CLASS STRUCTURE AND THE POLITICAL ATTITUDE OF CHINESE MIDDLE CLASS

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[Abstract : Based on the data from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) in 2006, this article discusses the political attitudes of the middle class in China today and their possible impact on social stability, and presents the following findings: compare with other classes or strata, the middle class has an increasingly evident critical social consciousness, with political attitudes that are in fact not conservative; with this stratum, the “new middle class” is more likely than the old to be committed to “social reform”; the fact that farmers and workers identify with the “middle” level of society is obviously favorable to social stability; upholding social equity and improving the image of all levels of government are extremely effective means of forestalling conflict; and people’s political status is playing a declining role in fostering a consciousness of social stability.]

I. THE THEORETICAL HYPOTHESIS

Recently, topics related to the middle class have become increasingly noteworthy. One of the key focuses being highlighted is on the impact of the cultivation and expansion of the middle class on social stability and social harmony. Judging from existing literature, the overwhelming majority of Chinese scholars and their studies argue that: the expansion of the middle class is the cornerstone of China’s future social stability. Although others have reflected on this subject, it is safe to assert that, this hypothesis put forward by Aristotle and inherited by the later generations has won support from most people in the political field and academic circle in China.

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1 This article represents partial research achievements of “Study on Chinese Society Stability” presided over by researcher Li Peilin. The excerpt version of this article was published in the second issue of Social Science in China in 2008.
Nevertheless, the understanding acquired from multinational study provides us with another picture —— the emergence of the middle class is often accompanied with the spreading of social conflicts related to this class. In other words, if the formative process of the middle class and the class power structure generated by the formation of the middle class are taken as two distinctly different study targets, then it will never quietly walk onto the historical stage during its formative process. For instance, the emergence of the American middle class, or even the middle class trend in Western European countries, once violently stirred up the so-called “revolution” in the 1960’s. The anti-war campaign in the US, the student movement in France, and the rebellion of university, students, marijuana addiction, sex liberation movement and the subsequent democracy trend which had spread across the entire western society, are all more or less related to the expansion of the middle class. Therefore, Barbara said, whether at the end of the 1800’s, or in the 1960’s, the American middle class —— especially the middle class labeled as professional specialists and management personnel, had significant conflicts in understanding with the manual workers. In her view, if the middle class was compared with the working class, it was the working class which was more conservative in politics. In the book *The American Perception of Class*, Vanneman, Reeve and Lynn Weber Cannon also showed similar views. If it can be said that the formative practice of the middle class in Western Europe and the US has depicted a scene of “conflict” brought by the formative process of the middle class in the developed countries for us, then the industrialization and post industrialization process in some Asian and South American countries show us the political participation enthusiasm of the modern middle class. For instance, the formation of the middle class in the South Korean society in the 1970’s and 1980’s displayed the reconstruction of the entire social and political structure in a disguised form. Just like the western society, student movement not only sounded the trumpet of “political democratization”, but also replenished

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and swelled the ranks of the middle class. Furthermore, the student movement joined and supported by the middle class also directly led to the creation of direct presidential election system. Study on Brazil’s middle class discovered that—the growth of the middle class, especially the upward flow of lower middle class, closely depends on the rapid development of national economy and the improvement of social facilities—such as education facilities. When they can smoothly obtain economic gains, their yearning for wealth and life enjoyment will dampen their political enthusiasm; but when their social gains are impeded by economic fluctuation and social turbulence, the middle class will actively take part in political movements—the middle class not only have established a large number of non governmental organizations in the whole society, but also created direct presidential election system through extremely violent demonstration activities.

Despite the large number of literatures which reflected on the political transformation process of eastern European countries at the end of the 1980’s and the beginning of the 1990’s, few people noticed the correlation between the growth of the middle class and the “collapse” of the socialist system in eastern European countries. In fact, if one makes a class analysis on Hungary, Poland, and the former Soviet Union, one will find that: the expansion of intellectuals and the population of the middle class in these countries bring them the possibility to produce and mobilize a sufficiently large social force to oppose the previous system setup. Why is it that under the pressure of “democratic movement” the ruling party carried out multiple reforms, and made repeated compromises, but still met a miserable end? The key reason is the transformation of the political opposition of the middle class’s backbone, which mainly came from managers and administrants.

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When Huntington was studying the modernization process of the developing countries, he discovered that the middle classes in these countries were always pioneers of revolution during their growth stage, in the aspects of safeguarding personal interests, opposing bureaucratic governance, pursuing equality, and embracing globalization, they showed a clearer stance than physical laborers, and had more legitimate strategies and “voluntary” consciousness. Huntington argued that, the earliest middle class often were creators of urban politics. During the process of transforming traditional society into modern society, “a society with a high level of political participation by the middle class is prone to breed instability”. Study made by Lipset also indicated that, during the modernization process of the developing countries, economic growth and the improvement in people’s education will lead to the trend toward political democracy.

At a time when China’s economic system reform has attained remarkable achievements, when the rapid economic growth has led to fast expansion of the middle class, and when university education has prepared more and more reserve force for the middle class, studying the current and future political orientation of the middle class should justifiably become a theoretical and realistic issue to be closely watched by the public. While the absolute majority of sociologists affirm the social stabilizing function of the middle class, the issue that this Article is concerned with is: in comparison with other classes, will China’s middle class become the reformer of the existing social systems during its growth period? Will it express its dissatisfaction with the reality through its class action? In other words, we wish to explain the impact of the potential political intention of China’s middle class on future social stability from the class psychological perspective as mentioned by Richard Centers.

The hypotheses of this paper are:

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If during the formative process of the middle class, compared with other classes, its trust in the government, its fairness evaluation toward social systems, and the satisfaction degree toward the work of the government are much the same with those of other classes, then compared with other classes, the social stability awareness and political reform awareness of this class will also have no difference. In other words, under such circumstances, we can neither say they are the society’s stabilizer, nor can we say they will affect social stability.

If during the formative process of the middle class, compared with other classes, they have little trust in the government, and hold negative evaluation toward social justice, and are not very satisfied with the work of the government, then their social dissatisfaction will become stronger, they will develop identification crisis toward the rationality and legitimacy of the national system in their mind, which means they will become potential creators of given social instability factors.

If during the formative process of the middle class, compared with other classes, they hold strong trust in the government, high evaluation toward social fairness, and relative satisfaction toward the work of the government which guides the social development, then they will maintain the existing social order, their political attitude during social transition will also be relatively stable, they will also actively dispel social anxiety brought by other classes or strata.

II. DEFINITION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS, STUDY STRATEGY, AND INTRODUCTION TO DATA AND VARIABLES

1. Definition of the middle class

By making reference to the class typology by Eric Olin Wright and taking into account the actual conditions in China, This Article gives its definitions of each class which are listed below (For details please refer to Figure 1):

New middle class: Non physical laborers with no assets, and employed by governmental institutions or enterprise organizations. It includes “professional
manager class”, “professional supervisor class”, “professional class”, “technical manager class”, “technical supervisor class” and “manual manager class”.

Old middle class: Owners with certain assets who hire 7 or less non-family-member employees or the self employed who does not hire others. The class that hires employees is the upper class of the old middle class, in terms of its characteristics of using employees to carry out production and labor, it belongs more to the owner class. The self employed who does not have employees more resembles the working class, and belongs to the lower class of the old middle class.

Owner class: Business owners who own assets such as production materials and employs 8 and above non-family-member labor force.

Peasant class: Household land contractors who practice farming.

Working class: The manual worker or semi manual worker employed who do not own production materials. It mainly includes: “employed semi technical working class”, “employed manual working class” and “supervising class of the employed manual working class”. Wherein, for the semi technical manual laborer, in terms of skill capital, it resembles the lower class of the middle class; in terms of manual worker nature, it resembles physical working class. As to the manual supervisor class, in terms of power distribution ability, it resembles the middle class; in terms of non skilled nature of labor process, it resembles the manual working class.

2. Study strategy, introduction to data and variables

This Article will, on the basis of differentiating new and old middle class, respectively analyze the political attitude of each class and its potential impact on future social stability. For this purpose, this Article has designed quantified analysis for two processes:

Firstly, use three groups of variables in different types to measure the political attitude of all classes. In order to decrease the random perturbations created by one certain variable which measuring people’s political attitude, this Article uses three groups of variables for analysis as shown in Table 1. Each group of
variables requires the interviewee to make “satisfaction degree”, “trusting degree” and “fairness degree” evaluation on each questions contained therein. Then add up the final scores of the 5 questions in each group. Therefore, the possible maximum score of each group of questions is 10; the minimum score is -10. The lower the score, “the more dissatisfied”, and “the more distrusting” the interviewee feels about the question or “the more unfair” the interviewee thinks the society is; the higher the score, “the more satisfied”, and “the more trusting” the interviewee is about this question or “the fairer” the interviewee thinks about the society. In order to control the impact of other variables, this Article also applies dichotomous variable treatment on the final score. Mark any score between -10 points and -1 points as “0”, namely defined as negative evaluation; and mark any score between 1 point and 10 points as “1”, namely defined as positive evaluation, so as to obtain three dichotomous variables of “whether or not satisfied with the work of local governments”, “whether or not to trust the local government”, and “whether or not the current society is fair” respectively. It strives to, while bringing the impact of other factors under control, use logistic model to analyze the political attitude of each class of course, the focus will be placed on the new middle class and old middle class.

Table 1 Three groups of questions for measuring political consciousness of all classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluations toward the satisfaction degree on the following work by the local government</th>
<th>Evaluation toward the trust degree on the following items of the local government</th>
<th>Evaluation toward the fairness degree on the following social issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Toward the government work in establishing fine social trend</td>
<td>Toward government media news</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Wright was making international comparison of class awareness, he once used several variables attached with strong class preference assumption. For details please refer to: Eric Olin Wright: *Class in Post-industrialized Society (Class Counts: comparative studies in class analysis)*, Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, page 416.
Secondly, on the basis of making analysis of political attitude, we have studied and designed another three dependent variables: “Do you think there is now conflict of interest among social groups in today’s China?”, “Do you think the present Chinese society is harmonious?” “Do you think the conflict of interest among all Chinese social groups in the future will intensify?” on such basis, we try to analyze each objective class defined by adopting class relation as the orientation —— especially the psychological perception of the middle class, and use it to predict their political attitude in the future. But when making the analysis, this Article will use the three dichotomous variables obtained from the first analysis step as independent variables, so as to assess its impact on “whether or not social conflicts will intensify” in the logistic model.

The basic departing point for adopting this measurement is the “situation hypothesis prophecy” of American sociologist Thomas: If people define its situation as “true”, then they will finally act according to such a definition\(^1\). In

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\(^1\) Sociologist Merton’s Self—fulfilling prophecy, is also as foundation to rely on for interpretation.
China, a large nation whose development is guided by the government, each class's degree of trust in the local government, the degree of satisfaction with the work of the local government, as well as the evaluation toward the fairness of the existing society, will be closely associated with their possible social integration mentality. Undoubtedly, under this index system, the more negative the evaluation of the people and the class, the higher their dissatisfaction with the existing society will be, in the opportunities which might be provided by the social development, the stronger their motivation will be to try to reform this society, this will breed risks to threaten normal social development; whereas the more positive the evaluation of the people and the class, then the higher their recognition toward the society's status quo will be, and the more recognized attitude toward the development directions maintained by the current social order, and the stronger their willingness to maintain stability of the existing society, and they will also try harder to remove other development risks which might possibly occur.

The data used in the analysis come from “Chinese General Social Survey” implemented by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2013. These surveys used sampling frame design based on the district, city and county statistical data provided by the fifth census and the sixth census, and adopted stratified multiple-stage sampling method, collected data of a total of over 7100-7300 households covering 130 counties (cities, districts), 260 villages (towns, neighborhoods), 520 villages/community committees from 28 provinces and municipalities nationwide. Then through intra-household sampling method, collected 7063-7300 or so valid questionnaires, the survey error is below 2%. During the data usage process, this Article uses 1% of the population sampling data of 2005, the fifth census data and the sixth census data for corresponding weighting.

3. Class Structure in today’s China

When I analyzed the trends of Chinese class structure, I used all of our institute’s data from 2001 to 2013. But in this paper, I used the date of 2006 to do the
analysis of class consciousness, because there were consciousness variables in the survey only in that year. From Figure 1 it can be inferred that, China’s owner class is still a small class in terms of the percentage of the number of its members, accounting for only 0.52%. The old middle class consists of small employers hiring employees and those self employed, but the small employers hiring employees only accounts for 2.63%, and the self-employed accounts for 11.51%. If the professional manager class, technical manager class, manual manager class, professional supervisor class, technical supervisor class and professional class are deemed as the camp of new middle class, then the percentage of the new middle class is still below 10%—— if the technical supervising class is also included into the new middle class, then the percentage of the new middle class is roughly at around 10%.

**Figure 1 Class Structure of Present China (2006)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership Class</th>
<th>Employment Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner Class (8 or above employees)</td>
<td>Professional Manager Class 0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical Manager Class 1.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Manager Class 0.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Middle Class:</td>
<td>Professional Supervisor Class 0.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Employer Class</td>
<td>Technical Supervisor Class 1.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1-7 employees)</td>
<td>Manual Supervisor Class 1.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-Manual Class 1.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Class 1.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

manage underlings

supervise underlings
The biggest characteristic of China is the large percentage of the farmer class, which reaches about 46.96%. The percentage of the working class is also at around 30%. One major trend in the future is the shrinking of the farmer class and the expansion of the working class. During the expansion process of the working class, the middle class will also experience considerable growth.
### III. The Political Attitude of the Middle Class

When making psychological analysis on class, the established practice in sociology is to place identity class and objective class simultaneously into the model to ascertain the impact on any possible class action. Existing studies have found out that, people’s identity class is easier than the objective class to lead to the emergence of action class. But these studies also tell us that, class structure built by adopting social mobility as theoretical foundation might not be suitable for analysis related to class relation orientation ——i.e. class solidarity, class conflict and class generic action\(^\text{12}\). Therefore, here a class typology framework with Marxist tradition and evident class relation orientation is constructed. If we use this framework as the objective class (or theoretical class) and put it into model analysis, then what results will be produced?

Table 2 makes a detailed report of the impact of each variable to us.

When the impact of the variables such as “sex”, “age” and “salary of the last month” etc have been brought under control, the “Party member identity” which

serves as political capital loses its statistical influence in all models. This is an extremely interesting discovery: In the past study, especially in studies which adopt social stratification and social mobility as core contents, the political capital variable of “Party member identity” holds very significant impact. But in all the models of Table 2, it loses statistical interpretation power. This on the one hand indicates that the increase of Party members, especially the rapid growth in the number of Party members, has brought tremendous pressure to the Party’s ideology integration; on the other hand it also reflects the fact that the transition of the times affects the quality of party members during quantity expansion. Therefore, the integration ability and unity ability of party members are key guarantee of its influence, rather than simple quantity of number.

According to customary hypothesis, the higher one’s income is, the larger one’s gains in the existing system will be, and the stronger the sense of support and endorsement as affected by the “gains” toward the existing system. However, what’s interesting is that, in the analysis of Table 2, this variable also has no interpretation power whatsoever. This prompts us to think about such a topic: People do not develop sense of satisfaction toward the status quo due to the high absolute value of the actual income; instead they develop the sense of satisfaction in comparison with the reference group, and in the comparison between their self mental expectation and the actually attained target. It is more so under market segmentation. Therefore, as far as the purpose to be reached by the “expanding middle income class” policy is concerned, its economic meaning in adjusting income distribution will prevail over the political meaning for safeguarding social stability.

“Educational background” itself is a very important variable. When we view it as virtual variable, compared with “non formal education receiver”, it loses interpretation power in the former two models. However, in the “evaluation toward the trust in departments of the local government” model, those with higher education background ——“technical secondary school / college / undergraduate and above education degree holders” displayed negative impact, namely compared with “non formal education receiver”, their Exp(B) of selecting
“distrustful” has increased. In other words, the group of people with higher educational diploma has less trust in the local government. And this group of people exactly meets the criteria of “educational middle class”.

### Table 2 Comparison of the political attitude of the middle class and that of other classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Evaluation on the satisfaction of all jobs done by the local government</th>
<th>Evaluation on the fairness of all systems in the current society</th>
<th>Evaluation on the trustworthiness of all agencies of the local government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender (male=1)</td>
<td>-0.135</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group (comparison group: 65 years and above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years old and below</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>-0.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years old</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.933</td>
<td>-0.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45 years old</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td>1.230</td>
<td>-0.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55 years old</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>1.103</td>
<td>-0.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-64 years old</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>1.336</td>
<td>-0.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political status (party member=1)</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level (Comparison Group: no formal education)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>0.968</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high/skill/occupational high school</td>
<td>-0.277</td>
<td>0.758</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tech/collage/university and above</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly income of last month</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID Class (comparison group: lower)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are consistent with other research results are: When people identify themselves as the “social middle class” or “social middle and upper class”, their evaluation toward all aspects of the real society will be more positive. Whether in the evaluation mode of “whether or not satisfied with the work of the local government”, or in the evaluation model of “whether or not the current social systems are fair” and the evaluation model of “whether or not to trust all agencies of the local government”, the identity class displays extremely strong interpretation power. In other words: the higher the class status of people’s identity class, the higher their evaluation toward the government’s satisfaction degree, and the higher the feeling toward the sense of social fairness, and the more trustful they will be toward all agencies of the government. That is: the class position identified by people is different from the class people are actually
in, then the mental experience acquired by people will also be different. It is exactly due to such reason that, people’s political attitude is affected by factors from multiple aspects. Such situation once again proves that: when people identify themselves psychologically with relatively higher status, their function for safeguarding social stability will be comparatively significant. This is extremely useful for the lower class —— the sense of satisfaction acquired from the increase of gains, namely the psychological evaluation flexibility to identify themselves as the society’s middle class, is far greater than that of the middle and upper class. Therefore, any efforts done by the government aiming at improving the living conditions of disadvantaged group will be greatly praised —— till today, the political gains of livelihood issues are still greater than the political gains of other issues.

What's different from the original study is: After we introduce objective class with class relation meaning into the model, the objective class or theoretical/subjective class variables become significant here. In the evaluation model of “whether or not satisfied with the work of the government”, compared with the farmer class, the lower class of the old middle class, the new middle class and the upper class of the working class all indicate that: A relatively large number of people in these classes have chosen “negative evaluation”. In the evaluation model of “whether or not the current social system is fair”, the upper class of the old middle class also comes to have statistical interpretation power, and also shows negative evaluation with higher probability than that of the farmer class. However, in terms of the degree of trust in the government, the upper class of the old middle class and the new middle class has more negative evaluation tendency than the farmer class —— and shows lower value of Exp(B). This is a rarely revealed phenomenon in the existing quantified research related to class analysis in China. The middle class —— new middle class have more social criticism consciousness, and have more suspicion toward the government and the social system, their requirements toward the government’s work might be more strictness. We can safely say that, in today’s China, compared with other classes, the farmer class and the manual working class are relatively satisfied.
with the existing social system and the determined direction of the government work. The government’s settlement of the “three rural issues”, efforts in the reduction and exemption of compulsory education fee and the promotion of the strategy of the construction of new rural areas, all greatly improved the affinity of the farmer class toward the government; the improvement of the urban employment situation, the relative increase of the salary of physical laborers in recent few years, and the implementation of the urban “low-income family receiving welfare” policy, also provided opportunities to improve the material life of the manual working class.

However, the upper class of the working class ——semi-skilled / semi-management class, instead resembles very much the situation of the middle class. Although its results in the evaluation of “the degree of trust in all agencies of the government”, in another two models, this class very significantly displays negative evaluation intention —— namely compared with the farmer class, the value of Exp(B) of dissatisfaction with the government is higher, and they experience more unfairness. Members in this class, if they are not manager, they resemble the middle class very much in terms of skill capital; if they are not semi skilled personnel, then they resemble the middle class very much in terms of management power. The mutual comparison between neighboring class positions is highly inclined to produce more dissatisfaction during the changing of its reference group. Furthermore, for some newly graduated university students, although they have high level of academic background, they are unfortunate enough to become members of the blue collar class in the competition for employment opportunity. Such temporary sense of frustration also boosts the dissatisfaction of this class.

Inside the old middle classes, the old middle class who hires employees is closer to the owner class. In terms of position, they lie in proximity to the owner class in the first place. Although their sense of fairness toward the current society is relatively low, their satisfaction degree and degree of trust in the government are not very significant, but coincide with those of the owner class. If the development of market economy provides it with the opportunity to continue
expanded reproduction, or continue to create conditions for its capital accumulation, they will, just like the owner class, still maintain the system setup of the real society. However, when certain system setup affects their development, they will also doubt the fairness of the system setup.

But the lower class of the middle class —— the self employed with no employees, mainly consists of flexible job holders with self created business in cities and the shops run by husband and wife who come from the rural areas. They have certain extent of self determination in labor, but the working time might be very long; its market competitiveness is also very weak. Under such circumstances, in the aspect of initiative of labor, it is close to the middle class, but in terms of income level and lifestyle, it resembles the upper class of working class. Such class position often obstructs its wish to change into the employer class, the contradiction between its development expectation and its development reality makes it easy to develop dissatisfaction.

Although the new middle class does not own production materials, it owns power, technique and skill capital. During the social production process, they not only continue to reproduce their own power and technical skills, but also reproduce the ideological and cultural consciousness and social public opinion which affect the whole society. In terms of occupation, they are the producer, user and reproducer of knowledge; and also the main operator and target audience of the media and mass communication. Compared with the farmer class and the working class, their education degree and other factors determine their dependence and easy acceptability toward the media; in contrast with the owner class and the old middle class, their work contents and spiritual pursuit are easy to relate to social consciousness. Although their economic income far surpasses those of the farmer class and the manual working class, their mental expectation toward improving living conditions also far surpasses those of the farmer class and the manual working class. In recent years the soaring of urban housing prices, the high level of medical expenses and education expenses, all greatly obstructed their gratification of the desire to improve living standards quickly. For some newly recruited university graduates, although they have joined the
ranks of white collar class, their salary level lags far behind their expected human capital returns. All these are reasons that the new middle class is likely to develop into potential risks for the stability of the existing society. This exactly coincides with the development risk theory: Under the previous system distribution, people originally can tolerate the limits of certain systems, but when reform improves system distribution, and brings opportunities to social members, the dissatisfaction of the class with excessively high desire which cannot be satisfied in real life will find channels of expression, their doubts on the legitimacy and rationality of the society will burgeon into existence in the space provided by development.

IV. The Sense of Social Conflict of the Middle Class

Has the negative evaluation toward the current society by the middle class affected its social conflict consciousness? The existing study in the academic circle has discovered that: The lower the social position a class is in, the stronger it will develop social conflict consciousness. The existing study in the academic circle has also discovered that the identity class has more interpretation power for social conflict consciousness, but the objective class basically has no interpretation power. Will these discoveries be verified in our models?

Table 3 provides us with a detailed report. Like the information in Table 2, variables such as sex, age, Party member, and income do not have significant interpretation function. This also verifies from another aspect that: When other variables are brought under control, the interpretation power of income toward people's sense of social conflict is very limited. It is not true that the higher the income, the weaker its sense of social conflict, there is no linear relation between them. Of course in other words, it is also not the case that the lower income one has, the more likely he or she will develop sense of social conflicts. After the effective reduction of the quantity of absolute impoverished population through intervention by the government, and the social security system provides the absolutely impoverished population with basic material and survival materials,
the rebellion from the lowest class of the society will be dispelled by social development.

However, education level is a very significant variable. Here, compared with the reference group, the higher the education level one has, the more likely one will think the more serious “the conflicts among all social groups today”, “the more unharmonious the current society” and “future social conflicts will intensify”. It is surprising that: Compared with “non formal education” receivers: the Exp(B) of those with technical secondary school, college and undergraduate and above education background thinking “the current social groups have conflicts or serious conflicts” is 3.105 times higher; the Exp(B) of its thinking “the current society is not harmonious or very inharmonious” is 1.445 times higher; the Exp(B) of its thinking “future social conflicts will intensify or will absolutely intensify” is 2.510 times higher. Is it due to the fact that those with higher education degree have natural tendency for social care, or the education itself increases people's sense of social conflicts and the sense of society's disharmony? These are two issues of different nature. We tend to think that, the education popularization brought by the modernization process increases the social reflection consciousness of the education receivers, and also improves the pursuit standard toward other powers outside material life by the education receivers. Therefore, the popularization of education and the improvement in people's education standard on the one hand will provide social hot-bed for the growth of the modern middle class, on the other and it offers necessary knowledge reserve for the sprouting of the class consciousness of the middle class. This is also the item which Lipset has admonished over and over again.

**Table 3 Comparison on the sense of social conflict and contradiction intensification between the middle class and other classes**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of conflict toward all existing social groups</th>
<th>Sense of disharmony toward the current society</th>
<th>Sense of intensification toward future social conflicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts or serious conflicts exist ≠1</td>
<td>Unhamonious</td>
<td>Will or absolutely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male=1)</td>
<td>-.110</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group (comparison group: 65 years and above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years old and below</td>
<td>-.142</td>
<td>.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years old</td>
<td>-.329</td>
<td>.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45 years old</td>
<td>-.111</td>
<td>.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55 years old</td>
<td>-.299</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-64 years old</td>
<td>-.127</td>
<td>.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political status (party member=1)</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>1.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level (comparison Group: no formal education)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>1.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>1.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high/skill/occupational high school</td>
<td>.598***</td>
<td>1.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tech/collage/university and above</td>
<td>1.133***</td>
<td>3.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly income of last month</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID Class (comparison group: lower class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Middle class</td>
<td>-.300*</td>
<td>.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>-.522***</td>
<td>.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>-.420**</td>
<td>.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective class (comparison group: farmer class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer class (8 and above employees)</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>1.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old middle class 1 (1-7 employees)</td>
<td>.973***</td>
<td>2.646</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarly, here, identity class is also a variable with considerable interpretation power. The higher class one identifies oneself with, the less sense of conflict, sense of social disharmony and the sense of the intensification of future social conflicts that one holds. Recognizing this point is very important: Saying the middle class has social stability function must have such a prerequisite, namely the middle class itself must identify themselves as the middle class, and position themselves at society’s middle class or middle to upper class so as to deliver their own social action or class action. Even for those who are outside the rank of the middle class in occupational stratification, income stratification or educational stratification, if people identify themselves as the middle class, then, their action will reflect the orientation of the middle class where they position themselves —— for instance wealthy peasants, it is exactly such a case in point.

Whereas the middle class in the objective class provides us with very pessimistic interpretation: compared with the reference group, "the new middle class" is a variable with significant interpretation, this class has stronger sense of social conflict, and more prominent sense of social disharmony, and their belief in the possibility of intensified conflicts among social groups in the future is the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity class</th>
<th>Satisfaction to local government's work (satisfaction = 1)</th>
<th>Fairness sense to present society (justice = 1)</th>
<th>Trust in local government (trust = 1)</th>
<th>Constant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old middle class 2 (self-employed class)</td>
<td>.515***</td>
<td>1.674</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>1.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New middle class</td>
<td>.452***</td>
<td>1.572</td>
<td>.654***</td>
<td>1.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-tech Working class</td>
<td>.487***</td>
<td>1.627</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>1.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual Working class</td>
<td>.290</td>
<td>1.277</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>1.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory sense to local government's work (satisfaction = 1)</td>
<td>-.779***</td>
<td>.459</td>
<td>-.633***</td>
<td>.531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness sense to present society (justice = 1)</td>
<td>-.490***</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>-.674***</td>
<td>.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in local government (trust = 1)</td>
<td>-.437***</td>
<td>.646</td>
<td>-.776***</td>
<td>.460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>1.107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[-2 \text{ Log likelihood} \quad 3216.575 \quad 2897.045 \quad 3679.536 \]
\[N \quad 2889 \quad 3151 \quad 2697 \]

Note: *** \(p < 0.001\); ** \(p < 0.01\); * \(p < 0.05\).
highest. The discovery here once again verifies the conclusion reached above: in
the class structure typology of relation orientation, the “objective class” will
become significant. This holds important theoretical meaning and realistic
meaning, because, to certain extent, it represents the overlapped construction in
the formation of class consciousness and consistent opinion of the class, this also
signifies that the social mobilization cost for the objective class to transform into
action class is greatly reduced. If we cannot reject this point, we will have to pay
more attention to the social criticism of the new middle class.

For the upper stratum class of the old middle class —— small employer class,
the Exp(B) of they thinking the current society has conflict and serious conflict is
2.646 times higher than that of the farmer class. However, this class loses
interpretation of the dependent variable of “future social conflicts will intensify”.
This indicates that, the upper stratum class of the old middle class resembles the
case reflected in Table 2; it is still a group of people close to the owner class. The
nature of owner class will be more or less displayed on them. For the lower of
the old middle class —— the self employed class, apart from not showing
significance in the “sense of social disharmony”, it shows significant
interpretation power in “the sense of conflict for the current social group” and
“the sense of intensification of conflicts among social groups in the future”. Like
the upper class of the working class, they have a nature relatively close to the
lower class of the new middle class; therefore its sense of social instability will
be stronger.

Under such conditions, the orientation of the political attitude of the new middle
class will surely exert potential impact on the stability of the entire society ——
when the social and economic situations are developing smoothly, its negative
impact might be controlled within certain scope. However, if one certain link
undergoes disconnection or contradiction to some extent, its impact might
become evident, it might express doubts toward the normal operation of the
existing society and try hard to reform it.

After introducing three dependent variables in Table 2 into Table 3 as
independent variables, we find that they have very strong statistical
interpretation. This means that, the more people feel “satisfied about all work of the local government”, the more people think “the existing society is fair”, and the more people “trust all agencies of the local government”, then the less sense of social conflict, the sense of social disharmony and the sense of the intensification of future social conflicts there will be. It is obvious that: People’s political attitude is not abstract, rather it is concrete. So long as the work of governments can satisfy most common people, so long as the system distribution of governments can maintain decent justice, so long as all the agencies of governments can obtain the trust of the common people, then, the sense of social conflict can be restrained within controllable range. The long period of order and stability of the nation can also be guaranteed to a certain extent. Even if some classes feel somewhat dissatisfied with the reality, which results in the occurrence of local clashes, as long as the authority can adjust the order of interest amid the conflict, and integrate negative impacts of different outlook of value, then the society can also maintain safe runs in the overall perspective.

Being aware of the fact, the development in the recent 30 years in China is exactly the rapid development achieved under the guidance of the government. The discussion of the miracle in East Asia, or the summary of Chinese experience, will invariably have to mention the propelling effects of the government. The reason that the government is so powerful is very closely associated with people’s trust in and reliance on the government. To preserve the existing development achievements, apart from the need to make steady progress in political reform, establishing the government’s fine image, implementing the thinking of “people first” and “governance for the people”, holding high the banner of social justice, also hold extraordinary realistic meaning for maintaining the long lasting stability of the society.

V. Conclusion

Firstly, the middle class is not always society’s stabilizer. In our study, whether it’s the old middle class, or the new middle class, they all have relatively great risks of social reform. Their evaluation toward the satisfaction degree of
the work by local government is low, they also show low trust in the local government, they also don't feel much sense of social fairness. Their perception to the future social conflicts is the strongest. According to situation hypothesis prophecy, if members of one class widely think that future social conflicts will intensify, then, when social conflict really takes place, they will consider it as a natural result; its attitude will easily evolve into “participation” or “laissez faire attitude”. Therefore, we have no reason to think that the middle class will become the society's stabilizer. The way of thinking to regard the expansion of the middle class as the inevitable path to stabilizing the society is not reliable.

Secondly, the lower class’s identification toward the middle class will improve the society’s stability. Therefore, the social integration function brought by gains improvement of the lower class is larger than that of the society’s middle class and society's upper class. Indeed, in traditional society, the biggest threat toward social stability often comes from lower class, the rebellion arising from the inability to acquire basic necessities for survival by the impoverished class. However, in modern society, due to powerful interference from the government; authority, the lower class —— rebellion forced by extreme scarcity of living material in class concept, has been eliminated. The development history of major countries after “World War II” indicates that: As long as the country strengthens social security construction, the rebellion coming from the lower class toward the legitimacy and rationality of the ruling governance can be brought under control.

Thirdly, while verifying theoretical hypothesis, this Article also has the following several findings:

1. The improvement of government image, the increase in people’s trust in the governance, and the enhancement in the sense of social fairness are all helpful for improving the stability of the society. This requires the government to continue to reform a series of irrational regulations and systems, establish fair and impartial harmonious society. It is necessary to know that, the more satisfied people feel about the work of the government, the more trust they will repose in all departments of the government, and the more likely they will
be to experience social justice, then the more unlikely they will feel the current social conflicts, and the more strongly they will feel the current society is a society to be valued, and the more likely they will oppose the judgment of “in the future the conflicts among all social classes will intensify”. Therefore, this is a very realistic finding of quantified study with significant policy conclusion.

2. The meaning of political capital is very difficult to detect in terms of the impact on class formation. In the quantified study of this research, when the identity class and the objective class are both brought under control, the political identity represented by “Party member” no longer displays its important value. Therefore, the expansion of the Party member team is not an issue of the larger the better. The larger the team, the higher the integration cost it will need; the more the number of persons, the poorer the ability of group uniform action will be. Given the present situation, quality should take priority over quantity. Party buildup departments should pay more attention on this point.

3. The level of income does not directly affect people’s social attitude. During its research process, this research has discovered that, it is not true that the higher one’s income, the more positive one’s evaluation toward the society will be. It is also not true that the poor class with lower income is more likely to develop dissatisfaction. People’s subjective experience is deeply influenced by complicated impact of many social factors. Therefore, income can only be associated with social attitude through the influence of certain inter-medium variables. It should be noticed that, in normal society, it is people’s interpretation toward the reality, rather than the reality itself, that triggers collective action.

4. The class typology division of class relation orientation holds more significant meaning when interpreting the consistency possibility of class action, and in interpreting the formation possibility of class consciousness. Different academic needs and different ideal types will produce different interpretation functions. This is the improvement after absorbing past study experience. The study conclusion here is: The middle class as objective class is not only a class with obvious political interpretation, but also a class which might exert critical influence on China’s stability in the future.
5. The government departments need to guide the employment of university graduates, so as to enable them to transform into white collar class in a relatively smooth manner, and avoid slipping into “semi manual worker semi-skilled” class or manual working class. The contradiction between the employment pressure created by enrollment expansion of universities on the one hand, and the failure of university graduates to smoothly transform into white collar employees on the other, is affecting the education benefits of the “primary occupation”. If their work reward is lower than or similar to the salary of those whose human capital is inferior, then their widespread dissatisfaction will gradually accumulate, and they will find channels to vent their frustrations. The average educational background of those semi-technical manual laborers is relatively higher, but the white collar nature of their work is not evident —— obviously they have entered the labor market they are not willing to enter, this is the most prominent reason for this class to experience “social dissatisfaction”.

REFERENCES:


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**Figure 1 Class Structure of Present China (2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership Class</th>
<th>Employment Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner Class (8 or above employees)</td>
<td>Professional Manager Class 0.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical Manager Class 0.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Manager Class 0.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Middle Class: Small Employer Class (1-7 employees)</td>
<td>Professional Supervisor Class 0.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical Supervisor Class 1.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Supervisor Class 1.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Middle Class</td>
<td>Professional Semi-Manual 0.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Semi-Manual 1.16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- manage underlings
- supervise underlings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ownership Class</th>
<th>Employment Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed Class (no employee)</td>
<td>Owner Class (8 or above employees) 0.52%</td>
<td>Professional Manager Class 0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technical Manager Class 1.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Manager Class 0.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Supervisor Class 0.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technical Supervisor Class 1.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Supervisor Class 1.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Class 2.31</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-Technical Working Class 7.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Working Class 21.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Class 51.61%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Class Structure of Present China (2006)
Figure 3 Class Structure of Present China (2011)

Ownership Class

Employee

many

some

no

new middle class

12.68

manual supervisor class

2.31%

semi-technical working class

9.64%

manual working class

24.26%

Old Middle Class:

Small Employer Class

(1-7 employees)

2.72%

Owner Class

(8 or above employees)

0.84%

Old Middle Class:

Self-employed Class

(no employee)

11.03%

farmer Class

36.52%

highly skilled

moderately skilled

lowly skilled

New middle class

12.68

no underlings

supervise underlings

manage underlings

no underlings
Figure 4 Class Structure of Present China (2013)

Ownership Class

Employee

many

some

no

Owner Class

4.62%

New middle class

15.75%

Manual Supervisor Class

2.87%

Old Middle Class:
Self-employed Class
(no employee)

13.85%

Semi-
Technical Working Class

12.73%

Manual Working Class

22.72%

farmer Class

30.32%

highly skilled

moderately skilled

lowly skilled

Underlings

manage

supervise

no

underlings

Employee Class

Employment Class