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OPENING UP THE CHANCES OF BEING URBAN MIDDLE CLASS?
UNVEILING TENSIONS OF WELL-EDUCATED RURAL-TO-URBAN
MIGRANT'S LIFE EXPERIENCE IN CENTRAL CHINA IN THE ERA OF
NEW-TYPE URBANIZATION PROJECT

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Opening Up the Chances of Being Urban Middle Class? Unveiling Tensions of
Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrant's Life Experience in Central China in the Era
of New-Type Urbanization Project

XU Heng

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy

August 2019

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_____ **(Signed)**

_____ Xu Heng **(Name of student)**

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Abstract

Since the implementation of China's new-type urbanization project in 2014, together with the nationwide relaxation of the *hukou* system and the enactment of a series of 'university graduate-friendly' policies in China's inland metropolises, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' prospects of achieving upward social mobility in urban China has been described in an overly optimistic light. Building on a series of literature which have attempted to identify the underlying factors that contribute to shaping rural-to-urban migrants' life chances and upward social mobility prospects in urban areas, this research deploys the bottom-up perspective to unveil the tensions well-educated rural-to-urban migrants encounter in their upward social mobility pursuit in Central China under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Based on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with 20 well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City (both are pilot cities of the new-type urbanization project in Central China), as well as an intensive exploration of the new-type urbanization project in these two cities, this research argues that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' motivation and experience of pursuing upward social mobility is not only embedded in their experience of geographic mobility under the rural-to-urban divide, but is also shaped by the socioeconomic and institutional changes brought by the implementation of a new-type urbanization project. More specifically, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' specific experience of geographic mobility not only allows them to obtain a first-tier university diploma, relatively higher income, and white-collar occupations in urban areas, but also invokes their strong aspiration of settling down in the city and

further obtaining urban middle-class membership. However, the radical socioeconomic changes and institutional shifts brought by the new-type urbanization project oblige well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to accept the fact that urban homeownership outweighs the urban *hukou* and their occupational status in defining their expected urban middle-class membership. Meanwhile, with insufficient economic and social capital, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants cannot overcome the difficulties of obtaining urban homeownership and other privileges which serve to underpin urban middle-class membership. The irreconcilable tension between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' strong aspiration of being urban middle class, on the one hand, and the insurmountable challenges they encounter in obtaining urban homeownership and other privileges enjoyed by their urban counterparts, on the other hand, drag them into the swamp of senses of deprivation, uncertainty, and inferiority. In contrast to governmental propaganda predicting that the 'university graduate-friendly' project would broaden up well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' road towards achieving full development in urban areas, this research highlights that the 'university graduate-friendly' project operates to repress well-educated rural-to-urban migrants into the pool of cheap intellectual labour and further increases Wuhan's advantage in the fierce inter-urban competitions. Thus, the conflict between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' aspiration of being urban middle class and the fundamental aim of this project inevitably leads to this project's inadequacy in assisting well-educated urban migrants to obtain their aspired urban middle-class membership. For well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who move to Xiaogan, their decision to move back is not only the product of negotiation they made under the rural-urban divide, but also is driven by the expectation they assign to Xiaogan. They perceive Xiaogan as the comfortable arena in which they can more easily achieve urban

middle-class membership and fulfil their family formation plan. At the same time, this research finds that the institutional and socioeconomic changes brought by the ‘Wuhan-Xiaogan’ Integration Project increase returned migrants’ difficulties of obtaining urban middle-class membership and make them more vulnerable to the underlying contingencies and risks of their urban life in Xiaogan Prefecture City.

Overall, this research aims to understand the well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ shared experience of geographic mobility and expectation for urban middle-class membership, their diverse choices of destination, and their life chances in urban areas.

Key words: Well-educated urban migrant, new-type urbanization project, geographic mobility, social mobility, homeownership

Chapter One: Research Background

1.1 Introduction

China has experienced substantial social changes since 1978 (MacFarquhar & Fairbank, 1992).

Because the strategy for national development decisively shifted from ideological mobilization to enhancing China's global competitiveness through rapid modernization in the early 1980s and the radical expansion of the market economy in the mid-1990s, China, like other post-socialist states, is experiencing a process of radical privatization and is aggressively engaging in globalization.

Rather than achieving balanced development, as promised by official propaganda, the striking disparities in development between rural and urban areas, between coastal and inland regions, and between different ethnic groups characterize the social inequality in contemporary China (Chan; 2010; Chen, Liu & Lu, 2016). The acceleration of economic growth and urbanization in coastal regions, as well as the rapid collapse of the collective economy (i.e. people's commune in rural areas) nationwide, provide the conditions and incentives for rural surplus labour to move to mega-cities for employment opportunities. Thus, unprecedentedly massive rural-urban domestic migration emerged and rapidly increased in the last two decades, despite of the persistence of

institutional constraints from the household registration system (the *hukou* system). According to the official statistics, the number of rural-to-urban migrants reached 288.36 million in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Scholars increasingly indicate that young rural-to-urban migrants, unlike first-generation of migrant workers who work in urban area and return to their rural hometowns to form families and settle down, have strong aspirations of settling down and living in urban areas (Cai & Wang, 2008; De Brauw et al., 2002; Liu, Wang & Chen, 2017; Wang, Ren & Liu, 2019). Thus, rural-to-urban migrants' living and working conditions, as well as their chances of obtaining equal urban citizenship in urban areas, have drawn much attention from both academia and the general public. However, previous empirical studies indicate that rural-to-urban migrants cannot easily obtain urban citizenship, nor do they share the same access to public service resources enjoyed by their urban counterparts, due to the persistent constraints of the rigid *hukou* system. On the contrary, most of the rural-to-urban migrants must bear the unstable, transient, and troubled presence in urban areas. Moreover, they are more likely to be assimilated into the bottom class of the social stratification structure in urban society (Ni, 2014; Lu, 2002; Song, 2016; Xu et al., 2016).

The majority of previous social stratification studies have highlighted that rural-to-urban migrants are culturally, socially and economically disadvantaged in urban areas (Logan, Fang & Zhang,

2009; Solinger, 1999; Wen & Wallace, 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014). They insist that the persistent constraint of the *hukou* system is the main institutional mechanism which perpetuates the rural-urban divide of citizenship and impedes well-educated migrants' course of settling down and receiving upward social mobility in urban areas (Ding & Liang, 2010; Li, 2010; Li et al., 2015; Wen, 2005; Xie & Wang, 2006).

Besides the institutional constraints of the *hukou* system, some researchers argue that the rural-to-urban migrants' vulnerability in urban areas, i.e. their disadvantaged position in obtaining homeownership, permanent occupations, and social welfare, also results from their relatively poor education background or inadequacy of human capital. Due to the inadequacy of human capital, most rural-to-urban migrants are excluded from obtaining the relatively well-paid, permanent occupations in urban areas (Wu & Wang, 2014). Given this, some scholars insist that rural young adults who have successfully acquired first-tier university degrees (hereafter referred to as well-educated rural-to-urban migrants) are more likely to obtain permanent, well-paid occupations and enjoy more secure livelihood in urban areas than are migrant workers. However, recent literature has noted that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are also vulnerable in the urban job market (Li, 2015, 2003; Li, 2002). These studies further explicate that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' disadvantaged position in the urban job market is a result of the urban

labour market segmentation and other exclusionary policies in urban areas. This urban labour market segmentation and other exclusionary policies are generated from the strict *hukou* system and the rural-urban divide of citizenship. Thus, these recent studies insist that, like other groups of rural young adults in urban areas, well-educated urban migrants' prospects of settling down and achieving upward social mobility in metropolitan areas is also bleak (Li, 2015, 2003; Li, 2002; Li & Wang, 2012; Li & Zhang, 2008; Lian, 2009; Lu, 2005; Murphy, 2004; Song, 2016; Yan, 2009).

As mentioned, some scholars highlight that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are disadvantaged in obtaining well-paid, permanent occupations and urban citizenship in cities, and they are more culturally and psychologically vulnerable in urban areas, especially metropolitan areas (Lian, 2009; Zhang, 2013). These scholars argue that, due to the long-lasting rural-urban divide in terms of socioeconomic and cultural development, most rural young adults grow up in the relatively isolated and backward communities in rural areas. When they move to the metropolitan areas, then, they are more likely to suffer from the cultural shock or rupture, mainly as a result of the incompatibility between the rural lifestyle and urban culture. As a result of such irreconcilable incompatibility, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants tend to be marginalized or self-marginalized in metropolitan areas. Some researchers further shed light on the fact that some well-educated rural-to-urban migrants suffer from the underlying ambiguity or contradiction in

their identity, despite the fact that they have obtained career promotion and income growth in urban areas (Cheng, 2016; Lin, 2012; Wang, 2016).

Given the social instability and inequality caused by the rural-urban division, as well as the necessity to achieve the sustainable development, China's central government designed and implemented the new-type urbanization project in 2014. Loosening the threshold for rural-to-urban migrants to obtain permanent urban *hukou* is one of the aims of this urbanization project. In addition, stimulating the renovation of infrastructure in the inland regions, transferring manufacturing industries from coastal regions to inland regions, and expanding urban citizenship and welfare access to the migrant population are additional important parts of this ambitious urbanization project. The local authorities of some inland metropolises, such as Wuhan, Xi'an, and Chengdu, have implemented a particular series of policies to encourage well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to settle down in their jurisdictions, as China is actively involved in the industrial upgrading and transfer. According to official propaganda, the 'university graduate-friendly' policies designed by the local authorities of these newly rising metropolises nearly encompass all aspects of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' survival, assimilation, and development in urban areas. In other words, these 'university graduate-friendly' policies are aimed at providing well-educated rural-to-urban migrants with effective support in obtaining the

relatively high income, permanent occupations, private housing, and various types of service which are mobilized by privileged social groups to construct urban middle-class membership (Goodman, 2014; Miao, 2017). Based on such significant institutional and socioeconomic changes, some scholars have indicated that previous institutional constraints in well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' settlement and attainment of upward social mobility in urban areas are being loosened as a result of the implementation of the new-type urbanization project (Lian, 2015; Yang, 2016; Zhang & Lin, 2017).

Another important aim of the new-type urbanization project is to enhance the attractiveness of middle-sized and small cities for rural-to-urban migrants through transferring labour-intensive industries to these cities, making the large-scale investments in infrastructure, and expanding public provisions in these cities. Drawing on detailed investigations regarding socioeconomic development in smaller cities in inland regions and its impact on the living and working conditions of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who migrated to these smaller cities in their hometown regions after university graduation, some scholars have concluded that implementation of the new-type urbanization project has improved urban migrants' chances to attain upward social mobility in the smaller cities of hometown regions (Lian, 2015; Liu, 2019; Yang, 2016). However, their research has only yielded a thumbnail sketch of returned migrants' current situation in their

hometown cities under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Returned migrants' motivation to move back to their hometown region, the negotiations they went through when deciding on whom they wanted to be, and why they wanted to be those people in their hometown regions are topics that still lack detailed investigation.

Rather than using a macro-level approach to scrutinize well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' situation under the new-type urbanization project, this research has chosen to adopt the bottom-up perspective to re-explicate how well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' geographic mobility to the urban area shapes their livelihood, development, and upward social mobility in urban areas. Rather than understanding well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' upward social mobility in urban areas from a deterministic perspective, this thesis aims to explore the processes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants go through while they make choices about whom they want to become and where they want to become those people. Moreover, from the perspective of bounded agency, this research attempts to investigate how well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' ideas on upward social mobility are both embedded in their experience of geographic mobility under the rural-urban divide and shaped by the institutional and socioeconomic changes elicited by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project. Based on these exploratory attempts, this research also aims to examine whether the new-type urbanization project can provide

well-educated rural-to-urban migrants with enough support to achieve the relatively high income, permanent occupation, private housing, and various services which are mobilized by privileged social groups to construct urban middle-class membership. Finally, this study aims to provide a more nuanced insight into how the institutional and socioeconomic changes introduced by the radical urbanization project influence the social mobility pattern and social stratification structure in China's urban society.

In the introductory chapter, I briefly outline the social changes, particularly the implementation of the new-type urbanization project, which influence well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' livelihood and upward social mobility in urban areas in contemporary China. Based on this review of recent social changes, I justify the necessity of deploying the bottom-up perspective to re-investigate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' settlement, occupational development, livelihood, and prospects of attaining upward social mobility in urban areas under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Towards the end of this chapter, I briefly explain the organization and outline of this thesis.

1.2 Social Changes and Their Impact on the Interplay between Urban Migrants' Geographic Mobility and Social Mobility in Contemporary China

The degree to which modern industrialized societies enable talented individuals to rise in status, or conversely, the extent to which they reproduce inherited inequalities or social hierarchies from one generation to the next, are topics that still dominate the sociology under the general rubric of stratification (Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Favell & Recchi, 2011).

Partly due to the acceleration of globalization since the early 1990s, previous legal and institutional barriers, such as the border between nations, norms of communities, and collectives, that hinder the free movement of people, services, goods, and capital, have been gradually dismantled. Owing to the 'emancipatory' influence brought by these significant social changes, spatial movement has become easier and more frequent among individuals who are immersed in the wave of globalization (Bauman, 2000; Harvey, 2010). Thus, whether the accelerated flows of information, capital, and labour can provide ambitious, talented young adults with greater opportunities to attain upward social mobility has become a new part of the longstanding debates of sociological studies under the topic of social stratification and mobility. 'Spatial spiralism', which is designed to examine whether ambitious young adults with higher educational backgrounds can attain the livelihood improvement and career advancement by migrating from

their hometowns to metropolitan areas, is commonly used to understand immigrants'/migrants' social mobility chances in industrialized society (Watson, 1964).

In China, individuals' opportunities for migration, as well as their access to the public resources and services, had been strictly controlled and allocated by the government via the *hukou* system since the 1950s. Prior the implementation of the opening and reform policy in the late 1970s, such a rigid system in China had segregated the rural and urban populations, initially in geographical terms, but more fundamentally in social, economic, and political terms. It formed the foundation of China's divisive dualistic socioeconomic structure and the country's two classes of citizenship (Chan, 2010). In the form of government-sponsored rural-urban migration under the Chinese socialist regime, residents with rural origins could only obtain permission to transform their rural *hukou* to urban *hukou* by pursuing higher education (including both vocational and tertiary education), undertaking professional occupations, or serving in the army. This rigid system selected only the elite or privileged youths from rural areas to obtain urban *hukou* status (Hao et al., 2014, Liu, 2005; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2015). After obtaining urban *hukou* status, those rural elites would have access to permanent occupations in state-owned work units or enterprises and have the right to enjoy higher-quality public resources and service which were only enjoyed by the permanent urban residents (Wu & Treiman, 2007, 2004). Thus, during this period, the opportunity

for rural residents to achieve upward social mobility in the urban area was exceedingly limited.

Since the opening and reform in the late 1970s, the previous collective ownership economy system (including the people's commune in the rural area and the working unit system in the urban area) had gradually been dismantled nationwide. Thus, the institutional constraints on the movement of people, services, goods, and capital were gradually but slightly undermined. The establishment of the market-oriented economy in the middle of 1990s, especially China's accession into WTO in 1999, both stimulated the boom of manufacturing industries and the acceleration of the urbanization in coastal regions and metropolitan areas. The rapid modernization of coastal, urban regions yields the massive demand for cheap labour from rural areas. Thus, the rapid establishment of the nationwide market economy and the disintegration of institutional constraints on the human migration stimulate the desire and motivation of ambitious young adults in rural and provincial areas to move to coastal and metropolitan areas to attain personal development. Moreover, the government's retreat from the public service sphere - which refers to the large-scale commodification of public goods, such as education, medical services, and housing - in the late 1990s compelled the individual to bear the chief responsibility for his or her own survival and development (Yan, 2009). Due to the paradoxical phenomenon of desire and the enforcement of self-determination, which is defined by Bauman (2000) as 'compulsive and

obligatory self-determination', ambitious rural young adults can and must move to urban areas for the employment opportunities and better livelihood. However, as a result of the persistent nationwide constraints of the rigid *hukou* system, most of the rural-to-urban migrants were, in reality, treated as second-class citizens, deprived of the right to settle down legally in cities and access to most of the public welfare and state-provided services enjoyed by urban local residents. To an individual, *hukou* status is an important ascribed attribute in determining one's social and economic status in (Chan, 2009; Chan & Zhang, 1999; Solinger 1999; Wu & Treiman, 2004). The existence of such an overt discriminatory state institution is starkly incompatible with a rapidly modernizing China, which is aspiring to more actively engage with globalization and achieve nationwide sustainable development.

Recent theoreticians, such as Becker (1992) and Bauman (2000), have highlighted that people are becoming rapidly individualized in contemporary society. Thus, it is and must be their duty and necessity to cope with risks and challenges which are being socially produced. For ambitious young rural migrants, they must rely only on themselves to both overcome the negative effects of the exclusionary policies and strive for personal development in urban areas.

Recent studies have indicated that the young generation of rural-to-urban migrants have a keen aspiration to plant their roots in the urban areas in which they are studying or working, rather than wishing to earn more money in metropolitan areas and move back to their rural hometowns (Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Duan & Zou, 2012). However, most of the literature insists that rural migrants are largely exposed to the instability in their livelihood, career development and difficulties with obtaining homeownership, as well as suffer from other underlying exclusionary mechanisms in urban areas. Most researchers, especially those who have focused on stratification and inequality issues in urban China, have focused on the institutional causes to elucidate why rural-to-urban migrants are disadvantaged in urban areas. They argue that the persistent institutional constraints (i.e. from the *hukou* system) and other city entry policies significantly contribute to impeding rural-to-urban migrants' obtainment of permanent occupations with the bright prospects of career promotion, as well as homeownership and citizenship, in urban areas. These researchers further argue that the institutional barriers in the urban areas are the main structural forces which serve to confine young rural-to-urban migrants to the bottom of the social stratification structure in those areas, as well as reinforce the rural-urban divide in China (Chan, 2010; Liu & Xu, 2017; Wu, 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014; Zhang & Wang, 2010).

Aside from acknowledging the negative effects of the *hukou* system in excluding rural-to-urban

migrants from obtaining permanent occupation and citizenship in urban areas, some researchers have focused on the micro-level factors (i.e. educational background and family background) to elucidate the causes of rural-to-urban migrants' disadvantaged position in urban areas. Some researchers have highlighted that the inadequacy of cultural capital, particularly the lack of higher education degrees and professional skills, is the main reason for rural-to-urban migrants' vulnerable position in urban areas. They further argue that higher educational backgrounds and professional skills can help rural-to-urban migrants obtain well-paid occupations in the urban labour market and urban citizenship (Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Wang, Ren & Liu, 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014).

However, many researchers have rejected the overly optimistic emphasis on the importance of a higher education degree in improving the rural-to-urban migrants' situation in urban areas. While there is an increasing number of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants migrating to metropolitan areas after receiving higher education offered by formal higher education institutions (Tam & Jiang, 2015; Wu & Zhang, 2010), some researchers have indicated that the expansion of the higher education system under the rubric of 'meritocracy' in the late 1990s did not bring 'efficiency and opportunities' to ambitious rural young adults striving for personal development. For example, according to Bauman's (2000) elaboration on his definition of the difference between 'the

condition of individuals *de jure*' and 'their chance to become individuals *de facto*', the expansion and commodification of higher education system in the late 1990s has significantly increased the overall number of college students, which has indirectly resulted in the stiff competition of the labour market. These researchers further argue that the expansion of the higher education system since the late 1990s is the main reason for the over-supply of higher education degree holders, and this over-supply largely undermines the competitiveness of university graduates with disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. well-educated rural-to-urban migrants) in the job market. Thus, family background continues to play an important role in arranging university graduates into various kinds of occupations, with rural-to-urban migrants being more likely to obtain the relatively low-paid and temporary occupations in urban areas. Moreover, through scrutinizing well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' working and living conditions in metropolitan areas, some researchers have highlighted that well-educated urban migrants are also exposed to instability in career development, the rapid rise of housing prices and rent, and other underlying challenges in urban areas (Li, 2015, 2013; Li, 2002; Li & Wang, 2012; Li & Zhang, 2008; Lian, 2009; Lu, 2005; Murphy, 2004; Thøgersen, 2002).

1.3 The Implementation of the New-Type Urbanization Project and its Impacts on Rural-to-Urban Migrants

1.3.1 Brief Background on the New-Type Urbanization Project

To solve the inadequacy of public service supply in urban area areas and the other underlying issues in China's urbanization, and as well as further narrow the disparity of in regional development which has been deepened by accelerated modernization in last three decades, China's central government initiated and implemented the 'New-Type Urbanization Project 2014-2020' in 2014. To encourage urban migrants to settle down in the small and mid-sized cities, the central government has implemented two essential policies which are expected to shape rural-to-urban migrants' choice of residence. First, to attract more urban migrants - especially those with professional qualifications or formal higher education diplomas - to small and mid-sized cities, the central government implemented coercive requirements on local authorities of these cities to provide local permanent *hukou* to the migrant population in their jurisdictions. Thus, these migrants can obtain urban citizenship and access to the same public services, including education, vocational training, retirement insurance, health care insurance, and welfare housing, enjoyed by

local residents in the small and mid-sized cities. Within such an ambitious project, the central government promised that 99% of migrant children would share equal opportunities for schooling with their urban counterparts in 2020 (State Council of China, 2015). Second, the central government set out a series of targets to improve infrastructure, which encompass water supply, sewage treatment, and community service facilities, in small and mid-sized cities. The details of these targets are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 National New Urbanization Project: Targets

Items	2012	2020
Urbanization levels (%)		
Resident urban population	52.6	≈60
Population with urban <i>hukou</i>	35.3	≈45
Basic public services coverage (% of resident urban population)		
Migrant children receiving compulsory education		≥99
Vocational training for new entrants to labor force		≥95
Basic retirement insurance	66.9	≥90
Basic health care insurance	95	98
Welfare housing	12.5	≥23
Infrastructure (%)		
Public transit trip rate in cities with over 1 million population	45 ^a	60
Urban public water supply rate	81.7	90
Urban sewage treatment rate	87.3	95
Urban household refuse safely disposed rate	84.8	95
Urban community service facilities coverage rate	72.5	100
Resources and environment		
Per capita of urban construction land (m ²)		≤100
Urban renewable energy consumption rate (%)	8.7	13
The ratio of urban green buildings and new buildings (%)	2	50
The ratio of urban green areas and built-up areas (%)	35.7	38.9
Air qualities of cities according with national standard rate (%)	40.9	60

Note.

^a Shows the data was collected in 2011.

Source: China's New-type Urbanization Plan (2014).

Moreover, to encourage university graduates to settle and contribute to boosting socioeconomic development, the local authorities of some newly rising inland metropolises (i.e. Wuhan, Xi'an,

and Chengdu) have implemented a series of policies to enhance the attractiveness of their jurisdictions to university graduates who are striving for career development and secure livelihood in metropolitan areas. These policies can be categorized into two types: first, loosening the threshold for university graduates from other areas to obtain permanent local *hukou* and share access to the same public resources and services enjoyed by their local counterparts; and second, provide subsidies and beneficial policies to increase the employment opportunities, grants, and other support for university graduates to start a business, obtain the permanent occupations, and buy commercial housing in these inland metropolises.

Official statistics have revealed that these ‘graduate-friendly’ policies in inland metropolises have yielded noticeable positive results in terms of attracting more university graduates to settle down. For example, according to the statistics released by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Wuhan in 2019, around 406,000 university graduates chose to stay in Wuhan to work and live in 2018. Since the implementation of the MCCSW project in 2017, the number of graduates who choose to stay in Wuhan has increased by 20.4% (Wuhan Recruitment Bureau, 2019).

Following the logic of ‘spatial spiralism’, which assumes the migration to developed areas would enable talented rural/provincial youths to attain upward social mobility, to re-evaluate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ position in urban areas under this new socioeconomic scenario, well-educated rural-to-urban urban migrants appear to have great opportunities to obtain permanent occupational development and secure livelihood. This is because the institutional barriers, particularly the rigid *hukou* system, seem to have weakened in both metropolitan areas and smaller cities. Thus, it is assumed to be much easier for ambitious rural young adults to achieve upward social mobility in urban areas by accepting higher education in metropolitan areas. Given this assumption, some researchers have envisioned that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ pathway towards planting their roots and attaining upward social mobility in urban areas is broadened in the era of the new-type urbanization project (Lian, 2015; Yang, 2016; Zhang & Lin, 2015).

1.3.2 Empirical Efforts to Explore Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrants’ Destiny in the Era of the New-Type Urbanization Project

Some recent empirical efforts which have investigated well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’

position in urban areas after university graduation have mainly concentrated on returned migrants' position in the small and mid-sized cities of inland China. These studies on well-educated returned migrants have focused on their more advantaged positions in the job market due to the relative scarcity of higher educational backgrounds and professional skills. Aside from their security in career advancement, most well-educated returned migrants can more easily obtain homeownership, urban citizenship, and access to high-quality public resources and services in small and mid-sized cities (Lian, 2015; Liu, 2019; Liu & Li, 2017; Shen & Zhang, 2017; Yang, 2016). The findings of these empirical efforts are in accordance with the government's overly optimistic vision of the implementation of the new-type urbanization project and its effect on young rural-to-urban migrants' prospects of achieving upward social mobility in urban areas.

1.4 Necessities for Re-Investigating Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrants' Prospects of Upward Social Mobility under the Context of the New-Type Urbanization Project

While the institutional thresholds for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to settle down in urban areas seem to have been weakened under the context of the new-type urbanization project, recent scholars have argued that the institutional legacy of the *hukou* system, together with other

underlying city entry criteria, still contribute to excluding rural-to-urban migrants from obtaining access to the same public welfare, resources, and services enjoyed by their urban counterparts. In addition, the majority of them are still disadvantaged in the job market of metropolitan areas as compared to migrants with urban origins (Chan, 2010; Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Fang & Zhang, 2016; Liu & Xu, 2017; Wu & Zhang, 2018; Yang, 2016).

Moreover, homeownership, like occupational status, citizenship, and financial income, is also commonly accepted as an indicator to evaluate migrants' living conditions and upward social mobility in China's urban area (Mandic, 2010; Wu & Wang, 2014; Zavoretti, 2017). Though the institutional restrictions for migrants to obtain homeownership seem to have been loosened due to the implementation of the new-type urbanization project, some researchers have insisted that the homeownership gap between rural-to-urban migrants and their local urban counterparts still exists and is even being enlarged under the context of the new-type urbanization project. They further argue that this enlarging gap should be ascribed to the disparity in family financial support between rural migrant households and urban households (Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Fang & Zhang, 2016; Gan et al., 2016).

Through extending the social stratification and mobility studies to social agents' emotional and subjective sphere, recent scholars have argued that migrants'/immigrants' geographic mobility, which also serves as the spatial experience between developing and developed regions, may lead to a shift in their subjective self-identification of class status. More specifically, the experience of geographic migration will shape migrants'/immigrants' ideas on who they are, whom they want to be, and where they want to be those people (Davis, 2008; Gabriel, 2002; Geller, 2015; Ruvolo et al., 1992). Besides evaluating whether rural-to-urban migrants' geographical mobility to the urban area enables them to attain career advancement, livelihood improvement, and homeownership in urban areas, some researchers have suggested that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, who are usually perceived as high achievers in rural areas, have a strong sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in self-identification of class status (Li, 2013; Liao & Wong, 2018; Wang, 2014).

Moreover, both the macro-level studies, which have deployed the indicators (e.g. income, occupational status, or educational background) to identify and measure the middle class (Li, 2002; Lu, 2002; Zhou, 2005), and the micro-level studies, which have attempted to describe how the privileged social groups mobilize homeownership, consumption, and lifestyle to construct their urban middle-class identity (Goodman, 2014; Miao, 2017; Tang, 2013), have depicted the characteristics of the urban middle class, as well as how this privileged social group mobilizes

various resources to maintain their relatively advantaged status and obtain better life chances in urban areas. Whether the ‘university graduate-friendly’ projects which were initiated within a group of newly rising inland metropolises have encompassed nearly all aspects of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ survival, assimilation, and development in metropolitan areas as described by official propaganda, as well as whether such an ambitious project can effectively assist well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to obtain the urban middle-class membership, are important questions to ask.

Drawing on the academic debates and the new socioeconomic and institutional shifts that have resulted from the new-type urbanization project, it is necessary to adopt the bottom-up perspective to re-investigate the processes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants went through when making choices about whom they wanted to become and where they wanted to become those people in the era of the new-type urbanization project. Meanwhile, this research, from the bottom-up perspective, presents a more nuanced insight into whether the new-type urbanization project can provide well-educated rural-to-urban migrants with enough support in achieving the relatively high income, permanent occupation, private housing, and various services which are mobilized by privileged social groups to construct urban middle-class membership.

To solve the aforementioned problems, I organize the chapter plan as follows. In the second chapter of this thesis, I first systematically review previous macro-level studies which have attempted to describe the social stratification structure and the social mobility pattern from the top-down perspective. Second, I critically review previous research which has purported to explicate the emergence and characteristics, including behaviors, attitudes, and identity, of the middle class in contemporary China. Drawing on these reviews, I highlight the necessity of deploying the bottom-up perspective to understand well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' survival, assimilation, and development in urban areas, as well as emphasize the importance of understanding well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' pursuit of upward social mobility from both objective and subjective perspectives. Then, I critically summarize recent studies, which have been inspired by Bourdieu's theory of practice, to scrutinize the ambiguity in class identification of well-educated young adults with disadvantaged backgrounds. Based on this critical review, I introduce the rationale of choosing the refinements of Bourdieu's theory of practice as the theoretical framework of this research. Finally, I outline the research questions of this study and explicate how to operationalize the key concepts of theoretical framework in the following empirical investigations. In the third chapter, I first introduce the rationale of deploying critical realism as the epistemological stance of this study. Second, I briefly present the information on the research sites - Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City - as well as justify the

rationale of the research site selection. Then, I introduce the basic information on the research participants, eight of whom are well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in Wuhan Provincial City, and twelve of whom are returned migrants in Xiaogan Prefecture City. Finally, I introduce the data collection methods (in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis) of this study. In the final part of the third chapter, I briefly outline the data coding and analysis of this study, as well as further introduce the methods deployed to ensure the trustworthiness (including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) of this study. In Chapter Four, I deploy the bottom-up perspective to discern well-educated urban migrants' current situation and the prospect of attaining upward social mobility in Wuhan under the context of the new-type urbanization project. More specifically, greater attention is paid to well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' voices on their definition of upward social mobility in urban areas and their strategies to attain such upward social mobility. Drawing on intensive investigations of the eight well-educated urban migrants' narratives on the successes they achieved in Wuhan and the strong frustration behind their success stories, I suggest that well-educated urban migrants' rural-to-metropolis spatial mobility not only yields them with more developmental opportunities but also inculcates them to generate the 'metropolis-oriented' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure. Within such perceptual scheme of class structure, well-educated urban migrants' definitions of class status and upward social mobility are based on the comparison between

themselves and their urban middle-class counterparts. On the one hand, well-educated urban migrants have attained inter-generational upward social mobility in terms of conventional socioeconomic and cultural measurements. Thus, they perceive themselves as high achievers in the rural area and exhibit a sense of privilege over their rural peers when deploying the 'metropolis-oriented' framework to understand their social status in their rural hometowns. However, they perceive such achievements as taken for granted, while their definition of upward social mobility is whether they can achieve urban middle-class membership. Homeownership, career promotion, and children's access to high-quality educational resources are three pillars which underpin their definition of upward social mobility. On the other hand, due to their difficulties with obtaining homeownership and career promotion, as well as their children's access to high-quality educational resources in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants hold pessimistic self-perceptions of their upward social mobility prospects in Wuhan, as well as have keen senses of uncertainty, unfairness, and inferiority, especially when comparing themselves with local urban university graduates. In Chapter Five, I examine whether the 'Millions of College Graduates Staying in Wuhan' (MCCSW) project, which was initiated and implemented by the Wuhan local government, can broaden well-educated urban migrants' chances of becoming urban middle class in Wuhan, as described in governmental propaganda. However, based on the in-depth interviews with well-educated urban migrants who chose to stay in Wuhan after graduation, I illuminate that

well-educated urban migrants hold strongly suspicious attitudes towards the MCCSW in terms of its capacity to broaden their road towards achieving personal development in Wuhan. Based on the intensive fieldwork on the job fairs and affordable housing project for university graduates (*daxuesheng anjufang xiangmu*) in Wuhan, I, inspired by David Harvey's critical elaboration on 'urban entrepreneurialism', insist that the MCCSW project cannot fulfil well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of achieving personal development and upward social mobility. In particular, this overvalued project is incapable of assisting well-educated urban migrants in attaining homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources in Wuhan. I further argue that the MCCSW project is mainly designed to enhance Wuhan's competitiveness among inland China's metropolises in attracting manufacturing industries and investment from developed areas. Thus, transforming millions of university graduates into a large troop of cheap intellectual labour is the underlying but fundamental goal of the MCCSW project. In Chapter Six, I deploy the perspective of bounded agency to scrutinize returned youths' decision to move back to Xiaogan, the prefecture city located in their hometown region, and the prospect of obtaining urban middle-class membership in Xiaogan under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Drawing on intensive investigations of twelve well-educated urban migrants' narratives on the inner struggle they endured in the decision-making process of moving back to Xiaogan, I assert that returned youths' decision to

move back is not only the product of the negotiations they made under the obstacles they encountered in Wuhan but is also driven by the meanings and expectations they assign to their hometowns. Returned youths share the same dream of being urban middle class as well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in Wuhan. However, after reviewing the insurmountable difficulties of being urban middle class in Wuhan, returned youths choose to migrate to their hometown cities to fulfil their dreams of being urban middle class. Through deploying a ‘metropolis-oriented’ perceptual framework to understand Xiaogan and their prospects of being urban middle class in this city, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as the arena in which they can much more easily obtain that urban middle-class membership and complete their family formation plan. More specifically, due to the relative scarcity of their institutionalized and embodied cultural capital, as well as the quicker conversion from their cultural capital to economic capital and social capital in Xiaogan, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as the site in which they can obtain well-paid, permanent, and prestigious occupations in governmental institutions, state-owned enterprises, or public high schools, on the one hand, as well as accumulate more economic and social capital to complete their family formation plan, on the other hand. According to the intensive investigation on returned youths' workplace situations, I first highlight that returned youths' occupations in governmental organizations, state-owned enterprises, or public high schools not only yield them with relatively high salaries, prestigious status, and high-quality welfare treatment, but also

provide them with a strong sense of 'fish in the water', which results from their relatively bright prospects of career promotion. Thus, returned youths are more likely to experience high satisfaction with their current status in Xiaogan. Then, drawing on Dean Curran's refinement of Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, I highlight that returned youths gradually generate a sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards the radical socioeconomic shifts brought by the implementation of the 'Xiaogan-Wuhan Integration' project in Xiaogan Prefecture City. Based on returned youths' strong apprehensions about their future in Xiaogan, I argue that the implementation of such an ambitious project in Xiaogan largely contributes to accelerating the social stratification in Xiaogan according to the wealth differentials, as well as further undermining the stability of returned youths' livelihood and development in Xiaogan. Based on what has previously been discussed, I further argue that the radical institutional and socioeconomic changes brought by the new-type urbanization project heighten the importance of wealth differentials associated with class relations in shaping individuals' life chances in the rapidly urbanized Xiaogan. In Chapter Seven, I systematically explicate how this study can engage with and contribute to the social stratification and social mobility literature under the scenario of the new-type urbanization project. Finally, I outline the policy implications and limitations of this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The upward social mobility chances of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants has been regarded as an important issue within contemporary China's social stratification and mobility studies. Previous studies can mainly be classified into two types. The first type comprises the studies which have heavily relied on the macro-sociological models to describe the social stratification structure and detect the social mobility pattern in reform-era China. These studies have contributed to identifying the structural factors which work to hinder well-educated migrants' route towards upward social mobility and reproduce the class inequality in reform-era China. The second type refers to those studies which have focused on the subjective/individual dimension to unveil the processes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants went through when generating their specific expectations regarding upward social mobility, encountering the underlying structural powers impeding their upward social mobility pursuit, as well as negotiating with the underlying constraints and further deploying tactics to fulfil their expectations. Based on a systematic and critical review of previous research, this chapter illustrates that Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice is a penetrative framework to provide an illuminating but critical insight into the research questions of this thesis. A brief introduction to Bourdieu's theory of practice, a justification for

selecting refined Bourdieusian theory as analytical framework, and a nuanced elaboration on how to operationalize the analytical framework in this study are presented in the following sections.

2.1 Studies on Social Stratification Structure and Social Mobility Patterns in Reform-Era China

2.1.1 Market Transition Debate and Early Studies on Social Stratification Structure in Reform-Era China

Early studies on social inequality and the social stratification structure in reform-era China were primarily organized around the market transition debate (Bian, 2002; Cao & Nee, 2000; Li & Walder, 2001; Walder, 1995; Walder, 1995; Walder, Li & Treiman, 2000; Walder, Luo & Wang; 2013; Zhou, 2000). The market transition theory assumed that the expansion of the market economy would undermine the socialist principles of redistribution, which would result in a decline in returns to political privilege and an increase in returns to human capital and private entrepreneurship (Cao & Nee, 2000; Nee, 1996, 1991, 1989; Nee & Matthews, 1996). Opposing explanations have highlighted the persistent impact of the redistributive system or suggested that

the conversion of political power to economic advantage still exists in reform-era China (Bian & Logan, 1996). Moving beyond such controversy, some scholars have indicated that such a dichotomous interpretation should not have been drawn (Bian & Zhang, 2002; Jin & Xie, 2017; Zhou, 2000). They argue that the expansion of the market economy was not inevitably accompanied by a decline in the state's influence in the re-distributive system. Following this logic, more scholars are paying closer attention to the roles of specific institutions (the socialist legacy) in shaping the social inequality in reform-era China (Wu, 2019; Zhou, 2000). The urban work units (*danwei*) and the household registration system (*hukou*) have thus received special attention (Wu, 2002; Wu, 2019; Wu & Treiman, 2004).

2.1.2 *Hukou*, *Danwei*, and Chinese Social Stratification Structure in Reform-Era China

Hukou and *danwei* were two essential institutions established in the 1950s to effect the redistribution of resources and life chances among Chinese people. The *hukou* system required all Chinese households to be registered in the locale in which they resided and categorized under either agricultural or non-agricultural status. The system divided China into two societies (Chan 2009, Chan & Zhang, 1999; Wu, 2019), with the majority of the population confined in to the

countryside and entitled to a fraction of the rights and benefits that the socialist state conferred on urban residents, thus creating not only a spatial stratification between the countryside and the cities but also two unequal classes of the Chinese population (Solinger 1999; Wu, 2019; Wu & Treiman, 2004). In urban areas, the *danwei* served as an intermediate agent linking individuals to the state and conferring unequal socioeconomic status and life chances on workers in accordance with its structural position in the re-distributive hierarchy (Bian, 1994; Walder, 1992; Wu, 2019). Studies have documented individuals' *danwei* attainment and associated socioeconomic benefits in urban China (Bian, 1994, Lin & Bian, 1991; Wu, 2019).

Rapid privatization in the late 1990s fundamentally restructured the *danwei* system and created a more open labour market in urban China (Wu, 2019). Thus, some researchers have noted that the importance of the *danwei* sector in shaping and stratifying an individual's life chance in urban areas seems to have been largely undermined by the radical expansion of the market economy (Lin & Wu, 2009; Wu, 2019). Meanwhile, another group of researchers has indicated that *danwei* has remained relevant, but their mechanism for creating inequality may have undergone a substantial transformation as the channels of resource distribution among *danwei* had been significantly shifted (Li, 2015; Wu, 2002; Wu, 2013; Xie & Wu, 2008).

Compared to *danwei*, the *hukou* system played a much more prominent role in social stratification, especially in shaping rural migrants' life chances in urban areas. The rigid *hukou* system not only bounded the Chinese population in terms of geographic location, but also stratified their access to various occupations. The rural population was mostly attached to agricultural production, while the urban population enjoyed a larger scope of occupational choices. In addition, the *hukou* system also served to maintain the rural-urban divide in terms of citizenship. More specifically, the rural population enjoyed few of the rights and benefits which the state granted to the urban population. Previous studies have indicated that rural *hukou* origin would significantly limit one's educational attainment and chances of joining the Communist Party (Wu, 2019; Wu, 2011, Wu & Treiman, 2004), and, even today, large disparities in schooling and income between rural and urban *hukou* holders remain (Hao et al., 2014; Liu, 2005). Though *hukou* status is perceived as a primarily ascriptive attribute, there are still limited available channels for those of rural origin to obtain urban status, such as receiving vocational/higher education or joining the Communist Party or military service (Zhang, 2015). For migrants with rural origins, converting their *hukou* status from rural to urban is a central aspect of upward social mobility. This selective process also shapes the pattern of inter-generational occupational mobility in Chinese society (Lin & Bian 1991; Wu, 2019; Wu & Treiman, 2007). However, as some researchers have highlighted, access to these resources and channels is constrained by family background, including *hukou* origin (Wu &

Treiman, 2004).

Despite economic reform having relaxed administrative control of rural-to-urban migration via the *hukou* system, many local city governments continue to employ *hukou* status as the explicit basis for providing subsidies, welfare, and public services and to discriminate against migrants without local *hukou* (Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Wu, 2019; Zhang & Wang, 2010). In addition to the rural-urban *hukou* divide, the distinction between local *hukou* and non-local *hukou* also plays an important role in determining workers' occupational status, attainment and earnings (Li et al. 2012). In the rapid urbanization process, especially since the implementation of new-type urbanization in 2014, many villages have been directly incorporated into cities, and their residents have been granted with urban *hukou* status. How such significant social changes alter the selectivity and socioeconomic significance of urban *hukou* status necessitates more in-depth investigation (Wu, 2019; Wu & Zheng 2018).

2.1.3 Micro-Level Factors and Social Mobility in Reform-Era China

Given the existing intellectual gap between the macro-level institutional transition and social

inequality among individuals, a new line of literature has moved a step further toward identifying the micro factors which work to shape the social mobility pattern and reproduce the social inequality in reform-era China. Education, housing, and social networks/*guanxi* have been identified as the important micro-factors which shape individuals' life chances and further contribute to influencing the social stratification structure in urban China (Song & Xie, 2014; Tam & Jiang 2015, Walder & He, 2014; Wu, 2019; Wu & Zhang 2010).

Higher Education Expansion and Social Inequality in Reform-Era China

Despite the arguments about how the institutional transitions have shaped social stratification and social mobility in reform-era China, it is impossible to ignore the increasing importance of higher education qualification in individuals' status-attaining process in reform-era China. Some researchers have argued that profit-oriented firms have played an increasingly important role in the urban labour market since the mid-1990s. If meritocracy is the major criterion for these firms to hire employees, higher education qualification should become the locus for researchers to investigate the pattern of an individual's social mobility in reform-era China.

Status Attainment Model and Higher Education Qualification

Most of the academic attempts, which purport to understand the importance of higher education qualification in shaping one's occupational attainment and life chances, are based on the logic of the status attainment model (Jackson et al., 2008). Following fundamental work by Blau and Duncan (1967), the standard status attainment model attributes an individual's attained status in society to one of two theoretically distinctive causes: inheritance or personal effort. While the society, in which an individual's attained status is caused by personal effort, is built on the principle of meritocracy. In most Western countries, achieved status is measured by an individual's occupation of a wage job. Inheritance refers to advantages inherited from the one's class origin or family background, which is usually examined by parental education (often referring to the father's educational background) and parental occupation; in contrast, personal effort is always related to personal achievement, which is commonly defined by an individual's educational achievement.

The status attainment literature long focused on the role of education in the intergenerational mobility process (Jackson et al., 2008). Diagram 1.1 illustrates the hypothesized relationship

between social origin, educational attainment, and social destination under the status attainment model. Most empirical studies have found that higher educational attainment acts as the mediator which transmits the effect of social origin (family background) on the youth's social destination. There are two pathways that comprise the mechanism: social origin influences higher educational attainment, while that higher educational attainment has a significant effect on the youth's class destination. To explore the underlying mechanisms which have resulted in immobility in some Western states, researchers have focused on the association between social origin and educational attainment to detect the causes of social immobility. These researchers indeed provided abundant empirical evidence demonstrating how social origin influences the next generation's higher educational attainment via higher educational access, school performance, and field of study (Ayalon & Shavit, 2004; Blanden & Machin, 2003; Reimer & Pollak, 2009; Torche, 2005; Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan & Cheung, 2003).

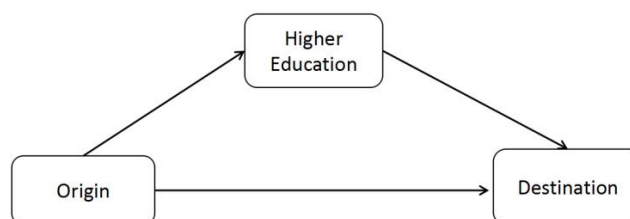


Diagram 1.1 Origin, education, and destination: the OED triangle

Some sociological researchers have focused on the disparity in higher education access between children with advantaged backgrounds and their disadvantaged counterparts to account for social immobility in Western states (Blanden & Machin, 2004; Reimer & Pollak, 2010). Using vertical educational alternatives (making choices between more prestigious, traditional research universities and less prestigious, more application-oriented universities of applied science) and horizontal educational options (selecting the field of study) to measure the distribution of college access in Germany, Reimer and Pollak (2010) discovered that, although there is no significant correlation between a student's social background and the horizontal educational alternatives, there is still a strong correlation between an advantaged social background and their easy access to prestigious research universities.

Researchers have found a strong correlation between a student's social origin and his or her choice of discipline, and they have further drawn on this to account for how the inequality in the higher education system has resulted in the social immobility in Western countries (Ayalon et al., 2008; Erickson & Jonsson, 1998; Gerber & Schaefer, 2004; Kalmijn & Van der Lippe, 1997; Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan & Cheung, 2003). Some have indicated that children from skilled manual-worker families typically select technical areas at the lower or intermediate level, while children of the service class more often enrol in professional fields like law and medicine (Jackson

et al., 2008; Werfhorst, 2002). They have additionally noted that children from middle-class families perform better in universities than do children from working-class families, particularly in cultural and professional fields of study, while technically oriented disciplines, such as mathematics, become the shelter for those students with disadvantaged family backgrounds (Davies & Guppy, 1997; Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan & Cheung, 2003).

Social Mobility Studies Based on the Status Attainment Model in Reform-Era China

As noted in the first chapter, the rapid dissolution of the state-controlled employment arrangement system and the rapid expansion of the higher education system in the late 1990s have significantly altered the dynamics of social stratification and mobility in China in last two decades. Through applying the status attainment model to re-investigate social stratification and mobility in reform-era China, previous empirical studies have highlighted that different sectors of the higher education process, including higher education access (particularly access to elite university or first-tier universities), the field of study, and higher educational performance, serve to perpetuate, enhance, and legitimize the disparity in status attainment between young adults with disadvantaged social backgrounds and their counterparts with the advantaged social backgrounds

(Chan & Ngok, 2011; Hannum, 1999; Hannum, An & Cherng, 2011; Li, 2013; Li et al, 2015; Lin & Zhang, 2006; Wu & Zhang, 2010; Yang, 2006).

Some researchers have pointed out that, due to the shortage of senior high school education resources in rural areas, most students with rural backgrounds face a disadvantaged disadvantage situation in the college entrance examinations. This disadvantage eventually results in their limited access to formal education offered at prestigious universities (Chan & Ngok, 2011; Hannum, An & Cherng, 2011; Li et al., 2015; Lin & Zhang, 2006; Wu & Zhang, 2010; Yang, 2006); indeed, the expansion of the higher education system, especially the reform of the higher education institution enrolment policy, indeed favors students with advantaged social backgrounds (Tam & Jiang, 2015; Wu & Zhang, 2010). Some researchers have argued that, although the expansion of the higher education system has indeed quantitatively increased rural students' access to higher education, family background continues to play an important role in sorting students into different tiers of schools and different fields of study (Wu, 2019, 2011). Attending a prominent high school is key strategy deployed by urban middle-class families to ensure their children obtain higher scores on college entrance examinations and thus gain access to higher-quality universities (Liang et al., 2012). While a series of special admissions policies have been designed to recruit students with talents, these policies, in reality, benefit those from advantaged family backgrounds (Liu, Wang &

Yang, 2009; Wu & Zhang, 2010). Meanwhile, rural students' access to elite and prestigious universities is highly limited (Chan & Ngok, 2011; Yang, 2006). Researchers have further found that those rural students who are enrolled in prestigious universities are more likely to be allocated to 'cold subjects' (*lengmen xueke*) - disciplines with low economic return and the bleak employment prospects (Yang, 2006). Moreover, due to the advantage advantages (e.g. in reading, English, or sports) attained from previous formal education experience, youths with urban, affluent family backgrounds tend to exhibit better school performance than youths with rural, low-income family backgrounds (Ding, 2006; Ding & Liang, 2010).

Some scholars have further explored the implications of these findings for inter-generational social mobility and the evolution of China's social structure (Wu, 2019; Zhou & Xie, 2017). Zhou & Xie (2017) have highlighted a decline in social mobility among non-agricultural occupations from 1996 to 2012, although there has been substantial mobility from farm origins to non-farm destinations associated with the recent economic development and industrialization.

On the whole, previous scholarly efforts have unveiled the nature of the higher education system in post-socialist China. Rather than providing equal upward social mobility opportunity to youths

with different socioeconomic backgrounds as described by official propaganda, the higher education system is serving to perpetuate and legitimize the inheritance which urban, affluent youths have obtained from their class origins. This inequality further leads to the disparity in developmental opportunity between rural youths and their counterparts with advantaged backgrounds, which eventually contributes to reproducing the social inequality between rural and urban, poor and rich in reform-era China.

2.1.4 Homeownership and Social Inequality in Reform-Era China

Since the radical commodification of the urban housing system in the late 1990s, the rate of home ownership has rapidly risen, and a new mechanism for wealth generation has emerged (Li & Wang, 2012; Wu, 2019). While access to privatization programmes was relatively equal for urban residents working in the state sector, cadres and professionals had substantially greater wealth than others in the form of home equity shortly after privatization, primarily as a result of their prior tenure of newer and higher-quality apartments (Song & Xie, 2014, Walder & He, 2014). Rural migrants without local *hukou* were excluded from the urban welfare system and, thus, were persistently disadvantaged in access to housing (Logan, Fang & Zhang, 2009). Meanwhile, the

booming real estate market and skyrocketing prices since 2003, especially in certain large cities, have further enhanced incumbents' advantages and led to widening wealth gaps, especially between housing owners and migrants. More specifically, residents with more economic capital and re-distributive power can rely on their additional private flats to generate financial income, while most migrants must live in the city village or city outskirts. They are largely exposed to the low-quality and instability of the residential space (Li, 2016; Ma, 2018; Wu, 2019). Even though some migrants who have bought private flats in urban areas, they have to experience material deprivation and hardship to a significant extent (Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Logan, Fang & Zhang, 2009; Mandic, 2010; Wu & Wang, 2014).

Meanwhile, some researchers have highlighted that the homeownership serves as a mechanism to differentiate urban residents' access to urban citizenship, public resources, and residents' lifestyle in rapidly urbanized China (Fleischer, 2007; Wu, Edensor & Cheng, 2018; Wu, Zhang & Waley, 2016; Zhu, 2011). Urban residents who have sufficient financial capacity to purchase a high-quality private flat, they can easily obtain access to the high-quality public resources, convenient public facilities, and modern compounds. In contrast, migrants, particularly those without enough financial support, are largely excluded from obtaining access to those benefits enjoyed by their counterparts with better socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.1.5 Social Network and Social Inequality in Reform-Era China

Previous research has indicated that the lack of formal labour market mechanisms continues to create both a strong need for and opportunities for economic actions to be organized around informal channels via social networks or *guanxi*. They insist that the intensity and effectiveness of one's social networks or *guanxi* significantly shapes one's life chance and status attainment in urban areas (Bian, 2002; Lin & Bian, 1991; Lu, Ruan & Lai, 2013).

Some researchers have pointed out that the network perspective fits well with Chinese culture of *guanxi*, or interpersonal connections of sentiments and obligations that dictate social interaction and facilitate favor exchanges in Chinese society. These researchers note that *guanxi* contacts are predominantly relatives and close friends of *guanxi* users, and, when they are acquaintances or distant friends, connections are made through intermediaries to whom both *guanxi* contacts are strongly tied (Bian, 2002, 1994; Bian & Zhang, 2001)). This phenomenon contrasts with that of Western countries, where weak ties of infrequent interaction are more frequently used than stronger relationships in obtaining information about job openings. While, in China, strong ties are

used to secure influence on the authorities who make employment and promotion decisions (Bian, 2002).

Researchers have also highlighted that the disparities in social capital possession and return between rural-to-urban migrants and urban locals have considerably led to income inequality between these two groups in urban China (Lu, Ruan & Lai, 2013). Some researchers have discovered a strong correlation between an individual's social background and his or her ability to establish and mobilize a *guanxi* network determining that university students with disadvantaged backgrounds (mainly those from rural and low-income family backgrounds) tend to establish short-term, instrumentally oriented *guanxi* with others who share similar backgrounds. When facing difficulties or obstacles in seeking employment, they cannot mobilize effective social networks or *guanxi* to gain access to high-paid, permanent occupations like what their advantaged counterparts do (Li, 2013).

In brief, their social capital deficit (including capital possession and return deficits, as well as inadequacy in expanding social networks) is another structural factor which impedes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' achievement of upward social mobility in urban society.

2.1.5 Limitations of Previous Studies on the Structural Factors and Social Inequality in Reform-Era China

Based on the presented literature review, previous studies, based on specific sociological models, indeed work together in identifying which structural factors contribute to situating well-educated migrants at a disadvantaged position in pursuing upward social mobility, despite their successful migration from rural to urban areas after receiving higher education in metropolitan areas. These studies also provide abundant empirical evidence on how these underlying structural factors reinforce and reproduce the class inequality and rural-urban divide in reform-era China. However, some critics have expressed deep concern regarding the inadequacy of the rigid sociological models commonly deployed by empirical studies. For example, Lahire (2011) further argues that the social reality embodied in each individual actor is more complex than what is presented in these structural models (Lahire & Fernbach, 2011). The limitations of previous studies on the structural forces and social inequality in reform-era China mainly centre on the following.

At socio-ontological level, as suggested by Archer (1995) and Bhaskar (2013), structure and

agency are two separate but interdependent strata which respectively possess entirely different properties and powers. In the dialectical interplay between these two sides, structure is the prerequisite for agency (the social agent's action and representation), meaning that social structures both enable and establish limits on agency.

Moreover, while social structures already exist for each social agent, agency (action) can still modify those structures, which means that a whole set of actions can maintain or change social structures (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 2013). Thus, when conducting social scientific inquiries, both sides of this interplay should be taken into our consideration. In previous studies on the structural forces and social inequality, well-educated migrants' understanding of their current situation and their prospect of upward social mobility, as well as strategies they adopt to pursue upward social mobility, which are manifestations of agency, have largely been overlooked. Well-educated urban migrants have been depicted as a large group of 'units' which passively bear the influence of social structure.

At the epistemological level, Helen Roberts (2013) criticizes previous social stratification studies in Western countries as merely viewing social class as one's market situation or life chance in a

stratified society. She further argues that social class is more involved with the question of where an individual is situated and what influences an individual's situation and life chance. Indeed, the processes by which an individual obtains his or her class position, including what an individual has experienced in pursuing upward social mobility and how an individual has gotten to a specific position, have largely been overlooked in previous empirical research. In previous social stratification and inequality studies, social class has merely been viewed as a particular market situation, or life chance. As Reay (1998) argues, limiting class debates to those sociological models which are entirely involved with 'objective' conditions or spheres would result in neglecting the myriad ways in which social class differences contribute to social inequality. Social class, as a complicated geometry formed in numerous and dynamic ways, would be oversimplified as a static condition which is arbitrarily categorized based on particular 'objective' criteria (Reay, 1998).

At the methodological level, as critical realists advocate, the social world, as an open system, is a consequence of the interaction between many different powerful particulars, and the operation of any individual particular is modified and restricted in various ways as a result of operating in relation to various others. In contrast, the natural world, as it is when science intervenes, is a closed system in which the operation of one particular power is isolated from the operation of all

others (Bhaskar, 2013; Bhaskar & Callinicos, 2004). Thus, critical realists highly reject the positivist claim regarding obtaining knowledge on the social world via sensory data input. They further argue that the positivist approach will produce a closed system ontology which construes the natural and social worlds. Previous sociological models are closed systems which combine a particular set of properties to define and measure the class origin or class destination of well-educated migrants. Thus, those underlying structural mechanisms, which are less measurable, work to impede well-educated urban migrants' upward social mobility, and how those mechanisms shape well-educated migrants' practice and representation could not have been fully investigated by previous studies based on those sociological models.

At the same time, the applicability of previous macro-sociological models to the study of social stratification and social mobility under the context of the new-type urbanization project has been strongly questioned by academia. First, these macro-sociological models were mainly designed and developed by Western scholars to investigate social stratification and social mobility issue of industrialized society. When modifying these macro-sociological models and applying them to rapidly urbanized China, previous researchers have mainly focused on the social stratification and social mobility issues in mega-cities. Thus, the social stratification and social mobility issues in small and mid-sized cities were, more or less, overlooked. Since the implementation of the new

urbanization project in 2014, the Chinese central government has taken a series of efforts, such as transferring manufacturing industries from the coastal areas to inland areas to boost the socioeconomic development in inland small and mid-sized cities. Thus, social stratification and mobility issues in small and mid-sized cities under the context of the new-type urbanization project warrant further scholarly investigation.

Recent studies have shed light on the fact that well-educated return migrants have successfully obtained non-manual worker jobs or occupations in governmental organizations, state-owned enterprises, or other public institutions in smaller cities (Lian, 2015; Shen & Zhang, 2017; Yang, 2016). Moreover, they enjoy subsidies and other welfare policies provided by their prestigious work units in terms of housing, catering, and medical services. Based on the empirical findings of such studies, the previously mentioned sociological models seem to successfully predict that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants will obtain white-collar occupations, improve their living conditions, and further achieve upward social mobility in urban areas through the meritocratic system if the structural barriers are largely removed. In metropolitan areas (e.g. Xi'an, Wuhan, and Chengdu), the institutional threshold for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to obtain permanent urban *hukou* has significantly been eliminated. Furthermore, the 'university graduate-friendly' projects, which implemented in a group of inland metropolises seem to ensure

well-educated urban migrants' access to high-quality employment opportunities, grants to start businesses, and private flat ownership from the affordable housing project. Thus, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants also seem to have greater opportunities to achieve upward social mobility in metropolitan areas. Moreover, some scholars have highlighted that income, occupational status, and homeownership are commonly mobilized and deployed to define urban middle-class membership in reform-era China (Goodman, 2014; Lu, 2007; Tang, 2013; Miao, 2017). If the 'graduate-friendly' projects indeed provide well-educated rural-to-urban migrants with assistance as described in governmental propaganda, well-educated urban migrants are more likely to climb to the urban middle class in inland metropolitan areas under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Thus, future studies which follow the logic of previous studies based on sociological models may arrive at the conclusion that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have more developmental opportunities, and are more likely to move up to urban middle class through the meritocratic pathway, due to the socioeconomic and institutional shifts brought by the new-type urbanization project. This exceedingly optimistic prediction is highly congruent with governmental propaganda on the new-type urbanization project's impact on well-educated young adults' development in urban areas. However, previous social psychological studies have insisted that upward social mobility should not only refer to the shift in objective class status, but should also encompass the change in an individual's subjective class identification (Elbert & Perez, 2018;

Hodge & Treiman, 1968; Jackman, 1979; Jackman & Jackman, 1973). Including the subjective dimension in our investigation on well-educate rural-to-urban migrants' upward social mobility in urban areas may raise a series of questions; for example, do well-educated rural-to-urban migrants subjectively agree that they have structurally moved up to the urban middle class position or received upward social mobility? What are well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' perceptions on who they are, and what are their expectations on whom they want to be and where they want to be those people? Are any underlying factors impeding their journey to that expected social position? These crucial research questions have generally been overlooked in previous social stratification and inequality studies from the top-down perspective.

Regarding the relationship between social structure and agency, some scholars have noted that social structures are the contexts in which social agents' actions and representations take place; in turn, the agents' actions and representations constitute the environment in which the structures are reproduced or transformed (Danermark et al., 2002). In other words, agency can serve as the prism for social researchers to investigate a change in social structure and its impact on the social agent. Thus, it is possible to obtain a more nuanced picture on why well-educated rural-to-urban migrants generate particular expectations on whom they want to be and where they want to be those people, what underlying constraints they encounter in fulfilling their expectations in terms of

upward social mobility, and what strategies they deploy to overcome those constraints, if scholars re-investigate these issues from a bottom-up perspective.

2.2 Studies on School and Working Experience of Well-Educated Trans-Class Travelers with Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice has widely been adopted by previous studies as the theoretical framework to study trans-class travelers (in this case, ambitious young adults from backward rural or provincial areas who strive for securing livelihood and career advancement in metropolitan areas), as well as their living and working conditions in metropolitan areas. These studies have usually traced back to these trans-class travelers' life experiences in universities or workplaces to investigate how underlying structural barriers in different sub-fields of metropolitan areas collide with trans-class traveler's ideas on who they are and whom they want to be. Based on this collision, previous researches have further investigated how these trans-travelers failed to develop tactics for fulfilling their ideas, as well as why they were channeled to the marginalized position in the metropolitan areas.

In the following sections, I first briefly outline Bourdieu's definitions of inter-related concepts, habitus, capital, and field. Second, I critically review previous studies which have studied the educational and working experiences of trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds in both Western countries and China. Then, I further summarize the limitations of previous investigations. In the fourth part, I discuss the criticism of Bourdieu's theory of practice and Bourdieu's definition of agency, as well as introduce the refinement of Bourdieu's framework which is adopted in this research. Finally, I outline the research aim and research questions, as well as elucidate how the key concepts of Bourdieu's theoretical framework are operationalized in this research.

2.2.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Rather than directly examining how the changes in social structure influence a social agent's practice or representation, Pierre Bourdieu attempts to penetrate the surreptitious forms of social differentiation or inequality by which pedagogical and other institutions inculcate within our personal and bodily dispositions. He insists that social agents, or social actors, exhibit intricate, complex understandings of the social conditions which influence, and are influenced by, their

personal decisions and actions (Calhoun et al., 2002; Elliot & Lemert, 2013).

As a ‘constructivist structuralist’ or ‘structuralist constructivist’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), Bourdieu aims to transcend the ‘artificial’ dichotomy of subjectivism and objectivism. He insists on a dialectical relationship between structure and agency; in other words, structural powers guide and impede an agent’s actions and representations, while the social agent’s practices and representations provide the conditions for the existence of the structure, and a whole set of actions can further reproduce social structures (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Calhoun et al., 2002; Elliot & Lemert, 2013; Grenfell & James, 1998; Jenkins, 1992). Based on the ambition to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy to account for the social changes or social reproduction, Bourdieu focuses on the logic of practice to explore social agent’s practical knowledge, the social structure which circumscribes social agents, together with the capital and position occupied by social agents. His theory of practice is the umbrella term which includes his elusive but innovative concepts, i.e., habitus, capital and field.

Habitus

Drawing on this ontological stance, Bourdieu has designed the concept of habitus to bridge the structure-agency dichotomy. Habitus is the central concept of his theoretical framework. It can be defined as a system of durable, transposable (but not immutable) dispositions, which are structured structure predisposed to function as structuring structure (Bourdieu, 1990, 1984, 1977). As the result of an agent's incorporation of his or her experience of past socialization, habitus is embodied as a form of the agent's inclinations - tendencies to believe, judge, feel, and act (Calhoun et al., 2012; Grenfell & James, 1998).

Thus, habitus is a driving principle of agents' relatively homogenous and durable practices and representations. Bourdieu (1990) emphasizes that the social agent's experience of early socialization establishes the fundamental framework for the agent to acquire cultural elements. However, such a framework usually works on an unconscious level through familiarization within an imposed family structure and through inculcation at school. The lack of competition from other socializing influences during childhood, together with the long duration and many repetitions of primary socialization, result in the homogeneity and stability of a social agent's practices and representations.

The stability of the social agent's disposition is then reinforced by the influence of the dispositions on the future mode of socialization. In his work, *Reproduction of Education, Culture, and Society*, Bourdieu argues that disposition is part of what one is 'reasonably permitted to hope for' regarding the duration of one's studies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Thus, the probability that an agent will confront other sources of socialization is highly limited. This stability results in the reproduction of the social agent's initial social position via academic institutions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

However, to avoid the criticism for determinism, Bourdieu stresses that habitus is a flexible, open-ended generative system, which serves as a set of loose guidelines of which actors are not necessarily aware (Calhoun et al., 2012).

Field

Bourdieu (1977) insists that the expression of habitus largely relies on the field, another important concept of his theory. Field refers to the social space characterized by 'objective relations which have a logic and a necessity that is specific and irreducible to those that govern other fields'

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, one's social world consists of different fields, such as religion or culture. These fields are micro-fields, while the macro-field is the 'field of power' (politics). This macro-field is the source of the hierarchical power relations which structure all other fields (Bourdieu, 1990).

Capital

One of Bourdieu's contributions is to define the social agent's position in a specific field in terms of the structure and nature of the capital held by the agent. Bourdieu strongly criticizes economists' definition of capital for 'simply regarding capital as the medium for a series of transactions or relationships taking place in a rapidly moving world of successively flashing-past time' (Bourdieu, 1986). He further argues that we can only see a world of agents, each trying their best to maximize their position without the 'baggage of history', if we arbitrarily accept the economist's definition of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Savage, 2015). He defines capital as the following:

Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and

which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types and sub-types of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e. the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices (Bourdieu, 1986)

Meanwhile, according to Bourdieu's definition, researchers can obtain a detailed understanding of which capital can define the power or status of the agent in the field the hierarchy or structure of the field via studying the variation of capital distribution in the specific field (Bourdieu, 1986). Based on their nature, Bourdieu (1986) mainly classifies different forms of capital into four types: economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital.

Economic Capital

Economic capital can be immediately and directly converted into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights. Previous social mobility and education studies have indicated that the gap of economic capital possession between students with disadvantaged backgrounds and their advantaged counterparts would lead to the significant differences in educational attainment between these two groups of students. For students with disadvantaged family backgrounds, tuition fees for the college education function as the main impediment which excludes them from attending elite universities, while children with advantaged family backgrounds may receive family financial support to continue their studies in elite universities (Putman, 2015).

Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital, capital can exist in three forms. The first is the embodied form, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. The second form refers to the objectified state, i.e. in the form of cultural goods (such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, or machines). The third form is the institutionalized form, i.e. titles and diplomas offered by formal educational organizations (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu's development on the definition of cultural capital provides an effective analytical tool to account for the gap in academic performance between students with disadvantaged backgrounds and their advantaged counterparts. Bourdieu (1986) first criticizes the presupposition inherent in the common-sense view, which regards academic failure or success as an effect of natural aptitudes. He also criticizes the presupposition of the human capital theory for only focusing on the gap in family monetary investment in education to account for the gap in academic performance between students with disadvantaged backgrounds and their advantaged counterparts. He further criticizes this view for neglecting domestic transmission of cultural capital. By relating the gap in academic performance between students with different family backgrounds to the unequal distribution of cultural capital among different classes, Bourdieu holds that children's academic ability is also the product of domestic transmission of cultural capital. Furthermore, he points out that the educational system serves to perpetuate and reproduce unequal social structure by sanctioning or legitimating the hereditary transmission of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social Capital

Bourdieu defines social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes that the relationships, in which social capital develops, can only exist in the practical state in material or symbolic exchange which helps to maintain them. Thus, he argues that what underlies the surface of exchange, and the social relationship is the mutual acknowledgment of the meanings or values of specific social capital. For example, the exchange of gifts contains the mutual acknowledgment of the purpose of the action as an effective way to develop social relationships rather than a merchant exchange of goods. Drawing on these arguments, Bourdieu insists that the strength of social capital is highly dependent on the social agents’ mutual acknowledgment of the value of particular social capital. If this mutual acknowledgment is broken or the social relationship is unstable, the social agent will risk losing the support provided by the social network (Bourdieu, 1986).

Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital refers to all forms of capital specifically recognized within a given field

(Bourdieu, 1991). These forms of capital are at play and are expressed in practice in the fields, and they are valued in a certain way (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, symbolic capital reveals the structure or hierarchy of the related field - the dominant class typically possesses the right to recognize the symbolic capital and use this symbolic capital to preserve their privilege and reproduce the hierarchical structure.

The Relationship between Capital and Field

Bourdieu emphasizes that capital cannot exist and function except in relation to a field (Bourdieu, 1990). Drawing on this claim, he further stresses that 1) there are various forms of capitals (e.g. economic, social, and cultural) that people can pursue and accumulate; 2) these various types of capital are inextricably social, because they derive their meaning from the social relations that constitute different fields; and 3) the struggle to accumulate capital, and to reproduce capital, heavily relies on how it can be converted within and across fields (Calhoun et al., 2012).

Meanwhile, different forms of capital can be converted into other types and work together in perpetuating and reproducing the basic structure of the field. Previous empirical studies have

indicated that young adults with advantaged family backgrounds can receive sufficient family economic support to pursue a high-quality education, as well as develop the taste and aesthetic that is favored by advantaged social groups. These two forms of capital, then, provide those young adults with ‘more bargaining chips’ in entering elite universities. Studying in an elite university can then provide them with a prestigious academic diploma (another form of institutionalized cultural capital) and opportunities to establish social networks with other young adults who come from upper-class families (an important type of social capital). What they receive from the elite university can, in turn, help those young adults to obtain occupations with high income and reputation. However, the majority of young adults with disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e. those from rural/provincial areas, the working-class, or the ethnic-minority community) are excluded from having the privileges enjoyed by their counterparts with an advantaged backgrounds (Savage, 2015).

2.2.2 Previous Studies on the School and Working Experience of Trans-Class Travelers with Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Sense of 'Fish Out of Water' and Institutional Habitus

Drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration on the interaction between habitus and field, previous researchers have argued that these trans-class travelers' actions, subjective feelings, and even lifestyles (i.e. styles of speech, consumption, and dressing) are strongly influenced or shaped by their habitus. Their habitus is generated from their experience of early socialization within their ethnic-minority, working-class or rural families and is continually modified by life experience beyond the family. However, the university, as another field, is built on the elite and middle-class culture. Thus, the habitus which disadvantaged well-educated youths acquired in the previous social socialization of working-class/rural or ethnic minority culture tends to be depreciated, underrated, or even suppressed in this elite or middle-class field (Crozier et al., 2008; He, 2013; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009). When these trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds enter university, they would experience a collision between the disposition generated from their original communities and unfavorable circumstances in the current field. Therefore, they tend to form a sense of 'fish out of water' or that they are 'not in the right place'. Researchers have further indicated that, due to a sense of unfamiliarity, trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience ambivalence or tension in self-identification and further generate a sense of insecurity and uncertainty. These negative

feelings, in turn, influence their academic achievement and/or performance in the workplace (Aries & Seider, 2007, 2005; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013; Baxter & Britton, 2001; Bowl, 2001; Crozier et al., 2008; He, 2013; Leathwood & O'connell, 2003; Lehmann, 2012; Orbe, 2004; Reay et al., 2001; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009; Thomas, 2012).

Capital and Limited Prospects for Upward Social Mobility

Previous research has also followed Bourdieu's elaboration on capital to explain why and how trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds cannot generate efficient strategies to change their unfavourable circumstances in universities or the workplace in metropolitan areas. Bourdieu (1986) criticizes economists for simply reducing the efficacy of various types of capital to economic capital and rejects structuralists for reducing the exchanges or conversion of different forms of capital to the phenomenon of communication. He further argues that researchers should focus more on how the value and meaning attached to particular capital, the conversion of different kinds of capital, and the mode of capital accumulation and utilization are changed across the field (Calhoun et al., 2002). Following this, many previous studies have revealed that the capital which well-educated trans-class travelers with disadvantages have accumulated, as well as

their mode of capital utilization, are sharply depreciated in most sub-fields of the university or workplace in the metropolitan areas. Thus, they are situated at a disadvantaged position in these fields (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013; Bowl, 2001; Crozier et al., 2008; He, 2013; Leathwood & Connell, 2003; Lehmann, 2012; Qin & Li, 2014; Reay et al., 2001; Sin, 2013; Thomas, 2012).

Economic Capital Some researchers have argued that well-educated trans-class travelers' time management mode acts as a medium which transmits the negative influence from their inadequacy of economic capital to their further upward social mobility pursuit (Bowl, 2001; Crozier et al., 2008; Thomas, 2012). They discovered that, due to the insufficiency of economic capital, most trans-class travelers tend to spend more time on part-time jobs or housework arranged by their families. This time allocation indeed decreases the time they can spend on their studies, on developing their social networks, and on career development (Bowl, 2001; Thomas, 2012). Through its impact on these young adults' time management mode, inadequacy of economic capital inhibits these young adults from accumulating institutionalized cultural capital (higher education qualification) and social capital (the social network they can develop on a university campus) and results in their poor academic performance and the bleak employment prospects (Crozier et al., 2008; He, 2013).

Cultural Capital Previous studies have indicated that cultural capital encompasses not just higher educational qualification and aesthetic culture, but also an individual's skills, abilities, and knowledge, which are embodied and operationalized in his or her daily life (Aries & Seider, 2005). Among these studies, well-educated trans-class travelers' inadequacy of cultural capital mainly refers to their lack of competencies and 'immaterial knowledge', such as not possessing the 'right' linguistic skills, the proper dress, knowledge of how to act in certain social situations, or strategies and contacts used to procure a permanent occupation. These studies have also noted that well-educated trans-class travelers with the disadvantaged backgrounds also cannot accumulate and utilize different forms of cultural capital as well as their advantaged counterparts (Aries & Seider, 2007, 2005; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013; Crozier et al., 2008; He, 2013; Lehmann, 2012, 2004; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009).

Social Capital In the aforementioned studies, social capital refers to support which an individual receives from his or her social network, particularly from his or her family, community, and university. Some researchers have indicated that well-educated trans-class travelers with the disadvantaged backgrounds lack social capital for career development (Aries & Seider, 2007, 2005; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009). In addition, these trans-class travelers lack effective knowledge or consciousness to accumulate and utilize various forms of social capital for their

upward social mobility (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013; He, 2013).

Well-Educated Trans-Class Travelers' Response to Their Disadvantaged Position

Previous studies have also focused on how these well-educated trans-class travelers respond to their disadvantaged positions in elite universities or in the workplace.

The ambiguity in trans-class travelers' self-identification of class status is the locus for scholars to investigate how well-educated trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds answer or react to the incompatibility and constraints they encounter at university or in the workplace. Due to experiencing incompatibility of habitus between individual and institution, as well as being aware of their inadequate possession and utilization of different forms of capital, most well-educated trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds tend to develop a sense of 'painful dislocation' and experience frustration towards their previous class-based self-identification (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Crozier et al., 2008; He, 2013; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009).

Some researchers have pointed out that, due to this sense of ‘painful dislocation’, well-educated trans-class travelers with disadvantaged backgrounds tend to deny their former class-based self-identification and unconditionally adapt to their new circumstance (Aries & Seider, 2007, 2005; Crozier et al., 2008; Leathwood & O’connell, 2003; Orbe, 2004; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009; Reay et al., 2001). In contrast, other researchers have found that some well-educated trans-class travelers maintain their former class-based self-identification by asserting the importance of the hard-working, self-determining spirits which are highly attached to their former self-identification (Aries & Seider, 2007, 2005; Crozier et al., 2008; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, 2009).

2.2.3 Limitations of Previous Bourdieusian Studies

The aforementioned studies have highlighted the process by which the incompatibility between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ habitus and new circumstance conditions, as well as their disadvantage in acquiring and utilizing different forms of capital, work together to situate them in a marginalized position in the university and workplace. However, those studies have overlooked these well-educated young adults’ capacity to modify their habitus in accordance with the rules of

various sub-fields in the urban area upon constant exposure to the disjuncture between their original communities and metropolitan areas. Some of these researchers have even been criticized for 'biographical determinism'. In addition, the arguments of these studies are not adequate to investigate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' position in the urban area if the institutional barriers for them to occupy urban areas seem to be undermined. The limitations of these studies mainly center on the following.

1. Some Bourdieusian researchers argue that 'habitus is permeable and responsive to what is going on around them' (Reay, 2004), and Bourdieu, himself, states that 'current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalized and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socialization' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, the social agent has the capacity to internalize what he or she experiences in a new circumstance as another layer or composition of his or her habitus, and this new disposition will influence that agent's pattern of generating practices and representations. This argument is further supported by shreds of evidence provided by some recent studies, which have discovered that a group of well-educated youths have, indeed, successfully adapted to new circumstances in the university or workplace, developed the awareness and capacity to accumulate and utilize new capitals in the field, and received better educational attainment or career development (Lehmann, 2012; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009).

If we follow the logic of these studies from the perspective of ‘biographical determinism’, we would inevitably overlook social agents’ capacity to internalize their experience as a new layer of disposition.

2. Most of the aforementioned studies have assumed that those well-educated youths with disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have homologous habitus which generated from their experiences, and a given individual’s habitus tends to remain stable throughout the different stages of life experience prior to entrance in the field of university or workplace. The homogeneity and stability of habitus greatly rely on the stability in life experience and consistency between habitus and circumstance, which Bourdieu refers to as the ‘ontological complicity between mental structures and the objective structures of the social situation’ (Lahire, 2011). However, as key characteristics of modernization, the flow of people, resources, and information are significantly accelerated while traditional isolated and stable communities are gradually dismantled. Thus, social agents are more likely to be constantly exposed to the horizontal disjuncture (here the rural-urban dichotomy) and vertical disjuncture (the confrontation between rural habitus generated in the past and the present sub-fields in the urban area at present) (Atkinson, 2010; Atkinson & Lahire, 2012; Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Sweetman, 2003). It is quite difficult for social agents to maintain homogeneity, stability, and consistency of their habitus. Therefore, it is

necessary to re-investigate how well-educated young adults with disadvantaged backgrounds deal with the dis-articulation and instability of their habitus, as well as inconsistency between their habitus and the field in which they are situated.

3. The obstacles to the flows of capital, population and other resources seem to be largely weakened under the context of new-type urbanization. In addition, the institutional barriers for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to assimilate and settle down in metropolitan areas also seem to be eliminated in this new context. How these broader institutional or structural changes directly influence trans-class travelers' ideas on who they are, whom they want to be, and where they want to be those people necessitate further detailed investigation. Moreover, which tactics do trans-class travelers deploy to fulfil their expectations in terms of upward social mobility under this new socioeconomic context also need to be re-investigated.

2.4 Criticism and the Refinements of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory

2.4.1 Criticism of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

While Bourdieu's theory of practice is a widely used analytical framework for researchers to investigate the negotiations and struggles of trans-class travelers in understanding who they are, whom they want to be, and how they can become those people (Lahire & Fernbach, 2011) - as well as how education and culture contribute to the legitimization and reproduction of the differentiation between social groups or classes, as well as the class stratification structure as a whole (Bourdieu, 2001) - his concept of habitus has been criticized as 'structural determinism' by many commentators. Richard Jenkins (1982) argues that Bourdieu's model is something of a closed loop. He insists that structures produce the habitus, which then generates practice; in turn, practice reproduces the structure, and so on (Jenkins, 1982). He also criticizes Bourdieu's theory for overlooking the individual's conscious deliberation and awareness (Jenkins, 1992).

Jenkins's critique mainly points to the deterministic readings and applications of Bourdieu's theory, which confers a determining and decisive weight on the actor's early experience of family or community. Bourdieu himself rejects this deterministic reading and application of habitus. He argues that the habitus governs practice not along the paths of mechanical determinism, but rather within the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions. He further asserts that the habitus, like every 'art of inventing', is what makes it possible to produce an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable even if they are also 'limited in their diversity' (Bourdieu, 1990).

Moreover, regarding Jenkins's idea of 'individual's conscious deliberation', Sweetman (2003) argues that reflexive or flexible engagement is unreflexively adopted by the social agent, and acquired as another layer of the social agent's habitus. He further notes:

this flexible or reflexive habitus is increasingly common due to various economic, social and cultural shifts. These frequent and rapid social shifts, not least shifting patterns of work and employment, changing forms of community and relationship, and the changes of consumer culture, encourage us all to monitor and improve ourselves constantly (Sweetman, 2003)

In previous deterministic readings and applications of Bourdieu's theory, an individual's disposition seems to be dominantly influenced by the individual's experience of primary socialization. Moreover, an individual's habitus seems to be stable and homogeneous over the course of life. That means that a habitus, which is the product of a homogeneous and unambiguous family configuration X, can only encounter the situations identical or analogous to X in the course of an individual's life. Bourdieu calls this the 'ontological complicity between mental structures

and the objective structures of the social situation' (Lahire & Fernbach, 2011). However, under the context of globalization and the large-scale establishment of the market economy system, a social agent's experiences over the course of life which serve as the main source of the generation of habitus, cannot be as homologous and stable as what determinists or fatalists assume. Some researchers have also pointed out that the Bourdieusian framework - or, at least, a deterministic application of the Bourdieusian approach - is not entirely suitable to account for probable dissonance of individual's habitus, and inter-individual variations in practices and representations in contemporary society (Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Sweetman, 2003; Trizzula et al., 2016).

On the whole, the issue which underlies both the criticism and defence of Bourdieu's theory is whether Bourdieu's concepts can be used to analyze individuals' practices in a social world which is continually shifting.

2.4.2 Agency in Bourdieu's Theoretical Framework and Refinements of Bourdieu's Theory

Before turning to a summary of the refinements of Bourdieu's theory, a more general discussion on agency and its definition within Bourdieu's theoretical framework is necessary.

Bourdieu attempts to overcome the polarization of structure and agency. He claims that habitus refers to ‘the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality’ (Bourdieu, 1977). More specifically, objective probabilities of life-chances could be internalized in a social agent's disposition, and the internalized dispositions and appreciations, in turn, are externalized and reflected in the social agent’s actions which tend to perpetuate the objective structure from which they have generated.

Thus, although Bourdieu attempts to bridge the gap between agency and structure, he primarily emphasizes the constraints which social structure poses on the social agent (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, within Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, social agents should not be conceived as autonomous egos who can make ‘free choices’. Rather, social agents are complex material entities whose repertoire of choices is strongly shaped by their socioeconomic, psychological, and cultural dispositions which are deeply embedded in the specific sets of historical material conditions in which they are generated. Thus, what constitutes a choice is dependent on one's repertoire of conceivable and practicable options. This repertoire may be decreased or increased depending on one’s changing life situation. Thus, agency, according to Bourdieu's account, refers to agents’ capacity to weigh their options in relation to specific problems (Atkinson, 2011; Lakomski, 1984).

Drawing on Bourdieu's statement on social agents' agency, some researchers advance the concept of bounded agency to contribute to the re-conceptualization of agency. They argue that agency is a socially situated process in which past habits and routines are contextualized and future possibilities envisaged within the contingencies of the present moment (Evans, 2002). Such socially situated agency is influenced, but not determined, by the broad structural conditions and policies which directly affect the extent and impact of institutional and situational barriers, on the one hand, and the disposition or dispositional barriers (i.e. one's belief or perceptual scheme, a term used by Bourdieu [1990, 1984, 1977]), on the other hand (Evans, 2007; Meyers, 2017; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). From the lens of bounded agency, researchers can unravel how social selves' practices and representations are shaped by the experiences of the past, the opportunities present in the current moment, and the perceptions of possible futures.

Based on the Bourdieusian definition of agency, some commentators have argued that social agents can develop a disposition through frequently encountering significant and rapid shifts of field and internalize this disposition as an important layer of their habitus. Due to constant exposure to the horizontal disjuncture (here the rural-urban dichotomy) and vertical disjuncture (the confrontation between rural habitus generated in the past and subfields in the urban area at

present), social selves' habitus tends to be multi-layered. Flexibility is already internalized as their 'second nature' (Atkinson, 2011, 2010; Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Sweetman, 2003). This flexible habitus enables its bearer to quickly adapt to, and stand out in different subfields of the social world.

When a specific disposition encounters a field (context) which is identical or similar to the field (context) in which it was generated, this disposition will stand out from the 'competitions' (i.e. other dispositions) and further transform into an individual's competency in that field (context). As Lahire (2011) argues, after being realized in the specific context (field), that disposition will be transformed from propensity at a subconscious level to knowledge or ability (Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Trizzulla et al., 2016).

Accounting for why one disposition may be expressed more than another in a particular context, these commentators have paid particular attention to how dispositions are internalized in terms of the repetition and duration of the socialization experience. Different mechanisms of internalization can have different consequences for the strength, stability, and transferability of dispositions. Moreover, these commentators have highlighted that particular elements of the context (field)

provide the conditions for ‘wakening up’ or realizing a particular disposition (Lahire & Fernbach, 2011).

Thus, as social selves who constantly encounter the disjuncture between rural and urban areas through receiving higher education in metropolises and working in urban areas, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have the capacity and condition to generate a new scheme of perception and behavior, which can help them adapt to the rapid shift under the rural-urban divide, as well as internationalize this new scheme as another layer of their habitus.

2.5 Concepts and Research Question

2.5.1 Concepts

Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrant Within some academic efforts, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have been defined as ‘intellectual migrant workers’ (*zhi li xing nong min gong*) (Lian, 2015, 2010, 2009), while another minority thread in the literature has abstractly

defined all university graduates with rural backgrounds as well-educated rural-to-urban migrants (Wen & Ngok, 2011).

To emphasize well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' higher educational background and their motivation to plant their roots in urban areas, this research defines well-educated rural-to-urban migrants as young adults with rural backgrounds who have graduated from first-tier universities in the metropolises and have chosen to seek permanent occupation and residence in urban areas. Thus, the definition of well-educated rural-to-urban migrant encompasses both those well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who have chosen to remain in the metropolis after university graduation and those who have left the metropolis and returned to a smaller city in their hometown region.

Returned Youth This research follows the majority of previous literature in defining returned migrant (Liu & Li, 2017; Lian, 2015; Shen & Zhang, 2017; Yang, 2016). Returned youth refers to well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who have chosen to return to the smaller cities in their hometown region.

Social Class Criticism has persisted over the last decade or more on the inadequacy of the class analysis model, which fundamentally relies on the economic measurement of class position. These This criticism highlights the complexities of social class and suggests that other factors, such as social capital and cultural capital, are also important in locating social selves' class position (Atkinson, 2010; Bathmaker et al., 2016; Bennett, et al., 2009; Savage, 2015). Thus, defining or measuring social class in the Bourdusian approach is an important academic effort made by scholars for understanding class inequality in contemporary society. As previously discussed, the volume and structure of capital determine one's 'position in the social space', or class position. The primary class division in Bourdieu's scheme is between those with high and low total capital. However, within each of these classes, there is a further distinction among those with a greater proportion of either economic or cultural capital. The concept of capital is thus believed to provide a map of the main social divisions in contemporary society (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Savage, 2015).

Understanding social class from the subjective perspective, which mainly refers to an individual's subjective class identification and its relationship with objective class status, is another important trend of current class research (Elbert & Perez, 2018; Hodge & Treiman, 1968; Jackman, 1979; Jackman & Jackman, 1973). When investigating well-educated urban migrants' class

identification or subjective class status in post-socialist China, recent studies have pointed out that rural young adults still suffer from the ambiguity in class identification or subjective class status, despite the fact that more and more of them are successfully attaining career advancement and financial income increases in urban areas (Lin, 2012; Wang, 2014).

Based on the aforementioned issues, it is necessary for sociologists to expand the scope of the class analysis by incorporating cultural aspects and subjective class status/class identification into the work of redefining social class. Thus, social class in this study refers to both objective class status - mainly defined by economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital - and an individual's class identification, which is mainly defined by an individual's perception of his or her position in the status hierarchy.

A major problem facing researchers attempting to utilize Bourdieusian theory to measure social class is that the forms of capital - particularly cultural and social - are difficult to quantify and operationalize (Vryonides, 2007).

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of capital and previous efforts to define the social class in

post-socialist China (Lu, 2002, etc.), this study respectively operationalizes economic capital, social capital and cultural capital in the following ways.

Economic Capital refers to salary and financial support from family in this study.

Social Capital refers to all social networks (including both strong ties and weak ties) which social selves mobilize in job hunting, obtaining homeownership, and other relevant aspects of upward social mobility pursuit. The definition of social capital in this research is broader than the conventional understanding of *guanxi* in China's context.

Cultural Capital occurs in three forms. The first is the institutionalized form. In this study, institutionalized cultural capital mainly refers to a higher education diploma. The second is the objectified form, which refers to cultural goods, such as books, cameras, and online-games, which are consumed by the social selves. The last is the embodied form, which refers to the professional knowledge possessed by the social selves, as well as their dressing and speaking style.

Field

As another important concept of Bourdieu's theory of practice, the concept of field, provides us with the relational perspective to scrutinize how social selves of a specific group mobilize various types of capital to maintain advantaged positions over other classes. In this study, the city in which well-educated urban migrants plant their roots is defined as the field in which well-educated urban migrants are striving for upward social mobility.

Habitus

As some scholars have indicated, Bourdieu extends the class study to social selves' subjective and emotional dimensions through developing the concept of habitus (Reay, 2002). Following the refinement of habitus proposed by recent Bourdieusian researchers (Atkinson, 2011, 2010; Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Sweetman, 2003), this research assumes that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' habitus also tends to be multi-layered and flexible according to the shifts in the field in which social selves are situated. This research operationalizes habitus as the scheme of perception which deployed by well-educated urban migrants to

understand who they are, whom they want to be, and where they want to be those people. Habitus also refers to the repertoire of tactics well-educated rural-to-urban migrants deploy to fulfil their expectations in terms of achieving upward social mobility in urban areas under the context of the new-type urbanization project.

Urban Middle Class A number of studies have been undertaken in mainland China that have attempted to measure the size and wealth of the middle class (Goodman, 2014). These studies, based on the macro-sociological models, have attempted to define China's urban middle class by a combination of indicators, such as income, occupation, hierarchical position, consumption, and self-ascription (Li, 2005; Lu, 2005; Silverstein, 2012; Wright, 2005; Zhou, 2005). These academic efforts have made significant contributions to understanding the size, wealth, living standard, and other characteristics of the urban middle class in reform-era China.

Meanwhile, another group of researchers has argued that the precise identification of China's urban middle class is clearly problematic. They insist that the concept of middle class is a powerful state-sponsored discourse designed to encourage economic growth, consumption, and a rising standard of living. It is also designed to legitimize the increasing social inequality, even, to

some extent, masking the emergence of the extremely wealthy (Goodman, 2014; Miao, 2017). Such state-sponsored discourse is typically related to another state-sponsored discourse - *Suzhi* (Anagnost; 2004; Kipnis, 2007). Through intensive and in-depth investigations, these researchers have highlighted that privileged urban social groups utilize and mobilize a series of resources, goods, and services (notably housing, but also clothing, automobiles, imported goods, clothing, holidays, and travel) to cultivate their *suzhi*, as well as further legitimize and reproduce their advantaged social positions in urban areas (Goodman, 2014; Goodman & Chen, 2013; Miao; 2017). These empirical studies present us with a nuanced picture of the privileged social groups' attitudes, behaviors, and identities under the label of urban middle class in reform-era China.

However, through deploying the bottom-up perspective to understand the underlying issues related to the urban middle class membership, this study provides well-educated rural-to-urban migrants with the channel to express their understanding or definition of urban middle class, their motivations for becoming urban middle class, and their tactics to fulfil their expectations. Thus, urban middle-class membership in this study refers more to well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' imagined 'urban middle-class status' than the conventional definition of urban middle class based on a given model.

David Harvey's Thesis on Urban Entrepreneurialism Though there have been some academic efforts to evaluate whether the new-type urbanization project, especially the 'university graduate-friendly' projects in inland metropolises, has fulfilled the assigned policy goals, how such ambitious urbanization projects are connected to the industrial upgrade and transfer in contemporary China - as well as how these projects shape well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' life chances and status in urban areas - still warrants critical and systematic investigation. David Harvey's thesis on the urban entrepreneurialism, which is introduced and developed in his paper '*From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation of urban governance*', presents an innovative perspective to understand how the radical transformation of urban governance mode and strategies deployed by the urban governing coalition are connected to and shaped by the inter-urban competition in the capitalist economy. In addition, his critical analysis on urban entrepreneurialism yields future researchers with a critical understanding of how the radical shift to urban entrepreneurialism influences working conditions, as well as bargaining power in labour relations (Harvey, 1989; Macleod, 2002; Rutland, 2010; Wood, 1998). Thus, this study follows David Harvey's thesis on 'urban entrepreneurialism' to understand the nature of 'university graduate-friendly' projects implemented in the newly rising metropolises, as well as to investigate how the projects influence well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' status in the urban labour market, their life chances, and their prospects of achieving upward social mobility in metropolitan

areas.

2.5.2 Research Questions

Drawing on what has been discussed, the research questions of this study are developed and categorized into three levels:

1. For well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in metropolises, how is their idea about whom they want to be in those metropolises shaped by their experience of rural-to-metropolis geographic mobility, and how do they negotiate their perceptions of whom they are and whom they want to be in accordance with the institutional and socioeconomic reconfiguration of metropolises under the context of the new-type urbanization project? What tactics do well-educated rural-to-urban migrants deploy in fulfilling their dreams of becoming whom they want to be?
2. Can the implementation of the new-type urbanization project, especially the ‘university graduate-friendly’ projects implemented in inland metropolises, broaden up well-educated

rural-to-urban migrants' path towards becoming whom they want to be in the metropolitan areas? Can such an ambitious project adequately yield as many opportunities for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to become urban middle class as described by governmental propaganda? If not, who benefits more from such a project?

3. Why do well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who return to smaller cities in their hometown regions make the decision to move back? Whom do they want to be in their hometown cities? How do those who have returned negotiate their perceptions of whom they are and whom they want to be with the institutional and socioeconomic changes in their hometown cities? How does the implementation of the new-type urbanization project in their hometown cities influence those returned migrants' road towards becoming whom they want to be?

Through adopting the Bourdieu's theory of practice as a theoretical framework, this research aims, from the bottom-up perspective, to re-understand the processes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants went through when making choices about whom they wanted to become and where they wanted to become those people. More specifically, this study investigates why well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have developed particular ideas about whom they are, whom they want to

become, and where they want to become those people. Meanwhile, this study explicates that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' ideas on upward social mobility are shaped by both their experience of geographic mobility and institutional and socioeconomic changes introduced by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project. Finally, this study attempts to investigate how the institutional and socioeconomic changes brought by the radical urbanization project influence the social stratification structure and social mobility pattern in reform-era China.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this research, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are regarded both as individuals who may be strongly influenced by the institutional and socioeconomic changes and as social agents who can make evaluations and negotiations on whom they are, whom they want to be, and where they want to become those people. Thus, this study adopts critical realist social ontological and epistemological stances to scrutinize well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' livelihood and the prospects of achieving upward social mobility in rapidly-urbanized China. Based on the critical realist epistemological stance, a qualitative study has been conducted on 20 well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in Hubei Province. Eight of those participants were young rural adults who received a first-tier university diploma in Wuhan and remained in this newly-rising metropolis after graduation. The other twelve were returned migrants who received a first-tier university diploma in Wuhan but returned to Xiaogan Prefecture City, the smaller city in which their rural hometowns were located, for stable livelihood and further development. To explore those well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' ideas about whom they are, whom they want to be, and where they want to be those people, in-depth interviews were adopted as the main data collection method. Participant observation and document analysis were conducted as additional data collection methods to investigate how the implementation of the new-type urbanization project has shaped well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' expectations in regard to upward social mobility, as well as their tactics to achieve those expectations. The thematic framework analysis

strategy was deployed as the tool for data coding and analysis. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness are briefly discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.1 Rationale of the Critical Realist Perspective

Social science research should be directed by explicit or implicit assumptions of society as a whole (ontology), by conceptions of what we can obtain knowledge about (epistemology), and by an understanding of how such knowledge can be obtained (methodology). Ensuring the congruence between the ontological stance, epistemological perspective, and methodological choice is an essential step for social science research. Traditionally, there are two primary, yet profoundly opposite ontological positions: objectivism and subjectivism. The objectivist side insists that the social world or social structure exists independently of social agents and their activities, while the subjectivist claims that the social world only exists in the social agent's experience and is shaped by that social agent's perceptions, interpretations, and actions (Denermark, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Critical realism is one of the most important paradigms which has aimed to reconcile or transcend

the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism that has influenced social science researchers in the recent decades (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 2013; Bhaskar & Callinicos, 2003; Danermark, 2002). Critical realists argue that social events are the products of a range of interacting mechanisms, and society is an open system which cannot be studied by 'neural observation' or 'experimentation' as in natural science. Aside from admitting the social world as a complex, open system, critical realists further insist on the dialectical relationship between society/social structure, in which structure and agency are perceived as two separate but complementary phenomena with different powers and properties (Archer, 1995; Danermark, 2002).

At epistemological level, critical realists argue that reality is differentiated and stratified, and it exists independently of our conceptions of it. The reality at the level of the real domain refers to the underlying mechanisms which generate factual events, while those actual events are included in the reality at the level of the actual domain. If those factual events can be experienced and observed, such experiences refer to the reality of the empirical domain, because, assuming there is an external reality, that reality exists independently of our conceptions of it. Consequently, there exists a reality which can be subjected to social science analysis. The purpose of social science research is to come as 'close' to the reality, which is socially determined and changeable. Thus, social science researchers seek knowledge about a socially produced reality, rather than just a socially defined one. Due to the gap between the intransitive and transitive dimensions of reality,

critical realists argue that knowledge produced by science is always fallible, but all knowledge is not equally fallible. Scientific observation and theories are thus concept-laden, but not concept-determined (Danermark, 2002).

Thus, the critical realist perspective is closely congruent with the research aim and theoretical framework of this study. Based on this high congruence, the critical realist perspective is adopted as the epistemological stand of this research.

3.2 Rationale of Qualitative Research as Research Strategy

As critical realists advocate, social world, as an open system, is a consequence of the interactions between many different powerful particulars, and the operation of any individual particular is modified and restricted in various ways as a result of operating with various others. In contrast, the natural world, as it is when science intervenes, is a closed system in which as far as the operation of one particular power is isolated from the operation of all others (Bhaskar, 2013; Bhaskar & Callinicos, 2003). Thus, critical realists reject the positivist claim about obtaining knowledge on the social world via sensory data inputs. They further argue that the positivist approach will

produce a closed system ontology which construes the social world. Thus, following the steps of previous quantitative studies would inevitably limit our investigation on how the implementation of the new-type urbanization project has shaped well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' life chance and class position, which have conventionally been measured by a series of indicators such as income and occupational status. It would also overlook the processes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants go through when making choices about whom they want to become and where they want to become those people, why they have such ideas, and how such ideas are shaped by the institutional and socioeconomic changes introduced by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project will be overlooked.

Qualitative research aims to penetrate how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context at a particular time. Thus, qualitative research implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes, as well as on the meanings which cannot be adequately examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, or frequency. Although qualitative scholars belonging to different disciplines or camps are often deeply at odds with each other, they all share a general rejection of the reductionism, determinism, and instrumental reasoning which mark 'mainstream' social science. In contrast to quantitative researchers who advocate the application of a 'natural science research method' to social science,

most qualitative researchers stress the socially produced nature of reality, the intimate relationship between researchers and participants, and the context constraints which shape inquiry. They further advocate that social science researchers should focus more on a the detailed description of the social world, confront and tackle the constraints of daily life, and get closer to the social agent's voice and perspective through detailed interviewing and observation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In adopting a bottom-up perspective to re-understand the processes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants went through when making choices about whom they wanted to become and where they wanted to become those people under the institutional and socioeconomic changes introduced by the implementation of the radical urbanization project, this study has chosen a qualitative research as the research strategy.

3.3 Rationale of the Case Study

3.3.1 Properties and Advantages of the Case Study

The case study is an approach that uses in-depth investigation of one or more examples of a current social phenomenon, utilizing a variety of data sources. The major advantage of the case study is flexibility. Case studies unveil the processes created and used by individuals involved in the phenomenon, event, group, or organization under study. Moreover, case studies provide ample opportunities for researchers to investigate how people, groups, and organizations perceive and interpret the stimuli with which they are confronted, as well as how they interpret their actions and practices (Hakim, 2002).

Sharan Merriam (1998) argues that the case study should be particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. The first characteristic refers to focusing on a particular object, such as a person or an event. The descriptive characteristic requires the researcher to describe the case in detail; as Merriam (1998) argues, a case study should include as many variables as possible and depict the various dynamics between them over an extended period. The heuristic characteristic refers to a more profound understanding of the researcher's previous experiences, theories, frames of reference, and the relationship between the researcher and participants. The last property,

inductive, refers to the experiences of the case enabling certain conclusions, which serve for generating theory (Danermark, 2002; Merriam, 1998).

Thus, the case study is highly consistent with the aims of this research and provides an effective paradigm to investigate the research questions of this study.

3.3.2 Identification of the Case

Another critical component of conducting a case study is identifying the case, or defining what the case study is focusing on (i.e. what the case is). Researchers have noted that a case may be simple or complex, but something which lacks specificity and boundedness cannot be considered a case (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). From the critical realist perspective, a case or case object should have the following four characteristics:

1. The case object must support a self-standing narrative: the case object must be a sufficiently self-contained entity that can provide meaningful analytical insight.

2. The case object must be the minimally integrated social system: the case object should be a well-bounded, internally nested set of ontologically layered structures that form a minimally integrated constellation.

3. Case objects are open, historically evolving systems: the case object must be in continual exchange with its material habitat and its variable social environment.

4. Case objects are dialectically reproduced by human intentionality and by institutional stasis.

Thus, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who have graduated from first-tier universities in metropolises, and have worked and lived in urban areas between 2014 and 2019 for at least two years, have been identified as the case object of the present study.

3.4 Rationale of Sites Selection

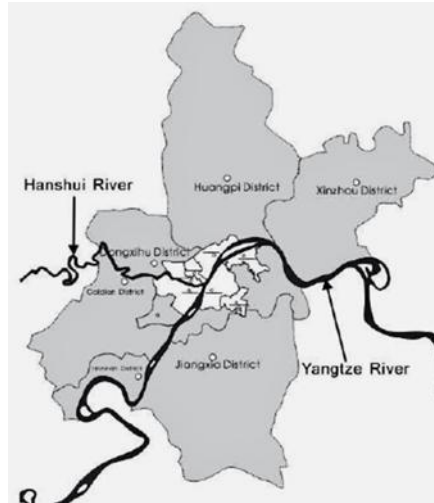


Figure 3.3 Map of Xiaogan Prefecture City

Hubei Province is located in the central region of China. The capital of Hubei Province is Wuhan Provincial City. Eight first-tier public universities (*yi lei da xue*) of Hubei Province are located in Wuhan. According to statistics from the Annual Report of College Graduate's Employment in Hubei Province, the number of college graduates reached 427,137 in 2016. Of those graduates, 50.63% hold a bachelor's degree, 7.84% of them are postgraduate diploma holders (including doctoral diplomas and master's diploma) and 41.53% have obtained a diploma offered by a vocational college (Hubei Provincial Department of Education, 2016).

Basic information on the destination choice of college graduates in Hubei Province is presented in

Table 3.1. In 2016, 60.21% of college graduates chose to stay in Hubei Province, while 12.21% of them moved to Guangdong Province after university graduation, and just 4.00% and 2.44% of them respectively selected Shanghai and Beijing as their destination for spatial movement.

Table 3.1 Basic Information on College Graduates' Destination for Spatial Movement in Hubei Province

The Destination for Spatial Movement after Graduation	Proportion of the Whole College Graduate Population
Hubei Province	60.21%
Guangdong Province	12.21%
Zhejiang Province	4.64%
Shanghai City	4.00%
Jiangsu Province	2.70%
Beijing City	2.44%

Source: Annual Report of College Graduate's Employment in Hubei Province

As presented in Table 3.2, 70% of college graduates are from Hubei Province - meaning those graduates' *hukou* belongs to Hubei Province - while just 3.12% are from Henan Province. The percentages of students from other provinces are all below 2%.

Table 3.2 Basic Information on College Graduates' Hukou in Hubei Province

Province	Population	Proportion	Province	Population	Proportion
Hubei	309,727	72.51%	Sichuan	3,275	0.77%
Henan	13,335	3.12%	Chongqing	2,582	0.61%
Anhui	8,432	1.97%	Hainan	2,568	0.60%
Hunan	8,006	1.88%	Yunnan	2,439	0.57%
Jiangxi	7,734	1.81%	Shanxi	2,405	0.56%
Zhejiang	6,930	1.62%	Liaoning	1,674	0.39%
Shandong	6,820	1.60%	Heilongjiang	1,406	0.33%
Gansu	5,656	1.33%	Qinghai	1,266	0.30%
Jiangsu	5,243	1.23%	Jilin	1,236	0.29%
Shanxi	4,916	1.15%	Ningxia	1,227	0.29%
Hebei	4,840	1.13%	Tianjin	1,117	0.26%
Guangxi	4,518	1.06%	Beijing	747	0.17%
Guangdong	3,937	0.92%	Tibet	526	0.12%
Guizhou	3,858	0.90%	Shanghai	445	0.10%
Inner Mongolia	3,476	0.82%	Hong Kong SAR	10	0.00%

Fujian	3450	0.81%	Macau SAR	7	0.00%
Xinjiang	3329	0.78%			

Source: Annual Report of College Graduate's Employment in Hubei Province

According to the official statistics presented in this table, Hubei Province could provide us with enough opportunities to establish relatively substantial connections with well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, including both rural-to-urban migrants who stayed in Wuhan after graduation and those who returned to small and mid-sized cities in which their hometowns were located.

Implementing the loosened *hukou* policy for new urban migrants, as well as increasing the expenditure on public services and infrastructure, are two major goals for the Wuhan local authority to fulfil the new-type urbanization project under its jurisdiction. According to information provided by the National Development and Reform Committee, Hubei provincial government accelerated the speed of combing the basic endowment and medical insurance system in rural and urban areas, while the endowment insurance system covered 60.1% of its population, and the medical insurance system around 59.5%, in 2015. As a result of the radical policies to transform the rural population into urban *hukou* holders, the proportion of permanent urban *hukou*

holders among the entire population of Hubei Province increased from 55.67% to 56.85% (National Development and Reform Committee, 2016).

To, as described in governmental propaganda, assist university graduates in dealing with challenges in obtaining local *hukou*, occupations, and stable livelihood, the Wuhan government initiated and implemented the ‘Millions of College Graduates Staying in Wuhan’ (MCCSW) project (*baiwan daxuesheng liuhan gongcheng*) in 2017. This ‘graduate-friendly’ project is not only a part of the new-type urbanization project in Wuhan but also serves to support the ‘rise of central area’ national strategic project (Hubei Development and Reform Commission, 2017; Wuhan Development and Reform Commission, 2016). To attract one million university graduates to remain in Wuhan within five years, the Wuhan local authority has organized a specific official institution - the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau (*wuhan zhaocai ju*) - to be responsible for all issues involved with MCCSW project. This ambitious project encompasses nearly all aspect of university graduates’ career development and livelihood in Wuhan, including loosening the threshold for them to obtain permanent Wuhan *hukou*, providing them with low-interest loans to purchase commercial housing, and establishing minimum salary standards for university graduates (The Recruitment Bureau of Wuhan, 2017).

Meanwhile, the local authority of Xiaogan Prefecture City initiated the ‘Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration’ plan in 2018. This plan is the core strategy of Xiaogan’s implementation of the new-type urbanization project. The Xiaogan local authority aims to boost the socio-economic development and urbanization under its jurisdiction by accelerating the integration of Xiaogan to Wuhan in terms of infrastructure, industry, market, technology development, public service, and environmental protection (Development and Reform Commission of Xiaogan Prefecture City, 2018).

More importantly, Wuhan was issued by the central government as the provincial pilot city of new-type urbanization project in 2014. While Xiaogan was nominated as the prefecture pilot city of this project (State Council of the People’s Republic China, 2014).

According to the information presented above, Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City of Hubei Province could provide us with ideal scenarios to re-evaluate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ subjectivity and strategy involved with achieving upward social mobility under the context in which the institutional barriers for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to settle down in metropolitan area is largely eliminated on the one hand, and the attractiveness of

medium/small-sized cities to them is enhanced, on the other hand.

3.4.2 Other Reasons for Research Sites Selections

As a local youth who was born in Xiaogan Prefecture City and completed a four-year undergraduate study in Wuhan Provincial City, my familiarity with the socioeconomic conditions and local culture of these two cities has made it convenient for me to get through the assimilation phase of fieldwork. Moreover, my relatively substantial social network in these two cities has yielded me with ample information and channels to scrutinize how the implementation of the new-type urbanization project influences well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' career advancement and living conditions in urban areas. Meanwhile, my experience of studying and living with classmates with rural origins at university enabled me to easily establish trust with the research informants and listen to the inner world struggles and negotiations they went through when making choices about whom they wanted to be and where they wanted to be those people.

3.5 Research Participants

Some researchers have argued that what we can receive from a case study depends on the way we choose the case (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989).

To ensure that the phenomenon of interest observed in the case adequately represents the phenomenon, a purposive sampling method is utilized in this research.

3.5.1 Criteria of Participant Recruitment

Research participants consisted of variety of well-educated young adults who graduated from first-tier universities in Wuhan and had lived and worked in Wuhan Provincial City or Xiaogan Prefecture City between 2014 and 2019 for at least two years. Network or chain sampling was adopted as the participant recruitment strategy whereby participants were asked to refer other individuals whom they knew shared the same experience of rural-to-urban migration. The criteria for participant recruitment were as follows:

1. All participants should have rural backgrounds; at least one of their parents should be a rural *hukou* holder.

2. All participants have graduated from the first-tier universities in Wuhan within the last five years.

3. All participants have already experienced the university-to-work transition and currently hold the permanent occupations and places of residence.

A delimiting time frame of five years was selected to ensure that participants had adequate experience within the university-to-work transition, including searching for employment opportunities in the job market and assimilating to workplaces.

The purposive sampling of this research was based on variations across particular distinguishing characteristics. To ensure the diversity of selected participants, certain attributes of the participants, including university and discipline, gender, age, occupation, and highest academic qualifications,

were taken into consideration when recruiting research participants.

Issues with Participant Recruitment

Maintaining sensitivity to the relation flows, particularly the relationships between researcher/gatekeeper and between gatekeeper/participant, as well as their effect on what the researcher receives from the case study, is an essential procedure to ensure the validity of a qualitative study which is based on small-N cases (Emmel & Hughes, 2009). In the fieldwork in Wuhan Provincial City, five participants, with whom I had close relationships when I studied at Hubei University, were the gatekeepers of my access to other participants, who they introduced to me. Thus, when conducting in-depth interviews with participants in Wuhan, I paid much attention to the interactions between the gatekeepers and me, the relationships between the gatekeepers and other participants, and the possible effects of these relationships on my data collection. Moreover, I also took these interactions and their effect on my interviews into consideration when conducting data coding and analysis.

When conducting fieldwork in Xiaogan Prefecture City, I mobilized my *guanxi*, or social network,

to obtain effective support from the director of the Human Resource and Social Security Bureau of Xiaogan Prefecture City, junior cadres of the Xiaogan Branch of People's Bank, and other public institutions in recruiting the well-educated returned migrants who fulfilled my recruitment criteria. However, how to alleviate my participants' concerns regarding my relationship with the junior directors/cadres of their workplaces, how to invite them to narrate their reflections on their life experiences in their hometown city, and how to approach the negotiations and struggles they experienced when deciding to move back, were challenges that I inevitably encountered when conducting the in-depth interviews with these participants. Divulging my role as a Ph.D candidate and junior researcher from the Department of Applied Social Sciences at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, as well as my research purpose, to the participants largely alleviated participants' concerns regarding their privacy and any sensitive issues which might have been raised in the interviews. More importantly, when conducting the in-depth interviews, the participants exhibited much curiosity about the higher educational institutions in Hong Kong, particularly the research student programmes and the lives of Ph.D students in Hong Kong. Thus, beginning the interview with an open yet intensive discussion on my Ph.D life in Hong Kong was an important strategy that I used to alleviate the participants' concerns and build trust with them. The issues I encountered with participant recruitment in Xiaogan have also been considered in my data coding and analysis processes.

3.5.2 Detailed Participant Information

The following two tables contain the detailed information on the 20 research participants. Eight of them were well-educated well-to-urban migrants who chose to stay in Wuhan after university graduation. Twelve were the returned migrants who moved back to Xiaogan Prefecture City after graduation. To maintain the privacy of the participants' personal information and to preserve anonymity, all of the name that appear in this study have been changed.

Table 3.3 Basic Information on the Eight Participants in Wuhan Provincial City

Name	University	Degree & Major	Ethnicity	Gender	Birthplace	Political Background	Family Background	Occupation & Approximate Income	Current Company

Ling	CCNU	Master of Social Work	Han	Male	Yingshan County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant workers	Junior Human Resource Manager Above 9000 RMB/Month	SUNAC Wuhan
Yan	HBU	Bachelor of Chinese Literature Study	Han	Female	Yingshan County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant workers	Senior employee Around 7000 RMB/Month	HSBC Wuhan
Yang	HBU	Bachelor of Public Policy	Tujia	Male	Jianshi County	Communist Youth Member	Father: Migrant worker Mother: Housewife	Project Manager Around 15000 RMB/Month	Alibaba Wuhan
Ru Li	HBU	Bachelor of Public Policy	Tujia	Male	Badong County	Communist Youth Member	None ¹	Curriculum Manager Above 10000 RMB/Month	JUREN Educational Agency Wuhan
Shan	HBU	Bachelor of	Han	Male	Zhongxia	Communist Youth	Father: Migrant	Project	Xiangyang

¹ Ru Li's parents passed away when he was four. He grew up in his uncle's family. His uncle is peasant in Lipo Town of Badong County, Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture.

		Administrative Management			ng County	Member	worker	Manager	Investment Company
							Mother: Tailor	Around 15000 RMB/Month	
Qiao	HBU	Bachelor of Information Engineering	Han	Male	Yuanan County	Communist Youth Member	Workers in township enterprise	Senior Employee Above 4500 RMB/Month	China Unicom Wuhan
Fu	CCAU	Mechatronic Engineering	Han	Male	Guangshu i County	Communist Youth Member	Father: Migrant worker Mother: Housewife	Junior Engineer Around 5000 RMB/Month	Dongfeng Peugeot Citroen Automobile Company
Gao Ling	WUT	Automotive Engineering	Han	Male	Xiaogan City	Party Member	Father: public school teacher in town Mother: Housewife	Junior Engineer Around 5000 RMB/Month	Dongfeng Peugeot Citroen Automobile Company

According to basic information presented in Table 3.3, eight participants were well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in Wuhan. Seven of them were males, and one was female. They were

diverse in terms of ethnicity, birthplace, major, family background, university, political background, company, and occupation & approximate income. However, all of them were the first-tier university degree holders in Wuhan, and they had obtained white-collar occupations in this radically expanding inland metropolis. Two of them were junior engineers at the Dongfeng Peugeot Citroen Automobile Company, which is the automobile giant of the Central China market, while another worked for Alibaba, the rapidly rising Chinese multinational conglomerate. It is worth mentioning that the gender imbalance of the research participants was considered in the data collection process. Moreover, the detailed accounts of why more female research participants returned to their hometown city than stayed in Wuhan are presented in the following empirical chapters.

Table 3.4 Basic Information on the Twelve Participants in Xiaogan Prefecture City

Name	University	Degree & Major	Gender	Ethnicity	Birthplace	Political Background	Family Background	Occupation & Approximate Income	Current Company
Hui Yao	HBU	Master of Applied Chemistry	Female	Han	Zougang Town of Xiaochang County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant workers	High School Teacher Above	Huangpi Road Senior High

								4000 RMB/Mo nth	School
Qin	HBU	Bachelor of Applied Mathemat ics	Female	Han	Xiaohe Town of Xiaochan g County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant workers	Administr ative Staff Around 6000 RMB/Mo nth	China Power Xiaogan branch
Yu Jiao	Zhongnan University of Economic s & Law	Master of Applied Statistics	Female	Han	Zhouxian g Town of Xiaochan g County	Communi st Youth Member	Father: Migrant worker Mother: Farmer	Junior Public Institution Staff Around 5000 RMB/Mo nth	People's Bank of PRC, Xiaogan Branch
Peng	CCUST	Master of Economic s	Female	Han	Yanghe Town of Yingchen g County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant Workers	Junior Public Institution Staff Above 6000 RMB/Mo nth	People's Bank of PRC, Xiaogan Branch
Dan	CCNU	Master of Economic s	Female	Han	Huayuan Town of Xiaochan g County	Party Member	Parents: Farmers	Junior Public Institution Staff	People's Bank of PRC, Xiaogan

								Above 6000 RMB/Mo nth	Branch
Tang	HBU	Master of Finance	Male	Han	Baisha Town of Xiaochan g County	Party Member	Parents: Farmer	Junior Public Institution Staff Above 6000 RMB/Mo nth	People's Bank of PRC, Xiaogan Branch
Xiong	Zhongnan University of Economic s & Law	Master of Economic s	Male	Han	Sanhe Town of Yingchen g County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant Workers	Junior Public Institution Staff Above 6000 RMB/Mo nth	People's Bank of PRC, Xiaogan Branch
Can	CCNU	Master of Accountin g	Male	Han	Zhuzhan Town of Xiaonan District	Party Member	Father: Migrant Worker Mother: Housewif e	Junior Public Institution Staff Above 6000 RMB/Mo nth	People's Bank of PRC, Xiaogan Branch
Jin Hao	HBU	Master of Finance	Male	Han	Xinpu Town of Xiaonan	Party Member	Parents: Migrant	Junior Public Institution	People's Bank of PRC,

					District		Workers	Staff Above 6000 RMB/Mo nth	Xiaogan Branch
Yi Han	Zhongnan University of Economic & Law	Master of Accountin g	Female	Han	Xiaohe Town of Xiaochan g District	Party Member	Parents: Migrant Workers	Junior Public Institution Staff Around 5500RMB /Month	CBRC ² , Xiaogan Branch
Feng	Wuhan University	Bachelor of Economic s	Female	Han	Langjun Town of Yingchen g County	Party Member	Father: Village Cadre Mother: Village Primary School Teacher	Junior Public Institution Staff Around 5500RMB /Month	CBRC, Xiaogan Branch
Nian	Hubei Academy of Social Science	Master of Public Policy	Female	Han	Chenghua ng Town of Hanchuan g County	Party Member	Parents: Migrant Workers	Junior Public Institution Staff ³ Around 5500RMB /Month	CBRC, Xiaogan Branch

² CBRC refers to China Bank Regulatory Commission

³ According to the relevant national policies and regulations, the official staffs of the people's bank of China are subject to the special banking system, but their salaries, welfares, and administrative ranks are equal to those civil servants. While CBRC is the public institution. Thus, the permanent staffs of CBRC are working staffs of public institution.

According to the information presented in Table 3.4, The twelve cases were well-educated returned migrants in Xiaogan Prefecture City. They all came from households with rural *hukou* in the Xiaogan region. Eight of them were females, and four were males. They were also diverse in terms of birthplace, major, family background, university, political background, workplace, and occupation & approximate income. They obtained permanent and respectable occupations offered by People's Bank, China Bank Regulatory Committee, or China Power. Moreover, their monthly income was much higher than the average monthly income in Xiaogan.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

As previously discussed, tracing the processes and the inner world struggles the research participants went through when making the decisions of whom they wanted to be and where they wanted to be those people under the context of the new-type urbanization project, as well as scrutinizing how such ideas were shaped by the socioeconomic reconfiguration and institutional changes brought by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project, are the aims of this research. Therefore, in-depth interviews were adopted as the main data collection method in this study. Participant observation was deployed to re-evaluate the implementation of the MCCSW

project in Wuhan Provincial City and the ‘Xiaogan-Wuhan Integration’ Project in Xiaogan Prefecture City from a bottom-up perspective. In addition, document analysis was used to investigate the underlying aims of the new-type urbanization project in Wuhan and Xiaogan, particularly the fundamental goals of the MCCSW project. Messages, photos, and videos the research participants have posted on QQ space, the friends’ circle of WeChat, and Weibo were also adopted as secondary data in the case study after receiving their permission.

In-Depth Interviews

The interview refers to a method of data collection or information or opinion gathering that specifically involves asking a series of questions. Typically, an interview represents a meeting or dialogue between people, through which personal and social interaction occurs. The advantages of in-depth interviews include that they enable the interviewer to follow up on and probe responses, motives and feelings, and their potential added value is that the recording of nonverbal communications, facial expressions, and gestures, for example, can enrich the qualitative aspects of the data (Davies, 2008).

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with all 20 selected informants at least once. A second-round interview was conducted with specific informants when there was a necessity to further probe a participant's response. According to Bourdieu (1990, 1984), a person's linguistic skills, forms of dress, and specific knowledge of how to act in a particular social situation are embodied forms of cultural capital. Thus, participants' clothing, modes of speech, expressions, and gestures were recorded and taken for further analysis.

Issues that Needed to be Considered When Collecting Data

There is a long-lasting objectivist-constructivist debate regarding the nature and function of the interview. On the one hand, positivists aim to maintain the neutrality of the interviewer and objectivity of the interview. They believe that, in this way social science researchers can obtain a 'mirror reflection' of reality that exists in the social world. On the other hand, subjectivists suggest that unstructured, open-ended interviewing can elicit 'authentic accounts of subjective experience'. For example, social constructionists further claim that no knowledge of reality that is 'out there' in the social world can be obtained from the interview. The interview is plainly and exclusively an interaction between the interviewer and interviewee in which both participants create and

construct narrative visions of the social world (Miller & Glassner, 2011; Silverman, 2011).

However, there is a group of social researchers, including critical realists, who profoundly criticize both two sides of the dichotomy. They indicate that interviews involve the interviewer and interviewee engaging in a fluid interactive process to generate a set of responses which formulate perspectives, observations, experiences, and evaluations pertinent to an overall research agenda (Smith & Elger, 2014). In critical realism, the researcher/interviewer is seen as having expertise in characterizing broader contexts and outcomes of human action while the expertise of the interviewee is likely to be about explanatory mechanisms that focus on 'reasoning, choices, and motivations'. Thus, the relationship between researcher/interviewer and participant/interviewee should be a negotiation and dialogue of 'I'll-show-you-my-theory-if-you'll-show-me-yours'. Although interviewees have the expertise in their attitudes, motives, and reasons, what researchers care more about are the relationships between causal mechanisms, the varying contexts in which such mechanisms operate, and the resultant outcomes which underlie interviewees' attitudes, motivations, or reasons. Thus, in critical realism, an interview should be both a mutually-shaped negotiation and a theory-driven dialogue. The interview should be guided (not determined) by the analytical framework which the researcher holds.

Thus, I attempted to maintain a reflexive attitude in my role, my degree of involvement with participants, and the context or situation in which the interviews were conducted, throughout the whole process of conducting the in-depth interviews. In addition, I tried to maintain a reflexive attitude towards my relationships with these participants, as well as how those relationships influenced later data collection, coding, and analysis processes. More specifically, due to my close relationships with five participants in Wuhan (all of them were former schoolmates during my undergraduate years), I had access to information on certain dimensions of their lives and jobs which could be considered private. This research, more or less, had the risk of exposing participants' privacy and other issues of their inner world. Thus, at the beginning of the interview, I informed the research participants/informants about the research purpose, my role as a social science researcher, and why they had been selected as research participants in this study, as well as the measures to ensure their privacy. The guidelines of the interviews are presented in Appendix A.

From February 28th, 2018 to February 27th, 2019, I spent twelve months on fieldwork in Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City. The details of the data collection schedule are as follows.

Table 3.5 Schedule of Data Collection

Time	Activity
28 th February 2018-30 th April 2018	Document collection and analysis on the new-type urbanization project in Wuhan and Xiaogan
1 st May 2018-30 th September 2018	Interview eight participants in Wuhan
1 st October 2018-20 th October 2018	In-depth investigation on the MCCSW project in Wuhan and integration project in Xiaogan
21 st October 2018-20 th November 2018	Interview twelve participants in Xiaogan
1 st December 2018-26 th February 2019	In-depth investigation on the affordable housing project in Wuhan

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical consideration refers to general ethical issues faced by qualitative researchers. In any qualitative research, ethical consideration is largely related to the protection of the participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Given the ethical issues that I encountered in fieldwork, various safeguards were employed to ensure the protection and rights of participants.

First, informed consent remained a priority throughout the proposed study. Written consent to voluntarily proceed with the study was obtained from each participant.

Second, the participants' names and other identifiable information of participants were kept confidential. Cautionary measures were taken to secure the storage of research-related records and data.

3.8 Data Analysis and Synthesis

As a commonly used data analysis approaches in qualitative research, thematic analysis, as suggested by its name, refers to the search for themes (Bryman, 2012). Despite the lack of an explicit series of procedures for thematic analysis, the following contents, suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003), are considered in the data analysis:

1. Repetitions: topics that recur again and again;
2. Indigenous typologies or categories: local expressions that are either unfamiliar or are used in

an unfamiliar way;

3. Metaphors and analogies: the ways in which participants represent their thoughts regarding metaphors or analysis;

4. Transitions: how topics shift in transcripts and other materials;

5. Similarities and differences: exploring how interviewees might discuss a topic in different ways or differ from each other in certain ways, or exploring whole texts, like transcripts, and asking how they differ;

6. Linguistic connectors: paying close attention to the use of connectors, like 'because' or 'since', as such terms imply causal relationships in participants' minds;

7. Missing data: reflecting on what is not included in the data by asking questions about the interviewees;

8. Theory-related material: using social scientific concepts as a springboard for themes.

During the fieldwork, I preliminarily transcribed the interview recordings and took field notes as I obtained them. I also took reflexive notes and analytic memos, as well as wrote summaries of participant observations and interviews. These tactics served for sorting and condensing the raw

data into key data elements, which constituted the coding framework. Meanwhile, key concepts developed from the literature review were also included in the coding framework. I then dissected raw materials into text segments based on the coding framework.

Next, I abstracted coding categories from the coded text segments and refined coding categories in response to emergent meanings within the data. Through repeated readings and relating coded text segments to the analytical framework, I later accomplished the following procedures. First, I grouped and combined 26 preliminary coding categories into 12 coding categories. For example, a coding category labeled 'Preference towards Metropolitan Culture' was integrated into a broader coding category, 'Metropolis-oriented Habitus', because well-educated rural-to-urban migrants generate and develop a set of perceptual and behavioral schemes based on the metropolis's superiority in the spatial hierarchy. I then re-coded the materials deploying the new coding framework. Second, I paid more attention to analogies and metaphors articulated by participants and noted marks and interpretations in the side margins. This procedure enabled me to highlight the participants' perspectives and articulate this with my argument.

Second, linguistic connectors, which revealed the perspectives of participants, were additionally

highlighted in the data coding and interpreted in the analysis. Third, the contexts in which participants' ideas and meanings were embedded, were marked and included in the data analysis. Finally, missing data and data of high frequency were included in the data coding and analysis.

3.9 Critical Realist Perspective of Qualitative Research Validity

Different methodological approaches to qualitative research contain different approaches to validity, making it impossible to develop a universally accepted approach to the validation of qualitative research. Due to their acceptance that knowledge is socially produced and more or less distant from intransitive reality, critical realists believe there is no 'golden key' to judging the validity or rigor of the qualitative study. Rather than seeing the existence of multiple voices as a barrier to validity, critical realists such as Pawson and Tilley (1997) make a virtue out of perspectivism. They argue that an essential aspect of promoting the validity of the qualitative study is to recognize that the results will be viewed differently from different perspectives (Porter, 2007). In this research, validity refers to two dimensions: methodological trustworthiness and theoretical validity.

3.9.1 Methodological Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are adopted as the main criteria to define the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The following are the definitions of each of the components of trustworthiness, as well as tactics to ensure the trustworthiness in this research.

Credibility refers to whether the findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, and the reader. Methodological credibility and interpretive credibility are two main parts which comprise credibility as a whole (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Maxwell, 2012). Methodological credibility refers to how well matched the logic of the method is to the proposed research questions and the explanation that the researcher is attempting to develop while interpretative validity refers to how valid the data analysis is, as well as the interpretation on which it is based. Although interpretive validity partly relies on methodological validity, it places a greater emphasis on quality and rigor of research design, as well as the researcher's interpretation and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Dependability refers to whether the findings are consistent with the collected data (Blommmberg & Volpe, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this research, I attempted to eliminate inconsistencies and remained reflexive and sensitive to when and why they occur.

Confirmability corresponds to the notion of objectivity in quantitative research, which requires the researcher to remain aware of his or her subjectivity and its effect on the results.

Transferability refers to whether and to what extent the results of this study can be transferred to another particular context. Patton defines transferability as ‘speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions’ (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

3.9.2 Theoretical Validity

When general social theories are applied as a framework for interpretation, the critical realist

evaluates them in regard to whether they are usable and generate new insight into the phenomenon of interpretation (Danermark, 2002).

3.9.3 Methods to Promote Validity

The following tactics have been deployed to promote the validity of this study.

Member Checking

The process of returning analyses to informants for confirmation of accuracy is known as member checking or respondent validation (Angen, 2000). After completing data coding and analysis, the results of the interview analysis were all returned to participants to be checked. When they rejected or expressed disagreement with the results of the analysis, I further discussed that with the research participants to probe why they rejected or disagreed with the analysis.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity encompasses the process of monitoring and reflecting on all aspects of a research project from the formulation of research ideas to the publication and utilization of the findings. It involves reflecting on the various social roles, interactions, and processes which resulted in the emerged observations and conclusions (Jupp, 2006). As I've previously mentioned, when interviewing with the informants, I attempted to maintain a reflexive attitude towards my relationships with them, my relationships with the gatekeepers (if possible), and the specific context in which the interaction took place. In addition, I wrote down reflexive notes after the interviews and participant observations and included those notes in the data coding and analysis.

Triangulation

In this research, triangulation refers to the triangulation of data. This tactic was also deployed to improve the validity of this study.

Peer Review

Some researchers have contended that a researcher's peers have limited ability to judge whether the interpretations made have adequately considered all perspectives, because they do not have the same involvement with the informants as does principal investigator (Moore, 1994). In this study, peer review is mainly used to assess whether I have argued cogently and written persuasively. In addition, peer review has been used to evaluate whether the presented theoretical framework is suitable and whether this research generates new insight into the study of social stratification and social mobility in the era of the new-type urbanization project.

Chapter Four: Well-Educated Urban Migrants in Wuhan Provincial City

This empirical chapter aims to deploy the perspective of spatial-social mobility to discern well-educated urban migrants' current situation and their prospects of attaining upward social mobility in Wuhan under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Drawing on intensive investigations on eight well-educated urban migrants' narratives on the successes they achieved in Wuhan and the strong frustration behind their success stories, this chapter demonstrates that well-educated urban migrants' rural-to-metropolis spatial mobility not only yields them with more developmental opportunities but also inculcates them to generate the a 'metropolis-oriented' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure. Within this perceptual scheme of class structure, well-educated urban migrants' definitions of class status and upward social mobility are based on the comparison between themselves and their urban middle-class counterparts. On the one hand, well-educated urban migrants have achieved upward social mobility in terms of socioeconomic and cultural measurements. In addition, they perceive themselves as high achievers in the rural area and have developed a sense of privilege over their rural peers when deploying the 'metropolis-oriented' framework to understand their social status in their rural hometowns. On the other hand, as a result of their difficulties with obtaining homeownership and career promotion, as

well as their children's access to high-quality educational resources in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants hold pessimistic self-perception of their upward social mobility prospect in Wuhan, and have keen senses of uncertainty, unfairness, and inferiority especially when comparing themselves with local urban university graduates. In order to identify how well-educated urban migrants' understandings on their class status and upward social mobility are shaped by their rural-to-metropolis spatial mobility, as well as unveil how they negotiate their self-perceptions of class status in accordance with socioeconomic reconfiguration in Wuhan under the context of the new urbanization project, three main investigative attempts were made as follows.

In the first section, I illuminate that well-educated urban migrants' perceptual framework of social stratification is deeply embedded in and circumscribed by their spatial mobility under the rural-urban dichotomy. Drawing on Bourdieu's important but elusive concept of habitus, I purport to argue that well-educated urban migrants' perceptual scheme of social stratification is generated from early socialization in their migrant worker families and is later reinforced by their experience of receiving higher education in the metropolises. Thus, their geographic mobility experience under the rural-urban dichotomy inserts the spatial hierarchy, as an important dimension, into their perceptual scheme of the social stratification structure. Within this perceptual scheme, settling down in a metropolis is regarded by well-educated urban migrants as a prerequisite for attaining

better livelihood and upward social mobility, while their hometown region (including both the rural hometown and smaller cities in the hometown area) is considered to be a place of backwardness. By deploying such a 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework to understand their class status and upward social mobility prospects, well-educated urban migrants perceive themselves as high achiever in rural area and generate sense of privilege over their rural peers, meanwhile their definition of upward social mobility in Wuhan is mainly organized around the comparison between themselves and their urban middle-class counterparts. However, they convey strong senses of unfairness and uncertainty, as well as perceive themselves as having lower status when comparing themselves with their local urban counterparts. Based on well-educated urban migrants' narratives on their current situation in Wuhan, I highlight that homeownership, the prospect of career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources are three dimensions which constitute well-educated urban migrants' comparisons with their urban local counterparts, and further underpin well-educated urban migrant' perceptual framework of class status and definition of upward social mobility in Wuhan. Thus, well-educated urban migrants' strong senses of unfairness, uncertainty, and inferiority are mainly generated from their difficulties with obtaining homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to the high-quality educational resources which are more easily enjoyed by their urban middle-class counterparts.

In the second part, I first investigate how homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources become three pillars which constitute well-educated urban migrants' comparison with their urban counterparts and underpin their definition of upward social mobility. I then elaborate on why well-educated urban migrants are disadvantaged in upward social mobility race in Wuhan. Based on the secondary data on the socioeconomic changes in Wuhan under the context of the new-type urbanization project, as well as interviews with selected young local young adults with middle-class origins, I highlight that private homeownership has replaced *hukou* status as the main determinant which stratifies residents' life chances in Wuhan. In addition, private homeownership is widely deployed by the urban middle class as a source to differentiate themselves from the 'migrant mass' and prevent migrants from accumulating various forms of capital in Wuhan. Due to their strong aspirations to distance themselves from their rural backgrounds and settle down in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants are compelled to accept homeownership as the key mark to identify and objectify their upward social mobility in the metropolis. Due to their relative deficiency of financial support from family in obtaining private homeownership, career promotion is the only way in which well-educated urban migrants can rely to increase their economic capital. Moreover, due to their previous success of moving from the rural area to the metropolis via their pursuance of higher education, well-educated urban migrants

tend to recognize ensuring their children's access to high-quality educational resources as a necessary step to secure their children's advantaged position in upward social mobility race. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field, I highlight that well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in the upward social mobility race is mainly a result of their deficiency of economic capital, social capital, and embodied cultural capital. Due to the inadequacy of economic capital, well-educated urban migrants cannot easily obtain private homeownership in Wuhan like their urban middle-class counterparts. Thus, their children's access to high-quality educational resources is also strongly constrained by their difficulty of obtaining homeownership. Moreover, as a result of the inadequacy of embodied cultural capital and social capital, well-educated urban migrants cannot easily win in the competition for career promotion.

Finally, based on the secondary data on the socioeconomic reconfiguration and demographic changes in Wuhan under the context of the new-type urbanization project, I argue that the new-type urbanization project has ironically reinforced the importance of homeownership in the social stratification structure, which, in turn, has reinforced well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in the upward social mobility race.

4.1 Basic Information on Research Participants

According to the basic information presented in Chapter Three on the well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in this study, all of the participants were first-tier university degree holders and had obtained white-collar occupations, with two of them being junior engineers at the automobile giant of the Central China market and one working at a Chinese multinational conglomerate. Based on the traditional social class studies which have defined social mobility as a shift in social status in terms of rigid class categorization based on specific markers (e.g. occupation and educational background), all participants had already achieved upward social mobility. Moreover, these well-educated urban migrants had already achieved intergenerational upward social mobility, especially when compared with their parents. As recent research has indicated, social class not only refers to objective class status in terms of rigid measurement but also refers to the individual's subjective class identification (Elbert & Perez, 2018; Hodge & Treiman, 1968; Jackman, 1979; Jackman & Jackman, 1973). Well-educated urban migrants also subjectively recognize themselves as enjoying a higher status than their rural parents and peers in the social stratification structure, and they further perceive their spatial mobility to Wuhan as a successful separation from their rural hometowns, which are perceived as places of emaciation and backwardness. In the following section, I mainly discuss the informants' success stories and sense

of superiority over their rural peers. I then investigate how the informants' successes and a sense of superiority are closely related to and strongly shaped by their spatial experience under China's rural-urban dichotomy. Based on this investigation, I argue that well-educated urban migrants' mobility race under the rural-urban dichotomy inserts the spatial hierarchy, as an important dimension, into their perceptual framework of social stratification. According to them, the real measurement of successful upward social mobility is not just a 'university degree' and 'white-collar job' but also the ability to 'stay and survive in the metropolis of their hometown province, Wuhan'.

4.2 Being Hope and Model in Rural Hometown

4.2.1 Sense of Superiority over Rural Peers

In addition to recognizing the white-collar occupations and relatively higher economic income they have obtained in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants also tend to subjectively place themselves at a higher class status over their rural peers. Well-educated urban migrants' sense of superiority can be glimpsed in Yang's judgment on his rural peers' occupational choice.

I have two good friends in senior high school. We kept in touch after high school graduation. One of my friends went to Hangzhou for university education, and another went to Wuhan, like me. However, after college graduation, they returned to our hometown and are now working as civil servants in the local government. I admit they have low working pressure and permanent living. But, based on my observation, they just do some routine tasks in the workplace and eat and play on weekends (*shangban zuoxia richanggongzuo, zhoumo chichi hehe wanle*). It is unacceptable for me. Besides, they complained to me about their bleak prospect of career promotion when we gathered in the lunar new year...In my opinion, young adults would do better not to return to hometown immediately after university graduation. I admit our familiarity with local culture and social network may be useful for your development in my hometown. However, it is pretty hard to find satisfying occupations and learn a lot in hometown region (*hengnan zhaodao lixiang de gongzuo yiji dedao henhao de duanlian*)...If you want to fully apply what you learned in university in your work, staying in the metropolis is the better option (Yang)

Yang was hired by the Wuhan branch of Alibaba in 2018. He came from Tunbao Village of Enshi

Tujia and Miao Minority Autonomous State. His father was a migrant worker in the construction industry, and his mother was a housewife. He had successfully achieved intergenerational upward social mobility in terms of occupational status and economic income. From his perspective, Wuhan is a place which can yield more developmental opportunities to young adults with higher educational background, while returning to one's hometown (whether their rural hometown or smaller cities in their hometown region) for work is perceived as the despondent option which may drag well-educated urban migrants into the swamp of laziness and conservatism. What he received in Wuhan enabled him to approach modernity and development, as well as to establish a sense of superiority over his rural peers.

Well-educated urban migrants' strong sense of superiority is not just expressed through their attitudes towards their rural peers' choice of working location; it is also revealed in their choices throughout the important stages of life, such as their wedding banquet and occupational choices. This sense of superiority can be seen in Ling and Shu's wedding banquet in their rural hometown.

As the only child in his family who received the opportunity to pursue higher education in a metropolis, Ling, a rural young adult from Chen Jia Village of Yingshan County, was admitted

into the Department of Public Policy, Politics & Law College, Hubei University in 2010. He obtained the CCP membership and maintained outstanding academic performance in all four years of his study. He then passed the graduate admission examination and was admitted into the Department of Social Work, Central China Normal University in 2014. After completing his study at this prestigious university, he decided to stay in Wuhan to search for employment. He first worked in Intime City Plaza as a marketing manager, then moved to the Hechang real estate company and worked as junior manager of the human resource department. He recently moved to the Wuhan branch of Sunac China (a nationwide real estate developer) and worked in the human resource unit. His wife Shu was another one of the research participants in this study. They met in junior high school in their hometown. Shu also graduated from Hubei University. After university graduation, she chose to work at the HSBC Wuhan branch.

Picture 4.1 Ling and Shu's Wedding Banquet



Source: Xu Heng

Although the wedding banquet was held in their rural hometown, Shu and Ling still decided to incorporate the urban elements, such as a tailed suit and Western wedding veil, bubbly drink tower, roses, and red carpet, into the banquet. Unlike their rural peers who had held traditional wedding receptions to treat villagers, Shu and Li transformed their wedding banquet into a stage show, in which they expressed their hardships and successes in Wuhan to their villagers. Ling provided the following explanation on his wedding banquet arrangement:

The primary intention for us to hold this wedding ceremony in town is to show what we already achieved in Wuhan to our villager. You know, for rural young adults who have received higher education in a metropolis like us, our parents, other relatives, and countrymen, going to the metropolis (*da chengshi*) is perceived as making progress (*you*

jinbu) while returning to a rural area after university graduation is regarded as a failure (*daxue biye hui nongcun jiushi shibai*)...Thus, our parents, relatives, and other villagers have strong expectations that we should obtain prestigious occupations and permanent, high-quality livelihood in the metropolis. If we succeed, it is not only what was achieved but also the honor for our whole family...How do we prove ‘we already settled down and have a better livelihood in Wuhan’ in front of the villagers? Holding this wedding ceremony in our hometown is an important way (Ling)

From Ling and Shu’s perspective, inserting urban elements into the their wedding banquet and holding this banquet in their rural hometown was an important way to build and objectify their image as ‘high achievers’ among their fellow villagers. Settling down and working in Wuhan was perceived by this young couple as the most effective way to distance themselves from the backwardness and emaciation of their rural hometown and further pursue developmental opportunities and high-quality livelihood. Obtaining first-tier university diplomas and white-collar occupations in Wuhan enable this young couple to portray themselves as the hope of their family and successful models in their village.

Based on the presented information, it is clear that well-educated urban migrants' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure is not only related to their occupational or socioeconomic status but is also strongly shaped by the spatial hierarchy (i.e. the rural-urban dichotomy) in newly-urbanized China. Within this perceptual framework, the metropolis is perceived as a place of prosperity, rapid modernization, and greater opportunities, while the hometown region (including both the rural hometown and smaller cities in the hometown region) is perceived as a place of backwardness and emaciation. Thus, their perceptual framework of the social stratification structure contains two dimensions. One is measured in terms of occupational status and financial income while the other is ranked according to the rural-urban dichotomy. By deploying this perceptual scheme to understand their social position in their rural hometowns, well-educated urban migrants tend to perceive themselves as high achievers among their rural families and further rank themselves at a higher status than their rural peers.

In the next section, I answer the following question: How do well-educated urban migrants develop this 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure? Drawing on Bourdieu's elusive but important concept of habitus, I argue that well-educated urban migrants' perceptual framework of social stratification is the manifestation of their disposition generated from their mobility experience under the rural-urban dichotomy. More specifically, this

'metropolis-centered' framework is generated from their early socialization in migrant worker families and is later reinforced by their experience of pursuing higher education in the metropolises.

4.2.2 Growing up under the Rural-Urban Dichotomy

As previously stated, well-educated urban migrants' 'metropolis-centered' social class perceptual framework is first generated from their early socialization in migrant worker families. Because they were born in and grew up in migrant worker families, their early socialization included the experience of visiting the metropolises in which their parents worked. This is described in Ling's quote.

When I was a primary school student, I went to Shanghai and stayed with my parents every summer holiday. Even though they were really busy at the construction site, we still had time to go to the cinema or for other activities. I still remember we usually went to Nanjing Road and had dinner at McDonald's. Also, I watched many exciting action movies, such as Hero, Curse of Golden Flower, in the cinema on Nanjing Road. Since

that, I think living in a big city is more interesting and convenient. (Ling)

The early life experience of being constantly exposed to the socioeconomic prosperity in the metropolises lays the foundation for well-educated urban migrants' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure. Furthermore, their parents' experience of being migrant workers, especially the hardship and uncertainty their parents bore in the metropolis, contributes to shaping well-educated urban migrants' 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure. This can be seen in the informants' narratives on the hardship their parents endured as migrant workers in metropolises.

...My father is a painting worker (*youqi gong*) on a construction site. He went to Shanghai when he was 25, and he has done painting work for more than 20 years...He needs to stay with paint and other painting materials every day. You know, they are nearly damaging to people's lungs...When the market is good, he can get more chances to make money. But he needs to move around to search for work if the market is not good in Shanghai...Even though my parents earn much more than their counterparts who do farm work in the rural area, they are still vulnerable and painstaking in the metropolis.

If he is a permanent employee in a governmental organizations, a state-owned enterprise, or even a private company, he can enjoy much better medical service. (Ling)

Ling's narrative regarding his parents' hardship reflects the fact that the rural population is excluded from obtaining permanent occupations, relatively high social status, and greater social welfare in metropolises under the previously rigid *hukou* system. Even though most of them migrate to metropolises for work, it is nearly impossible for them to become state employees. Migrant workers' hardships are also reflected in Yang's narrative on his father's working experience in the metropolis.

My father went to Chongqing for work when I was eight. Being exposed to the burning sun, heavy rain, and the chilly wind is usual for him. My father's hardship of being a construction worker in Chongqing was often used by my mother as an example to demonstrate that people who do manual labour are subordinate to people who have a good education background and do mental work (*lao li zhe zhi yu ren lao xin zhe zhi ren*). (Yang)

Shan also illustrated the instability and hardships suffered in urban areas by the low-educated rural population in his narration of his parents' working experience in the city.

My parents left our hometown for an employment opportunity in the city when I was a kid. They suffered a lot in the city because they just did temporary, low-paid, and manual work. No matter when he returned to our hometown in the lunar new year or talked with me on the telephone, my father always told me that receiving higher education and obtaining permanent occupation in the urban area is the only way for our rural youths to change their fate (*zai dachengshi du daxue ranhou zhaodao wending gongzuo shi nongcun haizi gaibian mingyun de weiyi chulu*). (Shan)

Well-educated urban migrants' narratives on their parents' working experience in metropolises contain two layers of the social stratification structure. First, because they work in urban areas, especially in metropolises, their parents rank above those villagers from their hometowns who do farm work. Second, due to being excluded from the urban welfare system and being exposed to instability and hardships of manual work, their parents rank much lower than urban residents who have permanent occupations. Their narratives additionally imply that they and their parents

perceive pursuing a higher education and further obtaining a white-collar occupation in a metropolis as the most effective way to separate oneself from the backwardness of their rural hometown and extricate themselves from the hardships experienced by their parents. Such parents' experience of being migrant workers in metropolises contributes to reinforcing well-educated urban migrants' 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure.

4.2.3 Receiving Higher Education at First-Tier Universities in Wuhan

Well-educated urban migrants' 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure is also reinforced by their university experience in Wuhan. Unlike previous researchers, who have indicated that rural students would quickly develop senses of dislocation and exclusion when pursuing higher education in a metropolis, the informants of this study achieved success successfully in various fields on the university campus. Their successes were not only limited to academic performance but were also revealed in their active participation in student organization and other activities. Their successful university experiences can be glimpsed in the following narratives.

In my second year, I began to do some part-time jobs and small business around campus, such as providing tutorial for junior high school students and selling bedding to newly enrolled students on campus. In my third year, I earned around ¥ 4,000 by selling bedding to new students, and I nearly covered my living expenses by doing a part-time job. I was really proud of myself at that time. (Yang)

I tried to participate in nearly all student activities, like the New Year Gala Show, Christmas Gala Show, and University Badminton Competition. In my second year, I was nominated as the student cadre who was responsible for recreational and sports activities in my college because of my active performance in those activities. (Gao Ling)

Previous researchers have mainly focused on the incompatibility between different fields on the university campus and rural young adults' habitus, which are generated from early socialization in their rural families, to account for the sense of dislocation and exclusion they develop in university life. Unlike rural young adults of the past, who grew up in stable and fixed environments in the rural area, this study's participants had childhoods in which they experienced frequent spatial movement between the rural hometown and the metropolis. Encountering the socioeconomic and

cultural disjunction between the rural and urban area was common and even normal for these participants. As a result of constant exposure the horizontal disjuncture (here the rural-urban dichotomy) and vertical juncture (the confrontation between rural habitus generated in the past and subfields in the urban area at present), well-educated urban migrants' habitus tend to be multi-layered. Flexibility has already been internalized as their 'second nature' (Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Sweetman, 2003). Their flexible habitus enables them to quickly adapt to and stand out in various subfields on the university campus. Therefore, well-educated urban migrants' flexible habitus and the successes they achieved at university reinforce their self-perceptions as being more successful and privileged than their rural peers. As a result of their successes at university, well-educated urban migrants' 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure is reinforced.

Despite the fact that the well-educated urban migrants in this study recognized the objective upward social mobility they had achieved and perceived themselves as more successful and privileged than their rural peers, they conveyed strong senses of unfairness and uncertainty when they deployed the 'metropolis-centered' perceptual framework of the social stratification structure to understand their upward social mobility prospects in Wuhan. During the interviews, they repeatedly placed themselves at an inferior position within the social stratification structure when

comparing themselves with their urban local counterparts.

4.3. Well-Educated Urban Migrants' Prospects of Achieving Upward Social Mobility in Wuhan

4.3.1 Well-Educated Urban Migrants' Self-Perceptions of Class Status in Wuhan

As discussed in the previous sections, well-educated urban migrants tended to recognize themselves as more successful and privileged than their rural peers when they deployed the 'metropolis-centered' framework of the social stratification structure to perceive themselves and their peers in the rural area. Ironically, although they had already obtained white-collar occupations with considerable income - higher than average monthly income of university graduates (around 4,461 RMB) in Wuhan⁴ - all of the informants in this study conveyed strong senses of uncertainty and frustration when they deployed this perceptual framework to understand their current situation in Wuhan. Their pessimistic self-perceptions of class status in Wuhan are revealed in the following quotes.

⁴ According to the statistics released by Wuhan Human Resource Center in 2018, university graduate's monthly income is around 4461 RMB.

It is tough to say at present. As you know, for a young adult without an advantaged family background like me, it is really difficult to settle down and improve livelihood in few years. (Ru Li)

Living in Wuhan is quite different from settling down in Wuhan (*zai Wuhan shenghuo he zai Wuhan zhanwen jiaogen shi liangmashier*)...It is nearly impossible for me to settle down here if just relying on myself. (Qiao)

In addition to expressing feelings of uncertainty and frustration regarding their current status in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants conveyed a strong sense of unfairness when discussing issues related to their development, such as homeownership, career promotion, and family formation plan (i.e. their children's access to the high-quality educational resources). Their sense of inferiority can be glimpsed in the following quotes.

For young adults who have a strong background (*duiyu naxie you beijing de nianqingren*), it is not hard to stand out from colleagues and receive promotion.

Ironically, for people who have just moved back (*duiyu women zhe zhong zhiyou beiyang de ren*), holding an occupation and earning money to survive is already enough. (Fu)

For people who just receive around 5,000RMB per month like me, it is very hard to imagine when and how we can buy a private house in Wuhan. It is quite unfair that no matter how hard working I am, I still cannot buy a tiny house in Wuhan. (Qiao)

It is pretty hard to ensure that our children will not lose on the starting line. Those talent-cultivating courses and hobby lessons are necessary but are outside of the service provided by the public school. For people like me who just rely on salary, it is hard for me to afford them for my children. (Ling)

Behind well-educated urban migrants' difficulties in settling in Wuhan is their deep-seated sense of inferiority. Despite the fact that they had successfully obtained white-collar occupations and first-tier university diplomas, they still placed themselves at a lower position in the social stratification structure when comparing themselves with their urban local counterparts, particularly in terms of obtaining homeownership. This deep sense of inferiority is illustrated in

the following quote.

I think I will still sit at the bottom of the class hierarchy in the near future...Unlike local young adults who already have homeownership, the first thing we need to do is have our own house in Wuhan because this is highly related to the quality of your living and whether you can settle down and form a family. However, at present, it is nearly impossible for people who sit in the low strata like me to buy a house in Wuhan if I just rely on my salary. (Ru Li)

Here, the 'bottom of the class hierarchy' is used by Ru Li to describe his disadvantaged position in obtaining homeownership when compared with his urban local counterparts.

The presented quotes imply two layers of measurement in well-educated urban migrants' self-perceptions of class position in Wuhan. First, well-educated urban migrants' pessimistic self-perceptions of their class status and upward social mobility prospects are generated from the comparison between themselves and their urban local counterparts. Thus, their definition of upward social mobility is highly based on whether and how they can obtain what is enjoyed by

their urban local counterparts rather than their more successful and privileged status over their rural peers. Second, homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources constitute well-educated urban migrants' comparisons with their urban local counterparts. These three dimensions, particularly homeownership, underpin well-educated urban migrants' subjective self-identification of class status in Wuhan. Thus, well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in securing homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources are sources from which their inferior self-perceptions of class status are built.

4.3.2 The Significance of Homeownership in Well-Educated Urban Migrants' Self-Identification of Class Status in Wuhan

First, like other rapidly-urbanized metropolises in China, the high-quality public services and facilities in Wuhan are geographically unevenly spread. Homeownership, on which residential differentiation lies, constrains and differentiates residents' access to those high-quality public services and facilities. Taking the geographical allocation of public educational resources as an example, these public educational resources are unevenly geographically allocated in Wuhan.

Meanwhile, the compulsory education resources in the central districts (i.e. Jiang'an, Hongshan, and Wuchang districts) far exceed those in the suburbs (i.e. Caidian and Xinzhou districts), both qualitatively and quantitatively. This uneven geographical allocation is illustrated in the following table and diagram.

Table 4.1 Geographic Allocation of Compulsory Education Resources in Wuhan

District	Primary School	Junior High School	Key Primary School	Key Junior High School
Jiangnan District	26	18	14	10
Jiang'an District	22	26	14	16
Qiaokou District	13	12	6	9
Wuchang District	21	30	13	23
Qingshan District	11	10	4	6
Hongshan District	24	12	16	7
Dongxi Hu District	16	9	8	6
Hannan District	3	2	2	2
Hanyang District	17	11	8	5
Caidian District	4	4	2	2
Jiangxia District	4	6	2	4
Huangpi District	1	4	0	3
Xinzhou District	4	7	1	5

Source: The Yearbook of Educational Bureau of Wuhan 2018

Diagram 4.1. The Geographic Locations of Public Primary Schools in Wuchang and Hongshan Districts



Source: Education Bureau of Wuhan 2018

Thus, if Wuhan residents want to guarantee their children's access to the high-quality compulsory education offered by key schools, they must ensure that the *hukou* of their school-age children is consistent with the *hukou* of the guardians and family housing (based on the property ownership certificate of the parents), all of which must be located in the corresponding area of the school. For migrant workers who do not possess homeownership and *hukou* in Wuhan, their children can receive compulsory education offered by a public school located where the parents' residence permits are issued. For university graduates who obtained Wuhan *hukou* after graduation, their children can enjoy compulsory education in the district to which their *hukou* belongs (Education Bureau of Wuhan, 2018). Here, homeownership acts as the mechanism which differentiates and

stratifies households' access to compulsory public educational resources. Thus, having a 'school district flat' (*xuequ fang*) or possessing homeownership in the central district is the prerequisite for Wuhan households to ensure their children's access to the high-quality educational resources. Newcomers, such as migrant workers and university graduates from other places, must then spend large amounts of money to purchase homeownership in central districts to ensure their children's access to high-quality compulsory education. Those residents who cannot afford 'school district houses' or flats in central districts cannot control over or decide which public schools their children will be admitted to. These facts further support the assertion that homeownership is the prerequisite for residents to obtain access to high-quality public service and facilities in Wuhan.

Second, as indicated by previous scholars, homeownership has gradually replaced bank deposit, debt instruments, and capital stock investments as the main alternative financial asset, which yields a large profit to the newly affluent urban middle class (Coulson & Tang, 2013; Theurillat et al., 2017). In Wuhan, the homeownership, especially the ownership of an extra flat in central districts, yields considerable financial income to local urban households. This can be glimpsed in the following quote.

Besides the house we live in Jiangnan district, my family possesses another small flat in Qiaokou district. My parents divided this flat into four rooms and lent them to young adults who work in this district. They can receive more than 4,000 RMB from them every month. This rent basically covers my family's daily expense, so we can use our salary for other uses. (Ding)

Ding is a local young adult who works in China's social media giant *Headline Today* (*jinri toutiao*). He graduated from the Department of Journalism and Communication, Normal University of Central China. His parents are permanent employees of Wuhan Railway Bureau. As beneficiaries of housing reform in late 1990s, Ding's parents bought the flat offered by Wuhan Railway Bureau at the subsidized price. Because of benefiting from state's generous housing reform, his family had the extra financial capacity to purchase another flat in well-equipped compound of Jiang'an district. The housing advantage of Ding's family bring them with stable economic income in the form of rent, while simultaneously this extra income contributes to enhancing Ding's consumption capacity and financial security. Homeownership here serves as the financial asset which can generate a considerable amount of economic capital for urban local families. This economic capital, in turn, contributes to maintaining the urban local household's economic advantage over migrant masses.

Meanwhile, the urban space is not only differentiated and ranked in terms of public service and facility allocation but is also stratified in terms of symbolic value. Residential compounds and amenities of real estate in central districts are perceived by local urban residents as the sites that not only cultivate a modern lifestyle and taste for their families but that are also imbued with implied prestige in terms of local urban membership. This is illustrated in the following conversation.

Me: Why do you think young people should buy a private flat if they want to settle down in Wuhan?

Wang: Because it is necessary. If you want to settle down in Wuhan, the most important thing you have to deal with is having a stable residential place. It not only influences your living condition but also shapes your subsequent decisions, such as forming a family, having a child.

Me: How about renting a house in the market? Young adults can work in Wuhan but just

rent a house.

Wang: In my opinion, it is not a wise choice for long-term benefit. Based on my knowledge, your living condition will be, more or less, unstable if you choose to rent a house in the market. If you buy new real estate in the market, you can enjoy nice residential compounds and convenient amenities. These will not only influence your feeling, taste, and lifestyle but also may impact the circumstances in which your children grow up. Besides, if you do not have your own house in Wuhan, how can you identify you belong to this city?

Wang, a local young adult, graduated from Central China Normal University in 2015. His parents are civil servants of the Health Bureau of Dongxi Hu district, Wuhan. Like thousands of local young adults who grew up in an urban middle-class families, he obtained a civil servant position at the Human Resource and Social Security Bureau of Wuhan. Owing to the financial support from his parents, he bought a private house in Wuchang district. More importantly, like other local young adults of middle-class families, Wang is also the only child of his parents. The one-child family structure of urban middle-class families, which is resulted from one-child policy in 1990s,

impels most urban middle-class parents to mobilize economic capital and other family resources to ensure their child's well-being in city even when their children could earn their own living (Or, 2017; Croll, 2006). Thus, Wang's relative easiness of obtaining urban homeownership in developed district is not only enabled his parents' advantage in housing reform but also conditioned by his one-child family dynamics.

On the one hand, homeownership in the central district is considered by Wang to be an important asset that can be converted to embodied cultural capital (e.g. an urban lifestyle and taste) and objectified cultural capital (e.g. modern residential compounds and convenient amenities) for his family. On the other hand, he perceives homeownership in the Wuchang district as an indicator which can signal his family's middle-class membership. Indeed, housing consumption in central districts is a social practice for Wuhan's middle class to both indicate their class membership and differentiate themselves from the newly urbanized 'masses' in terms of their possession of embodied cultural capital and objectified cultural capital. Unlike migrant population who mostly perceive the private flat as the residential site and financial asset in urban area, young adults from local middle-class family emphasize more on the cultural and symbolic capital of homeownership in well-equipped compound of develop district. Besides, they insist these cultural and symbolic capital will further work to enhance and reproduce their urban middle-class status.

Third, as a result of deploying a ‘metropolis-centered’ perceptual framework of social stratification to understand their class status and upward social mobility in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants’ definition of upward social mobility is closely related to whether and how they can obtain what is enjoyed by their urban local counterparts. Thus, well-educated urban migrants are impelled to recognize the significance of homeownership in their subjective identification of class status in Wuhan.

I think whether to own a private house in Wuhan is the inevitable issue we have to face if we want to have a better-quality livelihood. Without my own house in Wuhan, I’m still a migrant no matter if I form a family or have a permanent occupation here. After having my own flat, I can start to think about further personal development. (Ru Li)

As Fraser (2000) argues, the homeownership is ‘the material symbol of having a family and has always been viewed as the source of safety and happiness in Chinese life’. Similarly, Ru Li perceives obtaining homeownership as the social practice that objectifies ‘the urbanity’ he has successfully achieved, as well as support his long-term safety and development in Wuhan.

Well-educated urban migrants' strong aspirations to distance themselves from their rural origins and obtain local urban membership motivate them to acknowledge the importance of homeownership in their upward social mobility race.

Therefore, the socioeconomic importance of homeownership, the symbolic meaning of homeownership assigned by locals to strengthen their super status, and well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of joining the urban middle class work together to create and reinforce the significance of homeownership in well-educated urban migrants' self-identification of class status and upward social mobility. However, due to their lack of family support in terms of economic capital, well-educated urban migrants are disadvantaged in obtaining homeownership, especially purchasing flats in central districts of Wuhan Provincial City.

4.3.3 Well-Educated Urban Migrants' Worries about Obtaining Full Membership of Middle Class in Wuhan

Due to the relative deficiency of financial support from their families, well-educated urban migrants are disadvantaged in obtaining homeownership, especially when compared with their

urban local counterparts. This can be glimpsed in Ru Li's quote:

For young adults from rural families, we at least need ten years to save money for the down payment, and it is completely based on the assumption that housing prices will not rise in the next few years. We cannot rely on family support to buy a flat or inherit homeownership from our parents like many urban young adults. It is very hard to imagine how high the housing price will be after ten years. I just feel my income increase will never catch up with the rocketing housing price. (Ru Li)

Ironically, well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in purchasing private flats is reinforced by the rapidly rising housing prices triggered by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project.

The explosive rise in housing prices is boosted by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project in two ways. First, due to the tremendous amount of profits generated from the booming housing market, governments (particularly local governments), real estate developers, and banks form a coalition and further actively boost the bubble of the real estate market. Within

this coalition, local governments monopolize the supply of land, real estate developers manipulate the commercial housing supply, and banks provide capital to support both the demand and the supply sides of the housing market (Coulson & Tang, 2013; Ma, 2018; Theurillat et al., 2017). Although the new-type urbanization project covers nearly every aspect of the urbanization model of contemporary China, according to the analyses presented in previous research, the land finance model⁵ and governments-developers-bankers coalition have not been shaken by this ambitious project (Chen, Liu & Lu, 2016; Zheng, Wang & Cao, 2014). Thus, the new-type urbanization project leaves local governments, real estate developers, and banks with enough space to maintain such a coalition in boosting the bubble of the real estate market.

Second, the relaxation of the previously rigid *hukou* system is one of the main goals of the nationwide new-type urbanization project. Under this context, the Wuhan local authority aims to release 3 million Wuhan urban *hukou* positions to residents in suburban or rural areas of Wuhan, college graduates from other places, and migrant workers. According to the municipal bureau of statistics, Wuhan's urban population reached 8,899,900 in 2018 - this was 178,200 more than in 2017, for an increase of 2.04%. Meanwhile, the urban population increased by 473,200 from 2015, based a 2015 the sample survey of 1% of the national population, for an average annual increase

⁵ "Land finance model" is the method through which local governments try to obtain the corresponding revenue through the lease of land use rights in order to maintain local fiscal expenditure (Zhu, Zhou, & Lin, 2012). Generally, land finance only refers to the revenue from leasing land use rights, but the concept can be expanded to include all revenue generated from the land.

of 157,700 (Municipal Bureau of Statistics of Wuhan, 2019). Moreover, due to the nationwide relaxation of *hukou* system, the previously strong connection between residents' *hukou* position and their position in the social stratification system is largely undermined. Thus, homeownership is deployed by local urban residents, especially the urban middle class, to maintain their superior status in terms of access to high-quality public resources and services, which in turn reinforces the importance of homeownership in obtaining urban middle-class membership and further contributes to the rise in the housing prices. Overall, the close institutional tie between formal homeownership in developed districts and households' access to high-quality public resource, together with migrants' rapidly-growing demand of high-quality public resources indirectly established the conditions for the rapid rise in housing prices.

According to statistical data collected by previous researchers, the housing price in Wuhan has rapidly risen since 2011. Wang (2017) points out that the price bubble of the real estate market has already generated and will expand in Wuhan in the coming years.

Table 4.2. Basic Information of Wuhan Housing Price 2011-2016

Year	Housing Price	Growth Rate of	GDP	GDP Growth Rate	Housing Price
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	(RMB/m ²)	Housing Price (%)	(Billion RMB)	(%)	Growth Rate/GDP Growth Rate
2011	7,192	25.16	676.2	21.1	1.2
2012	7,344.05	2.11	800.4	18.8	0.11
2013	7,717	5.08	905.13	13.09	0.39
2014	7,951	3.03	1,006.95	11.25	0.27
2015	8,515.79	7.1	1,090.56	8.3	0.85
2016	10,123.6	18.88	1,191.26	9.23	2.045

Source: Author's (Wang, 2017) calculations based on data from the Wuhan Real Estate Yearbook (2012-2017)

Well-educated urban migrants' reinforced disadvantaged position in obtaining homeownership is further reflected in the affordability of housing in Wuhan. Due to a lack of data that reflects the affordability of housing prices in Wuhan, this research adopts the data from Numbeo to compensate for this deficiency. Numbeo is the world's largest user-contributed database. According to the newest data released by Numbeo, the housing price-to-income ratio was 20.06, and mortgage, as a percentage of income, was 158.87% in Wuhan in 2018.

Due to their deficiency of family support in terms of economic capital, most well-educated urban migrants cannot afford a down payment for homeownership in Wuhan. Even for those well-educated urban migrants who receive financial support from their family for a down payment,

the heavy burden of the mortgage continues to undermine their living quality and consumption ability. This can be glimpsed in the following quotes.

My mortgage is around 3,000 RMB per month. After paying the mortgage, I only have a little more than 2,000 RMB for other uses. So, my wife and I just rely on her salary for daily expenses. We used to buy products from foreign sports brands, like NIKE or Adidas, but now we can only afford national brands, like ANTA. (Fu)

After paying for the mortgage, I just have around 3,000 RMB per month. You cannot escape from activities involved with ‘courtesy demands reciprocity’ (*li shang wang lai*). The expense of these activities is around 1,000 RMB around. So, I just have 2,000 RMB for the daily expense. My wife always makes the joke that, ‘we used to eat snacks offered by BESTORE (Chinese famous snack brand), but now we cannot afford that anymore’. So how could people like us have a middle-class life if just relying on such limited financial capacity? (Gao Ling)

In contrast, urban middle-class households usually have multiple financial resources, such as an

additional private flat or stock. Besides, they enjoy financial security provided by the urban staff's pension system and housing accumulation fund system. Thus, for urban young adults from local middle-class families, continuous financial support from their family helps them avoid the deterioration in living quality and degradation of consumption capacity experienced by well-educated urban migrants after providing a down payment for homeownership. This is illustrated in Wang's narrative on his mortgage and living quality after marriage.

After my wedding banquet, we went to Europe for our honeymoon. My family provided 50000 RMB for our travel expenses. Our car was provided by my wife's parents. The mortgage for our new house is around 4,000 RMB per month; I paid half, and my parents paid the other half. My parents always told us that their money is our money, we just need to use our salary to improve our own living conditions. (Wang)

The heavy financial burden from housing mortgage compels well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to prioritize the financial security in their imagined 'urban middle-class membership'. While local middle-class young adults' considerable financial support from parents enable local middle-class young adults to ensure their financial freedom and use the luxurious consumption,

i.e., overseas travel, as the important indicator of their middle-class status. The sharp contrast between well-educated urban migrants' constant financial burden from heavy mortgages, on the one hand, and the strong economic support their urban counterparts receive from their middle-class parents, on the other hand, contributes to lowering well-educated urban migrants' subjective self-identification of class status in Wuhan.

For well-educated urban migrants, their position in the labour market is the only determinant of household financial income, which, in turn, constrains their capacity to obtain homeownership in Wuhan. In other words, well-educated urban migrants must merely rely on career promotion to increase their household financial income, and further accumulate enough economic capital to purchase a private house. This is revealed in Yang's plan for career promotion.

The motivation for me to jump to Alibaba was earning more money. In the beginning, I worked in COFCO and Meituan to gain more working experience. When I was promoted to the managerial position of Meituan, I started to plan for jumping to Alibaba. In early 2018, I jumped to Alibaba and obtained the sales manager position here. My salary is nearly three times as what it was before. Thus, I may afford the mortgage for

buying a house in Wuhan. (Yang)

As the result of the radical expansion and massification of the higher education system since the late 1990s, the supply of university graduates has exceeded the nationwide demand of the labour market in the last two decades. This oversupply has led to ‘diploma depreciation’ and further undermines university graduates’ bargaining power with their employers for salary increases and career promotion (Bai, 2006; Chan & Lu, 2011; Fu & Ren, 2010; He & Mai, 2015; Wu & Hawkins, 2018; Wu & Zhang, 2010). The depreciation of well-educated urban migrants’ institutionalized cultural capital can be glimpsed in Qiao’s quote.

Our career promotion prospect not only depends on what we know, in my opinion, but also depends on what our employer wants us to do. In my company, even though we are called as ‘digital engineer’, we are actually doing elementary work, such as checking and fixing problems with the broadband cable network. If we complain that the salary is low or the prospect of career promotion is too bleak, our employer can actually hire a young graduate on a lower salary and train him or her to do the same work. So, how can we easily bargain with our employer for promotion? (Qiao)

Meanwhile, as a result of their rural origins, well-educated urban migrants lack embodied cultural capital and social capital, which are essential in their competition with colleagues and translate to opportunities for career promotion. Their deficiency of embodied cultural capital and social capital situate them at a disadvantaged position in the career promotion competition.

I'm really discontented with the arrangement of my company. Who gets a promotion opportunity is highly determined by the willingness of the boss or senior manager. They cannot provide an objective, neutral, and convincing standard for the allocation of promotion opportunities. For example, my local colleague Charles dressed in a nice suite, behaved formally, and spoke English fluently in the university enrolment interview. This left a good impression on the interviewer. Ironically, the interviewer at that time was the boss of our company. Thus, he quickly got extra attention from the boss and received a promotion. (Ru Li)

In the state-owned enterprise, a junior employee's promotion opportunity highly depends on the preference of the executive or leader. Only junior employees who grew up in this

system (*zhigong zidi*) or those with a strong social network can quickly stand out from the masses and get a promotion chance in a short period. Thus, promotion sounds like an unreachable dream for me. (Fu)

In contemporary China, the expansion of the higher education system has led to a more competitive job market with a pool of candidates with higher educational qualifications (Tang, 2013). This kind of pressure impels more middle-class parents to invest more in their children's education. This investment is focused on achieving both a higher level and higher quality of education. The cost of education, which intertwines with housing consumption, has become another significant expense for urban middle-class families (Bulter & Robson, 2003; Bulter, Hamnett & Ramsden, 2013; Wu, Ednsor & Cheng, 2018; Wu, Zhang & Waley, 2016). As a result of successfully obtaining white-collar occupations in metropolises through the completion of higher education, well-educated urban migrants, like the urban middle class, both recognize the importance of high-quality educational resources in obtaining higher-paying jobs and perceive ensuring their children's access to high-quality educational resources as an important strategy to prevent their family from suffering from downward social mobility. 'Putting children at the same starting line with their urban counterparts' (*rang haizi bu shu zai qi pao xian shang*) is a phrase that was repeatedly mentioned when the participants of this study were discussing the importance

of their children's access to high-quality educational resources. This can be glimpsed in Ling's quote.

For young adults who grow up in rural families like me, receiving a good education is the most reliable way to leave the rural area and receive a developmental opportunity in the metropolis. It will not only increase our knowledge and skills but also broaden our vision...We already experienced the bitterness of chasing upward social mobility in the metropolis. Thus, my wife and I hope our kid will sit at the same starting line with urban children, so they will not experience our bitterness anymore. (Ling)

Recent scholars have indicated that China's middle-class families purport to ensure their children's access to both the formal education offered by high-ranking schools and extracurricular classes. These extracurricular or after-school classes include subjects tested on university entrance examinations, as well as non-tested lessons which are recognized to improve children's quality, or *suzhi*, e.g. piano, violin, painting, or dance classes (Tang, 2013, et al.). Following this rule of the urban middle-class pursuit, well-educated urban migrants also admit that their children's access to high-quality educational resources not only refers to their children's opportunities to receive

compulsory education offered by key schools, but also includes whether their household can afford various extracurricular activities (*kewai huodong*), excellent-training classes (*peiyou ban*), and interest-cultivation classes (*xingqu ban*) for their children. This is demonstrated in Shu's narrative.

Nowadays, children are not only competing on academic performance in school, but also on synthesized quality (*zonghe suzhi*), such as their competitiveness in English speaking, sports, and music. Even though academic performance is the most essential factor which influences children's enrolment in a key high school, nearly all households ensure that their children have one specialty (*techang*). Thus, we also hope to support our kid to take an extracurricular class. (shu)

Although well-educated urban migrants recognize the importance of receiving a high-quality education in supporting their own upward social mobility pursuit and preventing their children from suffering from downward social mobility, their children's access to high-quality educational resources is strongly constrained by their difficulties in obtaining homeownership.

First, due to their inadequacy of economic capital and family financial support, well-educated urban migrants cannot purchase the unaffordable ‘school district’ flats (*xuequ fang*) to ensure their children's access to high-quality educational resources offered by key schools. For well-educated urban migrants who do not have ‘school district’ flats, their children will receive compulsory education provided by public schools allocated by the local education bureau (Education Bureau of Wuhan Provincial City, 2018). However, due to the limited educational resource supply of key schools, well-educated urban migrants' children would likely be allocated to ordinary schools to receive compulsory education.

Second, even for those well-educated urban migrants who are able to buy private flats in Wuhan, they cannot spare enough money or obtain financial support from their parents to afford extracurricular courses for their children, because the down payment and the ensuing high mortgage largely undermine the financial capacity of their families. This can be seen in Fu's quote.

The down payment already took away the savings of my parents. The mortgage also takes a large part of my salary away. It's very hard for me to spare extra money to

support my daughter to take a piano course or table tennis course like her classmates' parents. (Fu)

The heavy down payment and housing mortgage have undermined the financial capacity of Fu's family. Their limited financial capacity, in turn, constrains their children's access to extracurricular courses and activities.

Thus, the ownership of a 'school district' flat serves as the main mechanism which converts urban local families' economic capital into high-quality institutionalized embodied cultural capital for their children. But well-educated urban migrants' household without homeownership in developed district of Wuhan are mostly excluded from accumulating these institutionalized and embodied cultural capital.

Moreover, as previous studies have indicated, some middle-class families can use personal networking or *guanxi*, to help their children to get into key schools, even if their families do not fulfil the requirements of enrolment based on residency registration (Tang, 2013). In Wuhan, some middle-class families, especially those have a close network with the education bureau, might

mobilize their *guanxi* to ensure their children's access to key schools. However, due to their deficiency of effective *guanxi* or social capital, well-educated urban migrants' families cannot secure their children's access to high-quality education in this way. This is visible in Shu's answer.

My colleague's father is a retired military officer. He has a reliable network in the army.

Thus, my colleague's father mobilized his *guanxi* to ensure her daughter's access to the key kindergarten opened by the army...but we don't have such reliable *guanxi*. It might be a little harder for my daughter to be enrolled in a key kindergarten. (Shu)

4.4 Discussion and Summary

Well-educated urban migrants' upward social mobility not only refers to the objective shift of their social status in terms of income, occupation, and educational background but also refers to the change in self-identification of class position. Well-educated urban migrants' upward social mobility prospects are largely shaped by their spatial mobility under the rural-urban dichotomy and deeply embedded in the socioeconomic reconfiguration in newly urbanized China. Bourdieu suggests the social selves' spatial experience is a key medium for coding and reproducing social

relations (Bourdieu, 1977). The hierarchy of the social space yields an important framework through which social selves understand who they are and whom they want to be in society (Fleischer, 2007). For well-educated urban migrants, their spatial mobility from their rural hometowns to Wuhan not only serves as a strategy to provide themselves with developmental opportunities in Wuhan but also embodies their spatial experience under the rural-urban dichotomy. Such spatial experience under the new-type urbanization project provides a ‘metropolis-centered’ perceptual framework of the social stratification structure to well-educated urban migrants for understanding their social status and upward social mobility prospects.

On the one hand, well-educated urban migrants’ spatial mobility from their rural hometowns to Wuhan yields them with first-tier university diplomas and white-collar occupations with considerable income, as well as gives them a sense of privilege over their rural peers. However, as a result of deploying a ‘metropolis-oriented’ perceptual framework of social structure to understand their social position, well-educated urban migrants tend to regard the objective and intergenerational upward social mobility they have received as taken for granted. On the other hand, well-educated urban migrants understand their social status and upward social mobility in Wuhan based on a comparison between themselves and their local middle-class counterparts.

However, rather than perceiving themselves as members of the urban middle class in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants convey strong feelings of unfairness, uncertainty, and inferiority when discussing about their upward social mobility in terms of comparing themselves with urban local counterparts in Wuhan. Homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to the high-quality educational resources are three pillars which closely relate to well-educated urban migrants' living conditions and development in Wuhan, as well as underpin their comparison with their urban counterparts. The close connection between homeownership and residents' access to public resources, services, and amenities, urban middle-class residents' superiority in possessing and utilizing various forms of capital in the mobility race, and well-educated urban migrants' strong aspirations of settling down in Wuhan contribute to homeownership being the key mark to define class status and upward social mobility in Wuhan. However, due to the lack of financial support from family, well-educated urban migrants have less economic capital to purchase homeownership or private flats. Their disadvantaged position in obtaining homeownership, in turn, undermines their capacity to ensure their children's access to high-quality educational resources. Meanwhile, due to a lack of other channels to accumulate financial income, striving for career promotion becomes the most important and the sole method for well-educated urban migrants to increase their economic capital for their upward social mobility pursuit. Unfortunately, as a result of the deficiency of embodied cultural capital and social capital, they are also at a disadvantaged

position in the competition for career promotion. Thus, well-educated urban migrants' pessimistic self-perceptions of their class status and upward social mobility in Wuhan are largely based on their difficulties in securing homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources.

Moreover, because the 'land financial model' has not been significantly reformed with the new-type urbanization project, local governments, real estate developers, and banks still have space and incentive to form a coalition to boost the real estate bubble in Wuhan. Meanwhile, as a result of the socioeconomic reconfiguration and demographic changes brought by the rapid implementation of such an ambitious urbanization project, the urban middle class increasingly emphasizes the importance of homeownership in differentiating themselves from the migrant masses; they deploy the ownership of a private flat as an exclusionary system to prevent migrants from increasing their economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital to achieve upward social mobility in Wuhan. These shifts have contributed to creating the explosive rise in housing prices under the context of the new-type urbanization project, which in turn reinforces well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in the upward social mobility race.

Chapter Five: Can the ‘Graduate-Friendly’ Project Help Well-Educated Urban

Migrants Stay and Settle in Wuhan?

After discerning well-educated urban migrants’ disadvantaged position in becoming urban middle class in Wuhan Provincial City, this chapter aims to examine whether the ‘Millions of College Graduates Staying in Wuhan’ (MCCSW) project, initiated and implemented by the Wuhan local government, can broaden well-educated urban migrants’ chances of becoming urban middle class in Wuhan as has been claimed in governmental propaganda. However, based on the in-depth interviews with well-educated urban migrants who choose to stay in Wuhan after graduation, this chapter illuminates that well-educated urban migrants hold strong suspicious attitudes towards the MCCSW in terms of its capacity to broaden their path towards achieving personal development in Wuhan. Well-educated urban migrants’ suspicions about the MCCSW project emphasize the necessity to critically examine the intrinsic goals and well-educated urban migrants’ status of the MCCSW project, as well as further investigate why this ambitious project cannot adequately provide well-educated urban migrants with opportunities to join the urban middle class.

Based on intensive fieldwork on the job fairs and affordable housing project for university

graduates (*daxuesheng anjufang xiangmu*) in Wuhan, this chapter indicates that the MCCSW project cannot fulfil well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of achieving personal development and upward social mobility. In particular, this overestimated project is incapable of assisting well-educated urban migrants' in obtaining homeownership, career promotion, and offspring's access to high-quality educational resources in Wuhan. Drawing on David Harvey's critical elaboration on 'urban entrepreneurialism' and the empirical data obtained in this research, this chapter attempts to re-examine and evaluate the purpose of the project and its impact on individuals' life chances. In addition, this chapter argues that the critical examination of this project should be situated in the context of China's massive industrial shift from coastal to inland areas, as well as the recent economic downturn. Following this logic, this chapter further indicates that the MCCSW project is mainly designed to enhance Wuhan's competitiveness among inland China's metropolises in attracting manufacturing industries and investment from developed areas. Thus, converting millions of university graduates into a large troop of cheap intellectual labour is the essential goal of the MCCSW project. Indeed, rather than broadening well-educated urban migrants' path towards becoming urban middle class, most 'welfare policies' of such an ambitious project serve to produce and maintain this troop of cheap intellectual labour. Based on this critical analysis, this chapter demonstrates that the underlying tension between the aim of the MCCSW project, on the one hand, and well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of becoming urban middle

class, on the other hand, forms the basis of the MCCSW project's deficiency in yielding well-educated urban migrants with opportunities to join the urban middle class.

5.1. MCCSW Project and University Graduates' Bright Future in Wuhan

Previous research has indicated that China's university graduates face difficulty in obtaining permanent occupation and *hukou* in metropolises due to the radical expansion of higher education system and the persistent obstacle of the *hukou* system (Li, 2002; Li, 2015; Li & Zhang, 2008; Lu, 2005; Yang, 2016). To, as described in governmental propaganda, assist university graduates in dealing with the challenges of obtaining local *hukou*, occupation, and stable livelihood, the Wuhan government initiated and implemented the 'Millions of College Graduates Staying in Wuhan' project (*baiwan daxuesheng liuhan gongcheng*) in 2017. This 'graduate-friendly' project is not only an important part of the new-type urbanization project in Wuhan but also serves to support the 'rise of central area' national strategic project (Hubei Development and Reform Commission, 2017; Wuhan Development and Reform Commission, 2016). To effectively implement a series of policies under the MCCSW project and attract one million university graduates to stay in Wuhan within five years, the Wuhan local authority designated an official institution - the Wuhan

Recruitment Bureau (*wuhan zhaocai ju*) - to be responsible for all issues involved with the MCCSW project. Basic information on this ambitious project is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Basic Information on the MCCSW Project

Aim	The aim of the MCCSW project is to attract one million university graduates to stay and further settle down in Wuhan within the next five years.
Content	The MCCSW project comprehensively encompasses <i>hukou</i> , homeownership, starting a business, and employment, which are four essential issues for university graduates.
Details	1. Graduates who graduated in or after 2014 can automatically obtain the Wuhan urban local <i>hukou</i> without any further requirements.
	2. The Wuhan local authority will build more than 500,000 m ² young talent flats or apartments (<i>rencai gongyu</i>) to provide a residential place for 200,000 university graduates within the next five years. The core project of this policy is a university graduate affordable housing project (<i>daxuesheng anjufang</i>) in which university graduates can buy a private flat with an 80% discount.
	3. The Wuhan recruitment bureau will coordinate with specific enterprises, i.e. Xiaomi, Huawei, and Zall Group, to build 3,000 university graduate internship basements to enhance graduates' capacity to obtain employment. Moreover, the Wuhan local authority will expand 10,000 social service positions to attract university graduates.
	4. The Wuhan recruitment bureau will establish 50 public institutes to provide training and support for university graduates who want to start a business in Wuhan.
	5. The Wuhan local authority cooperates with banks to provide specific loans to university graduates to start a business and expand the 'Green Sycamore' Grant to support their business.
	6. University graduates' children can receive compulsory education offered by public schools assigned by the local educational bureau.
	7. Establishing minimum salary standards for university graduates: vocational college graduates 40,000 RMB/year; bachelor's degree holders 50,000 RMB/year; master's degree holder 60,000

	RMB/year; Ph.D. degree holder 80,000 RMB/year
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Source: The Recruitment Bureau of Wuhan 2017

According to the statistics released by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Wuhan in 2019, approximately 406,000 university graduates chose to stay in Wuhan to work and live in 2018. Since the implementation of the MCCSW project in 2017, the number of graduates who choose to stay in Wuhan has increased by 20.4% (Wuhan Recruitment Bureau, 2019). Thus, university graduates' prospects of attaining better livelihood and upward social mobility are described in an overly optimistic light by both governmental propaganda and mainstream social media (e.g. Southern Weekend and Phoenix News). Some social media sources even predict that Wuhan will be one of the most 'graduate-friendly' cities in mainland China in the next five years.

Picture 5.1 Press Meeting of the MCCSW Project



Source: Hubei Daily

However, drawing on the examination of the implementation of policies under the MCCSW project, the following section highlights that this ambitious project cannot provide effective assistance to well-educated urban migrants in fulfilling their dreams of becoming urban middle class in Wuhan as what described by governmental propaganda.

5.2 The Implementation of Policies under the MCCSW Project in Wuhan

The in-depth investigation on the implementation of the MCCSW in Wuhan is mainly conducted on two aspects. The first is the large job fairs organized under the MCCSW project. The second is the university graduate affordable housing project. Drawing on the intensive unstructured

interviews and participant observations conducted at the large job fairs (one was organized by a private human resource company, while the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau directly organized another at National Wuhan University), this section first demonstrates that the MCCSW project cannot effectively raise university graduates' average salary, provide them with stable and well-paid occupations, or change university graduates' inferior position in the job market, as claimed by mainstream propaganda. In addition, the Wuhan local authority has low motivation and capacity to enforce other employers to follow the related policies of the MCCSW project and maintain the transparency of the recruitment process. Then, based on the fieldwork in the construction site of the affordable housing project, as well as interviews with well-educated urban migrants who have a strong demand for private homeownership in Wuhan, this section points out that the affordable housing project cannot yield access to high-quality public service and resource, convenient facilities, and amenities to possessors. Thus, the ownership of affordable housing cannot provide well-educated urban migrants with an effective channel to accumulate economic and cultural capital, and further assist them in obtaining urban middle-class membership. Moreover, the lottery system, as well as other policies, cannot maintain the transparency and integrity of the implementation of the affordable housing project. Thus, due to their lack of economic capital and social capital, well-educated urban migrants are disadvantaged in purchasing the private flats of the university graduate affordable housing project.

5.2.1 Job Fairs Organized under the MCCSW Project and the Severe Challenges Faced by University Graduates

Picture 5.2 Job Fair in Lijiang Hotel



Source: Xu Heng

The first job fair on which the fieldwork was conducted was organized by the 4sJob Human Resource Company in Lijiang Hotel on 14th September 2019. The Wuhan Recruitment Bureau also entitled and assisted 4sJob Human Resource Company with organizing this university graduate job fair. Although both 4s Job Human Resource Company and Wuhan Recruitment Bureau publicly announced that this job fair would successfully provide over three thousand

employment opportunities to university graduates, the employment opportunities offered in this job fair were far from university graduates' expectations and from what was claimed by the governmental propaganda. Most of the university graduates who participated in the job fair expressed low confidence in obtaining ideal employment opportunities. This negative emotion is expressed in Kaiqi's response.

Kaiqi: I take a very conservative attitude towards finding an ideal job in this job fair. My expectation is not too high. I want to find a permanent occupation with bright career promotion prospects.

Me: How about the salary?

Kaiqi: As a university graduate, I cannot expect too much. However, it should be higher than the average salary of a university graduate (around 4,461 RMB in 2018). Probably 5,000 RMB at the beginning.

Kaiqi graduated from the Normal University of Central China. Her disappointment towards this job fair was generated from employers' rejection of or complicated attitudes about the 'minimum salary standard' policy established by the Wuhan local authority. Her disappointment is revealed in the following conversation.

Me: To be honest, I'm quite impressed with the jobs offered in this job fair. The salary satisfies your requirement.

Kaiqi: No, it is pretty tricky! On the surface, the average salary in this job fair is higher than the minimum salary established by the Wuhan local government. However, the occupations with higher salary are all offered to those with working experience...(She points to one of the posters provided by a local real estate company)...How could a university graduate obtain two years of working experience before his or her graduation? You see, the salary of occupations offered to university graduates is pretty low (around 3,500 RMB). It cannot even cover our basic living expenses in Wuhan.

Picture 5.3 Recruitment Poster of Local Real Estate Company



Source: Xu Heng

Kaiqi's comment reveals that the employers of this job fair had little motivation to follow the 'minimum salary standard' policy established by the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau. Moreover, this policy itself had little legal effect or enforcing power on employers. This can be seen in the discussion with Mr. Qu.

Me: Why does your company provide such a low salary to university graduates (during internship, the salary is below 3,000 RMB; after official hire, the salary will be raised to 3,500 RMB)? This salary is against the minimum salary standard policy.

Mr. Qu: From our perspective, the policy is just a suggestion towards the employer. It

has no direct legal effect on our recruitment work. We admit providing that higher salary may help raise employees' satisfaction and living standard. However, we are not a charity. We should also consider our profit.

Mr. Qu is a Human Resource manager at the Primus Hotel Wuhan Hannan. Although his company is one of the five-star hotels in Wuhan Provincial City, the salary offered by his company to university graduates is much lower than the minimum salary standard established by the local authority.

Thus, the implementation of the MCCSW project, at least those policies related to university graduates' employment issue, does not adequately improve university graduates' inferior position among employers. This can be glimpsed in Kaiqi's answer.

We are psychologically prepared for such a situation. Now, this city is full of college students. Employers do not need to follow the government's policies. Even if they follow, whether they do is another matter. (Kaiqi)

In addition to the poor implementation of the ‘minimum salary standard’ policy in this job fair, the occupations offered in this job fair were elementary jobs with dim prospects of career promotion - far from the claim of ‘providing arena for university graduates to apply their professional knowledge and skills’ (*wei daxue biyesheng tigong shizhan zhishi yu jineng de wutai*) promised by the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau. This mismatch was described in Jun Ru’s response after the job fair.

I’m pretty disappointed with the job fair. Most of the employers offer extremely elementary occupations with low salary. For example, most of the IT companies in this job fair advertised that they plan to recruit statistics engineers. However, when I discussed with the HR managers, I found out most of the companies just want to hire a programmer (*ma nong*). These two occupations are quite different. If this IT company hires me, I think I will have few chances to apply what I learned in University to this work. (Jun Ru)

Jun Ru graduated from The Polytechnic University of Wuhan. Her major was statistics. After noticing the mismatch between the requirements of employers at the job fair and her strong

aspirations of applying her professional knowledge to her future workplace, she felt disappointed in this job fair.

Based on the presented information, it is possible to conclude that, although the Wuhan local authority formulated a series of policies related to university graduates' employment, particularly the minimum salary standard policy, in 2017, those policies had little legal effect or enforcing power on private employers in the job market. Thus, the MCCSW project cannot alter university graduates' status as cheap labour among the employers of private companies.

If the job fair organized by a private human resource company could not fulfil university graduates' aspirations of attaining well-paid occupations with relatively brighter prospects of career promotion, what about the 'official' job fair which was directly organized by the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau?

This other job fair on which the fieldwork was conducted, which was directly organized by the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau in National Wuhan University on 21st September 2018 was on a much larger scale than the job fair organized by 4sJob Human Resource Company. The majority

of the employers at this job fair were state-owned enterprises and public institutions. These employers strictly followed the minimum salary standard policy and provided permanent occupations with bright career promotion prospects to university graduates, though the number of occupations was still far from the demand of university graduates. Moreover, as previous research has indicated, effective social networking or *guanxi* plays an essential role in individuals' entry into and further promotion in state-owned enterprises and public institutions (Bian, 2002, 1994; Chen, 2013). For well-educated urban migrants without large social networks, their employment prospects remain grim.

The whole job fair was divided into two parts. The first part was the official press conference. In this conference, the head of the Wuhan Recruitment Bureau presented a speech to introduce the welfare policies offered by the Wuhan local authority to university graduates. The second part was the job fair, at which university graduates could directly submit their documents to employers.

Picture 5.4 Job Fair at National Wuhan University



Source: Xu Heng

Picture 5.5 Job Fair at National Wuhan University



Source: Xu Heng

Although the occupations offered by the employers at this job fair were much better paid than the employment opportunities of the job fair organized by 4s Job Human Resource Company, university graduates, especially university graduates with rural backgrounds, still held pessimistic attitudes regarding whether they could obtain an ideal offer at this large job fair. This conservative

attitude could be seen in the conversation with Zhi Cheng.

Me: What do you think of the employment opportunities offered in this job fair? From my perspective, most of the employers are state-owned enterprises or public institutions, and the salary looks pretty reasonable.

Zhi Cheng: Yeah, in a sense, those occupations are pretty attractive. However, competition is extremely severe. Taking the occupations offered by Urban Planning and Design Institute of Hubei Province as an example, they recruit staffs not only in this job fair but also in the job fairs organized by Wuhan Recruitment Bureau in other first-tier universities. In total, they will recruit 16 staffs nationwide this year. Thus, the applicant will face the competition not only from university graduates in Wuhan but also from university graduates of other provinces. Besides, this is a public institution with a governmental background. If you want to find a job in such a public institution, you should have enough social network. However, for university graduates from rural areas like me, it is hard for me to seek any effective social network in Wuhan. (Zhi Cheng)

Picture 5.6 Job Fair at National Wuhan University



Source: Xu Heng

Zhi Cheng graduated from The Agricultural University of Central China. He came from the rural area of Jinzhong Prefecture City, Shanxi Province. According to the presented conversation, it is clear that, while the occupations offered by the state-owned enterprises or public institutions met well-educated urban migrants' expectations for well-paid and permanent jobs with prestigious status, the total number of occupations offered by those organizations was too small in comparison to the enormous employment demand of college students. Meanwhile, because effective social networking plays an essential role in an individual's entry into those organizations. Thus, it is quite difficult for well-educated urban migrants to stand out from the intense competition to obtain those occupations due to their deficiency of social network or *guanxi*.

As mentioned, the series of employment policies initiated under the MCCSW project cannot satisfy well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of obtaining well-paid occupations with bright prospects of career promotion. The next section, then, examines whether the affordable housing project, which is another important section of the MCCSW project, can assist well-educated urban migrants in obtaining homeownership, the essential factor that underpins their definition of urban middle-class membership in Wuhan.

5.2.2 Affordable Housing Project for University Graduates in Huangpi District, Wuhan

Based on the fieldwork on the construction site of the affordable housing project in Huangpi district, this section argues that a private flat from the affordable housing project cannot yield the same economic and cultural capital to well-educated urban migrants in their pursuit of urban middle-class membership as provided by homeownership in developed districts of Wuhan. Furthermore, the average price of a private flat from the affordable housing project still exceeds well-educated urban migrants' financial capacity. More importantly, the lottery mechanism and private flat transactions in the affordable housing project lack governmental oversight, which leaves opportunities for individuals with enough economic capital to obtain the purchasing rights

for a private flat from the affordable housing project and subsequently sell that flat to university graduates at a higher price. Such a disorderly situation further reinforces well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in obtaining homeownership from this project.

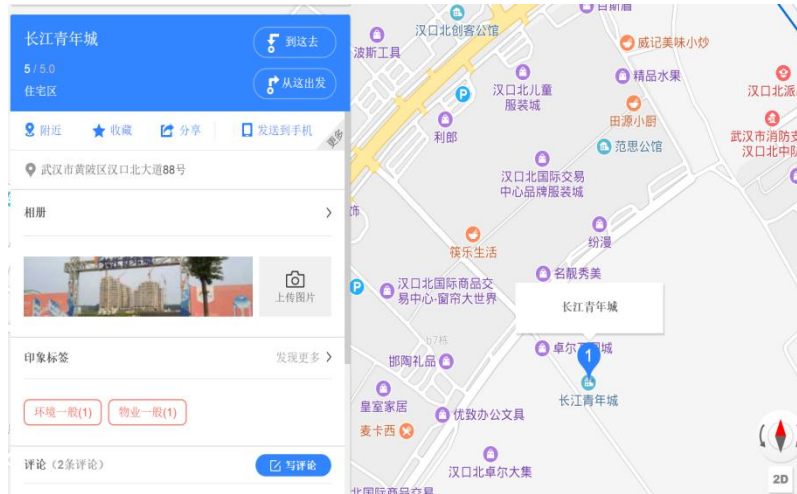
The construction site of the affordable housing project, on which the fieldwork was conducted, is located in Panlong Town Economic Development Zone of Huangpi district, Wuhan. As one of the suburban areas of Wuhan City, Huangpi district is lacking in high-quality public services, resources, and facilities. Thus, the remote location of Huangpi district already undermines the connection between homeownership and the possessor's access to high-quality public services, resources, and facilities.

Picture 5.7 Construction Site of Affordable Housing Project



Source: Xu Heng

Figure 5.1 Geographic Location of Affordable Housing Project



Source: Baidu Map

As mentioned, the affordable housing project is located in the newly developed zone of Huangpi district. There are a few wholesale markets for clothing and home building materials in the Panlong New Economic Development Zone. Thus, the quality of public services, resources, and facilities of the affordable housing project is much lower than in other zones of Huangpi district. Taking the compulsory educational service in Huangpi district as an example, there are four junior high schools and one primary school in this district. Because none of these schools are located near the area in which the affordable housing project is located (Educational Bureau of Wuhan, 2018), homeownership of this project cannot ensure resident's access to the basic public resources and services. Meanwhile, due to its remote geographic location, the amenities and compounds of

this housing project are also extremely poor. Thus, homeownership in the affordable housing project cannot help well-educated urban migrants secure access to convenient amenities and compounds or their children's access to high-quality educational resources as well as private flats in the central areas of Wuhan could

However, the overly remote geographic location of the affordable housing project not only undermines the connection between homeownership of such a project and the possessor's access to the high-quality public resources, services, and facilities of Wuhan City, but it also reduces its residents' opportunities to enjoy modern compounds and amenities. As discussed in the previous chapter, the strong institutional connection between homeownership and residents' access to the high-quality resources, services, and facilities is an essential factor which has contributed to the reinforcement of homeownership as the significant constituent of urban middle-class membership. The affordable housing project's overly remote location therefore reduces university graduates' interest in purchasing the flat in this project. This is clear in Shan's response.

The flat of the affordable housing project is totally worthless. If we have to buy a flat, this flat at least should ensure our access to the urban transportation system, public

facilities, and, if possible, children's access to high-quality educational resources. But this housing project is located near the countryside (*xiangxia*). It's irrational to buy the flat of the affordable housing project. (Shan)

Shan's response not only reveals that the overly remote geographic location of the affordable housing project undermines well-educated urban migrants' motivation to purchase flats from this project, but also reflects that the affordable housing project is located in a district which is perceived as the countryside in terms of symbolic hierarchy. Within this symbolic hierarchy, Panlong New Economic Development Zone, together with other zones of Huangpi district, is perceived as the countryside (*xiangxia*), while the countryside (*xiangxia*) is regarded as a place of backwardness and emaciation. Thus, the homeownership of this affordable housing project cannot provide residents with a sense of privilege that the ownership of the real estate in central districts yields to local middle-class residents.

Aside from the fact that a private flat from the affordable housing project cannot fulfil well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of attaining urban middle-class membership through homeownership, the average price of a private flat from this project still exceeds the financial

capacity of many well-educated urban migrants. This can be seen in Ru Li's answer.

The housing price is still quite high for me. The price of an apartment is around 6,500 RMB/m², but the ownership does not belong to me. In the future, If I want to move to other places, it will be quite difficult for me to sell the apartment. But the price of the private flat is more than 8,000 RMB. It is quite unreasonable. If I want to buy this flat, I need to borrow money from others to collect the down payment. If I add the mortgage into the consideration, I will run out of all my savings and will only rely on my wife's salary for the daily expense of the whole family. (Ru Li)

According to Ru Li, while university graduates could spend around 6,500 RMB/m² to obtain an apartment in this housing project, they only obtain the right to residence and use. If they want to obtain the flat as property or acquire the ownership, they must spend 8,000 RMB/m² to purchase the private flat. Thus, well-educated urban migrants must still endure a substantial financial burden to obtain homeownership in this project. However, those well-educated urban migrants without sufficient economic capital, like Ru Li, are still disadvantaged in obtaining homeownership from the affordable housing project.

Figure 5.2 Average Housing Price of Affordable Housing Project



Source: Fang Tianxia Website

In contrast to the claims of mainstream social media that the private flat transactions in the affordable housing project are open and fair, both the lottery mechanism for purchasing rights and the transactions of the private flats lack governmental supervision and regulation. This flaw leaves room for those individuals with enough economic capital and social capital to obtain purchase rights and subsequently sell the private flat to university graduates at a higher price. The affordable housing project was opened for sale on 30th December 2018. On the snowy opening day, they were still thousands of university graduates queued up waiting for the lottery. The winners of the lottery received the right to purchase a flat from this housing project. Ru Li gave the following negative feedback on the lottery.

Even if I have enough money, it still will be impossible for me to get the purchase right.

I think you already know the severe situation of the lottery. Some people use their social network to get the quota and buy the flat, and then they sell to graduates who are desperate for homeownership. How can I buy a private flat in such chaos? (Ru Li)

Due to the lack of governmental supervision and regulation, spectators were able to obtain the purchase rights to the private flats and subsequently sell them to university graduates at a higher price. This disorderly situation undoubtedly reinforced well-educated urban migrants' disadvantaged position in obtaining homeownership from this affordable housing project.

Picture 5.8 Citizens Waiting for the Lottery of the Affordable Housing Project



Source: Xu Heng

Given the aforementioned intensive investigation on the job fairs and affordable housing project of the MCCSW project, this section sheds light on the fact that the MCCSW project cannot fulfil well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of obtaining well-paid occupations with bright prospects of career promotion and homeownership in central areas. Based on the in-depth interviews with the informants, the following section highlights that the disparity between well-educated urban migrants' aspirations regarding homeownership and career development, on the one hand, and the limited opportunities offered by the MCCSW project, on the other hand, are the fundamental reasons for well-educated urban migrants' disappointment towards and further rejection of the MCCSW project. Moreover, the loose implementation of the policies under the MCCSW project has contributed to furthering well-educated urban migrants' disappointment with this project.

5.3 Well-Educated Urban Migrants' Disappointment with the MCCSW Project

Based on the in-depth interviews with well-educated urban migrants, their disappointment with the MCCSW project can be categorized into two aspects. First, well-educated urban migrants are

highly unsatisfied with what the MCCSW project can effectively provide in regard to what they expect regarding career advancement and homeownership. From the perspective of well-educated urban migrants, career advancement mainly refers to the attainment of a permanent occupation with brighter prospects of career promotion. Homeownership refers to obtaining a private flat in an urban areas which is closely attached with high-quality public resources, services, as well as convenient facilities. However, the MCCSW project cannot provide enough assistance for them in fulfilling these aspirations. Well-educated urban migrants' disappointment is revealed in the following quote.

The affordable flats provided by this project are not attractive to me in terms of price, location, and facilities. Even if I buy a flat in this affordable housing project, I still have to rent a small flat or room in the central areas. Why should I waste money on this aspect? (Qiao)

Qiao works at the Wuhan branch of China Unicom. His company is located in Wuchang district. He currently lives in a rental house near his workplace. The compound of the affordable housing project is located in a remote suburban area. Thus, the location of the affordable housing project

would compel Qiao to spend approximately two hours on every day commuting if he chooses the private flat from this housing project. In addition, a private flat from the affordable housing project would not provide Qiao with access to any high-quality public resources or services. Such a large disparity has invoked Qiao's rejection of the affordable housing project.

Most of the opportunities for internship and employment provided by the MCCSW project are not suitable for me. For a university graduate with a disadvantaged family background like me, obtaining an occupation with stable income and the bright prospect of career promotion is our fundamental requirement in job hunting. (Ru Li)

In Ru Li's case, a permanent occupation with brighter promotion prospects is one of the few strategies available to him to accumulate more economic and social capital and change his disadvantage position in the metropolis. However, the majority of opportunities for internship and employment under the MCCSW project are temporary jobs without clear prospects of career advancement. Moreover, due to the inadequacy of effective social networking, Ru Li, like many university graduates with rural backgrounds, cannot easily obtain the permanent occupations offered by the governmental institutions, state-owned enterprises, or other organizations which

follow the employment policies of the MCCSW project.

Second, well-educated urban migrants are deeply disappointed with the fact that the MCCSW project is being not implemented as promised by governmental propaganda.

Well-educated urban migrants are especially disappointed with the fact that the Wuhan local authority has the capacity to enforce private employers, real estate developers, and other stakeholders to follow the policies of the MCCSW project. When discussing the practicability of 'basic salary' policy, Ling cited Karl Marx's famous assertion that 'capital is profit-seeking, the nature of capital is exploitation, and the pursuit of surplus value' to demonstrate his disappointment.

I think the initiative of such a policy is good. But it still questionable whether this policy has any legal effect on enterprises, especially private enterprises. You know, they are the mainstream of the job market. As Karl Marx says, 'capital is profit-seeking, the nature of capital is exploitation, and the pursuit of surplus value'. Employers basically have the strong motivation to put down the salary of employees. Thus, I hold a conservative

attitude on whether private enterprises will follow the basic salary policy initiated by the

Wuhan government. (Ling)

In addition, well-educated urban migrants are disappointed with the opaqueness of the lottery system of the affordable housing project. Due to the lack of an effective social network, well-educated urban migrants are disadvantaged in gaining flat ownership in this project.

The following part investigates why the MCCSW project cannot provide well-educated urban migrants with what they aspire to obtain when joining the urban middle class by scrutinizing the nature of the MCCSW project and well-educated urban migrants' status in that project. In addition, this section explores why this flawed project continues to run and further questions whose benefits this project will protect and develop in Wuhan.

5.4 The Nature of the MCCSW Project and its Irreconcilable Tensions with Well-Educated Urban Migrants' Aspirations

This examination of the deficiency of the MCCSW project is conducted through scrutinizing the nature of the MCCSW project and well-educated urban migrants' status of this project. This investigation is mainly based on a document analysis of the 'Central Rise Strategy Planning Book' (*zhongbu jueqi zhanlve guihuashu*), 'Urban Agglomeration in Central Reach of Yangtze River Planning Book' (*changjiang zhongyou chengshiqun fazhan guihuashu*), 'National New-Type Urbanization Project Planning 2014-2020' (*quanguo xinxingchengzhenhua guihua*), 'Implementation Plan of '13th Five-Year Plan' to Promote the Rise of Central Region in Hubei Province' (*hubeisheng cujin zhongbu jueqi he shisanwu guihua de shishi fangan*) and 'New-Type Urbanization Project of Wuhan Provincial City' (*wuhanshi xinxingchengshihua guihua*). The first three official documents were issued by the National Development and Reform Commission of China. The fourth one was issued by the Development and Reform Commission of Hubei Province, and the last one is issued by the Development and Reform Commission of Wuhan Provincial City. According to the analysis of these documents, this section first argues that all of strategies of Wuhan's new-type urbanization, including the MCCSW project, serve to enhance Wuhan's status in China's new wave of modernization. In this wave of modernization, Wuhan is considered to be the core metropolis of the central area and the urban agglomeration of the central reach of the Yangtze River to attract the industries and investments that have shifted from eastern coastal areas. Inspired by David Harvey's critical analysis of urban entrepreneurialism, the second

part of this section argues that university graduates comprise what is perceived as the most valuable resource for Wuhan to stand out from other inland metropolises in attracting the enterprises, industries, and investments from coastal areas. Within the developmental plan of Wuhan Provincial City, university graduates are perceived as cheap intellectual labour. Thus, all of the policies of the MCCSW project are designed to produce, cultivate, and maintain a large troop of cheap intellectual labour. This section then proceeds to highlight that the whole socioeconomic reconfiguration in Wuhan under the new-type urbanization project operates to retain well-educated urban migrants as the pool of cheap intellectual labour for the city's development. This goal clearly opposes well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of becoming urban middle class. This irreconcilable tension between well-educated urban migrants' aspirations and the goal of Wuhan development results in the inadequacy of the MCCSW project in providing assistance to well-educated urban migrants in their pursuit of middle-class membership, as well as reinforces well-educated urban migrants' suspicion towards and rejection of this project.

5.4.1 The Status of Wuhan in China's New Wave of Socioeconomic Development

The investigation on the nature of the MCCSW project is inseparable from the analysis of the

socioeconomic context in which Wuhan is situated and of Wuhan's status of China's contemporary development.

The large-scale industrial shift from the eastern and southern coastal areas to inland area is a major feature that characterizes the socioeconomic context in which Wuhan is situated. As one of the few metropolises in central China, Wuhan is considered to be one of the primary cities to attract and adopt the industries and enterprises, particularly the labour-intensive industries, from the eastern and southern coastal areas to inland areas. In the plan of national socioeconomic development, Wuhan is designated as the center of this new urban agglomeration to fulfil the duty of industry transfer. This is demonstrated in 'National New-Type Urbanization Project Planning 2014-2020' (*quanguo xinxingchengzhenhua guihua*).

Among the urban system of central and western China, the core cities with more developed economy should be entitled as key developmental areas to undertake the responsibility to absorb the industries transferred from eastern and southern coastal areas. Based on strict protection of the ecological environment, local governments of those key developmental areas should guide the labor-intensive industries with strong

market competitiveness to be transferred to their administrative areas...Besides, the local governments should speed up the industrial cluster development and population agglomeration in these key developmental areas. Through these strategies, these key areas will be more important in the national project of new-type urbanization (National Development and Reform Commission, 2014).

Besides, Wuhan is also facing the severe pressure of industrial upgrading. In the ‘Central Rise Strategy’ (*zhongbu jueqi zhanlve*), Wuhan is nominated as the equipment manufacturing center and high-tech industrial base. However, Wuhan is not the only one to be assigned those functions of new socioeconomic development. It also faces intense competition from other key cities in central China. Wuhan’s new function and its intense pressure are illustrated in the ‘Central Rise Strategy Planning Book’ (*zhongbu jueqi zhanlve guihuashu*).

Wuhan and Nanchang will be nominated as the centers to develop the optoelectronics industry, and Hefei, Wuhu, and Wuhan should be nominated as the centers to actively build the industrial chain of a flat-panel display, supporting Wuhan and Hefei to build the intelligent-storage industrial base...Besides, all levels of governments should

contribute to building new-energy vehicle production bases in Zhengzhou, Hefei, Wuhu, Wuhan, Nanchang, and Changsha. Wuhan is nominated as the new national space industry base. Changzhutan, Wuhan, Ganzhou, Yingtan, Luoyang, Anqing are nominated as the new material bases. All levels of governments should provide assistance to build Wuhan, Changsha, Zhengzhou, Nanchang, Xinxiang and Changzhi as new biomedical bases, promoting cities such as Wuhan, Yichang, Zhengzhou, Luoyang, Nanchang, Ganzhou, Changsha and Zhuzhou as pilot cities of national e-commerce development...(National Development and Reform Commission, 2016)

Wuhan is also considered to be the base for the cultural industry in central China.

Wuhan is nominated as the digital media engineering technology center; Central China cultural property rights exchange market will be built in Wuhan; Donghu district of Wuhan Provincial City will be built as one of the national intellectual property service industry center...(National Development and Reform Commission, 2016)

Wuhan Provincial City also has a strong motivation to adopt more foreign investment and attract

more foreign organizations to establish their branches in this city. This enthusiasm can be glimpsed in ‘Implementation Plan of ‘13th Five-Year Plan’ to Promote the Rise of Central Region in Hubei Province’ (*hubeisheng cujin zhongbu jueqi he shisanwu guihua de shishi fangan*)

In the next five years, Wuhan will be more open. The plan proposes to encourage and support foreign investment to set up various functional and regional headquarters and branches in Wuhan and to encourage and support international organizations, international business organization (associations), and international economic and trade promotion organization to settle in Wuhan. We will strive to attract 300 of the world's top 500 enterprises to invest in Wuhan and double the overseas project contracting and labour cooperation. (Development and Reform Commission of Hubei Province, 2017)

Moreover, Wuhan itself bears the responsibility to support the urban agglomeration of the middle reach of the Yangtze River by attracting and upgrading the industries of smaller cities of this urban agglomeration.

Developing Wuhan city circle...Maximizing Wuhan's advantages in science, education,

and industry, strengthening its leading role in central China and reinforcing its status as the national innovative pilot city, and upgrading the level of internationalization of this city circle...Accelerating the integration of Wuhan city circle, and promoting the urbanization of Wuhan and E'zhou, Xiaogan, Xianning, Huanggang, Huangshi and other cities of this circle, strengthening the linkage and development of cities of the Han river ecological economic belt and boosting the development of the western Hubei ecological culture tourism circle. (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015)

Based on these official documents, Wuhan is not just considered to be the core city of the central area to attract and adopt the industries and investments transferred from eastern and south coastal areas, but it also bears the pressure of attracting foreign investment and upgrading its own cultural and high-tech industries. Moreover, it must support the urban agglomeration of the middle reach of the Yangtze River through boosting the internationalization and attracting investment to this region. However, Wuhan is not the only metropolis in central China. Under the context of rapid circulation of investment, technology, and enterprise, Wuhan also faces the intense challenges from other core inland metropolises in attracting investment and enterprise from developed areas.

5.4.2 Urban Entrepreneurialism: Retaining University Graduates as the Pool of Cheap Intellectual Labour

As discussed in the preceding section, the rapid transfer and circulation of investment, technology, and enterprise is the major feature that characterizes the socioeconomic context in which Wuhan is situated. According to David Harvey (1989), the diminish of spatial barriers not only accelerate the circulation of capital, technology, and other productive factors, but also enforces capitalists to pay more much closer attention to relative location advantages, precisely because diminishing spatial barriers give capitalists the power to exploit minute spatial differentiation to good effect. The small differences in what spaces contain in the way of labour supplies, resources, infrastructure, and the like become of increased significance. Thus, for investors and possessors of enterprises from coastal areas, as well as foreign investors, the spatial differences among inland metropolises become increasingly important in their decisions of industry transfer and investment.

As David Harvey (1989) argues, the significant reduction in spatial barriers to the movement of goods, people, money and information has contributed to increasing the significance of the qualities of a place and strengthening the vigour of inter-urban competition for capitalist

development. The enhanced sensitivity of investors towards the spatial differences among inland metropolises has undoubtedly triggered the competition between key cities of central China. According to the 'Central Rise Strategy Planning Book', Wuhan is facing severe competition from Zhengzhou, Changsha, Anqing, Wuhu, and Nanchang in attracting the industries, technologies, and investments transferred from coastal areas, despite the fact that it has been dubbed the core city of central China, the new equipment manufacturing center, and the high-tech industrial base.

The intense inter-urban competition impels the Wuhan local authority to search for an effective way to make its city stand out among other inland metropolises. As David Harvey (1989) argues, if capitalists have become increasingly sensitive to the spatially differentiated qualities of which the world's geography is composed, then it is possible for the peoples and powers that command those spaces to alter them in such a way that they become more attractive to highly mobile capital. Then corporatist forms of governance can flourish in such spaces, and they, themselves, can take on entrepreneurial roles in the production of favourable business climates and other special qualities (Harvey, 1989). Thus, seeking and maintaining Wuhan's comparative advantage in attracting the attention of investors is the greatest challenge for the Wuhan local authority. As the only city in which more than 80 higher educational institutions with 1.3 million university graduates are located, the Wuhan local authority naturally perceives this large number of

university students as a source to assist the city in conquering the inter-urban competition. This intention of the Wuhan local authority can be glimpsed in ‘Planning Book of the MCCSW Project’ (*baiwan daxuesheng liuhan gongcheng guihuashu*).

Wuhan has 89 higher educational institutes with 1.3 million college students. The number of college students ranks the top among single cities in the world...The Party Committee and government of Wuhan Provincial City launch the MCCSW project in order to keep millions of college students to settle down and work in Wuhan. This large troop of university graduates will provide talent and intellectual support power to stimulate the renaissance of great Wuhan. (Wuhan Recruitment Bureau, 2017)

As David Harvey (1989) points out, labour power of the right quality can be a powerful magnet for new economic development so that investment in highly trained and skilled workforces suited to new labour processes and their managerial requirements can be well rewarded. Thus, when the Wuhan local authority deploys the perspective of urban entrepreneurialism to attract and maintain a large troop of university graduates, these university graduates are perceived as the cheap intellectual labour, which can be exploited for the attracting investment and industries.

Following this logic, the *hukou* policies of the MCCSW serve to concentrate this large troop of university graduates in Wuhan. The policies related to the internship and employment issues work to train this large number of university graduates to be function as cheap intellectual labour, while the policies related to housing and children's educational issues aim to maintain and further expand this large troop of cheap intellectual labour.

In sum, the status of a university graduate in the MCCSW project is essentially as the cheap intellectual labour which serves to enhance Wuhan's comparative advantage in the inter-urban competition for investment and industry. The MCCSW project, as well as the socioeconomic context in which the project is situated, is, again, working to retain university graduates as the pool of cheap intellectual labour.

5.4.3 The Irreconcilable Tension between the Goal of the MCCSW Project and the Aspirations of Well-Educated Urban Migrants

As discussed in the previous chapter, well-educated urban migrants hold strong aspirations of

becoming urban middle class in Wuhan. However, this thesis holds that the goal of MCCSW project is successfully transforming university graduates into cheap intellectual labour for the socioeconomic development of Wuhan. This irreconcilable tension between the goal of the MCCSW project, and the aspirations of well-educated urban migrants, reinforces well-educated urban migrants' suspicion towards the MCCSW project, as well as their pessimistic attitudes regarding their prospects in Wuhan. This negative attitude can be glimpsed in Ru Li's quote.

I'm very pessimistic towards the prospect of a university graduate, especially a graduate like me, in Wuhan. As you know, employers in the job market perceive us as cheap labour. The local government also use us as the source to attract investment and business. Besides, the local government also perceive us as the 'puppet to maintain the prosperity of the local housing market' (*jiapan xia*). How can we receive real development in Wuhan? My wife and I have decided to return to her hometown for development in the next few years. (Ru Li)

Given the irreconcilable tension between well-educated urban migrants' aspirations and the fundamental goal of the MCCSW project, it is clear that the project fundamentally serves the

interests of the Wuhan local authority, particularly through its benefit regarding the inter-urban competition under the context of rapid nationwide urbanization.

As another important group of well-educated urban migrants, those young migrants who choose to return to smaller cities in their hometown region for further development have drawn the attention of recent scholars (Lian; 2015; Liu & Jin, 2019; Liu & Li, 2017; Yang, 2016). The next chapter investigates these well-educated urban migrants' motivations to return and their prospects of upward social mobility in their hometowns.

5.5 Discussion and Summary

In 2017, the Wuhan local authority formulated and implemented the 'Millions of College Graduates Staying in Wuhan' project to establish new circumstances for university graduates to settle and work in Wuhan.

Based on the intensive fieldwork on the job fairs and the affordable housing project for university

graduates (*daxuesheng anjufang xiangmu*) in Wuhan, this chapter has argued that the MCCSW project cannot fulfil well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of achieving personal development and upward social mobility. Furthermore, the actual implementation of the MCCSW project is far from the overly optimistic description of government propaganda. Given the inadequacy of this ambitious project in fulfilling their aspirations of becoming urban middle class in Wuhan, well-educated urban migrants are disappointed with the MCCSW in terms of its capacity to broaden their path towards achieving personal development in Wuhan. Drawing on David Harvey's critical elaboration on 'urban entrepreneurialism', this chapter has argued that the fundamental aim of the MCCSW project is to enhance Wuhan's comparative advantage within the inter-urban competition in attracting investments and industries from developed regions. Thus, the MCCSW project, together with the socioeconomic context in which it is situated, is working to retain millions of university graduates as a pool of cheap intellectual labour. The resulting underlying and irreconcilable tension between the aim of the MCCSW project and well-educated urban migrants' aspirations of becoming urban middle class is the fundamental reason for well-educated urban migrants' disappointment with and further rejection of this project.

Chapter Six: Returned Youths and Their Prospects of Gaining Urban

Middle-Class Membership in Xiaogan Prefecture City

This empirical chapter aims to deploy the perspective of agency to scrutinize returned youths' decision to move back to Xiaogan, the prefecture city located in their hometown region, as well as their prospects of attaining urban middle-class membership in Xiaogan under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Drawing on intensive investigations of twelve well-educated urban migrants' narratives on the inner-world struggles they went through in the decision-making process of moving back to Xiaogan, this chapter argues that these returned youths' decision to move back was not only the product of the negotiations they made under the obstacles they encountered in Wuhan but was also driven by the meanings and expectations they assigned to their hometown city. These returned youths share the same dream of being urban middle class with as those well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in Wuhan. However, after reviewing the insurmountable difficulties of being a part of the urban middle class in Wuhan, they chose to geographically relocate for their dream fulfillment. Deploying 'metropolis-oriented' perceptual framework to understand Xiaogan and their prospects of being urban middle class in this city, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as the arena in which they can much more easily attain the

urban middle-class membership and fulfil their family formation plans. More specifically, due to the relative scarcity of their institutionalized and embodied cultural capital, as well as the faster conversion from their cultural capital to economic capital in Xiaogan, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as the arena in which they can obtain prestigious and permanent occupations in governmental institutions, state-owned enterprises, or public high schools, as well as easily achieve urban middle-class membership and complete their family formation plans. According to an intensive investigation on returned youths' situation in their workplaces, this chapter highlights that returned youths' occupations in governmental organizations, the state-owned enterprises, and public high schools provide them with relatively high salary, prestigious status, and high-quality welfare.

Meanwhile, due to their relative adequacy of cultural capital in the work units of their hometown city, returned youths are assigned to important positions in their work units, and their prospects of career promotion are much brighter than their promotion prospects would be in the metropolises. Thus, returned youths express high satisfaction with their current status in Xiaogan. Then, drawing on Dean Curran's refinement of Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, this chapter aims to highlight that returned youths have tended to generate a stronger sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards the significant socioeconomic shifts brought by the rapid implementation of the new-type

urbanization project in Xiaogan. Based on returned youths' strong apprehensions regarding their future in Xiaogan, this chapter argues that the implementation of the new-type urbanization project in Xiaogan has largely contributed to accelerating the social stratification in Xiaogan according to the wealth differentials, as well as further undermining the stability of returned youths' livelihood and development in Xiaogan. Based on the aforementioned information, this chapter argues that the radical institutional and socioeconomic changes brought by the new-type urbanization project have reinforced the importance of wealth differentials associated with class relations in shaping individuals' life chances in the rapidly urbanized Xiaogan.

The first section explores the struggles and negotiations returned youths went through when deciding to move back to Xiaogan, as well as their expectations regarding the prospects of fulfilling their middle-class dream in Xiaogan. Based on those returned youths' narratives on their decision-making process, this section argues that returned youths' ideas on whom they want to be and where they want to those people are both the products of the negotiations they made under the obstacles they encountered in Wuhan and the outcomes driven by the meanings and expectations they have assigned to their hometown city. Through deploying a 'metropolis-oriented' perceptual framework to evaluate Xiaogan and their prospects of being middle class in this city, the returned youths first acknowledge that Xiaogan is inferior to Wuhan in terms of socioeconomic

development; however, it is the place where they have better chances of attaining the urban middle class status. For returned youths, this urban middle-class membership not only refers to homeownership or career promotion but also emphasizes on the fulfillment of their family formation plan. Moreover, drawing on Bourdieu's conceptions of capital and field, this section highlights that returned youths occupy advantaged positions in the local job market and among career promotion competition in the workplace due to the relative scarcity of their institutionalized and embodied cultural capital in Xiaogan. Thus, the conversion from returned youths' cultural capital to economic capital would be much easier and faster in Xiaogan. Based on this shift of the interplay between field and capital, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as a comfortable arena in which they can much more easily accumulate enough economic and social capital to fulfil their family formation plan, which is highly difficult for them to achieve in Wuhan. This section further indicates that returned youth' expectations regarding their family formation plan in Xiaogan are slightly differentiated according to their socialized gender roles. Among male returned youths, Xiaogan is perceived as the site in which they can more easily undertake the family role of the breadwinner via obtaining homeownership and career promotion. For female returned youths, Xiaogan is perceived as the place in which they can not only easily obtain a permanent occupation with a considerable salary but also commit themselves to the supporting role in the family.

The second part of this chapter describes the returned youths' current situation in Xiaogan Prefecture City. This section demonstrates that returned youths are highly satisfied with their current situation in Xiaogan. Drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration on the interrelationship between habitus, field, and capital, this section endeavors to explicate that returned youths' strong satisfaction is not only generated from the improvement in financial situation, prestigious status, and higher-quality welfare yielded by their current occupations in governmental organization, state-owned enterprises, or public high schools, but also is based on the compatibility between their habitus and the positions they occupy in their field of within the workplace. More specifically, their current work units provide them with accessible and meritocratic paths to achieve the improvement of their living conditions and career advancement. The coherence between returned youths' industrious disposition - an important layer of their habitus - and their current status in the workplace, in turn, compels them to favour the meritocratic and industrious circumstances yielded by work units in hometown city.

The last section first highlights that behind returned youths' satisfaction with their current status is their strong sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards their future in Xiaogan. This strong sense of anxiety and uncertainty is generated from their concern regarding the rapidly rising housing prices and unequal geographic allocation of public resources in Xiaogan under the context of the

new-type urbanization project. Drawing on Dean Curran's refinement of Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, this section argues that the risks introduced by the institutional changes of new-type urbanization are universal to well-educated young adults with various class backgrounds. However, the sense of uncertainty is unequally distributed among well-educated urban migrants. Young adults with the local middle-class backgrounds are able to receive more family support for fulfilling their family formation plans and alleviating the sense of uncertainty. Meanwhile, returned youths, as the first generation of urban residents in their migrant worker families, have no path to follow but to rely on themselves to design their own biographies. Thus, returned migrants possess a stronger sense of uncertainty than their urban middle-class counterparts. Based on this, this chapter argues that the radical socioeconomic changes brought by the new-type urbanization project both accelerate the social stratification and increase the importance of wealth differentials associated with class relations in shaping individuals' life chances in the rapidly urbanized Xiaogan.

6.1 Basic Information on Returned Migrants

The basic information on returned migrants of this research has been presented in the Chapter

Three.

According to the recent data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, the per capita disposable income of Xiaogan was approximately 2,522 RMB/per month in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Thus, the salary which returned youths obtain from their current occupations is much higher than the per capita monthly income of urban residents in Xiaogan Prefecture City. In addition, the Xiaogan branch of People's Bank, the Xiaogan branch of CBRC, and the Xiaogan branch of China's Power are local branches of central government agencies or state-owned enterprise belonging to the central government. Thus, these occupations can provide not only higher financial income but also higher-quality welfare and prestige to returned youths. For a young teacher with a first-tier university diploma, he or she can also receive additional financial income by providing tutorial courses in private educational agencies. Before proceeding to a detailed elaboration on returned youths' current situation in Xiaogan, this chapter first scrutinize returned youths' decision to move back to their hometown city. Beyond taking the perspective of the push-pull theory like traditional demographic studies, this chapter adopts the perspective of agency to understand decisions to move back by focusing on the expectations and meanings which returned youths attach to their hometown city.

6.2 Returned Youths' Decision to Move Back to Xiaogan Prefecture City

Returned youths' decision to move back is both a result of the negotiations they made under the obstacles they encountered in Wuhan and driven by the meanings and expectations they assign to hometown city. Xiaogan Prefecture City is perceived as a comfortable arena in which returned youths can not only obtain permanent occupations with stable financial income and high-quality welfare but also fulfil their aspirations of attaining urban middle-class membership. Moreover, working and living in Xiaogan, and particularly holding permanent occupations in governmental organizations, state-owned enterprises, or public high schools, are additional methods for returned youths to construct and maintain their sense of privilege among their rural peers. Returned youths' definition of urban middle-class membership is closely attached with the completion of their family formation plan. However, the expectations they hold in their family formation plans in Xiaogan are slightly differentiated according to their socialized gender roles. For male returned youths, Xiaogan is perceived as the site in which they can more easily undertake the family role of the breadwinner via obtaining homeownership and career promotion. For female returned youths, Xiaogan is perceived as the place in which they can not only easily obtain a permanent occupation with a considerable salary but also commit themselves to the supporting role in the family.

6.2.1 Moving Back is the Negotiation Made under the Obstacles of Metropolises

Returned youths first perceive their decision to move back to their hometown city as the negotiations they made when encountering the insurmountable barriers in their urban middle-class membership pursuit in Wuhan. When explaining their decision to move back, the returned youths in this study were not reluctant to admit that staying in Wuhan was their priority and that they held high expectations for successfully achieving urban middle-class membership and fulfilling their family formation plan in Wuhan in the first few years after university graduation. This can be seen in the following quotes.

At that time, I thought that big cities might have more opportunities for young people, the people's *suzhi* and the quality of welfare are also much higher than those in hometown, and the infrastructure is much better. So, I wanted to stay in Wuhan at the beginning. (Tang)

Generally speaking, the financial income in Wuhan is more attractive than that in Xiaogan...In the first several months after graduation, I took an internship in a finance

and security company. (Yu Jiao)

In the beginning, I decided to work in Wuhan and search for a chance to settle down in that city. In the first year, I was working in a financial and security company. Then, I got the permanent occupation in the press of Hubei Daily Media Group...At that time, I thought I could receive personal development and stable livelihood in Wuhan. (Feng)

Based on the presented quotes, it is clear that the socioeconomic, cultural, and symbolic superiorities of the metropolis significantly shape returned youths' perceptions towards Wuhan and the smaller cities in their hometown region. Through deploying a metropolis-centered perceptual framework to estimate their developmental opportunity in Wuhan, like other well-educated urban migrants in this city, at the beginning of the university-to-work transitional period, returned youths also had high aspirations of planting their roots and obtaining urban middle-class membership in Wuhan. However, the insurmountable obstacles they encountered in Wuhan strongly undermined their previous expectations and impelled them to re-evaluate their developmental opportunity in Wuhan. These insurmountable barriers are first revealed in returned youths' vulnerability due to the rapid institutional and socioeconomic changes in Wuhan. This can

be seen in the narratives of Feng and Tang.

The direct incident which made me leave Wuhan is the rapid reform of public institution in Wuhan (*wuhanshi shiye danwei gaige*). Hubei Daily Media Group used to be an important public institution under the Hubei Provincial Authority. However, because of the implementation of public institution reform nationwide since 2012, many public institutions were transformed into enterprises. The press I used to work for was also rapidly transformed to be a state-owned enterprise with stakeholding system. So, my occupation was also transformed from an 'iron-bowl' job (*tie fanwan*) to a contract job. This rapid change nearly destroyed my expectation of receiving stable livelihood in Wuhan. (Feng)

I used to work in the Wuhan branch of Minsheng Bank. I was hired in 2015. Thus, I encountered the outbreak period of bad assets of the banking system. Unfortunately, Minsheng Bank also had a large number of bad assets. In order to decrease the bad assets, Minsheng Bank decided to decrease employees' salary and welfare. This radical policy pushed many employees to leave Minsheng Bank. At that time, this radical

change directly worsened my living quality and career promotion. I even cannot afford my rent in Wuhan. Thus, I decided to leave. (Tang)

Based on the narratives of Tang and Feng, rapid institutional and socioeconomic changes largely undermine the stability of returned youths' career development and lives in Wuhan. Due to the lack of financial support from family, returned youths, like other well-educated urban migrants, must rely on permanent occupations to increase their financial income, achieve career promotion, and ultimately obtain the urban middle-class membership. Moreover, the permanent occupation is one of the few channels which returned youths can deploy to accumulate various forms of capital to fulfil their family formation plan. However, the rapid shift of macro institutional and socioeconomic circumstances significantly increases returned youths' difficulties with maintaining the stability of their occupations in Wuhan. Returned youths' vulnerability in the face of rapid institutional and socioeconomic change compels them to re-evaluate their unstable situation and grim prospects in Wuhan and further adds to their motivations to leave.

As discussed in the two previous chapters, homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources are three pillars which underpin well-educated urban

migrants' definition of urban middle-class membership in Wuhan. Due to the deficiency of economic and social capital, returned youths, like other rural-to-urban migrants in Wuhan, are also disadvantaged in becoming urban middle class. Their difficulties in obtaining homeownership, career promotion, and their children's access to high-quality educational resources, and particularly difficulty in purchasing a private flat, in Wuhan not only lower their expectations of attaining urban middle-class membership in Wuhan, but also erode their confidence in fulfilling their family formation plans in Wuhan. This can be glimpsed in the narratives of Yu Jiao and Yi Han.

When I was working in Wuhan, I had to take nearly the entire four-subway line to go to my workplace. Because my workplace is located in the central area of Wuhan, the rent of a studio in that place is more than 2,500 RMB/month. I had to save money for buying my flat (Yu Jiao planned to buy a flat with her boyfriend) in Wuhan. However, whenever I saw the news about the rising housing prices in Wuhan, I would question myself, 'when will I have enough money to buy my flat in Wuhan?' This terrible situation deeply undermined my confidence in buying a flat in Wuhan and made me feel like a duckweed in the sea (*ganjue ziji haoxiang dahai li de yipian fuping*). (Yu Jiao)

I was working in a finance and security company in Wuhan. My workload in that company was very heavy. Because of my poor health, I frequently got sick at the beginning. During that period, I always wondered if it would be much better if I had a family in Wuhan. However, if I did not have a flat, how could I form a family? However, when I saw the housing price in Wuhan, I realized it is nearly impossible for me to buy a flat in this city. How could I think about having a family? (Yi Han)

Homeownership is perceived by Yu Jiao and Yi Han as the material foundation to objectify their urban middle-class membership, as well as the most important source to fulfil their family formation plans in Wuhan. Furthermore, obtaining a permanent occupation with a less demanding working environment is another layer of returned migrants' definition of urban middle-class membership and an important tactic to fulfil their family formation plan. However, the unaffordable housing price, together with the heavy workload and pressure they undertake in the workplace, undermine their expectations of forming a family and attaining urban middle-class membership in Wuhan.

Therefore, return migrants' decision to leave Wuhan and move back to Xiaogan is not without the

struggle of their inner world. The insurmountable barriers the returned youths in this study encountered in Wuhan strongly undermined their initial aspirations of planting their roots in Wuhan and compelled them to seek other places in which they could more easily complete their family formation plans and obtain urban middle-class membership. Thus, they perceived their decision to return as the inevitable strategy to avoid the insurmountable barriers they encountered in Wuhan, as well as the accessible tactic to seek an easier platform to fulfil their dream of being middle class in the urban area. The multi-layered meanings returned youths attached to their decision of to leave can be seen in the following conversation.

Me: Have you ever regretted your choice of leaving Wuhan and moving to a smaller city?

Nian: Yes and No. In my opinion, moving to a smaller city is the compromise I made for my further development, especially after encountering those insurmountable difficulties in Wuhan. I admit Wuhan is a metropolis, which has the prosperity of socioeconomic development, but for a young adult received higher education like me, the most important thing is whether I can obtain high-quality living and achieve my personal

development. In Wuhan, the barriers are too hard to overcome. So, I have to move to a smaller city. Moving to a smaller city does not represent that my life would be meaningless. Moving to a smaller city is my strategy to find an easier arena to fulfil my expectation to achieve personal development and obtain a high-quality and stable livelihood.

6.2.2 Hometown City is the Comfortable Arena for Being Urban Middle Class

Drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration on the interplay between field and capital, this section highlights that returned youths may occupy an advantaged position in local market and further career promotion due to the relative scarcity of their institutionalized and embodied cultural capital in Xiaogan. Returned youths' relatively advantaged status in Xiaogan may accelerate the conversion of their cultural capital to economic and social capital, which in turn strongly assist them to improve their living conditions and fulfil their family formation plans. As mentioned in the previous section, returned migrants' definition of urban middle-class membership is closely attached to the fulfillment of their family formation plan. Based on this, Xiaogan is perceived by returned youths as the comfortable arena in which they can more easily plant their roots and attain

the urban middle-class membership.

First, Xiaogan is perceived by returned youths as the arena in which their institutionalized cultural capital will assist them with occupying the advantaged positions in the job market and further career development. This is illustrated in Can's narrative.

Compared with the instability and hardship I experienced in Wuhan, my life in Xiaogan will be more stable...In Xiaogan, the number of young adults with a graduate degree is much smaller than that in Wuhan. Thus, my graduate degree will be an obvious advantage in the local job market. According to the relevant policies, young adults with a graduate degree, like me, will be assigned to important positions of the workplace, and the salary level of the employee with a graduate degree will be the same as that of a deputy section chief in a state-owned enterprise or governmental organization (*xinzi daiyu he fu keji ganbu tongji*)...This reason drove me to move back to apply for the occupation at People's Bank. (Can)

As Bourdieu indicates, 'the profits cultural capital produce, is mediated by the relationship of

(objective and subjective) competition between himself and the other possessors of capital competing for the same goods, in which scarcity—and through it, social value—is generated’.

Thus, the material and symbolic profits which academic qualification guarantee also depend on the scarcity of these qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Can’s institutional cultural capital is relatively rare in the job market in Xiaogan. Therefore, the relative scarcity of his master’s degree in Xiaogan will translate into a comparative advantage in the job market, which later may assist him in securing a the higher financial income and brighter prospects of career promotion in the workplace. Moreover, according to Bourdieu (1986), the academic qualification also makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital. The value of Cans master’s degree and its conversion rate to economic capital are highly recognized by the state-owned enterprise or governmental organization through the recruitment regulation. Thus, Can’s master degree can also guarantee him with a relatively higher salary and brighter career promotion prospects if he attains the entry into these organizations. Thus, as a result of those comparative advantages granted by his educational qualification, Can perceive Xiaogan as the arena in which he can more easily maintain a stable career development and livelihood.

Second, the relatively low housing price and living cost in Xiaogan work together with returned

youths' advantaged position in the local job market to impel those returned youths to conceive Xiaogan as the place where they will much more easily obtain homeownership and their children's access to high-quality education, while these two aspects largely underpin returned youths' definition of urban middle-class membership and completion of their family plan. This can be seen in Xiong's narrative.

My wife and I all have postgraduate degrees. It would not be so hard for us to find a relatively well-paid job in Xiaogan. If we try to save a sum of money and borrow a little from friends or relatives, it will not be so difficult for us to afford the down payment in Xiaogan. Besides, the relatively low living cost in Xiaogan leaves us enough space to save money...Because of the relatively low pressure of purchasing a house in Xiaogan, we also think we can invest more money into our child's education...However, in Wuhan, our income could cover daily expenses and rent. It is nearly impossible for us to buy a house or do other things. (Xiong)

As Bourdieu (1986) insists, 'The universal equivalent, the measure of all equivalences, is nothing other than labour-time (in the widest sense); and the conservation of social energy through all its

conversions is verified if, in each case, one takes into account both the labour-time accumulated in the form of capital and the labour-time needed to transform it from one type into another'. Thus, the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital to afford a private flat and higher-quality living conditions also influence returned youths' perceptions of hometown city. According to Xiong's narrative, the relatively low housing price and living cost constitute the socioeconomic circumstance in which he can spend much less labour time on converting his cultural capital to economic capital, and further enhance his financial capacity to afford homeownership and high-quality livelihood for his family. The ownership of a private flat is perceived as the material foundation for returned migrants to form a family, while children's access to high-quality educational resources is conceived as an important source which underpins returned youths' completion of their family formation plan. Thus, based on the relative easiness of converting their cultural capital into economic capital in Xiaogan, Xiong and his wife perceive Xiaogan as the place where they can easily obtain homeownership and secure their children's access to high-quality education.

Third, compared with rural hometowns, Xiaogan is much more socioeconomically and culturally developed. Moreover, Xiaogan is the prefecture city in returned youths' hometown region. Due to the relative superiority of Xiaogan prefecture city in administrative, socioeconomic, and cultural

spheres, returned youths believe that working and living in Xiaogan can still provide them with enough resources to maintain their sense of privilege among their rural peers. This can be glimpsed in Jin Hao's narrative.

Thus, Xiaogan is a smaller city if you compare it with metropolises. However, it is still much better than a rural area or small county... In Xiaogan, there are still some opportunities for young adults with higher education background, such as occupations offered by governmental institutions or state-owned enterprises... I know people always think these occupations are pretty boring and not suitable for young adults with ambitions. In the beginning, I also agreed with this opinion. However, if this is compared this with life in a rural area or small county, young people still have the chance to stand out and be successful if they work in Xiaogan. However, in a small-town or rural area, there is nearly no platform for well-educated young adults. (Jin Hao)

Jin Hao's narrative reveals that Xiaogan is perceived as the place which has the closest relationship to modernization and development in their hometown region in terms of its relatively

superior status in the spatial hierarchy, as well as socioeconomic and cultural development. Thus, due to Xiaogan's relatively superior status in the spatial hierarchy, Jin Hao believes that planting his roots in Xiaogan will provide him with enough resources to maintain his sense of privilege among his rural peers.

Moreover, the rapid 'Xiaogan-Wuhan' integration project, initiated by the Xiaogan local authority and supported by the Wuhan local authority and the Hubei provincial government, has stimulated the socioeconomic development in Xiaogan and enhanced the connection between Xiaogan and Wuhan. The socioeconomic development in Xiaogan brought by this integration policy has reinforced returned youths' expectations on Xiaogan as the comfortable arena in which they can more easily urban middle-class membership and maintain their sense of privilege among their rural peers. This can be glimpsed in the following quote.

In last few years, especially after the establishment of the inter-city high-speed railway station in East District, Xiaogan has developed fast. You can see, now there are several big plazas and nice art center in Xiaogan. Besides, people need to spend around 40 minutes traveling to Wuhan through taking the inter-city high-speed railway... The

disparity of living quality between Wuhan and Xiaogan becomes smaller... So, in Xiaogan, I can still enjoy modern urban life rather than moving back to backwardness in a rural area. Thus, since that, I think returning to Xiaogan is also a good option. (Can)

Based on Can's narrative, the integration policy has first significantly reduced the geographic barriers, which hindered Xiaogan residents from enjoying economic prosperity and modernization in Wuhan. Second, the integration policy itself has brought rapid socioeconomic development to Xiaogan district. Thus, the ambitious 'Xiaogan-Wuhan' integration project has enhanced Xiaogan's superior status compared with rural areas in terms of its closer connection with development and modernization. Xiaogan's relatively superior status in the spatial hierarchy reinforces returned youths' perceptions of Xiaogan as a comfortable arena in which to maintain their sense of privilege among their rural peers.

Moreover, because Xiaogan is the prefecture city of their hometown region, returned youths' place attachment to hometown region is another factor which impels them to have strong expectations of Xiaogan. This can be glimpsed in Hui Yao's narrative.

Another important reason which made me return to Xiaogan is that this city is near to my hometown region. On the weekends, I can go back home to visit my parents in one hour by taking a bus. Besides, I still have some relatives in Xiaogan city, so I'm quite familiar with this city. So, at that time, I believe my life in Xiaogan will be more stable and comfortable than that in Wuhan. (Hui Yao)

According to Hui Yao, the geographical connection between her hometown and Xiaogan Prefecture City, as well as her *guanxi* in Xiaogan (although she did not mention whether her relatives had provided her with assistance in working and living in Xiaogan), have provided her with the opportunity to enhance her relationship with her parents and other family members, which have contributed to reinforcing her place attachment to Xiaogan. This strong place attachment, in turn, has fortified her expectations on Xiaogan as the arena in which to pursue a stable and comfortable life.

6.2.3 Urban Middle-Class Membership, Family Formation Plan, and Stable Livelihood

Besides perceiving Xiaogan as a comfortable arena to obtain urban middle-class membership and

maintain their sense of privilege among their rural peers, returned youths' expectations of fulfilling their family formation plan in Xiaogan also significantly vary in terms of gender. Xiaogan is perceived as the site in which they can more easily undertake the family role of the breadwinner through obtaining homeownership. This can be seen in the following quotes.

The most important factor which drives me to move back to Xiaogan is the relative easiness to buy a private flat in this city. As you know, as a male, if I want to put down roots and achieve success in the city where I live or work, I should have my private flat in this city. This is the prerequisite and the most important issue. If I do not have my flat, it is quite hard for me to move further, such as through marriage and having a child... In Xiaogan, the housing price is much lower than that in Wuhan. Even though my salary in Xiaogan would also be lower than that in Wuhan, it can still cover the mortgage. Besides, I can much easier save money for the down payment. (Jin Hao)

On the one hand, through deploying the metropolis-centered perceptual framework to evaluate his prospect in Xiaogan, Jin Hao still recognizes the homeownership as the most important indicator to define whether he has attained 'success' and planted his roots in this city. Homeownership is

also perceived as the material foundation which serves to objectify Jin Hao's capacity to form and support a family. On the other hand, the lower housing prices in Xiaogan, as well as Jin Hao's relatively advantaged position in the local market and in further career promotion, work together in reinforcing his optimistic attitude towards his prospects of obtaining homeownership.

Thus, male returned youths' completion of their family formation plan is based on undertaking their role of breadwinner through attaining the homeownership in Xiaogan.

In contrast, female informants prioritize the marriage and possibility of undertaking a supporting role in their family formation plan in Xiaogan. This can be glimpsed in the following quotes.

An important factor which compelled me to return was the urge to get married and form a family (*ganjin chengjia liye*). As you know, as a female, if you do not get married and form a family before 30, it only means you are not decent if you're a civil servant or doing other jobs. However, when I was in Wuhan, I was extremely busy with work in Hubei Daily Media Group. I did not have enough time and money to consider this issue. However, in Xiaogan, my current occupation is quite stable and relatively well-paid.

This gives me enough space to consider this issue. (Feng)

The direct reason for my return is the urge to form a family with my fiancé. We have been together since we were high school students in my hometown. I'm already 26. It is time for us to have a marriage and form a family. If we do not get married and legally form a family, our relationship will still be unstable... However, in Wuhan, the working pressure and housing prices are too high. It is nearly impossible for us to form a family... In Xiaogan, we at least have a permanent occupation with relatively higher income. It is much easier for us to form a family and settle down. (Dan)

For female returned youths, their socialized gender impels them to prioritize marriage and undertaking a supporting role in their family formation plan. This perception is further reinforced by traditional gender ideology that a stable marriage and family are the institutionalized sources from which to define a female's integrity and maturity. Due to the permanent and relatively well-paid occupations they obtain in Xiaogan, as well as the relatively low housing prices in this city, female returned youths have more money to complete their marriage plans and spend more time on undertaking the supporting role in their new families. Thus, Xiaogan is perceived by

female returned youths as the arena in which they can easily fulfil their family formation plan through pursuing marriage and undertaking the supporting role of the family.

6.3 Returned Youths' Current Situation in Xiaogan Prefecture City

This section highlights that returned youths are satisfied with their current situation in Xiaogan Prefecture City. Drawing on Bourdieu's explication on the relationship between habitus and field, this section illustrates that returned youths' satisfaction is not only generated from the relatively well-paid occupations and better-quality welfare, but it is also based on the high compatibility between their current status in the workplace and their industrious habitus generated in previous socialization.

6.3.1 Stable Financial Income, Well-Equipped Workplace, and Better-Quality Welfare

When discussing their current situation in Xiaogan, returned youths expressed high satisfaction with their current situation in Xiaogan. Their strong sense of satisfaction is first based on the

relatively higher income provided by their current occupations. This can be glimpsed in Qin's description of her financial situation.

Even though my salary is lower than that of my classmates who work in the China Power, Wuhan branch, my salary is still much higher than the average salary of residents in Xiaogan. My salary is also quite higher than the salary of well-educated young adults who work in other governmental organizations... My monthly income can cover all my living expenditures and also support my husband to pay the housing mortgage... We plan to save money and buy a small car at the end of this year. (Qin)

Qin's relatively high salary not only covers basic livings and the housing mortgage but also provides her family with the better financial capacity to support other commodity consumption (e.g. purchasing a private car), which is an important indicator to measure an urban resident's consumption ability and living standard (Miao, 2017).

Returned youths also conveyed a strong sense of satisfaction when discussing about their well-equipped workplace. This can be glimpsed in Xu Jiao's narrative.

It's quite unbelievable that Xiaogan branch of People's Bank can provide such a nice workplace to us. It also reversed my stereotype on the governmental institution in a smaller city. I used to think this work unit would be poorly equipped and boring... Our workplace not only contains all the office equipment but also has a nice fitness room with showers and a table tennis room... Many companies in Wuhan cannot offer such a well-equipped working environment to employees. (Xu Jiao)

In addition, the returned youths in this study expressed satisfaction with the higher-quality welfare provided by their work units. This can be seen in Peng's narrative.

The welfare provided by our work unit covers my accommodations and catering. The accommodation service provided by my work unit is not like the collective dorm provided by a private company or factory. The accommodation is like a private flat in the housing market. In our first year in People's Bank, we don't need to pay any money for accommodations. In the next four years, we need to pay around 100 RMB per month. It is nearly equal to free accommodation. After five years, our work unit will suggest

you move out and buy a private flat in the market. But if you still want to live in a flat owned by the work unit, it will still be OK... The catering is provided by the employee canteen of our work unit. The catering service already covers our three meals every day, and the food quality is pretty nice. Most important is the canteen is free for the employees of People's Bank... I think the welfare provided by my work unit is very important, especially for young employees without family support like me. We have a chance to save money for future plans, like buying a private flat. (Peng)

For returned youths, their work units have already provided them with employment-based social security, including basic pensions and medical insurance for employees, unemployment insurance, work injury compensation, maternity insurance, and housing provident fund (*wu xian yi jin*). The accommodation and catering welfare provided by their work units are already beyond the legal obligations of the employer. According to Peng's reflection, the additional and higher-quality welfares not only significantly alleviate the pressure of their daily expenses and provide them with more chances to accumulate economic capital for future pursuits of stable livelihood and upward social mobility, but also enable them to generate a sense of superiority over other migrants in the stratification system of the same city.

6.3.2 The Compatibility between Returned Youths' Current Status and Their Industrious

Habitus

Returned youths' satisfaction is mainly generated from the compatibility between their current status in the workplace and the industrious layer of their metropolis-oriented habitus. More specifically, returned youths' current status in the workplace yields them with sufficient meritocratic channels to achieve improvement in their living conditions and promotion of their occupational status. This situation is highly consistent with returned youths' specific expectation that they can attain better livelihood and upward social mobility in the urban area through their industrious efforts. This compatibility can be glimpsed in the following quotes.

Basically speaking, for employees with higher educational qualifications, we can receive career promotion through publishing papers in the journals recognized by our work unit, such as *The Journal of Hubei Economics*. According to the relevant regulations, we can be promoted to a middle-level economic analyst if we publish two papers. Besides, I'm also assigned to undertake the tasks of translating economic reports from foreign social media and analyzing the local economic statistics. My performance in these works will

also be included in my promotion assessment... This kind of assessment system and career promotion path highly aligns with my expectations. (Can)

I'm not only working at the Huangpi Road Senior High School but also working at a private educational agency. I can earn around 2,000 RMB through taking on tutorial tasks in the private educational agency. The principals of Huangpi Road High School allow me to take these extra works; they regard my part-time job as the platform to enhance my teaching skills... The money I can earn from my part-time job greatly changes my living condition. (Hui Yao)

Based on the presented quotes, returned youths' workplace provide them with space and opportunities to improve their living conditions and obtain career promotion through their industrious efforts or meritocratic paths. As explicated in the empirical Chapter One, through previous socialization under the rural-urban dichotomy, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have generated a metropolis-oriented habitus, in which they endeavour to obtain urban middle-class membership and stable livelihood through their industrious efforts. Thus, the meritocratic circumstance in which returned youths are situated in Xiaogan is highly compatible

with the industrious sphere of their metropolis-oriented habitus. This compatibility is the source on which returned youths' sense of 'fish in the water' is based.

Drawing on this compatibility, some of the returned youths (i.e. those who bought a private flat prior to 2017) expressed confidence in obtaining urban middle-class membership in Xiaogan.

If I don't have any contingencies, I think my wife and I can save enough money to buy a car and support our children to receive a high-quality education in Xiaogan. Besides, we have already bought our flat, although we are still paying the mortgage. But it is still OK if we can have smooth career development... We can be optimistic about enjoying a stable livelihood in Xiaogan. (Xiong)

Xiong received his master's degree in economics from Zhongnan University of Finance & Law in 2014. He and his wife had lived for two years in the employee apartment provided by the Xiaogan branch of the People's Bank of China. The couple bought their flat in 2016.

I recognize myself as a member of the urban middle class in Xiaogan. I have already bought a private flat and a car in this city. My wife and I plan to have our child next year. People always say residents who have their own flat and car can be middle class. I think I'm middle class in Xiaogan. (Tang)

Tang received a master's degree in finance at Hubei University in 2014. He was hired by the Xiaogan branch of the People's Bank of China in 2015 after his short but unsuccessful career in Wuhan. He and his wife bought a private flat in early 2017 and a car in 2018.

6.4 The Rapid Socioeconomic Changes and Unequal Distribution of the Sense of Uncertainty in the Rapidly-Urbanized Xiaogan

This section proceeds with a brief outline of the socioeconomic and institutional changes brought by the deepening implementation of 'Wuhan-Xiaogan' Integration Project in Xiaogan Prefecture City since 2017. This section first elucidates that the rapid rise in housing prices in the East District and the increasingly unequal distribution of public resources in the city as a whole are the two major side effects brought by the radical implementation of the ambitious integration project.

This section then insists that, while these side effects are universal to well-educated young adults with different class backgrounds, the sense of uncertainty is unequally distributed among well-educated young adults. Returned youths, especially those returned youths who did not buy private flats prior to 2017, are deeply concerned about the side effects of integration project and hold a strong sense of uncertainty towards the stability of their livelihood in Xiaogan. Then, drawing on Dean Curran's critical refinement of Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, as well as based on the unequal distribution of senses of uncertainty among well-educated urban migrants, this section argues that well-educated young adults' extent of exposure to, as well as their tactics against, the side effects of institutional and socioeconomic changes in newly-urbanized Xiaogan vary according to their class background. For young adults with urban middle-class backgrounds, they utilize the economic support from their family to avoid or alleviate the side effects brought by these radical institutional and socioeconomic changes. However, returned youths, as the first generation of urban residents in their families, can only rely on themselves to design their own 'biographies'. Thus, those young adults with migrant backgrounds are consigned to suffer bear the brunt of the side effects brought by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project in Xiaogan. Finally, this section argues that the deepening implementation of the new-type urbanization project in Xiaogan heightens the importance of class differential in economic resources in accelerating the class stratification and reinforcing the class inequality in this city.

6.4.1 Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration Plan and the Rise of East District in Xiaogan Prefecture City

The Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration plan (*han xiao yi ti zhan lve*), co-initiated and implemented by the Hubei provincial government, the Wuhan local authority, and the Xiaogan local authority in 2018, is the core strategy of Xiaogan's implementation of the new-type urbanization project. 'Relying on Wuhan, integrating to Wuhan, Serving Wuhan, Developing Xiaogan' is the principle of this urban integration policy. The Xiaogan local authority aims to boost the socioeconomic development and urbanization in Xiaogan through accelerating the integration of Xiaogan to Wuhan in infrastructure, industry, and market, technology development, public service, and environmental protection (Development and Reform Commission of Xiaogan Prefecture City, 2018).

As the most important part of the Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration plan, the establishment of the inter-city high-speed railway station in Xiaogan East District is the policy which has directly influenced the socioeconomic development and geographic allocation of public resources in

Xiaogan. The establishment of inter-city high-speed railway station has rapidly transformed the East District of Xiaogan Prefecture City from a suburban area with large-scale undeveloped land to the most prosperous part of this city. This can be seen in Lei's narrative.

The East District used to be a backward rural area. When I was a kid, I even saw the buffalo walking on the road in the countryside. Since the opening of the inter-city high-speed railway station in 2016, this district has received significant changes. Several plazas are built there, such as Intime plaza. Wanda Square will also be built there in 2020. Besides, nearly all luxurious real estate projects are built there. Now, this district is the most prosperous area in Xiaogan. (Lei)

Lei is an urban young adult in Xiaogan Prefecture City. He graduated from the Normal University of Central China in 2015. Now, he is working at the Bureau of Human Resource and Social Security in Xiaogan. His parents are senior civil servants of the State Taxation Bureau.

With the deepening integration policies, particularly the completion of high-speed railway stations, the housing prices in East District have rocketed rapidly in the last two years. The average housing

price in East District is much higher than the average housing price in Xiaogan Prefecture City - according to the statistics provided by the Anju Ke Company, the average housing price was 5,567 RMB/m² in July 2019. This is depicted in the following table.

Table 6.1 Average Housing Price of Main Commercial Housing Projects in East District in 2019

The Name of Commercial Housing Project	Average Housing Price (RMB/m ²)
Fuxing City	8,583
Yuji Binhu Tiandi	9,944
Xihu Pearl	8,444
Qiankun Palace	10,563
Tongque Tai	8,818
Wanliu Hui	8,819
Hangtian Palace	10,324
Zhongjian International Garden	9,697
City Central Square	8,840

Source: Anju Ke

Due to the rise of East District in socioeconomic development and urbanization in Xiaogan, the Xiaogan local authority has also implemented a series of policies to transfer the public services,

resources, and facilities to East District for reinforcing the integration to Wuhan. In 2016, the Xiaogan local authority closed the old office building of the city government in the old town and opened the new office building in the East District. In 2017, the Xiaogan local authority launched the construction of Xiaogan Cultural Center, which was nominated as the provincial model of the PPP project by the Development and Reform Commission of Hubei Province. In 2018, the Xiaogan local authority closed the Civil Affairs Center in the old town of Xiaogan City and built a new ‘Xiaogan Citizen Home’ (*Xiaogan shimin zhi jia*) in East District. Meanwhile, with the goal to transfer and concentrate the high-quality public services in East District, the Xiaogan local authority is encouraging the Xiaogan central hospital, key primary schools, and high schools to open their branches in East District. Such a series of policies significantly change the geographic allocation of the public resources, services, and facilities in this city, which is, in turn, strengthening the prominence of East District in the public resources, services, and facilities allocation of Xiaogan Prefecture City.

Picture 6.1. New Office Building of Xiaogan People’s Government



Source: Baidu

Picture 6.2. Xiaogan Citizens Home



Source: Baidu

Picture 6.3 Xiaogan Cultural Center



Source: Sohu

Due to the rapid integration to Wuhan and concentration of public services, resources, as well as facilities in East District of Xiaogan, Xiaogan local residents perceive the East District as a place of development, prosperity, and modernization while other parts of this city are regarded as the places of stagnation and backwardness. This is revealed in Lei's quote.

The East District has developed fast and become closely connected to the urban area of Wuhan. However, other parts of this city, especially those zones near other counties and villages, remain the same as what they appeared to be ten years ago... There is no doubt that people's living in East District will be more comfortable and convenient than people's living in other parts of Xiaogan. (Lei)

Based on this ideology of the geographic hierarchy of Xiaogan Prefecture City regarding the extent of urbanization and connection to Wuhan, local urban residents, especially young adults with middle-class backgrounds, recognize the ownership of a private flat in East District as the material resource to ensure their household's access to development, convenience, and prosperity. Moreover, the ownership of a private flat in East District has become a source for the reinforcement of their urban middle-class membership. This can be seen in Dai's answer.

It is necessary for people who have enough money to buy a private flat in East District, because living here is more convenient and comfortable. There is no difference between a private flat in the East District and that in Wuhan. In the compound where I live, there is a well-equipped underground garage, fitness club, and kindergarten for its residents' children... My wife's family is also satisfied with my current private flat. (Dai)

Dai is a local young adult who graduated from Hubei Industrial University in 2014. He returned to Xiaogan and became a civil servant of the Bureau of Quality Supervision. He bought a private flat in City Central Square in 2017. His parents assisted with him with the down payment. He uses this new private flat for his marriage.

Moreover, to secure their stable and decent livelihood in Xiaogan Prefecture City, returned youths also accept such ideology on geographic hierarchy and acknowledge the importance of owning a private flat in the East District. This can be seen in Dan's answer.

A private flat in the East District will be my priority if I buy a private flat in the housing

market of Xiaogan, because living here is very convenient, I can easily take the inter-city high-speed railway to Wuhan, and I can enjoy the nice park and other facilities in this district... My fiancé and his family also think a private flat in the East District is much fancier (*yangqi*). (Dan)

Here It is clear that a private flat in East District, according to Dan and her family, is a property which ensures their household's access to the prosperity and development brought by the integration project and further represents the decent and stable urban livelihood she received in Xiaogan Prefecture City.

6.4.2 The Unequal Distribution of Sense of Uncertainty among Well-Educated Young Adults and Returned Youths' Vulnerability in Rapidly Urbanized Xiaogan

Well-educated young adults recognize the rapid rise of housing price in the East District of Xiaogan and the increasingly unequal allocation of public resources in Xiaogan Prefecture City as the two major side effects brought by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project.

Although well-educated young adults with different class backgrounds all express concern

regarding those side effects of the integration project, the sense of uncertainty is unequally distributed among well-educated young adults.

Returned youths who did not buy private flats in Xiaogan Prefecture City prior to 2017 have stronger senses of anxiety and uncertainty towards the socioeconomic and institutional changes, especially the rocketing housing price and concentration of public resources in East District, under the context of the new-type urbanization project. These stronger senses of uncertainty and anxiety can be seen in the following quotes.

It's really hard to predict that I will receive stable livelihood in the future. If the housing price continues to rise at the rate that it is now. You know, the housing prices of some commercial housing compounds are already above 10,000 RMB/m², and my salary is a little above 6,000 RMB. So, it is hard for me to collect money for the down payment. But if I don't buy a private flat now, I probably could not even afford a private flat in other parts of this city. (Can)

Can's narrative reveals that the rocketing housing prices comprise the main source of his sense of

uncertainty and anxiety. The rocketing housing price compels him to prioritize buying a private flat in their current development plan. Due to the inadequacy of financial support from his family, he has to rely on his salary to fulfil his plan of purchasing a private flat. However, the rapidly rising housing prices largely undermine his confidence in obtaining ownership of a private flat in the future.

Moreover, the rocketing housing prices undermine returned youths' sense of certainty regarding the stability of their future livelihood and their confidence in dealing with future contingencies in life.

The current situation compels me to buy a private flat in Xiaogan. I will check out from the accommodation apartment of my work unit three years later and further seek a residential place in the housing market... Even if I make the down payment and buy the private flat, the living quality may decline in the future. Besides, my rural parents need me to support them. My salary is not only for just myself, but I should also spare some money for supporting my parents. If they have a serious illness, it may be hard for me to collect enough money to deal with that. (Yu Jiao)

As can be seen in Yu Jiao's answer, as a result of the relative deficiency of economic support from family, returned youths must endure more financial pressure in obtaining private flats in Xiaogan. Moreover, their rural parents are excluded from the higher-standard social security and welfare systems enjoyed by urban middle-class households. Thus, returned youths bear the responsibility to support their aging parents. However, the rocketing housing prices will erode their family's financial capacity to deal with contingencies in their rural households, such as serious illnesses.

Unlike returned youths who hold a strong sense of uncertainty and anxiety regarding the socioeconomic changes brought by the integration project, young adults with a local middle-class background both display a concern for the side effects brought by the integration policy and have more confidence in maintaining a stable livelihood in the future. This is demonstrated in Lei's narrative.

The rise of housing prices absolutely influences all residents in Xiaogan, but we should also see fast development brought by the integration project... For me, the housing price is very high but still affordable. (Lei)

Lei acknowledges that the rapid rise of housing prices is one of the side effects of Xiaogan's integration project and worries that the rocketing housing price may undermine the stability of Xiaogan's society. However, the financial support he received from his middle-class family provides him with the means to both alleviate the uncertainty brought by rapid urbanization and enjoy the modernization and prosperity of the East District. The relative housing advantage of Lei's parents is partly resulted from the state generous housing reform in 1990s. As the senior civil servants who received windfall gains from the subsidized purchase of workunit flats in housing reform in 1990s, Le's parents bought the flat provided by the State Taxation Bureau at a extremely low price in 1999. Thus, because of the relative housing advantage, Lei's parents decided and have the financial capacity to support their son to purchase private flat in East District. After receiving the official information about the 'Xiaogan-Wuhan' integration project and envisioning the fast development in East District, Lei's parents suggested him buy the private flat in East District. His parents provided him with financial support for down payment to purchase a private flat in East District in late 2017. The housing advantage of Lei's parents is inherited to Lei in the form of financial support in covering the first instalment.

Those returned youths who had already bought a private flat prior to 2017 admitted the negative

impacts brought by the radical urbanization project. However, they expressed a sense of unfairness when discussing the housing price and its impact on them. This is demonstrated in Tang's answer.

The housing price has gone up rapidly in the recent two years. I think it has become unaffordable for young graduates without any economic support from family. I'm a little lucky that I bought my private flat in early 2016. At that time, the housing price was below 5,000 RMB/m². Now, the price is over 8,000 RMB/m². (Tang)

6.4.3 Class Differential in Economic Capital and Social Stratification in Xiaogan

Based on the unequal distribution of the sense of uncertainty among well-educated young adults in Xiaogan and returned youths' vulnerability due to the side effects of the rapid implementation of the integration and urbanization project, it can be assumed that well-educated young adults' extent of exposure to side effects and tactics to combat negative impacts vary according to their class background. Drawing on Dean Curran's refinement of Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, this section further asserts that the institutional and socioeconomic changes introduced by the integration project in Xiaogan exacerbate the importance of class differential, particularly that of

economic capital, in shaping individuals' life chances and accelerating the class stratification in Xiaogan.

Dean Curran (2016) first acknowledges that the radical socioeconomic and institutional changes in late modernity have increased the uncertainty and unpredictability in the social world, which has impelled young people to recognize themselves as the center of the action and the authors of their own biographies (Beck, 1992; Curran, 2016; Evans, 2016). However, like other scholars who have rejected Beck's thesis of dissolution of class in the risk society, Curran argues that the growing risk of contemporary society not dissolves the class relations but reinforces the class inequality in terms of individuals' life chances. Given that wealth differentials have gained increasing causal relevance to individuals' life chances (Adam, Beck & Van Loon, 2000), inequalities in life chances generated from inequalities in class resources will actually become greater, because differentials in economic resources will be a primary means by which some avoid these humanly produced risks, while others are consigned to suffer the brunt of the contemporary social-material order (Curran, 2016).

As discussed in previous section, the institutional and socioeconomic changes brought by the

radical integration project in Xiaogan have exposed all well-educated young adults to the side effects of rapid urbanization and exacerbated individuals' pressure and responsibility to alleviate these side effects and fulfil their family formation plans. However, the extent of the exposure to those side effects varies among young adults with different class backgrounds. Those rural young adults without economic support from their families will primarily be hit by the side effects of the rapid urbanization and integration policy. As the first generation of urban residents within their rural families, returned youths cannot follow their rural parents; they can only rely on themselves to combat the side effects brought by the integration project and must design their own 'stable livelihood'. However, the rapid rise of housing prices and the unequal allocation of public resources in their hometown city largely increase their difficulty in fulfilling their family formation plans and undermine their capacity to deal with household contingencies. These challenges, in turn, invoke a strong sense of uncertainty. Returned youths who bought private flats prior to 2017 fortunately obtained the necessary foundation to alleviate the negative impacts of the radical social change. They may smoothly fulfil their family formation plans and maintain the stability of their families in Xiaogan due to their possession of private flats. Meanwhile, young adults with urban middle-class backgrounds primarily receive strong financial support from their families for purchasing private flats in the East District. Such possession of a private flat in the East District provides the material foundation to fulfil their family formation plan, as well as

functions as prerequisite for enjoying the high-quality public resources, facilities, and services in this district. Moreover, due to their relatively adequate economic capital, local urban middle-class households have a stronger capacity to deal with family contingencies. Thus, the relatively adequate financial support they receive from family becomes the major means for urban middle-class young adults to alleviate risks involved with the rapidly-urbanized Xiaogan and further maintain their advantaged position in the social stratification structure in Xiaogan.

Thus, the side effects, particularly the rapid rise of housing prices in East District, which brought by the radical integration and urbanization policies both reinforce the class inequality in life chance between young adults with rural backgrounds and their urban middle-class counterparts and accelerate the class stratification among returned youth, themselves, regarding the ownership of private flats in Xiaogan.

6.5 Discussion and Summary

Returned youths' decision to move back is not only the product of the negotiations they made under the obstacles they encountered in Wuhan but is also driven by the meanings and

expectations they assign to their hometown city. These meanings and expectations they attach to hometown city are not simply generated under the 'push-and-pull' mechanism between Wuhan and Xiaogan but are driven by the evaluations returned youths have made on whom they want to be and where they want to be. Through deploying the 'metropolis-oriented' perceptual framework to understand Xiaogan and their upward social mobility prospects in this city, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as the arena in which they can much more easily fulfil their family formation plans and obtain urban middle-class membership. Due to the relative scarcity of their institutionalized and embodied cultural capital, as well as the more rapid conversion from their cultural capital to economic capital in Xiaogan, returned youths perceive Xiaogan as the arena in which they can convert their cultural capital into prestigious and permanent occupations, considerable revenue, and higher-quality welfare. Moreover, these achievements can help them maintain the stability of their current livelihood in Xiaogan. In addition, returned youths are quite satisfied with their current situation in Xiaogan. Their satisfaction is not only based on the relatively high salary, prestigious status, and high-quality welfare provided by their work units, but is generated from the compatibility between their industrious habitus and their brighter prospects of career promotion in their current workplaces.

However, returned youths have a stronger sense of uncertainty and anxiety regarding their future

in Xiaogan under the context of the Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration Project. The side effects of such a radical integration project have led to the unequal distribution of a sense of uncertainty among well-educated young adults in Xiaogan. Drawing on Dean Curran's refinement of Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, this chapter argues that the rapid implementation of the new-type urbanization project in Xiaogan largely contributes to enhancing urban middle-class households' advantaged position in enjoying the development and prosperity of urbanization, while further undermining the stability of returned youths' livelihood and development in Xiaogan. Based on what has been discussed, this chapter argues that the rapid urbanization in Xiaogan Prefecture City not only provides more opportunities for returned youths to move back and obtain permanent and prestigious occupations in hometown city but has also brought the radical institutional and socioeconomic changes which have reinforced the importance of wealth differentials associated with class relations in shaping individuals' life chances in the rapidly urbanized Xiaogan.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Contemporary China has entered a rapidly urbanizing era, in which not only the metropolis-centered urban agglomerations are aggressively expanding, but the infrastructure and economies in smaller inland cities are also developing rapidly (Chen, Liu & Lu, 2016; Wang et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2016). Strikingly, in an attempt to boost local industrial upgrading and create a relative advantage among inter-urban competition in attracting industries and investments from developed coastal areas, the local authorities of newly rising metropolises, such as Wuhan, Chengdu, Xi'an and Nanjing, have implemented a series of policies to attract non-local young adults, especially those with higher educational qualifications, to settle down and work in these jurisdictions. These 'university graduate-friendly' policies seem to nearly encompass all essential aspects of university graduates' survival and development in metropolitan areas, including expanding *hukou* to university graduates, establishing the salary bottom line for university/college graduates, and providing graduates with rental subsidies and affordable private flats (Liu & Jin, 2019). Given the significant changes brought by the rapid nationwide implementation of the new-type urbanization project, official media has acclaimed that young adults with higher educational qualifications, including well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, will enjoy brighter

prospects of personal development in urban areas, especially in the metropolises which are actively engaged in the fierce inter-urban competition. Simultaneously, smaller cities in inland China are also experiencing the rapid infrastructural expansion and socioeconomic development, as well as fast integration with nearby metropolises in recent few years. Thus, it is assumed that the attractiveness of smaller cities to young migrants seem to be enhanced in this new era (Chen et al., 2018; Chen, Liu & Lu, 2016; Guan et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2017; Tan, Xu & Zhang, 2016; Wang et al., 2015; Zheng, Wang & Cao, 2014). Given these ambitious and rapid institutional and socioeconomic changes, some recent scholars insist that the new-type urbanization project has broadened up well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' road of being urban middle class in both metropolitan and smaller cities (Lian, 2015; Liu & Jin, 2019; Liu & Li, 2017).

Inspired by the concept of bounded agency, this research insists on the necessity of re-understanding well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' upward social mobility pursuit under the context of the new-type urbanization project from the bottom-up perspective. This study highlights that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' perceptions of their class status and class structure, as well as strategies for acquiring middle-class membership, are expressions of their agency. In this study, agency is understood as a process in which past habits and routines are contextualized, and future possibilities are envisaged within the contingencies of the present

moment (Evans, 2002). Such socially situated agency is influenced, but not determined, by the broad structural conditions and policies which directly affect both the extent and impact of institutional and situational barriers and the disposition or dispositional barriers (i.e. one's belief or perceptual scheme, as termed by Bourdieu [1990, 1984, 1977]) (Evans, 2007; Meyers, 2017; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). Drawing on the perspective of bounded agency, the study argues that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' strategies for their upward social mobility pursuit are shaped by their subjective perceptual schemes, which are generated from their experiences of geographic mobility under the rural-urban divide, as well as the situational barriers of the current socioeconomic landscape under the context of the new-type urbanization project.

In this concluding chapter, the major threads that emerged from preceding chapters are drawn together and further elucidated. Guided by Bourdieusian's refinements of habitus (Atkinson, 2011, 2010; Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Thatcher, Ingram, Burke & Abrahams, 2016), the first section re-emphasizes the necessity of re-understanding well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' subjectivity on their class status and upward social mobility in the context of new-type urbanization project. In this discussion, special attention is paid to how well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' imagination of urban middle-class membership is shaped by their metropolis-oriented perceptual framework, which is an essential manifestation of their

multi-layered, flexible, but metropolis-oriented habitus or dispositions. Based on the metropolis-oriented perceptual framework, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have strong settlement intention in metropolitan area. Moreover, they regard formal homeownership, career promotion and children's access to high-quality educational resources as the most important indicators to underpin urban middle-class membership in the new context. Drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration on capital and field, this section then elucidates how the possession and composition of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' capital influence their visions and strategic actions in pursuit of upward social mobility. Special light is shed on the importance of social capital and cultural capital in shaping well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' pursuit of urban middle-class membership in the next socioeconomic context. Meanwhile, the heterogeneity of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' strategies to fulfil their urban middle-class dreams, as well how this heterogeneity influences well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' life chances in the urban area, are additionally discussed in this section.

In the second part of this section, the active involvement of China's government (including both central government and various levels of the local authority) in this new wave of urbanization, and the fierce competition for university graduates among newly-rising inland metropolises are systematically re-investigated. Inspired by David Harvey's critical analysis of 'urban

entrepreneurialism', this research adopts a more critical bottom-up perspective to understand the nature of the new-type urbanization project and 'competition for university graduates' among inland metropolises. Through this critical perspective, this thesis sheds light on how the fundamental contradiction between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' expectations of being urban middle class, on the one hand, and the underlying goals of the governmental development plan, on the other hand, lead to the inadequacy of such ambitious urbanization policies in broadening well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' path towards becoming urban middle class.

The third section highlights theoretical contributions of this research makes to China's migration studies and social stratification studies. This study first sheds light on the changing migration patterns of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in the era of the new-type urbanization project. Drawing on well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' life experience, this study indicates that the changing migration pattern is not only resulted from the well-educated migrants' dispositions but also conditioned and enabled by the socioeconomic reconfiguration brought by the rapid urbanization in last few decades. More specifically, the penetrative insight into the returned migration pattern of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in smaller cities expands our understanding on the interplay between migrants' geographic mobility and social mobility in the context of new-type urbanization project. Second, based on the uneven distribution of difficulty of

obtaining homeownership and sense of uncertainty among well-educated young adults in urban area, this study also enriches our understanding of urban middle-class membership and social inequality reproduction in the era of new-type urbanization project. The institutional arrangements, i.e., school district housing policy, and the unequal geographic allocation of urban public resource make the highly-stratified housing market as the new mechanism which stratifies urban residents' life chance and perpetuates urban middle-class households' advantaged status. The importance of housing market in shaping individual's urban life is further enhanced by the persistence of land finance model and real estate economy. Therefore, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are still far away from being urban middle class although most of them have obtained permanent *hukou* and white-collar occupations in urban area. Meanwhile, this study indicates that China's urban space is shaped to be the circumstance in which individuals with economic and social capital are favored. In this socioeconomic context, urban middle class is more characterized by individual's senses of certainty and security in front of the rapid changes in the urbanization process. This study further highlights that such senses of certainty and security are underpinned by family resources to deal with contingencies, afford leisure consumption, as well as to ensure household's access to high-quality public provision, convenient facilities and other aspects of urban prosperity. Due to the growing importance of family resource in shaping individual's urban life chance, urban middle class' social status is more likely to be reproduced while well-educated migrants without

enough family resource are hindered in obtaining urban middle-class membership.

The last two sections of this chapter are mainly about the policy implications of this study and the recommendations for future researches. The policy implications of this study are organized around the aim of building a self-subsisting environment for non-local well-educated young people to settle down and receive full development in urban area. This study further suggests scholars focus on the unequal distribution of senses of uncertainty and deprivation between well-educated young migrants and local counterparts to explore the underlying mechanisms which reproduce the social inequality in urban China. Meanwhile, this study sheds light on the necessity to conduct comparative study between Wuhan and other inland metropolises which initiates ‘graduate-friendly’ projects, i.e., Xi’an, Chengdu, to probe the differences among these inland metropolises and understand the tendency of China’s new-type urbanization project. Last but not least, this study calls more attention on the gender and ethnic differences among well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in terms of their choice of destination, their family formation plan, and their self-perception of their class status.

7.1 Re-Understanding Well-Educated Rural-Urban Migrants and Their New Pursuit of Urban Middle-Class Membership

7.1.1 Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrants' Metropolis-Oriented Disposition and Imagination of Upward Social Mobility

Based on the empirical data on well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' relatively successful experience on the university campus and in their early career development in urban areas, this research first highlights well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' flexible, multi-layered but metropolis-oriented habitus and its impact on their subjectivity of class mobility. Recent Bourdieusian scholars insist the necessity of re-investigating social agents' habitus in the era which is characterized by the tremendous and frequent flow of people, capital and information. These Bourdieusian scholars argue that being frequent exposed to the collision between their habitus and new field is increasingly common to social agents, immigrants and trans-class travelers, who are largely involved in movements of people, information and capital (Atkinson, 2011, 2010; Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011; Thatcher, Ingram, Burke & Abrahams, 2016). For those social agents, being flexible or reflexible to such collision has gradually become

their second nature (Sweetman, 2003). Drawing on the emphasis on individual's agency, some Bourdieusians further indicate social agents have the capacity to internalize their experience of being exposed to the collision, as well as oscillating between their field of origin and new field as the new layer of their disposition. Therefore, these theoreticians argue that social agents' habitus tend to be multi-layered and flexible (Decoteau, 2016; Lahire & Fernbach, 2011). Because of the multi-layered and flexible habitus, contemporary social agents have the capacity to reconcile the contradiction between their habitus and new field, as well as further maintain their roles of original community and new field (Adams, 2006; Thatcher, Ingram, Burke & Abrahams, 2016).

Based on the penetration into my informants' early experience of migration and relatively successful adaption in university campus, this research found that the new generation of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have the capacity and will to reconcile their role of high achiever in rural hometown and role of newly-urbanized citizen in metropolitan area. This is not only resulted from my informants' frequent geographic movement in the era which is characterized with the fast flows of capital, human, and information between rural and urban regions, but also shaped by the informants' agency to internalize their later experience as the new layer of their disposition. Therefore, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' habitus is more likely to multi-layered and flexible, which enable them to adapt to university campus smoothly and successfully.

However, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' flexible disposition does not imply that they maintain an egalitarian attitude towards the urban area and their rural hometowns. As a result of constant exposure to the socioeconomic and cultural disjunction between rural and urban areas, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants perceive their rural hometown as a place of emaciation and backwardness, while they perceive urban areas, especially metropolitan areas, as places of development and hope. This thesis suggests that, through deploying such a metropolis-oriented disposition or perceptual framework to negotiate their understanding of upward social mobility, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants add a layer of spatial hierarchy into their imagined upward social mobility. This layer of spatial hierarchy or geographic hierarchy has commonly been exaggerated and overly simplified in previous migration and social stratification studies, which have been based on a top-down perspective. Moreover, this study further highlights that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' imagined upward social mobility does not simply refer to inter-generational upward social mobility, which is measured by conventional indicators, such as educational background, income, and occupational status, in traditional social stratification studies. On the contrary, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' self-identified upward social mobility is underpinned by their comparison between themselves and their urban middle-class counterparts. More specifically, well-educated rural-to-migrants' definition refers to obtaining the

socioeconomic status, citizenship, and, more importantly, urban middle-class membership enjoyed by well-educated young adults with urban middle-class origins.

Through the perspective of bounded agency, this thesis first argues that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' definitions of urban middle-class membership are both tightly embedded in their life histories, particularly their experiences of geographic mobility under the rural-urban divide, and circumscribed by the socioeconomic and cultural changes under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Due to their strong willingness to separate from rurality and assimilate into urban areas, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, like other young migrants with more human capital, have strong settlement intention in metropolitan areas. They prefer to receive *de facto* urban resident's status via obtaining urban formal homeownership (Cai & Wang, 2008; De Brauw et al., 2002; Liu, Wang & Chen, 2016; Wang, Ren & Liu, 2018). For well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, urban formal homeownership is primarily perceived as the material base which can both differentiate them from the migrant 'mass' and objectify the urbanity they receive in the metropolitan area. This is congruent with recent studies that have indicated that homeownership would provide a lasting foothold to migrants in the city, which contrasts with migrants' common depiction as transient, troublesome presences that can never be local (Zavoretti, 2017, et al.). Second, as a result of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' experience of smoothly

adjusting to campus life and experiencing success in student activities, these migrants demonstrate a strong preference for attaining urban middle-class membership through the meritocratic pathway. Due to their relative adequacy of institutional cultural capital and deficiency of other forms of capital in urban areas, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants perceive career promotion as another important indicator of urban middle-class membership and the only way in which they can receive upward social mobility. More importantly, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants attain the role of high achievers in rural areas and successfully migrate to metropolitan areas through receiving higher education at first-tier universities in urban areas. This successful experience of migration impels them to recognize the importance of their children's access to high-quality educational resources in cities. Specifically, children's access to high-quality educational resources, such as formal education offered by key schools, is perceived by well-educated rural-to-urban migrants as an effective way to level the inequalities in development between their children and their counterparts from local middle-class families. This finding is supported by recent studies which argue that migrant families perceive child's education as hope for both their children and for themselves. Indeed, access to high-quality formal education means access to university degrees, respectable white-collar jobs, and secure families (Zavoretti, 2017).

Moreover, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' view of urban middle-class membership has

further been circumscribed by socioeconomic development under the rural-urban divide, especially the radical shifts brought by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project. Previous research has indicated that the establishment of the housing market leads to a *de facto* commoditization of urban residence (Wu, Edensor & Cheng, 2018; Wu, Zhang & Waley, 2016; Zavoretti, 2017). Under this scenario, housing consumption, particularly the homeownership in gated communities, is becoming not only an important indicator of urban middle-class wealth and privileged access to property, goods, and services, but also a significant factor which underpins their urban middle-class identity (Goodman, 2014, Goodman & Chen, 2013; Tang, 2013; Miao, 2017). As described in Chapters Four and Six, the radical implementation of the new-type urbanization project provides the institutional condition for the continuity of the ‘land finance model’ and reinforces the importance of homeownership in differentiating urban residents’ access to public goods, services, and facilities in cities, especially in metropolitan areas. This socioeconomic change impels well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to accept the capacity to purchase a private flat in a gated community as the most efficient way to situate themselves at a relatively advantaged position in the increasingly unequal and segmented society, as well as obtain access to other privileges enjoyed by their urban middle-class counterparts.

7.1.2 The Importance of Capital in Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrants' Upward Social Mobility Pursuit and The Heterogeneity of Their Coping Strategies

This research also highlights the importance of different sorts of capital in well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' upward social mobility pursuit. Drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration on the capital and complex interaction among different capital in shaping individual's status, this thesis indicates that economic, social and cultural capital do not only have direct effect on migrants' urban life chance, but also intertwine with economic capital and further interact with China's socioeconomic and cultural contexts in shaping well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' possibility of obtaining urban middle-class membership.

First, due to the growing importance of formal homeownership in fulfilling migrants' settlement intention and middle-class membership pursuit, economic capital is increasingly important in well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' acquisition of urban formal homeownership and their imagined urban middle-class membership. The inadequacy of economic capital and limited channels of accumulating financial resource undoubtedly have undermined well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' capacity to obtain the urban formal homeownership. Besides, the lack of

economic capital also undermines well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' capacity to ensure their children's access to high-quality educational resource, especially the extracurricular courses offered by commercial educational institutes. Therefore, the insufficiency of economic capital is the biggest barrier which hinder well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' pursuit of urban middle-class membership.

Second, the underlying importance of social capital and complex mechanism of social capital impact on well-educated migrants' pursuit of urban middle-class membership are also highlighted in this thesis. Besides admitting the importance of social capital, especially the effective social network provided by family, in migrants' job hunting and occupational attainment in metropolitan area, this research sheds light on the underlying importance of social capital in young adults' acquisition of urban formal homeownership in the context of new-type urbanization project. The importance of family support in young adults' acquisition of formal homeownership is first situated in close linkage and mutuality between parents and children in Chinese cultural context. Within this family linkage and mutuality, parents' monetary support might imply a reciprocal flow of service and care from their children. This reciprocal relationship, as the unique form of social capital, impel parents to provide support in facilitating their children to obtain urban formal homeownership (Or, 2017). Meanwhile, the one-child policy further enhances this reciprocal

dynamic of family. The one-child family dynamic makes parents continue to provide care and resources to their children even when they could earn their own living and get married (Croll, 2006). This study finds well-educated young adults from urban middle-class families are usually the only child of their families. Such family dynamic, together with urban middle-class families' relative adequacy of economic capital enable these families to provide effective family support in children's urban homeownership acquisition despite the skyrocketing house prices. While well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are usually from households with several children but less economic capital. This family structure and inadequacy of economic capital largely undermine well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' possibility of receiving family support in obtaining urban homeownership. Meanwhile, the retreat of state in housing provision since late 1990s and the rocketing housing price directly enhance the importance of family support in obtaining urban homeownership (Or, 2017). The lack of effective family support inevitably hinders well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' urban homeownership acquisition.

Third, the importance of cultural capital in shaping well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' urban life chance and pursuit of urban middle-class membership is systematically examined in this thesis. Based on the rapid implementation of 'university-graduate friendly' projects in newly-rising metropolises and industrial upgrading nationwide, this study indicates the institutionalized cultural

capital, especially the higher education degree offered by first-tier universities, is increasingly important for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to obtain permanent urban *hukou* and white-collar occupation in metropolitan area. Therefore, this study first argues that institutionalized cultural capital plays an increasingly important role in well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' settling down in metropolitan area. However, the increasingly importance of economic and social capital in well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' acquisitions of urban homeownership and children's access to high-quality educational resource, together with the negative effect of higher education expansion since late 1990s, result in the brutal fact that merely accumulating institutionalized cultural capital is not enough for well-educated migrants to acquire the urban middle-class membership in metropolitan area.

Inspired by Bourdieu's elaboration on the interplay between field and capital, this study finds well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' change of their destination city leads to the changing rule of their upward social mobility pursuit, which further shifts the importance of different sorts of capital, especially institutionalized cultural capital, in their urban middle-class membership acquisition. This is reflected by the heterogeneity of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' coping strategies in their pursuance of urban middle-class status, particularly returned youths' relative easiness of obtaining urban middle-class membership in smaller cities in hometown region.

Because well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have similar class origins and bear the same pressures of survival and development in urban areas, factors or concerns that affect migrants' coping strategies in the quest towards achieving upward social mobility and life chances in urban areas were assumed to be homogeneous in previous social stratification and migration studies. However, drawing on twenty well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' life histories in Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City, this thesis highlights the heterogeneity of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' coping strategies in the quest towards becoming urban middle class, as well as their life chances in the urban area under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Such heterogeneity of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are mainly revealed in migrants' choices of destination, as well as their housing status in urban areas. Drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration on the interplay between field and capital, this thesis suggests that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' scope of coping strategies in their pursuance of urban middle class status is, first, strongly restricted by their disadvantaged position in urban areas in terms of their deficiency of economic and social capital. Due to the inadequacy of economic and social capital in metropolitan areas, relying on occupational development is typically the only strategy well-educated rural-to-urban migrants can deploy to accumulate capital, particularly economic capital, to engage in the journey towards urban middle-class membership in

metropolitan areas. Moreover, the close connection between urban homeownership and residents' access to public services, goods, and facilities in Wuhan also compels well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to purchase private flats if they want to extricate themselves from a transient, unstable presence in Wuhan. However, due to the lack of economic capital and family support, most of the well-educated rural-to-urban migrants cannot afford the rocketing housing prices, which is largely boosted by the radical social changes brought by the implementation of new-type urbanization project. Besides, the inadequacy of social capital also hinders well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' road of achieving career promotion in metropolitan area. In a nutshell, the socioeconomic reconfiguration in the new-type urbanization project makes the metropolitan middle-class game be a field in which the economic and social capital is highly favored. Thus, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants without economic and social capital are inevitably situated at the disadvantaged position in this unfair but fierce game. This brutal reality largely undermines well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' aspirations of settling down in Wuhan and forces them to migrate to other urban areas for development.

Moving back to smaller cities their hometown regions (in this research, Xiaogan Prefecture City) is an important coping strategy which well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, especially those who lack economic capital, deploy to continue their pursuit of urban middle-class membership.

Previous research has indicated that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' return is driven by the 'push-pull mechanism' between metropolitan and undeveloped areas (Lian, 2015; Yang, 2016). This thesis argues that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' return to their hometown city is the result of the negotiations they have made with their expectations of urban middle-class life and the insurmountable constraints they encountered in Wuhan, rather than the simple product of a broader 'push-pull mechanism' between metropolitan and smaller cities.

For well-educated returned migrants, especially returned female migrants, fulfilling the moral obligation of supporting their elderly parents in rural hometown, as well as fulfilling their family formation plans in their rural hometowns, are important components of their motivation to move back. Living and working in Xiaogan Prefecture City can enable well-educated returned migrants, especially returned females, to both maintain a closer connection with their rural parents and bear the smaller financial burden in forming their new families in urban areas.

Well-educated returned migrants' relative advantage in their hometowns, which has mainly resulted from the scarcity of their institutionalized and embodied cultural capital in smaller cities, is the most important factor which drives them to move back. Based on Bourdieu's elucidation on

the interplay between field and capital, this research asserts that well-educated returned youths' moving back to Xiaogan is essentially a return to the field in which institutionalized cultural capital is relatively scarce but also highly appreciated. Due to the relative scarcity but high value of returned migrants' possessed cultural capital in Xiaogan, well-educated returned migrants face fewer difficulties and spend less time in transferring their possessed cultural capital to other sorts of capital required in their quest towards urban middle class. Partly due to this advantage, all well-educated returned migrants in this study obtained permanent, relatively well-paid, and prestigious occupations offered by state-owned enterprises, governmental organizations, or public high schools in Xiaogan. Moreover, the relatively-high value of their institutionalized cultural capital in hometown city also enables well-educated returned migrants to achieve career development through occupational performance in their prestigious work units. Such meritocratic pathway of career promotion is highly compatible with returned youths' industrious, self-dependent habitus, which is generated from their experience of receiving education. Thus, based on their relatively advantaged status in job market of hometown city and brighter career promotion prospect in work units, well-educated returned youths have strong sense of 'fish in the water' in terms of working and living in Xiaogan.

This thesis also argues that well-educated returned migrants' life chances in their hometown city

are also circumscribed by the socioeconomic changes brought by radical urbanization. The rapid socioeconomic changes brought by the ‘Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration Project’ (*han xiao yi ti gongcheng*) have not only triggered the rocketing housing prices in East District but have also reinforced the unequal geographic allocation of public resources, services, and facilities in Xiaogan Prefecture City. Given these radical socioeconomic changes, well-educated returned migrants must obtain the homeownership, particularly private flats in gated communities in East District if they want to ensure their families’ access to the high-quality public resources and services, modern infrastructure, and convenient facilities. While the access to high-quality public resources and services, modern infrastructure, and convenient facilities has gradually come to indicate urbanity and middle-class membership in Xiaogan. The broader socioeconomic changes brought by the rapid implementation of the new-type urbanization project in Xiaogan increasingly enforce well-educated returned migrants to face the similar but unfair game of obtaining urban middle-class membership which they previously encountered in Wuhan. This game increase well-educated returned migrants’ exposure to uncertainty when living and working in their hometown city. Thus, the rapid Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration Project, on the one hand, accelerates the attractiveness of Xiaogan to well-educated returned migrants and provides the condition for returned youths to move back to fulfill their urban middle-class dream, but on the other hand, increases returned youths’ financial burden of obtaining formal homeownership in Xiaogan and

exposes them to the socioeconomic uncertainty.

For the few well-educated rural-to-urban migrants whose families can strive to provide them with financial support to purchase a private flat in Wuhan Provincial City, their homeownership does not immediately award them urban middle-class membership. On the contrary, their families must bear the constant but heavy financial pressure of hefty housing mortgages. Due to such financial burden, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' financial capacity to afford their children's access to after-school/extracurricular education, and as well as other middle-class amenities which serve to indicate urban middle-class membership, such as private cars, is largely undermined.

These well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' families are relatively well off in their rural hometown because their parents are migrant workers who have worked in coastal metropolitan areas since the late 1990s. However, their parents are excluded from enjoying the relatively high-level welfare and pension endowed to urban residents in work units. Thus, the heavy financial pressure caused by the housing down payment and mortgage also largely undermines well-educated rural-to-urban migrant families' capacity to deal with contingencies, such as serious illness. The constant financial pressure and limited economic capacity to deal with family

contingencies chiefly drag well-educated rural-to-urban migrants into an overwhelming sense of uncertainty.

7.2 Re-Evaluating China's New-Type Urbanization Project and 'Competition for Talent' among Newly Rising Metropolises

Unlike several recent studies which have attempted to evaluate the implementation of the new-type urbanization project from the top-down perspective, this study presents a more critical perspective to understand the nature of China's new wave of urbanization and the 'competition for talent' between new-rising metropolises (*xin yi xian chengshi qiangren dazhan*). I first argue that previous policy studies have largely overlooked how the radical implementation of these ambitious projects might influence well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' situation in the urban labour market and their further settling down in the urban areas. More specifically, I argue that previous studies have disregarded well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' voices on how the radical implementation of the new-type urbanization project and the deepening of inter-urban competition for industry and investment might influence their settling down and further development in urban areas. Based on informants' relatively easiness of obtaining urban *hukou*

and white-collar occupations in Wuhan Provincial City, this study admits that the ‘university-graduate friendly’ projects, as the important feature of new-type urbanization project, have largely reduced non-local well-educated young adults’ difficulties of obtaining local permanent *hukou* and making a living in metropolitan areas. However, the positive effect of such ‘university-graduate friendly’ project is quite limited. Drawing on the intensive fieldwork on the MCCSW project (*baiwan da xuesheng liuhan gongcheng*) in Wuhan Provincial City, this research rejects the local government’s overly optimistic vision of the project in broadening up well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ path towards personal development. Through the in-depth investigations on the job fairs and university graduates’ affordable housing project in Wuhan Provincial City, this research highlights that the failure of the MCCSW project in assisting well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to fulfil their development in Wuhan is deeply embedded in and shaped by the irreconcilable tension between the nature of such an ambitious project and well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ aspirations of being urban middle class.

Inspired by David Harvey’s critical analysis (1989) on the ‘urban entrepreneurialism’, this thesis further discloses the nature of both the radical urbanization project and the MCCSW project in Wuhan. Through entirely situating the analysis in China’s new socioeconomic context, in which the flow of capital, labour, and other resources is being rapidly accelerated, this research argues

that the radical urbanization and Wuhan's active involvement in attracting university graduates to settle down are mainly designed to enhance Wuhan's relative advantages in the fierce inter-urban competition for attracting the industries and investments transferred from developed coastal regions. The flow of capital, labour, and other types of resources among different regions of China is being significantly accelerated by China's active integration into neoliberal globalization. As David Harvey (1989) argues, the significant reduction in spatial barriers to the movement of goods, people, money, and information has contributed to enhancing the significance of the qualities of a place and strengthening the vigour of inter-urban competition for capitalist development. The enhanced sensitivity of investors towards the spatial differences among inland metropolises has undoubtedly triggered the competition among these newly rising metropolises in terms of the attractiveness of investments and industries.

Meanwhile, the local authorities of a group of inland metropolises (e.g. Wuhan, Xi'an, Nanjing, and Chengdu, among others), which are constantly facing the severe pressure of industrial upgrading and constant risk of talent outflow, are impelled to implement a series of policies to increase the attractiveness of their cities in regard to investment, industries, and talents. For Wuhan Provincial City, in which the higher educational resources and human capital are concentrated, attracting a large troop of university graduates to settle down and retaining them as

the pool of cheap intellectual labour would be the effective strategies to enhance its relative advantage in such fierce inter-urban competition. However, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, especially those who have strong aspirations of being urban middle class, are reluctant to take up the role of cheap intellectual labour assigned by the MCCSW project.

From a bottom-up and critical perspective, this research further suggests that, rather than yielding well-educated rural-to-urban migrants with opportunities for achieving urban middle-class membership, the MCCSW project has not significantly changed well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' relatively disadvantaged position in the labour market and in obtaining housing ownership in Wuhan Provincial City (Liu & Jin, 2019; Liu & Li, 2017; Yang, Zhou & Zheng, 2019). Given the critical analysis on the MCCSW project presented in Chapter Five, this thesis calls for greater efforts in explicating, from a bottom-up perspective, how the fierce competition among the newly rising metropolises for well-educated young adults might influence well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' chances of attaining urban middle-class membership through conducting the comparative study between Wuhan Provincial City and other metropolises in which 'university-graduate friendly' project is implemented, i.e., Xi'an, Chengdu, Hangzhou.

7.3 The Changing Migration Pattern and Social Stratification Mechanism in the Era of New-Type Urbanization Projects

This study mainly engages with China's migration studies and social stratification studies, as well as provides theoretical insights into the newly-changing migration pattern and social stratification mechanism in the era of new-type urbanization project.

First, this thesis enriches our understanding on well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' settlement intention through deploying the lens of bound agency to penetrate migrants' choice of migration.

Like other non-local migrants with continuous investment in human capital, including formal schooling and professional training and skills upgrading, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants have strong expectation and motivation to permanently settle down in metropolitan areas (Cai & Wang, 2008; De Brauw et al., 2002; Liu, Wang & Chen, 2016; Wang, Ren & Liu, 2018). Besides identifying well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' strong permanent settlement intention, this thesis finds that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants prefer to fulfill their permanent settlement intention via obtaining formal homeownership in metropolitan area. Through the lens of bound agency, this thesis further insists well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' strong aspiration of

obtaining formal homeownership is not only resulted from the close tie between formal homeownership and residents' access to high-quality public resource, service and facilities in urban area (Wu, Edensor & Cheng, 2018; Wu, zhang & Waley, 2016) and growing importance of homeownership in urban middle-class formation (Coulson & Tang, 2013; Fleischer, 2007; Tang, 2017, 2013; Zhu, 2011). Besides, these migrants' strong aspiration of urban homeownership is the product of their metropolis-oriented habitus, which is generated from their past experience of geographic mobility under the rural-urban dichotomy. Well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' metropolis-oriented perceptual framework impels them to regard urban homeownership as the material basis which can both enhance their role of high achievers in front of their rural peers and objectify their urban resident's status in metropolitan area. Therefore, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants express strong aspiration of obtaining homeownership despite the rocketing housing price in metropolitan area. Based on the new change of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' settlement intention, this research argues that migrants' experience of geographic mobility not only changes their expectation of whom they want to be in urban area, but also shapes their strategies to fulfill such expectation.

More importantly, echo recent studies which focus on the well-educated returned youths (Liu & Li, 2017; Lian, 2015; Shen & Zhang, 2017; Yang, 2016), this thesis provides the timely insight into

the new migration pattern of well-educated returned migrants in the era of new-type urbanization project. Rather than merely understanding these migrants' choice of moving back within the 'push-pull' mechanism, this thesis argues that well-educated returned migrants' choice of moving back to hometown city is not only the negotiation they made under the difficulties they encounter in metropolitan area, but also the product of their place attachment towards hometown and aspiration of receiving urban dream. Their relative advantage in job hunting and career development in smaller cities and their strong place attachment towards hometown region impel well-educated returned youths to regard hometown city as the arena in which they can more easily fulfill their urban middle-class dream and family formation plan. This dynamic is the fundamental factor which leads to returned migrants' choice of moving to smaller city in their hometown region. However, this dynamic between returned migrants' place attachment and their relative advantage in smaller cities has been overlooked in previous studies. Besides, drawing on the systematic analysis of China's new-type urbanization project, this research argues that this new migration pattern of well-educated returnees is encouraged and enabled by China's radical attempts to boost urbanization in smaller cities of the urban agglomerations. Within China's initiates of new-type urbanization project, smaller cities of the urban agglomerations are designed to be the zone to accept the transferred industries and absorb the extra migrants from nearby metropolises. Based on the insight into returned youths' migration pattern, this research argues the

interplay between individual's geographic mobility and social mobility should not be understood as the unidirectional relationship in which the geographic mobility from undeveloped to developed district will bring individual with upward social mobility. Under the context of new-type urbanization project, the choice of moving from metropolitan region to smaller cities, which is conventionally understood as the geographic mobility from developed to less developed district, will also bring well-educated migrants with upward social mobility in their destination city.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of numerous factors (i.e. financial income, occupational status, educational background, consumption, and lifestyle) in shaping an individual's class position and upward social mobility in urban areas, this research identifies the increasing importance of homeownership in shaping well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' life chances and class position in urban areas, especially metropolitan areas, under the context of the new-type urbanization project. The majority of recent social stratification studies have highlighted the importance of homeownership as an important financial asset and investment, in defining economically privileged classes in urban China (Coulson & Tang, 2013; Li & Wang, 2012; Tang, 2017, 2013; Theurillat et al., 2017). Besides echoing those studies, this research further points out that the close tie between urban residents' access to high-quality public provision and formal homeownership, especially the ownership of a private flat in a gated community, together with the

rocketing housing price have gradually made the urban housing market as the important mechanism which stratifies urban residents' life chance and social status in urban areas according to their household wealth. More specifically, individuals from wealthy households can use their urban homeownership to ensure their access to high-quality public provision and convenient urban facilities, as well as generate more economic income through renting out extra private flat. While those households without the capacity to afford urban homeownership are being excluded from enjoying the fruits and developments brought by the rapid urbanization. Moreover, such social stratification mechanism of urban housing market is reinforced by the socioeconomic and demographic changes brought by the new-type urbanization project (Chen et al., 2018; Chen, Liu & Lu, 2016; Guan et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2017; Tan, Xu & Zhang, 2016; Wang et al., 2015; Zheng, Wang & Cao, 2014).

Through illuminating the unequal allocation of sense of uncertainty between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants and their counterparts with urban middle-class backgrounds, this research highlights that homeownership has also become an important mechanism which serves to stratify urban residents' financial capacity in terms of family origin under the context of the new-type urbanization project. The heavy down payment and mortgage would situate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants within the 'salaried class' status (Miao, 2017, et al.), which refers to a

group of young adults with higher educational backgrounds and white-collar occupations but limited financial capacity, or would place them in an ‘asset-rich-money-poor’ situation (Mandic, 2010). While simultaneously, well-educated young adults from urban middle-class families can receive effective family support in affording their housing mortgages, children’s extra-curricular lessons, and other luxurious forms of consumption (Or, 2017).

Drawing on the growing importance of housing market in stratifying urban residents’ life chance and social status, this study also envisions well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ future class position in urban society. Most well-educated rural-to-urban migrants without homeownership will have to continue their transient, troubled presence, and are more likely to be retained within the migrant ‘mass’ in metropolitan area even though they are entitled with the right to obtain urban permanent *hukou*. For well-educated rural-to-urban migrants who have obtained private flats in Wuhan, their ownership of these private flats does not immediately enable them to obtain middle-class membership. Even though their livelihood in Wuhan Provincial City is much more stable than the livelihood of their counterparts without homeownership, the heavy down payments and mortgages involved contribute to situating this group of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants within the ‘salaried class’ (Miao, 2017, et al) or place them in an ‘asset-rich-money-poor’ situation (Mandic, 2010).

For well-educated returned migrants in Xiaogan Prefecture City, the relative but apparent advantages brought by the institutionalized and embodied cultural capital they acquired in first-tier universities in Wuhan enable them to obtain permanent, respectable, and relatively well-paid occupations offered by governmental organizations, state-owned enterprises, or public schools in hometown city. Meanwhile, the relative scarcity of this cultural capital provides well-educated returned migrants with enough channels to obtain career promotion through the meritocratic pathway. Altogether, these advantages might enable well-educated returned migrants to transfer their cultural capital into economic capital, and fulfil their urban middle-class dreams in hometown city. Although the radical socioeconomic changes brought by the Wuhan-Xiaogan Integration Project have largely increased their exposure to financial pressure brought by the rising housing price, this research asserts that well-educated returned migrants are more likely to have stable livelihood and considerable consumption capacity, as well as become urban middle class in Xiaogan Prefecture.

In a nutshell, this thesis highlights the growing importance of housing market in stratifying urban residents' life chance and social status in city under the context of new-type urbanization project.

Because of this notable stratification mechanism, the advantaged status of urban middle-class

young adults is largely maintained and reproduced through receiving family support in affording private flat in developed district of city. While simultaneously, the high housing price and heavy mortgage situate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants within an ‘asset-rich-money-poor’ situation. This disadvantaged situation cannot be changed by well-educated migrants in a short period due to their lack of effective family financial support. Thus, this study further argues that individual’s possession of private flat or housing status would gradually supplement occupational status, *hukou* status and financial income to be an important indicator to measure individual’s class position and further identify urban middle class in the era of new-type urbanization project.

7.4 Policy Implications

Based on the empirical findings discussed above, this study will raise the following policy suggestions to local authorities of both Wuhan and Xiaogan to solve well-educated rural-to-urban migrants’ financial of obtaining occupational development, access to high-quality public service and resource, as well as ownership of a private flat in urban areas. Through implementing the following policy reforms, local authorities of Wuhan and Xiaogan can effectively fulfill their intention of grabbing migrants with human capital and professional skills for sustainable

development under the context of new-type urbanization project.

7.4.1 Reforming the Graduate's Internship Program of First-Tier Universities: Lessons for Policymakers

As elucidated in the empirical chapters, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants can only rely on their salary to accumulate the economic capital for engaging in the intensive pursuit of being urban middle class status under the context of the new-type urbanization project. Thus, obtaining well-paid occupations or achieving occupational promotion might be the few effective strategies for well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to ensure their survival and increase their salary in urban areas, particularly metropolises.

However, as indicated in Chapters Four and Five, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are disadvantaged among the fierce competition, both for relatively well-paid occupations in the labour market and occupational promotion, due to their deficiency of social capital and embodied cultural capital. Given the fact that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants cannot reverse the disadvantaged position they hold as a result of such deficiencies, enhancing well-educated

rural-to-urban migrants' employability, which is widely deployed by education scholars to understand the congruity between the characteristics of graduates and specific needs of the labour market (Guilbert et al., 2016; Kuzminov, Sorokin & Froumin, 2019), is a promising method for policymakers to increase well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' chances of achieving their middle-class dream. As elucidated in Chapter Five, the general human capital acquired from the pursuit of routine education at a university is largely depreciated in the labour market due to the oversupply of university graduates, while practical experience, or occupation-relevant experience, is widely recognized by employers as one of the most important criteria to select candidates for well-paid, managerial positions. Thus, reforming the university graduates' internship programme to assist graduates, particularly graduates with rural origins, in increasing their practical experience, which is desirable in the labour market, is an effective strategy for policymakers to enhance well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' employability.

As reflected by the research participants, most of the internship programmes offered by first-tier universities are short-term and far from providing enough practical experience and other forms of support to their later career development. Thus, establishing a 'university-enterprise joint internship programme' might be an effective alternative to replace the current inflexible internship programme. The university could sign an agreement with relevant enterprises to co-organize such

a programme, through which the university could send students who have completed major subjects (normally year-three students in a four-year programme) to relevant enterprises to participate in a minimum one-year internship programme. Through participating in such an intensive internship programme, university graduates, especially those with rural origins, could acquire the practical skills and experience which are valued by employers. In addition, they would have more opportunities and time to accumulate social capital and cultural capital, which may be helpful to their career development. Through participating in this target-oriented internship programme, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' employability, especially their employability within well-paid and managerial occupations, would be significantly improved.

7.4.2 Changing the 'School District' Policy

Based on the empirical data presented in Chapters Four and Six, children's access to high-quality educational resources is an important dimension which underpins well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' definition of urban middle-class membership, including both well-educated migrants in Wuhan Provincial City and returned migrants in Xiaogan Prefecture City. This finding is supported by several recent studies, which have indicated that the easiness for their children to

receive a high-quality education is an important factor that influences well-educated rural-to-urban couples' choice of city in which to settle down (Liu & Jin, 2019; Yang, Zhou & Zheng, 2019). However, due to the unequal geographical allocation of public educational resources and the persistence of the 'school district policy', children's access to educational resources offered by public schools is largely restrained and determined by their family's homeownership, especially the geographic location of their family's private flat.

However, due to the inadequacy of family financial support, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants are strongly disadvantaged in purchasing the overly expensive private flats in the areas with better educational resources. More specifically, the average housing price in the areas with high-quality educational resources is generally unaffordable to well-educated rural-to-urban migrants. While some of them have bought private flats in Wuhan or Xiaogan, these private flats are located in relatively remote areas. Thus, the educational resources available to their children are quite limited. Moreover, due to inadequacy of social capital in urban areas, well-educated rural-to-urban migrant couples cannot mobilize effective *guanxi* to secure their children's access to key public schools as well as their urban middle-class counterparts.

Well-educated rural-to-urban migrants not only recognize the importance of their children's access to the formal education offered by key public schools but also perceive extracurricular courses or after-school courses as another important layer of the high-quality educational resources which their children should receive. However, most of well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' families cannot afford extracurricular or after-school classes because their families' financial capacity is largely undermined by their housing mortgages. Unlike their urban middle-class counterparts, they cannot receive enough financial support from their parents to support their children's extracurricular expenses.

Previous studies have indicated that broadening rural young talents' access to key schools is an effective tactic to ensure more rural young adults have access to first-tier universities and opportunities to achieve upward social mobility (Liang et al., 2012). Thus, policy reforms should be undertaken to expand well-educated rural-to-urban migrant families' access to high-quality educational resources. These reforms should be organized mainly around the 'school district policy', which maintains the strong connection between homeownership and families' access to educational resources and further legitimizes the educational inequality between migrant and local middle-class families.

Given the fact that urban middle class families purchase ‘school district’ private flats as important investments to ensure their children’s access to key schools (Nie, 2019; Tang, 2013; Wu, Edensor & Cheng, 2018; Wu, Zhang & Waley, 2016), the policy reform should not be too radical (e.g. abolishing the ‘school district’ policy immediately); otherwise, these reforms may trigger discontent among the urban middle class and further intensify the contradiction between the urban middle class and migrant groups in the aspect of educational resource allocation. Thus, local authorities, particularly the local bureau of education, should enact modest reform strategies to shift the current educational inequality issues.

As previous researchers have indicated, the abolishment of enrolment exam competition during the years of compulsory schooling, as well as the introduction of the ‘school district’ policy, are the two institutional factors which have impelled urban middle-class families to purchase these ‘school district’ private flats as investments to ensure their children’s access to high-quality educational resources (Nie, 2019; Tang, 2013). Thus, the local authority should first re-introduce the enrolment exam in compulsory schooling, which would open it up to students with various social backgrounds. The examination should be organized and supervised by the Wuhan bureau of education. Through this open competition, the bureau of education in each administrative district should ensure that the first 500 children in the enrolment examination from families with local

hukou would be admitted to key schools regardless of social background, housing status, or other indicators of socioeconomic status. The other quotas of key schools would then be allocated to children from families with ownership of private flats and *hukou* belonging to the districts in which the key schools are located. This relatively modest reform strategy could both provide sufficient meritocratic pathways to children of well-educated rural-to-urban migrant households and provide urban middle-class families with opportunities to ensure their children's access to high-quality education through investing in 'school district' flats.

Moreover, the unequal geographic allocation of educational resources, particularly the high-quality compulsory education offered by public key schools, is another important factor which both encourages urban middle-class families to purchase 'school district' housing and excludes many rural-to-urban migrant families from enjoying high-quality public educational resources, as their limited financial capacity could only afford them private flats in remote districts with deficient public resources. Thus, encouraging key schools to open branch schools in remote districts or newly developed areas could be an efficient solution to reduce this inequality. In addition, the local authority should provide subsidies and other benefits to encourage experienced teaching staff of key schools to undertake teaching roles in these branch schools in remote areas.

7.4.3 Shifting the Public Resource Allocation and Expanding Public Resource Access in Urban Areas

Like their children's access to educational resources and services provided by key schools, urban residents' access to other public resources and services, convenient infrastructure, and modern facilities is also highly stratified through their homeownership both in Wuhan and Xiaogan, which means that urban residents with private flats in developed districts can easily and frequently enjoy high-quality medical services and public facilities, convenient transportation, and other facilities (e.g. modern plazas), while urban residents with private flats in remote areas or who rent flats in urban villages are largely excluded from enjoying such high-quality public resources and facilities.

This inequality in access to public resources, services, and facilities not only strongly shapes and differentiates urban residents' life chances in these rapidly urbanized regions but also stratifies urban residents' perception of their class status and the entire class structure. As elucidated in Chapters Four and Six, urban residents with private flats in developed or prosperous districts, including returned migrants who have obtained private flat in the East District of Xiaogan Prefecture City perceive themselves as the members of middle class in the city in which they have settled down. Meanwhile, those urban residents, especially well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, without homeownership in developed or prosperous districts tend to place themselves in lower

positions in the social stratification structure. The close connection between homeownership and access to high-quality public resources and services, convenient facilities, and modern lifestyle becomes the material basis for urban residents with private flats in prosperous/developed districts to construct their sense of belonging to the high *suzhi* group and differentiate themselves from the migrant 'mass'. In contrast, the deficiency of public resources, services, facilities, and other infrastructure in remote area is an important factor which makes many well-educated rural-to-urban migrants reluctant to obtain homeownership, even of a private flat from the graduate affordable housing project, in remote areas. This finding is supported by recent studies which indicate that the housing quality, supporting facilities, estate management, and services of the public rental housing in China's newly rising metropolises, such as Nanjing and Chongqing, are strongly associated with residential (dis) satisfaction and choice of homeownership (Gan et al., 2016; Ren & Folmer, 2017).

This socioeconomic situation leads to the uncomfortable fact that many urban migrants, including those young talents with higher educational backgrounds, are excluded from enjoying the high-quality public services, resources, and facilities which are commonly enjoyed by their urban middle-class counterparts, even though they have obtained urban *hukou* and permanent occupations. Thus, dismantling the institutional ties between homeownership and urban residents'

access to high-quality public resources, facilities, and services should be the first step that the local authorities must take to solve this issue. The local authorities of Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City should implement a series of policies to expand access to high-quality public services, resources, and facilities to all urban residents with local *hukou* regardless of their homeownership and the geographic location of their private flats.

In addition, local authorities of both Wuhan and Xiaogan should allocate greater expenditure to expanding transportation lines (e.g. subway line, bus line, and urban viaducts) and other forms of infrastructure (i.e. public hospitals and sports centers) in remote areas, especially those areas in which the public rental housing project or graduate affordable housing project is located. Moreover, local authorities should provide tax preferential and fiscal subsidy policies to encourage real estate developers to open commercial plazas and other leisure facilities, which are important indicators of a modern lifestyle, in the areas in which the affordable housing project is located.

7.4.4 Reforming the ‘Economically Affordable Housing’ System in Urban Areas

As described in Chapter Five, the ‘university-graduate affordable housing’ programme cannot

effectively satisfy university graduates' demand for private flats in Wuhan. Thus, the local authority of Wuhan Provincial City should first develop more 'graduate affordable housing' projects to satisfy well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' demand for affordable private flats.

Second, the developers of the affordable housing project and local authority should make firm efforts to ensure the transparency and fairness of the lottery session of the housing project. Given what has been discussed in Chapter Five, few buyers can mobilize their social networks to bypass the lottery session to purchase a private flat from the affordable housing project. As a result of the deficiency of effective *guanxi* in Wuhan, well-educated rural-to-urban migrants must participate in the lottery session and may miss the chance to purchase a private flat. Moreover, there is currently no policy to prevent buyers from transferring the ownership of private flats from affordable housing projects. This policy flaw also contributes to increasing well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' difficulty in obtaining private flats from the affordable housing projects. To solve this issue, the local authority of Wuhan Provincial City should strictly supervise the lottery sessions of affordable housing projects. More specifically, local authorities should ensure all buyers are university/college graduates who have obtained Wuhan local *hukou* within the last five years. Meanwhile, the local authorities and developers of the affordable housing project should divulge the details of the lottery session to the public. The local authorities should also implement a strict

policy that forbids the ownership transfer of affordable housing projects for the first five years.

For returned youths in Xiaogan Prefecture City, the local authority of this city should allow the work units which hire relatively large numbers of university graduates (e.g. the Xiaogan branch of the People's Bank) to request land to build dormitories or apartments for their employees. Moreover, these work units should allow young employees, especially those with newly formed families, to purchase partial ownership of the private flat in employees' apartments or dormitories if they have lived in the apartment/dormitory for at least five years.

7.4.5 Providing Financial Support to Well-Educated Rural-to-Urban Migrants for Settling Down

Like previous studies which have attempted to capture the heterogeneity of migratory behaviors and choice of destination, this research indicates that well-educated rural-to-urban migrants, like other migrants with professional skills or human capital, have strong willingness to settle down in the city in which they work (Liu & Xu, 2017). However, as indicated in the empirical chapters, the homeownership has become the most important factor which influences well-educated

rural-to-urban migrants' assimilation and shapes their life chances in the urban environment. Due to the deficiency of family financial support as well as the radical socioeconomic changes brought by the implementation of the new-type urbanization project, most well-educated rural-to-urban migrants cannot easily obtain ownership of a private flat and enjoy the high-quality public resources, services, and facilities which are connected to homeownership. This situation makes well-educated rural-to-urban migrants the *de facto* urban population with alien or marginal urban citizenship. This situation further forces some well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to maintain their rural *hukou* to ensure their rural land-use right as insurance in case they fail to prosper in the city (Zhang & Wang, 2010).

Thus, solving well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' financial difficulty in attaining the homeownership in the cities in which they are living is the fundamental reform which Wuhan and Xiaogan local authorities should implement.

Given that most well-educated rural-to-urban migrants lack financial support from their families to purchase private flats in urban areas, the local authorities should first implement policies that allow well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to sell their rural land-use rights to receive a subsidy

on their housing down payment if they choose to purchase a private flat from the affordable housing project.

To alleviate well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' subsequent financial pressure from housing mortgages, the local authorities and bankers should eliminate mortgage interest in the first ten years for university graduates who have bought the private flat from affordable housing projects.

Through providing financial support to well-educated rural-to-urban migrants for obtaining homeownership in urban areas, both Wuhan and Xiaogan local authorities could effectively attract well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to settle down, as well as further obtain the access to stable livelihood and high-quality educational resources and services enjoyed by their urban middle-class counterparts.

7.5 Recommendations for the Future Study

Situated within the varying tensions well-educated rural-to-urban migrants experienced in their

pursuit of urban middle-class membership under the context of the new-type urbanization project, this research has particularly deployed a bottom-up perspective to understand how well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' experience of geographic mobility shapes their perceptions of who they are, of urban middle-class membership, of where they want to be urban middle class, and their strategies to fulfil their urban middle-class dreams. Drawing on well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' experience of pursuing urban middle-class membership in rapidly urbanized Wuhan Provincial City and Xiaogan Prefecture City, this research highlights how the socioeconomic shifts brought by the radical implementation of the new-type urbanization project have shaped the rules of the pursuit of urban middle-class membership, as well as further sheds light on the finding that the attributes now expected in the new pursuit of middle class status are actually reflective of the economic, social, and cultural capital most commonly held by affluent, local families. Through these investigations, this research has illustrated how the rapid implementation of the new-type urbanization project perpetuates the class inequality between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants and their local middle-class counterparts, as well as causes most of the well-educated rural-to-urban migrants to fall into an overwhelming sense of uncertainty, instead of assisting them in becoming urban middle class.

Future studies should first incorporate the silenced voices of well-educated migrants with urban

backgrounds, or those well-educated migrants who grew up in urban families, to understand how the socioeconomic changes brought by the new-type urbanization project have shaped their chosen destination, occupational development, and family formation plan. Previous studies have indicated a marked heterogeneity in migrants attainment among migrants and further highlight that most gains occur among those with urban origins and with better educational backgrounds (Wu & Wang, 2014). However, it is still necessary to deploy a bottom-up perspective to understand how this group of well-educated migrants' life experiences, particularly their experience of geographic mobility, have shaped their perceptions of who they are, whom they want to be, where they want to be those people, as well as strategies they deploy to achieve such goals. More importantly, future studies should conduct a systematic comparison between well-educated rural-to-urban migrants and well-educated migrants with urban origins in terms of their experience of pursuing upward social mobility in cities, especially metropolitan areas. The possible difference between well-educated migrants with urban origins and those with migrant backgrounds in terms of their sense of uncertainty could be the empirical focus of future studies. In doing so, future studies could provide a more holistic picture of the ongoing processes of class formation and class stratification under the context of the new-type urbanization project.

Second, comprising a significant portion of university graduates with rural backgrounds,

well-educated rural young adults who choose to return to their rural hometowns to start their own businesses (*fan xiang qingnian*) have not been included in this research. Recent scholars have mainly deployed a top-down perspective to assess whether the supporting policies provided by the government can assist those returned rural young talents to successfully re-assimilate into their rural hometowns and start up their own businesses, as well as further examine whether these returned rural young talents can bring development and prosperity to their rural hometowns (Fan, Yang & Chen, 2016; Liu, 2019; Qiu, Fan & Chen; 2015). However, there is still a necessity to incorporate these returned rural talents' voices to understand their motivations to return and how the experience of this particular return migration shapes their perceptions of who they are, whom they want to be, and the strategies they deploy to achieve such goals. Future studies should also investigate how these returned rural talents and their hometown businesses influence the class stratification structure in rural society.

Third, this research has glimpsed the gender and ethnic differences among well-educated rural-to-urban migrants in terms of their choice of destination, their family formation plan, and their self-perception of their class status. However, how well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' gender and ethnic backgrounds intertwine with their rural origin to shape their experience of geographic mobility, and further influence their perceptions of whom they want to be, where they

want to be those people, and the strategies they deploy based on such subjectivity, have partly been overlooked in this study. Thus, future studies should aim to present a detailed and systematic elucidation on the complex interactions between class, gender, and ethnic background in well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' pursuit of urban middle-class membership in rapidly urbanized China.

Forth, this research has only included Wuhan Provincial City and its agglomeration circle into the scope. However, there are other newly-rising metropolises, i.e., Xi'an, Chengdu, Hangzhou, and their agglomeration circles which actively engage in the inter-urban competition to attract non-local university graduates. Thus, future studies can be based on the systematic comparison between these newly-rising metropolitan agglomerations to comprehensively understand the implementation of 'university-graduate friendly' project and its impact on well-educated rural-to-urban migrants' pattern of migration, urban life chance, and class status in urban society.

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Appendix A

Guideline for In-depth Interviews

Pre-interview

I'll look for the biography or CV of the interviewee. Also, I will check and analyze the background information of interviewee's current occupation and residential city.

Interview

Early Life

Family Background: Can you briefly introduce your family background, does it influence on your later life experience?

Parents: Could you please introduce the basic information of your parents. For example, their occupations, their characters. Could you please describe your relationship with your parents. For example, are you close to them?

Peers: Could you please introduce important friends in primary school, junior high or senior high school? What influence did they have on your life experience?

Participant's University Life

Could you please introduce basic information about your university? What's your major? Can you summarize your university life?

Could you please introduce your academic performance when studying at the university? Whether you have been the party member?

Could you please introduce your relationship with your classmates and teachers? Did you have important/close friends in the university? What do you think of the relationships between you and your friends?

University-to-Work Transition

Could you please describe your experience of university-to-work transition, such as the experience

of job seeking?

What were your original choices for occupation and residential city before graduating from the university?

What were your later decisions for occupation and residential city after graduation? Are there any differences between your original choices and later decisions?

What factors have influenced your decision-making process? Do you think there was any policy influenced your decision-making in terms of occupation and residential city?

Working Career

Current Occupation: Can you describe your attitude toward your current occupation? Such as your work role, your relationship with colleagues and leaders, your prospect of promotion.

Your current job is your first job? If no, can you explain why you changed your job?

To what extent your social life is connected with work? Do you have any friends in your work unit or company?

Do you have any plan for your career development? What strategies did you used and will use for career development?

Life and Leisure

Can you briefly describe your current residential city and your attitude towards this city?

Are you single or in affection or married? Can you briefly introduce your plan for the relationship?

Do you have any friends in this city? Can you introduce basic information about your friends in this city? Have they influenced your life in this city?

Do you have any hobby outside of work? What will you do in your leisure time?

Plan for Later Life

Do you have a plan for buying housing in your current residential city?

Do you have a plan for having children?

Open Questions

Looking back on your life experience from the university-to-work transition to the current situation, what's understanding you have towards this life course? Do you think you have achieved upward social mobility?

On the whole, do you think you have achieved upward social mobility ?

Appendix B



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Investigating Well-Educated Urban Migrant's Upward Social Mobility Chance under the Context of New-Type Urbanization Project

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research conducted
by _____.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and
published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e. my personal details will not be
revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand
the benefit and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any
time without penalty of any kind.

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Name of researcher _____

Signature of researcher _____

Date _____



**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (PARTICIPANT'S
PARENTS/OTHER RELATIVES/PEERS)
Investigating Well-Educated Urban Migrant's Upward Social Mobility Chance
under the Context of New-Type Urbanization Project**

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research conducted
by _____.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and
published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e. my personal details will not be
revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand
the benefit and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any
time without penalty of any kind.

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Name of researcher _____

Signature of researcher _____

Date _____

参与研究同意书

「新型城镇化背景下高知识城市新移民社会流动性问题」

本人_____同意参与由_____开展的上述研究。

本人知悉此研究所得的资料可能被用作日后的研究及发表，但本人的私隐权利将得以保留，即本人的个人资料不会被公开。

研究人员已向本人清楚解释研究程序，本人明了当中涉及的利益及风险；本人自愿参与研究项目。

本人知悉本人有权就程序的任何部分提出疑问，并有权随时退出而不受任何惩处。

参与者姓名 _____

参与者签署 _____

研究人员姓名 _____

研究人员签署 _____

日期 _____

参与研究〔父母/其他亲属/伙伴〕同意书

「新型城镇化背景下高知识城市新移民社会流动性问题」

本人 _____ 同意让 _____ 参与上述研究。

本人知悉此研究所得的资料可能被用作日后的研究及发表，但参与者的私隐权利将得以保留，即参与者的个人资料不会被公开。

研究人员已向本人及参与者清楚解释研究程序，本人明了当中涉及的利益及风险；本人及参与者自愿参与研究项目。

本人知悉本人及参与者有权就程序的任何部分提出疑问，并有权随时退出而不受任何惩处。

参与者父母/其他亲属/伙伴姓名 _____

参与者父母/其他亲属/伙伴签署 _____

研究人员姓名 _____

研究人员签署 _____

日期 _____

Appendix C



Investigating Well-Educated Urban Migrant's Upward Social Mobility Chance under the Context of New-Type Urbanization Project

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Xu Heng, who is a staff member / post-graduate / undergraduate student of the Department of Applied Social Science in The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The project has been approved by the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee (HSESC) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HSESC Reference Number: HSEARS20180206004).

The aim of this study is investigating well-educated urban migrant's upward social mobility chance under the context of new urbanization project. The study will involve completing a interview, which will take you about one or two hours. The interview is about your family background, your experience of university-to-work transition, your current working and living conditions in the residential city (i.e. monthly income, living expense, current occupation) and other spheres related to upward social mobility. All information related to you will remain confidential and will be identifiable by codes only known to the researcher. After completing the study, all the records related to your personal information will be destroyed.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact the principal investigator Dr Koo Ching Hua, Anita (tel. no.: (852) 2766- / email: ssakoo@) or Mr. Xu Heng (tel. no.: (852) 9601- / email: xu.h.xu@).

You have every right to withdraw from the study before or during the interview without penalty of any kind.

If you have any complaints about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact Miss Cherrie Mok, Secretary of the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-Committee of The Hong

Kong Polytechnic University in writing (c/o Research Office of the University) stating clearly the responsible person and department of this study as well as the HSESC Reference Number.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Department of Applied Social Science in The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Dr Koo Ching Hua

Principal Investigator/Chief Investigator

Mr Xu Heng

Co-Investigator

2018/02/03

邀请参与「新型城镇化背景下高知识城市新移民社会流动性问题」研究

您好！我们诚意邀请您参与本研究项目。

本研究主要探讨新型城镇化背景下接受过正规高等教育的城市新移民在现居城市的生活条件、工作状况以及向上社会流动机会等问题。您在访谈中所做的答复将会被使用为分析的一部分。衷心希望您提供准确的资料，以使调查的结果具代表性及真确性。

此访谈大约需要一到两个小时。问题主要涉及您个人的成长和教育背景（例如在各阶段的学习经历），您在大学时期的表现，您在大学毕业季谋求工作以及规划未来发展时的经历、在现居城市的生活状况，工作情况（例如月收入，生活开支和目前所从事的职业），以及向上社会流动的机会。是项调查搜集所得的一切资料将严加保密，并只作此调查分析之用，不作个别报告。所得的资料亦将于调查完成后销毁。

如欲了解是次研究之详情，您可以接洽本研究的主要研究人员，顾静华，目前任职于香港理工大学应用社会科学学系。联络方式如下，电话：(852) 2766- ，电子信箱：ssakoo@polyu.edu.hk。您或可以接洽本研究的研究人员，徐恒，目前就读于香港理工大学应用社会科学学系。联络方式如下，电话：(852) 9601- ，电子信箱：xu.h.xu@polyu.edu.hk。

本研究的参与纯属自愿。如果您决定不参与此研究，您的拒绝并不会受到任何的处罚。您并可以在过程中随时决定退出。

本研究项目已获香港理工大学的人类实验对象操守小组委员会 (HSESC) 或其代表核准 (HSESC 参考编号: HSEARS20180206004) 。

如果您对于本项目的研究操守有任何不满，您可经书信联络香港理工大学人类实验对象操守小组委员会的秘书莫小姐（经香港理工大学研究事务处转交），请在信函中注明该项目的负责人员，其所属系所以及相关 HSESC 参考编号。

对您的支持，先此致谢。

香港理工大学应用社会科学学系
副教授 顾静华博士
博士研究生 徐恒 启
2018 年 2 月 3 日