



# AS **BLUE-COLLAR** INCOMES RISE, A STIGMA STILL TAINTS THE 'LOWER' WORKING CLASS

## 80%

A survey carried out last year by leading headhunter Wise Talent Information Technology found that 70 percent of graduates were seeking good-paying jobs, but 80 percent said they weren't willing to take on daily overtime of more than one to two hours.

### Lu Feiran

**A**fter working as a household domestic in Shanghai for nearly 30 years, Zheng Meilin proudly notes that her income is on par with the wages of many white-collar office workers.

A native of Anhui Province who came to the city as part of the migrant worker tidal wave, Zheng has monthly disposable income of more than 11,000 yuan (US\$1,528). It's hard work, but she is happy with what she earns.

She lives in an apartment block that houses many blue-collar and domestic workers — including couriers, takeaway delivery people and women who specialize in postnatal care of mothers and newborns.

Many of her neighbors also hail from Anhui.

"We don't hide our income from each other," Zheng told Shanghai Daily. "Most of us have after-tax incomes of around 10,000 yuan — some even higher if they're more diligent."

According to the Shanghai Government Work Report issued in January, the yearly average disposable income of residents in the city is about 85,000 yuan. By that standard, Zheng and her residential neighbors are middle- or even higher-income people.

That contradicts the common perception that you have to be a white-collar worker in a high-rise office building to get a higher income.

Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing, in

a report on blue-collar workers over the past 10 years, reports that their average monthly salary has increased from 2,684 yuan in 2012 to 6,043 yuan in 2023. The rate of increase in that period was slowed only by the COVID pandemic.

Ten years ago, white-collar workers earned on average 2.4 times more than blue-collar workers. Today, that ratio has been whittled to 1.4.

"More blue-collar jobs have been created, and workers' rights and interests are more protected than before," said the report. "Therefore, we found that blue-collar workers are much more satisfied with their jobs."

In 2023, according to the report, *yuesao*, or women who provide postnatal care to new mothers and newborns, earned

an average 8,824 yuan a month, the highest wage among workers classified as "blue-collar." They overtook truck drivers, at 7,641 yuan, and takeaway delivery people, at 6,803 yuan.

Zhang Qing, one of Zheng's neighbors, has been a *yuesao* for five years. She now earns 12,000 yuan — a salary she said is "hard-earned."

Zhang shared her usual daily schedule with Shanghai Daily.

She gets up at 6:30am and works until 1pm, and then from 3-9:30pm. She gets up twice during the night to take the baby to the mother for breastfeeding. The work includes making meals for the mother, tending to the baby and doing laundry.

"The work trained me to sleep fast," she said. "I can fall asleep whenever my head hits

the pillow because that's the only way I get enough rest."

Before becoming a *yuesao*, Zhang was a domestic worker like her friend Zheng. However, she said domestic work was harder and less lucrative than that of a *yuesao*, so she enrolled in a training course and switched jobs.

Zheng, 52, on the other hand, has stuck to domestic work. Her daily schedule is fully booked from 7:30am to 7:30pm.

"I work in each household for about two hours — longer if they ask me to make meals," she said. "I choose employers who live close to each other so that I save time on travel."

Zheng said before 2022, she was working about 14 hours a day, and then she decided to take it easier.

"On the one hand I'm not