

But while almost everyone else in China has seen their incomes increase in recent years, truckers have experienced the reverse, with fuel price rises the main reason for that.

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State-set diesel prices are at historic highs, with China's diesel price now more than 30 percent above its 2008 peak due to recent reforms. For independent truckers, their vehicles have become a burden.

??2008????????????30%????????????????????

"We have no way out, and that's the truth," Mr Liu says. He has tried selling the truck he bought for Rmb30,000 (\$4,600), roughly three years' salary, after working on construction sites for 20 years, so he can try his hand at something else. But he has not been able to find a buyer.

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In Shanghai, drivers tell similar stories of hardship. "Most of us live in small communal rooms with our families," said a truck driver in Shanghai's Baoshan port. "There are no kitchens, no bathrooms."

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A driver there can earn Rmb70,000 to Rmb80,000 a year, excluding maintenance and living costs, he says, but most of this is eaten up by freight agents and management companies. "The logistics companies give us the same pay today as they did several years ago when diesel was just Rmb4 a litre," he says. Diesel now costs twice that amount.

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One problem is that there are so many independent truckers in China that each feels they will lose business if they raise their prices even slightly. That overcapacity also makes clan ties and provincial origins particularly important in determining who gets work, and several trucking groups in the Shanghai ports are organised around provincial delineations.

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Truckers are not the only ones to be hit by high oil prices, part of the reason authorities were so swift to stifle any news of the strikes and violence in Shanghai. Taxi drivers have also been complaining loudly. Two weeks ago Beijing doubled the fuel surcharge for long trips in a bid to appease taxi drivers' complaints.

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Chinese taxi drivers have historically been relatively quick to organise. In late 2008 a strike by taxi drivers in

Chongqing inspired similar actions in Guangzhou, Sanya, Shantou and other cities. Earlier this year, cabbies in Zhengzhou briefly went on strike to protest against a new overtime rule.

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"Besides manufacturing and industrial workers, taxi drivers are the ones who have the biggest record of having gone on strike in recent years," says Andrew Gilholm, Shanghai-based analyst at Control Risks, a consultancy. "Often it has been about fees as much as fuel prices. But because of their unusual position in terms of being able to co- ordinate and disrupt, they are a bit of a special case."

"??"?????"????"(Control Risks)????????????????(Andrew Gilholm)??"??"

