
Remaking disability in China: The Little People's Kingdom in Kunming (Yunnan Province, China)

Patrick Devlieger*^{†1} and Fu Guanxing*^{‡2}

¹KU Leuven [Leuven] – Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

²Guizhou University of Finance and Economics – 276 Huangshanchong Rd, Yunyan, Guiyang, Guizhou, China

Abstract

In this presentation we contextualize ‘The Little People’s Kingdom’, an entertainment park in which people of short stature are performing song and dance twice a day in an open air show, near Kunming in Yunnan Province, China. We first narrate the perspective of the founder Mr. Chen and staff-members, followed by the narratives of Little People themselves. We then situate the phenomenon in the context of China in its emergence as an open and modern country, in the context of its cultural heritage, and existing cultural research on Little People. We will conclude by discussing the question whether the Little People’s Kingdom should be described as a freak show. In the discussion of this paper, we will argue that the Little People’s Kingdom can be understood as a case of cultural industry, revolving around ‘smallness’ which involves both innovation and continuity of Chinese culture. We will also argue that a good understanding of ‘The Little People’s Kingdom’ and the remaking of disability in China requires notions of philanthropy, perspectives on human rights protection, and business potential in the context of China’s continued development as a modern state. It would also require an analysis of the formation of the gaze, without suggesting that the Little People’s Kingdom is merely a freak show.

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*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: patrick.devlieger@soc.kuleuven.be

[‡]Corresponding author: fuguangxing@gmail.com