

**CHINA'S MIDDLE CLASS AND PROSPECTS  
FOR DEMOCRATIZATION**

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## **Executive Summary**

1. Rapid economic development coupled with a rising middle class has given hope to China's political development. China watchers are deadlocked in a debate on whether the rising Chinese middle class is a force for democratization.
2. A revisit of democratization history around the world provides clues to the possible directions China's new middle class politics might be heading. A pro-democracy attitude or force may not be indispensable to a country in its laying of foundations for democratization.
3. China's middle class consists of three groups, with a unique group—the cadre-turn-entrepreneurs—be active and influential in its interactions with the state.
4. Of the private entrepreneurs, between 40% and 60% are former cadres, i.e., those who used to be a government bureaucrat, party official, director or manager of a state-owned enterprise (SOE) or a township and village enterprise (TVE).
5. Because of the close ties between the cadre-entrepreneurial group and the state, China's middle class tends to be more conservative than radical, more status-quo oriented than redistribution-oriented.
6. The conservative and elitist Chinese middle class does not necessarily prevent democracy from making its way into China's political life. In effect, British democratization had a very conservative, if not feudalistic beginning. What is important is the pattern of transformation and class relationship.
7. While the British upper landed class was transformed into a rising commercial class, the Chinese cadres have been transformed into an entrepreneurial class.

8. Despite their conservative tendency, the cadre-entrepreneurs have the tendency of becoming more progressive if the state becomes repressive, prompting this group to solicit political participation from a larger pool of the population.
9. The conservative nature of the Chinese middle class is predicted to make China's democratization more stable than volatile, more gradual than radical. China is more likely to experience a long but steady path toward democratization, and follow the paths of many major early-democratized countries toward democratization.
10. Should a close coalition between cadre-entrepreneurs and the growing, new internationally oriented professionals develop, democratization may be sped up.
11. Rapid economic development has resulted in the rise and expansion of the middle class in China. If China's middle class were to continue to grow as rapidly as it did in the past thirty years, China is likely to experience more pro-democratic, political reforms.