



**MEDIA IMAGES OF THE MIDDLE CLASS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JAPAN AND CHINA
IN THE HIGH ECONOMY GROWTH PERIOD**

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Abstract

Previous studies on social classes and social strata have not taken media-constructed images as objects of research. Meanwhile, existing media studies have paid limited attention to media-constructed images of the middle class. This study aims to fill this research gap and establish a fundamental understanding of the abovementioned issue. First, an original model for understanding the middle class on the basis of objective attributes, subjective characteristics, and media images is presented. Second, the perspective of media studies is integrated with this model. Finally, a practical analysis of middle-class images constructed by the media is conducted.

In particular, this study focuses on Japanese and Chinese newspapers during their respective periods of high economic growth (Japan: 1955–1973, China: 2001 to 2012). By quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing reports or articles on the middle class in these newspapers, the paper resolves the media-created images of the middle class.

Results revealed that the construction of images of the middle class in Japanese and Chinese newspapers has been influenced by government and academe. Similarities were observed between Japan and China: (1) strong policy orientation, (2) the use of local language to classify the middle class, (3) bias toward a “new middle class,” (4) value for consumption of goods, (5) gender divisions, (6) a Western orientation, and (7) hegemony during the construction process. Meanwhile, several differences were likewise observed, such as those in use of educational background, portrayal of housewives, and usage of such adjectives as “average” (Japan) and “affluent” (China).

Keywords: Middle Class, Media Image, Japan, China, Newspapers.
