
Middle Class In China

During the last three decades, the emergence of the middle class in China has been rising steadily as the Chinese society has undergone a rapid modernization (Chen & Lu, 2011). While China is an authoritarian undemocratic state, the middle class is part of the political establishment for the central government to ensure legitimacy, socio-political stability and sustain the economic development (Shin, 2014). However, according to the modernization theory, there is a direct proportion between economic development and political democratization (Huntington, 1991). When a traditional society is developing into a modern society, inevitable and adequate conditions for democratic politics are formed. However, in China, the middle class seems implausible to lead the party-state into democracies (Shin, 2014). Instead of craving and promoting democracy, they are more willing to seek advancement from the current system while facing modernization and difficult circumstances. This situation has been a controversial cause of the correlation between economic modernization and political democratization (Shin, 2014). The main reason why the middle class in China keeps supporting the regime rather than having an opposition is they value material interests most in life (Tang, 2011). Meanwhile, their socio-economic conditions and socio-political freedoms maintain and conduce to their economic status, which are the two factors of the middle class seize for enhancement within the current system instead of reforming the party-state (Miao, 2016).

To begin with, China was an agricultural country before the Chinese economic reform, which was a relatively poor nation (Li, 2010). Neither the authority nor the Chinese people, they both had the willingness of gaining economic growth and having modernization. As a tool for the central government to control the state, the middle class obtains benefits from the state-led economic development (Chen, 2013) that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the largest single employer and it provides a high subsidy for the privatization of public housing (Li, 2010). Therefore, when the middle class emerged under the governance of CCP, they desired to maintain and protect their economic interests as they focused on material well-being the most. To investigate deeply, the socio-politico-economic circumstances and rights affect the attitudes and behavior of China's middle class toward democracy and requiring improvement or even reformation.

For the socio-economic conditions of enlarging the China's middle-income group which indicated how they grew into the middle class. As said before, for the sake of evolving the idea of a "harmonious society", the CCP implemented different policies in order to build and reinforce the middle class which is a state-sponsored and state-led economy. Whether the people became the middle class from the political, economic or cultural and educational aspects, CCP can intervene in their economic activities (Miao, 2016). The central government dominated most of the resources and investment flow and the majority of the middle class are hired by the regime, for instance, public workers received an increase in wages so as to extend their spending power. Starting from the Open Door Policy, the success of private entrepreneurs, government officials and scholars is relied on the party-state, such as the opened market and arranged subsidy. As a result, the Chinese middle class formed and expanded with the political-economic circumstances, which arranged by the current regime. According to the studies by Zhou (2002) and Zhu (2007), while the middle class in China obtained such benefits, they will inquire the adjustment from the authoritarian government if they face difficulties or request

changes. For example, China government would save its market with strong autocratic policy measures like the People's Bank of China had a dramatic interest rate cut in 2015 for the sake of saving China's stock market (State Street Global Advisors, 2015). These demonstrated that they believed in their political leaders who will sustain their economic activities and demanded for the assistance from the party-state.

Additionally, not only the formation and extension of the Chinese middle class are correlated to the CCP, the maintenance and sustainability of their middle-ness are connected to the CCP tightly (Chen & Lu, 2011). As mentioned previously, the central government can interfere the economic development of the middle class that they endure political harassment and bureaucratic corruption (Tang et al., 2011). Consequently, they fear the sociopolitical instability which impacts their economic well-being negatively. While the CCP can support the economic activities of the middle-income group, it can place burden on them too, such as raise the rate on housing tax in 2015 (The Epoch Times, 2018). Moreover, as China is an undemocratic authoritarian state, it will suppress and punish the human rights activist and the dissident. Take the 709 crackdown on the Chinese Rights-Defense Lawyers as an example, the lawyers are in the middle-class status and they promoted democracy and demonstrated their opposition to the CCP. There was a total of 286 lawyers undergoing political persecution by the CCP in 2015 (China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group, 2015). Meantime, if the Chinese middle-income group striving for democracy and freedoms which may not lead to real democratization in China due to the majority of the rural populations are not ready and well-prepared for participating in elections and taking the social responsibilities under a democratic state (Unger, 2016). They afraid the result of democratization in China will be a takeover of the peasants that they cannot keep having a relatively higher socioeconomic status among the society. Thus, the Chinese middle-class does not dare to pursue a change in regime for desiring democracy in order to maintain their own interests and even their life. And they preferred to retain the sociopolitical stability as long as there is no invasion to their economic interests.

Furthermore, there is a tight relationship between the middle-class entrepreneurs and the government officials that conducted collusion (Tang et al., 2011). The local government officials assisted the companies with relaxing censorship for gaining more economic interests while the businessman increased the local gross domestic profit in order to meet the target set by the central government. For instance, the corruption between the para-xylene manufacturers and the local government which are the well-know collusion cases in China. Therefore, the middle-income group in China will not seek for a democratic regime as it may be harmful to their material interests, while there is relatively less bureaucratic corruption under a democratic state (Tang et al., 2011).

Besides, although most of the middle-income people in China have a comparatively higher education level, they knew and may have a deep understanding of democracy, freedoms and human rights, many of them do not crave for democracy. Instead of the reasons discussed before, the censorship on education and social media by the CCP is the factor of the middle class supporting the party-state. The teaching content of the nine-year compulsory education is decided and censored by the government (The Bannedbook, 2019). Starting from primary school, there are the Young Pioneers of China which is a youth organization for the CCP to control the children ideologically (The Bannedbook, 2019). For example, there are moto and response for the leaders and members to praise communism. During secondary school, ethical and political education is provided for the sake of teaching the advantages of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the CCP to the students (The Epoch Times, 2019). All the

academic staff in schools are under the censorship by the government, if there are any academic activities that damage the authority and violate the direction of CCP, the teachers will be fired (The Epoch Times, 2019). In addition, the social media in China is full of fake news and there is only good news about the CCP that can be posted due to the political filter by the government. In consequence, even if most people of the educated middle class are more likely to be influenced by the western universal value, they only know the positive side of the CCP and along with the long-term brainwashing, their political leader, government (CCP) and the communist are the best in their mind. Therefore, the Chinese middle class only requires steady political regulation by the current regime while encountering difficulties as the idea of 'Love Our Party' is engraved in their brain from birth till death, especially the middle class because they are the economic beneficiary under the governance of the authoritarian party.

In conclusion, the social, economic and political conditions and freedoms under the undemocratic party-state influenced the attitudes and behavior of the middle class. The relationship between the central government and the middle class is very tense that the party arranged lots of assistance for them to gain economic growth and the middle class afraid of the sociopolitical instability that may injure their material well-being. The political harassment conducted by the regime and predict of the democratization result made the middle-income group do not want democracy and only seek adjustment from the current regime. The socialization determined by the central government which is controlling the mind of the middle class not to oppose the CCP. These all kind of strategies used by the central government, contributed to emerge and enlarge the Chinese middle class without promotion of democracy.