

The Uneven Distribution of Cultural Capital

Book Reading in Urban China

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Drawing on interviews with 400 couples in four cities in 1998, this exploratory study focuses on variation in reading habits to integrate the concept of cultural capital into the theoretical and empirical analysis of inequality and social stratification in contemporary urban China. Overall, we find that volume and composition of cultural capital varies across social classes independent of education. Thus, to the extent that cultural capital in the form of diversified knowledge and appreciation for certain genres or specific authors is unevenly distributed across social classes, we hypothesize that the possession of cultural capital may be a valuable resource in defining and crystallizing class boundaries in this hybrid, fast-changing society.

Keywords: *cultural capital; class; inequality; Chinese literature*

Cultural capital, like economic capital, is unequally but not randomly distributed across social space. Moreover, because variation in consumption of cultural products corresponds to other dimensions of social structure, the analysis of cultural capital is integral to any study of social inequality. Since Max Weber ([1968] 1978), social theorists have acknowledged that cultural as well as economic resources shape a society's power

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structures, but only with the work of Pierre Bourdieu did researchers begin to systematically turn away from approaching culture in terms of intrinsic aesthetic values toward exploring its “symbolic power” in the service of class subordination and domination.

For Bourdieu, cultural choices are vertically ranked along a continuum of high to low. Consequently, distinction in cultural taste with respect to such seeming trivialities as preferences in clothing, leisure pastimes, music, or reading material can signify social standing and maintain, reinforce, or reproduce an already-existing social structure (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985). Not all those who have built on Bourdieu’s arguments have presumed single hierarchies of taste or agreed on specific links between occupational status and cultural choice, but they have continued to make a strong case for the integration of the consumption of cultural resources into general theories of social stratification (DiMaggio, 1982, 1991, 1994; DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990; Ganzeboom and Kraaykamp, 1992; Katz-Gerro, 1999; Katz-Gerro and Shavit, 1998; Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Sobel, 1983; Wilson, 1980).

To date, however, studies of inequality in contemporary Chinese society have largely ignored the role of cultural tastes and consumption. In an initial effort to fill that scholarly lacuna, this article uses materials from a survey of reading habits among 400 urban couples living in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Tianjin, and Wuhan to explore the interaction between economic and cultural capitals in the rapidly changing hybrid economy of metropolitan China. We thereby address two related questions: the distribution of cultural capital across social classes and the role of non-economic capital in creating or maintaining larger patterns of social inequality in contemporary Chinese society.

We first review definitions of cultural capital and alternate explanations for its variation across social class. Then, using preferences in book reading as an indicator of cultural capital, we summarize how choice of genre and authors varies across this sample of 800 urban residents. We conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of class-stratified reading habits for understanding the role of cultural capital in the emerging social structure of contemporary urban China.

Conceptions of Cultural Capital

Our theoretical point of departure is Pierre Bourdieu’s analytic framework of multiple capitals. According to Bourdieu (1984), the social structure of an advanced capitalist society is not simply a hierarchy determined by income and property ownership. Rather, it is a muddy “social space” in which multiple forms of capital define social positions that are hierarchically and horizontally

distinctive. Although any asset, resource, or good that is valued in society can be a form of capital (Bourdieu, 1985), in his analytic showcase, *Distinction*, Bourdieu primarily focuses on economic and cultural capitals. In France, he shows, professionals and industrial/commercial employers form distinct classes in social space not only because they possess economic capital but also because they have distinct orientations of consumption, distinct tastes for cultural products, and, more generally, distinct lifestyles or habitus (Bourdieu, 1984).

In this model, cultural capital is mainly embodied in people's cultural tastes. The culture of the highest class is viewed as the most distinguished culture. Dominant classes (or fractions of them) can use their distinct cultural tastes both to indicate their social status and to maintain their advantage in social, economic, and cultural arenas. Cultural tastes here operate as an exclusionary device for distinguishing among social groups and as a means for facilitating class cohesion (or elite solidarity). Bourdieu also presumes that preferences for specific pieces of music, artworks, or authors can signal high or low taste and that they map systematically onto rankings in the workplace (Bourdieu, 1984: 17, 271, 361).

By contrast, Richard A. Peterson, an American sociologist, questions the universality of such complete isomorphism between occupational and cultural hierarchies (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992). For example, in his work on leisure activities and musical preferences, Peterson found that in the United States, higher-status people consume a far greater variety of artistic genres and of leisure activities than do those in lower-ranked occupations. In fact, "occupational groups at the top are much more likely to prefer non-elite musical and artistic genre than those in low status occupation groups" (Peterson, 1992: 249). In Peterson's terms, high-status people therefore are not cultural "snobs" but cultural "omnivores"; conversely, those in the lowest occupational groups are not cultural "slobs" but cultural "univores" who prefer one genre and have little contact with or knowledge of spheres beyond their class, locality, race, ethnicity, and religion. Equipped with knowledge about a wide range of cultural genres, higher-status omnivores navigate successfully in many settings—for instance, they may excel in social relations on the job or in building up social networks that can help them get or do their jobs (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, 1996; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985). What distinguish "omnivores" from "univores" are not distinctive tastes but degrees of familiarity with a more varied set of cultural genres (Erickson, 1996).

Thus, cultural capital may exist in one of two forms: as distinct tastes (Bourdieu) or as a distinct cultural repertoire (Peterson). As we began our project, we assumed the validity of neither position but created measures that would enable us to test the validity of both theories.

The Importance of Book Reading

In this exploratory study, we focus on only one cultural activity: book reading in leisure time. This practice is widely accepted as a robust indicator of cultural diversity and societal cleavages (Bourdieu, 1984; Erickson, 1996; Kraaykamp and Dijkstrab, 1999; Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Stokmans, 1999; Tepper, 2000; Van Rees, Vermunt, and Verboord, 1999). In addition, reading habits provide a particularly excellent metric for gauging differentiated cultural patterns in urban China.

First, while many cultural activities such as attending concerts, visiting museums, or going to theater are possible only for those in certain regions or income levels, reading is open to all because books are widely available in stores and libraries. Indeed, it was found to be one of the most popular leisure activities among our respondents in all four cities, second only to watching television. Investigating this type of cultural activity therefore may produce high response rates with little bias. Second, book reading is done away from the workplace. While people's behaviors at work are largely dictated by their positions, their behaviors during leisure time are freely chosen and therefore better reflect their true preferences. Third, reading is an individual activity; while decisions about television watching in a family are often jointly made, a reader can follow personal preferences. Fourth, reading allows substantial differentiation of cultural tastes, enabling the types of books a person reads to serve as a good indicator of individual cultural preferences in general. For these reasons, a study of reading habits not only calibrates distribution of cultural capital but also becomes part of the larger comparative literature on cultural preferences and social class.¹

Class and Cultural Capital

Whether defined exclusively as income or more elaborately as a multidimensional position determined by control over property, labor, and scarce knowledge (Wright, 1985, 1997), class is a major dimension of socioeconomic distinction in any market-oriented society. And, while they may initially appear to be only indirectly related to cultural preferences or consumption, cultural taste and preference have historically been placed by social theorists at the heart of their analyses of social inequality (Veblen, [1899] 1953; Weber, [1968] 1978). Contemporary sociology continues to find dynamic links between cultural orientations and the creation and reproduction of social class (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio and Useem, 1978; Erickson, 1996; Gans, 1974; Hall, 1992; Halle, 1993; Milner, 1999). Anthony Giddens's theory of

class structuration, for instance, generally suggests that economic relationships may be translated into “non-economic” social structures and individual cultural orientations (Giddens, 1973: 105).

Bourdieu explicitly views cultural preferences and consumption as constitutive of class position because one class may face conditions of existence and have life experiences different from another’s. No matter how diverse such conditions and experiences may be at the individual level, they form what Bourdieu calls the “class habitus,” which he defines as a “system of durable, transposable dispositions” that the members of a particular class (partly) share (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). Thus, for Bourdieu and those who have built on his work, class is the main determinant of cultural preference (Breen and Rottman, 1995; Scott, 1996). Cultural practices, in turn, not only serve “as markers of class” (Bourdieu, 1984: 2); they also create, legitimate, and reproduce class distinctions.

Bourdieu’s critics question whether there exists a straightforward relation between social position and cultural taste. Rather than viewing class and taste as nearly isomorphic, a number of North American studies have found that cultural tastes cut across class boundaries (Lamont, 1992; Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Simkus, 1992). Peterson’s analyses of patterns of cultural choice, for instance, find that high-status people in the United States do not form an exclusive taste group. However, by distinguishing omnivores from univores, Peterson actually returns to a class-based approach that in effect mirrors Bourdieu’s divide between highbrows and lowbrows. To the extent that higher-class people are normally familiar with more cultural genres than lower-class people, culture is still related to class.

Other critiques of Bourdieu’s habitus insist that explanations of cultural differences among a population must go beyond an exclusive stress on class differences rooted in the workplace. Regional subcultures, for instance, may play a part (DiMaggio and Peterson, 1975; Gastil, 1975). Within given regions, such cultural dispositions are likely to be transmissible from one generation to the next through the normal channels of socialization independent of structural influences (Hebdige, 1979; Lamont, Schmalzbauer, et al., 1996; Marsden and Reed, 1983; Marsden, Reed, et al., 1982).

Demographic attributes on the individual level may also act independently of class, and their impact may change across a person’s life course (Belloni, 1996; Collins, 1992; Erickson, 1996; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Shaw, 1994). Gender differences, which Bourdieu ignored repeatedly, cut across class-focused explanations, although not always in the same directions (Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000; Netz, 1996; Tepper, 2000). Whereas some researchers suggest that women participate less than men in highbrow

culture (Green, Hebron, and Woodward, 1990; Samuel, 1996), others come to exactly the opposite conclusion (Bryson, 1996; DiMaggio, 1982).

Similarly, age and birth cohort shape cultural consumption. On the one hand, people may increase the scope of their knowledge about cultural genres as they become older (an age effect). On the other hand, each generation may have its distinctive cultural preferences (a cohort effect), which is one of the reasons we often observe so-called generation gaps. The two types of effects are often so closely intertwined that they cannot be easily disentangled statistically. However, like gender, differences in age cannot be ignored; thus, in our analysis, we explicitly control for age while assessing the impact of class.

Variation in years of formal education also can determine cultural differences independent of occupational class. Education not only enables people to accumulate cultural knowledge but also appears to intensify aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, individuals with higher levels of education generally participate in a greater number of high-culture activities and retain a larger cultural repertoire than do others (Gans, 1974). Not surprisingly, empirical studies have repeatedly shown education to be a primary predictor of people's cultural preferences (Bennett, Emmison, and Frow, 1999).

In the analysis that follows, we explore the ways in which these demographic attributes of individuals interact with their location in social class to systematically pattern reading habits and tastes among men and women in different occupations.

Data and Measurement

Data

Our data on reading habits were collected as one module of a yearlong interview project that we conducted in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Tianjin, and Wuhan. An initial sample of 400 households was selected randomly from household registries in each city; every household was visited four times between January 1998 and January 1999. Because the goal of the survey was to understand how households headed by the nonpolitical managerial elite defined their lifestyle and social lives in comparison to those headed by officials, blue-collar workers, and the self-employed, we initially oversampled households headed by men who held managerial or professional positions. In each city, we randomly selected twenty households headed by managers above the level of section chief in industrial or commercial enterprises, twenty households headed by professionals in state institutions or

enterprises, twenty households headed by officials above the level of section chief in government or Party agencies, twenty households headed by industrial or service workers in state or collective enterprises, and twenty households headed by private entrepreneurs.²

After gaining more detailed knowledge of their working conditions and salaries, we assigned all respondents to one of eight social classes defined by occupation, according to their current work status: officials, managers, professionals, administrative staff, service workers, production workers, private business owners, and the self-employed. The data on reading habits were collected in September 1998 and then linked to materials gathered during earlier interviews in January and May that had focused on educational, family, and economic circumstances. Using these eight occupational groups, we describe how reading habits vary across different demographic and occupational groups, and we then systematically test for the interaction between cultural capital and social class.

Indicators of Cultural and Literary Knowledge and Taste

To gauge the range and intensity of respondents' cultural and literary knowledge and taste, we asked them directly how often they read twenty-two general categories of nonfiction and fiction and then how much they enjoyed particular literary authors, drawn from a list of twenty Chinese and Western essayists and novelists.³ Answers on genre were scored on a four-point scale ranging from "never" (0), "rarely" (1), "sometimes" (2), to "often" (3), and those on authors ranged from "never heard of" (0), "know name but haven't read" (1), "have read but don't like" (2), "have read but no opinion" (3), to "have read and like it very much" (4).

To capture a respondent's scope of *cultural knowledge* we summed the number of book genres read. Because our list of book genres covers a great variety of different areas of reading interest, this variable addresses Peterson's argument that members of advantaged classes consume a broader range of leisure activities and therefore have a wider scope of cultural choices and preferences than do members of lower-status classes. More specifically, we assume that the more book genres a respondent has read, the greater the scope of cultural knowledge she or he has achieved and maintained.

The distribution of book genre preferences across the eight occupational groups is presented in Table 1. As the mean scores reveal, most genres attract only a small readership and only two (professional skills and current events) have scores above 1.40, indicating that more than half the respondents said

they read books of a particular type sometimes or often. The other genres that are most popular are everyday life (1.32), children's education (1.30), biography (1.25), and reportage (1.24), while the least popular choices are religious books (0.31), science fiction (0.52), and stocks/bonds (0.58). A more complete interpretation of the variation across class is offered in our discussion of the findings, below.

To capture a respondent's *literary knowledge* requires more than simple frequency counts of preferred genres. It also demands that one take into account familiarity and preference. Thus, in our questions about their knowledge of twenty well-known classical and contemporary literary authors, we simultaneously asked them about their experience with and preference for each author. Table 2 summarizes the simple mean scores for each author. The best-liked authors are Cao Xueqin (3.01), the author of famous classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*; Lu Xun (2.79), who was once praised as "the chief commander of China's cultural revolution" by Mao Zedong (1965: 372); and Su Dongpo (2.67), one of the greatest poets of the Song dynasty. The least-favored authors are Wang Xiaobo (1.10), Su Tong (1.38), and Wang Anyi (1.44), three contemporary novelists.

While a respondent's scope of *cultural/literary knowledge* is measured by counting the number of genres and authors read, her or his *cultural/literary taste* is measured using the technique of factor analysis, enabling the respondents to identify their own categories of taste. We could have developed a subjective classification by ourselves, but it might not accurately reflect our respondents' own reading tastes. We therefore have adopted the technique of factor analysis to help us detect the latent taste categories (or "latent factors," in the terminology of factor analysis) as identified by our respondents. This statistical approach is particularly helpful in testing Bourdieu's conclusion that advantaged classes have a greater preference for highbrow culture than do disadvantaged classes.

Explanatory Variables

Class. Building on the sociologist Erik O. Wright's work on multiple dimensions of class power and position (1985, 1997), we reassigned respondents to eight class categories according to their own job descriptions, which include ownership of property, skill, and authority in the workplace. We adopt Wright's class approach here rather than using simple income levels because the attention to location in structures of domination and exploitation is particularly germane to post-reform China. The eight categories include two indicating control of property (private owners and the

(text continues on p. 12)

Table 1
Kinds of Books Read, by Profession (mean score)

Book Genre	Government/ Party Official	Enterprise Manager	Professional	Administrative Staff	Service Worker	Production Worker	Private Owner	Self- employed	Average
Professional skills (<i>zhuanye jishu jineng</i>)	1.34	1.78	2.03	1.39	0.82	1.04	1.90	0.89	1.43
Current events (<i>shishi zhengzhi</i>)	2.11	1.66	1.73	1.64	1.04	1.08	1.30	0.68	1.43
Everyday life (<i>shiyong shenghuo zhishi</i>)	1.59	1.15	1.56	1.67	1.11	1.05	1.50	0.98	1.32
Children's education (<i>youguan ziniu jiaoyu de shu</i>)	1.32	1.10	1.46	1.73	0.99	1.20	0.90	1.14	1.30
Biography (<i>renwu zhuanjif</i>)	1.66	1.56	1.49	1.34	0.88	0.91	1.50	0.79	1.25
Reportage (<i>jishi wenxue</i>)	1.89	1.39	1.51	1.33	0.86	1.02	1.10	0.62	1.24
On the reforms (<i>youguan gaige de shu</i>)	1.98	1.49	1.34	1.34	0.66	0.74	1.10	0.45	1.12
Educational materials (<i>jiacaifudaoshu</i>)	1.32	1.01	1.59	1.26	0.77	0.80	0.80	0.66	1.11
Masterpieces of Chinese & foreign literature (<i>zhongwai wenxue mingzhu</i>)	1.59	1.26	1.39	1.26	0.78	0.79	0.60	0.34	1.08
Self-improvement (<i>rensheng xuyang</i>)	1.41	0.96	1.24	1.17	0.79	0.69	1.20	0.30	0.97
Management (<i>jingying guanli</i>)	1.18	1.77	0.87	0.92	0.55	0.40	2.00	0.52	0.87

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Book Genre	Government/ Party Official	Enterprise Manager	Professional	Administrative Staff	Service Worker	Production Worker	Private Owner	Self- employed	Average
Romance (<i>yangqing xiaoshuo</i>)	0.73	0.59	0.82	1.11	0.79	0.73	1.10	0.73	0.80
Detective (<i>zhentan xiaoshuo</i>)	0.75	0.77	0.78	0.91	0.67	0.72	1.00	0.64	0.76
History/geography (<i>lishi/dili</i>)	1.07	0.71	0.91	0.91	0.62	0.55	0.50	0.45	0.75
Foreign relations (<i>zhongwai guanxi de shu</i>)	1.36	0.90	0.94	0.90	0.50	0.46	0.50	0.27	0.75
Philosophy (<i>zhexue/xueshu zhuzuo</i>)	1.36	0.90	1.00	0.82	0.48	0.27	0.40	0.16	0.71
Poetry/prose (<i>shige/sanwen</i>)	1.14	0.79	0.94	0.90	0.49	0.38	0.20	0.41	0.71
Marital arts (<i>wuxia xiaoshuo</i>)	0.80	0.63	0.58	0.62	0.67	0.69	1.00	0.79	0.66
Sports/games (<i>tiyu/youxi</i>)	0.93	0.87	0.67	0.72	0.48	0.57	0.60	0.34	0.64
Stocks/bonds (<i>youguan gupiao de shu</i>)	0.65	0.66	0.58	0.75	0.52	0.54	0.20	0.36	0.58
Science fiction (<i>kehuan xiaoshuo</i>)	0.64	0.56	0.61	0.64	0.45	0.39	0.70	0.23	0.52
Religious (<i>zongjiao dawu</i>)	0.53	0.32	0.36	0.47	0.28	0.15	0.50	0.02	0.31
Average	1.24	1.04	1.11	1.08	0.69	0.69	0.94	0.54	

Prompt question: "How often do you read the following kinds of books?"

Table 2
Enjoyment of Particular Authors, by Profession (mean score)

Literary Author	Government/ Party Official	Enterprise Manager	Professional	Administrative Staff	Service Worker	Production Worker	Private Owner	Self- employed	Average
Cao Xueqin	3.39	2.94	3.25	3.09	2.92	2.80	2.30	2.63	3.01
Lu Xun	3.25	2.85	2.87	2.79	2.68	2.71	2.80	2.46	2.79
Su Dongpo	3.52	2.95	2.91	2.44	2.37	2.35	3.40	2.27	2.67
Ba Jin	3.30	2.49	2.80	2.56	2.38	2.46	2.60	2.30	2.60
Maxim Gorky	2.91	2.62	2.77	2.54	2.44	2.36	2.50	2.29	2.57
Qiong Yao	2.02	2.36	2.54	2.60	2.55	2.65	2.60	2.39	2.50
Jin Yong	2.89	2.30	2.26	2.33	2.12	2.44	2.10	1.84	2.29
San Mao	2.57	2.30	2.65	2.43	2.02	1.97	2.80	1.73	2.29
Yang Mo	2.95	2.06	2.52	2.13	1.92	1.64	0.60	1.13	2.05
Zhang Ailing	2.35	2.34	2.24	2.16	1.61	1.29	2.00	1.21	1.91
Wang Shuo	2.59	2.46	2.09	1.77	1.33	1.48	0.90	1.13	1.81
Guy de Maupassant	2.68	1.95	2.23	1.74	1.40	1.39	1.40	1.04	1.78
Qian Zhongshu	2.23	2.14	2.17	1.84	1.46	1.32	0.50	0.84	1.74
Feng Jicai	1.84	2.35	2.03	1.78	1.31	1.27	1.60	0.89	1.69
Mark Twain	2.27	1.81	2.01	1.57	1.15	1.30	1.60	1.18	1.62
Jia Pingwa	2.14	1.79	1.78	1.63	1.11	1.18	1.00	0.77	1.49
Liang Xiaosheng	2.52	1.96	1.85	1.48	0.98	1.02	0.70	0.89	1.49
Wang Anyi	2.14	1.95	1.71	1.56	0.90	1.17	1.40	0.57	1.44
Su Tong	2.11	1.76	1.69	1.58	0.96	0.82	1.50	0.82	1.38
Wang Xiaobo	1.51	1.47	1.37	1.17	0.89	0.72	1.20	0.48	1.10
Average	2.56	2.24	2.29	2.06	1.73	1.72	1.78	1.44	

Prompt question: "Did you enjoy reading the following authors?"

self-employed) and two indicating control of organizations (enterprise managers and government/Party officials). Since people with some kind of skill form a large and varied part of the workforce, we use four categories for this dimension (professionals, white-collar administrative staff, blue-collar production workers, and service workers).⁴

1. *Service workers*: unskilled or semi-skilled employees who provide direct services, including retail clerks, those who make repairs, cooks, janitors, and drivers.
2. *Production workers*: blue-collar manual laborers who are directly involved in production.
3. *Self-employed*: service or production workers who do not employ others and have few capital assets. In most Chinese surveys they are described as *getihu*.⁵
4. *Private owners*: those who employ others and also own substantial capital assets.
5. *Administrative staff*: office employees who perform routine white-collar tasks.
6. *Professionals*: those with specialized secondary or postsecondary educations who perform nonroutine white-collar jobs but do not hold supervisory positions above the level of section chief.
7. *Enterprise managers*: holders of supervisory positions above the level of section chief in industrial or other profit-making enterprises.
8. *Government or Party officials*: holders of supervisory positions above the level of section chief in government or Party agencies.

In the regression analysis reported in our findings, the service worker is the omitted or reference category.

City dummies. To capture some of the regional variations of contemporary China, our survey selected two cities that by 1998 had leaped ahead in terms of income and living standards—Shenzhen, a special economic zone adjacent to Hong Kong, and Shanghai at the mouth of the Yangzi River—and two that were closer to the national average, Tianjin in North China and Wuhan in Central-South China. Wuhan is the omitted or reference city.

Gender. To take into account gender differences, we compare men to the reference category of women.

Education. Education here is measured by years of schooling.

Age. In this study, age is measured continuously (in years).

Findings

In this section, we first review class differences in reading habits and then explain why and how we use the technique of factor analysis to construct our key dependent variables: taste clusters and the cultural contents they represent. Finally, we analyze how differences in *cultural knowledge* and *taste* (measured by book genre preferences) and in *literary knowledge* and *taste* (measured by literary author preference) are related to occupational class as distinct from the effects of locality, gender, education, and age.

Bivariate Analysis of Class Differences in Reading Habits

The class differences in reading habits are clearly exhibited in Tables 1 and 2. Marked differences in mean score between the eight classes are present for book genre preferences as well as literary author preferences. The two tables reveal a deep cultural gulf between classes.⁶

As Table 1 shows, the self-employed are the least active in book reading. Their average score for all book genres (0.54) indicates that nearly half the people in this class never read anything in any genre listed. As a matter of fact, the readership of the self-employed is ranked the lowest among the eight classes for fifteen out of the twenty-two genres; the exceptions are martial arts, management, romance, professional skills, poetry/prose, stocks/bonds, and children's education.

Government and Party officials, on the other hand, appear to be the most avid readers. Not only does their overall score (1.24) indicate that on average, all of them have read something in any given book genre, but they also outperform the other classes for most book genres. As compared to managers and professionals, government and Party officials seem less interested and less active in reading books in the categories of management, romance, detective fiction, science fiction, everyday life, professional skills, educational materials, stocks/bonds, and children's education. The break between white-collar and blue-collar occupations is also stark. The average scores of officials, managers, professionals, and administrative staff all exceed 1, while they do not rise above 0.69 for the self-employed and service and production workers. It is also striking that private business owners are the top consumers not only of management books but also of romance and detective novels.

The contrast between classes is even sharper in their attitudes toward literary authors (Table 2). Again, government and Party officials appear to have the most cultural capital while blue-collar workers and self-employed artisans

have the least, but in this table we also see officials surpassing every other group in their enjoyment of all but three writers (Qiong Yao, San Mao, and Feng Jikai). The self-employed outrank government and Party officials only in the case of Qiong Yao, a Taiwan-based author of romances. Private owners also appear to engage with literature very unevenly, sometimes outscoring managers and professionals (e.g., in the enjoyment of Su Dongpo and San Mao) while at other times scoring lower than production workers (e.g., Cao Xueqin, Yang Mo, Wang Shuo, and Qian Zhongshu).

Simple as they are, the bivariate analyses presented in Tables 1 and 2 cannot be aggregated to confirm a particular relationship between class and culture because the tables simply cover too many book genres and literary authors. In order to identify the patterns of reading habit, we must therefore first create a more manageable number of taste clusters (Marsden and Swingle, 1994). To that end, we carried out separate factor analyses of respondents' book genre preferences and literary author preferences. Furthermore, because the apparent class differences in the bivariate analyses may actually be attributable to the demographic characteristics of respondents in those classes, we need to develop models that go beyond the eight occupations. To test whether the significant differences between classes would remain after taking this possibility into account, we use the technique of multiple regression analysis to estimate the effect of class differences in reading habits independent of all other variables. In the language of social science, regression enables us to gauge the importance of class as we hold constant the respondents' education, age, gender, and city of residence.

Factor Analysis of Reading Taste Clusters

In Table 3, we see that twenty-two book genre preferences produce four distinct factors that we can use to identify respondents' reading tastes.⁷ The first factor is composed of eleven genres that are aesthetically coded (poetry/prose and masterpieces of Chinese and foreign literature), are intellectually challenging (philosophy, religion, reform, self-improvement, and foreign relations), or have an orientation that is mainly factual or documentary (reportage, biography, history/geography, and current events). These genres are normally associated with high culture. Four types of popular fiction (romance, martial arts, detective, and science fiction) make up the second factor. The third factor consists of five items that may primarily interest business executives (stocks/bonds, management, reform, foreign relations, and sports/games). The final factor is composed of five items mostly related to family life (education materials, children's education, everyday life, romance, and professional skills).

Table 3
Rotated Factor Loadings for Book Genres

Book Genre	Highbrow	Popular Fiction	Management Related	Family Related
Religious	0.718	0.149	-0.064	-0.307
Reportage	0.698	0.013	-0.107	0.231
Masterpieces of Chinese & foreign literature	0.661	0.113	-0.204	0.213
Biography	0.617	0.030	-0.009	0.242
Philosophy	0.617	-0.025	0.138	0.086
Self-improvement	0.606	0.000	-0.016	0.347
History/geography	0.596	0.085	0.181	0.039
Current events	0.577	-0.053	0.346	0.163
On the reforms	0.529	-0.046	0.440	0.092
Foreign relations	0.512	0.034	0.415	0.110
Poetry/prose	0.501	0.010	-0.060	0.387
Martial arts	-0.078	0.840	0.108	-0.105
Detective	0.151	0.771	0.115	0.028
Romance	-0.048	0.596	-0.339	0.426
Science fiction	0.344	0.526	0.140	-0.008
Stocks/bonds	-0.227	0.144	0.693	0.131
Management	0.272	-0.027	0.568	0.127
Sports/games	0.305	0.251	0.430	-0.030
Educational materials	0.113	0.044	0.045	0.710
Children's education	0.057	0.176	0.122	0.633
Everyday life	0.190	0.016	0.219	0.527
Professional skills	0.187	-0.141	0.280	0.520
Eigenvalue	8.870	1.746	1.251	1.052
Cumulative explained variance (%)	40.318	48.255	53.941	58.721

Note: Extraction method: principal components analysis. Rotation method: oblimin with Kaiser normalization. Boldface indicates the genre's inclusion in the factor labeled above.

In other words, although people may be interested in a variety of book genres, their preferences generally cluster around one of the four above-mentioned fields. On the whole, the four factors have a high cumulative explained variance (58.7 percent), and each has an eigenvalue above the threshold of one. These statistical estimates ensure that the identified factors are reliable variables of reading taste among Chinese residents in the four cities.

Similarly, our attempt to discern underlying relations between respondents' preferences for literary authors produces four factors that explain

Table 4
Rotated Factor Loadings for Literary Authors

Author	Contemporary Novels	Red Classics	Romances	Classics
Su Tong	0.867	-0.046	0.099	0.114
Wang Xiaobo	0.855	-0.064	0.150	0.224
Wang Anyi	0.618	0.054	-0.009	-0.098
Liang Xiaosheng	0.600	0.017	-0.077	-0.229
Wang Shuo	0.557	0.208	-0.135	-0.174
Jia Pingwa	0.550	0.012	-0.056	-0.309
Qian Zhongshu	0.547	0.208	-0.132	-0.157
Ba Jin	0.094	0.810	0.022	0.158
Lu Xun	-0.019	0.755	0.068	0.057
Maxim Gorky	-0.113	0.697	0.022	-0.203
Cao Xueqin	-0.012	0.591	0.264	-0.144
Yang Mo	0.351	0.588	-0.158	-0.019
Qiong Yao	-0.041	0.236	0.710	0.142
San Mao	0.163	0.028	0.616	-0.287
Mark Twain	0.121	0.085	-0.083	-0.723
Guy de Maupassant	0.091	0.238	-0.205	-0.638
Jin Yong	-0.001	-0.063	0.145	-0.570
Su Dongpo	-0.005	0.399	0.186	-0.448
Zhang Ailing	0.359	-0.138	0.389	-0.381
Feng Jikai	0.300	0.225	-0.049	-0.244
Eigenvalue	6.841	1.942	1.232	1.056
Cumulative explained variance (%)	34.203	43.911	50.072	55.352

Note: Extraction method: principal components analysis. Rotation method: oblimin with Kaiser normalization. Boldface indicates the author's inclusion in the factor labeled above.

55.4 percent of the total variance of the items (Table 4). The distinction between the four factors is strikingly clear-cut and exceeds what we expected when we designed the questionnaire. In the first factor are seven authors of contemporary novels (Qian Zhongshu, Wang Anyi, Jia Pingwa, Wang Shuo, Su Tong, Wang Xiaobo, and Liang Xiaosheng). Most of them began their literary career in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Qian Zhongshu is an apparent exception, as he first published his acclaimed novel *Fortress Besieged* in 1947; but because his name did not become known to most Chinese readers until 1980, when the book was reprinted for the first time since 1949, his inclusion in this category is not surprising. Analysts often assume that a preference for contemporary literary authors marks a high-cultural taste. It is thus interesting to note that in Table 2, the gaps in mean score between elite

and nonelite classes are much wider with regard to those seven authors than to others.

The second factor is composed of five authors whose works were strongly recommended by the government in much of the post-1949 period, especially prior to the Cultural Revolution (Ba Jin, Lu Xun, Yang Mo, Maxim Gorky, and Cao Xueqin). Some of their works were even included in middle school and high school textbooks. The third factor covers only two female authors of popular romance fiction from Taiwan, Qiong Yao and San Mao. The last factor consists of four authors whose works are widely hailed as “classics.” That Guy de Maupassant, Mark Twain, and Su Dongpo belong in this category is inarguable. Even Jin Yong’s works of martial arts fiction are in a class by themselves, appealing not only to the general public but also to intellectuals and literary critics. The literary merits of these stories, always set against a meticulously researched historic background and written in a superbly elegant style, are widely acknowledged. In fact, “Jinology” has emerged as a new field of cultural inquiry in China’s literary circles. Two authors—Feng Jikai and Zhang Ailing—do not load high on any single factor; perhaps their works fit into more than one category.

Researchers studying cultural taste often rely on their own subjective judgment to classify certain items as highbrow, middlebrow, or lowbrow (Bourdieu, 1990; Levine, 1988; Rubin, 1992). Our approach is instead to create a metric of reading tastes that emerge from respondents’ own preferences for specific genres and specific authors. This method enables us to go beyond the common highbrow/lowbrow distinction. Both theoretically and practically, cultural taste does not form a continuum from high to low values; rather, it is inherently a concept of diversity (DiMaggio, 1987). In this respect, our approach has greater validity than the previous ones, as it is more suitable for studying urban China, where life chances and paths to success have become increasingly diverse (Davis, Bian, and Wang, 2005).

Regression Analysis

Having reduced the forty-two separate reading preferences to eight taste clusters, we are now in a position to answer our question about the relationships between reading tastes and occupational class, disregarding intervening variables. To do so, we use multiple regression analysis of our dependent variables on all the independent variables identified above.⁸ Table 5 presents the results from five multivariate regression models regarding respondents’ knowledge of and taste for various genres of books, while Table 6 reports the results of another five regression models regarding their knowledge of

and taste for specific literary authors. To satisfy our interest in comparing the relative strengths of the effects of occupational classes, as well as those of other variables included in the models, on dependent variables, both tables report standardized regression coefficients (β), which make possible comparisons of entities measured in different units.⁹

The Determinants of Cultural Knowledge and Taste

Like Bourdieu and Peterson, we find a strong class effect on reading habits whether we examine genre knowledge or genre taste. In Table 5, columns 1 (total book genres) and 2 (highbrow books) present regression estimates obtained to test in the Chinese context the hypotheses of Peterson and Bourdieu, respectively, on the effects of class. Those in authority at their workplace (government/Party officials and enterprise managers) and those with professional or administrative skills not only read highbrow books (column 2) more often but also read significantly more widely across genres than do other groups (column 1). The self-employed group reads significantly fewer highbrow books than does any other group (column 2). Keep in mind that these class effects are estimated after we statistically control for personal characteristics and intercity variations. That is, Chinese adults who live in the same city and are matched in gender, age, and education vary in their scope of reading and their reading preferences because they belong to different occupational classes. This means that class distinction, as measured by possession of authority, skill, or property, significantly differentiates reading habits and taste.

Class distinction matters less strongly and less consistently with regard to family-related books (column 3), management-related books (column 4), and popular fiction (column 5). But these outcomes do suggest what Chinese urbanites prefer to read beyond a highbrow/lowbrow dichotomy. While it is widely assumed that all Chinese emphasize family education and family harmony, here we see that professionals, administrative staff, and production workers read significantly more family-related books than do other groups. Interestingly, government/Party officials and enterprise managers, though enjoying more genres and reading more highbrow books, do not necessarily read greater numbers of family-related books. Probably to further their career goals, enterprise managers, but not government/Party officials, are particularly interested in reading management-related books. Finally, class makes almost no difference in the reading of popular fiction. With the one exception of administrative staff, who are more likely than others to prefer this genre, popular fiction is equally popular across class boundaries.

Table 5
Class and Other Effects on Book Genre Preferences
(standardized regression coefficients)

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable				
	Total Book Genres	Highbrow Books	Family Books	Managerial Books	Popular Fiction
<i>Class (service worker = 0)</i>					
Government/Party official	0.128***	0.160***	0.028	0.068	0.045
Enterprise manager	0.125***	0.097**	0.048	0.187***	0.008
Professional	0.196***	0.130**	0.228***	0.094	0.061
Administrative staff	0.149***	0.098**	0.151***	0.065	0.099***
Production worker	0.030	-0.029	0.086*	0.015	0.046
Private business owner	0.045	0.025	0.027	0.036	0.043
Self-employed	-0.037	-0.091**	0.058	-0.013	-0.019
<i>Personal characteristics</i>					
Gender (women = 0)	0.069**	0.060*	-0.112***	0.261***	0.051
Age	-0.126***	-0.011	-0.169***	-0.017	-0.241***
Years of schooling	0.309***	0.308***	0.335***	0.062	-0.042
<i>City (Wuhan = 0)</i>					
Shanghai	-0.341***	-0.265***	-0.282***	-0.297***	-0.074
Tianjin	-0.092**	-0.045	-0.078*	-0.140***	-0.001
Shenzhen	0.030	-0.012	0.009	0.072*	0.044
Adjusted R square	0.316	0.286	0.254	0.208	0.054
Number of cases	645	647	647	647	647

*Statistically significant at the level of 0.10.

**Statistically significant at the level of 0.05.

***Statistically significant at the level of 0.01.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding of Table 5 is that as far as knowledge of book genres and taste are concerned, two newly emerged classes who own capital assets (private business owners and the self-employed) closely resemble the working class (production workers and service workers) rather than classes who either control organizational assets or possess skills or credentials. It is premature to predict whether this specific pattern of cultural capital will endure as the market economy matures and artisan work and small-scale retail employment no longer provide a stepping-stone to higher incomes and ownership of capital assets.

Other variables in the model also provide interesting insights into who reads what and how much in Chinese cities. Men and women have different reading tastes. As compared to women, Chinese men read more widely

(column 1), read more highbrow and management-related books (columns 2 and 4), but read significantly fewer family-related books (column 3). However, readers of popular fiction are not differentiated by gender (column 5). In short, Chinese men seem more oriented toward highbrow culture and career goals in their book reading, whereas Chinese women are more family oriented.

Age shapes reading habits as well. Not surprisingly, given their stage in the life course and their higher average level of education, younger men and women read more widely than do their elders; they also read more family-related books and popular fiction. However, age makes no difference to the reading of highbrow or management-related books. Thus growing older does not necessarily increase or decrease the appreciation of high culture, as reflected in the reading of highbrow books.

Education, as expected, makes a huge difference. Those who receive more education tend to read more genres of books than those who do not. Education is also a strong determinant of reading tastes. It has a very strong positive association with reading highbrow and family-related books, as its large standardized coefficients indicate. However, it has no significant independent effect on reading managerial books and popular fiction, a pattern that we attribute both to the specialized occupational niche for managerial information that cuts across education levels and to the high levels of literacy in urban China that make reading popular fiction a leisure pursuit widely dispersed throughout the population.

Across all indicators of breadth and preference except for fiction, Shanghai residents consistently score lower than their counterparts in the other cities. Our data did not let us test explanations for this regional variation, and thus we can only speculate about why our Shanghai respondents are less interested in reading. Are they too busy developing their careers? making money? watching television? Or is the private space in their home too small or too crowded for them to enjoy a quiet interval reading a favorite book? Clearly, the finding calls for further research.

The Determinants of Literary Knowledge and Taste

Class apparently affects the scope of literary knowledge (Table 6, column 1). Government/Party officials, enterprise managers, and professionals read more literary authors than do other groups. Administrative staff, business owners, and the self-employed follow a pattern closer to that of production and service workers.

As for literary taste, compared to working classes, government/Party officials and professionals are more inclined to read contemporary novels and

Table 6
Class and Other Effects on Literary Author Preferences
(standardized regression coefficients)

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable				
	Total Authors	Contemporary Novels	Red Classics	Romances	Classics
<i>Class (service worker = 0)</i>					
Govt./Party official	0.126***	0.118**	0.071	-0.020	0.120**
Enterprise manager	0.094**	0.137***	0	0.010	0.077
Professional	0.121**	0.112*	0.052	0.076	0.101*
Administrative staff	0.051	0.052	0.002	0.076	0.038
Production worker	-0.010	-0.030	-0.030	0.011	0.020
Private business owner	0.001	-0.030	-0.030	0.114***	0.032
Self-employed	-0.050	-0.050	-0.040	0.009	-0.030
<i>Personal characteristics</i>					
Gender (women = 0)	0.010	-0.020	0.028	-0.120***	0.064*
Age	-0.020	-0.060	0.094**	-0.080*	-0.050
Years of schooling	0.386***	0.328***	0.298***	0.009	0.263***
<i>City (Wuhan = 0)</i>					
Shanghai	-0.160***	-0.080*	-0.250***	-0.030	-0.040
Tianjin	-0.060	-0.110**	0.053	0	-0.090**
Shenzhen	-0.100**	0	-0.170***	0.050	-0.080*
Adjusted R square	0.266	0.221	0.212	0.027	0.135
Number of cases	660	641	641	641	641

*Statistically significant at the level of 0.10.

**Statistically significant at the level of 0.05.

***Statistically significant at the level of 0.01.

“classics” but not “red classics” and sentimental romances. Enterprise managers consume more contemporary novels but lead in no other category. Private business owners are unique in their preference for more romance fictions, signaling a low cultural taste (columns 2-5).

Again, years of formal education have a strong, positive impact. The higher the level of education attained, the more authors an individual reads. Those who are highly educated are truly omnivores, loving to read not only contemporary novels but also red classics and classics. Only romances, a low cultural form, fail to arouse their enthusiasm.

Whereas differences in occupational class, and education produce the most consistent effects, gender, age, and locale produce varied and sometimes contradictory outcomes. For example, age overall has no impact on

the number of authors read, but the older respondents read significantly more red classics, while the young read more romances. Although our data do not allow us to draw a conclusion with certainty, we hypothesize that the distinctive reading habits of older respondents may reflect a cohort difference attributable to the distinctive content of their primary and secondary school curriculum prior to the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Also of note is the absence of any gender difference in the overall number of authors read, but a clear preference for classics among men and for romantic fiction among women.

Here, as in the area of engagement with book genres, we find that Shanghai residents stand out as being less engaged in and less knowledgeable about literary readings than are their counterparts in the other three cities. However, the observed variation across genres further substantiates our argument about the significance of regional variation. While the residents of Shanghai and Shenzhen score lower overall on the number of literary authors read and much lower when it comes to reading red classics, Shenzhen residents do not score lower on reading contemporary novels and romances, and Shanghai residents do not score lower on reading classics and romances. In contrast, Tianjin residents display a particularly strong distaste for contemporary novels and classics.

Summary

Cultural capital can be conceptualized as a distinct cultural taste or a distinct cultural repertoire. Hence, cultural inequality may manifest itself in the form of either “a hierarchy of tastes” or “a hierarchy of knowledge” (Erickson, 1996: 219). By examining social differentiation in reading practices, this article applies a multicausal model to assess the determinants of cultural inequality in urban China. Two broad conclusions can be drawn from the empirical findings reported. First, as indicated by varying standardized coefficients, education proves to be the most consistent factor of differentiation among all explanatory variables, powerfully driving cultural taste and cultural consumption. Second, once education is controlled for, class leaves a clearly significant mark.

A cultural divide between elite classes and working classes is clearly visible whether we look at reading habits in general or literary reading in particular. Overall, those in managerial and professional occupations, particularly officials in government and Party jobs, are most likely to read books that are intellectually challenging and books with literary prestige. At

the same time, they are also more likely to have knowledge about a wide range of book genres and literary authors. By contrast, those in blue-collar jobs are uniformly less active readers of books, regardless of genre.

Among all classes, the self-employed appear to be ranked the lowest in their possession of cultural capital. People in this class read even less than do production workers and service workers. We hypothesize that financial hardship, time constraints, rural origins, and migrant status set the self-employed apart. Because they are self-employed, they have little leisure; every day is a day to find work, and their working hours are long and irregular. In 1998, migrants and those from rural areas constituted a high percentage of the self-employed. They therefore were less likely to have a settled abode and to have books used during their school years or acquired from other members of the household.

Private business owners also constitute a class apart in terms of cultural capital. On the one hand, they own more economic capital than do people in any other classes. Yet, unlike high-ranking white-collar professionals and managers, they possess little cultural capital. In their book reading, they resemble working classes much more than elite classes. Perhaps this newly emerging capitalist class is still in the process of formation, and certainly they find it hard to break from their work. Moreover, because they need to use their leisure to nurture the *guanxi* ties that are essential for success in private business, they may have less time for solitary reading (Wang, 2000).

An interesting exception to the above observation about the self-employed and private entrepreneurs is in the area of popular fiction, a genre that Chinese culture generally holds in low esteem. Here we find surprising homogeneity across nearly all occupational classes, transcending even the fundamental gap between elite classes on the one hand and the self-employed and manual laborers on the other. Instead, the main divide in preference is by age, a finding in close keeping with other studies of mass consumption that show cohort trumping class (Davis, 2000).

Our analyses give rise to a general conclusion that the Chinese society is differentiated along both economic and cultural lines. Individuals from different social classes have significantly dissimilar patterns of cultural consumption—or, in the vocabulary of European and North American social science, cultural capital is unequally distributed across occupational groups. That disparity may, in turn, partially define and crystallize boundaries between social classes. To the extent that cultural capital in the form of diversified cultural knowledge or the ability to appreciate high cultural products gives one advantages in engaging in all kinds of socioeconomic activities, we may find that whoever possesses more cultural capital in China today may

also be more capable of succeeding in this hybrid, fast-changing society in the future.¹⁰

If inequality is a multidimensional phenomenon, then it is as important for those studying social differentiation to analyze the distribution of such nonmonetary assets as cultural capital as to examine income and wealth distribution. However, to date the English-language literature on social stratification in China contains almost no research on the cultural dimension. We hope that our findings—from an exploratory study that does not draw on a representative sample of the entire urban population—point to a new avenue of inquiry in the empirical study of inequality.

Appendix Literary Authors

Contemporary Novels

Su Tong (1963-) began his literary career while studying Chinese literature at Peking Normal University. He is one of the so-called experimentalist (or avant-gardist) novelists, who consciously exaggerate the dark side of traditional and contemporary China to explore what he calls “the potential of evil” (qtd. in Smith, 1997) without any high-minded concern for human dignity and justice. Su is best known for his novella *A Crowd of Wives and Concubines* (1990, translated into English as *Raise the Red Lantern* and filmed by Zhang Yimou), his novel *Rice* (1991), and several disturbing short stories, which, like his novels and novellas, involve graphic depictions of sex, violence, and other evil deeds.

Wang Xiaobo (1952-1997) was a worker and a college teacher before becoming a freelance writer in the early 1990s. He died of heart disease in 1997, leaving behind such fictions as his *Trilogy of Ages* (1997) (*Golden Age*, *Silver Age*, and *Bronze Age*), *Iron Age* (1998), and *Legends of the Tang Dynasty* (1980) as well as a collection of essays, *The Silent Majority* (1997). Sex and power are pervasive themes in almost all of Wang’s fiction. A movie adapted from a novel about a homosexual love affair, *East Palace, West Palace*, won international recognition. Although some literary commentators view Wang Xiaobo as one of China’s most innovative novelists of the twentieth century, his writings did not enjoy much commercial success before his death.

Wang Anyi (1954-), daughter of a famous writer Ru Zhijuan, is one of contemporary China’s most influential and innovative writers. Most of her early writings were based on her personal experiences as a sent-down youth during the 1960s and 1970s. She gained public attention with her mid-1980s trilogy on extramarital sex—*Love in a Small Town* (1986), *Love on a Barren Mountain* (1986), and [Love in a] *Brocade Valley* (1987); all three works demonstrate her bold treatment of the themes of female

sexuality and marriage. Her novels of the 1990s were largely devoted to the life of the average city dwellers of Shanghai, her hometown. Among Wang's acclaimed Shanghai novels is the nostalgic *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (1996), which traces the wretched life of a former Shanghai beauty pageant winner from the 1940s to the present. Wang has also published essays, journalism, travel writings, literary criticism, and memoirs.

Liang Xiaosheng (1949-), a former Red Guard and sent-down youth, is one of China's most prolific writers; his publications include epic novels, novellas, short stories, essays, plays, television scripts, poetry, cultural critiques, and even social commentaries. Liang is best known in China for his semi-autobiographical tales of the experiences of an educated youth in the desolate Great Northern Wasteland in the northeastern part of the country. Examples included *This is a Miraculous Land* (1982) and *The Snowstorm Tonight* (1984). In his more recent works, Liang has continued to speak for the downtrodden, especially for aging educated youth victimized by merciless "market reforms." The urban impoverishment caused by the massive layoffs of workers from state-owned enterprises has become a major theme of his writings since the mid-1990s.

Wang Shuo (1958-) started his literary career in 1978. He gained fame in the 1980s with his series of short stories, novellas, and novels on urban life, including *Playing for Thrills* (1988) and *Please Don't Call Me Human* (1990). Characterized by a satirical and nihilist style, Wang's fictional works marked the shift from the "new era" of the 1980s to the "post-new era" of the 1990s—an age of commercialism, cynicism, and self-mockery. Wang's typical protagonists poke fun at powerholders, intellectuals, formal education, and official culture, while spending their time eating, drinking, swindling, gambling, bragging, and seducing women. Although some critics label him a "hooligan" author, Wang does not seem to care. He freely admitted that his work "has no moral principles." Wang has also written scripts for TV series and movies, some of which became quite popular in China (e.g., *Stories of the Editorial Department*).

Jia Pingwa (1953-) was born in a farmer's family in Shaanxi province. He began writing in the 1970s and became a famed author in the 1980s. Over the past thirty years, Jia has written poetry, essays, short stories, travel notes, historical chronicles, and novellas as well as novels. His earlier works found inspiration in his peasant origins and celebrated the unrefined beauty in the primitive mode of country life. He thus was regarded as a member of the Roots-Seeking Movement of the 1980s. In 1993, however, he published *The Ruined Capital*, a novel on life in the city that is filled with explicit and implicit sexual references; within months, the book had sold at least 500,000 copies. The appearance of such a novel by a highly respected "roots-seeking" author was viewed as a watershed event that effectively obliterated the distinction between "high" and "low" in Chinese literature.

Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998) was a renowned scholar and writer. He received bachelor degrees in literature from both Tsinghua University (1933) and Oxford University

(1937). Qian returned to China in 1938 to face the instability caused by the War of Resistance against Japan and subsequent Civil War, holding no long-term jobs before 1949. During this period, he wrote his acclaimed novel *Fortress Besieged* (1947). In this semi-autobiographical book, Qian unleashed his biting satire on many Chinese intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century. After 1949, he concentrated mainly on literary research and spent several years translating Mao Zedong's collected works into English. Only after *Fortress Besieged* was reprinted in 1980 did general readers in China rediscover him as a first-rate novelist. In 1990, *Fortress Besieged* was adapted into a television miniseries in China.

Red Classics

Ba Jin (pseud. of Li Yaotang, 1904-2005) wrote his first novel, *Destruction* (1927), to express his sadness over China's status in the world at the time and his longing for a social revolution. He was most productive during the 1930s, when he composed his best-known works: the Love Trilogy, comprising *Fog* (1931), *Rain* (1933), and *Lightning* (1935), and the Torrent Trilogy, comprising *Family* (1933), *Spring* (1938), and *Autumn* (1940). In the following decade, Ba Jin completed many other works, including the novelettes *Garden of Repose* (1944) and *Ward Four* (1946) and the celebrated novel *Cold Nights* (1947). After the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949, he was elected to many important national literary posts. He continued to serve as the honorary chair of the Chinese Writers' Association until his death, even though Parkinson's disease left him almost completely debilitated for the final decade of his life. Among all his works, the most famous is probably his semi-autobiographical novel *Family*, in which the young author launched a fervent attack on the life-destroying ethics of patriarchy that had ruled China for thousands of years. The novel has since been adapted into dramatic forms on stage and in film.

Lu Xun (pseud. of Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936), a left-wing writer, played an important role in the history of modern Chinese literature. In 1918, he wrote the first major short story ever published in the vernacular, "A Madman's Diary." With its stern criticism of Confucian traditions, it became a cornerstone of the New Culture Movement. Another of his well-known longer stories was "The True Story of Ah Q" (1921). In addition, he published numerous collections of short stories, poems, essays and other discursive writings, as well as volumes of literary criticism and translations. Lu Xun's importance to modern Chinese literature lies in his significant contributions to every modern literary genre except the novel. Though Lu Xun never joined the Communist Party, he was highly sympathetic to the Chinese Communist movement. He was accorded the honor of being named "a national soul" at his funeral in 1936. Since then, his books have greatly influenced many Chinese.

Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) was a founder of Soviet literature and socialist realism. He authored scores of world-famous works, including *Three of Them* (1900), *The*

Lower Depths (1902), *Mother* (1906), *A Confession* (1908), *Okurov City* (1909), and *Life of Matvey Kozhemyakin* (1910), as well as an autobiographical trilogy consisting of *My Childhood* (1914), *In the World* (1916), and *My Universities* (1922). Lenin highly appreciated Maxim Gorky's work. "There can be no doubt," he wrote in 1917, "that Maxim Gorky's is an enormous artistic talent which has been, and will be, of great benefit to the world proletarian movement" (qtd. in "Maxim Gorky," n.d.). Many of Gorky's works were translated into Chinese in the 1930s through the 1960s and became very popular in China.

Cao Xueqin (1715-1763), a novelist in the Qing dynasty, is the author of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also known as *The Story of the Stone*), which is considered one of the greatest classic Chinese novels. Even illiterate Chinese are intimately knowledgeable with its plot and main characters, which have provided source material for much popular entertainment, whether the traveling opera of old or contemporary movies and TV serials. Whereas most people regard *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a romantic novel, Mao Zedong viewed it as a remarkable story about class struggle in Chinese feudal society. He once commented that people would have to read the book at least five times before they could fully appreciate its real value (Chen, 2005).

Yang Mo (pseud. of Yang Chengye, 1914-1995) published her maiden work in 1934. During the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-45), she left Beijing to join the Communist forces in the countryside. After 1949, she published quite a few novels, novelettes, and short stories; the best known of these is her 1958 novel *Song of Youth*, a story about a young woman student of the 1930s betraying her landlord family and becoming a student revolutionary leader. The 1959 film adapted from the novel was extraordinarily popular, and, together with the novel itself, it has influenced more than one generation.

Romances

Qiong Yao (also known as Chiung Yao, 1938-) is the poetic pen name of the Taiwanese romance writer Chen Zhe, who is famous for her vivid and sentimental love stories. Since publishing her first novel, *Outside the Window*, in 1963, she has authored more than forty books, many of which have been adapted into films, TV series, and plays. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Qiong Yao's romances found their way to the mainland in a variety of formats. Although she is nowhere regarded as a writer of serious literature, her romantic tearjerkers nevertheless have millions of readers on the both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

San Mao (1943-1991) is the pen name of the Taiwanese prose writer Chen Ping, who was born in Chongqing, grew up in Taiwan, and committed suicide at the age of 48. As a young girl she longed to wander about the world, and subsequently she spent fifteen years (1967-82) traveling in Europe, Africa, and Central America. She

won great fame through her autobiographical fiction based on her life in the Sahara with her Spanish husband. In addition, she published some twenty-odd travelogues and novels featuring the primeval forests of South Africa, the plains of western Africa, the tropical rain forests of the Amazon, and the snow-covered Andes. Her writings about herself as a romantic wanderer in exotic settings caused a big stir among young readers in the People's Republic in the 1980s and 1990s.

Classics

Mark Twain (pseud. of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910) was an American writer, journalist, and humorist who authored such masterpieces as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1881), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896). During his long writing career, Twain also produced a considerable number of essays. Twain was first introduced to Chinese readers in 1906. Since then, almost all of his works have been translated into Chinese. He is probably the most popular American writer in China.

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) was a French author of the naturalistic school who has been generally considered the greatest French short story writer. He was most productive in the 1880s, during which he created some three hundred short stories, six novels, three travel books, and one volume of verse. Among Maupassant's best-known books are *Boule de Suif* (*Butterball*, 1880), *Une Vie* (*A Life*, 1883), *La Parure* (*The Necklace*, 1984), *Bel-Ami* (*Best Friend*, 1885), *Le Horla* (*The Horla*, 1887), and *Pierre et Jean* (*Pierre and Jean*, 1888). Maupassant's style has been imitated by countless writers, and his influence can be seen on such masters of the short story as Anton Chekhov, W. Somerset Maugham, and O. Henry. Maupassant's works first appeared in Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century. By now, nearly all his novels and short stories have been translated into Chinese.

Jin Yong (pseud. of Cha Liangyong, also known as Louis Cha, 1924-) is the single best-known author of contemporary Chinese martial arts fiction. He has published fourteen novels and novellas and one short story, all written between 1955 and 1972, including *The Book and the Sword* (1955), *Eagle Shooting Heroes* (1957), *Fox Volant of Snowy Mountain* (1959), *Sword of the Yueh Maiden* (1970), and *The Deer and the Cauldron* (1972). Nearly all of his works have been adapted to feature films and TV series, in many cases more than once. Significantly, these works appeal to intellectuals as well as to the general public. Jin's stories are filled with thrilling plots, honor, betrayal, hospitality, love, revenge, duty, and, above all, elaborate martial arts stunts, which are immensely appealing to Chinese readers everywhere in the world. Moreover, his stories are always set against a meticulously researched historic background, and his prose style is superbly elegant. Some critics believe that Jin Yong's work has brought Chinese vernacular writing to a new peak. For this reason, the literary merits of Jin's

works have been widely acknowledged. There has even emerged a new field of cultural inquiry—"Jinology"—in China's literary circles.

Su Dongpo (also known as Su Shi, 1037-1101) was one of China's greatest poets and essayists; he was also an accomplished painter and calligrapher and a public official of the Song dynasty. In 1057, he passed the civil service examinations to attain the degree of *jinshi*, then a prerequisite to holding high government office. In the next twenty years, he held a variety of government positions throughout China. Afterward, because of factional struggles at the Song court, he was twice sent into exile. Su Dongpo excelled in poems (*shi*), but he was also a leader of the Song dynasty poets trying to loosen conventions of form and content, especially in the song form known as *ci*. Although he wrote some 2,000 poems, his poetic fame rested largely on his 350 *ci*.

Others

Zhang Ailing (also known as Eileen Chang, 1921-1995) was a prominent female novelist and essayist. She wrote some of her most acclaimed stories, including *Love in a Fallen City* (1943), *The Golden Cangue* (1943), and *The Red Rose and the White Rose* (1944), in Shanghai when the city was under Japanese occupation and when she was married to Hu Lancheng, an infamous traitor to the Japanese. Those works mainly dealt with the tensions between men and women in love and were written in a refined, elegant, and poetic style. After China's victory in the War of Resistance against Japan, she became less productive. In 1952, after the foundation of the People's Republic, she fled the mainland to Hong Kong; she migrated to the United States in 1955 and never returned to the People's Republic again. While working for the American News Agency in Hong Kong, she published two anti-Communist novels, *The Rice Sprout Song* (1954) and *Naked Earth* (1954), both in Chinese and in English. Perhaps for this reason, until 1980 her works were banned on the mainland, where she has subsequently won fame again.

Feng Jikai (1942-), based in Tianjin, is one of the best-known contemporary Chinese novelists. He began publishing conventional fiction denouncing the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. After 1980, however, Tianjin local history, folk customs, and folk culture became the favorite themes in his fiction, as is evident in such titles as *Legend of Magic Lamp* (1981), *The Miraculous Pigtail* (1984), *High Woman and Her Dwarf Husband* (1984), *Three-Inch Golden Lotus* (1986), *Yin-Yang and Eight Trigrams* (1988), and *Exploding Twin Lights* (1995).

Notes

1. Although book reading is an important part of social life, little empirical research has been done in China on its relation to social differences. An exception is Kang et al., 1998.

2. Because the rapid growth of the non-state sector over the decade of the 1990s created higher levels of job mobility than household registries could capture, the occupational distribution that resulted from the survey did not match what we had originally planned.

3. For more information on each of the twenty authors listed in Tables 2 and 4, see the appendix; the brief descriptions may help us understand the distinct cultural connotations represented by the works of different writers.

4. A team of sociologists at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences recently developed an analytical framework to investigate the newly emerging (or reemerging) class structure in both urban and rural China. Although the team never clearly sets forth its underlying theory, the scheme, which identifies ten social classes in contemporary China (senior government officials, senior business executives, private business owners, professionals, clerical workers, the self-employed, service industry workers, industrial workers, farmers, and the urban and rural unemployed or underemployed), seems to be a blend of Marx's class, Weber's authority, and Bourdieu's habitus (Lu Xueyi et al., 2002: 7-10). This framework somewhat resembles ours, though we focus only on urban China.

5. The Chinese category of *getihu* is socially and culturally very different from the Western category of "the self-employed," which includes doctors, lawyers, psychotherapists, and other professionals in private practice. We thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing the distinction to our attention.

6. The purpose of bivariate analysis is to determine whether two given variables are associated with one another. Cross-tabulation is often used to visualize potential bivariate relationships.

7. Factor analysis is a statistical technique that helps reduce an abundance of variables to a more limited number of underlying or "latent" factors. In this study, when using oblique rotation to test whether the latent factorial structures of both sets of variables are orthogonal, we find that in both instances, some factor correlations are indeed larger than 0.32. Therefore, factor analyses here are done with oblimin rotation.

8. Multiple regression is a statistical technique used to estimate the direction and quantitative magnitudes of the relationship between a dependent (outcome) variable and each of the independent (explanatory) variables while holding constant all other variables contained in the model.

9. Unstandardized regression coefficients use the original units of measurement, making it impossible to compare the relative strengths of effects of independent variables on dependent variables.

10. While class membership matters, it is not the only factor that affects cultural preferences. A regional pattern of cultural capital distribution is also quite evident. Contrary to conventional wisdom, for instance, we find Shanghai residents to be the least avid readers of books. Compared to their counterparts in the other cities studied, they are distinguished by a lower level of readership in all genres except popular fiction. Their literary knowledge and tastes are also generally low. It is not clear what can explain this puzzling discovery. One reason may be differences in the availability of cultural repertoires across the cities. When we asked our respondents how many movies they had seen in the past year and how many sports events, city tours, exhibitions, and concerts and plays they had attended, Shanghai respondents as a group indeed scored higher than the four-city average in three of the five areas. However, with the exception of art exhibits, they scored lower than Shenzhen respondents, who consistently read more books and knew more about literature. Perhaps there are two types of culture, displayable and nondisplayable; the Shanghainese appear to be high culture along the displayable dimension but perform poorly in nondisplayable areas such as book reading. But, again, this explanation cannot account for the differences in literary taste. Finally, we may hypothesize that Shanghai people are less involved in reading because they live in a more atomized and commercial culture. We are hesitant to make that claim, but all indicators do seem to point in that direction.

Although we cannot come to a definitive explanation for Shanghai's unexpected results, the data clearly demonstrate that regardless of variation by class, education, gender, and age, there

remains significant cultural differentiation along city lines. Conceivably, such regional differences represent what scholars call “subcultures.” Thus the reading habits of our respondents reveal that even as members of China’s managerial, professional, and entrepreneurial elites become increasingly engaged with global markets and less controlled by “homogenizing” state policies, they may also be as strongly influenced by the values and tastes of their regional location as by their class positions. In any event, the importance of subculture is an issue worth exploring further.

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