

ONE WORD—PLASTICS

BY JENMO TIAOCAO

This pseudonymous posting (the name means, “how to change jobs?”) on a Chinese-language Internet bulletin board identifies ten professions most avoided by China’s graduates.

1. Coal processing

The word “mining” raises terror in the hearts of Chinese students. After hearing repeated news reports about mine explosions and collapses in which everyone in the mine is killed, no one with 16 years of education is willing to make a living in this way, or to expose himself to the daily threat to life and limb, or to spend all of his days in the blackness of a mineshaft.

2. Mine engineering

As above.

3. Paper manufacturing

Working in this profession makes you feel that you have left the comforts and quiet of metropolitan life far behind. Working among the paper rollers means enduring foul odors, severe pollution and high temperatures all year round. People who spend many years in a paper factory suffer from hearing loss and nervous exhaustion. There are many fatalities in paper factories, with people falling into vats of acid or being crushed between rollers. Long-term employees have accustomed themselves to rotating work shifts, and they are gradually reduced to a zombie state. Paper manufacturing is a highly profitable enterprise, but only for the proprietor; wages in the profession are notoriously low. For that reason, most new graduates make an effort to avoid this profession, and even those who make it their field of study typically move into another profession at earliest opportunity.

4. Leather manufacturing

There have been reports of a particularly high incidence of cancer among those who work in the leather industry. It is well known that leather manufacturing involves carcinogenic chemicals. Leather manufacturing is reportedly the largest light industry in the northwest, but students who choose this pro-

fession live miserable lives. There have been recent reports of one factory offering salaries of only 300 yuan, sending shock waves through the ranks of students training for the profession. Pay in this field ranks among the lowest of any profession.

5. Chemical engineering and chemical technology

Training for this profession, also referred to as the fine chemical industry, is offered in nearly every industrial institute in the country. Although the profession is in great demand throughout China, the pay is low, and the working conditions are infamous. New graduates arriving at factories find themselves on a frontline of survival in which physical exertion is a paramount factor. Students have long bemoaned the industry’s rotating shift system. Zhejiang University is reputed to be the best place to engage in chemical engineering, but research students there are said to earn only around 3,000 yuan. This profession offers a classic example of the conflict between planned economic production and a market economy.

6. History

Most people who graduate in this subject aim to become researchers or lecturers. But how can there possibly be enough academic postings for everyone? As a result, most history graduates end up working as receptionists or telephone operators, the luckier ones finding jobs as secretaries. The best place for history graduates is Nanjing University, but after graduation, all students care about is academic credentials and advancement.

7. Public service management

Almost any Normal University offers training in this profession, which has come into high demand under the prosperous capitalist system, and offers quite good remuneration. But under the actual social conditions in China today, there is a severe disconnect between the degree of social development and society’s systemic needs. As a result, the demand for this profession is largely theoretical, or as one graduate in the profession puts it, “Whose service needs my management?” The fact is that the professional knowledge students gain is on the level of “a jack of all trades and master of none.” This profession cultivates the establishment of organizations and administrative units made up of cat-lovers,¹ but the actual situation is that in today’s society, if you don’t have good connections and

backing, it is by no means easy to find a job with a cat-lover organization.

8. Chinese

Most universities offer a degree in Chinese, but the only schools that focus on Chinese as a research subject are top colleges such as Peking University, Fudan University and Nanjing University. Other colleges offer Chinese only as part of a general curriculum, and graduates in this field tend to face a high rate of unemployment. This is a profession that is really only suitable for young people. A pretty girl can hope to become a secretary; one who is plain but has a pleasant voice may find work as a telephone operator, while one who is neither pretty nor in possession of a pleasant voice, but who can write well, might become an editor. One who possesses none of those qualities can only hope to become a receptionist. This is a classical example of a profession only for the young.

9. Mechanics

Graduates in this profession are the focus of nationwide college entry incentives. But if you wish to study for this profession, you should cultivate an introverted personality and placid attitude. No one is willing to spend a lifetime dealing with charts and lifeless, invisible mechanics.

10. Environmental engineering

In foreign countries this is considered a very good profession, offering stable employment and high pay. Because overseas

economies have developed to an advanced level, industry has stabilized, and cat-loving types place very great importance on the environment. The typical environmental protection department overseas is a cat-lover's organization. According to reports, Japan and Denmark each invest three percent of their GDP in environmental protection programs, making environmental protection a good profession. But in China, environmental work is still stalled at the stage of prohibiting random tree-chopping and so on; it has not yet reached a substantial scale. Likewise, environmental protection professionals have only reached the stage where they won't starve to death. The only places where such professionals can really survive are in environmental research institutes, and the remuneration has not yet reached reasonable levels.

Translated by Stacy Mosher

The original Chinese article was posted on an education bulletin board on the Vancouver-based Chinese Web site, Creaders.net: <http://www1.bbsland.com/education/messages/206940.html>.

1. The Chinese expression *ai maopu, ai shenghuo* (literally, loving to stroke cats and loving life) has popped up on a number of youth-orientated Chinese Web sites. The translator has not been able to find anyone who knows exactly what it means, but its use in context suggests a meaning something like the English "tree-hugger," in both the positive and negative sense.



Coal mine in Gansu Province. Photo: Reuters.