

Helping each other, helping ourselves: A case of employment for an adult with autism in Nanjing, China

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Abstract. This article presents the results of research on one case of employment for an individual with autism in a Chinese city. The research investigated the context of this employment, including family and local leaders' and coworkers' responses to it. Interviews and participant observation were conducted and almost daily work notes collected. Two major themes resulted. First, community efforts led to employment for an individual with autism providing a situation that was seen by all as mutually beneficial, to both the individual and her family as well as to the Community and local government, the Street Office. Second, despite this opportunity provided by the government, the mother's role continued to be essential and primary, including a main goal of making sure her daughter with autism could adapt herself to the coworkers' expectations and job requirements.

Keywords: China, autism, supported employment, international, parent involvement, family

1. Introduction

Over the past thirty years, China has changed from an isolated, poor country to one of the world's largest and globalized economies. Economic development has led to improvements in infrastructure, the education system, and overall standard of living. During this period, the lives of people with disabilities have also been impacted. Most recently, early intervention is being provided with funds paid by the government in some areas of the country. This is in addition to increased schooling opportunities that are occurring, as many cities and towns attempt to put the Compulsory Education Law of 1986 into practice by providing nine years of education to all students. While this is not yet guaranteed, especially large cities are making progress towards this goal. Basic welfare services such as the

Minimum Living Standard Assistance [9] (MLSA or *dibao*) for low income families including those with disabilities are also being provided to more and more families.

The 1990 Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities touches on both education and employment for adults with disabilities. Regarding employment, governments at various levels are encouraged to promote and encourage three types of employment, including concentrated, dispersed, and self-employment [16]. Concentrated employment refers to jobs created at welfare institutes, places that largely hire individuals with disability. Dispersed refers to persons with disabilities employed in community factories, businesses, etc. at a certain ratio. Specifically, this law states,

State organs, nongovernmental organizations, enterprises, institutions and urban and rural collective economic organizations should employ a certain proportion of disabled persons in appropriate types of jobs and posts. The specific ratio may be determined by the Peo-

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ple's governments of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government in line with their actual conditions (Chapter 4, Article 30).

Due to the vague language and lack of mandate, this does not always occur. In the current atmosphere of a market economy and drive for profit, companies are unwilling to hire individuals with disabilities even with tax incentives offered to them [18]. In addition, there are large numbers of unemployed workers since China moved from a planned economy to a market-based system which led to both state and private enterprises focusing on profit and getting rid of excess workers (or going bankrupt). This has meant that it is even more difficult for individuals with disabilities to compete for existing jobs. Moreover, many welfare factories that used to employ individuals with disability have been closing down as they cannot compete financially.

A very significant change in Chinese society that has occurred since the mid-1980s is the closing down and reform of many state-run enterprises and the end of an era where one's "work unit" (*danwei*) provided everything, including salary but also all social needs such as housing, healthcare, and education for young children. In its place has come a larger role and responsibility for communities, in the form of Residents Committees (*jumin weiyuan hui*) and the basic government which oversees these committees, the Street Office (*jiedao banshi chu*) (see [6] for an in-depth examination of this system). The social services and social welfare resources previously provided by work units are increasingly provided by these local government entities, including public safety, public health/family planning, environment and sanitation, and social welfare services for marginalized and disadvantaged populations including elderly, disabled, and unemployed [5]. Though the terminology and structures are confusing, overall what has happened is that with the decline of state jobs in work units that provided for all of one's needs, Street Offices have seen their responsibilities increased, while Residents Committees have often combined with others to form "Communities" (*shequ*) [2] (an abbreviation of the full name of Community and Residents Committees or *shequ jumin weiyuanhui*).

This article is about the case of one Community and its overarching Street Office that has provided employment for an individual with autism. While there is very little literature about community and supported employment in China, much has been written in the west, including the United States. Like in education,

individuals with autism (and other disabilities) in the United States were also excluded for a long time from vocational opportunities in the community [20]. Since 1986, when supported employment was first raised in the US under the Rehabilitation Act Amendments, the goal has been to provide employment for individuals in the community, that is, regular competitive employment [24]. In the United States, job developers actively seek new positions and relationships with employers to advocate for and obtain these opportunities for individuals with cognitive disability and autism, something that was unheard of just thirty years ago [10]. One important step is that of assessment, to ensure a job and job site are appropriate for an individual given his or her strengths [12,21].

Effective and successful community employment depends on comprehensive support services [19]. Specifically, supported employment often requires a job coach, either full or part time [24]. For those with autism, researchers point out the importance of job coaches being available when the individual begins working, as he acquaints himself with rules and culture of the workplace, including things such as when and where to take a break, dress code, amount of interaction between workers that is accepted, etc. [21].

Some authors have written about supervision specifically. Hagner and Cooney [8] wrote specifically about the supervision of employees with autism. They described 14 individuals with autism who had successful job experiences. In ten instances, there was no previous experience or connection between the individual with autism, his/her agency, and the employer. Yet their overall assessments of the experience were positive, including of the quality of work of the individual with autism. This research also found that initial job training was often provided by the agency and the work supervisor or specific coworker, and ongoing training provided sometimes by a job coach, but often by the supervisor at the work site him/herself. Indeed, Unger [23] also found that while job coaches may begin providing regular support, their presence often fades to that of more of a facilitation role. Moreover, in terms of job supervision, Hagner and Cooney, and Unger all found that supervisors note that they provide supervision for all employees, not just the ones with autism or other disabilities.

Of course, individuals with autism have unique needs, including communication and social deficits. Thus, the job coach for an individual with autism may play the special role of "social and vocational bridge between the worker with autism and coworkers" working on greetings, social skills and behavior [1, p. 35].

Research on employment of individuals with disability in China is very limited, in both the Chinese and English language literature. A search of all articles published in China on autism since 1994 returned approximately 800 articles, none of which touched on adults and/or employment. In English, Chau and Yu [4] wrote about occupational therapy stations for individuals with disabilities established in local neighborhoods, which included basic training in vocational skills and some opportunities to earn wages. Also, Pearson and colleagues [17,18] described employment and the lives of young adults with cognitive disabilities from the perspectives of both the young adults and their parents. However, all three of these articles described examples in Guangzhou, a southern city close to Hong Kong and one of the most advanced in China. Thus, the conditions in the rest of the country, and especially for individuals with autism, have not been researched up to now.

This research involved a qualitative case study to explore the issue of employment of individuals with disability, in particular autism, in China. For adults with disabilities, employment is an important way to become full participants in society, and this article examines the experiences of one family and one Street Office and Community that has provided employment at their community library to the family's young adult daughter with autism.¹ The purpose was to understand both how one community addresses and serves adults with disability as well as how the individual and family involved view and experience the employment opportunity.

2. Methodology

The research for this article was conducted by the first author, while the second author (the young woman's mother) contributed almost daily work notes about her daughter's employment situation over a one and one half year period, as well as participated in the analysis and writing of this article. A qualitative case study approach was used [14]. Interviews and partici-

pant observation were conducted over an initial period of two weeks, and a follow up interview and observations were conducted one year later by the first author. In addition the second author's work notes were analyzed and provide ongoing details of this case of employment.

The initial period of research occurred two months after the young woman, Ge, began working at a small library housed in a community center overseen by the Street Office.² Ge was diagnosed with autism in 1988 at age 3 years 8 months, and attended a special education school for eight years, 2nd grade through 9th grade (1999). She is very verbal, but tends to perseverate on her own narrow interests (such as the Chinese zodiac animals and the number five), and thus has difficulty with appropriate social interaction. She is also very organized and persistent about putting things in their proper place; this was one reason that the library was seen as a good fit for her. The first author spent two weeks observing at the library and at Ge's home. Observation occurred before and after work, on the way to work, in the library, as well as in other areas of the community center where the library is located. Interviews were conducted with Ge, her family, and four local government leaders in the Street Office and the Community and Residents Committee (Community) to which Ge's family and household belongs. Family interviews were taped and transcribed, while detailed notes were taken during the government official interviews. Informal conversations were also included during observations with four of Ge's coworkers at the community center. Interviews lasted 40 minutes to 2 hours, with a shorter one for Ge. They were conducted in each person's workplace, or in the family's home.

2.1. Setting: The community, community center, and library

The neighborhood in which Ge lives is in the north-eastern part of a large city in eastern China. Before 1984, this neighborhood was agricultural land, and used to be considered the "suburbs" (*jiaoku*, not part of the actual city). Thus, when residential apartment buildings were built up and a Street Office and Residents Committees established, many other urban neighborhoods thought of them as a rural area with little experience in urban planning and management. However,

¹The terminology is confusing, as the idea of community is new in China. For this article, when we refer to the local government, we will use the standard term Street Office. When we refer to the smaller, more grassroots Community and Residents Committee, we will use the term Community with an upper case "C." When we are referring more generally to the neighborhood and society in which Ge lives, we will use the term community, with a lower case "c".

²This is a shortened version of her actual name, as the second author is part of this family and they are well-known in China. All other names in this article have been changed.

the Street Office and all of its Communities quickly became known as national models and pride themselves in this. In 1996, the overall area was selected as a National Civilized Community (*quanguo wenming shequ*), and this designation has continued each year. In addition, national leaders often come to visit and learn from them.

Like the Street Offices and Communities described in the literature review, these entities have taken over much of the responsibilities that work units used to cover, including social welfare and services for individuals with disabilities. This Street Office has 60,000 people in its jurisdiction, with nine Communities under it, each with 1000–2000 households in them. Overall there are approximately 190 persons with disabilities residing under this Street Office. Specifically in the Community where Ge lives, there are 34 individuals listed as having a disability. It seems likely that this number is low, but that could be due to some families not registering their children as such (having a disability) until they are older and more in need of assistance from outside the family. Of the adults, some have disabilities such as deafness or physical disability and are able to work independently in the community, while others with more significant needs either are provided with stipends from the government (such as *dibao* or food or cash during the holidays), some had been provided with a job at a welfare factory and continue to receive a basic salary even though the factory has closed, and in Ge's case, employment in the community has been offered.

The library where Ge works is perhaps better described as a Reading Room – it is one room on the second floor of the community center that serves all nine Communities in this local jurisdiction. The library contains several thousand books and, most important to the regular customers, all of the local and regional daily and weekly newspapers. While people check out books infrequently, many come on a regular basis to read the newspapers, spending whole mornings or afternoons there. Other services at the community center include a dance class next door to the library, an art class down the hall from the library, and various services downstairs ranging from employment, to legal services, to handyman arrangements. While Ge works in the library, she and the other library employee, Ms. Yue, can and do spend time in other parts of the community center chatting with other employees or observing classes.

2.2. Data analysis

Data were coded based on the constant comparative method [7,14]. All interview data were combined into

a single Microsoft Word file, and then coding was done on the computer. Specifically, data were examined to find words, phrases, patterns of behavior that repeated or stood out, and a list of codes that covered these topics was made [4]. Once all data were coded, similarly coded data were placed together. Grouping codes, or categorizing [22] led to the generation of major themes, presented below in the results section.

Lincoln and Guba [11] suggest several techniques which were used for establishing trustworthiness and dependability of the data. First are activities that make the production of credible findings and interpretations more likely, including prolonged engagement and triangulation. Prolonged engagement allowed for a deep understanding of this case, as the first author returned twice over two years, and the second author was involved as a parent and taking daily work notes. Triangulation occurred between observation data, interview data, and Ge's mother's work notes.

Another technique recommended by many qualitative research scholars [11,14,15] is conducting member checks to allow participants to confirm the accuracy of the data conclusions. Throughout data collection, interview transcripts or summaries were shared with both parents and two of the four government participants. Moreover, the collaborative nature of this study involved the first author coding and categorizing data, and then discussing the generation of themes with the second author, who upon reviewing the data provided confirmation of the accuracy of the findings. Of course, this is a case study of one family and one community and the results cannot, and are not intended to, generalize to a larger population.

3. Results

Analysis of data led to the generation of two major themes regarding disability and family in this community. First, community efforts led to employment for one individual with autism providing a situation that was seen as mutually beneficial, to both the individual and her family as well as to the Community and local government, the Street Office. Second, despite this opportunity provided by the government, the mother's role continued to be essential and primary. Ge's mother, who had been unemployed for several years, took on the role of unofficial job coach, and it was clear that she was seen as responsible for teaching Ge to be successful in the job, including the primary goal of making sure Ge could adapt herself to coworkers' expectations and job requirements.

3.1. *Mutually beneficial situation*

All of the government leaders interviewed, as well as both parents, talked about how Ge's employment at the community library was a situation that benefitted both the local Community and Street Office as well as Ge and her family. This did not necessarily mean that her coworkers or even the government officers felt that she provided a service that others could not do, but rather that the fact of employing her would be overall beneficial to their Community. The director of the Street Office, Director Xiao, said that helping disadvantaged groups (*ruoshi qunti*), including helping Ge and her family, was "part of the effort for a harmonious society . . . only by solving the problems of disadvantaged groups can society be harmonious." Given China's recent push for a harmonious society in the face of new social problems, helping to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities in this way was seen as benefitting the whole community.

The vice-director of the Street Office, Director Yao, also talked about how they had selected Ge for this opportunity because they knew she would behave well and represent the Street Office and Community in a positive manner. She said, "Ge is special, mainly because of her parents' efforts, so she is very capable, and can adapt easily to working in the library." Many officials were similarly moved at the sacrifices made by her parents, and impressed with Ge's abilities (and lack of disruptive or destructive behavior), and so they decided that they wanted to help and reward these efforts, including Director Xiao and Community Party Secretary Shu. The fact that Ge could "adapt easily" to the job is an important point further discussed in theme 2. Regarding this first theme, what must be noted is that Ge was something of an exception, helped to find a job in large part because she was seen as someone who would be successful on her own, without disrupting ongoing work or making the overall community look bad. According to Director Xiao, individuals with disabilities living under this Street Office are helped "in different ways, based on their different situations."

One of the ways that it is evident that providing Ge with a job was beneficial to the community was local officials' tendency to contact the media and show her off to visitors. This was mentioned repeatedly by all interview participants, as well as observed by the first author and written about by the second author in the daily work notes. The leader of the Community in which Ge resided, Ms. Mu, explained that many leaders come to visit because the Community is seen

as a model for others. She said once they hired Ge, the Community and local leaders also contacted the media to tell them about her, and a short news program was done on her employment there. Hiring a person with a disability was one way that demonstrated that "this Community is constantly refreshing, constantly changing (*bu duan de gengxin, bu duan de bianhua*)" (Community director Mu). Director Xiao also talked about this, saying that by "introducing Ge to others, we can get the approval and respect of others."

Party Secretary Shu also talked about having government officials and others, including foreigners, come to visit at their community, including the community center. At first, he said, hiring Ge was debated, as some felt that people might not like to see a person with a disability there. However, he and others were very eager for her to work there. He argued that "if others saw her working there, they would think it is a good thing that we are helping her, visitors would be impressed by this, it's a good thing." Director Xiao also said, "in fact most people feel good that we are concerned with and helping her, they think we should do this, including visitors, leaders . . . they are happy to see her working here."

Emphasizing the mutually beneficial nature, Party Secretary Shu also said her employment at the community library was an opportunity for Ge to show off her special skills, which included knowing which day of the week any date falls on, recognizing and being able to write every character in the dictionary, and remembering facts about people after only hearing them once. She was often asked to display these skills when visitors, including municipal and national government leaders came to visit, and they were impressed with her and with the fact that this community had hired her and helped her.

This theme of mutual assistance was also salient in the interviews with Ge's parents, observations, and Ge's mother's work notes. She truly enjoyed the work, and her parents were thrilled that she had an opportunity to participate in society. They also saw how she benefited the community. In the words of her mother, "The library is a window on the Street Office. Director Yao often takes people to visit, and Ge being there performs a very positive function" (work notes). In a later interview, she further explained that "It's like this. Because they gave Ge a job, outsiders come and visit and they get the feeling that this Street Office is very concerned about disadvantaged groups . . . that they are doing better than others."

Indeed, this Community and Street Office have accomplished something that others have not. Other

adults with disabilities in this community also have been provided either with a job or *dibao*. Ge's father summarized the mutually beneficial accomplishments this way:

Many Street Offices just talk about being concerned [but don't actually do anything] . . . many don't do disability work as good as [our community]. Our community shows people, we have done something, this [Ge] is a disadvantaged person, and she's come to work for us. It shows people, and then they can feel that our Street Office is doing better than others. This glory is very important for the Street Office . . . it's a help to Ge [and it's a help to them], showing other people, they have done something real for people with disabilities.

The data revealed over and over again the importance of the mutually beneficial nature of this job opportunity. Clearly, the Community and Street Office provided a job for Ge which was something very much desired by her and her family, as a way to participate in society. Her parents were grateful for the job, and Ge enjoyed it and liked being shown off to visitors, so the family did not mind that the assistance is two-way. Her mother wrote about a year after Ge began the job,

Today Ge said that Director Liu brought people to visit, and asked Ge to guess the calendar. Ge was really happy, so I don't mind . . . the Street Office has made Ge into something that they can show off to the outside, and Ge also has an opportunity to interact with leaders. As long as she is willing, and doesn't mind, then it's fine with me. (work notes)

The Street Office and Community liked to let others know that they had given Ge this job, sometimes contacting the media, and sometimes themselves taking pictures for propaganda materials. One day, Ge's mother recalled,

At lunch today Ge told me that someone came to the library and took pictures of her today. She said it was a Party Secretary from the Street Office, but she didn't know which one. In the afternoon the Community Party Secretary called me and told me he had taken pictures of Ge, scenes of her at work. (work notes)

These pictures were used on bulletin boards around the community, demonstrating the work of the Street Office and the accomplishments of residents. Again, her parents did not mind this type of media attention, as they were grateful for the job opportunity and they

knew this did not bother Ge, but rather that she liked the interaction.

It is clear that Ge's job has benefitted her as an opportunity to participate more in society, and benefitted the Community and Street Office as a way to show their accomplishments towards helping disadvantaged people and working toward a more harmonious society. However, just as students with disabilities need support when they are included in general education classrooms, so do many adults with disabilities to be successfully included in community jobs, and this piece was not a part of what was formally offered.

3.2. *Working to fit in: Mother as job coach*

Although the family has continued to be grateful for this opportunity, and although the Street Office and Community officials have emphasized that on the whole they benefitted from her presence, data analysis found that the situation would not work without the active participation of Ge's mother. This theme emerged through observation, interviews, and also in the second author's analysis of the daily work notes. Specifically, though well meaning and kind enough, coworkers and others seemed to feel that they had no responsibility to help Ge beyond allowing her to work there, nor did they attempt to modify any of their own behavior to help her to be as successful as possible. Whenever difficulties arose, they left it up to her mother to solve them. Her role became to educate the coworkers or, more often, to help Ge to change her behavior. Ge's mother felt that she had to help Ge change to adapt to the situation, because she could not expect coworkers to change to adapt to Ge and her unique characteristics. Coworkers, on the other hand, did not see themselves as having a responsibility to support Ge, but rather sought out her mother to complain or report on her behavior.

Indeed, Director Xiao and Ge's parents both explained that once the Street Office officials decided to hire her, they simply notified the library director (Ms. Yue) that Ge would be working there, and there was no other training or information provided to Ms. Yue or others. As described earlier, Ge was selected because they felt she could easily be successful. This was often challenging during the first year of her employment, because coworkers did not know how to interact with her, and did not feel able to give her the guidance that would help her to be successful. That role of job coach was left to her mother.

Throughout the whole year and a half after Ge began working, her mother expressed a conflict between

being responsible for helping Ge to succeed, and being wary of appearing meddlesome by coming in too often. One way she addressed this was by approaching others and indirectly providing guidance or requests, such as during Ge's first month:

Later I took her downstairs to see Ms. Lu. Ms. Lu said Ge is very willing to do things. Actually that was just my purpose, to have Ms. Lu ask Ge to do more things for her. It's not good if she has nothing to do. (work notes)

All of her mother's work and "job coaching" was done unofficially, and she treaded carefully because she did not want to anger anyone and lose her daughter's chance at this job. On her second day of work, Ge's mother wrote that when she stopped in to see how Ge was doing,

Everyone was reading newspapers, no one talked to each other, and Ge was sitting there alone. At the time it seemed a very cold setting, and Ms. Yue had gone out to chat with other people, leaving Ge alone in the library. I wonder if she will just be alone with no one to talk with, flipping through the same book all day. But I can't ask Ms. Yue to do anything for us . . . I need to just go in there and let others know about Ge, help her to meet other people. (work notes)

Ge's mother repeatedly wrote and talked about the fact that that she did not go too often to her daughter's workplace because she did not want to bother others. Instead, she tried as best she could to teach Ge to behave in a way that would be accepted. She said that "as long as I can make sure that Ge behaves there, and make her adapt to them, I can't ask them to adapt to her, to us. I have no right to change them, I can only make Ge adapt to them" (interview). Even when she was unhappy about something, Ge's mother did not feel she could expect more. In writing about interactions with colleagues in the library, she wrote that even when they were not that friendly or did not take the initiative to interact with Ge or herself, "Of course I still have to go in with a smile on my face, I have no reason to expect other people to act a certain way towards Ge." (work notes)

However, she remained eager to help her daughter and was determined to continue, despite these challenges. Because the workers did not understand autism or Ge, their expectations tended to be low and they frequently waited until her mother was around to relay a suggestion or a concern, rather than providing guidance

directly to Ge. Ge's mother understood that this role of hers was essential for Ge's success. For example, about 8 months after beginning the job, she recounted this episode:

At midday Ge and I went out to the market and bumped into Ms. Duan [the head of the community center, Ge's supervisor]. She told me these few days have been so stressful, Ms. Yue didn't come, Ms. Lu also has something going on and so is not coming in, so Ge is responsible for the library, and she is really worried. I said, 'Why are you worried, doesn't Ge do a good job at managing the library?' Ms. Duan said sometimes she leaves early, without even closing the door. I said, 'Well then tell her, tell her to lock the door first and then go.' Ms. Duan said, 'No, she doesn't understand.' I said, 'How can that be? [Of course she understands]'. Ms. Duan said, 'Well, you tell her then.' I said, 'OK, just one sentence, and she will understand, no problem.' (work notes)

In fact, Ge's level of comprehension was indeed such that she would easily understand and follow instructions from others, if only they gave her the chance.

Another example of the coworkers expecting her mother to address any problems, and waiting for her rather than dealing with an issue themselves, occurred the following month. At that time, Ge's mother went into work and found that Ge had been annoying people with her repetitive and sometimes inappropriate language (calling people "dummy", etc). Her mother wrote,

This morning I went to Ge's work . . . I saw a woman from the art room, and she told on Ge, saying that Ge now calls people names, like dummy. So the people in the art room recently all ignore Ge . . . [During this discussion] Ge was on the side both saying 'You can't swear at people' and laughing at the same time. So right then I criticized her very seriously. Actually, the people in the art room are all really nice. I told Ge she had to go and apologize herself, to say 'I'm sorry and next time I won't say things I shouldn't say and swear at people.' I said if she did swear again, then she could not go to her job anymore. She said, 'I will remember, I won't call people names again.'

The result was that she did apologize and begin to interact with the art room people again. The challenge was that they were unhappy with her but waited passively for Ge's mother to arrive, as there was no one

else at the work site to discuss this problem with. This delayed effective addressing of the problem.

One final area that required the intervention of Ge's mother was regarding coworker misunderstanding of autism which led them to tease Ge for their amusement, without realizing that they were not only upsetting her but reinforcing her obsessive behavior. For example, they knew she was obsessed with the number Five, and so even though her parents told her to ignore books with a "5" on it, her coworkers sometimes showed her the number, "just for fun." Almost a year after she began working there, her mother wrote,

At noon Ge came home and said Ms. Yue threw away the number Five. I asked what was up with this? She said that [another community center worker] had written a number Five. What can you do though, [that worker] is good to Ge, I know they are just teasing Ge when they have nothing to do, so it's not good for me to go and say anything to them, that would be too formal. I am afraid they would misunderstand . . . so all I could do was work with Ge, telling her next time to not get too excited, and if they write that character [5], just walk away and don't laugh . . . Ge said she could do it, so we'll see how she does. (work notes)

A few months later, this continued, and again her mother emphasized the fact that it was up to her, and to Ge, to change Ge's behavior, rather than to ask for accommodation or assistance from coworkers:

At lunch time Ge came home and said, 'This morning I went to hang out in the art room. I sang for them. That woman wrote that character again.' I asked, 'When she wrote that character, did you leave?' She said 'I left, I went to the library.' I said, 'Good, that's right, you don't want to get mad or excited, just leave, that's right.' Actually, I have gradually realized (*xiang tong le*), other people have no duty to train Ge. They also don't know how to train her. They see her as a child to tease and play with. I have no right to criticize other people. All I can do is just teach Ge how to deal with them. Ge is better and better, I have confidence in her. (work notes)

Despite the lack of active involvement by coworkers in either helping to teach Ge or to modify the environment to be more appropriate for her, Ge's parents remained grateful for the opportunity, and thrilled at her progress. Like many individuals with disability, Ge also needed support in her job, and that role was played

by her mother. Due to cultural norms and expectations, they were unable to directly ask for coworkers' to help by changing their own behavior, but overall her mother was able to help Ge to be successful and remain in the job for almost two years, and continuing as this article is written.

4. Discussion

This article presented the results of research on the case of employment for an individual with autism in an eastern Chinese city. As in Western countries such as the US, this individual also requires some support or supervision to be successful in her job [8,23]. However, in China there is no system in place for supported employment, and thus this is a unique case where, as so often occurs in China, the role of the parent as both parent but also teacher and advocate is essential. Previous research has looked at parent advocacy roles when children are younger [13] and it is clear from this current research that that role does and must continue into adulthood, given the lack of systems of support in place.

This research found that this Street Office and Community are indeed taking over social welfare roles such as providing for disadvantaged groups, including individuals with disabilities [5]. While previously this Street Office operated a welfare factory, as that and others have closed down [17], they are seeking new ways to provide opportunities for these individuals; Ge's experience is one of the most inclusive examples.

Of course the experience is one of trial and error in a way, and as a result has had both its successes and its ongoing challenges or problematic points. As described above, overall the officials and Ge's family saw this opportunity as one that benefitted both sides. Yet one individual case cannot change societal beliefs about disability. Coworkers continued to tease her, without understanding the potential harm they were doing. There was not yet a culture of inclusion or a channel through which Ge's parents could formally provide training and education to coworkers; instead, her mother did all she could informally and indirectly to educate the coworkers, while directly trying to change Ge's behavior.

Comparatively speaking, this lack of accommodations made at the workplace in this city in China would not occur in a society such as, for example, the US, where federal law requires reasonable accommodations, and supported employment legislation details

provision of support and training both for the individual with disability and coworkers. Yet we cannot expect different societies to simply copy existing systems from the West, from developed countries. Instead, we can hope that each will learn from the other. Indeed, it is encouraging that the Community and Street Office officials were so proud of their employment of Ge, motivated to be successful in this area of disability work and to do better than other communities. While the initial reason was not person centered, the underlying belief was that helping individuals with disability participate more fully in society is a good thing; and that is something positive.

The uniqueness of Ge's case cannot be ignored. The community did provide her with this opportunity because they wanted to help individuals with disability become employed, but more specifically because she was well-behaved, interesting to talk to (and to observe her special skills), and would not cause difficulties at the library. In China, there is often a concern that if something goes wrong, no one wants to take the responsibility for that; thus there is hesitancy towards hiring someone who may be likely to be injured or need extensive support. This article has described a promising example of what can happen, but by no means indicates that this is a trend that will lead to opportunities for the many other adults with various disabilities in this city.

Indeed, just because the Street Office and Community and Residents Committee gave her this job, teaching people and changing attitudes is not so easy. Ge was a symbol for them of their concern for individuals with disability. On the other hand, it truly was also an opportunity for her to interact with people beyond her family, and to do work in the community. But what was missing is a real understanding of her and autism and disability. More education is required so coworkers can have more appropriate (higher) expectations for her, and interact with her in a more productive manner. This is an overall social problem due to a lack of awareness of autism by the general population, and not the result of any malice on the part of the coworkers.

4.1. *Limitations and future research directions*

This research was a small case study of one unique situation in one part of China. While the results cannot be generalized to a larger population, this study does add to the existing, very limited, literature about employment for adults with disabilities in China. However, further research must be done, both on other individuals with disability in this same community, as well as

on other communities in China, to further understand the various factors impacting employment opportunity there.

Another limitation of the study perhaps is both a strength and a weakness. The fact that the second author is the mother of the focus individual in this study, and her work notes were analyzed by the first author and then discussed with her, means that the authors have a very in-depth understanding of the situation. Of course it may also mean that there is bias in our analysis. This cannot be helped in this type of research and the strengths of the range of our materials, as well as the collaborative nature of the study between researcher and family member, exceeds the possible weakness of having this bias.

Another limitation is that although the first author observed for an extended period during the first couple of months, and then for a few days during the end of the first year, even more persistent observation [11] would strengthen the dependability of the findings. Future research should include at least several months of focused participant observation at this site, in order to build further trust especially with the coworkers.

Future research must continue to examine employment opportunities (or lack of) for adults with autism and other disabilities in China. Current research, and current efforts in practice in China, focus almost exclusively on children. But these children will all become adults, and it is essential that they are provided with opportunities to appropriately and productively participate in and contribute to society. Continued research can assess achievements that are being made, and be used for suggestions to improve practice. While every country and culture is different, it is not impossible that readers from other countries can learn from China's experiences, while China can also learn from outside disability experiences as well.

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