Taiwanese Youth's Intention to Work in China

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[Extended Abstract for PAA 2015]

Abstract

About half a million Taiwanese (more than 2% of the entire population) are now working in China, but little is known about these migrant workers and what motivated their move to China. In this study, we examine factors that affect Taiwanese youth's intention to work in China using vignettes embedded in the panel survey of the Taiwan Youth Project. The respondents made judgments based on randomly chosen vignettes about the likelihood that a fictitious person would take a job to work in China and whether this fictitious person should take the job given various conditions. Preliminary results show that the strongest predictors of both the respondents' positive and normative beliefs are the fictitious person's gender, marital status, and their parents' approval: The respondents judged males as opposed to females; single persons, compared to those married with children; and those with parental consent, compared to those without, to be both more likely and more appropriate to take a job in China. The fictitious person's educational level and current salary were inconsequential, whereas the percent pay raise of the fictitious new job had only a modest impact. These findings suggest that family values trump economic considerations in Taiwanese youth's decision to work in China.

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Introduction

Estimates suggest that about half a million Taiwanese are now working in China.[i] This comprises more than 2% of the Taiwanese population and 5% of its workforce, and the number is large enough to change the results of recent, and presumably future, presidential elections.[ii] In a 2010 island-wide survey, 13% of respondents reported that they themselves or some of their family members were working or living in China, accounting for a million Taiwanese households.[iii] Despite these far from trivial demographics, little is known about these migrant workers and why they decide to work in China.

To become a migrant worker is not a common decision for Taiwanese. Taiwan has traditionally *not* been a sending country of migrants, except in the case of students who study in the United States and stay for work, though even this number has declined over recent decades (Ministry of Education 2013).

To work in China is an even trickier decision. Not until the late 1980s did it become legal for Taiwanese to travel to China. Cross-strait talks since the early 1990s had temporarily eased the political tensions since the Civil War over half a century ago, but conflicts have escalated again given's the Chinese government's perception of President Lee Teng-hui as a pro-independence trouble maker.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of Taiwanese no longer identify themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese; instead, an emergent identity of Taiwanese (and *not* Chinese) has gained hold, especially among younger generations born and raised in Taiwan without any emotional or family connections to the mainland. In a 2014 island-wide survey, respondents leaning towards Taiwanese independence or hoping for quick independence reached 24%, a record high since 1994. The same survey showed that 60% of respondents identified themselves as solely Taiwanese, the highest level since such surveys began in 1992, while 33% identified as Taiwanese and Chinese, and only 4% identified as Chinese, both figures the lowest since the surveys began.[iv]

On the one hand, the Sunflower Social Movement in the spring of 2014, protesting the trade treaty between Taiwan and China, has revealed the tip of the iceberg of Taiwanese youths' negative attitudes and distrust toward China. On the other hand, the salary and employment conditions for Taiwanese youth have dwindled such that working in Taiwan has become equated with a below subsistence wage and dismal career prospects. This, in turn, makes job opportunities in China's booming economy especially attractive by comparison. Moreover, the language barrier to working in China is minimal for Taiwanese workers, all of whom speak fluent Mandarin, making China a more advantageous

option than, for example, working in Southeast Asia or the West. How, then, can we explain this tricky mixture of negative attitudes and financial benefits? Clearly, we need to know more about the factors shaping Taiwanese youth's decision to work in China (i.e., positive beliefs) and their (normative) judgments about whether it is appropriate to do so.

In this study, we seek to understand the determinants of the normative and positive beliefs about Taiwanese youth's decision to work in China. We use vignettes data collected in 2011, from a panel survey of a representative sample of youth who were 7th and 9th graders in three counties of Taiwan in 2000. The factors we consider in the vignettes include family values (marital status and parental approval) and economic considerations (current salary and pay raise), in addition to demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, and education).

The rationale of the vignettes or the "factorial survey" approach to studying positive beliefs and normative judgments is summarized in Jasso (2006). Recent studies have applied it to study migration-related decisions (e.g., Abraham, Auspurg, and Hinz 2010; Li 2007).

Data and Method

Panel Survey of the Taiwan Youth Project

The Taiwan Youth Project is a panel survey that started in 2000. The survey has interviewed a representative sample of youth who were then 7th and 9th graders in Taipei City, Taipei County (which is now called New Taipei City), and Yi-lan County annually until 2009 and then biennially thereafter. Close to two thirds of the original sample were successfully interviewed in 2011, in which year the research team collected the vignette data we analyzed here. The analytic sample after listwise deletion of missing data includes 3,120 respondents and 12,471 vignettes. For details about the sample design, see Yi (2013).

Vignettes

The vignettes we analyzed came with the following descriptions, with the vignette characteristics and their potential values underlined in [brackets]:

> Please consider a [female/male] classmate of yours from junior high school, who is considering a long-term job opportunity that requires relocation to Shanghai.
>
> {If this classmate is a [high school/college] graduate, her/his father is a [Taiwanese/Mainlander], her/his mother is a [Taiwanese/Mainlander], and his/her current monthly salary is about NT$[50,000, …….]. If she/he

takes this job, her monthly salary will increase by about NT$[20,000, ……]. If this classmate of yours is [unmarried, married with children], and her/his parents [approved, disapproved] of her/his going to work in the Mainland.

What are the chances that you think your classmate *would be willing* to take this job and work in the Mainland? The chances are _____ %. (0% means that she/he would absolutely not take this job; 100% means that she/he would definitely take this job.)

If this classmate of yours came to you for suggestion, do you think if she/he *should* take this job offer? (1) very much, she/he should, (2) she/he should, (3) she/he should not, (4) very much, she/he should not.}

The statement in {curly brackets} was repeated four times for each respondent. Each respondent provided four pairs of responses in these vignette data. Thus, the data follow a multilevel structure with vignettes nested within respondents.

Statistical Model

In the preliminary analysis, we considered only the determinants of the youth's intention to work in China in the vignettes but not the characteristics of the respondents themselves. Thus we applied ordinary least-squares regressions with adjustment to standard errors for vignettes within clusters of respondents.

The analysis based on an ordinal logit model for whether or not the fictitious person *should* take the job yielded the same results as the OLS regression.

We are in the process of linking data from previous waves to conduct a multilevel analysis, allowing not just the intercepts but also the coefficients from the vignette estimates reported here to be heterogeneous and vary with the respondent's characteristics. These results will be reported in the full paper.

Preliminary Results

The first regression predicts the chances or likelihood that the fictitious person will work in China (Column 1 in Table 1). The respondents believed that women are 7% less likely to go than men. Taiwanese are slightly less likely to go than mixed-ethnicity individuals (the reference category, marginally significant) and the offspring of both mainlander parents. Contrary to what the standard economic model would predict, those who earn more were also deemed more likely to go than those who earn less. Consistent with the standard economic model, one percent increase in base salary is associated with .12% increase in likelihood to go. That is, if we double the salary, respondents felt that she/he would be 12% more likely to go. Hence, money matters, but not as much as we might predict based on existing knowledge. Single/unmarried people are judged

25% more likely to go than those married with children. If the parents approve of her/his going, then the fictitious person is considered 22% more likely to go. In sum, the migration decisions of Taiwanese youth to work in China are not so much guided by economics (i.e., education and money), but more about family values (e.g., parental authority or filial piety and family responsibility).

The second regression predicts whether the respondent thinks that the fictitious person *should* go (recoded so that 1 indicates "very much she/he should not go;" and 4 indicates "very much she/he should go") (see Column 2 of Table 1). We observed similar patterns as in the regression that predicts the chances or likelihood of going: It was judged that women, compared to men, should *not* go, while, once again, it was found that education had little impact. Respondents judged that mainlanders should go, as should high-salary-earners, in order to pursue even higher salaries in China. Singles should go, and those whose parents approve should go. Hence, the respondents' positive beliefs and normative judgments corroborate with each other in these decisions about working in China.

Discussion

Why are family values given more weight in these decisions than economics? Are Taiwanese youth really ambivalent about working in China? What will be the future actually be like for Taiwanese migrant workers in China? For Taiwanese youth, working in China is not just a simple question of pursuing a better paying job away from one's home, but neither is it about moving to a totally foreign country where everything from people to social customs to politics will be unfamiliar. For most Taiwanese youth, the island's absorption into mainland China seems inevitable, yet this is no way lessens many Taiwanese people's feelings of political hostility and social isolation vis-à-vis the Chinese mainland. Working in China entails breaking one's physical ties with family members and loved ones. If there is no parental endorsement for such sacrifices, it may be seen as violating the code of ethics for marriage and family. In such cases, it is generally not seen as worthwhile to work away from home in China. Married people, relative to single ones, and women relative to men, are more bound by marriage relations and family responsibilities, and thus face higher expectations to remain close to home.

The relatively low consideration given to the economic factors of working in China may also reflect people's understandings and experiences of the actual opportunities available for Taiwanese in the Chinese job market. Generally, these

opportunities are not for blue-collar workers, but favor managerial professionals or engineers who already have higher incomes. As for the social aspects of daily work and life, native Taiwanese relative to mainlander Taiwanese who may have family connections in China are more likely to feel excluded from personal interactions and collective identity in China. As a result, lower-income people and native Taiwanese are considered less likely to work in China.

China is a destination for which different social groups in Taiwan have different perceptions and expectations. Previous research finds that some social groups—specifically, women, the younger generation, and people with lower socioeconomic status—tend to have more reservations about cross-strait policies in Taiwan. This explicitly reflects such groups' collective concerns and anxieties caused by the surging "China impact," particularly after the acceleration of cross-strait exchanges since 2008 (Chen 2012). These groups are economically vulnerable and relatively disadvantaged in Taiwanese society; hence, they are more likely to oppose increasing quotas for Chinese students or tourists in Taiwan. They seem uncomfortable and insecure in facing increasing social interactions with Chinese people coming to Taiwan. It is thus understandable that they would have reservations about working in China, especially if there is no support from their family members.

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Table 1. OLS Regressions Predicting Respondents' Positive Beliefs (Probability) and Normative Judgments (Should Go or Not) about Hypothetical Decisions to Work in China Using Vignette Characteristics

Independent Variables	Probability of Going (0-100%)		Should Go or Not (1-4)	
Female (vs. Male)	-7.35	***	-.10	***
	(.62)		(.02)	
Years of Schooling	.06		.001	
	(.16)		(.005)	
Ethnicity: Mainlander	.54		.03	
(Ref: mixed)	(.77)		(.02)	
Ethnicity: Taiwanese	-.88		.01	
(Ref: mixed)	(.79)		(.02)	
Base Salary (in NT$10,000)	3.61	***	.10	***
	(.39)		(.01)	
Pay Raise (as % Increase of	.12	***	.0034	***
Base Salary)	(.01)		(.0003)	
Unmarried (vs. Married	24.93	***	.63	***
with Children)	(.36)		(.01)	
Parents' Approval	21.73	***	.44	***
	(.28)		(.01)	
Constant	12.39	***	1.55	***
	(2.96)		(.09)	
R^2	.38		.27	
N	12,443			

Note: Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering within respondents are in parentheses.

Source: Taiwan Youth Project, 2011.

* p＜.05; ** p＜.01; *** p＜.001

[i] There are no official estimates because the migrant workers are difficult to define. This number we quote is based on a relatively conservative estimate: http://hk.crntt.com/doc/1016/8/6/8/101686816.html?coluid=93&kindid=3311&docid=101686816. Another estimate suggests that there are up to two million migrant workers (and families) in China: http://www.gvm.com.tw/Boardcontent_22051.html (retrieved on 2014/09/20).

[ii] See, e.g., Chen (2014) for a quantitative analysis of this claim: http://cass.its.taiwan.cn/zjlc/cgq/201408/t20140808_6893055.htm

[iii] This is drawn from the Social Image Survey, conducted by the Institute of Sociology, Academia.

[iv] BBC Chinese, 2014/07/14. "Taiwan Poll: Taiwan Independence Reached Record High." http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/china/2014/07/140714_polls_tw_independence.shtml, (accessed 2014/07/31).