

Chapter 5

Socioeconomic Status and Child/Youth Outcomes in Asian American Families

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The term “socioeconomic status” (SES) refers to the relative position of a family in a hierarchical social structure, based on the family’s access to wealth, prestige, and power (Mueller & Parcel, 1981). In child development literature, it is operationally defined with measures of the educational levels, occupational prestige, and income of the children’s parents (Willims & Tramonte, 2014). Decades of research has established the important role of SES in children’s education and psychosocial outcomes. Nevertheless, systematic research on the role of SES in families from immigrant backgrounds remains limited. The role SES plays in Asian American families is particularly complex, intriguing, and worth examining. For example, recent research suggests that the role of family SES in determining child educational achievement appears weaker for Asian American children than expected (Liu & Xie, 2016). Why is this the case? How has family SES been conceived in Asian societies and how may this notion of SES have influenced Asian American families and child/youth educational outcomes? And what is the role of family SES in Asian American children’s psychosocial outcomes? In this chapter, we first examine SES backgrounds of Asian Americans. We then review research on the role of SES in Asian American children’s educational outcomes, including protective cultural factors that may mitigate the negative effect of low SES on Asian American families and child/youth outcomes. In particular, we trace the role of SES in ancient Chinese history to understand the East Asian folk concept of SES. Next, drawing on past research including our own, we highlight the significant role that SES plays in Asian American children’s psychosocial

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outcomes and family dynamics in immigrant families. We conclude with recommendations for future research on SES and Asian American families.

SES of Asian Americans

Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the United States. Immigrants from Asia have overtaken Latino immigrants and become the largest group of recent immigrants to the U.S., accounting for 36% of total new immigrants arrived in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2013). The SES of Asian Americans measured by education, occupational status, and income has shifted dramatically in the last century. Earlier records show that they fell far behind Whites in educational attainment (Siu, 1996). In 1940, for example, Chinese Americans finished an average of 5.5 years of education (compared to 8.7 years for Whites) and were only half as likely to complete high school or college as Whites (Weinberg, 1997). Today's Asian Americans, including newly arrived immigrants, however, are among the most highly educated and professional segments of the U.S. population (Liu & Xie, 2016). The 2010 Community Survey census data revealed that approximately 49% of Asian Americans (aged 25 and older) obtained at least a bachelor's degree, surpassing the share in the whole U.S. population (28%), European Americans (31%), African Americans (18%), and Hispanics (13%) (Pew Research Center, 2013). In terms of professional status, a century ago, most of the older generations of Asian immigrants worked in mining, farming, and railroad construction (Liu & Xie, 2016). Today, it is estimated that over 50% of Asian Americans have occupations in management, business, science, and arts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In terms of income, Asian Americans exceed in median annual household income (\$66,000) when compared to the whole U.S. population (\$49,800), European Americans (\$54,000), African Americans (\$33,300), and Hispanics (\$40,000) (Pew Research Center, 2013). Asian Americans also lead other racial/ethnic groups in terms of per capita income: the annual per capita income for Asian Americans, European Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics are \$34,399, \$32,910, \$20,277, and \$17,433 respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Within the general Asian American community, Indian Americans led Asian groups in educational attainment: approximately 70% of Indian Americans have obtained college degree or more, compared to Korean (53%), Chinese (51%), Filipino (47%), Japanese (46%), and Vietnamese Americans (26%) (Pew Research Center, 2013). Indian Americans also had higher median household income (\$88,000) than other Asian groups (\$75,000 for Filipino, \$65,390 for Japanese, \$65,050 for Chinese, \$53,400 for Vietnamese, and \$50,000 for Korean Americans) (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Family SES and Children's Educational Achievement

SES is essential if we want to understand the interaction between micro-level context such as family and children's developmental outcomes (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, Guerin, & Parramore, 2003). Scholars have documented strong

relationship between family SES and children's cognitive development and educational outcomes. Children from higher SES families are likely to have better long-term cognitive functioning and academic performance, e.g., language development, literacy levels, IQ, and achievement test results when compared to those from lower SES families (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Crane, 1996; Korat, 2011; McLoyd, 1998; Noble, McCandliss, & Farah, 2007).

How specifically does family SES influence children's cognitive and academic outcomes? We review three models below. First, in the *Wisconsin model* proposed by Sewell and colleagues (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969), family SES influences children's achievement by affecting their attitudes and behaviors. Sociologist Lareau (2002, 2011), for example, found that White and Black middle-class parents are more likely to have attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to children's educational success. Second, in the *family investment model*, families from different SES backgrounds invest different levels of financial, human, and social capital in children's cognitive development and education (Willingham, 2012). Financial capital or family income impacts children's educational outcomes through structuring access to cognitive stimulating material including the availability of books and the number of trips for intellectual purposes, as well as the quality of physical home environment conducive to education (Guo & Harris, 2000). Human capital, defined as "the knowledge and skills of the parents that can be imparted to their children" (Willingham, 2012, p. 35), is also important for children's education. For example, in language development, SES-related differences can be found in parent-to-child speech in terms of the length, quantity, and quality of the conversations as well as vocabulary used (Hoff, 2003; Rowe, 2008). Social capital, i.e., the social connections to people with resources, also powerfully shapes child educational outcomes. For example, Sirin (2005) pointed out that high-SES families are more likely to live in wealthy school districts with social benefits related to school success, such as schools with more experienced teachers or good instructional arrangement when compared to low-SES families. Finally, in the *family stress model*, low SES may expose both parents and children to chronic stress, which is likely to lead to negative effects on children's brain development directly and indirectly through the impact on parents' psychological health and parenting behaviors (Willingham, 2012). Yamauchi (2010) pointed out that mentally healthier parents are more able to adopt parenting practices conducive to children's development. Additionally, nurturing parents act as protective factors from negative effects of economic hardship on children (Mosley & Thomson, 1995; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). Ludy-Dobson and Perry's (2010) work on "poverty of relations" also suggests that the wealth of relationships, e.g., parental love and genuine investment on, can moderate the negative effects of material poverty on child outcomes.

The effects of family SES on children's cognitive and academic outcomes may differ by ethnic groups. For Asian Americans, and likely other groups (e.g., Lopez, 2001) as well, effect of SES on children's educational outcomes may not be as clear-cut as the three models suggest. On the one hand, Asian American families have higher average SES than other families, which may explain why their children have higher educational outcomes than children from other ethnic groups in the U.S. On

the other hand, family SES background, interestingly, only partially explains Asian American children's higher educational attainment than their White and other ethnic minority peers (Harris, Jamison, & Trujillo, 2008; Liu & Xie, 2014). Below, we examine research findings on the role of SES in children's educational outcomes in Asian American families.

Family SES, Culture, and Asian American Children's Educational Achievement

Education patterns of Asian Americans have changed dramatically since they first arrived in the U.S. Earlier records show that they fell far behind Whites in educational attainment (Siu, 1996). However, since the 1960s, students from Asian American families, particularly Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students, have been documented to outperform students from other ethnic groups, including the Whites, in aggregate data on standard testing, college enrollment rates, and educational attainment (Aldous, 2006; Hsin & Xie, 2014; Kao, 1995; Lee & Zhou, 2014; Pearce & Lin, 2007; Pong & Hao, 2007; Xie & Goyette, 2003). Their English aptitude test scores have consistently been higher than other minorities and their math aptitude test scores have been higher than their White and minority peers as well (ACT National Scores Reports, 1997 to 2004; College Bound Seniors Report, 1996 to 2004; Xie & Goyette, 2004). Asian American students also enroll in Ivy-League 4-year universities at disproportionately high rates (Thernstorm & Thernstorm, 2003).

Scholars believe that the important role of SES among Asian American immigrants is often masked in the discussion of education of Asian American children (Louie, 2003). Most Asian American immigrants before WWII came to "meet low-wage, low human capital labor needs," while post 1965 immigrants came to meet the scientific and technical personnel needs of the U.S. labor market (Nee & Wong, 1985). Even in the last few decades, there has been a significant increase in SES of Asian immigrants coming to the U.S. For example, in 1980, there were 35% of Asian immigrants aged 25–64 with at least a bachelor's degree and the number was almost double (61%) in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2013). With the exception of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees, most Asian immigrants also have high-salary jobs in the fields of science, engineering, and finance after their arrival in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2013). This selectivity may contribute to high educational achievement in children through positively influencing parental attitudes and behaviors, family human, and social capital as well as investment in children's education.

The middle- and upper-class parents tend to be more educated, have stable families, have high social capital through their jobs, can live in desirable neighborhoods, have access to better schools, enjoy more resources, and can provide additional support to their children out of school. Not surprisingly, their children tend to do well in school. For example, Weinberg (1997) reported that the Vietnamese refugee

children who came from highly literate middle- and upper-class families did not face as many obstacles in education as their working-class counterparts. Similarly, Lew (2006) found that Korean parents with economic means have greater access to social capital for assisting their children in school, tend to have strong co-ethnic network (e.g., Korean churches), can hire private bilingual tutors and college counselors, and can afford to send their children to private, tuition-based after-school academies. Similar patterns have been noted among Chinese immigrants (Li, 2006; Louie, 2004).

Challenges of Low-SES Asian American Families

It is important to note that the relative high levels of SES of Asian American families in comparison to other ethnic groups in the U.S. should not eclipse the struggles of significant portion of low-SES families in the community. SES plays an important role in structuring resources and investment. A family's SES can influence educational success by adding class-based resources, such as financial, social, and cultural capital, along with access to safe neighborhoods, quality schools, and a variety of extracurricular activities. Low SES may subject children to poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, inadequate schools, and disruptive social contexts harmful to academic achievement (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Lew's (2006) research with high- and low-achieving Korean students showed that family SES determines how much and what kind of educational resources and social networks students can gain access to, and the process of obtaining social capital differentiates the academically successful students from the dropouts even within the same ethnic groups.

In contrast to their middle-class or upper middle-class counterparts, working-class parents are likely to work for long hours, have less supervision on their children, reside in poor neighborhoods with limited access to good schools, and have limited resources and inadequate support for their children (Li, 2008; Louie, 2001, 2004; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). In a study examining Korean high-school dropouts, Lew (2006) found that the dropouts were more likely to come from households with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, single mothers, and less parental supervision at home. They tended to lack strong ties to co-ethnic networks at home and in their communities that could offer substantial economic and social resources. They were often left alone to make important decisions regarding schooling or career guidance. Similarly, drawing on longitudinal interview data collected on 72 Chinese immigrant children and their parents, Qin and Han (2014) examined challenges faced by parents in working-class Chinese immigrant families. Contrary to the popular "tiger mom" stereotype (Chua, 2011), Chinese immigrant parents in the study experienced a range of challenges in their children's educational involvement. One common challenge was the lack of time parents and children could spend together after migration. The problem was particularly pronounced in working-class families where the parents had to work very long hours in Chinese restaurants or other service sector jobs. Language barrier was another common challenge. Lack of con-

tent knowledge and knowledge of the U.S. education system further contributed to their lack of involvement in their children's education. As a result, the majority of working-class parents expressed a strong sense of powerlessness and sometimes hopelessness in their children's education.

In this study, many working-class parents did not believe in their own effectiveness and capabilities when it came to their children's education. For example, Mrs. Cheng said, "I don't know anything, I don't know English. I just hope that they follow the guidance of their teacher." In school-based engagement, parents often considered themselves as an "outsider." Another parent, Mr. Qiu said, "My comprehension ability is low. I consider my opinion as an outsider's. I do not want to express my comment to affect the school's work." Sometimes parents also had a lot of self-doubt and were worried that they might teach something wrong to the children.

When their children clearly needed help, parents often felt inadequate. For example, Lian's father commented about his daughter's schooling, "If she doesn't know the study material; there's nothing I can do. I can only tell her to work harder." In some cases, even when parents were concerned about their children's lack of progress, there was not much they could do. In Ling's family, both parents were worried about their daughters' grades in school, but felt completely at a loss in helping their children with schoolwork. With a blank expression, the father said, "I can only understand the report cards, A, B, C. Other things I don't understand...If they can't achieve at the level we hope, there's nothing we can really do." Parents also emphasized their role as the provider after migration and downplayed their role in their children's education. Mr. Lau who worked in a Chinese restaurant indicated, "I'll provide, but the rest depends on themselves." Traditionally, Chinese parents held teachers in high esteem and rarely questioned teachers nor challenged the school on issues concerning education. Immigration and the resulting feeling of powerlessness further reinforce this dynamic with the school. Other studies have found similar results (Heng, 2014; Li, 2013).

As a result of the perceived barriers and the feeling of powerlessness, parents often unintentionally left their children to cope on their own, forcing children in some families to be precociously independent after migration. In Chinese childhood socialization, there is a common mentality that parents should try to foster independence in their children, encourage them to *kao zi ji* (i.e., depend on themselves, instead of others, and be more independent). After migration, parents in this study frequently mentioned the importance for their children to "depend on themselves." Often children were pushed by their parents to "make their own decision and take the consequences as well." While in China, children may be encouraged to depend on themselves with the support of parents, after migration, children in some families found themselves being pushed to "depend on themselves" before they were ready to do so practically or psychologically. Other studies confirm the lower levels of involvement in Asian American families, especially those from working-class backgrounds (Li, 2013; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

Protective Factors for Low-SES Families

Asian Americans do not represent a homogenous group, but include a variety of groups from different parts of Asia, including regions where most of the families come from low-SES backgrounds. Low-SES Asian American families came with limited human capital and may face additional challenges in their educational pursuit, as reviewed above. Yet their children still outperform other peers from comparable SES backgrounds (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Indeed, recent research shows that educational achievement differences between Asian Americans and Whites persist even after controlling for parental education, household income, and family composition (Harris et al., 2008; Liu & Xie, 2016). Drawing on data on White and Asian American adolescents participating in the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, Liu and Xie (2016) found that Asian American students' academic achievement was less likely to be influenced by their family SES than their White peers. They found that among high-SES families, there were no differences in achievement between Asian and White students; but in low-SES families, Asian American students had significantly higher achievement than White students from similar background. Our data from a longitudinal project on understanding psychosocial development of academically gifted students show (see Note 1) show that there were no significant differences between low and high-SES academically gifted Chinese American adolescents in terms of academic efficacy and performance (i.e., GPA) at either the 9th or 11th grade (see Note 2 for specific statistical results). These and many other similar findings (for a review, see Lee & Zhou, 2014) point to other important protective factors that influence Asian American children's educational outcomes.

Traditional Chinese Concept of Education and SES

In this section, we review a number of potential protective factors that may buffer the negative effect of low SES on Asian American children's educational outcomes including the traditional Asian concept of SES, parental involvement, and access to ethnic resources and social capital. First, we provide a detailed historical discussion of the concept of SES in Chinese society, especially the relations between education and social mobility, which may provide some insights into the relations between culture, SES, and education in Asian American families.

In Ancient China (*pre Qin Dynasty*; 2100–221 B.C.), individuals' social status was determined by their clan and was quite stable and hardly mobile (Hsu, 2009). Throughout Chinese history, the ruling class classified civilians into *si-min* (four groups of commoners): scholars, peasants, artisans, and merchants, and the ruling class forbade civilians to change from one group to another for a long period of time. However, during Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911 A.D.), civilians' social status became much more flexible and fluid, which is attributed to a variety of factors including civil-service examination being open to all the commoners, the influence of Confucianism on education, and establishment of nation-wide school and scholarship system (Ho, 1959).

The civil-service examination system has a long history in Chinese society from Sui Dynasty (581–618 A.D.) to the end of Qing Dynasty in early twentieth century (Xu, 1990). Prior to Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD), the civil-service examination was primarily open to the ruling class and scholars (Ho, 1959). While peasants were allowed to take examinations, artisans and merchants were always forbidden to take the examination. In Ming times, however, the ruling class by and large recruited officials according to individual ability and meritocracy. As a result, many ordinary commoners, including peasants, artisans, and merchants, spent a lot of time studying and preparing for the examinations. Drawing from historic data of China, Ho (1959) found that in Ming dynasty, 62.4% of *jin-shi* (state doctor who prepared to become officials) came from ordinary families, including peasants, artisans, and merchants. In other words, there was great upward social mobility in Ming Dynasty. A lot of commoners took advantage of the civil-service examination system to become scholars and thus gain higher social status. In Qing times, there remained a lot of upward social mobility, although the pathway to upward mobility became slower toward the end of the period.

Confucianism places education in high regard. Confucius believed that education is not a privilege of the upper or ruling class, but should be offered to anyone; and everyone should have equal access to education (Ho, 1959). One well-known Confucius' saying is that "in education, there should be no class distinction" (有教无类; *the Analects*, 15.38). Confucius also emphasized the importance of effort in the pathway toward educational success. The interplay of civil-service examination system and Confucianism together shaped intellectual and social emancipation during Ming and Qing Dynasties (Ho, 1959). Many ordinary commoners believed that through personal effort and commitment in studying, they were able to climb up the social ladder and eventually move to the elite class.

In addition to the impact of examination system and Confucianism, establishment of both public schools and private academies also drove upward social mobility in Ming and Qing times. Although public schools were first established during Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD), the number was small and a lot of them were confined to large cities (Chao, 1953). Yet, public schools were widely established in every county and prefecture in Ming times and the widespread of public-school systems remained in the Qing dynasty. Moreover, the Ming and Qing governments provided scholarships or small monthly subsidies to those who pursued *sheng-yuan* degree (the lowest level of scholars) (Chao, 1953). Such financial subsidies served as another important channel of upward social mobility for commoners, particularly those who had limited income.

To summarize, in recent Chinese history, there was a strong belief that social class is more fluid and can be transcended by education. Civil-service examination system, Confucianism, and establishment of school system contributed to the upward social mobility of commoners in Ming and Qing dynasties and significantly influenced contemporary Chinese folk belief of relation between education and SES (Wong, Wong, & Wong, 2012). Chinese, in general, believe that individuals can climb up the social ladder through diligent study and success in examinations. There are numerous traditional Chinese sayings that communicate such sentiment; for

example, a student's 10 years of academic study is known to none, but he will become famous overnight once he passes the imperial examination (十年寒窗无人问, 一举成名天下知) or a fish leaps over the dragon gate (鲤鱼跃龙门)— a fish represents an ordinary commoner and the dragon gate presents the civil-service examination). A large body of educational research on contemporary Chinese societies suggests the belief that education serves as a key to success and upward social mobility has lasted up to the contemporary Chinese society and been rooted in the value system of regular Chinese people (Lin, H.-Y., 1999; Lin, W.-Y., 2003; Louie, 2001; Ng, Pomerantz, & Deng, 2014; Wong et al., 2012).

The above Chinese folk concept that SES can be transcended by education is also widely accepted in other Confucian-influenced Asian countries (Chen & Stevenson 1995; Liu & Xie, 2014). In most Asian countries, education has been viewed as a primary route to self-improvement, upward mobility, and family honor (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1996; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Research also shows that East Asian concept of self views individuals as more malleable than does the Western concept of self (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Heine, 2001), individuals are expected to achieve by “molding themselves,” and SES can be transcended by education (Dweck, 2006; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Academic success is considered the key to financial security, a measure of competence, and a reflection of family status (Schneider & Lee, 1990; Yang, 2001; Yang & Rettig, 2003). In contemporary Asian societies, the value of education continues to be high in an era of global competition (Oh, 2006). Access to quality education is unusually competitive, and families tend to invest a disproportionate amount of their resources in supplementary education to improve their kids' future life chances (Lim, 2007; Zhou & Kim, 2006). There are also signs of increasing educational disparities across social class in contemporary Asian societies such as China and South Korea. We will discuss this at a later part of our chapter.

Parental involvement. The above belief that education provides great opportunities for upward social mobility is placed in unwavering high regard among Asian immigrants (Xie & Goyette, 2003). This traditional emphasis on education is primed even more strongly after migration because structural circumstances in the US also promote pathway to social mobility through education (Lee & Zhou, 2015). After migration, many traditional Asian cultural beliefs and values are transmitted and reinforced through parental socialization and involvement (Louie, 2001; Robbins, 2004; Zhou & Bankston, 2004). Parental socialization and involvement are important protective factors buffering against the negative impact of low SES on children's educational outcomes. Research shows that Asian immigrant parents, including low-SES parents, are involved in and contribute to their children's education through a wide variety of ways including imbuing high value on education, having high expectations (Louie, 2001), sacrificing for children (Sun, 1998), providing children with favorable learning opportunities (Peng & Wright, 1994; Schneider & Lee, 1990), motivating their children's achievement through induction of guilt about parental sacrifice (Conchas, 2006; Lee & Zhou, 2014), comparison of their children with those from other families (Sue & Okazaki, 1990), and investing heavily in their children's education (Braxton, 1999; Kao, 2001, 2004; Sun, 1998).

In most Asian immigrant families, children's education often takes a center stage. For example, for Vietnamese students, academic achievement is viewed as a collective family affair, as part of family bonds and obligations (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Further, instead of direct involvement in school settings, Asian American parents adopt direct hands-on practices at home (e.g., teaching children academic skills) and use indirect involvement with the purpose of creating good learning environment (Chao, 2000; Huntsinger, Jose, Larson, Krieg, & Shaligram, 2000). Research shows that Asian American parents are more likely to structure an environment conducive to children's learning by controlling children's time spent on activities distracting children from studying, such as requiring children to finish homework before watching TV, helping children concentrating on academic activities, and/or sending them to after-school classes (Kim, 2002a, 2002b; Kim & Rohner, 2002; Sy, 2006). Thus, Asian American parents, especially those from low-SES families, may lack in traditional measure of parental involvement in school, but manage to use direct practices at home to facilitate children's internalizing process of Asian learning virtues and parents' expectations.

Ethnic Community Resources. Another protective factor is that Asian American parents use available resources within their co-ethnic community to help their children move up the educational ladders in the U.S. society. Asian immigrant families often settle in the community where their co-ethnics live and the social network facilitates parenting and child socialization of their heritage values and traditions (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Low-SES Asian American families actively obtain access to resources from their co-ethnic communities in order to override the SES disadvantage. Zhou and Bankston (1994) discovered that, in disadvantaged neighborhoods, ethnic social network helps Vietnamese families preserve traditional values, offers a path to upward mobility, and prevents their children from being Americanized into the underprivileged local environment. The social network provides families, especially low-SES families, with tangible resources such as tutoring class, intangible resources such as information relevant to school shared by middle-class co-ethnics, and high reference group in academics acted by high-achieving co-ethnics (Lee & Zhou, 2014). The shared social capital tempers the difference between low-SES and high-SES families in Asian Americans.

While access to some academic and enrichment programs can be more restricted for working-class than for middle-class families due to cost, parents from lower SES background can take advantage of after-school programs such as ethnic language schools and church-affiliated after-school programs, both being less expensive than other enrichment programs. These ethnic institutions not only provide academic and enrichment programs, but also serve as the locus of social support and control, network building, and social capital formation (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Similar to Chinese and Korean immigrant communities, the Vietnamese ethnic communities also support after-school programs for students and cultural celebrations (Centrie, 2000; Kim, 2002a; Zhou & Bankston, 1996, Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Kim (2002b) found that parents' community ties and other structural variables were significantly related to academic achievement of Vietnamese students.

Some other cultural factors, such as Asian American youths' perceptions of family obligation, were also found to be a buffer for the negative effects of family SES for low-SES families. For those Asian American adolescents who highly valued family obligation and the importance of providing family assistance, their academic expectations and perceived importance of academic success were less likely to be influenced by family financial stress (Kiang, Andrews, Stein, Supple, & Gonzalez, 2013).

SES and Psychosocial Adjustment

In the above section, we examined the role of SES in Asian American children's educational outcomes. What about psychosocial outcomes? Does SES play a role? Research indicates that SES is associated with children's socioemotional development in both direct and indirect ways. Exposure to negative life events in low-SES families such as economic hardship, unemployment, problematic family relationships, or even family dissolution likely contribute to a lack of sense of control over life, stress, and lowered level of psychological well-being (Amato & Zuo, 1992). Frustrated parents are more likely to apply ineffective parenting strategies, such as shouting at the child to show disapproval, and are less likely to provide consistent and supportive parenting (McLoyd, 1990). Further, low-SES families tend to provide fewer opportunities for children to engage in stimulating experience leading to more engagement in behaviors that elicit negative feedbacks from parents, which can be a vicious cycle (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). In direct and indirect ways through parenting, SES affects children's socioemotional functioning such as behavioral problems, depression, and self-esteem (Bradley & Corwyn, 2003; Ho, Lempers, & Clark-Lempers, 1995; Lee, Wickrama, & Simons, 2013).

However, as Bradley and Corwyn (2002) pointed out, research did not show consistent results that SES is related to socioemotional development due to different methods to assess mental illness and varying strength of the relationship with different mental disorders. For example, different reports of socioemotional well-being partially explained why some of the research did not have consistent findings of the relationship between low SES and poor adaptive functioning among adolescents (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). In addition, McCoy, Frick, Loney, and Ellis (1999) pointed out that the relationships of SES with schizophrenia and personality disorders were consistent, but its relationships with neuroses and affective disorders were inconsistent.

The effects of socioeconomic status on children and adolescents' psychological well-being may also differ across various ethnic groups. For instance, using large-scale survey data collected from public-school students (148 Asian American, 1813 Hispanics, 1755 non-Hispanic African American, and 1256 non-Hispanic White), Fradkin et al. (2014) examined ethnic differences in adolescents' perceived quality of life and found that Asian American adolescents reported lower physical, emotional, and social quality of life than their White counterparts; however, Asian

American youths experienced greater quality of life as compared to their African American and Hispanic peers. Furthermore, the authors found that the SES differences (between Asian American and other ethnic groups) effectively explained the gaps in self-reported quality of life among Asian American, African American, and Hispanic adolescents; nonetheless, the differences in quality of life between Asian American and White youths remained the same after controlling for the SES differences and may be due to factors related to their minority status.

SES and Asian American Children's Psychosocial Outcomes

Compared to research on SES and Asian American children's educational attainment, studies examining the relationships between family SES and Asian American children's psychosocial outcomes are much more limited. A number of studies investigated differences in psychological health and adjustment of children and adolescents from diverse Asian subgroups did not find significant role of family SES (Okazaki, 1997; Qin, Rak, Rana, & Donnellan, 2012; Wong, 2000). For example, drawing on survey data collected from 183 non-Hispanic White and 165 Asian American college students from fairly high-SES families, Okazaki (1997) found that Asian American university students showed greater emotional distress and higher level of social avoidance than their White peers, and that ethnicity and individual preference to independence and interdependence, rather than family SES, were significant predictors to social anxiety—college students showing preference to independence and autonomy were less likely to report social anxiety problems, compared to students who had higher interdependence self-construal (Okazaki, 1997). Similarly, drawing on data collected on 487 academically gifted Chinese American and European American high-school students, Qin et al. (2012) found that Asian American adolescents showed more depressive symptoms and anxiety as compared to their European American peers. In this sample, Chinese American participants reported lower family SES than European American participants. They also found that parent-child conflict and cohesion significantly predicted mental health of Chinese American and European American students after controlling for family SES (Qin et al., 2012).

In our new analysis of the within-Chinese group data, comparing low- and high-SES Chinese American high-achieving students from the study, we found that low and high-SES Chinese American students reported similar levels of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem at both 9th and 11th grades (see Note 2 for finding details). In another study examining generational differences within Asian Americans (335 American-born and 1193 foreign-born Asian Americans), John, De Castro, Martin, Duran, and Takeuchi (2012) found that Asian immigrants usually had lower SES and were more likely to have blue-collar and service jobs when compared to native-born Asian Americans; nonetheless, with advantages in SES and better self-rated mental health, U.S.-born Asian Americans reported more mental disorders in the past 12 months including DSM-IV anxiety and depression disorders than Asian immigrants (John et al., 2012). While this raised some measurement questions, their

findings did suggest that occupational class might not be an effective factor in predicting mental disorder, anxiety, or depressive symptoms of the Asian American population (John et al., 2012). Other socio-cultural factors, such as discrimination and marginalization in workplace (e.g., white-collar Asian Americans working in predominantly White settings), might account for the gaps in psychological disorders of foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian Americans (John et al., 2012).

It is important to note that in most of the above studies, SES was mostly used as a control variable and often not the focus of investigations. There have been some studies showing that in understanding Asian American children's psychosocial outcomes, family SES remains a critical yet often ignored factors that at least indirectly influence Asian American children's psychosocial well-being. Compared to those from higher SES families, Asian American children from lower SES families are more likely to be exposed to potential risk factors for their well-being such as parents' limited social support due to low English proficiency, lack of experiences with formal education, and lack of resources (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Wight, Aneshensel, Botticello, & Sepúlveda, 2005). Compared to their counterparts from middle-class families, Asian American children from lower SES families are more likely to be short of learning support and verbal stimulation that play key roles in their academic achievement. These factors could lead to poor learning outcomes, which in turn are correlated with behavioral and emotional difficulties (e.g., school misconduct, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression) (Guerrero, Hishinuma, Andrade, Nishimura, & Cunanan, 2006).

One study, in particular, highlights the indirect effects of family SES on Chinese American adolescents' developmental outcomes. Drawing on the family stress model, Benner and Kim (2010) investigated 444 Chinese American families living in Northern California and illustrated the mediating mechanism of family processes in the effects of family SES on Chinese adolescents' academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes. Particularly, low family income and financial instability among Chinese American families were related to more parental economic pressure and parents' depressive symptoms (Benner & Kim, 2010). Chinese American parents with greater perceived financial pressure and depressive symptoms were more likely to show higher levels of hostile and coercive parenting practices and less nurturing and involved parenting than their counterparts (Benner & Kim, 2010). Higher levels of maternal hostility and coerciveness and lower levels of father's nurturing and involved parenting were associated with lower academic achievement among Chinese American adolescents (Benner & Kim, 2010). Further, Chinese American adolescents with higher levels of maternal hostility and coerciveness also reported higher levels of depressive symptoms and engagement in delinquent behaviors (Benner & Kim, 2010).

Protective Factors for Low-SES Families

While low SES may be associated with more risks in mental health, it is possible that the protective factors of traditional cultural notions of SES and co-ethnic community and network also serve as indirect protective factors that mitigate the effect

of low SES on Asian American children's mental health. Besides these cultural and community factors, research suggests that in children's mental health, Asian American family dynamics such as family involvement, support, cohesion, and flexible parenting strategy may play a particularly important protective role for low-SES families (Mason, 2004). In lower SES Asian American families, parents' effective involvement in education and children's school life facilitates their children's academic adjustment that further benefits their mental health (e.g., Guerrero et al., 2006). Way and Robinson's (2003) longitudinal study on Asian American children from low-SES families shows that children whose parents provide more family support (e.g., acceptance and warmth) reported significantly fewer mental health problems (e.g., low self-esteem, high anxiety, depression). In addition, this study suggests that the protective effect of family support for children is over and above the effects of peer support and friendly school climate. Further, in Zhang and Ta's (2009) study on gaps in mental health within the Asian American group, they found that family cohesion might be a protective factor for Asian Americans with low SES. Drawing on survey data collected from 2034 Asian Americans participating in the 2002–2003 National Latino and Asian American Study (including 497 Vietnamese, 499 Filipinos, 579 Chinese, and 459 Other Asian Americans), Zhang and Ta (2009) found that although Vietnamese reported the most disadvantaged SES and the highest foreign-born rate, their self-reported mental and physical health did not lag behind other Asian American groups. The authors attributed the lack of the gaps in mental health to the protective effects of family cohesion (Zhang & Ta, 2009).

In another study drawing on a 5-year longitudinal study, Qin (2008) compared mental health of two groups of high-achieving students from mixed SES backgrounds and found that flexible parenting after migration mattered more than SES in shaping students' stress level. After migration, most Chinese immigrant parents in the study, both middle and working class, experience downward social mobility due to language barriers and a lack of social network. Many struggle to find jobs and adjust to the new social milieu which is not always friendly to them. This often limits their time, energy, and ability to parent effectively. Families in the study were coded as middle class or working class based on parents' levels of education, jobs held in China, jobs held in the U.S., and family income. Students were divided into stressed and non-distressed groups based on self-reported measures of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. In the non-distressed group, 9 families were coded as middle class and 11 families were coded as working class. In the distressed group, 4 families were coded as middle class, while 14 families were coded as working class.

As previous research has documented (Sluzki, 1979), the great majority of parents in the sample experienced downward social mobility, which was more marked for those who had stable, middle-class jobs back home. A well-respected doctor in China, Ms. Liu struggled to put together a small acupuncture practice. A vice president of a company in Hong Kong, Mr. Tang worked in a bakery after migration. The stress and constant worry stemming from perceived economic insecurity were present in both working-class and middle-class families. Parents frequently mentioned "pressure" and "worry" related to their new living situation, including those who held professional jobs. It was not uncommon for parents to bring their pressure back

home to the children. Qin found that, importantly, parents of the two groups adopted very different modes of parenting after migration. Parents of the distressed adolescents, mostly working class but some middle class, tended to adhere to a static parenting modality, strictly and rigidly following traditional Chinese parenting tenets without making too many adaptations in the new cultural context. This approach resulted in high levels of parent-child conflict, ineffective communication, and estranged parent-child relations in these families. Parents of the non-distressed adolescents, about half middle class and half working class, on the other hand, tended to adopt the flexible and adaptive parenting modality, which considers both the developmental needs of children and the changing cultural context after migration. Their parenting strategies were characterized by parental adjustments in terms of letting go of some parental control, tuning into the emotional worlds of their children, communicating more with their children, and maintaining a moral Confucian discourse at home. These strategies allowed parents and children to remain connected emotionally after migration, which in turn provided a healthy context for adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Findings also suggest that while SES played an important role in structuring parenting challenges in families after migration, it was the family dynamics that mattered most.

Previous research suggests that while SES may play a role in structuring parenting challenges in families after migration, it does not account for all the differences. Compared with their middle-class counterparts, parents from a working-class background are more likely to face additional barriers in building relations with their children after migration, such as lack of time together with their children due to long hours of working in service-type jobs (e.g., Qin, 2006; Sayer, Gauthier, & Furstenberg, 2004). Parents in middle-class families are likely to have time and resources to be more involved in their children's lives (Lareau, 2002) both before and after migration. The adaptation may be easier for middle-class parents who can devote more time to be thoughtful in their relations with their children. However, as some of the families illustrated, parents from working-class backgrounds can maintain positive communication and relations with their children through adopting the flexible, adaptive parenting modality. On the other hand, parents from middle-class families can negatively affect their relationship with their children when they exert too much pressure on their children for educational achievement at the cost of their psychosocial well-being.

SES and Immigrant Family Alienation and Tension

While family cohesion and support may be important protective factors for low-SES Asian American families, parent-child tension and emotional alienation may occur to both middle-class and working-class families, especially for recently arrived immigrant families. For example, using 5-year longitudinal, in-depth qualitative interview and ethnographic data, Qin (2006) compared the experiences of two families in an East Coast city: the Lai family represents the middle-class families—both parents work as professionals and have high levels of education; they came to

this country to pursue educational and professional opportunities; and their children tend to attend schools in the suburbs with mainly White students. The Zhen family represents the working-class families—both parents work in service-type jobs and have limited education; they came to this country through a family reunion visa and resided near Chinatown; and their children tend to attend urban schools with fellow co-ethnic immigrant students. In this study, Qin found that both the working-class family and the middle-class family experienced increasing parent-child emotional alienation over time after migration, marked by absence of meaningful interactions between parents and their children and a lack of communication around academic and personal issues. Interestingly, while alienation occurred in both families, the underlying reasons were somewhat different. In the middle-class family, the alienating effect of parallel dual frame of reference in parent-child relations appears more acute than in the working-class family. Asian American children from middle-class families tend to attend suburban schools with mostly middle-class White peers and thus have ample opportunities to be exposed to and thus assimilate many U.S. cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Even though middle-class parents tend to work as professionals, their exposure to the U.S. culture and language may still fall behind that of their children's, depending on both the diversity of their working environment and their social circle. In working-class families, while parents tend to have limited exposure to mainstream U.S. culture, their children's contact with the new cultural context may also be restricted because they tend to attend schools with mostly immigrant peers. Furthermore, in the middle-class family, high parental academic pressures also play a significant role in pulling the child emotionally away from the parents. In the working-class family, the effects of a parallel dual frame of reference seem eclipsed by many structural factors shaped by larger social and economic forces, e.g., increasing work demands after migration, children's loss of native language, and parent-child separation in the process of migration. These factors create both structural and linguistic barriers in connecting parents with their children and produce growing alienation over time.

Conclusion

Our review shows that family SES powerfully shapes immigrant family experiences before and after migration. It structures family resources and investment in Asian American families, which has important implications for children's educational and psychosocial outcomes. Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group in U.S. Their SES has shifted dramatically in the last century. Today's Asian Americans are among the most highly educated and professional segments of the US population. While their higher average SES, in comparison to other groups, may explain Asian American children's higher educational outcomes, SES does not tell the whole story for Asian American student achievement. Compared to their middle- and upper middle-class counterparts, low-SES families came with limited human capital and face additional challenges in their children's educational pursuit. Yet

their children still outperform peers from other groups with comparable SES backgrounds. Our review shows that a number of protective factors including maintaining the traditional Asian perception of the fluid nature of family SES, support from family, and co-ethnic community can buffer the negative effect of low SES on Asian American children's educational outcomes.

Relative to research on SES and Asian American children's educational attainment, studies examining the relationships between family SES and Asian American children's psychosocial outcomes are much more limited. A number of existing studies, where SES was used as a control variable, did not find any significant relationship between family SES and Asian American children's mental health. Compared to those from middle-class families, Asian American children from lower SES families are likely exposed to more direct and indirect risk factors to their mental health such as parents' elevated stress, long work hours, limited social support, and lack of resources. Nevertheless, our review suggests that in children's mental health, positive family dynamics such as family involvement, support, cohesion, and flexible parenting strategy can mitigate the potential negative effect of low SES on Asian American children's psychosocial outcomes. Overall, our review supports Portes and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory, indicating that immigrant families with limited financial and human capital can achieve upward social mobility through maintenance of the heritage culture and social capital built in the ethnic communities. It is important for clinicians, other practitioners working with immigrant families, and policymakers to develop strategies, intervention programs, and policies that foster immigrant family resilience and connection to ethnic communities.

SES is a critical factor influencing Asian American children's educational and psychosocial outcomes through different parenting and family processes. Much of existing research on Asian American families treats SES as a control variable. However, as our review shows, the role of SES in Asian American families is complex and intriguing. It is important for future research to continue examining the distinct role of SES in Asian American families. We would particularly want to highlight a few worthwhile directions. First, it is important to continue to examine other protective factors and strategies that parents in low-SES Asian American families enlist to support their children's education. Poverty-related challenges are among the biggest challenge to US education. Disproportionally high numbers of minority students are trapped in schools and communities with limited resources and dire conditions. Our review suggests that there are ways low-SES families and communities can build up social capital to help children thrive. More scholarly efforts to unpack and understand ways low-income immigrant families help their children attain educational success can yield valuable information to help low-income families beyond the immigrant communities.

Second, the traditional notions of education and SES may be shifting somewhat in contemporary Asia. As our review shows, in Asian immigrant communities in the U.S., education still plays a central role in promoting upward mobility for low-income immigrant children and their families. However, in contemporary Asia, things may be becoming more challenging for low-income families. In China, for

example, in the last few decades, there has been much discussion of the critical role of family SES in one's success, life, and even marriage harmony prospect. Some examples of this recent public discourse (mostly on social media) include "the wealthy/official second generation," "phoenix men or women" (men or women from urban, relatively well-off families), and "peacock men or women" (men or women born in the countryside and later earned professional status in the city). In contemporary China, family SES (and the related urban/rural divide) appears more salient and the belief that education can be critical in obtaining upward social mobility may be weaker compared to decades earlier (Hao, 2009; Wang & Zhu, 2009; Wen, 2005). This may also appear weaker than in Asian immigrant communities in the U.S. There may be a number of different reasons for this. First, both the relative gap and distance between low and high-SES groups may be smaller in the immigrant community compared to their country of origin. Immigrants are a selected group (Lee & Zhou, 2015) compared to their counterparts who do not have the human or social capital to immigrate. Further, ethnic enclaves and Asian communities in the U.S. facilitate exchange of information and social capital between families from different social classes that promote second-generation successful adaptation (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Immigrant optimism and their unique frame of reference, i.e., comparing their well-being with family and friends back home, also equip immigrants and their offspring with strong achievement motivation, which can translate into success in the educational realm. This can be further enabled by the receptive US social structural context where education can still play a key role for upward mobility. It is important for future research to continue to pay attention to socio-cultural changes and the ensuing role of education in contemporary Asia, which will likely influence the source of immigrants and ethos around education and upward mobility in Asian communities here.

Third, as recent demographic trends indicate, new cohorts of immigrants from Asia seem to come with higher levels of SES than their previous counterparts. However, this does not necessarily indicate that they are free of concerns in the families or in child educational and psychosocial outcomes. Research shows that there may be unique challenges in mental health for affluent youth, often as a result of excessive pressure to achieve and physical and emotional isolation from parents (e.g., Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). Qin and colleagues' most recent work with Chinese international students from well-off families suggests tremendous challenges in family dynamics back home. Analyzing survey data on 330 and in-depth interview data on 48 Chinese freshmen at a large Midwestern University, Qin and Xie (2017) found that a substantial portion of Chinese students in our sample reported multiple challenges in their family dynamics and relations with parents, including parental conflicts, fragmented family structure, and lack of parental presence and involvement in their childhood and teenage years. In particular, parent-child emotional connection was often sacrificed in the midst of parental concern for family finances and children's educational outcomes. As more and more wealthy Asian families arrive in the U.S., these family challenges will likely linger and negatively influence family dynamics after migration.

Finally, it may be worthwhile to tease out the specific components of family SES in future research. For example, immigrant family's financial resources do not necessarily guarantee children's successful connection to other resources that they need for education if parents do not have adequate education or sufficient knowledge of the local educational system. While educational level, income, and professional status may often be strongly associated measures of SES, some scholars believe that one measure of SES in a family may be disproportionately higher than other ones. Rana, Qin, McNall, and Johnson's (2014) work in a small Sikh community, for example, suggests that correlation between education and income is not necessarily strong—while many of the families in the community did quite well in their small businesses (most often family owned stores), most parents were not very educated or knowledgeable of local school systems or extracurricular activities to help children access resources they need. From a family investment view, parents may be high on financial capital, but low on human capital. It is important for future research to continue to examine the main and interactive effects of different components of family SES and their influence on Asian American family dynamics and child/youth outcomes. This is particularly important as Asian immigrants continue to grow under the current global context.

Notes

1. The data are part of a longitudinal project focusing on the psychosocial development of academically gifted students, conducted by Desiree Qin. All the participants who participated in the project were recruited from a public high school in a northeastern U.S. metropolis that served the need of academically gifted students. The school used the Specialized High School Admission Test (Krane, 2001) as the only admission criterion and enrolled fewer than 5% of the students who took the test. The entire ninth-grade cohort was invited to participate. Finally, 745 students (90% of the cohort) filled out the Time 1 survey. When the students were juniors, the students were invited to join the follow-up survey and 529 students (71%) participated. These students consisted of 40.5% Chinese American, 26.7% other Asian backgrounds (e.g., Korean, Indian), 23.6% European American, and 8.9% with other ethnicities (predominantly Black and Latino groups). The findings reported in this chapter were based on a sample of 211 Chinese American students who reported their eligibility for free school lunches (a proxy for SES). In the sample, 110 students were classified as low SES (free or reduced-price lunch) and 101 students as middle or high SES (full-price lunch). The gender distribution was almost even for both low and middle/high-SES groups (50.91% and 50.50% boy, respectively). The mean age for the overall sample in the ninth grade was 14.49 (SD = 0.31). The majority of the students were second and later generation: for low-SES group, 85.45% were second and later generation and 14.55% first generation; and for middle/high-SES group, 76.24% were second and later generation, 22.77% first generation,

and 1.00% not reporting. For both ethnic groups, the majority lived in a nuclear family (90% of the low-SES group and 84.16% of the middle/high-SES group).

2. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas of Variables of Adolescent Outcomes by SES, and Results of Pairwise Comparisons for SES Difference in Adolescent Outcomes at 9th and 11th Grades.*

Variable	Low SES			High SES			Estimate (high SES vs. low SES)	SE	Z
	<i>M</i>	SD	α	<i>M</i>	SD	α			
9th Grade (T1)									
<i>Adolescent psychological adjustment</i>									
Depression	0.60	0.22	0.78	0.61	0.21	0.73	0.01	0.03	0.33
Self-esteem	1.91	0.57	0.90	1.86	0.60	0.90	-0.06	0.08	-0.69
Anxiety	0.40	0.20	0.85	0.43	0.21	0.85	0.03	0.03	1.09
<i>Adolescent academic adjustment</i>									
Academic efficacy	1.70	0.55	0.67	1.74	0.55	0.69	0.04	0.08	0.49
Academic performance (GPA)	91.01	4.09	-	89.82	5.43	-	-1.20	0.67	-1.79
11th Grade (T2)									
<i>Adolescent psychological adjustment</i>									
Depression	0.59	0.20	0.75	0.62	0.21	0.75	0.02	0.03	0.86
Self-esteem	1.90	0.55	0.90	1.87	0.60	0.91	-0.03	0.08	-0.40
Anxiety	0.43	0.20	0.84	0.45	0.20	0.85	0.02	0.03	0.67
<i>Adolescent academic adjustment</i>									
Academic efficacy	1.71	0.50	0.70	1.83	0.62	0.77	0.13	0.08	1.64
Academic performance (GPA)	90.24	7.10	-	90.55	5.13	-	0.34	0.89	0.38

- (a) Considering that time was a within-subject factor in which levels of each variable of adolescent psychological and academic adjustment at T1 and T2 were interdependent within subjects (Pan, 2001), a Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) regression model was used to examine whether the academically gifted Chinese American adolescents in the low- and high-SES families were different in each of the variables at T1 and T2. Given that the purpose of the analysis was to test SES differences in each of the variables by time and the within-subject factor (i.e., time) needed to be included as an independent variable in the model to control the dependency between times within subjects, the two-way interaction of SES and time needed to be included in the GEE models. For all the variables, the GEE models included the following predictors: SES (0 = low; 1 = high), time (0 = T1; 1 = T2), the two-way interaction of SES and time, and effect-coded controlled variables, i.e., adolescent gender (-1 = male;

1 = female), generational status (−1 = first generation; 1 = second generation or beyond), and family arrangement (−1 = nuclear family; 1 = single-parent household).

- (b) To examine SES difference in levels of all the variables of adolescent psychological and academic adjustment by time, we conducted a pairwise comparison for SES difference at T1 and T2, which resulted in two pairwise comparisons for each of the variables. For all the variables, estimate was a value of difference between high-SES and low-SES groups that was generated from the GEE regression model. In addition, Bonferroni adjustment was conducted to control over the family-wise error rate across the two comparisons at 0.05 for each variable. For space consideration, we did not report the results of the GEE regression models for all the variables, but only reported the results of pairwise comparisons for SES difference at T1 and T2 separately.
- (c) SE = standard error of estimate.

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