

# The Impact of CPC Membership on Subjective Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Volunteer Service Participation

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## Abstract

**This study explores the impact of CPC party membership on subjective well-being, using data from the 2021 "Chinese Social Survey". The analysis was conducted using an OLS linear regression model and the Bootstrap method. The results indicate that party membership significantly enhances an individual's subjective well-being, primarily through increased sense of identity and collective belonging. Participation in volunteer service acts as a mediator between party membership and subjective well-being, with party members gaining a sense of achievement and social support through volunteer activities, which further boosts their well-being. The study also finds that factors such as social support, economic status, and life satisfaction significantly influence subjective well-being.**

## Keywords

**Party Membership; Subjective Well-Being; Volunteer Service; Sense of Identity.**

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, China's social productivity has reached new heights, achieving significant leaps forward, and people's quality of life has been continuously improving, leading to increasing happiness. As an example, the "2023 Global Happiness Survey" conducted by the internationally renowned polling organization Ipsos showed that China had the highest happiness index among 32 countries, reaching 91%. This indicates that the Chinese people have a high level of satisfaction and happiness with their life situations. According to the "People's Happiness Index Research Report" released by Tsinghua University, China's national happiness index reached an astonishing 138 in 2020, representing a remarkable increase of about 70% compared to data from a decade ago. This significant improvement vividly reflects the benefits of China's development reaching the people. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "The Chinese Dream is the dream of the people's happiness," and "the people's yearning for a better life is our unwavering goal." Today, enhancing people's sense of happiness has become a core issue and top priority in national governance.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB), as a focus of interdisciplinary research in psychology, sociology, economics, and other fields, encompasses multiple dimensions including emotional responses, life satisfaction, and evaluations of life events. With the vigorous development of socio-economics and the improvement of living standards, the pursuit of happiness by the public has become increasingly significant, driving the in-depth study of subjective well-being. Since the 1950s, subjective well-being has been a topic of common concern across multiple disciplines, accumulating a wealth of academic achievements. Early research primarily focused on descriptive analysis. W. Wilson proposed correlations between resource possession, self-actualization activities, social comparisons, and need satisfaction with subjective well-being [1]. These conclusions were further expanded and revised by E. Diener [2] and others in subsequent

studies. Researchers gradually shifted their focus to the complex interactions between individual internal factors (such as personality traits) and external environments, delving into the psychological adaptation mechanisms behind these interactions. However, existing research also faces significant limitations: the relationships between multiple factors (including self-esteem, social relationships, and life events) and subjective well-being often exhibit bidirectional influences, increasing the complexity and challenges of research. Therefore, scholars such as E. Diener emphasize the urgent need for further refinement and development of existing theoretical frameworks to more accurately predict the unique impacts of different variables on the components of subjective well-being.

So, what truly makes people happy? People often hold a simplified view that wealth is the main pathway to happiness. However, this notion is not entirely accurate. In academic research, Easterlin proposed a famous theory known as the "Easterlin Paradox" (also known as the "Easterlin Fallacy"), which suggests that economic growth does not necessarily lead to an increase in subjective well-being[3]. This paradox challenges the traditional belief that wealth is the main source of happiness. In fact, within the same country, although the subjective well-being of rich individuals is generally higher than that of poor individuals, this does not mean that wealth is the only or decisive factor in happiness. Secondly, there is no significant difference in the average happiness level between developed and developing countries, challenging the traditional notion of a direct positive correlation between economic development and happiness. Finally, national economic growth does not always accompany a synchronous increase in national subjective well-being, further questioning the view that economic growth is the main driver of happiness. Therefore, subjective well-being is influenced by multiple factors such as individual personality traits, social support, and life events. In studies of specific identity groups (such as college students, the elderly, etc.), different identities have a significant impact on subjective well-being. Among them, political identity, as an important component of social identity, especially in the unique context of China, the relationship between CPC membership and subjective well-being has attracted considerable attention. Studies have shown that overall life satisfaction among CPC members is generally higher than among non-members [4,5,6]. However, in the research of Appleton and Song , it was found that membership in other parties did not enhance subjective well-being, making this effect particularly unique among CPC member groups[7]. However, existing research has not deeply analyzed the inherent connection and mechanism between CPC membership and subjective well-being, namely, what makes CPC members happier? This study aims to address this question by conducting a more in-depth exploration.

Based on identity theory, individuals' sense of identification and belongingness to the social groups to which they belong have significant effects on their subjective well-being. As a unified group with shared values and collective belongingness, the Communist Party of China may have a positive impact on subjective well-being among its members. In addition, CPC members' participation in voluntary service, as an important way to implement the Party's mass line, may be associated with subjective well-being. Therefore, this study will explore the following questions: 1) Among CPC member groups, which factors are correlated with higher subjective well-being? 2) How do CPC members enhance their subjective well-being by strengthening their sense of identity and collective belongingness? 3) Does participation in voluntary service mediate the subjective well-being of CPC members?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Factors Influencing Subjective Well-Being from the Perspective of the Happiness Paradox

Easterlin [3] revealed several notable phenomena: within the same country, the subjective well-being of wealthy individuals is generally higher than that of the poor; however, there is no significant difference in average happiness levels between developed and developing countries; and economic growth does not always correlate with an increase in the subjective well-being of citizens. Subsequent studies by Diener et al.[8], Cummins, and Myers found that the wealth of a nation affects the happiness of its residents[9,10]. Veenhoven and Hagerty conducted research on developing countries such as India, Nigeria, and Mexico, and discovered a significant increase in happiness among their residents over the past 50 years[11]. With recent academic research delving deeper, some new findings do not entirely support Easterlin's original views. These challenges have prompted scholars to reassess the relationship between economic growth and national happiness. Easterlin et al. further refined their views, proposing a U-shaped trend in the relationship between economic growth and national happiness. They suggested that while short-term changes in average happiness align with economic development trends, the long-term effect of economic growth on happiness levels is limited[12]. This argument has sparked widespread attention in academia.

### 2.2. The Relationship between Party Membership and Subjective Well-Being

When delving into the mechanism behind party members' subjective well-being, the theory of identity provides a logical and profound framework. Identity theory posits that individuals possess knowledge about belonging to a certain social group and the emotions and values associated with their group membership. In other words, individuals recognize their membership in a specific social group and acknowledge the emotional and value significance it brings them[13]. Identity theory reveals the close connection between individuals and society, emphasizing how individuals find their position and value through constructing and reinforcing their identity [14]. For party members, their identity is not only a commitment to political stance but also embodies profound meanings of social responsibility and collective belonging. In the formation of party member identity, loyalty to the party and identification with the values it represents are core elements. This loyalty and identification stem not only from individuals' deep understanding of the party's history, ideals, and goals but also from their trust in the party and pride in its achievements. This strong sense of identification enables party members to maintain firm beliefs and determination in the face of challenges and difficulties, thus laying a solid foundation for their subjective well-being [15].

Moreover, party members' subjective status and rights within the party are also important factors in enhancing their subjective well-being. Through participating in party activities, discussions, and decision-making, party members not only realize their own value but also gain a greater sense of involvement and control. This sense of involvement and control enables party members to perceive their importance and influence within the party, leading to feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction. These feelings further strengthen party members' identity and enhance their subjective well-being [16]. Additionally, reinforcing identity contributes to enhancing individuals' emotional stability and self-efficacy. Through identification and reinforcement of their identity, party members can better cope with challenges and difficulties in life, maintaining a positive and proactive attitude. This positive attitude not only contributes to their success in careers but also brings them more happiness and satisfaction.

Therefore, from the perspective of identity theory, the formation of party members' subjective well-being stems from factors such as loyalty and identification with the party, their subjective status and rights within the party, as well as the emotional stability and self-efficacy brought

about by identity. These factors interact and reinforce each other, collectively constituting a solid foundation for party members' subjective well-being. Therefore, strengthening the cultivation and enhancement of party member identity is of great significance for improving their subjective well-being.

This study hypothesizes as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Individual party membership has a positive effect on their subjective well-being. Party membership has a significant positive impact on individuals' awareness and behavior of participating in volunteer services. According to social participation theory, individuals engage in social activities to realize their self-worth, enhance social connections, and improve their quality of life. Within this theoretical framework, party membership not only becomes an important dimension of social participation but also serves as a strong motivator for individuals to actively engage in volunteer services. As a special social role, party membership deeply influences individuals' values, behavior patterns, and sense of social responsibility. Party members are entrusted with the lofty mission of wholeheartedly serving the people, which aligns with the core concept of volunteerism [17]. Therefore, party membership naturally stimulates individuals' awareness of volunteer service, prompting them to actively participate in various volunteer activities. Additionally, party membership reinforces individuals' sense of social responsibility and mission, enabling them to demonstrate greater dedication and responsibility in volunteer services [18].

Party membership directly promotes individuals' participation in volunteer services. Party organizations provide party members with a broad platform to participate in volunteer services by encouraging, supporting, and organizing various volunteer activities. Through organizing training, providing resources, and establishing incentive mechanisms, party organizations not only enhance party members' motivation to participate in volunteer services but also improve their capacity for volunteer services. For example, university student party members, as outstanding young people, not only hone their practical skills and professional qualities through volunteer service activities but also inspire and lead more young people to engage in volunteer service activities through exemplary behavior, forming a positive demonstration effect [19]. Therefore, from the perspective of social participation theory, party membership indeed positively influences individuals' awareness and behavior of participating in volunteer services.

Hypothesis 2 : party membership positively influences individuals' engagement in volunteer service activities.

Based on the above elaboration, party membership positively impacts individuals' subjective well-being through various pathways such as strengthening identity, enhancing social status and honor, etc. Moreover, party membership tends to motivate individuals to actively engage in volunteer service activities, which not only demonstrates the spirit of party members' social responsibility but also serves as an important bridge for realizing personal and social values. Additionally, a large body of research indicates that participation in volunteer services is a key factor in enhancing individuals' subjective well-being [18]. By participating in volunteer services, people have the opportunity to help others, deepen social connections, and gain inner satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. These positive psychological experiences collectively contribute to the positive contribution of volunteer services to subjective well-being.

Therefore, building upon Hypotheses 1 and 2, this study proposes Hypothesis 3: Volunteer service participation plays a mediating role in the relationship between party membership and subjective well-being. That is, party membership may enhance individuals' subjective well-being by increasing their level of participation in volunteer services.

### 3. Data and Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Source

This study utilized data from the 2021 "China Social Survey" (CSS) conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The data were collected from 604 village (community) committees across 151 counties (cities, districts) in 31 provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the central government), excluding regions of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. A total of 10,268 questionnaires were distributed, of which 10,136 were successfully retrieved. Since this study examines the impact of party membership on subjective well-being, samples that responded "not applicable" or "refused to answer" to key variables such as subjective well-being and political identity participation were excluded. Finally, 1965 valid responses were obtained for analysis.

#### 3.2. Variables

##### 3.2.1. Dependent Variables

Quantifying happiness is a fundamental task in exploring individual quality of life and psychological well-being. Previous studies have utilized various validated measurement methods to construct a comprehensive and rigorous assessment system. Firstly, researchers widely employ self-report scales, particularly the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), which quantitatively evaluates individuals' overall satisfaction with life based on their direct self-perception. Secondly, the Experience Sampling Method (ESM), as a method for real-time collection of individuals' emotional experiences in daily life, has also been widely adopted to obtain more detailed and immediate happiness data. Additionally, considering the core role of social networks and interpersonal relationships in subjective well-being, some studies have incorporated assessments of individuals' social support and interpersonal relationships to further reveal the sources and influencing factors of their happiness. These scholarly measurement methods collectively constitute a multidimensional and systematic evaluation framework for studying subjective happiness, providing powerful tools for a deeper understanding of the complexity and diversity of individual happiness. In this study, we employed Subjective Well-Being (SWB) as the key indicator and quantitatively assessed the subjective happiness of the respondents through direct inquiries. Specifically, we posed the following question: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?" This question was rated on a scale of 1-10, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction. During data processing, to present the levels of satisfaction more clearly and facilitate subsequent analysis, we recoded and classified the raw data. We combined scores of 10 and 9 into the category "Very Satisfied," 8 and 7 into "Satisfied," 6 and 5 into "Neutral," 4 and 3 into "Dissatisfied," and 2 and 1 into "Very Dissatisfied." Meanwhile, we assigned numerical values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 to these categories, respectively.

##### 3.2.2. Independent Variables

We transformed party membership into a binary categorical variable, distinguishing whether individuals are Communist Party members. Party membership was defined based on the response to the question "What is your political affiliation?" When the respondent's answer indicated Communist Party membership, we assigned it a value of 1, representing party membership. For respondents who were not Communist Party members, we assigned a value of 0.

##### 3.2.3. Mediating Variables

To assess whether individuals participated in voluntary activities, this study analyzed responses to the question: "How many times have you participated in voluntary service activities in the past three months?" To simplify the analysis and focus on the binary status of

whether individuals participated in voluntary activities, we transformed this continuous variable (number of participations) into a binary variable indicating whether individuals participated in voluntary activities. Specifically, when the respondent's answer was 0, we assigned a value of 0, representing "not participating" in voluntary activities; whereas when the answer was greater than or equal to 1, we assigned a value of 1, representing "participating" in voluntary activities. This binary variable setting helps us identify and analyze the participation status of voluntary activities more clearly and explore its relationship with related variables (such as subjective well-being, social support, etc.).

### 3.2.4. Control Variables

Control variables are mainly divided into three parts, covering basic demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and occupational status that affect individuals' subjective well-being. Firstly, in terms of basic demographic characteristics, we included the gender variable, with 0 indicating female and 1 indicating male. Considering the influence of education level on subjective well-being, we divided the level of education into four categories: elementary school or below, middle school, university, and postgraduate, assigning values of 1 to 4, respectively. Additionally, we also considered urban-rural affiliation, with 0 representing non-agricultural hukou and 1 representing agricultural hukou. Secondly, in the dimension of socioeconomic status, we focused on individuals' subjective socioeconomic status, dividing it into upper, middle, and lower three levels, and assigning values of 1, 2, and 3, respectively. This variable reflects individuals' relative positions in the social structure and is of great significance for understanding their subjective well-being. Finally, in terms of occupational status, we considered two key variables: nature of employment and job stability. The nature of employment was coded as 0 for non-institutional employment and 1 for institutional employment, while job stability was coded as 0 for unstable and 1 for stable. All control variables were properly handled, and detailed information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic information of the variables

Variable	Categories/Coding	Total
Dependent variable		
Subjective well-being (Score 1-5)	Mean	3.86
	SD	1.03
Independent variable		
Party	CPC	1020
	Non-CPC	9115
Mediating variable		
Volunteering (Yes = 1)	Mean	0.41
	SD	0.49
Control variable		
Gender (male = 1)	Mean	0.44
	SD	0.50
Education	Primary school and below	2994
	Middle school	5085
	University	1928
	Postgraduate	120
Hukou (City = 1)	Mean	0.35
	SD	0.48



	Upper class	730
Class	Middle class	4164
	Lower class	5102
Work (Within the system = 1)	Mean	0.22
	SD	0.41
Work stable (Stable = 1)	Mean	0.60
	SD	0.49

### 3.3. Model

We consider subjective well-being as a continuous variable and utilize the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model for regression. To investigate the potential mediating role of participation in volunteer activities in the relationship between CPC membership and individual subjective well-being, we further employ a stepwise regression analysis. The model is established as follows:

Direct Effect Model:

$$Y=cX+e_1 \quad (1)$$

where  $Y$  represents the dependent variable, subjective well-being;  $X$  represents the independent variable, CPC membership;  $c$  is the coefficient; and  $e_1$  is the error term.

Mediation Model:

$$M=aX+e_2 \quad (2)$$

$$Y=cX+bM+e_3 \quad (3)$$

where  $M$  represents the mediating variable, participation in volunteer activities;  $a$  and  $b$  are coefficients;  $e_2$  and  $e_3$  are error terms.

In Equation (1), we examine the relationship between subjective well-being and CPC membership. In Equation (2), we explore the relationship between CPC membership and participation in volunteer activities, considering mediation.

It's important to note that the coefficients  $a$  and  $b$  in the mediation model represent the indirect effects of CPC membership on subjective well-being through participation in volunteer activities. The mediation effect can be evaluated using the Sobel test or other appropriate mediation analysis techniques.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Overall, the average subjective well-being of residents in China is 3.860 points. The average subjective well-being of CPC members is 4.261 points, while that of non-CPC members is 3.818 points. The subjective well-being of CPC members is significantly higher than that of non-CPC members. Figure 1 vividly illustrates the difference in subjective well-being between CPC members and non-CPC members. Additionally, from Figure 2, it can be observed that in various subgroup samples, the subjective well-being of CPC members is higher than that of non-CPC members. Within the CPC member group:

Female CPC members have higher subjective well-being than male CPC members.

Urban CPC members have higher subjective well-being than rural CPC members.

CPC members with a lower level of education (up to university) have higher subjective well-being than those with higher education levels, although the subjective well-being of graduate CPC members is slightly lower than that of CPC members with a university degree.

CPC members with higher socioeconomic status have higher subjective well-being than those with lower socioeconomic status.

Furthermore, it can be observed that CPC members who participate in volunteer activities have higher subjective well-being than those who do not. Looking at the difference in average subjective well-being scores across various groups of variables, socioeconomic status and participation in volunteer activities have a significant impact on the subjective well-being of CPC members. The difference in average subjective well-being scores between CPC members with different socioeconomic statuses and participation in volunteer activities is 0.3205 and 0.118, respectively. Particularly regarding socioeconomic status, the difference in subjective well-being scores between CPC members with middle and lower socioeconomic status is 0.594. This indicates that CPC members with lower socioeconomic status may face more life pressures, economic difficulties, and social exclusion, leading to lower subjective well-being. Regarding participation in volunteer activities, among non-CPC members, the participation rate in volunteer activities is only 38%, while the participation rate of CPC members in volunteer activities reaches 53%. The participation rate of CPC members in volunteer activities is higher than that of non-CPC members.



Figure 1: Comparison of mean scores of subjective well-being in each group

## 4.2. Empirical Analysis Results

### 4.2.1. The Impact of CPC Membership on Individual Subjective Well-Being

The Impact of Party Membership on Individual Subjective Well-Being To investigate the impact of party membership on subjective well-being, this study conducted a series of linear regression models. The specific data results are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. Model 1 includes the core independent variable, political membership, and all control variables, primarily examining the effect of political membership on subjective well-being while controlling for other variables. Model 2 incorporates participation in voluntary services on the basis of Model 1. The data results of Model 1 indicate that after controlling for relevant variables, there is a significant



positive correlation between political membership and subjective well-being. Compared to non-party members, party members' subjective well-being increases by 0.227 points ( $P < 0.001$ ). The data results validate Hypothesis 1 of this study.

Table 2: Regression to the benchmark models

	Modal 1
	happy
Work	0.055 (0.056)
Education (Reference group: Primary school and below)	
Middle school	-0.019 (0.059)
University	0.102 (0.070)
Postgraduate	-0.030 (0.161)
Class (Reference group: Upper class)	
Upper class	0.000 (.)
Middle class	-0.276*** (0.077)
Lower class	-0.648*** (0.078)
Hukou	0.072 (0.046)
Gender	0.026 (0.041)
Work stable	0.285*** (0.043)
_constant	4.132*** (0.092)
N	1965
R <sup>2</sup>	0.107

Table 3: Exploring the Mechanism of the Impact of CPC Membership on Subjective Well-Being

	Modal2	Modal3	Modal4
Party	happy 0.227*** (0.064)	Volunteering 0.230*** (0.046)	happy 0.140+ (0.079)
Volunteering			0.125+ (0.064)
Control variable	controlled	controlled	controlled
_constant	4.113***	0.506***	3.973***

	(0.092)	(0.087)	(0.150)
N	1965	712	702
R2	0.113	0.059	0.108

Standard errors in parentheses; +  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Additionally, job stability has a significantly positive impact on subjective well-being, with a score increase of 0.275 points ( $P < 0.001$ ) for individuals with stable employment. Social-economic status (class) shows a significant negative correlation with subjective well-being. Compared to individuals with the lowest social-economic status, those in the second and third-class social-economic status exhibit a decrease in subjective well-being scores by 0.250 points ( $P < 0.01$ ) and 0.613 points ( $P < 0.001$ ), respectively, indicating that higher social-economic status correlates with lower subjective well-being. This result may reflect the higher pressure and expectations faced by individuals with higher social-economic status, thus affecting their subjective well-being. Regarding the influence of education level on subjective well-being, it is noteworthy that a postgraduate degree shows a significantly negative correlation with subjective well-being, with scores decreasing by 0.098 points.

In summary, party membership and job stability have a significantly positive impact on subjective well-being, while participation in voluntary services also contributes to improving subjective well-being to a certain extent.

Model 2 incorporates participation in voluntary services (Volunteering) on the basis of Model 1. Voluntary service participation has a marginally significant positive impact on subjective well-being, with an increase of 0.125 points ( $P < 0.1$ ) in subjective well-being scores for each additional participation in voluntary services. Moreover, after incorporating participation in voluntary services, the R-squared value of the model increases from 0.107 to 0.113, indicating an overall improvement in the model's fit. Combining the results of the voluntary service participation model (Model 3) from the table, political membership significantly influences participation in voluntary services, with party membership significantly increasing the frequency of participating in voluntary services (0.140,  $P < 0.1$ ). Finally, Model 4 shows that after incorporating participation in voluntary services, the impact of political membership on subjective well-being slightly increases (0.230 points,  $P < 0.001$ ), further validating the positive effect of party membership on enhancing subjective well-being. Therefore, participation in voluntary services may play a mediating role in the influence of party membership on subjective well-being. Party membership may further enhance subjective well-being by increasing the frequency of participation in voluntary services. Further analysis and validation of this mediating effect are required.

#### 4.2.2. The Mediating Mechanism of Voluntary Activity Participation on Subjective Well-Being

According to the regression results of Model 1, party membership has a significant positive effect on subjective well-being ( $c = 0.227$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). In Model 2, party membership has a significant positive effect on participation in voluntary activities ( $a = 0.140$ ,  $P < 0.1$ ), indicating that party membership significantly increases the frequency of participating in voluntary activities. Model 3 shows that participation in voluntary activities has a marginally significant positive effect on subjective well-being ( $b = 0.125$ ,  $P < 0.1$ ). In Model 4, after adding the mediating variable of participation in voluntary activities, the coefficient of the effect of party membership on subjective well-being slightly increases ( $c' = 0.230$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), while the effect of participation in voluntary activities on subjective well-being remains marginally significant ( $b = 0.125$ ,  $P < 0.1$ ), indicating that participation in voluntary activities plays a certain mediating role in this relationship.

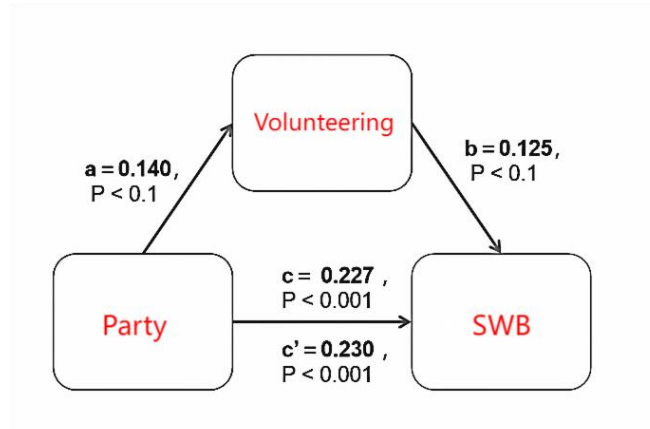


Figure 2 : Schematic illustration of the mediation effect of volunteering participation on subjective well-being

To further validate the mediating effect, we employed the Bootstrap method with 1000 resamples to estimate the mediating effect and its confidence interval. The calculation results are as follows: the estimated value of the mediating effect is 0.018, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.005, 0.031]. According to the Bootstrap test, the estimated value of the mediating effect is 0.018, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.005, 0.031], which does not include zero, indicating a significant mediating effect. Therefore, through stepwise regression and Bootstrap method tests, we found that party membership has a significant positive effect on subjective well-being, and this effect is partially mediated by increased participation in volunteering activities. Volunteering significantly mediates the influence of party membership on subjective well-being, confirming research hypothesis 3 and demonstrating that volunteering plays a crucial mediating role in the influence of party membership on subjective well-being.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

With the robust economic growth and improvement in living standards, people's attention to life satisfaction has been steadily increasing, and academic research on subjective well-being has become more in-depth. How can people be made happier? Previous studies have discussed this issue from various perspectives, examining both internal psychological mechanisms and external social mechanisms. From the happiness paradox, it is evident that economic growth does not necessarily lead to an increase in subjective well-being, but rather, it is influenced by a variety of factors. An individual's subjective well-being depends not only on economic conditions but also on social support, personality traits, life events, and other factors. Among these, political identity has garnered considerable attention due to its unique nature. Comparative studies have shown that only the political identity of Chinese Communist Party (CPC) members positively influences individuals' subjective well-being, while membership in other political parties does not have the same effect. A deeper exploration reveals that domestic research on happiness typically treats political identity as a control variable, proving its positive effect on happiness but rarely exploring the underlying reasons and mechanisms.

According to identity theory and social participation theory, an individual's sense of identity and belonging to their social group significantly impacts their subjective well-being. In the specific social context of China, CPC membership can lead to greater social participation, allowing individuals to gain more self-worth within a like-minded collective and feel proud of their identity, thus enhancing happiness in various aspects. Similarly, volunteer activities enhance people's happiness by increasing social participation and gaining social value, which aligns with the ideals of the CPC. To enhance cohesion and solidarity, the CPC also emphasizes volunteer service among its members as an important way to implement the party's mass line.

Based on existing research and the above analysis, this study, from the perspective of identity theory, uses data from the 2021 Chinese Social Survey (CSS) and employs OLS linear regression models, stepwise regression, and the Bootstrap method to explore the impact of CPC membership on subjective well-being and to examine the mediating role of volunteer service participation. The findings are as follows:

Firstly, the study results indicate that party membership has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being. Party membership not only enhances individual identity and collective belonging but also further improves subjective well-being through social support and emotional recognition. Specifically, party membership provides individuals with higher social recognition and a sense of belonging, thereby significantly increasing their subjective well-being.

Secondly, when analyzing the impact of party membership on subjective well-being, volunteer service participation demonstrates a significant mediating effect. By participating in volunteer service, party members not only embody the party's principles and values in practice but also gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction through service. This positive volunteer experience further enhances the subjective well-being of party members. According to regression analysis, volunteer service participation partially mediates the relationship between party membership and subjective well-being, meaning that party membership indirectly enhances subjective well-being by increasing volunteer service participation.

This study, through an in-depth analysis of the applicability of identity theory and social participation theory in explaining the relationship between party membership and subjective well-being, reveals how party membership enhances individual identity and collective belonging, and through social participation (such as volunteer service), improves subjective well-being. This finding not only aligns with existing research but also provides new perspectives for further understanding and promoting the subjective well-being of party members. Identity theory emphasizes that an individual's sense of identity with their social group significantly affects their subjective well-being. Studies have shown that party membership can significantly enhance individual subjective well-being, which is widely supported in the literature. For instance, there is a significant positive correlation between social support and subjective well-being [20], and party membership, as a form of social support, also demonstrates a positive impact on subjective well-being. Social participation theory suggests that individuals can achieve higher social recognition and satisfaction through social participation, thereby enhancing subjective well-being. The study results show that volunteer service participation, as an important manifestation of party membership, further enhances subjective well-being by providing social support and strengthening social connections. This is consistent with the positive impact of volunteer service on well-being highlighted in social participation theory [21]. Specifically, volunteer service can enhance subjective well-being by improving the structure and interaction levels of social networks [22], further demonstrating the important role of social participation in enhancing subjective well-being.

Despite achieving some meaningful findings, this study has several limitations. First, in selecting control variables, this study only includes variables highly relevant to happiness. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design to further explore the causal relationship between party membership and subjective well-being. Second, the sample of this study primarily comes from China, and the generalizability of the findings needs to be validated. Future studies could conduct cross-national comparative research to explore the impact of party membership on subjective well-being in different countries and cultural contexts. Additionally, this study mainly derives conclusions through quantitative data analysis. Future research could combine qualitative methods to delve deeper into the intrinsic mechanisms between party membership and subjective well-being.

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