

CHINA

The Status Quo and Prospect of Chinese Autistic Education

Ms. Leilei Zhan

Senior Editor, Jiangsu Education Journal House

I. The prevalence rate of autism in mainland China

So far, China has not conducted any exclusive nationwide investigation into the prevalence rate of autism, so there are no official and formal data of statistics about it. At present, the statistics of the academic circle toward the prevalence rate of autism is chiefly based on the existing data about autistic children from the spot check of disabled children as well as the prevalence rate of autism put forward by international community.

In 2001, Chinese Federation of the Disabled conducted a sample investigation among disabled children ranging from 0 to 6 years old in six provinces and one municipality. By sorting out the data from among a total of 60,124 samples, this federation eventually determined that the prevalence rate of autistic children in China was 0.097%.

In 2004, together with the Health Bureau of Beijing, the Federation of the Disabled of Beijing conducted a sample investigation among disabled children ranging from 0 to 6 years old in Beijing. By sorting out the data from a total of 30 thousand samples, this federation eventually determined that the prevalence rate of autistic children in Beijing was 0.153%.

The diagnoses about autism in two investigations (in 2001 and 2004 respectively) were conducted on the basis of only the following standard: The patients should have typical symptoms or all autistic symptoms, but such atypical symptoms as Asperger were excluded. Therefore, the percentages derived were strict and prudential. Accordingly, the number of autistic children was a basically conservative figure.

As revealed by the statistics of the sample investigation conducted by the Disease Control Center of USA in 2006, the incidence rate of autism in the USA was 0.645%, while what is universally recognized and most extensively applied in international community is that the average incidence rate of autism worldwide accounts for 0.4% of the total population. Then, as reckoned according to such data, China, as a country with the largest population worldwide (1,328,020 thousand in 2008), has the largest number of autistic patients worldwide, reaching 5.3 million. Even if reckoned according to 0.1%, this number would also reach 1.3 million.

What is worth pointing out here is that the incidence rates of autism in China or in the world as a whole present a rising tendency. As estimated by experts, the number of autistic patients in China ranges from 2.6 to 8 million.

II. The origination and development of the autistic education in mainland China

In 1982, as a professor in the Center for Guiding the Psychological Health of Chinese Children, Tao Guotai confirmed the diagnosis of and disclosed to the outside for the first time 4 autistic cases of

Chinese children. Thence, the autistic education of China embarked on the path of its arduous start and rapid development.

The earliest institution of autistic education and training in China was initiated by parents of autistic children, before which the autistic education had been in a completely individual state.

In 1993, thanks to the efforts of Tian Huiping, the parent of an autistic child, China had the first educational institution specializing in serving autistic children----- Beijing Stars and Rain Education Institute for Autistic Children. In the same year, with the help of Professor Yang Xiaoling in the Research Institute of Psychological Health at Beijing Medical University, the first class of special education for autistic children in China enrolled students formally at the School of Mental Retardation in Haidian District, Beijing.

In 1994, consigned by the National Ministry of Education, the Education Bureau of Beijing conducted an experiment of preschool and compulsory education toward autistic children, focusing on researching the objectives, contents, methods and principles of the education and training of autistic children, thus making preparation for the popularization of autistic education in the national period of “the 9th five-year-program”. Thence, a prelude was unfolded ever since for autistic children to step into a field of special education.

In the 21st Century, schools of mental retardation in various parts of China have begun to enroll autistic children of school ages in succession under appropriate conditions, as well as develop the practical research into autistic education and rehabilitation.

III. The status quo of autistic education in mainland China

1. Policies and statutes

Although the autistic education and rehabilitation started late, they have been receiving more and more attention from Chinese government and society as a whole.

In 2006, *The Development Outline of the “11th-Five-Year-Program” for the Cause of the Disabled of China* was approved and conveyed by the State Council. This Outline distinctly classified Autism as a mental disability for the first time, as well as included the rehabilitation of autistic children in its work plan. In addition, this Outline put forward a development strategy that comprehensive rehabilitation centers of autistic children should be established in Beijing as the seat of the central government and various provinces. Furthermore, according to this Outline, the training of autistic education and rehabilitation has been developed in 31 pilot cities nationwide, so as to explore and establish an intervention system for the screening & examination, diagnosis and rehabilitation-oriented training of autistic children in an early period.

In May 2009, as explicitly put forward in *The Proposals on Further Accelerating the Development of the Cause of Special Education* of such departments as the Ministry of Education conveyed and issued by the General Office of the State Council, “We should try to create conditions to offer compulsory education in many forms to the children and youngsters seriously disabled in limbs or brainpower, and autistic, brain-paralyzed and multi-disabled children and youngsters, as well as ensure that the

disabled children and youngsters of school ages at children welfare institutions can accept compulsory education.”

2. Education and arrangement

Institutions offering services of autistic rehabilitation and education in China can be basically classified into two types: 1. National and public ordinary schools and schools of special education, undertaking the learning in regular classroom and special education for disabled children of school ages (including autistic children) chiefly according to *the Law of Compulsory Education*; 2. Private institutions of autistic services of various types, undertaking rehabilitation-oriented services of various types according to their respective conditions.

China carries out a system of compulsory education of nine years. During the compulsory education of nine years, the arrangement of autistic children of school ages is chiefly classified into the following four types: 1. Learning in regular classrooms at ordinary elementary schools; 2. Learning in schools of mental retardation; 3. Receiving trainings in some training institutions for infantile autism; 4. Learning at home.

The training and education of pre-school autistic children are chiefly offered in short-term training classes established by private organizations, while they are also offered in experimental classes and pre-school classes enrolled by a small number of schools of mental retardation in medium and large cities.

3. Early diagnosis and intervention

China has made remarkable progress in the research into the diagnosis and rehabilitation of child autism. In medium and large cities, *the diagnostic standards of the tenth edition of the Manual of International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10, 1992) and *the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV, 1994) have been mastered by more and more professionals. In addition, China has successfully brought in some training methods recognized overseas, as well as accumulated some experience in the training of rectifying and curing autistic children.

The diagnostic means, methods and tools universally applied by some scholars and treatment institutions include: mental quizzes, tests of adaptive capability and checklists exclusive for diagnosing autistic children, including *Autism Behavior Checklist*(ABC), *Clancy Autism Behavior* (CARS), and *Psycho-educational Profile for Autistic and Developmentally Disabled Children* (PEP).

In 2009, the Chinese Federation of the Disabled has issued *the Checklist for Appraising the Development of Autistic Children (Trial)* in the national system of the Federation. This checklist applies to the appraisal of autistic children ranging from 0 to 6 years old. In addition, on this basis, the Federation formulated a plan of individualized teaching and rehabilitation training according to the development characteristics of each autistic child.

IV. Problems encountered and the prospect of the autistic education in mainland China

1. Lifelong services

There is no specific medicine or therapy at present for autism, as a lifelong disability. Therefore, the intervention and training of autistic patients are ordained to be a life-long process. In China, Autistic Education is mainly for meeting the needs of children of pre-school or school ages, training and arrangement for adult autistic patients hasn't been conducted yet. For this purpose, the permanence and continuance of the services must be taken into consideration while the national policy on the overall layout of service institutions is formulated.

2. The service capability of institutions

Many an institution is not skilled in education and rehabilitation for autistic patients, and the effect of rehabilitation is also not so obvious. At present, experts and scholars in the Chinese Federation of the Disabled are formulating the standards for the construction of institutions of autistic services, exploring the problems of setting up and standardizing the educational courses for rehabilitating autistic children, as well as trying to secure some financial assistance through national revenue for rehabilitation trainings to autistic children living in financial difficulty.

3. Inclusive education

Only a few ordinary schools in China can offer corresponding trainings for autistic students. Ordinary schools lack specific administrative support and educational expense, teachers, and professionals engaged in research into autistic children, and professional support for the inclusive education of autism to be popularized.

By actively organizing various forces, the department in charge of education is conducting a research into autistic education as well as the linkage between preschool and school-age education. In addition, this department will formulize a feasible policy, so as to ensure autistic children can be supported, admitted and assisted by ordinary kindergartens, ordinary elementary schools and junior high schools in receiving education.

4. The system of education and rehabilitation

With professional institutions of rehabilitation as a backbone, communities as a basis, and families as a support, we should gradually establish and perfect a service system of socialized rehabilitation, having become the direction of our efforts.

In the final analysis, there are numerous autistic patients in mainland China, while autistic education started late. However, in the last 20 years, Chinese government has been attaching great importance to and continuously adopting many types of effective measures for autism and all walks of life have been paying extensive attention to and actively participating in the services of autistic education. Therefore, there is a sound ground for us to believe that: With the development and progress

of social civilization, the continuous growth of national economy, the gradual improvement of the legal system, and the establishment and gradual perfection of the community support plan, the cause of autistic education will receive more and more attention and the future of autistic children will become more brilliant.

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<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Q1: Autistic children mainly go to special schools specially for autistic children. What are the advantages/benefits for autistic children going to such special schools for autistic children?

A1: There is actually no special schools for autistic children only. Some children of high functional autism enter ordinary schools to receive integrated education while some other children of low functional autism enter special schools for mental retardation.

Special schools attach more importance to autistic children. The teaching skills and methods are more professional.

Q2: Will there be adverse effect for autistic children who need high support to go to ordinary school?

A2: Yes, there will be. In general, as there are less research and training on autism in these schools, most of them can't conduct training professionally and accordingly on autistic students. But in some big cities, like Beijing, Shanghai and Guargzhou, some ordinary schools can provide adequate resource support for autism, but there are few such schools at present.

Q3: There are 4 options of education for autistic children. Who make the judgment after early diagnosis?

A3: The parents make the choice after consideration with doctors/institutions/and experts.

Q4: What happens if the parents make the wrong choice of the schools?

A4: The schools cannot reject the autistic children once the parents have their choices. However, parents can shift their autistic children to other schools, when they find their children have not got proper training in the schools.

Q5: What kind of professional standard is there for the accreditation of autistic education? Who is responsible for checking such standard?

A5: China Federation of Disability is currently working on the professional standard. The contents of standards include body size, facilities, teacher qualifications, teacher-students ratio, etc. These standards are made only for rehabilitation institution for autism.