

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES
AND THEIR COMPANION ANIMALS
IN URBAN CHINA

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By

Siyu Ru

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OR

Dean
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
University of Saskatchewan
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5C9 Canada

ABSTRACT

Disability among humans is an important concern in both developed and developing countries. Although efforts have been made to protect the rights of people with disabilities, and public attitudes towards people with disabilities (PWDs) have become increasingly supportive over the past decade, people with disabilities still experience a wide range of social exclusion. Social exclusion not only limits the social participation of people with disabilities but also impacts their well-being. Improving the inclusion and well-being of people with disabilities requires multiple strategies. At the social level, it calls for legislation and policies based on the social model of disability. At the individual level, social support helps people cope with pressures and challenges leading to enhanced well-being. The human-animal bond is understood as a mutually beneficial relationship, with companion animals providing emotional and social support in unique ways.

This research adopts human needs theory, social exclusion theory, social support theory, and attachment theory to explore the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities and their experiences of living with a companion animal in China. The research questions of this study are four-fold: (1) What are the experiences of being disabled in urban China?; (2) What are the experiences of participants living with companion animals with whom they have a bond?; (3) What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of living with companion animals?; and (4) What is the relationship between participants with physical disabilities and their companion animals?

Drawing on a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews with six participants with physical disabilities showed that participants experienced multiple forms of social exclusion, including limited opportunities for education and employment, inadequately accessible facilities, and negative public attitudes toward people with disabilities, which led to smaller social

networks and a strong sense of loneliness. The unfulfilled social needs influence participants' well-being negatively. Social support from others helped participants cope with disability-related stressors. In addition to such human support, the support offered by companion animals was significant, providing physical, emotional, and social benefits that positively influenced the lives of people with physical disabilities. Although participants identified challenges caused by the financial, practical, and emotional burdens and by the loss of a pet, the benefits of living with a companion animal outweighed the drawbacks. Participants viewed companion animals as a family member and developed a deep bond with their companion animals, which was understood as love, care, support, and trust.

This dissertation is explanatory in nature and contributes to the sociological study of the human-animal bond. As the first study investigating experiences of PWDs living with companion animals in China, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of the nature of the human-animal relationship. Expanding upon previous research findings, I argue that companion animals play a supportive role in the lives of PWDs and compensate for a lack of human support. Therefore, living with companion animals may be a meaningful way to improve the lives of people with smaller social networks or limited human support. Valorizing the important role of companion animals also helps promote animal welfare and recognize animals as valuable social members.

Keywords: people with physical disabilities, social exclusion, companion animals, human-animal bond, support, well-being.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDPF: China's Disabled Person's Federation

CRPD: The United Nations Convention on the Right of People with Disabilities

PWDs: People with disabilities

DPOs: Disabled person's self-help organization

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When I started my Ph.D. program in 2016, my supervisor told me about her research on animal-assisted interventions and the One Health framework. It awakened my interest in the human-animal bond and human-animal studies. I started to read published research in this field and recalled my happy childhood accompanied by my dog, Benben. He provided me with companionship, comfort, and love and was loved by my family and also our neighbours. I appreciated the research findings on the benefits of living with companion dogs because I have had such experiences myself. I also participated in the therapy dog program at the university as a volunteer. It has been a great experience to interact with the therapy dogs, their handlers, and students. As a result, I decided my dissertation would focus on the human-animal bond. I could learn more from people who live with animals about their experiences and inform others who have not experienced this unique bond about how animals can positively influence people's lives.

While I was reading articles about the human-animal bond, I found one sociological research article on the interaction between people with visual impairments and their guide dogs. At almost the same time, I learned of a newly established guide dog training centre in my hometown in China. This presented a good opportunity to start my research, and I also hoped my research findings would help both the visually impaired community and the staff at the training centre. I then contacted the organizers and the trainers, and visited the training centre every time I went home. The training centre staff updated me about their progress on training their dogs, how they raised money to support the development of the centre, and about discrimination their staff and clients faced, such as a trainer and a dog being refused entry when they attempted to get on a subway. The staff and organizers made great efforts and hoped this training centre would be successful, in spite of many challenges.

Unfortunately, the training centre and guide dog program temporarily closed at the end of 2018 due to some complicated reasons. When I was home in the summer of 2019, the trainers were studying at a guide dog training centre in Shanghai, and the dogs were kept at the local Disabled Persons' Federation. The experience of being rejected at the subway station and what happened to the training centre demonstrate how the social environment creates barriers for people with disabilities.

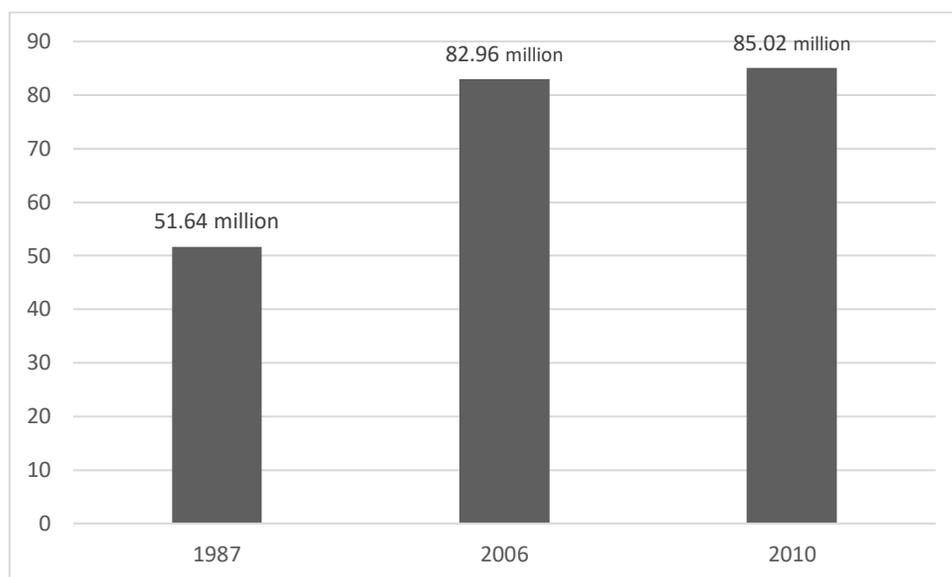
Therefore, I had to change my research focus, but I was still interested in the human-animal bond, especially the bond between animals and people with disabilities. With suggestions from my supervisor, I decided to explore the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals and how this bond influences the lives of people with physical disabilities. Living with companion animals can also be a unique lens through which to explore how people experience their disabilities in urban China. This dissertation will present the findings from my study of the experiences of six people with physical disabilities, in particular, the social exclusion they experienced, the support they received, their understanding of disability, and their bond with companion animals.

As for the guide dog training centre, the organizers did not stop trying to find a new home for the training centre. Overcoming all of the challenges plus the influence of COVID-19 in early 2020, they eventually managed to re-establish the training centre in April 2020. In the winter of the same year, the first guide dog graduated from the training centre and started working with a person with a visual impairment.

Disability among humans is an important concern in both developed and developing countries (Zheng, *et al.*, 2011, 2016; Guo, *et al.*, 2019). An estimated 15% of the world's population experiences some form of disability (World Health Organization, 2022). According to

the Second National Sampling Survey on Disability in China (the first sampling survey was conducted in 1987), the total number of people with disabilities¹ (PWDs) was 82.96 million in 2006, and the crude disability rate increased from 1.5% in 1987 to 6.39% in 2006 (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2007, 2008). The latest data released by the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) were based on the 2010 census, at which time an estimated 85.02 million people had some form of disability (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2012). As shown in Chart 1, the total number of PWDs has been growing.

Chart 1 Total Number of People with Disabilities in China (1987-2010)



Data source: China Disabled Persons' Federation
http://www.cdpf.org.cn/sjzx/cjrgk/200804/t20080402_387541.shtml
http://www.cdpf.org.cn/sjzx/cjrgk/200711/t20071121_387540.shtml
http://www.cdpf.org.cn/sjzx/cjrgk/201206/t20120626_387581.shtml

¹ The terminology and definitions applied to people who fit the definition of having a disability have changed over time. In the 1990s and 2000s, the idea of “people first language” (PFL) and the term “people with disabilities” were actively promoted. PFL puts words that recognize the person first as the primary reference instead of one’s disability (<https://gcdd.org/news-a-media/people-first-language.html>). This dissertation adopted PFL to show respect to PWDs. In mainland China, official documents, media reports, and most people use the term *Can Ji Ren* to refer to people with disabilities. If the term is translated into English word by word, the three characters are impairment, illness, and person/people, so *Can Ji Ren* emphasizes health conditions. A new term, *Can Zhang Renshi*, is also being used. The characters can be translated as impairment, barriers, and person/people. In the Chinese language, the adjective is usually placed in front of the noun. Therefore, it is difficult to use PFL to refer to PWDs in Chinese simply because of the language structure and grammar. Rather than PFL, barrier-focused language can be promoted in the Chinese language. Putting more emphasis on barriers, the new term reflects the feature of the social model and shows disability is a social phenomenon. In this respect, the term *Can Zhang Renshi* can be a better term to refer to PWDs in Chinese.

Although the Chinese government has made efforts to protect the equal rights of PWDs, there are gaps between government policies and the experiences of PWDs (Wang, *et al.*, 2017; Guo, *et al.*, 2019). Compared to people without disabilities, PWDs are more likely to have limited access to education and employment, which can lead to a lower socioeconomic status (Zheng, *et al.*, 2011). The inadequate healthcare system and social security system can further impact the health of PWDs. Social exclusion experienced by the disabled community can result in self-exclusion and self-stigma (Mak & Cheung, 2008; Yu & Tao, 2017), which can negatively influence the well-being of PWDs. Diverse ways are needed to improve inclusion and the well-being of PWDs. To protect the rights of PWDs, profound changes and policy transformations based on the social model of disability – rather than mere service provision – are called for at the social level. At the individual level, one utilitarian perspective is the influence of the human-animal bond on the well-being² of PWDs.

The bond between humans and animals has a long and evolving history (Soave, 2000; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; AVMA, 2022). The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA, 2022) acknowledges and defines the bond between animals and humans as “mutually beneficial and dynamic” and a relationship that involves the “emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, animals, and the environment” (AVMA, 2022, para.2).

Therefore, the human-animal bond is reciprocally beneficial and can lead to fulfilment in both

² Diener, Suh, and Oishi (1997) define well-being as judging life positively and feeling good. Following Diener’s definition of well-being, Veenhoven (2008) suggests that well-being is synonymous with overall happiness and life satisfaction. He argues that although the subject of well-being is not a research focus in mainstream sociology, it has been discussed by previous sociological studies, e.g., job satisfaction in the sociology of work, marital satisfaction in the sociology of family, and life satisfaction in the sociology of aging (Veenhoven, 2008). The term well-being is used in the broadest sense to encompass physical, mental, and social domains of health (Carr, Wallace, Pater, & Gross, 2019). Previous research on the influence of the human-animal bond on human well-being also uses the term “lives of owners” (Gee & Mueller, 2019; McConnell, Brown, Shoda, Stayton, & Martin, 2011). Therefore, “the well-being of PWDs”, “PWDs’ well-being”, and “lives of PWDs” are used interchangeably in this dissertation for a vocabulary variety.

humans and animals (Van Heerden, 2001). This definition is the most utilized one (Applebaum, MacLean, & McDonald, 2021; Fine, 2019; Takashima & Day, 2014). It should be noted that this definition of the human-animal bond involves different types of animals, including wild animals, farm animals, companion animals, etc. This dissertation focuses on companion animals³ and their bond with people with physical disabilities.

In the case of companion animals, this bond traces back to the time of domestication of the dog about 35,000 years ago. Throughout human history, small companion animals, such as dogs and cats, have played a crucial role in society, religion, art, literature, and science and there is evidence of early acknowledgement of the benefits of bonding with companion animals (Takashima & Day, 2014). Fine (2019) makes an analogy between the human-animal bond and the parent-infant bond. This analogy shows the bond between humans and companion animals is significant and reciprocal. In his previous work, Fine (2014) used the Greek term for familial love, *στοργή* (*storgé*), to describe this unique bond and special love, with this familial love strengthening the human-animal bond and fostering a sense of kinship with companion animals. Although he points out the dark side of human-animal interactions (e.g., cruelty to animals, the link between domestic violence and animal abuse) and the potential for unhealthy relationships with companion animals (e.g., isolation caused by unhealthy dependencies on pets) (Fine, 2014), a healthy human-animal bond involves “a complex psychological and physiological interaction” (Fine, 2019, p.6) that has a significant impact on both human and animal well-being.

Animals play a crucial role in people’s lives and living with companion animals has been prevalent in different societies (Gray & Young, 2011; Amiot, Bastian, & Martens, 2016). Dogs and cats are the most commonly owned pets as they interact with people most closely (Archer,

³ The definition of companion animals is presented on page 19.

1997). In Canada, 41% of households have at least one dog (8.2 million household dogs) and 38% of households have at least one cat (8.3 million household cats) (Canadian Animal Health Institute, 2019). With the prosperity of Chinese society after economic reforms, a growing number of people are living with companion animals. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, there were 27.4 million pet dogs and 58.1 million pet cats by 2015, with the number of companion animals in China still growing (Zhang, 2018).

The special bonds between humans and companion animals and the influences of those bonds have generated increasing attention in academia. Studies on the human-animal bond have found various benefits of living with companion animals, including physical benefits (e.g., improved health), psychological benefits (e.g., emotional comfort and reduced stress levels), and social benefits (e.g., promoting social contact and community integration) (Amiot, *et al.*, 2016; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018). Researchers also suggest these benefits are more significant for people with smaller social networks, such as PWDs (Zhang, 2008; Li, 2012; Amiot, *et al.*, 2016; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018). However, there has been scant research on the interactions between PWDs and their companion animals. This dissertation investigates the lived experience of people with physical disabilities in urban China⁴ who live with companion animals, and the effect of this unique bond on their lives. This research adopts human needs theory, social exclusion theory, social support theory, and attachment theory to explore the lived experience of PWDs and their bond with their companion animals.

⁴ Previous studies on the interactions between people and their companion animals in China were conducted in urban areas (Zheng, Fu, & Headey, 2005; Zhou, Zheng, & Fu, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Fu & Zheng, 2009; Li, 2012; Liu, 2016). Two reasons can explain this. First, living with companion animals is more common in cities (Li, 2012). Second, family sizes tend to be smaller in cities compared with traditional rural life, which may result in more and more people living alone (Zhou, Zheng, & Fu, 2007). Interpersonal relationships in cities may be difficult and unsatisfactory, so people may gain comfort and companionship from companion animals.

Previous studies on the relationships between PWDs and animals mainly focus on service animals (Sanders, 1999; Fairman & Huebner, 2001; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008; Malamud, 2013; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Liu, 2016; Hall *et al.*, 2017). Service animals are rigorously trained to assist people with disabilities with their needs and daily activities, including mobility, emergency alerting, environmental control, and socialization (Hicks & Weisman, 2015). Service dogs can provide functional assistance and social support to PWDs and foster greater social involvement and community participation, (Fairman & Huebner, 2001; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008; Malamud, 2013; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Hall *et al.*, 2017). However, it takes significant time and effort to successfully train a service animal (Sanders, 1999). To illustrate, the success rate of training guide dogs is limited and so there are an inadequate number of guide dogs in China (Li *et al.*, 2010); an estimated 17 million people with visual impairments live in mainland China, but there are less than 200 guide dogs working currently (Liu, 2016). This leads to a gap between visually impaired people in need and the number of successfully trained guide dogs, not to mention other types of service animals. The service animal program is still developing in China.

The term “companion animal” refers to animals with no obvious economic or applied function (Hicks & Weisman, 2015). A companion animal is “a being whom we have a significant relationship and close connection with, and who lives, works, and plays with us on a daily basis” (Johnson, 2001, p. 201). The emergence and prevalence of companion animals show the social nature of human-animal relationships, different from humans treating animals in a utilitarian way throughout history (Haraway, 2003). Although service animals and companion animals function differently, emotional connections, psychological benefits, and social support are common between the two (DiSalvo, *et al.*, 2006; Hicks & Weisman, 2015).

Compared to service animals, companion animals are less costly but have received inadequate attention in research on support for PWDs (Zimolag & Krupa, 2009). Because of the limited number of service animals in China and the higher cost to apply for and live with a service animal, PWDs may find it more difficult to have a service animal than a companion animal. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals. This dissertation mainly focuses on people with physical disabilities due to two considerations. According to data from the CDPF, more people are living with physical disabilities than other types of disability (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2007). Moreover, a physical disability is more visible when those affected enter public settings, and people with physical disabilities can be stigmatized because of the discredited attribute.

The main research questions of this study are as follows: (1) What are the experiences of being disabled in urban China? For example, have the participants experienced being excluded or discriminated against? What kinds of supports are available for people with physical disabilities?; (2) What are the experiences of participants living with companion animals with whom they have a bond? How do companion animals influence the lives of PWDs? Can living with companion animals help people with disabilities cope with negative experiences?; (3) What are the perceived benefits (such as receiving support or having someone to talk to) and drawbacks (such as being rejected in public places) of living with companion animals?; and (4) What is the relationship between participants with physical disabilities and their companion animals? A phenomenological approach and qualitative research methods were adopted to explore the lived experiences of participants with physical disabilities. In-depth interviews with six participants were conducted for data collection. The stories of the participants will address the above-mentioned research questions.

The research findings of the experiences of PWDs in China and their needs help increase public awareness of this community. By exploring the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals, this dissertation offers deeper insights into the nature of the human-animal bond. Showing the important role of animals in human lives and society also helps to promote animal welfare.

Traditional sociologists have overlooked the relationships between human animals and other animals (Irvine, 2007). Sociology “routinely has portrayed nonhuman animals as mindless, emotionless, self-less, reacting rather than acting, apprehending rather than comprehending, and existing only in the immediate situation” (Sanders, 2003, p. 406). Research on the human-animal bond may challenge the anthropocentric assumptions in sociology. This dissertation may support the subfield of the sociology of animals and society. The increasing importance of animals in our everyday lives makes it necessary to “incorporate animals into our investigations of society”, and this effort “will enhance understanding across many avenues of sociological inquiry” (Jerolmack, 2005, p. 651-652). This dissertation, along with other studies conducted by sociologists in this area, contributes to “greater interest and sensitivity to human-animal issues” (Alger & Alger, 2003, p. 77). The next chapter presents the findings of previous studies on disability and on the human-animal bond.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW: DISABILITY AND HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

This chapter discusses the relevant research literature in two fields: (1) studies on disability issues and people with disabilities and (2) studies on the human-animal bond. The first part of the chapter focuses on disability issues, particularly in China. The definition of disability, causes and types of disabilities, legislation protecting the equal rights of PWDs, and experiences of PWDs will be covered. The medical definition of disability is still prevalent in China, which views disability as an individual problem rather than emphasizing social barriers faced by PWDs, thus reflecting social attitudes toward the disability community. Although there are laws and regulations protecting the equal rights of PWDs, gaps exist between policies and the daily experiences of PWDs. PWDs are disempowered in workplaces, schools, and other public settings and experience stigma and discrimination (Guo et al., 2019; Shang, Fisher, & Xie, 2011).

The second part of the chapter focuses on human-animal studies. The definition of the human-animal bond, the development of human-animal studies, and research findings on the benefits and drawbacks of the human-animal bond are introduced. The human-animal bond plays a significant role in the lives of both humans and animals and can benefit the well-being of both. Companion animals play an important supportive role, and the benefits of the human-animal bond have positive effects on the lives of PWDs.

2.1 Disability as a Social Phenomenon

Mills' sociological imagination provides insight to "understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals" (Mills, 2000, p. 5). Individuals live in social contexts, and people's lives and experiences are shaped by social forces. Researchers suggest the conceptualization of disability should

acknowledge not only the variety of impairments experienced by people but also the social contexts of disability, because “different environments may have different expectations for and social constructions regarding ability, resulting in differential impact of disability on any individual” (Kattari, Lavery, & Hasche, 2017, p. 868). Disability is a complex social phenomenon, and the experiences of PWDs and their self-identity are socially constructed (Mak & Cheung, 2008; Yu & Tao, 2017) and are intertwined with other forms of social identity, including gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status (Withers, 2012; Kattari, Lavery, & Hasche, 2017).

2.1.1 Defining Disability

The understanding of disability has developed over the years, and reflects the fact that disability is a complex social issue. For example, the medical model of disability, which views disability as a medical or health problem, limits PWDs’ opportunity to participate in society (Swain & French, 2000). On the contrary, the social model of disability indicates that unsupportive social environments, negative attitudes, stigma, and discrimination are social barriers that hinder PWDs’ participation in social life (Thomas, 2004). The development of different approaches to understanding disability will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, on the theoretical literature.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), disability is caused by “the interaction between individuals with a health condition, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression, with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support” (World Health Organization, 2022b, Overview section, para.1). This definition suggests that disability is not merely a health issue faced by individuals but a complex social phenomenon. The social

environment has a significant influence on the experiences of PWDs. Inaccessible environments create barriers that keep PWDs from fully participating in society. Therefore, efforts to remove environmental and social barriers should be made to overcome the difficulties experienced by PWDs (World Health Organization, 2022a).

The Federal Disability Reference Guide in Canada also points out that “disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and mind and features of the society in which they live” (Government of Canada, 2013, p.2). Similar to the WHO definition, the Government of Canada emphasizes the physical, mental, or developmental limitations experienced by PWDs as well as the interactions between PWDs and the social environment.

According to the Chinese *Law of the Protection of Persons with Disabilities*, a person with disabilities is “one who has abnormalities of loss of certain organ or function, psychologically, physiologically, or in anatomical structure and has lost wholly or in part the ability to perform an activity in the way considered normal” (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, n.d., General provisions section, para.2). This definition demonstrates two points: (1) disability affects important functions and activities and (2) it distinguishes normality from abnormality. The definition of disability used in China follows the medical model of disability and reflects the corresponding attitude toward PWDs at the governmental level (Yu, 2018). Definitions of disability, which are typically based on theoretical models, have significant social, economic, and political implications and shape the way PWDs are perceived, recognized, and supported (Mitra, 2006). In this respect, the official definition and legislation related to disability issues directly influence the lives of PWDs. The simple medical definition of disability can be problematic. It excludes many people whose lives are actually impacted by disability

without proper protections and benefits (Zheng, et al., 2011). The narrow definition also overlooks the fact that PWDs face challenges beyond disability itself as the unsupportive social environment has a disabling effect on their lives.

There are two main research perspectives underpinning sociological conceptualizations of what constitutes disability: disability studies and medical sociology (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Thomas, 2004). Researchers in disability studies, such as Vic Finkelstein, Mick Oliver, Tom Shakespeare, and Nick Watson, argue that disability is structured by social oppression, exclusion, and inequality, with PWDs being an oppressed group in society. Therefore, PWDs should fight for their rights, including full equality and social inclusion. For instance, Finkelstein (2001a) believes that although impairment is a prerequisite of disability, it is the problematic societal responses to disability, such as exclusion from employment and the educational system, inaccessible built environments, and minimal benefits, that constitute disability. In other words, it is society that disables PWDs. The political struggle of PWDs should focus on changing the social environment and gaining control over their lives (Finkelstein, 2001b). Finkelstein's work on disability studies laid the foundation for the establishment of the social model of disability (Thomas, 2004).

Shakespeare and Watson (2001) built their understanding of disability on the social model, but they argue that “the ‘strong’ social model itself has become a problem” (p.13). Disability is understood as restrictions of activity that are caused by both social barriers and impairments. Therefore, the separation of impairment and disability emphasized by the social model is problematic. Impairment and disability are not dichotomous; rather, they are different places on a continuum, and disability as restricted activity is a product of biological, psychological, cultural, and socio-political forces. Shakespeare and Watson (2001) also suggest

that everyone is impaired to varying degrees, and this insight promotes a better understanding of the human experience and challenges socially constructed divisions between “the disabled” and “the normal”.

The perspective of medical sociology or specifically the sociology of chronic illness and disability suggests disability is caused by illness and impairment and involves suffering and social disadvantages. Figures in this approach include Michael Bury and Simon Williams. Although Bury agrees that the social model significantly influences social and sociological thinking about disability, he criticizes the social model as over-socialized and over-politicized. According to Bury (2000), disability is a restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity and the main cause of illness or impairment. The prevalence of both chronic illness and disability rises with age. On the other hand, Bury (2000) acknowledges that some restrictions are influenced by social context and culture to avoid individualizing disability. Therefore, disability is both biologically and socially caused, though the former is the main cause, and research on disability and PWDs should focus on the interactions between individuals and their social location. Williams (1999) argues that sociology should “bring the body back in” and that disability is about “the interplay between the biological reality of physiological impairment, structural conditioning, and socio-cultural interaction” (p.180).

Although sociological understandings of disability are divided into two perspectives, common ground can be found between researchers in disability studies and medical sociology (Thomas, 2004). The researchers mentioned above agree that impairment plays an important role in causing restrictions of activity that constitute disability. However, disability should not be defined solely by restricted activity caused by impairment. Disability comes into the picture when the restrictions are socially imposed. In this respect, disability is a form of social

oppression equivalent to other forms of oppression associated with gender, race, class, and sexuality (Barnes & Mercer, 2005) and involves “the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional wellbeing” (Thomas, 1999, p. 60).

2.1.2 Disability and Chinese Culture

Emphasizing normality/abnormality and the medical meaning of disability can result in viewing disability as a personal tragedy and in stigma and prejudice (Bogart, Logan, Hospodar, & Woekel, 2019). Overall, although attitudes toward PWDs have become more positive in the past decade, especially among people with a higher level of education and the younger generation, public attitudes toward disability and PWDs are not sufficiently inclusive, with negative attitudes rooted in traditional Chinese culture (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Zhang & Rosen, 2018).

There have been different philosophies and schools of thought since ancient China, but Confucianism is the most influential traditional philosophy and has a major effect on social values and social modes of action (Lu, 1996; Zhang & Rosen, 2018). Confucianism was initially developed by Confucius (551-479 BC) during the Spring and Autumn period (771-476 BC). Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty (157-29 BC) proscribed all non-Confucian schools of thought and endorsed Confucianism as a national philosophy (Li, 2000). The central concept of Confucianism is “*Ren*” (humaneness/benevolence), which addresses kindness, compassion, respect, and harmony. *The Chapter of Great Harmony* [Da Tong Pian, 《大同篇》] describes the ideal society, which is called the Great Harmony [Da Tong, 大同] in Confucianism. In the ideal society, helpless widows and widowers, orphans, the elderly without offspring, as well as the sick and the disabled are well cared for. “Respect the elderly, cherish the youth, support the

weak, and help the disabled” is still a moral rule in contemporary Chinese society (Zhang & Rosen, 2018, p. 1115).

Although traditional culture in China emphasizes a humane attitude toward PWDs, in reality, prejudice and discrimination against PWDs is common. The negative attitudes toward PWDs are also the result of traditional cultural beliefs about disability. For example, the moral rule “help the disabled” addresses sympathy and encourages the public to provide assistance to PWDs, but it does not emphasize the empowerment of PWDs (Zhang & Rosen, 2018). This principle reflects the unequal status between people with and without disabilities and insinuates people with disabilities are inferior (Campbell & Uren, 2011). Moreover, Confucianism emphasizes social hierarchy based on gender, age, generational status, and social status, and individuals are expected to act according to their status. Self-restraint and collectivism are essential for maintaining harmony in family and society. With the emphasis on social hierarchy, people with disabilities are regarded as holding the lowest social status (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Zheng, *et al.*, 2016).

Maintaining “face” is another important element in traditional beliefs, and shameful family affairs cannot be revealed to outsiders. When it comes to understanding disability, traditional culture focuses on the cause of disability and assumes a link between disability and previous wrongdoing. The birth of a child with a disability may be viewed as a punishment for past misconduct (Xiong, *et al.*, 2011; Zheng, *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, having a disabled family member is perceived as a type of shameful family affair that should be concealed. In this way, disability has long been a private issue requiring maximum interpersonal discretion in Chinese

society. People are not comfortable publicly discussing disability and PWDs are invisible in public places. People also interpret disability as a loss of face at the public and societal level⁵.

Negative attitudes toward PWDs contribute to the invisibility of PWDs in public settings. The invisibility further serves to strengthen the negative attitudes rather than generate a more positive perception. PWDs may internalize stigma and become self-isolated, which can significantly impact their well-being (Yu & Tao, 2017). Invisibility also limits interactions between PWDs and the general population, which contributes to the lack of awareness of disability issues and perpetuates stereotypes and negative perceptions.

2.1.3 Disability and Legislation

The Chinese government has developed both organization and legislation to protect the equal rights of and build a more inclusive society for PWDs (Zhang, 2006; Campbell & Uren, 2011). Laws and regulations related to disability cover “legal rights protection, education, employment, barrier-free environments, disability prevention and rehabilitation, and mental health” (Schrader, *et al.*, 2018, p. 7).

China’s Disabled Persons’ Federation (CDPF)

The CDPF was established in 1988 and is the umbrella organization for people with disabilities. The CDPF is a government-led non-profit organization and works on behalf of the government to implement policies related to PWDs. The CDPF’s mission is “to promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in society equally with others, ensure that persons with disabilities share in the material and cultural achievements of society, and foster humanitarianism across society as a whole” (China Disabled Persons’ Federation, 2016b,

⁵ News released on June 9, 2020, showed that one disabled person was driven away by the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau [Chengguan, 城管] because he was playing the Erhu fiddle on the street near a hotel hosting foreign visitors. Chengguan thought his behaviour would spoil the city’s image in front of foreigners. https://www.sohu.com/a/400750420_114988.

para.1). The CDPF has a countrywide network of branches that reach down to the county level⁶ to manage issues related to PWDs, including disability registration and certification, benefits payouts, career consultations, and employment training (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2016b).

Legislation

Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of People with Disabilities [Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Canjiren Baozhang Fa 《中华人民共和国残疾人保障法》] (enacted in 1991 and amended in 2008) is of particular significance to the protection of the rights of PWDs in China. The law contains 9 chapters and 68 articles, addressing education, employment, rehabilitation, welfare, cultural life, barrier-free environment, and legal liability. Article 3 of the law demonstrates an anti-discrimination principle, stating: “People with disabilities shall enjoy equal rights with other citizens in political, economic, cultural, social, family life, and other aspects. The citizen’s rights and personal dignity of people with disabilities shall be protected by law. It shall be prohibited to discriminate against, insult and injure people with disabilities and derogate the personal dignity of disabled persons through mass media or by other means” (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, n.d., General provisions section, para.3).

Other policies related to the equal rights of PWDs include *People with Disabilities Education Ordinance* (implemented in 1994 and revised in 2007) [Canjiren Jiaoyu Tiaoli, 《残疾人教育条例》], *People with Disabilities Employment Ordinance* (implemented in 2007) [Canjiren Jiuye Tiaoli, 《残疾人就业条例》], and *Regulation on the Construction of Barrier-*

⁶ The administrative divisions in China include four levels: provincial, prefectural, county, and township level.

Free Environments (implemented in 2012) [Wuzhangai Huanjing Jianshe Tiaoli, 《无障碍环境建设条例》]. PWDs have equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights, and the rights PWDs are protected by law (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2016a). The Chinese government has also participated in the global movement to protect the rights and dignity of PWDs. For example, China is a signatory to the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and has signed the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2019). Interventions and strategies, such as Learning in Regular Classroom and the quota scheme, have been implemented to improve access to education and employment for PWDs in China.

2.1.4 Causes and Types of Disabilities

Disabilities can be either congenital or acquired. The Second National Sampling Survey on Disability in 2006 distinguished seven types of disability: physical, visual, hearing, speech, intellectual, developmental, and multiple. Table 1 shows the prevalence of different types of disability in China. China's disability prevalence rate (6.39% according to the data from 2006) is low in an international comparison⁷ (the estimated rate is 15% by WHO), partially due to the narrow medical definition of disability (Schrader, *et al.*, 2018). Some types of disability, such as emotional behaviour disorders, learning disabilities, and language impairments, which are well documented in other countries, are not fully recognized in the Chinese disability categories. This leaves a large number of PWDs unaccounted for in official statistics, without legal protection or access to social welfare programs, training, or other forms of government support. Many PWDs are not willing to apply for the Disabled Person Certificate provided by the CDPF, even though PWDs with the certificate can receive welfare support from the government; the main reason is

⁷ In Canada, data in 2017 show that one in five (22%) Canadians aged 15 years and over (or about 6.2 million individuals) experienced one or more disabilities (data from Statistics Canada: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128a-eng.htm>). Compared with Canada, the disability prevalence rate in China is significantly lower.

not wanting to be labelled as disabled. Some parents are reluctant to apply for the Disabled Person Certificate for their children with disabilities because the parents are afraid their children will be stigmatized or discriminated against once they are identified as PWDs (Shang et al., 2011).

Table 1 The prevalence of different types of disabilities (data from the Second National Sampling Survey on Disability, 2006)*

Types of disability	Numbers of people (million)	Percentages (%)
Visual	12.33	14.86
Hearing	20.04	24.16
Speech	1.27	1.53
Physical	24.12	29.07
Intellectual	5.54	6.68
Developmental	6.14	7.40
Multiple disabilities	13.52	16.30

* The data are from http://www.cdpcf.org.cn/sjzx/cjrgk/200711/t20071121_387540.shtml.

The disability prevalence rate in China is estimated to increase in the near future due to ageing, and the causes of disability demonstrate an epidemiologic to sociodemographic transition (Peng, Song, Sullivan, Qiu, & Wang, 2010). There has been a significant increase in the number of people with a physical disability, but a dramatic decline of people with an intellectual disability (Zheng, *et al.*, 2011; Schrader, *et al.*, 2018). These changes are linked to shifts in the age structure (physical disabilities are strongly correlated with older age groups) as well as medical advances and preventive measures (e.g., prenatal diagnostics).

2.1.5 Experiences of Living with Disabilities

Although China ratified the CRPD in 2008 and a series of policies and regulations have subsequently been developed and introduced to protect the legal rights of PWDs, PWDs in China experience significant social barriers that prevent them from full participation in social life.

Because of the social exclusion experienced by PWDs, from personal relationships to education, the labour market, and the built environment, they are rarely seen in public places (Hao & Li, 2020; Yu & Tao, 2017). This section discusses previous research findings on PWDs' experiences in various aspects of social life, including lack of accessible facilities, limited opportunities for education and employment, negative attitudes towards PWDs, and difficulties in family relations.

(1) Lack of accessible facilities

This type of social/environmental barrier restricts PWDs' freedom of movement and access to information (Wiggett, 2006). To illustrate, Campbell and Uren (2011) used visual ethnography to observe the social environment and the visibility of PWDs in public settings. They found that, despite the positive change in attitudes toward PWDs, PWDs are still invisible in public spaces and the changes in disability policies have not made public spaces more accessible (Campbell & Uren, 2011). The lack of accessible facilities reflects the social environment and prevents PWDs from entering public settings and participating in social activities. Other researchers have identified this same concern (Yang, 2018; Zhao & Zhang, 2018). Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure a more accessible and inclusive environment for PWDs (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Yang, 2018; Zhao & Zhang, 2018).

(2) Disability and education

According to *the Chinese Compulsory Education Law* [Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Yiwu Jiaoyu Fa, 《中华人民共和国义务教育法》], students with disabilities can receive education in three ways: (1) inclusive classrooms in regular schools, (2) special classes in regular schools, and (3) special schools (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2006). The Chinese government has made greater efforts to promote *Learning in Regular*

Classroom [Sui ban jiu du, 随班就读], meaning that students with disabilities learn in a regular classroom with other students without disabilities.

However, inclusive education still needs further development in China. According to data from the CDPF (see Table 2), only 6.02% of PWDs have a senior high school or higher level of education in 2006. Wang and Michaels (2009) reported about 36% of all school-aged children with disabilities did not attend school in 2008, even though positive inclusive education was promoted across China. Hiding or denying the reality of a school-aged child with disabilities is still common, especially in rural China (Shang et al., 2011). The reasons for Chinese families to hide disabilities are the cultural taboo and the fear of discrimination. This also reflects that hiding disabilities is a way to cope with the stigma and social discrimination (Lam, Tsang, et al., 2010; Tsang, Tam, Chan, & Cheung, 2003).

Table 2 Education levels of people with disabilities (data from the Second National Sampling Survey on Disability, 2006)*

Education level	Numbers of people (million)	Percentages (%)
Illiterate	35.91	43.29
Primary school	16.42	31.85
Junior high school	12.48	15.04
Senior high school	4.06	4.89
College and above	0.94	1.13

* Data are from http://www.cdpf.org.cn/sjzx/cjrgk/200711/t20071121_387540.shtml.

Discrimination against students with disabilities can be found in schools, which is ironic because education is supposed to help students develop a more inclusive attitude toward PWDs. Children with disabilities have limited educational opportunities and social support and are bullied, harassed, humiliated, and ignored by their peers and teachers (Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Shang, Fisher, & Xie, 2011). Many of the teachers are reluctant to have students with disabilities in the classroom due to fears they would negatively influence the overall academic

performance (Shang et al., 2011). Although the *Learning in Regular Classroom* model aims to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities, the one-size-fit-all curriculum ignores individual differences. It is more likely to place students with disabilities at a disadvantage (Deng, Poon-Mcbrayer, & Farnsworth, 2001).

Without adequate educational support and assistance, children with disabilities and their families endure the dual pressures of financial burden and stigma, with some children with disabilities having to drop out of school at a young age (Shang, Fisher, & Xie, 2011). The discrimination and stigma that children with disabilities suffer can significantly impact their development and may result in lifelong poverty (Guo et al., 2019).

(3) Disability and employment

Limited access to education further leads to inadequate skills for PWDs in the labour market. In addition to widespread discrimination, PWDs often experience social exclusion in the labour market. (Hao & Li, 2020; Yu & Tao, 2017). PWDs face multiple challenges in employment: PWDs who are not employed have limited employment opportunities, and working PWDs also face financial hardship due to low wages and benefits and limited opportunities for future career development (Yu & Tao, 2017). Although most PWDs have a strong desire to be employed, they are excluded from the labour market (Yu & Tao, 2017). The lack of employment opportunities deprives PWDs of their rights to social participation and self-development.

As presented in the “disability and legislation” section, PWDs’ right to work is protected and discrimination against PWDs is prohibited by law. Anti-discrimination legislation based on the social model and an employment quota scheme based on the medical model are intended to work together to promote the employment of PWDs. However, the two governmental approaches

have only had limited success (Hao & Li, 2020). For anti-discrimination legislation, Article 38 of the *Law on the Protection of People with Disabilities* stipulates that:

No discrimination against people with disabilities shall be practiced in the employment, promotion, determination of technical and professional titles, remunerations, welfare, rest and vacation, social insurance, etc. (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, n.d., Chapter 4, para. 19).

Despite clear provisions in laws and policies, discrimination against PWDs is still common. Hao and Li (2020) suggest that the limited effectiveness of anti-discrimination legislation is caused by a blurred definition of disability and discrimination and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. Also, in practice, selective policy implementation at the local level is not uncommon, and local governments selectively enforce or do not enforce these laws (O'Brien & Li, 1999). This may also be the reason for the gap between policy and practice.

As for the quota scheme, according to the *Law on the Protection of People with Disabilities* and the *People with Disabilities Employment Ordinance*, public and private sectors and organizations (such as the state organ, public institution, and enterprise) should have at least 1.5 percent of their workforce comprising PWDs (the specific quota varies locally, but should be no lower than 1.5 percent) (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2010). Otherwise, the organization must make a contribution to the Disabled Employment Security Fund. The Disability Employment Security Fund contributions are collected monthly by local tax bureaus and are used to provide PWDs with employment and skills training. The payable amount is calculated by the formula below:

Payable amount = (number of total employees in the previous year employment quotas required by the local government – number of employees with disabilities) average annual wage of the employees in the previous year.

The quota scheme is inefficient in providing job opportunities to PWDs in practice due to deep-rooted discrimination and conflicts between the mainstream labour market and the quota

scheme (Schrader, *et al.*, 2018; Hao & Li, 2020). The mainstream labour market legal framework requires strict employment protection for regular employees (e.g., social insurance and housing provident fund contributions), leading to increased labour costs and decreased employment flexibility for the employees. Employers would rather “sign labour contracts with so-called ‘high-quality employees’” (Hao & Li, 2020, p.13) or hire dispatched employees⁸ than hire PWDs. Considering the cost of hiring and supporting PWDs, such as providing workplace accommodation and vacation training, is higher than the financial penalty, employers would rather pay the penalty than have disabled employees. Therefore, the conflicts between the mainstream labour market and the quota scheme result in a “crowding out effect” of PWDs in the labour market (Hao & Li, 2020, p.14).

Because of inefficient government enforcement, the quota is rarely fulfilled. Some local governments use the Disabled Employment Security Fund as a governance performance indicator (Schrader, *et al.*, 2018). Instead of encouraging employers to hire PWDs, those local governments focus on collecting the penalty payment. Some companies and organizations choose “symbolic employment”: they hire employees with disabilities and pay minimum wages without allocating work to them. These realities prevent the employment and empowerment of PWDs (Schrader, *et al.*, 2018). PWDs are marginalized in the labour market, resulting in many PWDs continuing to live in poverty (Schrader, *et al.*, 2018; Guo *et al.*, 2019).

⁸ The term “labour dispatch” is defined as “a method of employment whereby the employer dispatches the employees it recruits to other employers, and the latter employers directly manage the working process of such employees” (Hao & Li, 2020, p. 12). Despite the fact that the Amendment of Labour Contract Law in 2012 calls for “equal pay for equal work” for dispatched employees, the “unequal pay for equal work” concept is still prevalent due to inefficient government enforcement. Employers are inclined to hire dispatched employees rather than regular contracted employees.

(4) Disability and poverty

Disability is often associated with poverty (Elwan, 1999; Braithwaite & Mont, 2009; Banks, Kuper, & Polack, 2017; Guo, *et al.*, 2019). It has been estimated that 20 percent of the impoverished population in developing countries experience disabilities (Braithwaite & Mont, 2009). Based on China National Sampling Survey on Disability data from 2006, Guo *et al.* (2019) found that Chinese young people (aged from 15-24) living in low-income families were more likely to have a disability compared with those living in well-off households. Disability links with poverty bidirectionally (Elwan, 1999; Braithwaite & Mont, 2009; Banks, Kuper, & Polack, 2017; Guo, *et al.*, 2019): on the one hand, living in poverty can contribute to disability because poverty is associated with malnutrition, limited medical resources, and lack of social support; on the other hand, people with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed and face economic disadvantage due to social exclusion and marginalization (Tuttle & Tuttle, 1996; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008).

In recent years, poverty alleviation efforts have been made by the Chinese government, with the target to end poverty⁹ in all forms by 2020. The annual household income in families with disabled members has increased. However, even though it's less severe than absolute poverty, relative poverty can cause stress, social exclusion, and social deprivation (Banks, Kuper, & Polack, 2017; Guo, *et al.*, 2019). More efforts are needed to improve the living conditions of PWDs and their families as well as provide accessible and affordable healthcare services.

⁹ The Chinese government defines poverty as earning less than US\$416 (about 2,800 yuan) a year or around \$1.10 (about 7.4) a day. This standard is lower than the World Bank's definition of poverty (\$1.90 a day).

(5) Misunderstanding, prejudice, stigma, and social exclusion

Misunderstanding and discrimination against PWDs still exist in China. Although the situation has improved, especially in major cities and among the educated population, the continued use of a medical approach to disability reinforces a backward view of disability. Many Chinese still treat disability as a problem to be fixed and pitied instead of addressed by removing social barriers faced by PWDs.

One example is how people with disabilities are referred to in Chinese language. PWDs used to be commonly referred to as *Canfei* [残废], which is a combination of two characters meaning “incomplete or deficient” and “useless”. The term *Canfei* carries a strongly disrespectful and pejorative connotation regarding people with disabilities, and was in common use until the 1980s. The term referring to people with disabilities was then revised to *Canji* [残疾], with the second character meaning “disease or sickness”. This term emphasizes that a disabled person is an individual who has lost all or part of his/her ability to perform normal activities due to loss or impairment of psychological or physiological functions. Compared to the former term, *Canji* is more neutral but has been argued to be inappropriate and imply people with disabilities are abnormal (Dai, 2017). Alternative terminology has been proposed¹⁰, including *Canzhang* [残障], meaning “disabled and barrier”, and *Shenxin Zhang'ai* [身心障碍], referring to “physically or mentally obstructed” (Yu, 2018). The new terms highlight the obstacles faced by people with disabilities and the social environment being insufficiently accessible for the disabled. However, the new terms have not been widely used. The laws and regulations still use the term *Canji*.

¹⁰ In 2008, when the Law on the *People with Disabilities Act* was amended, some scholars suggested that the term *Canji* should be changed to *Canzhang*. However, up to now, it is still controversial in academia and practice whether or not the term should be changed.

Another example is the stipulation of the one-child policy. Under the one-child policy, the majority of Chinese couples could only have one child; however, mothers who gave birth to a child with a disability were allowed to have a second child (Shang et al., 2011). This stipulation implied that children with disabilities were assumed to be less productive members of family and society compared to children without disabilities.

Discrimination against PWDs in disadvantaged rural areas in China can be more severe (Shang et al., 2011). Children with disabilities and their families are more likely to experience social stigma, discrimination, and abuse. Despite being a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees the right to care and protection, the right to economic security, social security and welfare provision, the development right to health, education, and disability support, and the right to social participation (UNICEF, 2022), China has not provided effective protections to children with disabilities living in rural communities.

The symbolic interaction perspective suggests that the self is social in nature and self-concept is developed and maintained through social relations (Turner, 2014). Stigma and prejudice experienced by PWDs have psychological effects on an individual level (Mak & Cheung, 2008). Self-stigmatization happens when PWDs have internalized society's negative attitudes about disability. Self-stigmatization leads to further negative self-evaluation, negative emotions, self-blame, concealment of stigmatized status from others, and self-isolation (Mak & Cheung, 2008; Yu & Tao, 2017). For PWDs, a fundamental form of suffering is the loss of self, or in other words, a diminished self-concept (Charmaz, 1983), and this may further impact their general well-being.

(6) Family relations

Family takes the major responsibility for caring for a disabled family member (Xiong, *et al.*, 2011). With inadequate support from the government (e.g., medical insurance and minimum life insurance), both PWDs and their families are more likely to live under financial pressure (Peng, *et al.*, 2010; Campbell & Uren, 2011; Zheng, *et al.*, 2016). Zheng, *et al.* (2016) found that family caregivers tended to hold a more negative attitude toward disability due to the tensions between PWDs and their families.

PWDs depend closely on their caregivers, often stay at home, and receive limited rehabilitation or education. Their caregivers do not experience disabilities themselves but must deal with multiple issues, such as managing care, disability-related physical and emotional problems, their own personal lives, and family relations (Mak & Cheung, 2008). Both PWDs and people associated with them (e.g., family members, caregivers, friends, and services providers) are subjected to stigmatization from the public (Corrigan, Watson, & Miller, 2006; Mak & Cheung, 2008; Shang, Fisher, & Xie, 2011). Stigma perceived by the people associated with a stigmatized person is called courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1963) or associative stigma (Mehta & Farina, 1988). PWDs and their families face pressures caused by limited social support and inadequacy of the healthcare system, which can result in further problems and vulnerability, such as increased financial burden, tense family relations, lower social status, and social isolation.

The coping strategy one chooses to deal with disability influences coping, adaptation, and life satisfaction (Shubert, 2013). Living with a major disability does not necessarily result in a lower level of life satisfaction if the person with disability has adequate social support and feels in control of their life (Schulz & Decker, 1985). Besides support from family, friends, and

society, companion animals can also be a source of support and bring positive changes to PWDs' lives. The next section will discuss previous studies on the human-animal bond.

2.2 The Human-Animal Bond

Humans connect with animals in a variety of ways. Human-animal studies investigate the interactions and relationships between humans and animals. This section discusses the development of human-animal studies, summarized from previous studies in Western countries and in China, including the benefits and drawbacks of living with companion animals.

2.2.1 Defining the Human-Animal Bond

According to American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the human-animal bond involves diverse types of “interchange between humans and animals at an individual or cultural level” (AVMA, 2022). The human-animal bond is more specifically defined as “a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors considered essential to the health and well-being of both. The bond includes, but is not limited to the emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, animals, and the environment” (AVMA, 2022, para.2). This definition emphasizes that the human-animal bond is essential for and can positively influence both humans and animals.

Researchers conducting human-animal studies contend that animals are socially constructed and the relationship between humans and animals is dynamic (Sanders, 1999; Demello, 2012). The relationship between humans and animals can take multiple forms but, for most people, living with companion animals is the primary way to interact with animals. As discussed in the next section, the impacts of living with a companion animal have been acknowledged by scholars.

2.2.2 Development of Human-Animal Studies

Human-animal studies involve the study of human-animal relationships. In other words, a human-animal study “explores the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them” (Demello, 2012, p.4). Human-animal studies are interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary and draw on insights from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Sociology has also contributed both theoretically and methodologically to human-animal studies.

Sociology has a long history of anthropocentrism and has only recently included animals in research (Irvine, 2003). Although the relationships between human and nonhuman animals have been excluded from conventional sociological research for a long time, studies on the human-animal bond started in the 1980s and have grown steadily over the years (Flynn, 2000; Sanders, 2000; Sanders, 2003; Irvine, 2012). In 2002, the American Sociological Association officially recognized a section on Animals and Society (Irvine, 2012). Irvine (2008) summarized three main areas of sociological research on human-animal relationships: (1) connections between the exploitation of animals and other forms of oppression; (2) animal abuse and its connection to violence toward humans; and (3) human-animal interactions and the concept of self.

(1) The exploitation of animals

Research in this area suggests that speciesism, demonstrated as discrimination against or exploitation of animals, is another form of oppression (Irvine, 2007). Sexism, racism, and speciesism work together as an interlocking system of oppression. (Adams & Donovan, 1995; Niber, 2003; Torres, 2007). Similar to sexism and racism, speciesism is deeply rooted in the structure of society.

Nibert (2003) proposed a “three-pronged theory” to illustrate the interactive forces that produce ethnic stratification. These interactive forces are: (a) economic exploitation of one group by another (humans exploit animals by consuming them); (b) unequal power held by one group over another (humans hold unequal power over animals); and (c) ideological justification reinforcing the first two forces (humans take human supremacy for granted). Nibert (2003) then criticizes capitalism because it enhances the “tradition of exploiting humans and other animals to create wealth and privilege for the few” (p. 12). Nibert (2002) and Torres (2007) transcended the dualism of human rights and animal rights and focused on the social system that produces and reproduces oppression. Economic and cultural system reform can address this exploitation and oppression.

(2) Animals and violence

Previous studies in this area investigate the relationship between violence to animals and violence to humans (Nibert, 1994; Flynn, 2000; Zilney, 2007). “The link” between cruelty to animals and violence to humans has provided implications in social work and law enforcement (Demello, 2012). For instance, Flynn (2000) investigated the relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence by interviewing women in shelters. The participants revealed that their partners abused their pets as a form of emotional abuse towards the women themselves. The participants often turned to their pets for emotional support and comfort, and some of them delayed leaving a violent situation for fear that their partners would harm their pets.

Feminist research has highlighted the similarities between male domination of women and male domination of nonhuman animals (Birke, 2007), showing the overlap between sexism and speciesism. Sociological studies in this area show “how we use animals to display patriarchal power within families or bureaucratic power within the criminal justice and social

service systems” (Irvine, 2008, p. 1963). These studies can enrich our understanding of violence (Irvine, 2008).

(3) Human-animal interaction and self

This area focuses on the interactions between human and nonhuman animals. Sociological studies in this area are primarily rooted in the symbolic interactionist tradition and encourage the rethinking of the self (Irvine, 2008). Clinton Sanders (1999, 2000, 2003) provided insights with his empirical research on the interactions between dogs and companion dog owners, guide dog owners, and guide dog trainers. He found that pet owners consistently defined their pets as “persons” with whom they share lasting, intimate, and emotionally involved relationships (Sanders, 1999, 2000). The interviews with guide dog owners revealed that the relationship between the guide dogs and the owners was based on mutual trust, understanding, commitment, and communication, i.e., the same as all effective and satisfying intimate relationships among humans (Sanders, 1999).

Another example is Olga Solomon’s (2012) study of cross-species sociality. Her research on the interaction between children with autism and therapy dogs challenges the assumption about sociality that is based on language and involves mental states of intention. She concludes that sociality “is almost never about being social, but is almost always about doing something together, and becoming different in the process” (Solomon, 2012, p. 122).

The benefits of human-animal interactions have been recognized, and the advantages have been adopted in animal-assisted intervention (AAI) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT) (Sanders, 1999, 2000; Chalmers & Dell, 2015). Based on evidence that animals can influence people’s emotions and self-concepts, animals have been increasingly included in treatment programs for people with various psychosocial needs. Because animals are perceived to be

incapable of rejection and judgment, people who have been previously considered isolated from mainstream culture, including PWDs, people in hospitals and prisons, and people recovering from substance use harms, can benefit from the unique bond between humans and animals. Next, I will present the benefits of the human-animal bond demonstrated in previous studies as well as the drawbacks and challenges related to living with companion animals.

2.2.3 Advantages of Human-Animal Interactions

The bond between humans and animals plays a crucial role in people's lives. Empirical studies on the animal-human bond have identified multiple benefits of living with companion animals. The major benefits include physical, psychological and emotional, social, and spiritual benefits.

(1) Physical benefits

Animal presence influences human physical health (Friedmann, *et al.*, 1980). Previous studies have found that pet owners have a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease compared to non-owners, and also have a lower frequency of doctor visits (Zheng, Fu, & Headey, 2005; Rijken & Beek, 2011). Besides reducing the likelihood of illness, dogs have the capacity to detect the emergence of illness (Irvine, 2012; Hodgson, Darling, & Kim, 2015), and have been trained to detect cancer and alert their owners to upcoming epileptic seizures (McCulloch, *et al.*, 2006; Brown & Goldstein, 2011). People can engage with companion animals in outdoor activities, such as going for a walk or simply spending time with a companion animal outdoors. These outdoor activities can provide physical exercise and benefit the owners' health (Zimolag & Krupa, 2009; Rijken & Beek, 2011).

(2) Psychological and emotional benefits

Having a companion animal can benefit an owner's psychological health. The presence of an animal ameliorates the stresses and strains of daily life, and pet owners tend to have less intense reactions to stress (Maharaj & Haney, 2015). The "shared relationship provides the experience of closeness, warmth, and pleasure" (Sanders, 2003, p. 418), and loving and pleasant feelings can be engendered from the bond and attachment with companion animals.

Companionship is the principal motivation for companion animal ownership (Taggart, 1996; Ipsos-Reid, 2001; Zimolag & Krupa, 2009). The animal's response to the human caregiver does not depend on the latter's appearance, age, economic status, abilities, or health conditions (Sanders, 2003); therefore, relationships with companion animals are perceived to be uncritical and non-judgmental. Another study found that pet owners have a higher level of self-worth and self-esteem compared to non-owners (Fine, 2019). Living with a companion animal can provide an opportunity for the owner to be the caregiver, which leads to a fulfilling way of life (Kanat-Maymon, Wolfson, Cohen, & Roth, 2021).

This positive response can also be used in therapy, and dogs can be trained to be "co-therapists". In efforts to help the mentally impaired, improve the life of seniors, help the socialization of children, and alter the life of prisoners and persons who problematically use drugs, the results can be more positive when animals play a role in the therapy (Soave, 2000; Anna-Belle & Dell, 2015). Living with a companion animal is found to be related to reduced depressive symptoms in people with physical disabilities or health conditions (O'Haire, *et al.*, 2013; Amiot, *et al.*, 2016; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018).

(3) Social benefits

Family size tends to be smaller in modern society compared to traditional societies, which may result in more people living alone (Zhou, Zheng, & Fu, 2007). Human relationships in modern society may be difficult and unsatisfactory (Archer, 1997). Animals can act as a “social lubricant” and as “social facilitators” because they are always a focus of conversation and can generate positive attention (Sanders, 2003; Takashima & Day, 2014; Hodgson, Darling, & Kim, 2015). This positive attention increases the owner’s social interactions with other people (Sanders, 2000; Fu & Zheng, 2009). For instance, owners walking their dog often meet other dog owners and start a conversation, which extends their social networks with people having the same interests. Increased social interactions and number of friends can lead to greater community integration. More social contacts may generate a sense of belonging, which enhances people’s well-being (Carpiano, 2006).

Companion animals can help expand social networks for people with limited social networks. For example, companion animals can increase social interactions for children with autism (Smart & Smart, 2017) and facilitate increased verbal interactions in elderly people (Hodgson, Darling, & Kim, 2015). Compared to people with serious mental illness living without companion animals, pet owners with serious mental illness have a higher level of social community integration (Zimolag & Krupa, 2009). Companion animals are especially beneficial for PWDs for building social networks, because PWDs tend to have smaller, less dense, and less complex social networks compared to people without disabilities (Amiot, *et al.*, 2016).

(4) Spiritual benefits

Positive human-animal relationships also provide spiritual benefits (Levinson, 1972; Serpell, 2000). Companion animals act as a “moral link with other categories of animals, and

with the broader category of ‘nature’ of which other animals are perceived to be an integral part” (Serpell, 2000, p.109). Living with companion animals helps people appreciate the natural world and rethink the boundary between humans and animals, culture, and nature (Fox, 1981).

Companion animals also help their human companions connect with their inner selves. Levinson (1972) points out that one of the difficulties faced by humans in modern society is a growing sense of alienation. Building positive relationships with animals can help people restore a connection with something fundamental within themselves, or in other words, an “unconscious animal within” (Serpell, 2000, p.110). This is a way to restore the inner self and cope with the sense of alienation (Serpell, 2000).

In summary, previous studies have identified various benefits of pet ownership among people of different ages with different health conditions. Beyond the positive influences of the animal-human bond on humans, animals can also benefit from human-animal interactions. For example, dogs with owners who consider them as social partners had a lower level of stress (Schöberl, *et al.*, 2012). A positive human-animal bond influences the neurotransmitter level in both humans and animals, which benefits the health of both parties (Odendaal & Lehmann, 2000). Therefore, the human-animal bond is interdependent and mutually beneficial (Amiot, *et al.*, 2016).

In China, pet keeping has become popular in urban areas since the 1990s (Headey, Na, & Zheng, 2008). According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, there were 27.4 million pet dogs and 58.1 million pet cats by 2015, and the number of companion animals in China is still growing (Zhang, 2018). This rapid development provides an opportunity to investigate the human-animal bond and the influence of companion animals on people’s well-being and lives. Research in China on the animal-human bond started later than in Western countries, but there

has been growing attention paid to this field both in academia and in practice. Previous studies in China have shown that living with companion animals has positive influences on people's physical and mental health (Zhou, Zheng, & Fu, 2007; Zheng, Fu, & Headey, 2005; Fu & Zheng, 2009), and the findings are consistent with research on the benefits of the human-animal bond conducted in other countries (Janssens et al., 2020; Maharaj & Haney, 2015; McConnell et al., 2011; McConnell, Paige Lloyd, & Humphrey, 2019).

Previous studies in China also considered the bond between companion animals and different demographic groups, such as only children (Zhou, Zheng, & Fu, 2007), empty-nest parents (Zheng, Fu, & Headey, 2005; Fu & Zheng, 2009), and women living alone (Headey, Fu, & Zheng, 2008). Zhou, Zheng, & Fu (2007) found that only children living with companion animals have a lower level of loneliness and are more willing to share and take care of others compared to only children who do not live with companion animals. Empty-nest parents living with companion animals had fewer medical visits (Zheng, Fu, & Headey, 2005). Because companion animal can provide companionship and social support, empty-nest parents living with companion animals had a higher level of life satisfaction and sense of happiness than non-pet owners (Zheng, Fu, & Headey, 2005; Fu & Zheng, 2009). Li (2012) found that motivation for having pets varied among different age groups. People between 40-60 years old reported pets could relieve their stress and anxiety. For people between 20-40 years old and seniors, pets could provide companionship and a sense of fulfillment. Young people under 20 believed that pets could bring joy.

Researchers suggest that the benefits of living with companion animals are more significant for people with smaller social networks, such as PWDs (Li, 2012; Amiot, *et al.*, 2016; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018). Although efforts have been made to investigate the potential benefits of

pet ownership in the broader community and among different groups of people, research addressing companion animals among people with disabilities has been lacking in China (Li, 2012). This dissertation focuses on the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities living with a companion animal in China and explores how this unique bond influences the lives of PWDs.

2.2.4 Drawbacks of Living with Companion Animals

Previous studies have also identified several detrimental effects of living with companion animals. For instance, the financial cost of pet ownership is a challenge for people with a limited income (Putney, 2014; Amiot, *et al.*, 2016). Caring for companion animals may sometimes cause inconvenience (Chur-Hansen, Winefield, & Bechwith, 2008). Pluijm *et al.* (2006) found that having a pet could increase the risk of falls, which can be a challenge for PWDs and older adults. Also, the motivations for having a pet vary from person to person, e.g., “pets as companions to love versus pets as toys, status markers, and brands” (Beverland, Farrelly, & Lim, 2008, p. 490). The latter involves control and domination.

Drawbacks identified by previous studies in China include public health issues (e.g., zoonotic diseases), personal safety problems (e.g., animal bites, being scared by large-sized animals), environmental and public hygiene issues (e.g., animal waste disposal), abandoned and stray animals, and animal abuse (Li, 2012; Zhang, 2018). Due to inadequate relevant laws and regulations of companion animals and animal welfare in China, such problems related to companion animals have the potential to become social problems.

The problems of pet keeping cause conflicts between pet owners and non-owners (Zhang, 2018). In China, most people live in a residential complex [Xiaoqu, 小区], which means pet owners and non-owners must share public facilities, such as elevators, stairwells, and public

areas. Because people hold different attitudes toward animals, it is understandable that not everyone is comfortable around pets. Some dog owners take little responsibility for disciplining their pet for bad behaviour, do not leash their dog on walks, and do not clean up dog waste, which results in complaints from other residents and impacts the public attitudes toward companion animals (Li, 2012).

Zoonotic diseases, such as rabies and toxoplasmosis, impact the health of both people and their companion animals. For public concerns about zoonoses, researchers suggest that enhancing personal hygiene and vaccinating companion animals can protect both humans and animals against common diseases (Li, 2012). On the other hand, China witnessed the outbreak of SARS in 2003 and, more recently, COVID-19, and these highly infectious diseases have caused panic among people and impacted the well-being of companion animals as well. Although no clear scientific evidence shows that companion animals can transmit COVID-19 to humans, some owners abandoned and even killed their pets in response. Those behaviours can be problematic and reflect the power dynamic between pet owners and pets.

Besides abandoned pets, the dark sides of pet ownership, such as conspicuous consumption and unregulated pet breeding industries, also exist in China. These dark sides reflect limited concerns about animal welfare and even cruelty toward animals. Although the number of households having companion animals has been growing rapidly in the last 30 years, awareness of animal welfare still need to be improved (Carnovale et al., 2021). The role of animals in traditional culture has influenced people's attitude towards animals and pets. The traditional culture, to some extent, has been an important factor that hinders the achievement of animal welfare (Song, 2004).

This dissertation explores how the human-animal bond influences the lives of people with physical disabilities in urban China, and addresses the following research gap:

1. Although previous research has been undertaken to explore the human-animal bond in China, there is limited research. In particular, no research has been conducted on the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals and how the human-animal bond can influence the well-being of PWDs. Therefore, this research will be the first research in China to investigate the bond between PWDs and their companion animals.

2. As shown in this chapter, companion animals can be a source of support and provide multiple benefits to their human caregivers. Exploring the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities in urban China may provide a better understanding of the exclusion they experience and the support they need. Exploring PWDs' lived experiences with companion animals bolsters previous research findings that indicate non-human support is an important source of support, and the human-animal bond may be an alternative way of caring for and supporting PWDs.

3. The research findings regarding the positive influences of companion animals reflect the important role of animals in human society. By focusing on the experiences of PWDs living with companion animals and the positive changes brought by companion animals, this research may provide a better understanding of the human-animal bond and increase awareness of animal welfare.

CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Chapter 2 introduced previous studies on disability and human-animal interactions, and this chapter discusses theoretical understandings of disability and the human-animal bond. The first section of this chapter presents different theoretical models of disability. The perspective on disability has shifted from being one of individual tragedy to the result of social and environmental barriers experienced by the individual in the West. The models of understanding disability influence policies and legislation related to disability and public attitudes towards PWDs. Social exclusion experienced by PWDs in China can be better combated by a transition from the medical understanding to the social model. The second section discusses theories adopted in this dissertation to understand the experiences of people with physical disabilities. The theoretical perspectives include human needs theory, social exclusion theory, social support theory, and attachment theory. Finally, the theoretical framework for this dissertation research will be discussed. The lived experiences of people with physical disabilities in urban China and their experiences of living with companion animals are described and interpreted from the four theoretical perspectives.

3.1 From Individual Tragedy to Social Barriers: Changes of Models of Disability

The previous chapter discussed three definitions of disability based on different models of understanding disability—the medical model and the social model. Researchers have identified different theoretical models to understand disability (Oliver, 2009; Swain & French, 2000; Withers, 2012; Wong & Vega, 2020). Wong and Vega (2020) outlined the four theoretical models proposed by Withers (2012), which are (1) the charity model, (2) the eugenics model, (3) the medical model, and (4) the social model. Swain and French (2000) went beyond the social model and proposed an affirmation model that is based on a non-tragic view of disability and

celebrates positive social identities. The models of understanding disability have changed over time, and they play crucial roles in shaping policies and attitudes toward PWDs. This dissertation will mainly focus on the medical model, which views disability as an individual issue, and the social model, which views disability as a structural and social phenomenon.

3.1.1 The medical model

The medical model of disability is based on a biomedical perspective and focuses on the treatment of disability (Thomas, 2007). This model views disability as an individual issue rather than investigating the social environment in which PWDs live. Under the medical model of disability, disability is caused by impairments, and a person with a disability is treated as having a problem that needs medical intervention (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). PWDs should seek treatment and rehabilitation so they can have a more “normal” life with improved function (Oliver, 2009; Barnes, 2012).

Because the medical model emphasizes “deficits”, diagnosis, and rehabilitation, medical knowledge and practice determine disability and treatment options. PWDs are dependent on people without disabilities, and the experiences of PWDs are devalued and unacknowledged (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). Disability is perceived as a personal tragedy (Oliver, 2009), and PWDs are more likely to be treated as inferior to people without disabilities (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017).

The medical model of understanding disability is reflected in policies and practices related to disability issues (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Withers, 2012). For example, the medical model of understanding disability is still prevalent in China. One piece of evidence is the official definition of a person with disability, which addresses the loss of function and the dichotomy between normality and abnormality. Another evidence is that although the Law on the Protection

of People with Disabilities contains anti-discrimination articles, it encourages PWDs to “display an optimistic and enterprising spirit, have a sense of self-respect, self-confidence, self-strength, and self-reliance, and make contributions to the socialist construction” (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, n.d., General provisions section, para.23). However, PWDs tend to experience various forms of social exclusion which create barriers to fully participating in society.

3.1.2 The social model

In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability views disability as a social construct. This model explores social explanations of disability and suggests that PWDs are disabled and disempowered by a disabling social environment (Thomas, 2007). The social model of disability emerged from the disability social movements in the 1960s. Followed by the Civil Rights Movement and organizations of the LGBTQ community, the disability social movements called for the right of PWDs to have access to the broader society (Thomas, 2004).

The social model suggests that the exclusion and marginalization experienced by PWDs are caused by “disabling environments, barriers and cultures” (Oliver, 2009, p. 45) instead of biological differences. Based on this view, the social model of disability has three key features: (1) it distinguishes impairment from disability, where impairment is individual and private while disability is structural and public; (2) it is distinguished from the medical model, which defines disability based on individual deficits, whereas the social model defines disability as a social creation; and (3) it distinguishes disabled people from non-disabled people, where disabled people are an oppressed group while non-disabled people are often the cause of oppression (Barnes, Oliver, & Barton, 2002; Thomas, 2007; Shakespeare, 2010). Therefore, disability is a form of oppression, and social barriers and exclusions experienced by people with disabilities

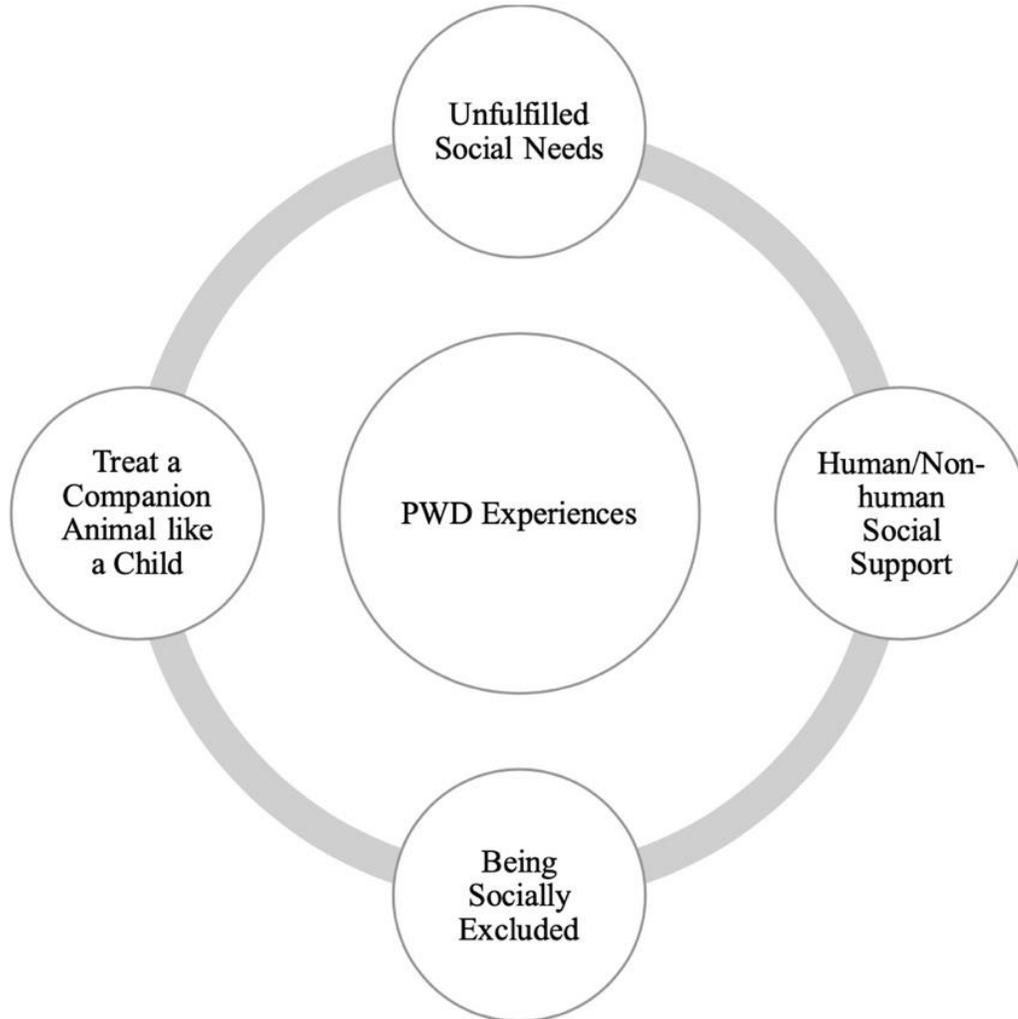
should be addressed (Thomas, 2004). Instead of pity or charity, the social model challenges discrimination, supports equality, and creates a more accessible and inclusive social environment (Kattari, et al., 2017; Thomas, 2004).

As discussed in the medical model section, there is a contradiction in the legislation and policies related to disability. The laws and regulations demonstrate an anti-discrimination principle based on the social model, but disability is defined based on the medical model. This contradiction reflects that policy reform and a shift in understanding of disability based on the social model are not well established (Zhao & Zhang, 2018). PWDs in China experience social exclusion caused by a disabling social environment. Building a more inclusive society calls for a transition from the medical model of disability to the social model of disability. There is a need to focus on the exclusion faced by PWDs, address their needs, remove barriers, and create a social atmosphere celebrating difference and diversity.

3.2 Theoretical Framework of This Research

Exploring the lived experiences of PWDs helps to reveal the barriers they face and the support they need. Human needs theory, social exclusion theory, social support theory, and attachment theory are used in this dissertation to understand the experiences of people with physical disabilities in China. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework for understanding the lived experiences of the participants. Social support theory and attachment theory are used to understand the positive influences of companion animals and the human-animal bond. The following sections will introduce and discuss each of the abovementioned theories.

Figure 1 Theoretical framework for understanding participant experiences



3.2.1 Human Needs Theory

All human societies have had to contend with various biologically and socially shaped needs (Gil, 1976). Beyond basic biological needs, humans also have social needs. For example, Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is well-known, and he suggests that social needs include the need for love and belonging, which is achieved through a sense of connection, intimacy, and friendship. The realization of these needs depends on the social environment.

Basic human needs are not a research focus of sociology, though efforts have been made towards “[the] restoration of the concept of ‘basic human needs’ to full membership in

sociological theory” (Etzioni, 1968, p. 870). Although there is no specific theory of basic human needs in sociology, some sociologists' theories imply human social needs and the impact of unfulfilled needs on people’s well-being. For example, in *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim (1933) suggests that humans are social animals by nature and rely on cooperation and interactions to survive and thrive. Most people are not willing to bear the pain brought by a sense of loneliness; therefore, people try to avoid having conflicts with or being excluded by others and follow the norms accepted by the members of the group. In *Suicide*, Durkheim (1951) emphasizes the negative relationship between suicide rates and social integration. Individuals who lack close social ties lose moral purpose and fall into isolation:

Social man necessarily presupposes a society which he expresses and serves. If this dissolves, if we no longer feel it in existence and action about and above us, whatever is social in us is deprived of all objective foundation [...] Yet this social is the essence of civilised man [...] Thus we are bereft of reasons for existence; for the only life to which we could cling no longer corresponds to anything actual; the only existence still based upon reality no longer meets our needs. (p. 213)

Sociologists studying social networks and social capital suggest a correlation between social relationships and health, with research findings showing that social capital predicts better mental and physical health (Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1986; Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Carpiano, 2006; Smith & Christakis, 2008; Song, Son, & Lin, 2010). Feelings of belonging, trust, and support can improve health for those who identify with the group (Ehsan, Klaas, Bastianen, & Spini, 2019). In this respect, connections with others, a sense of belonging, and social contribution are essential for people and are associated with enhanced well-being (Rose, 2015).

The rationale for presenting human needs theories here is to demonstrate how PWDs’ experiences (being socially excluded or being supported) may influence their well-being. People have fundamental social needs, such as autonomy, relations to others, etc. Although this

dissertation did not measure well-being and this is a research limitation, we can infer that social exclusion experienced by PWDs may impede the satisfaction of their social needs, which negatively influences their well-being. On the other hand, support from other people and companion animals may lead to better need fulfillment and enhance their well-being. The following section will present three theories discussing human needs, including the theory of human need, self-determination theory, and the theory of social production functions.

(1) Theory of human need (THN)

Theory of Human Need (THN) was developed by Doyal and Gough (1991), and they posit a hierarchical relationship between fundamental social conditions, culturally specific satisfiers, intermediate needs, and the two basic needs (health and autonomy). Satisfaction of these needs leads to avoiding serious harm and engaging in social participation.

Universal social conditions consist of the following social systems: production, reproduction, cultural transmission, and political authority. These universal social conditions allow access to a variety of specific satisfiers, which include culturally and environmentally diverse approaches to achieving at least a minimally optimal satisfaction of the intermediate needs. Doyal and Gough (1991) classified these intermediate needs into groups: (1) adequate nutritional food and water, adequate housing, non-hazardous work and physical environments, appropriate health care, security in childhood, and significant primary relationships; (2) economic security; and (3) safe birth control and child-bearing, and basic education.

These intermediate needs must be met at a minimally optimal level, and then two primary basic needs, physical health and autonomy of agency, can be addressed. Satisfaction of the two basic needs help to avoid serious harm and engage in social participation (Doyal & Gough, 1991). Autonomy of agency refers to a construct involving mental health, cognitive non-

deprivation, and relatively instructed opportunities for choice. Three factors are related to the achievement of autonomy: (1) adequate information and understanding about one's environment, which requires cultural transmission and education; (2) psychological capacity based on rationality and emotionality; and (3) opportunities for exercising autonomy. Without autonomy of agency, individuals face significantly restricted social participation. When the two basic needs are fulfilled, the individuals and communities reach the universal goal of avoidance of serious harm.

(2) Self-determination theory (SDT)

Self-determination Theory (SDT) is an influential psychological theory of human needs. SDT identifies three fundamental psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The first is to feel competent about life tasks. When the competence need is not fulfilled, negative self-evaluation can develop. The second is a need for relatedness, without which psychological pain can be produced. The third is a need for autonomous, self-regulated individual activity. Competence, relatedness, and autonomy are interdependent. The fulfillment of the three fundamental psychological needs leads to the achievement of psychological growth, human integrity, and well-being.

Previous research on the human-animal bond adopted SDT to explain the positive influences of the human-animal bond on people's well-being (Kanat-Maymon, Antebi, & Zilcha-Mano, 2016; Kanat-Maymon et al., 2021). Research findings showed that living with companion animals is related to improved basic psychological needs fulfillment in the owners, which predicts a higher level of well-being (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016, 2021).

(3) The theory of social production functions (SPF)

Finally, the Theory of Social Production Functions (SPF) describes a hierarchy of universal needs and instrumental goals/resources, where needs are on the highest level and goals and resources occupy a lower place in the hierarchy (Ormel, 2002; Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006). In this theory, needs are related to one's overall well-being and refer to a range of basic physical and social needs that should be met at least to a minimal level (Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, & Vonkorff, 1997). The better the needs are satisfied, the higher the individual's overall well-being. Needs are inherent, universal, and relevant to all people. On the other hand, goals and resources are means by which these needs can be fulfilled. For instance, having a close relationship is a means to fulfill the need for affection.

SPF theory distinguishes between two basic physical needs and three basic social needs. The two basic physical needs include comfort (i.e., avoiding harmful stimuli such as hunger and thirst) and stimulation (i.e., avoiding lack of activation) (Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006). The basic social needs are affection, behavioural confirmation, and status. Affection refers to the love one receives for being who they are, regardless of their assets (status) or actions (behavioural confirmation). Affection can be achieved by close relationships that provide the feeling of being loved, trusted, accepted, and understood. Behaviour confirmation is mainly related to actions or what one does. The need for behavioural confirmation is met by relationships that offer the feeling of doing the right thing in the eyes of relevant others and oneself, including doing good things, doing things well, being a good person, contributing to a common goal, and being part of a functional group. The third basic social need, status, is fulfilled by relationships that provide the feeling that one is being treated with respect, is independent or autonomous, has influence, realizes oneself, and is known for one's achievements, skills, or assets (Steverink & Lindenberg,

2006). When these three basic social needs are achieved, one's overall well-being is enhanced (Ormel, et al., 1997).

The three theories presented above (THN, SDT, SPF) suggest that human needs are universal, and also share some similarities when identifying basic human needs. To be more specific, for THN, significant primary relationships are one of the intermediate needs, and a prerequisite for autonomy, while SDT views relatedness as a fundamental psychological need. SPF identifies affection as one of the basic social needs that is fulfilled by close relationships. Therefore, the three theories all emphasize the central role of relationships and being connected with others.

The three theories also stress the need for autonomy. Notably, autonomy is not viewed as part of a Western, individualist notion of human independence, but as a means self-regulated participation in an interdependent process (Gough, 2004). As Gough (2004) comments, autonomy refers to “self-regulation and volition, the recognition that acts are undertaken by you, not done to you” (p. 303). PWDs, especially people with congenital disabilities, tend to have inadequate decision-making power and cannot achieve full participation in their chosen way of life (Kattari et al., 2017; Susinos, 2007). Their need for autonomy tends to be unfulfilled.

The trend in sociology has been to place less emphasis on concerns about human nature and more emphasis on the socially structured nature of social problems (Wrong, 1961). Etzioni (1968) suggests that human needs theory can address concerns about sociology's over-socialized theorization of humans and human societies. Sociologists can pay more attention to the needs for affection and recognition than to basic needs such as nourishment (Etzioni, 1968), and affection and recognition are the social needs identified by the theories of human needs mentioned above. Human needs are objective, universal, and transcultural. Although basic human needs are

universal, societies “differ in their cultural patterns, stratification structure, polity, and role specifications, [and] societies also differ in the extent to which their membership is able to satisfy their needs” (Etzioni, 1968, p. 871).

A sociological definition of fundamental social needs is the need for a perceived sense of personal significance, achieved through a perceived sense of social belonging and social contribution (Rose, 2015). Previous studies have found that social relationships have a protective influence on physical health (Cohen, 2004; Maier & Klumb, 2005) as well as on psychological and mental well-being (Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006). When social needs are fulfilled, people experience a high degree of subjective well-being, and have a strong sense of identity, belonging, interpersonal connection, and social support. When social needs are not met, their sense of personal significance is threatened, which leads to a sense of disconnection, loneliness, isolation, and emotional pain. The social withdrawal can further diminish the likelihood of having social needs met and impact the overall well-being.

Because fundamental social needs are universal, PWDs also have the needs for autonomy, affection, and recognition. For example, one of the basic principles of the CRPD is “respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons” (United Nations, 2019, p. 5). PWDs are more likely to be excluded from social activities and face barriers to education, employment, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the social needs of PWDs are not sufficiently fulfilled, which can have a negative influence on their well-being.

3.2.2 Social Exclusion Theory

The term “social exclusion” was first introduced in the 1970s by the French scholar Rene Lenoir and applied to issues such as poverty, the lower class, and vulnerable groups (Bhalla &

Lapeyre, 1997). Lenoir saw the need to foster social cohesion and improve the living conditions of people in poverty (Yu & Tao, 2017). Since the 1990s, social exclusion has become an important perspective in the study of social issues in Western academia, and the definition of social exclusion is continuously being developed (Silver, 1994). The European Commission holds that every person has a right to a basic standard of living and a right to take part in the basic economic and social institutions of society, such as education, employment, and health care. Social exclusion as a multifaceted concept can explain the disadvantages faced by individuals and their unrealized rights (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997; Yu & Tao, 2017).

Social exclusion is a structural phenomenon and refers to certain social processes that lead to “the isolation of certain groups and individuals who are marginalized by organizations and institutions by which society is organized” (Susinos, 2007, p.118). The process results in “a loss of the sense of belonging” and “the denial of certain economic, social, political, cultural and educational rights and opportunities” (Susinos, 2007, p. 118). Focusing on the relationship between the individual and society and the dynamics of the relationship (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997), social exclusion enriches the concepts of poverty, social exploitation, marginalization, and discrimination (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997). Social exclusion can be investigated by asking this question: Who is excluded by whom, in which areas, and in what ways? This question also reflects that social exclusion is a dynamic process (Yu & Tao, 2017). A lack of education, unemployment, disability, geographical isolation, self-exclusion, limited access to facilities and services, and a lack of information, etc. are all related to social exclusion (Cass, Shove, & Urry, 2005).

Social exclusion is a common experience shared by PWDs (Susinos, 2007; Yu & Tao, 2017). The social restrictions experienced by people with disabilities range “from individual

prejudice to institutional discrimination, from accessible public buildings to unusable transport system, from segregated education to excluding work arrangements” (Oliver, 1996, p. 33). When discussing barriers to social participation faced by PWDs, the concept of social exclusion is closely associated with the social model of disability (Morris, 2001; Susinos, 2007; Yu & Tao, 2017). The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) suggests that society disables people with disabilities, unnecessarily isolating and excluding them from full participation in society (UPIAS, 1976). Over the last three decades, people with disabilities in many countries have organized to challenge the oppression and exclusion experienced by PWDs (Thomas, 2007; Oliver & Barnes, 2010). Disability movements challenge the over-medicalized and individualist account of disability and emphasize barrier removal and building a more inclusive society (Hahn & Belt, 2004).

Most studies discussing social exclusion faced by PWDs in China consider the macrostructure level, e.g., policy-making and the welfare system, and less attention is paid to individual experiences (Peng, 2008; Zheng, 2008; Yu & Tao, 2017). As for individual experiences, several dimensions of social exclusion experienced by PWDs have been identified: (1) not being consulted or listened to; (2) having no friends; (3) having no contribution and being a burden; (4) feeling unsafe, being harassed and bullied; and (5) lack of decision-making power (Morris, 2001; Susinos, 2007; Yu & Tao, 2017). PWDs are more likely to have a small social network, be isolated, and have limited access to a social life (Yu & Tao, 2017). People with physical disabilities not only need to cope with restrictions caused by their physical conditions, they also face a wide range of social exclusion. This dissertation explores the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities, including experiences of being excluded and being supported, how they perceive disability, the influences of disabilities on their lives. Participants’

stories provide the insight that PWDs are unnecessarily excluded from various social activities, and unsupportive social environments are barriers to their full participation in society. Social exclusion also creates barriers to the fulfillment of PWDs' basic social needs, which impacts their general well-being negatively.

3.2.3 Social Support Theory

Social support theory suggests that one of the fundamental human desires is to have social connections with others, and there is a positive association between social support and well-being. Social support influences one's well-being both as an independent factor and as a mediating factor between stressors and well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lin, 1986), and it helps people confront challenges, pressures, and difficulties as well as enhances their ability to adapt to the environment (Caplan & Killilea, 1976).

In *Social Support, Life Events, and Depression*, Nan Lin (1986) provides a synthetic definition of social support as “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by community, social networks, and confiding partners” (p. 18). The social aspect reflects the individual's linkage to the social environment, and the definition identifies three layers of social relations (Lin, 1986). First, the outer layer includes relationships with the larger community, which provides a sense of belonging in the larger social structure. Participation in voluntary organizations, such as churches, schools, clubs, sports activities, *etc.*, reflects the extent to which an individual participates in society at large. The sense of belonging and being part of the community influences one's general well-being.

Second, social networks are a layer closer to the individual. One can have a direct or indirect relationship with other people through the social networks, which provides a sense of bonding. A bonding relation means an actual linkage of one with another, and it is more

substantial than a relationship with the larger community. Third, relationships with intimate and confiding partners are the innermost layer. This represents a binding relationship containing reciprocal and mutual exchanges and care for one another's well-being (Lin, 1986).

The social aspect emphasizes that social interactions are central to the concept of social support (Dean, 1986). Although the three layers of social relations are sources of support influencing well-being, the significance of each layer varies. The intimate and confiding relationships, which are closest to the individual, have the most significant influence on well-being compared to the other two layers.

The support aspect contains two dimensions: instrumental and expressive. The instrumental dimension refers to "the use of the relationship as a means to achieve a goal" (Lin, 1986, p. 20), such as finding a job and the provision of money or goods. The expressive dimension, or in other words, emotional support, refers to "the use of the relationships as an end as well as a means" for sharing sentiments and reaching an understanding on issues and problems (Lin, 1986, p. 20). The two dimensions reflect the two broad types of social support.

There is no consistent way to classify the types of social support. While Lin (1986) divides social support into two categories, Cobb (1976) suggests social support includes emotional support (one is cared for and loved), esteem support (one is valued and esteemed), and network support (one belongs to a network of mutual obligations); he does not include instrumental or material support in his investigation. Nan Lin (1986) combines emotional and esteem support as expressive support.

Social support helps people cope with pressure and challenges and helps enhance the well-being of the recipient (Hsu et al., 2018). Moreover, it helps people meet their basic needs, such as approval and esteem (Kaplan, et al, 1977). Social support can be investigated by asking

this question (House, 1981): who gives what to whom regarding which problems? Sources of support include spouse/partner, relatives, friends, neighbours, co-workers, service providers, caregivers, etc. Previous empirical social support research classified social support into four types: informational, tangible, emotional, and belonging (Hsu, Chen, & Ting, 2018).

Informational support provides guidance, advice, or useful information to someone. Tangible support is the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services. Emotional support offers empathy, concern, affection, love, trust, acceptance, intimacy, encouragement, or caring. Belonging support gives someone a sense of social belonging; this can be viewed as the presence of companions to engage in shared social activities. To better understand the support received by people with physical disabilities, this dissertation will adopt four types of social support. This classification can help clarify what types of support people and companion animals can provide to PWDs.

Living with companion animals can provide social support to people and fulfill the need to bond (Fine, 2019; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018). As a source of social support, companion animals offer emotional support, such as companionship and comfort. Companion animals can be confidants for the owners and be outlets for the owners' feelings and emotions during stressful times. Companion animals also provide belonging support. Research findings show that companion animals can generate social contacts and interactions, and can enhance communication and solidarity among people, which lead to the integration of community and society. Social support provided by companion animals may be more significant for people with smaller social networks and limited sources of human support. This dissertation adopted social support theory to explore both human and non-human support for people with physical disabilities, especially the perceived support of the human-animal bond.

3.2.4 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was first developed by Bowlby (1969) to explain infant-caregiver relationships. According to Bowlby, an infant forms a strong emotional bond with a primary attachment figure and has certain behaviour indicating attachment (Bowlby, 1969). Here, the term “attachment figure” refers to a caregiver who provides “a secure base, a safe haven, and proximity maintenance” (Rockett & Carr, 2014, p.416). Seeking closeness, avoiding separation, and expecting protection are all examples of attachment behaviours (Jalongo, 2015). In other words, attachment theory suggests that humans “are biologically predisposed to seek out and sustain physical contact and emotional connection to selective figures with whom they become familiar and come to rely on for psychological and physical protection” (Sable, 2013, p.94).

In Bowlby’s attachment theory, one of the key concepts is the attachment system which refers to a psychological organization within infants (Rockett & Carr, 2014). The attachment system regulates behaviours for maintaining or initiating proximity and contact with attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969). The attachment system works most actively when infants are stressed, threatened, frightened, tired, or ill, and the attachment system is “toned down” when attachment figures provide comfort (Bowlby, 1969). Children develop emotional connections with other companions as they grow into adulthood (Ainsworth, 1991), and early attachment experiences have a long-term effect and influence subsequent relationships (Bowlby, 1979). The goal of the attachment system in adulthood is influenced by cognitive factors such as the belief that communications are open, the perception that physical proximity exists if necessary, and the trust that the attachment figure is available if needed (Bowlby, 1979).

Attachment theory has been adopted to explain the human-animal bond since many pet owners experience the human-animal bond to be as emotionally close as a human attachment

(Rockett & Carr, 2014). Ainsworth (1991) suggests four attachment behaviours: (1) proximity seeking and maintenance – the attachment figure’s accessibility is expected; (2) separation distress – the absence of the attachment figure leads to distress; (3) safe haven – the attachment figure is a source of emotional support and comfort when the environment is perceived to be stressful or threatening; (4) secure base – the attachment figure is a dependable source of support. Based on the criteria, previous research on the human-animal bond provided evidence that companion animals can be an attachment figure. Companion animals provide unconditional love to their human caregivers, and the presence of the animal can comfort the owner (Larson et al., 2010; Maharaj & Haney, 2015). Research has also shown that owners experience grief and distress when they lose their pets (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Gibson, Chalmers, Ru 2022). These examples imply that human caregivers exhibit attachment behaviours toward their companion animals, such as proximity seeking and maintenance and separation distress. Owners believe their companion animals are always there for them, and they receive emotional support and comfort from companion animals when the owners are stressed (Brooks et al., 2018), reflecting attachment behaviours of a safe haven and secure base. Although not all research on the human-animal bond draws on the perspective of attachment theory, research findings demonstrate that pet owners display attachment behaviours and develop an attachment relationship with their companion animals.

Fine (2019) suggests that the attachment relationship between human caregivers and their pets fulfills people’s desire to protect and nurture attachment figures, and that the owner-pet relationship can be understood as parallel to the parent-child relationship. Owners provide care to their companion animals and are concerned about the animal’s well-being; companion animals rely on their caregivers for care and protection (Fine, 2019). In this way, mutual trust and

connection are shown in the relationship between companion animals and their owners. Research findings show that some owners treat their companion animals as kin, and caring for companion animals is related to a sense of belonging and meaning (Muraco, *et al.*, 2018). Attachment theory is applied in this dissertation to discuss how the participants understand their bond with their companion animals. Participants' stories reveal that the participants view their companion animals as their children and assume responsibility to take care of them. The human-animal bond is built on love and trust.

Multiple strategies are needed to improve the inclusion and well-being of PWDs. At the social level, anti-discrimination legislation and policies based on the social model of disability are needed to address social exclusion faced by PWDs. At the individual level, social support from different sources helps PWDs cope with disability-related negative experiences and emotions. The common ground among the human need theory, social support theory, and attachment theory is that humans desire to have social connections with others. This dissertation does not measure the well-being of PWDs directly, and this is one of the research limitations. However, based on human needs theory and social exclusion theory, it can be inferred that social exclusion experienced by PWDs and the unfulfilled social needs may impact their well-being. On the other hand, social support theory and attachment theory suggest that the attachment bond with others and support from others enhance one's well-being. Besides human support, companion animals can also be an attachment figure and be an important source of social support. Promoting the social participation of PWDs and protecting their legal rights at the social level and providing social support at the individual level can work together to improve the inclusion and well-being of PWDs. The next chapter will discuss the research methods used in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

This research explores the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities in urban China and their experiences of living with companion animals. To be more specific, this study focuses on the following research questions: (1) What are the experiences of being disabled in urban China? For example, have the participants experienced being excluded or discriminated against? What kinds of support are available for people with physical disabilities? (2) What are the experiences of participants living with companion animals with whom they have a bond? How do companion animals influence the life of PWDs? Can living with companion animals help people with disabilities cope with negative experiences? (3) What are the perceived benefits (such as receiving support or having someone to talk to) and drawbacks (such as being rejected in public places) of living with companion animals? (4) What is the relationship between participants with physical disabilities and their companion animals? In order to answer these questions, this research was based on a qualitative approach. This chapter discusses the research method used in this study, including the method of inquiry (qualitative research), research methodology chosen (phenomenological approach), and the specific method of data collection (in-depth interviews).

Most previous empirical studies on animal-human relationships have used qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation (Sanders, 1999; Flynn, 2000; Wiggett, 2006; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008; Li, 2012; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Liu, 2016; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018), and some others have adopted quantitative research methods (Refson et al., 1999; Whitmarsh, 2005; Matsunaka & Koda, 2008). Sociological studies focusing on the interactions between service dogs and people with visual impairments applied an ethnographic or phenomenological approach (Sanders, 1999; Wiggett, 2006; Wiggett-Barnard &

Steel, 2008). Considering the limited previous research on the lived experience of PWDs with companion animals and only a small group of people having this experience, this study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative methods aim to gather detailed and rich data of a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Maietta, 2002; Bryman, 2004), and the research findings may generate a better understanding of PWD's experiences in China.

This dissertation is interested in lived experiences of PWDs, the phenomenological approach is a helpful way to explore the lived experiences and understand the meaning attached to these experiences. Because phenomenological research emphasizes understanding a person's experience of the world, qualitative research methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, are often used as a research method (Wilson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are used in this dissertation for data collection.

4.1 Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological research explores the meaning of the lived experiences surrounding a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By embedding the experiences in their context and situation, a phenomenological approach aims to understand their essence. In other words, a phenomenological approach investigates what an experience means for the individual who has the experience and can provide a description of it. Based on the description of the experience, the meaning and the essence of the experience are obtained (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological approach is rooted in Husserl's philosophical perspectives (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Husserl's central concept is intentionality of consciousness (Husserl, 1931). Consciousness is directed toward an object and intentionality gives meaning to a phenomenon. Rejecting the object-subject dichotomy, Husserl suggests that the reality of an object is perceived within the context of meaning that an individual attaches to an experience

(Creswell, 2007). In this respect, a phenomenological approach requires researchers to enter the experienced world of the participants and discover the meaning of the experience.

The phenomenological approach emphasizes the suspension of presuppositions, which is called “Epoché” by Husserl (Husserl, 1931). “Epoché requires the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994, p.26). Researchers should bracket out or set aside the prejudgements and preconceptions of a specific phenomenon to obtain the essence of the phenomenon. In this way, a phenomenological approach helps people understand a phenomenon as it is lived, absent any preconceived ideas. To achieve this goal, the researcher should understand this phenomenon through the voices of the research participants. As Moustakas (1994, p. 84) explains, “evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences”. With the presentation of the essence of the phenomenon, readers can generate a feeling of “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Creswell & Maietta, 2002, p.153). Phenomenological research aims to describe rather than explain and proceeds from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions. However, some researchers contend that it is impossible to start without preconceptions or bias, and the researcher is an interested and subjective actor in the research process rather than a detached observer (Lester, 1999).

The key figures in the development of modern phenomenological research include Amedeo Giorgi, Max van Manen, and Clark Moustakas. There have also been different types of phenomenological approaches, for example, Max van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenology and Moustakas’s transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of lived experiences around a phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) argues that phenomenological research

should not simply offer a description of an experience, but it involves an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets and mediates different meanings of the experience.

The transcendental phenomenological approach aims to explain the essence of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Different from the hermeneutic approach, transcendental phenomenological research focuses less on interpretations but more on the descriptions of the experiences of the participants. This approach provides a textual description of the participants' experiences (what they have experienced) and a structural description of the experiences (how they have experienced it). The combination of the textual and structural descriptions is the essence of the experience.

This dissertation explores PWDs' experiences in China and their experiences of living with companion animals. The social environment in which PWDs and companion animals live influences their experiences. The textual description and structural description of PWDs' experiences improve the understanding of being disabled and living with companion animals in China. Therefore, the transcendental phenomenological approach underpins this dissertation. The major procedural steps for conducting a phenomenological study include (Creswell & Maietta, 2002):

(1) *Identifying a phenomenon of interest to study.* This study investigates the experiences of being disabled and PWD's experiences of living with companion animals.

(2) *Asking central research questions.* According to Moustakas's transcendental phenomenology, the researcher asks the participants two general questions: (1) What have people experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and (2) What situations have typically influenced or affected their experience of the phenomenon? (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, two questions should be answered: (1) What have PWD experienced, and what are the

experiences of living with companion animals as disabled owners? and (2) What is the context in which they experience disability and human-animal relationships?” These two general questions reveal the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities living with companion animals.

(3) *Collecting data from people who have experienced this phenomenon.* Data collection is primarily through interviews, and it is suggested that interviewing 5 to 25 individuals who have shared experiences is appropriate for a phenomenological study (Creswell and Maietta, 2002). People with physical disabilities who live with companion animals are the target participants in this study. Focusing only on people with physical disabilities living with companion animals impacted the sample size, and the small sample size is one of the research limitations of this dissertation. I conducted in-depth interviews to explore the lived experiences of being disabled and living with companion animals in urban China. Interview questions concerned negative (i.e., exclusion) and positive (i.e., support) experiences of being a physically disabled person and the benefits and drawbacks of living with companion animals.

(4) *Analyzing data.* Moustakas (1994) suggests data analysis steps begin with identifying “significant statements” or short phrases of participants that capture the meaning of the phenomenon. For example, “I was not allowed to take the National College Entrance Examination because of my disability” was coded as “limited opportunities for education”; “PWDs tend to be lonely” was coded as “a sense of loneliness”; “the dog can keep you company” was coded as “companionship”.

(5) *Reducing the significant statements to major themes.* The overlapping significant statements will be identified, and then be combined into a small number of meaning units or themes. These themes describe the experiences of individuals.

(6) *Analyzing the context of the experiences.* A phenomenological study explores not only the individuals' experience (the textural descriptions) but also the context, the setting, or the situation in which the participants experience it (the structural descriptions).

(7) *Writing a detailed analysis of the essence of the experience for the participants.*

In summary, phenomenological research elucidates patterns of meaning and gains insight from voices that may have been previously unheard. Therefore, a phenomenological approach can elicit rich descriptions of experiences from people with physical disabilities, because PWDs are often excluded from mainstream society and their voices are not heard (Lester, 1999).

4.2 Semi-structured and in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews provide rich information and significant details about personal matters, such as an individual's lived experience, values and decisions, perspectives, and so forth (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Therefore, in-depth and semi-structured interviews are used to explore the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities¹¹. There were three advantages of using interviews for this dissertation. First, individual experiences are accessible through interviewing. Weiss (1994) suggests that the interview is a virtual window on experiences:

Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. [...] We can learn, also, through interviewing, about people's interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affect their thoughts and feelings. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves. We can learn about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human condition. (Weiss, 1994, p.1)

Rich descriptions of participants' experiences can be gained by interviews, which help to understand their experiences and interpretations of disabilities and the human-animal bond.

¹¹ This research had received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Saskatchewan before it was conducted (Application ID: 1889).

Second, interviews allow the researcher to see through the eyes of the participants. As shown in the previous section, the phenomenological approach investigates the individual lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). To reach a meaningful understanding of the experiences of people with physical disabilities (e.g., exclusion, support, and their interpretations of disability) and their bond with companion animals (e.g., benefits and drawbacks), their own stories are analyzed in the study. Participants' accounts provide valuable information about the personal experiences of people with physical disabilities.

Interviews offer participants an opportunity to share their stories and say something for themselves, which may challenge the mainstream where their voices cannot be heard (Susinos, 2007). Meanwhile, the opportunity to narrate their experiences in the interviews demonstrates that people with physical disabilities are active agents who face difficulties and have expectations rather than being passive victims. Their stories not only provide meaningful information about their own experiences in urban China, but also inform other social members of the rights PWDs and the uniqueness of human-animal bond.

Third, semi-structured interviews provide both prepared guidelines and flexibility. The semi-structured form provided me with a general framework of the interview. For the interview guide, see Appendix A. With the predetermined questions and topics (Berg, 2007), I had a clear idea of what should be asked and how to deliver my questions to the participants. Compared with an unstructured interview, I could monitor the direction of the interview and reduce the likelihood of departures from the topic. Therefore, the research questions could be explored successfully. Compared to a structured interview, the less structured interview allows participants to delineate their stories and ideas. This process may produce rich information and even unexpectedly valuable descriptions.

Using interviews for data collection can also be challenging. The validity of the interview findings in this dissertation relied heavily on whether participants were willing to provide truthful answers to questions. During the interviews, I asked participants about whether they had had experiences of being excluded and whether they thought the social environment was inclusive. Because of the sensitive nature of these interviews, some participants talked only implicitly about their experiences of being excluded or discriminated. They may also have been reluctant to comment on policies related to PWDs and companion animals.

4.3 Participants and Procedure

Who. People with physical disabilities who live with companion animals are the participants for this study. As mentioned in the first chapter, there are two reasons for choosing people with physical disabilities. First, according to data from CDPF, among 85.02 million people with disabilities, there were 24.72 million people with physical disabilities in 2010 (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2012). More people live with physical disabilities (29.08%) compared with other types of disability. Second, a physical disability is more visible when people with physical disabilities enter public settings. People with physical disabilities may be more likely to be stigmatized because of the discredited attribute.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were required to be over 18 years old and hold the Disabled Person Certificate provided by the CDPF. People who were self-identified as disabled¹², people who did not hold the Disabled Person Certificate, people with other forms of disabilities, and those who were not living with a companion animal at the time of the interview

¹² As discussed in the second chapter, the Chinese government adopts a narrow definition of disability based on the medical model, and the definition distinguishes normality and abnormality. People with visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, mental and multiple disabilities who meet the disability standards can apply for the Disabled Person Certificate. Although this dissertation calls for disability policy transformation based on the social model, only PWDs holding the certificate were included in this dissertation for research convenience.

were excluded from this dissertation. Six participants with physical disabilities who were living with pets participated in this research. Table 3 shows the general information about the participants.

Table 3 General information of the participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Disability Type	Age of Onset	Companion Animal Type	Time of Living with Current Pet(s)	Had Pets before
1	Female	32	Mobility issue (Two legs were amputated)	2	One cat	4 months	Yes
2	Female	52	Mobility issue	1	One dog	1 year	Yes
3	Female	57	Mobility issue	1	One dog	11 years	Yes
4	Male	55	Mobility issue	2	Two dogs	3 years 2 years	No
5	Female	48	Mobility issue	1	Two dogs	7 years 5 years	Yes
6	Male	53	Mobility issue (One leg was amputated)	20	Fish	3 months	No

Sampling and Access. PWDs often experience social exclusion, which may result in self-stigmatization and lead to even fewer social contacts. Nonprobability samples have the benefit of accessing “sensitive or difficult-to-reach populations” (Berg, 2007, p.43); therefore, two nonprobability sampling strategies are used to select participants: purpose sampling and snowball sampling. Purpose sampling is typically used in qualitative research to select information-rich subjects. This involves the identification and selection of individuals with certain characteristics and “well-informed with a phenomenon of interest” (Etikan, Musa, Alkassim, 2016, p.2). People with physical disabilities living with companion animals are the subject of this dissertation, and they can provide rich descriptions of their experiences.

It is suggested that recruiting interview participants is difficult in the Chinese context, but one strategy is to take advantage of *guanxi*¹³ and find “key contacts” who are linked to potential participants (Torres de Oliveira & Figueira, 2018, p.124). I considered contacting staff at the local Disabled Persons Federation as my key contacts. My father used to work in a factory with employees with disabilities, and he had connections with the local Disabled Persons Federation. Therefore, I explained my research to my father, and he helped connect me with staff at the local Disabled Persons Federation. Two staff members helped me distribute the recruitment poster and find potential participants. Because the CDPF is a government-organized non-governmental organization, potential participants might be reluctant to participate in interviews due to linkage with the organization. When I was contacted by potential participants, I informed them that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the interviews without explanation or penalty of any sort.

Snowball sampling is also used to recruit potential participants. Snowball sampling is an efficient strategy for recruiting people with specific characteristics required for a study, and it is helpful for studies on sensitive topics or difficult-to-research populations (Berg, 2007). At the end of the interview with each participant, I asked them to help me find other potential participants because they might know other people with physical disabilities living with companion animals. Only one participant successfully referred another participant.

I received the ethics approval on September 1st, 2020 and I emailed my recruitment poster to two staff members of the local Disabled Persons Federation in the same month. They helped me distribute the poster and look for potential participants. In mid-October, I received an

¹³ *Guanxi* refers to an individual’s social connections or networks, and the relationships are mutually dependent or beneficial. “Once *guanxi* is established between two people, each can ask a favor of the other with the expectation that the debt incurred will be repaid sometime in the future” (Yang, 1994, p.2).

email from the first potential participant. I responded to her email explaining my research project and asking if she was eligible to participate in the interview (meeting the inclusive criteria). I also explained the procedure of informed consent and indicated that each participant's confidentiality and privacy would be protected. She was able and willing to participate in the study, and I sent her another email to make an appointment and sent her the consent letter for review. (For consent letter, see Appendix B.) At the end of October, I had an interview with her. Before the start of the interview, I expressed my gratitude to the participant and explained the consent form, and then oral consent was received from the participant. After confirming that the participant was ready, the interview began. I connected with the other five participants following the same procedure. I interviewed two participants in October, three participants in November, and one participant in December.

Where. The participants are from Xi'an city, Shaanxi province. Xi'an is a provincial capital located in Northwestern China. The population of the city was about 12.95 million as of the 2020 census (The People's Government of Shaanxi Province, 2021). There were about 578,000 PWDs in 2015, accounting for 7.16% of the city's population, and 138,800 were people with physical disabilities (China Daily, 2015). Because of COVID-19, it was difficult for me to travel internationally and conduct face-to-face interviews with participants. Therefore, the interviews with the participants were conducted remotely through Zoom Pro. In early 2020, China underwent strict lockdown and quarantine in response to COVID-19. The lockdown ended in March 2020 in Xi'an, and people's lives were getting back to 'normal'. The participants also shared that COVID-19 and the lockdown did not impact their lives. However, because of the zero-COVID policy, China took even stricter measures at the end of 2021, and the lives of PWDs

could have been significantly impacted by the continual lockdown and quarantine at this time (though it was after my interviews were completed).

To avoid being overheard or experiencing an intrusion and to protect confidentiality, I stayed in a private room in my home that was inaccessible to others during the interview. I recommended that participants do the same during the interview to ensure they would not be interrupted by others.

Length. I interviewed six participants with physical disabilities who were living with pets. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes¹⁴, and one follow-up interview was conducted with Participant 2 which lasted 20 minutes. Interviews covered three main topics: (1) experiences of being a physical disabled person, (2) experiences of living with a pet or pets, and (3) the social environment for PWDs and companion animals.

Transcription and equipment. With the approval of the participants, each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by me. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, and I translated the transcriptions to English. Phenomenological research requires rich descriptions of a person's experiences. Recordings of interviews help me overcome the limitations of my memory and provide qualified material for data analysis which requires detailed transcriptions (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). A high-quality voice recorder was used for the recordings.

Problems encountered and solutions. (1) Sensitive/emotional issues. Sensitive and emotional issues are unavoidable during interviews, especially for PWDs due to their stigmatized

¹⁴ I hoped the interview could provide the participants with an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings and make their voices heard. I did not set a time limit for the interviews, but the interview questions were covered in 60 minutes, and the participants also stated that they did not have other things to share. Therefore, 60 minutes seemed to be a natural ending point. Because I wanted to ask Participant 2 for some detailed information, I invited her to have a follow-up interview, and she agreed to participate. The follow-up interview lasted 20 minutes.

identities. Recounting the tough memories of being excluded or discriminated against can be distressing. For instance, participants mentioned they had lost opportunities for education and employment, though they worked hard and deserved to have those opportunities. One participant recalled the experience of being excluded from school activities when he was young, and he commented it was the most painful memory for him.

Strategies suggested by other researchers were helpful to soothe participants (Goodrum & Keys, 2007; Graham, Grewel, & Lewis, 2006; Roulston et al., 2003): turning to another topic, continuing with the interview with a softly spoken comment (e.g., ‘right’, ‘I see’), allowing them to set the pace of the interview (e.g., silence), helping them to take time out of the interview context (e.g., asking if there is a need to turning off the recording device, checking if they felt alright or needed a rest).

(2) No response and refusal to participate. Ten people contacted me, but four of them did not participate in the study. One participant emailed me and was willing to have the interview. However, when I tried to make an appointment and send the consent letter, I did not hear back from her. I contacted the potential participant again a few days later, but I still did not receive a reply. This was considered her refusal to participate in the interview. I then sent her another email explaining that it would not be a problem, and she has the right to participate in or withdraw from the research project for any reason, without explanation or penalty of any sort.

Another potential participant contacted me and said he had minor mobility issues caused by an accident recently, and he was living with a cat. In the email, he said his cat was very cute and brought a lot of joy to his family. However, he did not apply for the disability certificate. I explained he did not meet the inclusion criteria and could not participate in the interview.

(3) Unstable Internet connection. Because interviews were conducted through an online videoconferencing platform, unstable Internet connections influenced conversations and interactions between the participants and me. Considering the quality of the interview and the high cost of international calling, interviews were not conducted via telephone. Video freezing and choppy audio occasionally happened during online interviews. When this situation happened, I waited for a while until the Internet connection was better. Then I explained that there had been an unstable connection and let the participant repeat or clarify what they had said.

(4) Fewer participants than expected. I planned to interview up to ten participants, but the actual number of people interviewed was less than expected. There are two main reasons. First, PWDs tend to have limited opportunities to participate in social activities, which results in a smaller social network. PWDs often experience social exclusion, and social exclusion may lead to self-isolation. Participants also commented that PWDs tended to be sensitive and might not be comfortable sharing their stories with a stranger. Second, the fact that the online interviews were conducted through Zoom limited people's participation, and people with limited Internet access could not participate. To provide more contextual information, a discussion of the official documents about pets in China is added in the discussion section of Chapter 6. The official documents in this dissertation are defined as released material produced by central and local governments on pets and pets' management. The documents are all in Chinese.

The small sample size is a potential research limitation in this dissertation, but the six participants provided rich information. Lester (1999) suggests that phenomenological research aims to provide detailed descriptions of individual experiences and situations, which do not lead to direct generalization in the way that survey research does. Therefore, generalization is not the main purpose of this dissertation. This study is the first research on the bond between people

with physical disabilities and their companion animals in China, and the research findings may provide insight for future research using different research methods.

Roles and rapport. The participants and I, the researcher, have different roles. This adheres to features of qualitative interviews, which emphasize the researcher's empathy and listening skills and advocate offering space for participants to share their experiences and opinions. As Cypress (2018) suggests, the quality of the information obtained from an interview largely relies on the interviewer. Therefore, "[t]here should be a genuine interest and utmost respect in knowing about the perspectives of people who are willing to share their time, including appropriate interview skills and techniques" (Cypress, 2018, p. 305).

The participants play a role as informants because they are encouraged to talk about their experiences and perspectives (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008) and are placed in the "authorial position" (Bryman, 2004, p.198). Participants have opportunities to talk about their own experiences and their understandings of being a person with physical disability and a bond with a companion animal.

As for the researcher's role, I am not a person with disability; therefore, I am an outsider to the group studies, or in other words, "a current or former member or participant in what is being investigated" (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p.102). In-depth interviews with the participants help me to understand and gain insight from their experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Faced with the dilemma between developing connections with participants based on involvement and maintaining a professional researcher role, I tried to adopt a "fixed role between supportive friend and professional researcher" (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008, p. 41). In this way, I could engage in a more direct and emotional manner and understand their descriptions more

deeply when listening to their stories (Sandelowski, 2000) and avoid the risk of being immersed in participants' viewpoints and losing sight of position as a researcher in developing a social scientific perspective (Bryman, 2004).

The relationship between researchers and subjects in qualitative research is different from the more abstract and impersonal relationship in quantitative research (Berg, 2007), and in-depth interviews seek to develop intimacy (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Although I did not have face-to-face interviews with the participants, I made the following efforts to create rapport during email contact and interviews: (1) identifying ways in which participants know clearly about what participating in research actually entails (e.g. having a good informed consent procedure, being honest about the length of interviews) (Wiles, Vikki, Crow, & Heath, 2006), (2) avoiding words with negative meanings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2006), and (3) chatting casually with them before the interviews to ease their nervous feelings (Ritchie & Lewis 2006). Because of the limited time, establishing rapport was done quickly to encourage participants to feel relaxed to participate in the interview. The opportunity to do rapport-building in the individual in-depth interview can reduce pressures felt by the participants and make them more comfortable when sharing their stories (Cypress, 2018).

4.4 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis based on the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted, and Nvivo 12 was used for data analysis. Thematic analysis “offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.77), and it was used by previous qualitative research on the human-animal bond (Carr, Wallace, Onyewuchi, Hellyer, & Kogan, 2018; Kosteniuk & Dell, 2020) and PWDs’ mental health (Minotti, Ingram, Forber-Pratt, & Espelage, 2021). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the procedure of data analysis includes the following steps: (1) listening to the recordings and

reading through the transcriptions several times to become familiar with said the data, (2) coding the data line by line across the entire data set to generate initial codes, (3) searching for potential themes and gathering data relevant to each theme by collecting codes, (4) reviewing the themes and generating thematic maps of the analysis, (5) refining the themes until the analysis represents the data, naming and defining the themes, (6) selecting quotes and examples which support the themes and writing the research paper.

In this dissertation, both the inductive approach and deductive approach are used to identify themes. On the one hand, the analysis of the data requires a certain degree of openness in order to “enter into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed” (Beach, 1985, p.281). On the other hand, the data analysis process is also guided by the research questions of this dissertation to elicit relevant answers to the questions. When identifying themes related to support provided by companion animals, social support theory and the four types of social support guide the analysis process. The research focuses of this dissertation are threefold, and the following three chapters present the themes and sub-themes for each of the three questions. Figure 2 to Figure 4 demonstrate themes and sub-themes discussed in each of the finding chapters.

Intercoder reliability was not applied in this research, although intercoder reliability helps to improve the robustness of qualitative analysis (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). In practice, intercoder reliability is more likely to be used in content analysis but is not suggested to be applied to ground theory or exploratory research (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). This dissertation is exploratory in nature and is the first research on the experiences of people with physical disabilities living with companion animals in China. The purpose of this dissertation is not to achieve generalization or “reveal universal objective facts” (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020, p.4), but to

explore and interpret participants’ experiences in the context of urban China with the guidance of different theoretical perspectives. In this regard, “researcher reflexivity and active personal engagement with the data” can be helpful (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020, p.4). Reflexivity is a useful tool to enhance the quality and validity of research, and it requires critical reflection on the research aims, methods, process, and outcomes (Finlay, 2012). To support validity, research processes should be demonstrated and need to be transparent (Finlay, 2012). Triangulation between previous studies on PWDs and the human-animal bond was also adopted to validate the analysis.

Figure 2: What are the experiences of being a person with physical disability in urban China?

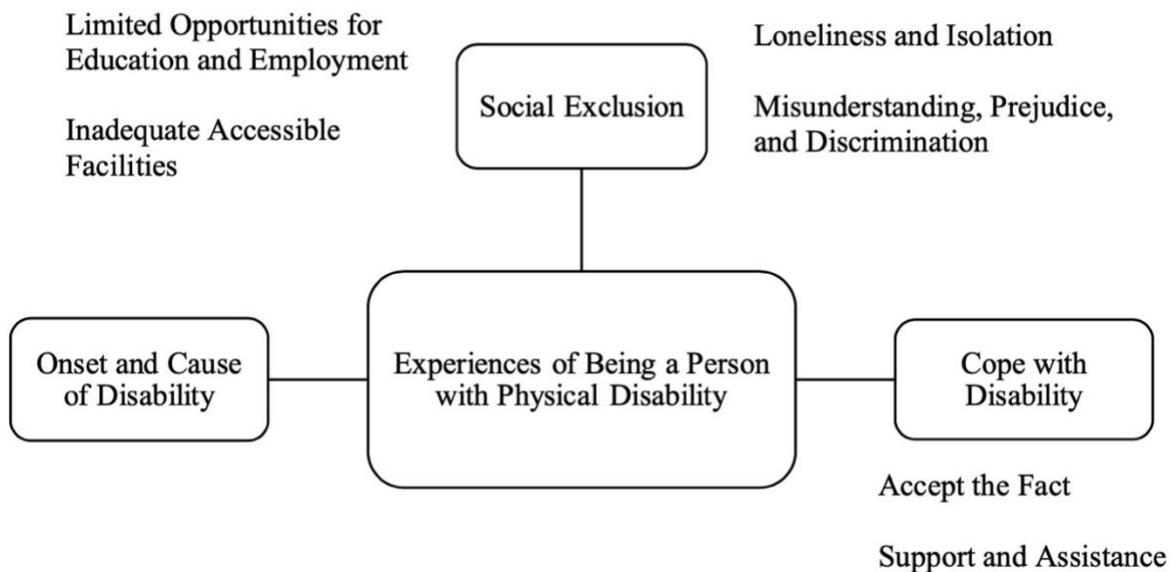


Figure 3: What are the participants' experiences of living with companion animals?

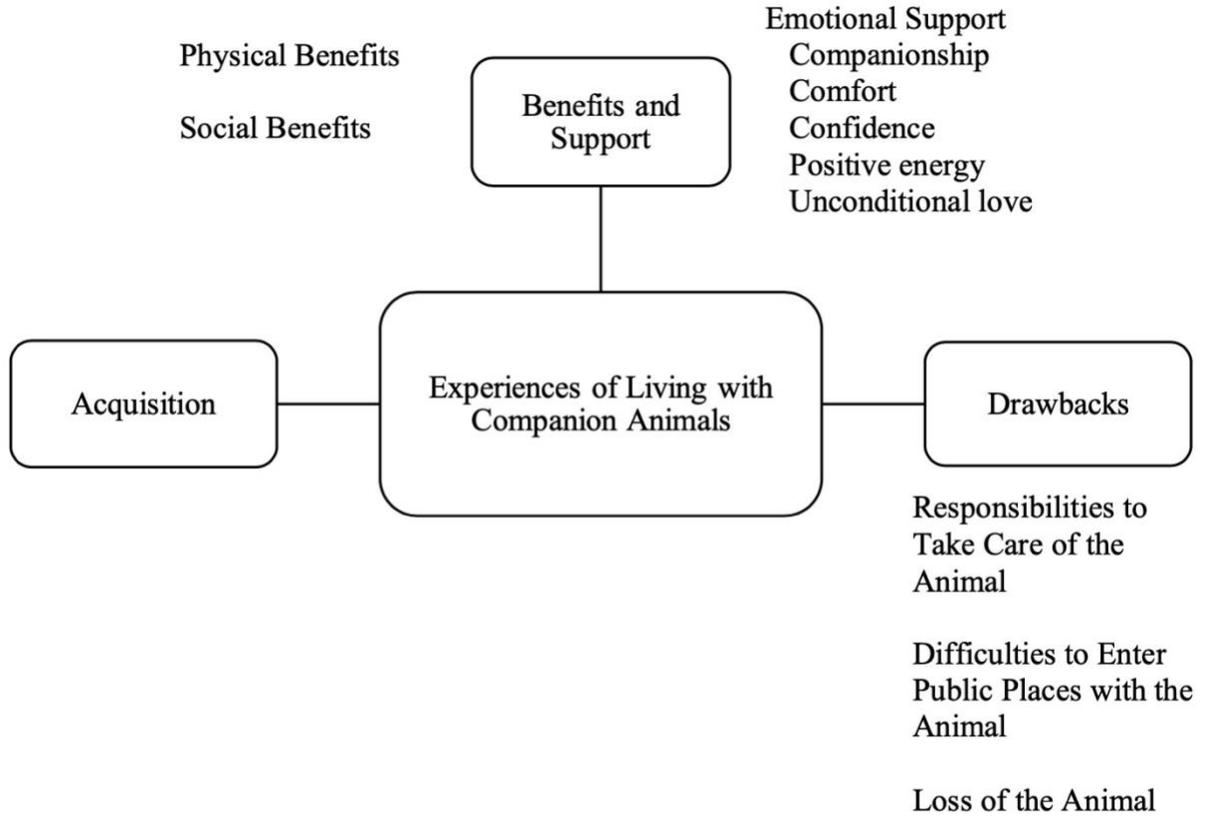
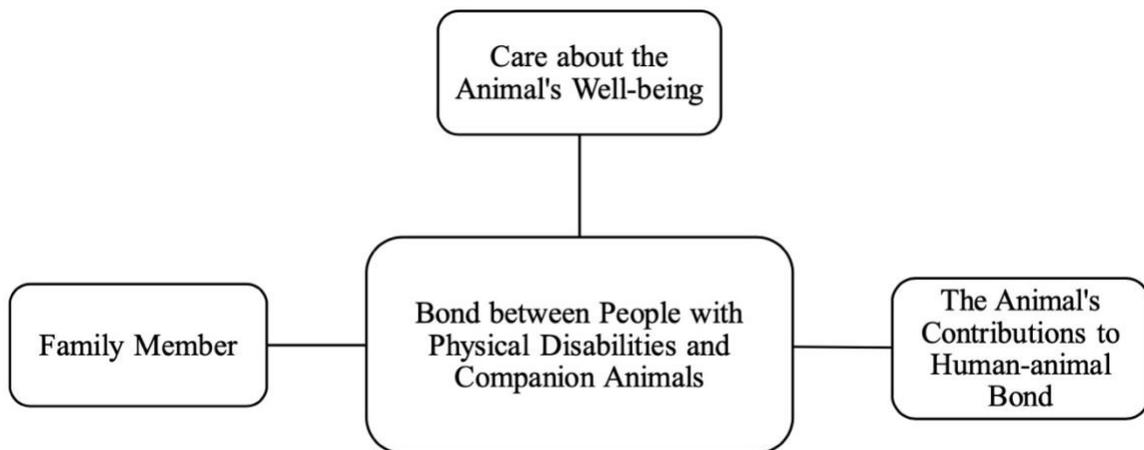


Figure 4: What is the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals?



In summary, this chapter introduced the methodology for this dissertation. A phenomenological approach was adopted to explore the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities and make their voices heard. In-depth interviews were employed for data collection and a thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The next chapters will demonstrate the main findings of the interviews.

CHAPTER 5 Lived experiences of being a person with physical disability

Chapter 5 to Chapter 7 present the main findings from the interviews. Chapter 5 explores the research question, “What are the experiences of being disabled in urban China?”. The rationale for placing this chapter at the beginning of the main findings is to demonstrate the experiences and needs of people with physical disabilities, which provides contextual background for their acquisition of a companion animal and positive influences brought by the human-animal bond.

This chapter begins by explaining the onset and cause of each participant’s physical disability. During the interview, each participant was asked about their education and employment experiences, whether they had negative experiences due to their physical disabilities, such as misunderstanding or discrimination, and their perceptions of the social environment for PWDs. Participants experienced barriers related to education, employment, built environment, and interpersonal relationships. PWDs were more likely to experience social exclusion, which led to a smaller social network and a strong sense of loneliness and isolation. The invisibility of PWDs in public places further leads to a lack of knowledge of the disabled community and misunderstanding and even discrimination against PWDs. Participants viewed their physical conditions as an objective fact that they needed to accept. Even though having physical disabilities caused challenges and difficulties and left regrets in participants’ lives, they encouraged themselves to be positive. Support from others also helped participants cope with their physical conditions and negative experiences. A discussion of the findings and a summary of this chapter will be presented at the end.

5.1 Onset and Cause of Disability

The first two interview questions asked for participants' personal stories about their disabilities, including the cause and onset of disability. All participants were with inborn or acquired lower limb disabilities. Participant 2, 3, 4, and 5 had poliomyelitis when they were young, which left them physically disabled. Participant 1 had a car accident when she was two years old and had both legs amputated. Participant 6 had a car accident when he was 20 years old and had below-the-knee amputation. Among the four participants who were diagnosed with poliomyelitis when they were young, three of them were born in the 1960s, and Participant 5 was born in the 1970s.

I had poliomyelitis. Polio was widespread between the sixties and seventies. Nowadays, after the *Tangwan* [candy pill, oral poliovirus vaccines] has been widely used, there is basically no such disease. When I was younger than one year old, I had a fever and I didn't take *Tangwan* at that time. The medication did not cure my disease, and it caused my physical disability. (Participant 2)

Participant 5 was a friend of Participant 2, and she also had mobility issues due to poliomyelitis. Her physical condition had become more severe in recent years:

I had a fever when I was about one year old, and I had polio. I have the same situation as Participant 2. I'm almost 50 years old now, and I've been like this for many years. Then in 2015, I fell and broke my already impaired leg. So now my mobility issue is heavier than before. (Participant 5)

With the increased use of oral poliovirus vaccines and improved medical conditions, the incidence of poliomyelitis started to drop in the late 1960s. Participant 5's friends expressed surprise because Participant 5 was infected by poliovirus when she was young.

Most of my disabled friends had polio before. So, this means that the polio population is huge, and there are many PWDs whose physical disabilities were caused by polio. But most of them are the same age as Participant 2. They're a few years older than me. I was born at the last stage of those years when polio was widespread. My friends – they're in their fifties and almost sixty years old – all said how come you still got this disease at the time when you were born because polio cases started to reduce and children started to take *Tangwan* at that

time. Although there were not as many polio cases as before, there was no guarantee that no one got the disease anymore. Even now, there are still polio cases. For people of that age, at the time when the country's economy and everything was underdeveloped, it was much harder for them to find a job, and they had poorer living conditions and had a lower educational level than me. (Participant 5)

Participant 1's and Participant 6's physical disabilities were caused by car accidents.

Participant 1 was injured in a car accident when she was two years old and had both legs amputated. When asked if her condition had changed over time, Participant 1 provided an affirmative answer.

Of course. I didn't seem to have a sensation when I was young. They called it, Huanzhi [phantom limb]. I didn't have that sensation when I was a kid. But now as I get older, I can feel pain in the phantom limb, and I can feel the phantom limb. It's quite uncomfortable. And also, with the changing weather, the pain will get stronger. (Participant 1)

According to participants' statements, their physical disabilities are part of their daily experiences, and their physical conditions have changed over time. The participant need to adapt to the changing physical condition and its impact on their lives.

Participant 6 was the only participant with an acquired disability. He was involved in a car accident in his twenties, which left him with a lower limb disability. Before this accident, Participant 6 had attended college and later joined the army. His life trajectory was different from the other participants, since the age people start to have a disability is crucial to the impact of disability on their lives. As Participant 4 shared, people who were disabled when they were young and those who were disabled later in their lives had very different experiences.

PWDs like me, we got polio when we were young. We have physical disabilities since we were two or three years old, and we've been in that situation since we were a kid, which is different from an acquired disability. For people with acquired disabilities, they may become disabled in their twenties due to work injury or car accident. Although they have disabilities as well, it's completely different from our disabilities in nature because we have been disabled since childhood. For us, life has always been like this. Before they [people with

acquired disabilities] had the accident, their lives must've been a lot better than ours for 20 years. They used to be people without disabilities, and they could do whatever they wanted. There are more and more discussions about PWDs and disability issues in society now. However, I think many people don't really understand PWDs. Although there are a great number of PWDs – you can see there are hundreds of PWDs in the residential complex where I live – some PWDs have acquired disability. This is different in nature and meaning. (Participant 4)

Participant 4's statement shows that people who have congenital disabilities and people who have acquired disabilities had different experiences, and what disability means to them are different as well. This reflects that disability is a complicated phenomenon. However, because of a lack of knowledge of the disability community, the “able-bodied” world does not understand that every person with disability is unique.

5.2 Social Exclusion Experienced by People with Physical Disabilities

All participants used the word “inconvenience” [Bufangbian 不方便] to describe the impact of their physical conditions. The physical disabilities they had not only resulted in physical limitations and restricted mobility but also exclusion from social activities. Being excluded from education, labour market, and interpersonal relationships was a common negative experience shared by the participants. Although the public's attitudes toward PWDs had become more positive, participants were still misunderstood or even discriminated against. The disability-related negative experiences led to negative emotions, such as a strong sense of loneliness, lower self-esteem, and a feeling of unfairness.

5.2.1 Limited opportunities for education and employment

Having a physical disability impacted participants' opportunities for education and work. PWDs faced more barriers when they pursued further education and a career compared with “able-bodied” individuals. Some participants were excluded from the postsecondary education and labour market. As shared by Participant 3:

Disability absolutely has a great impact on me. PWDs face a lot of restrictions when they go to school or work or have a romantic relationship. People without disabilities have a lot more options. But for us PWDs, we were restricted from going to university. We were not allowed to go to university at that time. We couldn't meet the criteria physically. As for employment, employers didn't want PWDs. So, we face a lot of restrictions, and we are not able to do many things. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 mentioned that people with disabilities were not allowed to participate in the National College Entrance Examination in the 1980s. The four participants born in the 1960s and 1970s all shared that they did not have the opportunity for further education after graduating from high school. In 1985, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health jointly issued the *Medical Examination Standards for Enrollment of Ordinary Colleges and Universities* [Putong gaodeng xuexiao zhaosheng tijian biao zhun, 《普通高等学校招生体检标准》]. Compared with previous medical examination standards, the new standards had been lowered. For example, individuals who had impairments in upper or lower limbs were allowed to take the National College Entrance Examination. However, there was a gap between the policy and practice. Participants were not allowed to take the examination by their high schools because they might impact the college enrollment rate. Participant 2 and Participant 5 were not able to go to university even though they had a good academic performance. With no postsecondary education or work opportunities, they had to stay at home when high school finished. It was at this time that the participants felt the difference between themselves and their “abled-bodied” classmates. The exclusion impacted their life chances, led to a sense of unfairness, and left them with painful memories.

I was not allowed to go to university because of my disability, although I could definitely get into university. When I was in junior high school, students with good grades were selected and were in the same class. I was in the class. Then we had finished all the high school courses in the first year of high school, and we started to review all the courses in the second year. Students in the class would 100 percent enter university. But my teacher told me to drop out in the

second year of high school. I asked why, and he said, “Because you can’t take the college entrance examination. We have 60 students in our class, and the 60 students must be admitted to university. Because you have a disability, if you kept being in the class and did not get into university in the end, the 100% enrollment rate could not be guaranteed. Therefore, you have to go home. Even though you can pass the examination, you can’t gain admission to the university.” In the end, I was not allowed to take the examination, and I was driven back home. I was at home when other students were in the second year of high school and started to review the courses. I had no job and could not go to school. I think that year may be the most painful time in my life. Because PWDs were not allowed to take the college entrance examination – but it has been changed now – I just went back home. That time was a turning point in my life. When I was in school, I did not feel I was different from others, as long as I had good grades. But it was difficult to find a job once I left school. So, I stayed at home for a long time. (Participant 2)

Although Participant 2 experienced social barriers to attending university, she did not give up. A few years later, she majored in Chinese literature through remote learning, and then she became an athlete. Her life completely changed as a result. She traveled around the world for competitions and was on TV. Although her life condition had been improved, she still felt unfairness. Participant 2 shared that she had been excluded from further education, and then she became famous and was praised simply because she was lucky to have the opportunity. It was just a random opportunity and did not help PWDs as a community to gain equal rights.

Participant 5 had a similar experience when she graduated from high school. Although she was confident in her abilities, she was excluded from education and employment. She related the physical disability to regret and pity.

Participant 5: I think disability leaves my life with regrets. I face restrictions in my life because I am a person with disability. It’s better now. But when I was young, being disabled definitely impacted me, including going to school. Unlike now, it does not matter anymore, and it’s okay to take the college entrance examination. But I was impacted by the disability at that time. It also impacted my employment. So, my life just could not be like what I had hoped or imagined. I faced a lot of restrictions.

Interviewer: I heard that people with disabilities were not allowed to go to universities.

Participant 5: Yes, it was. People older than me were not able to go to university. I remembered there were fewer restrictions on my age, but there were still some restrictions. Unlike now, children with disabilities can take the National College Entrance Examination as long as they are in high school. I remember we had a pre-selection at that time, and only a small proportion of students could be selected. For example, if there were about sixty students, only two or three could pass the pre-selection. I would fail the medical exam because of my physical condition. Therefore, we face a lot of restrictions. (...) Overall, my life is fine, and I don't have many negative experiences. But there were restrictions when I was in technical school. I was one of the top students when I was in technical school. But when it came to the factory recruitment, they didn't hire me just because of my physical condition. I was hurt and hit hard by this. I studied really hard at that time, and I thought they would have no excuse to refuse me if I had good grades. But things were not like what I had thought. They would not hire me just because of my physical disability. (Participant 5)

Although participants had positive visions of their ideal lives, their dreams could not come true in reality. They faced social barriers that kept them from full participation in social activities and had limited opportunities to thrive. Participant 1 was born in the 1980s, and as Participant 5 mentioned, the younger generation faced fewer restrictions for attending college, though exclusion still existed in the labour market. Participant 1 went to a technical school and learned computer science, but she had limited options when looking for a job. Participant 1 shared that employers did not believe she was capable of doing various jobs, and she could only try to find jobs the “able-bodied” world assumed suitable for PWDs:

If people with disabilities go to a job interview, employers will not hire us because we are disabled. They would think you're not capable of doing the job, and they would turn you down very quickly. In fact, I think I'm capable of doing manual work. But many people think I can only sit there and work. So, I used to take their expectations into account and looking for jobs like customer service or typing. (Participant 1)

After being rejected many times, Participant 1 started her own business. She was an Internet influencer at the time the interview was conducted, and this job provided her with a decent income and made it affordable to have a cat. As for Participant 6, he had one leg amputated in his twenties. His parents were working in a college, and they helped him find a

staff position at the college after the accident. Therefore, in contrast to the rest of the participants who had a congenital disability, Participant 6 was not excluded from postsecondary education and labour market. This also reflects different experiences of people with congenital disabilities and acquired disabilities as commented by Participant 4.

5.2.2 Inadequate accessible facilities caused restrictions when PWDs went outside the home

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, accessible facilities are crucial for PWDs to participate in society. Inadequate accessible facilities caused restrictions when PWDs entered public places, as shared by Participant 5:

When I go out, if there is no accessible facility, I will be restricted by it. If I want to go somewhere far from home, it will be challenging without accessible facilities. But in general, accessible facilities in this city have been improved. It has been much better than before. (Participant 5)

The participants commented that although there were accessible facilities in more public places than before, the design of some accessible facilities did not consider the real needs of PWDs. As Participant 1 shared,

It is okay in some public places, but it's still inaccessible for PWDs in many places. For example, although there are special toilets for PWDs in some public restrooms, the door was too narrow. My wheelchair could not get in there at all. Also, there are ramps at many places, but the ramps are either too steep or too narrow. How can I use the ramp? It is very dangerous. Another example is that there are elevators in every high-speed railway station I've been to, but in many cases, people without disabilities rush to use the elevator. (Participant 1)

On the other hand, participants agreed that PWDs could go to public places and finish tasks independently if there was better physical access.

If there are ramps in all places where there are steps, people using wheelchairs don't need other people's help. But if there are too many obstacles and there are steps everywhere – for example when I go to the bank, if there is no ramp, I can't go into the bank independently, and I need

others to help me – it is very hard. In fact, it is pretty easy to help us. They just need to build a ramp, and I don't need anyone's assistance and can do things myself. (Participant 2)

Because Xi'an was to hold the National Games [*Quanguo yundong hui* 全国运动会] in 2021, this event provided an opportunity to improve the accessibility facilities and create a more inclusive environment for PWDs.

I think accessible facilities are not adequate. The city will hold the National Games soon. I used to be an athlete and represent this province for competitions. I have been asked to be a supervisor for the barrier-free environment. I can inspect accessible facilities in public places, and I can report unqualified accessible facilities. It has been improved a lot these years, including accessible toilets. There are accessible toilets in large stations and grocery stores, and it has been better now because we conducted a throughout inspection of accessible toilets a few years ago and gave some suggestions. When it drew the attention of the government, it was pretty simple to solve the problem. We also went to different banks to inspect accessible facilities there. Now basically every major bank has a barrier-free ramp. If you urge them to improve accessible facilities, they will do it. But if there is no one speaking up for PWDs, people will think PWDs are only a minority group in society, and they won't take the initiative to care about PWDs. Someone must bring up the discussion. Because the city will hold the National Games, the provincial government takes this very seriously. The National Games for PWDs will also be held. So accessible facilities need to be improved. Therefore, the government has paid more attention to inspections of accessible facilities since the beginning of this year. We have also been asked to go to major tourist attractions. If we find something that needs improvement, we can report it and urge them to improve. Step by step, I believe it will be better. (Participant 2)

Although participants shared that the building of accessible facilities had been improved, and that PWDs were involved in the inspection and improvement of accessible facilities, the process still relied on the government and a top-down strategy.

5.2.3 PWDs tended to have a strong sense of loneliness and isolation

PWDs were more likely to face challenges related to education, work, and relationships. Social exclusion caused restrictions for them to go outside, and the participants stayed at home most of the time. Due to the limited opportunities for social activities, the participants tended to

have limited social contacts and small social networks. Participant 2 pointed out that, “many PWDs have little contact with society, and they have few opportunities to go outside.”

Participant 1 described her daily life:

My life is pretty dull and boring. These days I’ve become a little more positive and started reading. I sometimes hang out with my friends. But because it is inconvenient for me to go out, I usually just stay at home. (Participant 1)

Because of their physical conditions, participants felt it was difficult to maintain relationships with friends and colleagues. For example, Participant 6 often could not go to gatherings with his colleagues after work: “My colleagues sometimes have gatherings after work, but I rarely go with them. My colleagues feel that I am always like this, always do not participate in the activities. It is not appropriate if I don’t join them. But they can understand me because I’m disabled.” Participant 1 had the similar experience. Because of the difficulties in maintaining relationships with her friends, she became self-isolated gradually and was not willing to go out, which had negative impacts on her mental health and general well-being:

I used to call my friends and hang out with them. Gradually, I started to feel uncomfortable. I just felt that they did not have disabilities but I do, and it was inconvenient for me but why I always went to see them instead of them coming to see me. I felt I was the one who tried to maintain our friendship. I started to complain about them. And then I didn’t want to go outside and meet anybody. I just stayed at home. I was pretty upset then. But I started reading books every day, and I feel better these days. (Participant 1)

Because the participants often stayed at home and did not have many social contacts, they tended to have a strong sense of loneliness. Participant 1 lived alone, and the strong feeling of loneliness was the main reason for her to have a cat. Participant 4 also commented that PWDs were lonely because they were more likely to be excluded from society. People without disabilities did not have the experience of being excluded and might not understand the loneliness held by PWDs. As Participant 4 shared, “So we PWDs are lonely. (...) Only a

disabled person can understand another disabled person. This is a kind of loneliness I cannot explain.” Then he recalled being excluded from school activities when he was young, an experience that had become a painful memory:

When I was in primary school, what made me most uncomfortable and upset was the PE class. Every time we had PE class, I had to stay alone in the classroom while my classmates were all playing outside. They were running and jumping outside. But I could not join them. They were all gone and left me alone in the classroom. This is the most painful memory in my mind. The classroom was empty, and there was only me sitting there and having nothing to do. I feel so upset even when I think about it now. And there is another thing that made me sad. At that time, students needed to do labour work in the countryside every year. All the kids were very excited about it, but I was the only one staying at home. That made me upset. (Participant 4)

PWDs had the fundamental social needs to build connection with others and participate in social activities. Being isolated aroused negative emotions. Being alone also influenced Participant 4’s personality and led to a lower level of self-esteem: “I may have been unsociable and eccentric since I was young. And I have a feeling of inferiority. No one can help with it. Everyone wants to be strong and independent, but you can’t overcome the feeling of inferiority as you want.”

5.2.4 Misunderstanding, prejudice, and discrimination

People’s attitudes toward PWDs are further evidence of social exclusion experienced by the participants. Although participants agreed that the social environment for PWDs had been better and the public had become more friendly to PWDs, some participants still experienced misunderstanding and discrimination. For example, Participant 1 was an Internet influencer, and she often received mean comments:

There are many fans commenting they like me and want to marry me. However, there are other people who always say, ‘You are disabled, and you should feel lucky if someone likes you and wants to marry you’. So you see, some people still distinguish people into different classes. They think PWDs are in the lower class and are not as good as normal people. (Participant 1)

According to the participants, some people in society still held hierarchical views and believed PWDs belonged to a lower social class, while people without disabilities should be in an upper social class. Therefore, PWDs were looked down on and discriminated against.

Some people's words and behaviours imply that I am a disabled person. It makes me feel uncomfortable. But it is also true that I am disabled, and I can adjust myself most of the time. Some people just like to classify people into different ranks. I'm upset if they make me feel that way, especially if I care about that person. If I don't care about them, it's fine. (Participant 1)

Although the participants experienced physical limitations caused by their disabilities, they wished to be treated equally and did not want others to feel sorry for them or pity them. However, they were always seen as pitiful and deserving of sympathy, and this attitudes toward PWDs reflected the prevalence of the medical model of understanding disability in China. Participants hoped to be respected and treated equally. As commented by Participant 4:

Some people still look down on PWDs, especially those with a lower level of education. Their incomes and living conditions may be the same as PWDs, and they sometimes chat with me. But they look down on PWDs. (...) So I think society should give PWDs more care and encouragement on the mental level. The sense of inferiority is not formed because of myself. It is caused by the social environment. When you see a disabled person, you may think, "I want to help him." It is normal. But you should not help us just because you pity us. It makes us PWDs uncomfortable. To some extent, we are pitiful in terms of physical conditions or mobility restrictions, but we are not pitiful mentally and spiritually. When I was little, some people saw me and said, "He is such a good kid, but so sad he is disabled, so pitiful." And I was upset. They might have a good intention, and they did not mean to upset me. But the whole society was like this, and this idea was prevalent in society. Some people just said "pitiful", "poor boy" when they saw me. They made us PWDs feel that we are not equal to people without disabilities. It's like there is a boundary between PWDs and people without disabilities. No matter how severe his disability is, even if he is paralyzed and stays in bed, he always has his thoughts and self-esteem. So the real improvement of the life quality of PWDs means we must have a sense of confidence and self-esteem. But nowadays, some people still make a judgement that disabled people are pitiful immediately after they see a disabled person. What's wrong with disabled people? Are we useless or cannot do anything? So it needs to be improved. (Participant 4)

The understanding of disability requiring a transformation from the medical model to the social model is displayed here. As Participant 4 shares that their negative self-identity was formed due to their unsupportive social environment. Transformation requires focusing on the social barriers faced by PWDs instead of feeling sympathy towards the disability community.

5.3 Cope with disability

The participants faced restrictions caused by their physical conditions and experienced social exclusion. Participants had their own strategies to cope with their disabilities and negative emotions. They felt they needed to accept their physical conditions, and they encouraged themselves to face their disabilities positively. On the other hand, understanding and help from family, friends, and society not only provided social support to the participants but also represented a recognition of PWDs as a minority group.

5.3.1 Disability as an objective fact needed to be accepted

Participants viewed their mobility issues as an objective fact that they needed to accept, and they admitted that they were different from people without disabilities. As Participant 1 shared, “I’m different from people without disabilities because of my disability. It is a fact.” Their physical conditions were related to restrictions, social exclusion, and negative emotions, but the participants saw no point in self-pity, and they encouraged themselves to be open-minded and optimistic.

The car accident already happened to me, and I need to keep an open mind. I need to think it through and face the fact. I can't keep feeling sorry for myself just because something bad happened to me. I think we should have a positive attitude. I don't have that negative thought. I'm really optimistic. After the car accident, I knew this is it. My life would be different from people with no disabilities. So for me there is just a simple thought, I will live a good life no matter what happened. That was the thought I had back then, and it's the same thought I have now. (Participant 6)

Disability gave me an inferiority feeling. Although I have this feeling, I also need to adjust myself and don't be too negative. As long as I can use the best of my ability and as long as I live happily, it really doesn't matter. My life is going on no matter I'm happy or upset, so why should I be bothered all the time? I'd better spend a day happily. I thought it through when I was young. My leg had already been like this. Blaming would not change the situation. So I need to be open-minded. It really doesn't matter. (Participant 4)

Participant 2 saw the positive side of being physically disabled. Her physical condition made her stronger and more resilient. Participant 2's statement might be a starting point for building a positive self-identity of PWDs:

I think a coin has two sides. My disability may bring me a lot of misfortune, but if I think the other way, it may also bring me a lot of unexpected things. Maybe if it weren't for my disability, I wouldn't have such a strong will to make achievements. I want to make up for the regrets caused by my disability. I mean I want to do better than people without disabilities. Because of my disability, I think I'm not well physically. Then I must work much harder and do better, and I want to show that I can stand in the same and equal position with others. So it may give me a kind of encouragement. (Participant 2)

The participants accept the fact that they are different from people without disabilities. Although they had negative experiences and emotions, they encouraged themselves to be optimistic. The participants also believed that their disabilities made them stronger and more resilient. This lays a foundation for developing a positive identity of PWDs and building a society celebrating diversity and difference. On the other hand, coping with disability by themselves reflects that PWDs need more social support. PWDs in Chinese society still experience social exclusion and rely on their families and friends for assistance and care. Efforts should be made to address social barriers faced by PWDs and provide more social support.

5.3.2 Support and assistance helped PWDs cope with disabilities

The participants appreciated support and help from family, friends, and other people. The support not only helped the participants to solve problems but also provided them with positive emotions. When they were out, they sometimes received help from strangers. For example, when

Participant 3 was on the bus, other passengers often offered a seat to her, which brought her a warm feeling. Participant 1 also received help from strangers:

If I can't go up the step on the side of the road when I am out, I'll just ask others to help me. Sometimes, I didn't even ask for help, and people came over to help me, which was heartwarming. But I am a person with strong self-esteem and wanting to be independent. I hope I can overcome difficulties by myself most of the time. So if strangers help me without asking me, I feel a little uncomfortable. (Participant 1)

Based on Participant 1's statements, PWDs might need help sometimes, but they do not want to be treated differently or with pity. PWDs pursue independence and want to be respected and treated equally. Although assistance from others helped the participants overcome challenges, other people's sympathy and pity was not what they desired.

On the other hand, family members and friends did not treat the participants differently, and friends and families are important sources of social support. Participant 5 attributed her outgoing personality to her parents, because they were very supportive and provided her a good family environment while growing up. Participant 1 received emotional support from her friends:

My friends are so good. They don't treat me as a person with disability. I feel that my bad feelings about myself are brought by other people. My friends don't treat me as a disabled person. And when I'm with them, I feel that I'm not that different from people without disabilities and I sometimes forget I am disabled. (Participant 1)

Similar to Participant 1, Participant 6 was not treated differently by his friends, and support from friends meant a lot to Participant 6 after the car accident he had:

Participant 6: My friends don't look down on me, and they don't treat me as a disabled person. If I have difficulties, I just call my friends, and we will solve the problem together. I don't feel that I have been discriminated against. I have known my friends for many years, and they are all good people.

Interviewer: So your friends are very important to you.

Participant 6: Yes. I think they are very important. Friends can support you. It is important. (Participant 6)

Although the participants identified social barriers for PWDs and wished that the social environment for PWDs could be more inclusive, they perceived positive social changes. For example, PWDs received financial support and free transit passes from the government. Especially in recent years, the government invested more in improving accessible facilities, and public attitudes toward PWDs have become more positive. For the participants, these changes were perceptible. As shared by Participant 4:

Especially in the past five years, society has provided greater support to PWDs, whether it is the construction of accessible facilities or the provision of employment opportunities and trainings. We are grateful for the support and care. The railway stations and airports provide accessibility services, and the attendants provide great support and assistance. I felt very happy and touched when receiving the assistance. The government also provides financial support for PWDs. I receive an extra 60 Yuan a month as medical benefits. It's not really about the money. It means a lot because PWDs are recognized by society. It's much better than before. It took seven yuan for me to take the bus 20 years ago. It was a large amount of money for me at that time. But now I have the transit pass, and it is free to take the bus. So I can feel the support for people with disabilities. There is indeed big progress. (Participant 4)

As discussed in Chapter 3, people have basic social needs for a sense of self significance, belonging, and social contribution, and PWDs are no exception. The support from society and the government was meaningful for the participants not only because it helped with PWDs' daily lives but also because it reflected social and governmental recognition of the disability community. Even though PWDs were a minority group, they were an important part of society, and their rights and equal participation should be protected and their well-being should be addressed. Feeling recognized helped to achieve the social needs of the participants and was associated with positive emotions. As shared by Participant 5:

The awareness of PWDs has been increased, and the support for PWDs has been improved. When there is no accessible facility in some places, or there are ditches or obstacles, other people will offer help. It gives me a warm feeling in my heart. And I think this is also a recognition of PWDs and support for us. (Participant 5)

The participants enjoyed the benefits of social development and were grateful for the material support they received. On the other hand, they felt that support for people with disabilities still needed to be improved and enhanced, especially to address PWDs' mental health. PWDs hoped to build connections with others and with the outside world, but social exclusion experienced by PWDs makes it difficult to achieve their needs. Participant 4 wished that the Disabled People's Federation would organize activities that provided an opportunity for PWDs to know others who have similar experiences:

I think it is important to address the real needs of PWDs. Now we receive material support from the Disabled Persons' Federation. For example, I receive a new wheelchair every three years. This is good. But I still think that PWDs feel empty spiritually. I really hope they can organize activities or gatherings every once in a while, so we use this opportunity to meet and communicate with other PWDs. This would be great. The material support is not enough if society really wants to care for PWDs. We also need help mentally and spiritually. (Participant 4)

5.4 Discussion

Participants answered the first set of research questions by sharing their experiences as a person with a physical disability, the social exclusion they experienced, the supports they received, and what disability meant to them. Their answers also revealed the basic needs of PWDs and the support PWDs wanted. In line with previous research findings, participants with physical disabilities faced personal barriers (e.g. physical limitations and low expectation of self.) and environmental barriers (e.g. lack of physical access, economic barriers, sociocultural and institutional inequalities, and people's attitudes) (Stewart et al., 2009; Susinos, 2007; Swain & French, 2000).

Social exclusion can be explored by asked the question: Who is excluded by whom and in what way in which field? The participants' experiences answered this question. According to the participants, PWDs often experienced multiple forms of social exclusion and had unpleasant

experiences associated with education, employment, built environment, and interactions with others. Social exclusion led to limited social contacts for PWDs, and led to negative emotions such as loneliness, a sense of inferiority. On the other hand, the participants also received support from other people and society, and the social support helped them cope with disability-related stressors.

Since the 1980s, there have been a series of positive legislative and administrative policies that protect equal rights for PWDs in China (Deng, Poon-Mcbrayer, & Farnsworth, 2001). These, along with the active advocacy of the disability community, have caused the social attitudes towards PWDs to become more positive, especially among the younger generation and people with a higher level of education (Campbell & Uren, 2011). Despite these initiatives and changes in attitude, PWDs still experience social barriers, including limited opportunities of education and employment, inadequate accessible facilities in public places, and being misunderstood and discriminated against.

Four participants who had poliomyelitis and were disabled in their childhood faced limited education opportunities. The Chinese government passed a number of pieces of legislation from the 1980s, such as the *Compulsory Education Law* in 1986; the *Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities* in 1990, and the *Regulations on Education for Persons with Disabilities* in 1994, which encouraged schools to provide education to students with disabilities, but without mandating it. Due to a lack of specific policies and legislation, the educational needs of students with disabilities have not been fully addressed in practice (Shang et al., 2011). The Chinese government also established *Suiban jiudu* (learning in regular classroom), a model for educating students with a disability in mainstream schools, but due to a lack of specialist teachers and an alternate curriculum, the special needs of children with

disabilities have not been adequately addressed and the children often drift within regular classrooms and are unsupported and disengaged from classroom activities (Deng, Poon-Mcbrayer, & Farnsworth, 2001).

Most of the participants had difficulties and barriers when they looked for a job. PWDs are more likely to be excluded from the labour market due to their health conditions, and their capability of doing various jobs is underestimated. The “able-bodied” society also has assumptions of the types of job which are suitable to PWDs. Previous research suggests that PWDs face multiple challenges whether they have a job or not. PWDs who do not have a job face challenges such as lower working skills and limited employment opportunities. Those who are employed face the challenges of low income and limited opportunities for promotion and career development (Yu & Tao, 2017). The restricted opportunities for education and employment reflect that the social environment is not fully inclusive for PWDs in China (Shang et al., 2011; Xiong et al., 2011; Yang, 2018).

When high school was finished, participants were at home all day if there was no suitable daytime activity, which result in limited social contacts and small social networks for PWDs. PWDs tend to have fewer social contacts with people without disabilities. The two groups have different experiences and have little in common to talk about, and it is difficult for PWDs to build and maintain a relationship with people without disabilities. Although PWDs can understand each other and are willing to build a connection, they do not have enough opportunities to gather together.

Lack of and inappropriately designed accessible facilities create barriers that limited the participants’ participation in social activities. According to the participants, the National Games provided an opportunity for the local government to improve the basic accessibility for PWDs

this year, which can encourage PWDs to go to public places independently. Campbell and Uren (2011) pointed out that previous events, such as the 2008 earthquake in Wenchuan, Sichuan province and the 2008 Beijing Paralympics, had a positive influence on social attitudes towards PWDs. Such events serve as significant opportunities to address the welfare of the disability community and break down the stigma attached to disability to some extent (McGivering, 2008; Hallett, 2009).

However, it should be noted that the urge to improve accessible facilities before the National Games or Paralympic Games is evidence of campaign-style enforcement. Campaign-style enforcement is “a type of policy implementation involving extraordinary mobilization of administrative resources under political sponsorship to achieve a specific policy target within a defined period of time” (Liu, Lo, Zhan, & Wang, 2015, p.85) It is usually applied when regular enforcement is not effective and urgent tasks need prompt responses (Liu et al., 2015). While campaign-style enforcement can have some short-term outcomes – for example, the government and the public pay extra attention to PWDs for a while – there is a need to understand the limitations of campaign-style enforcement. The frequent use of campaign-style enforcement reinforces the lack of the rule of law tradition and a top-down political structure (Liu et al., 2015). Addressing the full participation of PWDs and building an inclusive society require more coherent and sustainable strategies. Although China ratified the CRPD in 2008, disability policies based on principles of respect for human dignity and rights have not been thoroughly developed (Hao & Li, 2020). Policy refinement calls for understanding disability based on the social model focusing on barrier removal and empowerment rather than treating people with disabilities as passive recipients of care.

Previous research exploring the meaning of being socially excluded for PWDs concluded that “being shut out of society” means being denied equates to a denial human rights (Morris, 2001, p.178). The rights include to be part of the community, to be free from prejudice and discrimination, to communicate and interact with others, and to have choices and decision-making power in their lives. Being disabled does not necessarily result in being dependent or being unable to make a contribution. Rather, the social environment in which people with disabilities live is a crucial factor (Morris, 2001). The social model of disability emphasizing the disabling social environment may help reduce environmental barriers, create support, and improve inclusiveness for the disability community.

Social connections are related to people’s well-being (Veenhoven, 2008). Based on the need theory, social participation is rewarding in itself because it allows contacts with other people and fosters a sense of being part of society and having control. Social participation creates social capital that can provide support and positively influence one’s well-being.

Notably, disability is a complex phenomenon. Age of onset, type of disability, severity, presence of multiple disabilities, visibility of disability, and the progressive or episodic nature of the conditions influence the experiences of disabled individuals (Kattari et al., 2017; Stewart et al., 2009; Zapata, 2020). Previous research on the transition to adulthood for youth with physical disabilities suggests that youth who had congenital disabilities experience more challenges in their transition experiences compared with their peers who had acquired disabilities in their teenage years (Stewart et al., 2009). The difficulties include environmental barriers and limited opportunities for youth with congenital disabilities to make decisions and participate in community activities and “real-life” experiences. (Stewart et al., 2009, p.11). In this research, Participant 6 was the only participant with an acquired disability, and his experiences were

different from other participants who had congenital disabilities; unlike them, he did not experience exclusion from the education system or the labour market. In line with previous research, the age of onset impacts PWDs' experiences (Stewart et al., 2009). As Participant 4 commented, every disabled person is unique, and they have different experiences. There is a need to raise public awareness of disability as being a complicated phenomenon and of PWDs having their own unique experiences.

The intersectional identities of PWDs, consisting of but not limited to factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and family background, also influence their experiences and the meaning of disability to them (Kattari et al., 2017). For example, Participant 5 and Participant 6 mentioned their parents had a higher level of education and offered great support to them, which helped them develop a more positive attitude toward disability. This is consistent with previous research finding that how parents treat disability and the disabled child influences the mental health and identity of PWDs (Yu & Tao, 2017).

Exclusion and discrimination generate negative emotions, such as loneliness, a feeling of inferiority, and a lower level of self-esteem/confidence, which have negative influences on the well-being of PWDs. Social support serves as both an independent contributor to an individual's well-being and a buffer against adverse events (Lin, 1986). PWDs are predominantly supported by their families (Campbell & Uren, 2011), and they can obtain tangible support from the government. As participants mentioned, they received tangible support, such as allowance and mobility aids and equipment from the local Disabled Persons' Federation. The local Disabled Persons' Federation also organizes training seminars for PWDs and posts employment information on its website. The government serves as a crucial source of tangible and

informational support. However, PWDs need more emotional and belonging support to help them cope with disability.

Summary

Negative (e.g. social exclusion) and positive experiences (e.g. receiving support) together comprised the experiences of the participants with physical disabilities. Despite the policies and legislation protecting the rights of PWDs and the changing attitudes toward the disability community, the participants still experienced a wide range of social exclusion that kept them from full participation in society. The participants acknowledged that disability-related exclusion had had negative impacts on their lives and generated a strong sense of loneliness. PWDs expect to be treated equally, be recognized, and able to participate in social activities. The unfulfilled social needs and social exclusion reflect the continued need to improve inclusion and the well-being of PWDs. Support from others helps PWDs cope with disability-related stressors (Yu & Tao, 2017). Besides friends, families, and society, companion animals are a possible source of support and can bring positive changes to PWDs' lives. The next chapter will present the main findings regarding the participants' experiences of living with their companion animals, including the positive influences brought by their animals and perceived drawbacks.

CHAPTER 6 Experiences of living with companion animals

This chapter shifts the focus from participants' experiences of being a person with a physical disability to their experiences of living with a companion animal as a disabled owner. Three questions are explored. First, what are the experiences of participants living with companion animals with whom they have a bond? Second, why do people with physical disabilities want to have a companion animal and do they have any expectations on living with a companion animal? Third, how do companion animals influence the life of PWDs? To be more specific, this dissertation is interested in what kinds of support and benefits companion animals can bring to their disabled owners and if there are any drawbacks of living with companion animals.

6.1 Acquisition of companion animals

During the interviews, participants were asked to explain how they acquired their companion animals, whether they had companion animals before, and why they wanted to have companion animals. Among the six participants, Participant 1, 2, 4 and 5 had companion animals at the time of the interviews. Participant 1 adopted a stray cat a few months before the interview. Participant 2 acquired her dog because its former owner did not want to keep it anymore.

I adopted this dog last year. It was in July last year. Someone posted the dog on WeChat, saying she didn't want the dog anymore. Her child went to junior high school, and she was afraid the dog would impact her child's academic performance. Then my friend saw this post, and she knew I liked dogs very much. So she sent me the dog's photo and asking me if I wanted to keep the dog. I found out he looked a lot like the dog I had before. So I asked the owner if I could have the dog and she agreed. Then I brought the dog home. From last year to this year, I've been living with this one for about one and a half years. (Participant 2)

Adopting a dog who had been relinquished was not uncommon, since Participant 4 and Participant 5 also acquired their first dog in this way. The first dog Participant 4 acquired

belonged to his sister's colleague. The colleague expected to improve her relationship with her teenage son by having a dog. Although her son liked the dog, their relationship was still tense, and they were too busy to take care of the dog. These two reasons led to relinquishment. At first, Participant 4 and his sister acquired the dog for their parents to keep them company: "My sister wanted to give this dog to my parents at first. My parents are nearly 80 years old. They could have a dog to have fun and walk with the dog." Their parents did not keep the dog due to worries of being unable to care for it, so Participant 4 adopted this dog. One year later, after Participant 4 had his first dog, he adopted a stray dog.

Participant 5 also had two dogs when the interview was conducted. She kept her two dogs for seven and five years respectively. The first dog she had was abandoned by his previous owner, and she received the second dog from her friend. During the interview, Participant 5 shared [Dog Name 1]'s sad past before she adopted him:

"When I adopted [Dog Name 1], he was already about half a year old. I heard that he used to belong to my friend's neighbour. When they were out, the neighbour's child saw someone was selling puppies on the street – [Dog Name 1] was for sale – the little child liked the puppy, and his parents bought [Dog Name 1]. After buying the dog, they left [Dog Name 1] in the underground garage and didn't care for him. I heard from my friend that they never took [Dog Name 1] out for a walk and just threw a cold steamed bun to him, that's it. So I told my daughter that [Dog Name 1] was quite pitiful, and he must have suffered a lot at that time; otherwise, how could he become so sensitive? His former owner just left him there alone all the time. The child might only like him for a few months, and then he just didn't care about the dog anymore. His parents did not have time to care for the dog. I happened to tell my friend my daughter would go to college, and I wanted to have a dog. She then took a photo of [Dog Name 1]. In the photo, his hair was messy. And my friend asked me if I wanted to adopt him. I said yes. She helped me keep [Dog Name 1] for two or three months because my daughter was about to take the National College Entrance Examination at that time. When [Dog Name 1] came to my home, his hair was all shaved off. He was so small. So, he was pretty pitiful at that time. As for [Dog Name 2], my friend's dog gave birth to puppies, and I went to her home to see the puppies. I fell in love with [Dog Name 2] immediately and brought him home. I brought him home when he was about 40 days old, and he has never left me for one day." (Participant 5)

For the remaining two participants, Participant 3 bought her dog and had been living with the dog for almost eleven years, and Participant 6 started keeping fish three months before the interview.

The participants were asked why they wanted to have a companion animal. Loving animals and longing for the companionship from the pet were the major reasons mentioned by the participants. For Participant 1 and Participant 2, their love for animals and desire to have one was why they wanted to have a companion animal.

I remembered when I was little, and my family had a cat. Then I went to school, and I did not really have a chance to have a pet. I love dogs, but I didn't have an opportunity to have one. When I finally have dogs, the one who has left the deepest impression in my memory is [Dog Name], the dog I had before. I just love dogs, including other people's dogs and stray dogs. If I see stray dogs on the street, I will feed them. (Participant 2)

Participant 1 and 2 both mentioned that although they liked animals and always wanted to have a pet, they had not had an opportunity to acquire one before. Participant 2 used to be an athlete and often needed to travel around the world, so she could not take care of a companion animal. (She had had a Dachshund years ago. Because Participant 2 needed to go abroad for a competition, she asked her friend to take care of the dog. However, her friend lost the dog. Participant 2 was very sad and did not have another dog until she retired.) Participant 1 was afraid she could not take care of a companion animal because she did not have a stable income. When she started her own business, she decided to have a cat. Their statements also reflect the responsibility of having a companion animal.

Participant 3 had a dog years ago. However, she had to send the dog away due to the dog's behavioural problems. She did not build a strong bond with that dog since she just kept it for a short time. Because her daughter liked dogs and wanted to have one, she bought a Pomeranian for her daughter, even though she and her husband did not want to have a dog at

first. However, Participant 3 developed a strong bond with her dog as time went by, and her husband also helped take care of the dog.

In fact, I didn't think about having a dog. My daughter loves dogs, and she let us have one. So we bought a dog and have been living with this dog for these years. My husband didn't like dogs at all. But since our daughter wanted to have a dog, so we got one. As long as my daughter is happy, I thought, 'okay, buy a dog.' Then we bought this dog and have kept her the whole time. (Participant 3)

As mentioned above, Participant 4's sister brought the dog home for their parents at first. After Participant 4's parents decided not to keep the dog, Participant 4 adopted the dog. In addition, Participant 4 was convinced by his daughter that the dog could provide companionship and be a reason to go outside and have some exercise:

My daughter told me, 'Dad, you have a disability in your legs, and you can have a dog. If there is no one at home, the dog will keep you company. You can also go outside and take a walk with the dog'. I then thought having a dog was good. Because of my physical conditions, I often stay at home. So I said yes and brought the dog home. (Participant 4)

As shown in the previous section about participants experiences of living with physical disabilities, PWDs tend to have limited opportunities to participate in social activities, and often experience social isolation and have smaller social networks. Because PWDs do not have many opportunities to go outside, they often stay at home. This influences their physical and mental health negatively. Participant 4 expected living with a dog could bring positive changes to his life. As we can see in the following part of this chapter, he developed a deep bond with his two dogs and the dogs provided multiple benefits and support to him.

Participant 4 was not the only participant hoping to receive companionship from a pet. Companionship was a major benefit brought by companion animals, and this point will be discussed later. When asking if she had any expectations about living with her cat, Participant 1

said “No, not really. Just because I like animals.” Yet, when talking about how she adopted the stray cat, she explained:

It was about three or four months ago, my friends found a stray cat. They brought the cat home and knew I used to have a cat, but I gave my previous cat away for some reason. I missed my cat. I’ve been living alone and I wanted to have a cat again. I couldn’t help it and adopted the cat. (Participant 1)

Life events, such as ageing, retirement, and a child going to college provided an opportunity for Participant 5 to acquire her first dog and develop a bond with him. Her dog became a source of companionship and support.

My daughter went to college in 2013. She then told me, ‘you don’t have work to do, and you’re in poor health. Now I’m going to another city for school, and I cannot be at home. Plus, my dad is busy all day. Why don’t you have a puppy to be a company with you.’ I said, that’s fine, and then I have [Dog Name 1]. (Participant 5)

Other participants also mentioned they relied on their pets for companionship due to ageing, which will be discussed in more detail in the section on the benefits of living with companion animals. Participant 6 did not have a particular reason to have fish. When asking why he started to have fish, he replied:

One of my friends had a store and was selling fish tanks. He gave me one for free. Then I thought since I got a fish tank, I could not let it be empty, so I wanted to have fish. In the beginning, my friends gave me some fish as a gift. Then I had an idea to learn how to keep fish. Since I decided to have fish, I wanted to have good breeds of fish. So I gave back some of the fish to my friends and started to keep the fish I have now. (Participant 6)

Although Participant 6 did not have a particular reason for having fish, he decided to learn how to raise them. The learning process required the investment of time, effort, and money. As Participant 6 said, “If you choose to have a pet, you must take good care of it.” In this way, keeping fish is related to a greater sense of purpose for Participant 6.

From the participants' statements, they hoped to have companionship from the animals. Having companion animals lived up to the participants' expectations. Besides companionship, companion animals provided multiple positive influences and support to the participants. Next, I will discuss participants' perceived benefits of and support from living with companion animals.

6.2 Benefits of living with companion animals

This section presents the benefits and positive influences of living with companion animals based on the interviews. Companion animals encouraged the participants to do more physical exercises, which benefits PWDs' physical health. Companion animals provided emotional support to their human caregivers, including companionship, unconditional love, comfort, and increased self-esteem and self-confidence. Finally, companion animals served as a social lubricant, leading to more social interactions and contacts, which provided support and a sense of belonging.

6.2.1 Companion animals provided physical benefits

Companion animals, particularly dogs, provided a reason for the participants to go outside and increased their motivation to have physical exercise. Increased exercise benefits the physical health of the participants. Participant 2 and her husband both had physical disabilities, and having a dog encouraged both of them to go outside the residential building and have more physical exercise.

For people with severe physical disabilities like my husband – he needs to use a wheelchair, but I don't use it very often – he exercises less. He didn't like the dog very much at first. As time went by, he felt the dog was cute. And then every day he comes back home from work, he'll think if he needs to take the dog out for a walk. In fact, people in wheelchairs are restricted in terms of mobility, exercise, and activities. But with a dog, I think he can have some exercise while walking the dog. My husband once told me, 'I can go out three or four times a day now. If there weren't the dog, I would not need to go downstairs.' I then said, 'Yes, when you're out, you can enjoy the sunshine, and you can walk a little or even just push the hand rims of the wheelchair. You can exercise your back and

move your muscles and bones, right? It is a way to exercise and work out. If you didn't go downstairs four times a day, you would just stay at home.' We live on the 19th floor. I said, 'You would stay on the 19th floor. At the end of the day, you wouldn't have a chance to exercise. (Participant 2)

Participant 4 often stayed at home because of his physical disability. After acquiring his two dogs, Participant 4 got up early and took a walk with his dogs in the morning, and he also needed to take care of the dogs. It had become a new daily routine for Participant 4. He felt his life was "completely different" after acquiring the two dogs.

Before I had the two dogs, I just watched TV when I was at home, and I didn't have anything else to do. Now with the dogs, I groom the dogs, feed them, and take care of them. And I can move around and have some exercise. So I think it's good to have a dog. (Participant 4)

Participant 4 relied on his dogs to have more exercise which helped him stay healthy. He wished to be healthy and live longer, so he and his wife could live together happily and longer. This was his way to repay his wife for her care, support, and affection.

Now my only wish is to be healthy and to live longer. Why do I want to have the two little dogs? It is because I can go out and exercise more with them. Without my dogs, I would be lazy. I would stay at home instead of walking outside. After having my dogs, I need to walk them once in the morning and once in the afternoon. I got a good workout this way, and this is good for my health. With more exercise, I could live longer, and my wife can enjoy a happy life with me. It's a simple wish, but that's what I think in my heart. (Participant 4)

Taking care of the companion animals provides a reason for the participants to have more physical exercise. It can be more beneficial for PWDs' health since PWDs often stay at home and do not have opportunities for exercise. The participants were satisfied with living with companion animals. As we can see from the next section, having companion animals provides not only physical benefits but also unconditional love, companionship, comfort, positive feelings, and other emotional support.

6.2.2 Companion animals provided emotional support

(1) Companionship and comfort

People with disabilities have limited opportunities to go outside and participate in social activities. As Participant 4 commented, “PWDs tend to be lonely.” The presence of companion animals provided constant companionship and comfort, and they could be someone the participants could talk to. As Participant 2 shared:

Because many PWDs have little contact with society, and they have few opportunities to go outside. So I think if there is a dog to keep you company, you can have someone to talk to. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 had many hobbies. Even if she needed to stay at home for a long time, she would have different things to do. Although she had the same daily routine, she felt different in the presence of her dog:

I think I will do the same things if I stay at home alone. I would write, draw, or whatever. [...] But when there is a dog with me, I think it is different. The presence of my dog gives me a sense of fullness. (Participant 2)

The companionship provided by companion animals was more significant when participants experienced life events, such as ageing and retirement. As mentioned above, Participant 5’s daughter went to college, and it was then that she decided to acquire a dog for companionship. For Participant 3, her dog provided companionship to her and her husband. Although her husband did not like the dog at first, as time went by, he was willing to take care of the dog and developed a bond with the dog. As their child moved out, they liked talking with the dog and relied on the dog for companionship and comfort. When asked about the perceived benefits of living with a companion animal, the first benefit Participant 1 mentioned was comfort. She said, “I feel very lonely when I’m alone. I am comforted when I hug or pat my cat.” Then she explained what her cat meant to her:

I think my cat is a comfort for my heart, a comfort for my soul. When I have negative emotions or feel I really need love sometimes, I just want to hug him tightly. I feel very contented when I hug him. (Participant 1)

Companionship of pets comforted the participants, which helped them to cope with loneliness and disability-related negative experiences.

(2) Increased sense of confidence and self-esteem

When participants walked on the street with their companion animals, other people often showed affection for the animal. (This is also a social benefit and provides belonging support to PWDs, which will be discussed in the social benefits of companion animals' section.) When receiving compliments from passers-by, participants were proud of their companion animals, which increased confidence and self-esteem.

Sometimes, people stop and play with my dogs when we walk on the street or just watch them. I feel so satisfied and proud. I feel that my confidence has increased. (Participant 5)

(3) Positive energy, joy, fun, and happiness

The four dog owners and one cat owner stated that their companion animals brought joy and happiness to their lives. Participant 1 lived by herself, and she felt lonely sometimes. Her cat brought joy and fun to her life, "I play with him, and it makes my life more fun." With the companionship provided by the companion animal, participants could cope with loneliness and have more positive energy. As shared by Participant 2:

I think having a dog can make you have a more outgoing personality. [...] When I talk to my dog sometimes or nag him a little, I feel happy. And sometimes, if I drive out, I'll let him sit on the passenger seat. I'll take photos every time I go out. And other people will say, 'You went out with your co-driver again.' I just feel that it's boring if I drive out by myself. If I bring my dog with me, I just think the happiness doubles. When I see a safe and beautiful place, I'll stop and take a walk with him. I feel really happy. (Participant 2)

Companion animals not only made the participants feel more positive, they also brought fun and joy to their families. As shared by Participant 5: “My dogs have been staying with me these years and given me a lot of joy and fun. They have brought a lot of happiness to our family, to other family members.” The companion animal became an important member of the family, and both the participants and other family members developed a deep bond with it.

(4) Companion animals provided unconditional love

Companion animals are non-judgemental and provide unconditional love to the participants. Participants felt loved by their companion animals, which provided emotional support to them. The relationship between humans and companion animals was a unique and enduring bond that was different from interpersonal relationships. When describing human-human relationships, participants used the words “estrangement”, “concerns”, “worry”, and “being guarded”. On the other hand, participants felt more relaxed and did not feel concerned or guarded when interacting with their companion animals. The non-judgemental and unconditional love provided by companion animals was a major difference between human-human relationships and human-animal relationships.

For interpersonal interactions, it depends on the person you’re interacting with. But for pets, it doesn’t matter how you treat them. Like the cat I used to have, I felt like she always loved me no matter how I treated her. This one is not very close to me. However, the way he treats me is the same as I treat him. It’s like, I’ll always be here no matter he loves me or not, and he’ll be here no matter I love him or not. We don’t really need to be very close, but we both know that we will be here with each other and will never leave each other. He will not abandon me, and I will definitely not abandon him. There is a basic trust between us. He nuzzles me when he wants. (Participant 1)

Participant 1 described the trust between her and her cat. The human-animal bond was built on mutual trust, and the participants and their animal companions cared for each other and would not harm each other.

I think it's easier and more relaxing to be with pets, it's like you can let your guard down. When you're with other people, you may have bad experiences sometimes, like experiencing something unfair or unpleasant. It's a little harder to get along with people than with animals. When you're with an animal, it will treat you as its whole world and it won't hurt you. And then you can let your guard down. It's completely relaxing and pleasant when you're with an animal. But if you're with people, sometimes you may wonder what they are really thinking or something like that. I feel more tired when getting along with people. (Participant 2)

Similar to Participant 2, other participants agreed that when they were with their pets, they had no concerns and had a sense of security. Because the participants and their companion animals trusted each other, they could "tell anything to the pet, and the pet doesn't mind" (Participant 3). When asking the participants if they thought animals were non-judgemental and could give them unconditional love, they answered yes:

It's like they'll love me if I feed them meat, but they'll still love me if I just feed them a leftover steamed bun. I don't need to worry whether they would have a bad opinion of me. But when you're with other people, you'll have more concerns. Like what I said before, some people are more close to you, but others are not. (Participant 5)

PWDs often perceive negative attitudes from the public, and so non-judgemental and unconditional love from companion animals can be even more significant. Companion animals are an important source of emotional support.

6.2.3 Social Benefits

PWDs were more likely to experience social exclusion and tended to have fewer social contacts. The negative experiences resulted in a sense of loneliness and isolation. The unfulfilled social needs impact the well-being of PWDs. Companion animals serve as social facilitators and increase interactions with others. Increased social interactions and contacts with others led to positive emotions and a sense of social belonging.

I sometimes go out with my cat. Some people really like cats, they just come up and want to pet my cat, and they like my cat very much. They said ‘kitten, kitten’ from afar and wanted to get attention from my cat and me. (Participant 1)

There are a lot of people who think my dog is very cute, and they will come up and pet my dog. My dog gives us the opportunity to talk with each other. (Participant 2)

Participant 6 started to keep fish three months prior to the interview. Although Participant 6 admitted that he had not yet noticed significant benefits or positive influences of having fish, he was willing to learn how to take good care of the fish online or from his friends. Keeping fish serves as a topic for him to talk about with others. This way, Participant 6 could maintain relationships with his friends and have more social contacts.

Companion animals could be ice breakers and a topic of conversation, which help the participants build a connection with strangers. For example, although Participant 5 and I did not know each other before the interview, we built a connection with each other and the interview proceeded smoothly by talking about her companion animals. During the interview, Participant 5 commented: “When you and I are talking about my dogs, I have a lot to say, and I can talk about them endlessly to you. It is the same with other people.” When asked if people took the initiative to talk with her, Participant 5 gave a positive answer:

Yes, people are coming over and chatting with me. People play with my dogs and ask me questions about them. There are older people, young people, and parents with babies. They all love my dogs. There are some people I don’t know at all – they might rent an apartment here or just moved to the community – but they like my dogs and love seeing them. So every time they see me, they say hello to me. It is the joy that my dogs have brought me, isn’t it? (Participant 5)

Companion animals also facilitated interactions between PWDs and people without disabilities. When Participant 4 talked with people with no disabilities, he often felt nervous, which was caused by long-term isolation and a sense of inferiority, as he explained. His companion animal was a topic that initiated such conversation between him and people without

disabilities. Similar to Participant 5, increased social contacts brought positive feelings to Participant 4.

When you interact with other people, for example, if you don't know each other, you hardly have a topic to start a conversation. [...] As a disabled person, although I'm willing to interact with people without disabilities, deep down in my heart, I feel inferior to them, and I don't seem to have the courage to talk with them. However, since I have my dogs, it seems that I can chat with other people easier through the dog or relying on the dog, no matter they're disabled or not. [...] It has been much better than before. This is the feeling my dogs have brought to me after living with them for this time. I think it is good in terms of interacting with others. Because in the past, when I was out and wanted to chat with someone, I always felt a little stressed, wondering if this guy was willing to talk with me. I was not very confident. But with the presence of my dogs, I can use my dogs as a conversation opener, and then we can be open and talk about many other things. (Participant 4)

Participants also mentioned their dogs were liked by their neighbours and they often received greetings from the neighbours when they and their dogs were out. As Participant 3 said, "When I walk my dog, my neighbours nod a greeting and say my dog is pretty." The neighbours would play with the dog, which often created more conversations and interactions with the owner. More interactions between the neighbours might help improve community integration.

Because we've been living in this community for a long time, the neighbours are familiar with each other. Our neighbours always tease [Dog Name 2] and say he cannot leave me for one minute. Our neighbours always play with [Dog Name 2], and they all like him because he is very small and very cute. (Participant 4)

The statements from the participants evince the socializing role performed by their companion animals. More social interactions and contacts provide a sense of belonging and help the participants fulfill their social needs and feel less excluded, which enhanced their general well-being.

In summary, companion animals enriched the lives of PWDs and provided functional, emotional, and social support. The support and positive influences brought by companion animals could help PWDs cope with disability-related negative experiences and benefit their

general well-being. When talking about social support for PWDs, human support is more likely to be considered. Research on the human-animal bond provides a different perspective, indicating that companion animals can play a supportive role. Generally, the participants were satisfied with having companion animals. Although participants agreed that living with companion animals brought positive influences to their lives, they identified some drawbacks as well. Next, we will discuss the drawbacks of having companion animals.

6.3 Drawbacks of living with companion animals

In order to explore the participants' experiences of living with companion animals, participants were asked about both the benefits of having a companion animal and the drawbacks. When asked if they faced any difficulties or challenges because of their companion animals, most participants responded they did not feel there were any difficulties at first. Then, some participants said it was difficult to travel with their companion animals, and this difficulty was related to the less pet-friendly social environment. Others mentioned that caring for their companion animals could be challenging for PWDs. Although participants identified the drawbacks, they believed that the benefits of living with a companion animal outweighed them.

6.3.1 Taking care of the animal is a massive responsibility.

Participants experienced physical restrictions caused by their physical conditions. As discussed in Chapter 5, physical restrictions are an objective fact for people with physical disabilities. Because participants viewed having a companion animal as a great responsibility, it could be challenging to take care of their companion animals by themselves. For example, Participant 1 had a more severe physical disability than the other participants. Because she was living by herself, cleaning up after her cat was difficult for her sometimes.

Cleaning up after my cat is a little difficult for me. It is challenging for me because of my disability, and I have to keep cleaning his waste. He jumped onto

my wardrobe once and pooped on it once. My bedroom had been stinking for a week, but I couldn't find where the smell came from. It really upset me. Finally, I moved the wardrobe and found cat poop under and also on the top of the wardrobe. It had been stinking for a whole week, and it really frustrated me. (Participant 1)

The four participants with dogs all had small-sized dogs. Small dogs only needed short daily walks and were easier for the physically disabled participants to take care of. Participants' family members also provided support and helped care for the dogs. In this way, caring for the pet might not be such a challenge for PWDs.

I think for me there is no difficult to have a pet. Because I have a small dog, it's not hard to bathe or feed the dog. Walking the dog is not difficult either. So I don't think it's too much trouble. (Participant 2)

Although we didn't really train the dog, she is very good. She knows where to poop and pee and doesn't make a mess. My daughter helps us bathe the dog, and we [participant 3 and her husband] rarely do that by ourselves. And for walking the dog, I walk her more often. (Participant 3)

Participant 6 had just started to keep fish, and he did not see taking care of his fish as a burden. Instead, he was willing to learn how to keep fish and care for them as if they were his children. There was trust and love between the participants and their companion animals. Participants cared about the well-being of their animals and tried to provide the best living conditions for their companion animals that they could. Only Participant 1 stated she used to have financial challenges as a result of having a companion animal. However, once Participant 1 had a stable income, it was not a problem to provide good living conditions for both herself and her cat. Although other participants mentioned the costs of having companion animals, such as veterinary visits, they did not experience financial pressure caused by their animals. All the participants had jobs or used to work before retirement, and PWDs also received allowances from the government. These provided the participants economic support (tangible support) and made it possible to have companion animals. Although the participants needed to make efforts to

care for their companion animals, they did not view having a pet as a burden. Instead, they built a deep bond with the animals and received support and positive influences from their companion animals.

6.3.2 Having difficulties entering public places with companion animals

Not being able to travel with their pets and having difficulties going to some public places with their pets was another challenge mentioned by most participants. According to the city's *Regulations of the Restriction on Dog Keeping* [Xianzhi Yangquan Tiaoli, 《限制养犬条例》], dogs are prohibited from being brought into the following areas: (1) office areas, hospitals, schools, and kindergartens; (2) cultural relics protection institutions, museums, libraries, stadiums, cultural and entertainment venues; (3) restaurants and dining places, shopping malls, and hotels; (4) buses, minibuses, urban rail transit, cabs, and waiting areas; (5) squares, parks, arterial roads in the city, and pedestrian malls; (5) and other areas where dogs are expressly prohibited (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of Xi'an city, 2021). After acquiring the companion animals, the participants could not leave home or travel for a long period of time. Participants would worry about their companion animals if no one took care of them when they were out. As Participant 1 and Participant 3 said:

It is difficult to go out with my cat. Cats are not allowed in some public places like high-speed railways and the subway. When I have to go out, I always worry about him, like how to feed him things like that, because he's alone at home. I cannot take care of him. So every time before I leave home, I'll prepare some water and food for him. Cats love a clean environment, so I have to clean up after my cat every day. Otherwise, he would mess up the room. (Participant 1)

If I have to go out for a trip for a long time, I can't leave my dog at home alone. I worry about her. Ever since we have the dog, there must be someone staying at home. It doesn't mean the whole family can't go out together. If we're out during the daytime, we must be back home at night. Sometimes, we'll take her with us if it's a short trip. (Participant 3)

As Participant 1 said, companion animals are not allowed on public transportation, such as high-speed railways. When she had to move back to her hometown from another, she had no choice but to give her previous cat away. The loss of her former cat made her feel guilty.

I think the social environment for pets is not friendly enough. Pets are not allowed in many places. The reason why I had to send my cat away was that she could not get on the high-speed railway. I could not take her with me all the time. I was in a hurry to go home, and I really didn't have other choices. (Participant 1)

Other participants also talked about not being able to take their companion animals to some public places because animals were not allowed. Participant 2 did not think taking care of her dog was difficult, as mentioned above, but found it a challenge not being able to take her dog with her to public places, such as grocery stores and hotels.

Dogs are not allowed to enter many public places. I feel quite unhappy about it. I used to travel for competitions, and I went to Switzerland and other countries. I think people in those countries treat dogs nicer, and there are fewer restrictions. Like here in this city, if you go to a convenience store, they won't let your dog in and there is no place where you can leave your dog. For example, sometimes when I go out, if I need to go somewhere and I don't want to return home halfway, I have to leave my dog in the car. It's too hot in summer, and I always worry that he will die due to the heat. Then I'm very worried when shopping, and I just want to go out of the store as quickly as possible. It's the same when I'm in a restaurant. I just cannot eat well because I always want to go outside the restaurant and check if my dog is okay. [...] So I think it is quite inconvenient. I want to travel with my dog, and we need to stay in the hotel at night. But dogs are not allowed in hotels. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 used to be an athlete, and she travelled around the world for competitions. Therefore, she was able to compare different environments for pets in China and in Western countries based on her experiences.

I don't think the social environment is as friendly as in Western countries. I think, for example, in Australia, dogs are much happier. There are regulations against cruelty to animals. I've also been to Switzerland for a competition before, and I think how they treat dogs is much better. And it's convenient to bring dogs out. But here, people's attitudes seem not very friendly. Many people still hold

prejudice against pets and think pets are related to hygiene issues and zoonoses. (Participant 2)

This difficulty brought by lack of animal-friendly locations was intensified by government control of dogs and pet-keeping in general.

There is one thing that makes me feel bad. The restrictions on dog keeping are too strict and not flexible. Dogs were caught by Chengguan [agents of the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau]. I saw that before. It was very cruel. The dog was caught by Chengguan, and its owner was crying and screaming. There is no way we can do about it. The government is strict with pet keeping and pet management. They just take dogs away and won't care if you are disabled or not. So it makes me quite uncomfortable, and I can't accept it. I think the environment for pets is better in western countries. [...] I've had both dogs certificated. But if I heard people in the residential complex said that there were people checking and catching dogs, we would stay at home and would not go out. I feel so bad for my dogs when we have to stay at home because they can't play outside. They must be so uncomfortable. To tell you the truth, it bothers me less for not having a meal than not taking them for a walk. So once I have a dog, I become much more fragile emotionally. Therefore, there are advantages and disadvantages of having a pet. (Participant 4)

So far, there is no law or policy regarding cruelty to animals in China. The existing regulations regarding dog ownership rarely address animal welfare, instead mainly focusing on protecting the health and safety of people. Participant 4 then explained how the regulations on dog keeping affected him. Because the city enforced responsible dog ownership measures such as walking dogs on leash, PWDs might have difficulties walking dogs alone.

You can have pets, and you can have the certificate for your dog, and you must use a leash when going out. However, as a person with mobility issues, I can't use a leash. If I have my dogs on leash, how can I walk? If my dogs start running, I'll fall. So when it comes to a difficult time – when I say difficult I mean there're people checking dog lease usage – I have no choice but to let my wife walk the dogs. I'm not able to do so. So for me, people with disabilities may not be capable of having a dog. They say you need to have dog certificates, and be responsible for your dogs and use a dog leash. They're right to say that, right? But for us people with disabilities, it is difficult. I don't have other solutions. (Participant 4)

As shared by the participants, they received physical benefits and emotional and social support from their companion animals and developed a strong emotional bond with them. Companion animals play a supportive role in the lives of PWDs. There is a need to provide extra help and support for PWDs who have companion animals or want to have one in order to reduce the difficulties of pet ownership.

6.3.3 Loss of companion animals

Pet loss was another challenging aspect of having companion animals. The loss of companion animals is similar to the loss of a human companion and generates grief and other emotional reactions. There are different reasons for the loss of companion animals. The most obvious loss is through death. However, a companion animal can be lost without dying. For example, a companion animal may be relinquished because the owner is moving or cannot afford to keep the animal, or because of the animal's behavioural problems. Another possible cause of the loss of animals is that they go missing, for example getting lost on a walk, escaping from the house, being stolen, or being lost by a person trusted to look after the animal temporarily. Participant 1, 2, and 5 experienced the loss of their previous companion animals due to different reasons and experienced grief responses such as sadness, regret, and guilt. Participant 2 shared stories about the two dogs she had before and her reactions after the loss:

Because of my job, I was not allowed to take my dog to the training centre. I had a dog at home at that time. I had to travel often for competitions, so I sent the dog to my friend's home, and she could take care of him. Once, I went to Korea for a competition, when I came back, I found out that my dog was lost. I was very sad after the loss, and I didn't have another dog for a long time. I was upset for a long time after I lost my dog. It was a dachshund, a small dog too. Because of my disability, I am not able to have a big-sized dog. I kept looking for it everywhere. Once, I saw a dog that resembled my dog. I just called his name, but it was not him. I kept looking for the dog for a really long time, and then I felt less upset slowly and gradually. But I didn't have another dog until 2009. I was retired in 2008, and I wanted to have a dog after my retirement. I bought a Chihuahua in 2009 because Chihuahua is small and has short hair. I kept him for

11 years until he passed away in April last year. The veterinarian said there was something in his lungs. The one who lived with me the longest time was the Chihuahua. I didn't keep the Dachshund for long. It was about three or four years. Because I needed to travel for competitions, I always let others look after it. In fact, they liked dogs very much. Maybe the Dachshund was naughty and ran outside by itself. [...] The one who has left the deepest impression in my memory is the Chihuahua, my previous dog, and no more. (Participant 2)

There was a deep bond between Participant 2 and her dogs, and the bond continued after the loss. The grief experienced at the loss of a pet cannot be discounted. As Participant 1 said, companion animals were not allowed on public transportation, such as high-speed railways. When she moved back home from another city, she had no choice but to give her previous cat away, which led to a strong sense of guilt:

Because I sent my previous cat away, I always feel guilty for her. I haven't got over it even now. I feel that that cat loved me more than I loved her. She loved me so much that I still feel very guilty for giving her to others even now. (Participant 1)

Participant 3 used to have a dog years ago. Because of the dog's behavioural problems, she had to give up the dog. Since she only had the dog for a short time, she didn't develop a deep bond with the dog. She did not mention any grief responses after the dog left. However, when the interview was conducted, her current dog was already 11 years old, and she experienced anticipatory grief and started to worry about the loss of her dog in the future. As shared by Participant 3:

Once you have a pet, you can't just let go of it. My children's cousin used to have a pet dog for years. It got a tumour and died. We were all very sad, and they said, 'we will never have a pet anymore.' The pet is like a family member. You cannot just let go of it. I'm afraid to lose my dog, and I don't want to see it happen. This is the only thing I'm so scared of. People say that it's good to have a dog. But once it's sick or gone, you'll be sad indeed. Because when you have a dog for a long time, it'll be just like your family member. (Participant 3)

Grief is a natural response to loss. The feelings of upset and sadness and the memories of the lost dogs reflected the bond between the participants and their companion animals.

Overall, although participants identified difficulties and challenges, the benefits and happy experiences of living with companion animals outweighed the drawbacks. Participants were satisfied with having companion animals and built a deep bond with them. As Participant 4 shared:

I never had a dog before. When my first dog came home, I felt it was a little difficult to take care of him. It is the truth that I have extra work and need to make extra efforts. However, after one month of living with my little dog, I established an emotional bond with him. (Participant 4)

As shown in some quotes in this chapter, participants viewed their companion animals as family members and cared about them, and the bond between the participants and their companion animals was built on love and mutual trust. The next chapter will demonstrate the bond between PWDs and their companion animals.

6.4 Discussion

This chapter focuses on participants' experiences of living with companion animals. This chapter began with how participants acquired pets and reasons to have one, and then presented perceived benefits and support provided by companion animals and drawbacks of having a pet. Companion animals provided physical benefits, emotional support, and belonging support to the participants. Therefore, companion animals played an important supportive and helped participants cope with disability-related negative experiences. Taking care of the companion animal, having difficulties to go to public places with the animal, and the loss of companion animal were main drawbacks, especially the second one being related to the unfriendly social environment for companion animals. Although having a pet could be challenging for them, the participants agreed that living with companion animals was beneficial. Overall, the benefits of living with a companion animal outweighed the drawbacks.

Although some of the participants did not have specific expectations about having a companion animal, others mentioned loving animals and needing companionship as their main reasons to acquire a companion animal. Participants also shared that ageing, retirement, and children moving out provided opportunities for acquiring a pet, which is consistent with previous research showing that people need support of some form during major life transitions (Stewart et al., 2009). A pet can provide companionship, emotional support, and a sense of purpose during ageing and the transition to retirement life.

Although living with companion animals has multiple benefits, it is important to consider the responsibility involved before acquiring the pet. For example, Participants 2, 4, and 5 adopted dogs who had been relinquished by previous owners, though the previous owners wanted to have a dog at first for some reason. Lane, McNicholas, and Collis (1998) identified factors influencing the quality of owner-dog relationship and satisfaction of the relationship. Being persuaded to have pets and having unrealistic expectations of pets can adversely impact one's commitment to establishing and maintaining a successful owner-dog relationship, which further affects the satisfaction of the human-animal bond, brings stress to the owner, and impacts the welfare of the animal. Therefore, potential pet owners need to fully understand both the positive and negative aspects of having a companion animal before acquiring one.

For the benefits and positive influences of living with companion animals, this dissertation, focusing on the relationship between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals, found that companion animals play an important supportive role. The findings of this research are consistent with previous research that showed animals had positive influences on people's lives (Carr et al., 2018; Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016; Maharaj & Haney, 2015). Based on social support theory and human needs theory, we can infer that the support

offered by the human-animal bond can benefit the well-being of PWDs, although this dissertation did not measure PWDs' well-being specifically, which is also one of the research limitations of this dissertation.

According to human needs theory, PWDs have the fundamental needs for autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016), and need satisfaction is associated with general well-being (Rose, 2015). PWDs tend to experience social exclusion from society. They face a lack of physical access, sociocultural and institutional inequalities, and negative public attitudes (Stewart et al., 2009). Social exclusion also includes exclusion from interpersonal interactions (Morris, 2001). These barriers hinder the fulfillment of social needs of PWDs. PWDs are more likely to be subject to exclusion, stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination (Swain & French, 2000; Zapata, 2020). As presented in Chapter 5, participants with physical disabilities faced negative experiences caused by their physical conditions and experienced negative emotions, such as a strong sense of loneliness, lower level of self-esteem, and lack of confidence.

According to social support theory, social support helps people cope with stressful events. Previous empirical research drawing on social support theory mainly considers human support (Cao, Burton, & Liu, 2018; Orrick et al., 2011). Companion animals also play an important role in providing social support, especially for people with small social networks and limited sources of human support. The participants spent more time at home due to their physical conditions. Companion animals, especially dogs, encouraged the participants to go outside and have more physical exercises, which had a positive influence on participants' physical well-being. PWDs often experience social exclusion and tend to have smaller social networks, resulting in a strong sense of loneliness and isolation. Their pets provide companionship and

could be someone to talk with. Companion animals also provide emotional support to their disabled caregivers, such as comfort and unconditional love, which helps PWDs cope with negative experiences and emotions related to disabilities. Taking care of the animal kept the disabled participants busy and led to a sense of control and fulfillment. Companion animals also provided companionship, happiness, and joy to other family members, and family members were involved in taking care of the animals. In this way, companion animals can help maintain and strengthen family ties (Fine, 2019).

As for the belonging support, companion animals serve as social facilitators or social lubricant. Companion animals can be the topic of conversation and increase their disabled caregivers' interactions with other people. Participants mentioned they often receive greetings from neighbours. Future research can investigate how companion animals promote community integration. The emotional and belonging support from companion animals is related to greater need satisfaction, which enhances PWDs' general well-being (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016).

From the participants' experiences, the association between pet ownership and the general well-being of the owner can be direct and indirect (Lane et al., 1998). For example, companion animals can provide direct support to their human caregiver by offering companionship and comfort at times of stress or emotional upset. The emotional support from animals helps the owner combat feelings of loneliness. On the other hand, companion animals as social facilitators increase social contacts with other people. Increased interpersonal interactions not only lead to a sense of social integration and belonging but may expand the owner's social networks. The expanded social networks may provide increased human support.

Companion animals are a source of support for their disabled caregivers and enrich their lives. However, living with a companion animal is not always positive. Previous research has

identified several challenges related to companion animals and claimed that the benefits of human-animal interactions are emphasized more often than the drawbacks (Fine, 2019).

Common challenges of pet ownership include financial burden, limited ability to travel, lifestyle changes, daily cleanup and care of the pet, pet behaviour issues as a stressor, and grief over the loss of a companion animal (Chandler, 2019; Fine, 2019). In line with previous research findings, the participants identified several drawbacks of living with companion animals.

Participants cared for their pets, but providing this care could be challenging for PWDs.

However, this difficulty could be overcome by the help and support from other family members.

Having difficulties entering public places with their companion animals was the major challenge mentioned by most of the participants. This challenge is related to the unfriendly social environment for animals, manifested in public attitudes toward pets. Not everyone likes animals and understands the deep bond between humans and animals. Different understandings of companion animals cause conflicts between pet owners and non-owners. Several reasons are posited for social conflicts regarding companion animals. First, people worry about public hygiene and health issues, the spread of zoonotic diseases, and personal safety (Li, 2012). This may be caused by misinformation or misunderstandings regarding companion animals. Second, some owners do not take the responsibility to take care of their pets. For example, some owners do not clean up their pets' waste or do not ensure their pets are regularly vaccinated. This can intensify the conflict between owners and non-owners and impact community integration.

Third, some people still hold hierarchical views about humans and animals. For instance, Participant 2 shared that some of her friends did not understand the important role of companion animals in owners' lives and thought animals did not deserve to be treated well. Previous research also found that some people believed that pampering pets could lead to their owner

becoming less ambitious (Li, 2012). For example, the idiom, *Wan Wu Sang Zhi* [玩物丧志], in Chinese, means that excessive attention to one's hobbies saps or consumes one's ambition and will¹⁵. Paying too much attention to the pet may also hinder interpersonal interactions and relationships and impact the owner's mental health and general well-being. However, humans and companion animals are both sources of support. A relationship with a companion animal does not necessarily replace relationships with other people (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016).

The unfriendly social environment for companion animals is attributed to inadequate and ambiguous laws and regulations related to pet ownership and protection. Inadequate policies cause confusion in enforcement, which further leads to conflicts between owners and non-owners and harm pets' and pet owners' well-being. Previous research points out that traditional values regarding animals and inadequate policies make it challenging to manage pet ownership, which results in "one rule fits all", overreactions, or underreactions (Song, 2005). For example, participants mentioned the city's actions on the management of dog ownership, causing trauma in both the dog owners and their dogs.

Another example is the harsh treatment of companion animals under the zero-Covid policy in China. In November 2021, one dog owner was in mandatory quarantine in a hotel while her dog was left at home. Through the security camera in the apartment, the owner found that her dog was "disposed of harmlessly" [wuhaihua chuli, 无害化处理] by two disease prevention workers (Global News, 2021). When this sad story was spread on Weibo, it generated shock and anger toward the workers and outrage about the cruelty; comments expressed sympathy toward

¹⁵ This idiom comes from a historical allusion. The Emperor of Zhou received a dog as a gift from the Xirong tribe. The dog was well-behaved, and the Emperor of Zhou was obsessed with playing with the dog. The ministers, however, were deeply concerned about this and advised the emperor not to indulge in entertainment and to be diligent. The Emperor of Zhou listened to his ministers and eventually became a renowned emperor who was praised in history.

the dog and the owner. These reactions indicate that social consciousness respecting animal welfare has improved. Then the website of the China Central Television published a long opinion piece titled *Do not Treat People's Pets Just as Animals* [Biana Bieren De Chongwu Dang Chusheng, 《别拿别人的宠物当畜生》]. The article states that pets are a companion for their owners, and there is an emotional attachment between the pet and the owner. The opinion piece continued that with better understanding, progress in governance and management, and upgraded technology, humans and animals will live in greater harmony (China Central Television, 2021).

The concepts of animal welfare, anti-cruelty, animal rights, and the three R's principles were first introduced into China in 1999 (Song, 2005). Twenty-three years later, although a lot of progress has been made, laws and regulations related to the protection of animal welfare are still lacking in China. So far, only two laws exist respecting animal welfare in China. The first is *Animal Husbandry Law of the People's Republic of China* [Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xumufa, 《中华人民共和国畜牧法》], which is only applicable to livestock and poultry production standardisation. The second is *the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife* [Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Yesheng Dongwu Baohufa, 《中华人民共和国野生动物保护法》], which focuses on protecting endangered wildlife species. There is still no comprehensive piece of legislation dedicated specifically to animal welfare protection. Other categories of animals, such as stray animals, draught animals and those used for recreational purposes, still lack legal protection (Animal Protection Index, 2020).

As for companion animals, there is a lack of nationwide policies or laws related to the welfare of companion animals in China (Animal Protection Index, 2020), and the existing laws and regulations mainly focus on dogs; other types of companion animals are rarely discussed

(Zhao, 2018). According to *Animal Epidemic Prevention Law of the People's Republic of China* [Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Dongwu Fangyifa, 《中华人民共和国动物防疫法》], which was implemented in May, 2021, dogs kept by workplaces and individuals should be vaccinated against rabies regularly, and the owners should apply for registration with the certificate of immunization. When taking the dog out, the owner should carry the dog license and use a leash to prevent the dog from hurting people and spreading diseases (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Some local governments, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Qingdao, Guangzhou, and Xi'an, have enacted regulations related to the management of dog ownership (Animal Protection Index, 2020). The city's *Regulations of the Restriction on Dog Keeping*, which was implemented in 2002, require that pet dogs be registered, and the dog registration card be inspected once a year. The owner should pay the annual registration fee for the dog, and dogs should be vaccinated and revaccinated against rabies. The regulations prohibit dog owners from abusing or abandoning their dogs.

These measures help promote responsible dog ownership and lay a foundation for future legislation for the protection of pet animals and other categories of animals in China. Still, the priority of the laws and regulations is to protect the health and safety of citizens and to maintain public order and hygiene rather than to address animal welfare. Efforts should be made to develop and implement the General Principles of Animal Welfare (Animal Protection Index, 2020). This would promote a better understanding of the human-animal bond, a stronger sense of responsibility to care for companion animals, and a more animal-friendly social environment.

Regarding PWDs and animals, people with visual impairments have the legally protected right to use guide dogs. According to article 58 of the *People with Disabilities Act*, people with

visual impairments with guide dogs should comply with the relevant regulations in public places. Besides, article 16 of *Regulations on the Construction of Barrier-Free Environments* provides that people with visual impairments with guide dogs should comply with the relevant regulations when entering public places, and the staff of public places should provide barrier-free services in accordance with relevant regulations. These two national-level laws and regulations only address guide dogs; other types of service dogs for PWDs, such as service dogs for people with physical disabilities or people with hearing impairments and psychiatric service dogs, are not mentioned.

The city's *Regulations of the Restriction on Dog Keeping* provide that assistance dogs for people with severe physical disabilities and guide dogs for the visually impaired are exempt from paying registration fees. Visually impaired people with guide dogs and people with severe physical disabilities with assistance dogs can enter public areas. However, there is neither policies nor support from the government or the Disabled Persons' Federation for PWDs with companion animals, even though some PWDs rely on companion animals for emotional and social support.

Although guide dogs and assistance dogs are allowed to enter public places, their disabled owners often experience rejection in reality. Participant 2 stated that trainers and dogs from the city's guide dog training centre were refused entry by the subway station during the training process. Then the guide dog training center made a lot of effort to communicate with the supervisor of the subway station to make it possible for guide dogs to be on the subway eventually. The refusal reflects a lack of public awareness of service dogs.

A sensitive side of living with companion animals is animal loss. The grief response to the loss reflects the deep bond and emotional connection between human caregivers and companion animals. The loss of companion animals is another important topic in the discussion

of the human-animal bond. Given that animal lives are shorter than human lives, it is inevitable that the human caregiver will lose a pet and grieve after the loss. Evidence shows that the pet funeral industry has been growing rapidly in China, and it was estimated that nearly 1,400 companies operated pet funerals nationwide by November 2020 (China Central Television, 2022). However, limited academic attention has been paid to this phenomenon in China.

Although the loss of pets is not a research focus of this dissertation, the participants mentioned grief responses and anticipatory grief. Previous research in other countries suggests that grief over the loss of a pet can be the same as grief over the loss of a human significant other. Pet owners may experience disenfranchised grief because grief over the loss of a pet cannot be openly acknowledged. Field et al. (2009) suggests that the relationship and attachment between humans and animals, especially when an animal companion compensates for human relationships, can have a significant impact on the grief experienced after the loss. PWDs are more likely than people without disabilities to rely on their pets for companionship and emotional support. As Participant 4 shared, what pets mean to disabled owners is different from their meaning to people without disabilities. (Whether the companion animal actually plays a role akin to that of psychiatric service animals is another interesting question to investigate.) The grief may be more intense for disabled companion animal owners. Further empirical investigations are required in order to more deeply understand the deep bond between owners and pets and provide education about grief patterns as well as grief support (Kogan, Packman, Currin-McCulloch, Bussolari, & Erdman, 2021). The next chapter will discuss the bond between the physically disabled participants and their companion animals.

Summary

This chapter presents the main findings of PWDs' experiences of living with a companion animal. Although participants mentioned some drawbacks and challenges of living with a companion animal, they felt that companion animals provided multiple benefits and bring positive changes to their lives. Linking these findings with social support theory, companion animals play an important supportive role and help PWDs cope with disability-related negative experiences. Based on human needs theory, we can infer that companion animals benefit the well-being of PWDs.

The participants developed a strong bond with their companion animals as time goes by. They cared about the well-being of their pets and wanted to provide them good living conditions. Companion animals also make contributions to the human-animal bond. The next chapter will present the unique bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals and explore the meaningfulness of the human-animal bond.

CHAPTER 7 Bond between People with Physical Disabilities and Companion

Animals

Building on the lived experiences of participants with physical disabilities and their experiences of living with companion animals, this chapter focuses on the bond between the participants and their companion animals. This chapter answers the questions of “what role do companion animals play in PWDs’ lives?” and “what is the relationship between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals like?”. The questions were designed to obtain a deeper understanding of the nature of the human-animal bond. As presented in the previous chapter, pets provide various benefits and support to PWDs, which helped PWDs cope with disability-related negative experiences. The positive influences of living with companion animals was beneficial to the participants’ well-being. The participants also cared about the well-being of their companion animals, and they viewed their animals as family members and took care of them as if they were their children. The participants believed that their companion animals had agency and could understand them despite being non-verbal. Companion animals also contribute to developing to human-animal bond. The bond between the participants and their companion animals was understood as love, care, support, and trust.

7.1 Companion animals as a family member and a child

Companion animals were viewed as family members to whom the participants were attached. All participants described their companion animals as being like their children. As shared by Participant 5, “I’ve been living with my dogs for years. They are a part of my life, and they are like my family members. Emotionally, I feel that I’m raising my own children.”

For Participant 2, 3, 4, and 5, their children were grown-up and moved out of home. They treated their companion animals as their children who always stayed at home and accompanied

them, and this generated positive feelings. As Participant 2 commented, “I think my dog is like a child at home. Every time I come back from work or something, I’m glad to see him. It makes me feel warm in my heart.” Participant 3 thought her dog could provide companionship when her daughter was not at home, “My dog is like my child. My daughter is grown-up, and she’s not at home sometimes. I just treat my dog as my kid. I like to talk and play with my dog.” Participant 4 also shared:

My dogs are just like my kids. Because my daughter is married, there are just my wife and me at home, and we don’t have other things to do. Our life basically revolves around the two little dogs now. They keep me busy, which is good. I feel better and happier. (Participant 4)

The implications of treating companion animals as children is two-fold. First, it reflects the deep bond between the participants and their companion animals. Second, it highlights the responsibility to take care of the animal. As shown in the following section, participants cared about their pets' life quality and well-being.

7.2 Pets owners care about the well-being of their animals

The participants viewed their pets as their children and cared about the well-being of their companion animals. For the participants, having a companion animal was an important decision, and it entailed responsibility because the animals relied on their human caregivers. As Participant 6 commented:

If you choose to have a pet, you must take good care of it. I think it’s difficult to raise someone, and keeping fish is the same as raising a child. Kids get sick sometimes, and so do fish. You need to take care of them and keep them healthy. (Participant 6)

Participant 1 gave her previous cat away due to moving. When she acquired a new cat, her friends were against it, emphasizing the responsibility of having a pet. Participant 1 agreed with her friends about the responsibility, but she viewed her cat as a family member and a child

of her, which meant she needed to overcome the challenges in order to keep the cat rather than simply giving up.

As time went by, I started to treat my cat as my child. When I have good food or go somewhere fun, I want to take him to experience it. [...] When I found the cat I have now, my friends didn't want me to keep him. They told me that if I wanted to have the cat, I should be responsible. I should face the difficulties and never abandon him. They kept saying that and disagreed with me. But then I couldn't help and brought the cat home. So my friends told me to keep the cat to the end and not to abandon him no matter what. So it is not just about having a pet. It is like having a family member and having a kid. (Participant 1)

The participants cared about their companion animal's quality of life and addressed their companion animals' needs. It aroused negative feelings if they could not take good care of their pets. For example, when Participant 4 could not walk his dogs outside, he felt guilty and expressed his worries about the well-being of his dogs.

If I don't take them out for a walk, it's like I feel that I owe something to my dogs. So even I can only walk them for ten minutes, I take them out every day. [...] I trained my little white dog, and he is able to pee and poop in the bathroom. Generally, he can do it. But the dog seems to give me a feeling that he only goes to the bathroom at night when he doesn't have other ways. If I don't walk him outside, he doesn't go to the bathroom during the day. I just can't bear to see that. I need to take him out for a walk if he doesn't go the bathroom for a long time. (Participant 4)

When the companion animals were ill, the participants invested money, time, and energy and took good care of their companion animals. For example, Participant 2's previous dog was so sick that the veterinarian even said there was no hope of saving the dog. Participant 2 did not give up; she "stayed with the dog all day and took care of him." The dog recovered eventually.

7.3 Companion animals' contributions to the human-animal bond

Companion animals as subjective beings have personal agency and make unique contributions to human-animal interactions. The participants suggested their companion animals,

especially dogs and cats, had different personalities and characteristics and could understand them even though they were non-verbal.

The dog owners expressed that their dogs could understand their words, feelings, and physical conditions even though dogs could not verbally communicate. As Participant 2 commented, “Although my dog is not able to express himself or speak, he can understand what I mean. I can always talk with him.” Participant 5 had similar comments, “Dogs just can’t talk, but I feel that they understand everything.” Participant 4 felt that the first dog he adopted knew his disability because the dog waited for him when they walked outside. The dog’s response moved Participant 4 and enhanced the human-animal bond.

Why do I have such a strong bond with my little white dog? When I walk my little white dog, I feel that he knows I have mobility issues, and I have to walk slowly. He just walks in front of me for a little while, then stops and sits there, looking back at me and waiting for me. When I come close to him, he’ll stand up and keep walking. I am so moved. It just makes me so moved. So I think that dogs know everything. They just cannot speak. Dogs are not able to talk with you, but they know everything in their mind. (Participant 4)

This example showed that the dog seemed to know and respond to the participant’s needs, and the dog’s reactions contributed to a meaningful human-animal bond. The participants also recognized their pets’ unique traits, habits, and preferences. For example, Participant 4 felt that the two dogs he had were different. While one dog walked slowly and waited for him when walking outside, the other dog he had did not do so. As Participant 4 said, “The bigger one just walks herself. The two dogs are completely different.” Participant 4 attributed the difference to the dog’s previous experiences. He thought the bigger dog used to be a stray, and she was not very close to people. Other participants also recognized the unique characters and personalities of their animals. For example, Participant 5 shared stories about her two dogs:

The little one is timid. I use a walking stick when I go outside. He just follows behind my feet very closely. Sometimes I can’t see him when I look back, but

he's just right behind me. As for the other one, my daughter and I both think he has a strong personality. He is a miniature poodle. [...] But he doesn't like playing with other miniature poodles. He likes to play with other breeds like Pomeranian. He doesn't like some other dogs. He also has a hobby. He likes chasing birds and pigeons. He's naughty. My daughter always says he is very cool, but the things he does make you feel that he's like a little kid. He is smart and sensitive. My two dogs sometimes fight at home. If I call '[Dog Name 1]', he will look at me and go away. He will stop fighting with the little one and lie in the corner quietly, looking at me. You see, he can sense my mood and take the hint. The little one likes to cuddle with my daughter and me when we sit on the couch. When my daughter and I cuddle and play with the little one, [Dog Name 1] just lies beside us and looks at us quietly. My daughter then says he must think, 'you guys are so boring'. (Participant 5)

The participants thought that the history and previous experiences of the animal resulted in its unique personality. As shown in Chapter 6, [Dog Name 1] was abandoned by his previous owner. Participant 5 ascribed [Dog Name 1]'s personality to his sad past, "[Dog Name 1] was quite pitiful, and he must have suffered a lot at that time; otherwise, how could he become so sensitive? His former owner just left him there alone all the time." Participant 1 also found the cat she had now was different from her previous cat. While her previous cat was gentle and very close to her, the one she had during the interview was quite lively which might be due to the fact that the cat used to be a stray cat.

Different personalities and preferences indicate that companion animals are distinct beings. In this way, companion animals, especially dogs and cats, can contribute to the interactions with their human caregivers and make participants' experiences of living with a pet full of fun and joy. However, Participant 6 did not comment on his fish's unique characters and how they contributed to human-animal interactions. This may be because he just started keeping fish, and the bond between Participant 6 and his fish was still developing.

Companion animals influence their human caregivers. They influenced participants' daily routines and lifestyles. The participants needed to spend time taking care of and playing with

their pets. What is more, the companion animals influenced the participants' attitudes toward other animals. Participants learnt from their companion animals and were kind to other animals, making them a loving and compassionate person. For example, participants fed stray animals, worried about the conditions of stray dogs during the lockdown, and felt uncomfortable witnessing a dog being taken away by Chengguan from its owner. As Participant 3 commented, "Like what they say, having a pet makes people more caring and loving."

7.4 Discussion

Companion animals had an important role in the participants' lives. As a source of support, companion animals bring positive changes to PWDs. The participants were also concerned about their animals' quality of life and well-being and were willing to invest money, time, and energy in taking care of their pets. The emotional connection between PWDs and their companion animals can grow deeper over time.

Attachment theory has been adopted to explain the human-animal bond, since many pet owners view the human-animal bond as being as emotionally close as human attachments (Rockett & Carr, 2014). The bond between the participants and their companion animals demonstrates classic attachment behaviours, such as seeking close contact, resisting separation and wanting to be reunited, communicating by nonverbal cues, and turning to the animal for comfort (Jalongo, 2015). In this respect, companion animals can also be an attachment figure, and taking care of companion animals can fulfil the owners' desire to nurture and protect (Fine, 2019).

Companion animals rely on their owners for care and protection. Mutual trust and connection are shown in the relationship between companion animals and the owners. Research findings show that treating companion animals as family members and caring for companion

animals is related to a sense of belongingness and meaningfulness (Muraco, *et al.*, 2018).

Previous research findings show that oxytocin levels increase in both humans and dogs when they interact (Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003). Lin (1986) defined relationships among confiding partners as a binding relationship that “reciprocal and mutual exchanges are expected, and responsibility for one another’s well-being is understood and shared by the partners” (Lin, 1986, p.20). Therefore, the human-animal bond can be mutually beneficial, since the well-being of the two partners is considered (Lane *et al.*, 1998).

The participants recognized the unique traits and personalities of their pets and believed their animals could understand them. The agency of pets helps develop a strong connection with their human caregivers. Previous research suggests that companion animals are subjective beings and can understand and respond appropriately to emotional cues from their owners, and the communications between dogs and their owners are two-sided (Franklin, 2006; Maharaj & Haney, 2015).

Sociology has a long history of anthropocentrism and used to exclude animals from sociological research (Irvine, 2007; Taylor, Sutton, & Wilkie, 2018). Sociology “routinely has portrayed nonhuman animals as mindless, emotionless, self-less, reacting rather than acting, apprehending rather than comprehending, and existing only in the immediately situation” (Sanders, 2003, p.406). This view is based mainly on Mead’s linguicentric assumption that the inability to use symbols distinguishes human and nonhuman animals (Sanders, 2003).

Previous sociological research challenged Mead’s human-animal dichotomy (Sanders, 1999; Sanders, 2000; Flynn, 2000; Irvine, 2004; Irvine, 2007). These studies suggested that the caretakers perceived the companion animals to be unique and emotional beings who “were not only capable of expressing emotions but were attuned to” people’s emotional states (Flynn,

2000, p124). Therefore, there is a need to “revise the sociological understanding of the self away from the focus on language” (Irvine, 2007, p. 11). Irvine (2007) argues that the differences between human selves and animal selves are of degree rather than kind. Humans can engage in interactions that animals cannot because humans have a highly developed sense of self. Animals also have abilities that are essential to their social life. It is inappropriate to assess animal potential by human capacities (Irvine, 2007). Furthermore, sociological research on the human-animal bond may be more concerned with how people perceive their relationships with their companion animals, or whether they believe their companion animals can respond to them, rather than whether animals actually have the ability to do so. Researchers from neuroscience, evolutionary anthropology, behaviour biology, and cognitive ethology though have found evidence of animals experiencing selfhood (Pankspee, 1998; Bekoff, 2002).

Based on interviews with people living or working with dogs, Sanders (1999, 2000, 2003) suggested that interactions between humans and animals identified animals as minded participants in social life. He noted that people “consistently define their pets as ‘persons’ with whom they share lasting, intimate, and emotionally involving relationships” (Sanders, 1999, p. 9). The human-animal bond is based on mutual trust, commitment, and communication (Sanders, 1999; 2000). Animals’ personhood and selves are not merely anthropomorphic projections, and human caregivers are able to perceive the special characteristics of human-animal interactions (Irvine, 2004). Studies on the human-animal bond provide a better understanding of the subjectivity and self of the animal and expanding current image of the self. It also has implications for future research on humans who are not able to use language, such as infants, children with autism, Alzheimer’s patients, people with hearing and speech disabilities, etc.

(Irvine, 2003). The acknowledgement of animal selfhood can not only deepen sociological research and theories but also expand the legal and moral realms (Irvine, 2003).

Although the main purpose of this dissertation is not to investigate animal selfhood, the experiences of participants indicate that companion animals, particularly dogs and cats, can contribute to human-animal interactions. The bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals is a meaningful relationship based on support, affection, and trust.

Summary

This chapter explains the nature of the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals. The participants received physical, emotional, and social benefits from their companion animals, which positively influenced their well-being. PWDs view their animals as their children and care about the well-being of their pets, and companion animals could benefit from the human-animal bond as well. Companion animals have unique characters and personalities. Although companion animals are non-verbal, they can actively contribute to the human-animal bond. The bond between the physically disabled participants and their companion animals is an affectionate and supportive relationship.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the reality show *Two Percent of Love* (《百分之二的爱》 Bai fen zhi er de ai) produced by Bilibili¹⁶, one episode tells the story of a person with a physical disability who wants to adopt a cat. Although some of the comments on the episode supported the idea and viewers were moved by the scene where the disabled person and the cat cuddled together, this episode generated a debate in China about whether PWDs should own a pet. There were concerns about whether PWDs could take good care of the animals and if the animals would worsen their health conditions. This research investigates the experiences of people with physical disabilities and their experiences of living with companion animals. The findings of this study are an important contribution to the above debate.

8.1 Primary findings

To explore the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities and their bond with the companion animals, this dissertation focused on four research questions: (1) What are the experiences of being disabled in urban China? (2) What are the experiences of participants living with companion animals with whom they have a bond? (3) What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of living with companion animals? (4) What is the relationship like between participants with physical disabilities and their companion animals?

Adopting the phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews with six participants revealed that people with physical disabilities faced restrictions caused by their physical conditions and unsupportive social environments. They experienced various types of social exclusion, from education, income and employment barriers, the built environment, to

¹⁶ Bilibili is a Chinese video sharing website where users can submit, view, and add overlaid commentary on videos. It is one of the major Chinese videos on demand over-the-top streaming platforms. As of 2015, Bilibili had over 50 million users, with 75% of them under the age of 24. By March 1, 2017, Bilibili had over 100 million registered users.

interpersonal relationships. The findings are consistent with previous research on the experiences of PWDs conducted in both western and non-western countries (Stewart et al., 2009; Susinos, 2007; Warner & Adams, 2016; Xiong et al., 2011; Yu & Tao, 2017). According to human needs theory, people have fundamental social and psychological needs, such as autonomy, relatedness, a sense of personal significance and social contribution, etc. These needs are universal, and PWDs are no exception. The social exclusion creates barriers to the achievement of PWDs' fundamental needs, which results in negative emotions and impacts their overall well-being.

The stories of the disabled participants are not just about negative experiences. Although participants with physical disabilities experienced social exclusion, misunderstanding, and prejudice, they encouraged themselves to be optimistic and accept their physical conditions. Participant 2 shared that her disability brought her a strong will and helped her achieve a great deal. This can be a starting point to build a positive identity of PWDs and promote the transformation of perception, which adopts a non-tragic view of disability and challenges presumptions of dependency and abnormality (Swain & French, 2000).

Social support theory suggests that social support helps people confront pressure and challenges and enhances the well-being of the recipient (Hsu et al., 2018). The participants received support from families, friends, and other people, and the support helped them cope with disabilities-related unpleasant experiences. Being cared for, recognized, respected, and connected with others are what PWDs want to have. Efforts need to be made to remove barriers, allowing PWDs to participate in society and thus have more sources of social support.

Besides human support, companion animals can also be a source of social support. The participants received physical benefits (e.g., more opportunities for exercise), emotional support (e.g., unconditional love, comfort, companionship), and a sense of belonging from their pets

(e.g., more social contacts). These benefits and support bring positive changes to PWDs and enrich their lives. This result is consistent with previous research on the human-animal bond suggesting that companion animals can be a source of support and foster their human caregivers' general well-being (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2021; Lane et al., 1998; Meehan, Massavelli, & Pachana, 2017; Rodriguez, Bibbo, & O'Haire, 2020). Support from companion animals compensates for human support and can be particularly helpful for people with small social networks and limited human support, such as PWDs, senior citizens, and children (Zhang, 2008; Muraco, *et al.*, 2018). In this respect, companion animals play an important role in people's lives and human society.

The participants developed a deep bond with their companion animals, treated their pets as family members, and took good care of their pets. Previous research suggests that besides receiving support from companion animals, giving support to companion animals can fulfill owners' basic psychological needs and is associated with reduced psychological distress and greater closeness to the animal (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2021). The perceived benefits of human-animal interactions lead to a deeper bond with the animals and increase the tendency to care for the animal, which has a positive influence on animal welfare (Lane et al., 1998). Researchers pointed out that human-animal interactions benefited the well-being of animals as well (Odendaal & Lehmann, 2000; Schöberl, *et al.*, 2012). Future interdisciplinary research can further investigate how animals benefit from the human-animal bond and the degree to which human-animal bond is mutually beneficial and reciprocal.

Participants noted the drawbacks of living with a companion animal, including extra efforts to take care of the animal, not being able to enter public places with the animal, and pet loss. Among the drawbacks and challenges, having difficulties travelling and going to public

places were the most significant and were mentioned by both the cat and dog owners. This challenge is mainly caused by the unfriendly environment for animals. Although there were some drawbacks of having a pet, the benefits outweighed them. Participants viewed their companion animals as family members with their own personalities and cared about their well-being. The participants developed a deep bond with their companion animals, and the human-animal bond was understood as love, care, support, and trust.

This investigation into the lived experiences of PWDs reveals the barriers they face and the supports they need. PWDs experience a wide range of social exclusion and hope to be treated equally. Improving inclusion and well-being of PWDs need different strategies and efforts. It calls for increased knowledge of PWDs based on the social model of disability. Moreover, drawing on social support theory and attachment theory, companion animals play an important supportive role in the lives of PWDs. Human support and non-human support can work together to provide positive influences on PWDs. This research on the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals may contribute to animal studies in China and research on human-animal relationships in Chinese culture and social environment. A better understanding of animals and the human-animal bond contributes to the improvement of animal welfare and animal protection. The next section discusses the implications of this dissertation.

8.2 Implications

(1) Disability policy transformation based on the social model and the development of disabled person's self-help organizations. The social model of disability suggests that the disabling society rather than biological differences causes exclusion and marginalization experienced by PWDs, which prevent them from the full participation in social activities (Oliver, 2009; Kattari, Lavery, & Hasche, 2017). The social model of disability aims to promote

awareness of structural discrimination and support for disability policies reducing inequities (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Thomas, 2004). The medical understanding of disability is still prevalent in China, which is manifested in policy-making based on the individual-oriented medical model and poor public respect for PWDs and their rights. Although China signed the CRPD in 2007 and ratified it in 2008, the transformation of disability policy based on the social model has been vague (Zhao & Zhang, 2018). This is related to the government's unclear understanding of the fundamental principles of the CRPD in disability policy-making, and disability policy in China focusing more on social welfare than rights protection (Hao & Li, 2020).

Efforts are needed to promote policy change based on the social model, that leads to higher social inclusion. So far, disability policy-making is still top-down oriented by the government. Consultation with and participation of PWDs are limited on the policy-making stage (Zhang, 2017; Zhao & Zhang, 2018). Policy implementation also relies on supporting resources, enforcement mechanisms, and public participation. Therefore, encouraging public participation can be the next step forward to addressing the needs and rights of PWDs and promoting individual autonomy and full accessibility according to the CRPD.

In promoting disability policy reform and PWDs' political participation, disabled person's self-help organizations (DPOs) can play a significant role. For example, DPOs can be social advocacy groups to facilitate community-building. DPOs can also be policy advocacy groups to promote political participation of PWDs and raise PWDs' and the public's awareness of rights (Zhang, 2017). The development of DPOs helps promote policy and social change. In contrast to the CDPF which is a government-organized non-governmental organization (Zhang & Guo, 2012), DPOs are self-founded and self-managed. The survival and development of local

DPOs are difficult, as these organizations face challenges such as unsupportive policies, inadequate recourses, and professionals. Another issue is that it is difficult for DPOs to get registered legally at the government department of civil affairs, and many unregistered DPOs do not have any government funding or support. Considering the important role of DPOs in protecting PWDs' rights, more support should be offered to promote their development.

Previous research points out that the experience and identity of PWDs are influenced by interactions with different subjects and environments at the micro-level (e.g., interactions with family, friends, other PWDs) and macro-level (e.g., disability policy, social welfare system) (Yu & Tao, 2017). Besides promoting the transformation of disability policy and social values of respect for difference, on the micro-level PWDs experience positive feelings from receiving understanding and support from other people. Consistent with these previous findings, the participants indicated that support from their family and friends and kindness from strangers meant a lot to them. Therefore, positive interactions with others at the micro-level have a positive influence on PWDs. As Participant 4 shared during the interview, the CDPF mainly provided tangible and informational support to PWDs, and he hoped there could be more opportunities to know and contact other PWDs in the future. As organizations that serve PWDs, the CDPF and DPOs can organize more activities to encourage the participation of PWDs, thus building a platform for interactions and communications among them. Increased social contacts with other PWDs would enrich their lives and foster a greater sense of belonging.

(2) PWDs and companion animals. During the recruitment period, I learned that a mother kept pets for her daughter who has intellectual disability. They used to have fish and birds and had a little dog at the time I conducted my research. Another mother decided to acquire a Labrador for her son with hearing impairment. They believed that companion animals could

provide companionship to their disabled children. Unfortunately, since I focused on people with physical disabilities over 18 years old, I did not interview them. The fact that some PWDs and parents of PWDs choose to have a pet reflects the important role of the animal and the potential positive influences brought by the animal. My research indicates that companion animals play a supportive role and are an important source of social support for PWDs. Companion animals also encourage PWDs to exercise more. The physical benefit and social support have a positive influence on the well-being of PWDs. To respond to the discussion mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, instead of questioning whether PWDs have the ability to keep companion animals, a better understanding of the human-animal bond is needed. For PWDs who want to have companion animals, support from family, friends, and DPOs can be provided to help them acquire and care for companion animals.

The participants suggest that the environment for companion animals is not friendly enough in China and conflicts between owners and non-owners are not uncommon. There are inadequate laws and regulations for animal welfare and animal protection in China. As discussed in chapter 6, although the city's *Regulations of the Restriction on Dog Keeping* stipulate that abusing and abandoning pet dogs is not allowed, the welfare of pets is not the first priority of the regulation. There is still a debate about whether the concept of animal welfare is compatible with Chinese culture and whether animal welfare laws are necessary (Cao, 2020). As discussed in the literature review chapter, speciesism or human superiority is another form of oppression that is rooted in the structure of society and power relations (Niber, 2003; Irvine, 2007). The concern about animal welfare is related to the understanding of equality and the social environment. (Song, 2009; Gu, Bexell, & Wang, 2021). It has been shown that in societies where the economy is more developed and the idea of democracy is more established, the concept of animal welfare

is more accepted by the citizens (Song, 2004). Educational interventions focusing on animals and the similarities between humans and animals may improve public attitudes toward animals and raise the awareness and acceptance of animal protection and welfare (Gu et al., 2021). The increased knowledge of animals and the human-animal bond can also help address the responsibilities of having pets, which may lead to reduced conflicts between owners and non-owners and the protection of companion animals. There has been increased awareness of animal welfare and animal protection, especially among young and educated people. There are grassroots animal protection movements and individual voluntary efforts to rescue homeless animals. These efforts can positively influence public attitudes and lay the foundation for a future general law of animal welfare and animal protection.

According to Intergroup Contact Theory, contact with outgroup members reduces prejudicial attitudes toward that group, and this effect can be generalized to the whole outgroup. In contrast, beliefs in the human-animal divide and human superiority enhance prejudice toward outgroups and justify human dominance and the exploitation of animals. As with interpersonal relations, focusing on the similarities rather than distinctiveness between different social groups facilitates more intergroup tolerance and consideration for others. Gu et al. (2021) found that frequent contact with companion animals is associated with pro-animal attitudes, including supporting animal protection and welfare, believing in animal mind, perceiving human-animal continuity, and feeling a psychological closeness with animals. Similarly, increased knowledge of disability and more interactions with PWDs may lead to a better understanding of PWDs and reduce prejudice toward this group.

(3) PWDs and service animals. As mentioned in the first chapter, previous research on the bond between PWDs and animals mainly focused on service dogs (Sanders, 2000;

Rabschutz, 2007; Rodriguez, Bibbo, & O’Haire, 2020b). It is important to promote the development of service dog programs in China, as protecting PWDs’ right to use service dogs is part of the building of barrier-free environments. Service dog training is still under development in China, and only a small proportion of people with visual impairments live with guide dogs, leaving a significantly long waiting list (Sun & Chen, 2021). In practice, the development of service dog training faces challenges such as lack of support (i.e., policy, financial, and professional support), misunderstanding, and rejection. Lack of knowledge of people with visual impairments and guide dogs leads to low public acceptance of guide dogs, and guide dog users are often prohibited from entering restaurants, hotels, and other public places (Wang & Li, 2014). A report reveals that guide dog users were complained about by other customers at restaurants and by other passengers on the subway (Sun & Chen, 2021), and people with visual impairments experience difficulties when pursuing their right to access public facilities (Liu, 2016).

Although the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons* and *Regulations on the Construction of Barrier-Free Environments* both contain references to the issue of access to public places for guide dogs, they do not provide clear guidance for implementation and enforcement. For example, article 16 of *Regulations on the Construction of Barrier-Free Environments* provides that people with visual impairments with guide dogs should comply with the relevant regulations when entering public places, and the staff of public places shall provide barrier-free services in accordance with relevant regulations, but the “relevant regulations” have not been developed (Sun & Chen, 2022). In addition, laws and regulations mainly focus on guide dogs for people with visual impairments. Other types of service dogs who work with PWDs, such as psychiatric service dogs, service dogs for people

with physical disabilities or hearing impairments, are not mentioned in the regulations. Therefore, efforts should be made to fill the gaps to ensure the implementation of policies protecting the rights of PWDs.

Considering the high costs and long training cycles of breeding and training service dogs, the development of the service dog industry relies on support from multiple parties, including policy support from the government, adequate financial support, and well-trained professional staff. A formal system for training and qualification of service dog trainers and professionals needs to be developed; the qualification of service dogs and application procedures need to be improved (Wang & Li, 2014).

The public is unfamiliar with service dogs and laws protecting PWDs' rights (Liu, 2016; Sun & Chen, 2022). Efforts are needed to promote awareness of service dogs and PWDs so that more people can have an enhanced understanding of service dogs. Educational materials containing direct quotes from PWDs with service dogs may help increase public awareness of service dogs and support for protecting PWDs' legal rights to enter public places with service animals.

8.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions

The first research limitation is related to potential bias and small sample size. Small sample size affects the reliability of the results. The participants were recruited by purpose sampling and snowball sampling and perhaps more likely to hold positive views of living with a companion animal related to their experiences of disability. The small sample size and the recruitment of participants may lead to bias.

This research adopts the phenomenological approach. As presented in the methodology chapter, Creswell and Maietta (2002) posit that having interviews with 5 to 25 participants who

have the target experiences is adequate for phenomenological research. There were 6 participants in this study. The limited number of people with physical disabilities living with companion animals caused difficulties in recruiting more participants. Because of the influence of Covid-19, this research was conducted via online interviews, which brought extra challenges. People with limited access to the Internet could not participate in this study.

For a qualitative study, the generalizability of the findings is less important than the rigour and trustworthiness of the data and its interpretation (Guba, 1981), and the purpose of this dissertation was not to generalize the findings to all people with disabilities. This dissertation presents the first research on the interactions between people with physical disabilities and companion animals in China, and the findings contribute to future research using different research methods on the investigation of the human-animal bond in the Chinese context. For example, although this dissertation used the concept of well-being to explain the influences of unsatisfied basic needs, social exclusion, and human and non-human support on PWDs, well-being was not measured specifically. Previous studies used the short version of the WHO Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) and the WHO Quality of Life-Disability (WHOQOL-DIS) to measure PWDs' quality of life and well-being (Zheng et al., 2014), as well as the EQ-5D to assess quality of life during the COVID-19 pandemic in China and Canada (Denis-Robichaud, Aenishaenslin, Richard, Desmarchelier, & Carabin, 2022; Ping et al., 2020). Future research can use quantitative approaches or mixed methods to compare the well-being of PWDs with pets and without pets.

In this dissertation, the participants were interviewed one time, except Participant 2 who had a follow-up interview. Future research could employ a longitudinal research design to investigate how the human-animal bond develops over time. Additionally, because this

dissertation only focused on the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals, caution is suggested when applying the findings to the human-animal bond with different groups of people. It would be of value to conduct research with people with different types of disabilities and other groups of people (e.g., senior citizens, children) to investigate if a similar bond exists.

Second, disability is a complicated social phenomenon. As discussed in chapter 5, onset of disability (congenital disability and acquired disability), type of disability, severity, presence of multiple disabilities, and visibility of disability influence the experiences of PWDs. This research only focused on people with physical disabilities and did not compare the different experiences of people with congenital and acquired disabilities. The place of residence is another factor to consider. Because of the rural-urban divide, the experiences of PWDs living in urban areas can be very different from those living in rural areas. Although PWDs experience various forms of exclusion, PWDs living in urban areas have greater access to educational and medical resources as well as employment opportunities compared with PWDs in rural areas (Fu & Ren, 2010; Guo, *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, PWDs living in rural areas can be more vulnerable (Shang, Fisher, & Xie, 2011).

Third, this research did not investigate gender differences in experiences of being disabled and having companion animals. Previous research suggests that women tend to have more positive behaviours and attitudes toward animals (Herzog, 2007). Future research on gender differences in human-animal interactions may provide insights into whether there are different degrees of attachment and perceived benefits and drawbacks of having companion animals among different genders.

PWDs are systematically disadvantaged, marginalized, and excluded in society. Alongside sexism, racism, ageism, ablism has been added to the catalogue of forms of social oppression (Barnes, Oliver, & Barton, 2002; Thomas, 2007). The core ideas of intersectionality throw light upon the wider social structure, power relations, group domination, social subjection, and inequality (Thomas, 2007), and different subgroups of PWDs encounter different forms of oppression. As for gender and disability, Campling (1979, 1981) investigated the problems faced by disabled women in the areas of personal relationships, sexuality, motherhood, education, employment, and media stereotypes. Fine and Asch (1981, 1988) argue that disabled women had fewer opportunities to oppose stigma associated with disability compared with disabled men. Women with disabilities face a significant degree of social exclusion and experience disadvantages that set them apart from disabled men and non-disabled women economically, socially, and psychologically. Future research can explore the gendered experience of disability in China.

Fourth, this dissertation did not focus on the impact of the COVID-19 on PWDs. Interviews with the participants were conducted from October to December 2020. The COVID-19 situation had improved by that time, since the city-wide lockdown ended in March 2020 and people's lives were getting back on track. There was an interview question about COVID-19 and PWDs' experiences, but participants shared that COVID-19 and the lockdown did not have much impact on their lives. However, the pandemic has created new challenges for PWDs living in different countries. PWDs had already experienced isolation before the outbreak of Covid-19, and the physical and social distancing and other preventive measures may result in an even higher level of isolation. PWDs and their families may face greater financial insecurity during the pandemic. On the other hand, the new work arrangements, such as working from home, also

provide new opportunities for PWDs to participate in the labour market. There may be more flexible work arrangements, greater accessibility, and more accommodations in workplaces in the post-pandemic world (Statistics Canada, 2021). Future research is needed to investigate the experiences of PWDs during the pandemic period, including whether the pandemic has excluded and marginalized PWDs even more, or whether there are enabling effects of the new work arrangements.

Fifth, although interviews with the participants show that they cared for the well-being of their pets, this dissertation mainly focused on benefits and support of the human-animal bond for humans. Research findings do not provide direct evidence that the human-animal bond is a reciprocal relationship which benefits animals' well-being. Future interdisciplinary research can be conducted to explore mutual benefits and especially how companion animals benefit from the human-animal bond. As discussed in previous chapters, sociology has an anthropocentric tradition and has only recently included animals in sociological research (Irvine, 2003). The findings of the bond between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals contained in this dissertation may help extend the sociological imagination to this emerging field of research (Alger & Alger, 2003). This dissertation, along with other studies conducted by sociologists in this area, may be useful for generating "greater interest and sensitivity to human-animal issues" (Alger & Alger, 2003, p. 77).

In conclusion, this study on the experiences of people with physical disabilities shows that PWDs experience a wide range of social exclusion, such as limited opportunities for education and employment, inadequate accessible facilities, and difficulties in maintaining personal relationships. Efforts are needed to promote policy change based on the social model and build a more inclusive social environment. The experiences of the participants consisted of

both being excluded and being supported. Support from family, friends, and others helped them cope with disabilities. Companion animals also played a significant role in providing emotional and belonging support for the participants. The participants have developed a deep bond with their companion animals, which is understood as love, care, support, and trust.

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Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the participants. The participants are encouraged to share their experiences and insights based on three themes. The themes and interview questions are presented as followed.

Theme 1: Experiences of disabilities

主题一：作为残障人士的经历和体验

The questions under this theme will investigate the experiences of participants in terms of everyday life, work, and coping with disability. The participants will be encouraged to talk about their personal backgrounds (e.g., the cause and time of the disability), what the challenges and supports they have had as a person with disability, and how the experiences influence their self-concepts.

在这一部分的访谈中，研究参与者将和被访者讨论他们作为残障人士的生活经历、体验和感受，例如他们的个人背景、日常生活、工作经历、应对残障的方式、面临的困难与挑战，获得的支持，以及这些经历如何影响他们的自我认知和自我认同等。

(1) Can you tell me the cause and time of onset of your disability, if you are comfortable answering this question. Has there been any change over time? 如果您不介意的话，请谈论一下是什么原因造成了您目前的残疾，您在何时残疾的。另外，随着时间的过去，您的身体状况有变化吗？

(2) Please describe a day in your life. (What does your typical day look like?) 您可以描述一下您日常生活的一天是怎么样的吗?

(3) As a person living with a physical disability, what are your main challenges? Can you give me an example? Can you describe the situation/context when you experienced the challenge(s)? How does this experience make you feel? 作为一名肢体残疾人士, 您觉得您面临的主要的困难和挑战是什么? 您能举一个例子吗? 请具体描述一下您遇到这个困难时的场景。您对这个经历有什么感受?

(4) Can you describe the situation/context when you felt being supported or understood? How does this experience make you feel? 您能表述一下您感到被支持或被理解时的场景吗? 这样的经历让您感觉如何?

(5) How do you understand disability? What does disability mean to you? 您怎样理解残障呢? 您觉得残障对于您意味着什么?

(6) How do you see yourself? Do you think your disability influences your perception of yourself? Do you think how other people react to you influences your perception of yourself? Can you give me an example? 您如何看待您自己呢? 您认为残障会影响您对自己的看法吗? 另外, 您在和别人交往的过程中, 他们对您的反应会影响您对自己的看法吗? 您能举例子吗?

Theme 2: Experiences of living with companion animals

主题二：与伴侣动物生活的经历和体验

This theme focuses on the relationship between people with physical disabilities and their companion animals. The interview questions will discover the lived experience of living with companion animals, lifestyle changes after having companion animals, benefits and drawbacks of living with companion animals, and the relationship with their companion animals. The participants will be encouraged to talk about their personal backgrounds with companion animals, reasons of and expectations of pet ownership. The interview questions will investigate personal changes because of pet ownership and how living with companion animals influences participants' lives, self-concepts, and social relations.

在这一部分的访谈中，研究参与者将和研究员讨论他们与其伴侣动物（宠物）共同生活的经历、体验和感受，例如拥有宠物是怎样的体验，养宠物的原因和对养宠物的期望，宠物给他们的生活带来哪些变化（如个人生活、自我认同和社会关系等），拥有宠物的优点和缺点，以及与宠物的互动和关系。

(7) Tell me about your pet(s). Describe them. 请介绍一下您的宠物。

(8) Is the current pet you live with your first companion animal? Did you have companion animals before? What role do they play in your life?现在和您生活在一起的宠物是您的第一个宠物吗？您之前还养过其他宠物吗？宠物在您的生活中扮演了怎样的角色呢？。

(9) Why do you want a companion animal? Do you have any expectations about having a companion animal? 您为什么想养宠物呢？您对于和宠物生活在一起有什么期待或期望吗？

(10) Please describe the experience of living with a companion animal. Is having a companion animal what you expected? 请您描述一下您和宠物生活在一起的经历和体验。这和你之前的预期一致吗？

(11) What are the main benefits of having a companion animal? Can you give me some examples? Please describe the situation/context when your companion animal supported you. 您觉得和宠物一起生活给您带来的好处有什么？您能举例子具体讲讲吗？请描述一下当您的宠物给您带来支持时的场景。

(12) What are the main challenges of having a companion animal? What social realities make your life more difficult because of pet ownership (for example, veterinary care, animal illness, grief, daily care, *etc.*)? Please describe the situation/context when your companion animal caused trouble to you. 您觉得宠物给您带来的不便有哪些？具体来说，您觉得哪些因素让您的生活因为养宠物变得更加困难了（例如兽医检查、宠物生病、每天对宠物的照顾、因为宠物生病或者去世产生的悲伤情绪等）？您能举个例子具体讲讲吗？

(13) Have your companion animal changed you in any way? What influence does your companion animal have on your life, yourself, your relationship with others?和宠物一起生活对您带来改变了吗? 宠物给您的生活、您自己和您与他人的关系带来了哪些影响呢?

(14) What does your companion animal mean to you? How do you understand your relationship with your companion animal? Do you think human-animal relationship is different from human relationship? 您的宠物对于您来说意味着什么? 您怎样理解您和您的宠物之间的关系呢? 您认为和宠物之间的关系和人与人之间的关系有什么不同吗?

Theme 3: Social environment for people with physical disabilities and their companion animals.

主题三：肢体残疾人士和其伴侣动物生活的社会环境

This theme will explore the social environment in which the participants and their companion animals live. Interview questions will discover the experiences of living in the city as a disabled person and whether the environment is supportive enough for people with physical disabilities and their companion animals. The participant will be encouraged to talk about whether they have negative experiences due to their physical disabilities, the perceived attitudes of others towards themselves and their companion animals, and perceived social barriers.

在这一部分的访谈中，研究参与者将和研究员讨论大的社会环境对参与者生活的影响，例如城市的生活环境、相关政策法规、社会文化环境等是否为肢体残疾人士及其宠物

提供了足够的支持；肢体残疾人士在日常生活中以及在养宠物的过程中遇到过哪些阻碍、得到过哪些支持，以及周围人的态度等。

(15) As a person with disability, what kind of support do you have (for example, financial support, employment, education)? 作为残障人士，您觉得您在平时的生活中的得到的支持足够吗（例如，经济资助、教育就业等）？

(16) Have you ever experienced discrimination, prejudice, or isolation (*related to stigma and social exclusion*) before? If you have had these experiences, did these happen frequently? Can you give me some examples? Please describe the situation/context when you had the negative experience. How does the negative experience make you feel? 因为您的残疾原因，您有过负面的经历吗（例如，污名化、偏见、社会排斥等）？这些负面经历发生的次数多吗？您能举例说明吗？例如，您的这些负面经历的具体场景是怎样的。这些负面经历让您有何感受？

(17) Do your family and friends support you to have pet(s)? What are their opinions about and attitudes toward you living with companion animal(s)? Can you give me an example? What did your family say about your companion animal? 您的家人和朋友支持您养宠物吗？他们对您养宠物的态度和意见是什么？

(18) Do you bring your companion animal to public places? If, so what is that like? What are other people's attitudes towards you and your companion animal? 您有过带宠物到公共场合的经历吗? 如果有, 请您描述一下当时的情景。其他人对您和您的宠物的态度怎么样?

(19) Do you think the social environment is supportive enough for you and your companion animal? For example, are public spaces accessible for you and your companion animal? Do you perceive any difficulties and challenges of living with disabilities and living with a companion animal caused by social environment? Can you give me an example? 您觉得目前大的社会环境对您和您的宠物来说提供了足够的支持吗? 比如, 公共场合的无障碍设施的建设是够给您外出带来足够的便利, 相关政策法规落实的情况等。您认为您日常生活及养宠物中遇到的困难有多大程度和社会环境有关呢?

(20) Can you tell me your experience during the Covid times? The Covid-19 caused extra challenges to have a companion animal as a person with disability? Do you think your companion animal help you cope with the difficult time? Can you give me an example? 您能跟我讲讲在新冠疫情比较严重的时候您的经历吗? 疫情给您和您的宠物造成了更多的困难吗? 您认为您的宠物能帮助您更好地应对这样比较困难的时刻吗?

At the end of the interview, I would like to ask you some personal information, for example, your age, education level, employment, marital status, and living arrangement.

在访谈最后，我想问您一些您的个人信息，比如您的年龄、受教育水平、目前的就
职状态和工作、婚姻状况、居住方式。

Thank you for your participation. 感谢您的参与!

Appendix 2 Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Understanding the Relationship between People with Physical Disabilities and Their Companion Animals in Urban China

您好！感谢您参与本次调查研究。本研究的题目为：《中国城市肢体残疾人士与伴侣动物关系的研究》。

Researcher 研究员:

Siyu Ru, PhD candidate,
Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan.

茹斯羽, 博士研究生

萨斯喀彻温大学, 社会学系
+1 306-966-8868, siyu.ru@usask.ca

Principal Investigator/Supervisor 指导教师:

Dr. Colleen Dell, Research Chair in One Health & Wellness, Professor, Tenured
Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan

Colleen Dell 博士, 同一健康(One Health & Wellness)研究主席, 终身教授

萨斯喀彻温大学, 社会学系
+1 306-966-5912, colleen.dell@usask.ca

Purpose and Objective of the Research 研究目的和目标:

- This research is interested in the relationship between people with physical disabilities in China and their companion animals. To be more specific, this research will investigate the lived experiences of being physically disabled in China, their experiences of living with a companion animal, how this unique bond influences the life and identity of people with disabilities, and the social environment in which the participants live.
本研究将探讨中国城市肢体残疾人士与伴侣宠物的关系的问题。本研究将探究残障人士的生活经历和体验, 肢体残疾人士与伴侣动物(宠物)生活的经历, 与伴侣动物(宠物)的关系如何影响残障人士的生活和自我认同, 以及社会环境对于身体残疾人士和其伴侣动物的影响。

Procedures 访谈步骤:

- This research will use semi-structured interviews as research methods. Because of the influence of COVID-19, interviews will be conducted by videoconferencing to protect the wellbeing of you and the researcher. The interviews with you contain three meetings.

The first meeting is an introduction to the participant and his/her pet(s), and the goal is to build connections between you and the researcher. The second meeting is an interview aiming to gather information about your previous experiences. This interview will cover three themes: (1) Experiences of disabilities, (2) Experiences of living with companion animals, and (3) Social environment for people with physical disabilities and their companion animals. A third interview may be needed to cover anything more in-depth that had not been covered in the second interview.

本研究采用的研究方法为半结构式访谈。因为新冠疫情的影响，为了保护您和研究人员的健康，与您的访谈将以线上的形式开展。为了充分了解您的生活经历和感受，对您的访谈将分为三个部分。您与研究员的第一次见面的主要目标是建立联系、相互了解。第二次见面是本次访谈的核心部分，研究员邀请您就以下三个主题分享您的经历和见解：（1）作为肢体残疾人士，您的生活经历和体验是什么；（2）您和伴侣动物（宠物）在一起生活的经历和体验是什么，以及这种体验对您的影响是什么；（3）社会环境对您和您的伴侣动物的影响是什么。在第二次访谈结束后，研究员可能会与您联系进行第三次访谈。第三次见面的主要目的是补充信息，以深入了解第二次访谈中还未明确的问题。

- The first meeting will be about 30 minutes. The second interview is expected to take 60-90 minutes. The third interview will be about 60 minutes.

您与研究员的第一次访谈预计需要 30 分钟。第二次访谈是本研究最核心的部分，预计需要 60-90 分钟。第三次访谈预计需要 60 分钟。

- If you are willing to participate in this project but do not have adequate time to finish all three meetings, please inform the researcher. You can choose to have one in-depth interview with the researcher. The in-depth interview will take 60-90 minutes.

如果您愿意参加本研究但是没有足够的时间完成全部三次访谈，请告知研究者。您可以选择只与研究员进行一次深入访谈。这一次深入访谈需要 60-90 分钟。

- Interviews will be conducted at a time that is mutually agreeable.

访谈将在双方同意的时间进行。

- Because of the influence of COVID-19, to protect your and the researcher's wellbeing, remote interviews will be conducted through an online videoconferencing platform. Considering the quality of interviews and the cost of international calling, the researcher does not suggest participating by phone. For the online videoconferencing platform, the researcher recommends using Zoom to have the interviews with you.

由于新冠疫情的影响，为了保护您和研究者的健康，研究者将会和您进行网络访谈。考虑到访谈的质量及国际长途电话的费用，研究员不建议使用电话进行访谈。关于网络访谈所用的软件，研究者推荐使用 Zoom 和您进行访谈。

- Zoom is an application for videoconferencing and online meetings. The basic steps to use Zoom to conduct remote interviews include:

Zoom 是一款进行网络会议和视频会议的应用程序。使用 Zoom 进行本次网络访谈的基本步骤如下：

- 1) If you are interested in this research, you can contact the researcher by the email shown in the recruitment material.
如果您对本研究有兴趣，可以通过海报上的电子邮箱联系研究员。
- 2) The researcher will contact you by email for your permission to use Zoom to do the interviews. The researcher will also explain the functions of Zoom and how to use Zoom to do the remote interviews in the email. If you agree to participate in this research, the researcher will schedule a Zoom meeting with a password at a time convenient for you. The researcher will send you the Zoom meeting invitation and the password to you by email, and you can join the meeting at the time of the interview.

收到您的邮件后，研究员会和您联系并征询您对使用 Zoom 进行网络访谈的意见。同时，研究员会在邮件中向您说明 Zoom 的主要功能及如何使用 Zoom 进行网络视频。如果您同意参与本研究，研究员将和您确定访谈的时间，之后会将视频会议的邀请链接以及加入会议室的密码通过邮件发送给您，到时您可以点击链接加入视频会议。

Please see Page 6 for strategies to protect your confidentiality and privacy for using Zoom.

关于如何在使用 Zoom 进行网络访谈时保护您的隐私的措施，请参阅第 6 页。

- The remote interviews will be audio recorded. You have the right to request that the recorder be turned off at any time without giving a reason.
为了保证访谈资料的准确性，研究者将会对本次访谈进行录音。您有权在任何时刻要求研究者停止录音且不需要说明理由。
- After your interview, and before the data being analyzed, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. Please note that you have **14 days** to review the transcripts after the transcripts have handed to you.
访谈结束后，访谈录音将会被整理为文字记录。在访谈内容被用于研究者论文中之前，您可以检查访谈录音的文字记录并有权增加、调整或者删除您认为必要的信息。请注意，当您收到文字记录后，您将有 **14 天**的时间阅读文字记录。请及时通知研究者访谈记录是否需要修改。
- The researcher, Siyu Ru, will be responsible to transcribe the recordings of the interviews.
研究员茹斯羽负责将访谈的录音整理为文字记录。
- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

如果您有任何关于本研究目标、访谈过程以及您在研究中承担的角色等问题，请随时向研究员提问。

Potential Risks 潜在风险:

- During the interviews, you may talk about your experiences of being stigmatized or excluded. Possible risks include psychological discomfort when discussing previous negative experiences. The researcher will explicitly ask, at regular intervals and at the end of the interview, if you are experiencing any stress or discomfort.

在访谈的过程中，您可能会谈到您原来被污名化或歧视等负面经历。在谈论过去的负面经历时，您可能会产生心理上的不适感。研究员会在访谈中和访谈后询问您您是否感受到不舒服或觉得很有压力。

- If you experience psychological difficulties, you have the right to withdraw from the research project. You are encouraged to use the mental health counselling service provided by the local Disabled Persons Federation.

如果您感到过于不适，您有权选择退出本次研究。同时，您也可以使用当地残疾人联合会提供的心理疏导服务帮助您调整心理上的不适感。

Potential Benefits 潜在效益:

- The interviews provide an open environment to discuss your previous experiences and relationship with your companion animal(s). This research may benefit you by offering an opportunity to reflect on your life and your attachment to your companion animal(s). The interviews may provide an opportunity to deepen your bond with your companion animal(s).

这次访谈提供一个轻松开放的环境来讨论您之前的生活体验、感受以及您与您的伴侣动物（宠物）之间的关系。在这次访谈中，您可以回忆您的人生经历，思考您与您的伴侣动物（宠物）之间的亲密联系，加深您和伴侣动物（宠物）之间的感情。

- The research results may provide a better understanding of the disabled community and human-animal interactions. By discussing the social barriers faced by people with disabilities, this research may provide implications for building a more inclusive environment. However, please note that the benefits are not guaranteed.

本研究的研究结果有助于公众更好地了解残障人士群体，也有助于让更多人意识到伴侣动物（宠物）在人们日常生活中的重要作用。此外，通过和您讨论残障人士面临的社会障碍和困难，本研究可以提出关于建立更加包容的社会环境的意见和建议。但是请注意，以上的潜在效益不能保证一定实现。

Compensation 报酬:

- Because of the influence of COVID-19, the researcher cannot pass you anything in person. Therefore, the researcher will transfer 20 dollars (about 100 RMB) to you in appreciation of your time and support. Even if you withdraw during data collection, you will still receive the same amount of transfer.

为了感谢您对本研究的支持，您的参与是有偿的。由于新冠疫情的影响，研究者无法当面给予您实物回报，因此，研究者会赠予您 100 元人民币的现金红包，以感谢您对研究者的帮助。即使您最终决定退出本研究，您也可以获得等额的回报。

- The researcher will use Alipay to transfer the compensation to you. The researcher can transfer the compensation to your Alipay account or to your bank card. If you want the researcher to transfer the compensation to your Alipay account, you can show your Alipay QR code to the researcher during the interview, and the researcher will scan the code and transfer the compensation to you. If you want the researcher to transfer the compensation to your bank card, please provide your bank account information (including your name and your card number) to the researcher during the interview, and the researcher will transfer the compensation to you.

研究员将会通过支付宝向您转账。研究员可以通过支付宝将报酬转入您的支付宝或者银行卡中。如果您希望研究员将报酬转入您的支付宝中，请在网络访谈时向研究员出示您的支付宝二维码，研究员会扫码向您转账。如果您希望研究员将报酬转入您的银行卡中，请在访谈时提供您的姓名和银行卡号，研究者之后会将报酬支付给您。

Confidentiality 保密性:

- Because of the COVID-19, remote interviews will be conducted to protect the wellbeing of you and the researcher. The online teleconferencing program may create some limitations to your confidentiality, and please notice that no guarantee of privacy of data can be made. The researcher will use different strategies protect your confidentiality and privacy.

因为新冠疫情的影响，为了您和研究者的健康，本次研究的访谈将以线上的形式展开。但是网络会议程序有可能会对您的隐私造成影响，并且请注意数据的保密性不能被完全确保。但研究者仍会然采取多种措施来保护您的隐私。

- Strategies to protect your confidentiality and privacy when using Zoom to have interviews with you:

在使用 Zoom 和您访谈时时保护您隐私和身份安全的措施：

- 1) The researcher will use a Zoom Pro account and the latest release of Zoom to have the interviews with you. If you are willing to use Zoom to do the interviews, the researcher will only contact you via emails. You will be contacted separately,

and no group emails will be sent to you. All emails sent to you will be securely stored separately from the data on One Drive on the USask server.

研究员将使用 Zoom 专业版以及 Zoom 的最新版本和您进行访谈。若您希望通过网讯进行本次访谈，研究者将只通过邮箱与您联系。为了保护您的隐私，研究员会单独而不是通过群发邮件的方式和您进行联系。来往邮件将会和访谈数据分开保存至上传至萨斯喀彻温大学的服务器（OneDrive）。

- 2) To protect your privacy, the videoconference will be conducted in a private area of the home that will not be accessible by individuals outside of the research team during the interview. The researcher recommend that you do the same during the interview to ensure you will not be interrupted by others during the interviews. 为了保护您的隐私、防止他人打扰，在访谈期间，研究员将单独留在一个安全私密的房间。同时，研究员也建议您尽量在选择安全私密的房间进行访谈。

- 3) The remote interviews will be audio recorded only. The researcher will not use cloud session recording. The local session recording will be saved to a USask managed device instead of a personal computer or device. The researcher will move the data to OneDrive for long term storage and that access will be restricted to appropriate parties. To protect your privacy, please do not make any unauthorized recordings of the content of interview. 研究员会对本次线上访谈进行录音，以便之后的数据分析。研究者确保不会使用云储存。本地录音的音频资料会保存至萨斯喀彻温大学管理的设备中，研究员个人电脑等设备中不会存储相关数据，以避免数据泄露。之后，研究者会将访谈录音以及后续相关数据上传至 OneDrive 进行更长期的存储，访问这些数据的权限是有限制的。为了保护您的隐私，请不要对本次访谈进行未授权的录音或录屏。

- 4) Zoom data centres are grouped into the following regions: the United States, Canada, Europe, India, Australia, China, Latin America, and Japan/Hong Kong SAR. As of April 18, 2020, paid Zoom customers can opt in or out of a specific data center region. Paid Zoom customers can customize the meeting servers and Zoom connectors that can be used to connect to Zoom meetings they are hosting. You can check the links below for further information about privacy and security on Zoom. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Zoom 在全球有多个数据中心，分布于美国、加拿大、欧洲、印度、澳大利亚、拉丁美洲、日本及香港特别行政区。自 2020 年 4 月 18 日起，付费的 Zoom 用户可以选择加入或退出特定的 Zoom 数据中心。在付费用户主持会议时，其可以选择会议服务器和 Zoom 的连接器。你可以通过以下链接查阅 Zoom 的隐私和安全政策，获取更多关于隐私保护的信息。

<https://zoom.us/zh-cn/security.html>

<https://zoom.us/docs/zh-cn/privacy-and-security.html>

- The collected data will be used in the researcher’s dissertation. The researcher plans to present the research at Canadian Sociological Association in 2021. Required by the department of sociology, the researcher will present her work for the SOC 990 seminar. This research will be published as a peer-review article in Canada.

本次访谈的结果将被用于研究者的博士论文中。研究者计划在 2021 年加拿大社会学年会上汇报本研究的研究成果。根据萨斯喀彻温大学社会学系的要求，研究者在毕业前需在社会学系的研讨会（SOC 990）中汇报研究成果。另外，研究者计划将本研究发表至加拿大的学术期刊。

- Direct quotations of your interviews may be used in the researcher’s dissertation; however, your personally identifying information will not be included in the dissertation, presentations, and publications.

研究者的博士论文可能会直接引用您的访谈内容，但是为了保护您的隐私，您的个人身份信息将在论文、学术汇报和相关出版物中被隐去。

- The researcher will ensure that your personally identifying information will not be disclosed. The following precautions will be taken to protect your confidentiality.

研究者保证您的个人身份信息不会被泄露。研究者将会采取如下预防措施来保护您的隐私。

- a) “Although the data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences, the data will be reported in aggregate form so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. Moreover, the consent forms will be stored separately from the data so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.”

“尽管研究者将在学术会议上发表和汇报本研究的访谈数据，但相关数据会以汇总的形式进行汇报，以保证参与者身份不会被识别。此外，您的知情同意书会和访谈数据分开存放，以保证您的姓名与您的访谈资料不会被联系起来。”

- b) “The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although direct quotations may be reported from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information (list relevant possibilities such as the name of the institution, the participant’s position, etc.) will be removed from the report.”

“尽管研究者将在学术会议上发表和汇报本研究的访谈数据，但您的身份是保密的。尽管报告会直接引用某些访谈内容，但研究者会使用化名指代您，关于您的身份信息（例如你就职的单位、职务等）也不会再在报告被提及。”

- Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) to grant or deny your permission 请在以下表格中适合您的选项后标注对号以表明您的授权:

I grant permission to be audio recorded 我同意音频录音	
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Please only select one option below 请在以下表格里选择一项符合您意愿的选项:

I wish for my identity to be confidential 我希望我的身份是保密的。	
I wish for my identity to be confidential but you may refer to me by a pseudonym. 我希望我的身份保密，但研究者可以用化名指代我。 The pseudonym I choose for myself is 我为自己选择的化名是: _____	
You may quote me and use my name 研究者可以使用我的名字指代我	
I would like to be acknowledged for contributing to the research 我希望在论文致谢部分中，研究者可以提及我对本研究的贡献	

Storage of Data 数据存储:

- The physical and electronic data will be securely stored. The electronic data, such as the audio records of the interviews, will be uploaded to the USask server (OneDrive) immediately after collection and local copies on the recording device and local hard drives will be deleted once the upload is complete. All electronic data relevant to this research (e.g., the transcripts of the interviews) will be securely stored on the University of Saskatchewan password-protected computer that belongs to the researcher's supervisor. All physical data (e.g., consent forms) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in supervisor's locked University of Saskatchewan office. The researcher will use the secure Cabinet on PAWS as a backup to prevent the loss of data.
为了保护您的隐私，与本研究相关的纸质和电子数据将被妥善存储。在每次访谈结束后，研究者会立即将相关的电子数据（如访谈录音）上传至萨斯喀彻温大学的服务器（OneDrive）。上传结束后，录音设备及本地硬盘中资料将被删除。在之后的研究分析中，所有相关的电子数据（如访谈内容的文字版）将妥善存储至研究者导师办公室中的电脑中（登录电脑需输入密码）。所有相关的纸质材料（如知情同意书）将被安全地保存至研究者导师办公室中上锁的文件柜中。另外，为了防止数据丢失造成不便，研究者还会将电子数据备份至萨斯喀彻温大学学生门户信息下的电子档案中。
- The data will be stored for five years post-publication based on University of Saskatchewan Guidelines. After the storage period, the data will be destroyed beyond recovery.

根据萨斯喀彻温大学的指导意见，与本研究相关的数据将会被保存五年。数据存储空间过后，所有相关数据将被销毁且不可恢复。

Right to Withdraw 退出权:

- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project **one month (30 days) after your participation** for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.

您对于本研究的参与基于个人自愿，您可以只回答您认为适当的问题。您可以因任何原因退出本研究，且不需要对研究者提供退出说明或解释，您也不会因为退出本研究受到任何形式的负面影响。请注意，请在第三次访谈结束后的**一个月（30天）**告知研究者您希望退出本研究。

- Should you wish to withdraw, your interview data will be destroyed at your request. 如果您希望退出本研究，您的访谈资料将会按照您的要求被销毁。
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position (e.g., employment, access to services) or how you will be treated.

您是否参与本研究对您目前的状态和待遇没有影响（例如，就业情况、获得服务的机会等）。

Follow up 后续跟进:

- If you would like to obtain results from the study, please contact the researcher using the email address at the top of page 1. The researcher will provide you a summary of the research results in Chinese.

如果您希望了解本研究的研究结果，您可以通过本知情同意书第一页的电子邮箱联系研究员。研究员将发送给您一份中文的研究结果总结。

Questions or Concerns 问题或疑虑:

- Contact the researcher using the information at the top of page 1. 如果您有任何问题或疑虑，请根据本知情同意书第一页的信息联系研究员。
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you can contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan via email (ethics.office@usask.ca) or call collect (+1-306-966-2975). The contact information can be found on this webpage: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/contacts/our-offices/research-excellence-and-innovation.php>.

本研究已获得萨斯喀彻温大学行为研究伦理委员会的伦理批准。如果您对作为研究参与者的权益有任何问题，请通过邮件或电话等方式联系萨斯喀彻温大学研究伦理办公室：电子邮件 ethics.office@usask.ca；或拨打对方付费电话 +1-306-966-2975。萨斯喀彻温大学研究伦理办公室具体联系方式见以下链接：
<https://vpresearch.usask.ca/contacts/our-offices/research-excellence-and-innovation.php>.

Oral Consent 确认口头同意:

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it. 在取得研究参与者的同意之前，我已向参与者宣读并解释了本知情同意书的内容。研究参与者已了解并理解本知情同意书的内容。

Name of Participant 参与者姓名

Researcher's Signature 研究员签名

Date 日期