



Beyond Sight

Blind and Visually Impaired Professionals
in China

By Peter Carney

There are approximately 12 million blind and visually impaired people in China, the largest blind population of a single country in the world. With the success of China in the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, the images and perceptions of blind and disabled people is starting to change. Attitudes in urban areas are starting to progress but there is still a lack of awareness of disabled rights in rural parts of China.

In memory of Yang, without whom none of this would have been possible.

Beyond Sight gives a glimpse into the working lives of six blind and visually impaired professionals employed in a variety of industries and professions.

Sun Li Xin, Masseur

“It took me five years to come to terms with being blind, I didn’t know if was alive or dead.”

Sun Li Xin was born in Harbin and as a child contracted glaucoma at just nine years old. Despite an operation he became blind and a long and painful journey began. Sun Li Xin never attended school and helped as best he could on his parents farm. Entering adulthood he became frustrated with his disability and started to search for a better life. Sun Li was desperate to become a blind masseur after such a difficult childhood he was determined to help relieve people’s pains. Without a formal education and no money for training, his dream was almost impossible. Undeterred he planned his future and ways to fund his training. Working as a fortune teller for almost five years he saved up enough money to enter blind massage school. After two hard years he achieved his dream and qualified as a blind masseur. Now he is chasing another dream. “I want to become truly independent and own my own business.”



In 2007 more than 17,000 blind and visually impaired people were trained in massage therapy.







Li Renwei, Piano Tuner Teacher

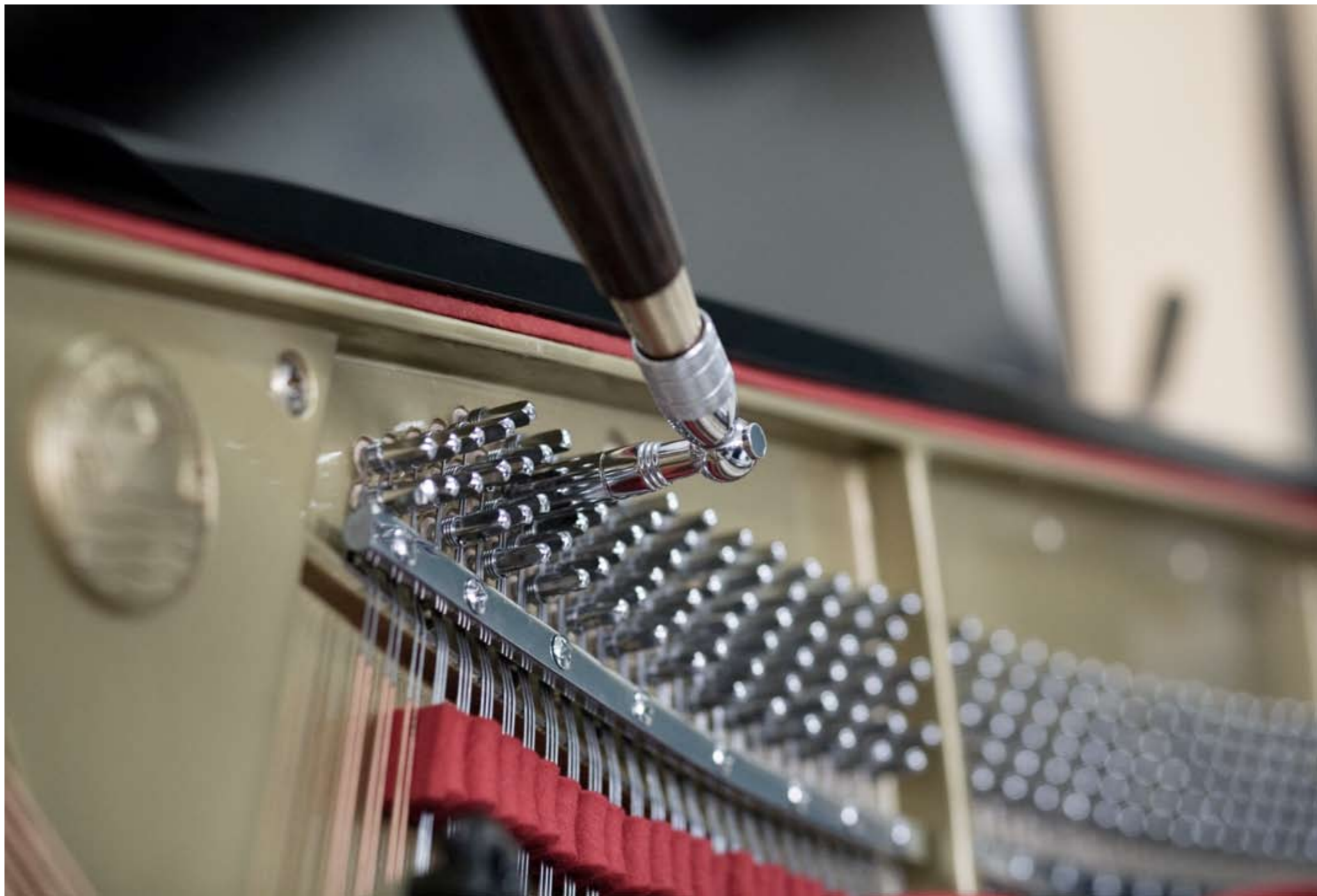
“I want to give back to young people and share my knowledge and give blind people a chance”

Li Renwei has been blind since birth and in the past there were not many opportunities for blind people. After a struggle he was accepted into Beijing blind school. He graduated in 1970 and began to work as a private piano tuner. After working for 20 years Li Renwei returned to the school he studied to pass on his knowledge. “I want to give back to young people and share my knowledge and give blind people a chance. Having a job, trade or profession is very important important for blind people so they can become independent and have a sense of self worth and confidence.”



In China, 36 new schools for the blind and visually impaired were established in 2007.







Li Ning, Broadcast Journalist

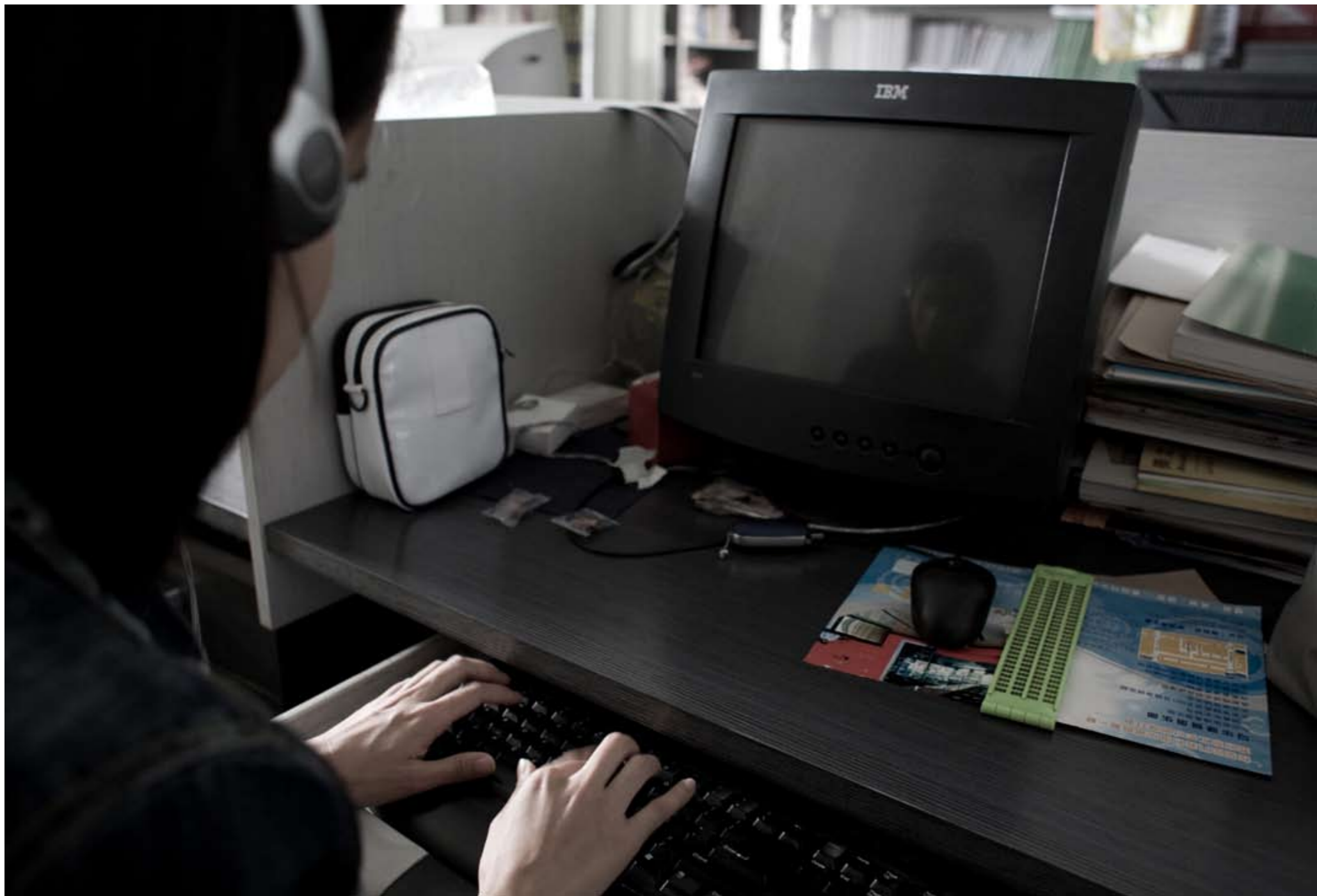
“I love my job, I can communicate ideas and educate people with our radio show which goes out across the country”

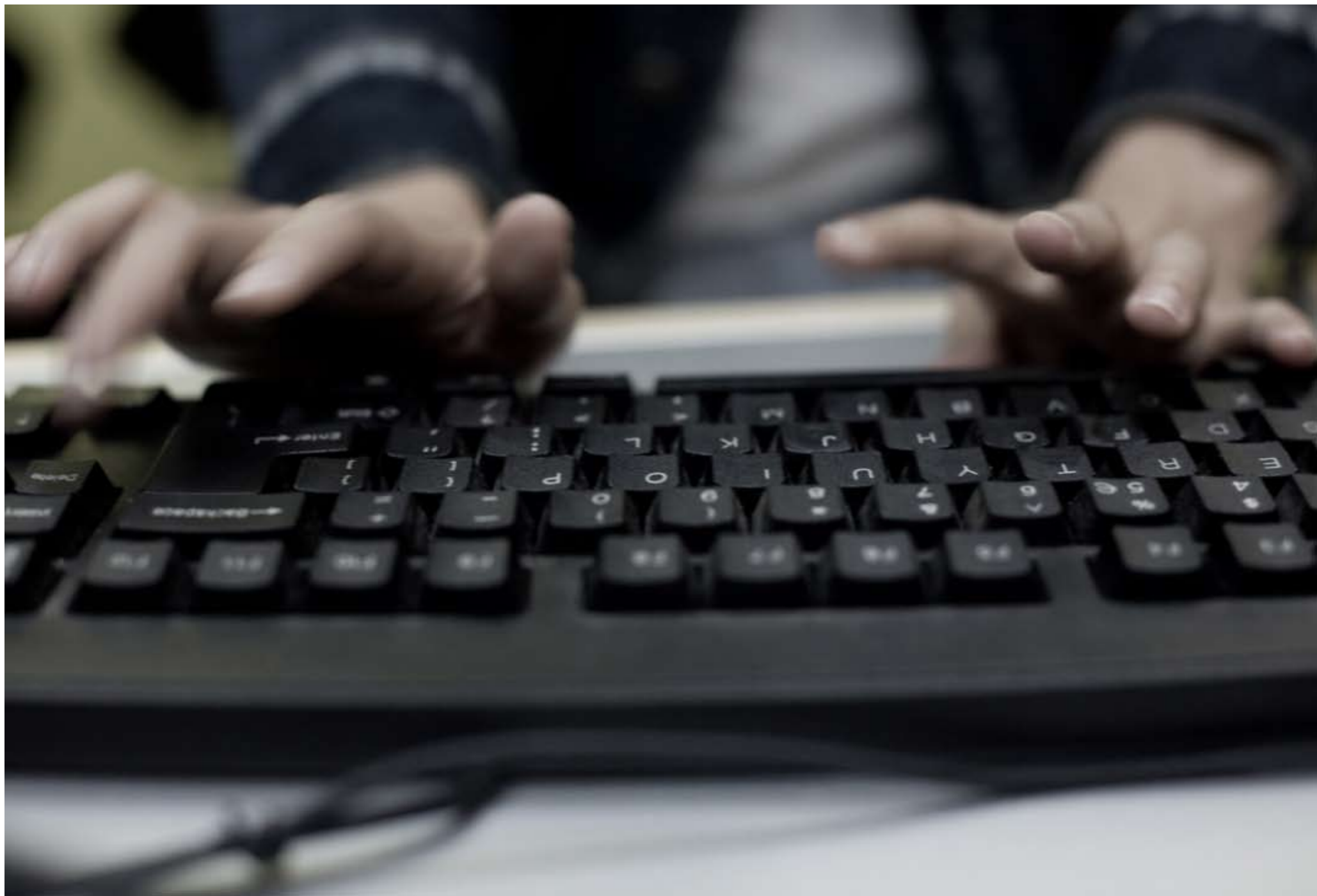
Li Ning was born blind and like all blind and visually impaired people they have developed a much more acute and sensitive sense of sound. Growing up Li Ning didn't realise that there were blind schools and other blind people as she was the only person in her village to be blind. Supported by her father she was encouraged to learn and studied massage. In her final year of her studies she stumbled upon One Plus One a small audio studio outfit in Southern Beijing. She started volunteering and after graduating was taken on full time. “I love radio, it can get the message across that blind people can do anything. It's really important especially in the rural areas. It's a really creative medium and I hope to demonstrate blind people's talents and bridge the gap between disabled and able bodied people”



“Our shows are broadcast to 65 million people all over china. I hope the shows can bridge the gap between disabled and able bodied people.”







Bi Qiang, Businessman

“For six years I did not return home to my family eating, sleeping and working in my first shop”

Bi Qiang started to lose his sight at aged 19 and within a few years became totally blind. Learning about his blindness and other illnesses he was inspired to help other people who suffered and in 1995 started his first pharmacy. He encountered many problems in conducting research for his company and found that he came to rely on his telephone and to this day it is his most important business tool. Determined to succeed Bi Qiang lived, worked, and slept in his store for 6 years to save costs and to try and save money to build his business. In addition to hard work Bi Qiang knew that customer confidence was key and pledged a money back guarantee if the medicine in his store was counterfeit or more expensive elsewhere. Bi Qiang has managed to build the second largest chain of pharmacies in Heilongjiang Province and oversees the operations at 124 stores across the province.



“I now operate the second largest pharmacy chain in Heilongjiang Province with 124 stores.”







Yu Yu, Musician

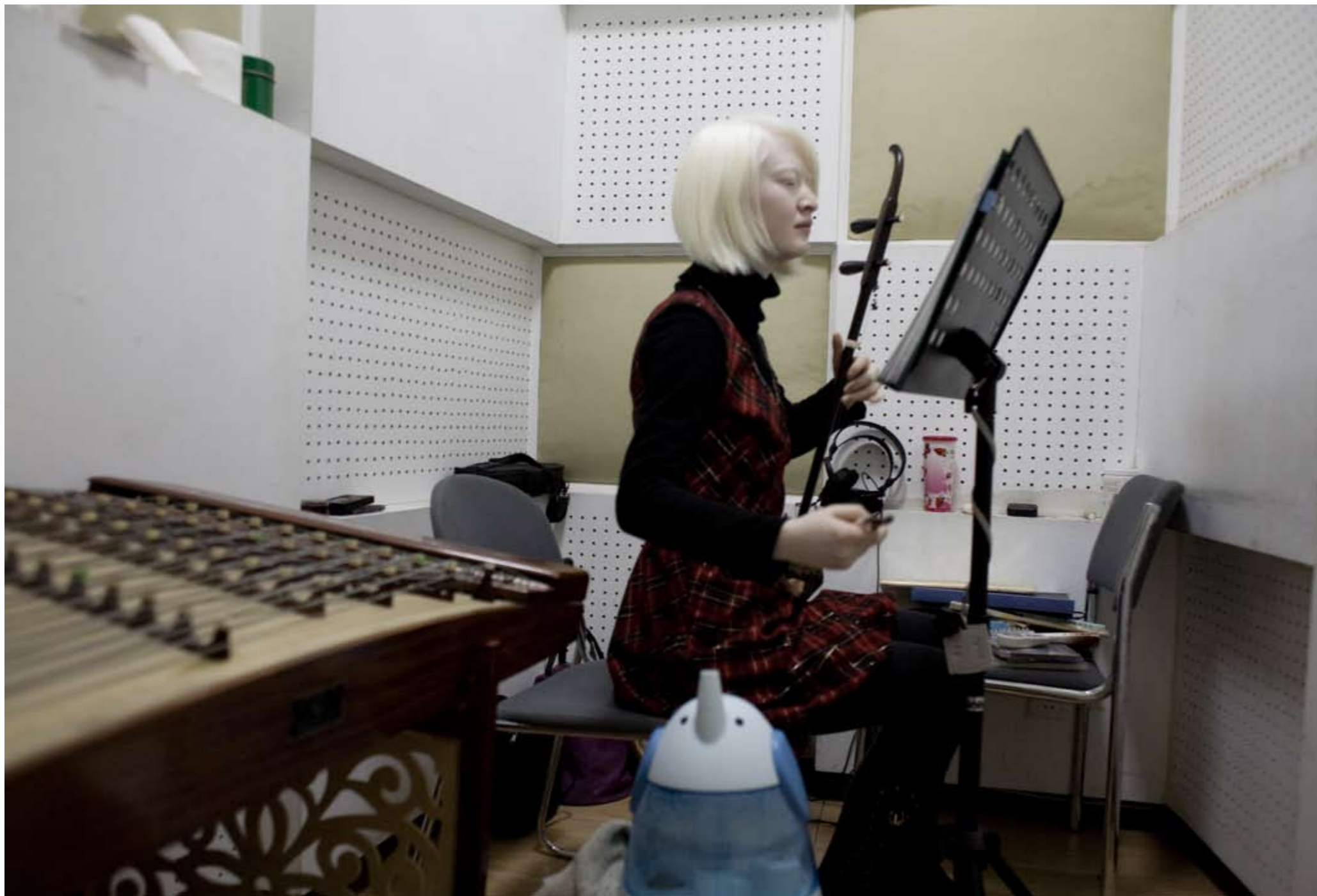
“Music is very important to my life. Now I travel all over the world sharing my passion with different cultures ”

Yu Yu was born albino and this has effected her eyesight, although not blind she is classified as being visually impaired. From a very early age Yu Yu loved music and it has been her dream to pursue her passion. She started to learn the erhu when she was nine years old and in 2005, age 14 she entered a national musical competition for disabled people. She was spotted at the competition and was asked to join China's Disabled People's Performing Art troupe which marked a pivotal point in her life. "I'm now part of a big family and have been able to travel the world and share my passion of Chinese music with other cultures. Before the Troupe I never been abroad and could only dreamt of visiting foreign countries. Being part of the troupe it has really opened my eyes to different countries and cultures all over the world . I can't even count the number of countries I have visited!"



“The Troupe has been amazing I have travelled all over the world and this year performed at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Paralympic games.”







Li Duan, Athlete

“After the explosion I couldn’t play basketball and was blinded but I found athletics and now I’ve competed at three Olypmics”

Li Duan started playing basketball at 5 years old and he dreamt of becoming a professional. His dream came true and he played in the CBA for several years. Although just playing in the CBA was not enough for Li Duan, he was well known for his jumping ability and was often regarded as a slam dunk specialist. “I wanted to be the Chinese Michael Jordan” he once remarked to his team mates. His hopes were dashed in 1996 when he was involved in a serious accident where he lost part of a finger and left him blinded. Undeterred Li Duan started training just one year after the accident at a sports institute in Shenyang where he met his coach Jin Fan. “I knew I had the jumping ability, but losing my vision made it difficult. Once I trusted my coach everything fell into place. I thought after the accident that everything was finished but I have now competed at three Olympics and won gold medals and broken world records.”



“The Beijing Olympics meant so much to me. Winning two gold medals was just amazing. I hope to do the same in London if my body stays in shape”





Thank you Ling
Ling, Ju an, Scarlett, Bissy,
Jin Ling, Stephen, Lynn, and
Emily without your help this
project would not have hap-
pened. The cooperation of
China Vision, One Plus One,
China's Disabled Troupe and
China Women's Association
also made this book possible.