Traveling for Auto Shows

Ting Song and Yuan Gu

Interview with Mr. JL's Parents

JL, male, born in 1983. Grade IV intellectual disability. Graduated from a special education school—Shanghai Yangfan School of Yangpu District in 2000. Started working at Shanghai Papa John's in 2009.

Interviewees: JL's mother and JL's father (who left for work in the middle of the interview)

Interviewers and writers: Ting Song and Yuan Gu

Interview date: September 11, 2016

Interview place: JL's home

Regret not Having Had Time to Take Care of the Petit Baby

Q: Shall we get started? So, both of you are from Shanghai, right? How did you meet?

JL's mother: Yes. We met through someone else. I used to live in Pudong while he lived on Xiangyin Road. I moved to Puxi after marrying him, and we just recently moved back to Pudong. We used to plant vegetables right across from Tongji University, then we went to work at Postal Mechanics Plant which was pretty close, too.

Q: How old were you when you got married?

JL's mother: Twenty-eight.

Q: You married late, didn't you?

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JL's mother: Not really. It was very normal to get married at that age in our time. Back then, no matter how well you did at school, you would end up in the countryside. Now there's hope, because whether you are originally a rural or urban resident, you can get a job if you do well at school, and if you get into a college, the college will get you a job.

Q: How much schooling did you receive?

JL's mother: I did several years of high school. Someone in the neighborhood repeated high school later, but I didn't, and no one did where I lived. Going to college wasn't a big thing then. You would need a tutor to repeat high school and I couldn't have spared the money for that. People nowadays realize the importance of education.

Q: When did you and your husband graduate from high school?

JL's mother: We both graduated in 1974, which was still during the Cultural Revolution. We had 2 years' high school and got a high school graduation certificate, but by today's standards, that certificate wasn't exactly official and didn't really carry much weight. We started working right after graduation.

Q: So, you started working on the farm right after graduation?

JL's mother: Right. We planted vegetables.

Q: You got married when you were 28. Which year was that?

JL's mother: It was 1982. Planting vegetables was hard work back then, not like now. If you worked in the rice paddies, you got off-seasons, but you had work to do every day for every season of the year when planting vegetables. Even after I got pregnant with JL, I still had to work.

Q: You mean you had to work during your pregnancy?

JL's mother: Yes, I had to work on the farm. People used to be not as delicate as they are now and didn't realize they had to take good care of themselves during pregnancy, including eating right. Back then, we didn't seem to care, actually no one seemed to care.

Q: Were you still working even when you were 7 or 8 months pregnant?

JL's mother: Yes, I was. I didn't really get much time off before having the baby. Some moms even kept working till the baby was born.

Q: Did you have any abnormal reactions during pregnancy?

JL's mother: The reactions were not that bad. But I was working too hard planting vegetables. The baby moved often in my tummy, so he probably was feeling really uncomfortable.

Q: Was the birth easy?

JL's mother: It was an easy birth at the hospital. When he was first born, the doctor said he was a perfect baby who had no problem sleeping or eating. Then he started fussing and crying non-stop, and was hardly eating, and we couldn't figure out why.

If we had known there was something wrong with him, I would definitely have quit my job and spent more time taking good care of him. Back then, we were kind of careless and went back to work 2 or 3 months after childbirth. We were super busy and there was no one babysitting him, except that the grandparents would lend a hand sometimes. I believe JL turns out to be the way he is today partly because no one had been there to take good care of him when he was young.

Q: Was there no one to take care of him at home?

JL's mother: There was a lot to do at home and he has only one pair of grandparents. Grandma actually had a job at a community-run company, and Grandpa wasn't in good health. All he could do was to get a bottle for JL when he was hungry or to rock him when he cried, but he couldn't really take any responsibilities. Not eating well could have had affected JL, too. If I had stayed home to take care of him, he would have been in better shape, but I didn't want to give up my job. Nowadays, people give up everything for their kids, including their jobs. Now we feel really bad that we didn't do our best for him when he was young.

JL's father: Kids were not a priority back then...

JL's mother: They were, for the average person.

JL's father: We didn't have such a strong sense then. It was the eighties, and the Cultural Revolution just...

JL's mother: What Cultural Revolution? It was already over! Kids just were not the priority then. Also, we were paid well for planting vegetables, so we didn't want to quit.

Q: Were you living with the grandparents?

JL's mother: Yes, we were. My husband's younger brother's kid was just 1 year old, and the two kids were raised together. We all worked, and no one could stay home to take care of the babies. If I had been working in a factory, I would have been able to take a year off. I wasn't working in a factory yet. I wish I had been.

Q: When did you start your factory job?

JL's mother: Around 1985. JL was just a little over 12 months. My husband and I worked in the same factory.

It was later that we realized that JL was petit in size and different from other kids who were all so chubby. We took him to the doctor who said there was something wrong with him.

Q: When did you take him to the doctor?

JL's mother: If we had taken him earlier, the doctor wouldn't have been able to tell anything. He needed to be at least 12 months or older. He started walking and talking later than other kids.

Q: When did he start talking and walking?

JL's mother: He started walking at 17 months and talking a little earlier than that. He is timid, like me, so he didn't get good genes from me there. His dad is more daring (laughing), I am more detail-oriented while he is more careless. JL is smart in his own way. He would watch TV on his own and watch the news, military channel, and sports channel, which few other kids ever watch. And he has a good memory.

Rejected by Both Kindergarten and Elementary School

Q: When did JL enter preschool?

JL's mother: I don't quite remember. We just sent the kids to the preschool affiliated with the farm once they met the age requirement. At the preschool, JL seemed to be

okay in the beginning, except that he would cry every night as if he didn't really want to go. When he got a little older, we realized that he seemed to be slower than other kids and was lagging behind. I could tell that the gap wasn't that big as to label JL dumb, because he still had certain abilities. While other kids would pick playmates that were older, he only played with the really young ones, which reflected badly on his IQ.

Q: So, he was born like this?

JL's mother: I would think so. When he was first born, he looked perfect to the doctor, but then, the doctor wouldn't have been able to tell anyway. Then the non-stop crying started.

Q: When did JL start kindergarten?

JL's mother: He was four, or was he five?

JL's father: I seem to remember that he started kindergarten at 25 months.

JL's mother: That was preschool, then he started kindergarten when he was three or four. He was petit in size and younger for his age mentally, too, so I held him back 1 year. He didn't like to be ordered around. Other kids seemed to be able to stay put and do whatever they were told, whereas he was self-centered and oblivious to the rules. So, the teacher wanted to kick him out saying that he wouldn't listen.

I tried to let him do the LRC (learning in regular classroom) and the teacher didn't want that either. Back then, teachers had the power to pick good kids and reject the others. The teacher's reason was that JL was 1 year behind and should not have been in her class in the first place. Had it not been for that, she would have agreed to let him do the LRC. We were not very savvy ourselves and didn't know much. Had it been today, he would have been able to do the LRC. We are in a more people-oriented age where kids who can't keep up will be allowed to do the LRC at school as long as they don't distract the other kids. Back then the government had no such policy, and kids got kicked out of school just like that. So, he didn't spend much time at the kindergarten and had to stay home afterwards.

Q: When did he start first grade?

JL's mother: When he was six.

JL's father: When he was eight.

JL's mother: He wasn't doing as well as other kids at school either. He was in a regular class for 1 or 2 years. He could understand everything the teacher taught, but his handwriting was awful. When he was young, there was something wrong with the way he held a pencil. I felt that he couldn't control the pencil and whatever he managed to write was all wriggly and not appealing. Even now his handwriting is bad. And he just muddled through school. He knew a lot of Chinese characters and all the *pinyin*. Occasionally he would ask us about a word he didn't know but we weren't much help.

Q: Did he suffer low self-esteem when he couldn't keep up at school? Did you panic?

JL's mother: I don't have a lot of patience. If he didn't get whatever I had taught him twice or three times, I became irritated, and being timid the way he was, he would become even more lost. I didn't do it the right way, of course. I should have

given him time to cool down, because pushing him just had the opposite effect. With some kids, if you leave them alone for 15 or 30 min, they will get it on their own.

I used to do very well at school. From elementary to middle to high school, I always had excellent grades. I had to get to the bottom of everything, otherwise I couldn't sleep. JL couldn't care less if he didn't understand something. He performed well sometimes, like when I taught him addition and subtraction within 100. And he was fast with mental calculations and had a good memory. We didn't really do much in terms of teaching him. If he got something, we felt that it made our lives easier. If he didn't get it, we had no patience to teach him anyway.

Q: How long did he stay at the regular elementary school before being sent home?

JL's mother: About a year. He couldn't keep up, didn't know how to write the Chinese characters, and wouldn't do his homework. So, he was sent home and stayed home for a year or two.

Q: At the regular elementary school, did he get along with his classmates?

JL's mother: He played with them but was not close with them. The other kids realized that he was different and kind of stayed away from him. He wasn't good at socializing or mingling. He played the way he wanted to and didn't care how others played.

Q: After he was sent home from the elementary school, how did he spend every day at home?

JL's mother: He just stayed home and played by himself.

Q: Did he play with friends when he was young?

JL's mother: He played with kids younger than he was. He has male cousins, but they didn't get to play together a lot.

Q: What's the grade of his disability? When did you have him tested?

JL's mother: Grade IV. And he got tested when he was in elementary school. We saw that he couldn't keep up at school, so we took him for a test.

Q: How did you feel when you got the results?

JL's mother: We weren't surprised because we could already tell ourselves. He wasn't doing well, but he wasn't failing that bad either. He was just different from the other kids.

Q: Did you consider having another kid?

JL's mother: I was traumatized and worried about having another child like him... I didn't want to take the risk.

Q: How did your relatives feel about him getting a disability certificate?

JL's mother: All the relatives knew. We have a good relationship with them, and they will help whenever JL needs it. JL is the baby of the family. Everyone else is grown up and busy with work. But they will help whenever we ask for it.

Uneventful Time at Special Education School

Q: What did you do with him after he was rejected by the elementary school?

JL's mother: Xiangyin Road Elementary School set up a special education class for kids not doing well at school, and JL went there. He did well in that class and had decent grades, except that his handwriting remained awful. He would write sometimes, and his writings actually made quite some sense. I don't remember how many years he stayed in that class. Then all the students in the special education class at Xiangyin Road Elementary School were transferred to the special education class at Yangpu District Elementary School, which was bigger, so JL went there. He took good care of himself in that he would ride his bike to school, which was pretty far. He knew the way and I didn't have to worry about him.

Q: How did you know about the special education class at Xiangyin Road Elementary School?

JL's mother: Someone gave us the information that was released by the Education Bureau. We had to donate to the school.

JL's father: We donated more than 2,000 yuan, which was a lot of money back then.

JL's mother: Two thousand is nothing right now, but more than 20 years ago, it was a small fortune. And we had to pull some strings to get access to the principal for the donation. It wouldn't have happened today because kids can go to whatever school they are supposed to go. I asked my workplace to donate on our behalf but didn't succeed, because there was no such expenditure budgeted. We had no option but to donate ourselves because we wanted him to have a place to go to. We were not savvy back then. Had it been today, I would have demanded my donation back. The government is very people-oriented now and will do things for kids like JL, so donations will not have been necessary.

JL's father: Back then, we were paid less than 100 yuan per month.

JL's mother: We probably would have got away with not donating. But we didn't feel like we were in a position to try that.

Q: What's the curriculum like in the special education class at the elementary school?

JL's mother: It's the same, covering both math and Chinese. Even though it was a special education class, some of the kids were actually very normal. They ended up in the class because they had been lagging behind, but once they got older, they moved on to regular classes. I ran into their parents later and they all have regular jobs now.

JL did well in the class. He had good grades in math, he spoke well, and he wrote decent essays and diaries. And he remembered things. He might not have done as well as other kids, but it was good enough for us. He was kind of in the middle.

Q: Did the school offer afterschool activities or field trips?

JL's mother: It did, but not a lot. Nowadays schools offer family-bonding activities, but not back then.

Q: Were there parent-teacher meetings at the elementary school?

JL's mother: There were and only one of us would go. I didn't think it was a big deal because JL was in a special education class anyway, so I was happy just listening to whatever the teacher had to say. Nowadays parents will try to bond with the teachers. We had no big hope, so we didn't bother with that.

Q: Did he make friends with any classmates at the elementary school?

JL's mother: He was on good terms with several of them, and one of them has remained in close contact with him. There were about two or three who were close to him, not a lot. Kids bullied him too. Sometimes he would play with kids in the neighborhood. He would ride his bike to their places, and I wouldn't be able to find him anywhere. And when he came home, he would just tell me where he had been.

Q: Did he go to a special education school, too, for middle school?

JL's mother: He only had 2 years' middle school. The free compulsory education covers 9 years, and since I held him back a year, he missed 1 year of free schooling.

Q: Did he make new friends at middle school?

JL's mother: Not a lot.

Q: Was the curriculum different there?

JL's mother: It wasn't very difficult. We started school late ourselves, and under the 9-year compulsory education system, we had to graduate at the specified time no matter which grade we were in.

Q: How did he do at the special education school?

JL's mother: He did okay and listened well. Once he got older, his temper got worse. The teachers were very nice to him.

Q: Did he behave differently at the special education school than he did at home? Did anything unusual happen?

JL's mother: We didn't feel that he was behaving differently. He just followed whatever was taught at school. As far as we were concerned, he went to school and he came home.

Q: Did he like going to school?

JL's mother: He did, because there were more kids to play with at school than at home.

Q: Did anyone bully him there?

JL's mother: Once or twice, not too bad.

Q: So, the kids got along pretty well? Would he tell you about his day at school when he came home?

JL's mother: He wasn't very coherent. Sometimes he would talk about it, but not too much.

Q: So, you didn't know very well how he was doing at school?

JL's mother: Right. As parents, we didn't pay too much attention to him and were not very thoughtful about him, which was wrong. Normal kids will enjoy a lot more attention, and kids like JL won't. Some kids are very smart and the parents will be very pleased with that. He can often be a handful and isn't very happy himself. And we feel bad about our own kid not doing as well as other kids.

Q: You don't really have to feel bad.

JL's mother: We make sure we feed him really well, only the best actually. But we don't focus as much on the mental side. He is used to having the best of everything (laughing).

Q: Since he is the only child.

JL's mother: How should I put it? We feel a little guilty.

Q: About him?

JL's mother: A little. And we don't talk about him in front of other people, we just listen while others talk.

Q: Except for not being able to keep up with schoolwork, he did well in everything else as a child, didn't he?

JL's mother: He wasn't very capable and didn't pay attention to details, at which I was disappointed.

Q: Do you normally take him to amusement parks or movies?

JL's mother: We don't take him out a lot. We used to be busy with work and I don't remember taking him out much. We would go to the park, but not often. The things we did most was to take him to visit my mom every week.

Q: When did JL learn to take care of himself?

JL's mother: I don't remember, except that it was later than other kids. He could dress himself even though he would often wear things back to front. He was okay with taking care of himself.

JL's father: He is actually very detail-oriented sometimes.

JL's mother: If we go out, he will turn off the gas and all the electronics. I don't do it myself. He will do it meticulously, and I will have to plug everything back in when we get back.

Q: Does he help around the house?

JL's mother: When he was young, I would offer him 2 yuan to do the dishes and he would take it. Then we stopped asking for his help and he just doesn't help now.

Q: When was that?

JL's mother: Either when he was at the Sunshine Home or when he was in middle school. Definitely before he started working at Papa John's. For quite a while he would do the dishes and wash his pants for 2 yuan. Then it just stopped, and it became a habit for him not to help around the house. He won't do the dishes now even if we ask him. It doesn't really matter anyway.

Slow-Paced at Work, but with Positive Attitude

Q: You mentioned that he stayed home for several years with no school to go to. So, what did he do?

JL's mother: He was just killing time. He bikes well, so he would go out on his bicycle and come back and go out again.

Of course, it wasn't good for him to stay home all the time, so I asked around at Wujiaochang and found a job that's for people with disabilities. It was at a factory manufacturing shoe buttons in Wujiaochang Town. He wasn't very capable to begin

with and was still young, and the work was hard, so he didn't do well in that he was slower than people without disabilities. And it wasn't exactly the kind of job that let you earn a living. So, after a month or two, we felt that it was too much for him and had him quit and stay home again.

Then he went to the Sunshine Home, and stayed there for several years and was paid several hundred yuan per month. I am losing track, but he probably already has 15 years' work experience.

Q: Fifteen years, that long?

JL's mother: Right. Under the state law, people with 15 years' work experience can retire. He probably started working in 2000.

Q: What did he do at the Sunshine Home?

JL's mother: He did some odd jobs, like crafts, making soap boxes, and pasting labels with double-sided tape. He didn't work hard. We never ask him to do anything at home, so he isn't very capable. And the teacher said his productivity was low. Whereas others would make several hundred yuan, he would only make a couple hundred, because they were paid for the number of items made. Some kids might not be that smart, but they were eager to work and could make quite a lot of money. JL had no idea about working and was picky about what he wanted to do. So, the Sunshine Home was basically a hangout place for him where he would play some ball games and help unload shipments. He couldn't handle delicate work.

Q: When did he start working at Papa John's?

JL's mother: About 6 or 7 years ago, and the contract was signed every year or every other year...

Q: I saw his personal information, and it looks like that he joined Papa John's in 2009.

JL's mother: Right. He didn't have any steady job before that. But once he joined Papa John's, he has always stayed there.

Q: How did he find the Papa John's job?

JL's mother: Sunshine Home referred him. There were several Caring Homes in Yangpu District dedicated to helping kids like JL. Papa John's ran a Caring Home too, with a storefront. It was almost like a base where there were people managing and teaching kids like JL how to work. Then other Papa John's stores started recruiting people with disabilities, so JL was transferred to where he works now after several years at the Caring Home. He isn't very capable at work, so it's surprising how he has managed to keep his job. I think he is blessed by the state policy. And Papa John's knows that they can't expect too much from kids like him, which is why he still has the job (See Fig. 1).

The pay is definitely low, but as long as he has a job, it's okay. What would he do if he had to stay home all day? Staying home for a couple of days is okay, but you would get numb and dumb if you stay home for a long time, and being on the computer all the time isn't good, either. So, it's nice for him to have a job to have a sense of responsibility, whatever the pay. Now that he interacts with people and with society, he is more alert and has a sense of going to work and getting off work. He is better with human interaction now and understands things better.

Fig. 1 Mr. JL at work

His job is actually pretty tough. He leaves for work very early and gets home very late, really late like close to 11 p.m. I don't know if he hangs out somewhere before coming home. In principle, he should be able to come home after 8 h at work. But he isn't fast at work to begin with, and he isn't good at saying "No." He is supposed to get off work at 8:30 p.m., but if someone comes in and places an order, he will have

to work more. I told him to come home as soon as it's time to get off work, because commuting on public transportation takes a long time for him. But he didn't want to hear that and believes that what I said makes him lose face. We used to have to work at both our day jobs and at home, but it's not the same for him. He has no work waiting for him at home, he only has a workplace to go to outside home. I really don't know whether he lingers outside or works too late at the store. Maybe some stores are still open when he gets off work, so he goes window shopping. I don't want to interfere too much. He should be left to his own devices.

Q: Did he want this job?

JL's mother: He started working at Papa John's a long time ago, when he had no real idea of looking for a job. He is protected by the state policy, and unless he makes a really bad mistake or there's no other option, he will not be let go. So, he is where he is now because of the state policy. He has some smarts, so he is doing okay at what he does.

He used to work close to Dabaishu, and I had him transferred to the current store to be closer to home. I talked to the manager of the previous store and he said, "I don't really want him to go. He is good." JL isn't picky at work. He will work till very late and won't leave till everyone else has left. That's why the manager said what he did about JL leaving that store. At the current store the business is good, so everyone has to work hard. At the Dabaishu Caring Home, it wasn't so busy, and he didn't have to work as hard. There's nothing wrong with doing what you are told to do, and if you are not very capable, you can make up for it by doing more. He doesn't have to do anything at home, and at work, he isn't looked down upon.

Q: How does he commute to work?

JL's mother: By bus. One problem with us living here now is that there's no bus if he comes home too late, in which case we will pick him up on our electric bike. There's no ferry after 8:30 p.m., but he doesn't get off work at that hour. So, it's been tough for him these last couple of years. Subway Line 10 will stop right in front of where we live, but it's still under construction. It will be easier for him once the construction is completed.

Q: Now that he is working, does he still eat at home?

JL's mother: He usually leaves for work at 8:30 or 9:30 in the morning, so he will have a simple breakfast. He buys lunch. He doesn't get to eat lunch till 4 p.m. and gets a 1-hour break. Between 4 and 11 p.m., he will probably buy something to eat. He knows how to spend money (laughing). He will eat after he gets home at night.

Q: Does he like the job there?

JL's mother: He does. Some kids don't bother to work and would rather stay home and live off their parents. He does us proud. At the store, he oversees drinks. He will make all kinds of drinks and pass them to the servers. It's not hard work per se, but he works long hours.

Q: How much does JL make per month?

JL's mother: Sometimes 2,300 or 2,400 yuan, and sometimes 2,800 yuan. One time he made more than 3,000 yuan, which was really nice, and I don't know whether it included OT pay. I couldn't ask further because JL would be unhappy about that.

Q: Does he save or spend his pay?

JL's mother: I won't leave the bankcard with him. He is a spender and will spend however much you give him, and sometimes will want more. I used to give him a small allowance, which I have been increasing little by little. Now the allowance is 1,000 yuan, and I put the rest aside for him. He buys his own transportation cards, but I pay for his phone cards because he doesn't know how to calculate them. Sometimes he will come home and tell me there's no balance on his phone, and I will just top it up for him.

Q: Does he know how to top up his phone balance?

JL's mother: He does, but he doesn't know how to make it go a long way. I used to give him 300 yuan for every 10 days which added up to 900 yuan per month, but it wasn't enough for him. Since he will use however much I give him, I decided to set a limit to stop him from becoming an even bigger spender. Now his phone expense is about 1,000 or 1,100 yuan.

Q: Does JL talk to you about school or work?

JL's mother: Not a lot.

JL's father: He won't talk about it, but he will tell you if you ask him.

Q: Have you been to the store where he works?

JL's mother: Not a lot. We visited the previous store twice and haven't been to the current one many times.

Q: So, you don't worry too much about him.

JL's mother: Not really. Sometimes we will do some shopping in that area and just stop by to check on him.

Long-Time Obsession with Cars and Trains

JL's father: Even before he started school, he wanted to see trains. He is very interested in cars and trains.

JL's mother: He used to draw them. When a new style of bus came out, he would try to draw it. His drawing wasn't very good since there was no one to guide him.

Q: When did he start drawing buses?

JL's mother: I forget. He has always liked doing it. We never asked him to learn drawing, he just really wanted to do it himself, drawing the front of the bus. He bought a lot of rulers of different shapes including round, square, and triangular. He would buy the rulers himself and use them for drawing. I thought his drawings were pretty nice. The vehicles were three-dimensional, and he only drew two-dimensional, which is different, after all. It's tricky to render the drawings three-dimensional, like shortening the line in the front and stretching it in the back. He would draw all the lines the same length because he didn't know better. He liked drawing cars, and he got excited whenever a new style of bus was introduced.

He used his pocket money to buy a lot of auto magazines which cost quite a bit. There were no computers back then, so we had to buy magazines to support his interest. He would devour the magazines on engines, models, brands and prices, and he understood everything.

JL's father: The magazines cost 20 yuan each back then.

JL's mother: Some of them cost 30 yuan each. There were magazines on sedans and he was really into those.

Q: When did he start buying the magazines?

JL's mother: When he was still young. I don't remember exactly when he started.

JL's father: He would buy the magazines himself, and he even went to auto exhibitions himself.

JL's mother: There was an auto exhibition in Pudong and I didn't want him to go. I was living on Xiangyin Road in Puxi, so I had no time to take him to the exhibition. He ended up going by himself, and some kind of big shot there gave him a business card and he brought home a lot of pamphlets. He really enjoys auto exhibitions.

Q: When was the auto exhibition in Pudong?

JL's mother: It must have been when he was in middle school. He was so into it and would never spend his pocket money buying snacks. I would have been okay if he had spent his money on snacks. He bought so many magazines that it got almost too much. Now that he should be buying books, he buys snacks and he'll say, "You told me to! Now that I am buying snacks, you are mad at me."

(JL's father fetched a stack of magazines from his room.)

JL's father: Look, so many of them... all on cars!

Q: Do you still allow him to buy those magazines?

JL's mother: Not now. I sold some of them when we moved, and he got mad at me. There are still some magazines left at home and I dare not touch them.

JL's father: His mom also embroidered a car picture and hung it in his room.

Q: Did he ask for it to be embroidered?

JL's mother: I mainly did it because he likes autos, so I embroidered that picture to put in his room. His room was decorated according to his preferences. Unlike other kids, he didn't hang a lot of things on the wall. He used to do a little of that and wasn't very neat about it. Now he has no such sense.

When he was really little, we bought him a tricycle, the kind for kids. We taught him how to get on it and he got it immediately. He had good technique, so we took off the training wheels quite quickly and he started riding around really fast on two wheels instead of the original four wheels. He doesn't need too much teaching with those things.

We went to Yangpu District to buy an electric bike. He had never ridden it before, but once we bought it, he rode it home. I think it comes natural to him, he doesn't have to learn.

Q: When was the first time he took the bus alone?

JL's father: It was a long time ago.

JL's mother: He knows everything about which buses to take to where in Shanghai, and I would consult him before I go anywhere. He used to find his way around, now he just looks up the routes on the computer and GPS. He is very familiar with routes, and I don't worry about where he goes on his days off. He knows his way around and I know that he will have no problem coming home.

He has a circle of friends who often talk about where to take pictures of cars, and two of those friends are interested in trains, too.

Q: Is JL interested in trains as well?

JL's mother: He is, but his main interest is buses. Whenever a new style of bus came out, he would look for it and take pictures of it.

Q: Is he still interested now?

JL's mother: He is, but he doesn't go out as often. Now he has the computer. Before he had the computer, he would go out to see the buses.

He doesn't have a lot of friends he can get together with, but he has a lot of WeChat friends who are all interested in trains and autos and they will talk about their shared interests. One time several of them made a plan to go to Hangzhou, and two friends picked him up at the train station. A new bus came out and they all went to take a look—JL took a lot of pictures on his cell phone. He doesn't have a lot of friends he meets up with, but he has a lot of friends whom he doesn't meet up with.

Q: When did he get to know this circle of friends?

JL's mother: I'm not sure. Four or five of them came to visit before, and maybe they just brought their own friends in. Two of them live a little far from us, so they don't come by now but might still have kept contact on WeChat. There's this friend who is really close and JL always goes to his place when he has time off. He also goes to the place of a young lady, who used to hang out at our place all the time but doesn't do that as often now.

Q: When do the friends come to visit?

JL's mother: After he gets off work.

Self-Dependent and a Comfort to Parents

Q: Does he know how to cook rice?

JL's mother: Last time I left the rice out and went somewhere. I came back to find that he already cooked it and folded the laundry. He knows what to do, he just doesn't do it a lot.

Q: Maybe with you around, he doesn't feel like doing much.

JL's mother: Right. I complimented him on cooking the rice.

Q: When did he learn how to cook rice?

JL's father: He has never seen us do it.

JL's mother: I asked him to do it and he refused, but if I really got to teach him, he picked it up fast. He can cook pancakes and eggs with tomatoes. He just doesn't want to do it, being a little lazy. I don't force him. He lacks self-discipline and plays on the computer all day long and won't go to bed till really late at night.

He is pretty independent. Sometimes we will go out after having fixed his meal, and he will have no problem microwaving it for himself. We aren't worried about that. Nowadays money solves everything, and takeout orders are delivered so easily. I am thinking about putting some money aside just for him to eat out if we don't want to cook for him.

He knows what to do with his computer, and we have to consult him on that. He is good with theories but not as good in practice. He has a lot of knowledge and

watches international and sports news. In that regard, he is like the average man. He likes to watch what every other man watches, like science and technology. I have no idea about the leaders and capitals of different countries, but he knows them all. He doesn't watch a lot of TV—he spends more time on his computer and watches news there.

Q: Does he buy his own clothes?

JL's mother: I don't usually let him do it, because I am not sure about it. Last time he went shopping with a friend and spent 200 yuan on a shirt that I didn't like much, because not many people would wear that kind of shirt. He is better with picking the right brand of shoes to buy and has good taste in that regard. I don't let him buy whatever he wants. I will transfer some money to him each month and not ask how he spends it.

Q: Do you know what he normally buys?

JL's mother: Miscellaneous stuff like snacks and small things that are not very practical. I told him not to buy small things but to save for big things, but he doesn't get it. There's that month when I gave him 1,500 yuan and he came back asking for more. When we had a parents' meeting, I asked another parent how much allowance she gave her kid and she said 500 yuan. The truth is that if you are really frugal, 500 yuan is more than enough. A bowl of noodles is 20 or 30 yuan, so 500 yuan won't go a long way if you buy that, but you can save money by buying steamed buns instead. People asked him to go traveling with them, and I told him that the fewer days he traveled, the more money he would have left. He doesn't exactly spend a fortune, but he spends a good amount. He doesn't have the habit of being careful with money. People like you can spend 2,000 or 3,000 yuan without blinking an eye. He makes less, so he should spend less. We are putting money aside for him, but he should do it himself, too.

Q: I believe you need to be patient when teaching him about money.

JL's mother: I will still worry that he can't manage money. Whoever invites him out, he will go, and whenever he goes, he spends money and comes home late, and taking a taxi costs money, too. Sometimes I feel that while we are still around, we should allow him to take it easy, but we worry that we have saved money for him for nothing. It's hard to explain it to him. We should probably let his cousins handle his money for him in the future.

Q: What do you think his strengths are?

JL's mother: He has an excellent memory and knows the capitals of different countries in the world and who sang which song, things that I have no clue about. We took him to Taicang to see relatives and friends, and years later, he can still remember who he met. He is just a little small in size. I wish he were taller and bigger.

Q: How are his reactions?

JL's mother: His reactions are okay, pretty fast. But people are not comfortable with them because they are like those of a kid.

Q: Can you recall things he did that made you happy?

JL's mother: He can be caring when he wants to be. (Laughing) He doesn't do the dishes because we do it all the time. If I nag at him about him going to bed late, he will push back and want to be left alone.

Q: Maybe a lot of people his age are like that.

JL's mother: But sometimes I realize that he understands and will try to comfort us.

Q: How does he do that?

JL's mother: If something really happens, he can understand it, analyze it, and talk about it in a very sensible way. He can do this the same way an average person does. For example, if I run into some difficulty, he will ask me not to dwell on it since it has already happened. You are going to interview him at his workplace, aren't you? He will be a little nervous at the interview and not be able to be himself, even though he will try to present his best to you. Sometimes the unwanted happens.

Self-Esteem, Self-Dependence and Friends as Priorities

JL's mother: He gets home from work late and will still be on his phone. I always ask him not to talk on the phone if it's too late. He has several friends. When some of them need help with something, he will step up and tell me he is going out. He looks all serious about being the savior. I will tell him to be more realistic about his own ability and to think twice about going so far to do something he may not be capable of.

Q: So, he will go out whenever his friends ask him to?

JL's mother: He doesn't know how to say "no." He will already be ready to hit the hay, but the call comes, and he doesn't want to lose face, so he will go out however late it is. Other kids will just say "no" if they don't feel like going out.

Q: Maybe he feels that friends are very important.

JL's mother: I would think so. If I keep saying "no" to his friends, he won't even talk to me. He wants his friends. If those friends abandon him, I am sure he will feel bad. If he had a bigger circle of friends, he could have moved on from one friend to another. But he doesn't have a bigger circle of friends. I wish there was some kind of club where volunteers and college students could host some activities each week. That way JL would have something to turn to. Now he doesn't, and he spends way too much time on the computer.

When he has time off, he will just hang out with several friends, and they don't exactly do anything specific. He has three or four friends whom he went to school with, and they all have disabilities, too. Those without disabilities won't hang out with them anyway. His circle is too small. Seniors can use the seniors' discount card when taking public transportation, but people like JL don't make much and taking a taxi costs 20 or 30 yuan. He has a disability certificate, but he wants to save face and is unwilling to use it.

Q: So, he doesn't want to be treated as someone with ID, right?

JL's mother: Right. When we went to the park, he didn't really have to pay for admission. But he would rather pay, even though it was 30 yuan, which was pretty expensive. He told us not to interfere.

Whenever he goes out, he will come home very late. His dad got so mad that he almost spanked him. We told him to come back earlier, and he would acknowledge it, but then he would come back really late again.

Q: How late are we talking?

JL's mother: As late as 1 a.m. Had it been any later, there would have been no taxis to bring him home. We would call him and he would tell us he was on his way back, and we would remind him that taxis costs extra when it gets late. When he got back, he was spanked because we were so mad. (Laughing)

Q: Do you still spank him even now?

JL's mother: We do whenever he doesn't listen. He was spanked many times, and his dad would feel bad about it and soften up afterwards, telling him, "I don't really want to spank you, but you have to listen and come home earlier." And he would howl in displeasure. He had gone all the way somewhere to hang out. If that place had been closer, he would have come home earlier. So, he would apologize to his dad. He is very small and skinny, and he has his frustrations. It's actually funny to see him that way.

Q: How does JL get along with his dad?

JL's mother: They don't communicate a lot. His dad is very stubborn, especially when something happens. If nothing happens, they can still talk.

I don't think JL has a good temperament. He will raise his voice almost as soon as we start talking to him. I wish he could listen better. Sometimes he just likes to be contrary, but sometimes he is really nice. I don't want to nag at him because it might turn him against me.

Q: Young people live in a different world from older people.

JL's mother: Right. It's normal for him to want to go out. We will worry but we can't really keep him home. So, I decided to leave him alone. He will be unhappy if we don't allow him to go out, saying, "Everyone goes out and comes home happy, so why are you treating me this way whenever I get off work?" He is not being unreasonable, so I told his dad to dial back a bit and put ourselves in his shoes. Still, we will worry and won't sleep till he is back.

Q: Ask him to call you or text you to let you know where he is and when he is coming home.

JL's mother: If we call him, he will tell us he is on his way back, but an hour later, he still won't be back. He won't tell us where he goes. If he went to World Expo, he should have just told us so. He won't communicate with us. He told us that he was hanging out on Yinhang Road which is close, but then he wasn't back as early as we had expected. If he had told us he went to World Expo which was farther out, we would have had different expectations. Sometimes he and several friends will go to Chenghuang Temple which is very far, and he will tell us that he's at a classmate's place instead, which is quite close. Sometimes he will say he is eating out, but he will leave at 5 p.m. and come home at 7 or 8 p.m., so we are very confused.

Q: Do his friends work?

JL's mother: They do. One of them works at McDonald's. He's a nice one, 1.78 m tall and good looking. He has better looks than JL.

Q: How tall is JL?

JL's mother: He isn't even 1.70 m. That friend looks decent and seems to be more understanding than JL. He found his job himself, whereas JL was referred. He makes more than JL does, 3,000 or 4,000 yuan sometimes.

Q: So, what disability does that friend have?

JL's mother: He couldn't keep up at school. I feel that his intellectual disability is less severe than JL's.

Q: Will JL go up to strangers and talk to them?

JL's mother: He is very courteous. When we met with relatives last time, he was very good at calling them "elder sister" and "auntie." My observation is that really smart kids won't do that. When he was still at school, people from the Education Bureau visited, and he would say, "Leader, thank you for your hard work." (Laughing)

Q: Kids have different personalities.

JL's mother: I just find it hilarious, and even for me, he is being too courteous. But he told me not to laugh at him. He would apologize profusely if he bumps into someone, and I would tell him it's not necessary, and he would tell me to mind my own business. (Laughing) When we have visitors at home, he will come out of his room to say "Hi." Not everyone does that.

Q: Does he have any difficulty chatting with other people?

JL's mother: He can chat. The content is okay, but I don't quite like the way he talks. He suffers a little bit of low self-esteem. He hopes to draw attention to himself and to have people look into his eyes. But I realized that he dares not look into other people's eyes. I told him to do it, because otherwise some people would look down on him.

Q: I believe it's not just a problem for him. Even people without disabilities have some pressure when chatting with others.

JL's mother: I am just not comfortable with it because it shows disrespect. Sometimes when he chats with someone, if that person changes subject, he should too. I believe that because his social circle is small, he may not like what other people talk about and other people may not be interested in what he says, they just have different interests. He will keep talking to someone about cars and soccer, oblivious of what that person wants to talk about. Sometimes he will watch soccer till 2 or 3 a.m. It used to be even later, but now that he works, he doesn't have the energy to stay up that late. He likes soccer and that's a very normal interest. People think he is capable at work, and he is indeed capable.

Q: From another perspective, this is fate. Even though there are things he is not good at, he is a unique kid, just like everyone else.

JL's mother: The biggest regret about him is that he is too small and skinny. If he were taller, he could have got a more physical job. His dad isn't tall, nor am I, which is why he isn't tall and why he's skinny too.

Less Time on Sports and More Time on Computer Games

Q: Does he exercise?

JL's mother: He comes home very late from work now, so he hardly has time for exercise. There's a basketball court in front and I bought him a basketball. He only played once or twice after I bought that ball.

Q: Does he not like exercising?

JL's mother: He does. When he was going to the Sunshine Home, he would win prizes at bike races and a lot of other sports competitions. He won either first or second place and brought home comforters, pillows, little trophies, and a lot of other prizes.

Q: Did he train for the bike races?

JL's mother: Not really. He knows how to ride a bike. He started with races at the Sunshine Home and moved on to district-wide races, and the opponents were all in a worse condition than he was. He was the only one among kids like him who knew how to do it. He couldn't have competed against people without disabilities.

The bike races weren't that easy. You were supposed to ride slow instead of fast, and you needed to be skillful at balancing and braking. The slowest was actually the champion, and the rear wheel had to touch the finish line for you to complete the race. He didn't quite get it and stopped as soon as his front wheel touched the finish line.

Q: What other sports competitions did he win besides biking?

JL's mother: There were quite a few that he always won prizes at.

He isn't in the best physical condition. There's a minor defect with his heart and it beats a little fast. We took him to the hospitals and were told by some that he needed surgery and by others that he didn't. It's nothing major. The doctors just said that we need to watch out in case he passes out, and he shouldn't engage in sports that are too strenuous. He gets short of breath when he runs fast.

Q: Does he like soccer and basketball?

JL's mother: He likes ball games. He used to be really into sports, but he isn't in the best physical shape.

Q: What other sports does he like besides basketball and soccer?

JL's mother: There's no other sports that he likes. And he doesn't even play ball games now. He gets lazy. I bought him the basketball and he won't play with it. He used to have a small circle of friends who would invite him to play ball games. That's why I said it would be nice if each district had a club where kids with disabilities like JL could play together. He has no circle of friends now and people without disabilities won't hang out with him. What's he going to do when we get old? So, this could be a major problem.

Q: Does he play games on the computer?

JL's mother: He will watch the news and play games on his computer. He doesn't watch a lot of TV now. When he has time off, he will spend the whole day playing games with friends, and even when he comes home at midnight, he will still play on his computer. We just don't get it.

Q: Young people nowadays seem to all be like that.

JL's mother: It's like a general addiction.

Q: I was flipping through your pictures and realized that you have traveled extensively. Did you take him on all your travels?

JL's mother: He would still go with us a couple of years ago, but not now. He did mention once that he definitely wants to visit Beijing. He hasn't been traveling a lot with us in recent years, because he prefers to spend time with friends in his circle. I would worry if those kids go traveling on their own, so I offered last time to take all of them to Beijing.

Q: So, you have a lot of free time now?

JL's mother: I do, since I'm retired. I would have no problem taking kids like JL traveling with their parents' consent, but they might not be able to appreciate it as much.

Q: When JL was young, was he very happy about traveling with you?

JL's mother: We took him to Hainan and he was very happy. His dad is still working even though he has officially retired. We will take JL traveling once his dad fully retires.

Q: When did you retire?

JL's mother: In 2006, when I was 50. His dad worked till 2014 when he was 60, and now he still has some kind of a job. I cook and clean the house. I used to make JL breakfast like pancakes, but now he wants to eat out for breakfast, which means less work for me. But I do need to cook lunch for him to bring to work. I don't want him to bring leftovers. So, I will cook and leave it in the fridge so that it won't spoil on hot days, and he will take it when he leaves for work. It's a lot of work cooking. A lot of companies provide employees with meals, but Papa John's doesn't.

Q: It's better to bring your own lunch than to eat out.

JL's mother: Right. But he leaves for work early, so he probably eats the lunch early and eats out sometime in the afternoon. I have no idea what he eats and he won't tell me.

Worried About Old Age and Hoping for Better Policies

Q: Why did you decide to move over here?

JL's mother: My elder brother and elder sister all live here. And we moved partly because of JL. What will he do when we get old? My siblings can help take care of him.

Q: How do you think JL is doing now?

JL's mother: He isn't very capable. When we first sent him out to work, we were not optimistic. Now that we see he has been doing well, has managed to keep his job for 6 or 7 years and can make a living on his own, we are less worried. I am thankful to the government for its policies creating job opportunities for kids like JL. He works pretty hard and the managers at the workplace all say good things about him. I am actually a little lost because I see him as not capable at all. (Laughing)

Q: Kids behave differently in front of their parents than they do in front of others.

JL's mother: They do. And I am sure the managers are protective of him.

Q: The government is doing what it should do and some other countries are doing a better job than we are.

JL's mother: At the meeting last time, some parents complained about pay inequality. I actually believe it's already a blessing that the government gives kids like JL opportunities. I won't complain, and I couldn't be more appreciative. The government is watching out for them, so they won't lose their jobs. Had it been some other workplaces, they might have been sent home if they were not performing well.

Q: What goes through your mind when you are with JL?

JL's mother: We have no choice, seeing how smart other kids are and how our own kid is...

JL's father: He gets depressed himself too.

JL's mother: We have low self-esteem ourselves. People will ask us how our kid is doing; how old he is and whether he wants a date. The people asking may not know our situation well, so I will have to turn them down. Who is going to marry him, except someone who is from outside Shanghai, a really poor place actually, and who isn't a top pick herself, isn't wild and is willing to settle down. It's not going to be easy. Girls without disabilities will have high standards, and we don't want JL to just settle for anybody because our financial situation isn't bad at all and we make good money. But there has to be a matchmaker. I wouldn't mind him having a date and it's okay if the girl has no money. Do you know a lot of girls?

Q: We don't, but I am sure there are families like that in Shanghai, and you could discuss it with other families when you get together with them.

JL's mother: I seldom meet with other families. There was one time when the teacher got us together for a meeting, but no one really talked. And those meetings were held just once or twice.

JL's father: We have to find JL someone who knows her way around the house.

JL's mother: That's a must. What else can we expect of her?

JL's father: We are getting old. While we are still alive, we can do things for him. What's he gonna do when we are gone?

JL's mother: We will have to find JL someone who can do household chores, is handy, and can take care of him for the rest of his life. To put it bluntly, life won't be rosy for JL when he gets old. I hope that he can find a wife now who won't mind his disability, is willing to do more around the house, and can live a good life with him. The key is that there has to be someone who will settle for him.

Q: Does he think about it himself?

JL's mother: He doesn't take any initiatives, because he isn't quite there yet. One time, there was this girl who had a crush on him. She was from Papa John's Caring Home too, and she was really into him. She has some disabilities, too... I told JL to bring the girl over when he got a chance and to go out with her. He would never take the first step, he just didn't have that sense. If he doesn't think about it, I won't either. I will just let him be and cool my own enthusiasm.

Q: Maybe the right girl will just come along like that.

JL's mother: They should probably meet in a shared circle so that they can get a chance to bond.

Q: Do you and your husband have any expectations for the government and for society?

JL's mother: His social circle is too small, and he doesn't have many people to hang out with. He isn't as smart as other people, so those with high IQ have nothing in common with him to want to hang out with him. A lot of people his age have a big circle of friends and some of them are already dads now. The best scenario is that each district will set up a club for people with disabilities where no one will look down on anyone and everyone can hang out together, have all sorts of activities, make friends and broaden their mental horizons.

Another thing is what will happen when we get old. We are the ones to take care of JL. It will never be the other way around. We will take care of him till we can't do it anymore, and what happens then? JL doesn't make much, so we won't be able to depend on him. So, the government is the only one who can take care of us. We hope for better policies so that we and JL can be taken care of when we get old.

Some families have kids who are in a worse condition than JL, and the parents would rather the kids depart the world before they do. What will JL do when we are no longer with him? Even if we put aside a fortune for him, can he manage it? Without kids and grandkids, what will happen in his old age? The best thing that I can hope for is a nursing home providing good care and offering discounts to people like JL. Nursing homes nowadays are very expensive and not everyone can afford it with just their pension. I hope that JL can enjoy a higher social status in the future and that people will take better care of him.

So that's what is on our mind now. We regret that we didn't do more when bringing him up. Our lives and his life so far have been miserable. We are still not too old ourselves, so we try not to overthink. We rely on the government and rely on relatives and friends. We are happy that he has a job now so that he can have some pension when he retires, and we hope he can stay at this job for a long time. But what if he is not physically up for this job several years down the road? We don't want to suggest anything. We just hope that the government can foresee that and issue some policies accordingly.

Interview with JL's Co-Worker (I)

Interviewee: Mr. A

Interviewer and writer: Yuan Gu

Interview date: December 19, 2017

Interview place: Restaurant where JL works

Q: What does JL normally do at work?

A: He makes drinks and appetizers. We do a lot of takeout orders and we get busy doing that. Sometimes the delivery guys will come to pick up the orders and he will pack and hand them to the delivery guys.

Q: Do you normally talk to him or interact with him?

A: Yes, I do talk to him and say “hi” to him.

Q: How does he get along with people and how is his personality?

A: His personality is okay. I don’t really talk that much with him. Mostly it’s just saying “hi.”

Interview with JL’s Co-Worker (II)

Interviewee: Ms. B (restaurant manager)

Interviewer and writer: Yuan Gu

Interview date: December 19, 2017

Interview place: Restaurant where JL works

Q: How long has JL been at this store?

B: He was transferred here from another store 2 years ago. I joined after he did. I was transferred here 2 years ago, too.

Q: How is he at work?

B: He takes his job seriously, but he is slower-paced than the other two employees being cared for. We are required to bring food to the table within 15 min after an order being placed, and he gets flustered when we get busy and doesn’t know what to do first and what to do next. I am not comparing him to regular employees, I am just comparing him against the other two employees being cared for, and he is a little slower in keeping up at work. He can handle making drinks and he remembers the ingredients and how one drink is different from another. When asked to cover another position, he won’t be able to keep up with our pace when we get busy. Our employees are expected to work at multiple positions, but it will be a little over his head if he has to make appetizers, too. There’s another employee being cared for who knows what to do at almost all of the stations. Of course, he has limited abilities, but his attitude is very positive. He is eager about keeping this job, and he can do what management asks him to do and beat quotas set for him. I hope that he can learn more and do more.

Q: JL mentioned in his interview that the manager and co-workers help him a lot.

B: The co-workers are very tolerant of him and take good care of him. And the company has good policies towards employees like JL. When their contract expired in November of this year, they signed a long-term contract with no expiration date.

Q: Does he chat with his co-workers during breaks? How does he get along with them?

B: They do chat. He gets along very well with his co-workers. He knows routes very well, so if some co-workers don’t know where is where, he will tell them. He is

also into cars, which we all know about. And if we talk about things he is interested in, he will come over and chip in.

Q: So, he has an outgoing personality.

B: He is pretty outgoing and not the kind to keep things to himself. He will verbally acknowledge whatever work we assign to him. He will notice the expiration dates of products and remind everyone of them, and he cares about product quality.

Q: What do you think of the policy to hire employees being cared for?

B: I am very supportive of it. Every Papa John's store has several employees being cared for, and J store only has employees being cared for. Sometimes the store will replace managers but will never let go of employees being cared for. This is how the government helps people with disabilities.

Interview with Mr. JL

Interviewee: Mr. JL

Interviewer and writer: Yuan Gu

Interview date: December 19, 2017

Interview place: Restaurant where JL works

Q: Which school did you graduate from?

JL: I graduated from Yangfan School of Yangpu District.

Q: What did you mainly learn at school?

JL: Arts and crafts, illustrations, and horticulture.

Q: Did you find those classes interesting?

JL: They were okay.

Q: Was the school far from where you lived?

JL: Not too bad. It took me 20 min riding to school on my bike.

Q: Did you feel any pressure about schoolwork?

JL: Pressure about schoolwork? I was very bad at schoolwork. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't learn, and that broke my mom's heart, and my dad's, too. But there's nothing I could have done. I wanted to learn, who doesn't? But I just couldn't. My parents worried themselves sick over my schooling, but I really couldn't learn. Chinese and math were the hardest for me. I was okay with PE, and also arts and crafts and drawing.

Q: What did you do for PE?

JL: We would alternate between playing basketball, soccer, and badminton. A little bit of everything.

Q: When do you leave for work now?

JL: 8:25 a.m.

Q: That's pretty early. Do you take the subway or bus coming to work?

JL: Bus, two different lines.

Q: Have you always lived in Pudong?

JL: We moved there 2 years ago. I hadn't wanted to move because living in Puxi is much more convenient, but my mom insisted, and I had no choice. The new place is so far, but what can I do? (Laughing) I have friends in Puxi and commuting to work would have taken only 20 min. Now I have to catch the bus and it's really a hassle. Something happened on my way to work today, as bus Line 453 collided with a car. I would have had to wait 30 min for another bus. I didn't want to be late for work, so I took a taxi.

Q: Do you live with your parents in Pudong?

JL: I do.

Q: How many days a week do you work?

JL: Five days, but not consecutively.

Q: What do you normally do at work?

JL: I make drinks and appetizers.

Q: How many years have you worked at this store?

JL: I have worked at this store for 2 years, and at another store for 6 years.

Q: Was it a J store where you worked for 6 years?

JL: Yeah.

Q: When you were new on the job, how did you familiarize yourself with the operational processes?

JL: I had someone teaching me, and I would try to remember everything bit by bit. I couldn't have remembered everything all at once.

Q: How do you make the drinks and appetizers?

JL: Cokes are easy since they come from machines. Some drinks need to be mixed by hand, for example, I mix lemon tea powder with water to make lemon tea. Appetizers are already made and just need to be baked in the oven. A lot of food is half-cooked and kept in the fridge, and I just bake it before serving.

Q: Does it get busy during peak hours?

JL: It does sometimes, and it gets really tiring. But what can you do?

Q: What food are you relatively skilled at making?

JL: I like to make milkshakes, but I am not good at making them. (Sighing)

Q: Do you find it easy to work here?

JL: There's a lot of work pressure here. I will start in the morning and maybe take a break at 3:30, then I will start again at 4:30 and work till 8 p.m. Sometimes I feel enormous pressure and I don't know how to adjust to it. Sometimes I feel so tense and almost breathless. I feel like I'm going crazy unless I can take a breather.

Q: How do you get along with your manager and co-workers?

JL: My manager and co-workers are all very nice. They will help me when I have difficulties, like when I don't have enough time to make all the food.

Q: When do you usually have lunch?

JL: During my 1-hour break. We have specific time slots for taking breaks, and if my break starts at 2:30, I will eat at 2:30.

Q: Does the store provide lunch?

JL: You will have to pay if you eat at the store. We figure out our own lunch.

Q: Besides lunch, what do you do during your break?

JL: Sometimes I will relax and chat.

Q: Do you go anywhere after work?

JL: I might hang out somewhere if I have nothing planned, and if there's something planned, I will go straight home. I actually don't hang out that much, unless friends come over to eat out with me.

Q: Are you still in the habit of playing sports?

JL: I only play occasionally. Since I'm busy at work, I get tired sometimes and just want to stay home and sleep.

Q: What do you normally do on your days off?

JL: I just chill out at home. And I like basketball and soccer.

Q: When I interviewed your parents at home, I saw a lot of auto magazines. You are interested in that area, right?

JL: My favorites are magazines on buses and trains because I am really into them. I have been to a lot of train exhibitions and auto exhibitions. I used to go with three friends, because we shared the same interest. Some of the exhibitions are held once a year. I didn't have time this year, but my friends went.

Q: What would draw your attention at the exhibitions?

JL: How the cars are made and their performance.

Q: Do you travel?

JL: I went with friends to Nanjing, just for a day. I visited the Nanjing Massacre Museum.

Q: What do you do with friends?

JL: We visit the auto exhibitions and eat out. We became friends because we could communicate in a certain area. For example, all of us are train fans and we share the same interest, which makes communication easier. Not everyone understands trains and buses or is interested at all.

Q: It's nice that there are exhibitions related to those both in China and abroad.

JL: But there's a technical gap between China and abroad. The buses we had before in China couldn't even compare against those abroad. The gap was huge. Now the technologies have matured quite a bit in China. We didn't have bus cards till the 1990s, when they had been around abroad for 20 or 30 years. Now we are catching up and our technologies are very mature.

Q: So, what's the gap with regards to trains?

JL: We used to not have high-speed rail, and we borrowed some technologies from Japan and some from Germany. For example, technologies for high-speed rail CRH380 were borrowed from Hitachi in Japan, and technologies for high-speed rail CRH5 were borrowed from Siemens in Germany. Express rail and high-speed rail are different in speed. High-speed rail is faster at 350 km per hour, and express rail runs between 240 and 260 km per hour.

Q: So, will you choose those transportation methods when you travel?

JL: High-speed rail and airplane will be my choices. I want to travel just on high-speed rail. And it's going to happen soon. I plan to visit Beijing, since I have never been there.

Q: Thank you for taking time from work for this interview.

JL: It's fine.

Observation of JL at Work

Observation date: December 19, 2017

Observation place: Restaurant where JL works

Observer and writer: Yuan Gu

Time	What JL did	Remarks
11:20	Arrived for work	
11:31	Made drinks at the drinks station	
11:38	Sent out appetizers he made and organized orders	
11:51	The manager assigned work and briefly talked with the employees	
12:00	Made drinks and appetizers	
12:30	Made appetizers, and handed takeout orders to the delivery person	JL handed out a wrong order, and the delivery person came back for the right one
14:10	Had interview	
15:00–16:00	Rested in the back of the kitchen	
16:00	Made appetizers, and handed takeout orders to the delivery person	
16:28	Made appetizers, and handed takeout orders to the delivery person	The delivery person got impatient waiting for the order, and talked to JL
17:00	A co-worker took over the shift, and JL went to the back of the kitchen	
18:14	Made appetizers, and handed takeout orders to the delivery person	
20:00	Punched out	

Translated by Cissy Zhao

Edited by Andy Boreham and Zijian Chen

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