

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Implementation and Challenge of Supported Employment for Persons with Disabilities in China

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Title page

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Introduction

As an alternative to sheltered workplace employment, supported employment (**SE**) promotes competitive employment for persons with severe disabilities in mainstream, inclusive settings that provide income above the minimum wage (**Kregel,1997**; Barreira et al., 2011). The emergence of **SE** has **changed** the stereotype **of** persons with severe disabilities **whom people always regard** as **incapable of** competitive work. **Moreover, SE has** enabled persons with severe disabilities to move from a traditional life of "isolation" to a **high-quality** life of social inclusion. **SE** has been regulated by **legislation** in some Western countries. For example, the US *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1984* specified that **SE** was an individualized employment service for persons with developmental disabilities. Later, *the Rehabilitation Act of*

1986 redefined **SE** from the perspective of competitive and inclusive **employment** and formally incorporated **SE** into the American vocational rehabilitation system. **SE** was introduced in China in the late 1990s and **was** mainly **practiced** by non-governmental **organizations**. It was not until 2014 that the Chinese government initiated a pilot program to implement **SE** (CAPIDR, 2014). In 2016, *the Thirteenth Five-year(2016-2020) Project: Accelerating Process of Well-off Living for Persons with Disabilities* took **SE** as a **critical** strategy to increase employment and income for persons with disabilities (State Council, 2016). In 2017, *the Thirteenth Five-year(2016-2020) Plan for Promoting Equal Access to Basic Public Services* highlighted the **critical** tasks of providing auxiliary **employment** and **SE** for persons with intellectual, mental, and severe physical disabilities(State Council, 2017). In 2021, **China** issued *the Fourteenth Five-year (2021-2025)Plan for the Security and Development of Persons with Disabilities* to enhance **the** quantity and quality of employment of persons with disabilities(State Council, 2021). Under **these** circumstances, **SE** is regarded as a crucial strategy to achieve the Chinese governmental goal of promoting **the** employment of persons with disabilities. This study, therefore, is to explore how important relevant practitioners understand and implement **SE** for persons with disabilities in China.

Supported Employment

SE is a highly specialized employment service provided by employment counselors for persons with severe disabilities, aiming to push persons with severe disabilities into competitive employment in regular workplaces(Wehman, 2012).In **the** US, **SE** was not initially a service for all persons with disabilities (**PWD**). The main target of **SE** was persons with **developmental disabilities** at **the** start, and **it** gradually expanded to mental disabilities, physical disabilities, brain

trauma, and autism in practice (Wehman, 2012). After the spread of SE to Europe in the 1990s, it even covered vulnerable groups other than PWD(European Union, 2012).

In order to cater to the individual characteristics and needs of different types of persons with severe disabilities, there are three main practice models of SE, including individual placement and support(IPS), enclave, and mobile work team (Konig & Schalock, 1991; Wehman, 2012; Marino & Dixon, 2014; Keel et al., 1997). The IPS involves a job coach who works with an individual with mental disability to locate a job in the community and provides intensive training. In the enclave, one job coach is assigned to several individuals with disabilities who work for one business. The mobile crew model involves a job coach working with several individuals with disabilities providing a service in the community. Compared with the latter two models, the IPS is the standard model of SE, which helps most participants successfully achieve competitive employment and rapidly expands in the US and many high-income countries (Drake et al., 2019). So far, the implementation of SE has established general steps, including assessing and establishing employment plans, finding and matching jobs, training employment skills, providing necessary support, and evaluating employee performance (Konig & Schalock, 1991; Jaleel et al., 2014).

An early study indicated that SE significantly increased the income of PWD, improved employers' acceptance, and became cost-effective(Kregel, 1997). This study also indicated challenges regarding insufficient government funding, tremendous service demands, and the need to formulate strategies to promote career development for PWD. Cramm and colleagues (2009) adopted qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the subjective experiences of PWD on SE. Their finding indicated that SE contributed to the self-development and happiness of persons

with intellectual disabilities. Bond and Drake(2014) affirmed the above effectiveness of SE. They also pointed out that the shortage of funds, the limited inclusion of the service population, and the fear of loss of social security due to work constituted obstacles to implementing SE.

Menear and others (2011) found that institutions providing SE services encountered difficulties, especially in terms of interaction relationships, values, beliefs, and ideologies among institutions and other organizations, which played a decisive role in developing SE in their regions. Meanwhile, Luciano and colleagues (2014) reported that the community size did not influence the implementation effect of SE.

Waghorn and colleagues (2015) pointed out that post-employment support was a crucial stage of SE for maintaining work and career development. Cimera (2014) indicated that PWD who were provided with follow-up services by individuals who were not employees of vocational training agencies had better career outcomes and lower costs than traditional support methods(i.e., agency-based job coach). Mank and colleagues(2000) found that support hours are high not because of high support needs but because of poor job matches in many instances.

As an essential role, employment counselors' capacity is closely related to SE outcomes. Employment counselors need specific abilities to help persons with severe disabilities obtain and maintain competitive jobs(Corbière et al., 2014). Whitley and colleagues (2010) suggested that employment counselors needed initiative, outreach, persistence, hardiness, empathy, passion, team orientation, and professionalism. Corbière and colleagues(2014)pointed employment counselors must use knowledge from various fields, including workplace, clinical, and policy knowledge.

Employment Situation of Persons with Disabilities in China

There are three forms of employment for PWD in China, collective employment, quota

employment, and individual employment. As a way of sheltered employment, collective employment has been the main form of employment for PWD for a long time in China(Liao & Luo, 2010). The leading representative of collective employment is welfare companies formed in 1949 and smoothly developed in 1978. By 1995, the welfare companies reached 60,237 and peaked. Despite the number of welfare companies has been gradually declining since 1996 (Yang, 2009), collective employment still plays a vital role in the employment of PWD in China. The latest statistical data indicated that around 268,000 PWD were employees of collective employment (CDPF, 2022). To further promote employment for PWD, the Chinese government began to implement auxiliary employment for persons with intellectual, mental, and severe physical disabilities in 2015(CDPF, 2015). Auxiliary employment is collective employment for the above specific PWD who were willing to work but found it difficult to enter the competitive labor market. Because of its centralized placement, auxiliary employment belongs to collective employment and has the nature of protection. However, unlike welfare companies, the object of auxiliary employment is limited to the above three types of traditionally disadvantaged employment groups. Meanwhile, auxiliary employment has greater flexibility in employment places, forms of employment, labor remuneration, and working hours (Bao & Xiao, 2017). By 2021, the number of PWD in auxiliary employment reached 143,000(CDPF,2022).

Quota employment is another vital form of PWD other than collective employment in China. It has been implemented since 1990, requiring government agencies, social groups, enterprises, public institutions, and private non-enterprise units to employ PWD according to the legal proportion that is not less than 1.5% of the total number of employees in the unit. Those who fail to fulfill their legal obligations should pay the employment security fund for PWD. By 2021, the

quota employment system involved around 818,000 PWD (CDPF, 2022).

Since the emergence of individual businesses in China in the early 1980s, individual employment has become one of the **primary** forms of employment for **PWD** (zhou, 2012). Individual employment means that **PWD** obtain **jobs** by establishing **economic** entities and social organizations(CDPF, 2018). By 2021, the number of **PWD** in individual employment reached 635,000(CDPF, 2022)

It is worth noting that since the beginning of this century, the Chinese government has put forward building a harmonious socialist society(The Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, 2006) and proposed realizing **the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation**(Qi, 2019). The **goal** of the above political concepts is to pursue happiness for all Chinese, including **PWD** in China. Under such political background, the Chinese government initiated a pilot project of **SE** for **PWD** in **seven provinces and cities, such as Beijing and Hunan, in 2014**. Later, **China** Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) reported that around 3503 **PWD, initially placed in segregated healthcare organizations, were successfully employed through SE services**(CDPF, 2015). Since then, **the Chinese government has enacted a series of policies** to indicate the governmental drive toward **SE**, such as *the Thirteenth Five-year(2016-2020) Project: Accelerating Process of Well-off Living for PWD* in 2016, *the Thirteenth Five-year (2016-2020) Plan for Promoting Equal Access to Basic Public Services* in 2017, and *the Fourteenth Five-year (2021-2025)Plan for the Security and Development of PWD* in 2021.

Domestic studies on **SE** mainly focused on theoretical discussion and description of experience **without** little consideration of empirical evidence. For example, Xu and Zhou (2016)**introduced** how to carry out **SE** based on practical operation; Liu and colleagues (2015)

summarized four basic steps of implementing SE, involving application of service and career assessment, job developing and vocational training, work adaptation and continuous support; Zhuo and others (2015) reported difficulties in implementing SE, such as low levels of family support, coordination problems between different agencies, employers' unwillingness to employ PWD, and problems with policy assurance and implementation. Given that SE is a Western product, the existing research lacks an in-depth understanding of its connotation and a specific analysis of the implementation process in China. This study thus explored the specific situation of implementing SE in China and formed the following three research issues:

1. How do the practitioners perceive SE in China?
2. How do the practitioners implement SE in China?
3. What are the problems and challenges in implementing SE in China?

Methods

Participants

This study adopted purposeful sampling to collect as much information as possible for analytical generalization in this study. Research participants were practitioners of SE, involving (1) leaders of the civil service institutions and employment counselors as they were not only responsible for carrying out SE but also directly involved in each process of SE; (2) program officers who were in charge of promoting the pilot project of SE in all seven provinces and cities of China; (3) government officers from Disabled Persons' Federation (DPF) both at local and governmental level, who are responsible for the development of SE in their respective regions and have comprehensive information on the implementation of SE in their respective regions.

Ultimately, 22 participants were selected from six provinces or cities in China. Among them,

17 persons were the head and employment counselors of service agencies for PWD, 1 China project officer of International Labour Organization(ILO), and 4 persons in charge of employment of local DPF. All participants were willing to participate after being informed of the research purpose and data usage.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to access participants' perceptions of the service objects, work sources, work destinations, implementing methods, procedures, and obstacles of SE. The specific interview questions include such as: "how does your organization carry out SE" "what are the main targets of SE services" "what is the specific process of SE" and "what do you think are the difficulties in carrying out SE." During the interview, the researcher will adjust the questions according to the participants' answers at any time, encouraging and stimulating the participants to clarify the facts of their own experiences, views, and potential reasons. Most interviews were recorded with the consent of participants, while detailed written records were made for those who did not.

Data Analysis

As interviews were conducted with specific themes, the analysis method of the interview texts was problem-focused (Weiss, 1995). The specific steps are as follows: (1) carefully reading the transcribed interview materials in order to find words, sentences, concepts, and propositions related to research questions based on familiar data; (2) Classifying the data and commenting on them; (3) Identifying emerging themes; (4) Reading the data according to the emerging themes and determining the main topics; (5) Encoding the data; (6) Selecting excerpts that support the topics. The entire data analysis process follows the above steps but often involves returning to the

early stages of data analysis to identify new findings.

The first author was responsible for all data analysis. In order to ensure the reliability of the analysis results, the first author and the second author randomly selected and analyzed 20% of the data, and the coding consistency was 84.3%. In addition, the coding validity is assured by presenting preliminary results to the research participants and exchanging views with them in order to ensure authenticity.

Results¹

Participants' Understanding of Supported Employment

The overwhelming majority of participants recognized that SE was an employment model different from traditional sheltered employment. They clearly understood that SE was a professional and personalized service, characterizing equal pay for equal work, and could promote the inclusion of PWD into the familiar environment. Only one participant from the local DPF tended to regard SE as the same as sheltered employment: *'both supported and sheltered employment aim to support employment for PWD. Although the terminologies are different, they are under the supervision of teachers or parents'* (Cdf01). Moreover, participants realized that SE shared some characteristics with quota employment. For example,

'Quota employment is the inclusive employment placement for all categories of PWD. SE is quota employment for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. What difference is that, for example, in the quota employment system, modifying the working environment would be enough for persons with physical disabilities to work in an inclusive environment successfully. However, modifying the working environment might not be enough for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities who may need further support in the work process. That is why SE

is a promotion way of quota employment'(Cso07).

Participants recognized that both supported and quota employment **was** inclusive **employment placement**. Through quota employment, **PWD can access** employment in ordinary workplaces. **Quota employment provides an institutional guarantee for PWD to obtain integrated employment opportunities**. Participants generally reported that quota employment was often a **factor for employers to consider the placement of PWD in developing jobs**. However, it would be impossible for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities to be employed only through quota employment systems alone. Because of cognitive **defects**, they **need support** in ordinary workplaces through **SE services**.

The overwhelming majority of participants tended to believe that sheltered employment was necessary because some **PWD** could not work in **an inclusive environment**. Moreover, the traditional goal of sheltered employment has been to train and prepare for competitive and inclusive employment(Brennan-Krohn, 2016). The participants also **believed** that sheltered employment **approaches** such as occupational rehabilitation stations and auxiliary employment could be a transitional stage **linked** and integrated with **SE**, playing a function of career preparation for **PWD** before or after entering inclusive employment.

Specific Practice of Supported Employment

Specific Targets. The participants reported that the category of disabilities in **SE** in China mainly involved persons with Intellectual and mental disabilities, autism. These targets mainly involved **individuals with** mild and moderated **degree** of **disabilities**, e.g., *'The main target of SE in the Western countries involves persons with severe disabilities, whereas we mainly focus on persons with mild disabilities. We have a few cases with moderate disabilities but do not have any cases*

with severe disabilities. Such a situation is prevalent in China'(Cso04).

The Service Provider: Organizations and Employment Counselor. The participants reported that SE in China mainly relied on non-government organizations, most of which provided daycare services for PWD. One governmental participant mentioned that the lack of organizations in their local area prevented them from obtaining governmental support to conduct SE, *'our financial support projects usually require at least three similar organizations to bid. Unfortunately, only one organization in our area is conducting SE. As government officials, we would like to support this project, but it does not meet governmental procurement requirements'* (Cdf01).

The participants claimed that one key challenge for such organizations to conduct SE was cultivating employment counselors. In China, there is no unified professional certification standard for employment counselors, and they often work after attending training courses for employment counselors. As they reported, employment counselors in their agencies have attended SE courses organized by China Association of Persons with Intellectual Disability and Their Relatives(CAPIDR) and ILO since 2014. Some employment counselors attend training in related categories such as 'career instructor' or 'employment instructor' training or attend SE training offered by their institution or China Intellectual and Developmental Disability Network(CIDDDN)². The Participants reported that one pilot area had regularized employment counselor training with the support of the local DPF. Almost all participants recognized the professional and complex job of employment counselors. For example,

'the position of employment counselor is very professional. It requires that he or she is not only a social worker with a professional ideal of social work and supporting disability, but also has the rich social experience to make things work among three parties including parents, PWD,

and enterprise' (Cso07).

Some participants reported they hired employment **counselors** according to their understanding of SE, e.g., *'we have requirements for those who would be employment **counselors** in our organization. He or she might **graduate with a major in social work or career instructor. The former is better**'*(Cso08). Most participants stated that the employment counselors in their institutions often worked part-time in the SE services. **The** employment counselors usually wore several hats and thus faced high work pressure, **so** those who had participated in the training of employment counselors might not be fully engaged in SE, **thus leading** to the loss of employment **counselors**. Some participants tended to believe that the relatively low and unstable salary contributed to the high rate of employment **counselor** attrition. The lack of employment **counselors** is the biggest challenge for implementing SE, e.g., *'We have many cases who need **support** through the SE services. **Unfortunately**, we cannot find **enough** employment counselors'*(Cso11).

Ways of Supported Employment Practices. Most participants reported **receiving financial support from the local government** to implement SE programs. The participants indicated that the local government first provided a subsidy to cases with disabilities in their institutions, then converted **case subsidies** into official **purchases**, e.g., *'Our pilot program of SE requested 10 institutions to support 20 cases with disabilities **successfully**. Each case had a subsidy of 10,000 RMB. The pilot program **ended** in 2016. Since then, the **government** subsidy policy **transformed** into purchasing services with **the** financial support of 19,000 RMB for a case'*(Cs09). According to the participants, **the way and the amount of financial support** varied by **region**. Some regions tended **first** to identify cases and then purchase services from institutions for the cases, whereas others tended to purchase services provided by the SE counselors(i.e., paying **wages** and social security).

The participants perceived that SE practices in institutions would depend heavily on government purchasing services in the future. They often complained about the governmental purchases in terms of relatively low budget standards and high requirements on their institutions. For example,

'The budget of the government purchases is too tight to pay labor costs. The proportion of labor cost in the budget is quite limited'(Cso04);

'There is a bid of the government purchases in City B. We cannot bid because our institution is not a social worker services organization'(Cso11).

Perhaps because of such limits on government purchases, most participants reported that their institutions, independently or in conjunction with other social organizations, initiated inclusive employment stations such as bakeries, milk tea shops, snack bars, and car wash stations. PWD in these inclusive employment stations were guided and supported to work with employees without disabilities. Such stations were inclusive but temporary. As stated by the participants, establishing such stations aimed to train the work capacity of PWD and prepare them to work in authentic, inclusive work environments. Some participants also emphasized that the inclusive employment stations were conducive to demonstrating the workability of PWD for the general public.

Implementation Mode of Supported Employment. Most participants reported that their SE practices referred to the IPS, which involved one-to-one support and had been regarded as a relatively efficient way to promote competitive employment for PWD (Bond & Drake, 2014). Only two participants talked about Working Group Model(WGM). For example,

'We also conduct the Work Group practices, especially for those with disabilities who cannot independently work in the inclusive environment yet, to further train their workability and

eventually *promote* IPS. We selected three persons with intellectual disabilities to *clean* in a hotel *supported* by an employment counselor. The hotel paid our organization directly, as the hotel wanted to sign a contract with our organization rather than the three persons with intellectual disabilities. Our organization then redistributed wages according to a predetermined allocation plan *discussed* with their parents before we started work '(Cso04).

As illustrated, the use of WGM depends on **the workability of PWD** and **is a vital** auxiliary to IPS. Another consideration for WGM might be related to **the** collaborative nature of **work** that **more than one person could do** at a time.

Specific Steps of Implementing Supported Employment. Regardless of **the placement model type**, **SE's first step is developing** job opportunities (Xu, 2016). **However**, in practice, **the** participants reported **that** developing job and career **assessments** often went hand in hand, which was often related to the uncertainty of developing jobs. The participants reported that their agency used the most primitive way to develop job opportunities, such as *going door to door, relying on contacts and connections of their organization*. One participant, whose organization is in a pilot area where **SE** is developing rapidly, shared their experience **with** developing jobs,

'In our pilot area, an organization has its team dedicated to developing job opportunities. Once they find suitable jobs, they will post to our pilot area. Other organizations in our pilot area could follow up to carry out the SE if they have appropriate cases'(Cso10).

This extract reflects the collaboration between organizations **to** cope with **the** shortage of human **and** professional **resources** in **developing SE**. While such collaborations and resource-sharing are conducive to **developing SE**, they also lead to competing interests between organizations, **e.g.**, *'A organization in our area got a large sum of government subsidy because the*

organization requested our cases to take vocational evaluation by them. After we knew what they did regarding vocational evaluation, we found that we could do the same at the start' (Cso15). The above again illustrated the shortage of funding resources and expertise in SE practices.

According to the participants, their developed job opportunities mainly involved the service industry, such as hotels, restaurants, and cleaning. Most came from foreign companies and private enterprises rather than state-owned enterprises. One important reason for not seeking job opportunities at state-owned enterprises may be the inherent system of recruiting personnel in state-owned units.

The SE practitioners' perceptions toward disabilities and low expectations have led to limitations in job choices for PWD and the types of work organizations. E.g., *'People with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, require single, repetitive work that cannot be faced with too many people, resulting in a limited range of work choice'* (Cso05). Moreover, the participants indicated that one of the biggest obstacles to job development was employers' doubts and rejection of PWD. For example,

'We found job opportunities in a 4S automobile store; and took 8 PWD to a job interview. 3 of them were selected, and we arranged for appropriate employment counselors to support them. Unfortunately, the Justice Ministry of the 4S automobile store did not approve it because of their worry of having employees with mental or intellectual disabilities in their company' (Cso03).

This extract illustrated that employers would refuse to hire PWD for fear of safety risks. It might also be that the employers did not know how to manage and communicate with PWD in the workplace because they lacked experience in hiring such persons.

Regarding job matching, **most** participants indicated the significance of matching job opportunities with **the** aspirations and needs of individuals with disabilities. Moreover, they **emphasized** that before job matching, they had to carry out vocational ability assessment and pre-employment training for **PWD**. **Only** those who received training **or were** assessed as having occupational attitudes and abilities were eligible for job-matching opportunities.

Once job matching is completed, specific vocational training **concerning** the matched job **will** be carried out for the selected **PWD**. As they reported, such training often happened in simulated training **scenarios** set by their **organizations** or in **the actual** work **scenes** of social enterprises through **probation** or internship. The aim is to enhance the ability of **PWD** to do the work **matched**.

Most participants **pointed** out that the employment counselors' on-site support for people with disabilities was a gradual withdrawal process in the workplace. Some participants also indicated: *'the cases often finish their job very well with **the** full support of our employment counselors. They heavily rely on our employment **counselor** and can not work without our support'*(Cso12). That is, sometimes, employment counselors may not adjust the method or time of on-site support according to the needs of individual **cases** and thus fail to achieve the purpose of **SE**. **The above** probably reflects the employment counselors' misunderstanding **of the** field support of **SE**. As discussed above, **employment** counselors might be poorly trained and **lack** recognition of their **role** in field support of workplaces.

Three participants indicated that some employers were reluctant to allow employment counselors to access on-site support. **They** reported **that** some employers had experience **hiring** **PWD** and did not think they needed **support**, while other employers worried that the presence of

employment counselors would cause trouble in their **workplace** and might have **a** risk of exposing their trade secrets.

Previous research has shown that high-quality post-employment support is crucial for **PWD** to maintain competitive employment positions (Waghorn et al., 2015). Participants in this study indicated that they provided tracking services, **such** as telephone **interviews** or on-site observation, according to individual cases' **length** of employment. **On some** occasions, the employment counselors returned to **the** workplace to provide intensive on-site support. **For** example,

*'The case is **a** person with mild autism having social problems. He is good at his job now, and his colleagues are nice to him. The new problem is that he has **a** strong desire to communicate with his **colleagues** and is a **small amount** of a chatterbox, **which** interrupts his colleagues' work too much. Recently, our employment counselor returned to support him **every day**'(Cso08).*

The return of employment counselors to provide intensive on-site support seems to suggest that there were some shortcomings in the early support **plan**. **For example, there is a lack of** consideration or effort to such as improving ordinary colleagues' disability awareness and to **seek** their help as **a** natural support. **If ordinary** colleagues were more aware of **the** social deficits of autism, they probably would become natural support resources to promote social interaction among themselves and **their colleagues** with **autism** rather than relying on **the** employment **counselors'** return to provide intensive support. The participants' talk of employment **counselors'** return to provide intensive support also implies the discrimination against **PWD** in the occupational scene. **The above** is directly responded **to** by some cases' rejection **of** employment counselors' tracking services, e.g., *'One case complained that our (the employment counselor)*

visit had resulted in the ordinary workers' laughing at them. Their ordinary colleagues called them fools after we left' (Cso09).

Outcome of Supported Employment: Unstable Cases

The vast majority of participants reported successful cases **who work independently in a competitive environment**. Several participants talked about a common phenomenon: some successful cases were withdrawn from **competitive** employment. For example,

'Several cases did quite well during the three-month probation period, and the employers prepared contracts for them and their parents to sign. However, their parents took them back to stay at home or go on vocational rehabilitation training in our organizations. One important reason for this phenomenon is related to our governmental policy. Once PWD work in an inclusive environment, they will have minimum wage and social security. Then their families would no longer be eligible to apply for government subsidies or low-rent housing' (Cso04).

As indicated, the parents tended to turn down job offers to receive disability benefits because of the welfare policy. For one thing, the parents' awareness might be a crucial factor preventing PWD from competitive employment. For another thing, the welfare policy itself is questionable. While welfare policies offer benefits for PWD, those policies may also harm their interests and rights (Li et al., 2022). The above is responded to by most participants' reports about a stipulation in the Regulations on Employment of PWD, which requires enterprises to employ PWD at a rate of 1.5%; otherwise, the enterprises would pay more in taxes that serve as a penalty; however, employers usually purchase the disability certificate to exempt the fee of penalty, commonly known as 'Guakao' in Chinese. Most participants complained about the phenomenon of 'Guakao.' For example,

*‘Those who have been in the situation of Guakao would impossibly enter our vocational rehabilitation and can not be employed through SE because technically they have been already employed. The **problem** is that the enterprises only take their disability certificate to reduce taxes and avoid **a fee of penalty**, but do not **ask** them to work’(Cso08).*

The extract indicated **a** specific connotation of the Guakao phenomenon. Specifically, Guakao refers to employers **paying** a nominal wage or **buying** social insurance for **PWD** in **exchange** for their disability **certificates**. **So**, employers **can** avoid **penalties** from the Chinese government, and **PWD** could get the least wage while **not going** to work. The Guakao phenomenon responds to the policy dilemma as discussed above. It further indicates that the general **public**, including **employers**, **does** not have **an** awareness of **disability** and **does** not believe **PWD** **have a** working ability. Perhaps influenced by the Chinese traditional culture, they tend to believe that **PWD** only need **maintenance** rather than actual employment, **which** might be the biggest challenge for further promoting employment for **PWD**.

Another two factors mentioned by the participants for withdrawing from **SE** involve disease progression of **PWD** and **lack** of job opportunities because of market competition.

Discussion and Conclusion

SE has **yet to be** incorporated into **the** public service system of China. **Although** the Chinese government has proposed **SE** in several documents, the policy has **yet to specify** guidelines **concerning defining and implementing SE**. This study indicated that **non-governmental service organizations had mainly implemented SE in China** with financial support provided by Local DPF.

In this study, **most** participants understood the nature of **SE**, **which differed** from sheltered employment and other traditional forms of employment for **PWD**. According to their perception,

they realized that SE meant jobs and a kind of human right (Wehman, 1988). However, the lack of such awareness has also been identified through reports from a participant who came from local DPF and represented governmental voices (*his misunderstanding of the essential nature of supported and sheltered employment*), and the majority of participants' descriptions about parents' and employer's responses toward SE. The above illustrated that SE was still a new thing that had not been popularized and accepted by governmental officers, parents of PWD, and the general public of China, which might be a significant obstacle to further implementing SE in China.

In practice, the basic process and practice of SE in China are generally the same as that in Western societies, conforming to the substantive spirit and normative standards of SE. At the same time, we are also facing the key factors affecting the implementation effect of SE, such as post-employment support, professional employment counselors, the relationships between institutions, and the conflict between social welfare and employment.

However, there are some minor differences in implementing SE. First, the main target of SE in China is limited to persons with mild and moderate disabilities. In contrast, SE was precisely based on the demand of persons with severe disabilities to obtain integrated employment, so the US focused on persons with severe disabilities in the practice and law of SE from the beginning (Wehman & Kregel, 1990). One possible reason for such discrepancy is the difficulty of providing employment services for persons with severe disabilities. Especially, China is a populous country, and job opportunities for ordinary people are difficult to obtain, let alone the PWD. Under the political context of pursuing of 'Harmony Society' and 'the Chinese Dream,' the employment of persons with mild and moderate disabilities is the government's focus, rather than persons with severe disabilities whom the Chinese government and their families maintain. Another possible

reason might be related to the pursuit of service effects in a short time, so the pilot organizations chose persons with mild and moderate disabilities as the primary service objects.

Moreover, the participants in this study reported that they established inclusive employment stations as a transition to authentic SE. They also tended to believe that the sheltered employment approach in China, such as occupational rehabilitation stations and auxiliary employment, can be a transitional stage linked and integrated with SE, playing the function of career preparation for PWD to be hired in inclusive employment environments. Furthermore, the participants in this study emphasized providing vocational training for PWD before job matching to improve the success rate of SE; intensive support may be returned to maintain employment on a case-by-case basis during the follow-up service. These practical differences reflected China's flexible approach in the face of human resources and capital difficulties in developing SE; On the other hand, those were the practitioners' attempts and reflections on promoting SE in China.

The results of this study indicated that China's SE was still in the experimental stage, lacking government policy design and action.³ Without government guidance, the small-scale folk practice presented many difficulties and unstable factors concerning the implementation of SE in non-governmental organizations, such as lacking standards with the qualification of employment counselors and service institutions; unstable and widely different supports from different local governments; relying on 'street sweeping' way of job development; exclusion and concerns toward employing a person with a disability, and parents' awareness of preventing PWD from competitive employment.

The concept of SE in the Chinese governmental documents and financial support for non-governmental organizations has illustrated initial attention on SE from the Chinese

government to improve employment of PWD further. Based on the pilot experiment implemented by non-governmental organizations, the Chinese government should further clarify the connotation of SE, its practical models and approaches, and the professional qualification and training standards of employment counselors, thus forming a stable mechanism for the long-term development of SE. As indicated by European Union (2012), it is necessary to bring SE into the government's mainstream public service system of a government to succeed.

Presently, the preliminary practice of NGOs in China has suggested the future direction of SE's policy and systematic development. Specifically, the brain drain and the lack of professionalism, as reported by all participants in this study, calls on the Chinese government to establish management and training system of employment counselors; ⁴The perceived exclusion and concern from employers toward PWD reflects the need of providing systematic support for employers, such as providing wage subsidies for employers; The participants' reports in relation to difficulties of vocational training in implementing SE have also indicated the decoupling of education system for PWD and SE, this suggests that the Chinese government should promote institutional reform to provide better education and employment for PWD(Li et al., 2022); The 'Guakao' phenomenon has indicated the flaw of the quota employment system, hindering further development of SE; On the basis of the existing institutional background⁵ and the vigorous development of auxiliary employment, the practice also reflects the need to integrate auxiliary employment with SE, which indicates that the Chinese government should establish specific provisions on the integration of SE into auxiliary employment system, as a way to promote the development of SE; In addition, the parents' nonsupport and obstruction to SE reflect the disconnection between the welfare system and SE practice. Most importantly, the result of this

study has indicated a general lack of disability awareness in China, such as the ‘Guakao’ phenomenon, the employers’ perception of exclusion and concern toward PWD, and the parents’ nonsupport and obstruction to SE. This is related to Chinese traditional culture, which emphasizes maintaining and protecting PWD rather than promoting their independence and self-reliance. In general, It is time that the Chinese government should take an active stance to improve the general public’s disability awareness, establish and improve the SE system, and further expand ST practices at the governmental level.

Note

1. Note on presentation of data: C is the first letter of “case.” “so” is short for “social organization” (df for Disabled Persons’ Federation and io for International Labor Organization); 01 is the interview number. Words in italics are direct quotations translated from Chinese from interviews with participants. Addresses, institutions, and other names mentioned are replaced by random capital letters.
2. A voluntary non-profit network of service agencies and parent organizations in the field of intellectual and developmental disability in China.
3. Currently, Hunan Provincial Disabled Persons’ Federation in China has promulgated *the Hunan Provincial Pilot Implementation Plan for SE of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities* in 2014, which sets the time, objectives, and implementation steps of the pilot project. In 2017, Beijing Disabled Persons’ Federation promulgated *the Measures of Beijing on SE Services for PWD (Trial)*. This law clearly defines the service objects of SE, the qualification requirements of service institutions and employment counselors, service content and subsidy standards, and the team construction of employment counselors, are stipulated.

4. In 2020, the Notice of General Office of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, General Office of the State Administration for Market Regulation, Office for National Statistics on Releasing Occupational Information such as Intelligent Manufacturing Engineering and Technical Personnel was issued, adding employment counselors for PWD under vocational instructors.
5. In 2013, China Disabled Persons' Federation issued the *Basic Standards for Nursing Care Services for PWD (Trial)*, which stipulated that nursing care service institutions with conditions should provide SE for suitable people to realize social employment. In 2015, China Disabled Persons' Federation and eight other departments issued *Opinions on the Development of Auxiliary Employment for PWD*. This policy proposed to strengthen the training of employment instructors, provide SE services, and help qualified persons with intellectual, mental, and severe physical disabilities in auxiliary employment institutions to integrate into the labor market and achieve employment.

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