

## **Formation and development of the middle class in China**

Veselova Liudmila, Saint-Petersburg State University (Russia), milaveselova@gmail.com

In the process of modernization, which is taking place around the world, there is a change in the social structure of societies, especially with regard to an increase in the number of representatives of the middle class. China, which is a developing economy, currently needs to solve one of the most important problems, namely, to form a middle class that will play the role of a “stabilizer” of social processes and will also be able to provide the country with professional workers.

The modern Chinese middle class began to emerge at the end of the 19th century, and the flourishing of the middle class came at the end of the 20th century. The growth of the middle class before the formation of the PRC was complicated by a number of social, political and economic problems. After the formation of the PRC, many members of the Chinese middle and upper class were subjected to repression and persecution in the course of political movements and economic reforms. It wasn't until 1978, due to Deng Xiaoping's reforms, that China's social structure began to change.

In Western countries, the middle class has gone through a long process of development, and many families, members of the middle class, have a long family history. In China, the middle class was virtually destroyed after 1949, so the middle class that is now emerging in China is the "first generation." In the West, more than a hundred years have elapsed between the emergence of the old and the new middle class. The old middle class was the result of industrialization, and the new middle class emerged from the transition from industrial to post-industrial society. In China, both types appeared almost simultaneously after the start of reforms in 1978. The old middle class in China did not emerge as a result of industrialization, but as a result of market transformation that took place during the period of reform and opening up. The reforms carried out in the country have formed a new economic system, which in turn has led to the emergence of a new middle class.

Interest in social stratification arose in China along with the revival of sociology as a science, which appeared in China in the 1920s, but was not widely developed. The problem was that sociology raised such acute issues as social stratification, and at the time of the formation of the PRC there were three social strata in the country, namely workers, peasants and a small intermediate layer of intellectuals, which, according to Marxism, should have gradually decreased. After the formation of the PRC in 1949, sociology was called a bourgeois "pseudoscience" and was banned in China for the next 30 years. Almost all the founders of sociology in China were trained in the West, for example, the famous Chinese sociologists Pan Guangdan, Fei Xiaotong, Lei Jieqiong, etc. In general, the approaches to studying the middle class in China are quite homogeneous, but the subject itself is uncertain.

The Chinese middle class is made up of groups of people who differ in their origins, education, political views, etc. At the same time the political, economic and social role of Chinese middle class grow from year to year and it is of great importance to understand its formation process, main problems, political and consumer habits and perspectives of the development.