

Chinese Middle Classes: Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and China.

Edited by Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. Pp. 268. ISBN 10: 1138120847; ISBN 13: 978-1138120846.

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This edited volume focuses on the rise and features of the middle class in four ethnic Chinese societies. It aims to investigate whether the middle classes in these societies share common Chinese features and attributes or whether they share common characteristics with other non-Chinese middle classes in the Asia-Pacific area.

The thirteen articles in the volume are divided into four sections entitled “Changing Profiles,” “Emerging Ethos and Lifestyles,” “Mobility,” and “New Politics.” In addition there is an introduction by the editor Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, the Director of the Institute of Sociology at the Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

The section on “Changing Profiles” maps in considerable detail the new middle classes in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and China. Most chapters are based on a revised version of the five-category scheme developed by Michael Hsiao and Alvin So for the East Asian Middle Classes projects. According to the revised classification scheme, presented in the opening chapter by Ming-Chang Tsai et al., there are nine classes: (1) the capitalists, (2) the small employer, (3) the self-employed, (4) the manager, (5) the professional, (6) the routine non-manual employee, (7) the working class, (8) farmers, and (9) military personnel. Ming-Chang Tsai et al. define managers and professionals as belonging to “the new middle class,” small employers and self-employed as belonging to “the old middle class,” and routine manual employees as belonging to the “marginal middle class.” As a consequence of this occupational class categorization almost half of the working population surprisingly belongs to the middle class. If the marginal middle class is added almost 70 percent of the working population belong to the middle class in Taiwan. According to chapter 3 by Tai-Lok Lui, who operates with a seven-category classification scheme, the middle class in Hong Kong, including what is called the intermediate class, also accounts for about 70 percent of the working force. In Macao, according to chapter 4 by Po-San Wan and Kenneth Law, the middle class is considerably lower at 61 percent of the working force. Finally Chunling Li’s chapter 5 estimates a Chinese middle class at only 30 percent. Except for China, these are high percentages. It would be useful to know whether such estimations are widely shared among scholars in the field. In the case of China, David Goodman, for example, also reports a middle-class share of approximately 30 percent of the working population. However, according to Lu Xueyi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences the middle class in China only constitutes 22–23 percent of the population.

The section on “Emerging Ethos and Lifestyles” with chapters by Tai-Lok Lui, Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao and Po-San Wan, and Shuo Liu addresses the subjective class profile or the collective mindset of the middle class in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. They portray a middle class with consumption ability and a comparatively high purchasing power. In the case of China, ownership of housing is a particularly important feature of the rise of the middle class.

Why is it important whether the middle class is rising or waning in these Chinese societies? For many political scientists and sociologists it is important because of the mobility and political potential of the middle class. In terms of mobility, a waning middle class would indicate reduced possibilities for social mobility. This is the argument often used to explain the weakening of social mobility in the USA. Three related chapters with contributions by Yen-Fen Tseng, Victor Zheng et al., and Posan Wan and Kenneth Law discuss the movement of the Chinese middle class to mainland

China, in particular Shanghai, the movement of Chinese professionals to Hong Kong, and social mobility in the case of Macao's middle class. They indicate that there is considerable mobility in all three cases, although the influx of Chinese professionals to Hong Kong has been met with some opposition from the local population.

In terms of politics, the middle class is often supposed to harbor democratic aspirations. This is the reason why observers often look for signs of middle-class growth in authoritarian countries in order to project likely political changes. However, in the case of China, the middle class does not seem focused on democratic change. Thus Shigeto Sonoda in his chapter questions whether the Chinese middle class constitutes a strong force for democratization. According to his research, the Chinese middle class shows a strong quest to retain the status quo, rather than change. Moreover, the chapter by Min-Sho Ho shows that even in the case of the Taiwan middle class, movements may act in ways that seek to protect and further their own interests rather than those of more disadvantaged classes or groups. He actually finds a political ambiguity in middle-class politics in relation to social movements.

Most chapters in the book are based on solid survey work. The result is detailed mapping of the size and composition of the middle classes in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and China. The volume draws extra strength from the fact that it also provides useful analysis of the sentiments of the middle class in these societies. In Hong Kong there seems to be a split in the middle class depending on whether or not career prospects are tied in with China interest factors. In Taiwan the middle class is worried about their future and anxious about jobs and financial security. In Hong Kong the growth of the middle class has slowed down, if not come to a halt, whereas it is growing in China. If China reaches the same percentage of the middle class in total population as in the other Chinese societies under study in this book, the middle class in China will reach around 700 million in the not too distant future. This is a number which will have significant repercussions for economic development and trade not only in China, but globally.

This volume represents sound scholarly work. It is a major contribution to the study of middle classes in Chinese societies and a must for everyone interested in the topic. It also opens new avenues for research in determining whether Chinese middle classes in ethnic Chinese societies feature unique characteristics or whether they also share important common characteristics with middle classes in other societies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Chinese and Americans: A Shared History.

By Xu Guoqi; foreword by Akira Iriye. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. 332. ISBN 10: 0674052536; ISBN 13: 978-0674052536.

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In this meticulously researched and fluently written book, historian Xu Guoqi presents what he describes as a “new paradigm” for the study of Sino-American relations: that of a complex and intertwined “shared history”. Examining relations between Chinese and Americans mainly in the spheres of education and culture, rather than those of high politics, the author elucidates “shared national experiences in the nineteenth century” and “the value and role of culture in linking both nations and their people in the twentieth century” (p. 17). While publications on Sino-American relations