

Do the most successful migrants emulate natives in well-being? The compound effect of geographical and social mobility¹

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Abstract

A growing body of research has been focusing on the well-being consequences of migration, yet most of this has overlooked the fact that many migrants experience intragenerational social mobility alongside geographical mobility. Without accounting for the effect of social mobility in working life, the impact of geographical mobility on well-being cannot be clearly examined. This paper focuses on the most successful migrants, who have started from the bottom and have achieved upward social mobility in the course of their careers, and compares their well-being with that of native non-migrants who have experienced a similar intragenerational social mobility trajectory. The analysis is based on a recent national survey in China, which has a representative sample for both the overall population and migrants. Findings show that migrants, whether from an urban or rural origin, have better incomes but significantly lower levels of well-being than natives, even with a similar career advancement trajectory and the same destination class position. Further exploration shows that the well-being disadvantage of migrants is mainly due to institutional and sociocultural barriers, rather than to reward differentials in the labour market. This may have a wider implication for migrants across national borders.

Keywords: Subjective well-being; geographical mobility; social mobility; *Xingfu*; internal migration

Introduction

Does migration improve people's well-being? Existing literature examining this issue has mostly reported a neutral to negative answer: compared with those who remain in their original locations, the well-being of migrants can be either higher or lower, due to varying situations in the sending and

receiving societies, self-selection bias and the psychological mechanisms involved. However, when compared with natives in destination locations, there is a much more consistent finding, revealing that migrants seldom reach similar levels of well-being as natives, whether in the context of internal or international migration (De Jong, Chamrathirong and Tran 2002; Lu 2010; Melzer 2011; Nowok et al. 2013; Safi 2010).

It should be noted that most previous studies in this field have primarily focused on the impact of migration but have not paid equal attention to the fact that, alongside geographical mobility, migrants may experience different social mobility trajectories in the course of their careers, which in turn may have different effects on their well-being. While upward social mobility is generally associated with a higher level of well-being, downward mobility in one's career trajectory tends to have a negative effect (Houle 2011; Zhao et al. 2017). Considering that downward mobility is a more frequent occurrence among migrants, especially in the context of international migration (Das-Munshi et al. 2012), it is not surprising that migrants tend to have a lower level of well-being when compared with natives in destination locations.

Is an occupational penalty therefore the main driver for migrants' disadvantage in terms of well-being? If not, what is the main reason? By taking into full consideration migrants' intragenerational social mobility trajectories, this research aims to reveal a clearer picture of the influence of geographical mobility on well-being and the underlying mechanisms. To achieve this objective, it is not enough to simply control for migrants' current socioeconomic status or class position, as this does not take into account varying starting points and mobility trajectories and thus cannot fully capture the impact of intragenerational mobility. In this research, I address this issue by looking at upwardly mobile migrants, the most successful among migrant populations, and compare their level of well-being with that of natives in destination locations with a similar social mobility trajectory.

In an era of increasing migration both within and across national borders, addressing the issue of well-being consequences becomes ever more pressing. The World Migration Report suggested that the most fundamental questions for potential migrants are 'whether they will be happier if they migrate and whether their life will be better than it is now' (International Organisation for Migration 2013: 175). Geographical mobility allows people to take opportunities elsewhere, and people who self-select for migration tend to be more physically able and better qualified than average to grasp the opportunities available to improve their economic situations and advance their careers (Chiswick 1999). However, at the same time, they may face social and spatial dislocation, which makes the well-being consequence of migration less straightforward to predict. Examining the well-being of 'successful' migrants who have achieved upward social mobility in their working lives would both

facilitate our understanding of how migration affects people's lives and shed light on future policy making.

I carry out the analysis on a recent Chinese database. China is an ideal case for the current study for two reasons. First, China has been experiencing a rapid industrialization and marketization process over the past four decades, which has opened up space for upward social mobility and has driven what is arguably the largest migration flow in modern human history (Liang, Li and Ma 2014; Lu and Wang 2013). Hence, it offers enough observations to answer the research questions. Second, under the institutional setting of the population registration system (*hukou*), which originated from the Soviet *propiska* (internal passport) system, China's internal migrants, especially its rural-to-urban migrants, are regarded as sharing a great resemblance in many respects to international migrants (Chan and Buckingham 2008; Roberts 1997). Therefore, this study may have wider implications for migration across national borders.

In this study, I include four comparison groups – urban non-migrants, rural non-migrants, urban-to-urban migrants and rural-to-urban migrants – so that people from both urban and rural origins can be examined. To avoid heterogeneity in starting points and mobility trajectories, I restrict the analysis to people who start their career from the bottom (either as manual workers or peasants), and compare the subjective well-being of migrants with that of non-migrants with a similar career achievement. In order to deal with self-selection bias in migration, I use propensity score methods to conduct robustness checks. The empirical analysis is based on the Chinese Urbanisation and Labour Migrants Survey of 2012, which has a nationally representative sample for both the overall population and for migrants and thus allows me to answer the research questions on a nationwide scale. The paper proceeds by first discussing the concept of subjective well-being, then reviewing the literature on the effect of geographical and social mobility on people's well-being, and then giving a brief introduction to the Chinese *hukou* system. After that, the data and variables used in the paper are introduced, followed by the section on empirical results. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings and the main implications.

The concept of subjective well-being

The conceptualization of well-being has been broadly categorized into two accounts: the objective-pluralist account and the subjective-monist account (Austin 2016). The former measures well-being through objective indicators in multiple domains, such as material living standards, health condition, education, environment, social connections, etc. The objective-pluralist approach has been widely used in constructing national well-being indices, which supplement traditional economic indicators, such as GDP, in monitoring social

progress. In contrast, the subjective-monist account puts more emphasis on individuals' subjective life experiences and perceptions and is regarded by its proponents as an important way of measuring quality of life (Diener 2000). In this paper, I am mainly interested in people's life perceptions, rather than the objective resources they have gained through socio-spatial mobility, and therefore I follow the second account and focus on individuals' subjective well-being.

To measure subjective well-being, there are three basic approaches – the affective approach, the cognitive approach and the eudemonic approach (Diener 2000; Steptoe, Deaton and Stone 2015). Academic research following the affective approach measures positive and negative emotions and feelings, such as 'happiness' and 'anxiety', while the cognitive approach is often operationalized as questions on 'life satisfaction' in survey research. The eudemonic approach, which is also termed 'psychological well-being', focuses on the purpose and meaning of one's life and has more diverse and blurred definitions. Numerous recent national and international social investigations have employed a 'multiple components' approach, whereby subjective well-being is perceived as an umbrella concept which consists of multiple dimensions. For example, the UK National Well-being Dashboard, introduced by the Office for National Statistics, consists of four indicators: happiness, anxiety, overall life satisfaction and the feeling of leading a worthwhile life. There is, as yet, no consensus on how these different dimensions are correlated nor on whether they should be analysed separately or combined together to derive a more comprehensive measure, nor on the extent to which this approach leads to a better understanding of people's lives (Huta and Waterman 2014).

In the data I use, subjective well-being is measured by a single indicator, '*Xingfu*'. The Chinese word, *Xingfu*, can be used both as a noun and an adjective. As a noun, it is best translated as 'well-being', and the normal Chinese translation for 'subjective well-being' is '*Zhuguan Xingfu Gan*', a subjective feeling of *Xingfu* (Chen and Davey 2008). When it is used as an adjective, however, such as in the response categories, it is normally translated into 'happy' due to the lack of a parallel English adjective corresponding to well-being. However, the meaning of *Xingfu* cannot be fully reflected by the English word 'happy'. As Ng and Ho (2006) have discussed, 'happy' refers to a momentary feeling, whereas *Xingfu* refers to 'a lasting form of happiness' (p. 9). According to Ng and Ho, the Chinese word *Xingfu* is closer to the English word 'welfare', or in this context, 'well-being'.

In the Chinese language, *Xingfu* is better interpreted as a contented state based on an overall assessment of life, which reflects a more stable and less moody situation than that reflected by classical affective measurement terms such as 'happiness'. A recent empirical study has shown that, despite Chinese people still considering emotion as a component of a broader level of well-being, the measurement of *Xingfu* is based more on overall judgment and

evaluation of life (Hsu, Zhang and Kim 2017). Therefore, it might share more similarities with the term 'life satisfaction' than with the term 'happiness'.² In fact, as it is a combination of emotion and judgment about one's life in general, it may be a better measurement of overall well-being than either 'happiness' or 'life satisfaction' in the Chinese context. Overall, this indicator may reflect both affective and cognitive dimensions of well-being, but may not capture its eudemonic aspect.

It is also worth noting that, although more and more countries have started to collect information about people's well-being, the use of subjective well-being on its own, as a guide for public policy, has been criticized for valid reasons, such as the reliability and validity of its measurement (Austin 2016), its focus on decontextualized and individualized subjects with a downplaying of socio-ecological contexts (Smith and Reid 2018), and the intractable controversies about the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of different policy options (Bache, Reardon and Anand 2016; Bache and Scott 2018). In China, subjective well-being has not been officially monitored as a national indicator or formally incorporated into policy-making, but as a goal for individuals and their families, it offers a valuable lens for us to better understand how socio-geographical trajectories affect people's lives.

Previous research

Effect of migration on subjective well-being

Migration has a history as long as humanity. Among various reasons behind migration, the pursuit of a better life is one of the ultimate drivers. Early research on migration had a focus on benefits with respect to job opportunities and material resources (Borjas 1987; Chiswick 1999; Fielding 1992). Recent researchers have realized that such benefits do not necessarily guarantee a better quality of life nor a happier life, and therefore more attention is turned towards examining migrants' subjective well-being.

Existing evidence shows that, contrary to migrants' expectations, they tend to be over-optimistic about the chances of obtaining their desired life in the new place of residence (Benson and O'Reilly 2016; Knight and Gunatilaka 2010). In addition to the consistent finding that migrants may hardly reach a similar level of well-being as natives in the destination location (De Jong, Chamrathirong and Tran 2002; Lu 2010; Melzer 2011; Nowok et al. 2013; Safi 2010), they may even, in some cases, have lower well-being than those who stay in their original location (for a review, see Hendriks 2015). Various mechanisms have been proposed to explain the well-being disadvantage of migrants which, with the risk of oversimplification, can be broadly categorized into two groups: labour market-related factors and psychosocial factors.

Reward from the labour market is among the primary concerns of migrants, as this is essential to improve their economic situations and material lives. There is abundant evidence from both cross-sectional and longitudinal data analysis that migrants tend to have higher incomes after migration (Chiswick, Lee and Miller 2005), which is as expected because migrants usually move from poorer to richer places and they tend to be more skilled and competent than their non-migrant counterparts staying in the original location. However, previous studies also indicate that migrants have relative disadvantages in terms of the local language and social networks and may face explicit or implicit discrimination. Therefore, despite an increase in income, migrants' relative social positions in the destination location may be lower than in their previous locations (Heath and McMahon 2005). Consequently, lower achievement in the labour market may affect migrants' long-term prospects, increase their psychological stress and reduce their levels of well-being (Das-Munshi et al. 2012).

In addition to stressors related to the labour market, migrants also face challenges in their sociocultural lives. Sociological research in this field dates back to Park's (1928) pioneer work in which migrants were described as 'marginal man', as they usually struggle between conflicting cultures. Cultural barriers, feelings of alienation, absence of social support and difficulties in social integration may all contribute to higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of well-being (Hendriks 2015; Lu 2010). Such factors apply to both internal and international migrants, although internal migrants may face relatively fewer structural and cultural barriers than international migrants.

Effect of higher social class positions on subjective well-being

Among the determinants of subjective well-being, a higher social class position is regularly found to have a positive effect (Diener and Fujita 1997; Stansfeld, Head and Marmot 1997; Veenhoven 1991). Similarly, the underlying mechanisms are related to both the labour market and psychosocial factors. First, based on the backbone of occupational structure, social class position indicates personal achievement in the labour market. A higher social class position often goes with higher income, which has been found to be a fundamental driver of well-being especially in developing countries where the basic needs are not satisfied for everyone (Stevenson and Wolfers 2008; Veenhoven 1991). Although the upwardly mobile may still face an income disadvantage compared with their higher-origin colleagues (Friedman, Laurison and Miles 2015; Laurison and Friedman 2016), the absolute increase in disposable income often enables them to lead a better material life than before. Apart from pecuniary rewards, a higher social class position allows greater economic security, stability and long-term prospects for career progression (Goldthorpe and McKnight 2006), greater control of work, fewer demands from supervisors and less stress

(Marmot et al. 1997), all of which are believed to be contributing to better psychological and physical well-being.

In addition, a higher social class has benefits for other life spheres beyond one's career. People with higher social class positions are more likely to have higher self-esteem, to live in safer residential areas and to gain positive feedback in social comparisons, so that they tend to be more satisfied with themselves in other aspects of life and report a higher well-being level in general (Chandola et al. 2006; Diener and Fujita 1997).

Given the positive association between social class position and subjective well-being, upward social mobility is expected to have positive effects.³ Recent empirical analyses have shown the expected results regarding upward mobility in one's own career. For instance, Houle (2011) examined the effect of intra-generational social mobility on psychological well-being in the US and found that the upwardly mobile have a similar level of well-being as stable members of the higher class. Sacker and others (2005) showed that social mobility in one's life course narrowed inequalities in physical well-being between different occupational classes. Studies on China showed that the subjective well-being of intragenerational upwardly mobile individuals is higher than that of stable members from the starting class positions and approaches that of stable members of the destination positions (Zang and De Graaf 2016; Zhao et al. 2017).

Overall, in contrast to geographical mobility, which may increase stress in both working and social lives and may thus impose risks for well-being, upward social mobility tends to bring about benefits both within and outside of the labour market and may thus improve well-being. This does not mean that upward mobility is necessarily an enjoyable experience in all aspects. In some cases, the upwardly mobile may face additional hurdles in pursuing equal payment and promotion opportunities in their jobs (Friedman, Laurison and Miles 2015; Laurison and Friedman 2016), may have a sense of estrangement and a mixed or uncertain social identity and may lose belonging and safety (Friedman 2016; Lawler 1999; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003; Miles and Leguina 2018), which may leave an imprint on their lives and subjective well-being. Nevertheless, as stated above, most empirical analyses have shown that upward social mobility has a generally positive effect on well-being – the well-being of the upwardly mobile is usually better than that of the stable members of their origin classes and may rival that of stable members of the destination class.

Combining the effects of geographical and social mobility, a complex picture thus emerges. On one hand, geographical mobility enables people to take advantage of better opportunities elsewhere and achieve upward social mobility, which tends to be beneficial for people's well-being. On the other hand, moving to a different place may bring about social dislocation, plus the extra hurdles and stress of an unfamiliar labour market, so that migration could also have a detrimental effect. Millions of migrants are striving for career success in

their new locations, and some have achieved upward social mobility. However, to date, very little is known about whether the well-being benefits of upward social mobility can compensate for the potential losses of migration, nor about whether, for the most successful migrants, the well-being disadvantage still exists when compared with the native population.

The interplay between migration, social mobility trajectory and well-being

Despite the fact that in many instances geographical mobility and social mobility take place hand in hand, the two dimensions have been traditionally studied separately. Savage (1988) noted thirty years ago that there was a ‘missing link’ between geographical and social mobility in academic research. Thirty years later, Payne (2017) echoed Savage’s assertion and noted the paucity of work in this field.

Notably, recent research in human geography, sociology and economics has brought new developments concerning the interface between these two dimensions of movement. For example, human geographers in the UK have picked up the line of research started by Fielding (1992) on the regional ‘escalator effect’ and explored different forms of spatial influence on people’s career development (Champion, Coombes and Gordon 2014; Findlay et al. 2009; Gordon, Champion and Coombes 2015). Unlike human geographers, who mainly focus on regional differences in labour market opportunities, sociologists are more interested in whether the opportunities are equally accessible to people from different social backgrounds. For example, recent studies have shown that certain geographical regions can both provide more opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and reinforce the crystallization of elite positions (Cunningham and Savage 2015; Friedman and Laurison 2017; Friedman and Macmillan 2017). Economists have paid more attention to spatial influence on income growth and mobility. For instance, Glaeser and Resseger (2010) showed that metropolitan areas with high concentration of skilled jobs accelerate individuals’ human capital accumulation and rates of earnings growth. Chetty and colleagues (2014) revealed substantial variation in intergenerational income mobility across different geographical regions in the US. Goodwin-White (2016) showed that immigrants’ geographical choices have a lasting influence on second generation educational and wage outcomes.

These studies have facilitated new developments in the field by examining the interplay between geographical and social mobility. However, there is a virtual absence of work assessing how the double movement in social and physical space affects people’s personal lives. One recent study by Miles and Leguina (2018) showed that people with different socio-spatial mobility experiences have distinctive class identity narratives. Applying text-mining and correspondence analysis to 170 interview records, the authors found that people’s migration experience moderates the relationship between social mobility and

class identity formation, suggesting that the intersection of geographical and social mobility has a potentially important influence on people's life perceptions. In this paper, I aim to explore how the intersection of social and geographical mobility affects people's subjective well-being. Particularly, I expect to have a clearer view of the effect of geographical mobility on well-being by holding social mobility trajectory constant.

The *hukou* system and internal migration in China

The Chinese household registration system (*hukou*) was established in the 1950s when China had a planned economic system and the state controlled all resources. In this system, individuals were registered in their place of residence (*hukou* location) which was categorized as either rural or urban *hukou* (*hukou* type). The *hukou* type determined individuals' entitlements to state-provided goods and services and the *hukou* location defined the specific locality where the goods and services could be accessed (Bian 1994; Chan 2009). During the time period of the planned economy, urban *hukou* holders were given priority for a series of benefits, such as housing, permanent employment and medical insurance, while the majority with rural *hukou* had little access to extra resources beyond food (Cheng and Selden 1994; Liu 2005). Under the strict *hukou* administration of the early days, migrants, especially rural-to-urban migrants, faced such high hurdles to gain equal rights that the situation was referred to as being comparable with international migration (Roberts 1997).

Since the economic reform in the 1980s, the market has become increasingly important in resource allocation and the *hukou* administration has been gradually relaxed. An urban *hukou* status has lost most of its significance as a free pass to the default set of privileges, yet the *hukou* location remains as an identity of local citizenship, which is necessary for certain entitlements offered by the local government, such as government-subsidized housing, minimum living allowance and *hukou*-based social insurances (Wang 2004; Zheng 2008). For more details on differences of key entitlements attached to a local urban *hukou* status before and after the reform, see online appendix Table AI.

With free movement allowed and privileges attached to *hukou* status reduced – though they still exist – the ongoing market transition and institutional reform have created a better environment for migrants. As a result, China has witnessed arguably the largest migration flow in modern time. According to the third and the sixth Chinese censuses, the amount of internal migration has increased from 6.5 million in 1982 to 221 million in 2010. Compared with four decades ago, when the life chances of migrants were largely decided by their inferior *hukou* status, current migrants have the opportunity to have their human capital better evaluated and rewarded in the labour market. In fact, a certain proportion of migrants have achieved upward social mobility by being

promoted to managerial or professional positions or by establishing their own businesses (Lu and Wang 2013).

Yet very little is known about whether migrants' upward occupational mobility can compensate for the possible well-being losses due to migration. The lack of empirical evidence on this topic is partly because most previous studies have treated migrants as a homogeneous group, theoretically overlooking their different social mobility trajectories (Knight and Gunatilaka 2010; Li et al. 2007; Nielsen, Smyth and Zhai 2010). Another reason is the limitation of the available data. Despite the large number of internal migrants, their geographical distribution is extremely uneven⁴ and they are usually difficult to locate precisely, and among them, the number of migrants who have achieved upward social mobility accounts for a small portion. As a result, in most Chinese national surveys, migrants have tended to be under-represented in general and the number of the upwardly mobile is not enough for reliable quantitative studies.

Data, variables and analytical strategy

Data

The empirical analysis is based on the Chinese Urbanisation and Labour Migrants Survey, which was conducted by Tsinghua University in 2012. In order to have a representative sample for both the overall population and migrants, this survey employed a double sampling design with a replication approach. First, using a multistage stratified probability sampling method, the main sample (Sample A) was drawn as representative for the overall population; then targeting the sub-population of migrants, a supplement sample (Sample B) was drawn to represent the migrant population of the whole country by oversampling in areas of high migrant concentration and by screening at doorsteps. As the migrant sub-population is a part of the overall population, this sampling design features sampling with replacement and the two samples were then combined with sampling weight. The survey collected abundant information on respondents' occupation and migration history in addition to their socio-demographic characteristics, current living conditions and well-being, and it thus provided a good opportunity for me to answer the research questions.

In this survey, migrants are defined as individuals who have left the place of *hukou* registration and moved to a different county or district and have stayed at the destination for more than one month. In the implementation, since the official rosters in most residential committees – the penultimate sampling units for both Sample A and Sample B – did not include information about migrants, a geographical map for households was drawn in each residential committee to make a comprehensive list of households in the area. After the sampling

for households was carried out, an adult was randomly sampled within each household using the Kish selection method. The survey covers 28 out of 31 provincial units (except for Tibet, Qinghai and Hainan) in mainland China. The total sample size is 12,592, with 10,084 cases from Sample A and 2,508 from Sample B. In addition to the 2,508 cases in Sample B, Sample A includes 1,673 migrants, and thus the total number of migrants in the survey is 4,181.

Variables

Subjective well-being

As mentioned earlier, I use '*Xingfu*' to measure subjective well-being in the Chinese context. In the Chinese Urbanisation and Labour Migrants Survey, the question is worded: 'Overall, do you feel *Xingfu* about your life?' The response options consist of four ordered categories from 1 'not *Xingfu* at all' to 4 'very *Xingfu*'.

Migration status

According to *hukou* type, *hukou* location and current place of residence, respondents can be divided into six groups. As shown in Table I, *hukou* type differentiates urban and rural *hukou* sectors. After the *hukou* reform, *hukou* type has a declining significance regarding embedded institutional resources but still indicates urban and rural divisions, especially regarding levels of economic development. In this study, I only include those who have been urban or rural *hukou* holders since birth and exclude those who have changed their *hukou* type in later life.⁵ *Hukou* location indicates the specific locality where the *hukou* is registered. If an individual's *hukou* is registered in the current residential area, they are labelled as 'non-migrants' and they have access to institutional resources and privileges in the place of residence; if an individual has left the place of *hukou* registration and moved to another area, they are labelled as 'migrants' and normally do not have institutional resources or privileges in the destination place. Migrants can be further divided according to the destination place they moved to (urban area/rural area). Among the six groups, four (in shaded cells) are included in the analysis as comparison groups: urban non-migrants, rural non-migrants, urban-to-urban migrants and rural-to-urban migrants. The other two groups – urban migrants moving to rural areas and rural migrants moving to other villages – are deleted from the analysis, as such migration routes do not provide enough incentives to most people so that they are not very common in reality. In the dataset, the sample sizes for these two groups are only 2 and 24, respectively.

Among the four comparison groups, urban non-migrants are set as the reference. Compared with urban non-migrants, rural non-migrants have disadvantages in economic resources as most of them live in less-developed areas; urban-to-urban

Table I: Six sub-groups based on *Hukou* type, *Hukou* location and current place of residence. The four groups in shaded cells are included in the analysis

		<i>Hukou</i> location		
		Local area	Other areas	
			Urban area	Rural area
<i>Hukou</i> type	Urban	Urban non-migrants	U-U migrants	U-R migrants
	Rural	Rural non-migrants	R-U migrants	R-R migrants

migrants have disadvantages in not having access to resources and services related to the local *hukou* status; and rural-to-urban migrants have disadvantages in lacking a local *hukou* status and in lacking life experience in urban areas. Rural-to-urban migrants, facing the double challenge of accessible resources and socio-cultural differences, resemble to a great extent international migrants.

Current class position

In this study, I employ the EGP class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) to measure class position and collapse the original schema into five classes: (1) the ‘salaried class’, including the professional-managerial salariat and employers (Classes I, II and IVa); (2) the ‘intermediate class’ of higher and lower grades of routine non-manual employees and supervisors (Classes IIIa, IIIb and V); (3) the ‘self-employed class’ of own-account and small proprietors (Classes IVb and IVc); (4) the ‘manual class’, including skilled and non-skilled manual workers (Classes VI and VIIa); and (5) the ‘peasant class’ of agricultural labourers (Class VIIb), or peasants in Chinese terminology. In the Chinese context as well as in the dataset, Class IVa (self-employed with employees) shares more similarities with Classes I and II than with Classes IVb and IVc in relation to resources possessed. In addition, Class IVa members have managerial functions similar to those of many members of the salariat. Therefore, Class IVa is categorized into the ‘salaried class’ in this study. I conducted a robustness check by grouping Class IVa into the ‘self-employed class’, so that the ‘salaried class’ only consisted of Classes I and II. The conclusion did not change and the results are shown in online appendix Table AII.

As the EGP class schema was not constructed on any single hierarchical principle, there is no straightforward order between the classes. However, as Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) put it, across different scales of prestige, socio-economic status or general desirability, it is evident enough that the manual workers in industry and agriculture consistently rank below all the others. Based on this notion, I define upward mobility as movements out of the lowest class positions (manual worker or peasant class) into a higher social class position. Accordingly, the sample for analysis is restricted to the respondents whose first job class was manual worker or peasant, so that all respondents have a

similar starting point and, for those who are in the same current class position, a similar social mobility trajectory. I conducted an additional analysis differentiating between manual workers and peasants as the starting point but found no statistically significant differences. See online appendix Table AIII for details.

Other covariates include socio-demographic indicators such as gender, age, age-squared, marital status and years in education. These variables are controlled for as they may have distinct distributions among the four comparison groups and tend to have potential influence on subjective well-being. In addition, I control for the length of time spent living in the current destination, as migrants may experience excitement, boredom, and depression in the short term, and may reach a relatively stable level of psychological status only after they have fully adjusted to the new environment (Lu 2010; Nowok et al. 2013). Therefore, the length of stay in the destination location may not only contribute to the well-being differences between migrants and local residents, but may affect the within-group variance among migrants as well. Furthermore, three groups of explanatory variables are included to indicate economic differences (annual household income per person⁶), resource differences related to local *hukou* status (housing ownership,⁷ community environment, employment sector and social insurance) and sociocultural differences (proficiency in the local dialect and in standard Mandarin). Of particular note is that language difference is merely one, though an important one, of the many aspects of sociocultural barriers that migrants may need to face, but due to data limitation, I cannot take other aspects into consideration. The descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table II. In this study only people with their first job class as manual worker or peasant were included, with 7,290 respondents involved.

Analytical strategy

The analysis follows three steps. First, I compare the levels of subjective well-being between the four comparison groups, who are different in their migration statuses but share a similar social mobility trajectory. Second, if disparities in well-being levels are detected between the four groups despite their similar social mobility trajectory, further analysis is devoted to exploring the underlying mechanisms. Third, considering the self-selection bias in migration, a robustness analysis is conducted by using propensity score to minimize possible heterogeneity in personal attributes between migrants and non-migrants.

Results

Economic rewards versus well-being outcomes

As mentioned earlier, all of the respondents included in this study started their careers from the bottom, so that those who are currently in the same

Table II: Descriptive statistics for all the variables: unweighted data

	N	Percentage (%)	Mean (Standard deviation)
<i>Subjective well-being</i>			
Very unhappy	7,290	2.31	
Unhappy		17.02	
Happy		63.32	
Very happy		17.35	
<i>Migration status</i>			
Urban non-migrants	7,290	8.20	
Rural non-migrants		63.72	
Urban-to-urban migrants		2.46	
Rural-to-urban migrants		25.62	
<i>Current class position</i>			
Salariat class	7,290	3.99	
Intermediate class		3.87	
Self-employed class		8.98	
Manual class		37.26	
Peasant class		45.90	
<i>Control variables</i>			
Gender			
Male	7,290	51.43	
Female		48.57	
Age/10	7,290		4.40 (1.31)
Age/10-squared	7,290		21.09 (11.67)
Marital status			
Married/cohabited	7,290	86.39	
Single		8.64	
Divorced/widowed		4.97	
Years in education	7,290		6.93 (3.88)
Length of stay	7,290		31.90 (22.45)
<i>Explanatory variables</i>			
Annual income (in log form)	7,290		8.91 (1.17)
Whether have housing ownership			
No	7,290	29.78	
Yes		70.22	
Community environment	7,290		7.42 (1.58)
Employment sector			
Non-state sector	7,290	90.89	
State-owned sector		9.11	
Whether have social insurance			
No	7,290	76.97	
Yes		23.03	
Language proficiency in local dialect	7,290		2.91 (1.31)
Language proficiency in Mandarin	7,290		4.10 (1.43)

Note: The analysis sample is restricted to the respondents whose first job class was manual worker or peasant.

class position share a similar social mobility trajectory, while the difference is that for migrant groups such a trajectory takes place in the context of geographical mobility. Table III shows the percentage of each comparison group in the five current class positions. Among the 598 urban non-migrants who start their career from the bottom, 34 per cent have achieved upward social mobility (11 per cent to the salariat class, 14 per cent to the intermediate class and 10 per cent to the self-employed class⁸). The percentages of the upwardly mobile among rural non-migrants, urban-to-urban migrants and rural-to-urban migrants are 10, 32 and 28 per cent, respectively.

Figure I (left) shows the average annual income of the four comparison groups in each class position. Compared with urban non-migrants, urban-to-urban migrants have a higher average income in every class position. The income of rural-to-urban migrants rivals that of urban non-migrants and exceeds that of rural non-migrants. The two dashed lines mark respectively the average income of urban non-migrants in the analytical sample who have a humble career start, and that of *all* urban non-migrants, including those whose careers start from a higher position.

Comparing income among the four groups, we can see that migration is economically worthwhile in contemporary China. Migrants from an urban origin have an equivalent chance of upward social mobility to non-migrants, but they have a significant pecuniary advantage in the same destination class position, which may justify their motivation for migration. Migration is particularly rewarding for those from a rural origin: rural migrants have a tripled likelihood of achieving upward mobility compared with rural non-migrants, and they have a significantly higher income than their non-migrant counterparts in the same class position.

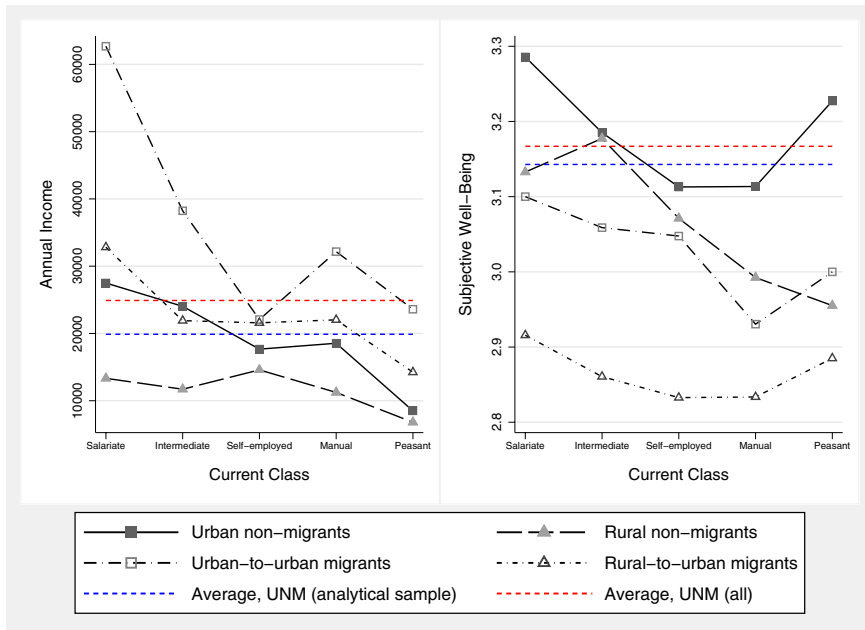
With regard to subjective well-being, however, an opposite pattern is revealed. As shown in Figure I (right), migrants from an urban origin have a lower level of well-being in every social class position than non-migrants.⁹ Turning to rural *hukou* holders, rural non-migrants have a lower level of well-being than their urban counterparts, but show no disadvantage in comparison with urban-to-urban migrants, and show a clear advantage over rural-to-urban migrants. By contrast, the well-being levels of rural-to-urban migrants are not only lower than urban natives in the destination, but are also lower than those of rural natives in the original location, and are even lower than the average well-being level of rural peasants who have stayed in rural areas without achieving any upward social mobility.

If using urban natives as a general reference, regardless of their class positions, we can see that most migrants, whether from an urban or a rural origin, have a higher than average income compared with urban natives from a similar starting point (indicated by the dashed blue line), and that the income of most urban-to-urban migrants surpasses the average income of the overall urban native population (indicated by the dashed red line). However, the majority of

Table III: *Distribution of current class positions among the four comparison groups (N = 7,290)*

Comparison groups	Current class position (row percentage, %)					Total (N)
	Salariat	Intermediate	Self-employed	Manual	Peasant	
Urban non-migrants	10.53	13.55	10.37	61.87	3.68	598
Rural non-migrants	2.43	1.33	5.75	22.80	67.69	4,645
Urban-to-urban migrants	11.17	9.50	11.73	64.25	3.35	179
Rural-to-urban migrants	5.09	6.53	16.33	62.74	9.31	1,868

Figure I: Average annual income and level of subjective well-being for four comparison groups in five current social classes. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



Note: UNM is short for urban non-migrants.

migrants have a significant well-being disadvantage, and even those who have an urban origin and who have achieved the longest range of upward mobility into the salariat class report a lower level of well-being compared with the average well-being level of urban natives.

Explaining well-being disparities

In order to examine the well-being disparities among the four comparison groups and to explore potential mechanisms, I conduct further analysis using the ordinal regression modelling framework. The results are shown in Table IV. Model 1 confirms the previous findings from the descriptive analysis that, compared with urban natives, rural residents have a lower level of well-being, but this disadvantage is smaller than that of migrants, especially that of rural-to-urban migrants. A higher current position is associated with a higher level of well-being, but even after allowing for a similar mobility trajectory and the same current social position, well-being disparities among the four groups still exist. Model 2 includes control variables, including gender, age, age-squared, marital status, years of education and length of stay in the current location,

Table IV: Ordinal logit regression model coefficients for the level of subjective well-being of the four comparison groups with different migration statuses (N = 7,290)

Subjective well-being	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Migration status (urban non-migrants = ref)</i>					
Rural non-migrants	-0.392***	-0.220**	-0.070	-0.107	-0.073
Urban-to-urban migrants	-0.479***	-0.307*	-0.411**	-0.220	-0.164
Rural-to-urban migrants	-0.912***	-0.580***	-0.608***	-0.281**	-0.197
<i>Class positions (salarial = ref)</i>					
Intermediate	-0.152	-0.131	-0.090	-0.053	-0.049
Self-employed	-0.289**	-0.197	-0.164	-0.105	-0.095
Manual	-0.412***	-0.245*	-0.211*	-0.215*	-0.198
Peasant	-0.491***	-0.258*	-0.079	-0.076	-0.049
<i>Control variables</i>					
Gender (female = ref)		-0.222***	-0.193***	-0.205***	-0.207***
Age/10		-0.855***	-0.941***	-1.043***	-1.028***
Age/10-squared		0.088***	0.099***	0.108***	0.107***
Marital status (married = ref)					
Single		-1.200***	-1.257***	-1.263***	-1.265***
Divorced/Widowed		-1.164***	-1.120***	-1.137***	-1.139***
Years in education		0.076***	0.061***	0.051***	0.046***
Length of stay		0.008***	0.009***	0.006***	0.006***
<i>Explanatory variables</i>					
<i>(1) Economic disparities</i>					
Annual income (in log form)			0.310***	0.260***	0.253***
<i>(2) Resources related to local hukou</i>					
Housing ownership (no = ref)				0.198**	0.175**
Community environment				0.319***	0.317***
Employment sector (non-state = ref)				0.202**	0.197**
Social insurance (no = ref)				0.196***	0.201***
<i>(3) Sociocultural differences</i>					
Language proficiency in local dialect					0.038
Language proficiency in Mandarin					0.061***
cut1_cons	-4.690***	-5.822***	-3.134***	-1.509***	-1.186***
cut2_cons	-2.359***	-3.430***	-0.714*	0.986**	1.309***
cut3_cons	0.680***	-0.265	2.508***	4.357***	4.684***
<i>Model fit</i>					
N	7,290	7,290	7,290	7,290	7,290
pseudo R ²	0.010	0.035	0.046	0.075	0.076
df	7	14	15	19	21
chi ²	138.946	503.756	664.618	1073.969	1082.911

*P < 0.10, **P < 0.05, ***P < 0.01.

but the well-being disparities among the four groups remain significant and substantial.

Models 3 to 5 include three groups of explanatory variables by sequence, indicating economic disparities, resources related to the local *hukou* status and sociocultural differences, respectively. Annual income is included to indicate economic disparities in Model 3, from which we can see that a higher income has a significant positive effect on well-being and, after the inclusion of this measurement, the well-being difference between rural non-migrants and urban non-migrants becomes trivial and non-significant. In contrast, income does not have any explanatory power concerning migrants' well-being disadvantages.

Model 4 examines the impact of resource differences related to local *hukou* status. Although a local *hukou* status does not guarantee access to these resources, it increases the probability of obtaining them. For example, previous studies have shown that, without local *hukou* status and therefore housing subsidies, migrants tend to pay more to either rent or purchase a place of residence, and are therefore less likely to own a house or live in communities with a good environment and a convenient location (Jiang 2006; Logan, Fang and Zhang 2010; Ma and Xiang 1998). In addition, lacking local *hukou* status may prevent migrants from having equal access to social insurance (Chan and Buckingham 2008) as well as equal opportunities to enter the state-owned sector which offers better welfare (Li and Tang 2002). Model 4 shows that all four indicators – housing ownership, neighbourhood environment, employment sector and social insurance – have a significantly positive effect on well-being and demonstrate strong explanatory power in migrants' well-being disadvantage. After including these *hukou*-related variables, the well-being disadvantage of urban-to-urban migrants decreases to a non-significant level and the well-being disadvantage of rural-to-urban migrants declines over 50 per cent in size.

Model 5 includes two indicators to measure sociocultural differences: how well respondents can speak the local dialect, and how well they can speak standard Mandarin – the two major languages of host communities. While local dialect is a salient marker of identity in a certain region, standard Mandarin is the official language nationwide and is more widely used in formal institutions and in the public sphere. Many migrants, especially rural-to-urban migrants, tend to use their own dialects and have regional accents when they speak Mandarin, which could affect their social integration and well-being. The results show that the proficiency in standard Mandarin has a significant effect on people's well-being, while fluency in the local dialect has a weaker and non-significant influence. After accounting for these two indicators, rural-to-urban migrants show no difference in well-being compared with urban non-migrants in the destination location.

The findings illustrate that, compared with urban non-migrants, rural non-migrants' lower well-being level is mainly ascribed to the economic disparity between urban and rural areas. For migrants, on the other hand, their well-being disadvantage is less related to the economic aspect than to the

institutional and sociocultural barriers. Specifically, the main obstacle facing migrants from an urban origin is the ongoing differentiation in *hukou* status which denies equal rights to certain resources, while for migrants from a rural origin, who have little experience of urban life, sociocultural differences may impede their social integration and further lower their well-being levels.

Propensity score method: a robustness analysis

Considering that migration is a self-selecting process in which different attributes of migrants and non-migrants may affect both the decision to migrate and future well-being outcomes, the findings might be undermined by this selection bias of migration. To reduce this potential bias, I conduct a robustness analysis by employing propensity scores in the estimation. Propensity score methods estimate the effect of a treatment or event by allowing for the covariates that may affect the probability of receiving the treatment or experiencing the event (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983). In this paper, propensity score – the conditional probability of assignment to a treatment or event given observed covariates – is estimated first, and then a weight parameter is generated and applied to create balance between the treatment and control groups. Although this approach can only account for observed covariates and cannot rule out hidden bias due to unobserved confounders, the two-step procedure allows the incorporation of more covariates and higher-order terms in the first stage, and avoids over-parameterizing and extrapolation in the second (Austin 2011; D'Agostino 1998; Dehejia and Wahba 2002). Therefore, it can reduce bias and increase precision, and provide a useful robustness check for this research.

In this study, the two-step matching process is conducted separately for respondents from urban and rural origins. First, I estimate the probability of migration using a logistic regression model among urban and rural *hukou* subsamples, respectively. Informed by previous studies, I draw on eight matching covariates which may influence both the decision to migrate and subsequent well-being. Apart from the socio-demographic variables that are already incorporated into the analysis – gender, age, marital status and years in education – I also include physical health status, self-efficacy score,¹⁰ father's education and the number of siblings at the age of 14 to estimate the likelihood of migration for each individual. The estimated propensity score is the predicted probability of migration from the fitted model. Although the eight covariates may not fully capture the pre-migration characteristics of migrants, they are the best available information in this survey and all have significant predictive power with respect to migration status.

Second, the predicted propensity score is used to obtain a balanced sample of migrant and non-migrant groups. To ensure the robustness of results, I use different matching algorithms in the analysis, including kernel matching, radius matching and nearest neighbour matching (Caliendo and Kopeinig 2008). The matching is restricted to the cases within the common support, which dropped

observations in migrant groups who have propensity scores either higher than the maximum or lower than the minimum scores of non-migrant residents. In the sequence given, the three matching methods include decreasing numbers of observations from non-migrant groups in constructing the counterfactual outcomes for migrant groups, leading to a sample size of 6,805, 6,754 and 4,204, respectively. With different analytical samples, the three methods give slightly different results, yet the basic findings are similar. The results that follow, shown in the main text, are obtained using the kernel matching method, while the results from the other two methods are shown in online appendix Tables AIV and AV.

After the selecting and weighting process, urban-to-urban migrants have similar covariate distributions as urban non-migrants, and rural-to-urban migrants share similar attributes with rural non-migrants. The distribution of the matching covariates before and after propensity score matching and the statistical tests for group differences are shown in Table V. The estimates from the models are shown in Table VI. These analyses confirm that, among respondents with a similar mobility trajectory and the same class position, migrants from both urban and rural origins have a significant well-being disadvantage compared with non-migrants.

Table V: *Descriptive statistics of matching covariates before and after propensity score matching*

Matching covariates		Urban origin		Rural origin	
		Migrants	Non-migrants	Migrants	Non-migrants
Gender					
Male	Unmatched	0.62	0.54*	0.54	0.50***
	Matched	0.62	0.65	0.54	0.54
Female	Unmatched	0.38	0.46*	0.46	0.50***
	Matched	0.39	0.35	0.46	0.46
Age/10	Unmatched	3.69	4.81***	3.56	4.71***
	Matched	3.71	3.77	3.56	3.57
Marital status					
Married/cohabited	Unmatched	0.71	0.87***	0.80	0.90***
	Matched	0.72	0.70	0.80	0.81
Single	Unmatched	0.25	0.05***	0.17	0.04***
	Matched	0.24	0.26	0.18	0.16
Divorced/widowed	Unmatched	0.04	0.08	0.03	0.06***
	Matched	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.03
Years in education	Unmatched	11.40	10.38***	7.97	5.90***
	Matched	11.51	11.60	7.98	7.87
Father's years in education	Unmatched	7.17	5.95***	4.70	3.10***
	Matched	7.24	7.25	4.69	4.65
Number of siblings at 14	Unmatched	1.70	2.43***	2.45	3.18***
	Matched	1.69	1.74	2.45	2.45
Physical health	Unmatched	2.98	2.77***	3.00	2.66***
	Matched	2.99	3.02	3.00	3.02
Self-efficacy score	Unmatched	3.35	3.26*	3.09	3.09
	Matched	3.33	3.34	3.09	3.10

* $P < 0.10$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.01$ (two-tailed t -tests).

The robustness check gives us more confidence that the well-being gap revealed is largely due to the external factors that have been discussed instead of personal attributes and characteristics that might distinguish migrants from local residents.

Conclusion and discussion

Does migration improve well-being? In order to have a clearer answer to this question, it is necessary to examine migrants' performance in the labour market alongside their geographical mobility, and to extend the scope from migrants' current positions to their overall social mobility trajectories. In this study, I focus on migrants who started from humble positions but achieved upward social mobility during their careers. Based on empirical analysis of a recent national dataset in China, this study found that the benefits of upward social mobility, including better economic rewards and potential psychological bonuses, are not enough to offset the well-being losses that accompany geographical mobility. Whether from a rural or urban origin, migrants report a consistently lower level of well-being than non-migrant local residents, after accounting for a similar mobility trajectory and the same current social position. Even those who have an urban origin and who have achieved the longest range of upward social mobility to the professional and managerial positions report a lower well-being level than average native urbanites.

I was tempted to ask: why, even for the most capable and successful migrants who have overcome difficulties in the labour market, is a well-being level equivalent to that of the local residents still beyond reach? Previous research has implied that differential rewards from the labour market might be a key reason, as migrants tend to suffer a wage disadvantage as compared to local workers in the same jobs (Meng and Zhang 2001), yet these findings could be explained by the fact that migrants tend to have a lower starting point in their careers. Once the whole mobility trajectory is accounted for, as this study has shown, migrants tend to have equivalent or higher incomes to those of local residents in the same class position.

Further exploration of the mechanisms show that, although economic disparity is the main driver for non-migrant rural residents' lower well-being levels, it is not the key reason behind migrants' well-being disadvantages; instead, it is the institutional barriers of the *hukou* arrangement and sociocultural differences that lead to migrants' limited gains in their quality of life. For migrants from an urban origin, lacking a local *hukou* status and being deprived of its associated resources account for their well-being disadvantage, whereas for migrants from a rural origin, the additional barrier of sociocultural differences adds to their difficulty in social integration. As a result, the well-being level of rural-to-urban migrants is not only lower than that of local urbanites but is also lower than that of rural non-migrants, even when they have moved into the salariat class.

Table VI: Ordinal logit regression model coefficients for the level of subjective well-being of the four comparison groups with different migration statuses (weighted data based on kernel matching results, $N = 6,805$)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Subjective well-being</i>					
<i>Migration status (urban non-migrants = ref)</i>					
Rural non-migrants	-0.278**	-0.234**	-0.098	-0.066	-0.007
Urban-to-urban migrants	-0.427**	-0.355*	-0.463**	-0.170	-0.116
Rural-to-urban migrants	-0.897***	-0.655***	-0.690***	-0.233	-0.140
<i>Class positions (salaried = ref)</i>					
Intermediate	-0.136	-0.108	-0.068	-0.019	-0.003
Self-employed	-0.202	-0.098	-0.080	-0.027	-0.006
Manual	-0.284*	-0.123	-0.095	-0.105	-0.073
Peasant	-0.314*	-0.109	0.036	0.028	0.073
<i>Control variables</i>					
Gender (female = ref)		-0.187***	-0.182***	-0.188***	-0.185***
Age/10		-1.293***	-1.344***	-1.425***	-1.404***
Age/10-squared		0.143***	0.151***	0.157***	0.157***
<i>Marital status (married = ref)</i>					
Single		-1.181***	-1.223***	-1.219***	-1.226***
Divorced/widowed		-1.411***	-1.321***	-1.307***	-1.312***
Years in education		0.070***	0.057***	0.046***	0.039***
Length of stay		0.009***	0.009***	0.005*	0.005*
<i>Explanatory variables</i>					
<i>(1) Economic disparities</i>					
Annual income (in log form)			0.267***	0.231***	0.225***
<i>(2) Resources related to local hukou</i>					
Housing ownership (no = ref)				0.354***	0.320***
Community environment				0.296***	0.294***
Employment sector (non-state = ref)				0.234*	0.240**
Social insurance (no = ref)				0.207***	0.208**
<i>(3) Sociocultural differences</i>					
Language proficiency in local dialect					0.040
Language proficiency in Mandarin					0.097***
cut1_cons	-4.677***	-6.720***	-4.376***	-2.594***	-2.106***
cut2_cons	-2.253***	-4.231***	-1.870***	-0.020	0.471
cut3_cons	0.879***	-0.958**	1.443**	3.443***	3.941***
<i>Model fit</i>					
N	6805	6805	6805	6805	6805
pseudo R^2	0.012	0.040	0.048	0.076	0.077
df	7	14	15	19	21
chi ²	124.341	347.835	392.554	550.881	561.449

* $P < 0.10$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.01$.

This study makes three contributions to the existing literature. First, it contributes to our understanding of internal migration in China, where occupational stratification combines with institutional barriers to function synergistically on people's well-being. With recent social changes, the environment within the labour market has been improved, so that migrants have a better chance to achieve upward mobility. However, after four decades of reforms that have targeted the *hukou* system, the remains of the system still penetrate people's daily lives and exert a lasting effect on their well-being. With this institutional barrier, migrants' personal striving for occupational success and a higher social position can only have rather limited gains on their well-being outcomes.

Second, this study may also contribute to our understanding of international migration. As discussed before, rural-to-urban migrants in China greatly resemble migrants who cross national borders. This study shows that they face at least triple barriers in pursuing a happier life through migration. The first barrier is the challenge of their occupational path, in which they need to overcome disadvantages such as lower educational levels and lack of fluency in the local language. The second is potential institutional barriers due to the lack of local 'citizenship'. This barrier may have a larger impact on migrants in destination countries with selective welfare systems than in destinations providing universalistic welfare to all residents. Third, the barriers resulting from sociocultural differences and their impact should not be underestimated. Such differences might be one of the greatest barriers to migrants integrating into the new society, and may thus exert a long-lasting impact on migrants' well-being. Therefore, it might be helpful for future migrants to consider that they may expect a higher income after migration and may have more opportunities to achieve upward social mobility than those remaining in the original locations, but to transform occupational success into a happier life, they have to fight another two battles and win both to become real winners.

Third, this study supplements existing research on socio-spatial mobility by bridging the gap in the understanding of its potential *influence* on people's personal lives and subjective experiences. The spatial dimension not only plays a unique role in social mobility trajectories, but also shapes its effect on people's quality of life and their perceptions about their lives. The compound effect of social and geographical mobility on well-being cannot be revealed by looking at the two components separately, while taking both into consideration contributes to our understanding of their respective influences on people's lives. This shows the potential of a combined perspective on socio-spatial mobility in research fields such as migration, health and human geography, and I hope this study will encourage researchers in these fields to further explore movements in both social and physical spaces and their interplay in the future research.

There are other potentials for future work along the line. For example, for the purpose of reducing heterogeneity of the starting point, this study restricts the target population to those who started their careers from the bottom.

Future studies may further explore whether migrants with a higher starting point may have a smaller well-being gap compared with natives in the destination location. In addition, this study only considers the well-being of migrants themselves whereas, in the Chinese context, other family members' quality of life is also important in family decisions. Future studies may take a collective approach and use family as the analysis unit. In terms of the potential changes in a longer time scale, survey data for a representative sample both of the overall population and of migrants rarely exist, not to mention collecting information on a longitudinal basis. Should such data be available, future studies may further examine the compound effect of social and geographical mobility in a dynamic manner.

(Date accepted: August 2019)

Notes

1. I would like to thank Anthony Heath, Nick Shryane and the three anonymous BJS reviewers for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions on previous drafts of this paper. Special thanks go to Jingming Liu and his colleagues at Tsinghua University for collecting and sharing this valuable dataset. In addition, I am sincerely grateful to Anthony Heath and Jingming Liu for their enormous support throughout my research process. The author alone is responsible for any remaining error in the paper.

2. In the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) series, which is a national representative survey conducted annually or biennially since 2003, three surveys have included more than one indicator for subjective well-being. CGSS2006 included an indicator of *Xingfu* as well as eight questions on life satisfaction in different life domains. The correlation between *Xingfu* and the principal component measure of life satisfaction was 0.53. CGSS2011 asked two single questions on *Xingfu* and overall life satisfaction, with the correlation between the two measures being 0.69. CGSS2005 asked respondents about their feelings in terms of both *Xingfu* and happiness, and the correlation between the two measures was 0.49. In many Chinese social surveys, *Xingfu* is more commonly used than either happiness or life satisfaction.

3. The effect of upward social mobility may come from two components: the position effect, which is linked with the embedded resources and benefits of a higher social position; and the mobility effect, which derives from the experience of moving upward per se. Recent empirical studies have shown that the well-being benefit from intragenerational upward mobility is mainly from the position effect rather than the mobility effect (Houle 2011; Zhao et al. 2017). In this paper, I do not differentiate between the two components and when I mention the effect of social mobility, I refer to the overall effect of the movement.

4. According to national statistics in 2011, around 75 per cent of internal migrants poured into the three metropolises of Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin, and the four eastern provinces of Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Fujian, whereas the permanent residents in these areas only accounted for 22 per cent of the overall population.

5. By doing so, I avoid introducing extra complexity. People with the experience of changing *hukou* account for 76 per cent in the sample, among whom the majority transformed their *hukou* type from rural to urban. This group features great heterogeneity in the ways they have converted their *hukou* type (e.g. via job recruitment versus via urban expansion), the different selection criteria they faced, and the length of time they have held their current

hukou status. The complexity of these situations and their influences on well-being are beyond the focus of this research.

6. Income is measured in logarithmic form. Considering that peasant families tend to work as a unit in agricultural production, I use average household income (household income divided by the number of family members) instead of personal income in the analysis. Due to data limitation and the lack of standard methodology to calculate equivalized income in China, I calculate the average household income based on household size only, while household composition is not taken into consideration.

7. As shown in online appendix Table AI, with migrants normally denied access to public housing and sometimes to commercial housing in the destination area, the indicator of housing ownership should not be understood merely as an indicator of wealth and assets, but also for disparities connected with *hukou* status. The same logic applies to the inclusion of neighbourhood environment, which is generated from principal component analysis based on four questions asking to what extent the neighbourhood was 'safe', 'clean', 'convenient' and 'pleasant'.

8. There is a debate about whether or not moving into the self-employed class should be regarded as upward social mobility. While some self-employed jobs give people more autonomy and a sense of independence, others might be a desperate choice for employees made redundant from paid work (Virdee 2006). The self-employed in China are not a homogeneous group, but compared with manual workers, the self-employed usually come

from more advantaged backgrounds and have significantly higher income and more assets after controlling for individual and household characteristics. Most manual workers had accumulated some wealth and built social networks before becoming self-employed. Therefore, self-employment is seldom regarded as a last resort for manual labourers in China, but more often a step up on the development ladder (Cao et al. 2015). It is also worth pointing out that the self-employed in this paper does not include street vendors.

9. The well-being level of urban native peasants is higher than expected given their low class position, which might be due to the rapid increase in value of their suburban houses and farmland in the urbanization process. In the dataset, this group has the highest level of housing ownership (90 per cent) compared with any other group among urban residents.

10. The self-efficacy score reflects the respondent's belief of being able to control challenging environmental demands by taking adaptive action. It was generated by principal component analysis based on the ten-item version of the General Self-efficacy Scale, which has shown reliability and validity across different cultures (Schwarzer et al. 1997). Previous studies have shown that people with higher self-efficacy scores are more likely to perform challenging tasks, set higher goals and stick to them (Schwarzer 2014).

[Correction added 9 Oct 2019, after first publication online on 25 Sep 2019: The previously incomplete note 5 and missing notes 6 to 8 have been corrected in this version.]

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web site:

Table AI: Key entitlements attached to a local urban *hukou* status before and after the reform

Table AII: Ordinal logit regression model coefficients for the level of subjective well-being of the four comparison groups with different migration statuses: salariat class consists of Classes I and II ($N = 7290$)

Table AIII: Ordinal logit regression model coefficients for the level of subjective well-being of the four comparison groups with different migration statuses: overall sample, rural sample and urban sample

Table AIV: Ordinal logit regression model coefficients for the level of subjective well-being of the four comparison groups with different migration statuses: results from the radius matching ($N = 6754$)

Table AV: Ordinal logit regression model coefficients for the level of subjective well-being of the four comparison groups with different migration statuses: results from the nearest neighbour matching ($N = 4204$)