Taste, discourse and middle-class identity: Ethnography of the Chinese Saabists
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This study adopts Bourdieu’s conceptualization of taste and distinction to examine the discursive construction of Chinese middle-class identities. Drawing on an ethnographic fieldwork of urban young professionals who display a shared passion for Saab cars, this article presents three examples to instantiate the ways that the participants employ linguistic and discursive resources to construct an urban middle-class identity revolving around consumption and commodification: the first example is an interview about their taste for the Saab car; the second is a participant observation of the Saab fans’ linguistic exchanges in which they demonstrate their ‘taste for each other’ – recognition of each other’s in-group membership and social identity; the third example is an online observation of their multimodal display of other lifestyle commodities. All three examples highlight the importance of language in creating a sense of distinction and in negotiating middle-class identities among Chinese urban young professionals.