

The Face of the City

1. 城市的面孔

Taxi ! is a non-fiction book recently published by Johns Hopkins Press. In this historically accurate book, the author, Graham Russell Gao Hodges, delves into the 100-year history of the New York taxi driver.

Since the first metered taxi appeared on the streets of New York in 1907, the American taxi driver has had to deal with ongoing pressures. A taxi driver's pressure is caused by the very nature of their profession as they spend 12 hours each day sitting in an enclosed space. Outside of the taxi, there is congested traffic and huge trucks while the inside can be filled with danger from: drunks, car thieves or violent passengers. This type of work environment is the catalyst for loneliness in many taxi drivers.

In these 100 years, taxi drivers have worked through their lonely job, spending their days and nights with fares whom they may never see again. Previously, a method they used to cope with the loneliness was to have “a fleeting intimacy with their passengers”. Pete Hamill, a reviewer, says, “This was the era of the cabby as philosopher or comedian, quick to make observations about life itself, or its subdivisions in politics and sports, or to crack wise about women and other mysteries.” This sort of “performance” has two goals. One is to connect with other people and alleviate the loneliness; the other is to look for a larger tip at the end of the ride.

However, at the beginning of the 1970s, this sort of taxi driver no longer existed. Edward Adler, a taxi driver who later became the writer for a TV show,

The Face of the City

explains, “They drove cabs so their kids wouldn’t have to drive cabs. When their kids finished at the university, they packed it in. ”

The taxi driver’s work environment has caused them to become a common icon in America’s popular culture. Some examples include the famous Taxi television series and the movie *Taxi Driver*, amongst others.

Taxi drivers in the larger cities of China may not be prominent in popular culture, but they are newsworthy topics in the media. Due to their fringe status and difficult working conditions, taxi drivers can become the object of society’s sympathy. Taxi drivers often reveal the true style of the city through acts of goodwill, such as stopping a dangerous criminal, rushing a gravely ill person to the hospital, or returning valuable lost items.

Not long ago, a Beijing newspaper reported two stories on taxi drivers. One report was about a taxi driver, Mr. Liu. While waiting at a stop light, Mr. Liu gets out his bamboo clappers and starts rapping for his fare. The goal of such a performance is to make the fare happier, and relieve the stress and anxiety that comes with living in the hectic city. Of course, this performance is free of charge.

The other report was about a taxi driver who studied English by himself, thus earning more money from foreign passengers, and a higher income than other taxi drivers. The report detailed an event where the taxi driver stopped outside the gate of a hotel, as he had spotted a group of foreigners speaking with another taxi driver. It was fairly obvious the other driver didn’t understand English, so this driver used fluent English to ask, “Where do you want to go?” He then suggested, “You should get in my cab.” The other driver could only watch hopelessly as the foreigners left. At first, I thought the driver who understood English would ask if the foreigners needed help, find out where they wanted to go and then tell the other driver to take them there. It never occurred

to me that he could use his English ability to steal these fares. The writer's goal for going into such detail was probably to show how important the ability to speak English can be in a taxi driver's life.

Pete Hamill's review of *Taxi!* ended with a certain amount of sentiment when he said, "The days of philosophy are gone, along with the jokes. The need for tips goes on." Something to be thankful for is; besides having taxi drivers who can use English to take on work, our city also has Mr. Liu, the rapping taxi driver who only wants to make his fares laugh and asks for nothing in return.

《出租汽车》是约翰斯·霍普金斯大学出版社新近出版的一本非小说类的书。作者格雷翰·拉瑟尔·高·霍基在这本资料详实的书中，探究了美国纽约城出租汽车司机的百年历史。

自从1907年第一部计价出租车出现在纽约街头那天起，出租车司机就成为这个国家忍受压力时间最长的一群人。这种压力源自这个行当本身的特性：每天坐在一个封闭的环境中，度过长达12个小时的时间。车外是拥堵的交通和巨型的卡车；车内同样充满了危险——醉汉、抢劫者、有暴力倾向的乘客……这样的工作环境，使得出租车司机成为最孤寂的人。

一百年间，出租车司机就这样孤独地工作着，与那些付给他们钱、也许永远不会再见面的人一起度过日日夜夜。曾经，他们采取了一种排解寂寞的办法——“与乘客短暂亲密法”。评论家彼德·汉密尔说：“这是出租车司机被当作哲学家和喜剧演员的时代，他们面对乘客，迅速地做出观察和判断，或者谈论政治和体育，或者用俏皮话谈论女人和其他隐私。”这种表演有两个目的：一是与人交流，打破孤寂；另一个是谋得更高的小费。

不过，在上世纪70年代初，这样的出租司机再也没有了。曾经作过出租车司



The Face of the City

机，后来成为电视作家的爱德华·阿德勒对此的解释是：“他们做出租车司机是为了自己的孩子不再做这行。当孩子们大学毕业时，他们就收车不干了。”

出租车司机的工作环境使他们成为美国流行文化中常见的形象。比如著名的电视连续剧《出租汽车》、电影《出租车司机》等等。

中国大城市的出租车司机虽然不是流行文化的主角，却是媒体关注的焦点。有时候，由于所处的边缘地位和艰苦的工作条件，出租车司机成为全社会释放爱心的对象；有时候，在他们协作追逐抢劫犯，或是飞车送急重病人入院，或是拾到重金交还失主时，他们就成为城市风貌的展示者。

不久前，北京的一份报纸上有两篇报道。一篇是关于一位刘姓出租司机，他自备快板，在等红灯时为乘客表演，目的是让乘客在紧张的城市生活中更加开心快乐。当然，这种表演是免费的。

另一篇报道，讲述一位自学英文的出租司机，因为这个技能，他赚到了洋人的钱，收入比同行高出许多。记者特别描写了一个细节：有一次，这位司机在一个酒店门口看到几个外国人正在与一位出租车司机说着什么，显然，那位司机不懂英文。懂英文的司机便走了上去，用流利的英语问道：“你们想去哪里？上我的车吧。”不懂英文的司机眼巴巴地看着洋人离开了。我原以为，懂英文的司机会问：“需要帮忙吗？”然后问清楚地址，告诉那位不懂英文的司机，让他载洋人到目的地。没想到，他用自己的英语能力，把这个活给‘钱’了。这位记者写这个细节的目的，大概是想说明，会讲英文对一个出租车司机有多么重要。

评论家彼德·汉密尔在对《出租汽车》一书评论的结尾处不无伤感地写道：“出租司机作为哲学家的时代伴随着那些笑话远去了。只有小费的要求保留下来。”值得庆幸的是，我们这个城市除了有会用英文揽活的出租司机之外，还有不求回报、只图博乘客一笑的会说快板的刘姓司机。

The Negative Effect of Hard Work

2. 吃苦耐劳的负效应

A Mexican reporter once told me that there have been conflicts between local residents and the many Chinese business migrants who, in recent years, have opened restaurants and stores in Mexico. For example, local people would have their shoes polished by shoe polishers. By contrast, the Chinese would polish their own shoes as they'd rather gamble their money. The Mexicans found this difficult to understand and complained the Chinese were disrupting the status quo. If everybody cleaned his own shoes, how would the shoe polishers survive?

In early 2007, the Chinese community in Milan clashed with local police because the Chinese peddlers were using carts as transport. This caused inconvenience to residents and violated local regulations. Additionally, residents were unhappy with the Chinese who usually worked long hours, as well as, throughout the weekends. For the Italians, the hardworking Chinese were disrupting established norms of working conditions.

These anecdotes remind us of how the Chinese were perceived in the United States over 100 years ago. In the 19th century, Chinese gold diggers were seen as hardworking, undemanding employees who never complained. According to the *Madisonian*, “One miner descended into a gulch with a sack of rice, two large rolls of blankets, two hogsheads, several heavy mining tools, a wheelbarrow, and a hand-rocker all swinging from his pack-pole.” The editor noted, “It was a mystery how that Chinaman managed to tote that heavy load along so gracefully, and not grunt a groan.”