was a government-sponsored lottery that aimed to increase the government’s revenue. Interestingly, a significant number of lottery shops were run by people with disabilities. In the social context in which special education had only begun to get public attention and discrimination in the workplace was taken for granted, selling lottery tickets was one of the few job choices for people with disabilities. In the mid-1980s the gambling, da-jia-le (everyone is happy), associated with the patriot lottery was extremely popular. The gang-related activities associated with the gambling and the moral concerns about gambling from government



officials led the government to consider ending the 40-year governmental lottery. From 1987 on, public debate over the patriot lottery triggered a series of petitions and protests. The lottery's termination was announced suddenly on January 19, 1988 and made many people, including large numbers of disabled people who made a living from the patriot lottery, jobless overnight.

In response to this crisis the disabled people who lost their jobs after the incident contacted the Eden foundation to ask for help. The Eden foundation organized a series of petitions and public hearings. The Eden foundation saw this transition not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to establish a support net for persons with disabilities. Eden held a national meeting on December 23, 1987 and invited governmental officials, social welfare experts, representatives from related foundations such as the Sunshine Foundation and the Dao-Hang Foundation, as well as persons with disabilities who had lost their jobs because of the new policy. The meeting addressed the right of people with disabilities to work in order to make a living, and made policy recommendations such as enacting special training programs, removing educational barriers and creating a special employment quota for people with disabilities.

The patriot lottery officially ended in January of 1988. Eden and 40 other disability-related associations organized the first ever disability rights street demonstration with about 500 demonstrators on January 19, 1988. The demonstration showed that the government had not kept its promise to protect disabled people and should revise the "Handicap" Welfare law to protect the right of disabled people to work. As Liu (2004) recalled, "The number of demonstrators was not really big, but the demonstration by disabled people such as persons in wheelchairs, with crutches, with visual impairment, etc., attracted public attention." This event quickly garnered media attention, which helped to gain public recognition of welfare and job security issues.

After this demonstration, disability activists brought up other disability rights-related issues such as accessibility to public facilities and public transportation, restrictions on college entrance examinations and employment discrimination. Several petitions, demonstrations and public hearings emerged from 1987 to 1990 all of which primarily targeted the revision of the "Handicap" Welfare Law to address various disability rights issues (Chen, 1992). On April 27th, 1988, 18 disability welfare civic organizations petitioned the Ministry of Education to lift the restriction that excluded people with disabilities from taking college entrance examinations. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1989, during a petition to the Legislative Yuan, Zhang Zhi-Xiong, a demonstrator with a disability, attempted suicide to demonstrate against the hardship disabled people must endure to live independently. Fortunately, he did not succeed, but the act intensified media attention and public awareness (Chiu, 1998). Following the demonstration and public support, the government held a National "Handicap" Welfare meeting involving various civic organizations in order to revise the "Handicap" Welfare Law. Finally, the revision of the "Handicap" Law was passed on January 12th, 1990.

During this process of collective action and negotiation with the government, many promises were made, but little progress was actually achieved. Several laws were passed, but government officials were reluctant to implement them. Disability rights organizations realized that in order to continuously negotiate with the government, they needed an umbrella association to coordinate various issues. Different disability welfare NPOs began to create an alliance. Led by Liu Hsia, from the Eden foundation, the committee for the revision of "Handicap" Law was founded on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1989. The committee led to the establishment of the League of Enabling Associations in 1990. Around 70 disability related civic organizations participated in the league.

The goal of the LEAs was to coordinate different disabled welfare groups to "advocate for disability rights and promote the welfare of people with disabilities."<sup>14</sup> The LEAs targeted

legislation reforms and also used different strategies to increase public awareness. It became the most influential civic organization for disability rights in Taiwan.

Once the LEAs was founded, it began to consider nominating its own candidate to the Legislative Yuan. During the search for qualified candidates to represent people with disabilities, LEAs suddenly found out that Liu Hsia, the well-known “wheelchair writer,” was not qualified to participate in the election because she did not have a high school diploma. Liu Hsia was the founder of the Eden foundation and the winner of the National Literature Award. She did not complete her high school education simply because of her disability and the lack of a support system in school. This requirement actually took away the political right to be elected since many disabled people were rejected from public school and therefore could not finish an “official” education. As a result, they quickly decided to nominate Liu to run for the Legislative Yuan Election and use the “Elect Wheelchair Writer into Legislative Yuan” event to further highlight the unjust legal system and social barriers people with disabilities face.

Liu’s nomination to run for the legislature did not pass because of the conservative political environment and slow legal reform procedures. Nevertheless, this “incident” demonstrated a lot about the discriminative legal environment for people with disabilities. This incident also shifted the disability rights movement’s focus from special education to work, and from there to political rights and participation in elections.

Several legislative actions, such as the revision of the “Handicap” Welfare Law in 1990 and the revision of the Child Welfare Law in 1993, followed this event. One of the major achievements of the revision of the “Handicap” Welfare Law in 1990 was a disability employment quota of one percent for the private sector and two percent for the public sector. Chiu (1998) points out that this is the first instance of institutional protection of employment for people with disabilities in Taiwan.

Increasing awareness of disability rights issues also created a paradigm shift in public discourse. With the effort of advocacy NPOs, newspaper narratives began to reframe disability issues from a citizens’ rights perspective, as opposed to a charity perspective. The idea came into public discourse that “the disability itself is not a social problem, but rather the lack of public support for disabled people.” For example, an editorial of the United Daily said:

“[People with disabilities] might lose their body part, but their work ability might not be affected. They do not necessarily need pity, but they need social concern. It is the responsibility of the society to give them a reasonable and just living environment and entitled welfare benefit. If the government can hire disabled people and allow disabled people to take national examinations, it will encourage the private sectors to hire disabled people. If the government can expand their protection for disabled people in different private sectors, it will open more markets for disabled people. If the private sector can provide job opportunities, disabled people will be less likely to be discriminated against. If we have the public facilities for people with disabilities, it will be much easier for them to go out” (Jobs for the Disabled People, 1988, p 16).

The founding of LEAs opened a new era in which disability related civic organizations worked together to promote legislative reform. It continuously played an advocacy role for people with disabilities and became an important component of the social welfare movement in Taiwan.

## Building a National Civic Organization: The National Public Forum Tours and Local Parents Organizations

The lifting of Martial law in 1987 and the following revision of the Assembly Law opened a new era of civic engagement in Taiwan society, not only in street demonstrations but also in grassroots movements. Before the establishment of the Hsin-Lu foundation in 1987, there were only two regional parents' organizations for persons with intellectual disabilities, one in Tai-Chung city and the other in Kaohsiung city. Both organizations were supported and led by professionals from the disability field. Following the founding of Hsin-Lu, parents' influence gradually expanded in different socio-political spheres.

First, many parents joined the AMR and sat on its board of directors. Zong, the founder of the Hsin-Lu, was elected as the chairperson of the board of directors in 1989. The active participation of parents in AMR changed the organization's dynamics. Parents were eager to advocate for their children's right to education and to promote legislative reform. Most parents did not, however, have professional backgrounds strong enough to continue the AMR's organizational goal—to promote professionalism in Taiwan's system for persons with disabilities. In addition, some professionals in the health field felt that they should keep their distance from politically controversial issues and focus instead on good-will, devotion and professionalism. This difference between parents and professionals soon resulted in the split of the AMR. A group of professionals split from the AMR and founded the Professional Association for "Mental Retardation" (PAMR) in 1989 (Luo, 1993).

Second, with the financial support of the Red-Cross, Hsin-Lu and AMR organized a public forum series in every city and county and conducted a survey on the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. This project aimed not only to estimate the size of the population, but also to support parent advocacy groups in different regions. To organize the public forums, organizers utilized different local resources, mostly pre-existing parents' organizations, institutions for people with intellectual disabilities or government agents. After the public forum, parents and professionals from Hsin-Lu and AMR encouraged the participants to organize self-advocacy parents' groups in each region.

This project was accomplished by May of 1990. Overall, 9,000 parents were invited and nearly 1,000 parents participated in the forum. Ten parent-led organizations (including Hsin-Lu) were established before the public forum series. Twenty-one parent-led organizations (including two national organizations and 90 local organizations) were founded after the project. Organizations for diverse intellectual disabilities were also founded, for instance the Down Syndrome Association and the Association for Autism.

In April of 1990, led by professionals, many parents from Hsin-Lu and local parents' organizations visited the Parents' Association in Japan. This well-organized parents' association and its role in advocacy and service opened the eyes of Taiwanese parents. Some members of the organizations immediately decided to form a national parents' association after this trip. Despite some political controversy and disagreement over the role of the parents' organization, the Parents' Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PAPID) was officially founded in 1992 with the support of the Hsin-Lu foundation and financial support from the International Women's Association. A functional differentiation between PAPID and Hsin-Lu was made. The PAPID positioned itself as a national advocacy membership association, aiming to voice for parents, to research welfare policy, to lobby for legislation and to play the role of check and

balance in the government. The Hsin-Lu foundation became mainly a service oriented non-profit organization.

The history of PAPID shows that the involvement of professionals played an important role in organizing parents during the early stages of establishing a social movement. International organizations such as the Red Cross and the International Women's Association provided financial support for the further development of the parents' organizations. The state had been repressive earlier under martial law. However, the parents' advocacy movement found a way to survive and develop through good-will foundations. In the process of democratic transition, the state also tried to incorporate social demands, and organized the national meetings. The national forum for parents ended up helping the civic organizations to expand their landscape. As a result, PAPID has become one of the most influential member-based civic organizations in Taiwan, and has contributed to the formation of a welfare state.

### Engaging in Public Policies (1993-2002)

In 1992, the first general election for the Legislative Yuan was held in Taiwan signifying the end of the authoritarian regime. Parliamentary democracy was realized in Taiwan. On the societal level many social movements which emerged from the democratic transition period, 1987-1989, gradually institutionalized and transformed their organizational strategies or goals from street protest to either service-oriented NPOs or advocacy and research-oriented organizations (Hsiao, 1999, 2003; Ku, 1999, 2003). The outcomes of the institutionalization of each social movement varied. Some movements gradually disappeared, while others continuously grew and expanded their influence in different spheres. In the disability rights movement, LEAs and PAPID continuously played a significant role in public policy-making and in empowering civil society.

One of the achievements of the disability rights movement has been the significant increase in the government's budget for disability welfare. Before 1989, the social welfare budget included a social security budget for government employees such as military personnel, government officials and teachers in public schools. The budget for the social welfare of disabled people was almost nonexistent. Only after a series of petitions and public forums held by the LEAs and other organizations since 1989 did the government reform social welfare policy. Since then, the social welfare budget has become independent of the social security budget and, at the same time, the budgets of social security and social welfare for disabled people have increased (Hsieh, 1997). The government's total spending on disability welfare increased from 2,372,870 NT dollars in 1991 to 16,795,208 in 2002 (Ministry of Interior & Eden Foundation, 2002).

Achievement can be seen also in the increase in the number of individuals registered for disability status. In 1991, 204,158 citizens (0.99% of the total population) were registered as people with disabilities. In 2002, the number of disabled individuals registered by the government's system was 790,312, which consisted of 3.52% of the total population. The categories of disability also increased (Ministry of Interior and Eden Foundation, 2002). On one hand, this shows that people with disabilities gradually obtained recognition from the state. On the other hand, people with disabilities also gradually came out of confinement in search of public recognition.

At the organizational level the achievements of LEAs and PAPID from 1992 to 2003 are multi-dimensional, including, (a) deepening of the grassroots movement, (b) organizing social protest, (c) cooperating with other social welfare SMOs, (d) serving on the governmental

advisory committee for policy making and new legislation, (e) supervising human rights violations, and (f) advocating disability rights with new agendas. At the grassroots level, PAPID continuously supported the development of local parents' organizations by providing educational training and by sharing organizational experiences. Hsiao and Sun (2000) point out that compared to other social welfare movements, PAPID is one of the few movements that continually developed after the democratic transition in Taiwan.

The LEAs also grew continuously and expanded their influences. LEAs' group numbers increased from around 70 associations to 230 associations, including PAPID, in 2002. Not only did the number of participants increase, but new issues were constantly raised. The PAPID and LEAs worked hand-in-hand on many major issues in the disability rights movement and continually played an important role in legislating, supervising and promoting public policy.

First, to promote the welfare state, the PAPID and LEAs worked with other social welfare SMOs and NPOs to promote social justice and social welfare issues. For example, they were members of the "Alliance of Social Legislation Movements," which aimed to advocate for national social security and social welfare in 1995, and the "Saving National Health Care System Alliance," which protested against the privatization of the national health care system in 1999.

Second, as representatives of the civil society, PAPID and LEAs continued their efforts to monitor the government's policy implementations. Several protests were organized by LEAs and PAPID to promote disability legislation and policy changes, including blocking the National Education Meeting in 1994 and demonstrating for a larger special education budget and against the neglect of special education on the agenda. In 2002, PAPID and LEAs organized the "Against Backwardness, for Surviving" demonstration attended by approximately 3,000 demonstrators. The demonstration was a protest against the government cutting the budget for people with disabilities and was one of the largest street protests since 1992.

Third, besides advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, LEAs and PAPID played an advisory role in legislation and participated in related government advisory committees. The most important legislation was the revision of the "Handicap" Welfare Law. It was replaced by the "Disability Protection Law" (the Act for Rights Protection for Disabled People) in 1997, in which government's role was reframed from a passive-reactive one to an active-enabling paradigm. Under the new legal framework, public policy must accommodate the needs of people with disabilities and must mandate that persons with disabilities be able to enjoy equal rights as citizens.

In addition, LEAs and PAPID also watched for human rights violations and social discrimination. For example, in 1994 the PAPID uncovered mistreatment of people with intellectual disabilities in the military. Because of the lack of social understanding and legal protection for persons with disabilities, persons with intellectual disabilities such as autism were still conscripted into military service. As a result, they were usually abused, jailed or even listed as missing from their military service. In 2000, LEAs and PAPID investigated the inhuman living condition of the "Zhong-Sheng" (眾生) Institution, where people with disabilities were chained, or put into iron cages, and developed health conditions such as skin disease and malnutrition (Xie & Liu, United News, 2000, May 16).

New agendas were constantly raised by LEAs and PAPID. PAPID advocated for inclusive education, de-institutionalization, community home (group home) projects and support for NPOs in their work with the government on planning and running community homes. In sum, from 1992-2002, the LEAs and PAPID worked with the state and against the state. They played a

leading role in the disability rights movement and channeled the communication between state and society in Taiwan.

### Conclusion

The disability rights movement has developed in Taiwan since the 1980s. The commitments of foreign missionaries and foreign-trained professionals played an important role in raising awareness about disability issues and initiating grassroots advocacy activities in their early stages. The charity-oriented NPOs not only provided services for disabled people in the early years when disability rights were not recognized by the state, they also provided the space to facilitate the disability rights movement. Parents' involvement has pushed the agenda into public policies since the mid-1980s. The end of martial law further opened up political space for disability rights advocacy in the late 1980s. Finally, the founding of the League of Enabling Associations in the 1990s and the Parents' Association for Intellectual Disabilities in 1992 signified a new era, when disability rights advocacy organizations work with the state for legislation reform, and at the same time continuously hold the state accountable and monitor human rights violations.

The Taiwanese disability rights movement started by bringing people with intellectual disabilities out from confined private institutions and homes into community-oriented service. However, although the spirit of community-oriented service has been written into law, the road to implementation at the community level remains long. Democratic transition might enable disability rights activists to promote progressive legislation, but the government might not be willing to put the law into practice under the challenge of economic globalization in post-authoritarian Taiwan.

The awareness of educational rights and equal opportunities for employment has been addressed by advocacy organizations. It is still questionable how they are perceived in mainstream Taiwanese society. In addition, although self-advocacy groups have been active in the movement, the advocacy of professionals and parents for the disabled people has played a much more important, even leading, role. More participation by self-advocacy groups is needed to progress even further. Recently, one self-advocacy group of people with intellectual disabilities has formed, but there is a lot of room to improve in order to achieve the goal of "nothing about us, without us."

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Can-zhang literally means “Handicap” in Mandarin, but the association uses LEAs its English name.

<sup>2</sup> Based on studies of the development of institutional support for persons with disabilities and the development of parents’ organizations, Ma (1995) divides the development of parents’ associations into four periods: the pre-development period (1949-1980), the emergence of parents’ organizations (1981-1987), the alliance and institutionalization of parents’ organizations (1988-1992) and further development of parents’ organizations, and organizational transition (1992-1995). Based on the studies of social welfare movements’ leaders, Hsiao and Sun (2000) divide the development of social welfare movements into three periods: promoting social welfare (before 1988), the development of social welfare organization (1989-1993) and further development (after 1993). Based on the studies of framing disability rights, Hsieh (1997) also divided the movement’s development into similar time periods without specifying particular years. This study’s focus is on changes in the political environment and the development of the disability rights movement.

<sup>3</sup> Children Welfare Law in 1973 cited from Ma (1995).

<sup>4</sup> The “handicapped” Handicap welfare law has been used widely in disability rights advocacy documents.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lib.pu.edu.tw/catholicism/una/una.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.st-joseph.org.tw/devenlop.html>

<sup>7</sup> Sunshine foundation: [http://www.sunshine.org.tw/news\\_view.asp?news\\_type=1&id=81](http://www.sunshine.org.tw/news_view.asp?news_type=1&id=81)

<sup>8</sup> Liu passed away in 2003. Her autobiography was published in 2004.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.eden.org.tw/>

<sup>10</sup> Father Brendan’s Chinese name is Gan Hwei - jung. He started his service in Taiwan in 1963, received a masters degree in special education in the US in 1975 and came back to be the director of the St. Raphael Opportunities Center in Tainan city from 1976 to 1992. He is also the founder of the De-Lan Developmental Center in 1988 and the *Bethlehem Foundation* in 1995 in Tainan County.

<sup>11</sup> The parents represent different kinds of disabilities. The core members are from FCDC.

<sup>12</sup> Hsin-lu could be directly translated as “the road of the heart,” i.e., an emotional experience (of the parents) or life journey. According to the first edition of Hsin-lu, it has two meanings: first, it refers to the life journey of the parents; second, it refers to the parents who are finding a path to communicate with their intellectually disabled children.

<sup>13</sup> Patriot lottery refers to the idea of contributing to the government’s revenue though lottery.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.enable.org.tw/about/about.asp>