In this note I want to reiterate developmental aspects of developmental dyslexia in Chinese. Dyslexia in children is characterized by atypical reading and spelling development and is attributable to central nervous system disorder. More than 80 years ago the neuropsychiatrist Samuel Orton called attention to such precursors of the condition as the high rate of stutterers, the frequency of slowness in acquiring spoken language, frequency of clumsiness and comorbid conditions such as attentional problems. He also noted the high rate of similar conditions in the families of the affected and wrote about the technique of cytoarchitecture in studying brain function of his dyslexic patients. Since then we have made progress in our understanding of the condition. Salient examples are the anatomical study of dyslexic brains by the Harvard group of the late Geschwind and Galaburda; the genetic study of dyslexia by the Colorado group of DeFries, Pennington and Olson; and the use of fMRI in studying bilingual (Chinese & English) subjects by the Singapore group of Chee.

Psychologically, we should examine domains which are differentially important at different stages of children's development of language, heard or spoken or read or written. At the preschool level, the emphasis should be on the speech-language domain, fine and gross motor skills and related aspects. At the school age level, we should examine children's use of characters, words, sentences in their reading and writing (both spelling & composing). They should show an awareness of the internal structure of Chinese characters and how characters are mapped onto speech sounds in terms of initials (onsets) and finals (rimes). In particular, analysis of errors of reading and spelling, grounded in sound theoretical frameworks, provides insight into diagnosis and remediation. It must be recognized that any assessment and diagnosis must lead to appropriate treatment for these children, in good time and in great measure. The noted psychologist Alfred Binet said it well almost 100 years ago tat after the diagnosis there must be treatment. Any endeavour of early diagnosis must recognize this dictum.

Reference