

Exploring the Socioeconomic Status of Adult Children of New Immigrants in Taiwan

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, Taiwan has witnessed a continuous influx of marriage migrants from Southeast Asian and mainland China and hence a growing number of their children. Given that a significant number of these children have already come of age recently, it might be important to understand how they fare socioeconomically. Accordingly, this study looks into the socioeconomic status of children of new immigrants in early adulthood in Taiwan. Drawing on the Taiwan Social Change Survey data from 2002 to 2020, multiple linear regression results unveil that children of new immigrants are disadvantaged compared to individuals with a non-immigrant background in terms of educational attainment, occupational status, and monthly income. After controlling for parental educational attainment, the only adequate variable available in the data that can be utilized to examine to what extent family socioeconomic status contributes to the disadvantaged socioeconomic situation of children of new immigrants, it appears that parental educational attainment may play a role in the social mobility process of children of new immigrants. Another noteworthy finding is that despite their advantage in educational attainment and occupational status, children of mainland Chinese immigrants earn less per month than children of Southeast Asian immigrants on average, which may require future research to explore plausible factors contributing to this phenomenon

Keywords: *Children of new immigrants, Socioeconomic status, Taiwan, Taiwan Social Change Survey*

INTRODUCTION

Although there were already Southeast Asian immigrants to Taiwan as early as the 1960s, the significant influx of marriage migrants from both mainland China and Southeast Asia after the 1990s signaled the dramatic change of Taiwan's ethnic landscape (National Immigration Agency, 2020). Some have argued that collectively, new immigrants have become the fifth ethnic category in Taiwan in addition to Hoklo, Hakka, mainlander (people in these three categories are of Han Chinese ancestry), and indigenous (Austronesian peoples) (Lin & Fan, 2015; Ma et al., 2018; National Immigration Agency, 2020). The statistics by the National Immigration Agency (2022) indicate that over 90% of new immigrants are female and the major ethnic groups are mainland Chinese (61.74%), Vietnamese (19.53%), Indonesian (5.45%), Filipino (1.84%), and Thai (1.67%). In the majority of cases, they married Taiwanese men with lower socioeconomic status and worse physical conditions who had difficulty finding a spouse in Taiwan and had to rely on their friends or matchmaking agencies to find a spouse overseas (Chan & Chen, 2014; Chin & Yu, 2008; Chiu & Ho, 2008; Hu & Hsiao, 2012; Ko, 2017; Ma et al., 2018; National Immigration Agency, 2020).

Due to the traditional value that emphasizes the continuation of the family line, the major task for female marriage migrants is childbearing (Chan & Chen, 2014; Chiu & Ho, 2008; Chung & Lin, 2015; Hu & Hsiao, 2012; Ko, 2017; Wang et al., 2012). While the number is declining, by October, 2020, there were still more than 6% of newborn babies who were children of new immigrants (Chan & Chen, 2021). Hence, we can see a continuous growth of the population of students with at least a new immigrant parent from the early 2000s (Ministry of Education, 2020). From elementary school to college, this student population is over 7

percent of the total student population currently (Ministry of Education, 2020). What is more, it is estimated that in 2030, more than 13 percent of the population aged 25 will be children of new immigrants (Chan & Chen, 2021; National Immigration Agency, 2020). That is to say, in the near future, it is possible that a significant number of people who take part in national development will be children of new immigrants. Accordingly, it is crucial to understand their social mobility in terms of educational and occupational attainment and hence design better policies that provide them with more opportunities to climb the socioeconomic ladder.

There are a number of empirical studies that have explored the academic achievement of children of new immigrants in the K-12 educational system and found that they performed worse academically than children of non-immigrants on average (Chin & Yu, 2008; Hsieh et al., 2015; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2013; Hung, 2011; Li & Tung, 2018; Wu & Tsai, 2014; Yao, 2009). Wu and Tsai (2014) contend that the root cause of their academic disadvantage is the limited cultural, social, and economic resources available in the family, which are the consequence of their disadvantaged family socioeconomic status. It must be noted that there is indeed heterogeneity among children of new immigrants. As Hsieh and Hsieh (2013) and Chen and Shen (2020) revealed, children of mainland Chinese parents had higher academic achievement than children of Southeast Asian parents. Tao et al. (2015) and Lin and Lu (2016) further demonstrated that there was no significant achievement gap between children of mainland Chinese parents and students with native parents. Even though the academic achievement of children of new immigrants seems to be well addressed in the literature, to my best knowledge, there are no existing empirical studies that have explored their social mobility in early adulthood. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to shed some light on this issue using the Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS) data.

RESEARCH METHODS

Description of the Data

I employ data from the TSCS survey, a nationally representative survey conducted twice per year, to explore the socioeconomic status of children of new immigrants in early adulthood. Specifically, I utilize data from 2002 to 2020 because I focus on individuals in their early adulthood, that is, from 18 to 40 years old. Individuals who were 40 years old in 2021, the year the present study has started, would be born in 1981 and began to be included in the TSCS survey since 2002. On the other hand, the 2020 data are the latest data available at present. Moreover, aggregating data from different years allows me to obtain a large enough sample of children of new immigrants; the aggregate data includes 10,638 respondents, of which 183 can be identified as children of new immigrants. A possible reason for this small number of children of new immigrants is that in many waves of the TSCS survey, questions regarding parents' ethnic backgrounds do not distinguish between mainlanders and mainland Chinese immigrants; in some other waves, although "mainlander" is a distinct category, mainland Chinese immigrants are placed in a category that includes also people from Hong Kong, Macao, Kinmen, and Matsu. Therefore, it is likely that a significant number of children of mainland Chinese immigrants are not identified. In fact, only 65 of them are identified in the current study, which are a share considerably smaller than their real share in the total population of new immigrants, that is, more than 50%. Accordingly, the results must be interpreted with caution.

Statistical Model

Given that the extant literature demonstrates a general disadvantaged socioeconomic status of new-immigrant families (Chan & Chen, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2016; National Immigration Agency, 2020) and the lower academic achievement of children of new immigrants (Chin & Yu, 2008; Hsieh et al., 2015; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2013; Hung, 2011; Li & Tung, 2018; Wu & Tsai, 2014; Yao, 2009), it is possible that they are also in an disadvantaged socioeconomic situation in early adulthood. To examine whether this hypothesis holds true, I employ multiple linear regression to analyze their educational attainment, occupational status, and monthly income in comparison with individuals with a non-immigrant background using the TSCS data. Due to the fact that information such as family income during childhood and adolescence and parental occupational status are unavailable in most waves of the survey, I am unable to fully look into the effect of family socioeconomic status on social mobility. At best, I can only include parental educational attainment, which is surveyed in the majority of the survey waves, in the regression model. The full model is shown below:

$$Y_i = a + X_i\psi + \beta_i E_i + \alpha_i F_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where Y_i indicates the socioeconomic status of individual i , which is measured as educational attainment, occupational status, and monthly income. a is the constant. X_i includes gender, age, and survey year, which serve as control variables. E_i signifies the ethnic background of individual i ; individuals with a non-immigrant background are the reference category. β_i demonstrates the difference between each ethnic category and the reference category. F_i represents both paternal and maternal educational attainments and α_i captures their effects. ε_i denotes the error term.

In the analysis, educational attainment is transformed into years of education, that is, a continuous variable. For instance, for individuals who have finished high school, their years of education are 12 while those hold a bachelor's degree have 16 years of education. Occupational status is transformed into a continuous variable as well based on the approach of Ganzeboom et al. (1992). In particular, I make use of the international socio-economic index of occupational status (ISEI) developed by Ganzeboom et al., which is built upon the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) established by the International Labour Organization (ILO), an agency of the United Nations. Simply speaking, Ganzeboom et al. translate 271 ISCO occupational categories into continuous scores that are more easily comparable by taking into account the mean education and the mean income associated with a given occupation and controlling for age. For monthly income, the TSCS survey, instead of asking respondents to provide information about their monthly income in accurate digits, only requires respondents to choose a range such as "30,000 - 40,000 NTD" (1 NTD is about 0.033 USD as on January 16th, 2023) within which their monthly income is located. Therefore, in the present analysis, the mean of each range is utilized to present the monthly income of the respondent who chooses a given range, which might introduce some errors into the model. Thus, we have to interpret the results cautiously. Descriptive statistics of the data are shown in the following table.

As can be seen, there are significantly more female respondents in both children of new immigrants samples. Moreover, both samples are older than individuals with a non-immigrant background on average. It is noteworthy that while both individuals with a non-immigrant background and children of mainland Chinese immigrants seem to have received some higher education, children of Southeast Asian immigrants may only have a high school diploma on average and exhibit greater within-group diversity. Thus, it may not be surprising to see that

children of Southeast Asian immigrants have the lowest occupational status on average. However, it is interesting that their average monthly income is higher than that of children of mainland Chinese immigrants and does not differ from that of individuals with a non-immigrant background significantly. In terms of parental educational attainment, children of Southeast Asian immigrants appear to be the most disadvantaged. Parental educational attainment is measured using the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) framework. In this framework, education levels are classified into nine levels: ISCED 0 is the lowest level, which indicates early childhood education and ISCED 8 is the highest level, which denotes a doctoral or equivalent degree (UNESCO, 2012). Both individuals with a non-immigrant background and children of mainland Chinese immigrants tend to have parents who have received upper secondary education, whereas children of Southeast Asian immigrants are more likely to have parents who have received lower secondary education only.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Non-Immigrant		Mainland Chinese		Southeast Asian	
Gender	male	female	male	female	male	female
	5,474	4,981	23	42	25	93
	(52.36%)	(47.64%)	(35.63%)	(64.37%)	(21.36%)	(78.64%)
			(p = 0.006)		(p < 0.001)	
Age	25.49		26.69		27.99	
	(5.02)		(6.25)		(5.95)	
			(p = 0.051)		(p < 0.001)	
Years of education	14.84		13.69		11.60	
	(2.22)		(3.14)		(3.57)	
			(p < 0.001)		(p < 0.001)	
Occupational status	47.57		44.30		36.35	
	(13.52)		(12.35)		(12.02)	
			(p = 0.085)		(p < 0.001)	
Monthly income	26633.95		19881.94		24339.09(24500.77)	
	(26021.31)		(21187.88)			
			(p = 0.042)		(p = 0.331)	
Father's education level	3.04		2.97		1.77	
	(1.71)		(2.05)		(1.58)	
			(p = 0.747)		(p < 0.001)	
Mother's education level	2.68		2.56		1.68	
	(1.55)		(1.96)		(1.76)	
			(p = 0.503)		(p < 0.001)	

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets, except gender.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

In Model 1, I employ years of education as the outcome variable. I control for gender because there are significantly more females in the children of new immigrants samples, which may bias the result. I also control for age due to the fact that the average ages of the children of new immigrants samples are older than that of the non-immigrant sample. In particular, the rapid expansion of higher education since the 2000s may have led to younger individuals' having more years of education (Chou, 2008). Another control variable is survey year for the reason that the average years of education of the Taiwanese population are increasing year by year (Executive Yuan, n.d.), which may bias the result as children of new immigrants tend to concentrate in the later waves of the TSCS survey. As shown in Table 2, after controlling for gender, age and survey year, the average years of education of children of mainland Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants are 1.264 and 3.572 years less than individuals with a non-immigrant background respectively, which are statistically significant.

In order to examine whether parental educational attainment can explain away at least part of these differences, I introduce both father's and mother's education levels into Model 2. It should be noted that they are the only adequate variables that can be used to measure family socioeconomic status in the TSCS data given that family income during childhood or adolescence is not surveyed in any wave of the survey. Besides, parental occupational status has been surveyed only in a small number of the waves; therefore, if I include parental occupational status in the model, the sample size would decrease to 2,785, of which only 42 can be identified as children of new immigrants. In Table 2, it is clear that after controlling for parental educational attainment, the differences reduce to 1.104 and 2.962 years respectively and are still statistically significant. This means that part of the differences in educational attainment can be explained by parental educational attainment. However, because other important indicators of family socioeconomic status such as parental occupational status and family income cannot be taken into account in this model, I am unable to examine whether family socioeconomic status can completely explain the gap between children of new immigrants and non-immigrants as Wu and Tsai (2014) argue.

In Model 3, given that the respondents' first full-time jobs have been surveyed only in few waves of the TSCS survey, it is inadequate to use this variable to measure their socioeconomic status; as a matter of fact, using it would reduce the sample size to 2,596, of which only 33 can be identified as children of new immigrants. Instead, I make use of the respondents' present full-time jobs when surveyed. Similar to Model 1, I introduce gender as the control variable into the estimation procedure. Age also serves as a control variable in the model since an older age may be related to a higher occupational status through mechanisms such as promotion. Survey year is taken into consideration again for the reason that economic fluctuations may result in differential employment opportunities in different years. We can see in Table 2 that the average ISEI scores for children of mainland Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants are 6.267 and 13.516 points lower than that of individuals with a non-immigrant background and these differences are statistically significant. In Model 4, I further control for parental educational attainment. As Table 2 demonstrates, the gaps between the two children of new immigrants samples and the non-immigrant sample shrink to 5.327 and 10.729 respectively. This may indicate that parental educational attainment plays a role in the social mobility process of children of new immigrants.

In Model 5, monthly income is used as the outcome variable. Gender is again used as the control variable. In addition, similar to occupational status, monthly income may be affected by

age and survey year due to the reasons mentioned above. After controlling for these variables, it is clear in Table 2 that children of mainland Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants earn 12,455.320 and 6,952.168 NTD less on average than individuals with a non-immigrant background respectively and these differences are statistically significant. This should not be surprising because of their lower average occupational status. What is surprising is that children of mainland Chinese immigrants earn less than children of Southeast Asian immigrants despite their higher occupational status. I further introduce parental educational attainment into Model 6 to explore whether this variable can explain away part of the differences between the children of new immigrants samples and the non-immigrant sample in monthly income. As revealed in Table 2, the difference between the two children of new immigrants samples and the non-immigrant sample decreases to 12,284.870 and 6,638.914 NTD respectively. It appears that parental educational attainment may have a positive relationship with monthly income for children of new immigrants, but its effect may not be strong.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Results

	Educational Attainment		Occupational Status		Monthly Income	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Gender (reference: female)	-0.311*** (0.043)	-0.311*** (0.040)	-3.631*** (0.287)	-3.599*** (0.277)	5,490.837*** (454.347)	5,489.520*** (454.289)
Age	-0.019*** (0.005)	0.026*** (0.005)	0.628*** (0.033)	0.808*** (0.033)	2,239.995*** (52.576)	2,271.534*** (54.637)
Survey year	0.099*** (0.005)	0.058*** (0.005)	-0.102** (0.037)	-0.310*** (0.037)	462.911*** (54.839)	433.007*** (56.609)
Mainland Chinese	-1.264*** (0.339)	-1.104*** (0.318)	-6.267** (2.207)	-5.327* (2.129)	- (3,641.372)	- (3,641.772)
Southeast Asian	-3.572*** (0.198)	-2.962*** (0.186)	-13.516*** (1.259)	-10.729*** (1.219)	-6,952.168*** (2,054.955)	-6,638.914** (2,062.486)
Father's education level		0.311*** (0.016)		1.373*** (0.110)		-19.124 (178.939)
Mother's education level		0.208*** (0.018)		1.077*** (0.124)		340.989 (201.369)
Constant	14.442*** (0.113)	12.215*** (0.122)	34.008*** (0.794)	24.821*** (0.854)	- (1,202.899)	- (1,377.660)
Observations	10,637	10,637	8,342	8,342	9,934	9,934

Notes: Standard errors are in brackets. ***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$

Discussion

Overall, confirming the hypothesis that children of new immigrants' disadvantage in academic achievement would have important implications for their socioeconomic status in early adulthood, the statistical results demonstrate that they are significantly disadvantaged compared to individuals with a non-immigrant background in educational attainment, occupational status, and monthly income. As shown in the extant literature, children of new immigrants tend to have lower academic achievement than their non-immigrant peers in elementary and middle school. Due to the linkage between academic achievement and social mobility through mechanisms such as tracking and academic credentials, it is possible that children of new immigrants bring their academic disadvantage into the labor market and consequently occupy the lower rungs of the occupational hierarchy. That is to say, high school students in Taiwan are placed into either a general or vocational track based largely on their academic performance; while the general track typically leads to higher education, the vocational track are more likely to lead to immediate participation in the labor market after high school graduation and hence positions lower in the occupational hierarchy (Tsai, 1998).

As this study reveals, children of new immigrants may have parents who have lower levels of education on average, which in turn may contribute to their lower socioeconomic status in early adulthood. Researchers such as Coleman (1968), Bourdieu (1986), Teachman (1987), and Lareau (2000) all found that parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are able to activate their economic capital to create a home environment that is conducive to the development of academic skills via means such as private tutoring and cultural goods that exert an educational effect (e.g., dictionaries), which gives their children an early advantage that enables them to perform better in school. Accordingly, it may not be surprising to find that children of new immigrants are in a disadvantaged socioeconomic situation in early adulthood given their parents' lower levels of education on average. Yet, while this appears to be true to some extent for children of Southeast Asian immigrants, for children of mainland Chinese immigrants, parental educational attainment seems to be rather unimportant in their social mobility process; in fact, their parental educational attainment does not differ from that of non-immigrants significantly, but they are disadvantaged in terms of educational attainment, occupational status, and monthly income. There may be other factors contributing to their disadvantaged socioeconomic status in early adulthood. However, given that I am unable to take into account factors such as parental occupation status and family income in the analysis, it is impossible to conduct a more in-depth analysis to address this issue by examining whether family socioeconomic status can explain away the gap between children of new immigrants and non-immigrants.

Another interesting finding is that although children of mainland Chinese immigrants have a higher occupational status on average, their average monthly income is lower than that of children of Southeast Asian immigrants. It would be crucial to understand whether there are additional barriers facing children of mainland Chinese immigrants in the labor market, which contribute to their having a higher occupational status but a lower monthly income than children of Southeast Asian immigrants. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that I can provide an adequate explanation based on the available data; this issue can be dealt with only if there are more appropriate data available in the future. Indeed, due to the small number of children of mainland Chinese immigrants in the sample, it is possible that the results do not truly represent the socioeconomic status of children of mainland Chinese immigrants; again, this issue requires more appropriate data in the future to deal with. As researchers have paid most attention to children of Southeast Asian immigrants because of empirical findings showing their disadvantaged academic achievement, children of mainland Chinese immigrants are much less

visible in the literature. If it is true that despite being advantaged in educational attainment and occupational status compared to children of Southeast Asian immigrants, children of mainland Chinese immigrants have a lower monthly income on average, it might be particularly important to explore factors that contribute to this phenomenon, which would help us better understand how children of new immigrants fare socioeconomically in Taiwanese society.

CONCLUSION

The present study explores the socioeconomic status of children of new immigrants in early adulthood in Taiwan using the TSCS data. Descriptive statistics show that they are in a disadvantaged situation compared to individuals with a non-immigrant background in terms of educational attainment, occupational status, and monthly income. Controlling for parental educational attainment, the only available variable in the aggregate data that can be employed to capture the effect of family socioeconomic status, in multiple linear regression appears to diminish the gaps between the two children of new immigrants samples and the non-immigrant sample, but its effect seems to be small. Other factors that cannot be taken into account in this study such as family income and parental occupation status may play an important role here. Besides, it is surprising that children of mainland Chinese immigrants' average monthly income is lower than that of children of Southeast Asian immigrants in spite of their higher average educational attainment and occupational status, which I am unable to explain based on the TSCS data. To address this issue and to better understand the social mobility of children of new immigrants, large-scale research projects focusing on this population sponsored by the government might be necessary. Given that children of new immigrants will constitute a significant portion of people who participate in national development in the near future, understand their specific needs in the social mobility process might be an urgent issue.

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