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# Vocational Experiences and Quality of Life of Migrants: Overview and Future Research

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## **Abstract**

Quality of life is a complicated concept that has attracted broad attention from multiple disciplines. This article introduces a set of studies that employ diverse approaches to explore how work, vocational, and career experiences shape quality of life among migrants, and proposes a future agenda to extend this stream of research. Specifically, operationalizing quality of life in different ways, research showcased in this special issue has demonstrated how international and intranational migrants achieve, maintain, and enhance their well-being in different life domains. Reflecting on the literature and the showcased studies, this article proposes that future research should advance the current inquiry by better categorizing vocational experiences, uniquely operationalizing of quality of life in migration contexts, taking a more culturally sensitive perspective, and broadening methodological approaches.

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# Vocational Experiences and Quality of Life of Migrants: Overview and Future Research

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**Keywords** Vocational experiences · Work · Career · Migrants · Quality of life · Well-being

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## 1 Introduction

Migration has become a worldwide phenomenon and is reshaping the world socioeconomically, culturally and politically. This change has also affected the workforces. While globalization has been driving the workforce to move across national boundaries, the urbanization and economic development have also been facilitating the intranational movement of workers. Research shows that the main reason for workers to migrate is to improve their quality of life (Navarro-Azorín and Artal-Tur 2015). However, migration appears to be a complex and stressful process, which makes the pursuit for improving the quality of life more difficult than what migrants would have expected (Ng et al. 2015). Migrants, both international and intranational, are confronted with unexpected challenges as well as prospective opportunities while adapting to unfamiliar and new environments. These challenges and opportunities play critical roles in shaping their quality of life.

One of the important areas where challenges and opportunities coexist for migrants resides in the vocational and career journey. According to Olwig and Sorensen (2003), vocational factors are powerful forces that influence migrants' general well-being, given that in many cases experiences related to work, as an essential part of one's life, can directly determine the success of an individual's transition and adaptation in the migration process. Other scholars in work and migration also contend that negative employment and work experiences (e.g., underemployment, unemployment, work adjustment difficulties) serve as key obstacles that prevent migrants from achieving stability and well-being (e.g., Man 2004). Due to the importance of vocational experiences for migrants, investigating these phenomena will not only enrich our understanding of migrants' work and career in an increasingly dynamic global work context, but will also generate new perspectives about how socioeconomic, cultural, political, environmental, and individual forces interplay to affect migrants' vocational/career experiences and subsequently sustain and improve their quality of life. This special issue puts together a series of papers that highlight how migrants' quality of life can be enhanced through their vocational experiences from diverse perspectives.

Indeed, quality of life is a rather complicated concept that is difficult to define, but is often used to broadly refer to well-being in various aspects that constitute one's life (Cantarero and Potter 2014; Jocham et al. 2006). Some researchers argue that quality of life covers physical, psychological and social well-being that individuals experience in different life domains (Rockwood et al. 2000), and tends to be a multidimensional, dynamic, and subjective construct (Jocham et al. 2006). This viewpoint has been dominated in the literature. From a subjective perspective, quality of life has been measured in many ways including life satisfaction (Frisch et al. 1992), subjective well-being (Costanza et al. 2007), health (Drotar 2014), psychological well-being (Ryff 1989), job satisfaction (London et al. 1977), and many others. With a focus on vocational experiences, contributors of this special issue have also assessed quality of life in different forms. For example, we have seen some authors focusing on job-related well-being such as job satisfaction (Li et al. 2016; Tian et al. 2016; Wang and Jing 2017), as well as how migrants balance their work and life (Mu and Yeung 2017). We have also noticed that some authors addressed broader well-being in life such as overall subjective evaluation of life status (Le et al. 2016); and physical, mental, and social aspects of life quality (X. Chen et al. 2017). Additionally, some contributors have extended the indicators of quality of life to migrants' living condition (J. Chen et al. 2017), self-esteem and detachment/attachment to one's heritage (Bernardo et al. 2016). Looking at quality of life from multiple angles, this special issue

provides diverse approaches in informing our understanding about how to improve migrants' well-being in different life domains.

The papers included in this special issue have addressed the vocational and quality of life issues from different cultural contexts, with particular focuses on international migrants to Australia and intranational migrants within China. First, in terms of international migrants, authors in this issue have found that both personal and environmental factors could exert influences on their work-related and general well-being (Bernardo et al. 2016; Le et al. 2016; Tian et al. 2016). The personal characteristics investigated include cultural traits and competences and individual efforts in developing careers, and the environmental factors investigated include experienced supervisor abuse at work, and employment characteristics such as job security and skill utilization. Many of these factors are also reflected in Wang and Jing's (2017) integrative, universal framework that summarizes the determinants of international migrants' satisfaction at work. Second, in terms of intranational migrants, authors in this issue explored how personal resources, workplace context, and socioeconomic characteristics impact the quality of life for rural-to-urban migrants within China. Some of the key factors in this line of inquiry embrace *guanxi* (relationships as social capital especially in Chinese settings), personal power, employment, and vocational status. Considering that the samples of these studies were from five major metropolises of mainland China including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, and Wuhan, which are typical popular destinations for rural-to-urban migrants, we are confident that the findings of these papers are collectively representative and generalizable for the phenomena taking place in China. Overall, while we recognize that the collection of papers in this special issue tend to concentrate on the Asia–Pacific region, we believe that such a narrower focus renders us the ability to provide more in-depth and targeted insights regarding international and intranational migrants' vocational and wellbeing issues.

Another prevalent issue that migrant workers face in the host country or urban area is perceived discrimination and injustice, which has been found to be detrimental to migrants' well-being (Ng et al. 2015). Several papers in this special issue have tapped on this area, although discrimination has not been measured specifically. First, for international migrants who move to multicultural societies that have high proportion of migrants, the potential discrimination and prejudice against ethnic minorities appear to have negative impact on migrant workers when they seek secure employment and foresee career prospects. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Tian et al. (2016) found that skilled migrant workers in Australia tend to reap the benefits from secure jobs only when they can freely utilize their skills. Paying attention to social injustice perceived by migrants in Australia, Le et al. (2016) reported that social injustice, while bringing unpleasant experiences, may actually motivate migrants to devote more efforts to engage in career activities so as to bring positive changes in their status. Second, intranational migrants can also experience discrimination. In the Chinese context, discrimination against rural-to-urban migrants is prevalent, to a large extent due to the *hukou* system which has assisted the government to manage mobility of nationals yet created enormous inequalities in the society. These systematic discriminations/inequalities have led rural-to-urban migrants to stressful situations, making them difficult to balance work and life (Mu and Yeung 2017), and producing obstacles for them to gain decent housing conditions in metropolitan areas (J. Chen et al. 2017). We acknowledge that measures have been taken throughout the world to reduce or prevent discriminations, and these actions have been able to legally protect numerous migrants and improve their quality of life across domains. However, more efforts are still needed to combat discrimination and prejudice at a deeper level so that fundamental changes can occur to the belief systems of the society.

We organize the eight papers into two major themes: one relates to the quality of life issues of international migrant workers, and the other relates to that of intranational migrant workers. In next section, we introduce these themes by providing an overview of the papers in this special issue, followed by the proposal of a future research agenda.

## 2 Quality of Life Issues for International Migrant Workers

International migration has a long history where countless human movements have occurred across borders. In typical immigration countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, the number of international migrant workers has been increasing rapidly in the past decades (e.g., Jensen and Rasmussen 2011). This trend of immigration has also started spreading across Europe (Kloek et al. 2013) and in several Asian countries and regions (Chan 2012), due to the fast-growing international collaboration and communication. For international migrant workers to fully integrate into, and lead a quality life in, the host country, they have to overcome substantial challenges such as potential prejudice (Stephan et al. 1999) and cultural and language differences (Chauhdry 2016). This assertion should be prevalent in various immigrant countries, particularly in Western developed countries. For example, past research demonstrates that many immigrant workers in Western societies have had experience of being discriminated against or abused at work (Bauder 2003), and these events can lead to negative feelings about their work and daily life. Similarly, for instance, it is not uncommon that cultural and language barriers are salient factors that prevent immigrant workers from acquiring desirable employment (de Castro et al. 2006) and thus potentially harm their well-being. In this special issue, four groups of researchers have investigated and analyzed international migrants to identify important sources contributing to their quality of life, which is measured by diverse approaches. While the first two papers start from employment characteristics to explore immigrant workers' job-related, psychological, and general well-being, the third paper focuses on immigrant workers' cultural competence in influencing their life satisfaction through shaping the way they engage in career activities. The last paper is a review that highlights the effects of personal and situational factors, both work- and non-work-related, on immigrants' job satisfaction. Although having not been explicated systematically, all these papers have, to a certain degree, directly or indirectly addressed some of the discrimination, prejudice, and disadvantages international migrant workers may have encountered in the host country.

Tian, Wang, and Chia's paper examined two important features (job security and skill utilization) of employment to understand job satisfaction among skilled migrant workers in Australia. They offered innovative insights by comparing skilled migrants with the local counterparts born in Australia in terms of how the two employment characteristics can interact to shape job satisfaction in different groups (migrants vs. non-migrants). Based on the psychological contract theory, they argued that job security is a solid indicator that triggers individuals to sense relational contract, which leads to positive attitudes, behaviors, and well-being. In light of the job characteristics theory, they further contended that skill utilization fosters positive self-esteem and self-identity and thus may be a source of job satisfaction. Using the sample including both migrants and local workers, they confirmed that both job security and skill utilization are positively related to job satisfaction. More importantly, they found the job security tends to be a stronger predictor of job satisfaction when employees experience a higher level of skill utilization at work. This

finding is in accordance with their theoretical claim that employees with high skill utilization, due to its ability to develop positive self-evaluations (e.g., self-identity and confidence in the workplace) that drive employees to view job security from a positive light, can strengthen the influence of job security on job satisfaction. Interestingly, they noticed that only among skilled migrant workers skill utilization served as a moderator in the job security–job satisfaction relationship. In contrast, skill utilization did not appear to impact this relationship for Australia-born workers. This study indicates that it is important to consider special characteristics of target groups, particularly migration status, when speculating the effects of job security and skill utilization on job satisfaction, given that high job security may not necessarily increase job satisfaction among all workers. According to the authors, relative to local workers, the greater preference of job security among migrants with high skill utilization is to some extent due to the potential direct or indirect discrimination toward migrants in the job market.

Bernardo, Angeline, Dagonzo, and Ocampo investigated the impact of abusive supervision experienced in the workplace on migrant workers' self-esteem and heritage culture detachment, which are under the broad umbrella of psychological and general well-being. The authors focused on Filipino migrant workers in Macau who are under temporary employment contract, to explore how negative workplace experiences can have detrimental impact on migrants' psychological states or feelings outside the work context. Arguing that one's heritage culture may to some extent help migrants maintain positive feelings, they theorized that failure to maintain, or detachment from, their culture can be a negative indicator of their psychological well-being. Their results suggest that when migrants encounter abusive supervision at work, the resulting unpleasant experience tends to be harmful to their self-esteem, which in turn produces difficulties for them to maintain their heritage culture. This study reveals that self-esteem is an essential mechanism that can explain the linkage between workplace experience (e.g., abusive supervision) and heritage culture attachment/detachment. The highlights of this paper lie in its focus on within-Asia migration, as well as its attention to short-term rather than long-term or permanent international migrants, both of which are still relatively underexplored in terms of migrants' quality of life issues. These highlights should bring interesting insights that stimulate more studies to understand the work and life wellbeing of within-Asia immigrant workers and of the migrant workers who are on short-term employment contract. Another important area that the authors have mentioned, while not detailed, is that the feeling of being discriminated harms both migrants' acculturation to the host culture and their attachment to their heritage culture. Abusive supervision might be a source of immigrants workers' sense of discrimination due to the fact that many of them might attribute to the abuses experienced at work to their immigration status (Avery et al. 2010).

Le, Jiang and Nielson considered an important individual characteristic in shaping the quality of life for migrant workers, cultural intelligence (CQ), which is about individuals' competence to adjust to a new culture and to function effectively in cross-cultural settings (Earley and Ang 2003). The concept of CQ and in particular, the cognitive aspect of CQ which focuses on knowledge about cultural values, norms and practices (ditto), is highly relevant for studying the wellbeing of international migrant workers. The key contribution of this paper lies in that the authors have attempted to unpack the psychological mechanism of CQ as well as the boundary conditions of its effect. Using survey data collected from migrant employees in Australia, the authors first found that cognitive CQ shaped migrant workers' life satisfaction through exerting its effect on career engagement, such that having the cognitive capacity to perform in a cross-cultural setting allowed migrant workers to effectively engage in career-related activities, and this sense of control over

own careers further enhanced migrants' life satisfaction. Furthermore, the authors explored perceived social injustice as a moderator of the effect from CQ to life satisfaction. Due to that discrimination against ethnic minorities is still prevalent in many multicultural societies (e.g., de Beijl 2001; Dietz 2010), when migrant workers perceive social injustice, they may be particularly relying on their own psychological resources, such as CQ, to manage their career processes and to feel positive about their life. This study suggests that it is important to cultivate CQ among migrants, for its positive impact on shaping their career development and quality of life; it also highlights that CQ is particularly important in protecting migrants when they perceive discrimination and injustice in the new country.

Wang and Jing employed a rather comprehensive approach to synthesize the factors that contribute to immigrant workers' job satisfaction. They reviewed journal articles published since 1980 and identified a series of important determinants of job satisfaction among immigrant workers. These determinants are classified into two broad categories: work-related factors and non-work-specific factors. The authors found that from the immigration perspective, work-related factors include work environment/context, job characteristics, work-specific personal factors (e.g., factors related to personal competencies, individual psychological states, and work-related demographics such as tenure). Their review also highlights the importance of non-work-specific factors, containing general demographics (e.g., age, gender, and education etc.); culture-related attributes such as language, cultural traits, and acculturation; and society/community-related factors. The authors argued that each of the two broad categories consist of both personal and situational factors. They not only explained how personal and situational factors can shape immigrants' job satisfaction separately, but also drew on Arvey et al.'s (1991) interaction model to clarify how these two types of factors can interactively and jointly influence immigrants' satisfaction at work. Apart from providing a solid summary that is inclusive of the factors considered in the above three papers as already discussed, another area that all four papers converge concerns the issue of potential discrimination against migrant workers. For example, Wang and Jing specifically discussed and explained that discrimination, prejudice, and unfair treatment may cause health and psychosocial problems among immigrant workers and thus negatively affect their happiness. The strength of this paper is that it has provided a clear, comprehensive, and finer-grained picture of the sources of immigrants' job satisfaction. By revisiting and summarizing existing research that explores job satisfaction among immigrant workers, this paper provides an overarching framework that can inform future empirical research in this area.

### 3 Quality of Life Issues for Intranational Migrant Workers: A China Focus

It is widely known that large scale of rural-to-urban migration has taken place in China over the last few decades. Hundreds of millions of people migrate each year for pursuing economic and developmental opportunities in larger cities. Due to the transient nature of migration these people are often referred to as the "floating population" in China (e.g., Liang 2004). These migrant workers, however, often have to confront significantly higher living costs compared to their hometown, and the lack of social welfare support due to the still prevalent *hukou* system (household registration system) restriction in China (e.g., Choi and Peng 2016; Gaetano and Jacka 2013; Wang et al. 2015). Therefore, these migrant workers are faced with heightened challenges both at work and in life, which might greatly

jeopardize their psychological wellbeing and quality of life. Therefore, it is not surprising that substantial research attention has been devoted into understanding the work and life experiences of migrant workers in such a particular context. In this special issue, we have seen four groups of researchers approaching this important topic yet offering slightly different perspectives. The first two papers as below are closely hinged on the concept of social capital and studied how social capital can assist migrant workers to adapt to and settle in urban areas. The third study reveals interesting evidence in comparing migrant workers and local workers on how they balance work and life. The last paper takes a different perspective to examine how socioeconomic characteristics, including vocational status, are related to rural–urban migrant workers’ quality of life, as measured by housing inequality or condition.

Chen, Yu, Gong, Wang and Elliot considered social capital as an important predictor of the quality of life for rural-to-urban migrants. Drawing on existing literature, they argued that social capital allows migrant workers to have access to valuable information that facilitates their job search and reduces job-searching stress; it also enables migrant workers to build better networks and social support so that they can experience better job security and job satisfaction. Such experiences have positive effect on migrant workers’ quality of life. Based on this reasoning, the authors proposed an overarching relationship between social capital, employment experiences, and quality of life for migrant workers, such that social capital leads to better employment experiences for migrant workers, which subsequently shapes their quality of life. In testing such relationships, the authors conducted a quantitative study in a large metropolitan city in central China, Wuhan, which has one-fifth of its 10-million populations being rural-to-urban migrants. The authors adopted a rigorous sampling approach in randomly selecting participants into the study from the entire migrant population in the city. Their results suggested that the positive effect of social capital on quality of life of migrants was mediated by the migrants’ employment experiences, especially job security and job satisfaction. Overall, this study provides important implications in facilitating and enhancing quality of life for rural-to-urban migrant workers. By unpacking the critical role of social capital and its psychological mechanism, this study highlights the need of building and sustaining social capital of migrant workers so as to facilitate their successful transition and settlement in urban areas.

Li, Wang, Sun, Jiang, and Cheng unpacked the concept of social capital in more details by studying the impact of the relationship between rural-to-urban migrant workers and their supervisors. The authors focused on an established indigenous construct, *guanxi*, which refers to the state of social networks, relationships and ties that prevail in Chinese societies (Chen et al. 2013). In studying migrant workers’ vocational wellbeing such as job satisfaction, the authors suggested that migrant workers’ *guanxi* with their supervisors plays a particularly critical role. Based on social capital theory, they proposed that a high quality *guanxi* would enable migrant workers to be well connected and centrally located in the organization, which will give them, first, access to better network resources and interpersonal ties within the organization, and second, higher personal power in allocating personal and organizational resources at work. These two factors should further facilitate migrant workers’ wellbeing at work and enable them to feel more satisfied about their job. Using survey data collected from hundreds of migrant workers in Shanghai, the authors tested the proposed mediation relationship and found that network resources and personal power fully mediated the relationship from *guanxi* with supervisors to job satisfaction. In sum, this study reinforces the importance of facilitating the development of social capital for migrant workers, same as the above study, yet it further delineates indigenous

psychological concepts such as *guanxi*, in understanding the work and life experiences of migrant workers in the Chinese cultural context.

Mu and Yeung conducted an interesting study in examining time use patterns of migrant workers—how individuals arrange their time for work, leisure, personal care and domestic activities. In particular, they investigated a number of relevant factors that would affect individuals' time use in different domains, such as gender, socioeconomic background, and family responsibilities. The authors embarked on a large-scale, mixed-method study by first investigating a nationally representative household data in China, with a follow-up study of in-depth interviews from over a hundred participants in Beijing. The results demonstrate that due to the transient nature of rural-to-urban migration and the overwhelming economic pressure, migrant workers had longer working hours and less leisure time, as compared to local workers. Furthermore, individuals' time use reflects the still gendered nature of Chinese household responsibilities. Due to men taking more financial responsibilities, migrant men spent much less time on leisure activities than local men, yet such difference was not present among migrant and local women. Educational and socioeconomic background also played a significant role, with those migrants that had higher education and better socioeconomic background were able to enjoy more leisure time. Finally, the authors shed light on how family responsibilities, including having unmarried son and having young, school-aged children, moderated the relationship between migration status and time use. Overall, with the rich data gathered from diverse sources, this study was able to paint a clear picture about the quality of life of rural-to-urban migrants and to what extent they are balancing their work, leisure and family needs.

The last paper in this theme comes from Chen, Wu, and Li, who investigated the quality of life of rural–urban migrant workers in China from the perspective of housing condition. Their key research questions concern the factors that cause the differences in housing conditions between locals and migrants living in urban China, with an eye on the role of vocational status in explaining the inequities of housing quality. Using survey data collected from four municipalities including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Guangzhou, they analyzed a set of socioeconomic characteristics regarding their relationships with housing conditions. In general, they found that rural–urban migrant workers have heightened difficulty to own high-quality housing conditions as compared to their local counterparts living in the metropolitan areas. Their analyses revealed that when considering migrants and local workers together, those working in state-owned organizations are more likely to be homeowners rather than renters as compared to those working in small businesses. Interestingly, among professionals, technicians, clerical and office workers, there are more homeowners than renters. In contrast, service and industrial workers are more likely to be renters rather than homeowners. However, ad hoc analysis indicates that across all vocational areas, there is larger number of renters than homeowners for rural-to-urban migrants. This study offered rich information that unpacks how housing condition, an important indicator of rural–urban migrants' quality of life, is related to different work- and non-work-related demographic, socioeconomic factors.

#### 4 A Future Research Agenda

As discussed above, this panel of papers have addressed some important issues related to migrants' vocational and quality of life issues, from both international and intranational perspectives. The topics are broadly associated with job-related well-being, general life

well-being, the balance between work and life, among others. These papers have looked at these well-being issues from different aspects of employment, vocations, careers, and work. Clearly, future research is still warranted in this field to extend the current topics and to unpack new areas that can advance our knowledge of migrants' vocational situations and well-being. We outline in this section some potential avenues for future scholarly inquiry of migrant workers' vocational experiences and quality of life.

#### **4.1 Categorization of Vocational Experiences**

In this special issue, vocational experiences have been reflected in a wide range of factors, including, employment/job characteristics (e.g., employment status, job security, skill utilization, supervision style, job demands, and management practices etc.), social capital at work (e.g., *guanxi* and personal networks), and self-reflection on personal characteristics in work and career (e.g., time use pattern for balancing work and life, efforts in careers, and work-related competencies etc.). However, this set of factors can be diffuse, and may not form a comprehensive and structured picture of vocational experiences in the migration contexts. Indeed, there has not been existing work that provides a clear definition and categorization of vocational experiences, which should be a key area to be addressed in future research. This line of inquiry should firstly probe the nature of vocational experiences of migrants, based on which appropriate sub-domains or types of experiences are to be identified. While presented in other contexts/populations and refinements are needed, the literature has shown some examples where the nature and types of vocational experiences have been analyzed. For instance, Crewe (2000) studied vocational experiences by analyzing vocational patterns such as education versus work, full time versus part time work, paid versus unpaid work, and different occupational areas. The author also stepped beyond these traditional patterns to refer vocational experiences to the work- and career-related factors that contribute to the person's vocational success. In a recent study, Bush and colleagues (Bush et al. 2016) suggested three main areas of vocational experiences of those individuals returning to work after severe brain injury: job satisfaction, career demanding, and modification of job duties and strategies. These examples are rooted in specific contexts or in particular populations and may not be applied to the migration setting. However, future research may draw insights from these examples that may be useful when exploring the nature of vocational experiences in migration groups.

#### **4.2 Operationalization of Quality of Life**

We have previously mentioned that quality of life is a construct that is rather complicated to define. The general agreement is that quality of life denotes one's overall subjective well-being that is developed in all aspects of one's life. Existing literature therefore has referred to quality of life very broadly and has not provided clear boundaries or scopes for how specifically it should be defined. For this reason, researchers have operationalized quality of life in different ways as elaborated in the opening of this article. Taking the papers in this special for example, most of them view job satisfaction and life satisfaction as indicators of quality of life, although a few other approaches have also been observed. All these examples and many of those reported in prior research (Aycaan and Berry 1996), particularly in migration contexts, focus on a particular area of life or general well-being (e.g., happiness at work, psychological and physical well-being). However, well-being in a specific life domain might not fully capture the overall quality of life. Future research should define quality of life more clearly by specifying a comprehensive set of dimensions

or components that can truly reflect the connotation of overall life quality. For example, Cummins et al. (1994) indicated that quality of life may include such aspects as emotional well-being, intimacy, health, material well-being, safety, and place in society. To ensure the full meaning of quality of life is captured, future empirical research may adopt established measures with sound content validity and psychometrics. Future research should consider the unique attributes that migrants have as compared to other human groups, and therefore adapt the quality of life measures based on what they value in the host country or the new living/working area.

### 4.3 Culturally Sensitive Perspectives to Migration

This special issue collects a range of papers that address the quality of life of migrants in different cultural context, with attention being given to rural-to-urban migrants in China, and international migrants who have moved to and lived in Australia and Macau. The two broad themes, covering intranational migrants and international migrants, provide informative and interesting cultural lens. However, we recognize that our coverage and thus research implications in this special issue is perhaps limited to these specific cultural contexts. We need more research that unpacks the wellbeing and quality of life issues for migrants in other cultural and geographical context. For instance, over recent years millions of migrants and refugees crossed into Europe, yielding substantial debates about policies and practices in facilitating their resettlement. We still know very little about the work experiences and quality of life of these new arrivals in the European society. More research is also required to understand the traditionally less studied regions, such as Africa and Middle East. Needless to say, studies on migrants are unavoidably embedded within and intertwined with social, cultural and political factors, and migrants in different countries and regions may thus grapple with different challenges and opportunities as provided in those contexts (e.g., Castles et al. 2013). For this reason, it is important for researchers to take a highly contextualized approach, such as by situating the study against the broader social context and by using culturally relevant measures and constructs.

### 4.4 Methodological Approaches in Studying Migrants

We have noted that the majority of the studies in this special issue adopt quantitative methods. In fact, some of the papers in this special issue use data collected from large-scale, nationally or regionally representative samples (e.g., J. Chen et al. 2017; X. Chen et al. 2017; Mu and Yeung 2017; Tian et al. 2016). This is a strength of this special issue in that the studies included are able to identify relatively generalizable findings in unpacking the predictors of migrant workers' quality of life. However, these studies, as well as many other studies in this field, are largely cross-sectional, which tends to provides only a snapshot of the phenomena. We need more longitudinal studies that track the development journey of migrant workers to understand how they resettle and integrate into a new society over time. We also need more qualitative studies, such as by using in-depth interviews and ethnographic research, to unpack the nuances of migrant workers' work and life experiences, and this is especially important for some migrant subgroups who are facing more potential disadvantages and barriers than others. For instance, increasing attention has been paid to the work and life experiences of women refugees, who face heightened difficulty in finding employment and/or achieving career advancement, due to various reasons including family duties, educational background and gender role perceptions (Koyama 2014; Wachter et al. 2016). Due to that our knowledge about these migrant subgroups is

still scarce, and that it can be difficult to acquire large, representative samples from them, qualitative studies are particularly useful in revealing the work and life experiences of these populations.

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