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Lifestyle of Kazakhstan's middle class in contemporary conditions

Over the past few years, the political, economic and social situation in Kazakhstan has changed a lot. Kazakhstan has managed to create an enabling environment for private sector development and attracting foreign direct investment, through decisive reforms in the economic and financial sectors, which led to the development of energy and oil & gas sectors. Within twenty years of independence the country has risen to a very high level of economic and today is an example of a successful transition among the CIS.

Nowadays in the conditions of the stable development of Kazakhstan's economy the problem of formation and development of the middle class is very important and urgent. The government relies on predominance of the middle class in society, which is regarded as a «comfort class», which provides political and social stability in the developed countries of the world. As a result of this perspective, the creating an enabling environment for further successful development of the middle class is one of the main priorities of social and economic policy in Kazakhstan. This article presents some results of a sociological research conducted in April 2013 with the support of the Centre of Sociological Research and Social Engineering in Almaty, Kazakhstan in order to determine the values and economic strategies of Kazakhstan middle class. Sampling is a multistage quota, reflecting a representative totality of the demographic structure of the city. Along with the quantitative survey, 20 expert interviews were conducted. The authors developed an approach to allocate the middle class of Kazakhstan; also in this article authors provided the evaluation and analysis of the current lifestyle of Kazakhstan middle class.

In general, summing up approaches presented in this study, it can be noted that they rely on the broader definition of middle class. In this case, to the middle class are included those whose needs appear above basic human needs such as food and clothing, and thus has necessary resources and the intention to raise living standard thanks to the skillful use of their knowledge and skills.

Key words: middle class, lifestyle, values, economic strategies.

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Қазіргі кездегі Қазақстандағы орта таптың өмір салты

Соңғы бірнеше жылдар Қазақстанның саяси, экономикалық және әлеуметтік жағдайы қатты өзгерістерге ұшырады. Қазақстанда экономикалық және қаржы саласында орасан зор реформалардың жүргізілуі нәтижесінде жеке секторды дамыту мен шетелдік инвестицияларды тартуға барлық дерлік жағдайлар жасалынды, бұл өз кезегінде энергетикалық және мұнай мен газ секторларын дамытуға ықпал етті. Тәуелсіз жиырма жыл ішінде еліміз экономикалық тұрғыдан ТМД елдері ішінде жоғары деңгейге көтерілді. Аталмыш зерттеуде ұсынылған бағыттарды жүйелей отырып, олар орта таптың кең анықтамасына негізделгендігін атап өтуге болады. Осындай жағдайда орта тапқа табыстары тамақ пен киім секілді жалпы адамзаттық қажеттіліктерді қамтамасыз етуден асатын, сонымен қатар, жеке білім мен кәсіби дағдыларын дұрыс қолдану арқылы өмір деңгейін әрі қарай дамытуға ресурстары жететін және ынталары барларды жатқыза аламыз.

Мақала 1790/ҒФ 4 «Қазақстандық қоғамның жаңа әлеуметтік құрылымы және аймақтық дамудың әлеуметтік-экономикалық басымдықтары» ғылыми-зерттеу жобасы аясында дайындалды.

Түйін сөздер: орта тап, өмір салты, құндылықтар, экономикалық стратегиялары.

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Образ жизни Казахстанского среднего класса в современных условиях

За последние несколько лет политическая, экономическая и социальная ситуация в Казахстане сильно изменилась. Казахстану удалось создать благоприятные условия для развития частного сектора и привлечения прямых иностранных инвестиций благодаря решительным реформам в экономических и финансовых отраслях, что привело к развитию энергетического и нефтегазового секторов. В течение двадцати лет независимости страна поднялась на очень высокий экономический уровень и сегодня является примером успешного перехода среди государств СНГ. В целом, суммируя подходы, представленные в данном исследовании, можно отметить, что они опираются на более широкое определение среднего класса. В таком случае к среднему классу относятся те, чьи потребности проявляются выше базовых человеческих потребностей, таких как пища и одежда, и при этом имеется необходимый ресурс и намерение для повышения уровня жизни благодаря умелому применению собственных знаний и навыков.

Ключевые слова: средний класс, образ жизни, ценности, экономические стратегии.

**LIFESTYLE OF KAZAKH-
STAN'S MIDDLE CLASS
IN CONTEMPORARY
CONDITIONS *****Introduction**

Sociological research for determination of middle class share in Kazakhstan and its main characteristics was conducted in Almaty in 2013. Sample size – 1000 respondents. Sampling is a multistage quota, reflecting a representative totality of the demographic structure of the city. Along with the quantitative survey, 20 expert interviews were conducted. As part of the study following criteria for classifying individuals in the middle class were selected:

1. The level of wellbeing, forming from the presence of permanent income, indices of average monthly per capita income and other indirect signs (number of present consumer durables, the amount of savings). Also presences of indirect signs of material status are taken into consideration – presence of savings, self-assessment of the family, the availability of consumer durables.

2. Characteristics of the socio-professional status (criterion of non-physical labor). In this approach as a criterion for getting into the middle class is used a non-physical labor. Socio-professional status in a class society serves a marker of certain structural positions.

3. Level of education (the presence of at least basic higher education). To take a specific socio-professional position, the middle class should be characterized by the presence of human capital that can generate income. For the measurement of level of education a criterion with a threshold value «presence of basic higher education» is used.

4. The level of self-identification (self-evaluation of its position in society not lower than «middle» in the proposed structure). Finally, the last criterion used in the allocation of the middle class – self-identification. It should be noted that the class awareness of itself as a class, is not a vital condition for its existence.

In general, summing up approaches presented in this study, it can be noted that they rely on the broader definition of middle class. Thus, the middle class differs from other social groups by the concentration of considerable volume of material wealth, of professional experience, social status, style of consumption, which allows speaking of it as a leading part of the society.

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Income and material status: limitations and evaluation

This proportion in the total population is large enough. However, it should be considered that, like any social group, highlighted middle class is not homogeneous. Firstly, there can be allocated a first core layer (so-called core) that combines the typical representatives of the group, which is most clearly express its characteristics and which is relatively stable but numerically small compared to other social formations. Then, the second core layer that is a structural reserve for the first core layer; the lower middle layer in which the attributes characteristic for the middle class, gradually weakens. Also the top layer of the middle class, lower class and layer of «status mismatches» are allocated.

The upper layer of the middle class (1.2%) – this layer includes respondents having a stable regular income, and the average per capita income of more than 100 000 KZT (5,3 subsistence minimum). Representatives of this layer also have at least a basic higher education, with the non-physical labor, indicating that they belong to a given structure as – the highest social class.

The first core layer (5.2%) – this layer includes respondents who also have all four criteria defining the middle class, namely the existence of a stable permanent income, presence of higher education (minimum basic higher), non-physical nature of work, with self-identification in the proposed scale «higher middle” or «middle».

The second core layer (transitional layer 40.6%). This layer is composed of people closest to the first core layer. Representatives of this layer have an average monthly per capita income of 55 to 100 thousand KZT, and indirect indicators of wellbeing close to the middle class. These are people who form the reserve of first core layer of the middle class, and have great potential in the future to become a full-fledged part of the middle class.

Talking about the differences of Kazakh middle class from the Western countries, experts agree that today comparing Kazakhstan and countries of Western Europe and the United States does not make sense, as well as searching of differences between middle classes in these countries as they are at different stages of their development, having their own specificity in mentality, consumer characteristics and economic realities.

Expert 5 (civil servant): Firstly, on the basis of our economic realities it is still very long way for the middle class in Kazakhstan to the middle class of Western Europe, and the United States. In our view,

based on the realities, in each state should be its own criteria of the identification of middle class. Second, if the middle class of developed countries was established, and a significant part of it compose small and medium business, workers of factories, the vast majority of doctors and teachers, the Kazakh middle class is in the process of formation, as doctors and teachers, workers of factories and etc., unfortunately, today cannot be classified as a middle class.

Expert 1 (sociologist-practitioner): Firstly, it is very difficult to talk about the Western middle class; the middle class has its own national characteristics in each country. The mentality is different, the differences in the economic, consumer features, moral values. Differences between Western middle class and our middle class are shrinking but the main difference is the ratio of the individual, respect for the rights and dignity of the individual... In the West, one is aware of its duty, its responsibilities.... Our middle class cannot solve problems in a civilized way, through the courts, through the structures of civil society.....

Lifestyle and values of the middle class

Of particular interest to experts is a style of consumption of representatives of the middle class. Most experts agree that they have a certain style of consumption, different from others, including the consumption and use of qualitative products and goods, and leisure practices. At the same time, experts note that the style and consumption is not uniform, taking into account heterogeneity of the middle class.

Expert 1 (sociologist-practitioner): «A certain style of consumption – is a modern style of consumption, that is, the middle class – people who can afford to use quality products, but not luxury items; who have modern housing that are trying to lead a modern way of life. It characterizes the Kazakh middle class».

Expert 2 (sociologist-practitioner): «High quality food, attention to health, investing money in their children's education, quality leisure and vacation”

Expert 4 (Professor of Political Science): «The style of consumption varies as the middle class is heterogeneous in Kazakhstan».

Economic strategies: purchase, renovation and vacation trips

The biggest purchase, planned in the next twelve months, characterizes not only well-being, but also the style of consumption, as well as the direction of economic strategies in different layers of the middle

class. According to the results of the study 21% and 19.5% of the total number of respondents indicated that in the next twelve months they will spend money on apartment renovations and vacation trips.

The obtained data indicate that majority of representatives of the upper layer of the middle class will spend money on a tourist trip (66.6%) in the next year, in 16.7% of respondents plan to buy a car and the second apartment (or a country house). In the first core layer to a tourist trip (24%), buying of an apartment or a country house (20%) can be joined expenses for apartment renovation (28%).

In the second core layer the percentage of respondents plan to spend money for the purchase of apartment (3.5%) greatly reduce. Similarly to the first core layer tourist trip (26.9%) remain popular, apartment renovation (21.3%). It should be noted the fact that plans to spend money on education appear only in the second core layer – 7.1%, as well as for medical services – 3.5%.

Another important component that characterizes the lifestyle of Kazakh middle class is to conduct high-quality leisure and vacation.

According to the research results, 40.4% of respondents indicated that they spent their annual leave at home in the city and 11.9% of the respondents did not go on leave over the last year. More than 50% of respondents had no opportunity for quality vacation during the leave, 8.2% of respondents spent their annual leave at resorts targeting tourists from the CIS. Number of those respondents who have spent their leave at home, increases linearly from the first core layer to the lower middle layer that demonstrates the differences and gradual changes in the life style of different layers and also that innovative practices diffuse in the same direction from the upper layer and the first core layer to the lower. In the upper middle layer 33.2% of respondents had a vacation in Southeast Asia, 16.7% of respondents spend their leave at a sanatorium in one of Kazakhstan resorts; in Western Europe or at home in the city. Most often, the representatives of the first core layer as holiday destinations has chosen resorts in Turkey, Egypt, Bulgaria, etc. (24%), 20% of respondents spent their annual leave at home, 16% did not go on leave in the last year, 12% of respondents rested in sanatorium in one of the resorts of Kazakhstan. Most of the representatives of the second core layer of the middle class (47.8%) spent their leave at home in the city or did not go on leave for the last twelve months. 52.1% of lower middle layer spent their leave at home in the city, 8.4% did not go on leave, which again represents a majority. In

the lower class, 55.8% of the respondents spent their holidays at home, 7.8% of respondents did not go on leave for the last year.

Specifics of leisure activity patterns also largely characterizes selected lifestyle that, in turn, along with the level of education and material well-being is one of the main characteristics of the middle class. Results of the study show that in the upper middle layer the most popular leisure activity is sports (66.6%), going to the movies and going to the cafes and restaurants – 50%, the least popular are going to the theater, reading books, hiking (33.3%). In the first core layer going to cafes and restaurants (56%) is preferred with a considerable margin from all other ways of leisure.

32% of respondents watch movies and TV shows at home, which is one of the simplest types of leisure activity. Least popular leisure practices in a given layer of the middle class is reading – 16%. In the second core layer going to the cinema is the most popular leisure practice (43.6%), followed by watching movies and TV shows at home – 38.1%, which is again characterized as a simple and low-cost (both material and intellectual) leisure activities. Approximately equal preference is given for hiking (36.5%), going to the cafes and restaurants (35.5%) and sports (35%). As descent down the social ladder the likelihood of a complete lack of meaningful leisure increases. This confirms the fact that ways of simple home leisure activities (watching movies and TV shows) increases linearly from the upper layer to the lower class.

If in the lower middle layer 44.9% of respondents prefer to watch movies and TV shows, in the lower class it is already 48.1% of the respondents. It also demonstrates the idea of diffusion of innovative practices in the middle class from the upper layer to the lower middle layer, and then to the lower class. In addition, in the lower middle layer 38.3% of respondents prefer reading books, doing sports – 35.9%, trips to nature – 31.7%, going to theater and ballet – 13.2%.

In the lower class except watching TV (48.1%) reading books 40.3% is also popular, typically, simple types of leisure activity. Representatives of this layer limit themselves to traditional home-stay in their spare time, which does not require material and time expenses. Even if representatives of the lower class leave their homes, then again for traditional meeting with friends or going to the movies. Among the most unpopular leisure practices for a given layer were visiting museums and exhibitions – 6.5%. As an alternative of leisure activities indicates visiting a mosque – 2.5%.

It should be noted that the qualitative outside-home leisure and possibility to afford it really add a very important and specific feature in the portrait of the modern Kazakh middle class. At the same time having a lot of free time and spend it with dignity is not always possible, even for representatives of the upper layers of the middle class. The amount of free time of representatives of middle class is reduced due to increased professional duties. This fact only increases value of free time and affects the desire of the middle class to make its leisure time as interesting as possible. They are willing to spend the available funds for full-fledged leisure [3].

Interest in the political life of the country

Interest in political life in Kazakhstan, as well as an active expression of their civil position in relation to the different situations occurring in the country, is one of the main signs that show the maturity of the middle class. It is characterized by its own ideology, which is based on the understanding of group interests and their role in society. On the one hand, it does not want a repetition of historical events, the lack of stability and confidence in the future and tranquility for their own well-being. Thus forms the need for moderate conservatism related to the conservation of traditions and strong government. Conservatism is intended to help preserve the current level and further growth of consumption. On the other hand, the middle class feels the need for presence of conditions for the implementation of its initiatives, life plans and ambitions.

According to a study in the upper middle layer 66.7% of respondents are always interested in politics. The vast majority of the representatives of the first core layer are interested political life of the country only from time to time. In the second core layer majority (58.4%) occasionally shows interest in political life and the political situation in Kazakhstan, 26.9% of respondents are constantly interested in it. 53.3% of lower middle layer interests from time to time, while 25.1% are not interested at all. Percentage of respondents who not interested in the political life of the country at all increases linearly from the upper layer to the lower class from 0% to 27.3%.

In the lowest class 40.2% of the respondents are occasionally interested in political life in Kazakhstan, in this class the largest percentage of respondents who are not interested in political events in the country at all, although the percentage of those who are constantly interested in political life, is big enough and has made 32,5%.

As data shows, an active civic position in the upper middle layer is expressed by 66.7% of respondents. For comparison, only 37.7% of respondents of lower class actively express their civic position, 22.1% of respondents do not express their position at all and 14.3% of respondents do not tend to express their civic position. In the layer of status mismatches opinions were divided almost evenly 53.8% of respondents in one way or another express their civic position, 46.2% of respondents practically does not express it.

For the question whether you are ready to leave Kazakhstan opinions of the lower class representatives are distributed almost evenly: 44.2% who are ready to leave Kazakhstan, and 48.1% of the respondents who did not consider such option for the future. The situation is similar in the layer of status mismatches, while 53.8% did not consider the option of moving to another country as a permanent place of residence, 46.2% are ready to leave Kazakhstan. While in all layers of the middle class the vast majority of respondents note their unwillingness to leave Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan's middle class today is heterogeneous and consists of several layers (upper, first core layer, second core layer, lower middle layer). In turn, upper middle layer and first core layer have all the features of the middle class in its classical meaning. While the second core layer and lower middle layer are the most numerous and extremely heterogeneous in composition, thereby break down into several subgroups as middle class signs weaken.

Instability of the socio-economic situation in the country is one of the factors of instability of income status. The desire to stabilize the situation is reflected in the different behavioral strategies. One of them – a saving strategy, which is a kind of innovative practice for the middle class, that gradually spread from its upper layers (investment in real estate) to the lower layers (bank savings).

As the results of the research show, the system of values of the middle class as a complete structure has not yet been formed, and is only in the initial stage. It should be noted that the values of the lower and middle class do not differ from each other, although the trends to change can be seen. Hence, such a model of values diffusion is an evidence of the ongoing process of formation of group consciousness and values. It should be noted also that

these data demonstrate the mechanism of diffusion of new values, which comes from the upper middle layer and the first core layer, gradually weakening.

And this explains the fact of heterogeneous spread of values, attitudes, lifestyles in different layers of the middle class.

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