



# **“Glimmer in The Dust”**

## **The professional spirit of labors with low social status in Chongqing**

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Among the crowded streets of District Shapingba, a scrawny old man in a white vest soaked in sweat was slowly squatting down, winding up a package in steel with hemp rope. He then tightened up the cord, and placed his shoulders under the wooden stick to bear the weight. He stood up steadily, and began to walk forward.

This is a close description of the work that Lao Jiang, and hundreds of other Bangbangs, insist on for countless times every day. The word “Bangbang” refers to the occupation of carrying heavy objects for employers simply through a wooden stick and the sheer will in manpower. It has been the city symbol of Chongqing for a long time, with implications transcending the work itself. It is never merely a kind of porters, but a beacon of glimmering light that constitutes this great city.

Yet this occupation is on the edge of elimination. According to incomplete statistics, the number of Bangbang, from nearly 400,000 in 1995, now has already declined to no more than 10,000, within 50% of which only has elementary school diploma. The pittance available for them (about 1,000 each month), is the main reason pushing them to jettison this vocation.

Lao Jiang was still carrying the package through the crowded streets of Shapingba, his body rising and falling rhythmically. He walked very fast, yet he also looked back from time to time to see whether his employer had kept up with him. Only when he confirmed that he or she was following did he resume walking.

“Old man, don't wait for me. Just go ahead straight!”

“No! I worry that you can’t find me and turn to believe I steal your package!”

The occupation of “Bangbang” is a legend itself. In a fiery summer day in the 1980s, a Bangbang was separated from his employer in a crowded area, Jiefangbei. He searched everywhere for a whole day, with the heavy packages weighing on his shoulders, because he was afraid that he may lose them if he didn’t keep the packages near him. Not until late in midnight that he found his anxious employer, and delivered the packages to their destination.

The Bangbangs’ firm altitude and honest quality never decay.

"No matter how far away the destination is, as long as we carry the packages on our backs, we will stick to the end," said Lao Jiang, as he wiped away the sweat from his forehead with a towel draping over his shoulder. "Last time one guest had to change the destination halfway, I took him all the way from Ciqikou to Nankai Secondary School. The long distance and detour did exhaust me, but it is the job, therefore I must do it!"

"Young man, you just asked me to wait for you at the door. Meanwhile I have to refuse several guests. I think you should give me more money!" Lao Jiang said with a big smile on his face. Before the guests could respond, he added: "I'm just joking, we are good. You hired me to carry the load, and therefore, we are one team. It's up to you to choose what to carry and how far to go. I promise I will finish the job nice and clear."

There is a prevailing opinion in the society claiming that the occupation of Bangbang should be eliminated by the times, both for the increasing number of large moving companies and the increasing convenience and accessibility of personal transportation. Their clothes are even

suggesting that they're no different from beggars. Yet the real working status and income of Bangbang are rarely known.

"In the off season, I usually give help to some moving companies, which may earn me just 100 yuan a day. During the peak season, however, I don't need to consider my income. It is well enough to sustain my two kids going to school." As Lao Jiang leaned over to avoid the hustling crowds, he explained: "Anyway, this is all I have. Unlike you schoolboys who are to become big bosses in the future, I just wanna do my job nice. When the guests are satisfied, I think I am satisfied."

Lao Jiang put away the hemp rope and wiped the sweat from his forehead with a rag from his pocket. For him, however, a bowl of noodles after work already surpasses delight for those who are enjoying plates of cuisines.



Jiang, a Bangbang in Chongqing, is trying to stand up and begin to move the have goods by his sticks.  
The photo is taken by Wei Danli

Seeing the noodle shop, Lao Jiang shouted to the wife of shop-owner: "Same old!"

The noodle shop owner Ma responded as she looked up quickly to see the familiar guest:

“OK, Three Liang (a traditional unit of measurement in China for food) beef noodles! More hot pepper! “

Seeing the regular customers nod, Ma put his face under the pan and said: "There are many patrons here. I want to remember the respective taste of each one so that by just recognizing them I will know whether red soup or clear soup, coriander or pepper.....”

Remembering the taste of each customer while maintaining the efficiency of service might somehow be a bothering job. Yet after seeing the smiles and senses of being home from them, Ma believed that all the work is worthwhile.

Ma mixed the seasonings, then picked them into the bowl. When the noodles floats to the top of the water, she would transfer them into the bowl on top of the seasonings. And finally some good beef was put into bowl. The whole cooking process is finished.

Ma has to make more than 100 bowls of noodles like this one everyday. That is to say, she has to stand in a high temperature environment for hours, and constantly she has to greet guests and tidy up the dishes.

"You see, I must frequently use the towel to absorb the sweat on my head. If sweat falls into the pan, the noodle is completely ruined.” said the Ma. with a smile as she replace the wet towel with dry one, and then wipe her forehead.





Ma, a noodles cook in Chongqing, is pulling the noodles out of pot. Everyday, she stands in front of this pot in the narrow space, cook hundreds of bowls of noodles.

The photo is taken by Huo Zhixing

Noodles are a crucial and irreparable part of life for people in Chongqing. The data from Ministry of Commerce in Chongqing indicates that 84 thousand street noodles shop exist in Chongqing nowadays, each of them, averagely, can sell 150 bowls of noodles per day. Totally, 12.6 million bowls are estimated to be consumed by guests in whole city each 24 hours.

In the early morning, countless noodle shops are as full as Maradona's. People even sit on small tables and stools setting outside the shop, and sometimes they just stand and eat the noodles. It is the thousands of ordinary noodle cooking masters like Maradona that rear and foster an

indispensable part of Chongqing culture. Diners, whether elegant ladies and gentlemen in suits or workers in rags gather here, eating a bowl of noodle regardless of their origin or status. After the peak period, Maradona turned down the fire of cooking noodles and looked at the diners who were eating noodles.

Watching those guests, who are ordinary individuals, enjoying precious chance in a day to taste the palatable noodles in front of them, Ma smiles. It is those people, no matter guards of primary school, Bangbang, or the cooks cooking noodles, who endeavor to do their best within the scope of their capacity in the situation replete with dust, in those humble occupations sometimes disdained by others, contribute to the formation of this steady and harmonious society. Like plenty of beans of glimmer that gather to create a spectacular column of light.