

Diploma 16  
Homo Urbanus  
Du Hao



Nongmin gong  
农民工  
Rural-Urban Migrant worker`



## Content

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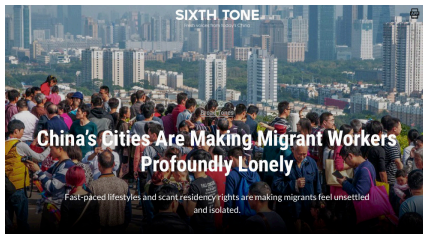
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## Nongmingong

Within the frame-work of our unit, I am exploring the issue of vulnerability in the urban environment by observing human behavior. My project looks at the social and spatial limbo that marginalized groups of people are experiencing in China. That group of people is in an “in-between” status-between rural and urban, and between work and poverty, in China they are called **Nongmingong**.



Li Xueshi

Mar 07, 2018 | 6 min read | Video



This year, an estimated 385 million Chinese people returned to their hometowns for Spring Festival, piling into packed cars, planes, and train carriages in the run-up to a holiday which has long been **recognized** as the world's largest human migration.

The Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan

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In English, **Nongmingong** translates to “**rural-urban migrant worker**” or “peasant worker”. They are facing a constant discrimination and regarded as “second class” citizens ever since the start of urbanization of Chinese cities.

The discrimination is not only about treatment by others, but more importantly it is through **institutionalized discrimination** by the government and various employment policies.





URBAN



Work in the cities

Nongmingong



Hold Rural HuKou

RURAL

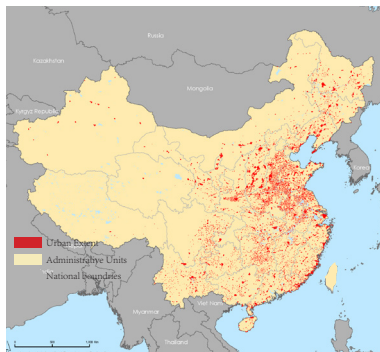
Following this human designation of labor identity, the Nongmingong are the people who are **holding a rural identity but work in the cities.**



The Hukou system was initially introduced to **control migration** from country to the city. In early **1950s**, as more population moved from rural to urban areas, the cities were facing resources pressure and food shortage. Hukou was then used to bind farmers to farm land and together with commune system to ensure the rural can function as a supportive backstage.

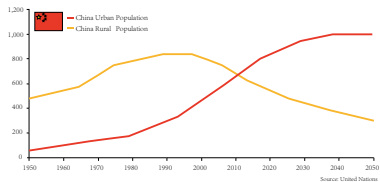


Rural identities at the time were even forbidden to move and work in the cities unless undergo a complicated process. This is enhanced by the fact that food stamps were only provided to **official urban dwellers**, thus further limited the movement of rural people to cities by limiting their access to food.

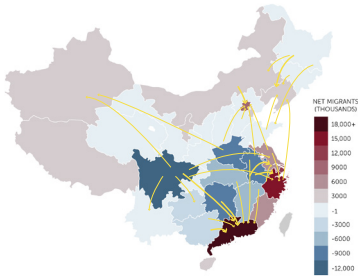


Urban extents illustrate the shape and area of urbanized places. Urbanized localities are defined as places with 5,000 or more inhabitants that are delineated by stable night-time lights. For poorly lit areas, alternate sources are used to estimate the extent of cities.

Note: National boundaries are derived from the population grids and thus may appear coarse.



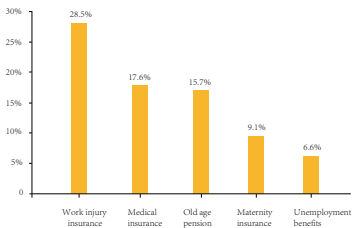
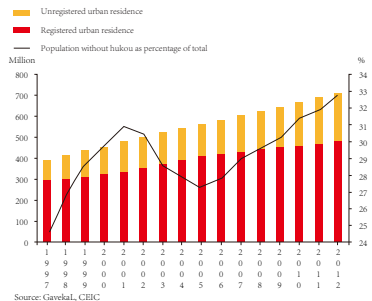
After the **economic reform in 1978**, as foreign investment started to come into Chinese cities, **urban extension** was at its fastest speed. China started to have a **duality of development**, and **rural and urban** areas became even more **segregated**. The disparities between urban and rural registration are particularly stark, leading to a differentiated model of citizenship, in which those with rural registration have fewer rights and privileges.



In the 90s, some of the 1172 million Chinese population are rural residents and about 150 to 200 million rural labourers are in surplus in China. Thus began the largest rural-urban temporary migrant movement which is described as a “blind flood” after the Chinese state has liberalized migration controls.



Since those migrant workers only have rural HuKou, their stay in the cities were considered as "temporary"



Most of them are not able to access social welfare, retirement pension and education for children.



Nongmingong, image from photography competition Nongmingong.

In terms of employment, they barely are permitted to hold formal work positions, plus their lack of education and skill, peasant workers can only do the work that the urbanites are not willing to do.



These are always works that require intensive labour and are paid with very low wages with no insurance.

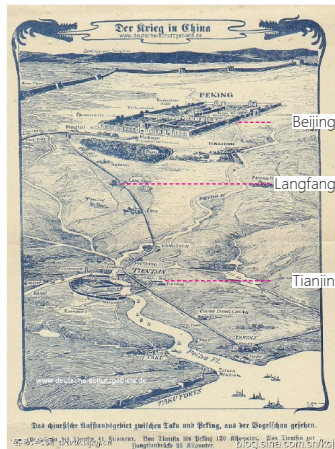
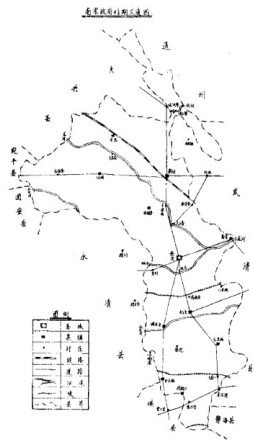
In 2020, the total rural migrant workers in China exceed 285.6 million.

Although entering 21st century the policies have gradually changed and many provinces are canceling hukou system.

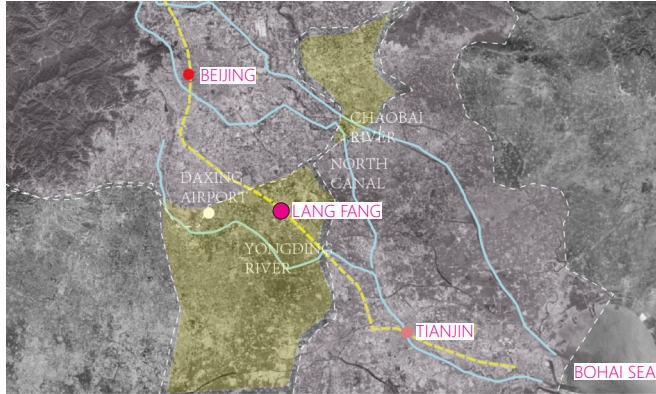
The fact is up to now, china has almost 300 million Nongmingong working far from home, it will still take a long time for the policy to really work. Also, change to urban Hukou means a loss of farmland in the home countryside in many places.

## Langfang City

For my project I focused on a group of Nongmingong in my city Langfang, the closest city to Beijing.



Langfang, the closest city to Beijing, is located between 2 major Chinese cities: Beijing and Tianjin. In 1894, a rail way is built between Beijing and Tianjin and set a station in the middle and that is Langfang, that's when the population starts to boom and develops to a city.



After new China is founded in 1949, Langfang's territory has changed for several times, with its land acclaimed by Beijing and Tianjin for use and resulted in its current status which is now cut into two separate part by Beijing and Tianjin. even now Langfang is always a central part of the Beijing-Hebei-Tianjin integration development scheme.

Geographically Langfang is lower than Beijing and Higher than Tian Jin. There are 3 main rivers ChaoBai river, north canal, Youngding river pass through langfang from Beijing to Tianjin and arrive in Bohai sea.

The three rivers all belong to Haihe River water system.



The area surrounding the rivers had a history of **flooding**.

Since it is very close to Beijing, which is the capital of new China. In 1963, november 17, Mao wrote down "we must bring the Haihe river under permanent control". since then in 10 years, Langfang had sent 300,000 people to take part in this project.



1418 main canals were excavated , with total length, 12440 kilometres, apart from getting rid of the threat of flooding, it also resulted in that the land of Langfang is crisscrossed by rivers and canals.



BEIJING

DAPING CANAL

CHENGGU ZHONG CANAL

CHENGGU ZHONG CANAL

NO.6 CANAL

NO.6 CANAL

NO.8 CANAL

NO.9 CANAL

NO.4 CANAL

DAXING AIRPORT

DRAGON RIVER

LANGFANG

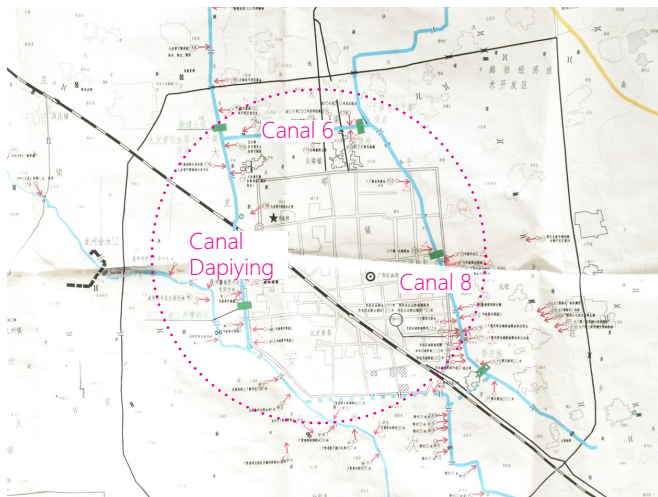
YONGDING RIVER

2 km



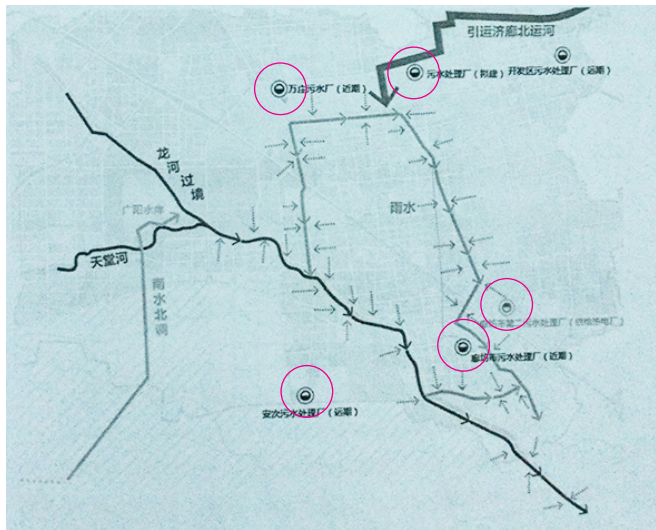
Archive image on Canal8 in 90s from Langfang planning office

The lack of quality and maintenance due to the limitation of the material and finance of that time resulted in the canals' polluted and smelly condition. Lots of complains are reported to the local government.



Canal map from Round-city water system Management Office

In 2011, Round-city water system Management office was founded. The office set a 3 year plan to transform 3 canals (canal6, 8 and Dapiying) surround the city centre to a modern canal for both practical and aesthetic reasons to correspond <the water pollution control and management “thirteenth five-year” strategical scheme>, a guidance policy set by the central government to increase the water quality of Beijing, HeBei, Tianjin core area.



5 urban sewage treatment plants were built and providing the main body of water to the canals. Other waters are comes from rain, the north canal, dragon river, and river transported from southern part of china which is a country-wide scheme. Many sewages used to connect to the canal from all parts of the city and factories are closed to reduce the water pollutions but will reopen when there is heavy rain situation and that caused the canal to be polluted and smelly again.

On the north west, there was the dam that controlled the water coming from Beijing in flooding period.



Canal 8 in 1990/2010/2020

A plenty amount of money was invested for the cleaning and reconstruction of the canal.

Overall, because of geographical characteristics, Langfang has the mission to unconditionally undertake the upstream water from Beijing Sub Centre, Beijing new airport and xiong' an new area, but also discharge flood to Tianjin downstream conditionally.

## 项目说明

### 一、项目概况

项目名称：廊坊市水务局关于环城水景观带养护管理服务

项目公开招标

采购人：廊坊市水务局

采购代理机构：中大宇辰项目管理有限公司

预算金额：总计 3990863.04 元，其中 A 包：2693170.91 元，

B 包：1297692.13 元

服务期：服务期一年。

付款方式：养护费实行先服务后付款，甲方每两个月向乙方支付一次承包费

A、B 包投标人资格要求：

- 1、投标人须具有独立法人资格和合法的经营范围；
- 2、符合《中华人民共和国政府采购法》第二十二条规定，2016 年度企业财务状况报告（会计师事务所出具的审计报告或谈判供应商出具的财务报表）；社保经办机构颁发的社会保险登记证书原件或开具的社保缴纳证明；参加本次政府采购活动近 3 年内，在经营活动中无重大违法记录的声明；
- 3、投标人须具有检察机关出具的无行贿犯罪档案查询告知函；
- 4、每个投标人只允许对一个包投标；
- 5、本次招标不接受联合体投标。

For the maintenance of the canal 8, government contracted Qinghua landscape maintenance company to to do the job.

## Guardians of the canal

A group of 30 people are hired to clean the banking of the canal which is 5 kilometres from Beifeng road to Guangming east road for daily maintenance. They are all Nongmingong which means rural-urban migrant worker. I call them the guardians of the canal.





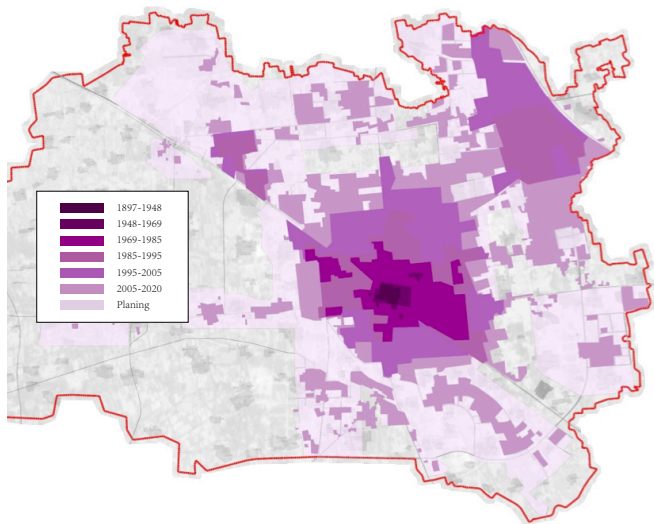
Beifeng road

Canal 8

Team base

→ Team members

Guangming east road



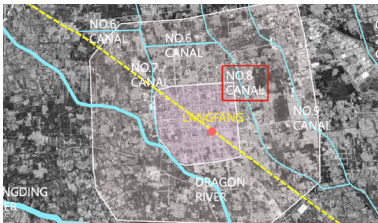
In recent decades, the expansion of Langfang city areas caused the demolishing of many villages, growing in territory and shaping its image as a more civilized city. This resulted in a flux of rural migrant workers. They are either attracted by the work opportunity or they are actually the people who just lost their farmland and are forced to work in the cities.



● Villages to be transformed



Langfang Nongmingong



Many of the workers are very old and employed in city maintenance. The workers I chose to focus on work for a private contractor as the cleaners of Canal 8, one of the round water system of the city, which functions both as a public space for urbanites and to boost the image for the city.



They are paid with minimum wage, at about 2000 Yuan (300 Pounds) / month and are doing very tired and repetitive work and usually lived in nearest villages for a lower rent at 500 Yuan/month.

Location & Starting point





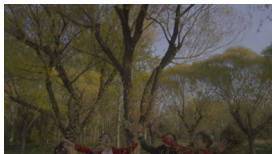
On the first glance, it seems ideal. There are people dancing, singing, practicing Chinese kongfu, selling tofu. Some people are playing cards next to a light post, some people are selling vegetables on the ground.



The trees are well selected, so in autumn they are colorful. Green yellow and red, before they fall to the pavement. It is extremely beautiful.

But in the city, every beauty has a price...

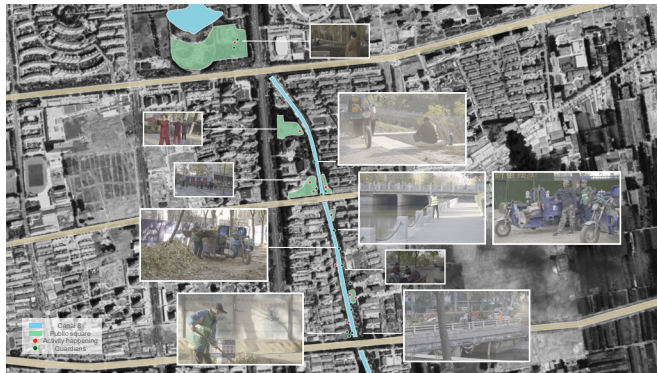
Behind the scenes, there is a battle ground for the cleaners. I observed this man who constantly, swept the leaves from one place to the other, collecting them in a pile. Just next to him, a group of people are playing with the leaves the man had just collected and asked me to help them with their Tiktok video. I found the amazing absurdity that the mans job seems to have no end. The cleaner did not complain, obviously its his job, he was doing that repetitive work for a living but not for his interest. So he just kept cleaning, if not he might be strictly punished.





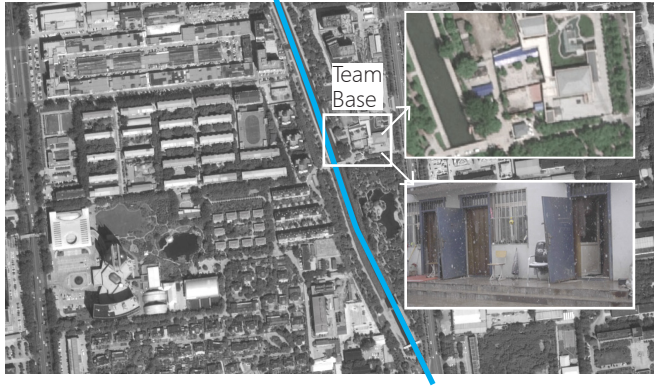
Maybe because I felt guilty. Maybe it is because I was suddenly aware of something that was invisible to me before. But when I looked around again, I began to see cleaners everywhere.

They are behind the dancers.  
They are Behind the Kongfu masters.  
They are Behind the singer.  
They are Inside a cleaning car behind the card players.



And even more, all along canal No 8, they are collecting leaves at the bridges, collecting leaves from the water, and pouring them together. they are testing the water quality, drinking a cup of tea, and smoking by their vehicles. I became interested in them, and when i spoke to one of the cleaners I learnt that...

Canal 8



The base of the team for their morning gathering was in the middle part of the canal, where there are 3 rooms belong to the maintenance company.

Two of the rooms are used for storage and at the same time providing a place for the workers to gather in the morning and rest in the noon.

## Methodology

For the methodology,  
I take aspiration from  
documentary film maker  
Wangbing.



Wangbing is a Chinese director, often referred to as one of the foremost figures in documentary film-making.

West of the tracks. 2002.  
The Ditch, 2010.  
Three Sisters, 2012.  
Dead Souls, 2018.





I used a method in between direct and participant observation in a way that I spent 3 months following them, learnt their behaviors in the space subjectively by feeling it with no preconcieved idea of what the life people in their social class would be. That allows me to build up a close relationship with them and gain their trust to enter their proximity while at the same time I am able to observe objectively through the lens of the camera.

## Characters

The main characters in the film are aunt du and an elderly-couple.

Aunt Du  
Age 63 Canal cleaner



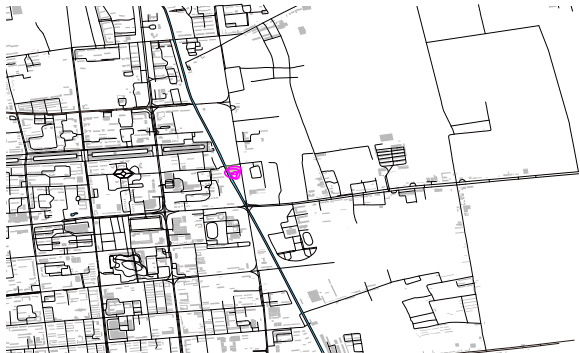
Aunt Du is a 63 years old. Her hometown is at a village far from the city center of Langfang which named the Wudi village. It is far from the city so the city expansion haven't affect her hometown. This means she won't be able to get money from selling the farmland to the government. Also cultivating farmland won't be able to raise the family. So she has been working in the cities for 10 years, taking various jobs but non of them provide contracts and insurance. She has moved places for many times, either for the cheapest rent or being asked out beacuse the houses she stayed in are for other uses. For example, she used to live in the room that the elder couple in the Film are now living, but asked out becasue the elder couple (the contractor's relative) need a place to live in.

Her name is Du Chunsheng which means "Born in spring".

Mrs. Fang  
Age 65 Her husband's caretaker

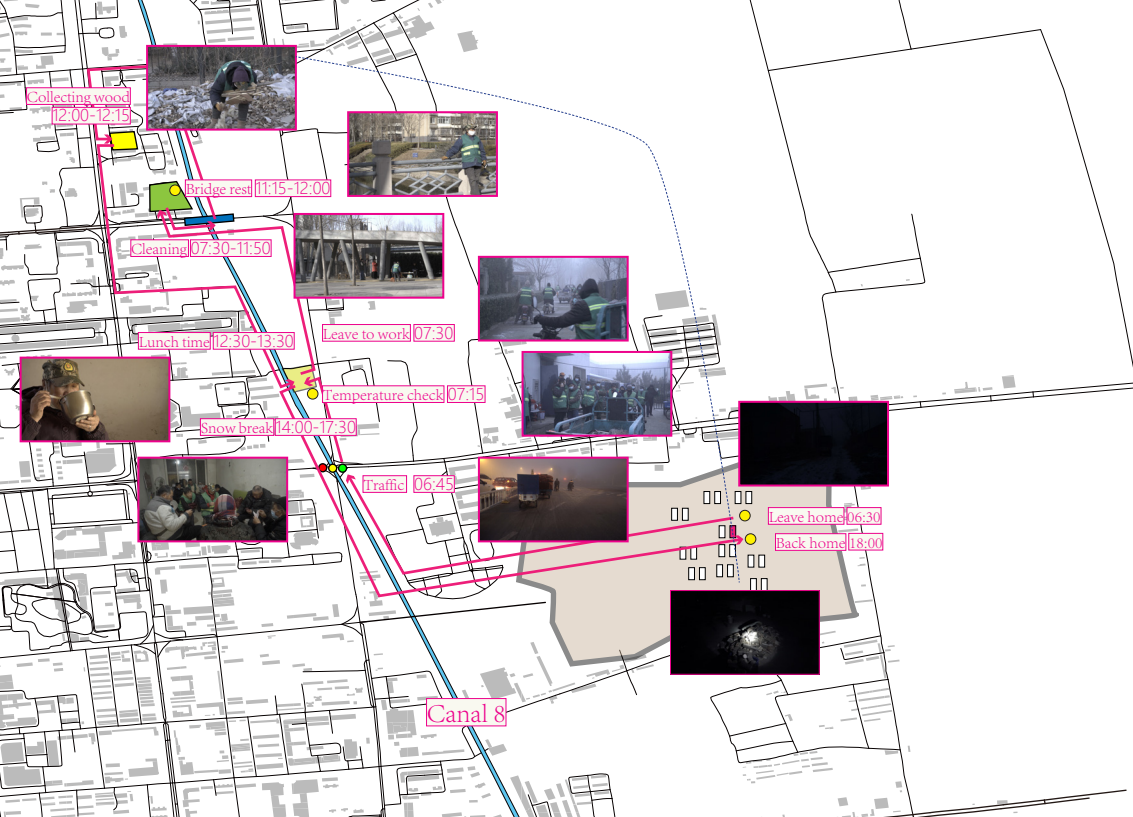


Mr. Wang  
Age 67 Guardian of the base



This couple lived in the room for the team base for 4 years. Like most of the cleaners, they came to the city from a rural area to make a living, without any skills or education, and they end up working in this company as canal cleaners for. The couple used to work as the cleaners as well, until the man had a cerebral stroke and lost his working ability, and his wife became his full-time caretaker. But he was not completely relieved from working: he became the guardian of the gathering place, looking after it in exchange for the right to live in the equipment storage.

The couple is vulnerable even among the cleaners, not only because of their living condition, but also because they are laughed at quite often by the manager and cleaning teams without any respect. But in fact the old couple's life could possibly be the fate of anyone of the other cleaners actually.



Film timeline and location

By moving in and out of their living and working places, I tried to observe in detail the components of their lives and the temporal and in-between spaces in the cities. After staying with them, I found that although physically and Financially they live in a hardship, they are very brave and positive towards their life. They do have lots of concerns, but they also have some hopes for the future to come.

# HOMO URBANUS

LABORATORY FOR SENSITIVE OBSERVERS

## TUTORS

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Architectural Association  
School of Architecture