

Inclusive Education in Chinese Primary Schools
– A Critical Realist Analysis

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Declaration of Originality

I, Xiao Qu, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This qualitative study critically examines the exclusion and inclusion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in Chinese primary schools. The settings are four mainstream schools and two special schools in one large city in East Coast China. The research investigates how 37 mainstream school teachers view and practise exclusion and/or inclusion. Underlying influences are examined, taking into account the contexts of the local schools, the education systems, and broader Chinese society. The study aims to offer a deeply contextualised understanding of inclusive education in China, beyond its current practice and national policy of 'Learning in Regular Classrooms'.

Informed by critical realism, the thesis analyses inclusion on the four planes of social being: bodies in material relations with nature, interpersonal relations, social structures and inner being. The thesis illustrates the importance of analysing inclusive education critically, holistically, and coherently at all four planes of social being. Disability and inclusion are understood through the critical realist concept of stratified ontology: the Empirical, the Actual and the Real. The intention is to reconcile conflicts between the medical and the social models of disability and to move the inclusion debates forward, in China and elsewhere.

The analysis aims to uncover the real forces behind educational inclusion and exclusion in Chinese schools. Confucianism is not often associated with inclusion, but the possibility of Confucianism, rather than human rights, offering practical advocacy for inclusion is explored. Also highlighted is the crucial need for teachers to believe in inclusion and see it as benefiting all children. The internalised values and motives can be powerful drives for inclusion despite structural barriers and practical difficulties. The thesis explores the restructuring of values, caring for inner wellbeing, and building relationships as approaches to enable real transformation in schools and society towards greater inclusion.

Impact Statement

Before I came to study and work in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2011, I had not heard of the term 'inclusive education' in China. My experience in the UK, culturally, economically, and politically a very different country from my own, opened up a broader world to me and taught me things that I did not know were possible. Having benefited from living in two different worlds, I am interested in how some of the other best ideas from the East and the West can be brought together.

This thesis in a way can be an ambassador between China and the UK. It takes good ideas from the West such as inclusion, critical realism, and children's rights, and shows how they can fit into the deep ideals in the East without imposing alien ideas or overriding local ideas. The thesis also offers the Western audience an understanding of Chinese education and local culture, with the aim of making social and cultural structures such as Confucianism and a socialist single-party country appear less alienating.

The main aim of my research is to prepare for and drive changes towards more inclusive education in China, in particular for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The critical realist idea of transformative change involves uncovering real causes. Following this, the thesis illustrates how educational changes also mean deeper changes in institutional systems, cultural beliefs, personal values, and inner drives and motives. I cannot hope for immediate effects of impact from this research, but I do hope to draw attention, advance debates, and inform policies. Changing practices can start with changing minds.

Inside academia, this thesis contributes to original knowledge within the field of special and inclusive education. It is among the many intellectual efforts to move forward future scholarship. The dissemination of my work includes two papers on some parts of this thesis published in the *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* and the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. I have presented my research at the Chinese Education Research Associate Annual Conference in London and the British Education Research Associate Annual Conference in Leeds. I am also selected by the UCL Institute of

Education – Hong Kong University short stay programme to present a paper at the Postgraduate Research Conference in Hong Kong in May 2019.

Outside academia, this research is relevant to all concerned with China's inclusive education, such as primary school educators, SEND specialists, policy makers, parents, and children themselves. So far it perhaps has had the most benefits for the participants in this research. During my fieldwork, by spending time with teachers and children and talking to them, I was inadvertently promoting inclusion to a certain degree. For many teachers and children who did not know about inclusion, by being involved in this research, they became more familiar with it and may be inspired to become more inclusive in their daily practices. I also intend to make my work available in Chinese so that a wider audience of stakeholders can be reached for greater impact in the future.

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Lists of Abbreviations

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BERA	British Education Research Association
CPC	Communist Party of China
CR	Critical Realism
CDPF	China Disabled Persons' Federation
CRPD	Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DfE	Department for Education
EADSNE	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
EFA	Education For All
EHC	Education, Health and Care
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LEAs	Local Education Authorities
LRC	Learning in Regular Classrooms
MoE	Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China
MoHR	Ministry of Human Resources of People's Republic of China
NPC	National People's Congress of People's Republic of China
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of China
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEND	Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This qualitative study critically examines the educational exclusion and inclusion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in primary education in one large city in Shandong Province, East Coast China. The case study is of how 37 teachers from four mainstream primary schools interpreted and practised exclusion/inclusion. Underlying influences are examined, taking into account the local contexts of schools, education systems, and society. Informed by Critical Realism (CR), the thesis uses the CR stratified ontology and the four-planar social being as the analytical frameworks to help to uncover deep causal mechanisms and to advance understanding of educational inclusion/exclusion. The aim is to offer a deeply contextualised understanding of 'inclusive education' in China beyond its current practice and national policy of 'Learning in Regular Classrooms' (LRC) (随班就读 *sui ban jiu du*). This thesis is positioned within the field of special and inclusive education, drawing on multi-disciplinary perspectives such as culture, history, linguistics, policy analysis, philosophy, and educational sociology. This critical approach explores how 'inclusive education' is conceptually constructed, understood, and practised in China.

Data were gathered through interviews, observations, policy analysis, and an ethnographic understanding of the research site. The analysis reports on teachers' interpretations of key inclusion concepts, records examples of inclusive and non-inclusive classroom practices, and reflects upon the local policy, historical, cultural, and political contexts. In particular, I examine how teachers interpreted inclusive education, how they viewed equality and segregation, what their experiences and strategies teaching children with SEND were, what they identified as the main difficulties in their inclusion efforts, and how they felt about promoting inclusion. Next, I engage with their actual teaching practices of inclusion or exclusion by observing teachers in classrooms.

This research offers a much-needed critical examination on inclusive education in China. Inclusive conversations are overdue in the Chinese mainstream educational discourse. The meaning and implementation of inclusion are often controversial and contested. Educators from primary schools in the research site city may think of inclusion as having good intentions but also an unrealistic foreign theory. This may be because of the everyday practical constraints they face, such as large class sizes, academic pressure for passing exams, and limited resources, funding, and expertise. Yet it is my contention after collecting and analysing data that, under the surface of these plausible reasons, aspects of cultural values, education systems, and political agendas function as main barriers. A better understanding of the deeper causes creates space for clear, effective, and consistent policies that can help to bring about transformative change towards more inclusive education. Reasons for favouring inclusive over segregated education will be discussed in chapter 1.5 regarding informal personal reasons and in chapter two regarding formal justifications and practical benefits.

In this thesis, I seek to answer this guiding research question: *What does inclusive education for children with SEND mean for Chinese primary schools?* Applying the critical realist four planes of social being (bodies in material relations with nature, interpersonal relations, social structures and inner being), the inquiry involves five interrelated research sub-questions:

- 1) How do primary school educators understand 'inclusion' and how can their different interpretations be explained?
- 2) In what ways are the schools inclusive or non-inclusive in their physical environments for embodied students?
- 3) How are children with SEND included or excluded in their mainstream school classrooms?
- 4) How do educational structures inform teachers of their inclusive or non-inclusive educational ideas and practices?
- 5) How do values underpin teachers' inclusive or non-inclusive views and actions and how are these values embedded within the local political and cultural contexts?

This study contributes to the plethora of already existing literature on special and inclusive education, Chinese education studies, and CR, merging these areas to offer new insights into contextualised inclusive and non-inclusive beliefs and practices within Chinese primary education. In the process, Confucianism becomes a key area of investigation. Confucianism is not often associated with inclusive education, but the possibility of Confucianism offering advocacy for inclusion is explored. Although human rights are cited in many countries as main defenders of inclusive education, they are a somewhat sensitive and often misunderstood concept in the current Chinese political environment. In this regard, Confucianism may help to overcome the challenge of providing a philosophical, traditional and widely accepted justification for inclusive education. However, this thesis is not intended to be a deeply philosophical study on Confucianism itself. Rather, the point is to use selective Confucian texts to explain teachers' views and actions regarding inclusion and exclusion within the Chinese cultural context. This may nevertheless signal possible directions for more in-depth investigations of Confucianism and inclusion in future studies.

Further, this thesis is not intended to contribute to the enriched philosophical formation or development of CR itself. As a meta-theory consisting of various philosophical positions and explanations such as on ontology, epistemology, structure-agency, and causation (Archer, 2003; Bhaskar, 1998, 2008a, 2008b; Gorski, 2013; Porpora, 2015; Sayer, 2000), CR does not have a single unifying framework, a set of beliefs, or methodology. It can be applied to research in different ways to various extents. In this thesis, CR is used as a reflexive philosophical stance and a resource of conceptual tools to guide data analyses. It offers the theoretical grounding for the interpretations of the empirical data and the theories drawn upon to arrive at such analyses.

Thus, drawing on Confucianism and CR, this thesis intends to contribute to the field of special and inclusive education by offering deeply contextualised understanding of what inclusion means for Chinese primary schools. In this regard, the conclusion signals the possibility of using Confucianism as the philosophical and moral foundation for further developing inclusive education in

China. Also suggested are three-dimensional CR models of disability and inclusive education based on stratified ontology. They aim to reconcile the theoretical conflicts between the medical and the social model and hopefully help to further move the inclusion debates forward, in China and elsewhere.

1.2 Research Context

The Chinese government is responsible for the compulsory education of over 131 million children aged six to 14 (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2017). This is twice the size of the population of the United Kingdom (UK) (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018). The latest national disability survey in China estimates that 2.5 million children aged six to 14 may have a disability in the seven official categories of visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, mental, and multiple disabilities (National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS), 2007).¹ UNICEF (2014) data shows that about 27 per cent of children (six to 14-year-olds) with a recognised disability in China were not enrolled in any form of formal education in 2013. This would mean an indicative number of 675,000. However, the Chinese official statistics only suggests about 85,000 in 2014 (NBS, 2015). Further, Ministry of Education (MoE) (2017a) data show that in 2016, 358,000 children in primary education and 123,000 in secondary education were registered as having a disability. Among them, 54.6 per cent (196,000) and 60.9 per cent (75,000) respectively were enrolled in mainstream schools while the rest attended special schools (*ibid.*).²

The above official numbers, rather inconsistent and confusing, do not add up. Yet it is nevertheless clear that children with a recognised disability in China often have limited access to mainstream provisions, and their access to formal education can be altogether denied. This reflects the inadequate inclusive provisions within the inherently excluding mainstream education for

¹ The first national survey of disability in China was carried out in 1987. It was not until 2006 the second national survey was conducted (NBS, 1988, 2007). The third national survey might be expected after 2025.

² In the Chinese education system, primary education is six years for children from age 6/7 to 11/12. Secondary education is three years for children from age 12/13 to 14/15. Together they form the nine-year compulsory education.

these children, which will be further illustrated throughout this thesis. Also highlighted is that the exclusion of children with disabilities from mainstream high-quality education is a large-scale problem within the Chinese education system.

Disadvantaged children in educational exclusion are at risk of further social exclusion when they become adults. Their double disadvantages raise concerns for social justice, equality, and children's rights. As a response, inclusion has increasingly become a global theme in education (United Nations (UN), 2015; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1990, 1994, 2015a), aiming to promote all children's equal right to a high-quality education.

In many parts of the world, inclusion has been recognised as integral to educational policies. For example, in England, inclusive education as a government policy and legal requirement has been implemented in a way that if parents wish and it does not affect the efficient learning of other children, all children should be educated in mainstream schools (UK Department for Education (DfE), 1981, 2001/2014; Parliament of UK, 1996, 2010). In the United States of America (USA), inclusive education is required by law in the form of the Least Restricted Environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2004).³ In South Africa, the education system incorporates an inclusion framework guided by national policies (Department of Education of South Africa, 2001, 2011). In Japan, Special Needs Education in mainstream schools was legally implemented since 2007 (Government of Japan, 2007; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2012). In China, LRC was established as a national policy since 1994, and inclusion has recently been reaffirmed as a priority in developing special education (MoE, 1994, 2017b). An expanded discussion on Chinese inclusion policies will be presented in chapter 2.5.1.

³ Least Restricted Environment refers to: "the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (IDEA, 2004, 118, STAT. 2677).

However, despite the global inclusion agenda, children with disabilities may still remain in segregated provisions or denied access to formal education today. For example, in the UK, the percentage of pupils with a statement or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan (242,185 pupils) attending special schools has been increasing from 38.2 per cent in 2010 to 43.8 per cent in 2017 (DfE, 2011, 2017).⁴ China has also seen a similar trend. The number of children with disabilities attending special schools has continued to rise with more special schools being built every year. There were 1,520 special schools with 371,625 students enrolled in 1999; and in 2017 the scale of segregated education has grown to 2,107 special schools with 578,826 students enrolled (NBS, 2000, 2018). This is more than the population of countries such as Maldives, Brunei, and Malta (World Bank, 2017). The increase was accompanied by a decline of numbers of children with disabilities in mainstream primary schools. In 2001, 69.86 per cent of children with disabilities who had access to formal education attended mainstream provisions, which was so far the highest point, and the number dropped to 54.6 per cent in 2016 (MoE, 2017a). Considering the inconsistency between China's global engagement with the inclusion agenda (UNESCO, 1990, 1994, 2015a) and the actual growing scale of segregated education domestically, it is rather a confusing message concerning the direction in which the country's inclusive education is heading.

The increasingly segregated education system in China reflects dissatisfaction with current mainstream inclusive provisions. Inclusion is unlikely to work if students with disabilities are simply placed into the inherently excluding mainstream school without fundamentally changing the education system. In this light, the LRC policies have been rather inadequate in providing clear, systematic, and effective guidance for improving teaching practices, restructuring school management, or reforming the education systems (Gan, 2010; Li, 2013). Subsequently, LRC has often been criticised as 似搞非搞 (*si*

⁴ Statement of Special Educational Needs is a statement issued by the local authority describing all the special educational needs of a child and the special help a child should receive. This is usually given to a child when all the special help he or she needs cannot be provided from within the school's resources (DfE, 1981). EHC plans are for children and young people up to 25 years old whose special educational, health and social care needs require more help than would normally be available in mainstream settings (DfE, 2017). Children with a statement or an EHC plan can still attend mainstream schools.

gao fei gao, seem, do, not, do), similar to 'it only looks like we are doing it, but actually, perhaps, we are not really') (Deng & Jing, 2013), 随班混读 (*sui ban hun du*, with class, chaos, read), similar to 'being chaotically present in regular classrooms' (Peng & Deng, 2011), and 随班就坐 (*sui ban jiu zuo*, with class, to sit), or sitting in regular classrooms (Chen *et al.*, 2006). Human Rights Watch (2013) is similarly critical that despite the Chinese government's efforts to improve special education in terms of the increased access to formal education, there are no clear and consistent strategies for high-quality mainstream inclusive provisions. Thus, deeper concerns and contexts behind this contradictory policy need to be examined in order to move inclusion forward.

1.3 Rationale

Three key concerns provide the rationale for this study. First, considering the great discrepancies across China such as local economic, cultural, and demographic factors, there is a need for further regional, district and county-level studies that offer more precise evidence of local circumstances. This allows special and inclusive education across China to be examined more accurately and practically. The research site city that I work in has not hitherto been the focus for research of this kind despite being an economically progressive and 'advanced' region in East Coast China.

Second, academic research on inclusive education in China is rather limited. Time will be needed for an academically informed literature to begin to be able to influence wider discourses. There are not yet any national journals wholly devoted to inclusive education in China. Among the 203 papers in 2018 in the 12 monthly issues of the leading journal within the field - *Chinese Journal of Special Education*, only 33 articles were in the topic of inclusive education, and among them, merely seven were empirical research papers situated in China. Other papers mostly focused on specialist intervention techniques in special schools, policy analysis, and literature review. In this regard, Chinese scholars (Deng & Jing, 2013; Deng & Liu, 2013) are critical that most studies in inclusive education often lack theoretical depth and criticality. This is because these studies often appeared more about surveying attitudes than being about

improving actual classroom practices. These studies also translated and introduced inclusion as a foreign theory and practice, often in a rather outdated fashion. The discussions often did not adequately consider the Chinese local contexts or attempt to develop local theories that may guide effective practices.

Third is the increase in segregated education in China. Inclusive education policies merely calculate enrolment rates. They hardly ever address how to improve education quality or reform the system (Deng & Jing, 2013). This cannot be separated from the general social climate where the voices of people with disabilities have been habitually ignored. Jiang and Xin (2017) write that the Chinese society has not yet formed a widespread inclusive culture that respects people with disabilities, sees them in a positive light, or treats them well and fairly. Rather, a traditionalist view of people with disabilities only as dependents still dominates the public discourse (Zhang, 2016a). In such a context, policy-makers, school managers, and individual teachers can often be oblivious of what 'inclusive education' means, theoretically and practically. The attitudes dominate among adults who have attended segregated schools.

Thus, inclusive education needs to be more commonly understood, informed by research. I hope the work may unsettle and problematise some taken-for-granted beliefs regarding children with SEND in education, draw attention to alternatives and possibilities, and create conversations on inclusion within the wider educational discourse in China, so as to move towards a more inclusive education system.

1.4 Notes on Terminology and Language

For clarity, I acknowledge and outline the complexity and ambiguity of some key terms and how I use them throughout the thesis. These include 'inclusion/inclusive education', 'children with SEND/disabilities', 'learning difficulties', 'China', and 'mainstream schools'.

Inclusion/inclusive education does not have a single unitary definition (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002; Slee, 2006; Norwich, 2008). In a broad sense, inclusion is about all learners. UNESCO (2005, 13) defines inclusion as "a

process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education”. This highlights that inclusion identifies and removes “all forms of oppression” and promotes “inclusion, equity and the celebration of difference with dignity” as fundamental values in society (Barton & Armstrong, 1999, 7). In a narrow sense, inclusive education has its origins in special needs education (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010; UNESCO, 2014). It means “all students being educated where they would be educated if they did not have a disability with necessary supports provided to students, educators, and families so that all can be successful” (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2006, 4). It emphasises making mainstream education accessible for children with disabilities in a high-quality way where multi-dimensional aspects such as physical attendance, meaningful participation, learner diversity, educational equity are taken into account, so that all children may enjoy equal opportunities and resources to realise their full potential (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Hornby, 2015; Kershner, 2009; Oliver, 1992). In this thesis, unless otherwise specified in texts, I use ‘inclusion/inclusive education’ in the narrow sense. This is consistent with the scope of this study. The term ‘special and inclusive education’ is also used to indicate this scope. By using the term in its narrow sense, I do not exclude or reject its broad meaning. I also highlight the importance of seeing inclusion as for all children in its broad sense throughout the findings chapters and final conclusion.

Children with SEND refers to children aged six to 14 who are identified as having disabilities, impairments, learning difficulties, or special educational needs / additional learning needs, both with and without a medical diagnosis. This is in line with UNESCO’s (2017, 7) description, that special educational needs is “a term used in some countries to refer to children with impairments that are seen as requiring additional support”. *Children with disabilities* or *children with a recognised disability* are also used in some contexts to particularly mean children with a medical diagnosis of disability within the official seven categories in China (see chapter 1.2). This is because in China the concept of SEND does not exist in official discourses. The term used in special education official documents is ‘disability’. Under the Chinese special education policy, children with additional educational needs without medical diagnoses are

not considered to be within the scope of special education. Yet they nevertheless experience educational exclusion within mainstream schools. This is within the scope of concerns of this thesis. 'Children with SEND' is thus generally used to refer to the subjects of exclusion/inclusion investigated in this thesis. It does not distinguish specific kinds or severities of needs, because the study takes the macro standpoints of policy, culture, structures, politics, and social theories, where specific needs are irrelevant to the points of discussion unless otherwise specified in texts. Further, this thesis has reservations in the use of the label 'children with SEND'. The label is only used for the convenience of analysis. Its deconstructed meaning is explained in chapter 3.1.1 by applying the CR framework of 'stratified ontology'. The conclusion also offers a detailed conceptualisation of a 'critical realist model of disability' in chapter 9.3.2.

Learning difficulties is used to replace 'intellectual disabilities'. People with a medically diagnosed Intellectual Quotient (IQ) below 70 are described in Chinese official documents as having intellectual disabilities (智力残疾 *zhili canji*) (China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF), 1995). In the Chinese language, variations of the term such as 智障 *zhizhang* and 弱智 *ruozhi* are derogatory and often used as insults. This stigmatising nature is the opposite of inclusion that this thesis seeks to support. Thus, 'learning difficulties' is used instead.

China refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC) (1949 -), not including the territory of Taiwan and Special Administrative Regions of Macao and Hong Kong for the reason of different educational authorities and political systems. 'Ancient China' is also used to refer to the period before 221 BCE.

Mainstream schools refer to state-run regular schools under compulsory education (primary and secondary schools) as opposed to special schools, alternative schools, or private schools. The equivalence of 'mainstream school' in China can be translated word-for-word as 'regular school' (*putong xuexiao*, 普通学校), making the latter term more appropriate in the Chinese context. However, 'regular school' implies that its alternatives such as special schools would be 'irregular', which may connote 'abnormality'. This language reinforces

the medical deficit model in special education, which this thesis in part critiques. Thus, 'mainstream school' is instead used to refer to Chinese 'regular schools'.

In addition, the discussion throughout this thesis engages with the Chinese language wherever appropriate by including Chinese script/characters (汉字 *hanzi*) and/or Romanised script (拼音 *pinyin*). This aligns with Singh's (2009, 2010) approach to using Chinese language to theorise: the use of Chinese words by Chinese research students may have "enhanced potency as theoretical tools for analysing evidence" (Singh & Meng, 2013, 908).

1.5 Personal Context

It is common in qualitative research for researchers to provide a personal context for readers to understand the value and validity of the work, as researchers' inner drives and social stances may influence their analytical interpretations.

Broadly, I have an insider view of the research site as a Chinese citizen who grew up in China. I also have an outsider view as an educational researcher trained at British universities. These positions allow me a reflexive and critical lens in my research.

Specifically, here I reflect briefly on what has drawn me to research in the field of special and inclusive education. I started my academic background in foreign languages and translation studies, which are not directly related to the present field. From October 2012 to July 2013, I had the opportunity to work for a charity, looking after adults with severe learning difficulties in a residential community in a remote mountain area in Perthshire, Scotland. Since my academic background (both undergraduate and postgraduate) had been in modern languages and linguistics, it was my first personal and professional experience with people with disabilities. Growing up in a comfortable environment in a major sized city in China, from primary school to university, I did not recall seeing any students with disabilities in my schools, as they were likely to be systematically excluded from the mainstream education. It was as if they did not exist.

However, the experience in Scotland made me vividly realise for the first time in my life, what daily lives could be like for someone with disabilities. They may live hidden away because the social and public environments may not be so friendly and inclusive. However, from working with many residents, I came to know and understand their wish to live among the 'normal' people, to be as equal a member of the wider society as anyone else.⁵ Especially having lived with the residents for ten months and knowing the lovely persons they were beyond their so-called 'disabilities', I felt increasingly troubled by the injustice such people often experience in the wider society.

The charity I worked with also ran special residential schools for children. After visiting a few, I became more and more interested in special education. I then did a case study research with one of the charity-run special schools in England for my MPhil degree at the University of Cambridge from 2013-2014. Two of the papers I wrote based on my MPhil thesis were later published through the Cambridge Open-Review Educational Research e-Journal in 2015.

Having now learned much about disability, special and inclusive education, I came to know that in the wider society, for example, in England, people with learning disabilities are one of the four most disadvantaged groups (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016), and 180 disability hate crimes can be committed every day (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012). In China, people with disabilities who live independently and are considered able to work are much more likely to be excluded from the job market, leading to a 10.8 per cent registered unemployment rate for people with disabilities in 2013, which was much higher than the average 4.1 per cent for the general public (CDPF, 2014). In terms of education, children are often divided into those with disabilities who are likely to be denied a mainstream education, and the remaining majority in mainstream schools who are considered 'normal'.

Now that I thought back to when I was at school in China, I realised that some of my classmates and friends who were often called 'stupid', 'lazy', or 'a bad student' by teachers because 'they could not learn' may have had

⁵ Within the residential community of the charity, we were called 'co-workers' and adults with severe learning difficulties were referred to as 'residents', not other names such as 'people with disabilities' or 'patients'.

additional educational needs that were never identified let alone met. Yet for those who were identified with a disability, they were nowhere to be seen in mainstream schools. The heavy academic pressure and competitive examinations I was used to did not make me question teachers' often harsh scolding of the 'low-achievers' and the routine practice of 'grade shaming' (students were ranked according to exam grades and the bottom ones may be scolded while the top ones praised publicly in class by teachers). It was as if schools were all about scoring high in exams. This inevitably has influenced us school children back then to apply similar attitudes in our relationships with others, such as seeing such-and-such as 'a good student' or 'a bad student' primarily based on their exam grades.

It is this narrow emphasis on academic competition in the exam-centred education and the social injustice towards disability experienced by many people who I have cared about that acted as motivations for me to pursue further research into this field of special and inclusive education. If education can serve as the engine to transform society for the better, it seems clear that children of all abilities should have the chance to study together as equals from a young age, not just for scoring high in exams but rather, more humanistically, for equal standing as citizens and personal growth. This would teach 'normal' students to think more inclusively and see their peers with disabilities as friends, and future work colleagues and partners. This would also grant to all the chance to experience what I have experienced and learned from people with disabilities: patience, responsibility, commitment, empathy, contentment, and love. After all, more money and more advanced technologies do not necessarily make a society more equal and just. It is the human elements like these that may do.

1.6 Researchers' Values – To Care or Not to Care

The above personal context shows that I have a value judgement of preferring inclusion. It is necessary to further explain my positions.

As Weber (1946, 146) writes, "whenever the person of science introduces his [sic] personal value judgment, a full understanding of the facts

ceases". Facts and values have been mostly treated as incompatible in scientific inquiry. In social science research, to be objective usually means to resist value judgments. However, this position has been increasingly challenged by critical realist philosophers (Anderson, 2004; Bhaskar, 1998, 2008a, 2008b; Collier 1999; Sayer, 2017). Sayer (2017, 471) argues that value judgments are "necessary for objective description in social science" because social science studies "living, sentient beings who are capable of suffering or flourishing...[and they] must have things that are good or bad for them". Qualitative social research cannot and need not claim to be value-free. Instead, what must be clarified is that value judgments are not dogmatically held and used to distort findings and analysis.

In this study, values are an integral part not only because they have drawn me into this research, but also because educational exclusion and inclusion inevitably entail suffering and flourishing. One cannot discuss them pretending not to attach any values. On the contrary, values in parts can illuminate and prompt unnoticed facts to be revealed (Anderson, 2004). Having said that, my thesis is by no means based on the simple evaluative assumption that 'inclusion is good and exclusion is bad'. I believe in the fundamental inclusive principles, but I also acknowledge that ineffective placements in the name of inclusion are as worrying as educational segregation. I try to be fair and impartial in interpreting evidence by considering competing interests from different perspectives. This is partly reflected in the multi-disciplinary lens I took in the analysis.

The thesis does not claim to have the answers to making inclusion work. Rather, it aims to create knowledge about deeply contextualised inclusive education in China and to provide a resource for future practical change. I do not offer any prescriptive solutions, nor claim to know or have the capacity to know how the world ought to be changed. Bearing in mind that all knowledge is fallible, instead, I intend to illustrate in my thesis the provisional real processes beneath individuals' lived experiences and social phenomena, and to draw attention onto and debates over the often-unacknowledged causes behind them. This aligns with Edwards' (2018, 39) position that "the task of social science is to identify options and debate them, but not to adjudicate on choices that in fact get made".

1.7 Organisation of Thesis

This chapter has introduced the main aims, rationales, contexts, researcher stance, and terms. Chapter two begins with a review of key concepts, theories, policies, and research to further define the intellectual scope of this research as well as to contextualise this thesis within the Chinese policy and education system. The discussion involves justifying inclusive education as a human right requirement and common global endeavour, clarifying the problems within the segregated educational provisions, highlighting the educational, economic, and social benefits of inclusive education in practical terms, acknowledging the complex problems inclusion faces in terms of neoliberal education policies, curriculum, attitudes, and pedagogy. The literature review then more specifically focuses on inclusive education in China, by exploring the situated meaning of the concept in the local language, discourse, policy, and practices. The review identifies the exclusion of children with SEND as a pressing and persisting problem within the Chinese education system, where the wider context of cultures, policies, and structures demonstrate aspects that contribute to the excluding and segregating nature of mainstream schools. These constitute main areas that need to be investigated during the course of the research.

Chapter three explains the methodology guided by CR and details the qualitative research design involving interviews, observations, and policy analysis. Specific CR tools of 'stratified ontology' and 'four-planar social being' are introduced as the analytical frameworks. This assists the aim to offer a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms behind the educational exclusion/inclusion phenomenon. Ethics and limitations of the study are considered.

Chapter four is the first among the five following findings chapters. It explores teachers' understanding of 'inclusion' and possible reasons behind using the CR stratified ontology. This helps to provide conceptualisation and contexts for further discussions regarding practices, structures, and values. Two main themes arise: those who interpret inclusion as mere integration, emphasising physical attendance, assimilation, norms, and collectivistic values, and those who see inclusion as meaningful education, highlighting love as pedagogy and celebrating diversity. For most teachers, 'inclusion' is a rather

alien and airy-fairy theory. In such a context, traditional Chinese culture and effective school leadership are found to offer strengths and guidance for individual teachers to practise inclusion despite the unhelpful policy environment.

Chapter five is the first among the four following findings chapters that use the CR framework of four-planar social being. This chapter looks at the physical aspects of inclusion. Children's experience with their physical world involves their continuous access to mainstream schools, the mobility conditions of the architectural design within campus, availability and usage of specialist resource rooms, and the arrangement of the learning space in classrooms. Discussions highlight that children need to be seen as having learning bodies as well as learning minds. The most basic level of practising inclusion in the physical world cannot be neglected.

Chapter six examines the interpersonal level of inclusion. Examples of non-inclusive interactions are recorded and explored to offer a deeper understanding of teachers' negligence, negative interventions, and rejections regarding children with SEND. Other teachers' inclusive strategies of accepting differences, positive reinforcement, and peer support are also discussed to illustrate the possibilities and practicality of inclusion within the constraints of the current education system. The chapter points to the need for student-centred teaching where children are valued as active learners, learning resources, and contributors to education. Also highlighted is the importance of seeing inclusion as a process of community building for all school members. In this, teachers' empowerment and wellbeing need to be valued.

Chapter seven focuses on the structural level of inclusion. Six structural barriers are identified: neoliberal education policies, *Gaokao* (national college entrance examination), teacher evaluation system, *bianzhi* (staffing quota system), *yi jiao jiehe* (the 'combining medicine with education' policy), and the finance of special and inclusive education. The chapter demonstrates how educational structures and sub-structures interlock and reinforce one another, and how they can be powerful in shaping educator's inclusive or non-inclusive views and practices.

Chapter eight explores the inner being level of inclusion. This involves values, concerns, and motives that drive individuals either to practise inclusion despite difficulties or to reject inclusion by preferring other competing values. Themes of career motivation, the shame culture, equality, and rights are discussed to offer further insights into what drives teachers' inclusive and non-inclusive views and practices. These point to the reality that teachers' belief in inclusive values can be vital for inclusion to work. Further, Confucianism is highlighted as a main point of investigation that can offer moral and philosophical underpinning for conceptualising and practising inclusion in China

Finally, chapter nine concludes the thesis by first reviewing and drawing together the primary arguments. Then the meaning of inclusion for Chinese primary schools is further considered in the bigger picture of the wider society. Next, original contribution is discussed in terms of using Confucianism in inclusion and suggesting CR models of disability and inclusive education. They may help to reconcile the theoretical conflicts between the medical and social models of disability. The chapter then discusses implications for the way forward before suggesting areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the theoretical debates, key policies, and academic research that animate the field of special and inclusive education internationally and in China. My interest in inclusive education research lies within better understanding what inclusion may mean for Chinese primary schools by uncovering the underlying causes behind how the inclusion for children with SEND can be viewed and enacted in Chinese primary schools. This may create space for further improving inclusion so as to contribute to educational equality, social justice, and children's rights. The guiding questions in this literature review include: *How is inclusion justified? What theories and policies of inclusion inform the practice of inclusive schools for children with SEND? What are the main barriers hindering inclusion from further developing? How is inclusion generally understood, developed, and practised in China?*

To answer these questions, I turn first to explore the theories, policies, practices, and key issues of inclusion in the international context. Then I move onto a review of inclusive education in China - its linguistic and cultural understanding, its policies and historical development, and its recent research and current trend.

2.1 Justifying Inclusive Education

Inclusion is primarily driven by concerns for children's right to education. Historically, children with disabilities have often been seen as 'uneducable' and routinely denied access to formal education. In the 1900s, special education as a sub-system of formal education started to develop first in the West as a then-revolutionary idea to provide some form of public education for children with disabilities. Residential schools for blind and deaf children, and sub-normality hospitals for 'ineducable' children with learning difficulties were part of eugenic efforts to reinforce their life-long segregation from mainstream society (Quicke, Beasley & Morrison, 1990). By the mid-twentieth century it began to be recognised that as "everyone has the right to education" (UN, 1948, Article 26).

Special education was first informed and dominated by the medical model of disability, which finds faults within the individuals by their deficits and sees them as tragic victims with illness to be cured (Allan, 1999; Barton, 1993; Brisenden, 1986; Slee, 1998; Tomlinson, 1982). It is essentially a “discourse of deviance” (Skidmore, 2004, 113) that constructs the notion of abnormality/ normality, divides the school population into those with SEND and without, and creates the illusion of certain children belonging to certain places of certain expertise.

Stimulated by the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s, segregated education for children with disabilities began to be questioned, and themes of ‘integration’ or ‘mainstreaming’ increasingly entered education policies. Since the 1980s, the medical model has been challenged by the social model of disability, which, developed by people with disabilities, argues that disability is a socially constructed concept based on contingent social beliefs (Allan, 1999; Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare & Watson, 1997; Slee, 1998). The social model sees the main disablers not within personal impairments, but rather as the prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion in the social contexts. It aims for social and political change where people with disabilities are equally valued as participating citizens and their rights and dignity respected (Alderson & Goodey, 2018; Finkelstein, 2004).

Debates over a social model of disability were accompanied by major international legal and policy progress regarding education for children with disabilities. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (UN, 1989), ratified by every country except the USA, specifies that children with disabilities have the right to education on the basis of equal opportunity without discrimination. It highlights that their social inclusion should be promoted as fully as possible:

“to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.” (*ibid.*, Article 23)

In the following year, to ensure access to basic and high-quality education for all children, the agenda of Education for All (EFA) was initiated at the 1990 Jomtien Conference. It laid the foundation for the concept of inclusive education to become a global commitment to be endorsed by 92 governments in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). The statement provided a framework for policy and practice towards EFA, and established the fundamental principle of education as that “all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have” (*ibid.*, para. 7). It maintained that inclusive schools are:

“the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.” (*ibid.*, ix)

As inclusion became a global theme in education, ‘disability’ was also increasingly understood in terms of the social model. For example, the WHO (2002) officially adopted the social model, viewing disability as a political rather than an individual issue: “on the social model, disability demands a political response, since the problem is created by an unaccommodating physical environment brought about by attitudes and other features of the social environment” (*ibid.*, 9). Similarly, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) (UN, 2006, Article 1) describes ‘disability’ as:

“those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

The CRPD further affirmed that inclusive education is a human right (UN, 2006). It stressed the right of persons with disabilities to education and specified that children with disabilities should not be excluded from a regular primary education because of their disabilities. It maintained that these children should be able to “access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and

secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live” (Article 24). A rights-based model of disability stresses independence, self-reliance, dignity, and wants instead of needs (Fulcher, 1999). It advocates that a basic right and matter of social equality is for every child to be educated alongside their mainstream peers (Allan *et al.*, 2006; Florian, Rose & Tilstone, 1998; Lindsay, 2007).

Recently, the global commitment to inclusive education has been reiterated in the fourth Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), which explicitly aims to ensure “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (*ibid.*, 14). This vision has also been reaffirmed in the *Incheon Declaration* at the World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2015a), which maintains a humanistic stance on education and development that is “based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability” (*ibid.*, 6).

However, doubts about inclusion exist despite the consensus of it being a human right. Main objections involve its practicality in meeting needs. For example, Lindsay (1997) notes that apart from the right to be included in mainstream schools, children also have the right to receive an appropriate education that is most suited to their needs. In other words, in the shadow of the rights discourse, the language of needs may be neglected (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). In this regard, Kauffman (1992, v) questions:

“under what condition, if any, is an approach to education ‘right’ even if it doesn’t work? Can education or treatment be morally ‘right’ if it provides no benefit, even if it does harm? Are we to assume that what is ‘right’ for most students is ‘right’ for all, regardless of benefit or harm in the individual case?”

Such doubts have been apparent in the UK: Warnock, who advocated a more inclusive school system (Department of Education and Science, 1978), changed her mind after 30 years and called for a review of the inclusion policy (Warnock & Norwich, 2010): inclusion is not all children educated under the same roof, and special schools may be the best and only option for some

children, as “what is a manifest good in society, and what it is my right to have...may not be what is best for me as a schoolchild” (*ibid.*, 36).

Thus, despite the global official recognition of inclusion as a human right and an integral theme of education (UN, 1989, 2006, 2015; UNESCO, 1994, 2015a), the process of practising inclusion has been accompanied by challenges and resistance. Ineffective approaches to inclusion may often lead to the quick conclusion of the fundamental philosophy of inclusion being flawed or the preference of special schools being better alternatives. Yet inadequate inclusion provisions do not logically entail that special schools are better – they may be worse. The next section hence discusses how segregated education is inherently problematic.

2.2 Debating Segregated Education

The broad principles of the UNCRC are often interpreted and applied differently depending on the values and traditions in local contexts. At times there is “confusion and disagreement about how best to honour children’s rights” (Alderson, 2008, 19). Special schools may be supported in terms of their positive practical impacts. For example, Harris and colleagues (2008) find that for children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, special schools have significant beneficial effects on pupils’ trust, self-esteem, ability to deal with difficult feelings, and behaviour in class and at home. Reed and colleagues (2012) observe that children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in special schools have demonstrated better performance in terms of behavioural and social outcomes than children with ASD in mainstream schools. Similarly, Cook and colleagues (2016) investigate experiences of friendships, bullying, and learning of pupils with ASD in mainstream and special schools in England, and conclude that special schools may better facilitate social interactions and cope with bullying. Thus, in this sense, special schools can be seen as fulfilling a child’s right to a suitable and beneficial education regardless of where the location is. In this regard, Lindsay and colleagues (2016) conclude in their large-scale study interviewing parents of children with language impairment or ASD in England that it is the quality of provision that matters, not the location

per se. Similarly, researchers (Allan & Brown, 2001; Qu, 2015) have found that a broader notion of inclusion interpreted by special school staff and pupils sees special schools also as 'inclusive' environments where pupils have the sense of belonging, achievements, progress, and enjoyment in learning.

Admittedly, special education has been acknowledged as having historical benefits for a developing industrial society, for the normal mass education system, and for encouraging new areas of medical expertise (Tomlinson, 1982). Yet its deeper assumptions cannot be left unquestioned. Three movements helped to give rise to special education - social Darwinism (eugenics), psychometrics (the measuring of IQ), and scientism (positivism) (Thomas, 2014). Eugenics (Galton, 1869), which, obsessed with the elimination of the 'defectives', maintained a discourse that children with disabilities cannot excel and do not deserve to thrive in mainstream schools or society. IQ measuring created a 'sub-class of the intellectually disabled', a concept in part culturally and politically constructed to reinforce the identity and legitimacy of the elite in-group and the exclusion of the disabled out-group (Goodey, 2017). Positivism values objective and quantitatively measured knowledge over subjective and qualitative knowledge. It ignores the parents' and children's own perspectives in education and instead assumes that experts must know better what is good for them. This often involves seeing children with SEND as needing certain expertise outside mainstream schools' capacity and hence necessitating segregated provisions.

Following these deep assumptions, special schools have problematic social implications. Firstly, far from a simple form of education like other alternative schools outside the mainstream such as Wardolf, Montessori, and Froebel schools, special schools often have a stigmatising nature and are deemed as sites of discrimination and oppression (Barton, 1997). A segregated education is not only characterised by low expectations of students and limited curriculum experiences (Ware, 2014), it also "creates a permanent underclass of students and conveys a strong message to those students that they do not measure up, fit in, or belong" (Falvey & Givner, 2005, 5). Alderson (2018, 183, 186) criticises segregated education for excluding its pupils from "the public polity and economy", carrying "powerful messages about the purpose of

schools, and of education, and of the kind of society students can expect to belong to”.

As special schools are fewer in number and less known to the locals, attendance at remote special schools often leads to the removal of the pupils from their families, friends, and communities from a young age. This alienation teaches children to live segregated childhoods (‘special’ versus ‘normal’) and creates and reinforces stigma and ignorance surrounding the children who are considered ‘special’. In this regard, Shaw (2017) concludes after a literature review that special schools have a negative impact on stigmatising children with SEND and also their parents and teachers. Broomhead (2016) particularly highlights that special school teachers experience stigma in that they are surrounded by the discourse of care rather than education, and hence may not be perceived as ‘proper’ teachers. This begs the question that to what extent are special schools educational institutions if there are no ‘proper’ teachers.

In addition, special schools are a form of segregation of students by attainment, which has long been a controversial area in global research. Studies have frequently found a negative impact of ability grouping on all groups, and particularly on children in low attainment groups in terms of learner identities, self-confidence, educational experiences, and learning outcomes (Francis & Wong, 2013; Francis *et al.*, 2016; Johnston & Wildy, 2016; Slavin, 1990). Ability grouping not only may trigger negative self-fulfilling prophecies within individual children, but it is also a significant social justice issue, as it often deepens disadvantage and leads to inequality. Children with SEND are already disadvantaged in that they require additional learning support. Special schools, which often reinforce stigmatisation and offer education of questionable quality, may mean a further disadvantage for these children. Concerning this, there is “a huge body of literature” (Rice, 2003, 460) arguing that children with SEND do not necessarily fare better in special schools. Peaston (2011) questions the efficacy of special schools and finds that scientifically predicted effective teaching methods in special education may often not be effective in actual teaching settings, as teachers may constantly face unpredictable challenges from a range of needs. Similarly, Scruggs and Mastropieri (2015) observe that in special schools, not only is the curriculum limited, but the expectations, pace, and intensity of teaching are also often at a

lower level than those in a regular setting. These arrangements may make children feel emotionally happier but being less challenged may not help them in the longer term.

Thus, as Paul and colleagues (2007) contend, special education is not the direct result of what has been known about children with disabilities and how to teach them effectively, but rather a reflection of society's wish to keep the children who are excluded from the mainstream education within school institutions. This is affirmed in the study by Kelly and colleagues (2014), who surveyed 54 headteachers in Ireland and concluded that the increased transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools is more of a passive choice in that mainstream schools have failed to meet the children's needs or to provide adequate access to health resources, rather than an active decision due to special schools being superior or beneficial. In short, as Dessent (1987, 97) argues, special schools "exist because of the limitations of ordinary schools in providing for the full range of abilities and disabilities amongst children". Further, skilled teachers and resources in mainstream schools, to assist children with identified SEND, can also benefit many borderline children with extra needs, who are neglected if they are treated as fully 'normal' (Alderson, 2018).

The next section further explains the inclusion imperative by discussing its practical benefits.

2.3 The Benefits of Inclusion

Inclusion has multiple practical benefits. UNESCO (2009) highlights that inclusion has main benefits in educational, economic, and social terms. First, academically, an inclusive setting presents opportunities for children with SEND to engage in activities that challenge them to aim high in academic performance. A multitude of studies has articulated that children with SEND have improved academic achievement after being in inclusive rather than segregated educational arrangements (Cole, Waldron & Majd, 2004; Cosier, Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2009; Demeris, Childs & Jordan, 2007; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999). For example, children with Down's syndrome are found to develop greater academic skills in mainstream schools than in

segregated provisions (Buckley *et al.*, 2006; de Graaf, van Hove & Haveman, 2013; Turner, Alborz & Gayle, 2008). Carter and colleagues' (2017) study with four American high school students identified with autism in mainstream schools similarly finds that with peer support interventions, academic engagement increased for two students and maintained for one student.

A common concern here may be that inclusion may reduce the quality of education for students without disabilities, as children with SEND may affect others' learning and demand too much of teachers' attention (Kauffman *et al.*, 2005). However, a substantial body of research (Andaya *et al.*, 2015; Gandhi, 2007; Kalambouka *et al.*, 2007; Dessementet & Bless, 2013) does not support such critiques, and instead shows that children with SEND in mainstream schools do not have a negative impact on the academic achievement of the typically developing children. On the contrary, studies (Farrell *et al.*, 2007; McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014) find that typically developing children can benefit from inclusion academically, as effective inclusive schools actively encourage and support teachers to continuously improve their practices to meet the needs of all their students. This reflects the spirit of inclusion, that is, "a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning" (UNESCO, 2005, 12). Thus, from an academic perspective, as many have argued (Allan, 1999; Ainscow, 2007; Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2016; Slee, 2001), by recognising and valuing the diversity of all learners and their equal right to high-quality education, inclusive education promotes the presence, participation, and achievement of all pupils in mainstream classrooms.

Second, economically, UNESCO (1994) states that inclusion increases the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. This position has been reaffirmed in 2009 in that it is "less costly to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specialising in different groups of children" (UNESCO, 2009, 9). Indeed, short-term costs such as teacher training and support, school infrastructure, and curriculum are inevitably incurred when schools first shift to inclusive education. In the long run, however, costs for inclusion can be minimised by drawing upon existing resources, staff, and facilities in

mainstream settings. This has been frequently acknowledged by UNESCO (1994, 2009, 2011) and also supported by research evidence (Choudhuri, 2005; Cobley, 2013; Metts, 2000).

In addition, an inclusive education system can empower students with SEND to become more economically active citizens in their adult life. Studies (Lamichhane & Sawada, 2013; Shogren *et al.*, 2007; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003) have found inclusive provisions to have a strong positive impact on employment prospects for children with disabilities. In contrast, segregated education tends to isolate these children academically, socially, and physically from the wider society, which makes it harder for them to find jobs when they enter adulthood. For example, when children with disabilities grew up and entered the labour market, those who attended special schools were found to be more disadvantaged than those in mainstream schools when seeking employment (Slee, 2010). Similarly, a systematic review by Banks and Keogh (2016) finds a statistically significant correlation between disability and unemployment. The macro-economic losses of this are assessed by Buckup (2009) in a study based on ten low- and middle- income countries. The conclusion is that the economic losses of excluding people with disabilities from work can range from three to seven per cent of the individual countries' GDP. This is a significant amount considering that the world average GDP growth rate was 1.97 from 2016-2017 (World Bank, 2018a). Thus, from an economic perspective, inclusive education is desirable not only in that it is the most cost-effective way to structure the public education system, it is also a win-win for both individuals and the society, as the economic contributions of people with disabilities can increase while their dependence on public expenditures on social care decreases.

Third, socially, inclusive schools can better prepare children with SEND to socially join in the mainstream society after they leave school, as all children are used to and encouraged to live, learn and play together in an inclusive environment from a young age (Alderson, 2013; Alderson & Goodey, 1998/2018; Allan, 2009; Pearson, 2016). For example, research (Banda, Hart & Liu-Gitz, 2010; Nelson *et al.*, 2007; Owen-DeSchryver *et al.*, 2008) find that children with autism can improve their social skills in inclusive settings as they tend to imitate their peers with more developed social skills when the children

interact. Similarly, children with disabilities in inclusive settings are found to be more likely to have positive social behaviours and develop friendship than their peers in segregated schools (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Strain *et al.*, 2009; Tsao *et al.*, 2008).

In addition, for the typically developing children, inclusion brings benefits in that when consistently exposed to an inclusive and diverse environment from an early age, these children may develop greater acceptance and more positive views towards their peers with disabilities. For example, Tuersley-Dixon and Frederickson (2016) assess the social inclusion of 20 children with complex needs attending mainstream schools in England, and conclude that increased visibility of disability may lead to greater peer acceptance. Georgiadi and colleagues (2012) similarly find that in Greece, typically developing children from inclusive settings tend to have more positive attitudes towards their peers with SEND. Fisher and colleagues (2002) reviewed multiple studies on the benefits of inclusive schools and found strong evidence to suggest that the diverse environments in inclusive schools not only help children with disabilities improve learning outcomes and communication skills, their mainstream peers also tend to become more tolerant and understanding. In this light, UNESCO (2009) highlights that an inclusive classroom may help children improve social participation, and at the same time raise awareness of disability to reduce the negative effects of labelling. Allan (2009, 245) similarly argues that children who are exposed to opportunities to “engage with, and critically evaluate, diversity and inclusion” understand others better as well as themselves. Thus, from a social perspective, as Shaw (2017, 304) highlights, one of the major benefits of inclusion may be the “creation of an equal society free from discrimination, which benefits the ‘non-disabled’ child and society as a whole”.

Therefore, multiple practical benefits point to the importance for schools to continuously commit to inclusion. This is not only because, “in the long run, the most disadvantaged are clearly best served by a non-discriminating and fully inclusive education system” (UNICEF, 2007, 100); it is also because learning together in an inclusive environment can help all children learn better, both academically and socially (Yadav, 2015). This has been clearly documented in the example of Essunga, a Swedish municipality that has succeeded in transforming itself within three years from being at the bottom of

the national school league tables to the top, through inclusive education that cultivated “a collective regard and responsibility for one another” (Allan & Persson, 2016, 93).

Nevertheless, commitment to inclusion does not demand the sudden close-down of all special schools. Rather, it is a gradual process. As the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EADSNE) (2011) suggests, inclusion should be seen as a process of change within a society, environment, and institutions which need to consider and value diversity to a greater degree. At its core, inclusion is a process of coordinated work involving multiple parties that help to strengthen the capacity of education by overcoming barriers in the education system, school management, and daily teaching that may limit the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners. Thus, as many (Baker, 2007; Kauffman, 2015; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; Lindsay, 2007; Warnock & Norwich, 2010) suggest, special schools may still remain a necessary provision as part of today’s inclusive education system, to accommodate children with the most severe and complex needs, and to support mainstream schools in their inclusive efforts. In this regard, the next section discusses difficulties and challenges facing the process of inclusion.

2.4 Wicked Problems in Inclusive Education

Scholars (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008; Winter & O’Rawl, 2010; Winzer & Mazurek, 2009) have pointed out the gaps within translating the philosophical acceptance of the inclusive theories and principles into effective teaching practices. Wicked problems of practising inclusion persist in various aspects such as policy, education system, pedagogy, and attitudes. Wicked problems refer to complex and interdisciplinary bio/socio/economic problems that involve multiple stakeholders’ perceptions (Price, 2016). In the field of special and inclusive education, for example, Armstrong (2017, 230) identifies four categories of wicked problems:

“[1] The adverse flow-on effects of neoliberal educational policies on children or young people with disabilities; [2] Achieving a curriculum which is fit for purpose in meeting the holistic needs of

learners with disability; [3] Responding in an effective way to behaviours by students with a disability which warrant adult concern or action and in a manner which avoids educational exclusion; [and 4] Ensuring that special and inclusive education is a progressive space which adopts ethical and effective pedagogy.”

The concept of wicked problems was first introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973), who critiqued positivist science for failing to provide answers to social problems by neglecting their open-system nature. They suggested that addressing the wicked problems in social policy-making would require a relativist, consensualist approach. However, Price (2016) disagrees with Rittel and Webber’s pessimistic and relativistic assumption of truth, and argues that critical realism (CR) can offer approaches to uncover deep causations and explanations at the level of structures and mechanisms of the wicked problems, where science and values, reality and consensus are all held equally accountable to policy-making. Examples of the CR analysis of the wicked problems identified in this study are discussed in later chapters (four to eight). Here, the following sub-sections unpack the above-mentioned wicked problems in special and inclusive education.

2.4.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, as Harvey (2005, 3) highlights, has become globally accepted “to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world”. It has considerable influence in education. Educational investment may be regarded by the state as a way to gain competitiveness in international economy; individual success or failure is also often interpreted in terms of personal-blame – not working hard enough or not smart enough – rather than public issues such as social structural barriers (*ibid.*). Neoliberal education policies dictate that schools are increasingly about achieving excellence, aiming for high examination passes, securing top places in top universities, and pushing the brightest children to excel while the majority fail. An obsession with international educational ranking such as the

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has exerted immense pressure on schools to increasingly narrowly focus on limited aspects of education, such as on academic achievements in certain subjects (Scott, 2017). As countries internalise their places in the PISA league table as part of their nation's identity, succeeding in such international competitions can be even more important (Scott, 2016).

Writers (Perez, 2015; Wright, 2013) have been arguing that success in school does not necessarily translate into success in adult life. However, the notion of 'ideal pupil model' prevails in the neoliberal reasoning (Dyson, 2005). This makes children with SEND particularly vulnerable to be further stigmatised, marginalised, and disadvantaged, as they tend to be viewed as less promising and competitive in their academic performance and the economic contribution due to their 'individual deficit'. Research (Lloyd, 2008; Slee, 2011) suggest that neoliberal educational policies can be an important reason for the increased exclusion of pupils from mainstream schools into special schools, as these policies emphasise academic outcomes and international school ranking. In particular, Norwich (2014) and Slee (2013) connect the exclusion of children with SEND to their perceived negative impact on school performance records. Furthermore, Valle and colleagues (2011) argue that neoliberal education policies may increase pressures and administrative workloads on teachers and reduce their capacities to provide extra support to students with SEND. Norwich (2014) also highlights that governments' political economy often exerts great pressure on schools to raise standards, and so leaves less room for children with SEND in mainstream settings.

The neoliberal orthodox in education hence poses a powerful structural barrier to inclusion. Neoliberal education policies have been increasingly concerned with performativity, privatisation, marketization, and the enterprising individual (Apple, 2011). This has created great social disparities and inequalities. Harvey (2005, 118) similarly highlights that neoliberalisation has "the universal tendency to increase social inequality and to expose the least fortunate elements in any society...to the chill winds of austerity and the dull fate of increasing marginalization". The hierarchy and competition in the education system stimulated by neoliberal principles thus rather contradict the philosophy of equality in inclusive education (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Yu,

2014; Rioux, 2014). Neoliberal education policies as a structural barrier to inclusion in Chinese schools will be further discussed in chapter 7.1.

2.4.2 Curriculum

Inclusion necessarily requires a meaningful curriculum broader than what is typically available. Traditionally, curricula around the world have been designed for the majority of the typically developing children, focusing primarily on teaching academic skills and implicitly cultivating other soft skills such as interpersonal, study, organisational, test-taking and living skills. Yet for children with SEND, the hidden curriculum of soft skills may need to be taught explicitly alongside the academic subjects. An inclusive curriculum for children with SEND, as Alexander (2012, 2) warns, should avoid narrowly “mimicking the curricula of PISA high performers” and be accompanied by assessments that are conducive to learning. Furthermore, Carter and colleagues (2012) suggest that such a curriculum should be both relevant to children’s own needs, lives, and aspirations as well as preparing them for their future employment.

Curriculum development first and foremost requires the educational aims and objectives to be set out to inform the kind of “knowledge, skills and dispositions” that an education system is designed to promote (Scott, 2016, 157). For inclusion to work, fundamental curriculum reform is needed that moves beyond its transfixion on cognition and performance increasingly reinforced by neoliberalism. Without such reforms, the inclusion process faces multiple curriculum challenges. For example, how to make the curriculum with significant modification implementable and not add substantial additional workload for teachers (Garner & Forbes, 2015), and how the curriculum can be effectively managed by addressing the tension of the dilemmas of difference (Norwich, 2008). The dilemma here is that, on the one hand, children with SEND may be denied opportunities to have learning experiences relevant to their particular needs if they are offered the same curriculum as others, while on the other hand, these children are likely to be denied equal opportunities and seen as a separate inferior status group if they are offered a different curriculum. Without clear answers to these problems, a curriculum can hardly

be truly inclusive. This aspect will be further expanded in chapter 7.2 regarding *Gaokao* (national college entrance examination).

2.4.3 Attitudes

Teachers effectively responding to classroom disruptive behaviours in inclusive and non-stigmatising ways is necessary for inclusion to work. Yet in practice, teachers can often be uninformed in their views about child behaviour (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2014). MacLeod (2006, 155) notes that some teachers may hold negative perceptions about children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and see them as “bad, mad, and sad”. Mand’s (2007) research in Germany also reports that children with behavioural problems can be disliked in both special school and mainstream primary schools. Similarly, Head and colleagues (2002) find in Scotland that the majority of mainstream teachers in the study hold negative views of inclusion and see children with SEND as diverting the resources that could otherwise have been used to better support children who are more willing and able to learn.

Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion are highly relevant to the implementation of inclusive practices (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011). Negative views on SEND are likely to lead to inappropriate use of sanctions for uncompliant behaviours from pupils with SEND, which may further marginalise and stigmatise them in class. This may also raise concerns regarding bullying (Carter & Spencer, 2006; Huefner, 2015; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). In this regard, Fink and colleagues (2015, 618) conclude that “children with SEN are the targets of victimisation at least in part because of their SEN status”. Thus, a key task of inclusion is for teachers to develop the necessary understanding and positive attitudes when responding to challenging behaviours from children with SEND. Teachers’ attitudes will be explored throughout the findings chapters, particularly in chapter eight regarding values and drives.

2.4.4 Pedagogy

Crucial to inclusion is teacher expertise, that is, high-quality, differentiated, and inclusive teaching that meets the needs of children with SEND as well as their typically developing peers. However, challenges arise from developing effective inclusive pedagogy. Scott (2016, 158) notes that pedagogic approaches are “derived from the curriculum standard and not from any summative assessment or evaluation standard or approach”. Without an inclusive curriculum guided by inclusive educational objectives, it is difficult to construct an inclusive pedagogy. Inclusive pedagogy also needs to grapple with the ‘wash-back effects’ of the assessment process such as the growing emphasis on examination under neoliberalism: teaching to the test induces the curriculum to narrow down to become more easily assessed, which in return informs more narrowly delineated pedagogic standard (*ibid.*).

In addition, there is the concern that general education classroom teachers are often not adequately trained to individualise learning for children with SEND or to manage such heterogeneity within classrooms (Costello & Boyle, 2013; Kauffman, 2015; UNESCO, 2001; Webster & Blatchford, 2015). This can be associated with mainstream schools not being sufficiently funded or equipped with the appropriate specialised resources for special education (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Lunt & Evans, 1994; O’Keefe, 2004). Chapters five to seven offer more detailed discussions in this regard.

In short, wicked problems surround the translation of the inclusion principles and research insights into effective practices. To provide answers to these difficult questions, continuous debates and research are needed to offer a deeper understanding that is well-grounded in specific local contexts. The next section thus turns to the key concepts, policies, and general practices of special and inclusive education in China to offer contexts for further analysis in later chapters.

2.5 Inclusive Education in China

The term 'inclusive education' first emerged in the West in the late 1980s (Skrtic, 1991). It entered the Chinese language as *quan na jiaoyu* (全纳教育) in 1993 when translated by Professor Chen Yunying (Xin, 2016a). The meaning of each character is:

全 (*quan*) - fully/all/whole

纳 (*na*) - admit/accept/receive

教 (*jiao*) - teach

育 (*yu*) - nurture/cultivate

The last two characters are formally used in combination to mean 'education' (教育 *jiaoyu*). This word can be found in Chinese dictionaries. The first two characters (全 *quan* and 纳 *na*) are two individual words put together in an attempt to translate a foreign concept, as 全纳 (*quan na*) is not yet a formal word in dictionaries, and hence there is no fixed definition. This allows a leeway of understanding of the translation '*quan na jiaoyu*', which literally means 'all-accepting education'. Possible interpretations include 'admitting all children to school education', 'acknowledging differences and accepting children's individualities', or 'accepting all forms of educational provisions'. Such ambiguity is also a result of the linguistic nature of the Chinese language, where there is often an inductive understanding creating a space intellectually for interpretation and discussion rather than the more delineative nature of European languages where precision is aimed for.

The term *quan na jiaoyu* is often confused with the alternative translation *ronghe jiaoyu* (融合教育). Both translations have been widely used as synonyms with no distinctive difference (Li, 2011). Both terms can be ambiguous. In the latter term, the first two characters constitute a formal word (融合 *ronghe*) that can be found in dictionaries, which means 'to fuse/mix/blend together and become one whole'. In the context of special and inclusive education, it may connote harmony, togetherness, and inclusion; but it can also imply the minority group of children with SEND being integrated and assimilated into the mainstream where all students become one homogenous unit.

Apart from the linguistic ambiguity, the confusion of terms is also apparent in official use. These two terms first appeared in government documents in 2014 (MoE, 2014) when both terms were briefly mentioned but undefined. In one Ministry of Education policy paper (2016), only *quan na jiaoyu* is used. In the same year, a policy paper from the State Council (2016) only used *ronghe jiaoyu*. In the latest official documents (MoE, 2017b; State Council, 2017a, 2017b, 2019), only *ronghe jiaoyu* appears. Internationally, organisations such as UNESCO and UN have been consistently using the translation *quan na jiaoyu* in their Chinese language correspondence. In the Chinese academic circle, both terms appear to have similar popularity. An exact phrase search on CNKI.net - China National Knowledge Infrastructure, an official online platform for academic papers – shows that by the end of 2018, 809 articles contain *quan na jiaoyu* in their titles, while 834 articles contain *ronghe jiaoyu* in their titles. But *ronghe jiaoyu* seems to enjoy much wider popularity in general discussions. An exact phrase search on baidu.com - the most popular online search engine in the Chinese language – returns 6,570,000 entries for *ronghe jiaoyu*, while *quan na jiaoyu* has 1,310,000 entries. This may be to do with that *ronghe jiaoyu* is the preferred term used in areas such as Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The meaning of inclusive education in China has not been officially defined in legal terms until 2017, when inclusion was briefly described as “to integrate the education for disabled students into regular education to the largest extent” (State Council, 2017b, Article 58). Yet this definition appears rather simplistic, generic, and does not offer adequate guidance of significance. It is also an understanding of inclusive education in its narrow sense, which only refers to children with disabilities while ignores the wider social diversity and differences in Chinese schools, such as children from ethnic minority backgrounds or migrant worker families. The deeply excluding nature of the mainstream education system not only affects children with SEND. There are seven million ‘left-behind children’ (留守儿童 *liushou ertong*) - children from migrant worker families who had to stay behind in their home villages without their parents because they did not have the access to schools in the cities where their parents work (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2018). These children, however, are not yet considered part of the official policy discourse regarding inclusive education.

In contrast, the Chinese academic circle offers a relatively more rounded understanding of inclusive education. For example, after a literature review, Sun and Wang (2014) suggest that inclusion is generally understood within the academic circle as a continuous educational process where the society and schools accept all students, stand against discrimination and exclusion, encourage active participation and collaboration, meet different individual needs, and make sure children with SEND receive support and help in various aspects. Huang (2013) argues that the core of inclusive education is that everyone has the equal right to receive education, which necessarily requires that schools equally accept all students, enhance student participation, and adjust curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching materials, so for example students with SEND may “come, stay, and learn” in mainstream schools. Taking it further, Sun and Sun (2016) describe the goal of inclusion as constructing a new social order that promotes diversity, breaks down segregation and marginalisation, and establishes a mechanism of communication.

However, to translate such academic debates into effective practices, difficulties arise from the wider socio-cultural contexts. China is a Confucian heritage culture with a claimed socialist political system. Educators’ views and practices in schools can be greatly influenced by the local traditions, beliefs, ideologies, and governance. For example, collectivism is a strong characteristic in the Chinese culture. It is culturally rooted in Confucianism and politically advocated by the one-party central government (Hawkins, Zhou & Lee 2001). This means large class sizes and strict discipline control can be uncritically, routinely practised in Chinese schools; and uniformity can also be valued more than diversity (Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2018). Such practices can be seen as based on a collectivistic understanding of education - “an organised means by which children learn to adapt themselves to the expectations of the larger community. School education is designed to instil in children the norms and expectations of the society” (Cheng, 1998, 15). Individual children with SEND, who may not be able to meet such norms and expectations, can be further disadvantaged, stigmatised and marginalised as ‘failures’ through their own fault.

Further, Confucianism supports a strictly hierarchical social order, where education has been used to cultivate elites for governance. This is clearly reflected in the Confucian saying: 学而优则仕 (*xue er you ze shi*) – “officialdom

is the natural outlet for good scholars” (Analects, 19.13). Education for children with SEND, which is not usually associated with producing elites, can be considered less important and often ignored (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012). The cultural emphasis on social hierarchy also means that people with disabilities are often regarded and treated to be in a weak, subordinate, and obedient social position in need of care, charity, and mercy (Xiong & Deng, 2011). Without seeing children with disabilities as in equal social relationships with others, education can hardly become truly inclusive.

Thus, the international inclusive agenda and culture, which stresses individual growth, equality, and rights for all children, may face difficulties to be accepted, internalised, or practised in the local Chinese culture. These socio-cultural contexts will be expanded and discussed in greater details in later chapters.

The following section first reviews the key development of the inclusion policy in China – *sui ban jiu du* (learning in regular classrooms).

2.5.1 Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC)

Before the concept of inclusive education was translated and introduced into China, spontaneous and voluntary practices of local mainstream schools admitting children with disabilities have been found since the 1950s (Hua, 2003; Piao, 2008; Xiao, 2005). This practice has nowadays been commonly referred to as:

随 班 就 读
sui ban jiu du
follow/with, class, to, read/study

Literally, the term means that a student studies in a class alongside others, but it is routinely translated in official documents as ‘Learning in Regular Classrooms’ (LRC). It means that children with a recognised disability should have access to their neighbourhood mainstream schools, where individualised education suitable to these children's needs should be provided (MoE, 1994).

'LRC' first appeared in government documents in 1987 (MoE, 1987), soon after compulsory education had become a legal requirement (National People's Congress (NPC), 1986/2015). It was stated that there has been a considerable number of children with a mild intellectual disability enrolled in mainstream schools in the past years, and such practices have had beneficial results in terms of improving social interactions between children with and without disabilities; local education authorities (LEAs) should support and improve this form of LRC and consider it as a good example for many more mainstream schools to follow (MoE, 1987). LRC was mentioned twice in paragraph two in the context where it was recognised by the government as an officially acceptable form within compulsory education. It seems to be more of a bottom-up approach of an official recognition of what has been in place for years in hindsight, instead of a top-down innovative reform actively addressing educational segregation and inequality. Nonetheless, this document has legitimised the practice of LRC and provided a foundation for further development of inclusive education in China.

After establishing that by law "the state protects disabled persons' right to education" (NPC, 1990/2017, Article 18), the first clear framework for developing special education was established in 1991: LRC and special units attached to regular schools are the main body and special schools are the backbone (State Council, 1991a). This means that inclusion was not prioritised and that special schools were equally encouraged. Specific and systematic instructions, legal enforcement, financial support, and accountability mechanism were also not in place to guide further development of inclusion (Chang, 2014). Such an ambiguous framework, however, was supported by many (Chen, 2014a; He, 1998; Piao, 2009), who highlight that the rationale behind it is to quickly raise the school enrolment rate among children with disabilities through the expanding scale of special schools as part of the process towards universal primary education. This narrow focus on institutionalising children with disabilities without considering the quality of provisions or the social implications may seem perfunctory and deceiving. It detracts attention from what inclusion means onto mere enrolment rate calculation. It directs a fallacious discourse of 'not as bad as' – children with SEND whose needs are not met in schools are not as bad as those who did not have access to any formal education, and

therefore concerns about the quality of provisions can be dismissed in front of the urgency to increase the quantity of placements. Nevertheless, the policy directions outlined above still indicate a heightened awareness within the government of a need to address the educational requirement of children with disabilities.

In 1994, the on-going practice of LRC became a national policy (MoE, 1994). LRC was deemed as beneficial and a main form of compulsory education for children with disabilities. The policy specifically requires that mainstream schools are responsible for catering for the needs of children with disabilities; schools cannot refuse entry of children with disabilities who are considered able to study on an LRC placement; and assessments of children with an LRC status should orient towards improving their confidence and can be different from those of typically developing students (*ibid.*). However, this document was over-generalising without offering systematic approaches. It does not provide specific support for the local schools as to how they could take on such responsibility administratively, financially, and professionally. Nor does it specify any sufficient accountability mechanism to ensure the wider implementation of LRC. The question of 'who are considered as able to study on an LCR placement' was undefined, and decisions often depended on the goodwill of the individual headteacher. The assessment arrangements for children with an LRC status may also be reduced to simply exempting them from exams.

Two decades later, major systematic national guidelines for special and inclusive education were updated in a milestone policy paper (MoE, 2014). The guidelines include supporting further development of special education infrastructure, reforming school administrative structures regarding teacher employment, increasing the salaries of the teachers who work with children with disabilities, providing special educational teacher training, creating a national curriculum for special education, and giving more freedom to the local governments to reform curriculum and classroom practices according to the local conditions (*ibid.*). It sets a target of 90 per cent enrolment rate into compulsory education for children who are deaf, blind, or have learning difficulties by the end of 2016 (*ibid.*). However, not all children with SEND were eligible for LRC. As for other children with disabilities that fall outside these

three categories, no clear plan has been mentioned. Furthermore, for the three mentioned categories, LRC was not specified as a priority. Special schools may also be promoted as they are part of the compulsory education.

The latest inclusion policy paper (MoE, 2017b) offers further guidance and significant implications for the future of special and inclusive education. It sets a target of 95 per cent enrolment rate into compulsory education for children with a recognised disability by the end of 2020 (*ibid.*). Unlike the previous promotion plan, the latest policy includes all children with a recognised disability rather than the limited three categories. It also explicitly encourages regular schools for the first time to accept children with severe or multiple learning difficulties if it is within the schools' capacity. Other first-time requirements include that special education is incorporated into all teachers' professional qualifying examinations, that local evaluation committees consisting of professionals in education, psychology, healthcare, and social work are established, that textbooks are written according to the national curriculum for special education which was published in 2016 following the first promotion plan, and that specialist educators need to receive no less than 360 hours of teacher training every five years (*ibid.*).

The most important changes in the second promotion plan may be that it updated the framework for developing special education: LRC is the main body; special schools are the backbone; home education⁶ and distant learning are complementary parts; and inclusive education is to be promoted all-around (MoE, 2017b). The new framework unequivocally states inclusion as a priority of developing special education in national policies, making it clear that the transition to inclusive provisions is the ultimate goal of currently having special schools. The plan also explicitly states that a basic principle of special education is to respect differences and encourage diverse development. This signals a breakthrough in the Chinese special education policies. In time, the new framework may gradually change the old mentality that education for children with SEND is mostly concerned with physical access and enrolment rate. Instead, schools and teachers are now encouraged to focus on meeting

⁶ For children with SEND who are unable to travel outside their homes with ease, specialist teachers regularly visit the students' homes and give lessons.

needs, celebrating diversity, and thinking about different educational institutions' social implications such as equality, justice, and rights.

The shift from simply emphasising the practical aspect of LRC to clearly promoting inclusive education in principle can also be seen from the recent legal document (State Council, 2017b). It officially defines the term 'inclusive education' (see p. 52) and establishes it as a legal requirement for the first time. The document specifically states that the quality of special education needs to be improved; inclusive education needs to be actively promoted; and mainstream schools are priority provisions for children with disabilities (*ibid.*). This is a progressive development compared to the previous official statements which were often unclear and unsystematic.

In the latest general education policy, 'inclusion' is highlighted among the eight basic ideas of educational development by 2035 (State Council, 2019). This is the first time that 'inclusion' entered the mainstream education policy discourse as a norm rather than a sub-theme for vulnerable groups. The broad inclusive values are also clear within the other seven basic ideas, namely, morality, all-round development, education for each and everyone, life-long learning, differentiated teaching, knowledge-practice consistency, and togetherness (*ibid.*). Further, "children with disabilities enjoying suitable education" is listed as one of the eight main aims of educational development (*ibid.*). This is the first time that children with disabilities or any minority groups are specifically highlighted as part of the main aim in general educational development. Although what 'suitable education' might be is still undefined, leaving space for non-inclusive practices based on subjective judgements, it nevertheless foregrounds equal concerns of high-quality education for children with disabilities and promotes the much-needed awareness in this regard.

'Inclusion' thus increasingly appears to be a relatively prominent theme within the policy direction of future education in China, both in the narrow sense of children with disabilities, and in the broad sense of high-quality and equal education for each and every child. Although these policies are often strongly value-based and more agenda-setting than offering specific practical guidance, they nonetheless reaffirm government's increasing commitment to educational

equality and diversity. Table 1 below summarises key development of government documents regarding LRC and inclusion discussed above.

Table 1. Key Government Documents regarding LRC and Inclusion

Year	Government Document	Implication
1986	<i>Compulsory Education Law of the PRC</i>	Compulsory education became a legal requirement for all children.
1987	<i>Education Plan for Full-Time Special Schools for the Intellectually Impaired</i>	'LRC' first appeared in government papers.
1990	<i>Law of the PRC on the Protection of Disabled Persons</i>	The right to education of people with disability is legally protected.
1991	<i>Programme for Disabled Persons during the Eighth Five-Year Plan</i>	Framework for developing special and inclusive education was established. Both special and mainstream schools were promoted.
1994	<i>Trial Procedures for Admitting Disabled Children/Teenagers to Regular Classrooms</i>	LRC became a national policy.
2014	<i>Special Education Promotion Plan 2014-2016</i>	Specific guidance and targets for promoting special and inclusive education were updated.
2017	<i>Special Education Promotion Plan 2017-2020</i>	Framework for developing special and inclusive education was updated. Inclusion became a priority.
2017	<i>Regulation on the Education of Persons with Disabilities Amendment</i>	'Inclusive education' was defined and became a legal requirement.
2019	<i>Chinese Education Modernisation 2035</i>	'Inclusion' entered mainstream education discourse as a basic idea of educational development; suitable education for children with disabilities was highlighted as a main aim of general educational development.

To summarise, policies on special and inclusive education in China have progressed over the years from the first official recognition of LRC, to explicitly establishing inclusion as a priority in education for children with SEND, and to indicating inclusion as a basic value for future educational development concerning all children. Admittedly, China's unequivocal commitment to inclusion came relatively late in the global trend (DfE, 2001/2014; IDEA, 2004; UNESCO, 1994). Nevertheless, the increasingly favourable policy environment and discourse have brought possibilities and hopes. Policy papers provide an official foundation on which inclusive education may be further developed. Frequent policy update also serves to maintain a continuous level of engagement.

However, more refined definition and systematic guidance are still needed to improve the quality of provisions and the quantity of placements. There seem to be fundamental contradictions in the ways that inclusive education is understood in the policy language. Key words such as special schools as "backbone", "all-around" inclusive education, and "suitable education" for all, can nonetheless be interpreted in different ways, leaving much flexibility for what provisions can be regarded as inclusive. Segregated schools can be promoted in the name of "suitable" and "inclusive" education. Such contradictions can be seen as partly embedded within how policies have been updated: the changes have mainly been about adding broad 'inclusive agenda' without challenging the old language or ways of thinking. This will be further explored in later chapters regarding the difficulties and barriers to inclusive practices.

The next section looks at the challenges of practising LRC debated in the literature.

2.5.2 LRC in Action

Practising LRC faces multiple challenges. Firstly, LRC has frequently been criticised as merely concerning children's physical integration into the mainstream settings rather than educational and social participation (Peng, 2011; Song & Liu, 2012; Xiao, 2005; Xu & Zhao, 2017). For example, in terms

of academic participation, Guan (2017) surveyed 113 head class teachers from inclusive mainstream schools in Beijing about 151 students on LRC placements in their classes who were identified as having ASD, visual or hearing impairments, or learning difficulties. The study finds that 66.72 per cent of students with learning difficulties and 78.57 per cent of students with ASD were reported to be either completely unengaged or to need constant reminding to engage in learning in class; only 36.26 per cent of the teachers replied that they had paid frequent attention to students with the LRC status; and 73.63 per cent of the teachers said they had focused firstly on classroom order and discipline rather than participation and learning outcomes when paying attention to these students. In terms of social interaction, Liu and Zhang (2017) interviewed 137 typically developing children aged eight and nine from three classes in a rural school in Gansu Province about their attitudes towards their five classmates with physical impairment. Results show very limited active and effective interactions between the two groups of children, and the five pupils with physical impairments appeared to be disliked and rejected by their classmates. This is not only because some children with SEND may lack adequate social skills, but also because typically developing children can be told by their parents to stay away from their peers with LRC status, who are often portrayed as 'defective' and bringing bad influence (Xu & Zhao, 2017). Clearly, practices of the current LRC policy can be merely concerned with children's physical presence and far from being truly inclusive.

Secondly, attitude surveys frequently find that teachers hold negative views towards children with disabilities and the LRC provision. Almost two decades ago, Wei and Yuan's survey (2000) in Beijing with 100 mainstream primary teachers found that only 33 per cent of the respondents agreed that all children should have the equal right to access mainstream classrooms. In 2010, similar results were found in Ma and Tan's survey (2010) in Shanghai with 410 mainstream primary teachers: 80.2 per cent of the respondents thought that children with disabilities should be educated in special schools, even though 77.6 per cent recognised that LRC could help children with disabilities be included and accepted into the wider society, and 61.2 per cent believed that LRC may improve educational equality and human rights conditions. Another survey by Zhong and colleagues (2011) in Beijing with 300 mainstream primary

and secondary school teachers showed that while 59.7 per cent of the respondents recognised that LRC can be beneficial for the non-disabled mainstream students, only 39.7 per cent saw LRC as a good form of education for children with disabilities, and a mere 39.7 per cent were willing to accept these children into their classrooms. More recently, Guan and colleagues (2017) surveyed 303 primary school teachers from six provinces across China and found that 87 per cent of teachers thought that children with autism should attend special schools, and only 11.3 per cent stated their firm support for the LRC provision for these children. These findings reveal a contradictory mentality: on the one hand, educators may see LRC as a good cause in terms of human rights, equality, and children's interests, but on the other hand, they may reject LRC in practice and still think rather negatively that children with disabilities should be segregated into special schools. This contradiction will be further explored in the findings chapters.

Thirdly, inclusion faces systemic barriers. For example, Zhang (2016a) highlights that a reason behind the resistance towards inclusion is the strong competition in Chinese education. Historically, formal education oriented towards the *keju* (Imperial Examination, 605 -1905) was commonly seen as a privilege associated with the elite class. A similar sense of elitism in Chinese education is still obvious today in an education system that seems to be designed for the success of a few instead of all: large class sizes (45 students per class is the standard in the research site city), limited and unbalanced allocation of educational resources, long school hours, an intensely academically oriented curriculum, high stake examinations, and a strong emphasis on ranking (these aspects will be further explored in the findings chapters). As Deng and Liu (2013) highlight, it is not uncommon for 'normal' children to be neglected in class because of their poor academic performance, let alone children with disabilities.

In addition, teachers are frequently found to have limited or no special educational training, often accompanied by their schools' shortage for appropriate and specialised resources (Zhang, 2016a). For example, Ma and Tan's (2010) study in Shanghai, as discussed above, found that only 36.8 per cent of the participants (teachers who teach children on LRC placements in their classes) have ever received training on special education. Similarly,

Chen's (2014b) study in Heilongjiang Province with 33 mainstream primary school teachers who taught LRC students in their classes similarly shows that: only three had received pre-service SEND training; among the nine teacher who had received in-service training, two had regular training and support; and one teacher reported that his/her school was equipped with SEND resources and facilities.

In short, China's inclusive education - currently encapsulated in LRC - faces multiple practical difficulties. Key problems of merely being concerned with children's physical attendance, being perceived negatively by teachers, and inadequate systemic change and support - have complex causes without ready-made, simple answers. These key issues identified in the literature thus form the main foci of the present research and will be further explored throughout the later chapters.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the global debates in the broader field of special and inclusive education, how inclusion has developed in China through the LRC policy, and practical difficulties facing China's inclusive education. By exploring key theories, international documents, Chinese policies, and research evidence, I intend to construct an integrated understanding of the field. I have highlighted critiques of the segregated provisions and the wicked problems facing the current inclusive practices. I remain committed and hopeful that inclusive education is a justified, propitious tool to alleviate discrimination and exclusion of people with disabilities, and to promote social justice, equality, and rights in society. Key within this is to recognise and better support educators as transformative agents in their daily classrooms, to become more aware of and dedicated to inclusion. A starting point may be through fostering a deeply contextualised understanding of what inclusion may mean for Chinese primary schools.

In the chapter that follows, I will overview the research methodology, explain how CR as a meta-theory informs my research design and data analysis process, clarify ethics, and acknowledge limitations of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Educational research in Chinese schools reviewed in the previous chapter often adopts opposing research paradigms of either an interpretivist approach that provides a qualitative understanding of the inclusive experiences and practices (Liu & Zhang, 2017; Song & Liu, 2012; Xu & Zhao, 2017), or a positivist stance that quantitatively measures attainments and surveys attitudes in inclusive settings (Ma & Tan, 2011; Wei & Yuan, 2000; Yan & Deng, 2017). A common focus is to suggest solutions after mapping the current situations through either measuring or interpreting events/phenomena. Yet ‘solutions’ derived in this way may be superficial and perfunctory, as researchers often failed to consider the underpinning causal mechanisms.

Informed by Critical Realism (CR), this study intends to offer a contextualised understanding of the deeper causes behind the resistance towards inclusive education in Chinese primary schools. The following section begins with introducing CR as the research philosophy.

3.1 Choosing Critical Realism as the Research Philosophy

Research is shaped by theories about reality and ways of gaining an understanding of the world. Among the variety of schools of thoughts in social science research, Gorski (2013, 660) identifies that “positivism is the dominant form of orthodoxy, and interpretivism is the dominant form of heterodoxy, and most social scientists position their methodological approaches implicitly or explicitly in relation to these two stances”. A positivist view aims to generalise and discover causal relationships through empirical observation and quantitative measurement of key variables. While an interpretivist perspective stresses the in-depth qualitative understanding of the particularity and is “exploratory”, “open-ended”, “data-driven” and “inductive” (Taber, 2012, 129). In the field of educational research, Hammersley (2012) notes that up until the end of the 1960s, positivist work characterised by topics such as standardised tests, school experiments, observation, survey, and statistical analysis had been

dominant, but more recently there has also been a growth of qualitative research.

However, these opposing research paradigms have been frequently criticised. Danermark and colleagues (2001) highlight that positivist assumptions mainly suit the study of natural science in a closed system, while interpretivist standpoints would reject the reality of social structures and ignore the objective aspects of the world. In the social sciences and especially for inclusive education, phenomena cannot be studied independently of social contexts as they are constantly shaped by various external elements in open systems (Alderson, 2013); nor can studies produce highly relevant analysis of powerful influences if the social structures in the real world are ignored.

Thus, CR was chosen as the research philosophy of the present study. It responds to the problems of positivism and interpretivism. CR accepts the existence of an objective world independent of human perception and the possibility of knowing that independent reality (Bhaskar, 1998, 2008a). It also acknowledges that the intrinsically meaningful social phenomena have to be qualitatively understood (*ibid.*).

Broadly, CR distinguishes between transitive and intransitive dimensions of knowledge. Bhaskar (2008a, 21) argues that the transitive dimension is human thinking, remembering, perceiving, interpreting and the concepts, theories, and laws, which are “the raw materials of science - the artificial objects fashioned into items of knowledge by the science of the day”. In contrast, the intransitive dimension involves “structures, mechanisms and real things, events, possibilities and processes of the world” (*ibid.*, 22) that are independent of human perception. In the transitive dimension, CR acknowledges that the world is not experienced as value-neutral (Collier, 1999; Porpora, 2015; Sayer, 2017), and that there are variations of interpretations of the same event depending on different individual perspectives in different social contexts. Through this fallible knowledge - different observations and experiences, among which, some can be closer than reality than others -, the intransitive objective world can be understood. In this, CR highlights the pitfall of ‘epistemic fallacy’ - collapsing being into knowing, independent ontology into epistemology. The transitive,

fallible knowledge needs to be separated from the intransitive, though changing, objective reality (Bhaskar, 1998, 2008a).

Specifically, this thesis uses two CR frameworks as the analytical tools: the three levels of realities at the Empirical, the Actual, and the Real, and four-planar social being. The next sections describe what they are and how they are applied.

3.1.1 The Empirical, the Actual, and the Real

Bhaskar (1998, 2008a, 2008b) distinguishes three domains of reality as the Empirical, the Actual, and the Real. The surface level of the Empirical refers to humans' observations and experiences of events; the actual is the events that objectively occur independently of subjective perceptions, whether observed or not; and the deep level of the real includes whatever exists, which is only manifested through its causal effect and not directly perceivable. See Table 2 below:

Table 2. Stratified Ontology (Bhaskar, 2008a)

	Domain of Empirical	Domain of Actual	Domain of Real
Experiences	×	×	×
Events		×	×
Mechanisms			×

This stratified ontology distinguishes CR from other research philosophies adhering to a flat ontology such as positivism and interpretivism. Scientific knowledge is seen as a process of disclosing what lies underneath experienced events, and acknowledging that the observed phenomena do not exhaust what could happen or has happened (Sayer, 2000). Critical realists (Archer, 2000, 2003; Bhaskar, 1998, 2008a, 2008b; Gorski, 2013; Porpora, 2015; Sayer, 2000; Scott, 2010) commonly affirm that the central task for CR

researchers is to uncover the structure and generative mechanisms in the real domain.

In this study, the stratified ontology is used as a conceptual tool to structure the data analysis to mindfully look for deeper causes to what has been perceived at the surface level of events. To overview, first, at the Empirical, inclusion is concerned with individuals' learning and teaching experiences, policies and research. Second, the Actual involves all that has happened despite being observed or not. Inclusion involves everyday learning and teaching activities, school organisation and operation. The Actual is also considered by interpretivists, but they reduce the Actual into the intricacy of individuals' meaning-making contextualised within the social world's open system. Third, the Real explores why and how it exists. This level is about the conflicting and converging causal mechanisms that shape special and inclusive education, such as neoliberalism, utilitarianism, children's rights, and ideals for an equal and just society. This stratified ontology can guide critical analysis to identify deep causes of resistance against inclusion, inform policies to develop effective solutions, and bring about authentic change.

For example, the key term 'children with SEND' can be deconstructed using this CR stratified ontology. The label itself is a way of classifying and grouping children at the Empirical, often for the convenience of policy-making and social analysis. But the label, often having a stigmatising nature, does not necessarily reflect at the Actual that children's own needs are special. When needs are not met, they may be considered special. Such special needs can arise from the nature of education planning and provisions that fail to meet the needs more than from the children themselves. At the Real, everyone has needs, but special needs are often social problems created by the ways schools are organised to offer cheap, mass education in most cost-benefit ways so as to improve national development and international competitiveness. Here, CR clearly can help to reveal the complexities underneath the label 'children with SEND'. They will be further explored and illustrated in the findings chapters. A detailed conceptualisation of a 'critical realist model of disability' will also be explained in chapter 9.3.2.

3.1.2 Four-Planar Social Being

CR also offers the conceptual tool of four-planar social being. The four dialectically interdependent planes of social life provides “a framework for connecting disparate parts of complex humanity and society” (Alderson, 2013, 22). Bhaskar (2008b, 153) defines the four planes as:

“material relations with nature in the physical reality of bodies and of the natural world; interpersonal subjective relationships between individuals and groups; broader social relations and inherited structures; [and] inner being, the stratified personality, subjective agency, and ideas about the good life, the good society”.

To explain, the first plane concerns the natural reality of bodies and their relations with the natural world. For example, children with SEND often have physical attributes (including the bodies and brains) that are considered drastically different from the majority others. These differences can be experienced as impairments in the natural world. To restrict the research to this first plane could mean children with SEND were blamed for their “inability to function” (Barton, 1993, 237) in a medical deficit model, and subsequently segregated education would be preferred. This plane will be explored through the non-inclusive experience of children with SEND in relation to access to mainstream schools, mobility, specialised facilities, and design of learning space. These will be further discussed in chapter five.

The second plane is about interpersonal relationships. Research at this level can look at student-student and student-teacher relationships and interactions in inclusive/segregated settings. Positive interactions can lead to suggestions on inclusive pedagogical techniques, while negative ones may result in narrow rejection of inclusion as unrealistic, unpractical, or unbeneficial. This plane will be explored in detail in chapter six.

The third plane looks at the broader picture of inherited social structures. Possible causes for exclusion and barriers to inclusion become clearer when seen in the wider context of education and social systems. For example, *Gaokao* (national college entrance examinations in China) and neoliberal

educational policies exert great pressure on schools to produce academically high-achieving students and to stay on top of the school ranking. This can routinely direct mainstream education to develop a competitive culture with a narrow focus on academic abilities. Systemic barriers to inclusion will be explored in chapter seven.

The fourth plane focuses on the intra-subjectivity, which concerns internal subjective agencies such as personalities, motives, drives, values, and emotions. For example, teachers who valued and believed in the inclusion principles tended to actively seek inclusion despite practical difficulties and structural barriers. In this, career motivation, the shame culture, equality, and rights will be explored as key themes in chapter eight.

3.1.3 Summary

CR allows this study to attempt at a holistic and deeper understanding of inclusive education on the four social planes that interact and shape one another. A CR approach also uncovers underlying causal processes of how inclusion is interpreted and practised by distinguishing the empirical, the actual, and the real domains of reality in data analysis. I hope this thesis will illustrate the usefulness of engaging with a CR lens to offer new insights into the exclusion and inclusion thinking in China. To date, CR tools have been used to analyse fields of educational, scientific and social practice (e.g., higher education, climate change, and healthcare), but inclusive education with an international perspective has largely been omitted from these studies. As far as I am aware, this is the first extended study within special and inclusive education in China to apply a CR conceptual and analytical framework.

The next section explains the research design.

3.2 Research Design

This study is designed as an in-depth case study where the social system of inclusive education in Chinese mainstream primary schools is treated as a

single case. The research approach involves methods of semi-structured interviews, observation, making field-notes, document analysis, and an ethnographic understanding of local contexts. In the following sections, I will detail my case study, the sampling of participants, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

3.2.1 Case Study Method

A case study is the investigation of “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2013, 13). It is a research instrument widely used in social science research as a detailed description of “a unique example of real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, 253), and “a means of understanding complex human situations and human encounters” (Simon, 1996, 226).

This study does not predict through measuring objective, generalisable, and replicable events. The focus is on explanation through exploring the intricacies of social phenomena in open systems. I aim to discover the underlying causal mechanisms based on teachers’ understanding and practices concerning inclusion. The case study method is then appropriate for this research, as it lends itself to the deep, reflexive, and qualitative investigation of special and inclusive education I seek in this thesis.

3.2.2 Participant Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The research sites are in a major city in Shandong Province, East China. Shandong is a large province with a population in excess of 100 million and approximately the size of countries such as Surinam and Tunisia (World Bank, 2018b). The scope of one city was chosen because first, considering the discrepancies among regions in China, a city (as opposed to a province, an area, or the whole country) offers a manageable scope for the present research within the limits of time and space; second, after the literature search, it became apparent that no previous similar research has been done in the city or indeed

the wider province that is known to the research community despite the city's economic and cultural significance; and third, the scope of one city may produce more relevant, in-depth, and accurate data, as the investigation of inclusive education can be highly context-specific depending on the local culture, policies, economic development, demography, and social climate.

I conducted the fieldwork at six state-run schools, including four mainstream and two special schools. I selected and contacted the headteachers from the sampled schools through personal contacts that I established during my two-week pilot study in March 2016. The two special schools were included for the purpose of providing contexts and frame of references regarding special education. They admitted students with learning difficulties, ASD, Down Syndrome, or cerebral palsy. Nine teachers, two pupils, and three parents from the special schools participated in the study.

The four mainstream schools are the main research sites of this study. Thirty-seven teachers, eight parents, and more than ten students were involved. Each of these schools worked at varying degrees towards inclusive practices. They each presented distinctive values, micro-cultures, and emphases within their curriculum thinking and practices. The geographical spread of schools reflects a broad balance across the city thus ensuring a certain degree of representativeness.

After gaining permission from the six headteachers to conduct research with teachers and children, I spent on average two weeks' time at each school. By spending extended time with the children and the participating teachers, I developed a deeper understanding of the sampled schools and established personal connections with the participants. This has helped to encourage detailed communication and to generate enriched data.

Mainstream school teachers were the main participants. I aimed for a cross-section of participants taking into account seniority of position, length of tenure, training background, gender and types of responsibility for special needs (see Appendix I for a list of participant details). The sampling of school staff includes: headteachers, head class teachers from both lower grades and

higher grades⁷, non-academic subject teachers, and school administrative staff, with mixed gender, years of experience, and qualifications. Thirty-two participants were female, as the teaching staff across the sampled schools were predominantly female. I identified and invited the participants via different methods. Most participants were recommended by the headteachers; some were referred by their colleagues who were participants themselves; and some others were identified and approached by myself during my two weeks' time in the case schools.

Since a key aspect of the methodology is to incorporate a variety of perspectives and voices into the data, I talked to children as a complementary data collection method. Notes were taken after each conversation. The location and time of talks were chosen spontaneously during breaks inside classrooms or around campus, with the permission from their teachers beforehand, but without the immediate presence of their teachers. The talks lasted up to ten minutes depending on the children and situations. Since each discussion was short, in some cases I talked with the same or similar groups of children more than once asking different questions over the weeks I was spending at each school. I tried to talk to children on an LRC placement as well as standard enrolment in mainstream schools and children in special schools. In mainstream schools, I took care to talk with the two groups of children separately due to the sensitivity of some of the questions on SEND. Some children on an LRC placement that I attempted to approach appeared more than often unresponsive to verbal communication or avoidant to social contact. Thus, field notes on behaviours and interactions instead of self-reported data were collected concerning children on an LRC placement. Common types of additional needs that these children had were learning difficulties, ASD, and cerebral palsy.

I also approached parents for their views. All the sampled mainstream schools promoted parent participation. I secured access and permission from the headteachers to talk to the parents, as well as from parents themselves.

⁷ In a Chinese school, the 'head class teacher' is equivalent to the form tutor of a British school. This teacher, however, will play a leading role in the life and welfare of all class members for the duration of their time in school, and the role will usually occupy the bulk of their weekly time as a teacher. These form the basis of the pastoral system within the school.

The location was in schools when they came and took part in school activities. I informed each parent about the research before talking to them. Talks lasted up to 20 minutes. Notes were taken.

As I was open to new and emergent opportunities while in the field, I also managed to talk to two LEA officials and two university staff. By chance, I met the two officials at a special and inclusive education conference at Zhongxin Special School during my fieldwork there. After stating my intention and gaining consent, I asked for their views on inclusive education and special schools. Both talks lasted about ten minutes each. Notes were taken immediately after. One took place in a school corridor during a session break, and the other on the playground after the conference. In addition, I talked with two university staff who I met during my pilot study. One was a lecturer in education at a local university, while the other worked in the international office at another local university. I informed them about the study and gained consent after directly contacting them via emails and text messaging. I talked with them for about 15 minutes each on the telephone and took notes of the key points.

Gaining access to the contacts for the sampled schools involved liaising with district officers, university staff, headteachers and class teachers. Being a Chinese citizen, my familiarity with the social context may have given me access and legitimacy within the community. I experienced no problems concerning access from gatekeepers.

3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interview with Teachers

Interview was the primary data collection method. The semi-structured interviews were useful to illustrate how teachers interpreted inclusion and to reflect on their teaching experiences with children with SEND. Thirty-seven mainstream school teachers and nine special school teachers were interviewed in locations where they felt comfortable, such as their offices, playground, and meeting rooms. The teachers were informed, and consents were given. Interviews lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes each and were audio-recorded. They vary in terms of depth, length, and quality.

Although the sampling was not intended to be statistically representative, I did aim for a balanced sample to provide triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As specified earlier, the primary focus of data collection is on mainstream school teachers' views and practices. This is because they are at the forefront of practising exclusion/inclusive in their daily classrooms, and their views and actions are most relevant to answering the research questions. From such a data set, I could focus on depth rather than breadth of data, while at the same time, I was able to confidently draw upon trends across the data set which contains participant responses from a range of perspectives. Such a rich data set helped to provide insights into inclusive education for children with SEND in Chinese primary schools.

The interview schedule contains five main parts. Firstly, for introduction, I briefly went through the participant information sheet and consent form to make sure that the participants were familiar with the general procedure and content of the study. Secondly, for personal information, I asked teachers about their career choice and general experience as a teacher. Thirdly, to explore notions of LRC and inclusion, I discussed with them their concepts, practices, and experiences with children with SEND in their classrooms. I asked questions such as 'how do you understand inclusion?', 'what is it like to teach children with SEND in your class?', and 'what do you think an ideal inclusive school would be like?' Fourthly, on the topic of social attitudes, I raised questions on disabilities, special schools, and social issues such as inequality, segregation, and discrimination. Lastly, I asked for their suggestions as to how to move forward and achieve greater inclusion. See Appendix II for a detailed interview schedule.

3.2.4 Observation

Following securing access to the research sites and gaining consents for interviews from teachers, I obtained permissions to observe their classes both before and after the interviews. I observed on average four to six hours with each of the 35 mainstream and seven special school teachers' classes (after

excluding four headteachers who did not teach) sitting at the back of the room and taking notes. Video recording was not permitted or used.

The observations were semi-systematic. There were particular foci, but no recording grids were used. One focus was on teaching methods that involve learning activity design, use of specialist resources, promotion of classroom inclusion and involvement of pupils, and reactions to challenging behaviours. Another focus was on students' response to teaching, their interactions with each other, particularly the dynamics between children on an LRC placement and standard enrolment, and the nature of interactions such as questioning style and mood. The set-up of the space, including seating arrangement, positioning of teacher, and classroom decoration, was also observed and recorded by notes. Examples of these observations are later discussed in findings chapters. See Appendix III for a detailed observation plan.

Admittedly, the specific instances and events that I actually recorded in notes were what I considered as important and relevant to my research questions (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001). This subjective process means that different researchers may record different interactions or aspects with different emphases even with the same observation plan. However, the study aim is not to offer a full description of all that was observable. Rather, my observation notes helped to triangulate and offer qualitative insights into my research question from my perspective of analysis.

Observations allowed me to gain a close familiarity with the teachers, children, and their daily school activities. I primarily took a bystander role and did not actively participate in the life and activities within schools. However, in order to maintain a clear and honest position within the school communities, I did participate in events that I was invited to and gave short talks on inclusive education to two classes in two schools. This may have helped me gain trust from the participants and form rapport, so that they may have felt more comfortable and relaxed during interviews and observation sessions, from which richer and more reliable data can be collected.

These formal observation data helped me gain an understanding of how LRC and inclusive education may be practised in some Chinese primary

classrooms. These data were later used in the data analysis process to triangulate against the interview data to increase the credibility of the research. Teachers may say what they thought I wanted to know, not necessarily what they actually believed or practiced. Observation helps to reveal inconsistencies and contradictions. However, even if teachers did not wholly live up to their own words, I did not judge them. Rather, I understand that at least teachers knew that the ideas were important enough to consider seriously.

As I was spending extended time within each school, I kept a reflexive review notebook to be completed at the end of each day. I took notes of important events and themes that emerged during my informal observation of other school activities, such as during class breaks and extra-curriculum activities. This allowed me to further match teachers' self-reported views and their actual actions across the school community (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Contradictions and inconsistencies between beliefs and behaviours can be revealed. These can then be further discussed, analysed, and theorised, enhancing the qualitative case study. See Table 3 for an overview of the data collected.

Table 3. Overview of Data Collected

	Technique	Sample
Primary Methods	Teacher Interviews	40 hours of interview data with 37 mainstream school teachers and nine special school teachers.
	Observations	200 hours of classroom observations, and about 240 hours of non-classroom observations and informal discussions over 12 weeks.
Secondary Methods	Informal Talks with Students	About five hours of informal talks with students to further explore themes that emerged in classroom observations and informal non-classroom observations.
	Informal Talks with Parents	About three hours of informal talks with 11 parents.

Informal Talks with LEA Officials and University Staff	About ten minutes of informal talks each with two LEA officials and about 15 minutes of informal talks each with two university staff.
Document Analysis	Student homework, letters, and artwork; National policy papers.
Ethnographic Understanding of Local Contexts	The Chinese culture, traditions, language, history, political system, economic conditions.

See Appendix IV for research timeline.

In the next section, I detail how I used thematic analysis to interpret the data.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is useful for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 79). It follows six stages: “familiarising yourself with your data...generating initial codes...searching for themes...reviewing themes...defining and naming themes...[and] producing the report” (*ibid.*, 87).

First, I familiarised myself with my data. After transcribing all the interview recordings which were in Chinese by myself, I read through the transcripts and observation notes for multiple times. I also translated fifteen full transcripts from Chinese into English, some of which were used as resources in research training seminars and tutorial discussions. The translation process helped me to think carefully and deeply about the exact meaning of teachers’ words.

Second, initial codes were generated. During the multiple readings of data, I coded common and recurring themes that emerged from the data. In this process, texts were broken down into chunks – words, sentences, paragraphs – according to themes so as to be examined for meaning (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, 171). I coded all data manually without any computer software in order to

remain close and sensitive to data. This allowed me to rethink and feel the themes, and to avoid fragmentation. In contrast, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis may objectify and fragment the process of analysing narratives (Merrill & West, 2009).

Third, I searched for overarching themes among these initial codes. I chose to focus on five main categories of themes that are most relevant to answering the research questions. These are: 1) the interpretation of inclusion; 2) the embodied experience in physical environments; 3) teachers' inclusive and non-inclusive practices in classrooms; 4) the wider education systems; and 5) values, cultures, and drives.

Fourth, to review the themes, I read through the interview transcriptions and observation notes at least five more times, each time focusing on a category of themes. This process refined my understanding of each theme and deepened analysis. It also allowed me to identify new sub-themes and check that data were accurately understood and coded.

Fifth, I defined and named themes and sub-themes by engaging with theories. Deeper concepts and ideas were used to interpret data. I then made links between themes and developed a structure for each of the five findings chapters using the five categories of themes.

Six, I wrote up my thesis. Key statements made by the interviewees were translated into English and quoted as illustrative texts to assist the report of findings and analysis. The accuracy of my translation can be verified in two ways. First, my translation has credibility because I have a master's degree in translation studies and have professional experience working as a freelance translator. Second, I back translated all the quotes to make sure the meaning did not change. Five randomly selected back translation examples were also checked and agreed upon by a Chinese colleague of mine at the university. Thus, I am confident that the translated interview quotes are accurate.

In the next section, I consider the research ethics.

3.4 Ethics

As this research involves vulnerable children, clarifying ethics is particularly important. According to Alderson and Morrow (2011), ten concerns in ethical research with children and young people need to be addressed.

First, this research has a worthwhile purpose and effective methods that can best answer the research questions. This study intends to benefit children, especially children with SEND, through offering a deep understanding of how inclusion is interpreted and practised in Chinese primary schools and why. This may inform future inclusion policies to be more progressive and effective. The qualitative research method drawing on CR has been explained earlier in this chapter as being able to uncover underlying causal mechanisms of events, hence it is best suited for the research purpose.

Second, harms and benefits were assessed. As this study primarily focuses on teachers' views and actions about children with SEND, direct interactions with children were limited, and potential harms such as embarrassment and intrusion of privacy, inconvenience and time were minimised. When I approached the children for short talks, I took care to do so in relaxed settings as opportunities arose, for example during class breaks or on the playground when they were not engaged in any particular activities, or when they approached me themselves. When children appeared to be unwilling to talk, I did not force them. Similarly, with teachers, I tried to create a friendly and comfortable atmosphere during interviews, and no harms were done. Participating in research may benefit the children in terms of increased confidence and excitement of having a 'big sister' attending classes with them, while benefits for teachers may include raised awareness of scientific research, increased knowledge, and time to talk to an attentive listener. Furthermore, the result of this study may bring benefits for children, teachers, and schools, as it is designed to contribute to promoting inclusive education which addresses quality of learning, children's rights, equality, and social justice.

Third, privacy and confidentiality were ensured. During interviews and observations, I did not ask intrusive questions or interfere with teachers' and

students' personal affairs. In addition, all participants' identities were pseudonymised. The schools where they work were also pseudonymised to add an extra layer of protection to participants' names and identities. Collected data were stored securely on my encrypted computer under password protection. They will be deleted in due course after the completion of this thesis. No data will be transferred to a third party. I did not talk about the views participants gave me in discussions or interviews with anyone else in the schools.

Fourth, I maintained an inclusive, respectful, and protective approach to participant selection and their experience of participation in the research. The research was undertaken in primary schools, in some cases where students have been identified as having SEND. I assumed that all students were potentially vulnerable, so the highest care was to be taken in securing their privacy and integrity. Although Chinese child protection laws differ from those in the UK, I took care to ensure that UK standards regarding safeguarding children were applied. To some extent, some aspects of special education are sensitive, but one of the main purposes for the study is to overcome some of the traditional inhibitions about public discussion of the needs of children with SEND.

Fifth, as my research does not receive funding from a third-party, the research is not influenced by any external biases or agendas. No financial expenses occurred for participants during research, and the participants were not paid. Small gifts such as snacks and sweets were given to some participants in a gesture of gratitude and friendliness.

Sixth, throughout the research design, data collection, and writing-up periods, I strictly conformed to the ethics guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2014). It is required that there should be an “ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom” in all research projects (*ibid.*, 4). For the lack of official ethical guidelines in China for educational research, I took care to respect the ethical requirements of the case schools where research was conducted, protecting the participants' interests, ensuring that participants were voluntary and well informed, valuing scientific integrity, and conforming to laws and regulations. I applied for the ethical clearance with the Institute of

Education, University College London, and I had received the clearance before I left for the fieldwork.

Seventh, all participants were clearly informed of the general topic of research and methods. Copies of information sheets were given to teachers. Other participants were verbally informed. See Appendix V for the information sheet for teachers.

Eighth, consent forms for teachers were signed prior to data collection. Verbal permissions were gained from parents, scholars, LEA officials, teachers regarding doing research with children, and children themselves. Teachers were clearly notified that they had the right to withdraw from the study, refuse observations, or skip questions during interviews if they wished. See Appendix VI for the consent form for teachers.

Ninth, interview transcripts were made available on request to individual teachers. I also offered to provide feedback once I have finalised the entire research and submitted the thesis. Findings are presented in this thesis in the form of interpretations from qualitative data and are used for conference papers, published journal papers and eventually for a monograph published in both English and Chinese.

Last, the study engaged with multiple stakeholders in an inclusive, respectful, and ethical way to offer a balanced picture of how inclusive education is understood and practised. The positive impact of the research findings may include influencing social discourse by promoting awareness of human rights, the social model of disability, and informing future inclusion policies to develop effective and progressive approaches towards greater inclusion. This may benefit the participants and other teachers and students in the long term.

3.5 Limitations

There are four main limitations to this study: 1) credibility and transferability concerning participants' self-reported data; 2) limited available literature on

inclusive education in Chinese primary schools; 3) personal biases that I may hold in favour of inclusion in general; and 4) the main focus on teachers in the study design.

First, I do not claim that the findings of this study are purely objective, typical, absolute, or definitive. As Scott (2010, 55) highlights, “all judgements about educational matters are inferential judgements”. This study is my subjective and qualitative interpretation of participants’ words and actions, from which conclusions of what inclusion means for Chinese primary schools can be inferred. As it is quite impossible “for an author to write a text that does not bear the traces of its author...All texts are personal statements” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 413), I tried to be as accurate and genuine as possible in reflecting the spirit of what I believe the participants meant. I accept that the knowledge I aim to create in this thesis is fallible. Nonetheless, fallibility does not necessarily mean inadequacy or insufficiency, as it “also implies that no epistemic certainty can be guaranteed” (Scott, 2010, 80).

Although generalisability and predictability are not the primary aims of this qualitative study, I do expect certain similarities of views, practices, and generative mechanisms concerning special and inclusive education among primary schools at least within the research site city. I hope that educators and policy makers who read this work might find themes that they may resonate with and be inspired by. I do not claim this work to have the universal relevance to all primary school educators in China, although many will be represented along the range of responses that I report.

Second, the available previous research on inclusive education in Chinese primary schools is rather limited. As reading prior research can help lay a foundation for understanding the research questions I explore, the lack of a rich and longstanding literature in the field of special and inclusive education in Chinese primary schools limited the study design to exploratory research. However, this limitation also provides opportunities for theory building and original contributions to knowledge, draws attention to important gaps in the field, and signals directions for future research. It also encourages me to establish links to and draw from a wider range of perspectives such as culture,

linguistics, and social theories, so as to offer a more rounded and deeper understanding of inclusion in China.

Third, considering my life stories concerning people with disabilities and Chinese education as explained in chapter 1.5, it was for personal values and emotions that I was initially drawn into the field of special and inclusive education in China and to conduct this research. All humans have biases and all views are value-laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Sayer, 2000). Although I do not assume that inclusion is always preferable in all cases, I tend to see inclusion in a positive light for the majority children with SEND unless convincing evidence in some cases would suggest otherwise, which I acknowledge. To mitigate the negative effect of such personal biases on the credibility of the research and prevent against 'cherry-picking' the data that fit into my biases, I searched for balanced views in the data through the multiple readings and provided descriptions of the contexts so that readers can interpret the claims I made. I took special care to critically review by myself and through feedback from my supervisors and my friends on how I selected and analysed data, if I chose possible words with positive or negative connotations, and how I presented findings and conclusions.

Fourth, the study design is limited to teachers' views and practices. The meaning of inclusion in Chinese schools can be further enriched by considering other stakeholders' perspectives such as parents, children, LEAs, policy-makers, social workers, and medical professions. However, a thesis is within the limit of available space and time. Focusing on teachers is a manageable scope while being able to offer deep insights.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explained why critical realism was chosen as a theoretical framework for my research and how it was applied in guiding research and data analysis. Study design and research procedure were described. Ethics and limitations of the research were considered. The five chapters that follow detail the findings and discussions of this research.

Chapter 4: Interpreting Inclusion

This is the first of the five findings and analyses chapters introducing and discussing the qualitative data collected for the study. Drawing from the CR stratified ontology, this chapter explores how inclusion was interpreted by mainstream school teachers at the Empirical, how common school practices at the Actual may influence perceptions of inclusion, and at the Real how culture and values as deeper causes underlie the way inclusion was interpreted. The analytical focus is not on the synthesis of teachers' interpretations to form a locally constructed theory of inclusion, but rather on the deeply contextualised explanations of teachers' views and on suggesting avenues for further exploration of the often taken-for-granted underpinning assumptions. This constitutes a starting point for identifying and analysing possible enablers and barriers to inclusion in later chapters. Based on the interviews data and policy papers, this chapter addresses the research sub-question: *How do primary school educators understand 'inclusion' and how can their different interpretations be explained?* The discussions involve two sub-sections: inclusion as integration and as meaningful education.

4.1 Inclusion as Integration of the 'Problematic' Children

Up until the late 1990s, the notion of physical integration - the opposite of separate education for students with SEND - was often confused with inclusion. For example, in the UK, the inclusion belief used to be that "placement in a mainstream school leads naturally on to the other forms of inclusion" (Department for Education and Employment, 1997, 23). Yet the simple location transfer continued to entail isolation and segregation, as integration was still based on the notion of ideal pupil types and deficit individuals (Allan, 1999; Hegarty, 1993). This was essentially assimilation rather than inclusion. In this regard, Cooper and Jacobs (2011, 6) described the physical integration as a delusion: "being present in a school equating with being socially and educationally included is one of the most dishonest and insidious form of exclusion". Today, the language and understanding of inclusion in global

debates have moved beyond integration and more towards the quality of education, children's rights, and breaking down institutional barriers (see chapter two).

Admittedly, despite the many innovative developments taking place in terms of inclusive education around the world (see chapter 2.1), it is by no means a smooth and even pathway towards greater progress. The discourse of 'inclusion' can still be frequently used in ways which actually refer to practices of integration. Challenges and difficulties of practising inclusion in Chinese schools will be explored in chapter five to eight. The following sections first investigate how and why Chinese teachers may still be unfamiliar with the language and notion of inclusion and instead interpret inclusion as mere physical integration.

4.1.1 Physical Attendance – A Normative Discourse

Although inclusive education in China is practised under the LRC policy, LRC is not the same as inclusion. As reviewed in chapter 2.5, the practice of LRC (Learning in Regular Classroom) is often primarily concerned with physical access. The confusion, however, was apparent among teachers. Inclusion was interpreted in terms of LRC, reducing concerns of meaningful participation and barrier-free education to mere access. For example:

"I think inclusive education is the same as LRC. For example, mainstream schools must accept all children regardless of their abilities as long as they live in the neighbourhood, as required by compulsory education." (Lina, Hemei School)

This confusion may be directly hinged on the current LRC policy at the Empirical. First, regarding compulsory education for children with SEND, there are currently four options set out by the national policy: LRC, special schools, home education, and distant learning (MoE, 2017b). Among these, only LRC resembles inclusion. Thus, when thinking and speaking about inclusion, often a foreign theory unheard of among teachers, teachers may see LRC as the same as inclusion.

Second, in principle, LRC does seem to share similar rationales as inclusive education. In the three key policy papers regarding LRC (MoE, 1994, 2014, 2017b), the first and foremost motive and purpose of developing LRC are stated as to implement compulsory education for children with SEND. Since the idea of compulsory education is primarily based on children's rights, it can be argued that LRC is principally designed to safeguard the right to education for children with SEND. This draws a similarity between LRC and inclusion, as both concepts are fundamentally rights-based.

Third, LRC is officially advocated as having the benefit of advancing the quality of mainstream provisions by providing the opportunities for all to study together, where the mainstream pupils and their peers with SEND can communicate, better understand, and help each other (MoE, 1994). These are also practical benefits and fundamental values shared by inclusion (see chapters 2.1 & 2.3).

Fourth, LRC is justified by the state in that it promotes educational equality, upholds humanitarian spirits, helps people with disabilities to better develop and integrate into the wider society to improve their livelihood and wellbeing, and contributes to achieving the ultimate goal of constructing a socialist harmonious society (MoE, 2014, 2017a). It is believed that a country's level of development can be indicated by how disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups are treated (Yong, 2016; Chen, 1997; Xin, 2016b). Better special educational provisions, including LRC, have been promoted on the ground of equality and social justice, which is shared by inclusion.

For clarity, Table 4 below summarises the key propositions of LRC (see chapter 2.5.1) and the global concept of inclusion:

Table 4. LRC versus Inclusion

LRC	Inclusion
Physical access and location of education	Location as well as the quality of education
Students are exempted from exams	Adapted assessments to facilitate learning
Concerned with children with a recognised disability only	Concerned with children with SEND in the narrow sense and all children in the broad sense
Visiting specialist teachers from special schools	On-site specialist teachers and coordinators
A policy suggestion	Often a legal requirement
Schools do not need to change	Schools adapt to cater for diverse learning needs
Medical model of disability	Social model and rights model of disability
Both are supported by the government with national policies.	
Both offer compulsory education for children with disabilities.	
Both are said to enhance the quality of the mainstream provisions.	
Both aim to promote educational equality, uphold humanitarian spirits, and create an inclusive society.	

Despite the similarities, LRC essentially differs from inclusion in multiple ways. Yet the differences are often hidden in official policy discourse, whereas the similarities are loudly articulated. The LRC policy at the Empirical thus may partly explain teachers' perception of equating LRC as inclusion.

The confusion continues at the Actual, where the practice of LRC did not distinguish children's mere physical presence from active participation in learning. This is reflected in teachers' description of inclusion:

“Inclusive education is to allow the problematic children to attend classes together with others in regular schools.” (Yanyan, Hemei School)

“It doesn’t matter if the children have psychological problems or physical defects, we let them attend classes together with other children and let them feel they can have normal interaction and communication with others.” (Liuchang, Shengben School)

“It means to uniformly admit some children with intellectual problems or abnormal behaviours into the normal classes.” (Quan, Qingzhi School)

At the Real, reasons behind the confusion of LRC and inclusion are embedded within teachers’ choice of words when describing inclusion. The dominant discourse was clearly negative and medically focused (the medical model of disability will be further discussed in chapter 7.5 as a structural barrier). Derogatory terms such as ‘problematic children’, ‘defects’, and ‘abnormal’ bear strong reference to the distinction of abnormality from normality, which, contrary to what they were trying to describe, is itself a rather excluding discourse. It separates Others from Us, and portrays that it is up to Us, who are ‘normal’ and ‘regular’, to ‘let’ and ‘allow’ Others, who are ‘problematic’, ‘defective’ and ‘abnormal’, to attend mainstream schools. This points to a narrowly normalising social value.

Norm

The English word ‘norm’ comes from the Latin word ‘*norma*’, which means ‘rule, carpenter’s square’. Etymologically, norm refers to measurable standards. In the social world, in terms of norms as normal standards, “society means that norms regulate human conduct” (Dahrendorf, 1968, 38). McDowell (1996, xiv) notes that “a normative context is necessary for the idea of being in touch with the world at all, whether knowledgeably or not”.

Social norms are more complicated and problematic than a ‘carpenter’s square’. They are subjective, value-laden, and not as easily measurable. Dahrendorf (1968, 33, 38) highlights that “norms, *i.e.* socially established values, are...always a selection from the universe of possible established values”, and that establishing such values as norms entails that “conformity is rewarded and deviance punished”. This process of reward and punishment serves to create, preserve, and reproduce privilege through the marginalisation of the deviants. It then becomes a moral question about who decides what the social norms should be and who will be benefited and privileged. In this regard, Graham and Slee (2008, 281) highlight, “normalisation is a man-made grid of intelligibility that attributes value to culturally specific performances and in doing so, privileges particular ways of being”. Thus, a normalising society can be “a powerful and insidious form of domination” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, 198).

In terms of norms of ability and intelligence, their averages and range, some may take a statistical approach using probability theory as if they can be measured accurately with a ‘carpenter’s square’. For example, Murray and Herrnstein (1994) proposed the bell curve theory for intelligence and argued that the norm is the mean along a normal distribution. This theory has soon after been much criticised by scholars (Fischer *et al.*, 1996; Heckman, 1995; Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995) for its unsupported assumptions about intelligence, flawed statistical methods, and the fact that imposed statistically derived norms negate the natural diversity of being. Nonetheless, such a statistical approach seems to rather inform Chinese teachers’ perception of norms today.

标准 (*biaozhun*) corresponds to the English word ‘norm’. The dictionary definition is “rules used to measure phenomena and objects”. *Biaozhun* is also frequently translated into ‘standard’ and ‘criterion’. In the Chinese education system where standardisation of curriculum and assessment is much emphasised, not only can the concept of having fixed norms be regarded by teachers as a matter of fact, these norms are also often understood in terms of the average/mean. For example:

“There is the distinction between the normal and the abnormal.
This is judged according to the average. Like, if the majority of

children can do what I've asked of them, but under the same condition one or two children can't do it, then they are different from the normal others." (Xintian, Shengben School)

"Speaking from teaching experience, through comparison, if some children are obviously different from the majority of other children, or their behaviours and abilities are different from the average, then I consider them as the special children." (Geyao, Sifang School)

Clearly, norm as the average/mean was used by teachers to divide and label students: those who are normal if above average and those who are 'special' if below average.

Looking deeper, this thinking is not without its cultural roots. For example, the Confucian classic *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸, *zhongyong*, in modern Chinese the word means median), as one of the Four Books of the Confucian classics, has historically been a compulsory content tested in the *keju* (Imperial Examination). It preaches that: "letting the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish" (The Doctrine of the Mean, 1). Confucius highly valued amicability and adhering the doctrine of the mean. He taught his disciples that: "perfect is the virtue which is according to the Constant Mean!" (Analects, 6.29). A state of equilibrium/harmony and the Constant Mean do not necessarily entail that the average is ideal or all should become average. But in modern days, the 'due medium' may be rather interpreted according to its word-for-word literal meaning - median. This is reflected from the numerous common sayings in use today that warn against straying far from the 'due medium', such as "the bird that sticks its neck out in a flock gets the shot", "a tall tree catches the wind that destroys it", and "fame portends trouble for men [sic] just as fattening does for pigs". Similarly, Haili said:

"There are many contradictions and controversies in education. You can never make everybody happy. So one principle to bear in mind is that you must stand in the middle. If you stand on the left,

then people on the right will surely find fault with you, and vice versa.” (Haili, Qingzhi School)

Thus, in the Chinese culture, norms as good and desirable based on the average/mean may often be accepted as unproblematic (this is also underpinned by the collective culture in China’s socialist society, which will be discussed in chapter 4.1.2). This mentality was found to be a key reason behind teachers’ support for segregated provisions against the LRC policy. Offering specialised diagnosis, intervention, and technology in the name of meeting the needs of those who depart far from the norm is a common rationale for the establishment and prevalence of segregated schools worldwide (Bogdan & Kugelmass, 1984). For example, Kauffman (2015) argues in favour of segregated provisions for children with SEND, positing that special schools arise from the need to individualise instruction for such children whose educational needs are considered dramatically different in many ways from other children based on the established norms. In this regard, this thesis argues against using segregated schools as a normalising technology and intends to unsettle and problematise the moral notion of norms, particularly in the school setting.

Norms underpin a divisive mentality, as it necessarily entails the notion of deviation and extremes which depart far from the average. This means the deviant ‘abnormal’ is in a relational existence with the concept of the average ‘normal’. Even if the current cases of the ‘abnormal’ are eliminated, the next borderline cases will become the new ‘abnormal’. Thus, as long as the average ‘normal’ are upheld as good and ideal, there will always be an underclass of deviants and extremes. This, as described by Davis (1995, 2016), is quite ‘the hegemony of normalcy’.

Foucault (1977) analysed in detail how normalisation functions as a technology of disciplinary power and pervades a penal philosophy within society. Norm prescribes what is normal, good, or right. It can be constructed via human sciences – *i.e.* expert knowledge -, and makes ‘dividing practices’ such as differentiation and categorisation of individuals become possible (*ibid.*). This is essentially a process of subjectification and individuation, where the disciplinary power is exerted in that Norm “categorises the individual, marks him

by his own individuality, attaches to him his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognise and others have to recognise in him” (Foucault, 1982, 781). This normalising power applies to all individuals: the ‘normal’ are positioned and shaped through this subjectification as they conform to Norm and are held in check by it, whereas the ‘abnormal’ become punishable. In this regard, Foucault (1977, 183) wrote that the disciplinary power of normalisation

“measures in quantitative terms and hierarchises in terms of value the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of individuals...The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalises.”

To situate this in education, Allan (1999) describes that schools are fields where this disciplinary power of the Norm is applied. Upholding norms and standards in school education has routinely been considered a shared truth (Flynn, 1997; Harwood & Rasmussen, 2004; Scott, 2017). This has been expressed visibly in national targets, high stakes testing, and the league table rankings, similar to Foucault’s (1977, 184) view: “the Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardised education”. Following this, school children have been increasingly made fixed educational subjects within hierarchical positions (Rausch, 2012). In particular, the ‘normalising judgement’ (Foucault, 1977) based on specialist knowledge – especially psychology and medicine - has produced the distinct category of children with SEND. Not only can these children be ‘punished’ with the social stigma and institutional exclusion that are attached to their categorisation, but their educational problems are also often medicalised, which in turn lends ‘scientific justification’ for their punishments. Under the gaze of the medical experts, these children may become more of medical subjects, some may even be considered as ‘ineducable’. In short, the disciplinary power of the Norm in education perpetuates the rhetoric of children with SEND belonging to segregated provisions for their ‘medical abnormality’. As Foucault (*ibid.*, 184) described:

“In a sense, the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity; but it individualises by making it possible to measure gaps, to

determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another.”

Thus, the discourse of SEND itself contains “unacceptable assumptions that legitimate and maintain existing exclusionary, discriminatory policies and practices”, and the construction of ‘special needs’ can be a form of dominance and oppression of children who do not conform to the norms imposed by authorities (Barton, 2005, 3). Florian (2014) similarly notes that as long as the normal and usual needs are defended as the appropriate standard, and the focus of special education is on what is different and unusual, then special education can never really be a good thing.

Summary

It has now become clear that an apparent reason at the Empirical for teachers’ interpretation of inclusion as physical attendance may be that LRC has been portrayed in national policies as similar to inclusion. This may have led some teachers to equate inclusion with physical attendance, which is a key focus of LRC. This highlights the inadequacy of the present inclusion policies in that they seem to confuse what the future directions for promoting inclusive education are, especially considering that the concerns on education quality and deep structural problems of the education system have been largely ignored (these will be further examined in chapter seven). Deeply at the Real, strong belief in the established norms can be unseen causal mechanisms, that are noticed in their effects on how they shape teachers’ beliefs and behaviours. Norms based on the average/mean as unquestionable and good, can lead teachers’ understanding and practice of inclusion to appear rather tokenistic. They may believe that first, there is a matter-of-fact distinction between children who are ‘abnormal’, ‘problematic’, or ‘defective’, and the rest of the ‘normal’ majority; and second, the ‘abnormal’ children are medical subjects and belong to segregated educational provisions.

As the analysis has revealed, simply training teachers about the enriched meaning of the inclusion concept is likely to be ineffective if deeper causes at the policy level and cultural values are ignored. What is needed is an official

discourse shift that rather sees diversity as the norm and fosters inclusive learning communities characterised by caring and respect for individual differences. As a start, the official policy language and key concepts perhaps can be further clarified and defined so as to avoid confusion. For individual teachers, re-visiting and re-interpreting the traditional Chinese culture such as *The Doctrine of the Mean* in modern times in relation to increasingly urgent concerns such as social equality and children's rights may also offer opportunities to draw attention to and foster a new understanding of inclusion.

4.1.2 Assimilation and Homogeneity – A Collectivistic Mentality

The second theme of teachers interpreting inclusion as physical integration emphasises assimilation and homogeneity. Further to acknowledging the physical attendance of children with SEND in mainstream schools, teachers may also expect these children to conform and to be treated the same as their typically developing peers with the same standard. For example:

"We teach all children equally the same here. Like the boy [with emotional behavioural difficulties]...he won't be discriminated against in this school, and he won't get special treatments either. All students are taught the same way if they come here."
(Guoming, Hemei School)

"Inclusion means that all children receive the same education here [in the mainstream school]." (Yunfeng, Shengben School)

This one-size-fits-all understanding of inclusion at the Empirical may stem from school activities under rigid institutional structures within an education system that is obsessed with standards, order, and control at the Actual (there will be an expanded discussion in chapter seven regarding structural barriers and in chapter 8.3 regarding seeing equality as equal treatment). This was clearly manifested in everyday school practices. For example, 整齐划一 (*zhengqi huayi*, to be uniform and become one) was mentioned by teachers as a common requirement for students. Translated into practice, this means the physical space of classrooms were arranged in fixed

rows and columns of desks and chairs; students were required to wear uniforms and red scarfs;⁸ 课间操 (*kejiancao*, class break exercise, a form of easy calisthenics or stretching exercise with set routines and music. It ranges from five to 20 minutes, and is exercised once in the morning on every school day) was compulsory where all students were required to stand in orderly formation and do the same exercise in synchronisation; and at the beginning of sports days, every class was expected to march in a 'guard-of-honour' style with highly uniform movements, for which the children usually had to train for hours. Needless to say, there is a strong political agenda behind these practices to produce obedience, docile, and easily controlled citizens. The school culture of uniformity itself also presents an immediate barrier to the inclusion of individual differences. Physical constraint on bodies is further reviewed in chapter five.

Deeply, at the Real, inclusion as assimilation and homogeneity cannot be separated from the strong collective culture in China. In a predominantly collectivistic society, individual differences may easily be overlooked, while similarity or even homogeneity is preferred.

Collectivism is a deep-seated in the historical, cultural, and political personality of China. First, historically and uniquely, China has been a single and unified civilisation state with a long, unbroken history since BCE 221. This highlights the primary, continuous concerns for generations of Chinese rulers as maintaining social order, stability, and central control (Jacques, 2012; Jiang, 2012; Zhang, 2008). Admittedly, Chinese history is also characterised by moments of disunity, such as the evolving dynasties and the Century of Humiliation (1839-1949 when China frequently suffered from military defeats from foreign powers). Yet, the bitter consequences rather served as lessons to further reinforce the commitment to safeguarding unity, stability, and order, which, not to exaggerate, may be valued in the Chinese culture more than anything else. Deng Xiaoping's political slogan of 'stability overwhelms everything else' will be further discussed in relation to human rights in chapter 8.4.⁹ In Zhang's (2008) words, the Chinese culture is characterised by an 'order

⁸ A symbol for being a member in the CPC youth organisation. All school children are expected to join.

⁹ Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) was the second-generation leader of the PRC despite never being president.

complex'. The obsession with strengthening social order and central control often involves stressing that individuals need to conform to authorities or even sacrifice personal interests for 'the collective good'.

Second, culturally, collectivism has roots in Confucianism. Confucius vigorously preached harmony, as he had witnessed the chaos and conflicts of the late Warring States Period (BCE 475 - BCE 221) and lamented the cost of instability and disunity of his time. He established that the highest stage of the ideal society is a state of *datong* (大同 great harmony, unity, togetherness), maintaining that "my doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity" (Analects, 4.15). An approach Confucius offered to achieve such an ideal is that of "their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy" (The Great Learning, 2). It means that serving the collective good is the ultimate purpose of individual development; all individuals should aim for the flourishing of the collective whole, the family, the state, and the world, whereas individual needs, interests, and desires come second. This collective emphasis has been clearly articulated in Confucian classics: it is an evil to "harm the collective good for the sake of personal interest" (Exoteric Traditions of the Han Version of the Songs, 1, 21). This collective value of 以天下为己任 (*yi tianxia wei jiren*) - a common Chinese idiom which means 'taking the flourishing of the world as one's own duty' - has largely become an established truth in the Chinese culture.

Another Confucian approach to the 'great harmony' is conforming to natural orders. '天人合一' (*tian ren he yi*, Heaven and Human become one whole) (Dong, BCE 179 - BCE104) and '与天地参' (*yu tian di can*, Human in unity with Heaven and Earth) (The Doctrine of the Mean, 23) are ideal states of the 'great harmony' commonly held in Confucianism. Such thinking was relevant in the agrarian traditions in ancient China, where in order to yield an abundant harvest in farming, one must obey the natural orders that were believed to be constant and unchanging: "one must follow the rules of the climate, time, water, and soil" (*ibid.*). The theorisation of this agrarian tradition in Confucianism creates a clear value emphasis that individuals should always strive to adapt and fit into the world, not only the natural but also the social, so that all can be

one unity. This forms a theoretical basis for a collective culture emphasising social conformity. In this regard, Weber (1951/1968, 235) highlights that Confucianism does not “allow man [sic] an inward aspiration toward a ‘unified personality (*Einheit*)’, a striving which we associate with the idea of personality”, because:

“Confucianism meant adjustment to the world, to its orders and conventions...the cosmic orders of the world were considered fixed and inviolate and the orders of society were but a special case of this...the ‘happy’ tranquillity of the empire and the equilibrium of the soul should and could be attained only if man [sic] fitted himself [sic] into the internally harmonious cosmos.”
(*ibid.*, 152)

Third, politically, the socialist agenda of the Communist Party of China (CPC) necessarily entails promoting collectivism. The State Council Information Office (2013) claims that “collectivism is the core value of Marxism; collectivism is a cultural gene of socialism...Socialist cultural genes are the stable and inherent basic principles and spirits of the socialist culture. These principles and spirits are collectivism”. Here collectivism is officially, rather misleadingly, asserted to be the core of Marxism. It is highly regarded metaphorically as the ‘gene’ of socialist culture. This position is popularly echoed by Chinese socialist scholars (Wang, 2010a, Wang, 2016; Zhang & Wang, 2001), who similarly see collectivism as a priority principle and the core value of socialism, in a way more important than equality, fairness, and justice. Further, the collectivist imperative has been reinforced by generations of political leaders. All presidents of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have continuously reiterated in official speeches the importance of promoting collectivism (Deng, 1994; Hu, 2012; Jiang, 2002; Mao, 1966; Xi, 2017), stressing that individual interests must obey collective interests and state interests. This is described by Luo (2012) as the first of the three principles of collectivism. The other two – collective interests should reflect individual interests, and collectivism values and protects the appropriate individual interests (*ibid.*) –, however, appear to be less mentioned publicly. Under such a context, without doubt, collectivism has been a key ideology alongside socialism and patriotism that all Chinese state schools teach (Cai, 2017). This form of collectivism deserves to be called totalitarian

collectivism, as it originates more from political leaders' desire to exert power than from Marxism (Harvey, 2010). Totalitarian collectivism underpins the "peculiar features of Chinese Communism" such as "thought reform" and "remoulding" (Schwartz, 1960, 20). This is further discussed in chapter 8.4.1 in relation to rights.

It now has become clear that to emphasise conformity and hierarchy, rather than collaboration and community as part of the collectivistic culture has historical, cultural, and political roots in China. Teachers' interpreting inclusion as assimilation becomes easier to understand. To illustrate further, teachers also said that segregated provisions could be sites of inclusion, as children with similar needs and abilities there together form a uniform, collective whole. This collective unit is by nature inclusive of all its members. This collectivistic focus distracts attention away from inclusion, while putting under the spotlight individuals' ability to conform to and harmonise with their immediate social environments. For example:

"Inclusive education can happen in both regular and special schools. Like these special children, if they come here [to the mainstream] and they can't communicate with anyone, they won't truly be a member here; whereas in special schools, everyone is similar and can be included." (Xiuqin, Hemei School)

"Children in a special school may still feel they are normal because everyone has about the same level of ability. But if they are in a mainstream school, they can feel they are very different from others, and this is not good for them." (Liangshu, Shengben School)

Although encouraging uniformity in the name of collectivism appears to be a common theme in Chinese schools today, nevertheless, the traditional Chinese culture rather specifically rejects uniformity. For example, 和实生物, 同则不继 (*he shi sheng wu, tong ze bu ji*) means that harmony/unity generates vitality for things to grow and develop, while sameness/uniformity only leads to stagnation (*Discourses of the States*, BCE 947 – BCE 453). This points to unity needing to be distinguished from uniformity. Confucius also preached unity, not

uniformity (see chapter 9.1.1 for his definition of the ‘great harmony’ *datong*). This is clear in his educational idea of 因材施教 (*yin cai shi jiao*, accord to aptitude to teach), which, rejecting the one-size-fits-all approach of uniformity, encourages differentiated and individualised teaching and learning (Analects, 11.22). Confucius further maintained that the ultimate goal of education is for an individual to cultivate oneself and become an ideal person, or, in Confucian terms, *shengren* (圣人, sage) or *junzi* (君子, person of superior virtues). He explained that “a *Junzi* cultivates himself [sic] so as to give peace to others” (Analects, 14.42). This highlights an approach to unity through cultivating personal virtues to manage peaceful relationships with others, rather than simply being the same as others.

However, admittedly, revisiting ancient wisdom alone may not be strong enough to support a fundamental change in schools' uniformity culture. Being familiar with the Confucian ideas does not necessarily mean one can feasibly apply them in practice. As Zhenting from Shengben School admitted:

“We all know how the [Confucian] sayings go, but in reality, who can actually do as Confucius says?...I’ve tried differentiated teaching before. It didn’t work. The parents objected. For example, I gave some under-achieving students less challenging homework and different tasks, their parents would come and complain that I wasn’t teaching their children equally to others. So in the end I had to teach everybody in the same way so that parents wouldn’t complain.” (Zhenting, Shengben School)

Thus, there is still much complexity surrounding Chinese schools’ pursuit of uniformity. Challenges within the restricting educational structures and insufficient inner drives will need to be considered. These aspects will be further explored in chapters seven and eight.

Summary

The analysis shows that teachers’ interpretation of inclusion as assimilation and homogeneity at the Empirical is embedded within actual common school

practices of encouraging uniformity, underpinned by historically, culturally, and politically ingrained collective values at the Real. Thus, for inclusion to work, collective social values need to be challenged and unsettled. As starting points, the historical relevance of collectivistic beliefs in agrarian, industrial, and knowledge-based societies needs to be considered and clarified. Aspects within the traditional Chinese culture that offer critiques of the malign version of collectivism characterised by narrowly pursuing uniformity cannot be ignored or misinterpreted. Uncritical adherence to the political agendas of promoting a collectivistic ideology in schools and society need to be re-thought. These starting points may help to create space for imagining a different version of education and future society. One that is inclusive, diverse, and flourishing. It not only concerns children with SEND but all citizens.

These aspects of critical thinking can already be seen among some teachers. The next section turns to a different interpretation of inclusion: celebrating diversity and meaningful learning.

4.2 Inclusion as Meaningful Education

It is widely agreed that inclusive schools are places where all students are recognised as members of the school community and not denied the opportunity to fully participate in the school life (Allan, 1999; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Hornby, 2015; Huang, 2013; UNESCO, 1994, 2015b). This of necessity requires viewing diversity as the norm and ensuring “a high-quality education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student” (Ferguson, 1995, 286). Similarly, Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2009, 45) emphasise the need for all students to become “integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula, and receive collaborative support to succeed”. Today, inclusion is increasingly seen in terms of valuing diversity and fostering communities where all children can learn in a caring and respectful environment (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). Chinese teachers are not an exception of this common view, despite difficulties and challenges discussed so far. The following sections report and explore teachers’

different views of inclusion as meaningful education in two main categories: one particular teacher who stood out because of her outspoken educational beliefs of love, and teachers from Sifang School where 'inclusion' was purposefully promoted as the predominant campus ethos.

4.2.1 Leiyu – Love as Pedagogy

Leiyu, Chinese subject teacher and head class teacher at Hemei School identified strongly with the idea of inclusion even though she reported that she had not previously heard of the term *quan na jiaoyu* (inclusive education). She confessed that she did not have any personal or professional experiences with the children who are "very very special" (with a medical diagnosis of disability), but she did talk about her experience with students who she had considered as having additional educational needs. She said that, for her, inclusion means to accept all children and everything about them:

"Every child is different in terms of studying style, personality, and progress. You have to accept their differences, know the individual child, and guide every one of them in the way that most suited to them...Teachers need to find a way into their students' hearts, tolerate all children, and love them. Love is the best way...Certainly, all children should be able to attend mainstream schools, because all children are complete [as opposed to being defective]." (Leiyu, Hemei School)

Leiyu stood out among all participants as she was the only teacher who appeared to hold insightful and positive views of inclusion without any specialist training (Teachers from Sifang schools expressed similar views because of whole school training. This will be discussed in the next section). Further conversations reveal that possible reasons may lie within the environment of her personal and professional life at the Actual and cultural beliefs at the Real.

First, during the interview, Leiyu came across as more kind and caring than many other participants, and she reiterated the importance of love. Through her life stories, it seems that this is not only in her personality but can

also be due to her personal experiences when growing up. She said that she grew up in a village, and her mother, who was a primary school teacher, often helped the poor, such as inviting beggars on the street to her home and giving them food even though her family was not wealthy. Such an upbringing may have taught her to be kind and treat everyone with equal dignity. This is reflected in her belief that every child is complete and should be able to attend mainstream schools, rather than being defective and having to go to segregated provisions.

She also mentioned that as a girl at school, she was not a top student. She struggled with learning and felt intimidated by her teachers, who were bad tempered and would scold her harshly when her behaviours or studies did not meet the teachers' expectations. She valued the hardship in her school years because she believed it had driven her to be kind and caring to her students. She said she did not want any of her student to feel intimidated and unloved as she did; it also made her better aware of students' diverse learning needs and styles, as she had not fitted into the teaching style in her school. Thus, her inclusive educational beliefs and practices can be seen as emergent from her personal experiences. As Bhaskar (1998) wrote, individual actions often draw upon pre-existed roles or social forms and can be effectively caused by conscious intentions.

Deeply at the Real, Leiyu expressed how she found her 'wisdom' in traditional Chinese culture. She believed that inclusion necessarily means teachers loving all their students, with an emotional power that can drive teachers to better understand individual students' strengths and weaknesses, and find ways, against difficulties, to support their diverse needs, rather than simply scolding them when they do not meet teachers' expectations. In Confucianism, one core belief is benevolence, and its essential meaning is to love others: "Fan Chi asked about benevolence. The Master said: 'it is to love all men'" (Analects, 12.22). Mohism - a major school of thought in ancient China - similarly holds that "to love others does not exclude the love of oneself; the self will be loved by giving love to others" (Mozi, 11.44.8). Further, the belief of benevolence logically leads Confucius, who was regarded as a great teacher, to prefer virtuous teaching driven by love for others, rather than using punishment to discipline his pupils. He maintained that: "if the people are led by laws and

uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame" (Analects, 2.3). This may lend theoretical support to Leiyu's benevolent approach of not using scolding as a method to discipline her students, which was also driven by her own childhood experience as discussed above.

In addition, Leiyu mentioned that she does not care so much about her teacher evaluation results. She saw this as an important factor enabling her to develop and practise inclusive educational beliefs. The current teacher evaluation system focuses heavily on academic performance, discipline management, and competition. The system does not recognise or reward teachers' inclusive efforts. Rather, it can encourage an excluding learning culture in schools (This systemic barrier will be further explored in chapter 7.3). Leiyu admitted that she used to be part of the school management team, worked highly competitively focusing on students' academic achievement, and won many prizes in teacher evaluations. But she felt she still could not find her inner peace or real purposes and fulfilment in life. By chance she started to study traditional Chinese culture. It gradually inspired her into valuing less the personal gain of scoring high in teacher evaluation and focusing more on the all-round development of her students. Feeling that she had proven herself with her previous achievements, she said she then comfortably stepped down from the school management team and asked to become a head class teacher. This new role allowed her to take her own class of students as her "experimental field". She described that she tries to "nurture all her students with love", because she values pastoral care and moral education as much as academic achievement. She admitted that she could afford to do this without having to worry about being dismissed by the school, because first, the exam grades of her class are not the worst; second, from her previous management role, she had established and still maintained good personal relationships with the headteacher and the school managers, and they did not find fault with her current teaching style.

Within the traditional Chinese culture, an important pair of values for Leiyu's inspiration may be righteousness and personal gain. The traditional Chinese character for righteousness 義 consists of two characters: the upper

one is a variation of 羊, which means sheep, and the lower one is 我, which means I/myself. Literally, 義 (righteousness) means how many sheep are given to a person, which represents the regulation of distributing personal gain among people. Confucianism values righteousness over personal gain, positing that “man [sic], in the view of gain, should think of righteousness” (Analects, 14.12), as “the mind of the superior person is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean person is conversant with gain” (Analects, 4.16). Confucian proponents also argued that “pecuniary gain is not to be considered to be prosperity, but its prosperity will be found in righteousness” (The Great Learning, 16), and that “considering righteousness before personal gain is honourable, and considering personal gain before righteousness is shameful” (Xunzi, 4.7). Similarly, Mohism also values righteousness but without putting it in opposition to personal gain. Mozi, born one century after Confucius and the founder of Mohism, believed that “personal gain is the same as righteousness” (Mozi, 10.8), as “to benefit others does not exclude benefitting oneself; the self will be benefited by giving benefits to others” (Mozi, 11.11). By the same token, Taoism maintains that “the more one expends for others, the more he possesses of his own; the more one gives to others, the more he has himself” (Dao De Jing, 81).

In short, Leiyu’s personal life events at the Actual and the moral strengths she found from traditional Chinese culture at the Real were important in shaping her perspectives and interpretations at the Empirical. Thus, tapping into the traditional Chinese culture may offer a familiar, accepted, and readily-available way to promoting greater awareness and a better understanding of inclusion in China. This will be further illustrated throughout the later chapters. Examples of Leiyu's inclusive practices will also be discussed in chapter six.

4.2.2 Teachers at Sifang School - Celebrating Diversity

In the research site city, all primary schools are encouraged to develop their own unique campus ethos or guiding educational ideas (学校特色 *xuexiao tese*, school characteristics). For example, Qingzhi School advocates multiple intelligences, Hemei School emphasises harmony and traditional Chinese

culture, Shengben School focuses on student-centred education, and Sifang School promotes inclusion.

Sifang school introduced 'inclusive education' as their unique school culture in 2011 with the appointment of the new headteacher Junyi. Teachers were trained regularly in inclusive ideas and practices; campus décor was arranged to highlight the theme of inclusion with artworks; activities that reflect the spirit of inclusion were encouraged. In short, through effective inclusive leadership, an inclusive culture has been established gradually and permeates the campus. Teachers commented that an inclusive culture was 'around every corner of the school'. The following section first details the four perspectives of interpreting inclusion reported by the teachers, before explaining the inclusive leadership at Sifang School.

Inclusion as the 'School Characteristics'

Junyi explained that the main reason for choosing to promote 'inclusion' as the school characteristics was that about 62 per cent of the 670 students in the school were from migrant worker families. This presented challenges arising from the higher degree of social diversity in her school, especially when compared to other schools such as Shengben School, where the entire student body was from local well-to-do families. Thus, in order to overcome the estrangement among children from distinctive social backgrounds, to strengthen the sense of belonging and solidarity within the school community, and to promote a welcoming social environment that is more conducive for learning, Junyi introduced 'inclusion' to her school as the guiding educational philosophy, and teachers were trained accordingly. Junyi elaborated that:

"Inclusive education means to accommodate differences, promote equality, encourage diversity, and develop individuality. First of all, we need to acknowledge the differences among teachers as well as the backgrounds of our students; second, we aim to accommodate every child's developmental needs; third, we will appreciate and respect everyone's achievements and development here...In short, it is to focus on the child as a

developing human being, pay attention to education equality, and make sure that the school is providing the students with an educational service and a school life that are suitable to their developmental needs.” (Junyi, Sifang School)

This highlights that inclusion is not only a concept related to children with SEND, but rather it means meaningful education, physical attendance, and accepting their differences to benefit for all children. This necessarily requires a child-centred approach to school education, one that promotes equal, effective, relevant, and high-quality education for all students in her school.

Junyi’s views can easily find expression in the global academic debates. Inclusion emphasises recognising and valuing the diversity of all students as well as their rights to an equal education (Ainscow, 2007; Allan, 2009; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Slee, 2001). Barton (1998) maintains that for schools to be inclusive is to celebrate difference, value diversity, and respect dignity. Similarly, D’alessio (2011) considers that diversity and difference should be valued as educational resources, and an inclusive discourse should be about a real process of celebration of difference rather than a mere process of acceptance and tolerance. To put this in practical terms, Yu (2016) highlights that instead of trying to change the children or merely accepting them, the emphasis of inclusive education lies within the transformation of the education system. This necessarily involves changing the school structure and teaching practices to be more flexible, collaborative, and inclusive, so that schools can better cater for every student’s different educational needs (these will be considered further in chapters six and seven). This can be seen as reflected in Junyi’s responses regarding what inclusion means for her and her school, as well as from the views of other teachers in her school.

With Junyi’s interpretation of inclusion established as the ethos of Sifang school, the other eight participating teachers’ understanding of inclusion appeared to be influenced accordingly. Their responses can be seen to roughly correspond to the four aspects of ‘inclusion’ as highlighted by Junyi, which are: “to accommodate differences, promote equality, encourage diversity, and develop individuality”. These teachers said that inclusion necessarily means to take active measures to meet different needs and to assist their students’ own

individual development so as to provide meaningful education for all children. In this regard, every teacher seemed to have slightly different foci on their inclusive beliefs and strategies.

Inclusion as Adaptive Teaching

For example, Fangfang said that:

"Inclusion means to fully accept everyone and to all-around accommodate all children. In practice, in plain words it means to make sure every child has learned what I've taught them. According to every child's differences in learning, I will give extra tutoring to those who learn slowly, and encourage those who learn fast to keep progressing." (Fangfang, Sifang School)

She appeared to see learner diversity in terms of the pace of learning. As her inclusive strategy, she reportedly would give extra support outside the regular class hours to those who may appear to struggle to keep up. This perspective of understanding inclusion seems to focus on the result and content of learning, in that the teacher aims to deliver similar learning outcomes by allocating more tutoring time to some who may learn slow.

Similarly, the art teacher, Geyao, also saw inclusive education as requiring an adaptive approach to teaching:

"To put inclusion into practice, it means to be flexible and adaptive with my teaching. For those who are talented and interested in arts, I will guide them to improve more with techniques and creativity; whereas for those who are not really into arts, I will try to let them know more about arts and cultivate their interests, but it is ok if they just copy a drawing from the textbook and quietly finish the required tasks in class. For different students, I have different requirements." (Geyao, Sifang School)

Although both Fangfang and Geyao acknowledged that to make their classrooms inclusive is to flexibly modify their teaching strategies according to

different learner needs, they appeared to have rather different foci. As the Chinese teacher, Fangfang seemed to focus more on adapting her teaching so that all her students could learn to meet certain common required standard, whereas Geyao as the arts teacher used differentiated teaching strategies and had different requirements for her students based on their own interests and aptitudes in the subject so that the students could reach their own goals and potentials. This highlights that inclusive views and strategies can be subject-specific.

Wendai also said:

"Inclusion means...teachers needing to unconditionally accept all their students, tolerate them, and teach them according to their own aptitudes. For example, I can ask the under-achieving students to answer the easy questions in class while letting the academically strong ones answer the tough questions. This way, using differentiated methods, I can keep everyone engaged and looked after, accept their differences, and help them progress."

(Wendai, Sifang School)

Unlike Fangfang and Geyao, Wendai rather stressed the process of learning in terms of student participation, motivation, and engagement in class. This valuing of all students' presence, participation and achievement in the mainstream classroom has also been increasingly recognised in the global literature as a core aspect of inclusion (MacArthur, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). Wendai further said that in order to encourage everyone in her class actively learn together, she often gave the 'quiet' ones opportunities to answer the questions with or without them raising their hands. This had been observed during her classes. On this point, Wendai further explained that in addition to encouraging full class participation, this method could also serve as a checkpoint that informed her if the class had grasped what had been taught. She believed that if the students who ranked academically lower in class could answer the questions, it usually meant the rest of the class had also known the answers, indicating that the whole class had learned, and she could move on to the next point.

Inclusion as Recognising Diverse Talents, Interests and Potentials

The next example of viewing and enacting inclusion is from Chenyan:

“I think inclusion means to fully accept all children and everything about them, to accept both their strengths or problems...In simple terms, it is to be clear about children’s differences, and to provide the children with a conducive platform in school where they can further develop their own interests and hobbies.” (Chenyan, Sifang School)

Chenyan particularly valued children’s personal growth outside academic studies. She also highlights the need for teachers to refrain from value judgement when facing children with challenging behaviours or low attainments.

Similarly, Tinghui said:

“Inclusion is to accept every child and allow the children to develop along their own paths according to their own abilities. Teachers need to provide the children with a platform where they can progress to reach their full potential. To maximise every child’s development as far as their abilities allow, I think this is inclusion.” (Tinghui, Sifang School)

Both Chenyan and Tinghui held a child-centred view and emphasised the importance of seeing schools as a facilitator for personal growth rather than imposing certain common standards for children to measure up. Taking this further, Xintian, English subject teacher and part-time on-site school psychologist mentioned valuing children’s emotional intelligence:

“All children are very different...and they have different physiques and potentials...Teachers need to accept and appreciate different aspects of children, not just their academic abilities. Some children have kind and caring hearts; some are enthusiastic towards others and active in school events; and some are hard-

working and always take care to keep the classroom clean. All these are children's strengths. Teachers shouldn't judge a student solely by their exam grades." (Xintian, Sifang School)

Xintian highlighted the need to celebrate children's diverse strengths and to move away from an exam-centred education and the narrow focus on children's cognitive ability. Working well with others, taking initiatives, and having dedication can also be important aspects of a school education.

Inclusion as Community Building for All School Members

Only one teacher reported that inclusion is also about making the school an inclusive work environment for teachers. For example:

"I think inclusion is not just about accepting the students as who they are, but first of all I think teachers need to accept themselves, their own strengths as well as weaknesses...Then the school also needs to accept the teachers as who they are. All teachers have different personalities. Some teachers may appear to be enthusiastic and passionate while others may be the opposite. Senior and junior teachers are also different in their educational ideas and styles of teaching. So the school needs to accept every teacher as well as every student." (Linping, Sifang School)

This broader sense of inclusion reflects how inclusion was seen as a general campus ethos at the school for the entire school community rather than just the student body. This perspective focuses on the aspect of feelings, emotions and identities such as one's sense of self, membership and belonging, rather than pedagogy and knowledge. In other words, inclusion was not seen as only certain specific educational techniques of what or how to teach children, but rather as outlooks and attitudes to life, that is, how members of the school interact in an equal and respectful way with each other so that all can feel valued for who they are.

Linping's views can easily find resonance in the global literature. Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2009) identify creating a climate of belonging as a continuing part of promoting inclusion in schools. They see this as involving all stakeholders within the school including all staff members to collaborate and participate in planning and implementing more authentically inclusive strategies, such as assuming competence, valuing all students, and adopting a community-oriented approach, so as to enhance the sense of membership and belonging for all staff members and students (*ibid.*). Armstrong (2008) similarly posits that inclusion means to acknowledge diversity and for all to receive equal recognition, respect and treatment. She further states that this necessitates seeing every member within the school community as equals, and creating a sense of belonging for all through being recognised, accepted, and valued for one's self.

In short, at the Empirical, the inclusion of diverse learners as understood by teachers at Sifang School involved catering for different paces of learning, focusing on participation in the learning process, developing strategies sensitive to subject goals, encouraging personal interests and hobbies, valuing emotional intelligence, putting the child rather than exams at the centre of education, and creating an inclusive school community for all its members. These different understandings informed teachers of their corresponding coping strategies as part of their inclusive efforts. This is inseparable from the whole school approach to purposefully promoting inclusion through various activities at the Actual, which were led by Junyi's inclusive leadership at the Real.

Inclusive Leadership

Behind an inclusive school, there is effective inclusive leadership. This has been widely recognised and explored. Researchers highlight that in terms of improving learning for all students, effective school leadership is second only to effective teaching (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Hattie, 2010; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). To develop this leadership, some recommend a cultural approach. Ekins (2013, 28) argues that a "wider reconsideration and reconceptualisation of the underlying culture and ethos of the school as a

whole” is central to enable the effective leadership of inclusive practices in schools. Similarly, Precey and colleagues (2013, 146) argue that “inclusive leadership happens through a transformation of the school culture and implies a deep change in the values, norms, beliefs and in the social relations and power that cannot be imposed”. As the school culture can influence teachers’ values and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEND, and generally decisions and behaviours are guided by shared values, when permanent and sustainable inclusive processes are to be established, it is essential that school culture is transformed into one that can induce positive values and attitudes from teachers so as to create conducive condition where inclusion can further develop.

Efforts in four key areas that contributed to the inclusive culture at Sifang School were reported by teachers and observed. First, Junyi paid attention to using the artistic design of the campus décor to convey the message of inclusion. On the walls there were art works, posters, and signs surrounding the theme of inclusion. For example, in the entrance hall of the office building, Junyi purposefully chose a quote to hang on the wall in large font: “every child in front of you means the whole world for someone”. Junyi explained that this is a constant reminder for teachers to value every individual student with equal dignity regardless of their perceived ability, gender, or social background.

Second, Sifang School offers a wide range of extra-curriculum activities with visiting professionals such as dancers, musicians, craftworkers, and stand-up comedians to lead the according activity groups. Although extra-curriculum activities were a common practice across all the four mainstream schools, Sifang School stood out in terms of the quality, quantity, and design of the activities. Further, Junyi mentioned that she had the idea to transform the office building into a ‘children’s city’, where each room will be used for a dedicated learning activity theme with according materials. Students can come and choose what they would like to learn or do in their free time by visiting different rooms, as if they were ‘shopping for knowledge/skills’. However, she said the proposal was rejected by the LEA because the office building was said to be too old to undergo the required construction work.

Third, strong parental involvement can be seen from the arrangement of a parents' committee. Two parents from the committee can voluntarily join the morning meeting every Monday with Junyi, the deputy headteacher, and six head teachers to discuss schedules for the week, important notices, and feedback or suggestions. Such constant, engaged, and transparent involvement of parents means that at times school may draw on the resources from parents, especially in terms of staff and time, to increase the inclusion capacity. For example, considering the usual class size of 45 students, parents may be helpful when it comes to school trips, as some parents reportedly took active roles in helping to organise school outing events and leading groups of children on the day. Junyi mentioned that for children with autism, if their own parents cannot go with them on the school trip, an additional parents' committee member would usually volunteer to come along and watch over them. Such arrangements mean there can be more school trips without children being potentially marginalised.

Fourth, Junyi initiated an innovative learning programme called 'micro-semester'. It is a week-long unconventional learning programme every semester that resembles alternative education such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Round Square. During the 'micro-semester', instead of learning in fixed classrooms about separate academic subjects as in most Chinese schools, each year group would be assigned a learning theme, and children would do a variety of activities within and outside the school regarding the theme. For example, for Grade One (six/seven-year-olds), last year's theme was 'shopping at supermarket'. Children learned maths by calculating budgets, Chinese by reading product labels, planning and communication skills by working in groups and deciding on a shopping list, and real-world experience of shopping semi-independently in a supermarket with the supervision of teachers and some parents. The class then had a picnic in the park with what they bought. Against the traditional expectation of school education in China, during the 'micro-semester', children do not have to sit orderly in a well-disciplined classroom; there is no academic pressure or competition; and all can participate, collaborate, and contribute in their own ways regardless of their abilities/disabilities. The 'micro-semester' was regarded highly and proudly by

teachers as an innovative and effective way to foster an inclusion culture within school.

With these specific innovations, teachers, parents, and students seemed to form an inclusive culture at the school. This theme, for example, was obvious on sports days: the common practice in most schools is for some children to sign up as the competing athletes while others take the role of audience and cheer for their friends. But at Sifang School, Junyi said that she insisted that there was no standing-by audience, but instead every child can and should participate and be an athlete. There was a wider range of activities available not only in competing sports but also leisure games, so that everyone can be an active part of the event. This reflects the key theme of inclusion within the school culture that particularly stresses all children's equal participation in the school community.

Summary

Junyi's whole school approach to inclusion shows that teachers' deeper understanding of inclusive education at the Empirical can be cultivated through school activities at the Actual under effective leadership at the Real. Despite the multiple structural difficulties within the wider Chinese education system (see chapter seven), inclusion is not impractical or impossible. As Junyi, headteacher at Sifang School said:

“We [individual teachers] cannot fundamentally change the grand structures of the current education system, but we can and should try our best to build transferable and sustainable education mini eco-systems in schools that help students to enter the future society with confidence and ease. So school leaders need to understand that exam scores are not the only criterion for education quality. It is the values and needs of children and parents that decide how schools should be.” (Junyi, Sifang School)

This highlights that deeply at the Real, inclusive leadership is based on values in education that put individual students' needs for personal growth at the centre. Such values challenge educators, school leaders, and policy-makers to rethink if producing high achieving students for economic development and international competitions can be schools' sole purpose today. Also questioned are the traditional ways of learning such as fixed classrooms, delineated academic subjects, and routine timetables. Thus, for effective school leadership to have the generative power towards more inclusive educational beliefs and practices among individual teachers, only introducing new initiatives is not enough. More importantly, it is about a fundamental value shift towards recognising the inclusion of all children and valuing their personal growth as integral to the purpose of school education.

4.3 Chapter Summary

Through exploring how the participants interpreted the term *quan na jiaoyu* (inclusive education), it has been revealed that first, teachers' interpretations of 'inclusion' form two clear divisions: the majority of teachers saw it in a way that resembles the physical integration of children into mainstream schools; the rest reported that inclusion is about both the physical placement and a meaningful education for children who tend to be otherwise marginalised. This necessarily means having to accept individual differences, to accommodate needs, and to celebrate learner diversity.

At the Empirical, the current practice of LRC informed by the inclusion policies in China may often lead to confusion that LRC is the same as inclusion. At the Actual, the practice of discipline, conformity, orderliness, and crowd-control in schools can also constitute a hostile environment for children with SEND who do not fit in or measure up. Deeply at the Real, inclusion can involve battling with cultural beliefs and personal values regarding norms and collectivism. Yet culture and values can also be used to support inclusion. In the cases where teachers expressed a deeper understanding of inclusion, tapping into the wisdom of the traditional Chinese culture and cultivating an inclusive

campus culture through effective leadership may lend strength to teachers to develop inclusive beliefs and practices.

However, beliefs, awareness, and discourse of inclusion themselves are not the same as the actual inclusive practices (Scott & Scott, 2018; Singal, 2008). There are prevailing doubts on the practicalities of inclusion in classrooms and unwillingness and reservation on its actual implementation despite the often-supportive attitudes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin *et al.*, 2010; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Lloyd, 2008; Pijl, Boer & Minnaert, 2011). The next chapter thus examines the practices of inclusion to reveal concerns, barriers, hopes, and enablers, and to help make sense of China's inclusive education.

Chapter 5: Bodies in Physical Space

This is the first of the four following chapters using the CR framework of four-planar social being to explore how inclusion has been and not been enacted in the four sampled schools. The chapter focuses on the first plane of bodies in material relations to nature, exploring what the physical space/setting mean for children with SEND. Drawing on observation and interview data, the enquiry mainly involves an investigation at the Actual in terms of the physical accessibility of mainstream schools, capacity for physical and embodied mobility within campus, additional resources availability, and the design of learning space inside classrooms. This will then shed light on how the physical environment of schools may be experienced by embodied students as inclusive or non-inclusive at the Empirical. Children', teachers', and parents' views will be used as illustrative examples. At the Real, multiple conflicting and converging forces are discussed. In this, the chapter summary particularly highlights the importance of seeing children as having bodies of needs as well as learning minds. The research sub-question intended to be answered is: *In what ways are the sampled schools inclusive or non-inclusive in their physical environments for embodied students?*

5.1 Physical Access

LRC as a national policy requires that mainstream schools cannot refuse the enrolment of children with mild disabilities within the neighbourhood (MoE, 1994, 2014). Recent policies also encourage mainstream schools to accept children with severe disabilities (MoE, 2017b) (see chapter 2.5.1). However, as practice can often be inconsistent with policy, children with disabilities do not necessarily have continued access to their neighbourhood mainstream schools. The hidden pressure behind it is often undetectable to the scope of official policies and regulations. Examples of such exclusions were more apparently observed and reported in special schools.

To illustrate, at Haiyang Special School, a number of students were said to have 'willingly' dropped out and transferred from mainstream schools. For example, Taosheng, a ten-year-old boy with distinct facial complexion and learning difficulties said that, his previous mainstream school returned his fees in the second academic year without giving any official reasons every time his mother tried to re-enrol him, and his mother transferred him to this new school.¹⁰ Considering that a) this mainstream school did not reject Taosheng's initial enrolment, b) his transfer appeared to be the decision of the parent, and c) special schools are recognised and encouraged by state policies (MoE, 2009, 2010, 2014, 2017a), although Taosheng was virtually refused physical access to his mainstream school, his transfer did not violate any regulations on paper.

Such practices highlight the insufficient policies at the Empirical and weak reinforcement at the Actual. At the Real, Taosheng's case reveals a low awareness for social justice and rights-claiming among educators and parents. For educators, this can mean seeking loopholes in the existing policies and comfortably rejecting children with SEND. For parents, this may be manifested in the uncritical obedience to institutional power or abuse without seeking to claim rights for themselves or their children. In Taosheng's transfer, the only voiced objection came from Taosheng himself. He said that he was not happy at the special school because some other students always called him 'dirty' and 'stupid', and that he wanted to go back to his previous mainstream school where he had friends. According to his teachers at the Haiyang Special School, he had violent behaviours such as hitting people and breaking things when he first arrived two years ago and tried to run away in several occasions. The teachers said now he was much calmer and thought it was the beneficial results of the special school improving his behaviours. While the teachers further endorsed the special schools for its specialised expertise and enclosed protective environment, what was ignored was the child's own voice - the fierce protest from a boy who came across as innocent, shy, and curious, and who

¹⁰ At the compulsory education stage, there is no tuition fee (NPC, 1986/2015). However, a "miscellaneous fee" is chargeable, covering areas such as textbooks, stationery, insurance, uniform, lunch, and/or central heating in winter (MoE, National Development and Reform Commission & Ministry of Finance, 2004; NPC, 1986/2015). Some local schools may also charge hidden fees such as magazine subscriptions or additional tutoring groups.

reportedly had peacefully confronted a group of name-calling bullies of his age on the bus and drove them away simply by calmly and dauntlessly asking them back 'why did you call me stupid?'

A similar example is a 13-year-old boy with learning difficulties demonstrating challenging behaviours at Haiyang Special School. He was transferred there two years ago after attending a mainstream school for five years. According to his father Dongpo, a former accountant who quit his job to look after his son in school every day, the main reason for the 'willing' transfer was that the boy could not keep up with his academic studies. So the parents saw no point in their son attending that school where the curriculum at the sixth grade (final year of primary schools) was heavily academic and competitive.¹¹ Dongpo said (paraphrase based on notes):

He couldn't keep up. My son can't even speak Chinese fluently and they were teaching him English. The school didn't arrange any classes or anything that suited his needs, but I understand it was impossible for the school to do so, because they chase after the high ranking on the league tables. I'm already very grateful that the mainstream school has accepted him for five years. His biggest problem is that he doesn't know how to follow rules. I sent him here to learn about discipline and following rules. If mainstream schools have a suitable curriculum and designated teachers to look after him, of course I would still prefer a mainstream school, because then it would be easier for us parents, and I can work again. (Dongpo, father of a student at Haiyang Special School)

Parents can feel grateful about their children being able to attend the neighbourhood mainstream school, which is their right. This illustrates that the inherently excluding nature of mainstream schools can be left largely unchallenged in the Chinese general public, where the culture is strongly normalising and collectivist (see chapter 4.1).

¹¹ It was common that parents of children with a recognised disability would quit their jobs to look after their children, as the additional support available at schools or from social welfare system is rather limited.

Being physically separated from the friends they had and places they knew in their previous mainstream schools, both two boys appeared to be confused, frustrated, and distressed. As emotions are “commentaries on our concerns” (Archer, 2000, 207), these emotional behaviours were understandably children’s natural reactions to their situations at the Actual. But challenging behaviours as such were routinely interpreted at the Empirical by adults as children’s own fault: they are naughty, bad, and needs discipline. Because the inner self is “hermeneutically sealed from extrospection and knowable only by our first person selves” (Archer, 2003, 22), children with SEND who may not be able to express themselves fully or clearly to others are especially likely to be misunderstood and mistreated. It is thus particularly important for adults to listen to children’s own voices, understand the reasons behind their seemingly irrational behaviours, and respect their right to control their own bodies and lives. Children with SEND cannot be seen only as bodies with problems. At the Real, their self-determining minds need to be respected.

The following three sections turn to the physical settings inside mainstream schools and how they may be experienced as inclusive or non-inclusive, first in terms of mobility.

5.2 Mobility

In comparison to special schools, the sampled mainstream schools had bigger campuses where students had more space to move around. The school were closer to students’ homes within their neighbourhood, where they can travel to and from easily with their neighbourhood friends. This is contrasted by students at special schools who often had to travel far every day and be pulled away from friends at home. For example, in the previous example, Dongpo said one reason why he was accompanying his son to school every day was that they had to take the bus for almost one hour, a task that his son could not do independently. Another parent also mentioned that the family rented a flat and moved closer to Haiyang Special School just to make the journey to and from the school easier. Thus, mainstream schools as they were, without changing anything else except for providing physical access, already can offer a relatively

more inclusive environment for children within their neighbourhood community. Access to neighbourhood schools affects children's out-of-school lives, evenings, weekends and holidays when they can play with local friends. If they attend a distant special school, they may be excluded from local friendship groups (Alderson & Goodey, 1998/2018).

However, traditionally, mainstream schools were not physically designed for children with disabilities. The effective inclusion of these children thus necessarily requires changes and adaptation in schools' physical settings. All students need to be able to move around the campus and all floors of the buildings with ease. However, Rui, a seven-year-old boy at Sifang School with cerebral palsy and the only student in a wheelchair, had no access to lifts or ramps at school. He had to be carried up and down the stairs by the school porter every day, or by his grandparents who lived nearby, if the porter was not available. Parental/family involvement in creating an inclusive school community is indeed important, but not all grandparents live close and can assume the role of a teaching assistant for their grandchildren. To be an effectively inclusive school, the main responsibility in accommodating students' needs cannot be left to their families. According to Rui's head class teacher Wendai, his mobility around the school was almost entirely dependent on his grandparents. Not only was this arrangement inconvenient for the school and the grandparents, the distraction of having Rui's grandparents frequently in school every day may also disrupt his involvement in the school community and pull him away from his friends over time. Yet under the current circumstances, grandparents helping out seemed to be the most doable solution for the time being. However, Sifang School reportedly had not planned to install lifts or ramps to make its physical environment more accessible. Teachers said that as there was only one student in a wheelchair, it might not be a convincing application to obtain the permission and additional budget from the LEAs to install lifts and ramps just yet; besides, the application process itself can also be prolonged and troublesome.

Nevertheless, having lifts and ramps installed alone does not make schools' physical environment more inclusive. The campus mobility level will not increase if these facilities are not actually used. This is the case at Qingzhi School. As the newest built school among the four mainstream schools, it was the only school equipped with a lift and a ramp for wheelchair access. This

owes to the latest architectural regulation in China, which put legal requirements on the accessibility of buildings for the first time (State Council, 2012). However, not only was there just one lift and ramp in one of their four school buildings, the building was also not for classrooms but rather for staff offices, a meeting room, a library, and some equipment rooms. During the time of fieldwork, the lift was not in use. There were also no students who were on a wheelchair on campus. Although for the time being, no teachers saw a problem with this setup, it still limits the school's capacity to offer a welcoming and inclusive physical environment for potential students who may have additional mobility needs.

Thus, mainstream schools' inclusive capacities in mobility can face challenges in terms of not having the necessary facilities, not using or effectively using, and misusing the available facilities at the Actual, and the low awareness at the Empirical for student's additional mobility needs. At the Real, in the context of a collective culture that stresses the social norms of individuals fitting into their larger groups and conforming to the natural world (see chapter 4.1), it is often less compelling for institutions to adjust their physical environments to support individual needs. This oversight often means that:

"If some schools have a child on a wheelchair who gets to participate in basketball matches [on his/her wheelchair], I think it would probably be reported on local newspapers as sensational news." (Yunfeng, Shengben School)

It is thus not surprising that even in the two sampled special schools, there were no lifts or ramps. With the new and developing legal frameworks on more accessible buildings and inclusion policies, I am hopeful that changes will happen. Time will also be needed for considering individual additional mobility needs to become part of the norm, in schools and in the general society.

5.3 Specialist Resource Rooms

As required by national policies, at the compulsory education stage, schools having more than five students with a recognised disability need to have a special education resource room (MoE, 2016). These schools will then serve as

inclusive education resource centres for their neighbouring schools (*ibid.*). According to the policy guidance, the minimum size of the resource room should be 60 square meters, consisting of three main functional areas of a learning and training area (sensory integration training, visual training, and speech and language therapy), an assessment area (space for evaluating student needs and assessing progress; storage space for individual education plans, teaching plans, teaching equipment, books, and videos), and an office area (for carrying out managerial work; reception for visitors) (*ibid.*). Sifang School and Qingzhi School were among these selected schools. However, their resource rooms were far from what the policy guidance describes. Below is a photograph of the special education resource room at Qingzhi School:



Next door to this room was a ‘calming down room’ of half the size, where all walls and floors were padded and there was a soft dummy inside. The special education resource rooms at Qingzhi School thus only meet one policy criterion: it can support sensory integration training. Understandably, this set up was before the official guidance was released. It will take time and coordination for schools to set up the newly required resource room. With such additional resources that none of the other three mainstream schools had, Qingzhi School

reportedly offered sensory integration training sessions for a group of students led by visiting specialist teachers from special schools. The headteacher Linwei spoke highly of the trainings, saying that besides helping the children to improve their sensory processing abilities, it promoted teachers' and parents' awareness of learning difficulties, particularly regarding sensory processing disorder. However, according to the teachers, the training sessions were a one-off programme two years ago initiated by the headteacher. There were some sporadic sessions in the following year. But the room was rarely used now. Teachers said this is because no one was in charge of contacting the specialists from special schools to come and deliver the sessions. Without a structured collaboration model, teachers at Qingzhi School started to forget to make arrangements or were too busy to do so. The rooms were also in the teachers' office building, away from student's classrooms and not easily accessible. Thus, the resource rooms gradually became abandoned.

A similar situation was also present at Sifang School. According to teachers, such a room no longer existed, or at least "no one knows where it is" (Xinyu, English teacher and part-time school psychologist at Sifang School). Xinyu further explained that:

"The local education authority allocated many special needs resources to the school as a standard requirement, but the school doesn't have the specialist staff to use these resources, so these facilities are just lying around somewhere, wasted and forgotten. After a while, many are broken or lost." (Xinyu, Sifang School)

The inefficient use of additional resources was not only relevant to children with SEND. In the example of similarly often-abandoned 'psychology tutorial room' (MoE, 2015c), all children may be affected:¹²

"Every school has a psychology tutorial room as required by the local education authority, but schools don't use these facilities. Parents were surprised when I told them their children can go to

¹² Psychology tutorial room (*xinli fudao shi*, 心理辅导室) is where psychological and counselling services can be provided for students. It is often equipped with a sandbox table, relevant books and counselling material (MoE, 2015c).

the school psychologist and play at a sandbox table. They didn't know anything about it." (Xintian, Shengben School)

Clearly, despite national policies at the Empirical, schools may routinely neglect these resources at the Actual. Deeply at the Real, this is inseparable from the neoliberal education policies and the exam-centred education system that can powerfully direct teachers' attention onto academic studies and other easily measurable aspects of student development (these structural barriers will be further explored in chapter seven). In addition, in the Chinese society, there is still much stigma surrounding those who see psychologists, let alone those with a recognised disability. Teachers mentioned that almost no parents or students would actively seek to use on-site specialist resources, perhaps because "no one wanted to be seen as having psychological problems or abnormal" (Xintian, Shengben School). This harks back to the previous analysis of the normalising culture and the emphasis on uniformity in chapter 4.1. There will also be an expanded discussion on the shame culture in chapter 8.2.

In short, having additional resources physically present in schools does not necessarily make schools more inclusive if the resources are not effectively used. Inclusion is experienced and practised. Agents' crucial roles must not be absented.

5.4 Physical Space in Classrooms

Students often have rather limited physical space in Chinese classrooms. The current national policy guidance regarding the physical size of classrooms was from more than three decades ago. It states that the recommended classroom size in primary schools should be 54 square metres; and the maximum number of students per class should be 50 students in the short term and reduced to 45 in the long term (MoE, 1981). The Education Office of Shandong Province (2011) recently reaffirms that 45 is the maximum class size. This means 1.2 square metre of physical space per student in a primary school classroom at the research site city. To put this into perspectives, it is about half the size of a standard primary school classroom in the UK, which is 2.33 square metres per student (calculated from about 70 square metres per every 30 students

according to Department for Education and Skills, 2014). In crowded classrooms (see photos below), all children may struggle with moving around with ease or feeling relaxed, let alone for children with additional mobility needs, agoraphobia, or social anxiety.



Qingzhi School



Sifang School



Hemei School



Shengben School

Crowded classrooms can limit the design of learning space. In all the four mainstream schools, classrooms were arranged with fixed seats in rows in a ‘sit-and-listen’ style. Other forms of seating arrangements were usually considered unpractical or impossible by most teachers, as they believed there was no space to rearrange the tables and chairs otherwise such as in groups or circles.

Classroom physical environment can significantly affect learning (Barrett *et al.*, 2015; Tanner, 2008; Weinstein, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Thomas, Pavlechko & Cassady, 2018). The design of the learning space “produces particular forms of activity and sets of relations by configuring the identities and

understandings of people who occupy it” (Lupton, 2009, 112). This means that in terms of creating an inviting, inclusive environment conducive to learning, seats in rows would unhelpfully break up interactions and connections among students as they cannot easily see each other. In such classrooms, student-student relationships are largely undervalued and unused. This can be counter-effective in building school communities where children can learn in open, welcoming, and inclusive environments. The marginalising effects were particularly obvious when students on LRC placements and some reportedly ‘naughty’ ones had fixed seats at the back corners of the classrooms.

Although no teacher doubted the traditional arrangement of seats in rows, change is not impossible. For example, at Hemei School, there was one special functional room called ‘Classroom of the Future’ (see photograph below):



This classroom is the same size as other regular classrooms at the school, but with specially designed tables, children can sit in groups in non-fixed seats without overcrowding the room. The tables and chairs can also be rearranged to other formations to serve the purposes of specific lessons. However, as admitted by teachers at Hemei School, this room had been rarely

used, as it was only for recording model lessons or streaming live lessons online interactively with another class in a partner school overseas. All the participating teachers at Hemei School still saw the room as an advanced facility, referring to it as 'for the future'. Yet in the UK and many other parts of the world, classrooms like this can be the most mundane and ordinary norm. Admittedly, financial expenses are needed to support the re-design of physical space in a large scale at the Actual. But what deeply constrains the inclusive classroom design at the Real is to do with the purpose of schools as offering cheap, mass education for national development and international competition more than for the personal growth, needs, and wants of individual children. Such structural barriers will be further explored in chapter seven.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Underlying the discussion in this chapter is that at the Real, while students are commonly viewed as having learning minds, the fact that they are at the same time having bodies of needs and experiences in the physical world can be routinely overlooked in education. In this regard, the discussions in this chapter have shown how children's inclusive experiences at the Empirical can be greatly constrained by unsecure access to mainstream schools, the lack of mobility facilities on-site, limited use of additional specialised resources, and the restricting learning space inside classrooms at the Actual.

In the mind-body dualism debates following Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), there tends to be privileges towards the mind when thinking about being human. A shared view can be that "what is essentially valuable about human beings is their mental capacity for rationality" (Jaggar, 1988, 40). In education, this tradition has been translated into emphases on academic learning and cognitive ability development, whereas the physical bodies can be disciplined, punished, constrained, or excluded to serve the learning minds. The needs and experiences of bodies themselves may be neglected.

However, Archer (2000) argues that the interactions and transactions with the physical environments are central to individuals developing embodied

and practical knowledge about themselves and the world around them. Students developing such knowledge is integral to education. For inclusive education, this means efforts and initiatives are not only on including the mind such as meaningful learning and sense of belonging. Creating inclusive physical environments to meet bodily needs in the physical space is also indispensable.

The next chapter examines the second plane of interpersonal relationships.

Chapter 6: Interactions

This chapter investigates inclusion and exclusion within the four mainstream schools mainly in terms of teacher-student interactions. The main focus is teachers' self-reported and observed teaching activities and outcomes regarding teaching children with SEND at the Actual. Drawing on observation and interview data, the analyses also report on examples of children's non-inclusive and inclusive experience in mainstream schools at the Empirical. Absent and ineffective strategies leading to the marginalisation and rejection of children with SEND are discussed as non-inclusive examples, while inclusive interactions are those where children were reported or observed to be engaged with learning, enjoying school, developing friendship, and having improved behaviours and attainments. Based on common and recurring themes, the non-inclusive examples will be discussed in the first three sections under the themes of: negligence, negative intervention, and rejection. The inclusive examples will be discussed in the remaining three sections under the themes of: accepting differences, positive reinforcement, and peer support. Possible underlying reasons behind the given examples at the Real will be explored or indicated to be explored in later chapters. The research sub-question answered in this chapter is: *How are children with SEND included or excluded in their mainstream school classrooms?*

6.1 Negligence

It was observed and self-reported that teachers may easily neglect children with SEND in their classes. They said that although they would have wanted to provide the "right" additional support, they just did not have the time, the energy, or the know-how to do so in the whole-class environment. Nonetheless, some still preferred mainstream schools for children with SEND in general, as they saw the mainstream environment as having a beneficial passive influence itself even though the children may not engage much in active academic learning. To unpack, this section first considers the teacher-centred whole-class teaching generally found inside teachers' classroom; then two examples at

Hemei School will be discussed to illustrate teachers' feeling of "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" in such a context.

6.1.1 Teacher-Centred Whole-Class Teaching

A teacher-centred classroom means that lessons are mostly delivered in a sit-and-listen teaching style with limited group activities. The whole class is usually expected to learn the same thing in the same way at the same pace. This 'direct teaching to the whole-class' mode of pedagogy is found to be typical in East Asian countries (Joong *et al.*, 2009; Leung, 2001; Xu *et al.*, 2017). This could be due to the constraints of large class sizes in the Chinese context. Leung (2001) also identifies that it may have roots within the Chinese culture. Since school education reflects the norms where social harmony is regarded as a top concern and individuals are expected to conform and fit in to the social world (see chapter 4.1 regarding Confucianism and collectivism), a primary role of teachers in Chinese schools is to set a role model in this process for students to follow and measure up to. The Chinese term for 'teacher education' - 师范, *shifan* – literally means 'teacher, model', which refers to setting good models for students. The term was derived from the classic text by Yang (BCE 52 – CE18), where teachers were defined as "a model for other people". When teaching mainly involves providing a role model, teachers can become the centre of education. Accordingly, teachers' talk – imparting knowledge – was found to be the main educational experience within the sampled schools.

Teacher-centred teaching has been so taken-for-granted in Chinese schools as the way to teach, that even in art classes where activities and creativity are expected, most of a 45-minute lesson can be devoted to teachers' talk (*e.g.*, what to draw and how it should be drawn). For examples, at Sifang School in Geyao's art class (Grade One), she asked a boy who stood up for no reason to sit down, and said to him: "why did you stand up? Sit down. The most important thing in class is to listen to teachers' talk. Everything else is not important". She then hung up four similar example drawings of a fish with its head pointing to the left on the blackboard after talking for half an hour and asked the students to draw a fish - any fish. At the end of class when students

showed their drawings, all the fish looked quite similar, and only six out of the 43 students drew their fish with its head pointing to the right.

Teacher-centred teaching stresses what teachers have taught instead of what students have learnt. It is about students listening to teachers and following instructions, rather than independent, critical, and creative thinking. Such teaching style requires students to keep up with the teaching on their own, not for teachers to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of the students. In short, at the Actual, the common teaching style and activities in a Chinese mainstream classroom can be quite the opposite of what inclusion requires. The general teacher-student relationship informed by it then often limits children's inclusive experience at the Empirical. At the Real, this is inseparable from the strong collective and normalising culture in the Chinese society (see chapter 4.1). It is also to do with a neoliberal understanding of schools' fundamental purpose. This will be discussed in chapter 7.1 as a structural barrier.

6.1.2 “I don't have the time or energy”

Lina, a head class teacher and Chinese subject teacher, described a seven-year-old girl in her class named Shao:

“I found that she's socially awkward and doesn't know how to solve problems. Her only way to solve a problem is to cry. This child is difficult. At the moment, as long as she doesn't cause any troubles, I just leave her be.” (Lina, Hemei School)

Corresponding to Lina's reported minimum interaction with Shao, my observation also did not find that she gave Shao additional attention or support. For example, during one class, Shao and another student sitting behind her were pushing their table and chair back and forth against each other harshly, each trying to get more space. The noise and commotion were somewhat disruptive and distracting in an otherwise orderly classroom. Lina sternly asked them to stop in front of the whole class, and then continued with her teaching. The two students stopped the pushing, and Shao started to make frequent sniffing noises with her nose for a few minutes, which may mean she was

crying. Lina did not stop to talk to her. After class, Shao was no longer crying, and Lina left the classroom without talking to her.

During the interview, when asked about this incident, Lina confessed that on hindsight, she should have talked to Shao after class to make sure she was ok and also to help her understand that she did not have less space than the girl behind her and she did not need to push back her chair. But Lina also admitted that she could not afford to stop the whole class just to comfort one girl, so she could only use “fast, simple, and crude” ways to ask Shao to stop making a scene. After class, since Shao was no longer crying, Lina felt that the opportunity window of talking to Shao about the chair pushing had passed, and she feared that if she mentioned it, Shao may cry again. Besides, Lina felt that Shao was still doing fine in general, so to avoid complicating things, Lina said she had chosen to leave her be.

The above observation and Lina’s own explanation may have portrayed Lina as not so caring or responsible. However, further conversations show that what teachers wanted to do and could actually do in their classrooms may be greatly constrained by factors outside their control. Lina said that she constantly felt overwhelmed by her responsibility for 45 students as a head class teacher as well as a Chinese subject teacher. She gave an example that she had to collect magazine subscription fees from her students on the day of the interview, which took her a whole day of preparation on a Saturday (including tasks such as making a form, calculating the amount, confirming with parents) and half of her Chinese class time. She said that outside teaching, she needed to prepare lessons, mark homework, and do a variety of administrative chores and random tasks (*e.g.*, for the school art festival, each class was encouraged to put forward a student performance. It was the head class teachers’ responsibility to arrange and rehearse the performance). Thus, although Lina acknowledged that some of her students may need extra help, she confessed that under the current workload, she sometimes even struggled with her assigned tasks, let alone sparing additional attention or energy to give extra help to particular students.

Indeed, inclusive education, as Barton (2005, 319) notes, is “a time-consuming, demanding and disturbing task and there are no easy short-cut

recipes". In Chinese schools, the whole-class teacher-centred teaching style and the current teacher responsibility structures at the Actual often do not allow the time, space, or comfort for teachers to think about or practise inclusion. The relationship between the system and teachers can shape models of teacher-student relationships. Shao's emotional and behavioural needs not being met by teachers was inseparable from Lina's needs for additional support not being met by the school under the current education system. This highlights that inclusion is not just a task for teachers regarding how they can further include students, but also a requirement for schools and the wider education system regarding how teachers can become empowered to do so. Expanded discussion on the complexity of such structural barriers at the Real will be presented in chapter seven.

Apart from teachers feeling that they do not have the time or energy, another common reason behind the neglect of children with SEND was reported to be "not knowing what to do".

6.1.3 "You can only leave them be. What else can you do?"

Teachers often saw SEND as necessarily requiring drastically different teaching methods, ones they often did not know about. For example, Ning, a nine-year-old boy at Hemei School, was said to have learning difficulties. His head class teacher Xiaofei described that:

"He doesn't take out his books and he doesn't listen in class. He just sits by the window and stares outside all the time. Sometimes he makes weird noises in class...His classmates don't reject or bully him, but they don't play together either. He doesn't have friends. He's quite lonely...This is just how he is. He doesn't fit in. You've seen him. When you talk to him, he either has no reaction or says things that no one understands. You can only leave him be. What else can you do?" (Xiaofei, Hemei School)

Observations show that during Xiaofei's maths classes, Ning's state was as Xiaofei described. For example, in the first observation session, Xiaofei told

Ning to take out his books in low voice when she walked passed his table on two occasions. His seat was at the back corner of the classroom by the window. Ning did not react. He kept sitting quietly and staring outside the window, seemingly unaware of what was going on around him. Xiaofei did not have further interaction with Ning in that class for the remainder of the observation session. Ning was generally quiet and undisruptive. He would make some noises here and there in the otherwise quiet class, but no one appeared to take notice.

During breaks in between classes, most of the time Ning would run out of the classroom and wander around the corridor by himself until the next class began. Sometimes he would stay in the room and join a playful scuffle with other boys. There were occasions where other boys responded to his 'poking' and played with him, but there were also groups of boys who did not react. One boy said that (paraphrase based on notes):

I don't like him, and I don't dislike him. I just don't really have any personal contact with him. He's a bit weird, and I'm kind of afraid of him. He can be lively, and I think he's good at sports. Some classmates tried to approach him and make friends, but he would usually reject them. In Grade One and Two, he got into some fights with others because of this, so now [in Grade Three] we are just not bothered anymore, and he's being mostly alone. (Boy, Ning's classmate, Hemei School)

Clearly, the climate within the class was not one that was deliberately excluding or segregating. Two other boys said that they did not mind playing with Ning, and they did not think ill of him, but they also did not usually initiate contacts with him, because they thought Ning was 'weird' and did not understand why he behaved the way he did. Thus, Ning's physical presence in the same class as others did not naturally lead to his social acceptance. Misunderstanding and hostile reactions from other children were noticeable when teachers did not purposefully provide necessary guidance. For example, during one class, the girl sitting in front of Ning turned back, forcefully pushed his table back further away from her chair, and said rather harshly with visible annoyance on her face: "you move back". Ning did not seem to mind and

showed no reaction. After the class, when asked why she pushed his table back like that, the girl answered (paraphrase based on notes):

He's making weird noises behind me all the time. He's so annoying. I don't know why he makes weird noises. It's just the way he is. (Girl, Ning's classmate, Hemei School)

Over time, it seemed that the class had formed an understanding that Ning was just 'weird, annoying, and unapproachable'. However, Ning was observed on various occasions during class breaks to have initiated social contacts with other boys by poking them then quickly running away, as if inviting them to chase him. When I was trying to talk to Ning by asking him about his name, he eagerly replied with a brightened up facial expression but unintelligible mumblings and shouts.

Without mutually understandable communication, it is understandable that from Xiaofei's perspective, she may feel quite clueless as to how she could better support Ning academically. Yet socially, with Ning's personality, it did not seem altogether impossible to create a welcome, understanding, and supportive classroom for him where he may feel happy and accepted with friends. A key here may well be teachers' willingness and awareness to devote time and energy to get to know Ning and also help other children to better understand him. Using the words from Leiyu at Hemei School: "every child has their own language. Teachers need to understand children's own ways of expressing themselves and enter their minds and hearts". In this regard, Thomas and Loxley (2001, 27) argue that specialist techniques are not necessarily the key to a successful education for children with SEND; sometimes "more mundanely and prosaically, the amount of help being given and the sensitivity with which it is given" can also make a great difference.

However, this is not always easy. Listening to teachers' difficulties, I was sympathetic to the challenges they faced. Both Lina and Xiaofei were working hard towards their responsibilities for most of their students. Their daily schedules were so tight that Lina did the interview during a lunch break, sacrificing her rest time, while Xiaofei was interviewed while she was marking students' homework in her office. What they could do was greatly constrained

by routine school activities at the Actual such as exam-centred teaching, large class sizes, and shortage of teachers. Deeply at the Real, an inherently excluding education system and the stigma surrounding the disability label informed by the medical model also further detracted their attention from 'how' onto 'whether' they could meet the additional learner needs (see chapter seven for further discussion). Consequently, children with disabilities can be routinely neglected and denied meaningful learning even if they are physically present in a mainstream school. As teachers described:

“Right now, LRC in our country is mostly just for these children to physically sit in a mainstream classroom. Nothing more...They are really just wasting their time in school.” (Tinghui, Sifang School)

“LRC is something like, I allow you to come to this school, but you are not really a true member of this school, because your exam grades don't count. So I think LRC is the opposite of inclusion.”
(Cuiling, Shengben School)

In Chinese schools, teachers are models (see chapter 6.1.1). Teachers cannot avoid setting a model of themselves being inclusive or excluding. Their neglect of children with SEND can become examples followed by their class. To have more inclusive teachers as models, complex efforts are required at multiple levels of policies, educational structures, and inner drives. These will be further explored in chapters seven and eight.

The next section turns to examples where teachers more actively reacted to children with SEND but their strategies appeared to lead to negative outcomes.

6.2 Negative Interventions

Negative interventions from teachers were mostly found in term of discipline control and insensitive understanding of and responses to children with SEND. They were negative in the sense that they seemed to lead to social rejection and exclusion of the student. This section first considers the general context of

discipline control commonly found inside teachers' classroom. Then an example from Qingzhi School will be discussed.

6.2.1 Discipline Control

Teachers' classrooms were commonly found to have a strong theme of discipline control. This can be reflected in their daily practice: children were expected to remain silent unless given permission to talk, to sit still in their chairs, and to face forward. Some teachers required that students should have certain postures such as arms on the table and straight backs. Group discussions were minimal, and students should instead raise their hands to be called upon to answer teachers' questions, or the whole class read out loud textbook passages in unison; and in-class tasks for students such as solving mathematical problems or reading & comprehension were mostly done independently in silence without peer interactions. Students who talked to each other during independent tasks could be stopped by teachers as a disciplinary breach. Discipline control can also be seen from the emphasis on uniformity within school activities as discussed in chapter 4.1.2.

For example, at Hemei School in Xiuqin's maths class (Grade Five), she asked the whole class after passing out the quiz papers if there were additional ones left at the back. One boy shouted out that he saw a pile earlier there. Xiuqin asked, quite impatiently, if he still had the pile. The boy replied no. Xiuqin then snapped: "if you don't have them then shut your mouth".

Xiuqin may be particularly strict and stern with discipline control, but since the maths exam grades of the class were higher than average, her style seemed to be quite popular and generally supported by parents. As reported by Leiyu, the head class teacher of the above-mentioned maths class, parents praised Xiuqin while complained about the English teacher Yanyan because of the low exam grades and the "undisciplined noisy class where it's hard for anyone to learn anything". Yanyan was a junior teacher in her late 20s. She appeared to be liked by her students, who called her a "big sister", possibly owing to her loose discipline control and easy-going interactions with students. Yet parents reportedly wanted another English teacher, to teach more like

Xiuqin, even though students described her as “scary and grumpy”. Here, the experience of learning was regarded as less important than the result of learning, which was rigidly measured by exam grades.

Another example is the almost absence of classroom discussion despite its benefit of promoting participation and inclusion being widely recognised (Costa *et al.*, 2007; Lake, 2001). Xiuqin and Cuiling explained their reasons:

“Our children are not so well self-disciplined, don’t you think? We don’t do much of classroom discussions because the children surely won’t discuss the things they should be discussing. They’ll just start chit-chatting with each other about random stuff.” (Xiuqin, Hemei School)

“Group discussions are very few. I have no control over what they actually discuss. As soon as I let them talk, I have no idea what they are talking about, and it’s hard for me to take back the control.” (Cuiling, Shengben School)

When the focus on order and discipline becomes so overbearing, discipline control seems to stray away from its initial purpose of creating conducive classroom environments to assist learning. Discipline then becomes its own end, rather than a means to another end. Under such circumstances, children with SEND who may have challenging behaviours may be seen as particularly unpopular. The emphasis on discipline control for its own sake in school education presents challenges for inclusion. Thus, how inclusion can fit into a strong classroom climate of discipline and order in Chinese schools is a key concern (see chapter 6.4 for further discussion).

To address this concern and create inclusive learning experiences for students at the Empirical, it may be a challenging and sensitive task. School activities regarding discipline control at the Actual cannot be separated from the wider socio-culture under the political centralism led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) at the Real. Mao Zedong (1949/1991, 516), who is highly regarded by many Chinese as the founding father of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the CPC, illustrates his vision for how contemporary Chinese society should be organised: “an individual must obey the unit; the minority

must obey the majority; the lower-ranked must obey the higher-ranked; all members and branches of the Party must obey the Central Committee". Upholding Mao's ideal, CPC today has been organising the state accordingly. This, together with the strong collective culture (see chapter 4.1.2), has led to what Feng (1995) describes, a tradition of people's "blind obedience to, and complete dependency upon, a central power in the Chinese society".

Thus, in Chinese education, discipline control is rarely problematised. In a study on students' perception of the aims of schooling (Lau *et al.*, 2000), the Chinese students commonly responded with: learning to respect authority. This is reflected not only through the example of parents' preference for stricter teachers such as Xiuqin, but also from that teachers often believed the primary aim of schooling, especially in the first few years, as teaching children to obey disciplines and follow rules. Admittedly, discipline can be important for learning, as children are expected to grow up to be law-abiding citizens, and a well-behaved class may also contribute to effective learning. Studies also frequently make links between stricter classroom discipline and higher academic attainment (Bauman, Tung & Hamin, 2012; Baumann & Winzar, 2016; Cohen *et al.*, 2009). This is observed as particularly visible in East Asian countries (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). Yet an authoritative, sometimes authoritarian classroom atmosphere may be suppressing for any child, let alone for children with SEND, especially those with disruptive behaviours. In this regard, the following example illustrates the harm discipline control may do to children.

6.2.2 Chenghai – The Making of an 'Abominable' Child?

Chenghai, a ten-year-old boy, was considered as having 'psychological issues' by teachers at Qingzhi School. He was not on an LRC placement as he did not have a recognised disability. His challenging behaviours reportedly included excessive swearing, habitual lying, cutting wires in the electrical room, tearing up documents in teachers' offices, damaging school facilities on the playground, pouring ink on his classmates' clothes, and throwing sands at others. His head class teacher, Ying, mentioned that the school had not provided any suitable

additional provisions or support for neither Chenghai nor herself. Chenghai was reportedly disliked and isolated by teachers and other students in his class.

Ying came across as a rather stern and strict teacher in her class with her disciplinary measures during observation – students were snapped at if they talked without permission or were not paying attention in class. Responding to Chenghai's disruptive behaviours, similar measures were used: when Chenghai misbehaved, Ying harshly scolded him and sometimes banged his table with hands or a small stick. She said by pretending that she was going to beat him, she hoped it could scare him into behaving well. As a complementary strategy, she said she also “trained” the rest of the class to ignore Chenghai so that they were not easily affected. Ying described that:

"The biggest problem with Chenghai right now is that he's seriously affecting others in the class...The other children in my class are like saints. It doesn't matter what Chenghai does to them to provoke troubles, they ignore him and keep on doing what they do. It is the result of the long-term discipline training from teachers." (Ying, Qingzhi School)

Chenghai's challenging behaviours may have already made him quite unpopular among his classmates. With Ying's stern strategy of discipline control, Chenghai seemed to be made even more into an outcast resented and rejected by his classmates. Observation data further illustrates the state of his exclusion. In class, Chenghai did not listen at all and appeared to be detached from the rest of the class. He did not have any books or stationeries on the table. He would play with coins, fumble with curtains beside him, try to speak to his classmates sitting close to him but no one responded, mumble to himself unintelligibly, walk around at the back of the room, kick other students' chair, and throw paper balls at others. From time to time, children sitting around him would stare back at him and frown. Teachers would also sternly stare at him as a warning, or verbally restrain him. He may stop misbehaving for a short while, then he would start again. After class, he wandered around the classroom and along the corridor. No one talked or played with him. He appeared all alone. In an extra-curriculum workshop of sandbox play, children played in groups of six. He was reportedly routinely rejected by the groups and would stay in the calm-

down room next door alone by choice. In addition, a group of parents was seen in front of the headteacher's office on a school open day, asking for Chenghai to be removed from the class so that their children would not be disturbed by him, which was refused by the headteacher. In short, Chenghai's unpopularity in school can be summarised by his Chinese subject teacher:

“Chenghai can really make you burst with anger. To be honest, it's so difficult for teachers to willingly accept or include him. It literally can't be done...That boy is so abominable. No one likes him.”

(Dinglu, Qingzhi School)

The consequences of the negative intervention of discipline control – physical intimidation towards Chenghai and the “training” of the rest of the class to ignore him - can already be seen. His relationships with his teachers and classmates deteriorated so much that others expressed open rejection to him. Over time, Chenghai had become mostly known just for his negative label of “a psychologically disturbed child”. When others started to see Chenghai mostly through this stigmatising lens, whatever he did was perceived firstly as “causing trouble with an ill mind”. For example, in one of Ying's maths class, students complained about the glare on the blackboard, and Ying asked the curtain to be drawn. Chenghai was sitting at the back corner of the classroom by the window. He reached out to draw the curtain, but he did not see the window was open and the curtain was stuck. He kept pulling and started to make noises. Ying apparently thought Chenghai was deliberately playing with the curtain and kept it open to cause trouble for others. She snapped at him harshly and asked the girl sitting in front of him to draw the curtain instead. Chenghai did not say anything or show any facial expression. Later when I told Ying that the curtain was stuck, she insisted that Chenghai did not care and just wanted to cause troubles for others on purpose.

This may not be the only occasion when Chenghai's behaviours were misinterpreted and unfairly treated. Misunderstanding such as this destroys trust and bonds, and rather reinforces stigma and negative relationships. It then begs the question: if Chenghai's so-called “psychological issues” were partly created and exacerbated by teachers in the first place due to a series of misunderstandings and negative interventions. In this regard, one teacher at

Qingzhi School, who did not wish to be identified, expressed that she actually did not think he was as bad as other teachers described, because he was among the few students who were polite enough to greet her when he saw her in school. This teacher said she particularly valued mutual respect in human interactions, so she rather saw Chenghai as having good character. However, she also confessed that in order to maintain good relationships with her colleagues, she would not speak well of Chenghai when everyone else spoke ill of him.

This teacher's views were in contrast with what Ying described, especially with that Chenghai would not greet Ying when he saw her in school. Ying interpreted this as Chenghai being rude and disrespectful, but it may simply be that Chenghai had his own personal preference for teachers. A relationship is a two-way street. Chenghai's deteriorating behaviours may almost be predictable when his teachers mostly saw him like this:

"He won't become a contributing member of the society. One day he will get himself killed by some gangsters, or maybe he will starve on the street. What can you do? For the sort of scum he is, that's just the way it will be." (Ying, Qingzhi School)¹³

Although Ying may sound extreme, she also explained her difficulties. Ying sounded emotionally distressed throughout the interview, and she thanked me for listening at the end, saying that she had felt better after having talked it out. She confessed that for a while because of Chenghai, she became so depressed that she was seeing a psychologist. Not only did she not receive any additional support from the school, she even had more pressure from the school because of the low exam grade and behavioural issues of her class (As Chenghai was not on an LRC placement and not exempted from exams, his low grades dragged down the class average. Teachers were also convinced that he had affected others' learning and held others back). Under the teacher evaluation system (which will be discussed in chapter 7.3), teachers and even schools were constantly assessed primarily based on student academic results.

¹³ Although 'scum' (渣子 *zhazi*) sounds harsh in English, in Chinese it may not bear the same severity. It is more of a pejorative term to show contempt of character than a swear word.

This not only puts teachers under great pressure, for schools, it also directs most of the attention and efforts towards producing 'elite' students, rather than catering for diverse learner needs so that all can achieve. This may have added to the sense of helplessness Ying felt. For example, regarding support from the school, Ying scoffed:

“The school will not do anything unless the pressure reaches a critical point and something must be done...The headteacher knows about Chenghai, of course, but he doesn't know the details. He's a busy man. Do you think he'd have time to listen to my problems about one student?...If I complain, I might even get punished, like I'm disobedient and causing troubles or something. Whoever wants to be a teacher must be an idiot...Now I regret it more and more. If I was younger, I'd definitely resign.” (Ying, Qingzhi School)

With the lack of support from the school and the somewhat stifling work environment at the Actual, Ying had developed a rather low career motivation and negative emotions about her role as a teacher. Emotions and inner drives are significant in informing and influencing human interactions (This will be discussed in greater details in chapter 8.1). In Ying's case, these factors have worked at the Real and led to her non-inclusive teaching practices and views regarding Chenghai. Nonetheless, when asked about special schools, Ying did not think they would be good for Chenghai. She saw segregated provisions as a damaging environment for him and instead would prefer a special arrangement in the mainstream school, such as one-to-one teaching for the main academic subjects, which she said the school refused out of budget and staffing concerns. This again shows that deeply at the Real, Ying's non-inclusive interactions with Chenghai were not about deliberately discriminating or segregating a child because of his additional needs, but more about her sense of disempowerment and low career motivation as a teacher within the current education system.

Ying's case harks back to what Linping from Sifang School said in terms of what inclusion means (chapter 4.2.2): inclusion means to accept all children as well as all teachers. If the school had an open and inclusive culture for

teachers, the teacher who secretly thought well of Chenghai may have felt more comfortable about speaking up for him. Ying also perhaps did not have to worry about being seen as disobedient or making troubles if she openly sought support from the school. Teachers then might be able to jointly develop helpful and effective strategies in a supportive environment to respond to Chenghai's challenging behaviours.

Thus, to create inclusive learning experiences for children at the Empirical, schools necessarily need to take better care of teachers at the Actual. This is based on deep values at the Real that teachers are important members of the school community and that their needs and wellbeing cannot be overlooked. In the Chinese context, "accepting all teachers", as Linping pointed out, can be particularly important. For example, Feng and Wang's (2013) survey with 456 primary and secondary school teachers in Beijing found that, among various sources of support such as parental involvement, salary level, and partnership with special schools, the most important inclusion support comes from principals and fellow colleagues. This may be linked to the strong collective orientation and the emphasis on 'harmony' and 'unity' within the Chinese culture (see chapter 4.1). Similarly, in terms of the lack of support for inclusion, Wang and colleagues (2013) surveyed 1,761 primary and secondary school teachers in Beijing with experience in LRC about the support they receive regarding inclusion. The study found that among the six forms of support mechanisms under two categories - social support including from colleagues, school managers, and campus atmosphere, as well as technical support such as physical environment, specialised equipment, and personnel with expertise -, teachers not only may particularly lack social support from colleagues possibly due to competition of performance, all the three forms of technical support can also be highly inadequate. Therefore, a focus on promoting inclusion in the Chinese context is not only on the inclusion of children, but also on the inclusion of teachers. After all, a marginalised and isolated teacher can hardly create an inclusive classroom.

The next section turns to teachers who openly rejected inclusion and instead preferred segregated provisions.

6.3 Rejection

Teachers who rejected inclusion commonly believed that there were different places that were suitable for different children. The example that stands out the most in this regard is Wei, an 11-year-old boy with ASD at Shengben School. The following two sections first discuss Wei's example before exploring the deeper functionalist assumptions at the Real behind teachers' rejection of inclusion.

6.3.1 Wei at Shengben School

Wei was the only student who was enrolled with an LRC status at Shengben School, a reputable, high achieving school in a wealthy area of the city. The school admission policy was one that children from migrant worker families were not accepted. The entire school population of around 1,300 students was all from local wealthy urban families. According to teachers, there was no additional support arranged for Wei at school. Instead, he regularly went to a 'rehabilitation centre' for children with ASD outside the school. He was only in school two or three days a week while spending the rest of the weekdays in the centre. When he was in school, teachers said he sat at the back corner of the room with his mother sitting beside him most of the time. He did not engage with learning or interact with others, but just mostly "lived in his own world". The only class he showed interest in was information technology, where he would go to the computer room eagerly and play games. As access for class observation in Wei's classroom was not granted by teachers, the following analysis is based on teachers' views.

Describing Wei's general state in school, his maths teacher said:

"We teachers have very limited interaction with him. It's been five years already, and we haven't really talked to him at all. He doesn't respond anyway if we do. He had no progress over the years...In my maths class, he never listens. He doesn't even look up. He just doodles or plays with his mother's phone...It's impossible for us teachers to help him to make any improvement

in school. His exam results are not counted anyway, so do you think teachers would do much about him?...He's like being forgotten, just sitting in the corner and ghosting around the school every day." (Wengfan, Shengben School)

Teaching for high academic attainments as an overwhelming priority of schooling can be a shared view among teachers. When the meaning of schooling is predominantly understood in this way, no doubt such a school can be seen as unsuitable for children who are less able to compete academically. However, in Jingjing's words, this was simply a "human development" outlook of education, that is, "if the mainstream environment can help the child progress and achieve, contributing to their development, then they should stay. If not, then obviously mainstream schools are not suitable for them". To further illustrate:

"*Quan na* (inclusion) is not necessarily a good thing all the time. We have to focus on children's development and be clear about what the most suitable type of school for them is...You can't include those who are not suitable to be here. It will be harmful to the children." (Jingjing, Shengben School)

When students' needs are routinely not met in school, it is indeed harmful. Yet what was harmful and failed was not inclusion itself, because inclusion did not happen at all. Instead, it was the ineffective and tokenistic attempts at inclusion in an inherently excluding mainstream education that failed. In the mismatch between educational service and student needs, it is often the students who are expected to change and adapt, especially when the students are in the minority. When the child is seen as failing the school, it demands the removal of the child; whereas when the school is seen as failing the child, it encourages institutional change oriented towards how to better accommodate diverse learner needs. Inclusion promotes the latter and challenges the myth of certain children belonging to certain places. Instead of a cost-benefit economic view of education, it is based on a moral view of education that sees all children as having the equal right to a relevant, high-quality, and effective education. This necessarily means not seeing students' 'educational failure' as solely the result of their individual characteristics, but

also as the institutional failure of schools to adapt and meet diverse learner needs (Ainscow, 2007).

To further understand how this mentality shift can happen in China for inclusion to work, it is necessary to explore at the Real the key values that underpin teachers' position of finding fault within the child. Normalising and collectivistic values have been discussed in chapter 4.1; the medical model of disability will be explored in chapter 7.5; the following section gazes at a strong functionalist tradition within the Chinese culture.

6.3.2 Functionalism in China – The Confucian *Li* (Propriety)

Popularised in the West in the 19th century, functionalism as a social theory takes a macro lens and sees society as a complex whole, where its constituent elements such as institutions, traditions, customs, and norms work together and perform their respective functions in order to promote solidarity and stability of the entire social system (Gerber & Macionis, 2013). An analogy made by social Darwinist Spencer (1851) is that society relies on its parts functioning together to sustain its internal stability and survival in the same way as a 'healthy human body' depends on the individual 'organs' working together. Functionalism stresses the "harmony and continuity of society" and how "parts of society, [such as] institutions and practices, contribute to holding society together and keep it going" (Hughes *et al.*, 1995, 206). In the educational context, Durkheim (1961) was the first to link sociology and education. He addresses how the socialising functions of schools as institutions, both manifest and latent, are to maintain social order and equilibrium, reduce conflict, transmit values, rules, and beliefs, and assimilate children (*ibid.*).

In China, the Confucian *li* may be seen as the earliest systematic thoughts that resemble the later Western theory of functionalism. Due to the indicative nature of the Chinese language, *li* may encompass different meanings such as propriety, ceremony, rites or ritual practice in a narrower sense; broadly speaking, it could refer to the rules of proper conduct, or roles and relationships in general. *Li* is not a set of formal laws or regulations enforced by the state, but rather conventions and unwritten rules recognised,

shared, transmitted, and adhered to by individuals across generations in society. With “its prominence as an apparatus for ordering society and its dominance over formal legal institutions”, the Confucian *li* was regarded by Ames (1997, 199) as “the determinate fabric of Chinese culture”. *Li* dictates what behaviours are appropriate and what are not. Individuals are expected to follow these established social standards and norms (*li*).

Confucius highly valued the restraint placed by social rules (*li*) upon the individuals as an important way to maintain social stability. He posited that “the management of a state demands *li*” (Analects, 11.26). Confucius further proposed a tool of ‘rectifying names’ (正名 *zhengming*), which means that everything should be in its proper order fulfilling its expected functions, and every individual should be true to his/her name/title and act accordingly. For example, Confucius believed that “there is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son” (Analects, 12.11). This translates into every individual or social group having an assigned fixed role to fulfil in order for the society to properly function. According to Confucius, only when one understands and obeys their given roles, refrains from changing their places in the world, and always bears in mind the correct/imposed order of things, can there be happiness and harmony in society.

This functionalist mechanism of social control has been so powerful and effective in safeguarding the solidarity of the traditional Chinese society that *li* has been regarded by scholars as a significant virtue that ensures the successfully continuous functioning of the feudal system for over two millennia in Chinese history (Chen, 1990; Hwang, 2012). The far-reaching influence of Confucianism did not end with the collapse of the feudal system in the early 20th century. It still permeates the Chinese culture today. In this regard, Tu (2008) highlights that the Confucian principles are so deeply rooted within the Chinese society that they are often regarded as common sense. In short, Confucianism has become a lifestyle.

Thus, teachers’ strong functionalist views of education – different schools and students have their fixed roles - are not difficult to understand. For example, Jingjing’s colleague Liangshu said that it would be irresponsible to place a child

with SEND in a mainstream school because he/she does not fit into the mainstream environment; at Qingzhi School, Quan said that categories of SEND should be clearly distinguished and only the 'suitable' ones should attend mainstream schools; similarly at Hemei School, Xiuqin believed that if the children themselves cannot keep up with others in the mainstream environment, they should go to special schools. With this functionalist mentality, teachers tended to stress that certain children do not fit into or benefit from the mainstream setting because of their own faults. This neglects how institutions and teaching can be adapted to meet diverse needs to make mainstream schools beneficial for children who may otherwise struggle.

Therefore, for inclusion to work in Chinese schools, it needs to grapple with the deeply ingrained cultural mentalities of functionalism. Classification of disorders or disabilities cannot be seen as the classification of the child (Farrell, 2010). A possible approach may be through developing a more holistic cultural understanding of Confucianism. The depth and width of Confucian values are much more than the Five Constant Virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity). These virtues themselves are also not absolute but rather contextual. It is important to keep in mind that apart from the first over-arching principles of *ren* (benevolence) and *datong* (unity/harmony) (see chapter 4.2.1), all other Confucian values are contextual and must not be held dogmatically in absolute terms (Chen, 1990; Tu, 2008). Looking deeper into Confucianism for ideas may then offer inspiration and philosophical guidance that are helpful for opening up the necessary intellectual space to imagine alternatives of a more inclusive education and society

I now turn to examining teachers' inclusive initiatives and efforts.

6.4 Accepting Differences

Inclusive schools are places where children are recognised and accepted for who they are (Allan, 1999, 2008; Black-Hawkins, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Slee, 2011). Barton (1997, 233) describes inclusion as "responding to diversity...listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and celebrating 'difference' in dignified ways". Ainscow (2007, 6) similarly

asserts that inclusion is about "a new way of thinking" where the educators effectively respond to learner diversity. This necessarily means to accept difference as normal and inevitable, and to avoid reverting to "traditional models of whole class teaching where all are expected to do the same work" (Spratt & Florian, 2015, 94). Reflecting such an understanding, the following two examples illustrate how teachers appeared to have made their classrooms more inclusive by using strategies based on accepting and respecting learner diversity.

6.4.1 Haili – Beyond ‘Normal’ versus ‘Abnormal’

Haili from Qingzhi School said that creating inclusive classrooms requires teachers to shift away from the traditional expectations of measuring students according to one common fixed standard. Instead, teachers can change their perceptions of norms, accept all children as who they are, and assist their own development in their own time and in their own way. Haili explained that:

"I think in order to include and accept the children, first of all, you need to see all their behaviours as normal, and that this is the way they should behave instead of thinking they are abnormal. Then you won't feel rejecting towards such children, but come to understand their behaviours, and allow them to develop in their own way, rather than imposing one standard and forcing all children into becoming this one ideal person." (Haili, Qingzhi School)

Haili also said that personally she did not like the phrases such as 'special needs' and 'problematic children', because she saw that every human being has his/her own problems and needs, and that such normative labels only stigmatise and marginalise the children, which can be counter-productive for learning. Clearly, Haili's rejection of narrowly normalising beliefs in education worked at the Real to encourage her to see learner diversity in a non-negative light and accordingly develop more inclusive practices and views regarding children with SEND.

To apply such an educational outlook in practice at the Actual, Haili said that accepting differences does not mean teachers would allow any behaviours indifferently. In terms of classroom management in particular, she said it means developing and using differentiated coping strategies at the Actual after distinguishing students' intended from unintended behaviours. These judgements at the Empirical are based on teachers' knowledge about students and are made with sensitivity to individual dignity, needs and differences. Haili explained that she understood that some students, who were usually socially popular among their peers, may act up on purpose just to get others' attention, so they need discipline. In contrast, some others may do so unintentionally such as Ming, a boy who reportedly had cerebral hypoxia at birth (see appendix VII for a detailed account of Ming's example), so scolding them can be too harsh and unfair, leading to negative outcomes. This differentiating strategy reportedly has helped to maintain classroom discipline while also allowing an inclusive space for diversity to a certain extent.

6.4.2 Leiyu – “I Allow It”

Leiyu was a unique teacher who reportedly based her inclusive educational beliefs on 'love' (see chapter 4.2.1). 'Love' works at the Real to inform her inclusive practices at the Actual. One of these inclusive approaches was to “allow”. She said that:

"I allow it [misbehaviour] as long as it doesn't affect others. If a student can't sit still, I allow him/her to squat under the desk or stand up and walk around in class...Everyone learns differently and expresses themselves differently." (Leiyu, Hemei School)

In Chinese classrooms often with strict discipline control, students not sitting orderly in their chairs during class can be unusual (see chapter 6.2.1). Leiyu gave an example of one boy named Bao in her fifth-grade class, who she thought was somewhat hyperactive. In class observation, I was sitting beside Bao. He appeared to be a lively, curious, and energetic boy. He often seemed bored not long after a lesson started. He would then try to talk to me, read a story book irrelevant to the lessons, start to fidget on his seat, squat under his

table, or stand up and wander around at the back of the classroom (his seat was at the back corner of the room by the window).

Leiyu believed Bao to be a smart boy, who was not intentionally disruptive but simply bored most of the time. Constraining or disciplining him might discourage him or make him feel negative about school. Considering that he had no difficulties with his studies, Leiyu 'allowed' his (mis)behaviours in class such as squatting under the table. Leiyu also said she put Bao's seat at the back of the room by the window, firstly because he would then have more room to move around without disturbing others, and secondly because directly behind him was the 'book corner', from where he could take and read books conveniently, as he liked to read.

Leiyu's strategy of 'allowing' within reason shows that inclusion is not incompatible with the emphasis on discipline control in Chinese classrooms. Rather than dogmatically following the fixed classroom management rules and imposing rigid discipline uniformly to the whole class, teachers can be encouraged to make judgement of what degree of discipline control in what individual situation is necessary and conducive based on their knowledge of their students. Subsequently, strategies can be developed accordingly to respect learner diversity and ensure positive learning experiences while still maintaining classroom order and discipline to a certain extent. This highlights that inclusion necessarily means education must be child-centred.

To further illustrate, Leiyu gave another example:

"I taught a boy with challenging behaviours and bad temper. At first, he would cause troubles and get into fights with others all the time. So I signed him up to the sports team in school. He trained days and nights, and he didn't get a moment to fight with others any more. Later, he won prizes for the school, and gradually he gained confidence and behaved better. He graduated last year. This year he came back to visit me." (Leiyu, Hemei School)

Rather than trying to constrain his additional energy and discipline his behaviours, Leiyu accepted and respected the boy's individual differences, 'allowed' his additional energy, saw it as a strength rather than trouble, and

used it to build up his confidence through sports. This example can be compared with the case of Chenghai (see chapter 6.2.2), where uniform discipline control was enforced by Ying, leading to deteriorating behavioural problems. In contrast, Leiyu's inclusive efforts gradually transformed the boy in her class, who was reportedly a 'headache' for many teachers, into a valued and contributing member of the school community.

A key to the two teachers' different approaches to somewhat similar cases at the Actual seems to be teachers' inner well-being, which can have causal powers at the Real. Ying felt isolated, pressured, unsupported, and unvalued (see chapter 6.2.2). This largely pressured her into responding negatively to students' challenging behaviours. In contrast, Leiyu was close friends with the school senior management and felt comfortable and relaxed (see chapter 4.2.1), which helped to empower her to practise her agency and apply her inclusive educational beliefs. Teachers' relationships with their schools can be a mirror of their relationships with students. Creating inclusive learning space for children thus also means creating inclusive working environments for teachers. This harks back to Linping's understanding of inclusion as accepting and valuing all teachers (see chapter 4.2.2). It highlights that inclusion needs to be recognised as a process of community-building for all members of the school and beyond (Armstrong, 2008; Booth, 2005; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2009). Within this, teachers' well-being cannot be ignored.

The next section further discusses examples of how teachers used positive reinforcement as an inclusive strategy.

6.5 Positive Reinforcement

Studies frequently find that rewards can work better than punishments in motivating learning (Adcock *et al.*, 2006; Filsecker & Hickey, 2014; Lepper, 1983; Wächter *et al.*, 2009). Rewards may include giving prizes, verbal praise, tokens that can be exchanged with desired items, and small snacks. These rewards may be used to increase desired behaviours such as academic

engagement and disciplinary obedience, and to decrease disruptive and challenging behaviours (McCurdy & Cole, 2014).

Positive feedback from teachers was reported and observed in classrooms across the research sites. Teachers said that positive reinforcement could increase students' self-esteem, confidence, popularity, and acceptance among their classmates. These emotions in the long term may help create inclusive learning environments in the classroom. The following outstanding example from Qingzhi Schools illustrates how positive reinforcement can be used as an effective inclusive strategy. Similar examples in other schools are included in Appendix VIII.

Lili from Qingzhi School gave a detailed account about a girl named Xin from her previous class, who was considered as having mild learning difficulties as her medically tested IQ was 76. Lily was Xin's head class teacher throughout her six years at the school. Xin appeared to be a slow learner from the beginning, and Lili often gave her additional tutoring in her office and gave her snacks as treats to encourage her. In Grade Three, Lili started to notice that Xin was becoming increasingly unpopular and isolated among her classmates seemingly because of her impairment. Xin did not appear to have any close friends, and no children wanted to sit beside her in class or on the bus at school trips. She was bullied by some boys in the class. It was clear that the class was gradually rejecting and excluding Xin.

To change this and make the class more inclusive for Xin, Lili reportedly took several actions. First, starting from Grade Four, she asked her students to write down at least one sentence every week on what they thought was positive about Xin as a compulsory part of their homework. She then gave positive feedback to Xin using these sentences when appropriate occasions arose. This way, not only were the students encouraged to approach Xin, to get to know her, to think positively about her, and to be more accepting of her, Xin herself could also enjoy a relatively more open and inclusive environment where she felt appreciated and encouraged by her friendly classmates.

Second, Lili took care to assign easy tasks for Xin in group activities so that she was able to do a good job, and then Lili would give Xin particularly

positive feedback in front of others for her achievements. This on the one hand helped to boost her self-esteem and confidence, which in turn encouraged her to enjoy learning more and aim higher; on the other hand, it was also to show her classmates that Xin could also achieve like everyone else, which helped to change and improve the previously formed negative image of Xin and her 'low status' in class.

Third, Lili asked Xin to be the 'student supervisor' at the canteen during lunch break, where she was responsible to make sure that other children drop off their plates in an orderly way after lunch. Xin took this task seriously, and the areas she was in charge of were always the tidiest. Lili identified this as one of Xin's strengths, and she took photos of her 'good work' in the canteen, showed the entire class, praised that she was doing such a great job, and awarded her a prize at a small ceremony in class. Again, the gap of estrangement and exclusion between Xin and her classmates was narrowed as the class learned more about Xin's strengths and her positive sides, and at the same time Xin also felt recognised and valued as a contributing member of the school community.

In addition to the main efforts of creating opportunities to encourage Xin with positive feedback, Lili also reported some other complementary strategies. For instance, first, as a feedback mechanism, Lili kept a diary where she tracked the things she did for Xin in order to support her and also Xin's changes and progress accordingly. The diary not only gave her useful information, based on which she could develop better inclusive strategies to accommodate Xin's needs, but it also served as a reminder that urged her to keep up the efforts. Second, Lili treated incidents of bullying seriously. Once, she caught some boys verbally abusing Xin. She sternly scolded them for their misbehaviours and asked them to write statements of apologies, which needed to be signed by their parents and then read in front of the class. As this strict measure was a way of publicly shaming the bullies in front of their classmates and families, it had reportedly prevented further bullying for Xin effectively. Third, Lili held class meetings from time to time where Xin's presence was excused, and in the meetings, she educated her students about the importance of caring, helping and supporting others despite their differences and disadvantages. As a follow-up measure, Lili even 'demanded' of some girls in class that they must play with

Xin at least once a week during class breaks. With the 'soft' approach of raising awareness and understanding as well as the 'hard' approach of dictating friendly interaction, Lili reportedly managed to reduce marginalisation and create a relatively inclusive learning environment for Xin, where she appeared to be accepted by others and recognised as a valued member of the class. Furthermore, Lili mentioned that one girl commented that after having befriended Xin and played with her, she found that Xin was actually a quite lovely girl and that she enjoyed Xin's friendship.

The results of Lili's efforts and Xin's progress at the Actual can be seen in Xin's own writing at the Empirical. Lili showed me a letter she kept:

"Now in Grade Five, I find that I start to like reading and raising my hand to answer teachers' questions in class. My mum and teachers often praise me. I think I have made great progress with my studies, and my classmates are treating me better. They start to play with me...Although I'm not good at studying, I'm very responsible and I'm always ready to help...I was bothered before that because I don't have good exam grades, nobody wanted to play with me. But now slowly others start to approach me and make friends with me. It makes me so happy...Although my exam grades are the worst in class, as long as others think well of me, I'm happy...I hope that all my classmates will like me and be friends with me." (Xin, student, Qingzhi School)

Lili said that this letter came as quite a shock for her and for some of her students who read this. One girl reportedly said that because Xin was usually quiet, she always mistook Xin as being empty-minded until she saw this and realised that deep down Xin had rich emotions and thoughts. The girl said that she felt ashamed that she had been looking down upon Xin over the past few years.

Lili's inclusive strategies show that being inclusive can be about having a positive mentality that permeates teachers' daily interaction with the children. Such a positive mentality - valuing children with SEND as much as others and seeing them as being able to achieve and reach their own potential – can be

based on drives such as educational equality and children's rights (see chapters 8.3 & 8.4), which have causal powers at the Real to encourage teachers to practise their agency and create inclusive experiences for children with SEND. A word of praise, encouragement, and positive feedback wherever possible can in time make a great difference for a child's development. This does not necessarily take up too much time or energy of teachers at the Actual. It is also clear that by promoting inclusion in Lili's class, all children can be benefited because it not only increases Xin's wellbeing but also helps her classmates to become better individuals who are more understanding and less ignorant and arrogant towards others at the Empirical. This came as a moment of enlightenment for Lili, who said that: "when we open ourselves up to understand and accept others, it benefits not only others but also ourselves".

The next section turns to encouraging peer support as an inclusive strategy.

6.6 Peer Support

Peer support has been commonly recognised as an effective way to assist learning for children with SEND as well as for their typically developing peers (Biggs, Carter & Gustafson, 2017; Carter *et al.*, 2005; Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). Particularly in the context of inclusive education, peer support can often be an underutilised resource (Bond & Castagnera, 2006). Many researchers (Hoff & Robinson, 2002; McCurdy & Cole, 2014) have identified the advantages of peer support as an inclusive intervention strategy: it is readily available in classrooms without taking up much of teachers' time; in the same classroom peers naturally influence each other's behaviours; and peer support may practically benefit children academically, cognitively, affectively, and socially. In the large class setting in Chinese schools with one teacher teaching on average 45 students per class without teaching assistants, peer support may especially be a time and cost-effective strategy to meet diverse learner needs. The following two examples at Sifang School show how teachers used peer support as a resource and strategy to create more inclusive classrooms.

First, Tinghui gave an example of Taotao, a boy with ASD in her previous class of which she was the head class teacher. She described that:

“At the beginning in Grade One, I told my students that Taotao was as equal as anyone else, but just a bit more innocent, nothing less. Because the children were quite young, they accepted and believed it. We had some excellent model students at that time who helped Taotao for example to use the toilet...He is not aggressive. He is a fun boy...My students back then were really kind, and they were nice to Taotao. I think by having Taotao in the class, the entire class was more united and supportive of each other.” (Tinghui, Sifang School)

Tinghui respected Taotao’s equal dignity by not further stigmatising his differences. This same theme was observed by Spratt and Florian (2015, 92) as “the universal feature of the inclusive pedagogy”. Further, Tinghui used student-student relationship as an effective resource to create inclusive classrooms. This highlights that inclusion is not just about the minority children with SEND but it rather concerns everyone. By involving the whole class, the class atmosphere also grew to be one characterised with solidarity, compassion, and mutual support where all children are benefited. As Farrell and colleagues (2007) similarly argue, what benefits children with SEND also benefits all children. Inclusion is not just a peripheral concern in education for a minority group, but rather about increasing the quality of education for all children. In the words of Armstrong and colleagues’ (2000, 1), “inclusive education is not an end in itself. Nor ultimately is the fundamental issue that of disabled people. In educational terms, it is about the value and well-being of all pupils”. Grimes (2014) also agrees that instead of special pedagogy to teach children with SEND, teachers are encouraged to use student-centred pedagogy to meet the needs of all children. At the Real, such inclusive views and practices can be seen as driven by beliefs of equal education for all. This is further explored in chapter 8.3.

In another example, Rui, a seven-year-old boy with cerebral palsy, was reported by his head class teacher Wendai as an agreeable boy without any challenging behaviours. Wendai said that when Rui first joined the school, he

was unable to hold a pen, but now in Grade Two, he can keep up with his studies reasonably well with exam grades as high as 70 or 80 out of 100. Regarding inclusive interventions, Wendai humbly said that she did not have special techniques regarding the inclusion of Rui apart from purposefully guiding her students to help and support Rui. Wendai showed a letter Rui recently wrote to her, where Rui himself expressed his happiness and gratitude:

"I can write so many words now. I have learned a lot of things. Ms Wendai is very nice to me. She cares about me a lot. My classmates helped me a lot. When I drop something, they pick it up for me. Especially Tan [Rui's classmate], she helps me get my lunch every day, and she gives me fruits. Gao [Rui's classmate] helps me with my homework. If I don't know something, she always tells me. I want to thank them. I'm so happy to come to school every day. I like Ms Wendai and my classmates very much. Thank you everyone for helping me. I will study hard and become a useful person." (Rui, student, Sifang School)

Much of Rui's happiness at school at the Empirical appeared to have come from his social interactions with others at the Actual. Accepted and supported by those around him in school, he actively participated in a range of school activities as reported by Wendai:

"He likes coming to school. He's happy here with friends, and he is learning and progressing. He's participating in all sorts of activities. It makes him happy...I think the school environment here is quite inclusive." (Wendai, Sifang School)

Rui's example show that inclusion does not have to be a daunting theoretical concept that requires complex techniques as teachers often thought. Mundane and common techniques that all teachers are familiar with such as encouraging peer support can in cases be an effective approach in creating more inclusive classrooms. Individual teachers do not have to wait until the ideal external conditions such as policy guidance and educational reforms to fall into place in order to start working towards inclusion. Actions can be taken now.

At the Real, as both examples above show, children themselves need to be valued as important participators and active contributors in education, not just passive recipients. Mainstream students can play a key role in the inclusive experience of children with SEND (Allan, 1997; McCurdy & Cole, 2014). Children as resources and contributors in education thus need to be valued. Yet current school activities often emphasise interpersonal relationships between rational adults or between strong teachers and compliant, receptive students. The mistrust of children's voices and an 'anti-child' model of interpersonal relationships in Chinese schools can be seen throughout the examples in chapter five and chapters 6.1-6.3: against Taosheng's will, he was transferred to a special school; classroom space was arranged in sit-and-listen style for better disciplining; and children's additional needs were neglected as long as they did not cause trouble for teachers.

Thus, for inclusion to work, children's power in shaping and contributing to education needs to be valued. This means moving beyond the single focus on teacher-student relationships in school activities in China. Students can also be seen as much more potentially active and effective resources for inclusion.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored at the interpersonal level the inclusion and exclusion of children with SEND in schools. Examples of children's non-inclusive and inclusive experiences in schools were recorded and discussed. The non-inclusive experiences (the Empirical) were found to be the results of

- 1) teachers' negligence due to the lack of time, energy, or the 'know-how' in the teacher-centred whole-class teaching environment (the Actual) shaped by the inherently excluding education system (the Real);
- 2) negative intervention strategies and practices that reinforced stigma and isolation underpinned by the imperative of discipline control (the Actual) within the exam-centred education system (the Real) and teachers' personal-deficit understanding of SEND (the Empirical);

3) rejection (the Actual) based on the functionalist beliefs and values that certain children did not belong (the Empirical and the Real).

These have revealed deeper concerns at the Real including the need to

- a) restructure teacher responsibilities to allow teachers the time and energy to work on inclusion;
- b) reform educational structures to move away from the teacher-centred whole-class teaching, discipline control, an exam-centred education, and a cost-benefit economic view of education;
- c) take good care of teachers' wellbeing and support their efforts and initiatives regarding inclusion;
- d) promote greater awareness to go beyond the medical model of 'SEND' and 'disability' and a narrowly functionalist understanding of schools;
- e) recognise that inclusion is a process of community-building for all members of the school.

In contrast, children's relatively inclusive experience (the Empirical) can be contributed to

- 1) teaching activities that recognise and accept individual learning differences;
- 2) the use of positive reinforcements;
- 3) peer support.

Examples of effective inclusive practices under these broad strategies at the Actual may offer implications that

- a) teachers can develop differentiated methods responding to challenging behaviours by distinguishing intended from unintended behaviours (the Empirical);
- b) students can be allowed to learn in their own styles, and this is not necessarily in conflict with maintaining class discipline (the Actual);
- c) inclusive classroom involves emotionally engaged teachers and children (the Real);

- d) inclusion not only benefits the minority with SEND but also all children (the Empirical and the Actual);
- e) inclusive strategies can draw upon some commonly available techniques currently applicable to all children without having to rely on specialised expertise (the Actual);
- f) children's important role and power in shaping inclusion and education need to be valued (the Real).

How teachers can effectively respond to learner differences in an inclusive way has been a key theme within global debates (EADSNE, 2011; OECD, 2010). Despite the concerns raised by the non-inclusive examples in this chapter, the inclusive examples nonetheless offered hope and optimism that inclusion to a certain degree in cases can be feasible and successful within the current education system without appearing overly technically complicated or daunting for teachers. Small efforts based on common techniques for all in daily teaching may make a considerable difference for some. As Florian and Linklater (2010, 370) argue, an inclusive pedagogy “focuses on extending what is ordinarily available as part of the routine of classroom life as a way of responding to differences between learners rather than specifically individualising for some”. Similarly, Haili from Qingzhi School said: “actually many problems [with children with SEND] can be resolved. It's just that teachers often don't really bother to think or do anything about them”.

Nevertheless, replicating the past successful efforts and avoiding the problematic cases wholly at the second plane of social being, the interpersonal level, will not work to bring about sustainable changes towards real inclusion in the long run. The third plane of underlying structural causes and conditions also needs to be further explored and understood. The next chapter will examine these in detail.

Chapter 7: Structural Barriers

Social interactions and events are not separable from the systems in which they happen (Archer, 2000, 2003). This chapter examines at the social structural level what inclusive education means for Chinese schools. To make sense of inclusion in the wider education system and how it may fit in, the approach is through understanding how the current educational structures and sub-structures present barriers for inclusion at the Real. Drawing on interview data and policy documents, the discussions involve how these structures may be implemented at the Actual and how they are interpreted by teachers at the Empirical. Six main structures arose from common and recurring themes: neoliberalism, *Gaokao* (national college entrance examination), teacher evaluation system, *bianzhi* (staffing quota system), *yi jiao jiehe* (the 'combining medicine and education' policy), and the finance of special and inclusive education. The research sub-question addressed in this chapter is: *How do educational structures inform teachers of their inclusive or non-inclusive educational ideas and practices?*

7.1 Neoliberalism in Chinese Education

Neoliberalism can be defined as:

"A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free market, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices".
(Harvey, 2005, 2)

Clearly, neoliberalism is associated more with capitalism and less with the socialism and communism that characterise China. But Chinese education is powerfully influenced by global neoliberal values (Ball, 2012; Zhang & Bray,

2017). The following two sections detail the neoliberal themes of competition and cost-benefits calculation in Chinese education and how they present barriers to inclusion.

7.1.1 Competition

As discussed in chapter 2.4.1, neoliberalism can be a wicked problem in special and inclusive education. It emphasises an ethic of competitive individualism (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). An education that picks out “the egoist interest of individuals” undermines some core values of inclusion - “bonds of compassion, benevolence, love for one’s fellows, and sense of community”, which was what Foucault (2004, 302) described as the essence of a civil society. Competition can drive and pressure schools to focus on producing high achieving students measuring up to continuously rising standards in order for schools to secure top positions at league tables; and children with SEND may be seen as ‘threats’ to their typically developing peers in the sense that they may drag others down academically or behaviourally (Alderson, 2018; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Scott *et al.*, 2016). These views are visible in the examples of teachers’ non-inclusion views and practices (see chapters 6.1-6.3).

The emphasis on competition in neoliberalism also adds financial pressures on schools to educate an efficient workforce for companies, institutions, and the state to gain competitive advantages in the global free market. This is reflected in the state strategy of 人才强国 (*rencai qiang guo*, human talents strengthen the country) (State Council, 2002). *Rencai* (人才) is a unique term in the Chinese language. The transliteration is ‘human, talent’, but the term is used to refer to the broad concept of ‘human resources/capitals’, particularly those with desirable aptitudes or capabilities, without distinguishing innate or acquired skills or talents. According to the State Council (2010, preface):

“*rencai* refers to those who have certain expertise or specialised skills, conduct creative work and make contributions to society. They are labourers with high ability and quality. They are the

primary resource for the economic and social development of our country”.

The state promotes *rencai* as “a strategic resource” in today’s global competition, and education has a “prominent, fundamental, leading, and overall role” in producing *rencai* (State Council, 2002). The state economic strategy is clearly able to direct priorities in education policies. As President Xi (2014a) states, “a continuing flow of *rencai* is an important strength and advantage of China in the fierce international competition”. For education, this means that the first task is to produce a number of high-level, highly skilled experts to lead innovations (Li, 2018).

This neoliberal emphasis in education policies attracts attention and directs discourse onto the education of the elites, who have been repetitively portrayed as valuable resources for the state’s international competitiveness and for the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Xi, 2014a). Indeed, high standards and aspiration for *rencai* are inarguably necessary and welcome in order to pioneer innovation and lead development, but they are not excuses that education for the rest does not matter. The overwhelming, narrow focus on producing elites raises concerns for social justice and equality in education. The phrase ‘education equality’ did not appear in the first national policy regarding *rencai* (State Council, 2002), and it only appeared once, rather perfunctorily, without further explanation in the latest *rencai* policy (State Council, 2010).

Under this context of educating for *rencai* to win in competitions, disadvantaged children can be increasingly pushed towards further disadvantages, marginalisation, and even exclusion. For example, Huamu from Qingzhi School gave an example of his previous school, where two head class teachers’ inclusive practices regarding two students with learning difficulties were so successful that they gained national attention and the school was reported nation-wide by the state media. However, soon after, the headteacher stopped promoting inclusion and chose to change the school priority to football instead. Huamu explained that:

“We were so sensational across the whole country...But one year later, the headteacher said, ‘well, let’s lie low and stop this’.

Because we were too famous for LRC, we became known only for LRC. We overdid it, and LRC became the unique feature of our school...It is the right thing to do, but this brand name doesn't sound nice, because you know, parents want a school with high-achieving students, not a school full of special children. So after the two students with learning difficulties graduated, the headteacher rebranded the school's unique feature as football...Everyone knows that President Xi likes football.”
(Huamu, Qingzhi School)

The headteacher's decision of 'demoting' inclusion at the Actual can be seen as under the pressure for schools to compete to raise attainment and to 'sell themselves' with desirable brand images based on consumer wants at the Real. In this case, parents want their children to become *rencai*, and the LEAs want schools to produce *rencai*, while vulnerable children such as children with disabilities are likely not to be regarded as potential candidates.

However, there are multiple cases of people with disabilities in China having well-known achievements (CDPF, 2011; Sina News, 2005, 2008). For example, Zhou Zhou, identified with Down Syndrome, was known as a music conductor performer (Wei, 2018); Huang Yu never received a formal education because of his physical impairment but started and ran a successful business in carving handcrafts (Sina News, 2003); and Bi Changyu, who has ASD, was praised as the 'Chinese Picasso' for his artworks (Yu, 2017).

Around the world, people with disabilities have similarly challenged the medical deficit model with their great accomplishments. In the USA, Helen Keller, despite being blind and deaf, graduated from college and received many honours for promoting women's rights and disability rights; in the UK, Professor Stephen Hawking is widely regarded as one of the world's most brilliant minds for his contribution to science despite motor neurone disease; and in Sweden, Greta Thunberg, who described herself as having Asperger Syndrome, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and selective mutism, was recently nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to stop global warming and raise awareness for climate change (Leung, 2019; Thunberg, 2018).

These examples and many more are reminders that people with disabilities have diverse and valuable talents, and that they can also be *rencai* who contribute to social and economic development. Inclusion in this regard rejects the neoliberal trend of narrow competitions in certain areas of education. It rather highlights the need to redefine and broaden the scope of the desirable skills, knowledge, and qualities in education, so that schools do not marginalise or reject children with SEND for fear of becoming less competitive and less desirable in the consumer market, and more people with disabilities like Zhou Zhou, Huang Yu, and Bi Changyu can become the equally contributing citizens they can be.

The next section considers how cost-benefit calculation in neoliberal education policies presents a barrier to inclusion.

7.1.2 Cost-Benefit Calculation

The cost-benefit calculation in Chinese education is clearly embedded within the main purpose of education advocated by the state. According to the *Education Law* (NPC, 1995/2015): “education must serve the advancement of socialist modernisation and the people, and be combined with productive labour and real-life practices” (Chapter 1, Article 5). This position has recently been reaffirmed by the National Institute of Education Science (2018, 3), which defines that “the main core output of future schools [is] to serve the social economy”. Similarly, President Xi reiterated the primary direction of educational development in his latest speech: “to serve the people, to serve the CPC’s governing, to serve socialism with Chinese characteristics, and to serve the advancement of socialist modernisation” (MoE, 2018a). Central to these statements of the purpose of education are political ideology and economic development. Thus, apart from producing compliant citizens who endorse the ruling Party’s political legitimacy, formal education is also the state’s financial investment in individuals with an expected future return. This means students who are likely to have the most successful and profitable careers tend to be allocated more and better resources and attention.

In this regard, for example, among the teachers, a view was that the limited resources and funding should be invested in the most cost-benefit way. One teacher who did not wish to be identified or quoted directly said educational funding should focus on the 'elite' 'smart' students because it may make a bigger and faster difference, but it may only produce small results if used to support children with SEND. This sweeping assumption highlights that, rather than focusing on personal growth and needs, there may be a result-driven, utilitarian mentality among the Chinese teachers.

Nonetheless, the same teacher did express later that she wished the government would invest more in children with SEND to tap more into their potential so that they can become more contributing citizens. She further gave examples of successful individuals with recognised disabilities she admired on TV. This shows how views about disability can be inconsistent. Similar contradictions were found among teachers who agreed that inclusion was a good cause in theory but who showed resistance in practice (see chapter 6.1). Fundamentally, this may be underpinned by the conflict between teachers' moral beliefs/ideals regarding what a good society should be and their neoliberal beliefs embedded within the current social and institutional structures under which they work every day.

Another example of the cost-benefit calculations in the formal education system in China is key schools. Key schools are designated selective state-run schools that enjoy better resources and receive additional funding from municipal, provincial, or national education authorities. The context for creating key schools was the limited resources in a relatively weak economy and the demand for quickly producing a productive labour force for social and economic development in the 1950s following the establishment of the new regime of PRC in 1949 (Tan & Wang, 2016). In the 1970s, Deng Xiaoping (quote in Bian, Wang & Ni, 2002, 137) asserted that "in order to produce *rencai* (high-quality labour force) early and quickly, teaching resources, education funding, and materials all should be used in key aspects that bring improvements". This emphasis clearly promotes cost-benefit calculation in education. Resources were not allocated based on needs as a public good, but rather were invested on predicted potential returns informed by perceived intelligence or cognitive ability measured by exams. The housing market subsequently responded with

more expensive neighbourhood near key schools, and those with more resources found ways to send their children to these 'better' schools (Tan & Wang, 2016). Acknowledging its serious implications for social inequality, in the 1990s, policies started to shift and discourage key schools (MoE, 1993a, 1997), until more recently key schools in compulsory education were clearly denounced (MoE, 2010; NPC, 2006, Article 22).

However, gaps often exist between policies and practices. Although the concept of key schools was officially removed from the mainstream education discourse, its practice may still linger. For example, regarding Qingzhi School, the headteacher Linwei mentioned that the LEA had planned to support and brand the school to become the 'elite' school of the district. Such a strategic focus on promoting certain schools does not stray far from the concept of key schools. Similarly, regarding Hemei School, Zheng, an academic in education management from a local university, who was in charge of liaising with local primary schools, did not deny that Hemei School was in effect a key school particularly supported by the LEA. When further asked about the inequality of allocating additional educational resources to key schools, Zheng held the same position as the official rationale for creating key schools in the 1950s, believing that key schools are a cost-benefit way to develop education, and he commented no further than that inequality cannot be solved.

Concentrating limited resources to produce elites at the Actual inevitably further disadvantages children with SEND and many others. It raises the question of if and how it can be justified to have an education system designed to benefit some at the expense of others. At the Real, this emphasis on cost-benefit calculation is embedded within the neoliberal education system, where the fundamental purpose of school education by law was described as producing an efficient labour force, early and quickly, for economic development, resources can be prioritised accordingly (MoE, 2018a; NPC, 1995/2015).

In short, this section has explored how Chinese inclusive education faces great resistance at the Real from the strong neoliberal themes of competition and cost-benefit calculation in Chinese education. To further understand the challenges, the institutional frameworks that are created and preserved by

neoliberal education policies need to be unpacked. In the following section, I turn my gaze to *Gaokao* (高考), the national college entrance examination in China.

7.2 *Gaokao* (National College Entrance Examination)

Gaokao (1952 - present) is a high-stake, centralised, standardised national testing system for selecting candidates for regular higher education, usually once a year in June. Its significance has always been highly regarded in the Chinese society. This can be reflected in the common saying: *Gaokao* is the baton that directs education. Under the pressure of high-stake testing, schools tend to overwhelmingly focus on narrowly training students to succeed in exams. This is because not only the students' own futures rely heavily on their grades, the reputations of schools and teachers also ultimately hinge on their students' success in the exam (Dai, Chen & Davey, 2007; Davey & Higgins, 2005; Lewin & Xu, 1989).

The exam-centred education directed by *Gaokao* was highlighted by teachers as a challenge for inclusion. These teachers' common understanding of schooling was that "getting high exam grades is a student's first priority" (Xinyu, Sifang School) and "the most important thing for teachers is to teach our students to get high exam grades" (Liuchang, Shengben School). When school education is mostly about achieving high exam results, it becomes education for the elites and the smart, rather than education for all. Schools then may be seen as irrelevant or meaningless for those who do not measure up academically. For example:

"The academic knowledge the students learn in school is just for them to pass standardised exams and go to the next level of schools. I don't know about you, but what I can remember now about the things I've learned back in schools is very little...So what is the use of learning all this stuff? Of course, you still have to study because you have *Gaokao*. But for these children [with disabilities], it's just a waste of time to be here learning about useless things." (Xiuqin, Hemei School)

Xiuqin clearly recognised that the heavily academically focused school curriculum does not benefit many children with SEND, but the pressure of *Gaokao* was powerful in directing the gaze of teachers narrowly and rigidly onto teaching to pass standardised exams. This means that the tested academic subjects often have priority over other non-academic subjects, but it is these non-academic subjects that are indispensable in creating more inclusive learning and socialising environments for children with SEND.

The education system that mostly trains children to pass exams saw the creation of a new expression in modern Chinese: 高分低能 (*gaofen dineng*, high scores, low capability). It describes students who are good at taking exams but poorly skilled in the workplace. The MoE has clearly recognised and attempted to address this. The latest standard of the national curriculum for compulsory education specifies that 49 to 58 per cent of the teaching schedule should be devoted to academic subjects (including history, geography, physics, biology, chemistry, Chinese, maths, and English) (MoE, 2001b). The standard states that an aim is to minimise the over-emphasis on academic subjects and to promote students' all-round development (*ibid.*).

However, in practice, students complained that sometimes they were asked to stay in classrooms and do homework in PE classes, and lunch break can also be the time for homework/tutoring sessions. Considering that in Shandong Province, by the time the research was conducted, only Chinese, Maths, and English (150 scores each), plus either Science or Humanities (300 scores each) were tested in *Gaokao* (Education Office of Shandong Province, 2016), simply encouraging non-academic subjects in compulsory education by specifying teaching schedule proportions is not enough to counter the trend of an exam-centred education. In this regard, teachers commonly said that recent reform attempts at broadening the school curriculum were quite meaningless, because as soon as students enter high schools, they will still face the same immense pressure of *Gaokao*; so in order to prepare their students better for the same foreseeable academic challenges, also to maintain schools' reputation of producing high achieving students, teachers still often saw it as their first professional responsibility to produce academically high scoring students, despite official policies that tried to promote all-round development and diverse talents.

Thus, as long as *Gaokao* does not change, pressure for achieving high academic attainments persists. Such an education environment is clearly a mismatch with the needs of some children with SEND, especially those with severe needs, as the main benefits of them attending mainstream schools may not necessarily be to compete academically with their typically developing peers. On the contrary, these children may benefit more from the 42-51 per cent of the non-academic subjects (MoE, 2001b) and the social environment where they can learn and live alongside their neighbourhood friends, and vice versa. These ideas have indeed been promoted in policy reforms, especially in the discourse shift from 应试教育 (*yingshi jiaoyu*, teaching to the test) to 素质教育 (*suzhi jiaoyu*, liberal/quality/character education) (State Council, 1999; 2001; Xi, 2017). However, in practice, as teachers identified, because of *Gaokao*, the academic emphasis in schools still remains. Under such circumstances, children with SEND often do not have a suitable and relevant curriculum at school and are hence not sufficiently prepared to enter independent adult lives. Inclusion was thus seen by teachers as an unbeneficial and implausible ideal incompatible with the current education system directed by *Gaokao*. This provides contexts for a clearer understanding of the wicked problem in special and inclusive education in China regarding curriculum (see chapter 2.4.2).

It is also worth noting that children with a recognised disability were not eligible to participate in *Gaokao* until 2015 (MoE, 2015a). This again highlights that historically, standardised tests were not designed for considering students with disabilities (Lai & Berkeley, 2012; Thurlow *et al.*, 2005). It may also further shed light on why Xiuqin held the strong view that it is “a waste of time” for children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools in an exam-centred education system.

Therefore, for inclusion to work, *Gaokao* needs to change. This is by no means a simple and straightforward task. The latest *Gaokao* reform in Shandong is expected to be implemented in 2020 (People’s government of Shandong Province, 2016, 2018) following the national initiatives (State Council, 2014). In Shandong, a key change aimed at lessening the exam-focus of the education system is the ‘two bases and one reference’ of the university admission policy (People’s government of Shandong Province, 2018). The two bases are *Gaokao* results (national standardised test) and student’s exam

results in the Academic Test for the Ordinary High School Students (local standardised test). One reference is students' 'comprehensive qualities', which refers to students' morality, intelligence, physique, and transferrable skills. This is different from the traditional admission policy where *Gaokao* results were the only criteria. The new change of 'one reference' may encourage schools and teachers to support student's all-round development outside narrowly academic studies.

'Comprehensive qualities' has already been part of the university admission policies for small selective groups of students since 2003 (MoE, 2003). However, before such practices are rolled out for all students, teachers already doubted its effectiveness and reliability. For example, Yunfeng from Shengben School said:

"Basically, all universities now have some places for admitting students by considering their 'comprehensive qualities'. That makes university principals' power greater, and there're no standards...They can just find an excuse to get someone into the university without being accused of using the back door. So in the end, the most reliable standard is still exam grades." (Yunfeng, Shengben School)

Clearly, high-stake testing such as *Gaokao* seemed to enjoy persisting support despite concerns associated with its narrow exam focus. This is inseparable from teachers' common beliefs that the free competition in *Gaokao* offers a fair way towards social mobility, because a peasant's son/daughter also has a chance at entering an elite university without any social connections as long as his/her *Gaokao* results meet the standard. This is reflected in the colloquial saying: 高考改变命运 (*Gaokao* changes ones' destiny, *Gaokao gaibian mingyun*). In this regard, Jingjing said:

"The most reliable standard is exam grade. Grades are fair. They tell your ability...Although *Gaokao* has its problems, before we can come up with another better system for the society to select talents, it is the best way for now." (Jingjing, Shengben School)

Jingjing's view is an example of the common reasons why high-stake testing can be supported by the general public: it is believed to be fair, scientific, and commonplace (Afflerbach, 2005). However, scholars (Airasian, 1988; Scott, 2011, 2016; Stone, 2003) frequently point out that high-stake testing is by no means the embodiment of equality and fairness or offering fully accurate evaluations of candidates' abilities in any social context. A test is not just an assessment activity at the Actual. At the Real, it is also about certain forms and levels of knowledge being promoted and regarded as desirable (Scott, 2016). High-stake testing "should not be understood as a device for making fair, reasonable and accurate judgements about the capacities of cohorts of students", but rather as "a standardising device" that creates norms (Scott, 2011, 106). Yet these deeper assumptions can be often left unquestioned among the Chinese general public including teachers. A historical underpinning may be that its predecessor *keju* (Imperial Examination) had functioned for more than a thousand years in terms of selecting talents and maintaining the continuity of the Chinese civilisation. This may have imprinted a rather uncritically positive understanding of high-stake testing in general in the Chinese culture.

In short, at the Real, *Gaokao* creates and drives the norms that students need to compete with each other for better educational resources (top-ranked universities, or simply more of teachers' attention and preference) and higher future social status (e.g., brighter employment prospects with degrees from top universities). This further disadvantages children with SEND who are less able to compete academically. As long as high-stake testing results are hailed to be the golden standard in education, the inclusion of children with SEND will remain peripheral.

The next section turns to the teacher evaluation system, a structure closely linked to the exam-centred education driven by *Gaokao*.

7.3 Teacher Evaluation System

In the context of neoliberal education policies, there seems to be a growing accountability trend globally within the education system, where teacher quality

has been defined, monitored, measured, and evaluated in terms of competitive performance schemes (Barzano & Grimaldi, 2016; OECD, 2009; Robertson, 2012). Following this trend, in China, as an incentive to encourage teachers and schools to raise teaching standards, ensure accountability, and improve educational quality, MoE (2008) introduced a nation-wide teacher evaluation system that officially links teachers' performance to their salary, encouraging them to compete and to 'sell themselves'.

The merit pay system for teacher evaluation is somewhat predictable in a merit-based education system featuring high-stake testing for students (see chapter 7.2.2). It highlights a 'winner-gets-it-all' neoliberal education policy: the better the teachers and schools perform, the more salaries are earned and the more funding is allocated; the more incentives teachers have and the more resources the schools attract, the better their performance may be (Ministry of Human Resources (MoHR), 2006). This benign cycle for the 'winners' at the same time also means a vicious cycle for the 'losers'. In the free market, losing businesses eventually disappear. But in education, the 'failing' students and schools do not just disappear. They are left behind, exacerbating inequality and injustice in the long run.

Not only can the merit pay in itself be a problematic concept for social justice and equality, how merit is measured and rewarded also needs to be further unpacked. Apart from reiterating the basic principles of the teaching profession such as adhering to laws, regulations, and codes of practice, the policy specifies four areas as the scope of evaluation for the merit pay for all teachers: moral education, teaching, researching, and career development (MoE, 2008). For head class teachers, there are the additional categories of class management, pastoral care, and event organisation (*ibid.*). The following sections discuss first the four areas of evaluation in local school contexts as reported by teachers, and second what these interpretations and practices may mean for inclusion.

7.3.1 Localising Teacher Evaluation in Schools

First, regarding moral education, the policy guideline only mentions "to evaluate teachers' practices regarding moral education in class considering subject differences" (MoE, 2008). Moral education as defined in official policies always has two prominent priorities: patriotism and political ideologies of socialism and communism. For example: "the basic task of moral education in primary and secondary education is to cultivate patriotic and good citizens" (CPC Central Committee, 1988); "moral education should educate students to know that the CPC led the people through revolutions and class struggles to build a new China...make students understand that people's happy lives are earned under the leadership of the CPC" (MoE, 1993b); "the overall aim of moral education is to educate the students to love the CPC, love the country, and love the people...to identify with and support the country's political system, to know about the traditional Chinese culture, revolution culture, and socialist culture" (MoE, 2017c).

Clearly, moral education in Chinese schools is strongly oriented towards producing uncritically obedient and conforming citizens under the current political system. This emphasis can be seen in the daily practices at the sampled schools. For example, Leiyu said that:

"It's all about obeying rules...Moral education now is just rigidly measuring how well one conforms to the school management. There isn't anything to do with ethics or student's inner wellbeing. Basically, they only care about things they can see and measure. As for things that they can't see such as inclusivity, emotional wellbeing or moral guidance, there aren't any." (Leiyu, Hemei School)

Measuring how well students conform to school rules can include checking attendance, uniforms, discipline, and classroom cleanness. These are more about school management at the Actual than the cultivation of moral characters at the Real. Yet in many schools, obeying authoritative rules seems to be portrayed as a moral imperative. In some respects, this can be uncontroversial, such as respecting laws and doing no harm. But it can also be

problematic when some rules are dogmatically followed. For example, the obsession of conforming to rules can be unhelpful for teachers to develop inclusive beliefs. As discussed in chapter 4.1.2, conformity and uniformity may lead teachers to see inclusion rather as assimilation, not celebrating diversity. Similarly, discipline control in classrooms (see chapter 6.2.1) can be seen as underpinning some examples of non-inclusive practices against children with SEND (see chapters 6.1-6.3). This shows that, apart from being a political and cultural tradition, discipline control in schools is also reinforced by the institutional structure of the teacher evaluation system with the rhetoric of morality.

Second, regarding teaching, the policy guidance states that “the focus of evaluation is on the teaching hours, lesson preparation, classroom teaching, teaching results, organisation of extra-curriculum activities, and teaching management” (MoE, 2008). These criteria, as reported by participants, were mainly quantitatively measured. For example, lesson preparation was calculated by the number of lesson plans teachers submitted every semester; classroom teaching was rated by school management staff who audited the class once or twice every semester; teaching results were evaluated based on students’ exam grades; extra-curriculum activities were mostly counted in numbers rather than contents or quality; and teaching management was reflected through classroom discipline control.

A concern arising from such a focus on the readily quantifiable aspects may be the inattention to quality. As Linping said:

“I just came back from a training programme in Shanghai. I feel education here in Shandong is ten years behind in comparison. Here when we do activities, the focus is on formality: taking pictures, filling out the paperwork, taking video recordings, and holding meetings. Then your job is done...Many new initiatives were started [to meet the inspections], but soon they were abandoned, and nothing came out of it...I feel we lack the craftsmanship spirit, the spirit of keeping doing one thing till perfection.” (Liping, Sifang School)

Linping's comments reflect that school activities at the Actual can often be done in a perfunctory way, merely focusing on numbers and checklists at the Empirical. She said that educators should be more like 'craftsmen', rather than, perhaps, stream-line workers. Under the neoliberal policies at the Real, however, it is easy to see that education in a stream-line factory style may be preferred for its efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

This quantitative focus in Shandong's education can also be seen as influenced by *Gaokao*. Shandong is the second largest province in China in terms of population, with around 100 million people (NBS, 2018). In *Gaokao*, provinces have their own university entry score standards based on the number of exam takers, available university places, and the difficulties of exams (Qiu & Zhao, 2012). This usually means that students in Shandong have to work harder and score higher in order to be admitted by universities. For example, in 2018, the *Gaokao* entry scores for degree-level universities in Shandong was 505 for non-science degrees and 435 for science degrees, which were among the highest compared to other provinces (*e.g.*, in Beijing, the scores were 488 and 432, in Jiangsu, 281, 285, and in Sichuan, 492, 458) (China News, 2018). If a Shandong student applies to a Beijing university, he/she needs to score at least 505 or 435, while a Beijing student only needs to score 488 or 432. In between some provinces, this difference can be more than 200 scores (*e.g.*, between Shandong and Jiangsu). Thus, schools in Shandong may be particularly pressured to focus on raising student attainments, as the LEAs are concerned with improving the graduation rate. This may have supported a mentality of counting numbers, distracting schools from activities and commitments other than producing high-achieving students.

Perhaps having recognised this issue of over-emphasis on exam results, in the national teacher evaluation policy, there is an additional statement regarding evaluating teaching results. It is specified that "graduation rate cannot be used as evaluation criteria, and teachers should be guided to care for every student, particularly those experience difficulties in learning or behaviours" (MoE, 2008). Accordingly, in the sampled schools, average class exam results were used instead as the teacher evaluation criteria. The intention is to encourage teachers to particularly support the low-achieving students to raise attainments. However, as teachers admitted, rather than supporting the low-

achieving students, some may just try to convince the student's parents to take their children to an IQ test and to apply for the LRC status if possible. If the LRC status is approved, the student can be exempted from exams, and teachers may obtain better evaluation results. It is apparent that the imperatives of improving the 'evaluable' academic performance can be so strong that some already marginalised or disadvantaged students may be seen in an even more undesirable way. This can serve to polarise and divide the student body more into the 'good' and the 'bad', fuelling exclusion and rejection. This mentality was already seen in many participants, as discussed in chapters 4.1.1 and 6.3.

Third, regarding research and career development, there seemed to be less ambiguity in interpretation. Teachers could have higher evaluation results if they participated in research activities, published papers, attended training programmes, or obtained additional qualification/certification. However, teachers commonly mentioned that they found it 'ridiculous' that research was part of the evaluation criteria. Some complained that they felt constantly overwhelmed by their usual teaching workload, and still having to publish research papers was just "a joke". In addition, many teachers also said that they did not find many of the teacher training programmes useful, as they were either too general or irrelevant in contents, or ineffective and time-consuming in delivery.

7.3.2 Implications for Inclusion

Apart from reinforcing the exam-focused education directed by *Gaokao*, the current teacher evaluation system also tends to reduce educational activities (the Actual) to the easily quantifiable aspects of teaching and learning (the Empirical). What is done and how it is done are seen as less important than if it is done and to what extent. Activities and events may be more about formalities to tick certain boxes rather than about creating beneficial experiences.

Highlighting this, Leiyu said that:

"Now we ask for scientific proofs for everything. People only believe what they can see. But often education can't be assessed by the so-called scientific methods. Often children's progress is

not visually quantifiable. You have to look with your heart...Education should be centred around children's learning. These lesson evaluations care too much about teachers' teaching. Teaching becomes acting." (Leiyu, Hemei School)

This emphasis on quantitative measuring has also been much criticised in literature. Duan and Yao (2003) note that the teacher evaluation system may prevent educators from developing a more comprehensive perspective on teaching, as the quantitative methods may overly emphasise teachers' commonality and specific teaching outcomes, making teachers less creative and losing sight of the bigger picture of education. Liu (2011) similarly identifies that teacher evaluation often disproportionately focuses more on administrative chores than the actual teaching, and it is difficult to design quantitative criteria to effectively motivate better teaching. Thus, heavily relying on quantitative methods, the current teacher evaluation system fails to reflect the complexity of education, including aspects related to inclusion.

There are not yet common, reliable and systematic ways to evaluate inclusivity in Chinese schools. Teachers said that this is because the 'soft' and qualitative aspects of emotions, wellbeing, and inclusivity are difficult to quantify. Admittedly, regarding children with SEND, factors such as the amount, form, and result of additional support are difficult to verify or measure. Inclusion as a process also happens across a long period of time with subtle and even undetectable changes. Further, if inclusion is somehow measured, there is the risk of teachers doing inclusion to score points and not for its own worth. This raises the questions, not only about how inclusion can be measured, but also if it should be measured at all. Thus, to evaluate inclusivity and to incorporate it into the current teacher evaluation system is not a straightforward task to simply plaster an add-on.

Yet, without the incentive of inclusion being part of the teacher evaluation system, it can be difficult for some teachers to go the extra mile to work towards inclusion, especially considering that there are other competing priorities driven by the existing teacher evaluation policies. For example, Linping said that:

"Teachers are not so keen on special educational training, because it's not really closely related to teachers' personal interest or career development. To get promoted, the teachers are evaluated according to the teaching performance in their academic subjects. Plus, there are only one or two special children in every class, and they may be exempted from exams if having the LRC status, so they may not matter so much." (Linping, Sifang School)

Similarly, Leiyu said that:

"The education system and the teacher evaluation system decide that schools only care about students' exam results, and the education is exam-centred. There's nothing we can do about it. Very few teachers would actually care anything about a child apart from their exam results. They [teachers] care about their own professional interest, and they could easily neglect some students because of this." (Leiyu, Hemei School)

The teacher evaluation system can powerfully shape teachers' priorities: school education is exam-centred, and teachers are overwhelmingly occupied with improving students' exam results. Under such circumstances, children with SEND may be seen as bringing extra stress and being burdens who affect teachers' evaluation results. For example, Lina said that:

"After all, the teacher evaluation is a form of recognition of teachers' professional ability. If a teacher has these problematic children in class, it doesn't matter how much effort the teacher makes, there's no payback or recognition of their work...Some teachers think special schools would be good for these children because they think highly of their own personal gains. By having special children in their classes, if not on an LRC placement, these children would affect the teacher evaluation results and the overall class exam grades." (Lina, Hemei School)

This shows that the evaluation system not only fails to encourage teachers to make inclusive efforts, it can also demotivate a teacher who does take the inclusive initiatives. In this regard, Yunfeng shared her personal feelings:

“Having a child like this [a girl with learning difficulties] in my class really does take up a lot more of my energy. I’ve been working so hard and doing so much, but my evaluation results are still low because of this child. It’s quite unfair for the teachers.” (Yunfeng, Shengben School)

Yunfeng’s struggle can be a common problem in Chinese schools. In a survey of 200 teachers regarding their views on the teacher evaluation system, Lü and He (2011) find that one of the main problems is that most of the teachers think the evaluation framework is unfair, as there is no difference between teachers who have different workloads. Wang (2010b) identifies that the current system heavily focuses on the utilitarian purpose, partial content, and rigid standards of education. As a result, some teachers may feel constantly under considerable pressure of work and less confident or enthusiastic about their teaching. Thus, as Yang and Wang (2013) find after surveying 250 primary and secondary school teachers in Tianjin, only 32 per cent of the respondents reported being satisfied with the merit pay of the teacher evaluation system. Li and colleagues (2012) even assert that the current teacher evaluation system in fact has rather negative effects on teachers, students, and society.

Children with SEND are often considered as adding additional workload for teachers as they often need additional support, and some may have challenging behaviours that add emotional strain on teachers. These factors understandably reduce some teachers' enthusiasm to have students with SEND in their classes (Malinen, Savolainen & Xu 2012; Deng & Manset, 2000). It is thus not surprising when Xinyu said that:

“Because providing extra support for these children [with SEND] is not included within the teacher evaluation anyway, some teachers only do it because of their own conscience or love. So in fact many teachers won’t do it.” (Xinyu, Sifang School)

In short, school education is so strongly guided by quantitative measuring that some teachers seemed to see meeting evaluation as the main aim of teaching. Without standardised evaluation, such as at the special schools in the research site city, teachers expressed confusion about how to teach, what to teach, and to what extent. The habit of having external, measurable standards seems to have left the intrinsic meaning and purpose of education forgotten.

It has now become clear that for inclusion to work in Chinese schools, teacher evaluation system needs to change to provide accordingly incentives for teachers, and to inspire, support, and sustain their inclusive initiatives. This is not just to benefit children with SEND, but also for the general well-being of the teachers and other students, for a more humanistic rather than mechanic outlook of education, and for more effective and relevant teaching and learning. Quantitative measurable aspects of education at the Empirical cannot be considered the only scientific and trustworthy truth. The non-measurable aspects at the Actual and Real also needs to be taken into account.

The next section then turns to *bianzhi* (编制, staffing quota system), which underpins large class sizes, shortage of teachers, whole-class teacher-centred teaching, and discipline control.

7.4 *Bianzhi* (Staffing Quota System)

Bianzhi is a national human resource management system used across state-run enterprises such as schools, universities, governments, and hospitals (Gu, 1998). It is part of the tradition of central planning in socialist regimes. Employees who are within the *bianzhi* are permanently employed and paid by the state. Their base salaries across levels of pay grades are also fixed by the state. Their jobs are usually referred to as 'iron bowls' of employment stability. The quotas are fixed numbers. Following the national guideline (MoE, 2001a), the local policy stipulates that the pupil adult ratio in primary schools in Shandong should be 19:1 (People's Government of Shandong Province, 2011). This ratio includes the heavy management layers, meaning that the actual student-teacher ratio is still higher. With the quota restriction, schools cannot

employ more staff than the fixed pupil adult ratio requires. Despite the increasing educational demands, the same ratio remains until the present day. This has created barriers to the inclusion of children with SEND in terms of large class sizes (see chapter 5.4) and heavy teacher workload due to teacher shortage (see chapter 4.1.1). These conditions then further contribute to the teacher-centred whole-class teaching and a greater need for classroom discipline control (see chapters 6.1 & 6.2).

The negative effects of large class sizes on learning in general have been much debated in the literature. Many (Deng & Manset, 2000; McCabe, 2003; Xiao, 2007) argue that large class sizes may discourage teachers from developing or using more individualised teaching methods. A teacher survey by Leahy (2006) finds that teachers strongly agree that larger class sizes are linked to lower student achievement. Dewey (1916/2007) maintains that smaller classes may reduce distractions and enhancing learning. Stevenson (2006) similarly concludes that smaller classes may improve academic performance, student behaviour, and teacher morale, and that it especially benefits the at-risk students.

For children with SEND, smaller classes may be particularly helpful. For example, arguing for smaller class sizes, Blatchford and Webster (2018, 18) call large class sizes “the elephant in the room” for the inclusion of children with SEND. They maintain that large class sizes often lead to the use of whole-class teaching; this can be unhelpful for children with SEND, as they may have difficulties following instructions and therefore need more individualised and differentiated support; yet in a large class setting, such support can be less likely (*ibid.*; Webster & Blatchford, 2017). The appeal for smaller class sizes for inclusion is not a recent trend. Two decades ago, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) suggested that for children with SEND to be truly included, the mainstream classrooms should have no more than 20 students. In parts of the world, the standard classroom size in public primary education is not far from this number. For example, according to the OECD (2019a) data in 2016, the average number of students per class was 27 in the UK, 21 in the US, and 19 in Sweden. In contrast, the standard class size in the research site city was 45, which was considered a ‘small class’ in China (see chapter 5.4).

Inclusion faces challenges in crowded classrooms. Teachers said they struggled with giving individual attention and time to meet the diverse learner needs (see chapter 6.1). Constant interactions with a large crowd of children can also be emotionally draining. For example:

“I teach four classes, around 180 students all added up together. It’s very tiring. Apart from delivering my lessons, I literally have no spare energy to think about doing other extra stuff. It’s impossible to take care of everything about everyone. As long as a child is not causing trouble, I wouldn’t notice him/her.” (Yanyan, Hemei School)

“With 40ish children per class, I can’t even take good care of other children, let alone the special ones...I have so many children in my classes to mind. I don’t have the capacity to individualise for that one particular child [with additional needs] at all.” (Dinglu, Qingzhi School)

To further illustrate, with the constraint of *bianzhi*, the shortage of teachers means that individual teachers have to take up multiple responsibilities. As it is common practice for one teacher to have several roles, teachers may feel unconfident about sparing additional time and energy to support additional needs or taking initiatives to promote inclusion. For example, Yunfeng and Ying explained how tiring their workload could be:

"The school is completely under-staffed. Many teachers have to teach more than one subject to multiple classes. I teach Chinese, comprehensive practical activity course, and traditional Chinese culture. I’m also a head class teacher and I need to take care of the class management. On top of all these I still need to think about how to support the special students. It's ridiculous...The teachers need to do so much now. We not only teach students and mark homework, but we also need to develop curriculum, publish research and books, keep online blogs, write up teaching designs and reflexive reports including all kinds of teaching tips and strategies, and then we need to deal with the challenging

behaviours of some students. We also need to be good at using computers and the internet. So many things." (Yunfeng, Shengben School)

"I'm responsible for so many other things outside teaching, like organising and supervising events such as cyber safety education, essay competitions, fire drills, public seminars, and medical check-ups. I also need to take care of the student insurance applications, texting with parents, and so on. I have so many administrative forms to do every semester that I can't even remember all their names." (Ying, Qingzhi School)

With such a demanding workload, no wonder teachers commonly reported that they did not have much energy or time to practise some of their own ideas or think about how to better individualise their teaching and how they can support students with SEND. In this regard, Xintian said:

"It's not guaranteed that in the mainstream school the teachers will always pay attention to that one particular child, because the teachers have so many things to consider, such as academic achievements, class management, events organisation, and so on. One only has so much energy. We can only say that we try our best, but we teachers are not gods, so we are bound to neglect that child at the end of the day." (Xintian, Shengben School)

The conditions of large class sizes and the shortage of teachers have clearly presented major barriers to inclusion. For the situation to change, there is not yet a readily available solution. *Bianzhi* is strictly controlled from top-down. As a common characteristic of central plans, they can be inflexible and insensitive to local needs. In addition, cracking down corruption has been a growing theme in recent years in the Chinese government (Wen *et al.*, 2017). This involves stricter control of the staffing quota to prevent redundant roles or loopholes that drain the state funds. This sweeping approach also denies local schools' needs for more teachers. To illustrate, Yuanli, a LEA official, said that (in paraphrase based on notes):

It's a structural issue of *bianzhi*. Now in my district there are already more than 1,000 teachers employed by schools outside *bianzhi* as temporary contractors. This shouldn't happen, and it's a huge hidden danger. The state requires that the quota can only go down, not up. Schools file reports nearly every day asking to recruit more teachers, but only very few can get approved. They can only wait for old teachers to retire and free up the quota. If no one retires, then schools don't usually get new teachers. (Official from one of the LEAs in the research site city)

Thus, to tackle large class sizes and teacher shortage at the Actual so as to allow more space for inclusion, at the Real, *bianzhi*, at least in schools, needs to be reformed accordingly. The government has recognised the need and has recently abolished the system in higher educational institutions and state-run hospitals (National Development and Reform Commission, 2017). The hope is that in time, similar reforms may also apply to primary and secondary schools. Further research and debate are greatly needed to create momentum to push forward such changes.

The next section considers how *yi jiao jiehe* (医教结合) can be equally, if not more, worrying as another key structural barrier to inclusion.

7.5 Yi Jiao Jiehe (Combining Medicine and Education)¹⁴

Yi jiao jiehe was officially introduced as a term in special education in 2009 (MoE, 2009), when East China Normal University in Shanghai was commissioned to act as a key experimental base to conduct pilot programmes which explored ways to combine medical rehabilitation and education within special schools. In the pilot schools, some medical facilities were installed, and teachers were supposed to be specifically trained with relevant medical and rehabilitative knowledge. Having considered the pilots to be successful, in 2015, the MoE designated 37 cities and municipal districts to be the experimental

¹⁴ 医 *yi*, medicine, in Chinese does not refer to just medication. It can mean healthcare, medical treatment, and rehabilitation.

areas for special education reforms, where further programmes of *yi jiao jiehe* can be carried out before eventually expanding the initiative nation-wide (MoE, 2015b). In 2017, the latest *Special Education Promotion Plan 2017-2020* (MoE, 2017b) listed “enhancing *yi jiao jiehe*” as the first strategy of improving the quality of special education.

At the Real, ‘combining medicine and education’ reflects the dominance of medical discourse of disability in China’s special and inclusive education. By law, a disabled person (残疾人, *canjiren*, damaged, ill, person)¹⁵ is defined as:

“one who suffers from abnormalities of loss of a certain organ or function, psychologically or physiologically, or in anatomical structure and has lost wholly or in part the ability to perform an activity in the way considered normal.” (NPC, 1990/2017, Article 2)

Clearly, people with disability in China are empirically defined using strictly medical concepts. The language heavily relies on natural science and treats disability as “individual’s inability to function” (Barton, 1993, 237). This is contrasted by the WHO (2011a, 7) definition which adopts a social model:

“Disability refers to the negative aspects of the interaction between individuals with a health condition (such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, depression) and personal and environmental factors (such as negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports).”

Straightforwardly, the medicalised discourse of disability in China may partly be embedded within the Chinese language itself. Language influences thoughts. The structure of a language may affect its users’ worldviews, cognition, and behaviours (Whorf, 1940). For example, the term ‘disability’ in Chinese has three variations:

¹⁵ Unlike in English where ‘disabled persons’ and ‘persons with disabilities’ have different connotations, in Chinese, 残疾人 (*can ji ren*, disabled persons) is the conventional and common way to refer to ‘persons with disabilities’.

残废 *canfei* (damaged/incomplete & useless/wasted)

残疾 *canji* (damaged/incomplete & illness/disease)

残障 *canzhang* (damaged/incomplete & impaired)

Canfei (damaged, useless) has been the dominant term for ‘disability’ in China in history, but starting from the late 1970s after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), there appeared to be a shift to *canji* (damaged, illness) among the public, as the former term was considered offensive and derogatory (Huang, 2004). In the *Constitution* (NPC, 1982/2018, Article 45), both *canfei* and *canji* are still used to refer to disability: severely injured military staff are referred to as *canfei* (damaged, useless), while other disabilities such as visual, hearing, or speech/language impairments are referred to as *canji* (damaged, illness). In the *Law of the PRC on the Protection of Disabled Persons* (NPC, 1990/2017), only *canji* (damaged, illness) was used for ‘disability’; and ‘severely injured military staff’ were referred to as *shangcan* (injured, damaged) instead. The latest term *canzhang* (damaged, impaired) moves relatively away from the medical focus, but it has not been used in official policy papers to date.

Yet, however the term changes, *can* (残 damaged/incomplete) remains the keyword (*canfei*, *canji*, *canzhang*).¹⁶ Being incomplete/damaged is an internal attribution within the self. It has a different connotation from the English word ‘disability’, which does not necessarily imply a person being ‘incomplete/damaged’. The English word ‘disability’ allows the interpretation that a ‘complete/undamaged’ person may be disabled by external factors. Thus, the Chinese language of ‘disability’ itself rather reinforces the medical deficit perception of the concept. Clearly, language not only has referential meanings, but also bears considerable social significance.

¹⁶ 残 (*can*) can be used alone to refer to people with disabilities as a shorthand for 残疾人 (*canjiren*, disabled person). For example, 老弱病残孕 (*lao ruo bing can yun*, old, weak, sick, disabled, pregnant), which is a set phrase commonly seen in public space such as on busses to refer to those who are not physically strong and thus need help. On public transport, this phrase can be routinely broadcasted as a reminder to ask people to give seats to those who may be less able to stand.

It is thus not surprising that at the Empirical, most teachers interpreted 'disability' with a strong medical focus. For example:

"If a person is physically complete and mentally normal, then he/she is normal. Isn't it so?...Disability means that someone has defects in some respects." (Jingjing, Shengben School)

This medicalised understanding of 'disability' accordingly informed a non-inclusive educational outlook: what children with SEND needed most was not believed to be education but rather correction or curing. Encouraging *yi jiao jiehe* may further reinforce this stigma. As Jingjing described:

"There is really not much the school can do...It's impossible for us to correct the child because we don't have the expertise in that area...Right now there isn't any mainstream school that is able to teach him [Wei, the boy with ASD]. Such schools don't exist yet." (Jingjing, Shengben School)

When schools fail to provide effective provisions to meet additional learner needs at the Actual, it is often perceived at the Empirical as children failing the school through their own fault. The medical model of disability works at the Real as a justification. It often informs an excluding view that some children need curing or rehabilitation instead of education. For example, commenting on children with challenging and disruptive behaviours, Cuiling said that:

"Hospitals can diagnose children's problems. I think if hospitals confirm some children have certain problems, then really, they shouldn't come to regular schools anymore. They should just stay at home and rest for like a year until they get better. If they are here, they'll only disturb others." (Cuiling, Shengben School)

Here the medical view lends support and justification for Cuiling's rejection of inclusion. The medical experts are trusted to make scientific decisions on what is best for a child. In this regard, as Foucault (1977) argues, power and knowledge exist together, and power is exerted through knowledge.

Specialist knowledge can medicalise educational problems, making some children medical subjects, or even 'ineducable'. For example, Mengya said that:

"I think we need medical diagnoses. If in medical terms this child ought to be in a special or mainstream school, then he/she should go there. Some children's intelligence already stops developing. This illness [learning difficulties] cannot be cured. So even if they stay in a mainstream school, they can't learn much and it won't do any good for them." (Mengya, Hemei School)

Admittedly, some children with SEND have medical needs, but this does not mean their educational needs can be replaced in medical terms. The gaze of the medical experts is primarily on the biological needs of human beings as living organisms. Educators on the other hand are more concerned with individuals' needs as social and learning beings. The medical view on education, which *yi jiao jiehe* further promotes, has blurred the boundary between the two realms. Medical reasons can then be used as powerful excuses to justify the educational exclusion of some children. For example:

"By definition, this group of people [with disabilities] is special. If you forcefully put them in a normal environment, they can never integrate and become part of the larger crowd." (Dinglu, Qingzhi School)

This quote vividly reflects the misconception at the Empirical, fuelled by the medical model of disability at the Real, that people with disabilities can be fundamentally different from the majority of the 'normal' population. The Actual of how educational and social provisions have failed to meet needs is ignored. Exclusion and segregation are thus not perceived in a negative light but rather matter-of-fact, standard even positive practice. There was then no wonder most teachers appeared to be unconcerned about or against inclusion.

This dominance of the medical model in Chinese special education also helps to explain why despite its apparently divisive, stigmatising, and alienating effects, *yi jiao jiehe* operates as a national policy and enjoys much support from scholars and teachers. In a systematic review of 70 key academic publications, Yang and Li (2016) conclude that 68 per cent of the authors support and

promote *yi jiao jiehe*, while only 16 per cent openly criticise and oppose the idea. To illustrate, Zhang (2010) highly regards *yi jiao jiehe* as the core task in developing special education, and it should be integrated into the special education system as a key component. Ge and Ma (2016) similarly posit that *yi jiao jiehe* is urgently needed in order for special education in China to further develop, seeing it as an inevitable and necessary path towards implementing inclusion. They argue that some children would be able to be better ‘included’ when they are more ‘rehabilitated’, so *yi jiao jiehe* is welcomed as an improvement of their educational provisions that can better help them achieve ‘comprehensive rehabilitation’ (*ibid.*). In this regard, Zhao and colleagues (2017) assert that *yi jiao jiehe* is the best approach for the rehabilitation of children with cerebral palsy. Furthermore, among teachers, popular support for the system was also found. A survey conducted by Zhang (2014) with 184 special school teachers shows that 97.3 per cent of the respondents overwhelmingly support *yi jiao jiehe* and think it can be beneficial for improving special education, while only five teachers posited against the idea.

Reasons for support mainly focus on two aspects. First, it is argued that considering the current state of public healthcare in China - limited social welfare, under-developed health services, usually crowded hospitals, and likely expensive medical bills -, integrating medicine as part of compulsory education in special schools may offer hope to provide a fast stream for some families with children who need regular or sophisticated medical interventions to receive support and alleviate their financial burdens (Fang, 2017; Zhao, Cui & Ding, 2017). Second, some (Shen, 2012; Zhang, 2013) maintain that *yi jiao jiehe* may be a conservative and indirect approach to inclusion, because it may shed light on developing effective SEND strategies, potentially contributing to inclusive pedagogies in mainstream schools when borrowed.

Meanwhile, critics also recognise the problematic implications of *yi jiao jiehe*. Deng and Lu (2012) argue that it is impractical and wishful to think special school teachers can act like ‘doctors’ while still fulfilling their roles as educators, and that *yi jiao jiehe* has the danger of compromising the nature of special schools as educational institutions with the medical focus. In a similar vein, Lu (2013) claims that *yi jiao jiehe* is regressive, as it not only diminishes the educational purpose of special schools, but also reinforces the excluding

thinking by treating some children as ‘patients’ rather than students. She further maintains that the idea causes inconsistency, confusion, and unfairness within the entire special education system, because the emphasis on introducing medicine into special education is only applied to students in special schools, but not those on an LRC placement in mainstream schools who may have similar needs or conditions (*ibid.*).

As a way forward, a variation of the term - 康教结合 (*kang jiao jiehe*, combining health and education) - has been used in academic debates in recent years (Meng, 2016; Li & Cui, 2015). It may lessen the otherwise strong medical emphasis by replacing *yi* (medicine) with the notion of health in general. This signals a more inclusive concept, as health – physical, mental, and social - that does not only concern children with SEND, but is important and relevant for everyone.

In summary, inclusion necessarily requires a turn-away from the medical discourse in special education and more towards the social and rights model of disability at the Real (see chapter 2.1). The current *yi jiao jiehe* agenda thus raises concerns in this regard. If other structural barriers discussed earlier in this chapter mean that teachers may want to promote inclusion but did not have the capacity to do so under various structural constraints, then *yi jiao jiehe* may mean that teachers did not want inclusion to begin with. Thus, for inclusion to work, “a new way of thinking” is needed (Ainscow, 2007, 6).

The next section looks at how special and inclusive education is financed.

7.6 The Finance of Special and Inclusive Education

Financial investment is indispensable in educational development. Adequate funding can help to support and sustain inclusive efforts and initiatives. The finance of special and inclusive education can include both additional funding for SEND and teachers’ general salary level. The next two sub-sections unpack the key concerns in these two aspects: additional SEND funding is mostly

channelled towards special schools, and teachers' salaries are often lower than the local average income.

7.6.1 Funding Segregation Instead of Inclusion

The LEAs set standards for the expenditure per student following the national guidelines and calculate the allocated funds to individual schools depending on the number of students enrolled. For children with SEND, this funding is usually much higher. In the research site city, the expenditure per student in 2015 for special school students was more than RMB 9,000 (GBP 1,057), at least ten times of the amount for primary and secondary mainstream school students; for children with autism and cerebral palsy, the amount can be as high as RMB 20,000 (GBP 2,347). Grants of up to RMB 8,800 (GBP 1,033) per student for the purposes of using public transport and purchasing specialised stationeries are also available for children with disabilities (Zhang, 2016b).

However, in most cases, the different amount of funding is determined by the type of the school, not the needs of the student. Apart from Beijing and Shanghai, where local policies specify that the expenditure per student for children on an LRC placement should be two to three times of the amount for the regular children, in most other places in China, children on an LRC placement do not enjoy any subsidies, and have the same amount of standard expenditure as other regular students (Save the Children, 2012). In the research site city, only one out of six districts (where Shengben School is located) revised the policy in 2016 so that the additional funding for children with SEND follow the students (anonymised source). Commenting on the lack of funding for inclusive mainstream schools, Sun and Ding (2014) note that a main reason can be that special schools as clearly defined institutions can attract structured investment for children with SEND much more easily than mainstream schools, where the degree of diversity and complexity regarding children on an LRC placement across schools make additional funding difficult to manage. This funding allocation also highlights the theme of cost-benefit calculation in neoliberal education policies: funding special schools may

produce more easily measurable results with more straightforward administrative procedures than funding inclusion.

Such an arrangement openly encourages segregation rather than inclusion. From the perspective of mainstream schools, the lack of funding may considerably reduce the degree of willingness and motivation to accept children who need additional resources and supports. It can also limit the schools' capacity to provide for these children even if they want to. In this regard, Lili commented that:

“We don't have the money. The school can't afford to employ additional teachers just to support such children. How much would that cost?!” (Lili, Qingzhi School)

For the students and their families, this funding arrangement means that going to special schools may better meet their personal financial interests, as they can receive subsidies and have access to specialised educational facilities which may not otherwise be available in a mainstream setting. Thus, it seems rather misleading that on paper, the state reiterates its commitment to promoting inclusion by regularly issuing relevant policy papers (MoE, 1994, 2014, 2017b) and actively endorsing international documents (UNESCO, 1994, 2015a), but in practice, most of the actual supports are channelled towards the segregated provisions.

7.6.2 Teachers' Below Average Salaries

Low motivation for taking inclusive initiatives was reported by teachers due to the lack of relevant financial incentives as well as a low salary level in general. For example, Fangfang said that:

“The little salary I get really makes my heart ache. Forget about any pay raise. If I teach an additional lesson, I only get 3 Yuan (GBP 0.35); if I work for an extra day, I only get 8 Yuan (GBP 0.94). The money is like non-existent...Of course I won't get any

financial compensation for having such a child [with SEND] in my class.” (Fangfang, Sifang School)

Across the four sampled mainstream schools, teachers reported that they did not receive any allowance for having students on an LRC placement in their classes. They commonly expressed frustration in that their additional efforts spent on supporting children with SEND were not duly acknowledged or rewarded. This lack of incentives can be associated with a low willingness to work towards more inclusivity. In this regard, a report by Save the Children (2012) finds the same situation across most areas in mainland China, identifying it as one of the major barriers to inclusion. Subsequently, the China Association for Promoting Democracy (2017) recently suggests that official policies should be revised to specify that head class teachers who have students on an LRC placement in their classrooms receive a financial allowance to encourage their inclusive efforts.

Special school teachers in comparison usually receive slightly higher salaries than their mainstream peers. In 1956, MoE set the salary standard for special school teachers to be 15 per cent higher than the mainstream level (Su, 2001). After six decades of economic development and inflation, this standard remains the same in most areas in China. In some provinces and cities, the LEAs recently raised the standard. For example, in the research site city (anonymised source), Guangdong Province (People’s Government of Guangdong Province, 2011) and Ningxia Province (Education Office of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, 2014), the difference is now 30 per cent; and in Shanxi Province (People’s Government of Shanxi Province, 2014) and Shaanxi Province (People’s Government of Shaanxi Province, 2014), the difference is 50 per cent.

Nevertheless, Chinese special school teachers’ earning in general is still only at the middle or lower middle level in comparison to the local average salary (Save the Children, 2012). This means that the salary for mainstream school teachers is even lower. For example, Yunfeng complained that:

“Why would anyone want to be a teacher?! The money is so little, and the work is so tiring.” (Yunfeng, Shengben School)

Teachers' employments are part of the *bianzhi* (see chapter 7.4). Their salary scales are accordingly set and controlled by it. Teachers' actual salaries consist of four main parts: base salary, seniority pay, merit pay, and allowance (MoHR, 2006). According to *bianzhi*, primary school teachers' monthly base salaries range from RMB 550 (GBP 63) to RMB 780 (GBP 89), and their monthly seniority pay can range from RMB 80 (GBP 9) to RMB 2,600 (GBP 298) (*ibid.*). While the specific amount of merit pay and allowance are not fixed by *bianzhi*, total budgets are given to schools (MoE, 2008).

Primary school teachers' salaries are often lower than the average salary level in the society in general, making the teaching profession less appealing in the job market (Yu & Zeng, 2015). Due to the lack of official data on teachers' actual salaries, the following examples are indicative. According to an online survey (Sohu News, 2018), in an urban primary school in Shandong, a senior teacher with 21 years of experience could receive a monthly salary of RMB 5,195 (GBP 595). In Laiwu, a city in Shandong Province, a primary school headteacher with 20 years of experience reportedly could earn RMB 3,400 (GBP 390) monthly, while a junior teacher could earn about RMB 2,000 (GBP 229) (Ye *et al.*, 2014). Considering that in 2017 the GDP per capita in Shandong was RMB 72,851 (GBP 8,351) (Shandong Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2018), teachers' salary per annum (GBP 229*12=2,748 for junior teachers, and from GBP 390*12=4,680 to GBP 595*12=7,140 for senior teachers) can be much lower than the local average income.

To put this into perspective, in contrast, primary school teachers in England can earn an above local average salary. According to the OECD (2019b) data, in 2016, the average annual actual teachers' salaries in public institutions in primary education was GBP 32,635 in England.¹⁷ This was higher than the UK GDP per capita, which was GBP 29,328 in 2016 (ONS, 2018). Higher salaries may provide more attractive incentives for aspiring individuals to go into teaching and for teachers to deliver high-quality teaching. The following table shows these figures in clear comparison:

¹⁷ The main pay range for qualified school teachers in England and Wales for 2018/2019 is from GBP 23,720 to GBP 35,008; leading practitioners can earn from GBP 40,162 to GBP 61,005, while headteachers can earn from GBP 45,213 to GBP 111,007 (Teaching, 2019).

Table 5. Primary School Teachers' Annual Earnings (Currency: GBP)

	China (Shandong Province) Indicative	UK Average
Teachers' Salaries	2,784, 4,680, 7,140	32,635
Local GDP per Capita	8,351	29,328

Summary

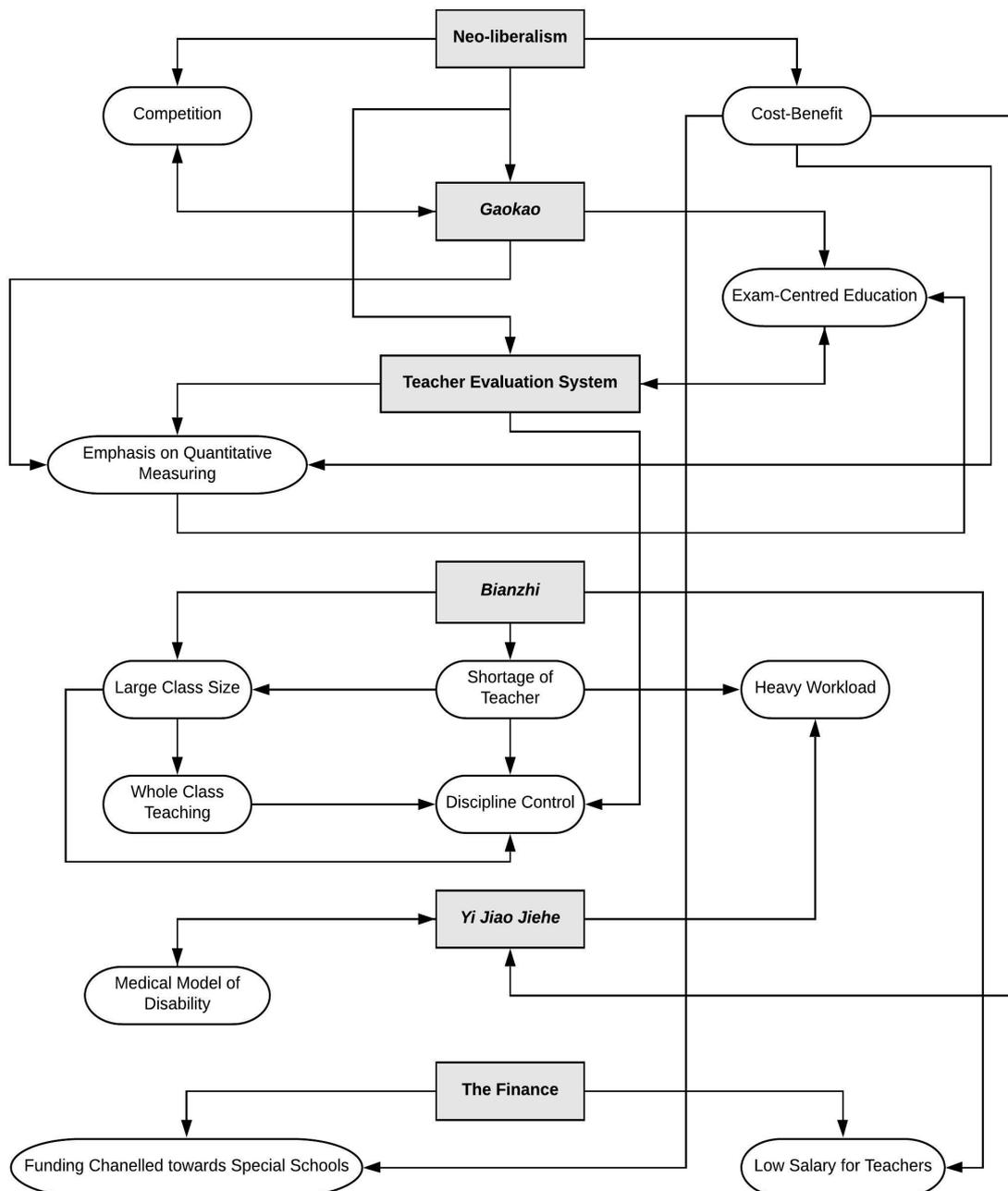
The way special education is currently financed in China at the Actual raises concerns for inclusion both in terms of the focus and the amount of funding. Inclusion can be encouraged by financial arrangements (Scott & Scott, 2018). With the examples of Beijing and Shanghai, where the additional funding for SEND is allocated to the students rather than the types of schools, other LEAs may gradually follow suit. The national education spending has also been growing. In 1999, the government expenditure on education was only 1.89 per cent of the total GDP (World Bank, 2018c); in 2017, the figure grew to 4.14 per cent (MoE, 2018b). This is edging closer to the world average of 4.81 per cent and the 5.52 per cent in the UK (World Bank, 2018c).¹⁸ Along with this trend, teachers' salaries in China may keep rising. For example, the recent government paper specifies that teachers' average salaries should not be lower than the local civil servants' average earnings (CPC Central Committee & State Council, 2017). Lang and colleagues (2015) point out that the local civil servants' average salary can be 113 per cent of the local average earnings. This sends an official signal of valuing the status of the teaching profession as above the social average. However, this salary standard has been a legal requirement stipulated by the *Teachers Law* since 1993 (NPC, 1993, Article 25). Although it has been largely unfulfilled so far, the official awareness and the trend of valuing and motivating the teaching profession at the Real may still offer reasons for optimism for the future of inclusion and education in general.

¹⁸ The percentage of population of children below the age of 14 in 2017 was 17.68 in China, 17.71 in the UK, and the world average was 25.94 (World Bank, 2018d). This means that while the actual funding available to individual children in China is still lower than that in the UK, it may not be necessarily lower than the world average.

7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that at the Real, the fabric of the Chinese education system is woven with multiple structures and sub-structures in complex ways. See Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Structural Barriers to Inclusion in Chinese Education



As the figure shows, structural barriers are inter-linked over multiple layers. Some underpin others; some mutually reinforce one another; and some form a loop strengthening, preserving, and perpetuating themselves. This makes it challenging, for example, to shift away from the exam-centred education, as both *Gaokao* and the teacher evaluation system need to change. These structures then cannot be separated from a culture of performativity driven by neoliberal values, a strong theme that is not only present in China but also elsewhere (Armstrong, 2002a; Gleeson & Husbands, 2001; Scott, 2017). Thus, in order to overcome one barrier, multiple related structures and the fundamental drives need to be taken into account accordingly. Highlighting this problem, Zheng said that (paraphrase based on notes):

The machine of the education system in China is so big, complex, and unwieldy that to change any part can mean the need to change the whole system; and the momentum needed to bring about real changes, the bureaucracy, and the complexity involved can be daunting. (Zheng, academic from a local university)

In addition to the structural barriers discussed in this chapter, the absences of certain structures are also barriers. For example, teachers expressed their worries that there were no systematic social welfare organisations to support children with severe needs after they leave school, and that these children seemed to have no place to go when they became adults apart from staying at home and being looked after by their families. This social exclusion, together with educational exclusion, forms a vicious cycle against inclusion.

Structural challenges facing inclusion are complex and persisting, in China and elsewhere. As UNESCO (2005, 9) identifies that globally, the “lack of organisational change has proved to be one of the major barriers to the implementation of inclusive education policies”. Organisational changes here refer to school structures such as curriculum and teaching strategies (*ibid.*). Bringing about these changes cannot be through targeting failing schools or underachieving groups (Dyson *et al.*, 2010). Without changing the wider educational structures that are inherently unfair, any initiatives are just

“compounded by the competitive, standards-driven nature of the system itself” (*ibid.*, 27).

Although structures can often have causal powers at the Real, they are not strictly deterministic. Individuals are not just passively determined, constrained, or enabled by social structures. Even under the same structural constraint, individuals may respond differently according to their own reflexivity, concerns, and knowledge of their circumstances (Archer, 2003). Contrasting examples in this regard have been clearly recorded and discussed in chapters four and six. The education of millions of children in exclusion cannot wait until all the desirable conditions ideally fall into place for educators to start working towards inclusion. Independent initiatives of inclusion from individual teachers were already possible (see chapters 4.2 & 6.4-6.6). Thus, the internal subjective agencies behind these efforts and initiatives such as drives, values, and emotions are worth exploring. The next chapter turns to the fourth plane of social being of individual agencies.

Chapter 8: Inner Being and Subjective Agency

Archer (2003) suggests that the interplay between objective social structures and subjective individual agencies entails three stages. The first stage points to how the “structural and cultural properties objectively shape the situations which agents confront involuntarily, and possess generative powers of constraint and enablement” (*ibid.*, 135). This has been explored in the previous chapter. The second stage – “agents’ own configurations of concerns, as subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality – nature, practice and society” (*ibid.*) - will be the focus of this chapter. This may then shed light on the third stage when “courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances” (*ibid.*). That relates to the current situations of inclusion in Chinese schools as reflected from teachers’ reported and observed practices. A deeper understanding at all three stages can better describe and explain the inclusion phenomenon, and signal directions for future change.

Archer (*ibid.*) maintains that the causal efficacy of the objective social structures is mediated through agents’ subjective evaluation. This mediation is associated with a process of ‘reflexive deliberation’: individuals with personal identities and concerns “know what they care about most and what they seek to realise in society” (*ibid.*, 130). Taking it further, Bhaskar (1998, xv) argues that “people’s intentionality is irreducible and causally efficacious ... and reasons when acted on are causes”.

Thus, based on the interview data, this chapter discusses four main themes relating to teachers’ intentionality and reasons: career motivation, the shame culture, equality, and rights. The focus is on exploring how these values and concerns at the Real can be causally efficacious for teachers’ practices and views regarding inclusion/exclusion. This chapter addresses the research sub-questions of ‘*what internalised values hindered or drove inclusion as reported by teachers?*’ ‘*how are these values embedded within the local political and cultural contexts?*’

8.1 Career Motivation

Some teachers complained about their teaching profession in general and appeared to have low career motivation. Their career dissatisfaction reportedly mainly stemmed from heavy workload (see chapters 6.1.1 & 7.4) and low pay (see chapter 7.6). These teachers also said they did not really actively choose to become teachers, and their career choice was more for pragmatic reasons such as that teachers' colleges were tuition-free, that the *Gaokao* admission requirement for teachers' college was lower than usual degree courses, that the teaching profession as part of *bianzhi* (staffing quota system) is respectable, stable, and relaxed with long holidays, and that being a teacher helps to meet the social expectation on women as wives and mothers. As inclusion in Chinese schools often required teachers to take independent initiatives and make additional efforts (see chapters 4.2 & 6.4-6.6), less motivated teachers may be less willing to do so.

For example, Ying (see chapter 6.2.2) said that she became a teacher mostly because first, going to teachers' college after high school was a way around *Gaokao* at that time, which she did not want to participate as she disliked the academic pressure; and second, the college was tuition-free. She mentioned the "good old days" when she did not have much to do apart from delivering lessons and marking homework. But with growing responsibilities in recent years, she now regretted becoming a teacher and would consider a career change if it was not "too late to start over". Five other teachers shared similarly low career motivation, among whom only one teacher at Sifang School had relatively more inclusive views and practices. This may be attributed to the inclusive leadership at this 'uniquely inclusive' school (see chapter 4.2.2).

Some teachers who reported strong career motivation also had less inclusive views and practices. However, they appeared to be motivated more to help the brightest students succeed highly. It may be interpreted that they were driven by higher merit pay and evaluation ranks, or their values of what gives meaning to them as a teacher. For example, Jianguo, physical education teacher from Hemei School, said he thought it would be better if children with ASD at his school attended special schools because there were no additional provisions for them in the mainstream. Jianguo's preference for special schools

could be linked to that he used to work in a special school for five years before he came to Hemei School. Describing his main reason for the change, he said:

“It’s not that I’m not a caring person...I really worked hard in the special school...but it was really different from what I wanted... After all, I’m a professional in physical education. I don’t want that my students are only those with disabilities. I want to teach children in regular schools, and one day when they are successful, they tell others that I was his teacher. That’s fulfilling.”

Teachers commonly said that one of the things they found fulfilling was to see their students progress and achieve. Children with SEND may sometimes take longer to show visible progress. They are also often set up to fail in an inherently excluding education system where their skills and talents are unrecognised. In this regard, some teachers expressed frustration that their efforts were not paid back or acknowledged, and subsequently saw inclusion in a negative light. This feeling was not only about cost-benefits calculation. It also seems to relate to what they valued and found meaningful as teachers (Archer, 2000, 2003). This was more clearly expressed by teachers in special schools. Tong at Haiyang Special School, who used to work in a mainstream high school as an English teacher before being reassigned, said that she felt she was losing her identity as a teacher and has become more like a nanny. In her own words, it was a “knowledge crisis” for her English language specialty.

Thus, for teachers who were more motivated by teaching bright children to succeed, having non-inclusive views and practices does not discredit them as irresponsible or ‘bad’. Rather, it may well be the current education system and its narrow standard for success that does not enable them to find enough meaning and fulfilment from practising inclusion (see chapter seven).

However, there were also exceptions where teachers found their own meaning in practising inclusion despite systemic constraints. Leiyu at Hemei School is a prominent example (see chapter 4.2.1). She said she rather found it empty and unfulfilling if teaching was only about producing academically highly achieving students and teachers were accordingly ranked. Instead, she gained strengths from studying traditional Chinese culture and highlighted ‘love’:

“It’s for love that I keep doing this [actively making her classroom more inclusive]. It’s my conscience as a teacher.”

Conscience as a teacher means that Leiyu saw the teaching profession as having inherent moral responsibilities. As she further explained:

“I don’t think I know any teaching techniques. If I have to say one, then it’s love...A teacher must be responsible for each individual student and guide them with love.”

In Leiyu’s daily classroom, love was expressed through building mutually respectful, trusting, and caring personal relationships with her students. She described that teachers’ main role is to “light a beacon” and to guide children to “ignite their inner locomotives” to discover learning and reach their potentials. The emotional power of love provides the necessary “energy of the heart” for her to do so. For her, teaching is not just about imparting knowledge; it is also about emotionally engaged teacher-student relationships. Thus, even if students did not show measurable academic progress, she said she still found it fulfilling when children who first resisted social contact began to accept her as a friend. She described a few examples where she felt touched when children, who she would describe as having mild ASD, gave her a hug, complimented her on her dress, and secretly put origamis they made as presents on her table. These moments of fulfilment in turn further motivated her to have positive views of inclusion and practising it. As she said: “I know it’s [inclusion] possible, because I’ve experienced it myself”.

Leiyu was the only teacher who mentioned and reiterated love. Other teachers with inclusive views and practices did not say ‘love’, but they expressed similar views. For example:

“Teachers need to care about these children [with SEND] more in their daily teaching. There’s no use scolding them...Talk to them more and establish emotional bonds. This is to better enter their hearts so that they listen to you calmly and do not misbehave...Praise them often and find ways to make them like you and trust you.” (Geyao, Sifang School)

Although specific moments of such relationship-building were not observed, Geyao was familiar with the necessary emotional sensitivity associated with the inclusion of children with SEND. This may be the result of the whole school training at Sifang School, where 'inclusion' was purposefully promoted as their 'unique feature'. This means teachers' inclusive efforts were more likely to be recognised and encouraged. This may give them meaning and fulfilment to further believe in and practise inclusion.

Admittedly, one cannot expect all teachers to be driven by love. Nor can love be trained. Nonetheless, encouraging greater awareness of educators' moral responsibilities can be a starting point for change. Instead of an economic view of education featuring a cost-effective, functional teacher-student relationship where teachers see students in terms of exam grades, what is needed is a moral view of education where teachers are more emotionally engaged and value children as equal learners with all their humanity. In this regard, Rogers (1983) identifies the key to effective learning as a model of teacher-student relationships that are based on trust, empathic understanding, and genuineness. Mutual trust between students and teachers can create a sense of safety, which can be a main condition for learning, as "students participate fully in the educational process when they feel safe" (Mazurkiewicz, 2013, 150). Allan and Persson (2018) particularly emphasise a trusting relationship between teachers and students with SEND as an important form of social capital, which contributes to more effective learning and inclusive experience for children and improved emotional wellbeing for teachers.

The importance of teacher motivation at the Real offers implications for inclusive teacher training at the Actual. Effective training needs to pay attention to teachers' deeper values, motivation, and drives, not just on specific educational concepts or teaching approaches. Apart from the whole school approach at Sifang School where inclusion was purposefully chosen and promoted as the 'school unique feature', none of the other inclusive teachers said their inclusive views and practices came from the SEND training. Teachers commonly said that there was not much SEND training that they could go to, and for those who could go to such training, the quality of training was often not satisfactory.

To explain, first, out of 37 mainstream school teachers, only seven reported that they had a few sessions on special and inclusive education during their degree studies, but they did not take them seriously because the sessions were not part of the exams. Second, the regular in-service teacher training every week in the four sampled schools predominantly focused on pedagogical strategies on academic subjects. Special education or inclusion themed training was reported to be only available once or twice every semester at most, and they were usually for head class teachers who had students on an LRC placement in class, not for all teachers. Third, teachers who went to such training said that they did not find the sessions practically useful as they were either too generally theoretical or too technically specialised. For example, a teacher who sat through a one-to-one speech therapist demonstration training session with a non-verbal child with ASD said that she found the training quite irrelevant to her, as it was too specific and technical. While at the other end, Chenyan from Sifang School said that: "many of such training sessions do not offer any actual help for me, because they are too macro and general. I need something specific and practical".

Clearly, if the training is about general concepts only, teachers may find it difficult to translate them into specific actions; yet if the training is about specific strategies only, few teachers may find it useful. Admittedly, training on both general concepts and specific strategies can be important, but what is missing here is the deeper values and inner drives. As examples throughout this thesis have shown, when teachers did not believe in inclusion, SEND training on the general concepts and practical strategies was likely to be dismissed. They saw it as idealistic and impractical in the current contexts or as mostly irrelevant because it was about the minority group of students with SEND (utilitarianism is discussed in chapter 8.3). In contrast, when teachers believed in inclusion and found it fulfilling, even without any SEND training, they were self-motivated to develop and enact inclusive strategies.

Therefore, direct SEND training of technical 'expertise' aiming at delivering measurable results is not enough. Also needed is indirect training without specifically singling out SEND. Such training can focus on teachers' deeper motivations, emotions, morality, and principles towards a common aspiration of equality and togetherness in education and in the future society.

These themes may offer a remedy for the ‘fear of the unknown’, or ‘fear of difference’, which has been identified by many as a key cause for resistance to inclusion (Bauman, 2004; Croll & Moses 2000; Robinson & Goodey, 2017; Shevlin, Winder & Flynn 2013). After all, inclusion will only work well when teachers and children are willingly involved (Alderson, 2013).

The next section turns to the theme of the shame culture.

8.2 The Shame Culture

As a complex social and moral emotion, shame is associated with failures and shortcomings and implies a sense of incompetence and inferiority especially when seen or judged by others (Fung, 1999). This is distinguished from the feeling of guilt, which comes from the internal conscience of the self in events of wrongdoing (*ibid.*). Chinese culture has long been characterised as a ‘shame culture’ (Chu, 1972; Hu, 1994; Zhuang & Bresnahan, 2017). This can be seen from the rich lexicon regarding ‘shame’ in the Chinese language. Wang & Fischer (1994) suggest that there are about 150 Chinese expressions for shame, guilt, and embarrassment, including variations of terms for different kinds of shame which have no equivalence in English. For example:

Table 6. Term Variations for ‘Shame’ Using the Concept of ‘Face’

Expression	Pinyin	Transliteration	Denotation
没有脸	<i>mei you lian</i>	have no face	Shame/disgrace for the lack of integrity or moral values
不要脸	<i>bu yao lian</i>	discard face	
厚脸皮	<i>hou lianpi</i>	thick face skin	
没面子	<i>mei mianzi</i>	have no face ¹⁹	Shame/embarrassment for the lack of honour, status, ability, or achievement
丢脸	<i>diu lian</i>	lose face	
颜面扫地	<i>yan mian sao di</i>	face sweeps ground	

¹⁹ *Lian* and *mianzi* are both terms meaning face, but in different expressions, they denote the nuanced meanings as shown in the table.

Although other words (e.g., 耻 *chi*, 惭 *can*, 愧 *kui*, and 羞 *xiu*) also translate into 'shame', using the concept of face (*lian* or *mianzi*) to mean shame is rather distinctively Chinese. Regarding the meaning of 'face', Bedford (2004, 36) explains that:

"*Lian* refers to one's dignity, self-respect, feeling of social concern and ability to fill social obligations in front of other people... Although gain and loss of *lian* can be decided by one's own conduct, eventually it is determined and judged by other people. Loss of *lian* entails loss of other people's confidence in one's character."

Lian is thus a relational concept. The intensity of feeling 'losing face' is decided by how much one values or cares about others' opinions. In collective cultures where harmony and conformity in socialisation are preferred, individuals may be more concerned with what others think, and shame may be experienced more often, especially when one's wrongdoings cause public embarrassment. This has been found in studies (Bedford, 2004; Lu, 2018; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

The emphasis on shame in Chinese culture is also implicitly promoted in Confucianism. Chu (1972) finds that at least one-tenth of the contents in the *Analects* are about 'shame'. For example, a Confucian *junzi* (person of superior virtues) or *shengren* (sage) is a virtuous person who at least knows shame (Fung, 1999). Confucius maintained that: "if the people be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good" (*Analects*, 2.3). Here shame is regarded as a positive approach for people to become 'good', in the sense that 'good' refers to conforming to social norms (*li*, propriety) and maintaining harmony (*datong*, unity). This, however, does not mean that shame is promoted as a positive emotion itself, but rather that certain transgressions are shameful and they are to be avoided with utmost care so that one does not 'lose face'. This self-regulating power of shame is also recognised in the literature (Conner *et al.*, 2015; de Hooge, Breugelmans & Zeelenberg, 2008; Tangney & Dearing, 2002) Creighton (1988) further suggests that the emotion of shame can function as a mechanism of social control. In short, the emotion of shame has been used

in Chinese culture as a powerful persuasion to influence attitudes and change behaviours. This is evident in special and inclusive education.

Special and Inclusive Education in a Shame Culture

As discussed in chapter 7.5, the medical model of disability is still dominant in China, and the broad notion of SEND is often perceived as medical disorders or illnesses. As shame cultures are largely based on pride and honour, parents thus may see it as a failure and experience shame if their children are deemed as having SEND (Fung *et al.*, 2007). This feeling has led some parents to attempt to hide their children with a recognised disability at home (Tait, Mundia & Fung, 2014). Their motives can be to avoid 'losing face' for the lack of status if their children go to special schools, or for the lack of achievements and success if their children go to mainstream schools.

The strong sense of shame associated with disability cannot be separated from the negative connotation of the notion, in China (see chapter 7.5) and elsewhere. Mooney (2007) commented that throughout history, the voices of people with disabilities have been routinely unsought or ignored. They have also been frequently disparaged, misunderstood, and portrayed as subjects of pity. The shame of having a disability can be embedded within the very language of the culture. Valle and colleagues (2011) identify that questions such as 'are you blind?' as well as derogations such as 'imbecile' and 'retard' reinforce the negative connotations of disability. Parents of students with disabilities often feel that their children are not understood or welcome in a mainstream school (Lindsay *et al.*, 2013; Roberts & Simpson, 2016). Students with SEND themselves may also experience shame, loneliness, and rejection in schools (Albinger, 1995; Tomlinson & Parrish, 2018).

In a shame culture, for parents who do demand equal access to mainstream schools for their children with SEND, their motives can be misinterpreted. Some teachers said that the main driver for parents' demand for inclusive education for their children with SEND was not concern for the quality of education, equal opportunity, or human rights, but merely the parents' own fear of 'losing face'. These teachers saw inclusion as the result of parents'

personal failure to overcome their own emotional barriers or to admit the 'reality' that their children are 'abnormal'. Parents insisting on a mainstream education for their children with SEND were thus described as selfishly serving their own personal interest of avoiding 'losing face' by their children attending special schools. To illustrate:

“The parents’ mentality is that they all think their kids are wonderful and normal, and they want them to go to a normal school. They don’t want others to see that their kids are in special schools, because the parents will ‘lose face’.” (Fangfang, Sifang School)

“For children on an LRC placement here, many parents in fact cannot accept that their children appear in class with such an identity...The parents don’t accept that there’s something wrong with their children. They insist that their children are normal. Many even refused to apply for the LRC status for their kids, let alone sending them to special schools.” (Mengya, Hemei School)

Sifang School was discussed in chapter 4.2.2 as a uniquely inclusive school as it was the only primary school in the research site city that unequivocally promoted inclusion as the school ethos. Fangfang also reported inclusive understanding and demonstrated inclusive teaching strategies. The headteacher's efforts in promoting inclusion and providing relevant training can be important reasons behind inclusive practices, but practising inclusion does not mean its philosophical principles are also automatically accepted and internalised. Some teachers practise inclusion out of belief in children's rights and meaningful education. Others may do so because they understand it as a culturally more desirable arrangement for some parents to avoid 'losing face'. However, this cultural concern often serves more as reasons for rejecting rather than promoting inclusion. For example:

“The parents should think about what is good for their children’s development, not what is good for their own ‘face’. They should think about what their kids are actually able to learn in a school if they come here...some parents are denying the reality [of their

children being 'abnormal'] and lying to themselves." (Wengfan, Shengben School)

"Whenever you mention special schools to the parents, their first impression is usually that they are schools for idiots. The phrase [special schools] sounds too harsh to the ears. It's too difficult for parents to accept such a name...Honestly, I think special schools are more beneficial for these children." (Dinglu, Qingzhi School)

Here, inclusion was seen as a way of parents trying not to 'lose face', which was regarded as personal pettiness not worth encouraging. Along this line, inclusion became a conflict between 'what is best for the children' and 'what is best for the parents', as if parents do not want the best for their own children. To further illustrate, Quan from Qingzhi School said:

"From parents' perspective, they don't understand what is best for their children educationally. Parents are not educators. They don't think about things from the perspective of children's education. They think about things from the perspective of their own 'face'." (Quan, Qingzhi School)

The belief that 'teachers as the professionals necessarily know better than parents about their children's education' reinforces the prejudiced interpretation of inclusion as parents' personal need to avoid 'shame', especially when teachers and parents disagree in children's educational setting. When teachers do not believe in inclusion to begin with, the deeply-ingrained 'shame culture' can be used to make sense and justify their rejection of inclusion. This internalised value belief makes it difficult to convince them otherwise.

Therefore, it is apparent that the shame culture in China presents a challenging barrier to inclusion at the Real: inclusion can be perceived as a lie, an escape from the 'shameful reality' that certain children do not belong at the Empirical. To move forward from this, it may be unrealistic to call for a complete discarding of the long-lasting shame culture in China. The sense of shame to a certain degree can help to motivate personal change (Lickel *et al.*, 2014). Yet shame is also problematic in that it "develops from experiences of prejudice and oppression" (Halevy, 2007, 21). For children with SEND and their families,

shame is clearly used as a tool of prejudice and oppression to stigmatise, marginalise, and exclude. Thus, for inclusion to work, a direction forward may be to encourage ideas and values that can be used to fight such prejudice and oppression. The next section suggests the ideals of equality and social justice in this regard. It also explores teachers' common misinterpretation of these notions, and what it means for inclusion.

8.3 Equality

Equality is “normatively important” in education because education is in part “a positional good” (Reich, 2013, 58). ‘Positional good’ refers to “the way the value of a certain good to a person depends on other people’s not possessing that good, or not possessing as much of it” (*ibid.*). For children with SEND who are already disadvantaged through no faults of their own, it is important that they are not doubly disadvantaged by the education system.

Equality is among the ‘socialist core values’ proposed by President Xi today in the Chinese society (CPC Central Committee, 2013; Xi, 2017). Xi (2017) stressed that the primary social conflict in China is “between people’s growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and insufficient development”. This points to a heightened awareness for more equal shares of progress across regions and social groups. The latest national education development plan also specified that “education equity is one of the most pressing and sensitive problem in China’s education system” (State Council, 2017a, Article 4.5).

However, despite such official narratives of equality, there seems to be relatively low awareness among the general public. Studies have shown contradictions and inconsistencies in people's understanding of ‘equality’. For example, in a survey on people's human rights awareness with 15,164 respondents across China (Zhang, 2016c), 71.6 per cent of the participants agreed that all human being's rights should be equally respected; but when they were specifically asked if ‘certain kinds’ of people's rights should be respected, the percentage of positive answers appeared to be quite low in some categories, such as drug addicts (15.6 per cent), sex workers (14.6 per cent),

criminals (17.6 per cent), and homosexuals (22.7 per cent). This means that most participants did not have a clear or coherent understanding of equality, as the same individuals, who believed in principle that everyone's rights should be equally respected, also at the same time saw certain groups of people as 'inferior', whose rights were not worth respecting. Further, a survey study conducted by Wu and Gu (2012) with 1,063 respondents across China finds that 85.7 per cent think that inequality will persist, and they accept it as part of society, and 60.2 per cent positively see inequality as necessary for social development. This result is not surprising under the long-standing trickle-down economic policy of "to let some parts of the society get rich first; they then have the responsibility to help and lead the rest to get rich as well; gradually common prosperity will be achieved" (Deng, 1993; Xi, 2014b).

In such a context, there is no wonder that teachers did not commonly relate equality, fairness or social justice to the inclusion/exclusion of children with SEND. Looking deeper, two strong sub-themes emerged: equality as equal treatment and valuing utilitarianism over equality. The following sub-sections unpack how teachers' understanding of these values has underpinned their resistance against inclusion.

8.3.1 Equality as Equal Treatment

A plethora of literature has explored how educational equality can be interpreted, such as in terms of equality of access, goods, treatment, outcome, opportunity, and adequacy (Coleman, 1968; Ladd & Loeb, 2013; Le Grand, 2018; Scott & Scott, 2018). However, among the teachers from the four mainstream schools, equality rather appeared to be mainly understood as equal treatment. This view of equal treatment can be seen behind teachers' understanding of inclusion as assimilation (see chapter 4.1.2).

Equality as equal treatment in schools may deny the diverse learner needs while reinforce the institutionalisation of the desirable types of pupils. Yet the belief of equal treatment may be popular among teachers in general. For example, Wu and Gu's (2012) study shows that, responding to the question of 'if you were an art teacher tutoring two differently abled students to apply for an

art academy, you would...', 60.7 per cent of the 1,063 respondents replied that they would provide the same support for the two students for the sake of equality, and potential result of failure is contributed to the students' own ability level.

Following the understanding of equality as equal treatment, segregated provisions for children with disabilities were not commonly associated with inequality by teachers. The logic is that 'equality' here means that teachers would provide the same support for all students in mainstream schools; children with disabilities then do not receive the additional support they may need to succeed; their 'failure' is contributed to their own ability level; and special schools are merely to provide the 'suitable' provisions for them, irrelevant to concerns of equality. Together with the functionalist belief that special schools were the 'right' places where certain children belong (see chapter 6.3), a common position was that:

"Special schools have nothing to do with segregation or inequality. It's just a more suitable place for these children to develop. Every child has his/her most suitable place. If you think special schools are segregating, what about arts schools and sports schools? Are they also forms of segregation and inequality? I think it's about different children's directions of development in life, which ask for different educational environments. It's not about segregation or inequality." (Tinghui, Sifang School)

A contradiction arises as Tinghui was earlier discussed as a rather inclusive teacher in the example of Taotao, showing how views can be inconsistent (see chapters 4.2.2 & 6.6). Tinghui mentioned that after Taotao graduated from primary school, he went to a special school. She saw Taotao again when she visited the school for a SEND training. She said she was quite saddened to see that Taotao, once a 'lively and cheering' boy, had become rather 'dull and lifeless'. Thus, personally, she preferred the inclusive placement for Taotao at her school, as she believed it had been beneficial for Taotao. Yet in general terms, Tinghui also expressed clear support for special schools, as she saw it as a better place for children with more severe needs and difficult behaviours who cannot benefit from a mainstream setting.

An underlying assumption here is also that every child has a fixed ability which requires a certain type of 'most suitable' provision. It seemingly contradicts the notion of equal treatment as equality, but teachers did not appear to see this as a need to refine their views of 'equality' such as equal opportunities or outcome, but rather, they tended to dismiss the matter altogether as irrelevant. This is fundamentally inseparable from what teachers value and care about most (Archer, 2003). The functionalist value of certain children belonging to certain places seemed to overshadow concerns for educational inequality.

This functionalist view can be further reinforced by the medical model of disability that children with SEND need specialist expertise and are distinctly different from typically developing children. This can make the concept of equality difficult to grasp. For example, one teacher specifically drew parallels between hospitals and special schools, arguing that children attending special schools is as natural as patients going to hospitals:

"It's not about inequality...If you are sick, you go to the hospital. You can't say patients going to the hospital is a form of discrimination or exclusion. The purpose of setting up hospitals is to help people with illnesses. The same goes for special schools."
(Xinyu, Sifang School)

Yet hospitals and special schools differ in at least three aspects. First, unlike hospitals which are built based on knowledge of patients, special schools are not the direct result of what has been known about children with disabilities and how to teach them effectively, but rather a reflection of society's wish to keep the children who are excluded from the mainstream education within the school system (Paul, Fowler & Cranston-Gingras, 2007). In this sense, special schools can be the very result of the discrimination and exclusion of these children that some teachers denied.

Second, patients going to hospitals do not entail the loss of access to other services they are otherwise entitled. A student with a disability can go to hospitals and still go to his/her neighbourhood schools. In contrast, going to a special school denies students the right to equal education with their peers in

local mainstream schools. Further, going to hospitals does not necessarily make 'being a patient' as a child's main identity. But as children spend extended time in schools, they can strongly identify as members of the school they go to. Especially for borderline cases, going to special schools that do not challenge them is almost the same as teaching them to be 'not as good'.

Third, admittedly, some children with severe/multiple/profound needs do need constant medical care and frequent hospital visits, and they may benefit more in specialist provisions. But this can often be used as a sweeping argument for excluding children with SEND in general, neglecting that many others can still benefit more in mainstream settings. Thus, it can be quite a fallacy to equate hospitals and special schools as essentially the same. Such a perspective regards children with SEND primarily as patients and draws a strong border between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal'. This does not help the equality debates. To further illustrate:

"How can they [children with SEND] be the same as the normal children? For sure not...their education needs different requirements and contents, so you can't think about it in terms of equality or inequality...They are also receiving an equal education in special schools." (Wengfan, Shengben School)

The deep assumption here is that children with SEND themselves are not equal to other children, so the education they 'deserve' should also be 'equally different' such as in special schools. In this sense, special schools are seen as moral and just because they respect children's equal access to education based on needs. This position, however, can be countered by the contention surrounding 'ability grouping' in literature (see chapter 2.2) along with the problematic idea that there are 'abnormal' needs outside the responsibility of mainstream schools (see chapter 4.1.1).

Equality as equal treatment or 'equally different' treatment has been much challenged in literature. Instead, equality has been defended to be about giving more benefits to the worst off. Nagel (1979) maintains that on the principle of equality, it is more urgent and important to help and improve the situations of the people in worse positions even if they are harder to help.

Raphael (1980, 49) similarly notes that: "if the man [sic] with greater needs is given more than the man [sic] with lesser needs, the intended result is that each of them should have (or at least approach) the same level of satisfaction; the inequality of nature is corrected". Thus, the aim of equality of outcome sometimes needs to be achieved through an 'inequality of treatment'. Then "everybody should, as far as possible, have an equally worthwhile life" (Norman, 1987, 80).

Rawls (1971) also posited that a just society should give priority to the worse off. His thought experiment of the 'original position' outlines that "no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like...The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance" (*ibid.*, 118). This describes a fair, just, and equal society that each individual would want if no one knows in advance who they would be. Following this, considering that 15 per cent of the world population has some form of disability (WHO, 2011a) - and many more at some part of their life -, one may not want to live in a society where there is a 15 per cent chance that he/she would be segregated, discriminated, or stigmatised because of disability. Individuals would then logically prefer social distributions where people with disabilities are treated fairly and given more resources to ensure their wellbeing.

However, in reality, there are rarely such impartial judgements as in the original position, and distribution preferences in front of and behind the Veil of Ignorance often differ (Schildberg-Hörisch, 2010). Individuals may value their self-interest more than social equality and fairness for others, especially if they already know that they are the ones who are better off. For example, Bjerk's (2016) laboratory experiment with 86 participants exploring their motivations for monetary redistribution shows that, when the participants knew their earning outcomes, most acted out of their own financial interest: 70 per cent of those with earnings above the means proposed no redistribution, while 60 percent of those with earnings below the means wanted complete redistribution; similar motivations were also found when participants did not know their earning outcomes. The study suggests that rather than preferring a more equal distribution on the ground of fairness and justice, participants were merely attempting to ensure themselves against the prospect of the low earning

outcome. Similarly, Frignani and Ponti's (2012) study on distribution preference with 192 participants found that decisions under the Veil of Ignorance can be simply based on risk aversion rather than principles of social equality and justice.

Thus, going back to teachers' belief in equal treatment, similar arguments can be made. As individuals can be driven by self-interest and risk aversion, they may not prioritise values of equality or justice for others unless they are in worse-off positions themselves. It can be in teachers' self-interest not to provide additional support for children with SEND who are often exempted from exams. They can save the time and energy to focus on producing high achieving students, which is also a requirement under the pressure of *Gaokao* and teacher evaluation system (see chapter seven). In this sense, equal treatment may just be a seemingly plausible and easy excuse to avoid talking about the complexity of inequality in education. It shows that, fundamentally, equality was not thoroughly thought about or valued as a top concern by teachers. Just as Quan said regarding segregated education: "it's not a matter of inequality at all".

Education, "beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equaliser of the conditions of men [sic] – the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (Mann, 1848). Yet when equality is narrowly viewed as equal treatment and dismissed as irrelevant in education, it allows a segregated system that exacerbates and perpetuates inequality and prejudice. What is urgently needed is thus to explore ways to promote greater awareness of equality as necessary and integral to education, and also as equal opportunity or outcome beyond narrowly equal treatment. Yet this alone is not enough. 'Equality' altogether may become a peripheral concern in utilitarian ethics. The next section considers this in detail.

8.3.2 Equality versus Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism maximises utility, usually in terms of happiness or wellbeing. Propagated by Bentham (1789/1907) and Mill (1863/1998), it posits that the moral action is one that produces the greatest sum of happiness for the

greatest number of people. Today in popular culture, it is often discussed in relation to the thought experiment of the Trolley Problem and similar related dilemmas.²⁰ A utilitarian view sees it as the moral and right decision to steer the trolley or switch the track to kill one worker in order to save five, as the utility it generates by saving five workers is greater than saving one. Cost-effective utilitarianism tends to be the dominant ethics model in many societies today. Costa and colleagues (2014) found that 80 per cent of their 725 participants made the utilitarian choice of steering the trolley to kill one and save five when answering the Trolley Problem question. Similarly, a study by Bergmann and colleagues (2018) with 189 participants driving virtual reality cars on simulation trials shows that 85 per cent of the drivers chose to swerve onto the sidewalk hitting one pedestrian to save two people on the street, and the percentage goes up to 92 in a trial for a group size of three and more people on the street. Clearly, when facing dilemmas, one may not be aware of the moral implications of sacrificing the innocent few to save many, especially considering that utilitarianism justifies such a choice as moral and right.

However, utilitarian principles are also critiqued. Happiness as a personal feeling is not objectively measurable (Briggs, 2014). Utilitarian principles can also raise questions for social equality and justice (Hare, 1981; Rosen, 2003). In the example of the Trolley Problem and its variations, it is morally justifiable to harm the minority of individuals in order to maximise the greatest happiness of the majority, even if it means involving innocent bystanders. Critiquing such a stance, Nozick (1974, 32-3) argues that:

“There is no social entity with a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good. There are only individual people, different individual people, with their own individual lives. Using one of these people for the benefit of others, uses him and benefits the others. Nothing more. What happens is that

²⁰ The Trolley Problem can be described as: “an out-of-control trolley is barreling toward five track workers who are trapped on the track ahead of it. If the driver does nothing, the five will be run over and killed. The driver cannot stop the trolley, but he can turn it onto a spur of track to the right, on which there is another trapped track worker who would be run over and killed were he to do so” (Graham, 2017, 168-9).

something is done to him for the sake of others. Talk of an overall social good covers this up”.

Indeed, the rhetoric of the greater good may sound compelling, yet what the greater good is exactly and whose good it represents need to be questioned. As Rawls (1972, 29) points out, "the plurality of distinct persons with separate systems of ends is an essential feature of human societies". Since individual happiness is diverse, and some may even contradict one another, it then follows that the greater good that is claimed to be the aggregation of individual happiness is rather a delusion. It may as well be the interest of the powerful. It may be the tyrannical power of the majority or the coercive power of the elite minority. In either case, the power is exerted when "the desires, needs, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions of distinct persons [are treated] as if they were the desires, etc., of a mass person" (Nagel, 1970/2012, 134). Clearly, the greatest sum of benefits that the abstract 'mass person' has does not distinguish among concrete individuals. In Nozick's (1974, 33) words, such doing "does not sufficiently respect and take account of the fact that he [sic] is a separate person, that his [sic] is the only life he [sic] has". This points to concerns for social justice and equality. In this regard, as Parfit (1997, 203) suggests, what matters is not just the greatest happiness, but also how well-off individuals would be; this may require that "we should sometimes choose a smaller sum of benefits, for the sake of a better distribution”.

Thus, one cannot always make the utilitarian choice comfortably and uncritically only considering the consequences of the action. Perhaps a deontological perspective that upholds rules, principles, rights, duties, and obligations also needs to be considered and even given more weight in some cases. In this regard, Confucianism offers scope for further exploration with principles such as *ren* (benevolence) (see chapter 4.2.1) and *li* (propriety/rule of proper conducts) (see chapter 6.3.2). Confucian ethics is not strictly utilitarian. The collective good and flourishing of all is indeed a strong theme, but the emphasis of *li* is also on adhering to rules while *ren* is universal without preference for minority or majority. Thus, the deontological choice of not to interfere in the trolley problem can be justified by Confucian morality in that rules are respected and the one worker is also loved/valued as the other five.

However, traditional wisdom is not necessarily visited today or internalised to guide practices. The following discusses how utilitarian values rather dominate views and practices of special and inclusive education among Chinese teachers.

Utilitarianism in Special and Inclusive Education

Utilitarianism can present challenges for inclusive education. Teachers were found to make utilitarian choices regarding children with SEND easily. A position was that an inclusive mainstream classroom would necessarily entail the irreconcilable conflict between the majority of the 'normal' children and the minority of children with SEND. With a utilitarian mentality, when facing such a conflict of interest, if any, it is natural, right, and moral that the interest of the majority should be protected first even if it means to sacrifice the minority. To illustrate, Quan said that:

“I don't have enough energy to take care of both the majority of the normal children and a few special ones. These are two conflicting sides themselves anyway. It's hard to reach a balance. Certain people's interests have to be sacrificed. Either it's the normal people's interests or the special groups' interests. If the special groups can't get the support they need in our normal classes, it's better for them to go to special schools.” (Quan, Qingzhi School)

The educational exclusion of children with SEND can be seen as particularly legitimate if they are considered as having a potentially negative effect on the majority of other children in mainstream schools (Allan, 2008; Slee, 2011). Admittedly, at cases disruptive and challenging behaviours may affect others in a mainstream class. In a classroom of 45 students, it can also be demanding for one teacher to manage difficult behaviours. However, the extreme cases cannot represent the diverse needs of children who experience educational exclusion. It is hard to imagine that children such as Rui (boy with cerebral palsy) and Xin (girl with mild learning difficulties) as discussed in chapters 6.4-6.6, can pose any major threat to their classmates, or can be

considered as having irreconcilably conflicting interests against others. What teachers may consider as a negative influence may well be minor things that many children do not mind, such as making strange noises or not sitting still in seats. Thus, it is overly generalised to juxtapose children with SEND and their typically developing peers as two incompatible, conflicting sides. The utilitarian morality here may be used as an excuse to avoid thinking more deeply about the complex question of inclusion.

The utilitarian thinking is also behind teachers' unwillingness to make special arrangements for students with SEND. For example:

"You can't ask the normal schools to spend too many efforts in promoting inclusion, because after all the abnormal children are a very small minority. It's impossible for all the teachers to just leave the majority of their students aside and to study about special education and inclusion. But for special schools, teaching these children are their specialities, so these provisions should be greatly promoted." (Liangshu, Shengben School)

Liangshu appeared to assume that children with SEND and their mainstream peers were completely two different groups requiring distinct instructions. Yet often, what benefits children with SEND also often benefits other children in general (see chapter 2.3). Inclusive teachers do not just 'leave' the majority of their students. They seek to improve education for all children. Evidence has shown that this is possible (see chapters 4.2 & 6.4-6.6).

Expressing the utilitarian view more radically, one teacher said that:

"It's irresponsible that one child like these makes the entire class disorderly...if that child goes to a special school, maybe his/her conditions may become even worse, but this is just the way the society is. You have to be responsible for the majority of the people." (Cuiling, Shengben School)

Clearly, the case for inclusion is undermined by the realities that many believed that educational exclusion can be justified by utilitarian calculations, that children with SEND are threats to others, and that school education can be

a single choice question between the majority and the minority students. In this light, as Safford and Safford (1996, 3) highlight:

"the implied cultural-utilitarian formula does not explain, assuming the importance primitive peoples must have ascribed to strength, stamina and sensory acuity, archaeological and anthropological evidences of protection and inclusion of members with physical and sensory impairments."

Armstrong (2002b) similarly contends that the need for individuals to be socially useful or productive cannot be the only determining values and concerns. What cannot be ignored is a deontological ethics model, that actions are judged as right or wrong based on rules and principles, not consequences. It is doubtful that everyone would want to live in a utilitarian society that treats individuals mostly as productive units and comfortably sacrifices the minority for the sake of the majority. Challenging the utilitarian orthodox and imagining alternatives may give hope for creating a more humanistic society that values dignity, compassion, equality and rights.

8.3.3 Summary

At the Real, equality is a driver for inclusive education. Despite equality being promoted as a core socialist value in China's official discourse, teachers did not necessarily associate the educational exclusion of children with inequality or injustice. On the one hand, equality may be understood in terms of equal treatment or 'equally different' treatment. This logic makes inequality less relevant when thinking about segregated education for different groups. This highlights the need for encouraging deeper understanding of equality beyond merely equal treatment. On the other hand, utilitarian principles can be valued more than equality, especially when resources are scarce and choices have to be made, such as in China, an economically developing country with the world's largest population. Utilitarianism as a barrier to inclusion can become particularly prominent when inclusion is narrowly understood as only benefiting the minority children with SEND. This points to the importance of recognising

inclusion in its broad sense as having the benefits of improving education and society for all, not just for the few (see chapters 2.1 & 4.2).

The next section turns to rights.

8.4 Rights

Concerns for children's rights are a main driver for inclusive education. The UNCRC (UN, 1989, Article 3.1), ratified by China in 1992, states that "in all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (also see chapter 2.1). Inclusive educational provisions for children with SEND bring benefits in educational, social, and economic terms (see chapter 2.3). They aim for children to live full and decent lives in mainstream society. These reflect the best interests of the child.

However, for teachers who preferred special schools for children with SEND, in cases it appeared that their own best interests may be prioritised before those of the child (see chapter 7.3.2). To illustrate, a teacher said:

"If it was my child, I certainly want him/her to be in a regular school with the regular children, and the school can provide him/her a very good education. But from a teacher's point of view, I would prefer such children to go to a better school with specialised facilities [special schools]." (Zhenming, Qingzhi School)

If special schools were really 'better', it did not make sense that she would not want that for her own child. The preference for teaching a class of smart and trouble-free students points to an absent awareness of children's rights. When teachers do not deeply realise that they are professionally and morally obliged to safeguard the best interests of all the children, and when they are unaware of the rights of disabled children, inclusion may largely be seen as unimportant or unnecessary for the lack of grounding or justification.

This is visible in that none of the 37 teachers used the term 'children's rights'. Among the 28 teachers who did not show clear support for inclusion,

when asked about rights, none saw it as relevant to segregated education. Many diverted the conversation to that inclusive education is a good cause, but it does not suit the local Chinese context. This 'context' appeared to mean the Chinese education system (see chapter seven). Further, some believed that children have the right to special education based on their needs. Deeper assumptions behind this position have been explored and challenged in chapter 4.1 regarding norms, in chapter 6.3 regarding functionalism, and chapter 8.3 regarding equality.

Only one teacher elaborated on her understanding regarding rights in China:

"All those 'human rights' talks are the business of the foreign countries. Here in China we have different local contexts. We only have one teacher for 45 students. To be honest, we really don't have enough attention or energy to spare, especially for those whose exam grades are not counted...It's quite hard to promote inclusion in China, because of the Chinese society itself, well, human rights? Never heard of it. We don't vote...Some communities here do some sort of representative voting, but it's just for show." (Linping, Sifang School)

This highlights that a human rights discourse can be largely absent in Chinese society, let alone specifically children's rights. Without being compelled by the rights principles, children's best interests can be ignored. Without an adequate rights discourse, inclusion is also likely to be quickly dismissed as impractical and unrealistic when difficulties and challenges arise.

As a global concept that emerged increasingly clearly and strongly after the World War II, international human rights apply to all human beings universally. This is clearly stated in the UDHR: "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world" (UN, 1948, preamble). This position was indeed officially acknowledged by the Chinese government. The Chinese delegate led by Chang Pengchun participated in the creating and drafting of the UDHR. It was ratified by the Chinese government,

along with its later covenants, such as *the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (UN, 1966) and *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (UN, 1966).

It thus begs the question of why the Chinese government's official stance regarding human rights is not accordingly reflected in the awareness among the general public. Not having a political system that allows authentic people's democratic votes, as Linping pointed out, is part of the picture. Deeply, it can also be to do with the version of 'human rights' portrayed and promoted by the CPC. The following two sections look at the notion of human rights in China from the political and cultural perspectives. As 'rights' is of central significance to inclusive education, a deeper understanding of what 'human rights' can mean in China may offer the necessary insight into how inclusion, a primarily rights-driven agenda, can possibly work in the Chinese context where rights are seldomly talked about.

8.4.1 The Politics of 'Human Rights' in China

The CPC in its earlier days of governing the PRC insisted that human rights was a capitalist idea and had nothing to do with a socialist country (Dong, 2004). In the 'ideology remoulding' movement of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) - a human rights disaster according to Human Rights Watch (1999) - ideas such as democracy, the rule of law, freedom, and human rights were labelled as capitalist evils that should be rejected and attacked (Yu, 1999). Under the "psychological persuasion" of totalitarian collectivism, specific therapies such as labour camps were used to "cure ideological sickness" (Schwartz, 1960, 20). At that time, the media was often used for political propaganda for 'class struggles' and 'enhancing dictatorship', while most of the general public had little awareness of human rights and nearly no knowledge of the UDHR despite China being one of the signatories (*ibid.*).

From 1978, driven by the imperative for economic development after the turmoil of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping's leadership (1978-1989) implemented a series of reforming and opening up policies encouraging a free market economy. However, the advancement in the economic realm did

not appear to transfer to the political and social realms. After the crackdown of the 1989 Tian'anmen Square protest, Deng (1993, 365) emphasised in 1990 that "the need for stability overwhelms everything else; we cannot lose sight of people's democratic dictatorship". This position essentially rejects human rights, not only because of the dictatorship, but also because the process of rights-claiming would often entail conflicts, and conflicts needed to be avoided at all cost to ensure stability.

Regarding human rights, Deng (*ibid.*, 125) stated in a speech in 1985 that:

"what are human rights? Are they the rights of the majority, or the rights of the minority, or the rights of everyone? The so-called 'human rights' in the Western world is in nature a completely different thing from the human rights we talk about here".

Deng did not specify what the differences were exactly in that speech, but the emphasis of continuing to juxtapose human rights in China and in the West was clear. Subsequently, a common understanding of 'human rights' among the Chinese then was that it was a political tool used by the imperialistic Western countries to blame, humiliate, and criticise the Chinese government (Ames, 1997).

It was not until 1991 under Jiang Zemin's leadership (1989-2003) that the government's position on human rights was officially stated. The first white paper on human rights in China (State Council, 1991b) established that "the first thing for the Chinese people to do is, for historical reasons, to secure the right to subsistence", and that "attention should first be given to the right to development". Subsistence refers to some minimum standard of living, and development means such standards can be expected to improve. The rationale behind this was explained by Jiang (2000, 64):

"China is a developing country with 1.2 billion people. This context decides that the rights to subsistence and to development are the most basic and important human rights. Without securing people's basic livelihood, no other rights can be realised".

To further elaborate, the White Paper from the State Council Information Office (2000, Chapter 6) states that:

“in terms of the basic orientation of developing human rights, we stick to the principle of developing the productive labour forces and promoting common prosperity, based on the improvement of the living standards of the entire people and promoting the human rights of the entire people; in terms of the order of priority, the top priority is given to the rights to subsistence and development, while taking into consideration the people’s political, economic, social and cultural rights and the overall development of individual and collective rights.”

Jiang’s government officially acknowledged and defined human rights in China for the first time. This stance was clearly communicated to the international community in the *Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights* (UN, 1993), which advocated that human rights need to be formulated and implemented with respect to cultural diversity and stages of economic development. It indicates that the CPC has changed its earlier position that ‘human rights’ was incompatible with a socialist society, and instead joined the global conversations on human rights.

However, this version of human rights continued to make the distinction between China and elsewhere using the rhetoric of suitable local cultural and economic contexts. It particularly has a clear focus on economy by highlighting China’s developing country status. By directing the public gaze onto the common collective aspiration towards a better material life, and onto the uncontroversial area of speedy economic growth where the CPC has been successful, it may seem more like a risk-aversion strategy of the state to avoid talking too much about difficult and uncomfortable questions than genuinely intending to develop human rights practices and awareness.

After Jiang, under Hu Jintao’s leadership (2003-2013), “the state respects and protects human rights” was written into the *Constitution* in 2004 for the first time (NPC, 2004). The political discourse on social relations developed a new focus on ‘building a socialist harmonious society’ (Hu, 2013). However,

this does not mean the CPC's position on human rights was radically changed. Similar to Deng's emphasis on stability, harmony by definition also means the avoidance of conflicts, thus indirectly rejecting rights-claiming which entails conflicts and disharmony.

Today, under President Xi's leadership (2013-present), the right to development has been re-emphasised as having the first and foremost place in the concept of human rights in China (State Council, 2015). The document states that as the country has achieved great economic development, "the Chinese people enjoyed practical benefits from the development of the country, and their human rights situation also made new progress" (*ibid.*). President Xi's (2018) latest position on human rights has the similar rhetoric:

"people's happy and prosperous lives are the greatest human rights...follow a path of human rights that is suitable to the local Chinese context...the rights to subsistence and to development are the first, basic human rights."

The vague language in the official narrative regarding human rights seemed to imply that collective economy growth means happier lives which naturally leads to better human rights situations. 'Human rights' continued to be portrayed as a predominantly economic concept today, while its political, cultural, and social dimensions remain peripheral. In this regard, Li (2015, 151) asserts that the Chinese general public often believes "in accordance with China's leaders, that collective rights trump individual rights and that improving standards of living for all citizens is a higher good than allowing greater freedom of speech for the citizens". This in turn has contributed to the shaping of "a strong state and a disempowered society" (*ibid.*, 41), where awareness for individual rights-claiming can be limited or suppressed.

As economic development to an extent depends on social stability, Deng's slogan that 'stability overwhelms everything else' is still often used today to justify the disregard for individual rights for the sake of collective development (Qian, 2012). The state's emphasis on social stability and control is so paramount that even the fundamental value of Marxism in supporting workers' rights may become dismissible. For example, a student Marxist society at

Peking University was threatened with being shut down following a series of police crackdown on students who supported workers over trade union disputes (Yang & Liu, 2018). The single-party government controls the discourse monopoly regarding human rights in China. Consequently, cases of arguable human rights violations such as the annexation of Tibet (Human Rights Watch, 2018) and the re-education camps for Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang Province (Zheng, 2018) were frequently portrayed in the state media as matters of separatist conspiracies and religious extremism while appealing to patriotic sentiments (Chen, 2008; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002; Yao, 2014).

Thus, it becomes clear that according to the version of 'human rights' promoted by the CPC - predominantly an economic concept prioritising the collective right to subsistence and to development reinforced by the rhetoric for social stability and harmony -, the inclusion of children with SEND appears to be rather irrelevant to the concept of rights. In such a context, no wonder teachers did not commonly think of 'rights' when they talked about the educational exclusion of individual children. Without being driven by rights, inclusion may be seen more as a goodwill gesture rather than an imperative. Simply relying on individual teachers' goodwill is far from enough for inclusion to work. Theoretical basis and moral justification are needed to drive changes. In this regard, the next section explores the cultural dimension of rights in China through Confucianism to seek possibilities for the much needed theoretical and moral grounding for inclusion.

8.4.2 Confucianism and Human Rights

The word 'rights' (权利, *quanli*) had no appearance in ancient Chinese legal documents. The term had meant 'authority/power and personal gains' mostly in a derogatory way, before being used by Ding Weiliang as the Chinese equivalence of 'rights' in his translation of *Elements of International Law* by Wheaton in the 1860s (Xia, 2001). The absence of a rights discourse in traditional Chinese culture is apparent in Confucianism. Bedford and Hwang (2003) argue that the Confucian ethics are primarily based on notions of individual duties and collective social goals rather than on personal rights. For

example, in terms of the relationship between individuals and collective groups, the traditional Chinese culture is strongly characterised with collectivistic and functionalist values (see chapters 4.1.2 & 6.3.2). From the classic Confucian thought of 'restraining oneself and observing proprieties' (Analects, 12.1) to the neo-Confucian theories of 'preserving Heavenly laws while destroying human desires' (Zhu, 1130-1200) popularised during the Song and Yuan Dynasties (960-1368), the Chinese culture has been described as one that "suppresses individuality and takes the nation and collective as the only value" (Xu, 1999, 417). Munro (1979, 40) similarly argued that "selflessness...is one of the oldest values in China, present...especially in Confucianism. The selfless person is always willing to sub-ordinate his own interests...to the interest of a larger social group". Historically, this clearly has not helped to cultivate a strong awareness for individual rights-claiming.

More specifically, Tiwald (2012) identifies the main conflicts between Confucianism and the idea of human rights as that: the Confucian ethics emphasises role-specific responsibilities, preserves traditional social hierarchies, and overwhelmingly values stability and harmony, whereas the notion of human rights stresses the role-independent entitlements and obligations that everyone has as a human being, checks and balances in privileges and powers, and changes and conflicts in the process of rights-claiming. However, scholars (Ames, 1997; Chan, 1999, 2002; de Barry & Tu, 1998; Sim, 2004; Tu, 1998) have argued that these contrasts are often overdrawn, and Confucianism also offers possibilities for valuing human rights albeit specific language was not used.

First, regarding the contrast between individualism and the Confucian collectivism, de Barry and Tu (1998) argue that the societal and communitarian values have contributed to human rights thinking in the West, while the dignity and wellbeing of individuals have also been main concerns in Confucianism. 'Human rights' is not based on the premise of totally egoistic individuals unconcerned with others' well-being. To claim a universal right includes stating recognition and respect for everyone else's equal share to it (UN, 1948, 1989). Rights are also duties: "everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his [sic] personality is possible" (UN, 1948, 29.1). This highlights rights as justice not selfish individualism. Rights are thus

not fundamentally incompatible with a collective culture, especially when individual and collective interests overlap. A purpose of human rights can be described to protect legitimate individual interests and needs. The same purpose is also shared by the Confucian ethics, but with a different proposed approach, that is, individuals should not think in terms of claiming rights for the self but rather how to manage harmonious relationships with others through virtues, caring and love (see chapter 4.1.2 regarding 'great harmony', *datong*). A caring and loving relationship will not diminish personal interests and needs. Thus, although Confucianism does not explicitly promote rights or individualistic values, it is not incompatible with the idea of human rights, as both traditions share similar goals of maximising individual well-being.

Second, regarding the role-based morality in Confucianism, scholars (Lee, 1992; Peerenboom, 1993; Rosemont, 1988) have endorsed the understanding that moral rights and duties in the Confucian sense only arise from social relationships according to specific roles individuals assume in relation to others (e.g., *li*, propriety), and that this goes against the presupposition of individuals having rights independent of cultures and societies. However, Chan (1999) rejects this absolute position and argues that there are also nonrelational moral duties in Confucianism, such as *ren* (benevolence). Confucius regarded *ren* as the first virtue that can override other duties such as *li*: "what has a person who is not *ren* got to do with *li*?" (Analects, 3.3). Regarding *ren*, Confucianism posits that "benevolence means to love people" (Mencius, Lilou II, 56). Here, 'people' do not distinguish specific social roles but rather a broad notion of human beings.

Mencius further illustrated that an individual is morally obliged to rescue a child who is about to fall into a well not because he/she had any personal relationships with the child or his/her families, but rather that: "all men [sic] have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others...the feeling of commiseration is essential to man [sic]...The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence" (Mencius, Gongsunchou I, 6). Regarding compassion for others, Confucius stressed reciprocity and considerateness: "do not do unto others what we would not want others to do unto us" (Analects, 12.2). He also encouraged altruism: "one who is benevolent, wishing to establish oneself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be better off oneself, seeks also to

make others better off" (Analects, 6.30). In essence, the Confucian benevolence advocates universal respect and love for all human beings and their rights to live and to develop regardless of their social roles. This resembles the basic principles of the modern concept of human rights.

Third, regarding social hierarchy, for example, 三纲 (*san gang*, three cardinal guides) preaches that rulers, fathers, and husbands have absolute authority over the ruled, sons, and wives respectively (Three Cardinal Guides and Six Disciplines, 1). Individuals' rights and interests can be limited if obedience and submission are expected as the norms according to one's social standing. However, Chan (1999) highlights that as *ren* (benevolence) is the first and foremost Confucian principle, if conflicts between obeying rules and benevolence arise, one should not submit to unkind, unreasonable or immoral authorities at the expense of *ren*. The Confucian social hierarchy can then be understood as a virtue-based utopia, where higher social status is associated with greater virtues. The virtuous – *junzi* (person of superior virtues) or *shengren* (sage) – can only be benevolent, righteous, courteous, wise, and faithful, and would not harm others or diminish others' interests or needs.

For example, regarding rules, benevolence requires that rulers should place their people's interests above anything else. Mencius stated that: "people are the foundation of the nation". He added, "for a state, people are the most important; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the ruler is of slight importance" (Mencius, Jinxin II, 60). This means although the rulers have the authority and higher social status, they should work towards maximising the wellbeing of the people. Traditional Chinese classics also state "whatever the people desire, Heaven must follow" (Book of Documents, Taishi, 1). This translates into, if the people are not satisfied with their ruler, the ruler can be replaced, and this is endorsed by the Heavenly Law. Thus, when the emphasis on social hierarchy in Confucianism is interpreted in the broader context of Confucian principles, it becomes clear that Confucianism does not mean an oppressive, coercive, or authoritarian society that negates human rights, but rather sees enforcing hierarchy in an ideal virtue-based social system as a means to perfect social order, where the rights, needs, and well-being of all members are respected, met, and taken care of.

Fourth, regarding the Confucian emphasis on harmony and avoidance of conflicts, Lee (1992, 255) notes that "anyone who is overly contentious, self-assertive, quarrelsome or litigious is considered contemptible", and that a virtuous person in the Confucian sense is one who is preoccupied with "self-overcoming and yielding, not with claiming and asserting what he [sic] is entitled to". Rights-claiming often implies conflicts and disharmony. Such situations are rather discouraged in Confucianism. It then may seem that Confucianism rejects human rights. However, as argued earlier, one Confucian principle cannot be looked at in isolation in absolute terms without considering other often conditional values. In cases of conflicts, in order to restore and maintain harmony, Confucianism encourages concessions and compromises. Yet this is based on the principle of *ren* (benevolence), which means that the individuals involved are virtuous and caring. They do not deliberately diminish others' interests and needs. When *ren* is no longer observed, concessions and harmony should not be pursued blindly. For example, Confucianism maintains that:

“Someone said, ‘What do you say concerning the principle that injury should be recompensed with kindness?’ The Master said, ‘With what then will you recompense kindness? Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness.’”
(Analects, 14.34)

Clearly, the Confucian emphasis on harmony does not exclude the possibility of conflicts. Confucianism respects the values of justice, dignity, and fairness, and the concept of rights also has the aim for individuals to live in peace and harmony.

Therefore, although Confucianism does not articulate the idea of rights at the Empirical, as many have argued (Ames, 1997; Chan, 2012; de Barry & Tu, 1998; Tseng, 2017; Tu, 1998), there is no inherent incompatibility between Confucianism and human rights at the Real. The Confucian preference for “duty, harmony, consensus, network, ritual, trust, and sympathy” do not necessarily threaten the concept of rights (Tu, 1998, 45). On the contrary, the Confucian values such as benevolence, dignity and justice can be seen as rather having laid foundations for human rights in contemporary China. This is

reflected in the Chinese scholars' early attempts in the 19th and early 20th century to introduce and promote ideas of democracy, science, freedom, and rights. For example, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) who initiated the New Culture Movement by establishing an influential journal called '*The New Youth*' (1915-1926), published articles that promoted awareness for science, democracy, and a new culture. As the chief editor, Chen (1915) spread the idea that individuals should put themselves first before the collective and have the liberty to act on their own will, but also that individuals' pursuit of freedom, rights and happiness should be the pursuit of the state. More recently, the theoretical concept of 'human rights' has also been a focus in academic debates among Chinese scholars (Qiu, 2009; Xu, 2013; Zhang, 1992).

8.4.3 Summary

It has now become clear that teachers' views of 'human rights being the business of the foreign countries and inapplicable in China' at the Empirical are more grounded at the Real within the political needs of the CPC rather than the cultural tradition of the Chinese civilisation. This can be seen that in areas such as Taiwan and Hongkong, where the Confucian-heritage culture is shared but different political systems are practised, relatively greater awareness and practices of rights have been reported (Chen & Cohen, 2013; Huang, 2018; Human Rights in China, 2017). Thus, although at the Empirical the language of human rights may not be often used in mainland China, and one may even find the term alienating and annoying, such as Linping at Sifang School, nonetheless, human rights is not a concept fundamentally alien or incompatible with the Chinese society at the Real. Aspects of human rights can be widely believed and practised albeit the specific language is not used. This can be seen from the above discussion of the traditional Chinese culture, as well as from cases of teachers' inclusive views and practices reported in chapters 4.2 and 6.4-6.6.

Inclusion is "part of the human rights agenda that demands access to, and equity in, education" (Florian, 2008, 202). Perceptions of Chinese local contexts at the Empirical cannot be justified excuses to reject human rights and

subsequently children's rights to an equal and high-quality education in their neighbourhood mainstream schools at the Actual. At the Real, the traditional Chinese culture such as Confucianism rather offers rich resources, such as benevolence, dignity, justice, individual agency, and righteousness, that can support human rights and subsequently inclusion. Politically, the Marxist ideals of emancipation, liberation, and freedom also foreground human rights, with the ultimate goal of communism as a unified, inclusive society of peace and flourishing for all.

With a vibrant market economy, socialist China already justified its capitalist elements by coining the expression of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Perhaps a stronger rights discourse can also be part of the 'Chinese characteristics' in time. Especially in terms of children's rights, it is not a threat to the authoritarian regime but rather a gain for economic and social development. Thus, as this section has shown, children's rights to equal and high-quality education that can drive changes towards more inclusive schools and society is not inherently, fundamentally incompatible with the local Chinese political ideologies or cultural contexts at the Real. Possibilities can be further explored in future studies to signal how vibrant debates and practical changes regarding children's rights can take place, borrowing from the traditional Chinese culture and without conflicting with the state's overarching political emphasis on stability and control.

8.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the inner subjective agency at the Real that can inform teachers' inclusive and non-inclusive thinking and practices regarding children with SEND. Taking the perspectives of career motivation, the shame culture, equality, and human rights, it has been argued that:

- 1) Effective inclusive teacher training cannot ignore teachers' deeper values and drives in education. Indirect training on underpinning beliefs is needed as much as direct training on theories and techniques;
- 2) Inclusion may be dismissed by teachers as personal pettiness of parents to avoid 'losing face' in a 'shame culture' and therefore as unjustified;

- 3) Teachers did not associate segregated education with inequality when equality was narrowly understood as equal treatment; further, inequality against minority groups was dismissible from a utilitarian point of view;
- 4) 'Human rights' was seen as incompatible with the Chinese local contexts and therefore the inclusion of children with SEND driven by concerns for children's rights was unrealistic and impractical in Chinese schools. Underpinning reasons can be more political than cultural.

These barriers within the mind fundamentally are to do with what teachers value and care about and to what degree (Archer, 2003). For teachers who valued equal treatment more than equal opportunities, utilitarianism more than equality and justice, and their own professional interests more than children's best interests, they tended to prefer segregated education for children with SEND. The process of weighing pros against cons determines one's preferences in decision-making (Archer, 2000). Teachers who do not believe in inclusion because they do not value equal opportunities or children's rights much are unlikely to develop or sustain inclusive views or practices even if the desirable conditions are all in place. In contrast, for teachers who value and believe in inclusion, even in difficult external environments, they may actively explore options and develop strategies to meet diverse learner needs. Examples of this have been clearly recorded and discussed in chapters 4.2 and 6.4-6.6. The deeper causal efficacy of teachers' intentionality and acted-upon reasons have been illustrated and explored in this chapter. Therefore, for inclusion to work, it is crucial for teachers to actually believe in inclusion and value its integral principles such as equality, justice, and rights.

Chapter 9: Looking Forward

In this final chapter, I will first review the primary arguments made in this thesis, before drawing together and expand on the findings and discussions I have presented in previous chapters. Original contributions will be highlighted, and some non-prescriptive, possible ways forward using the Empirical, the Actual, and the Real will be discussed. The thesis then ends with suggestions for areas for future research. First, I begin by reviewing the main arguments made throughout the chapters.

9.1 Review of Primary Arguments

Chapter two reviewed the key themes within special and inclusive education, including inclusion as a human right requirement, main concerns arising from segregated provisions, practical benefits of inclusion, and the wicked problems (neoliberalism, curriculum, attitudes, and pedagogy) within the field. Then the thesis introduced and problematised the concept, policy, and practice of inclusive education in China, showing how the exclusion of children with SEND from mainstream schools is a pressing and persisting problem.

Chapter three described critical realism as the research philosophy underpinning this thesis, where specific tools of 'stratified ontology' and 'four-planar social being' are used as the analytical framework. Research design and procedure were detailed. Ethics and limitations of the study were considered.

The five findings chapters that followed empirically explored what inclusive education may mean for Chinese schools by examining the deeper causes behind teachers' understanding and practices regarding the exclusion/inclusion of children with SEND. Drawing together the Empirical, the Actual, and the Real throughout the findings chapters, main arguments are as follows:

- New views are needed, beyond treating inclusion as merely integration, to challenge the often taken-for-granted normalising and collectivistic values within the Chinese culture.
- Inclusive ideas and practices can find strengths in traditional Chinese culture and be supported by effective school leadership despite structural barriers.
- The design and use of schools' physical environment relate to inclusion. Children need to be seen as having learning bodies as well as learning minds.
- Inclusive strategies can draw from common pedagogies such as accepting differences, positive reinforcement, and peer support to benefit all.
- Children need to be valued as active contributors to education, not just passive receivers.
- The powerful model of 'strong adult - compliant child' in Chinese schools need to be reconsidered. It may foster too much concern with a cost-effective, functionalist view of education, under which children with SEND may be neglected, harmed, or rejected.
- Inclusion is a process of community-building for all members of the school. Teachers' well-being should be valued.
- Structural barriers to inclusion are multi-level and interlocked. Effective inclusive efforts need to become an integral part of the education system as a whole rather than as a stand-alone add-on.
- Inner drives can be most important in making inclusion work. Teachers who believe in inclusion and are willingly involved are valuable resources to inclusion.
- Justice, rights and values of social equality and respect embedded within Confucianism offer a rich resource for countering the negative shame culture and the medical deficit model of disability.
- A human rights discourse may be deemed as incompatible with Chinese society mainly due to political reasons. Alternatively, Confucianism may offer cultural roots for greater rights awareness to support inclusion.

Inclusive education is a complex process. This thesis has illustrated the importance of analysing inclusive education critically at all four planes of social being. This holistic and coherent approach helps to avoid narrowly focusing on single isolated aspects when explaining views and practices regarding inclusion or exclusion. The CR stratified ontology further offers a deeper understanding by uncovering the real forces behind them.

9.2 The Bigger Picture

What inclusion means for schools cannot be separated from what schools mean for society. The Chinese society today is experiencing growing crises: an aging population especially following the one-child policy (NPC, 2015), pollution especially by the vast CO₂ emissions of producing Chinese exports that are actually consumed in other countries (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2011), food safety threats (NPC, 2009/2015), regional conflicts and protests (Human Rights in China, 2017), and trade wars with the USA (Blakeley, 2019). These all add to demands on the single-party government to produce policies and take measures to keep delivering its promises of “putting the people first”, “representing the fundamental interests of the majority of people”, and “serving the people” (NPC, 1982/2018).

Education policies play an important role in tackling or increasing social crises. Schools have been emphasised as sites for producing *rencai* (high-quality labour force) to lead economic development and strengthen international competition (see chapter 7.1). This clear focus has helped to drive China’s economic growth as one of the fastest in the world (World Bank, 2018a). But the cost is also taking its effects on the over-exploited natural resources and environment for development, increased social inequality, marginalised groups, and wasted talents and skills. Recent education priorities started to highlight non-economic themes such as all-round development, inclusion, lifelong learning, equality, and togetherness to cultivate more compassionate, caring, moral, and responsible citizens (State Council, 2019). This latest discourse update indicates the heightened official awareness of schools’ role in helping to resolve the crises and great problems in Chinese society.

However, simply adding more agendas will not work effectively to tackle problems if the relationships between the old and the new values, often conflicting, are not addressed. In terms of inclusion, despite frequent policy updates since the 1990s, exclusion persists today. Financial, practical, political, and moral concerns in the wider society continue to hinder the translation of inclusion policies and values into effective practices.

First, financially, inclusion requires additional funding to enable schools to obtain and develop the necessary resources and to incentivise inclusive practices. However, special and inclusive education in China has been heavily under-funded, accounting for only 0.3 to 0.4 per cent of the total education expenditure (Liang & Zhang, 2018) (also see chapter 7.6). This low investment may relate to the wider neoliberal education system (see chapter 7.1). It encourages competition and makes cost-benefit decisions based on children's potential contributing power to future economy narrowly informed by their perceived 'intelligence' or 'cognitive ability'. No sensible government will reject equal and high-quality education for all in principle. But facing immediate financial pressures domestically and internationally, a developing country often prioritises the limited resources for producing short-term gains most efficiently to improve and maintain international standing. In this, a student is increasingly becoming "a jumble of assets to be invested, nurtured, managed, and developed; but equally an offsetting inventory of liabilities to be pruned, outsourced, shorted, hedged against, and minimised" (Mirowski, 2013, 108).

Inclusive education challenges the policy that promotes a fast-growing economy today even at the cost of an increasingly divided society and disfranchised groups. The civic and public purposes of the school "as an institution necessary to preserve healthy citizenship, or equal standing as a citizen" are as important as the economic and vocational purposes, which is "to ensure the ability to obtain a well-paid or simply middle-class job and to maintain the competitive advantage of the state's economy in a globalised world" (Reich, 2013, 58). UNESCO (2015b, 37) has warned against a "strictly utilitarian vision and the human capital approach" to development, and advocated "values of respect for life and human dignity required for social harmony in a diverse world" (*ibid.*).

Thus, inclusion will not work if it is treated as a goodwill project at the mercy of available funding when the economy allows it. Inclusion is about real people's real lives. It contributes to breaking down discrimination, segregation, inequality, and injustice. This rather enables a functional, progressive, and sustainable economy by helping to create a healthy, stable, and flourishing society in the long run. For the Chinese government that has long emphasised stability and harmony, inclusion seems to be of particular necessity and urgency.

Second, practically, teachers' inclusive efforts so far are not always successful, in China and elsewhere. This creates doubts about the feasibility and practicality of inclusion. Main difficulties include: specialised resources and their efficient usage are lacking (see chapter five; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Lunt & Evans, 1994; O'Keefe, 2004); mainstream teachers may not have the necessary skills (see chapters 6.1-6.3; Costello & Boyle, 2013; Kauffman, 2015; UNESCO, 2001); inclusion does not fit into a merit-based education system (see chapter seven; Yu, 2014; Rioux, 2014); and negative attitudes towards children with SEND insist that they do not belong and they drag others down (see chapter eight; Carter & Spencer, 2006; Huefner, 2015; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

However, ineffective attempts at inclusion do not mean that segregated provisions offer the better alternative. Children with severe and profound needs may benefit more in special schools in the current education system, but many children on the wide spectrum of SEND often do not, academically, socially, or economically (see chapters 2.2 & 2.3). Similar practical concerns raised by mainstream school teachers rejecting inclusion had been reported and observed in the two sampled special schools – many teachers were under-prepared, resources were inadequate, curriculum was limited, and bullying still existed.

Thus, an answer to the practical challenges of inclusion is not to expect children, who would otherwise be excluded, to fit into an education system that is not designed for them and still benefit without difficulties. Any social movement forward is also a process of setbacks, resilience, and perseverance. Rather than excuses to reject inclusion, which is a well-justified global agenda

(see chapter 2.1), practical difficulties can be lessons to be learned and opportunities to improve. In this, policy-makers' and headteachers' vision and leadership have a crucial role (see Junyi's example in chapter 4.2.2).

Third, politically, inclusion is resisted when the powerful elite tries to preserve their privileges and status. Education systems and provisions develop in particular ways "because it is in the interests of particular groups in a society" (Tomlinson, 1982, 27). The powerful economic and political elites can influence policies and direct schools to produce the kind of workers and supporters they need. Merits, as measured and rewarded in high-stake standardised testing, are often used as justifications. Liu (2013) argues that this merit-based education system serves as a state control instrument to maintain social stratification and order: for those who seized power in China's transition to the market economy, their merits (supposedly deserved financial achievements) legitimised their privileges; while for the lower social groups, they were led to believe that they deserved their low social status because they failed the competition of *Gaokao* through their lack of merits. Clearly, a narrowly merit-based education system conflicts with the philosophy of inclusive education, which recognises a diverse range of skills, talents, and knowledge (see chapter seven; Rioux, 2014; Yu, 2014).

Chinese policy makers are becoming more aware of such inclusive values (see chapter 2.5.1). The government's goals for building a socialist harmonious society emphasise key themes such as equality, justice, integrity, kindness, and fulfilling life among others (CPC Central Committee, 2004; Hu, 2013). These values are also within the state's vision for the future of Chinese education (State Council, 2019). To translate these ideals into practice, an inclusive model of society is needed with schools that can teach children about togetherness, respect for differences, equality, kindness, compassion, and how helping the least fortunate benefits all. Rather than merit-based, these virtues are their own rewards.

Fourth, morally, utilitarianism has been a common justification for dismissing the needs of minorities, such as the exclusion of children with SEND (see chapter 8.3.2). The way a society treats its most vulnerable is a testament of its civilisation. In this regard, a teacher said:

“The civilisation level of the entire society [in China] is not so advanced yet for the general public to really care so much about the disabled people and some other disadvantaged groups.”

(Linping, Sifang School)

In this regard, inclusion is “an ethical project of responsibility to ourselves and others” (Allan, 1999, 126). It is a “moral endeavour” (Brighouse, 2008, xi) towards a more equal and just society, where each child is recognised as having strengths and weaknesses, and they learn in mixed groups how to live together (Alderson, 2018; Francis & Wong, 2013). A strong theme underlining the concerns, contradictions, and constraints clearly evidenced throughout the findings chapters is that, improving education for children with SEND also improves the education system as a whole to benefit all children. As Knight (2017) notes, “good practice for children with SEND is, in many ways, good practice for all”. This win-win was also recognised by teachers:

“You can't let special children stay only with other special children. When they grow up and enter society, they still need to make contacts with the regular people...when you are personally exposed more to these special children, you will be more willing to accept and include them”. (Liuchang, Shengben School)

“Typically developing children may learn to be less self-centred, and more caring, helping, and open-minded, so that they won't see certain people as strange because of the lack of understanding and exposure, and they won't become unnecessarily impolite towards them out of ignorant curiosity”.

(Tinghui, Sifang School)

White (2016, 125) argues that education's role is to equip people to lead a meaningful life by “helping them to acquire the framework, or structure, of goals, relationships, norms, affective reactions and so on”. A segregated education system undermines this role, affecting both children with SEND and others: learning goals are narrowly driven by gaining merits; relationships are prejudiced and biased; norms are used to coerce and divide; and compassion, care, and respect for one another become peripheral to competing to win.

Thus, seeing the bigger picture of society, financially, practically, politically, and morally, helps to gain deeper insights into what inclusion means for schools. Inclusion ultimately has the vision of a eudaimonia (Bhaskar, 2008b) – flourishing, wellbeing, or the Good Life - that we live well not simply by satisfying our own desires, but by seeking the good for others. It urges us to think more deeply about if and how we want to realise such a vision (Archer, 2000, 2003): Who do we want to be? What kind of future do we want to create? Do we want to do what is easier or what is right? Do we want to live in a divided society of winners and losers, or an inclusive society where everyone contributes and has equal opportunities to a flourishing life?

9.3 Original Contribution

This thesis combines inclusive education, critical realism, and Confucianism. Three primary contributions to special and inclusive educational research that this study has offered are: decoding the localised and contextualised understanding and practices of inclusion in Chinese primary schools; enriching real-life research methodologies by applying the CR analysis to uncover deep causal mechanisms through a multi-disciplinary lens; and reclaiming Confucianism as the moral underpinning of education for the ‘socialist harmonious society’ that the Chinese government aims to realise. I suggest that connecting these three concepts helps to illuminate inclusion and exclusion and to explain the limits and possibilities of related education practices. However, until the writing of this thesis, these three independent and important aspects of the field largely remained separated and their links unexamined. The links are further developed in the next two sections.

9.3.1 Using Confucianism to Support Inclusion in China

Practising inclusion faces complex barriers in China. Not only can inclusion be misunderstood as mere integration (see chapter 4.1), there are also practical difficulties at the physical, interpersonal, and structural levels (see chapters five to seven). At deep levels, this cannot be separated from the absence of a

strong rights-based public discourse in Chinese society under the current political system (see chapter eight). Inclusion in China can depend on finding alternative theoretical bases that suit the local social context. In this thesis, Confucianism emerged as a strong theme that is compatible with the rights discourse and supports inclusion. In the particular historical and political context in China, traditional culture may offer guidance and insights for individuals to make sense of the modern world. Confucius is highly regarded as one of the greatest moral teachers in world history alongside Jesus and the Greek philosophers (Paine, 1794/1988; Voltaire, 1756/2014). His teaching forms a profoundly influential and inseparable part of the Chinese culture and traditions, which can still be relevant today. As Yao (2012) advocates, only when the Chinese people find their 'roots' in their traditions can they understand themselves well and pursue their well-being.

I thus posit that instead of being based on the less popular language of rights, the inclusion debates in China perhaps can benefit from making theoretical links to traditional Chinese culture such as Confucianism. Many Confucian moral ideas are in line with the inclusion values. Benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), and Great Harmony (*datong*) have been discussed in earlier chapters as being able to foster a moral rather than cost-benefit economic view of education (see chapters 4.2 & 8.3.2). Yet some other traditional principles and interpretations such as propriety (*li*), seeing *datong* in terms of collectivistic uniformity, and the shame culture present cultural barriers to inclusion (see chapters 4.1 & 8.2). In this light, this thesis calls for further debates and deeper examinations of applying Confucian thinking to Chinese inclusive education, as Confucianism seems to contain key enablers as well as potential barriers to inclusion.

As the first advocate of popular education in China, Confucius regarded education as of vital importance, equal to population and wealth, which in his view are the three essentials of a nation (Analects, 13.9). He posited that education should be a life-long pursuit of learning for the sake of self-fulfilment. In the Confucian tradition, the self is often viewed as "a flowing stream, and human development as a way of harmonising the self with the family, society, and the world of nature" (Hayhoe, 2014, 88). However, this does not necessarily mean conforming and homogenising all into becoming the same.

The intrinsic motivation for learning in the Confucian culture, to learn for the sake of developing one's full humanity, can in fact be seen as a recognition of learner diversity in the sense that every learner can follow his/her own path with the ultimate goal of reaching one's full potential.

Confucius believed that everyone is educable, maintaining that “in education, there should be no distinctions of class” (有教无类, *you jiao wu lei*) (Analects, 15.38). The ‘class’, or 类 (*lei*) in this context does not only refer to the social class. Due to the indicative nature of the Chinese language as well as the ambiguity of the ancient texts, one of the predominant contemporary interpretations is that this ‘class’ refers to all types of human differences, such as the wealthy and the poor, the highly esteemed and the despised, the intelligent and the ignorant, and the good and the evil (Lee, 1996). In this sense, Confucius believed in the unlimited potential of each person to develop through education. In short, all are educable despite individual differences. In this regard, Lee (*ibid.*, 30) notes that “the concept that everyone is educable, everyone can become a sage, and everyone is perfectible forms the basic optimism and dynamism towards education in the Confucian tradition”. Thus, Confucianism can offer the necessary cultural roots and support for modern educational ideas regarding learner diversity in China.

A plethora of Confucian teachings may be used as enablers for inclusion. Confucianism encourages teachers to find their inner strengths to practise individual agency in an unhelpful policy environment: “being benevolent (*ren*) lies with oneself; how could it come from others?” (Analects, 12.1). It urges teachers to value all students with equal dignity: “human beings are similar in their nature but differ as a result of their practice” (Analects, 17.2). It promotes a kind, collaborative, and supportive learning culture against the contemporary neoliberal drive: “*junzi* (persons of superior virtues) are not competitive. If they must compete, it is in archery” (Analects, 3.7). It stresses building personal bonds between teachers and students: “know the students’ heart-minds” (Book of Rites, Xueji, 10). It sees education as supporting personal growth while allowing learner diversity: “a *junzi* teaches by *yu* (enlightening), leads the way for students without dragging them, strengthens them without suppressing them, opens their minds without arriving at the conclusion on their behalf” (Book

of Rites, Xueji, 9). It rejects rote-learning and narrowly teaching to tests: “if one can recite three hundred poems but is incapable of performing an entrusted official duty or exercising one’s initiative when sent abroad, what good are the many poems?” (Analects, 13.5). It values education as the vehicle to change the society for the better: “if a ruler desires to transform the people and perfect their customs, the ruler can only do so through education” (Book of Rites, Xueji, 1).

Confucianism clearly offers a rich resource of theoretical and moral principles that may inspire and support improved educational practices. More importantly, central to these is the common aspiration towards an ideal society emphasising equality and togetherness, in Confucian terms – the Great Harmony (*datong*). This is also the core vision shared by inclusive education. In this light, the manifesto for inclusive education and society in China was already written more than two millennia ago; it has been taught in schools today (e.g., Grade Eight Chinese II Textbook, 2017, 117-8); and its deeper meaning urgently needs to be re-discovered, re-interpreted, and internalised:

“The world community is equally shared by all. The virtuous and capable are chosen as office holders. Mutual trust is fostered, and good neighbourliness cultivated. Thus, people do not love their own parents only, nor treat as children only their own children. A competent provision is secured for the aged till their death, employment for adults, and the means of growing up for youngsters. People show kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, the disabled, and those with illness, so that they are all sufficiently maintained. Men have their proper work, and women have their homes. While people hate to see wealth lying about on the ground, they do not necessarily keep it for their own use. While people hate not to exert their own effort, they do not necessarily use it for their own ends. Thus, evil scheming is repressed, and robbers, thieves, and the lawless fail to arise, so that outer doors of homes do not need to be shut. This is called *datong* (great harmony, unity, or togetherness).” (Book of Rites, Liyun, 1)

9.3.2 Critical Realist Models of Disability and Inclusive Education

The ways disability is viewed can greatly inform the design of special and inclusive education. Segregated provisions are commonly associated with the medical model of disability (Allan, 2010; Harris & Enfield, 2003; Tomlinson, 1982; also see chapters 6.1-6.3, 7.5 & 8.3). In contrast, inclusive education is based on the social and rights-based models that see 'disability' as a socially constructed concept where the disabling society is the problem. Concerned with children's rights to education and school effectiveness, inclusion urges institutional changes that mainstream schools need to improve their capacities and quality of services to meet diverse learner needs. The debates that are for or against inclusion usually take the two polarised paradigms (the medical or social models), which need to be openly addressed if disagreements are to be resolved.

The social model's contention that society rather than individuals has to change presents disability in a "straightforward, uncomplicated manner in order to convince a very sceptical world" (French, 1993, 24). But the inclusion of children with SEND as part of the call for social change needs a more sophisticated and practically relevant theory of disability than simply rejecting exclusion and the medical model as mistaken. In this regard, for example, Swain and French (2008) proposed an "affirmation model", which aligns with the social model in rejecting the negative stereotyping of people with disabilities but also considers the medical model in affirming their experience of disabilities and individual impairments and offering treatments when they are effective. Similarly, scholars (Allan, 2008; Corbett, 1993; Hughes, 2009; Shakespeare, 2006; Shildrick, 2002) have argued against the pure social construction of disability and instead acknowledged disablement within individuals' physical bodies. Both attempts at more sophisticated social models share the common need to see disability in both physical and social terms. The global discourse also increasingly regards disability and inclusive education through a more holistic lens encompassing personal, cultural, political, and socio-economic concerns (UNESCO, 2009, 2015b; UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2011a; World Bank, 2013).

However, these multiple perspectives are seldom framed as theoretical constructions. In this regard, Paterson and Hughes (2000, 42) write that being unable to construct an adequate theory of disability is “one of the more spectacular failures of modern sociological research”. Such failures may fundamentally stem from the enduring paradigm division and irreconcilable tension between positivism that informs the medical model and interpretivism that underpins the social model. In this regard, the ontological and epistemological depth of CR (see chapter 3.1) makes a tiered model of disability become possible. It goes beyond the medical/social polarisation and instead sees them at different levels of the same reality of ‘disability’.

For example, Bhaskar and Danermark (2006, 280) argued for a “necessarily laminated system” of disability. They critiqued that each of the three main models of disability – medical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural – “accentuates just one of what are in fact a multiplicity of mechanisms involved in the formation and reproduction of disabilities” (*ibid.*, 281). This laminated system involves “(i) physical, (ii) biological, and more specifically physiological, medical or clinical, (iii) psychological, (iv) psycho-social, (v) socio-economic, (vi) cultural and (vii) normative kinds of mechanisms, types of context and characteristic effects” (*ibid.*, 288-289). These levels form structured knowledge of disability. The medical model, concerning physical and biological knowledge, and the social models, concerning socio-economic and cultural knowledge, are clearly different epistemological strata of the same reality of disability. Following this is a CR model of disability incorporating both the medical and the social models. See Table 7 below.

Table 7. Critical Realist Model of Disability

	Stratified Epistemology of Disability (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006)	Disability Models	Practices
The CR Model of Disability	Physical, biological, physiological, medical, clinical	Medical Model	Medical care (e.g., medication for mental health)
	Psychological, psycho-social	Medical/Social	Social care (e.g., psychiatrist counselling, support from social workers)
	Socio-economic, cultural, political, normative kinds of mechanisms, types of context and characteristic effects	Social Model	Enabling social structures (e.g., accepting and non-stigmatising views towards mental health, a supportive social welfare system).

This model makes it clear that disability - experiencing hindered participation in society – is emergent from properties within the human bodies but irreducible to them (Alderson, 2013; Bhaskar, 2008a). The social cannot be explained or predicted by the natural. To think the medical model alone can sufficiently explain disability is reductionist. On the other hand, the social depends on the natural for its existence. If human biology fundamentally changed, society would be organised differently. The social model thus cannot ignore the physical bodies or brains, or replace the medical model by pretending disability is entirely a social construction. The epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar, 2008a) is committed when the social understanding of disability and negative labelling of observed differences are mistaken as the whole reality and used to inform policies and practices. Such mistakes are clear in the examples discussed in chapters 4.1 (seeing inclusion as the integration of ‘problematic’ children), 6.1-6.3 (non-inclusive practices), 7.5 (the ‘combining medicine and education’ policy informed by the medical model of disability), 8.2 (the shame culture), and 8.4 (seeing equality as irrelevant in exclusion/inclusion). Thus, CR

brings together the medical and the social and offers a more epistemologically sound understanding of disability.

In education, the CR model of disability helps to make sense of the preference for inclusive over segregated schools. Segregated schools reduce the psychological, social, and cultural needs of the child to physical/medical problems to be fixed. In contrast, inclusive schools recognise the emergent power of the 'disabled bodies' by focusing on enabling participation and meeting a wide range of needs, seeing each child as a whole person. To further understand how inclusive schools need to consider both the medical and the social, the CR stratified ontology offers insights.

At the Empirical, disability may be observed and recognised as biological and/or behavioural differences behind the impairments that individuals may perceive, experience, and at times imagine. Subsequently, medical and technical interventions can be developed at the Actual, intended to reduce such noticeable, perhaps undesirable differences, albeit not always successfully or beneficially. This means medical professionals do have a valuable role to play in inclusive education. For example, cochlear implant enables children with severe to profound hearing loss to hear; and smart prostheses using artificial intelligence technology increase the scope of mobility for children with physical impairments. To wholly reject the medical model is to negate the contribution of modern medicinal development, which is driven by the desire to alleviate pain and enhance, extend and save lives at the Real. Thus, the medical model of disability is relevant and, in many cases, necessary for inclusion.

However, needs are not just objectively physical but also "relative, historically, socially and politically" (Tomlinson, 1982, 75). Inclusion shifts away from the person-blaming perspective at the Empirical. It demands that the traditional society, often disabling and oppressive to people with disability, must change. In education, this means that at the Actual, there are needs for broad and relevant curricula, inclusive pedagogies, and conducive learning space. These at the Real are driven by ideals to improve lives, such as rights, equality, respect, dignity, community, compassion, and love, which have been frequently discussed and continuously promoted by major international organisations (UN, 1948, 1989, 2006, 2015; UNESCO, 1994, 2005, 2009, 2015a; WHO, 2002,

2011a; UNICEF, 2007). See Table 8 below for this three-dimensional model of inclusive education.

Table 8: Critical Realist Model of Inclusive Education

	Inclusive Education	
	Medical Model	Social Model
Empirical	Observed differences, recognised physical, biological, physiological, medical, clinical, psychological needs and their deeper understanding in the physical world	Observed differences not stigmatised as personal faults, diversity valued as part of wide 'normal' spectrum
Actual	High-quality healthcare, medical/technological advancement in maximising the physical wellbeing of human bodies and brains	Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment that value a wide range of skills and knowledge, school activities oriented towards better meeting diverse learner needs such as small class sizes, high teacher-student ratio, encouraging meaningful participation in learning, and using Individual Learning Plans or differentiated education
Real	Right to health, to respect for the worth and dignity of every person, ideals of improving lives with less suffering in the physical world	Right to education and place in mainstream society, ideals of improving lives with less suffering in the social world
	Respect, dignity, community, wellbeing, participation, love, compassion, equality, justice, and rights are driving values and motives.	

Therefore, disability and inclusion are better understood when the most useful findings and efforts from the medical and social research and practices can be combined into the larger CR framework of stratified ontology. Advancing

medical knowledge on human bodies and brains has helped to demystify the social perception of disability beyond believing it to be a 'curse' or 'madness'. The social understanding of bodies as self-determining, meaning-making agents in turn urges medical practices to become more ethical and socially aware. In schools, under the medical model, Picture Exchange Communication System (Boesch *et al.*, 2013; Bondy & Frost, 1994; Cagliani *et al.*, 2017) and Applied Behaviour Analysis (Baer, Wolf & Risley, 1968; Kearney, 2015), for example, are found to have beneficial outcomes in facilitating social interactions. Under the social model, Inclusive Pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Spratt & Florian, 2015) and frameworks for developing inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Dyson *et al.*, 2010; Hargreaves, 2009) have also advanced school and classroom practices.

In this regard, *yi jiao jiehe* (the 'combining medicine and education' policy, see chapter 7.5) in China seemingly reflects the intention to consider both the medical and social models. However, the policy and its practice heavily focus on medical interventions, without mentioning fundamental changes to the inherently excluding mainstream education system. This highlights that the CR model of inclusive education is not about simply reintroducing or enhancing a medical gaze. The emergent power of the 'disabled bodies' at higher levels such as the social and cultural needs to be recognised (see Table 7). Further, the full ontological depth of the medical model for inclusion (see Table 8) also needs to be distinguished from one that is disabling and segregating. For example, at the Real, the focus on neoliberalism and utilitarianism in today's educational and social values can disregard equality and violate rights. Social responsibility is then likely to be ignored and the inherently excluding mainstream education is left unchanged at the Actual. Faults are to be found solely within individuals at the Empirical (see Table 9 below). Thus, inclusion needs a different version of the Real: one where educational development embodies more humanitarian motives, and driven by the common goal of creating an inclusive model of society within schools based on equality, justice, and rights.

Table 9 Stratified Ontology of Exclusion

	Exclusion
Empirical	Medical deficit perspectives on human differences, 'abnormalities' need to be fixed
Actual	Medical/technical treatment is relied on while the inherently excluding mainstream education is unchanged (In Chinese schools this includes high stake standardised testing, narrow curriculum, exam-centred teacher evaluation, whole-class teacher-centred teaching, shortage of teachers, large class size, limited financial resources, enforced discipline, non-inclusive design of physical space.)
Real	Neoliberalism, utilitarianism, normalising competitive values, totalitarian collectivism, the shame culture, functionalism

The usefulness of a CR model of inclusion is to paint a holistic picture beyond the usually isolated single focal points in education. Different fields of professionals need to work inclusively together towards different depths of children's best interests, such as physical, psychological, academic, social, and cultural. As Armstrong (2002a, 56) suggests, all sectors in society and participants from all disciplines need to be involved as part of a global inclusion debates and efforts, as opposed to just narrowly focusing on vulnerable minority groups, or otherwise inclusion would be "no more than an intellectual exercise". This necessity has also been illustrated in this thesis at the four planes of the physical, interpersonal, structural, and inner social being as well as the Empirical, the Actual, and the Real of inclusion.

9.4 Implications for Inclusive Education in 21st Century China

The thesis has discussed how the aim of educational inclusion of children with SEND can be translated into tangible, sustainable, and authentic changes. These work in terms of the understanding, physical, interpersonal, structural, and inner being aspects of social being. Yet it was not the primary purpose of this thesis to prescribe solutions. Instead, it was to deepen understanding and to generate critical dialogues/debates over the barriers and enablers of creating

more inclusive Chinese schools and society in the 21st century. Hence, I do not offer firm recommendations, but provide some discussion points about improving inclusion in China. The following brings key points to the fore by applying the framework of the Empirical, the Actual, and the Real.

First, at the Empirical, educators are encouraged to rethink disability and develop more positive perceptions and attitudes towards children with SEND. This thesis has highlighted the crucial need for teachers to believe in inclusion at the inner being level. Such beliefs are unlikely to be fostered if teachers continue to see children with SEND as 'problems', 'burdens', or needing a 'cure'. In this regard, Confucian principles such as *ren* (benevolence), *datong* (great harmony), *yi* (righteousness), and *junzi* (persons of superior virtues) have been discussed as useful in promoting greater awareness for an inclusive understanding of differences. These aspects of inner drives can perhaps be incorporated within general teacher training outside the specific training about special and inclusive education. Further, teachers' well-being also needs to be valued. The normalising and collectivist culture in the Chinese society can be as constraining for adults as for children. Non-inclusive work experience for teachers can be a model for non-inclusive learning experience for children.

Second, at the Actual, changes are needed in terms of teaching activities, school operations, and education systems. The strong themes of whole-class teacher-centred teaching and discipline control in Chinese schools does not necessarily mean there is no scope for learners with additional needs. Examples in chapters 6.4-6.6 illustrate how common pedagogy can be used to encourage inclusivity. Research on classroom management techniques also shows how potential challenging behaviours to a certain extent can be managed (Barbetta *et al.*, 2005; Smith & Bondy, 2007), without contradicting the need for discipline in large Chinese classes. Further, having an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) may sound unrealistic in the context of large class size and teacher shortage, especially when ILP is not yet a policy requirement or common practice in Chinese schools. Yet similar practices are nonetheless possible, such as in Leiyu's example in chapter 6.4.2, Lili and Xin's example in chapter 6.5, and Fangfang's example in Appendix VIII. Local initiatives and efforts towards inclusion can be developed and effective despite wider systemic constraints (see chapter 4.2.2). Key to these inclusive practices are educators'

inclusive beliefs driven by deeper values such as care, love, respect, community, and internalised Confucian principles (see chapters 4.2, 6.4-6.6 & 8).

Third, at the Real, changes can be the most difficult. Multiple real forces underlie disability and education that conflict and converge with one another. Amid the fear of the unknown there are aspirations for rights and justice. Beside the politicians and companies' demands for schools to produce 'elites' under the neoliberal drive, there are also teachers and parents' aspirations for all children to become citizens with equal standing living fulfilling lives. The powerful neoliberal influences on Chinese education and society has been increasingly portraying learners as a product for economic growth (see chapter 7.1). Equality and togetherness are not priorities in comparison. Today with growing global economic dangers such as the debt crisis and trade wars (Blakeley, 2019), inclusion may be considered as a luxury that a developing country may not afford (see chapter 7.6). Yet, the local practices of Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) were first found in poorer rural areas in the 1950s before they were recognised in official policies in 1987 and promoted nationwide in richer cities after 1994 (see chapter 2.5.1). Multiple examples (see chapters 4.2, 6.4-6.6, & Appendices VII, VIII) also show that inclusive experiences in cases are possible even without additional funding. Thus, finances are not the defining reasons to reject inclusion. It is rather the cost-benefit economic view of education driven by neoliberalism that contradicts the moral view of education as a public good and hinders inclusion. The short-sightedness within popular economic concerns today for immediate gains often denies the many long-term economic and social benefits of inclusion (see chapter 2.3).

Inclusion ultimately is about human flourishing. The real forces behind exclusion (see Table 9) not only concern and constrain the flourishing of people with disabilities but all of us. Inclusion is thus not a 'favour' that the majority can do to vulnerable groups when they can afford to, but rather a collective imperative for all citizens to take responsibility in shaping a world that we want to live in. Small changes guided by re-thinking and challenging the often-taken-for-granted values can have great repercussions in time. The inclusion of all

may be a utopia now, but “utopia starts with small steps” (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013, 111).

9.5 Future Research

Inclusive education in China would benefit greatly from future research that comprehensively and deeply examines the traditional Chinese culture to strengthen the philosophical roots for inclusion, and possible theories and strategies to counter the adversarial effects of the neoliberal drive today. Future studies might also interrogate more closely the relations between inclusion and other fields of inquiry, such as technology (artificial intelligence and technological innovation that facilitate effective teaching and learning), architecture (designing inclusive space), communications (adult-child relationships, listening to children’s voices), law (legal and political frameworks that safeguard children’s rights), and ethics (the philosophical and moral appraisal of inclusion). These have also been among the sub-themes partly explored throughout the thesis. But in-depth studies explicitly situated with these different fields are necessary to further advance the inclusion debates. More empirical evidence on the effects and benefits of inclusive pedagogies, classroom management strategies, and school leadership are also needed to support future inclusive discourses.

Apart from educator’s perspective, future research might also consider parents’ and children’s views. Strong cooperation between parents and schools was observed across the research sites in this study, and ways in which parents supported or challenged inclusion.

I hope this study will invite more interest in critical realism in future research in Chinese education and in the CR models of disability and inclusive education. Uncovering the real causes helps to guide real social change.

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Appendix I Participant Details

Hemei School

A mainstream school in the east part of the city specially funded by the municipal education authority. Established in the late 1990s, the school campus is about 22,000 square metres in size and has about 1,250 students and 80 staff members. There are reportedly about ten students with a recognised disability. The school develops its unique culture and teaching philosophy based on traditional Chinese culture, and takes 'harmony' and 'beauty' as the central themes.

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender	Attitudes towards Inclusion
Leiyu	Head class teacher, grade five Chinese (previously director of educational administration)	25	Female	Support
Yanyan	English teacher, grade five	4	Female	Support
Guoming	Maths teacher, grade three	9	Male	Neutral
Lina	Head class teacher, grade one Chinese teacher	19	Female	Neutral
Xiaofei	Head class teacher, Grade three Maths	14	Female	Neutral
Jianguo	PE teacher	5+1*	Male	Against
Xiuqin	Maths teacher, grade five, Director of moral education	17	Female	Against
Mengya	Head class teacher, grade six English teacher	5	Female	Against

*Five years in a special school and one year in the mainstream school

Qingzhi School

A newly established mainstream school in 2012 in the north part of the city with approximately 710 students and 40 staff members in a campus of over 32,000 square metres. There are reportedly five students with a recognised disability. The school culture/teaching philosophy is adapted from Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. The school has an innovative initiative of maintaining a database of students' individual learning profiles. Every student has a profile of his/her learning style, strengths and weaknesses based on questionnaires they answered when they were in their lower grades. These students' individual learning profiles are accessible for all teachers.

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender	Attitudes towards Inclusion
Linwei	Headteacher	30	Male	Support
Haili	Head class teacher, grade two Maths, on-site psychologist	8	Female	Support
Lili	Head class teacher, grade six Chinese teacher	28	Female	Neutral
Huamu	Course director, Maths teacher	18	Male	Neutral
Zhenxiu	Moral education teacher (previously Chinese teacher)	32	Female	Neutral
Jing	Head class teacher, grade four Chinese	1	Female	Neutral
Wenwen	Art teacher	1	Female	Neutral
Zhenming	Head class teacher, grade three Chinese	13	Female	Neutral
Dinglu	Head class teacher, grade four Chinese, Course director	7	Female	Against
Quan	Head class teacher, grade two Maths, deputy director of educational administration	11	Female	Against
Ying	Head class teacher, grade four Maths teacher	21	Female	Against

Sifang School

A mainstream school in the central part of the city, established in the 1960s. There are approximately 670 students and 50 staff members, with reportedly about 20 students identified as having SEND. This is one of the smallest schools in the city, with a campus size of less than 2,000 square metres. The school takes 'inclusion' as its guiding educational philosophy, primarily based on that more than half of the student population are from migrant worker families. The school operates a week-long innovative educational programme every semester called 'micro-semester'. It is a week of integrated education programme without classes or subject divisions in a traditional sense. Students have the opportunity to learn a variety of things relating to a specific theme or topic through interactive social activities and individual research.

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender	Attitudes towards Inclusion
Junyi	Headteacher	23	Female	Support
Tinghui	Maths teacher, deputy director of educational administration	10	Female	Support
Geyao	Art teacher (Previously Chinese teacher)	9	Female	Support
Suyun	Head class teacher, grade one Chinese	1	Female	Neutral
Chenyan	Head class teacher, grade six Chinese	1	Female	Neutral
Fangfang	Head class teacher, grade three Chinese	3	Female	Neutral
Linping	English teacher, grade six and two	10	Female	Neutral
Xinyu	Grade one English, on-site psychologist	13	Female	Neutral
Wendai	Head class teacher, grade two Chinese	22	Female	Neutral

Shengben School

A mainstream school along the coast in the south part of the city specially funded by the municipal education authority. First established in the 1930s, the school covers an area of about 4,000 square metres, and has a student population of 1,300, with approximately 60 staff members. There is reportedly only one student with a recognised disability. This school is regarded as the best primary school in the city. There are no children from migrant worker families in this school. The school takes 'student centred teaching' as the guiding education philosophy.

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender	Attitudes towards Inclusion
Xintian	On-site psychologist, activity teacher	13	Female	Support
Liuchang	Music teacher, Tutor of the League of Young Pioneers	10	Female	Support
Liangshu	Grade six Chinese	10	Female	Neutral
Yunfeng	Moral education teacher	16	Female	Neutral
Zhenting	Head class teacher, grade five Chinese	13	Female	Neutral
Jingjing	Director of educational administration	16	Female	Against
Dawei	PE teacher, grade five	19	Male	Against
Cuiling	Art teacher, grade two and five	6	Female	Against
Wengfan	Maths teacher, grade 5	8	Female	Against

Haiyang Special School

A special school in the north part of the city established in the late 1990s. The school covers a land area of about 1,800 square metres, and has 41 students from age six to 18 with a wide range of needs such as ASD, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, and learning difficulties. Among the 17 members of staff, three are from a special education background. The rest were relocated from mainstream schools where they previously had worked. The students are divided into four classes based on their age groups. The school develops its own curriculum, which is activity based with the goal of teaching social and living skills.

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender	Degree in Special Ed
Ouyang	Headteacher	24+2*	Female	N
Weiye	PE teacher	4	Male	Y
Jinda	Teacher (previously Chinese teacher)	10+10*	Female	N
Tong	Teacher (previously English teacher)	22+8*	Female	N
Anli	Teacher	5	Female	Y
Meiyu	Teacher	3+1*	Female	Y
Yunping (Mother)	Parent of a 15-year-old boy, who spent four years in the mainstream, two years at home, and two years in the special school			
Dongpo (Father)	Parent of a 12-year-old boy, who spent five years in the mainstream, and one year in the special school			
Taosheng (Boy)	Student of ten years old with learning difficulties who spent one year in the mainstream and two years in the special school			
Lingling (Girl)	Student of 12 years old with cerebral palsy who spent all her school years in the special school			

*Twenty-four years in mainstream schools, two years in the special school

*Ten years in a mainstream school, ten years in the special school

*Twenty-two years in a mainstream school, eight years in the special school

*Three years in a rehabilitation training centre, one year in the special school

Zhongxin Special School

A special school in the central part of the city established in the late 1990s, covering a land area of about 5,500 square metres. There are about 100 students aged from six to 18 with a wide range of needs such as ASD, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, and learning difficulties. The students are divided into 12 classes with 40 staff members in total. The school acts as the inclusive education resource centre in its district.

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender	Degree in Special Ed
Jinxing	Deputy headteacher	14+8*	Female	N
Renai	Teacher	<1	Female	N
Meimei	Teacher	13+10*	Female	N
Lihua (Mother)	Parent of an eight-year-old girl, who has been enrolled in the special school for less than a year			

*Fourteen years in mainstream schools, eight years in the special school

*Thirteen years in mainstream schools, ten years in the special school

LEA Officials:

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender
Yuanli	Deputy director in the education bureau of a district	13	Female
Gefeng	Director in the education bureau of a district	25	Male

University Staff:

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Gender
Zheng	Dean of the special education department of a Chinese university	11	Male
Huimei	International officer in a Chinese university	12	Female

Appendix II Interview Schedule

Chinese Version

访谈内容

1. 介绍

访谈目的，我的个人介绍。

访谈的匿名性。

访谈结束后，受访参与者可以查阅及评价访谈记录。

2. 个人信息

您为什么选择成为一名教师呢？

在您日常工作当中，作为一名老师，您最喜欢的是什么？

在咱们学校做老师，是一种怎么样的经历和感受？

您有考虑过其他的职业方向吗？

3. 随班就读

您了解随班就读吗？您是怎样理解这个概念的？

您班上有随班就读的孩子吗？或者您有教过其他班级的随班就读的孩子吗？

如果教过，您的个人经历和体验是怎样的？

在帮助随班就读的孩子的过程中，您有遇到过怎样的困难？

您觉得，现在在咱们学校，就实施随班就读方面做的怎么样？您觉得满意

吗？您个人对提高和改善咱们学校随班就读状况有什么想法和建议吗？

4. 社会态度

您是怎么理解‘残疾’，‘特殊需求’这个词的？

您认识的朋友中有残疾人吗？或者您有和残疾人接触过吗？

如果有，可以分享一下你们的故事吗？

您对残疾孩子或是有特殊需求的孩子去特殊学校有什么看法？

您听说过‘全纳教育’这个词吗？您对这个词是怎样理解的？

您觉得鼓励有残疾的孩子在普通小学上学这一种做法怎么样？现实可行还是过于理想主义？

你觉得在国内，社会普遍对于残疾人的态度是怎样的？您认可这些态度吗？
在未来您希望看到哪些改变吗？

对于改变这些社会态度，您觉得您可以做些什么吗？您的学生呢？咱们学校呢？

5. 走向全纳

5.1 领导视野

您认为在咱们学校，针对全纳已经做出了哪些努力？为了实现更高程度的全纳，您建议咱们学校应该做些什么？

5.2 合作

您觉得学校里就随班就读这个问题的整体氛围是怎样的？比如说，学校领导，老师和同学是积极支持和欢迎的吗？

5.3 支持

面对随班就读的孩子，您感觉学校及同事给予您足够的支持吗？

5.4 家长

对于随班就读的孩子，你觉得咱们咱们学校所在的社区环境是怎样的？

对于随班就读的孩子，您和他们的家长合作吗？是怎样的形式？

当地社区有积极支持帮助这些家长吗？

5.5 评估及考核

咱们学校针对随班就读的孩子，有怎样的诊断，评估和考核方式？

5.6 经费

您觉得咱们学校在随班就读方面的经费充足吗？在您看来，经费使用状况是怎样的？

如果您班上有随班就读的孩子，您有额外补贴吗？

5.7 课程及教学

对于随班就读的孩子，您有针对他们的个人教学计划吗？您会针对他们的学习进度及水平，调整教学大纲及内容吗？

对于随班就读的孩子，您有什么特殊的教学方法吗？

English Version

Semi-structured interview schedule

1. Introduction

Intention of the interview.

Promise of anonymity.

Possibility of looking through and commenting on the interview transcripts

2. Personal information

Why did you become a teacher?

What is your teaching experience at the school in general?

3. Learning in Regular Classrooms

Have you heard of inclusive education? What do you know about it? And what's your understanding of the concept?

What do you know about the term LRC?

Do you have students on a LRC placement in your class, or have you ever taught students on a LRC in your school? If yes, what is the experience like?

Do you personally support the idea of inclusive education? Why?

What are the main challenges you face when implementing LRC?

4. Social attitudes

How do you understand the concept of 'disability' and 'special needs'?

Do you think special schools are good for students with disabilities?

What do you feel the social attitude is towards disability in China? Do you feel this is right or if you would like to see some changes in the future? If yes, what would that be, and do you think if there's anything you could do, your students could do, and your school could do towards such changes?

5. Moving towards greater inclusion

5.1 Visionary leadership

What do you think have been done and should be done in order to promote greater inclusion in your school?

5.2 Collaboration

What is your feeling about the school environment for the implementation of LRC? For example, are the students welcoming about it? Are teachers positive about it and working together to encourage it? Is the school management actively promoting it?

5.3 Support for staff and families

Was special educational needs part of your teacher training?

If yes, what was it like? Do you feel you are sufficiently prepared to teach children with special needs in your class from your training?

If no, have you ever received special education training? If still no, how did you develop your strategies when teaching children with special needs?

Do you receive enough support when teaching students with special needs?

What kind of support do you have? (From school management? From other teachers? From specialists from outside the school?)

5.4 Effective parental involvement

What is your feeling about the community environment for students on an LRC placement? Do you work and how do you work with their parents?

5.5 Refocused use of assessment

How does your school assess and identify students with special needs?

5.6 Appropriate levels of funding

Do you feel your school has sufficient funding to further promote inclusion? And how do you feel the funding has been used?

Do you receive financial support for additional work with children with special needs?

5.7 Curricular adaptation and effective instructional practices

Do you have individual education plans for children with special needs? To what extent do you adapt the curriculum according to their needs?

Do you know any or use any special instructional methods for the children with special needs in your class?

Appendix III Observation Plan

Observation Foci	Examples
Learning activity design	How were the lessons structured and delivered? Were the teachers talking most of the time? Were there group work activities? Did the teachers maintain student engagement by asking them to listen frequently, or by using various interesting teaching activities?
Use of specialist resources	How did the teachers use multi-media to facilitate lessons? Did they use any additional resources for children with SEND?
Promotion of classroom inclusion	Did the teachers pay attention or give additional support to children who did not actively engage in learning, and how? Did the teachers give differentiated tasks for students who appeared to struggle?
Reactions to challenging behaviours	Did the teachers scold or punish children for their misbehaviours? How did they maintain classroom order and discipline? Did their strategies work well?
Students' response to teaching	Were children mostly engaged in class? Were they actively trying to participate in activities, such as raising their hands to answer questions? Would they do what were asked of them or need reminding?
Students' interactions with each other	Did children with and without SEND interact with each other, and how frequently? Were their interactions mostly friendly or hostile? Did they play together, and how?
Communication style and mood in class	Did the children appear to like the teachers or fear them? Did the children seem to be happy and relaxed in school or intimidated and controlled? Did the children seem to get along well with each other, talk and play with each other much? Were there bullying?
Setting-up of the space	Were students sitting in fixed seats in row or in flexible groups? How crowded were the classrooms?
Seating arrangement	Did students have deskmates or were they sitting alone? Were boys and girls sitting together? Where did children with SEND usually sit?
Positioning of teacher	Were the teachers mostly standing in front of the class, or walking around the class
Classroom decoration	How were classrooms decorated? Were there slogans, student art works, or homework on the walls?

Appendix IV Research Timeline

Timeline	Activities
October 2015 – February 2016	London, UK: Reviewed literature; Invited participants to join pilot study; Prepared for pilot study.
March 2016	China: Pilot study – informal talks and observations, and reflexive notes.
April 2016 – August 2016	London, UK: Reflections on pilot study; Revised and fine-tuned research questions and design; Prepared for and completed upgrade; Invited participants to join study; Prepared for fieldwork.
September 2016 – February 2017	China: In the field – interviews, observation, informal talks, transcription, initial analysis, selected translation.
March 2017 – July 2019	London, UK: Data analysis; Writing-up; Revisions; Submission; Viva.

Appendix V Participant Information Sheet

Chinese Version

关于如何在小学更好发展全纳教育/随班就读的研究参与者信息单

您好，您被邀请参加伦敦大学学院教育学院博士研究生曲晓进行的研究。

此项研究的目的是什么？

此项研究目的是探索小学如何可以帮助残疾及有特殊需求的儿童更好的随班就读学习，从而促进中国全纳教育的实施发展。此项研究旨在通过和工作在各小学一线的教师们进行访谈及随堂听课的方式，和广大有丰富经验的教师们探讨对于全纳教育及随班就读概念的理解、其实施过程种的经验和困难，从而发现问题、探其根源、找寻最适合的具体解决方法，最终帮助推进中国教育在融合与全纳方面的科学可持续发展。

为什么我被邀请参加此项研究？

您有在一所接纳随班就读学生的小学任教的经验。您的专业经验和对特殊教育的个人认识非常宝贵，对此项研究很有帮助。研究员曲晓诚挚邀请您参加此项研究，您的宝贵意见可以帮助更多的教育工作者更深入的了解全纳教育、随班就读等重要议题，从而帮助中国全纳教育和随班就读更好的发展。

我在此研究要做什么？

您将会被邀请与研究员曲晓进行个人访谈与讨论。访谈大概 1 小时左右，最长不会超过 1 个半小时。研究员曲晓会在征求您意见并得到许可后，对访谈进行录音。所得资讯会被安全保存并保密。

如果我不愿参加此项研究、或想中途退出怎么办？

您可以在任何时间退出此项研究，无需给出解释理由。参加与退出完全自愿，不会给您带来任何麻烦。在退出后，您可以要求我删除在此项研究中已经获取的个人相关信息及访谈资料。

已搜集的资料怎样被处理？

此项研究所收集的资料会被研究员曲晓保存在保险的地方并保密。您的名字以及个人信息都会经过匿名处理并保密保存，不会出现在任何印刷的材料或文件上。研究结束后，如果您要求，研究员曲晓会将完成的博士论文提供您参阅。

如果我想了解更多信息，和谁联系？

主要联系人：曲晓

电邮：qu.xiao@hotmail.com

您也可以联系主要联系人的导师：

Dr Steven Cowan: s.cowan@ucl.ac.uk;

Dr Diana Tsokova: d.tsokova@ucl.ac.uk

English Version

Inclusive Education/LRC in Chinese Primary Schools Participant Information Sheet

Hello, you are invited to participate in this research by Qu Xiao, a Ph.D. student at the University College London Institute of Education.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to explore how primary schools can help children with disabilities and children with special needs to study better in class, so as to promote the implementation of inclusive education in China. The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding of the concept of inclusive education and the implementation process by interviewing and observing classes with primary school teachers. The study aims to understand experiences and difficulties, discover problems, explore their root causes, find the most appropriate specific solutions, and ultimately help promote the sustainable development of Chinese education regarding inclusion.

Why am I invited to participate in this research?

You have the experience of teaching in primary school that accepts students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your professional experience and personal knowledge of special education are very valuable and helpful. The researcher Xiao Qu sincerely invites you to participate in this research. Your valuable opinions can help more educators to understand in-depth education and on-duty topics, so as to help China's inclusive education.

What do I need to do?

You will be invited to interviews and discussions with the researcher. The interview will take about an hour, and the longest will not exceed one and a half hours. The researcher will record the interview with your permission. The information obtained will be safely stored and kept confidential.

What if I don't want to participate or want to withdraw?

You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons. Participation and withdrawal are completely voluntary and will not cause you any trouble. If you choose to withdraw, you can ask me to delete the personal information and interviews that I have obtained in this study.

How will the collected data be processed?

The data collected will be kept safely and securely by the researcher. Your name and personal information will be anonymous and kept confidential and will not appear on any printed materials or documents available to a third party. After the study is over, if you ask, the researcher will provide you with a completed doctoral thesis.

Who do I contact if I want to learn more?

Main contact: Qu Xiao (qu.xiao@hotmail.com)

You can also contact the researcher's supervisors:

Dr Steven Cowan: s.cowan@ucl.ac.uk;

Dr Diana Tsokova: d.tsokova@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix VI Consent Form Sample

Chinese Version

关于如何在小学更好发展全纳教育/随班就读的研究

同意书

感谢您参与此次研究。此次研究是由伦敦大学学院教育学院的博士学生曲晓进行的。所得咨询和个人相关信息由曲晓加密保存在个人电脑，所有相关信息都对第三方保密。在阅读参与者信息单后，如果您同意参与，请在下方方框内打钩：

- 我同意自愿参加此次研究。
- 我同意接受访谈，并同意曲晓来我班上听课。
- 我同意个人访谈和交流被录音。
- 我明白我的名字及个人信息会被安全保管并保密，不会出现在任何印刷的材料文件上。
- 我明白如果我改变主意，我可以无条件随时退出，不会有任何麻烦。
- 我明白我可以随时联系曲晓。
- 我明白此次研究结果会被公开发表。
- 我已阅读参加者信息单，并明白此次研究的目的。

如果您对同意书满意并同意参与此次研究，请在下方签字。

参与者签名：

日期：

非常感谢您的支持！

研究员签名：

日期：

English Version

Inclusive Education/LRC in Chinese Primary Schools Consent Form

Thank you for participating in this study. The study was conducted by Qu Xiao, a PhD student at the University College London Institute of Education. The collected data and personal information will be stored on the personal computer of the researcher with password protection, and all data will be kept confidential to any third parties. After reading the participant information form, if you agree to participate, please tick the boxes below:

- I agree to volunteer to participate in this study.
- I agreed to accept the interview and for Qu Xiao to observe my classes.
- I agree that interviews are recorded.
- I understand that my name and personal information will be kept safe and confidential and will not appear on any printed material documents available for a third party.
- I understand that if I change my mind, I can withdraw at any time without any problems.
- I understand that I can contact Qu Xiao at any time.
- I understand that the results of this study will be published.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the purpose of the study.

If you are satisfied with the consent form and agree to participate in the study, please sign below.

Participant signature:

Date:

Thank you very much for your support!

Researcher signature:

Date:

Appendix VII The Example of Ming at Haili's Class

Haili said that Ming had cerebral anoxia when he was born and therefore developed distinct facial complexion, hearing impairments, learning difficulties, and behavioural difficulties such as throwing things and hitting people. Haili admitted that it was quite difficult for her to accept Ming without imposing any assumptions and biases of her own. But as the part-time on-site psychologist at her school, Haili saw the equal acceptance of all her students as a basic professional requirement for her role.

To set the scene, in Haili's classes, she mostly appeared to be a strict and stern teacher particularly with discipline control. For example, one boy was talking and laughing with his deskmate in class without paying attention to Haili. Haili called on his name to stand up and answer a question, which he answered incorrectly. Haili then rather sternly scolded him in front of others. When asked about her disciplinary measures, Haili responded that she did not believe in 'appreciation education' only, which means teachers mostly encourage students and use positive reinforcement. She believed that children needed to learn to be tough and resilient to handle setbacks and frustration, which they will surely face in the real world. Thus, she saw scolding, which she said should be fair, constructive, and not humiliating, as a way to keep classroom order as well as to help children build up their mental strength to handle negative emotions.

However, regarding Ming, Haili expressed that she would not scold him in front of the class because of his misbehaviours, as she judged it to be unfair considering his additional needs. She would try to do so privately, if she thought the scolding was 'necessary'. She said because of Ming's special needs, he may not fully understand some classroom rules and may misbehave unintentionally. Haili thought that if she scolded Ming in class every time he had any misbehaviours, which can be quite often, not only was it likely to be ineffective and unconstructive, in time he may be singled out and perceived by his classmates negatively as a 'trouble-maker disliked by the teacher'. Together with Ming's distinct facial complexion and somewhat under-developed social skills and academic performance, Haili was worried that such public scolding

may even further stigmatise and marginalised him in class. Haili also admitted that although she had not yet managed to identify Ming's strengths which she can encourage him to particularly work on, at least by not intentionally casting any negative light on him in front of his classmates, she would not accidentally encourage other children to think less of him. In the end, Haili commented that she felt Ming is not seen as different or strange by his classmates and appears to be a 'normal' member in her class.

This strategy was reflected during class observation. Ming's seat was in the middle of the class. When he broke rules such as talking in class without permission or making loud noises by fidgeting with things on his table, Haili would walk to his table and stand by his side, sometimes putting a hand on his shoulder while she kept on teaching without disrupting the flow. Haili usually walked around the classroom from time to time when she was teaching, so the specific purpose of walking to Ming's table appeared to be hardly noticeable. This technique appeared to work for Ming, and at cases for some other students, perhaps partly because Haili established her teacher authority in class by still publicly, sternly disciplining some students.

Appendix VIII Examples of Using Positive Reinforcement as Inclusive Strategies

Sifang School

At Sifang School, a common incentive system used by teachers was giving out collectable thumb stickers, with which students can exchange for small gifts such as stationaries and small toys at the end of semester. The gifts themselves may be of trivial monetary worth, but the gesture and process of giving out rewards – in most cases, student receive a sticker in front of the class for raising their hands and answering questions correctly – represent a sense of approval and pride. Students appeared to be keen on collecting these stickers, as most students put their stickers on the covers of their textbooks and displayed them on their tables.

For some students who may not be able to receive as many stickers, teachers adapted their 'standard' of giving out stickers flexibly depending on situations, so that all students can collect a fair amount of stickers to at least exchange for something at the end of the semester. For example, Chenyan explained her strategies regarding a 12-year-old boy named Xiaopang in her class, who reportedly had challenging behaviours:

"He just wants to get the teachers' attention with his wrong behaviours. He used to call teachers names. Now he doesn't swear anymore and becomes politer. But sometimes he's still quite a bully and gets into fights with others. I encourage him a lot and give him collectable thumb stickers as rewards. I ask him to keep a 'daily clear' notebook so that he can actually get things done. On the notebook, I write down everything he needs to do every day, and I will check a box and give him a thumb sticker for every task on the notebook he completes. At the end of the semester, he can exchange some small gifts with the number of thumb stickers he has earned. I use this method to encourage him to behave better, and it works." (Chenyan, Sifang School)

Instead of imposing discipline control to prevent negative behaviours, Chenyan promoted more positive behaviours by using the notebook as a visual aid to help Xiaopang keep up with the school activities and earn stickers. As a result, Xiaopang reportedly improved in the past year with Chenyan being his head class teacher. Observations similarly show that in class, Xiaopang did not have any disruptive or challenging behaviours, even though he did not raise his hands to answer questions. Nevertheless, he appeared mostly diligent and engaged in class, as he followed Chenyan's instructions in reading the textbook and doing writing exercises.

Another similar example is a 12-year-old boy named Liang at Sifang School, who reportedly had several brain surgeries on his brain tumour, and his intelligence was said to be accordingly affected. He was on an LRC placement. His head class teacher Fangfang described that:

"Other students can earn collectable thumb stickers by answering questions and participating in class, but he couldn't, so I ask him to write sheets of words as homework every day so that I can give him a thumb sticker for every sheet of words he writes. He appears to be quite keen and happy with this. He comes to me every day with zeal and asks me to mark his sheets of words and then exchanges for the stickers. He's a sweet obedient boy...He seems to be on good terms with his classmates. He can communicate with others. His classmates don't reject or exclude him. They are used to him already, and they are quite willing to play with him, but most of the time he still lives in his own world. He reads comic books by himself a lot. He doesn't play with others often, but if the rest of the class is doing something new, he would get curious and join them." (Fangfang, Sifang School)

Here what cannot be neglected are teachers' deep assumptions about children with disabilities: a medical deficit view of disability informs negative labelling and marginalisation of the child, whereas an inclusive perspective on respecting learner diversity encourages equal participation. This highlights the need to raise disability awareness and unsettle the often taken-for-granted

normalising and collectivistic values within the Chinese culture so as to create more space for celebrating diversity (see chapter 4.1.1).

Hemei School

Leiyu was discussed in the previous section as an inclusive teacher in her example of 'allowing' students to learn and behave differently without imposing uniform disciplinary control. She further shared her other inclusive strategies in terms of using positive reinforcement.

First, she said that sometimes she would ask her students do the same quiz or small exam twice. She believed that as children learn differently, some may not be able to fully grasp the knowledge they learned when they were tested for the first time, so she gave everyone more time and a second chance at small exams. She said it has been especially helpful for children who struggled with their studies, because when they saw they could also score high in exams, they tended to become more confident and motivated in learning.

Secondly, Leiyu had a unique way of dealing with disruptive behaviours and maintaining classroom order in her class. She was observed to call out the names of the students who were disrupting the class and say "I love you" to them in front of others. The students who were previously acting up would smile sheepishly and calm down instantly. The phrase was not used without context. Leiyu described that she often told her class the importance of love and different forms of love: classmates being kind and supportive of each other, teachers wanting the best for the students despite sometimes being stern and harsh, and parents' love for their children despite having strict requirements and high expectations for them. Thus, her saying 'I love you' as a disciplinary measure in class was not abrupt or strange within such a context. Instead of scolding the students and possibly misleading the other children into thinking that certain students are 'naughty', 'bad', and 'unlikable', Leiyu reminded the students who acted up about 'love' by positively expressing love to them first. This approach seemed to be effective in appeasing the disruptive behaviours, maintaining a kind and supportive classroom environment for all students, and also protecting the students' self-esteem by not treating them negatively in front

of others. This, Leiyu said, may help to prevent unnecessary differentiation and exclusion among children.

Compared to some other teachers who may have stern disciplinary measure such as snapping at students with 'be quiet' or even 'shut your mouth', Leiyu's 'I love you' showed emotional sensitivity to build personal bonds with student and respecting their dignity and self-esteem. This innovative strategy not only helped to maintain classroom order without negatively targeting, but it also worked to strengthen the emotional bonds in teacher-student relationships and to create a stronger learning community where children may personally feel belonged and valued. Leiyu's examples show that using love as a pedagogy may offer inspirations for other teachers in their inclusive efforts.