

# The Dilemmas and Coping Strategies of Disabled People Becoming Ride-Hailing Drivers in China under the Platform Economy Background

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of the platform economy, the ride-hailing industry has ushered in a booming wave, which has provided new opportunities for promoting employment for disabled people. Currently, many disabled people in China have gradually participated in the ride-hailing industry and achieved effective employment. However, in reality, disabled people in China still face certain employment difficulties as ride-hailing drivers, mainly manifested in low public awareness of relevant regulations, implicit discrimination against disabled people, and intense competition in the ride-hailing industry. To effectively break this predicament, the Chinese government should increase publicity on relevant regulations, address implicit employment discrimination, and increase preferential support for disabled ride-hailing drivers, thereby effectively solving the employment difficulties faced by disabled people as ride-hailing drivers in China.

**Keywords:** Platform economy; Ride-hailing industry; Implicit discrimination; Fierce competition.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, China's platform economy has shown vigorous development, with explosive growth in platform user scale and the continuous emergence of diverse and innovative business models. This has opened up vast development space for the ride-hailing industry, providing massive user resources and bringing unprecedented development opportunities. Data shows that from 2019 to 2023, the size of China's ride-hailing market showed a year-on-year upward trend, reaching 245.3 billion yuan, 268.7 billion yuan, 298.8 billion yuan, 326.3 billion yuan, and 360.6 billion yuan respectively, demonstrating a strong upward trend.

However, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics and the China Disabled Persons' Federation, as of the end of 2023, the total number of disabled people in China reached 85.914 million, but the number of certified disabled people employed in urban and rural areas was only 9.061 million, with an employment rate of less than 11%. The 2025 Government Work Report of the State Council of China emphasized the need to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of disabled people, improve care and support services for disabled people, and promote the advancement of assistance work for disabled groups. Therefore, for China, leveraging the ride-hailing industry to address the employment challenges faced by people with disabilities is not only an inherent requirement for achieving common prosperity but also a touchstone for testing the innovative capabilities of social governance. Indeed, there are cases like this in practice. In July 2024, after the launch ceremony for the first batch of ride-hailing vehicles driven by people with disabilities in Fujian Province, China, they officially began taking orders. Under the guidance of the Fujian Provincial Disabled Persons' Federation, the Fujian Provincial Association for the Disabled actively coordinated with relevant ride-hailing platforms, such as Didi and Cao Cao

Mobility, to open channels for people with disabilities holding C5 driver's licenses to register as ride-hailing drivers. However, currently, people with disabilities in China still face deep-seated contradictions when becoming ride-hailing drivers, and the ride-hailing industry has not truly empowered employment for people with disabilities. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply analyze the predicaments faced by people with disabilities as ride-hailing drivers and, based on China's realities and legal framework, provide possible solutions.

## 2. The Multidimensional Dilemmas of Disabled People Working as Ride-Hailing Drivers in China Under the Platform Economy

In recent years, China's ride-hailing industry has shown a booming development trend, providing certain opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve employment. However, people with disabilities currently face certain employment difficulties as ride-hailing drivers, mainly manifested in low visibility of relevant regulations, implicit discrimination against them, and intense competition within the ride-hailing industry. To further explore these employment difficulties, this study conducted a survey using Wenjuanxing (a survey platform) from March 30th to 31st, 2025. Among the valid questionnaires collected, categorized by occupation, 404 were completed by respondents working in the ride-hailing industry, while 688 were completed by respondents not working in the industry (i.e., ordinary passengers). The collected data had a reliability and validity of 0.9, indicating high reliability.

### (1) Low Awareness of Relevant Regulations

In fact, as early as April 2010, China's policy on allowing people with disabilities to obtain driver's licenses was implemented, with the C5 driver's license specifically issued to them. Five categories of people with disabilities in China can apply for a motor vehicle driver's license, including those

with left lower limb disabilities (who can apply for a C2 license), right lower limb disabilities, both lower limb disabilities, hearing impairments, and those with missing right thumbs. Currently, some provinces and cities in China have explicitly stipulated that disabled persons holding a C5 driver's license and meeting other necessary conditions are allowed to obtain a ride-hailing driver's license, such as Zhejiang, Yunnan, and Fujian. For provinces that have not yet explicitly stipulated that disabled persons are allowed to work in the ride-hailing industry, according to the relevant clauses of the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons" that "disabled persons enjoy equal employment rights," disabled persons, provided they hold the corresponding driver's license and meet other necessary conditions (such as meeting operational safety requirements and possessing corresponding service capabilities), should have the right to be ride-hailing drivers. In conclusion, in China, disabled persons who can successfully obtain a motor vehicle driver's license and meet other necessary conditions are qualified to work in the ride-hailing industry. However, most people in China have a low level of awareness of the relevant regulations allowing disabled persons to work as ride-hailing drivers. Our questionnaire survey results show that among 688 non-ride-hailing practitioners, 50.29% said they were completely unaware of the relevant regulations in their region regarding disabled persons working in the ride-hailing industry, and 31.1% said they only knew a small part of them. Furthermore, 48.55% of respondents believe that the current publicity channels for regulations concerning disabled persons' participation in the ride-hailing industry have a very narrow coverage, and most disabled persons cannot effectively understand the relevant regulations; 32.7% believe the coverage is relatively limited. This will bring many difficulties to disabled persons becoming ride-hailing drivers. From an insurance perspective, the lack of public awareness of regulations concerning disabled persons' participation in the ride-hailing industry will greatly increase the difficulty for disabled persons to purchase insurance. According to a report in March 2025, among China's approximately 28 million ride-hailing drivers, over 60% are currently operating without insurance, because the probability of accidents involving ride-hailing vehicles is 3.2 times that of private cars, and the repair costs are 47% higher. Data from a leading insurance company shows that the insurance coverage rate for ride-hailing vehicles is as high as 186%. Given the widespread difficulty for ride-hailing drivers to obtain insurance, a lack of public understanding of regulations concerning disabled ride-hailing drivers hinders the social insurance industry's ability to accurately quantify the risks associated with these drivers based on broad public awareness and data accumulation. Consequently, it becomes difficult to accurately assess key indicators such as accident rates and compensation probabilities using reliable risk assessment models, significantly increasing the difficulty for disabled ride-hailing drivers to obtain adequate insurance coverage.

### (2) Disabled Individuals Face Implicit Discrimination

In a society that advocates equality and diversity, disabled individuals entering the ride-hailing industry represent a positive attempt to realize their self-worth and integrate into society. However, in this process, disabled drivers face implicit discrimination from various quarters. On one hand, from the perspective of public perception, many people in China still cannot accept the fact that disabled people work as

ride-hailing drivers. Our survey data shows that when passengers learn that a ride-hailing driver is disabled, 33.87% feel "somewhat worried and have doubts about service quality," and 16.86% feel "very worried and feel unsafe." In online discourse, nearly 16% of people stubbornly believe that disabled drivers are unreliable and face communication barriers. Furthermore, a report details a case in Jiangsu Province, China, where a man surnamed Liu hailed a ride-hailing service to take his family from Nanjing back to Changzhou. Shortly after getting in the car, Mr. Liu was shocked to discover that the driver was disabled, which he found alarming. He complained to the ride-hailing platform's customer service, only to be offered a free ride and a RMB 30 yuan coupon. In this case, Mr. Liu's discrimination against disabled ride-hailing drivers is evident. However, it's worth noting that the ride-hailing platform's practice of offering Mr. Liu a free ride simply because the driver was disabled also constitutes implicit discrimination against disabled drivers. In fact, the process for disabled people to obtain driver's licenses is extremely rigorous, requiring them to complete various learning and examinations like able-bodied individuals, as well as special vehicle modifications and registration, with comprehensive safety measures. Even so, public stereotypes remain stubbornly entrenched, resulting in disabled drivers being negatively labeled before even providing services. On the other hand, in terms of market operations, the implicit restrictions imposed by platforms may make it extremely difficult for disabled ride-hailing drivers to operate. For example, in the actual registration and review process, people with disabilities may encounter more obstacles than able-bodied individuals. Platforms may overemphasize the potential risks posed by disabled drivers during the review process, resulting in stricter review standards and a lower pass rate. As an indirect example, as of October 2024, only 52 people with disabilities in Fujian Province, China, had obtained ride-hailing driver qualification certificates, and only 16 people with disabilities were engaged in ride-hailing work in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province. This indirectly reflects the significant obstacles that people with disabilities may face in obtaining ride-hailing driver qualification certificates and entering the ride-hailing industry.

### (3) The ride-hailing industry faces intense competition.

Currently, although the ride-hailing industry is showing a booming development trend, it is accompanied by enormous competitive pressure. In 2024, the monthly number of ride-hailing orders increased from 600-700 million to around 1 billion, but the increase in orders did not bring a corresponding increase in profits; instead, it intensified market competition. The direct victims of this intense competition are ride-hailing drivers, whose average daily income has been significantly reduced. According to statistics released by the transportation department of Yichang City, Hubei Province, in November, 56.63% of local ride-hailing drivers earned less than 100 yuan per day, 17.84% earned between 100 and 200 yuan, and 15.09% earned between 200 and 300 yuan. Moreover, this only represents revenue, not net income. It's worth noting that at the beginning of 2025, the Chinese e-commerce platform Douyin (TikTok) entered the ride-hailing industry with substantial investment. Douyin's entry will inevitably intensify competition within the industry, further squeezing drivers' income potential. In a survey of 404 ride-hailing industry practitioners, 45.05% believed the industry was currently quite competitive and stressful, while 22.28% considered it extremely competitive. Given the

current severe overcapacity and fierce competition in the ride-hailing industry, disabled individuals attempting to enter this field will undoubtedly face unimaginable difficulties. The ride-hailing industry is highly competitive, with ordinary drivers often resorting to extended working hours and lower prices to attract passengers in order to gain a share of the limited market. However, disabled drivers, due to their physical limitations and the lack of a robust social support system, find it difficult to participate in this intense competition. They cannot work continuously for long periods like ordinary drivers, nor can they withstand the economic pressure of excessively lowering prices. Our survey found that 34.41% of ride-hailing industry practitioners believe it is difficult for disabled people to enter the industry due to the high level of competition. 41.83% of ride-hailing industry practitioners believe that disabled people have some opportunities in the industry, but will face many challenges. Given the highly competitive nature of the ride-hailing industry, even with significant effort, disabled drivers may find it difficult to obtain stable income and good career prospects, and their living space is constantly shrinking.

### **3. Strategies for Addressing the Challenges Faced by People with Disabilities in China as Ride-Hailing Drivers**

Disabled people face difficulties such as low public awareness of relevant regulations, implicit discrimination against disabled people, and intense competition in the ride-hailing industry, which greatly restrict their ability to achieve effective employment in this sector. Therefore, it is necessary to help people with disabilities better integrate into the ride-hailing industry by increasing publicity of relevant regulations, addressing hidden employment discrimination, and providing more support.

#### **(1) Increasing Publicity of Relevant Regulations**

Currently, in China, people with disabilities are qualified to work in the ride-hailing industry as long as they successfully obtain a driver's license and meet other necessary conditions. However, most people lack awareness of the relevant regulations and have preconceived notions that it is inconceivable for people with disabilities to be ride-hailing drivers. Therefore, it is necessary to increase publicity of the relevant regulations. On the one hand, government departments should work with the Disabled Persons' Federation and traffic management departments to create easy-to-understand illustrated manuals, short videos, and policy interpretation columns focusing on core aspects such as applying for a C5 driver's license and obtaining ride-hailing driver qualifications. These materials should be distributed to government service platforms, community bulletin boards, and disability service organizations to both educate people with disabilities about their employment rights in the ride-hailing industry and increase public awareness of the relevant regulations for people with disabilities to be ride-hailing drivers. On the other hand, it is necessary to encourage ride-hailing platforms to embed pop-up prompts regarding regulations for people with disabilities in the driver registration process, and to collaborate with driving schools to add special courses on ride-hailing regulations to C5 driver's license training, thereby increasing the exposure of regulations related to people with disabilities' participation in the ride-hailing industry. Furthermore, at the societal level, it

is possible to regularly organize public awareness campaigns by representatives of disabled ride-hailing drivers, using media to share their professional stories and dispel public misconceptions about the driving abilities of people with disabilities.

#### **(2) Addressing Hidden Employment Discrimination**

On the one hand, public misconceptions about people with disabilities working as ride-hailing drivers should be corrected. For example, a "Barrier-Free Travel" themed campaign could be launched in collaboration with the media, inviting disabled ride-hailing drivers to participate in the filming of public service announcements to realistically showcase their standardized driving scenarios and service capabilities. A "Disabled Driver Stories" module could also be added to ride-hailing apps, using order evaluation data to visually present service ratings, safe driving mileage, and other empirical information of disabled ride-hailing drivers, gradually dispelling the public's stereotype that disabled ride-hailing drivers are "unreliable technically." On the other hand, ride-hailing platforms should continuously deepen their adaptive reforms. Ride-hailing platforms could be mandated to continuously optimize the registration process for disabled drivers, prohibit additional conditions unrelated to driving ability, and develop dedicated order-taking assistance systems for disabled drivers, such as enhanced voice recognition and gesture recognition feedback. Furthermore, a positive incentive mechanism should be established for ride-hailing platforms. For example, tax breaks could be offered to ride-hailing companies that meet certain employment quotas for disabled drivers.

#### **(3) Increased Support for Disabled Drivers**

Currently, the ride-hailing industry in China is highly competitive and intensified, undoubtedly creating a very high barrier for disabled people to enter the industry and face significant employment difficulties. However, we should clearly recognize that in China, various industries are gradually exhibiting intensified competition, which is a common phenomenon. Therefore, solving this problem cannot simply discourage disabled people from participating in the ride-hailing industry; this is neither fair nor a waste of human resources. The correct approach is to increase targeted support for disabled drivers. On the one hand, the government and platforms should work closely together to tailor specialized training courses for disabled ride-hailing drivers. It's not enough to simply enhance the driving skills of disabled ride-hailing drivers to handle complex road conditions; they also need improved service etiquette and skills to communicate effectively with passengers, thus comprehensively improving their professional abilities. On the other hand, ride-hailing platforms should fully consider the actual needs of disabled people and provide appropriate support in their order dispatch mechanisms, prioritizing their stable order volume to ensure a basic income. Furthermore, insurance institutions need to actively explore more reasonable insurance plans, optimizing premium structures based on the risk characteristics of disabled ride-hailing drivers to effectively reduce their insurance costs and build a solid safety net for their work.

## **4. Conclusion**

In the wave of the platform economy, the ride-hailing industry should have become an innovative arena for disabled people to break through employment barriers and achieve social integration. However, due to low awareness of relevant

regulations, rigid public perception, and industry Intense competition has led to structural difficulties. Low awareness of legal regulations results in insurance coverage difficulties for disabled drivers; implicit employment discrimination exacerbates occupational exclusion for disabled individuals; and fierce competition in the ride-hailing industry squeezes employment opportunities for disabled people. These contradictions expose the systemic erosion of the right to equal employment for disabled people in the digital economy. Therefore, measures such as increasing publicity of relevant regulations, addressing implicit discrimination, and providing greater support are needed to help disabled people better integrate into the ride-hailing industry. Only by incorporating the dignity of employment for disabled people into the ethical framework of digital economic development and promoting the transformation of the ride-hailing industry from "technology efficiency first" to "inclusive growth" can the industry's shared prosperity attributes be truly activated. This is not only a key breakthrough in breaking the employment predicament for disabled people but also a touchstone for testing the true nature of social civilization.

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