

**CHINA'S EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS AND
ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDE**

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Executive Summary

1. The evolution of Chinese class structure since economic reform has followed a pattern similar to what is found in modern industrial societies. This is evident in the expansion of occupational structure, particularly that of middle class strata, in the past three decades.
2. China's middle class is becoming a major component of the Chinese population. Given the persistently high heterogeneity within the group, it is not easy to define the Chinese middle class.
3. At present, scholars usually refer to occupation, income and education as primary conditions for middle class classification and further distinguish them by dividing them into three major groups: new middle class, old middle class, and marginal middle class.
4. New middle class composes of party and government officials, enterprise managers, private entrepreneurs, professional, and senior-level clerical workers; old middle class refers to the traditionally self-employed people; and marginal middle class makes up the majority of the middle class people working as lower/entry level clerical workers and employees in the sales and service sector.
5. Capitalist class, often referred to as owners of small- or medium-sized enterprises, is usually considered a key component of the rising middle class in China. As a newly emerged class with great economic capital, they have been progressively recruited into the Party to participate in socio-political activities.
6. At present, although there are indications of greater involvement of private entrepreneurs in policy-making procedures, their role remains primarily in the economic realm, thus reflecting the interdependence between them and the local government.

7. More middle class people claim satisfaction with their financial status, job, housing, and overall life. Therefore, they appear to be living a happier life than the rest of the society. The self-evaluation of these aspects of life from a high to low range of satisfaction corresponds with the order of new, old and marginal middle class groups.
8. The middle class as a whole appears to be less confident of its class status in society. The middle class identity has yet to be formed in China.
9. China's middle class is a mix of liberalists and conservatists with divergent backgrounds and life experiences. They tend to have more positive feelings about democracy and high expectation of social justice, and show more confidence in understanding and participating in politics.
10. However, they also hope for stability and to benefit from economic growth; they are prepared to be subservient to the authoritarian state for economic security and socio-political stability.
11. As economic conditions largely affect people's perception of class status, they will further shape a person's socio-political attitude. The financially more secured new middle class is the probable social stabilizers the Chinese government may count on in the future.