

How To Survive: The Daily Practices and Mentalities of Urban Poor in the 1920s–1930s Republic of China

Yu Xiao *

School of Ethnology and History, Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, China

* Corresponding Author Email: vellamocat@outlook.com

Abstract. In different historical periods, the urban poor are a seemingly overlooked but important group. This study employs a historical perspective and uses diverse literature to reveal the daily behaviours and mental worlds of urban poor in the Republic of China, 1920s–1930s. The study revealed that the mentality of the economically disadvantaged was characterized by pervasive existential anxiety. While this fatalistic cognitive framework served to mitigate psychological collapse, it also served to limit the development of direct political demands. Concurrently, a “survival first” ethos promoted a strategic renunciation of the principle of “face”, while limited everyday resistance and the emergence of social resentment amassed emotional and organizational resources for subsequent collective action. This social mentality is both a product of oppressive structures and a manifestation of the survival wisdom and subjectivity of vulnerable groups. Moreover, this study demonstrates that any account of modernization that neglects entrenched inequalities will encounter difficulties in achieving social integration.

Keywords: Urban poor; social mentality; republican China; history of daily practices; structural inequality.

1. Introduction

The Republican era (1912–1949) represented a pivotal juncture in China’s transition from a traditional imperial system to a modern nation-state. The collective impact of urbanisation, industrial transformation, and the restructuring of the public relief system has resulted in an unprecedented number of individuals experiencing poverty within urban areas. Research on urban poverty in the Republic of China is relatively rich, and can be summarised as two mutually reinforcing academic approaches. The first focuses on institutions and policies, primarily studying how the state and society define, constrain, and manage poverty through assistance, housing, and governance policies. More research concerns the conceptualisation of poverty issues and the authorities’ response strategies [1]. The second focuses on cultural and micro-level aspects. Such research typically adopts mentality history and microhistory methodologies to uncover the beliefs, emotions, and everyday strategies of ordinary people. Examples include contemporary social survey reports and ethnographies [2]. Overall, existing research contains both qualitative analysis and quantitative data, having established a solid academic foundation. However, there are few studies that systematically analyse institutional pressures, everyday practices, and subjective mentalities. Research is required into the subjective experiences and collective mentalities of the economically disadvantaged regarding their perception, interpretation, and coping mechanisms in the face of their existential predicament. Based on this, through the perspective of social mentalities history, this study focuses on the survival pressures and behavioural choices of urban poor during the Republican era. This research helps reveal how economically disadvantaged groups balance and choose between dignity, face, and survival strategies, along with how limited resistance and collective sentiments emerge.

The fundamental concepts underpinning this study pertain to the notions of urban poverty, daily practices, and societal mentalities. The term “urban poor” is used to denote a marginalized group residing in Republican cities. These individuals are characterized by their low income, which is earned through undertaking various forms of employment. Their livelihoods are often precarious, residing in shantytowns or, in some cases, experiencing homelessness. The term “daily practices” is employed to denote the daily actions of the urban poor that are undertaken for the purpose of

maintaining survival and reproduction. Such actions encompass work, family, and leisure activities. The concept of “social mentalities” is employed to denote the relatively stable set of emotional tendencies, cognitive frameworks, and value orientations that are shared by the urban poor. These phenomena act as mediators between macro-structures and micro-individual behaviours.

2. Methodology

The study employs mental history as its core research method, supplemented by microhistory. Mental history, a concept that advocates the exploration of the shared, non-systematic mental structures of specific historical groups. It emphasises the reconstruction of the cognitive and emotional structures of historical subjects from everyday discourse, customs, and symbols [3]. Conversely, microhistory provides a methodological framework for the detailed examination of individual cases, with the objective of deriving broader patterns from local evidence [4]. The combination of these approaches effectively connects social structure with individual experience, thereby grasping the subjective worlds of the poor and their behavioural logic under the dual constraints of institutions and material conditions [5].

This study aims to penetrate the surface of history and systematically reveal the complex and dynamic mental landscape of the urban poor during the Republican era by means of intertextual interpretation of the relevant sources. Specifically, the following sources are to be considered: social survey reports, newspapers and periodicals, secondary archives, contemporary accounts and literary works, and Chinese and foreign academic monographs.

3. Struggling to survive: The Daily Behaviour of the Poor

3.1. The Family Living Conditions of the Urban Poor

With regard to living conditions, the urban poor during the Republican era resided in extremely confined spaces and substandard living conditions. The details are as follows.

In terms of housing, the physical conditions of the urban poor during the Republican period were poor, and living space was extremely limited. A number of individuals were rendered homeless. A review of historical documentation pertaining to shantytowns reveals that during the 1920s, the shantytowns of Shanghai were constructed from bamboo and reeds. These dwellings were characterised by their confined nature and inherent leakage, leading to a sensation of being confined in a steaming basket during summer months and an icy cave during winter [6]. The monthly rent for shanty town residents stands at 10-yuan, accounting for over 80% of their monthly income, which places a severe financial burden on households [7].

Regarding living conditions, the dwellings of the urban poor were frequently in a state of disrepair and characterized by leaks. The majority of familial residences were not equipped to withstand precipitation, and the mean floor area was approximately 66 square feet [8]. In the context of Shanghai, it has been documented that impoverished households experienced significant overcrowding, with family units of five having to sleep in a lateral position with their legs flexed, resulting in considerable physical compression. One cannot even turn over in his sleep [6]. Most houses in Beijing feature fixed brick-built stoves. Although this design is economical and durable, it severely restricts the already limited living space [8]. The constrained living spaces and minimal living conditions experienced by the impoverished during the Republican period not only reflected profound material destitution but also significantly constrained individuals’ dignity and privacy.

It is evident that diet is a direct measure of survival. Even middle-class working families must spend the bulk of their income to meet basic food needs. Research has revealed that food expenses for workers in Beijing during the Republican era accounted for approximately 70% of their total household expenditures [9]. The dietary intake of the impoverished population was characterised by simplicity, with a diet consisting primarily of coarse foodstuffs, sufficient to meet the fundamental caloric requirements for survival. Food scarcity also led to clusters of “abnormal individuals” and

certain fatalities. Simultaneously, according to records from Beijing archives, extreme poverty made families unable to support their members, resulting in the abandonment of spouses and children. This distorted the family's function as a refuge, gradually commodifying marriage.

3.2. The Issue of Working Conditions for the Urban Poor

During the period of Republican rule, the primary means of subsistence for the urban poor was low-paid manual labour. Amidst the prevailing circumstances of warlord infighting, accelerated urbanisation, and frequent natural disasters, a considerable number of bankrupts were compelled to flee rural areas and seek refuge in cities. The majority of these immigrants lack both cultural capital and the necessary skills to secure more lucrative employment. Consequently, they are often compelled to undertake low-wage, physically demanding work at the base of the socio-economic structure. Examples of such roles include wheelbarrow drivers, dock workers, two-wheeled cart drivers, porters, garbage workers, funeral workers, and rickshaw drivers. As demonstrated in Qiu Guosheng's research, 71% of rickshaw pullers in Shanghai, 56.96% in Nanjing, and 57.97% in Hangzhou were from rural areas [10]. Young women worked near military camps and industrial facilities, mainly mending clothes for bachelors residing abroad [11].

In the 1920s and 1930s Republic of China, the most pressing survival anxiety for urban poor was job instability. Unemployment stripped them of meagre wages, pushing them to the brink of collapse. Fluctuations in the economic market continuously expanded the ranks of the unemployed. In 1935, the number of unemployed individuals engaged in various forms of employment, including traditional handicrafts, salt production, and modern transportation, amounted to 5.89 million [12].

3.3. Entertainment Activities of the Urban Poor

For the urban poor of the Republic of China, leisure and entertainment were not luxuries but essential safety valves for coping with the pressures of survival. However, due to extreme financial constraints, the poor spending on and participation in such activities remained severely limited.

From the perspective of expenditure expenditures, Yan Xinzhe's observations of rickshaw pullers in Nanjing during the Republican era yielded a concept of considerable research potential—“living improvement fees”—the residual expenses that remain after the provision of basic living standards have been met. Yan's survey revealed that of the 1,350 rickshaw drivers in Nanjing, 955 received no living improvement fees, and 255 received less than 5 yuan. The living standards of the population were such that they were “just enough to survive, not enough to improve their lives” [13]. A survey of 132 artisan households in Tianjin revealed that the average entertainment expenses of these families for 10 months were only 0.15-yuan, accounting for 0.88% of the total household expenditure [14].

About the content of entertainment activities, the entertainment of urban poor is often economical, highly stimulating, with simple yet diverse forms. In Nanjing, only a few adults have some very simple entertainment activities, which are just drinking tea, listening to books, listening to operas, drinking tea, playing the flute, and reading newspapers [15]. In Tianjin, wrestling, performing arts, opera review, storytelling, crosstalk, juggling, and watching strange people constitute their main entertainment activities [16]. Furthermore, the majority of women hailing from ordinary families were confined to their homes, and were considered to be somewhat indolent [17]. The majority of children living in Nanjing's shantytowns “have no opportunities for entertainment, and especially lack the tools to entertain themselves. [15]”

However, when the pursuit of high stimulation by the poor becomes excessive, entertainment can readily transition into a more paralysing and destructive form. The prevalence of gambling is a notable result. A survey revealed that by the 1920s, improper forms of entertainment such as gambling, alcohol consumption, and prostitution had become the “most common pastimes” among Shanghai coolies [18]. Although these behaviours provide immediate physical gratification and emotional solace for the urban poor, they are essentially a form of collective self-numbing that aims to escape the pain of reality.

4. Social Mentality: Anxiety, Fate, and Limited Resistance of the Poor

4.1. Social Emotions: Pervasive Anxiety and Humiliating Insecurity

4.1.1 The pervasive survival anxiety faced by the urban poor

The social sentiment of the urban poor during the Republican period was primarily characterized by widespread existential anxiety. This anxiety stemmed from the extreme scarcity of material resources and the imminent interruption of labour reproduction. This phenomenon was characterised by a dualistic aspect, simultaneously manifesting as both a psychological sentiment and a tangible physiological experience.

Research has indicated that the urban poor across the country were confronted with generally struggling in achieving basic subsistence, with the situation among the urban poor residing in inland areas being particularly dire [19]. The income of an ordinary worker in Shanghai can only meet the minimum living needs of his family, and any unexpected events can easily result in the family's financial bankruptcy [20]. In addition, the urban poor face not only pervasive threats to their survival but also the continuous impact of these threats. From the perspective of consumption structure, the Engel coefficient for working-class households in cities such as Beijing and Chengdu exceed 75 % [15, 21]. Moreover, the interplay between inadequate living conditions and the predicament of being poorly clothed engenders a daily, embodied physical experience of hunger and cold for the urban poor. Daily reports from some tabloids offer a glimpse into the poor's physical plight: "at dawn, rickshaw pullers groggily crawled out from under tattered blankets or from open-air steps, having feasted all night on dew... After splashing cold water on their faces and stuffing their bellies with cold leftovers, some had not even that, leaving them hungry [22]"

4.1.2 The humiliating insecurity of the poor

The humiliating insecurity experienced by the poor during the Republican period was a profound emotional experience, transcending the confines of mere existential anxiety. In their struggle to make a living, the poor were systematically stripped of their dignity. The Social Daily documented the state of the poor at the time: Rickshaw pullers dragged their heavy carts, chewing on flatbreads and fried dough sticks as they staggered along. Porters shouldered wooden poles, waiting for the early buses to arrive, hoping for tips from Westerners. Dung cart drivers pushed their "tank carts" (manure carts), stretching out bamboo pipes through alleys and lanes to empty loads of yellowish-white matter [23]. The poor scramble for survival, "accepting handouts" and "rushing to serve," forcing them to surrender their personal experiences and emotions while their dignity is gradually eroded. For prostitutes, this sense of humiliation is even more direct. Compelled by dire circumstances, numerous women were compelled into prostitution, labelled "night's laughing sellers". Reports indicate that their career choices were not driven by sexual promiscuity or debauchery, but rather "a necessity imposed by the pressures of survival" [24]. The practice of prostitution is inextricably linked to the commodification of the human body, resulting in the devaluation of human dignity in commercial transactions.

This erosion of dignity was manifested in a more complex and profound manner through the interactions between the urban poor and state welfare institutions. The increasingly institutionalized welfare relief in 1930s Beijing aimed not only to alleviate poverty but also to discipline the poor. To secure a lifeline, the poor were compelled to enter this officially defined contact zone. Applicants must strive to demonstrate that they deserve assistance, presenting themselves as resourceful and diligent in order to earn the government's "investment" [1]. This process transforming the basic need for survival into a supplication that required qualification constituted in itself a profound relinquishment of dignity.

In summary, the prevailing social sentiment among the urban poor during the Republican period was characterised by a pervasive and profound sense of loss of dignity. Confronted with the formidable challenges of social survival, the impoverished were compelled to commodify their labour, bodies, and even their very selves at a low cost. Concurrently, they were obliged to adhere to a set of

moral principles established by the upper classes. In order to satisfy their basic needs, the economically disadvantaged were subject to constant mental pressure, which resulted in a diminished sense of self-worth. This formed the most negative aspect of their social mentality.

4.2. Social Cognition: Fatalism and the Growth of Social Resentment

4.2.1 The prevalence of fatalism

In the middle and late Republican period, the urban poor faced an insurmountable structural survival dilemma and chose fatalism as the most common psychological buffer mechanism. At that time, the populace widely embraced notions of “universal deprivation of happiness” and “inevitability,” viewing wealth disparities as divine decree. The records provide a detailed insight into the nocturnal activities of rickshaw pullers in Beijing: “You might encounter a ragged, elderly rickshaw puller who, with a humorous and leisurely smile and a fatalistic outlook, will recount his tale of poverty and misfortune. [25]” Regarding intellectuals, “when afflicted by multiple ailments, or when facing shortages in food and clothing and suffering spiritual setbacks, beyond shedding tears of anguish, they would write to friends lamenting their plight as ‘Is it fate? Is it fortune?’ [26]”

It is apparent that the phenomenon of fatalism has permeated various societal strata, evolving into a pervasive social norm. Through fatalism, people shift the blame for life’s hardships from social injustice to some kind of supernatural force, which can, to a certain extent, reduce the risk of mental breakdown. The poor mystify and predestine social injustice and personal misfortune, cognitively transforming structural oppression into self-comforting notions of “such is fate.”

4.2.2 The growth of social resentment

The social mentality of the urban poor during the Republican era cannot be fully explained by passive fatalism. In the context of the development of modern industry and labour-capital relations, the working class began to realise their rights, shifting from a supernatural individual perspective to demands against specific oppressors and institutional relationships. Workers made social accusations based on class antagonism. As the supplement *Awakening* of the Shanghai Min Guo Daily urged in 1922, workers would seek to demonstrate their inherent capabilities once they became aware of them, asserting their rightful power within the production relations to seize control. The transformation of the poor’s social mentality from one of passive acceptance to one of active struggle is reflected in the history of the proletarian workers’ movement. Taking the Guangdong-Hankou Railway workers’ strike as an example, this event transformed workers’ dissatisfaction into specific grievances and demands directed at supervisors, railway authorities, and the prevailing bureaucratic system. The workers systematically listed their demands concerning production and labour rights, chanting slogans such as “We fight for survival”, “Survival in the face of death”, “Workers united as one”, “Let us unite against those who oppress us!”, and so on [27]. Similarly, the strike that took place at the Anglo-American Cigarette Factory in Hankou in October 1922 also highlighted labour-management conflicts between different social classes, gender discrimination, and issues of national dignity [28]. The historical evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates the transition of the urban poor from economic demands to political struggle. The shift in attitude towards social complaints signified a transition from a tacit acceptance of circumstances to a moral condemnation of external forces, namely foreign capital, factory managers, and colonial labour discipline. This shift in sentiment provided the emotional foundation for the working class to mobilise other social classes.

In summary, commencing in the 1920s, the prevailing fatalistic interpretation was supplanted and superseded by the realities of production relations, first-hand experiences of oppression, and explicit demands for self-interest. While fatalism still served as a psychological bulwark, the socialisation and organisation of resentment shifted individual endurance into public resistance, thereby laying the emotional and organisational foundation for subsequent, larger-scale collective action and political mobilisation. This shift also foreshadowed the emergence of a new political sensibility brewing within the lower classes, centred on class identity and national consciousness.

4.3. Social Value: The Surrender of “Face” and Survivalism

In situations of extreme survival pressure, traditional values underwent profound transformation. In Chinese culture, the concept of “face” is widely recognised as the cornerstone of social interaction, signifying dignity and social standing. However, for the urban poor during the Republican period, the conventional logic of “face” underwent a tragic shift amid existential crises, yielding to an ethic of survivalism. As Yang demonstrates, in situations of extreme poverty, the value of survival supersedes that of dignity. Conventionally considered to be utterly shameful practices, such as begging, scavenging, or the sale of one’s wife, are transformed into legitimate means of survival. In the process of relinquishing “face”, the poor have also redefined their concept of dignity. This relinquishment is not a moral decline, but a rational choice made under oppressive social structures.

From a social structural perspective, the poor abandoning “face” reflects their dissatisfaction with the social hierarchy and a redefinition of their self-dignity. Giddens notes that modern subjects continually reshape their self-identity within structural constraints, a process manifested in the poor as “forced creative adaptation” [29]. From a utilitarian perspective, the core of modern urban social relations lies in the pursuit of utilitarian ends, including subsistence. The daily practices of the poor are driven by the utilitarian demands of survival, rather than abstract moral ideals. Consequently, the concept of the “loss of face” among the poor does not signify a passive acquiescence, but rather a rational response to structural oppression, where the preservation of life is accorded the highest priority. The traditional “face” system is predicated on the capacity for social interaction and resource exchange, and therefore, in the absence of these, the system is rendered practically redundant. The urban poor are only able to subsist by losing their reputation. Face is not a static moral capital, but a relational resource that can be adjusted according to economic and social conditions. It illuminates the profound tension between morality and survival, as well as the cultural variation of “face” in the historical sense of mentality.

4.4. Limited Resistance: Resilience Strategies in Daily Practices

4.4.1 Limited resistance strategies

Confronted with challenging living conditions and an inequitable social structure, the urban poor during the Republican era adopted a strategy of resignation and fatalism, undertaking limited forms of resistance. This resistance was characterised by fragmentation and routine, neither open confrontation nor passive submission, but rather a set of action strategies designed to maintain survival and preserve subjectivity.

Firstly, this resistance manifests as a form of agency beneath a passive attitude: superficial compromise to avoid survival risks and optimise the allocation of daily resources. The objective is to ensure the preservation of opportunities for action in situations of adversity, representing a pragmatic choice for survival under conditions that are extremely unfavourable. Such as the attitude of “live for the day, work for the day”.

Secondly, the optimism, humour and established routines that impoverished populations develop throughout their lives can also be considered a form of psychological resistance. In Beijing, rickshaw pullers would leisurely lounge on the streets, recounting their hardships with a self-deprecating humour. Simple food can also bring a sense of satisfaction and psychological comfort to the poor. Guan Songshan, who was born in 1918 in a poor area of Beijing, recalled: “Poor people are used to eating steamed bread, sweet potatoes, and drinking soy milk. The cornmeal and buckwheat flour huoshao sold on the street are also delicious. [30]” The utilisation of laughter as a coping mechanism for the urban poor is not merely an emotional buffer. It also serves as a strategic means to uphold their daily dignity and mutual assistance network. Third, tabloids and popular media’s exaggeration of urban scandals and industry scandals provide the poor with cognitive “pointers”—that is, they crystallize the fraud, exploitation, and injustice in their daily lives into identifiable individual and industry behaviours [31-32]. Tabloids’ exposure of industries like the book industry, newspapers, trams, and rickshaws concretizes abstract social inequalities, guiding the poor’s social cognition and

emotions. Simultaneously, tabloids and popular media expose urban scandals and industry malfeasance, thereby providing practical information to impoverished individuals.

Additionally, the self-organisation and negative ordering of the economically disadvantaged are more institutionalised and organised. A study has interpreted the professionalisation of beggars as a self-organised survival strategy adopted by economically disadvantaged groups [33]. Urban beggars have established an internal code of conduct by forming guilds, carving out territories, and standardising slang and begging techniques. This enables the beggar community to sustain a stable livelihood for this marginalised group while countering police dispersals and competition from fellow beggars.

4.4.2 The intrinsic logic of poor resistance

The “limited resistance” exhibited by the urban poor during the Republican era demonstrated remarkable resilience. This resilience is manifested in a layered logic that is shaped by their existential circumstances.

Initially, seemingly submissive and fatalistic attitudes were, in reality, pragmatic choices, disguised as compromise and passively avoiding risk, thereby preserving room for action within oppressive structures. Secondly, the incorporation of humour, self-deprecation, and shared meals into quotidian practices furnished coolies and the impoverished with psychological resilience and emotional support within their communities, facilitating mutual assistance. Thirdly, while tabloids and popular media exposed the urban underbelly with a critical tone, they were transformed into practical cognitive tools within the poor’s experiential structures, enabling them to identify exploitation and fraud and optimise survival strategies. The underbelly that is the focus of this discourse also served as a survival mechanism for the poor. Finally, self-organised forms of society, such as beggars’ gangs and guilds, established institutionalised mechanisms of order and mutual assistance, thereby reducing the randomness and uncertainty of daily life. In summary, while the limited resistance strategies employed by the urban poor may not directly address the underlying causes of inequality, they nevertheless play a pivotal role in ensuring survival, preserving individuality, and fostering community trust. Furthermore, these strategies have contributed to the accumulation of potential collective momentum in the depth of history.

5. Discussion: The Structure and Experience of Inequality and the Failure of National Imagination

The social mindset of the urban poor during the Republican period is complex and diverse. This complex social mentality is influenced by multiple factors.

5.1. Structural Inequality: A Complex of Multiple Deprivations

In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the social mentality of the urban poor during the Republican period, it is necessary to analyse it within a comparative framework against the elite classes. The social mentality of the urban poor can be considered a psychological response to systemic inequality, which is not merely a singular economic hardship, but rather a combination of multiple deprivations. This concept of deprivation encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic deprivation, characterised by low wages and unemployment; spatial deprivation, marked by urban marginalisation and residential segregation; legal deprivation, defined by institutional discrimination and policing-oriented governance; and dignity deprivation, distinguished by social stigma and loss of face. And it is more imperative to acknowledge that the variances in tone and perspective inherent within historical sources essentially mirror the divergent values of disparate social classes. For instance, sociological surveys endeavour to present issues with “value-neutral” data, writers’ writing is imbued with humanitarian compassion, and tabloid social news often carries a mixture of curiosity and admonition. The individual narrative styles found in different historical sources, to a certain extent, reflect the reality of social class divisions.

5.2. From Mentality to Structure: The Paradox of Colonial Modernity

The prosperity of Republican period cities can be understood through the lens of colonial modernity. While introducing modern industrial materialism, it also reinforced social power dynamics such as hierarchical exploitation and gang control and strengthened the colonial order of rule. Within this paradoxical development model, the urban poor became the victims of society's underclass. They provided the cheapest labour for the city's operations, yet were excluded from sharing in the fruits of modernization. Their social mentality manifested anxiety, insecurity, and even resentment, yet they persisted in an optimistic outlook and a hope for the future. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a spiritual manifestation of the distorted experience of modernity.

5.3. A Divided Society and A Suspended National Identity

The socio-economic environment in which the urban poor resided during the Republic of China was characterised by significant fracturing and pronounced economic inequality. To the urban poor, the nation appeared remote and inscrutable. The Nationalist government's promotion of ideals was perceived as superficial and hollow by urban poor who were engaged in daily survival struggles. In the absence of adequate provisions by the state in terms of security and livelihood guarantees for its citizens, the cohesion of society around shared goals and beliefs is severely impeded, thus hindering the development of a robust sense of national identity. Behind the poor's arduous existence and the accompanying social mentality lay a fundamental political proposition in state-building: the Republic's regime, it can be posited, failed to complete the task of modern nation-building because it did not fulfil the prerequisites for social integration. The regime's crisis of legitimacy was embedded within the inequalities of the city.

6. Conclusion

This study employs the conceptual framework of mental history, synthesising a diverse array of historical sources to elucidate the quotidian behaviours and cognitive landscapes of the China's urban poor during the 1920s and 1930s. The mentality of the urban poor in the Republican era was characterised by a complex and contradictory unity. Anxiety underpinned their existence, fatalism served as their traditional means of explaining suffering, and a survivalist ethic guided their actions. However, beneath these ostensibly negative forms, the growth of resentment and the practice of limited resistance foreshadowed a potential for change. Subsequent analysis indicates that these social mentalities among the impoverished were not pathological conditions of individuals or groups, but rather normal psychological reactions to a distorted social structure. These mentalities were rooted in the stifling and multidimensional social inequalities of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society of the Republican period. It is evident that these inequalities were not solely shaped by the prevailing economic system; they were also reinforced by colonial power, local authority, and gender norms. This study posits that future research must re-examine the history of the Republic of China. The tragedy of that era was characterised not only by external invasions and wars, but also by the profound internal dysfunction of its social fabric. It is evident that a comprehensive and detailed plan for the modernisation of a nation cannot be constructed upon a social foundation characterised by extreme inequality and illiquid stratified class structures. It is imperative that further research is conducted into the voices of the lower classes throughout history in order to comprehend the pivotal point that any genuinely progressive social change must commence by confronting and eradicating these profound inequalities.

References

- [1] Dryburgh M. Living on the edge: Welfare and the urban poor in 1930s Beijing. *Social History*, 2016, 41(1): 14-33.
- [2] Xin Ping. *Cong Shanghai Fa Xian Li Shi: Xian Dai Hua Jin Cheng Zhong De Shanghai Ren Ji Qi She Hui Sheng Huo (1927-1937)*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1996.
- [3] Hutton P H. The History of Mentalities: The new map of cultural history. *History and Theory*, 1981, 20(3): 237-259.
- [4] Ginzburg C. Microhistory: Two or three things that I know about it. *Critical Inquiry*, 1993, 20(1): 10-35.
- [5] Zhou Xiaohong. Social mentality and Chinese feeling in the era of transformation: A dialogue with the paper "social mentality: social psychological research on transitional society". *Sociological Studies*, 2014, (4): 1-23242.
- [6] Huan Le Ren Jian Writing Group. *Huan Le Ren Jian: The changes of Shanghai's shantytowns*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1971: 5.
- [7] Nanjing Social Bureau. *Nanjing social Te Kan*. Nanjing: Nanjing Social Bureau, 1932.
- [8] Tao Menghe. Analysis of life in Peking. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2017: 67-68.
- [9] LI Jinghan. Discussion on the minimum standard of living in Peiping. *Sociological World*, 1929, 3.
- [10] Qiu Guosheng. Research on the people drawing rickshaw in Beijing. *Historical Archives*, 2003, 16(1): 119-124.
- [11] Anonymous. The slums on the bank of Xinkai River ready for demolition. *Tianjin Ta Kung Pao*, 1933-03-05, (13).
- [12] Luo Yuanzheng. *Veritable records of the republic of China*. Changchun: Jilin People's Publishing House, 1997: 4950.
- [13] Yan Xinzhe. Analysis of the life of rickshaw pullers in Nanjing. In: *Compilation of social surveys in the republic of China: Urban labour life volume (Part 2)*. Fuzhou: Fujian Education Press, 2005: 1259.
- [14] Feng Huanian. Analysis of the living conditions of craftsmen families in Tianjin. *Economic Statistics*, 1932, 1(3): 526-527.
- [15] Li Wenhai. *Compilation of social surveys in the Republic of China: Marginalized Social Groups Volume (Part 2)*. Fuzhou: Fujian Education Press, 2005: 393, 393, 719.
- [16] A visit to the "Old three regardless" area (Part 1 and 2). *Tianjin Ta Kung Pao*, 1934-11-19/1934-11-20, (13).
- [17] Wang Qingbin, Wang Shuxun, Lin Songhe, Fan Hong, Tao Menghe. *First Chinese labour yearbook*. Beijing Social Survey Department, 1928: 399.
- [18] Li Cishan. *Shanghai labour conditions*. New Youth, 1920, (6).
- [19] Li Yingtao. Quantitative research on the living standards of the poor who live in the coastal city during the early Republic of China. *Jiangnan Tribune*, 2022, (12): 94-101.
- [20] Shanghai Municipal Government Social Affairs Bureau. *Standard of Living of Shanghai Workers*. In: Editorial Committee of the Book. (Eds.) *Literature Series on Economic Research in Modern Chinese Coastal Cities (40)*. Beijing: China Times Economic Publishing House, 1-198.
- [21] Yang Wei. Research on the cost of living in Chengdu. *Jinling University Agricultural College*, 1940: 46.
- [22] Zhi Ying. Sketches of a rickshaw puller's Life. *Social Daily*, 1935-07-15.
- [23] YI Ding. Aspects of the metropolitan morning. *Social Daily*, 1934-04-19.
- [24] Ping Fan. Shanghai's human flesh market. *Social Daily*, 1938-05-13.
- [25] Jier Yinxiang. *Fenghua Beijing*. Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House, 2007: 15.
- [26] Lin Shicun. Utter boredom. *Wuhan Daily*, 1935-08-14.
- [27] Anonymous. Detailed Account of the Hankou Tragedy during the Beijing-Hankou Railway Workers' Movement, *Changsha Ta Kung Pao*, 1922-09-10.
- [28] Anonymous. Strike Wave at the British-American Tobacco Factory in Hankou, *Da Han Bao*, 1922-10-29.
- [29] Giddens A. *Modality: self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford University Press, 1991: 98.

- [30] Ding Yizhuang. Oral history of old Beijing residents. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2009: 502.
- [31] Ke Seng. The dark side of the book industry. Jingang Zuan, 1923-08-27.
- [32] Zang You. Civilized society and slick newspaper offices. Shanghai News, 1934-01-16.
- [33] Chi Zihua. Modern Chinese vagrants and refugees. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1996: 115.