

Of quality, harmony, and community:

Civilization and the middle class in urban China.



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Article Contents

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This article discusses the rhetoric and practices of China's middle-class “community building” (*shequ jianshe*, as the campaign to reorganize urban residential communities that started in the late 1990s is called), and the role of *suzhi* (quality) in building models of “harmonious” (*hexie*) coexistence through new forms of community governance. By investigating the official discourse on community and harmony and the self-representation of middle-class community activists, I will argue that assumptions about middle-class *suzhi* are essential to three governmental objectives associated with the new forms of community governance: (1) the making of new subjects who are autonomous enough to choose what to consume (and therefore stimulate the market) but also responsible enough not to challenge social order; (2) the creation of subjects who will govern themselves at the level of their residential communities without the need for government intervention; and (3) the benchmarking of social aspirations and behaviors, with the creation of models for individual self-improvement. This article is part of a larger project on community building in urban China and is based on materials and interviews collected over three years in Beijing, Chengdu, and Shenyang.

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