

Disability History Association Podcast

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Interview with Chao Wang, Katherrine Healey, and Elizabeth McFayden

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Caroline: Hi, my name is Caroline Lieffers, and I'm delighted to be chatting today with three graduate students who attended a four-week long National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. The Institute, which was entitled "[Global Histories of Disability](#)," was organized by Disability History Association Chair, Professor Sara Scalenghe of Loyola University Maryland. Twenty-five scholars and teachers at different stages of their careers, including three Ph.D. students, participated in the Summer Institute, which featured a series of readings and discussions about topics in disability history, as well as guest speakers. So with no further ado, I'd like to welcome our guests for today: Chao Wang, Katie Healey, and Elizabeth McFayden. Would you each mind introducing yourselves?

Chao: Hi, this is Chao, thanks for having me here. I'm currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago's History Department, and I study the blind community in twentieth-century China. Blind people had traditionally been organized into different kinds of organizational, occupational communities, such as music, fortune-telling, and massage. So I'm very curious about how this work shaped visual disability into different kinds of economic and cultural niches of self-help, and how the ecology of work based on, kind of, sensorial adaption to different environments responded to increasingly mainstream approaches that tried to compensate for disability—that is to say, for the lack of writing among blind people, or deficiency in their productivity—and how we might reevaluate their participation in social citizenship. So that's basically my dissertation project.

Caroline: That sounds really exciting! Would you mind telling me how you got into disability history in the first place?

Chao: I came to this history actually from an interest in the body and the language of different kinds of bodies. In my Master's I studied sign language in trans-Pacific communication from the U.S. to China—so, from the missionaries' perspective. I think that this particular interest in sign language got me into this part of U.S. history, and into manualism's early period in China and the late 19th century. That got me interested in how embodied language can shed more light on people's identity within a community, and how different cultures can really connect with each other, interact with each other, in such intimate ways. For example, in the late nineteenth century there was this importance on introducing Braille to China in a way very prioritized on writing, especially among blind people with a culture of oral tradition that is strongly in place. So language, I think, is the starting point from which I look at disability. And then I slowly moved toward how to think about embodiment and its relation with community building and community support, as well as different perspectives of disability, and different perspectives of what blindness is and how people feel about it. I think that's slowly built into my later work.

Caroline: That's really interesting—coming at disability history from the history of communication and language in these transnational contexts. Katie, what about your work?

Katie: Hi, this is Katie Healey, and I'm a 6th-year at Yale in the Program for the History of Science and Medicine. I'm writing about how hearing and deafness shaped notions of American citizenship during World War II, and how these ideas gave birth to the field of audiology just after the War.

I double majored as an undergrad in History and American Sign Language and Deaf Studies, and so for a long time I did not identify as a disability historian because of my training in Deaf Studies: we rejected association of the Deaf community with disability. But as I became more interested in hard-

of-hearing individuals or late-deafened individuals, who are not quite part of this Deaf community and are also not quite hearing, I started to see that disability history was very productive for my particular topic.

Caroline: And Elizabeth, what are you working on and how did you get into disability history?

Elizabeth: My name is Elizabeth McFayden, also known as Beth. I am working on my PhD in History at the University of Illinois at Chicago, with a focus on U.S. disability. I'm presently researching the intersection of veterans, disability, and masculinity for my dissertation. I came to disability history in a strange way. I was in my Master's program in my very first writing seminar. And the professor who was leading the writing seminar wanted to give us an indication of how many areas in history there were that we could write on—what subfields were at our disposal. And of the many subfields he put on the board—disability history was one. And I had never heard of it, ever. It was something that I immediately gravitated toward, and the only reason that he knew about disability history was because he had been a classmate of Paul Longmore's in California in graduate school.

Caroline: Wow!

Elizabeth: And so that's why he knew to offer that—like, hey, here's a subfield you might want to write about. And it became—I think passion is an overused word these days—but it seriously became my passion. That was the moment that I thought to myself, “yes, I know that I can sustain my love for this history throughout grad school.” And that's how I came to disability history.

Caroline: That's so exciting. And what a wonderful lesson for young instructors like us about the importance of including disability in the classroom, even if we aren't teaching a disability history course. You never know whose life it might change.

Elizabeth: Yes!

Caroline: But this, I think, helps escort us into the next question, which is—what motivated you to participate in the Summer Institute? You're all graduate students, but it seems like you're at really different stages in your studies with different backgrounds, working on really different topics. And I'm wondering what motivated you to go to the Summer Institute? What did you think you might learn?

Katie: I am just now writing my introduction to my dissertation, and so it was perfect timing. I was hoping that when I was at the NEH Institute I would be reminded of the trajectory of our field and also get to pick the brains of lots of people who do disability history specifically, as I've been surrounded by a lot of medical historians for the past few years—which is great, but I really needed that disability history perspective. And I was not disappointed at all. It was really reinvigorating to get to talk to so many different people who are all really passionate about disability—in different topics, different time periods, different geographical locations.

Caroline: What about you, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: When I discovered that they were taking applications, I had no idea what I could learn. But I did know that as a grad student, I only had one graduate-level disability history course that was offered at my school, and none at my prior school. And as part of an intellectual wish list, I wanted a community of scholars with whom I could discuss and explore disability history. We are able to do that online, of course, but it's difficult given everyone's busy schedules. Plus, in my opinion, nothing beats being in the same space and dedicating that time and space to that

intellectual exchange. And that was definitely what I got at the NEH Institute.

Caroline: That's excellent. What about you, Chao?

Chao: As for me, I think at first I didn't think too much about what exactly I was going to learn at this Institute, but I was intrigued by the perspective of global history, and thinking that a non-Western country like China could be incorporated into this discussion of disability—which here, I think, in the U.S., refers to a specific strand of academic activism and is directly in connection with a political movement. So I wanted to know more about the development of the field in the U.S. and how to situate my work in the present concerns of disability historians and disability studies—the different kinds of scholars in the workshop.

Caroline: That is really interesting. I love the idea that this Institute was an opportunity to break open the conversation about what defines disability, and bring these global perspectives all together so people could have really fruitful discussions. So having said all of this, was the Summer Institute what you expected? Did anything surprise you? Elizabeth, I can already see you're smiling.

Elizabeth: My answer—was it what I expected? It was all that and more. On a personal level, I was surprised at how much of my own work I thought I was going to be able to do while attending the Institute, and later in the Institute we were joking amongst ourselves because we all thought we were going to be able to do our own work while attending this Institute. But our days were just packed from beginning to end. And in order to get the most out of my attendance I wanted to keep up with the reading, as well as have time to digest all the information, and that required a lot of time and energy. And on a professional level I was surprised at just how much more work we need to do in disability history, especially at the global level. My work doesn't touch on that, but I'm open to either transnational projects or global projects at this point.

And something that was strange to me—I was surprised at how often our director, Sara Scalenghe, had to discuss our budget with the NEH. We were constantly overbudget, and I kept hearing this over and over and over again. And then it finally occurred to me that a budget is an able-bodied document that rarely, if ever, takes into account disability-related expenses. It was an “aha moment” for me. And it surprised me because it was such an obvious thing that I'd never given much thought to, but that affects millions of lives every day.

Caroline: That's a really significant observation. Thank you for that insight. Katie, was the Institute what you expected? Did anything surprise you?

Katie: Yes, Beth just gave a wonderful answer about how much work we did, and how productive we were at the Institute, but less so probably in our own work! I did not anticipate having so much fun, though. I went into it thinking, “OK, it's going to be like preparing for orals. We have these demanding reading lists.” And although we did do a lot of reading and a lot of work, we had such an awesome community. We had really fun conversations. We learned from each other and we ended up making strong friendships. It wasn't just about the actual readings, but I learned so much just from having casual conversations over lunch, or getting dinner, or at night. And it was less like an academic boot camp and more like—as one of our participants said, it was like a summer camp for nerds. [All laugh]

Caroline: That's an excellent answer! What about you, Chao? Did you have fun at the summer camp for nerds?

Chao: Yeah!

Caroline: Did anything surprise you?

Chao: I think the first thing that surprised me is how much time we devoted to an environment that was specifically designed for Deaf people. Gallaudet University provides a very friendly and, I think, very accommodating environment for disability scholars. Most of us are not working on Deaf history, but have an interest in both thinking about and also participating in the community of Deaf people here. So I think that was the first immersive experience that I got from the Institute. And then as we would go out to museums, and learn how to use material culture, learn from the objects that are not commonly seen as the objects of disability history—such as objects that were used in an institutional environment, that were designed for mad people or for different kinds of people with disabilities in the 19th-century U.S.—they kind of illustrated different perspectives on how we narrate that experience of Deaf people, of mad people, of blind people.

The things that I learned from scholars showing us a museum exhibit, or showing us how sign language is used and practiced in Gallaudet University, were particularly useful in giving me an idea of how a language kind of grows from a person's body and through his or her connections with other Deaf people or hearing people. We can see how the language can be constantly shaped by different preferences within the group, and how that shaping in fact can further produce concerns for the social and political advocacy of this community. I think that's the sense I got from just listening to scholars like Gene Mirus talking about sign language and his anticipation of how this language might function in the social sense or in the political sense.

Caroline: Yes, I imagine that Gallaudet University itself would be a really fruitful space to be having some of these conversations, just as you said. So, the question that I'm really curious about is who attended this Summer Institute? I got the sense that almost everybody was an academic of some kind, probably most were historians, but they came from a variety of career stages, right? So what kinds of interdisciplinary or inter-career stage conversations did you find yourself having at the Summer Institute?

Katie: So, you're right, everyone was an academic. And we ranged from graduate students, to full professors, department chairs, and then kind of everything in-between. And we were mostly historians, but we also had scholars from Anthropology, Musicology, English, Women and Gender Studies, and so forth. And that lends itself to very intriguing conversations. Most helpful for me, especially going onto the market now, was talking with the new faculty members who have just navigated the process, and getting their tips on how to use disability history to better market themselves.

Caroline: Oh, that's really interesting. So do you get a sense that disability history is something that employers are looking for these days?

Katie: No [everyone laughs], but they just don't know that they want us—so using it to complement other things that are in high demand right now. I think it's definitely not always the first thing you list about yourself, but you can pitch it in such a way that it just makes you more versatile.

Caroline: That's really encouraging to know. Thank you for that, Katie. What was it like to get to meet and to talk to these well-known scholars in disability history and disability studies—because of course that was a key part of Sara's organizing strategy when she put together this Summer Institute. What was useful about this choice to bring in so many different guest speakers?

Katie: It was fantastic. We got a backstage pass to their current projects and upcoming publications. And in addition to being inspiring speakers they were all really gracious mentors, who

really took time to meet with us one-on-one to talk to us about our projects, and share teaching resources and syllabi with us. And I also have to give a shout-out to Susan Burch, who brought us chocolate! [All laugh] And so even though most of them were only there for a day with us, they were part of our community and very graciously helped us with our own work and got us thinking in different ways about disability.

Caroline: It's really exciting because I think it helps break down some of those barriers that graduate students often feel exist between them and the big scary professoriate, right? [All laugh] So to be able to have these opportunities to interact and to have these really natural kinds of conversations must have been really gratifying. Elizabeth and Chao, did you want to add anything to Katie's answer? What was useful about the organizer's choice to bring in all these guest speakers?

Chao: Yeah, I think particularly when you are bringing in so many well established scholars, it can really break the boundaries—the disciplinary boundaries, but also regional and geographical boundaries. Although the themes of the Institute were organized by geographical regional focuses—like the first week we had U.S. disability history, the second part we had Europe, and then for the third part we had non-Western countries—these divisions do not really go against the idea of getting people from different regional focuses to come together to share some similar concerns. So as individual speakers came to this workshop and we had conversations with them, we were gradually thinking about how their concerns were shared. And I think it was a very good opportunity to learn from each other and to show that people are thinking similar things about disability.

Caroline: Elizabeth, did you want to add anything to that?

Elizabeth: We had close to 20 separate presenters, and each brought his or her own area of study to the table and was able to allow us to learn something about each of their diverse projects, and basically to sample the buffet that is disability history. I definitely had some “fan-girl” moments. One in particular—one that I was just over the moon about was Douglas Baynton. The way that his books are organized is beautiful, so at the end of the day I wanted to tell him that, as I was getting him to sign my books. And he told me something—I wish I'd written it down—but he told me something to the effect of “you're never happy with the organization, but you just do the best you can.” And to hear him say that really gave me—not that I don't have belief in my own work, but it really helped me to have more confidence in how I'm organizing my own work.

Caroline: Yeah, that's such an important moment, to realize that scholars—even the most established and respected ones—struggle with a lot of the same difficulties that we all do. They might be more experienced and maybe figure out strategies for dealing with them a little more quickly than we do, but nothing's ever perfect the first time. And to know that, and to hear these very well regarded scholars say that, I think is really encouraging.

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Caroline: So after experiencing all of these amazing encounters with all these different scholars who bring all these new ideas to the table—these global perspectives, these different disciplinary perspectives—did the Summer Institute change your plans for your PhD, or even for your career after your PhD?

Elizabeth: It didn't change my plans so much as it reinforced that I was on the right path—that in choosing disability history as my primary focus, I had made the right decision for me. And at this stage, at this beginning stage of my dissertation—I really needed that affirmation.

Caroline: That's no small thing. What about you, Katie?

Katie: Yeah, I would second Beth. It didn't really change my plans so much as it really changed my outlook. So I left much more energized and excited about my own work—after spending so much time you get a little sick of it, and the perspective of the community was really all I needed to get back into writing and seeing the light at the end of the tunnel—getting to work with this community who was really supportive of my project and gave me so many new, fresh ideas. And like Beth said, kind of reinforcing that this was the right path for me.

Caroline: That's great. I feel like Sara should get a medal just for encouraging graduate students, because it can be pretty bleak, and if she can manage to do that—or her guest speakers and her program can manage to do that—that's extraordinary. What about you, Chao?

Chao: Yeah, for me I think it changed how I view myself in my own discipline—which is to say the teaching part of that, which is a huge component of how disability scholars can incorporate disability perspectives in their own institutions. It was particularly useful for me because I am preparing to go back to my institution and to start thinking about how to address some of the concerns of both my research and also other scholars' perspectives from the Institute, and to apply them in a class that is specifically designed not for people interested in disability, but people interested generally in a regional focus, like China, Japan or Korea, in East Asia, for example. So how disability can figure as a very useful perspective for people to understand different cultures—I think that's what I'm starting to think about after this Institute. And as we all know, this global perspective, finally, gets down to very specific local ideas, local beliefs. So I think that balance is what I'm trying to struggle with right now.

Caroline: It makes sense for sure: finding the way in which disability can be a route into understanding history in new ways—or, these traditional kinds of geographical divisions can also be a route into understanding disability in new ways. And finding where you fit on that two way street, and which direction you want to emphasize at a given moment—I can understand that would be very challenging but also very exciting.

Chao: Yeah, and that's also I think the benefit of doing disability history, is that we can easily, I think, break up the boundaries—not only geographical boundaries but also temporal boundaries, like we are talking about this with people studying disability in the Middle Ages, disability in the Ottoman Empire. I think that despite the differences in temporal and spatial distributions, we can still share a lot of focus, like the study of blind people, the study of Deaf people, the study of the physically disabled people. I think that's something we have in common.

Caroline: Yeah, absolutely. You can cut across this history in lots of different ways and learn different lessons from those different kinds of cutting. So let's go back to this question of teaching that Chao brought up, because I think this is really central to Sara's whole purpose in designing this Summer Institute, right? It was in large part meant to be for thinking about teaching disability, and possibly even talking about teaching strategies when it comes to disability history. So is there anything in particular that you think our podcast audience might want to learn or understand about teaching disability that you could share with us? For example, I couldn't attend the Summer Institute and I would love to know what I missed!

Katie: One take away I thought was really important was that instructors should challenge themselves to go beyond their time frame or geographic focus for really productive comparisons. But they should also be aware that models of disability don't directly translate across time and space. So the American, kind of, framework of disability might not be very productive in another

place and time.

Caroline: So you're saying essentially that the American framework for disability and the kinds of grouping together and questions potentially about, like, discrimination or institutionalization for example, don't necessarily translate to a different global context?

Katie: Yes, and also the medical model of disability might have certain negative connotations in the West, but it might be understood really differently in places where medicine looks different.

Caroline: Yeah, that's a very interesting point, that the medical model of disability might not carry the same kinds of negative connotations in an environment where medicalization serves different purposes or perhaps came at a different time. What about Elizabeth and Chao, is there anything you wanted to add to what you thought about teaching disability? What you learned at the Summer Institute?

Chao: Yeah, I think the interesting thing I found from the Institute is how to embody different kinds of disability within the classroom, within the very uniquely designed environment that people live in, and to think about how students might imitate or try to adjust to the way in which disabled people live. I remember Cathy Kudlick talking about her experience of trying to do a simulation with her students. Like, she would tell her students to wear an eye mask and ask them to go out to the cafeteria and to think about how blind people in this situation would encounter difficulty in ordering food—but also by embodying this kind of sensorial mode it will immediately challenge the usual kind of conceptions or assumptions you might have when you see a blind person walking on the street or participating in different areas of social life. So I think that question of simulation is part of what I got from the Institute—it's very interesting to think about how to apply it into a class.

Caroline: Let's talk about this question of the embodied experience of disability. Definitely, there have been critiques of doing simulations, because potentially they don't accurately embody the lived experience of people with disabilities. They're sort of like "playing" disability. But that being said, I think your point could be that—used judiciously—they can open up new questions.

Elizabeth: I found my notes from that day.

Caroline: Oh, good!

Elizabeth: Catherine Kudlick was talking about the tension between the medical and social models, and how simulation exercises are problematic, but they're still useful. The exercise itself mirrors the medical model because it's the individual's problem—but, you pair that with a series of questions like, "How are people reacting to you in a public space, where no one else knows you, when you have the cane, when you have the glasses—how are people reacting to you?" And now you have much more of a reflection of the social model. And so it's not the exercise itself—it's pairing that with how people are treating you, and how people are reacting to you, to get to the social model and get beyond that medical model.

Caroline: Yes, that's very, very important. Thank you so much for bringing up those notes. I had often just been told, "simulations are bad." And so when I heard Chao describing what Cathy Kudlick was doing I thought, "that is very risky and exciting and I want to know more." I really love that broader context—that there is a role for them, but used judiciously and thoughtfully, and as an opportunity to ask questions that are not, "how much does it suck to be blind, right?," but rather "what does the world do when a person who appears blind is moving through a space?," which is a very different kind of question. So I think this is a really exciting conversation that should continue, for sure, about the purpose and utility of simulations in a classroom setting, and

how best to use them. Elizabeth, what about your perspective about what you learned about teaching?

Elizabeth: As a graduate teaching assistant who doesn't often get to teach her own classes, I often TA for classes that are not disability history-related, that don't incorporate disability in any way. But I think it's important that there's plenty of room in history in which to incorporate disability and so I incorporate it into my discussion sections and the students are very receptive to this history. We've done it with race. We've done it with gender, with class, with sexuality. Disability transcends all those categories of analysis. It transcends time and space and it's just one more step to bring it into the classroom to show how it's an everyday experience, no matter what history we're teaching.

Caroline: That's a beautiful answer, Elizabeth. You're absolutely right that there is no geographical space or time or disciplinary boundary or whatever that should exclude disability. Disability has a role to play in all of those different histories and in helping us understand those different histories. And I love your idea that you don't have to be in a disability history class in order to be doing disability history, right? I think that's really, really exciting.

Chao, I also really got the sense from your earlier answer that it was material culture and the embodied experiences of disability that really resonated with you, and I understand that you were able to get out of the classroom and visit various sites like the FDR Memorial, the National Museum of American History, the Helen Keller statue in the Capitol, which offer more material and embodied examples of disability history. So can we use this as an opportunity to ask the question about how these, sort of, "field trips," if you will, were able to change your thinking about disability history or about public history? Did you want to start us off with that?

Chao: Yeah, sure. I think about the final day, when we went to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and we really participated in a very intense—very kind of depressing—atmosphere in which all the objects are laden with the political meanings of the traumatic experience of the Holocaust. Seeing the shoes that were intentionally piled up on the ground, indicating that they are the people incarcerated in a concentration camp, and also seeing the progression of these people in the concentration camp towards death. I think these are moments of embodying certain kinds of psychological struggle, but also the very physical quality of the environment, like the smell of the concentration camp, the very visual effect of how the gas was trying to get at people. So I think that all of those different kinds of ways to embody the environment matter to historians when we think about people's experience inside a particular space. And also, how can we deal with these highly politicized narratives about the war and its aftermath? I think that's what I've got from the field trip to the Holocaust Museum. It was very striking and shocking to me.

Caroline: Yeah. It's interesting that the materiality of disability and embodied experiences of disability that you found so powerful in the classroom are perhaps even more powerful when they're applied in a public history setting like the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. So it says something about ways in which we can bring people in a very visceral way into the history of disability. Elizabeth or Katie, did you want to add anything about the field trips that you went on and how they potentially changed your thinking about public history, disability history, or the uses of materiality and objects in the study of history?

Katie: I don't think I can do a better job than Chao.

Elizabeth: For me, visiting these sites—especially the outdoor memorials—it really hit home how much we need more scholars of disability history and public history to "crip" that history. Otherwise it will continue to come from a place of triumphant overcoming and we've had enough

of that.

Caroline: Thank you for saying that, Elizabeth. That's so important. It's very necessary to say that and to continue to reinforce that disability is a key part of every history, and as such it's something we need to keep talking about in these public history environments. And especially since it's so relevant today. So if you can use public history to inform the ongoing fights for disability rights that are going on today then you've done something important.

So after attending the Summer Institute—one of my final questions—do you have a sense of where the field of disability history is going or what it needs? Things that up-and-coming scholars or grad students like me might want to keep in mind?

Elizabeth: Do I have a sense of where the field is going or what it needs? When I think about this I can think about it, first, for myself and my research, because up until now I was more interested in the cultural and intellectual side of disability history. And I still enjoy studying those perspectives, but I need to put more focus on the economic side of disability history, the political economy. And I think it's often left out of too many disability histories. And on the larger scale, there's so much more work to be done in general in disability history. There are plenty of subject areas, of time periods to be studied, and it's a small community really, still, with much room for growth, and it's only going to get bigger. So please join us!

Caroline: I really like that—first of all, just the questions that thinking about economics and disability opens up are really important. Like your point right off the beginning of the conversation about the ongoing, nagging role that “the budget” plays, and the historical role of “the budget,” and how that may have motivated, for example, eugenics movements—the dangerous power of the economics of disability. And at the same time I also love your point because what you're suggesting is that different methodological approaches within history and within the social sciences, including perhaps a more kind of classic economic history—with someone crunching the numbers—those have a role to play in disability history too. They might not be everybody's cup of tea, but they could lend a really useful perspective to our understanding of people with disabilities in the past.

Elizabeth: And I think we're heading in that direction. Not that all research should go in that direction, but for example Sarah Rose's recent book *No Right to Be Idle* really focuses on, you know, the workplace and how people are attempting to make their living, but are being thwarted in their attempts, all because of their disabilities. It focuses on much more than that, but that's a large part of it. And right now I am taking a history of capitalism class because I want to “crip” capitalism. I'm trying to bring that information into my prospectus and I have high hopes for this.

Caroline: Yeah, I think you're certainly onto something really exciting in looking at that larger question of how capitalism and disability informed one another, have been in conversation with one another, defined one another. I'll be watching you [everyone laughs]. What about you, Katie? You seemed like you were willing to wade into this big question.

Katie: Yeah, so one thing that kind of stuck with me was a need for more collaborative work. So, Susan Burch mentioned this, and she has co-published and talked about that experience and how it's much more productive than just writing alone. We need to build more communities and work together. And I think that global histories of disability really demand collaborative work, for reasons such as the linguistic limitations of a single individual. If we're looking at countries like Ghana that have so many different languages, one person can only do so much. So I was left with a call for more collaborative work, and the NEH Institute was a perfect place for that, but we need to have more that feature disability. So I think the last one before ours was back in 2000, so we need to have more NEH Institutes that focus on disability—more often than just once every 20 years.

Elizabeth: Yes!

Caroline: I would agree with that. I have long insisted that it's a shame that we as historians often feel like we have to work in isolation—working in our offices, solo, writing our single-authored papers, our single-authored books. I think work is very exciting when it reaches out and put scholars in conversation with one another, allows them to pool their various talents and perspectives. Great point, Katie! That's something that I think we could all learn from for sure. Chao, was there anything you wanted to add?

Chao: Yeah, I think for me it's a little bit different, because working on disability in non-Western countries is still, I think, just getting started. So I'm thinking of how to use the disability perspective to shed more light on the terrain of the research in places other than the West. In China, I think, disability needs to be situated in a very intersectional way with other categories like gender or class. Both are the very mainstream kind focus right now in Chinese history or East Asian history in general. For example, in gender history, if we try to situate disability at the centre of analysis and slowly show how disability can be constitutive of gender expression, of bodily expression, of gender identity, I think that's particularly useful for convincing other scholars of the usefulness of disability in this particular historical period or particular region. I think, for example, in Douglas Baynton's work situating disability at the center of U.S. immigration policy, you can see different categories slowly being changed, like race—ideas about race, what constitutes racially efficient ways, or a deficiency in race. So this problem can be more revealed in more interesting ways with people working on different categories. So I think with disability, we need to reshuffle the categories and see how it can raise interesting questions.

Caroline: That's a really eloquent way of putting that. And I think ending on a note that reminds us about the importance of intersectionality is excellent. Is there anything else that anyone would like to add about their experiences before we sign off?

Katie: I just want to express my gratitude to the guest speakers, and Gallaudet University for hosting us, and to the other participants and the community that we built and—Sara. She deserves so much kudos. She was so organized and receptive to all of our suggestions and was just the most gracious coordinator we could have ever asked for. So thanks to everyone!

Elizabeth: Yes, thank you, Katie for stating that so beautifully. For my part I think that the NEH should sponsor more disability-oriented Institutes, more than every 20 years. But I thank the NEH for believing in us in 2018, because this was a life-changing experience for me. So much so that I still find it difficult to put into words!

Caroline: That's excellent! Chao, anything you wanted to add?

Chao: Yeah, I would like to thank Sara for hosting this NEH workshop, and also for bringing so many brilliant scholars and putting them into conversation. One thing I want to report—some good news coming out of this Institute—is that I have organized a panel on disability history that is going to be presented at next year's Asian Studies Association conference. So I think that is particularly meaningful—to get disability really going in a field that is mainly structured not on these minority voices. But also, in this way you can see how disability can be incorporated into mainstream concerns in other fields. So I want to particularly thank Sara and the Institute for making this happen.

Caroline: Congratulations, Chao! Good for you! Thank you all so much for your time—it was a pleasure getting to know all of you!