



# **“Performing Own Roles”**

## **In-depth Investigation of the Menial Workers in 4 Cities of China**

Inspired by the news published on HuaLong Website in July

Group Name: Spotlight [T010]

Shanghai StarRiver Bilingual School, JiaChen Liu

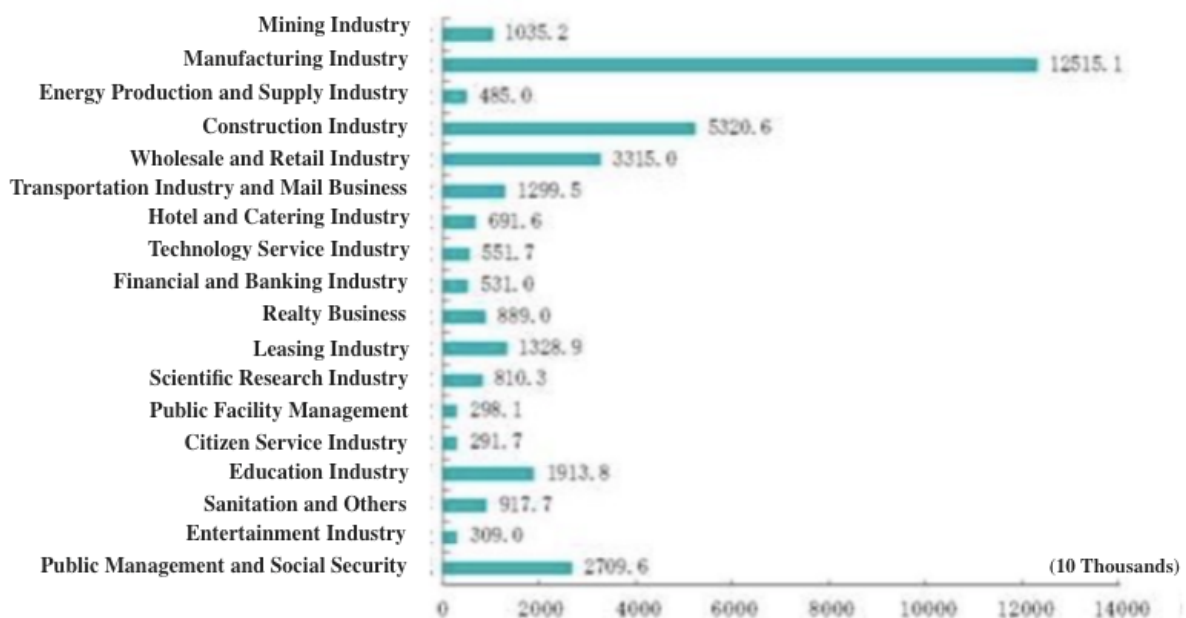
The Attached Middle School to Jiangxi Normal University, HanTang Qin

August 4 2016

*The temperature in Nanchang approached to 36 degrees centigrade, Mrs. Wu, a street cleaner, was taking off her dusty cap, using a splotchy towel to sweep her sweat from the head, and drinking a bottle of water under the scorching sun, “It’s palpable that we’re belittled by other people, but we earn our living by our own hands instead of stealing or robbing, so I don’t think we should feel ashamed.” she said.*

Nanchang University South Road (NUS Road) was hustling and bustling in a hot Monday afternoon. But unlike the Bayi Memorial Square or Central Business District that is usually full of tourists or commuters, people who do the most wearisome and dirtiest jobs with the lowest wages lived there and worked for the city, while many of them were treated badly by others just because of their jobs. Mrs. Wu, one of the street cleaners at NUS Road, was taking off her dusty cap, using the splotchy towel to sweep her sweat from the head, and drinking a bottle of water under the scorching sun. “It’s palpable that we’re belittled by other people, but we earn our living by our own hands instead of stealing or robbing, so I don’t think we should feel ashamed.” Mrs.Wu said.

*The Distribution of Jobholders in Legal Units Divided by Industries*



“From the data published by National Bureau of Statistics of China in the *China Third Economics Census*, the percentage that people who do so-called menial jobs is 10.88%, includes public facility management, citizen service industry and sanitation and others, this means that more than 0.15

billion Chinese out of 1.4 billion are doing these jobs.” (The chart has already been translated from Chinese.)

Although millions of Chinese are doing these jobs for the benefit of society, it's common, however, to see some parents educating their children to study harder or they will end up with jobs of street cleaners, security guards or vehicle fixers. Some people point at, strut in front of the workers, even give themselves airs as if they're doomed to be labeled by 'dirty, messy, and inferior'. According to the Hualong Website, a city cleaner was stabbed in July by a food seller because the city cleaner tried to persuade the seller not to throw the rubbish randomly. This incident was too small to attract people's attention, but it should have alarmed the masses. In recent years, it's increasingly common that these workers are not be respected, they are bullied by children, disdained by teenagers and treated as the negative examples by parents.

Although it is a widely held assumption that many who do low paying jobs in society are with inferiority, maybe even moral deficiency, this in-depth investigation report will show you the truth by comparing different pieces of related news, analysing various official data, and interviewing 20 workers who do the dirtiest things in four cities of China.



*The laboring people live at the foot of the social ladder, but most of them are optimistic about their life and jobs.*



“Mrs.Wu’s colourful clothes and passionate smile presents a brutal contrast against the dirty garbage bin and broken gray walls. Photographed by Jennifer Qin, in Nanchang, July 19, 2016.”

According to Matthew Effect (Morton, Matthew Effect) “the rich get richer the poor get poorer.” Then the common misunderstanding comes up into people’s mind--the more advancing the city is, the more complaints the lowest class have. Hence the reporters searched interviewees from 4 cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Zhengzhou, and Nanchang, however, the results were quite out of expectation. The workers from the four different cities all share the similar characteristics to each other. According to the response of twenty interviewees, their average working years are about 7 years, some even approaching to 20 years. Their earnings are not even enough to support their family but almost all of them don’t want to give up their jobs primarily because they have adapted to their life styles and also got the hang of their own surviving skills. More importantly, even though they may face the financial shortage or the contempt of many superficial people , they still hold a positive attitude to their jobs, and try to be nice to everyone, “Whether we’re complaining about our life or

not, life itself will not change for the sake of our own sentiments. So why not accept life as it is and see the world from a positive perspective?" a Nanchang taxi driver said with smile.

*Since the awkward situation is happening in their daily life, making a living is indeed hard for the lowest class.*

Nevertheless, it's self-evident that their life is not as comfortable as that of majority like ours. A man in his forty who owns a newspaper stall in Beijing is not willing to accept the interview. Fortunately, their neighbor---Mrs. Wang told their story with her mournful tone. The man and his wife got married in 2004, the exact year when they moved in Beijing. "At first, they had the aspiration and ambition, they embraced the want to make decent life." Mrs. Wang said, "this couple used to have the leisure time to chat with neighbors nicely and play with nearby children, but the time seemed to have eroded their juvenile." Everything had changed after their baby came to this world. They began to worry about that they could not afford their child's tuition, "They seldom showed up in their community, and smiled or chatted less to their neighbors in the last few years." Mr. Wang said. In 2015, the man had opened a breakfast stall beside their rattletrap newspaper stall, to make more money for their child, and for their family. "It's pathetic to see that as their child grows taller, the couple's wearing becomes more ragged." Mrs. Wang ended with a long sigh.

We may not notice that the development of the Internet technology has threatened the grassroots jobs. For instance, with the spread of the electric reading, less people are interested in hard copy. The publishing company may redraw people's attention by using the electronic magazine or newspaper, but the sellers, just like the man who has been mentioned above, had to come up another way to earn money so that they can make subsistence in this cruel society. Furthermore, a taxi driver from Nanchang said that the recent app like "uber" or "didi taxi" had reduced their customer numbers sharply.





“There’s an exercise book lying in front of the owner of a newspaper stall. The exercise book has recorded the selling price of every book she has sold. Photographed by HanTang Qin, in Nanchang, July 19, 2016.”

*What they want from the society is just more understanding and tolerance...*

Besides the burden of their financial position they need to bear, they have to bear people's indifferent expression and even insulting words. "Some kind people may throw the rubbish right into my garbage bin, while others just throw it randomly. It's just the matter of moral. I'd rather be more tired physically than blaming others." Mrs. Wu said with a smile.

"As a security officer, the thumb rule is to keep the proprietor safe. We do not intend to offend other people. We just need more understanding." Mr. Lin, a security officer in Zhengzhou said.

According to the result of the interview, 95% interviewees want to say 'Thank you' to those who ever kindly treated them, and they hope the majority do not hold prejudice to their jobs. "One swallow does not make a summer", a waiter in Shanghai said. She wants the majority to realize that one cannot have stereotype to any job.

According to a survey published by Tencent website, more than 40% netizens think "Every human being, regardless of occupations, being poor or wealthy, is the small pieces in a the huge machine of society." Also as the survey suggests, people should show respect to everyone. Also, as Plato the founder of the Western philosophy said, "every society has to have three groups of people: workers, soldiers and leaders and each has a sort of defining characteristic. Every society has to have workers like farmers or people who work in factories, producing all the things that we need in everyday life".

When reporters went to the Nanchang University South Road a couple of days after the interview, they saw these respectful workers like Mrs. Wu seemed wearisome. The sweat broke out all over her body and trickled down her back, but she was there working diligently on picking up the garbages. She smiled to the pedestrians as usual.



## Work Cited:

All of the source we use are approved by the original author.

1. YuTao Hu. "YuTao Hu Personal Portfolio". June 2016. Photobook. July 23rd 2016
2. National Bureau of Statistics of China. "China Third Economics Census". [stats.gov.cn](http://stats.gov.cn). December 14th 2014. Web. July 23rd 2016
3. Robert K. Merton. "Matthew Effect". Raised in 1968. Book. July 23rd 2016
4. n.p.. " Survey on the view of jobs". [tencent.sh.com](http://tencent.sh.com). March 4th 2016. Web. August 4th 2016