

China's Efforts to Safeguard Cultural Rights for the Visually Impaired: Insights from the "Cinema of Light" Public Welfare Initiative

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, and particularly since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), historic achievements have been made under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core. The basic rights of people with disabilities, including the right to survival and the right to development, have been comprehensively safeguarded, significantly enhancing their sense of well-being, happiness, and security.

As China's economy and society continue to develop rapidly, meeting the growing cultural and spiritual needs of people with disabilities and ensuring their cultural rights are now of critical importance. These efforts not only enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities but also contribute to building a more equal, just, inclusive, and harmonious society.

Among people with disabilities, those with visual impairments face unique challenges. Limited access to cultural products and services leaves them with fewer opportunities for cultural enrichment. According to the World Health Organization's World Report on Vision (2019), over 2.2 billion people globally experience vision impairment or blindness. China, with the largest population of visually impaired individuals in the world, is home to approximately 17.31 million people with visual disabilities. Their desire to engage with the richness of the world and pursue a fulfilling life underscores the urgent need to protect and enhance their cultural rights.

To address this, China has established a robust support system and mobilized widespread social participation, achieving notable results. A prominent example is the "Cinema of Light" public welfare project led by the Communication University of China. By producing accessible films, creating barrier-free cinemas, and promoting cultural inclusivity, this initiative exemplifies China's commitment to safeguarding the cultural rights of people with visual impairments.

I. "Cinema of Light": An Innovative Approach to Protecting Cultural Rights for the Visually Impaired

1. A Seven-Year Journey: The Evolution of "Cinema of Light" from Infancy to Maturity

The "Cinema of Light" stemmed from our college students and faculty's commitment to building a "Cultural Pathway for the Visually Impaired." "Our original

goal was to combine our efforts as media professionals to make a meaningful contribution to the lives of people with visual impairments,” recall the students and teachers from the Communication University of China’s Television School, who launched the “Cinema of Light” public welfare initiative with enthusiasm in 2017. After extensive discussions and evaluations of various project options, including documentary filmmaking and short film production, the team settled on a project to “tell the story of movies for the visually impaired,” taking into account the needs of visually impaired audiences, the university’s resources, and community support. According to the founding team, “Cinema of Light” produces accessible films by inserting descriptive narration between dialogue and sound effects, explaining the visual scenes and the emotions and meanings behind them, creating a replicable and distributable model for accessible films. The project follows the mission “to convey color through sound and let listeners experience art.” Since its inception, the initiative has aimed to provide two accessible films per week for visually impaired audiences, totaling 104 films annually, and this commitment to building an “inclusive cultural pathway” for people with visual impairments continues to this day, supporting the ongoing development of accessible media in China.

We Have Developed a Standardized Model for Accessible Film Production. Proficiency in film analysis and audiovisual language has been essential. “Cinema of Light” is more than just a charitable initiative; it is a professional endeavor. The project challenges the students and faculty to apply their understanding of audiovisual language, transform visual cues into descriptive audio, and manage voiceovers, editing, and the overall narrative flow of each film. This process tests their skills to the fullest, requiring both technical and creative expertise.

Fu Haizheng, a founding member of the “Cinema of Light” project and Executive Director of the Institute for Accessible Media Communication at the Communication University of China, explains that the journey from trial and error to a standardized production model has been one of growth and transformation. “The team adopted a standardized production process, with specific steps including film selection, scriptwriting, review, proofreading, and recording,” says Zhao Xijing, a faculty volunteer on the project team. “Each step adheres to a ‘three-stage review and three-stage proofreading’ process to ensure that the narration authentically reflects the film’s visuals and maintains the highest quality possible.”

In the film selection stage, “Cinema of Light” has broadened the scope of accessible films beyond traditional genres, incorporating a variety of types, including animation, drama, science fiction, and historical films, to meet the needs of visually impaired audiences across different age groups. To help individuals with visual impairments stay informed and engaged with current events, the team carefully produces a series of films reflecting national, social, and contemporary developments

around key events and milestones.

“In the scriptwriting and recording stages, we aim to capture the perspective of visually impaired audiences, using language they can vividly perceive. For instance, how do we describe the color red? It’s a warm, sun-like color,” explains Cai Yu, a founding member of the “Cinema of Light” project and a doctoral candidate at the Communication University of China. The team meticulously crafts each word and recording to ensure an authentic, accurate portrayal, offering a reliable interpretation of the film. In war films, for example, descriptions of military branches, weapons, and combat zones are cross-referenced with extensive research to ensure precise details, striving to immerse visually impaired audiences in a realistic cinematic war experience.

The “Cinema of Light” team has established a scientific and efficient operating mechanism. Each group within the project team has developed standardized manuals specific to their tasks, covering every step of accessible film production—from scriptwriting, reviewing, and voiceover to audio monitoring and final editing. This comprehensive approach even extends to project promotion, ensuring that the continuously evolving team of volunteers maintains consistent quality and standards in both their operations and the produced films.

Over the past seven years, more than 800 student and faculty volunteers have contributed to the project, producing over 600 accessible films in a broader range of genres and styles, each with expressive and heartfelt narration. These films embody the Cinema of Light team’s dedication to securing fundamental rights for people with visual impairments and reflect their commitment to supporting China’s initiatives for people with disabilities.

We Have Promoted the deep-rooted establishment of accessible cultural services. The mission of “Cinema of Light” goes beyond producing a hundred accessible films each year; it actively advocates for protecting cultural rights for people with disabilities across society. In an era where media technology is reshaping how information is accessed, Cinema of Light empowers individuals with visual impairments to fully engage in social and cultural life on equal footing, allowing them to share in the achievements of contemporary material and cultural development.

“‘Cinema of Light’ extends beyond film production; it even reaches into the screening phase,” explains Li Chaopeng, a student volunteer at the Communication University of China and a member of the project team. From publicizing screening information and coordinating charity screenings in theaters to helping visually impaired attendees find their seats, engaging in on-site Q&A, maintaining order, providing live descriptions, and assisting with post-film exit, “Cinema of Light” has carefully planned and rehearsed every detail of the screening experience to ensure the safest and most enjoyable viewing experience for visually impaired audiences.

After seven years of exploration, “Cinema of Light” has established a “Five-Assess

Model” that brings accessible film screenings to associations for the blind, cinemas, schools for the visually impaired, libraries, and community centers, effectively bridging the “last mile” for visually impaired audiences. Beyond these efforts, prominent film festivals, such as the Beijing International Film Festival, Changchun Film Festival, Hainan International Film Festival, and Silk Road International Film Festival, have dedicated public welfare screening sessions, allowing visually impaired individuals to participate in these global cultural events. While drawing greater attention to the needs of people with visual impairments and new developments, experiences, insights, and achievements in China’s disability support initiatives, these screenings also provide a platform to share China’s stories of public welfare, human rights, and cultural-ethical development on the international stage, advancing global efforts toward accessible information.

To date, the “Cinema of Light” initiative has extended its achievements to 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities across China, as well as the Macao Special Administrative Region, ensuring full coverage of 2,244 special education schools. Its practices have been widely promoted in cultural hubs like Jiaxing and Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province, as well as Suzhou in Jiangsu Province. More than 20 dedicated “Cinema of Light” screening halls have been established in cities such as Beijing, and five major film festivals now feature “Cinema of Light” public welfare screening units. Additionally, a “Cinema of Light” on-demand channel has been launched through China Broadcasting Network, reaching over 200 million households and benefiting eight million visually impaired individuals. As these figures grow, the “Cinema of Light” initiative continues to expand the “inclusive cultural pathway” it has built through the medium of sound and visual narration, reaching an increasingly broad audience and benefiting more visually impaired individuals. This public welfare initiative, driven by the mission of promoting inclusive cultural services to empower disability development, is generating positive impacts not only across China but also on a global scale.

2. “Cinema of Light” Enhances Well-being and Fulfillment for the Visually Impaired

French film artist André Bazin once noted in his work “What is Cinema?” that “humankind has a psychological desire to substitute the external world with realistic replicas.” He explained that “the concept of cinema is equivalent to the complete reproduction of reality, an imagined illusion of a world filled with sound, color, and depth.” Through “Cinema of Light,” visually impaired audiences not only gain access to information but also experience an elevated aesthetic and expressive quality that aligns with the principles of faithfulness, clarity, and elegance, achieving an enriched cultural and educational impact.

We Have Fulfilled the Gaps in Information and Artistic Appreciation for Visually Impaired Audiences. Students and faculty involved in “Cinema of Light” explain that, while ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of basic information in each film, the team has also dedicated significant efforts to enhancing both the interpretive depth and technical quality of their productions. On the interpretive level, “Cinema of Light” emphasizes a deep exploration of each film’s meaning. Beyond simply telling the story, the team strives to offer a comprehensive interpretation, allowing audiences not only to grasp the fundamental storyline but also to develop a richer understanding, encouraging imagination and reflection on the film’s broader themes.

After the launch of the “Cinema of Light” project, faculty and students from the Communication University of China established close connections with schools for the visually impaired, such as Beijing School for the Blind. Each month, a dedicated screening team is dispatched to show accessible films to students. Wang Zheng, a student at Beijing School for the Blind, shares that previously, “watching” a film often meant missing key details, such as background music, scenic visuals, or character interactions conveyed through gestures and expressions, leading to confusion and only a partial understanding of the story. Now, with regular screenings in the school’s auditorium, the “Cinema of Light” project has brought not only new joy and anticipation to daily life but also “comprehensible” films that help students gain knowledge and experience the beauty of the world and life.

Wang Xiaochui, Party Secretary of Beijing School for the Blind, remarks that the “Cinema of Light” project cultivates a sense of beauty and appreciation for students and other audiences, creating a space filled with aesthetic expression and imaginative possibilities. With its thoughtful selection of positive films and poetic interpretations, the project offers an environment where audiences can experience beauty, inspiring a sense of wonder and aspiration. This approach not only enhances the audience’s aesthetic sensibilities but also helps nurture the students’ character and enrich their personal growth, providing meaningful value in aesthetic education.

We Have Broadened Social Engagement Opportunities for the Visually Impaired. In 2021, “Cinema of Light” extended its reach to Changping District in Beijing. A representative from the district’s association for the blind explained that, unlike individuals with other disabilities, such as hearing impairment, visually impaired people often face significant barriers to communication due to their limited vision, making them less likely to venture outside. The accessible film screenings have provided this community with more opportunities to leave their homes and connect with volunteers and other visually impaired individuals, positively impacting their quality of life and enriching their cultural experiences. Teachers interviewed from Beijing School for the Blind noted that “Cinema of Light” has given students opportunities to engage with and

participate in society. Some students have even joined activities like the Beijing International Film Festival, film production, and discussion panels, inspiring more community support for this group and broadening their perspectives on the world and their future aspirations. Some parents now hope that, given the right support, their children can pursue broader educational and career options beyond traditional paths such as massage therapy or music, even advancing to mainstream schools to pursue their dreams boldly. In many ways, “Cinema of Light” has built a “pathway of dreams” for visually impaired children.

We Have Inspired a Drive for a Happy Life Among the Visually Impaired. The pursuit of happiness often begins with the ability to “see.” As one of the most essential and immediate senses for perceiving the world, vision forms the foundation of how people understand and engage with their surroundings. “A good film allows us to experience different lives in a short time, and the power of cinema is limitless,” says Ru Tianzi, a teacher at Beijing School for the Blind. Through moving stories, films convey life’s insights and profound ideas, and this window to the world should be open to everyone, including those with visual impairments.

Like sunlight and air, cultural life is an essential element of individual growth and development. For people with visual impairments, the “Cinema of Light” initiative provides accessible films that enrich their life experiences, help them acquire knowledge, nurture their spirit, broaden their horizons, and enhance their cultural literacy and competence. This initiative plays a vital role in empowering them to achieve equal social inclusion. Some students from Beijing School for the Blind commented that “Cinema of Light” enables them to perceive the nation’s development simultaneously, the changes of the times, and the transformations of society. It not only brings them spiritual joy but also expands their imagination and pushes the boundaries of their thinking, inspiring them to courageously explore the external world, pursue their inner dreams, and strive for a happy and fulfilling life.

3. “Cinema of Light” as a Model for Safeguarding Cultural Rights for the Visually Impaired

We Have Infused the Energy and Vitality of University Students by Empowering Them as Key Contributors. “With university students serving as the backbone of the ‘Cinema of Light’ volunteer team, the initiative combines professional expertise with youthful energy, injecting fresh momentum into the production and dissemination of accessible films in China,” remarks a representative from the Television School at the Communication University of China. Cultivating a sense of patriotism and social responsibility among young students is both an essential mission of higher education and the original driving force behind the “Cinema of Light” project. The initiative

encourages students to actively engage in film production and real-world human rights practices, effectively enhancing their awareness of the importance of respecting and safeguarding human rights. This approach not only embodies the educational philosophy of the Communication University of China but also strengthens students' commitment to the core values of journalism and communication studies. It helps them avoid a narrow, self-serving mindset, guiding them instead toward integrating their personal aspirations with societal needs. By fostering a dual alignment of individual growth with social contribution, the “Cinema of Light” project exemplifies the synergy between youthful enthusiasm and the pursuit of public welfare. It harmonizes ideals with action, intertwining the spirit of youth with dedication to social good and uniting foundational values with purposeful efforts.

We Have Given Full Play to Universities' Expertise, Technology, and Talent. Teachers provide comprehensive guidance, professional support, and quality control, serving as a strong backbone for the project team. The faculty at the Communication University of China defines the initiative as a blend of “public welfare, teaching, research, and experimentation,” guiding students to apply their knowledge in service of the country and society, embodying the principle of integrating knowledge and action. Wen Mohan, a student volunteer with “Cinema of Light”, explains that every aspect of the project—from planning, film selection, scriptwriting, and voiceover to post-production, screening, and distribution—is a collaborative effort between faculty and students. The synergy of professionalism, social experience, and youthful enthusiasm creates a smooth and inspiring creative process, giving students a strong sense of fulfillment and achievement. From just five initial volunteers, the team has grown to include hundreds, supporting a nationwide initiative. Reflecting on this growth, Zhao Shuping, the project's primary advisor, shared her insights, saying, “Giving students free rein and trusting them make all the difference.” The university's strong backing and teachers' dedicated guidance remain the project's unwavering source of momentum, ensuring its sustainable impact.

We Have Advanced Research and Collaboration in Accessible Information Dissemination to Enhance the Project's Global Impact. “Cinema of Light” has consistently committed to addressing the challenge of “cultural poverty alleviation,” extending its reach from bustling urban centers to remote rural areas, with footprints spanning the entire nation. On November 1, 2023, at the 2023 International Seminar on Global Poverty Reduction Partnerships—jointly organized by the International Poverty Reduction Center in China, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations World Food Programme, and the China Internet Information Center—the Communication University of China's case study, *Promoting Rural Revitalization through Cultural Support: A Case of University-Enterprise Collaboration on Accessible Film Production and Dissemination with “Cinema of Light”*, was awarded the “Best

Poverty Reduction Case” in the “4th Global Poverty Reduction Case Collection.” This project has since been included in the South-South Cooperation Poverty Reduction Case Library, serving as a distinctive example of poverty alleviation through cultural initiatives and providing valuable insights for global poverty reduction and rural development. On December 1, 2023, in observance of the 32nd International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Communication University of China and UNESCO co-hosted the International Symposium on Accessible Information Dissemination and Human Rights Protection in Beijing, under the guidance of the China Foundation for Human Rights Development and the China Disabled Persons’ Federation. The symposium gathered representatives from over ten countries, including China, France, Mongolia, and Malaysia. Participants explored strategies for enhancing social inclusion and empowering people with disabilities through accessible information dissemination. China’s practices in accessible media were highly praised by domestic and international attendees, as well as by experts from both industry and academia.

The “Cinema of Light” project has also played a significant role in supporting China’s ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (Marrakesh VIP Treaty)—the only international human rights treaty in the copyright domain aimed at enabling equitable access to published works for visually impaired individuals. In 2021, the project undertook a research initiative commissioned by China’s copyright authorities titled *Audiovisual Works and the Implementation of the Marrakesh VIP Treaty*. This research provided an in-depth analysis of the necessity, feasibility, and operational procedures for authorized entities to produce accessible versions of audiovisual works. By offering intellectual and practical contributions, the “Cinema of Light” project has significantly advanced the implementation of the treaty in China.

II. China’s Initiatives and Achievements in Protecting Cultural Rights for the Visually Impaired

Cultural rights are fundamental human rights, and the “Cinema of Light” project at the Communication University of China embodies China’s efforts to ensure that the visually impaired enjoy equal access to cultural resources and meet their needs for enriched cultural engagement. In recent years, China has implemented a series of measures to strengthen the protection of cultural rights for the visually impaired. These actions range from enhancing policy and legal frameworks to rigorous on-the-ground implementation and from elevating standards for accessibility facilities to providing diverse, accessible products and services.

Growing numbers of visually impaired individuals are gaining access to higher education through the general college entrance examination. Through reading and cultural engagement, they acquire knowledge, develop employable skills, expand their

career paths, and realize personal ambitions. In sharing the cultural achievements of society, they also made their contributions, adding warmth and value to the community.

(1) Continuous Improvement of China’s Policy and Legal Framework to Protect the Cultural Rights of the Visually Impaired

National development plans play a guiding role in shaping various fields of progress, and in formulating these policies, China consistently prioritizes the protection of cultural rights for the visually impaired. The State Council has issued eight consecutive five-year development plans focused on disability affairs. Additionally, specialized frameworks such as the *Opinions of the State Council on Accelerating the Process of Building a Moderately Prosperous Society for People with Disabilities* and the *Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan to Accelerate the Well-off Process for People with Disabilities* have been enacted and implemented. These documents specify concrete tasks and detailed responsibilities to advance initiatives supporting the well-being of people with disabilities.

Efforts to standardize and expand Braille usage have made solid progress. As a crucial medium for accessing cultural content, Braille provides an essential gateway for the visually impaired. Since 2009, four successive National Human Rights Action Plans have outlined specific tasks and measurable targets for promoting Braille, ensuring steady advancement in this area. Initiatives such as establishing reading rooms for the visually impaired and increasing the publication of accessible reading materials have continuously evolved alongside economic and social development, paving the way for visually impaired individuals to enjoy the same flourishing cultural achievements as others.

The establishment and enforcement of laws provide robust support for the visually impaired to fully and equally enjoy cultural rights. The Law of the *People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons*, initially enacted in 1990 and amended in 2008 and 2018, serves as the country’s specialized legislation for protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities. This law outlines the basic principles of safeguarding cultural rights for people with disabilities, including specific measures for the visually impaired. A dedicated chapter on “Cultural Life” affirms the state’s commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities have equal rights to participate in cultural activities. It underscores that cultural, sports, and recreational activities for people with disabilities should be community-focused, integrated into public cultural life, and tailored to meet the diverse needs of various disabilities, encouraging widespread participation. Additionally, it mandates that the government and society take steps to support the creation and publication of Braille and audio materials for the visually impaired and establish designated sections in public libraries to provide these resources according to their specific needs.

The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Construction of Barrier-Free Environments, which came into effect in 2023, provided further support for visually impaired individuals to enjoy cultural rights more fully and conveniently. This law includes a dedicated chapter on “Barrier-Free Information Exchange,” outlining provisions to ensure accessible cultural rights for the visually impaired. For instance, it encourages the publication of books, newspapers, and periodicals in accessible formats such as audio, large print, Braille, and digital versions to facilitate reading for individuals with disabilities and senior citizens. It also promotes the creation and publication of Braille and low-vision textbooks tailored to the needs of students at different educational stages, ensuring learning resources are accessible to the visually impaired and others with visual challenges. The law further requires that manufacturers of audiovisual, multimedia, mobile smart devices, and telecommunications terminal equipment gradually incorporate accessibility features, such as voice guidance and large text options. Moreover, related laws, including the *Copyright Law*, the *Law on the Guarantee of Public Cultural Services*, and the *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China*, also contain related provisions to protect and enhance the cultural rights of visually impaired individuals.

China is also actively aligning its domestic policies and laws with international treaties to broaden the availability of cultural products for the visually impaired, enhance their quality, and foster international cultural exchange. On October 23, 2021, China officially ratified the *Marrakesh VIP Treaty*. Under this treaty, China can provide accessible-format versions of works for individuals with reading disabilities, including the visually impaired, and can also utilize works from other treaty-member countries to create these formats without requiring permission from, or payment to, copyright holders. This ratification significantly expands the range of resources available to China's visually impaired population while reducing the cost of accessing such works.

(2) Strengthening Measures to Protect the Cultural Rights of the Visually Impaired in China

In recent years, a series of administrative measures have been introduced to enable the visually impaired to read more easily and enjoy cultural works, such as television, films, and theater productions.

The “Digital Reading Promotion Project for the Visually Impaired” is a flagship initiative launched by various levels of government in China to enhance cultural access for the visually impaired. Since 2017, the project has addressed key challenges in traditional Braille book publishing, such as high production costs, complex printing processes, and lengthy proofreading times. In collaboration with relevant government agencies, the China Disabled Persons' Federation has implemented this project to provide digital audiobooks, electronic Braille, and customized, continuous cultural

services through digital publishing platforms and specialized reading devices. “Although each Braille dot feels a bit rough to the touch, to me, they are like vibrant musical notes,” said Wang Yaqi, a visually impaired young woman, her face lighting up with joy as she described the pleasure of reading. As of October 2024, the project has activated 146,575 smart listening devices across 353 public libraries, achieving an activation rate of 81.24%. The devices support 62,281 registered users, facilitating a cumulative total of 102.24 million online interactions spanning 35.83 million hours. The average duration of a single use is 20 minutes, with some devices logging over 14 hours of use per day.

Artistic activities for the visually impaired have seen rapid development in China. Established in 1987, the China Disabled People’s Performing Art Troupe includes visually impaired members, who make up roughly one-third of the troupe. This group has performed in over 100 countries and regions and has been recognized as a UNESCO Artist for Peace by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Currently, there are 226 disability arts troupes across the country, with more people with disabilities working in cultural and arts professions. Many talented visually impaired musicians and vocalists have emerged from these initiatives. Every four years, the China Disabled Persons’ Federation, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the National Radio and Television Administration, organizes the National Disability Art Festival. The 10th festival, held in 2021, featured around 2,400 performers with disabilities, including visually impaired artists, showcasing a wide range of talents in vocal music, instrumental music, dance, and traditional Chinese opera.

The “Cultural Week for the Visually Impaired” has become a regular event. For several consecutive years, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the National Press and Publication Administration, together with the China Disabled Persons’ Federation, have organized this cultural week across the country. In 2023 alone, over 13,459 activities were held, including public reading sessions for blind children and accessible movie screenings, both of which were particularly popular among visually impaired participants.

Opportunities for visually impaired individuals to contribute to cultural creation continue to expand. The China Disabled Persons’ Federation, in collaboration with relevant departments, has organized numerous literary workshops for writers with disabilities, offering visually impaired authors the chance to develop their skills in creative writing. An array of scholarly journals dedicated to disability literature and books authored by visually impaired writers have been published, offering a glimpse into the rich inner world of China’s visually impaired community.

(3) Continuous Improvement in Accessible Environment for Protecting the Cultural Rights of the Visually Impaired in China

Accessibility is foundational to enabling individuals with disabilities and other special groups to fully participate in society and share in the benefits of social and economic development. For the visually impaired, accessible facilities that support sensory engagement—through sound, smell, touch, and tactile surfaces—function as “Cultural Pathways for the Visually Impaired,” similar to a tactile guide for cultural experiences.

The Chinese government and society increasingly recognize that transforming “barriers” into “accessibility” empowers the visually impaired to engage more actively in cultural life and contribute to society’s cultural wealth. With this growing awareness, standards for accessible facilities are becoming more refined, and the framework for accessibility standards continues to evolve and improve.

The *Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Construction of Barrier-Free Environments*, the country’s first dedicated legislation on accessibility, introduces the concept of “universal design.” Unlike traditional approaches that focus on building facilities specifically for people with disabilities, universal design incorporates the needs of people with disabilities equally into the design process from the outset. The law also emphasizes reasonable accommodation in specific cases, requiring modifications and adjustments tailored to various types of disabilities, all within the framework of universal design. These provisions ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy or exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing.

Standards for accessible facilities are essential to ensure they are functional and effective. In recent years, China has introduced several national standards to protect the cultural rights of the visually impaired. In 2012, China’s first national standard in public library services, the *Public Library Service Specifications*, was implemented. This standard specifies that public libraries serve all members of the public and should make efforts to address the specific needs of groups such as people with disabilities. It recommends that reading rooms for the visually impaired be situated on accessible levels, ideally between the main library building and public walkways. In 2019, the *Library Services Specification for the Visually Impaired* became China’s first national standard tailored to services for people with disabilities in libraries. This standard provides guidelines on the target audience, resources, service content and delivery, requirements, and oversight and evaluation of these services. A structured framework for library services for the visually impaired has since emerged across China. Guided by national standards, libraries nationwide are focused on expanding service reach, improving service quality, and building efficient, ongoing, and increasingly professionalized services for the visually impaired.

With the advent of the digital era, standards for internet accessibility have gradually been established. On March 1, 2020, China implemented its first national standard for accessible internet content, *Technical Requirements, and Testing Methods for*

Accessibility of Internet Content in Information Technology. This standard outlines 58 specific measures, including providing audio-based CAPTCHA codes and adding accurately descriptive web page titles, marking substantial progress in creating an “information pathway” for the visually impaired online. China has launched a special initiative to improve the accessibility and age-friendliness of government websites and apps. Since 2021, a total of 2,726 websites and apps have been upgraded, creating better conditions for visually impaired individuals to access information, communicate, obtain public services, and conduct online transactions.

The Chinese government also encourages the development of pioneering group and corporate standards and is committed to strengthening the coherence and integration of these standards. This approach aims to build a scientifically sound and systematically integrated framework for accessibility standards across various domains.

(4) Expanding Accessible Products and Services to Protect the Cultural Rights of the Visually Impaired in China

With China’s rapid social and economic growth, the range of accessible products for the visually impaired has steadily expanded, industry capacity has continued to grow, and the ability to supply these products has strengthened, with service quality also improving steadily.

A diverse range of tactile cultural products is available. Tactile sensation serves as a crucial channel for visually impaired individuals to accurately perceive and engage with society. Braille books remain one of the most commonly used cultural resources for this community. Since 2021, China has annually published over 500 new Braille book titles, including more than 100 editions with combined Braille and standard text formats, and reprinted over 400 Braille book titles, with production peaking at 1,200 titles and 30 million printed pages in a single year. This rich repository of Braille books provides a solid foundation for visually impaired individuals to share in the tangible “fragrance” of books. To further expand the reach of Braille books to those in need, China has heavily invested in the development of Braille libraries. Currently, public libraries across the country feature approximately 35,200 reading seats for the visually impaired and house a collection of around 146.6 million Braille books. With advancements in technology, the methods for visually impaired individuals to access information through touch have become increasingly diverse. Products such as Braille displays, and computers designed for the visually impaired are now integral tools for accessing cultural resources and services.

Auditory-based cultural products have significantly expanded. Audiobooks serve as the primary and most convenient reading medium for the visually impaired. Audiobooks produced by the China Braille Press have covered a wide range of subjects, including textbooks for primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as literature, medicine,

storytelling, and music. Additionally, audio-focused internet platforms have rapidly developed, introducing numerous screen-reader-compatible products for book listening and other information needs, offering the visually impaired a wealth of choices.

New forms of cultural products are on the rise. In recent years, audio-described films have gained increasing attention as a growing cultural product category. Supported by the National Publishing Fund, the Braille Press has produced 870 accessible films with copyright permissions, making them available to both visually and hearing-impaired audiences. The new building of the China Braille Library, which has been in operation for 13 years, screens one film per week with live narration by librarians. To date, over 700 film screenings have been held, serving approximately 30,000 attendees. Additionally, more than 300 film scripts with a total word count of approximately 2.4 million characters have been created for these activities. Public libraries, cultural institutions, disability organizations, and social groups across various levels frequently organize film-watching activities for visually impaired individuals. In addition to the Cinema of Light project, several video streaming platforms in China have established dedicated accessibility sections. These platforms automatically direct visually impaired users using screen-reader technology to curated collections of fully audio-described films, which have become immensely popular within the visually impaired community. Technology has also played a crucial role in enhancing accessibility in museums and exhibition centers. Features such as NFC-activated information, audio guides, tactile exhibits, and online virtual tours have provided visually impaired visitors with unprecedented opportunities for immersive, barrier-free cultural experiences. These innovations demonstrate a commitment to creating inclusive environments where visually impaired individuals can explore art and culture in new and meaningful ways.

III. Experiences and Insights from China's Efforts to Protect the Cultural Rights of the Visually Impaired

China's initiatives to protect the cultural rights of the visually impaired fully reflect the nation's adherence to a people-centered approach, its active fulfillment of international human rights treaty obligations, and its commitment to the principle of "equality, participation, and sharing" in the development of disability services. Through these efforts, China has continuously enhanced its protections for the visually impaired, offering valuable insights and inspiration to other countries.

(1) Emphasizing the Leading Role of the State

Respecting and safeguarding the dignity and rights of people with disabilities, enabling them to fully participate in society on equal footing and with equal opportunity,

and ensuring they share in both material and cultural-ethical achievements reflect a nation's sense of responsibility and commitment.

As a signatory of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, China has fulfilled its obligations under the Convention. In formulating laws, regulations, and policies related to people with disabilities—and in promoting and protecting their rights—China adheres to the spirit of the Convention. Practical, robust measures have been implemented, including “universal design” products, environments, programs, and services, along with “reasonable accommodations” and specialized assistive devices and support services. These initiatives address the aspirations and cultural needs of people with disabilities, supporting high-quality development in disability services.

China has focused on strengthening a legal framework centered around individuals with disabilities, establishing a comprehensive system led by the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons*. This system is further supported by key legislation, including the *Law on the Construction of Barrier-Free Environments*, *Regulations on Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation*, *Regulations on Disability Education*, and *Regulations on Employment for People with Disabilities*, creating a solid foundation for the protection of disability rights.

China actively integrates disability affairs into its overall national economic and social development plans as well as its National Human Rights Action Plan. Multiple departments have jointly formulated the *14th Five-Year Plan for Enhancing Cultural Services for Persons with Disabilities*. This plan supports eligible public libraries at the provincial, municipal, and county levels in establishing reading rooms or areas for the visually impaired, increasing resources such as Braille books and audiovisual materials, and equipping these facilities with Braille books and related reading devices. The initiative aims to provide visually impaired individuals with Braille books, audiobooks, large-print books, and accessible versions of movies and TV shows, ensuring comprehensive reading services for this community. Support has also been allocated to construct reading rooms for the visually impaired in 50 city-level and 200 county-level public libraries nationwide. Ongoing initiatives include the Visually Impaired Publications Project and the Digital Reading Promotion Project for the Visually Impaired, with a focus on publishing 50 disability-related works or works by disabled authors. Efforts are also being made to promote the translation and international publication of outstanding works by disabled writers. Additionally, the scheme encourages the production and broadcast of disability-themed films, documentaries, public service ads, and online audiovisual programs. It promotes accessible film services in cinemas and cable television networks alongside the production and streaming of accessible online films. The National Film Fund has provided financial support for the “Cinema of Light” project, playing a guiding role in its development.

(2) Encouraging Civil Society Participation

Disability services represent a vast and complex undertaking, and the state actively encourages enterprises, social organizations, and individuals to contribute donations and services for people with disabilities.

The protection of cultural rights for the visually impaired requires extensive involvement from civil society. Such involvement not only complements areas that government resources may not reach but also promotes a deeper understanding and respect for people with disabilities throughout society, reducing prejudice and discrimination. This broad support helps visually impaired individuals integrate more fully into society, ensuring equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. Through sustained efforts, China has built a strong social foundation for human rights protection for the visually impaired, with diverse social organizations, market players, and volunteers actively supporting initiatives that professionalize, normalize, and sustain these protections. The Ping An Public Welfare Foundation has contributed 1 million yuan annually for three consecutive years to support the “Cinema of Light,” serving as a prime example of grassroots participation in disability initiatives in China.

(3) Tailoring Approaches to National Conditions

China’s disability services are rooted in the nation’s historical and cultural traditions as well as its social and economic conditions. At the same time, China draws on international best practices, successfully creating a disability rights protection model suited to its unique context. Alongside the rights to rehabilitation, employment, and education, China is committed to advancing the full spectrum of disability rights, making the protection of these rights an integral part of a fair, inclusive, and sustainable development strategy that benefits every individual.

Given the unique needs of the visually impaired community, society has placed increasing importance on transforming their legal and cultural rights into tangible cultural benefits. By the end of 2023, China had established 24 provincial and 184 city-level radio programs dedicated to disability topics. Additionally, 1,541 public library reading rooms nationwide provide access to Braille and Braille audiobooks, and art troupes have been formed to serve individuals with disabilities. Through initiatives such as the National Disabled Art Festival and the “Five Ones” program, which brings cultural activities into the homes of individuals with disabilities, visually impaired individuals are included in the nation’s cultural and ethical development efforts.

(4) Empowering Through Technology

Technology has reshaped daily life and profoundly transformed the prospects of

people with disabilities. With ongoing breakthroughs in information technology, artificial intelligence, and life sciences, technological advancements are bringing renewed hope to individuals with disabilities. *The 14th Five-Year Plan for Disability Protection and Development* sets specific goals for leveraging technology to support people with disabilities. The 2024 State Council Government Work Report emphasizes the importance of advancing technological research and applications for health, elderly care, and disability support. *The 2023 Overview of Disability Development and Social Progress in China*, published by the China Disabled Persons' Federation, reveals a growing number of high-tech enterprises dedicated to disability support. These companies are maximizing the benefits of cutting-edge technologies to enhance the well-being of people with disabilities, providing them with greater independence, convenience, and equal opportunities for social participation.

To enhance the cultural and spiritual life of the visually impaired, haptic feedback accessibility technology customizes the vibration duration, frequency, and intensity of mobile devices like phones and tablets to convey distinct information to visually impaired users. Tencent Video, for instance, has launched an Accessible Theater section that automatically recognizes users entering through “voice screen readers,” placing the theater entrance prominently on their homepage. Additionally, a new range of games designed for visually impaired players uses AI to process player information and provide real-time feedback, meeting operational needs while creating a platform for community interaction. This “light of technology” serves not only as the eyes of visually impaired individuals but also illuminates their inner world, offering them the same opportunities as others to participate in society and experience the beauty of the world.

(5) Strengthening the Sense of Agency

In advancing services for people with disabilities, China consistently emphasizes respecting their wishes, prioritizing their participation, and inspiring their enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity. The aim is to foster a sense of self-respect, confidence, resilience, and independence, encouraging a shift from viewing people with disabilities as passive recipients of aid to recognizing them as rights holders and active contributors to economic and social development. Dong Lina, China's first visually impaired broadcasting master's degree graduate, has transformed her life through her efforts, using her voice to convey the beauty of the world to other visually impaired individuals. Chen Guangjiong, a visually impaired author, focuses his work on the lives, work, and emotions of people with disabilities, portraying the richness of visually impaired experiences. Entrepreneur Cao Jun, who is visually impaired, has long been committed to developing assistive software for blind people, helping them better understand and integrate into society.

“I cannot see the world, but I hope the world sees me,” remarked a visually impaired Chinese athlete during the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympics, capturing the sentiment of many in the visually impaired community. China is dedicated to strengthening the agency of visually impaired individuals, guiding society to treat them with equality and recognize their value and contributions. Efforts are focused on empowering them in multiple ways, facilitating learning and skills development, and creating conditions for equal access to education, employment, cultural activities, and full social integration, allowing them to realize the vibrant potential of their lives. (End)