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Middle Class: Definition, Role and Development

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Middle Class is solely capable to bind higher and lower classes into society as the organization of citizens. Our research, therefore, can be regarded as a sustainability study of society.

b) Research Objectives

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Middle Class: Definition, Role and Development

Anna Tarkhnishvili [α] & Levan Tarkhnishvili [σ]

Abstract-

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The first appearance of the term is typically associated with the origin of capitalist formation. The question is: what is the correspondence between the origin of a socio-economic phenomenon and its denomination? What is the role of Middle Class in the establishment / development of non-capitalist societies?

c) Research Methods

The methods include both empirical (collection and analysis of socioeconomic / historical data) and theoretical (socio-philosophical understanding of basic trends and forecasts).

d) Key Findings

In the post-Darwin science, any member of any society is neither a citizen nor a social actor but merely, a primate participant of struggle for survival. Middle Class, more then the other two classes, has to oppose this severe motivation (will to power or thirst for money) set to prevail over the civics.

e) Implications of Findings to Theory and Practice

The dogmas of "protestant capitalist ethics" agree with those of the struggle for survival. Perhaps, some amendments are desirable, in order to avoid "permanently intermittent" economic depressions?

I. Introduction

Almost everybody seems to know, what is called "the middle class", and even to belong to it. However, the most obvious things about this, one of the most important concepts in social sciences, often turn out to be not so certain, while the middle class appears to be a misleading concept. So, actually, our initial question turns to grow out into the following, more accurate, question: What do we know about the Middle Class?

Then, what should we do about this knowledge: perhaps, it imposes certain obligations, or galvanizes us into actions? (what kind of actions and/or obligations are these?) Roughly speaking, if we ARE the Middle Class, what are our duties towards the other classes and the entire state / society? If we are NOT, how should we identify the other being the Middle Class, and what is the way to establish good relations with them (in the case, we deem it desirable or necessary)?

II. Currency of the Issue

The very first step should be to show why and how has the problem of middle class gained currency in our days (actually, over the last quarter of the 20th century). The second step should be to try to fully understand what a Social Class is in general. Then we shall concentrate on the history and the present status of the middle class in the context of the society and its development.

In accordance with the results of the social researches conducted in many different regions/countries worldwide (Eastern Europe, FSU/NIS, USA, Latin America, Far East), the groups of people who are the middle class, in accordance with the economic criteria (i.e. the income level adequate for decent education, apartment, retirement, etc.) and the groups of people who regard themselves as the middle class people, differ: *these are the different groups of the population.* Economists estimating income levels, sociologists analyzing labor market and the focus-group survey data – all they provide quite different numbers and distinguished paradigms/parameters.

For instance, a middle-class standard of living in the United States has come to mean having "a secure job, a safe and stable home, access to health care, retirement security, time off for vacation, illness and the birth or adoption of a child, opportunities to save for the future and the ability to provide a good education, including a college education, for one's children" (i). At the same time, this standard of living belongs no more to the middle class of the American population: such is the conclusion of National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, one of the largest independent social research organizations in the United States (ii). More and more families of the country think they still are the middle class but in fact, they are a "paycheque-to-paycheque group of people" that has to save on almost everything, from toll calls to shopping. And that's the economists' conclusion. Both sociologists and economists agree that *there is no more* American middle class in the usual sense.

When and how do working class representatives become the middle class members? How it comes that the latter transform into upper class figures (if any)? Are there any criteria except for average

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annual income? Do the national/racial, cultural, religious and other differences play any role? Are there any borders and margins (maybe, some "marginal groups") between the classes? – all these questions require responses.

Additionally, the common measures of what constitutes the middle class vary significantly from country to country. For instance, the American middle class criteria were inapplicable to citizens of the Soviet Union, and are inapplicable to the societies of most Eastern European and FSU countries, even to those of Western Europe. However, the vast majority of the Soviet Union households did have certain grounds to identify themselves as middle class: they did have stable job, decent vehicle and recreation, not much affected housing and property, (plus, last but not least, free medicine and education in the Soviet Union)…

When poor countries start to get the maximum benefit from cheap labor through international trade and, but before they price themselves out of world markets for cheap goods, then "the poor start entering the middle class by the millions.

In February 2009, The Economist announced that over half the world's population now belongs to the middle class, as a result of rapid growth in emerging countries. It characterized the middle class as "having a reasonable amount of discretionary income, so that they […] have roughly a third of their income left for discretionary spending after paying for basic food and shelter" (iii). This allows people to buy consumer goods, improve their health care, and provide for their children's education. By this parameter, the number of middle-class people in Asia exceeded that in the West sometime around 2007 or 2008.

The Economist's article pointed out that in many emerging countries "when the peak of the population curve crosses the threshold into the middle class, the number of people in the middle class grows enormously" (ibid.)

Three years ago, a working paper by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) estimated that "1.8 billion people were now members of the global middle class" (iv). While, in accordance with The Economist's prediction, "the surge across the poverty line should continue for a couple of decades and the global middle class will grow enormously between now and 2030" (iii).

III. Preliminary Definitions

These are the normative socio-economic and "historical" definitions of Middle Class: (1) "A class of people intermediate between the classes of higher and lower social rank or standing; the social, economic, cultural class, having approximately average status, income, education, tastes, etc." and (2) "A class traditionally intermediate between the aristocratic class and the laboring class".

First Comment. The middle class is the aggregate of social groups holding an intermediate position between the ruled and the rulers, as they used to say in the past (reference is to the Definition (2). Now, there seem to be neither the ruled nor the rulers, because the market economy and democracy obviously "equalized" the society in both developed and developing countries.

Second Comment. The above definitions both sound (and really are) too broad, almost indefinite. It is well shown in an ironic, and yet, quite legitimate comment made by Dante Chinni: "Everyone wants to believe they are middle class… But this eagerness…has led the definition to be stretched like a bungee cord — used to defend/attack/describe everything… The Drum Major Institute … places the range for middle class at individuals making between $25,000 and $100,000 a year" (vi).

The plain and common definition in general use is, as follows: "the middle class is a class of people in the middle of a societal hierarchy" (vii). Actually speaking, this definition only shows the range of application, that is, the societal hierarchy (hierarchy being "the establishment of a dominance-subordination relationship among" individuals (viii)). However, the above definition says nothing about the class itself, giving no reference to its essence, its descriptor/s and patameters.

Weberian socio-economic theory gives the answer to the question "in the middle (and in terms) of what the middle class is?": "the middle class is the broad group of people in contemporary society who fall socio-economically between the working class and upper class" (ix). Again, as a matter of fact, this definition helps to obtain more accurate information about the range of application (the aforementioned "middle of a societal hierarchy"). However, several questions still remain. The major question is: Why do the economic calculations and estimations clash with the sociological/anthropological descriptions and evaluations, as regards for borders between the working class, the middle class and the upper class?

The classical definition of the middle class can also be found in the Weberian socio-economic terms (obtained with the use of functional – or stratification – approach). Here, the middle class is defined as that consisting of professionals or business owners who share a culture of domesticity, sub-urbanity and a level of relative security (in the form of socially desired skill or wealth) against social crisis (cf. with The Ultimate Middle class – American History Information). Mostly, other sociological definitions of middle class follow Max Weber. Some modern theories of political economy consider a large middle class to have a beneficial, stabilizing influence on society: it bears neither possibly explosive (revolutionary) tendencies of the lower class, nor absolutist (or oligarchic) tendencies of the upper

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class. Thus, the middle class is considered as composed of (quasi-)elite of professionals and managers who are largely immune to economic downturns and trends such as out-sourcing which affect the statistical middle class (x).

A contrary approach/opinion is taken from FactCheck.org: it sounds negative, even discouraging: *"Q: Is there a standard, accepted definition of what constitutes the "middle class"? - - A: No, there isn't. "middle class" means different things to different people – and politicians". (xi)*

In short, we have faced here an enigma or paradox. The counter-argument to this ironic (and apparently logical) statement could be that the middle class is a promiscuous mass. Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist, describes the Middle Society as a heterogeneous environment, the mixture of highly unstable (fluent) "old middle class" and somewhat more stable but less numerous, called "modern middle class" (xii).

Taking into account the previous views, we come to the more detailed and in-depth definition of middle class. The middle class is a social group of the people with the income more or less stable and sufficient for the satisfaction of a wide range of material and social requirements. The hallmark of this class is its high educational attainment. "The functions of middle class include the introduction of new products and innovations, reproduction of expert labor, and perhaps, support to long-term peace and stability in society" (xiii). What is more, the middle class is assured with certain economic independence and the liberty in the selection of the field of economic and market activity. These independence and liberty are said to be impossible without either sufficient income or social "intermediacy".

So, the characteristic feature of the middle class seems to "hold the keys of the social progress" (xiv), actually, holding together the most qualified and motivated experts with the highest potential of civil activity and the deepest civil/social cognizance. This class is endowed with the excellent social prestige while it is performing the functions of technological and economic progress in a society.

IV. History of the Concept

The first text where the term of "middle class" appears is "The Suppliants" by Euripides. His compatriot and "father of European philosophy", Aristotle read his own thoughts into the words of the ancient Greek playwright: "The most perfect political community is one in which the middle class is in control, and outnumbers both of the other classes" (xv).

In the Middle Ages, the (concept of) middle class was consigned to oblivion. The revival of the term – and, in all likelihood, of the class itself – began after the renaissance, in the age of great geographical discoveries (and conquests). The class was getting firmly established during – and due to – the industrial revolution, and it had become strong enough after the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th century. In terms of the Western political economy, the term "middle class" is first attested in James Bradshaw's 1745 pamphlet Scheme to prevent running Irish Wools to France (xvi).

In this treatise, the middle class was defined as the class sufficiently rich to purchase more expensive stuff only to encourage the com-patriot manufacturers or to invest in the interests of the state of which the middle class people feels patriot. It is a really precious point: the middle class can defend the economic development and political interests of its country.

To this effect, the definition provided by T.H.C. Stevenson is particularly interesting; this definition contains a different meaning: "The chief defining characteristic of membership in the middle class is possession of significant human capital" (xv). Members of the middle class do possess a significant capital means. Although, it is uncertain whether they spend these capital means for the sake of local manufacturers and the state, or for some other purposes, locally or globally.

Researchers usually cite the following components of middle class: a steady job and the ability to save for retirement, afford a home, and educate children. This is far from mere numbers, even high ones. Concept of middle class became widely disseminated (almost predominant) in the 1920-ies. It was also a hike in middle class identity.

Actually, all the definitions given to middle class by various scientists, institutions and even fields of knowledge (political economy, economics, anthropology, etc.) are quite different, sometimes almost contradictory, and even now, there is a persistent source of confusion around this term. This confusion "derives predominantly from there being no set criteria for such a definition" (xix). Just the opposite, there are too much criteria, in terms of different perspectives and disciplines.

Another option could be to give the definition of middle class "not in words but in numbers": for instance, "the statistical middle class includes all those households with income ranging from $25,000 to $100,000" (xx). There is just one shag to it: on the one hand, "some of the households, while actually being in the middle and thus sometimes referred to as being middle class, cannot, however, afford the middle class lifestyle" (xxi), and, on the other hand, a number of households with much lower average incomes believe they are a middle class people, according with focus-group surveys". The best answer/remark to such a "numeric definition" is given by Dante Chinni, (see above).

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V. Why a Class?

First of all, what does a social class mean? Sociologists identify it as "any group of citizens who share the equitable socioeconomic conditions". However, the only thing that we certainly know so far is that there, evidently, should be more than one individual who sort him/herself as middle class. So, we definitely talk about of a group. But there might be social groups of several different types: social aggregates, social unit, social network. After, we endeavor to show what is specific about Social Class and why the middle class is a social class.

Social Aggregate is a concept that has two meanings. First, it means the totality of social units (individuals, households, clans, etc.) that is the result of their spatial approaching. During this approaching, these social units do not alter due to the establishment of an aggregate, unlike certain convergence (community of ideas, interests or opinions) that emerges in other social groups where the above social units are interconnected. Apparently, this is not the case of the middle class, the members of which are closely bound. Second, Social Aggregate is the aggregation of the individuals who share certain behavior or characteristics (for instance, demographics) but are not socially organized, i.e. social category or nominal group are not common for them). So, basically, the Social Aggregate is the result of the random scatter of various individuals, households, etc., and is only based on accidental indicators. We have found that middle class, based on scientifically valid psychological and anthropological phenomena, is the result of the tendencies far from being accidental.

Social Unit is an organization regarded as a part of a larger social group. In different contexts, Social Unit may include administrative body, military force, political entry, working party, etc. As we see, different members (or member groups) of the middle class may and do participate in various social units but definitely, there should be no "overlap" between "social class" and "social unit".

Social Network is a social structure made up of a set of actors (individuals or organizations) and the dyadic ties between them. The social network perspective provides a clear way of analyzing the structure of whole social entities. The study of these structures uses social network analysis to identify local and global patterns, locate influential entities, network dynamics. Thus, the middle class is a very open and mobile structure with dominant communication, also considered as a Social Network describing a social structure determined by the ties through which any given social unit connections represent the convergence of the various social contacts of that unit. What is essential is that social phenomena should be primarily conceived and investigated through the properties of relations between and within units, instead of the properties of these units themselves – this is the Axiom of the Social Network Approach to understanding social interaction. Thus, one common criticism of social network theory is that individual agency is often ignored.

Social Class. In common parlance, the term "social class" or, more strictly, "socio-economic class" is usually defined as "people having the same social, economic, or educational status", e.g., "the working class"; "an emerging professional class", etc. But etymologically, the term "class" is derived from the Latin classis, which was used by census takers to categorize citizens in terms of their wealth, in order to determine military service obligations. Such meaning had remained for the entire epoch of feudalism. Roughly speaking, during incessant medieval wars it was important to demarcate the extent to which is a peasant armored, and to know, whether is he in position to hold a brigade, does he avail a horse or is he merely an unmounted warrior. Neither level of comfort nor annual income was much important at that time.

Science rivals such as Weber and Marx both defined social classes as the groups with same or similar economic basis. The difference was however that Karl Marx positioned social classes in the realm of industrial relations: Bourgeoisie or the owners of the means of production exploit Proletariat i.e. those who produce goods and services, while Max Weber positioned social classes in terms of labor market, and, on the basis of type of property and services used for income, he acknowledged two different socio-economic classes: owners (Besitzklassen or réntier) and acquirers (Erwerbsklassen). The first was defined as "a class of persons living on income from property / investments and/or having a fixed income, as from lands or bonds". That was the Pluralist Concept of Classes: there are so many classes as many there are forms of property.

In short, as regards for the middle class, Karl Marx was an acknowledger of two antagonist classes: Proletariat and Bourgeoisie. Max Weber believed that the development of administrative personnel in a jural state would make the middle class more and more vital/essential (as an educated class).

However, Marxian bipolar paradigm as well as Weberian multi-polar model both could hardly find a place for the middle class.

It is comparatively easy to demarcate a group of income: it is just a segment of percents. It is, however, much more difficult to define a social class. We found the useful approach and paradigm in magnificent "Human Action" by Ludwig von Mises. German sociologist uses the concept of "Ideal Type" that has nothing in common with either statistical average or midrange value. Many of the Ideal Type's "aspects may neither be reduced nor subject to any numerical determination […] The main reason is that a statistical

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average define the behavior of a class or type, which has been already determined by the description referring to some other features the reference to which is not given therein. The class or type belonging should be known by the moment when the statistics can start its research of some individual features and/or …or the midrange value" (xxiv). Ludwig von Mises comes up with the following conclusion: "It is logically impossible to belong to a social class / group on the basis of statistical average or midrange value".

So, we can research certain features of certain groups, classes and categories ("How many doctors are there in Senate"; "How many staff members aged from 30 to 45 y.o. are there in the head office of Norfolk Schools Credit Union", etc.). However, no statistical calculations can let us define the group belonging any single group member. There should be some criteria and characteristics to let us know "who is whose".

As we shall see, this is particularly right as far as the middle class belonging is concerned. It is not difficult to tell so called lower class from upper class: just engagement and income level will be enough. But it can be difficult enough in the particular instance of the middle class! Apparently, there can or should be some psychological, social, even national grounds for this "middle class Weltanschauung".

VI. Sub-Divisions of Middle Class

The middle class is the most mobile, so to say, "vertically mobile" class.

Upper middle class, made up of professionals distinguished by exceptionally high educational attainment as well as high economic security. It consists mostly of "white collar" professionals whose work is largely self-directed. Most of them are highly educated. These professionals typically conceptualize, create, consult, and supervise. Upper middle class employees enjoy greater autonomy and are more satisfied with their careers than non-professional middle class individuals. A household incomes commonly exceed $100,000.

Says Dennis Gilbert: "The upper middle class has grown... and its composition has changed. Increasingly salaried managers and professionals have replaced individual business owners and independent professionals" (xxvi). The lifestyles and opinions of the upper-middle-class become increasingly normative for the entire society. According to sociologists such as Dennis Gilbert, James Henslin, Joseph Hickey, and William Thompson, the upper middle class constitutes 15% of the population (xxv).

Middle-middle class. This term is applied to those at the actual center of the income strata, while this class may be composed of the households whose annual incomes is from 80% to 120% of the national median household income.

Lower middle class consists of semi-professionals. These are people in technical and lower-level management positions who work for those in the upper middle class. They have lower educational attainment, considerably less workplace autonomy and lower incomes. A group of authors are fair using the following description for the lower middle class: "They enjoy a reasonably comfortable standard of living, although it is constantly threatened by taxes and inflation." (xxvii).

VII. Middle Class: Search Criteria

Economic Level. The First Method. Traditionally, those households who spend no more then 30% of their monthly income on house rent/purchase may be categorized as middle class. So, many authors propose operational definitions of this Level: "75% and 125% of the national median should be used as the extremes. <…> 75/125 Method means almost 25% of the U.S. population is the middle class people" (xxviii).

The Second Method is based on the "indices rating households on an income-to-needs basis (xxix)". A score of one signifies household income that borders on the poverty level. Using this ratio, approximately 50 % of American households "appeared" the American middle class in 1989 (which is, obviously, not the same thing as "Asian middle class" or "European middle class").

So, from the economic standpoint, middle class is the main tax-payer, the key interior investor. The economic behavior of the middle class people is aimed at the evaluation of the professional expertise/competence of market players.

Journalist Chris Baker examined the ambiguous meaning of the term "middle class". He interviewed a man who earned about $100,000 a year and a woman who made $35,000, both of whom said they were middle class. Jared Bernstein, an economist at the liberal Economic Policy Institute, came up with no generally accepted, but a broad definition: "There are working families who can <…> have some investments, but they depend on each paycheck for their well-being" (xxxi).

Professional criterion. Notably, in most modern Western societies up to 60% of the economically active population are engaged in the sphere of services (mostly, medical and educative services; "economically-active population" is the term applied to the population aged between 16 and 60 and engaged in economic activities). The professional profile of the upper middle class includes professors, lawyers, doctors and top managers, while the representatives of lower and middle-middle class work in retail sales, inn-keeping, public service establishment, chain of restaurants / fast-food, repair shops, ateliers, etc.

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Certain middle class sectors (varying from country to country) are engaged in the sphere of industry (as additional to that of services). Typical job openings for the middle class members are small- and middle-scale enterprises display several key branches of the up-to-date industry, including partner enterprises that produce separate parts and assemblies for various tools, machines, lathes, etc.

Educational Level. Middle class representatives are remarkable for permanent emphasis on education: they always have advanced post-secondary education. In American Demographics, Elia Kacapyr argues that education continues to be the most important weapon for providing upward mobility (xxxii). Generally speaking, high educative level is considered as an upper middle class criterion, despite the fact that many entrepreneurs and business owners lack higher education.

Social Level ("Class Consciousness" Level). Most polls suggest that 90 % or more of Americans consider themselves to be "working class", "middle class" or even "upper-middle class". The results of these polls can be found at Survey by USA Today and Gallup Organization (May 2006). (xxxiii).

Political Level. What do politicians mean when they mention "middle class"? Each politician may be talking about a different group of people (depending on his/her target audience which varies from country to country). For example, Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards calls for "tax breaks to honor and strengthen three pillars of America's middle class: savings, work, and families". (xxx). Republican candidate Mitt Romney, meanwhile, has proposed eliminating "taxes on dividends, capital gains, and interest on middle class families."

As regards for the political point of view, it is up to the middle class to determine the priorities and value orientations for the electorate. The political orientations are based on the following: law-abiding citizens should protect human rights and principles of democracy.

Spreading its own social, cultural and political views and values "upwards and downwards", the middle class becomes a society integrator.

Last but not least: in domestic relations, middle class is referenced to be on guard of family values.

VIII. History of Middle Class

a) Origin of Middle Class

Ancient Greek city-state – "polis" (π όλις) – became the motherland of middle class. Communities of subsistent farmers in Ancient Greece were not as rich as those in the empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, so they were not only challenged but also encouraged to replace (and improve) the tribal and communal relations and land ownership. As the matter of fact, their land plots on the Peloponnesus were much smaller and less fertile. Therefore, mostly one single household – instead of kingdom or empire – was obliged to get engaged in the agricultural activities. So, familial and citizenship social network prevailed over clan relations, and this NEW social unit fundamentally differed the ancient Greek civilization from all its historical predecessors. It became the bud of the middle class. This class was called "demos" – the social layer between propertyless class of slaves and the "lamina" of oligarchs; those citizens of demos were hated by both yet trying to "knit together" the society of a city-state. The power and authority of the demos was always against tyranny – the power of oligarchs, - and its name was "democracy": the power and authority of the free and educated class. That class had "schole" (σχολή) – a pause, the free time to teach and to rule, to explore the laws and mysteries of the nature, to be creative. They became the class of poets and scientists, patriot rulers and philosophers.

b) Middle Class in Roman Republic

Ancient Greek colonists brought their civil tradition to the Italic peninsula. The success of Ancient Rome in the conquest of the kingdoms established by its neighboring tribes, and the origin of the Roman Republic were the result of the legacy of the democratic polis tradition – in short, the middle class. However, the founder of the Roman Empire, Gaius Julius Caesar was a middle class by origin.

In fact, it can be said that to be a Roman citizen meant being right between the layer of slaves and the emperor. The middle class people could be poorer or richer but the most important thing was: they were free, they could vote to choose leaders, that is, they could take part in Roman politics. After all inhabitants of the Empire ("barbarians") were granted Roman citizenship by the constitutio Antoniniana the middle class, the class of rulers, - and later the Western Roman Empire – collapsed.

c) Middle Class after the Dark Ages: Origin or Revival

Middle Ages were not the right time for Middle Class. The establishment ("re-naissance") of the middle class commenced after what we know as Renaissance (so called Quattrocento). The following factors caused or lead to the factual triumph of the middle class in the 16-19th centuries:

(1) First, the colonial exploitation of the 16th century drastically raised the standard of living (and the level of wealth) among the bourgeois. While the nobility owned, and the peasantry worked the countryside – that is, both nobility and peasantry were attached to the countryside and the agrarian production – a new bourgeoisie arose around mercantile functions in the city. Ironically speaking, these "town-dwellers" (literal translation of "bourgeoisie" or "burger") were not noble but they had noble metals in abundance: they had so much capital that they could rival the original nobles.

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(2) In fact, to be a capital-owning millionaire was the essential criterion of the middle class identity during the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution was the second major factor that eventually lead to the bourgeois revolutions in several western countries. Since then, middle class is constantly pro-innovative, that is, the class of strong partisans of both technical and social reforms/innovations);

(3) Bourgeois revolutions shouldered aside the "out-of-date" nobility for the sake of "new lords, new laws", full of energy and initiative. First, the middle classes helped drive the French Revolution; later, the French Revolution would lend a hand to the middle class people.

The colonial expansion, the industrial progress and, finally, the bourgeois revolutions equated the middle class to the original meaning of capitalist. The bourgeoisie is defined by Friedrich Engels as "the class of capitalists, who own the means of social production and are the employers of wage labor" (xxxv). In this sense the bourgeoisie does not include the intermediate middle class whose labor is supervisory and intellectual.

IX. Middle Class as National Class: Stories Worldwide

a) Middle Class in China

Middle class should definitely be something special for Zhongguo – the Middle Kingdom or Middle Country (a Chinese name for China). As early as Confucius (4th century BC) invented the term to describe a society of modest means: Xiaokang. In the ancient use, it could be loosely translated as a "basically well-off" society in which the people are able to live relatively comfortably, albeit ordinarily. Three thousand years later, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping breathed new life into the term: Xiaokang society became the eventual goal of Chinese modernization in 1979.

"The vision of a xiaokang society is one in which most people are moderately well off <…>, but in which economic advancement is not the sole focus of society. <…> Economic growth needs to be balanced with sometimes conflicting goals of social equality and environmental protection". (xviii)

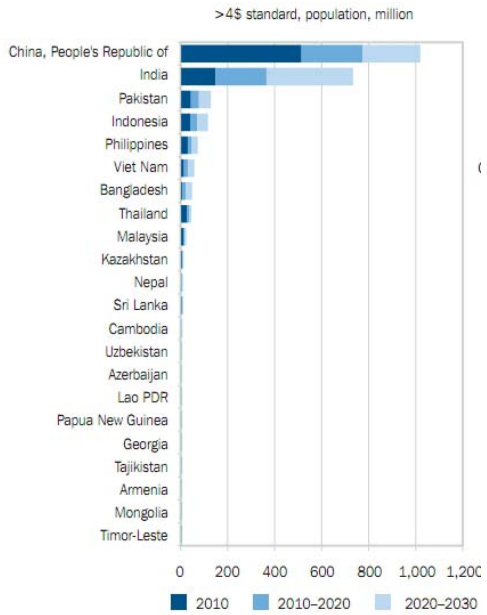
The revival of the concept of Xiaokang Society was in part a criticism of social trends in mainland China in the 1990s under Jiang Zemin, in which many in China felt was focusing too much on the newly rich and not enough on the rural poor. Furthermore, there has been a fear in some circles that Chinese society has become too materialistic placing material wealth above all other social needs". But the fact is: regardless of very hard social and economic situation in almost devastated China, the social (and after, economic and political) reforms appeared not as dramatic as they could be (and not as destructive as in the USSR).

The paramount leader Deng Xiaoping declared: "To get rich is glorious!" and "Poverty is not Socialism!" The subsequent economic reform in China impressed the world: the number of its people in abject poverty had felt from 250 million to 20 million. Over the past 30 years, the People's Republic of China is the world's second largest economy (by nominal GDP and by purchasing power parity) after the United States (xxxvi), and also the world's fastest-growing major economy, with average growth rate at 10% (xxxvii). In addition, China is the largest exporter and second largest importer of goods in the world.

The target of "Xiaokang society" will be achieved by 2020 if only the country keeps annual economic growth at a minimum of 7%: the last year, China's per capita GDP had already broken the $2,000 mark!

These are theory and practice of the China's middle class. As regards for the Asia's middle class, it is growing dramatically relative to other regions of the world (with an average middle class representative earning $2 to $20 per day). Back in 2008, about 56 % of developing Asia's population was considered middle class (against only 21 % in 1990 (xxxviii).

The following Pareto Table (from the same source) is the best way to reflect the comparative middle class statistics in China vs. other Asian countries:



b) Middle Class in Latin America

Official reports say, the middle class constitutes up to 65 % of the total population of the Latin American countries (while only in Chile the level of middle class is attaining as much as 77 %!). Back in 1990, it was slightly over a half (53%) but the entire region has survived serious changes in the realm of social and economic environment, since then. So today, the region of Latin America with its 286 millions of the middle class members has ceased to be "the world of the poor".

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Now, as José Juan Ruiz indicates, "the average per capita income in these countries is $10 per day" (xxxix).

One more quotation from same analyst: "Mexico … has a middle class twice as large as that of Spain, while the Brazilian middle class is some 1.25 times larger than its Spanish equivalent" (ibid.)

Some analysts predict that "by 2030, more than 100 million Latin American will cross the threshold of the $10,000 per capita annual income, and this will greatly influence the standards of request and consumption", says Joaquin Vial, Chief Economist, Global Trends at BBVA Location (xl). No doubt, this will happen for the benefit of not only South America.

All theorists of middle class as well as researchers of the Latin American countries and societies agree that, first of all, it is education that requires a second "regional 'push'", because it is education that stands for "the most potent weapon for improving social mobility and broadening the middle classes" (xli).

Among five "new middle-classers" three are from Brazil: according to Getulio Vargas Foundation (Fundação Getulio Vargas, São Paulo), by 2010, the Brazilian middle class topped 50% of the total population of the country (ca. 160 millions) (xlii). The second leading country in the region is Mexico, although its middle class has not grown unlike that of Brazil, Chile, Peru or Columbia. Just the opposite: the numerous middle class that was in existence these two decades ago had strongly minimized; "what has grown though is the number of households below the poverty line". According with the Enrique Dussel's explanation (Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, Mexico), close economic contacts with the USA allowed the Great Financial Crisis and the Great Recession to "infiltrate" in this country. The same way, up to 30% of the Argentina's middle class grew poor in 2001 (ibid.).

Another country with "once-mighty middle class" is Uruguay. By the last decade of the last century, its middle class had the larger percentage but the repeated economic crises elbowed the Uruguay's middle class aside in favor of oligarchs.

"The main problem with the middle class in Latin America is that it is very vulnerable, that is, very close to poverty line", says Enrique Dussel (xliv). In accordance with his calculations, there are three obvious leaders or three biggest middle class segments (in percent): Chile (77%), Uruguay (72%) and Argentina (71%). The countries with the smallest segments include Columbia (61%) and Peru (57%). However, the car sales in Peru had grown by 54% (from January to September 2010), over not more than eight months.

c) Middle Class in the United States

Almost common description constitutes that the American middle class is an aggregate of social groups whose annual income ranges from $25,000 to $100,000. Obviously, this space is too broad: it is even wider than the quantity distance between these numbers – twenty-five thousands and one hundred thousands. That is why William E. Thompson and Joseph V. Hickey (xlv) put forward a five-class model of the American middle class, in which the middle class consists of the two subgroups, as follows:

Average representatives of an upper middle class (up to 15% of the population) are also called "professional class" or "white collars". They are distinguished by high educational attainment (advanced post-secondary education) as well as high economic security. They normally earn around $100,000 a year.

A lower middle class (about 33%) usually consists of college graduates/ graduating seniors (associates and bachelors) as well as semi-professionals. Compared to the former, representatives of this subclass have lower educational attainment, considerably less workplace autonomy, and lower incomes. The professional profile of the lower middle class includes school teachers, sales and transport workers, manual laborers, lower and middle managers, etc., who constitute the majority of the middle class.

d) Middle Class in Western Europe

Vast literature about the status and the recent trends, as regards for the middle class in the countries of Western Europe, may be summarized in the Analyst Insight by Media Eghbal: "the share of middle class households' total disposable income has fallen in the decade before 2007, as average disposable incomes have not increased much beyond inflation". Several tables indicating the steep prices rise and huge fall in most households' incomes between 1997 and 2007 are evidential" (xlvi).

In 2008 and later, the situation had even worsened, since the sharp increases in food and energy prices squeezed Western European middle class households. In the UK, Spain and other countries, the purchasing power of lower middle class households is undermined and confidence is low.

Soaring prices cause industrial and political unrest: first come strikes. Unsuccessful strikes tend to repeat and know no end, while successful strikes can trigger further inflation. It should be said, however, that a wave of strikes is sweeping through Western Europe: "France, Germany, the UK, and smaller economies have seen industrial action in a range of sectors, from teachers to railway workers, demanding wage increases" (ibid.). In some places, like Germany and Greece, strikers succeeded in securing substantial pay rises for employees.

To resume the aforementioned, the today's middle class in most Western European countries is caught in a vicious circle. So far, no decisive effort to find out the solution of this problem has been made.

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e) Middle Class in USSR/FSU

In this section we shall discuss several post-Soviet countries at the background of the middle class status in the Soviet Union.

i. *RUSSIA*

Both Soviet and Russian experts recognize par excellence there was no middle class under Soviet regime. Moreover, most Soviet analysts denied the very possibility of the middle class existence and the validity of the concept: following Karl Marx they tolerated only a very flexible and mobile, temporary phenomenon between the antagonist classes of the ruler and the ruled.

At the same time, if there is a sign of equality between the middle class and well-to-do section of the population we could call the vast majority of the Soviet population (between the late 1960ies to the late 1980ies) "the middle class people", because all they – from workers and teachers to engineers and scientific officers – could easily afford to purchase a vehicle (mostly or definitely, a Soviet brand), to pay for lodging, to choose almost any corner of the Soviet Union for their holiday (at least, biyearly)… Additionally, free secondary, graduate and post-graduate education, also free health protection and almost unbelievable stability...

The only thing was that the Soviet people totally lacked a necessary global attribute of the middle class: freedom!

ii. *Kazakhstan*

Normally, a middle class family has ca. 50,000 Tenge (~$700-800) income per family member, a three-room apartment and two or three vehicles. As a rule, though, the real estate is a "Soviet heritage" (because most families got their apartments in so-called "period of stagnation" / 1960-1970-ies), the vehicles are almost same age as the apartments (since a Western term of "middle class" is applied to the local situation, the "descriptors" should be compared, too), and the income may widely fluctuate. So, as most Kazakhstan's analysts conclude, although the market-style reforms seem obvious the ostensive proof of these reforms – that is, clearly segmented middle class – is not given in point of fact. "Middle class should be the basis of a society, and yet, it is not a predominant factor" in the Kazakh society (xlvii).

In short, the Kazakhstan's middle class shares some of the same problems currently haunting other FSU countries: this class is immature, even "unformed"; also, it is too fragile: the recent Financial Crisis "transformed" many of the middle class households back into the lower class. The same thing happened in the Ukraine, Russian Federation, most countries in the Middle Asia and South Caucasus.

f) Middle Class in Eastern Europe

Development of middle class society may be taken to measure a degree of modernization of post-communist societies, of their transition to market system. Using survey data from both Poland and international studies Henryk Domanski examined both the main impediments and driving forces on this route. First, he showed that the main candidates to the post-communist middle class were higher managers along with intellectuals and owners. As regards for the development of cultural and economic liberalism, Domanski argues this is the middle class orientations.

According to the European Social Survey 2004/2005 data, post-communist societies prove to be still less liberal than Western countries. The "mentality lag" displays also in ratings of occupational prestige in Poland where business and managerial positions are marked with lower evaluations than expected. Henryk Domanski's position is that "confronted with harsh reality of the market relations, emerging middle class society will be more enforced than willingly accepted" (xlv).

g) Middle Class in Georgia: A Migrant Class

A number of Russian sources prove that "the labor migration is one of the primary sources of the middle class generation in a number of advanced countries". At the same time, in the majority of developing, poor and post-crisis countries, both migration and labor migration are primarily the initiative of the middle class: lower layer people cannot afford to leave the country and go abroad, while the motivation level of upper class members is really low if any.

Georgia is primarily a country of origin of migrants with flows directed mainly towards the Russian Federation, United States, Greece, Germany, Turkey, Austria, and a number of other EU member states such as France and Spain (International Organization of Migration, 2008). As a typical post-Soviet country Georgia has been seriously affected by out-migration after its independence proclaimed in 1991. The last 2002 population census in Georgia registered a drop of some 20% from the number of population registered in the 1989 census. "The largest part of this drop is due to emigration. Georgia for the period of 1989-2005 has the second highest net migration proportion after Kazakhstan in the Commonwealth of Independent States (xlv).

The problem is, however, that "Georgian official statistics on migration … is based since 2004 on the data on passenger-flows provided to the Georgian Statistical Office by the Georgian Border Department. This data informs only about the gross numbers of entries and exits and for this moment no practice to track individual comings and goings" (xlvi) in order to classify or range migrants is on place. Therefore, we may only make a proposition that, in accordance with the above thesis of the Russian analysts, a huge number of the middle class people has left the country.

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The following may be considered as an indirect evidence of the leading role of the middle class in the out-migration: the out-migration from Georgia (mostly to USSR and CIS countries) topped out in 1989-1992. In these years, the quantity of, conventionally speaking, middle class, or just comparatively well-to-do section of population was much higher then that after the civil war (1991-1992) and the Abkhazian conflict (1992-1993).

Georgian official statistics insists on the point that there is no evidence of large scale emigration from Georgia since 2004, even contrary, an opposite tendency of in-flows to Georgia is mentioned for two last years. However, a different picture is revealed if the numbers of asylum applicants are compared: emigrants from Georgia continuously apply for political asylum in third countries. The number of asylum applications by Georgians has increased steadily since 2000 and this development so far peaked in 2009, when 11,000 nationals of Georgia applied for political asylum abroad, that Georgia moved from the 21st place of source countries of asylum-seekers (2006) in 44 selected industrialized countries to the 10th place (2009) in only four years (xlvii).

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