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Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion

Working Paper 1 China

Representations of Poverty and Shame in Chinese Literature

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Introduction

The New Year began with a fervently discussed news report on the internet in China, and its title is said to have become a popular phrase immediately: 'A lack of money doesn't mean a lack of morals'.ⁱ It was about a man, Zheng, 58, who made a living as a *bangbang* in the city of Chongqing, Southwest China. For years, *bangbang*, a double use of 'bang' which is the cane used for carrying luggage, has been adopted to refer to the hundreds of temporary movers roaming the hilly streets of the city. On the New Year Day, Mr. Zheng carried two packs of down coats for his customer of whom Zheng lost track during the journey possibly due to large crowds. In the following days, Zheng looked for the coats' owner in vain at the expense of his own opportunity of earning money, also during which he suffered from a cold. On top of that, he had to resist the thought of taking a coat for his wife who was ill in their home village, and whom he had left to go to the city for higher wages. Zheng borrowed loans from relatives so that his wife could receive medical care as earning thirty yuan a day did not allow him to make ends meet. Had he taken a coat for his wife, it could have warmed her up and earned her envy from neighbours; had he sold the entire stock of the brand new coats, he would have a small fortune and easily paid for his wife's surgery. Yet Zheng did not go the easy way out. In response to a reporter's questioning of his motives, he said that a customer in the past had accused him of making off with the goods in a similar situation. He had also encountered distrustful customers who guarded their valuable goods as if he were a thief. As poor as Zheng is, he wanted to prove that morals and ethical standards were bounded by neither wealth nor social status. Zheng remarked: 'A lack of money doesn't mean a lack of morals' (*Queqian buyiding queda*).

This news coverage generated heated discussion among Chinese netizens on the internet. Many were touched by Zheng's deed and offered coats and possibly better paying jobs to him, and some even called this *bangbangge*ⁱⁱ 'a real man', or 'the backbone of China'.ⁱⁱⁱ To set its obvious newsworthiness aside, the story verges on the concern of this paper, i.e. associations between poverty and shame in popular perceptions represented by the mass media. In other words, we would like to probe into

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a story of this kind by asking: Do the poor feel low self-esteem or ashamed of their conditions of poverty? Does the society stigmatize or shame the poor, and if so, how would this occur? In Zheng's situation, he experienced shaming—suspicion or accusation, but he did not feel ashamed; quite to the contrary, he managed a life with a high degree of pride. As touching as Zheng's story is, it might only be an idealized case (the fact that it became news indicates its rarity), and the realities with which the poor are confronted are far more complex and at times, severe. To examine the cultural implications of poverty shame dynamics in a more systematic way, we conducted a content analysis of selected Chinese literature; through this lens, we have analyzed the dimensions of poverty and shame, as well as the manifestations, process, and consequences of shaming with regard to poverty characteristic to the Chinese cultural and social conditions.

Selection of Literary Works

Literature has long been considered as a 'barometer' of social life. Throughout Chinese history, literature has taken diverse forms of prose, poetry, essays, drama, and fiction. While the peak development of each form alternate during various historical times, fiction was not highly regarded among the literati until the modern era. After all, Chinese fiction literally means 'small talk' (*xiaoshuo*), and is said to have originated as recordings of gossip or unserious, miscellaneous stories circulated on the street (鲁迅 1998). Nevertheless, since the 13th century, fiction has gradually gained popularity, and especially nowadays, has come to represent the major form of Chinese literature. Popularity of fiction can well be shown in the huge quantity of publications, which has made sampling quite a challenging task. To speak of the immensely vast amount, a scholar of the modern history of Chinese fiction claimed that he had to read over two thousand works (Yang Yi 199). At the peak of 1997, it is estimated that about one thousand novels, and between 3000-4000 short stories were published annually in China (李运转 2000, 中国小说学会 2008).^{iv}

For the purposes of our research, the criteria set were influential or popular works by

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the most distinguished Chinese writers, which touched on the theme of poverty. To avoid personal bias as much as possible, a series of steps were taken to ensure relative representation of the works sampled for the study. We started with the secondary school curriculum on Chinese language and literature. The standard textbooks required to adopt for the 'language and literature' courses in all schools in China take the form of compiled excerpts selected by committees of experts solicited by the National Committee of Education in China. A quick examination shows that most of these selections are prose or essays, and among the very small number of excerpts from short stories, nearly none of them touched upon the theme of poverty. So, as we were unable to sample the literature from the texts themselves, the alternative was to start with the selection of novelists and whose works appeared in the above-discussed textbooks. To further enlarge the pool, we included also writers whose works appeared in the supplemental reading (excerpts of novels) for the secondary school curriculum in China. Via these means, 28 writers of traditional, modern and contemporary periods were selected. A few names had to be eliminated as their works barely dealt with poverty, and several more were added for the reverse reason. For a few authors, the decision about their works was easy, as they produced only a single classic novel, e.g. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin (ca1724-ca1763), and *The Scholar* by Wu Jingzi (1701-1754). Yet, as most of the writers are prolific, the criteria for selection could either be based on the theme of the given work (i.e. relevant to poverty and shame) or on the most prominent works of the given author.

We considered books with relevance to the theme of the project, but also works were reviewed that won prestigious literature awards in China: the Maodun Literature Award, Lu Xun Literature Award, and the National Short Stories Award. Another source of selection was several compilations of mainly short stories by authoritative literary critics. Other considerations included: diversity of topics as well as works of various historical periods, a balanced representation of subjects--including works on urban life and workers (Chinese writers produced many more works about life in the rural areas than that in the city). In recent years, there has seemed to be a decline in the influence (in both political and cultural terms) of literary works as well as the status of writers, as

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other means of mass media have increasingly multiplied. To compensate for this, we choose texts from a large number of less influential literature, and gave priority to those touching on the theme of the everyday struggle of disadvantaged groups, such as the unemployed. Finally, expert opinions were consulted on the selection of authors and works with the most relevant themes.^v Table 1 shows the selection list of 28 authors and their 34 works (13 novels and 21 novellas or short stories).

Table 1 List of Selected Novels and Short Stories

Author Name	Title/Year	English Translation
Wu Jingzi (1701-1754)	Rulinwaishi (ca1750)	The Scholar
Cao Xueqin (ca1724-ca1763)	Hongloumeng (1784)	Dream of the Red
Lu Xun (1881-1936)	Kongyiji (1919)	Chamber
	Zhufu (1924)	Kongyiji
	A Q zhengzhuan (1921)	New Year Sacrifice
Lao She (1899-1966)	Luotuoxiangzi (1936)	The True Story of Ah Q
	Yueyaer (1935)	The Rickshaw Boy
	Zhenghongqi xia (1961)	Crescent Moon
Shen Congwen (1902-1988)	Biancheng (1936)	Under the Red Flag
Xiao Hong (1911-1942)	Hulanhezhuang (1941)	A Remote Town
Zhao Shuli (1906-1970)	Liyoucai banhua (1943)	Memoirs of River Hulan
Zhou Lipo (1908-1979)	Baofeng zhoyu (1948)	Li Youcai's Songs
Liu Qing (1916-1978)	Chuangyeshi (1961)	Shanghai's mornig
Zhou Erfu (-)	Shanghai de zaochen	Violent Storm
Cong Weixi (1933-)	Yuanqu de baifan (1980?)	The Builders
Deng Youmei (1931-)	Nawu (1981?)	The Sail Away
	Yanhu (1982?)	Nawu
Gao Xiaosheng (1928-1999)	Chen Huansheng shangcheng (1980)	Snuff
Wang Meng (1934-)	Huodong bianrenxing (198)	Going to the City
Liu Xinwu (1942-)	Zhonggulou (1985)	The Changing Shape
A Cheng (1949-)	Qiwang (1984)	The Drum and Bell
Chen Jiangong (1949-)	Gaiguan (1979)	Towers
Han Shaogong (1953-)	Bababa (1985)	King of the Chess
Tie Ning (1957-)	Maijieduo (1986)	Covering the Coffin
Liu Zhenyun (1956-)	Yidi jimao (1991)	Dad Dad Dad
Chi Li (1957-)	Fannaorensheng (1989)	Pile of Wheat
Yu Hua (1960-)	Xusanguan maixueji (1998)	Scattered Feathers

Liu Heng (1954-)	Huozhe (2004)	Life full of Chores
Xiao Kefan	Gouride liangshi (1986)	Selling Blood
Tan Ge (1954-)	Zuihou yige gongren (1999?)	To Live
Jia Pingwa (1952-)	Xuebeng (1997)	Damned Grains
Xiao Kefan (1953-)	Qinqiang (2005)	The Last Factory Worker
Tian Ge (1954-)	Zuihou yige gongren	Snow Crash
	Dachang (1996)	The Qin Opera
	Xuebeng (1996)	The Last Worker
		Big Factory
		Avalanche

Main Findings

The Meaning of Poverty

Throughout China's history, poverty in absolute terms was a severe problem for the mass population, only recent decades, have witnessed a gradual phasing out of absolute poverty and a shift to relative poverty as the standard of living continues to rise. Thus, subsistence poverty, or the lack of basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter, in a most striking sense, is the first and foremost theme shared by many of the selected works.

As Author A Cheng put it: 'Food is the most basic human need.' Hunger is so real that a poor man's main, and, at times, mere goal in life is to fill the stomach, or in Yu Hua's terms, 'to be alive'. There are three types of the poor who suffered from hunger: peasants in the pre-1949 period, urban poor in the pre-1949 period, and those who lived through the political turbulence during the Socialist period. Peasants, especially those landless ones, had to sell labour to the landowners or rent land from them; in the latter case, they paid the overwhelming majority of grain produced as rent with very little left for their own consumption. As a result, their regular meals were porridge mixed with small amounts of grains and vegetables. The situation would get even worse if there had been a drought, and many would become beggars, as peasants then primarily lived on the mercy of the heaven. Illness could also crush a peasant's family. The urban poor

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such as the rickshaw pullers were in no better situation. Their jobs were so strenuous and against so many odds yet they could still hardly feed themselves or their families. The hardest time for rickshaw pullers seemed to be the bitterly cold winter when business was slow; hunger would become even more intolerable. This was depicted, in Lao She's *The Rickshaw Boy*, in which the human life course echoes the change of natural seasons. If the rickshaw coolie could make ends meet in his youth, he was likely to be unable to do so when he was aged. He would have no choice but continue to pull until he hit the ground and died.

Hunger during the socialist era had to do with policy failures. For example, during the 'natural disaster' (1959-1962), massive hunger spread across the country.^{vi} In order to fill stomachs, some began to sell household goods in exchange for food. In a novella by Cong Weixi (*The Builders*, 1980), an educated man who treasured his collection of world classics had to accept selling of these works one by one in order to buy food. Those without assets used their own bodies as currency—they sold blood to hospitals. Initially, blood selling was a means of life improvement, such as house reconstruction or payment for a wedding, the supply of blood was seen as a well which could always be refilled. Yet, during the 'disaster' period, blood was sold so that the family could eat a bowl of noodles only (Yu Hua 1998). In *The King of Chess*, the protagonist Wang was a master of chess who cared for nothing else. As devoted as he was to chess, the only other thing he enjoyed talking about and doing was food and eating. To him, 'having a full stomach is happiness.' When his mother was still alive, she had warned him not to be addicted to chess because 'playing chess is what the rich would do, since it cannot bring you food;' 'even if you do well on it, it is not a secure rice bowl' (A Cheng 1984/2001). Wang treated eating religiously and as delicately as he played chess. During the train journey amongst hundreds of teenagers who went to rural villages to be 'reeducated by the peasants' (in answering Mao's call), Wang's particular way of eating was depicted:

As soon as he got his meal, he started right away. He ate really fast. His throat moved, and his face tightened up. Often, he suddenly stopped, carefully used his index finger to

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wipe all the miscellaneous rice on his lip or chin, along with the soup into the mouth. If a rice grain fell on his jacket, he would press it and twist it into mouth. If he couldn't twist it and it fell to the ground, he would stop moving and look for it... Once finished, he would lick the chopsticks, pour water into the container, suck in the floating oil, and then drink it with great satisfaction.

In addition to hunger, lack of clothing is an equally acute problem in a number of the select works. The poor were in rags. They took whatever material was available to wrap themselves, including paper or cement sacks for the coal mine workers (Chen). In the winter time, those without sufficient clothes would stay in bed for most of the day. In *Violent Storm*, Zhao, the protagonist, was an impoverished peasant who moved, as a result of drought, from his hometown to the village as a beggar. His daughter died of hunger at the age of 7, leaving Zhao, his wife and his 5-year-old son to survive. They hardly had any clothes. In the winter, the whole family would stay in the brick bed unless they had to prepare firewood, fetch water or cook. In the summer, when the grains grew to the height of an adult person, Zhao's wife would labor in the field, largely naked, and would not return home until after dark. Once she was found naked by a fellow villager when she peeked out from the corn field. From then on Naked Zhao became a popular nick name in the village (Zhou 1948/19: 32).

Housing poverty represents another dimension of subsistence poverty. Depending on the regions, peasants might live in straw houses or mud caves, while the rich lived in brick houses. Urban poor suffered even more, because, they could only rent a one-room house, and the room always leaked or ran the risk of collapse when raining. Even a place of such poor condition was not their own. As soon as the poor could not afford the rent, they would be driven out by the landlord. For the gypsy-like beggars, to avoid freezing to death in the winter, they often stayed in the 'rooming hotels', where dozens of people shared a bed in one room. The prevalence of stealing was so severe that none of the lodgers would undress or take off their shoes (The Changing Shape, 1985). During the Socialist period, the housing shortage became very severe in the urban areas as population growth exceeded the stagnant housing supply. This problem

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peaked between the 1970s and 1980s. People had to live in cramped quarters, such as the Yins in the *Life Full of Chores*, or used bunk beds and extended the room with a shack which enclosed a tree (*The Happy Life of Zhang*).

While in addition to natural forces, war, low productivity and lack of employment were also important causes of poverty. The poor were forced to make a living by all kinds of means—formal, informal, legitimate and illegitimate. ‘Anything that can generate income becomes an occupation.’ Once money was brought in, they stretched spending so much as if they would ‘break one penny into two halves’ (*The Drum and Bell*, 1984). A key indication of extreme poverty lay in the fact that a man could not afford either marriage or family; those already married might have to be abandoned by their wives. Ah Q, the protagonist in *The True Story of Ah Q* of Lu Xun, represents such a case. Ah Q was alone, landless and homeless. He did temporary work for landlords, or stayed in a village temple while not working. He once pleaded to sleep with Mrs. Wu, a widowed servant of Master Zhao, however, he not only got rejected by Mrs. Wu, but also received a harsh penalty from Zhao.

Relative Poverty

Compared with absolute poverty, relative poverty is a more universal characteristic of poverty in China. The select Chinese literature shows relative poverty takes at least three forms: the first is relativity to one’s own past (see discussion on the Manchurians in a later section); the second is reflected in the stratification among the poor. In the rural area, for instance, poor peasants could be further classified into those with a small piece of low-quality land, the landless peasants who still had simple tools to cultivate on leased land, those who contracted their long-term labor with the landlords, and, at the very bottom, those who could only do temporary, miscellaneous jobs like Ah Q.

Similarly, in the first half of the 20th century in China, rickshaw pullers represented the urban poor in their large numbers and visibility. Yet, there existed a stratification among the pullers, which was reflected in the age and physical strength of the pullers, their

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relationships to the rickshaw, and their styles of work. The superior were a somewhat privileged group who only chose to take foreign customers, since they could communicate with a few needed words of a foreign language; they dressed neatly, and owned handsome rickshaws. The second group was made up of the young and physically fit pullers who would lease relatively new and good-conditioned rickshaws, and worked the entire day. Their best deal would be to get hired by private householders so that they could get, in addition to secure wages, tips and free room and board. They would also aim at owning their own rickshaw, as without having to pay rent, they could bring in more income and enjoy higher work autonomy. The group below consisted of those somewhat older and physically weaker, but they were still able to bargain for decent pay, and always worked in the evening.

The group further down consisted of those aged above 40 or below 20, and they pulled a broken rickshaw, with the hope of paying for the rent and earning their own food. Their weak skills or health did not allow them to work in the evening darkness. Some of this group might have been rickshaw pullers for their entire lives, but they were never admired or praised as pullers; others were forced to take up this job in middle age, they thus had neither strength, experience, nor friends, and often got bullied among peers. Yet the most pitiful were the old pullers whose miserable life was depicted by Lao She:

Those old and fragile pullers, in rags, would shake in freezing weather in the winter, and glance at passersby for potential customers. They would warm up when they started to pull a customer, however, if against the wind, they would have to drag the rickshaw and, for nine coins, risk their lives. Pulling the whole day might not even earn themselves a full meal, not to mention their dependents at home. They are truly in the hell; compared to the ghost, they simply had a live breath. They might die on the street like a [cheap] dog. It is said that a frozen-to-death 'ghost' would have a smile on his face!

Xiang Zi, the protagonist in *The Rickshaw Boy*, began in the second group. He was young and physically fit to be a puller. His goal was to save enough money to buy a

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brand new rickshaw and be his own boss. He took pride in the job and even in his own graceful body movement. But due to several unfortunate events, Xiangzi eventually evolved into an old, delinquent, shameless puller who would expect to die on the street any minute (to which we will come back).

The third form of relative poverty shown in the select literature is during the post-reform period when the standard of living improved rapidly. In the beginning of marketization, people started to desire better lives, as they finally began to earn more due to wage rises and bonuses, as well as the increased availability of consumer goods (especially household appliances). Compared to the previous period of the command economy, young factory workers and college-graduate professionals faced more opportunities to get ahead but also the pressure of competition and, hence access to life improvement in relative terms: earning more income, allocation of bonuses, consumer goods, change of jobs, housing allocations, and quality childcare. In other words, the sense of being poor or the desire to improve increased.

For those recently getting out of subsistence poverty, satisfaction of nonmaterial needs such as self-worth or respect became increasingly important. The experience of Chen, the protagonist in Chen Huansheng *Going to the City*, is illustrative. Thanks to the policy of privatization, Chen finally was able at last to get out of starvation and accumulate sufficient grain to smile about whenever he thought about it. Yet, the one thing that bothered him was that, compared to some fellow villagers, his life had been rather uninteresting, and he could not tell stories of adventures, which had made him feel low in the village. One occasion, however, brought about the change. During his trip to the city, he became sick and was sent to a hotel by Party Secretary Wu whom Chen whom he encountered incidentally. For a while, he felt such pain at having to pay 5 yuan for the hotel stay, but from then on, his status in the village improved as he was so admired by the villagers for staying in an expensive hotel and having been driven in Secretary Wu's car.

As shown in the select literature, representations of the consequences of poverty were

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multifaceted: there were hard-working poor who then, due to hopelessness, turned into lazy or even delinquent ones; poverty greatly limited the pursuit of interests or realization of capabilities; it restricted the marriage pool (marriage out of necessities instead of love); it led to anger amongst some people living in poverty, strained family relationships and often led to domestic violence.

Poverty and Shame Associations

In essence, we are interested in the associations between poverty and shame so that we can reveal how the poor perceive their own lives and how their lives are perceived by others. Shame here is defined as a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety (Webster). In the given context, then, 'shame' is used to refer to the feelings and their manifestations of the poor themselves, while 'shaming' to the attitudes or actions projected by others. From a review of the selected literature, poverty may induce shame under certain circumstances, however, numerous examples can also attest where poverty does not induce shame. Shame or shaming is only one of the reactions toward poverty or the poor. A more prominent observation seems to be the engagement of the poor in struggles to survive, ashamed or not. The strategies for survival vary. For those who were able to make use of their own labor, some leased more land and worked harder in the field, others ran faster and longer hours when pulling a rickshaw. In addition, 'resources' were maximized. . Mrs. Gao in *The Rickshaw Boy* was able to earn interest by loaning her meager savings from working as a servant. In *the Chess King*, a group of young people would rush as fast as possible the moment the bell for a meal rang, so that they could scrape a couple of the oil drops topping the vegetable soup. While working in the field, they would, at times, dig bamboo, or catch frogs and cats in the ditch as food supplement. In *the Damned Grains*, a woman collected mule dung from a passing team of luggage carriers, and dried them in the sunshine. Her husband did not understand her intention and took the dung as fertilizer, so he poured them into the pigpen. She cursed him: 'you'd better shit yourself to see if you can yield grains,' while she took out the mule dung to wash in the river. After the waste was washed away, , some corn remained, apparently undigested through the

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mules' stomach. Her family then enjoyed a 'good' meal.

In these stories, no 'shame' is displayed. It is quite likely that the survival under circumstances could get so brutal that human dignity was suppressed. On the other hand, the last incident, in particular, shows clearly a sense of accomplishment with not only the satisfaction of a full stomach but the innovative means of obtaining grains. We will further analyze the complex dynamics of poverty and shame.

Poverty without shame

As stated earlier, poverty may not induce shame, and the selected literature provides numerous examples to illustrate this point. The first one is a story about poverty by choice. Wang Mian, a character in *The Scholar*, a 17th-century classic, went to school at the age of 7 with the support of his widowed mother who was a seamstress. Wang had to quit school and became a cowboy at the age of 10. While reading books on his own, he developed superb skills in drawing lotus. His talents were well appreciated by officials of various ranks, so he was invited several times to take official positions to which he refused. He even hid away from officials such as the county mayor who came to pay a visit. In contrast, another character in the story who once occupied high positions with power and influence later became a political criminal during the dynastic changes. The story indicates both Confucian and Daoist perspectives on poverty, life and the world; to put it simply, the former is reflected in the motto 'a gentleman can stay in poverty',^{vii} while the latter in the value of nature or natural law over money, power and fame.

Wang Mian represents only one type of the old literati class in the pre-modern era . Many others would set the goal of passing the Civil Service Exam to enter the official rank so that wealth and prestige would be secured, a process in which honor and shame would be explicated (see the story of Fan Jin)

Besides the literati, those in lower social status experienced poverty without shame due

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to a number of cultural or social factors. In cultural terms, the notion of fate and Karma in Buddhism prevailed. For instance, in the novel *The Violent Storm*, many of the impoverished peasants deeply believed the critical differences in the fates of the rich and the poor, as the former had 'good and lucky lot' while the latter 'bitter lot' (Zhou, [1949]1983: 54), or 'your lot attracts poverty' (Zhou 1983: 57). Poverty may continue in the afterlife, as expressed in 'when you are alive, you are a poor person; when dead, you are a poor ghost' (Xiao Hong, 646). Further, some believed that when a poor person died, he or she might be able to gain rebirth into a wealthy family (Han Shaogong), usually on the condition that they had done sufficient good deeds.

In addition, the poor, and even the poorest can draw pleasure from many sources of life and social relationships. Feng, a mill laborer in *Memoirs of River Hulan* by Xiao Hong, got married and gave birth to a boy. Despite his material struggles, he enjoyed a fulfilling life and the birth of his son provided a major source of joy and meaning of life in traditional China. Even after his wife died from the second birth, he did not show despair as expected by others because he saw great hope in his two growing sons. Then, it was not unusual for the rich and poor to form a patronage system in which the poor offered labor in exchange for financial or other kinds of support. In Feng's case, he was so grateful that the landlord allowed his family to stay in a storage room where there was nothing but straw used to cover the newborn. He was always happy and grateful to take back some food for his sons and wife from the occasional banquets organized by his master. Feng not only got the material support he badly needed, but he appreciated even more the warmth and kindness of this additional assistance.

A more widely known character was Liu Laolao (Granny Liu) depicted in the classic *Dream of the Red Chamber*. As a country rustic, Liu was tactful in dealing with the wealthy: she resumed an earlier-established connection between her son-in-law's forefathers and those of the rich; she went to the rich for financial help, but this was disguised as a visit to a relative; she praised their wealth and prestige so the rich would feel good about themselves; her comic character and self-devaluation kept them amused. In return, Liu was rewarded with large amounts of money and gifts. In a time of

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crisis for the wealthy, Liu courageously agreed to raise a girl from this collapsing family whose mother had died and who was to be sold. Liu's story further illustrates the patronage system in traditional China. Liu's son-in-law and the wealthy family shared the same last name, Wang, and in this clan-like relationship, the rich were expected to help their poor relatives, since 'even the emperor has poor relatives' (Red). Moreover, as social mobility was limited, it was imperative that one accepted one's place, hence poor but content. As Liu vividly expressed it, you just 'take as much as your bowl can hold', and no more.

The Communist Revolution in China after 1949 brought about radical changes to the social structure of Chinese society, and there was drastic alteration in the notion of poverty. According to Communist ideology, poverty was situated in the perspective of class struggle, and sufferings of the poor were caused by the exploitation of the wealthy. Thus, the solution rested on rebel or revolution—eradication of class through seizing the assets of the rich and reallocating to the poor and disadvantaged, and then collectivization, which would ultimately lead toward the building of a classless society. Several novels in the selection focused on this theme. In these works, the rich were depicted as evil, who used extremely cruel measures to accumulate wealth at the expense of the lives of the poor. A crucial part of the Communist work was to urge the poor to 'wake up' and realize that it was the exploitation of the rich, rather than their 'lot', that caused their poverty. A typical approach was to organize meetings at which the poor were encouraged to tell their bitter experiences under the 'old system'. Also at these meetings, long discussions took place over 'who supported whom'. In other words, the view that many poor people held that it was the rich who provided land or jobs for the poor needed to be reversed. Instead they needed to see how the rich lived off the poor. Inequality was unjust—the rich lived luxurious lives while the poor starved; the rich could have several wives while the poor none (Zhou Erfu). During the Revolution, the poor were encouraged to take pride in their identity: 'the poor of the whole world belongs to one family, and we all have the same last name 'poor';' (390) 'mud stick with mud makes the wall; the poor help the poor become the king.' (103) Furthermore, poverty without shame implies that agency plays a key role in human life.

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With no doubt, material shortage would limit the life chances or realization of the capabilities to a certain extent, yet, it does not necessarily put the poor in an entirely passive position. The poor desire respect and dignity. They have dreams in life. Their hopes can be found in the names of several characters in the select literature as 'you' (have) or 'fa' (getting rich) (storm); children were given names of specific grains such as millet, red bean or green bean (Damned Grains). They take pride in themselves for physical or moral deeds, e.g. Xiangzi in his qualifications--physical strength and his superb pulling skills, and being able to earn food by selling labor (it's honest work compared with those engaged in criminal conduct). Wei donated 300 jin of coals to the Revolution and saved the certificate for years, an indication that he took pride in supporting the communists in the early days.

Their imaginative strategies are truly admirable in their dealing with extreme material scarcity. For several years, Mrs. Xu spared a handful of grains and saved them in a jar under the bed each time she cooked. The family did not feel the slight shortage, however, during the 1959-62 disaster when hunger prevailed, the jar of grains became a life-saving resource (Yu). Under desperate conditions, they got together and enjoyed the 'spiritual banquet' by sharing in great details the taste and cooking of their favorite dishes they had had before (Yu, Ah Cheng). There was also an old custom: On New Year's Day, the poor would put a wooden fish in a plate and pour some sauce onto it—they could not afford a real fish, but they still needed the blessings the fish would bring them, as in Chinese, 'fish' is pronounced the same as 'surplus' inferred as 'abundance'.

Shame and Shaming Associated with Poverty

Having illustrated with numerous examples of poverty without shame, we now turn to shame experienced by the poor. As shame is an English term, its Chinese expressions of equivalence should be briefly discussed.

The Chinese Expressions of Shame and Shaming: To trace the development of the Chinese language, at the inception of written Chinese, spoken Chinese was monosyllabic; that is, Chinese words expressing independent concepts (objects, actions,

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relations, etc.) were usually one syllable. Each written character corresponded to one monosyllabic word. The spoken language has since become polysyllabic to which the written language in modern period has evolved. Following this principle, shame in the contemporary Chinese language is normally translated into a two-character word: 耻辱 *chiru*, which is composed of two individual monosyllabic characters 耻 *chi* and 辱 *ru* that can each form other words when combined with other monosyllabic characters. Thus, shame can be expressed in a variety of words: 羞耻 (*xiuchi*, embarrassed and ashamed), 可耻 (to be ashamed), 羞辱 (*xiuru*, embarrassed and humiliated; both noun and verb), 侮辱 (*wuru*, to shame, being shamed), 污辱 (*wuru*, to stain and humiliate; both noun and verb), 屈辱 (*quru*, wronged and shamed).

In addition, two more two-character words that are also often used to refer to shame or guilt are: 羞愧 *xiukui* (embarrassed and guilt), 惭愧 *cankui* (embarrassed and guilt). In everyday usage, additional to these words, more rich expressions found in the select literature describing shame-related behavior are listed in Table 2. In contrast, Table 3 lists expressions contrary to shame. As limiting as translation still is, we can note two points from the two tables: first, besides words such as 'shame', 'guilt' and 'embarrassment' used in various forms as just discussed, gestures and body movement are part of the shame or non-shame expressions, e.g. 'head up' or 'can't hold head up', 'flush', 'lower or shorter than others', 'slap oneself', etc. Second, 'face' is quite frequently used to indicate shame or non-shame related feelings, while discussion on the associations between 'face' and 'shame' in the Chinese context is beyond the scope of this report.

Table 2 The Chinese Verbal Expressions of Shame in the Select Literature

English Translation	Shame Expressed in Chinese
Can't hold head up	抬不起头
Being scorned	挨骂
Lower/shorter than others	比别人矮一头；低人一等
Look down upon	让人看不起
Don't want face	不要面子
Weep, slap oneself	流了泪，打自己耳光
Being shamed	感到受了污辱
Embarrassed, don't dare to look up	不好意思，不敢抬眼睛……害臊
Do unethical thing	人一饿就什么缺德事都干得出来
Low	贱
Lose face	丢脸
Embarrassed to death	臊死人，丢人
Being laughed at	生怕被人笑话
Beijing afraid of embarrassment	怕羞
Flushed, and the veins on the forehead clearly shown	涨红了脸，额上的青筋条条绽出
Giving up face	舍着我这副老脸
Cursing	骂了一个狗血喷头
Ugly frog desires the flesh of the swan, you should pee to mirror yourself	癞蛤蟆想吃天鹅肉，你撒泡尿照照你自己
Cheap and low	唱戏的也不下贱啊!
Contempt	难免受人家的轻视
Wronged	觉得委屈
Paste dog's shit onto your face	他给你脸上抹狗屎哩
Degrading	村人对我的作贱
I am used to seeing people's high eyebrow and low eyes	我看惯了人的眉高眼低
Being afraid of people's shaming laugh	怕人耻笑

Table 3 Chinese Expressions Contrary to Shame in the Select Literature

English Translation	Shame Expressed in Chinese
Don't care about face	不要面子
Strength of character	穷有穷的骨气
Care about face	爱面子
Give face	给面子
Want face	要面子
Dignified, imposing manner	气派
Happy and proud	心里充满了一种自豪和喜悦
Paste gold onto face	往脸上贴金
Sounds good	说出去中听
Feeling advantaged or privileged	有一种优越感
Strive for face	争脸
Honorable, respectable	体面
Endure shame	忍辱
Head up	挺起胸脯
You are a big person with a big face...	你人大脸大，你给州里领导说句话。

Shame and Shaming Dynamics

To understand the poverty shame associations, it seems we need to distinguish between shame and shaming as well as how they each relates to poverty. The diagram below provides such a dichotomy: I. Neither shame nor shaming is present; II. Shame is present, but not shaming; III. Shaming is present, but not shame; IV. Both shame and shaming are present. While I has been dealt with in an earlier section, here we concentrate on the other three possible relationships between shame and shaming with regard to poverty.

		SHAME	
		NO	YES
SHAMING	NO	I	II
	YES	III	IV

First, shame can be experienced by the poor without shaming. One might argue that shaming is always present with shame, however, there is a distinct difference between an intended, concrete shaming action (represented in IV), and a generalized or unintended one (II). The latter can be well illustrated by some of the experiences of the Lins in the *Scattered Feathers*. In the 1980s, at the beginning of opening up of the economy and marketization, a young educated couple Lin and his wife felt material shortage as well as the pressures of life improvement in comparison with others. Lin was offered a temporary part-time job, to sell ducks on the street after work. The pay was very attractive, so he did it. However, he dared not look up while selling, and was terribly worried about being seen by acquaintances. As soon as he went home, he would take a shower and change clothes to get rid of the smell. On another occasion, the couple wanted to get their daughter into quality daycare. Since access to these 'resources' required 'connections' which they lacked, they had no choice but to send their daughter to a lower-tiered day care provider. At this point, they were approached by the next-door neighbour who gave them a 'quota' for their daughter to attend the desirable daycare together with the daughter of the neighbour. The Lins were happy initially but got angry when they speculated the real motive of the neighbour; the

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neighbour did this for their own daughter's sake--if the two girls went to the daycare together, the neighbour's daughter would have fewer problems in adjusting to daycare . The Lins felt shame for two reasons: one is their 'incompetence', or lack of connections; two is that they felt they were used by their neighbour. In both the incidences, no shaming, or intended shaming, was apparent, yet the Lins still felt shame due to their interpretation of the situation.

Second, shaming can occur without shame being acknowledged by the poor. The subculture theory in sociology has long argued that in the socially constructed reality, multiple sets of norms exist. So it can well be that the poor and those who impose shaming belong to two separate value systems; and the 'shaming' would have no effect on the poor if they did not accept the underpinning values or expectations. The woman in Dad Dad Dad managed to feed herself and her retarded son by sparing grains provided by the clan to feed the cats that would catch mice in the shrine (the mice might eat the genealogy books of the clan). Hearing of people's suspicious gossip, she just angrily stared at and then ignored them. In Damned Food, Yang borrowed two hundred jin of grains to 'buy' a woman who had a big tumor on her neck, because of which he hesitated to take her. She told him bluntly that she had been sold six times, and if he liked, he could go ahead and sell her for the seventh right there at the market, to save a trip back and forth. She giggled as she talked about these 'deals'. Yet he felt relieved when she assured him that she had no problem giving birth. The woman turned out to be a diligent laborer and a good, productive wife. In one year, they had high productivity of potatoes. Yang wanted to lend some to his older brother who was in desperate need. The woman refused, saying: 'He should grow himself, we have to store for our own needs.' To her, the priority was to feed her children, for whom she was willing to break 'face' with the brother-in-law. Later on, when they really starved, Yang went to borrow grains from the big brother, who took revenge by asking the man to get his wife to come and borrow. The woman was furious when she learned about the brother-in-law's reaction. She fought back by stealing some melons from the field of the brother-in-law.

These two women felt no shame even though shaming was imposed in all the incidents.

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They did not care. In some sense, shaming without shame might be roughly equivalent to what is often termed 'shamelessness'. However, we need to further make a distinction between the two terms. In its general usage, 'shamelessness' implies a value judgment from the standpoint of the shame imposer, and tends to refer to behavior that is deviant or even destructive for society. In the context of poverty and shame, the 'shameless' can be those who, due to chronic poverty or severe exploitation of the rich, became 'fallen' in the sense that they were engaged in criminal conduct such as drugs or gambling, like Long-Neck Han and Donkey Li in *The Violent Storm*. Han even assisted the rich to abuse poor villagers. 'Shaming without shame', on the other hand, is from the standpoint of the poor. They might also engage in deviance but for justified causes. For example, Yang's wife in *Damned Food* engaged in stealing on a number of occasions, she won the reader's sympathy as she did it to feed her starving children. She dawdled when working in the field of the commune, yet was exceptionally diligent in the family field. Again, even though her conduct might be viewed as shameful in the eyes of the fellow villagers, we as readers have to admire her agency in tackling hardships.

Third, as shown in IV, which represents situations where both shame and shaming are present, the questions that seem to be of interest are: Who imposes shaming? How does it occur? Most importantly, what are the reactions of the poor to shaming when shame is felt? With regard to the 'who' question, it should be noted that even though there are numerous examples in the select literature where the rich impose shaming on the poor, it is also true that much of the shaming is done by family members, relatives or neighbours. Fan Jin, a poor literati in the classic *The Scholar*, lived in absolute poverty—he dressed in rags and lived in a straw hut. His wife was the daughter of a butcher, Hu. Fan wanted to take the higher level of the civil service exam, so he went to his father-in-law to take loans for travel expenses. Hu cursed Fan at once:

What a stupid toad desires the meat of a swan--how dare you! I heard you passed the first level not because of your writings but the examiner pitied you. Those who become masters are really the Gods of Literature in the heaven. Don't you see they

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possess countless assets, and they have the fat, rich looks! Someone like you, so skinny, poor looking, should pee and look at yourself in its reflection... Borrow money from me? I kill one pig a day, but can't make much money. How can I give it to you to throw in the water, and your whole family eat the wind?! (18)

Later on, however, when Fan passed the higher level exam and was appointed an official, Hu's attitude changed completely.

Kong Yiji, another poor literati in Lu Xun's short story, was not as lucky as Fan as he was never able to pass the civil service exam. Without any practical skills, Kong became poorer and poorer. He lived on odd jobs to copy or write documents for people in exchange for meals. Occasionally, he stole to survive. Often, he was ridiculed by fellow villagers: 'Do you really know how to read?' 'How come you couldn't gain the title of Xiucan?' Apparently, Kong felt embarrassed and then mumbled scripts from the classics that no one could comprehend. When he was seen appearing with broken legs, people would say: 'You stole again?' Kong responded: 'Don't laugh...' 'Laugh? If not stealing, how can your legs be beaten to break?!' 'I fell, fell, fell...' Kong was begging with his eyes not to continue. At another time, someone said to Kong: 'Oh, you must have stolen other people's stuff!' Kong responded, 'how can you defame my innocence?!' 'What innocence?! I myself saw you were beaten for stealing [Master] He's books the day before!' Kong blushed: 'Pilfering is not the same as stealing! It's the business of scholars, and how can it be stealing;' 'A gentle man would be committed to poverty,' cited Kong from The Analects of Confucius.

These above two examples illustrate how shaming occurs and they respectively represent two reactions to shaming, the former acceptance the latter denial to the extent of lying. In addition, there are other types of responses to shaming as follows.

At times, the poor are confronted with difficult decisions: to save face or to endure poverty, and, often, they are willing to endure shaming in exchange for material gains. A man offered a fellow villager to sleep with his wife in exchange for a pair of Japanese boots (Tie Ning). In order to save money to buy his own rickshaw, Xiangzi changed from

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modesty to aggressiveness—he was willing to intercept other pullers' businesses. They cursed him or stared at him with anger, and he stared back at them. Xiangzi also married Tiger Girl who was much older, ugly and nasty because she was the daughter of a rickshaw shop owner and had the possibility of buying a rickshaw for him. Lin overcame the shame of selling ducks on the street as the money he made bought his wife and daughter luxurious gifts which he would not have been able to afford. They also let their daughter attend the daycare of repute despite the thought of being used by the neighbour. Mrs. Lin could barely stand the long hours spent on the way to work by taking the bus. One day she was pleased to tell her husband that a new shuttle bus route would be run by her workplace and convenient for her so she need not take the public bus any longer. She was briefly grateful until she quickly learned that her boss had made the decision not because of his concerns for the employees but for his sister-in-law who took the same route. Clearly, Mrs. Lin felt humiliation, but continued to ride on the faster, comfortable shuttle bus.

Occasionally, the poor are able to manage a balance between pride or 'face' and benefits. The protagonists in both *Life Full of Chores of Chi Li* and *Scattered Feathers* of Liu Zhenyun went through painstaking efforts to shop for gifts that were appropriate—spending not much money but looking 'expensive' or worthy. Pan, the bride in the *Bell and Drum Tower* by Liu Xinwu, in preparation for her wedding, was able to acquire stuff that was practical and looked 'worthy' as well. In the same novel, the strategic spending of a couple, Hao and her husband, was depicted: They were extremely stingy on food, or in other words, they 'extracted savings from between the teeth', while their clothing and household wares were fairly decent. They purchased a 12-inch black and white TV—to display their financial capability, yet they rarely turned it on—to save electricity, unless when their son was home or there were good programs. They were generous towards their son with good clothes and plentiful snacks; occasionally, they would buy expensive and rare fruits for the boy to eat in the middle of the courtyard so as to be seen. They minimized the electricity bills, however, they were careless about water usage as the latter would generate bills to be shared by the courtyard residents. In this sense, the poor explicated the role of 'agency' to maximize use of scarce resources and

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maintain a degree of dignity.

Shaming and counter-shaming.

Counter shaming can be seen as an active or aggressive response to being shamed, by which the poor fight back or even make use of being shamed to their own advantage, hence agency is articulated at its height. In *Bell and Drum Tower*, Guo, a young woman from the rural village, visited a family of her past father's old friend where she met Feng, a much more educated woman of similar age. During the conversation, Guo became furious that Feng talked down to her about scientific knowledge, and when Feng mentioned computers, Guo suddenly burst:

'What is it about electronic brains (translation of computer in Chinese) or monkey brains?! I only had pig brains and sheep brains. What's the use for me to know about the electronic brains? All I know are the wild veggies called 'laolu' outside our village. Have you ever had it? You should try it yourself. But I am telling you now, your face would get swollen if you eat it!'

Often, the poor are innovative in the counter shaming. In *The Scattered Feathers*, Mrs. Lin wanted to transfer to a job close to home, and, through connections, they found a person in charge of the new workplace. They felt so disgraced when their gift to this official—a pack of coca cola—was rejected. After some thoughts, they found a 'perfect solution' for its reuse, to let their daughter drink the soda in the courtyard, to be exposed to the neighbours who often laughed at their shabbiness. Iron Cat, a character in *The Sail Far Away*, was a teen who was forced out by his step mother during the Disaster period. He could not stand hunger, so he hid in a department store where he ate too many sweets after the store was closed. He then ended up in a hospital due to acute stomachache. In order to find stable meals, he told the staff that he was a regular thief, as a result, he was locked up and sent to a labor camp. There, he continued to steal food so scarce from fellow prisoners, and by 'taking the shame', he used it to support the survival of another child in the camp. Professional beggars in the old days

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represented a distinctively creative group in the counter shaming. They organized themselves into guilds, divided territories, and developed skills including 'soft begging' (saying blessing words in rhythm), 'tough begging' (saying wicked words), 'miserable begging' (displaying scars or disabilities), etc (Bell and Drum Tower).

Counter shaming can still take a radical form, i.e. the Communist Revolution. As stated in the previous 'poverty without shame' section, poverty is interpreted as the consequence of exploitation of the rich, and the solution to the problem is eradication of social inequality and redistribution of productive assets such as land, tools and factories. In the selected novels from this perspective, such as *The Violent Storm*, *The Builder*, and *Shanghai's Morning*, class conflict was portrayed as most stark; the asymmetrical power structure was such that the only path for the poor to be liberated was to get organized and overthrow the oppressors by depriving them of their assets and privileges.

Spiritual victory

In comparison with the poor who can be empowered through the Revolution, some with the least means would still want to maintain internal peace, but through a rather pathetic way of counter shaming, i.e. *Spiritual Victory*. *Spiritual Victory*, a term coined by Lu Xun in his famous novella *The True Story of Ah Q*, refers to a euphemism for self-talk and self-deception even when faced with extreme defeat or humiliation. Ah Q was alone and stayed in the village temple of earth and grains without stable jobs. He was a bully to the less fortunate but fearful of those who were above him in rank, strength, or power. He persuaded himself mentally that he was spiritually 'superior' to his oppressors even as he succumbed to their tyranny and suppression. Once Ah Q got splashed by Master Zhao, a landlord in the village, as he said proudly that he shared the same last name as Master Zhao, thus they belonged to the same clan; Ah Q even considered himself three levels senior than Master Zhao's son who gained a title of scholar. Yet, Ah Q did not respect them 'mentally'. He thought: 'my son would be even richer.' When he got into fights with others, he would say to himself: 'the world is now upside down. I was beaten

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by my 'son'. Although he kept being defeated, he would always turn the situation around in his head afterwards. The story's ending was tragic and ironical. After he was arrested mistakenly, Ah Q was told to sign a paper, an impossible task due to his illiteracy. He was then asked to draw a circle instead. Ah Q tried his best but felt shame that he could not draw it round enough. Then he immediately felt fine as he thought that only stupid people could draw very round circles. The day when he was taken for execution, he said his last words before death: 'In twenty years, I'll come back like a man again.' (rebirth)

Withdrawal

Among the responses to shaming, one still remains—withdrawal in the sense of giving up all hopes, hence efforts. This can reflect either the consequence of long-term failure, or of some traumatic events. Xiangzi started as a young, strong and proud rickshaw puller who desired to earn a decent living through his own sweat. However, he was defeated repeatedly by a series of misfortunes—robbery twice of his hard-earned rickshaw and the money saved to buy a rickshaw, the death of his wife and then of the woman he loved. At the end of the novel, Xiangzi, still young, lived like a puppet, or a 'meaningless existence'. He was rather shameless as he showed indifference when cheated and stole; he worked the minimum and visited brothels, just to get by and wait for the last day to arrive.

For a number of characters who experienced tragedy, suicide turned out to be a terminal withdrawal. The strong-willed woman in the Damned Grains who endured such a hard life finally committed suicide after she lost the ration book and money on her way to buy grains. Gousheng in the Qin Opera planted vegetables in the field which had been ordered to grow only trees by government officials. Being accused of violating state policy, he was punished by not receiving the subsidies of money and grains (for the loss of giving up the vegetable fields), and instead he had to pay a 200 yuan fine. Gousheng killed himself by drinking farm chemicals. Xiaofuzi, the woman with whom Xiangzi was in love, hung herself after she was forced to become a prostitute

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Intersecting Factors and Poverty and Shame

As shown so far, poverty and shame is associated in multiple ways. Nevertheless, to broaden our scope further, we can find that shame experienced by the poor or shaming towards the poor can well be intersected with numerous other factors: Donkey Li was poor, however, he was looked down upon among the villagers not because of his poverty but his gambling; the woman and her son were often bullied because she had no man in the house (husband mysteriously left) and the boy was retarded (Dad Dad Dad); Xiangzi felt shame at having to marry Tiger Girl as she was much older, ugly, and aggressive. In Iron Cat's case, during the Disaster period, when his relationship with his step-mother worsened, she cursed him as a 'manure producer' and said 'those who could breathe shall get lost and find their own ways', so Iron Cat left and ended up in prison. 'I' and a couple of others suffered humiliation for it was political shaming targeted toward the educated during the political movements of Mao's era. Also due to political shaming of coming from an 'affluent family', Xiaochi had difficulty finding a wife, so he took a woman who had run away from her poor husband. While these cases might still indicate poverty as the root of shame or shaming, the following examples will demonstrate, in specific, how beliefs play a key role in the poverty shame nexus.

For Xianglin Sao, a tragic protagonist by Lu Xun, the source of her deeply felt shame was not poverty per se although she was also poor, but the superstitious concern that she would be divided into two once dead, for each one of her two husbands. She worked and saved to 'donate' a wooden threshold in a local temple in the hope that one of her husbands would take the threshold instead of her. Afterwards, she felt completely relieved, however, when she saw that she was still not allowed by her master to prepare the divine food in the Chinese New Year for ancestor worship, she collapsed and died. In the Memoirs of River Hulan, You Er worked for years as a servant for a gentry-landlord. He often stole things, and did not seem to be embarrassed when others pointed it out. He would deny this by arguing that he was a decent man, and that although he was poor, he lived well. You Er would collapse only when others pointed out that he was childless (sonless). He would begin to weep: 'isn't this true! I won't have

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anybody to go and care for my tomb. My whole life is a waste; it will end empty; when I die, nobody will hold the banner (for the funeral possession).’ (547).

While You Er was most concerned about the shame of not having a son, his understanding of shame in accordance with the traditional hierarchical social structure is also interesting. You Er’s name ‘you’ in Chinese means ‘have’; ‘er’ means ‘second’, so he was probably the second son in his family; his nickname since childhood was ‘You Zi’ (‘zi’ here is a virtual character close to ‘small thing’). You Er was addressed by different names by different people according to their relative status, occupations and relationships to him. The old master called him by his nickname ‘You Zi’; the offspring of the master called him ‘Uncle You Er’; the cook of the family called him ‘Grandpa You Er’; tenants called him ‘Master You Er’; shop owners called him ‘Manager You Er’. You Er was pleased when he was addressed with respect, but got really fierce when he was called by a nickname. When children teased him by calling his nickname, he would chase and hit them with his long pipe with his eyes as red as an old hen. When the old Master called him ‘You Zi’, he accepted it, as he put it: ‘Even the prime minister has to address himself as servant and kneel down in front of the emperor.’ (XH: 636)

Inequality, Poverty and Shame

Partly due to inequality that is universally present, certain social groups suffer more from poverty and shame than others; review of the select literature shows several such distinctive groups:

First is the old. Although Chinese tradition is known for veneration of the old, which might have been true for the wealthy family in which the old controlled assets. The old people in poverty, as limitedly depicted in the select literature, demonstrate the reverse. In the the Memoirs of River Hulan, an old man who hawked in the freezing winter fell and the goods he was selling—steamed buns—spread onto the ground. Those who saw him grabbed the buns and ran away, leaving the old man to grunt. In *The Rickshaw Boy*, those who could still work pulled miserably, while the unproductive old lay in bed

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with empty stomachs and had to tolerate scolding by their family.

Second is the young. Earlier on, when absolute poverty prevailed, children suffered from hunger and lack of clothing as much as the adults. Their dependency made them more vulnerable. Yang's five children were trained to be apt at licking bowls after a meal, and if any of them did not do it clean enough, he or she would get scolded. In *Xusanguan Selling Blood*, Yi Le was born out of wedlock. When his step-father took his half brothers out to eat with the blood-sold money, he begged to also have a bowl of noodle, and whoever would give him a bowl of noodle, he would like to become the person's son. Poor children began to work at a very young age. They did all sorts of work as long as they could help the family to survive, e.g. picking up coal bits and pig raising among others. For those who could not work, they got beaten frequently as they were seen as 'burdens' by the parents who were frustrated in their poverty. Naked Zhao slapped his 5-year-old son and told him to 'get lost' because 'I can afford you no more'. Poverty and strained family relationship also caused Iron Cat to choose to stay in prison rather than home.

Third is the rural residents. Due to the rural urban divide, the city is viewed as representing modernity—the power center, better life chances and a higher living standard. During the 1980s, as the rural productivity began to grow, peasants increasingly travelled to the city where they often encountered 'shame'. Guo Xinger was humiliated on several occasions when going to the city for the first time as a village girl. When Chen had sufficient grain stored, he went to the city for interesting experiences, but was looked down upon by the hotel receptionist. In *Scattered Feathers*, Lin was originally from a rural area. As he settled down in the city, relatives or friends from his hometown frequented his home for a variety of reasons: tourism, going to a high-quality hospital, or purchase of scarce goods. While Lin's parents told villagers with pride: 'My son is in Beijing, go to him,' Lin felt shame for these countrymen behaved oddly (accent, habits, etc). Their visiting caused additional financial burden to the Lins, and Lin also felt embarrassed that he had barely any connections in Beijing to help fulfill their expectations. Most importantly, Lin felt lower in front of his wife who, as a city girl, had

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no such visiting relatives. Ironically, though, those adapted to the urban lifestyle may get rejected when returning to the village. At times, they were seen as putting on airs with the villagers (The Qin Opera)

Women, Shame and Poverty

Two contrasting pictures are presented in the select literature concerning women, shame and poverty. In the old days, women suffered more from poverty and shame than men. Women then had little independent source of income, and the already scarce resources of the poor were given more favorably to the male members of the family. For instance, food had to be distributed unequally among family members in such a way that priority was given to men and boys who were laborers or potential ones. Women had also to bear unjustified beliefs, that is, women were responsible for infertility or being sonless in particular (*Alive*). Poor men routinely beat their wives as a way of taking out their frustration of poverty. Worse, cruelty was often imposed on women by other women, typically daughter-in-law by mother-in-law. In the *Memoirs of River Hulan*, there were two stories about women, poverty and shame. The child bride was brought in after some discussion (as she was so young, and might be mere a burden and could not labor much if being brought in). As soon as she arrived, complaints about her began: 'she has no sense of shame; she ate three bowls of grains on the first day.' (594) After a short while, this 12-year-old bride got sick, and had to be treated by a witch and this involved beating; she died. Her father-in-law asked the Old Master to give a piece of land to bury the bride. Two servants, You Er and the old cook, went along to the burial and were offered a customary banquet. On returning from the burial, they showed no sadness for the death, but happiness as if it were a New Year celebration.

The other girl in the novel, Big Sister Wang, a daughter of a horse cart driver, secretly married and bore a baby boy to Feng, the poor mill worker described before. The attitudes of the neighbours changed dramatically prior and after. Prior, Big Sister Wang was praised for her physical strength and capabilities. Afterwards, she was accused as 'not a good thing' (665) because she had married a poor mill laborer. Her physical

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strength now was said to indicate 'poor bones and poor flesh;' 'what a dirty deal they had!' 'How shameful!' The neighbours traced Big Sister Wang's life full of mischief: she stole, she fought, she argued... (667). She eventually died in childbirth.

Women depended on men to provide for them, and poor women had to endure more to get financial security by agreeing to become the servant and then concubine of older men (Na Wu). If a woman had no man to provide for her, her means of making a living were extremely limited, and at times, her nearly only means was her own body. So poverty and prostitution was often an unfortunate combination faced by women characters in the selected works. In the two works by Lao She, Xiaofuzi in *The Rickshaw Boy* and 'I' in *The Crescent Moon* were both such women. Xiaofuzi was first sold by her father to a soldier for two hundred yuan, which supported her family—parents and two younger brothers—to live well for a brief period. Her mother, while weeping about Xiaofuzi, was able to be well dressed and have full meals. Her mother died from her father's beatings. Then, Xiaofuzi returned home after the soldier moved to another station. Her father, a rickshaw puller and alcoholic, said to her:

If you are really concerned about your younger brothers, you should find a way to feed them! How can you all depend on me! Each day I work like an animal, and I've got to feed myself. I can't pull the rickshaw with an empty stomach, can I?! Would you be happy if I fall to death? You have nothing to do. Why don't you sell what you have?!

So Xiaofuzi, 20 years old, became a prostitute for the sake of her two younger brothers. 'She was forced by the hardships to forget about shame,' in the words of Lao She (182). Xiangzi and Xiaofuzi were in love, and, after Xiangzi's wife died, they two could have come together. However, Xiangzi felt he could not afford to support not just Xiaofuzi but her whole family. 'Love or not, those in poverty have to make decisions based on money, and 'lover', as noted by Lao She (184) 'can only be born into an affluent family'. Xiaofuzi eventually hanged herself as she could not stand the torture of being a prostitute. *The Crescent Moon* was a novella about the process of a mother and a daughter

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becoming prostitutes. The mother married three times. Prior to the third marriage, 'I' was given two choices: whether mother would go and get married, or 'I' must make money by selling herself to support the two of them. 'Mother's heart is cruel, but money is even more so,' said 'I' (171). When the daughter sought her own living, she began to gradually understand her mother's situation. She realized:

The skills and morals that I was taught in school are really toys to kill time. My classmates don't approve of my mother, and they laugh at the unlicensed prostitute. Of course they must have this view; they have food. I have almost decided: as long as I get fed, I would do anything. Mother deserves respect. I won't die, although I thought about it; no, I want to live. I am young; I am beautiful; I want to live. Shame is not what I caused (275-6).

It was utterly painful for 'I' to realize that women then had one route to take, and only the one mother took. Mother raised daughter by being an unlicensed prostitute; then vice versa. It was women's destiny.

Nevertheless, women's traditional subordination was radically changed after the Revolution, a factor depicted in several literary works: arranged marriage could be cancelled by women at their own will; women peasants and factory workers were urged to participate in the political movements (e.g. land reform and collectivization). Wide participation of women in the labour force allowed them the ability to provide for the family and also earned them status. Many women had more say in family affairs, so a term 'wife fearing' became popular. During the post-reform era, women seemed to play an even more proactive role by both pushing their husbands to 'get ahead' and engaging in opening businesses themselves. In several works on the privatization of state-owned-enterprises, when husbands failed—getting laid off, the more successful wives resorted to divorce, showing women's distinctive reaction to the shame of their husbands' poverty.

The Ethnic Manchurians

So far, in the poverty shame nexus, we have primarily focused on the poor whose overall socio-economic status remained unchanged (except after the Revolution). In this context, the fallen ethnic Manchurians represented a different group in modern China. To trace their backgrounds, they originated as hunters and conquered the Han Chinese to have established the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). During the two hundred and sixty-some years of ruling, they were organized into military institutions and received stipends. However, toward the end of the Qing, most Manchurians gradually lost their military skills since they had no opportunity to practice them, but gained no occupational skills since they were not allowed to engage in them. With 'iron crops' (secure income) and plenty of leisure time, they developed highly sophisticated skills in hobbies—known as the 'art of life' (Lin). Yet, after founding of the Republic (1911-1949), they experienced desperation when their stipends were terminated. Despite suffering tremendous descent in economic and social terms, the Manchurians made painstaking efforts to maintain their lifestyles as well as dignity, or in the language of shame, their feelings of shame and rejection of shame were heightened. In order to keep up with the proprieties, they had to take loans or frequented pawnshops. In Under the Red Flag, to host the meal for guests who came for the 'third-day bathing' for the newborn, water had to be mixed into the wine to provide a 'sufficient' amount. In considering the means of making a living, the brother-in-law attempted to sell pigeons (his long-term hobby), but he could not do it at the market once he was addressed by other sellers as 'master'. Worse, they mistakenly thought he was there to buy, so pushed him into buying a pair of pigeons and chimes.

Na Wu, the protagonist in Deng Youmei's novella, suffered economic distress as the family assets had been sold gradually and he was invited to move in with Zi Yun, a concubine of his past grandfather. Zi Yun thought Na Wu would be grateful, however, to her surprise, Na Wu responded: 'well, it's fine to go and live there (with Zi Yun), but how could I address her? Our family doesn't address a concubine as grandma.' When, later on, Na Wu was forced to move in and lowered himself by calling Zi Yun grandma, Zi Yun felt so highly regarded despite their more strained economic situations. Na Wu, on

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the other hand, treated Zi Yun as if she were still a servant. He was picky about food and changed clothes three times a day which had to be washed and pressed by Zi Yun, after this Zi Yun bailed them out from the pawnshop with her own savings. When Na Wu was advised to learn some practical skills to be able to make a living, Na Wu wanted a shortcut of earning quick money—to learn to do abortion because girls from affluent families were willing to pay generously to cover up their unplanned pregnancies, which ironically showed his shamelessness. Regardless, he thought: ‘my body is as precious as gold and jade, how could I sweat!’

Wu Shibao, the protagonist in the short story Snuff by Deng, articulated his desperate struggles over material hardships and loss of status and dignity:

I have not even a place to stay, and how will I be able to live on? ...If I want to live, would I be able to endure the hardships? Even if I would be able to endure, would I be able to stand the insult? Even if so, would I be able to bear the disgrace?

Wu finally exerted himself and began to draw pictures in snuff for sale, of which he felt extremely ashamed; to Wu, it was humiliating that he had to ‘earn a living with his ten fingers’ (102).

Maintenance of face or dignity is certainly one distinctive feature of humans. The Manchurians were especially good at it. Mrs. Hai, another Manchurian in *The Bell and Drum Tower*, was a descendant of a wealthy and influential family which went through degradation. Her husband became a fortune teller on the street before he died. . She supported herself by working in daycare centre until retirement. The courtyard she was living in used to belong to one of her cousins who had sold it to the local public housing authority in the 1950s. Over the years, as she was a relative of the former owner and the longest resident in the courtyard, she helped to collect rent and utilities. Thus, neighbours vaguely thought of her as the former owner. In the 1980s when the government began to restitute houses back to their previous owners, the neighbours began to inquire when she would get ‘her’ assets back. Mrs. Hai was happy and proud

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to have been thought of as the landlady by neighbours. Without doubt, her pretense and vanity was rooted in the anxiety over the social decline of the Manchurians.

Conclusions

This paper focuses on the associations between poverty and shame in a selection of Chinese literature. It shows that as throughout most of the Chinese history, subsistence poverty deeply affected the vast majority of the population, 'survival' defined the tone; the poor were forced to maximize their meager resources, yet, often in innovative ways in the brutal struggles to live. There is indeed some evidence that the poor are disadvantaged—socially excluded—in part because they are poor, shame being an important mechanism in this process: poor people are often both shamed and feel ashamed (Narayan, et al., 2000). However, more importantly, the findings tend to lead to the conclusion that the relationship between poverty and shame is complex, and whether poverty induces shame has to do with the prevailing cultural values in the given socio-historical periods as well as the social backgrounds of those involved.

The Chinese literature selected covering the mid-18th century through to the present shows that Chinese society can be roughly be divided into three broad periods in which the cultural values shaped the poverty shame dynamics, hence formed three paradigms: the traditional, Communist and post-reform. In the traditional Chinese society, characterized as clan-based hierarchy in which the poor were the majority and their chances of upward mobility were minimal, poverty was accepted or endured through the integrative patronage between the rich and the poor. The dominant cultural values in accordance with the social reality then, represented by Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, respectively emphasized virtue, no action, and fate or karma, which justified poverty without shame. The Communist Revolution furthered poverty without shame by rejecting the 'fate and karma' interpretation and reverting 'shame' to the asset class who were blamed for exploitation of the poor. As a result, a series of drastic social reforms were instigated through which the poor were instilled with much 'pride'. Yet, the post-reform period signaled once again a dramatic turn from the Communist paradigm. With

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the opening up to Western capitalism, added to the remnants of traditional and Communist values, a hybrid of multiple traditions or values took form. In particular, the prevailing spirit has been well captured in sayings like 'getting rich is glorious', or 'being a rich is being a hero; being a poor is being a bear (idiot)', underpinning poverty as shameful in the context of legitimization of the enlarging socio-economic disparity.

Finally, even though the literature indeed provides a rich source for our study of the poverty and shame nexus, we must be well aware of its limitations as representation of reality. It is imperative to take into consideration the authors' diverse backgrounds with their own viewpoints of the world on which their works were based. Especially if literature tends to lead us to conclude that poverty without shame dominates, together with the poor's active role in taking the shame to their own advantage, we must be cautious, as, after all, literature are, aesthetically produced by those relatively more educated, many of whom are non-poor. Therefore, their works, no matter how insightful as they can be, should not substitute for the direct experiences of the lives of the poor and the poor's perceptions of the world, which call for serious social science research.

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ⁱⁱ In Chinese, 'ge' means 'older brother', and is used here to indicate a warm personal connection.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2011-01/07/c_12955501.htm

^{iv} The major forms of fictions in China are novels, novelle and short stories.

^v The author would like to express her gratitude to Professor Wang Wenyu and Ms. Zha Jianying for their expert opinions on selection of Chinese novels and short stories.

^{vi} The 'natural disaster'...

^{vii} The other half of the statement says: 'a villain would go out of norms if in poverty'.