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Research Article

Who Are “Chinese” Speakers in the United States?:

Examining Differences in Socioeconomic Outcomes and Language Identities

North Cooc and Genevieve Leung

Abstract

Calls to disaggregate data on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) overlook heterogeneity in experiences and outcomes *within* AAPI subgroups. Using national data from the American Community Survey, this study examines socioeconomic differences among Chinese Americans in terms of language identity. The results indicate the most frequently identified home languages among Chinese speakers are Formosan, Mandarin, Cantonese, and simply “Chinese.” The groups differ in representation depending on state residency and citizenship, while Cantonese speakers have the lowest levels of English proficiency and educational attainment. The strongest predictor of each language group is birthplace. The study has implications for serving disadvantaged and overlooked Chinese American subpopulations in the United States.

Introduction

Many scholars and policy makers have called for the need to disambiguate details about the social and economic outcomes of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs)¹ across important demographic characteristics (Holland and Palaniappan, 2012; White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, 2016). To improve policies aimed at serving AAPI populations and address current and past inequities, researchers have argued that communities must acknowledge when social issues may impact AAPI subgroups differently (Ro and Yee, 2010). Yet, lost in the calls for disaggregating AAPI data—usually by ethnicity—is the substantial variation *within* AAPI subgroups. For many

AAPIs, the variations in within-group experiences and outcomes may reflect large differences in languages (i.e., Mandarin vs. Cantonese), immigration (i.e., refugees vs. skilled workers), religion, birthplace, or other background factors. Similar to the common misperception that AAPI groups are equally successful, ignoring the diversity within AAPI groups means overlooking a subpopulation that may be struggling.

For Chinese Americans, the largest AAPI group in the country, the within-group diversity is an intertwined part of U.S. history. The descendants of Chinese Americans who came during the California Gold Rush and Transcontinental Railroad in the 1800s differ from more recent waves of immigrants from Fuzhou (Takaki, 1998). Indeed, earlier waves of Chinese immigrants also appear to identify more closely with subethnic identities (e.g., Cantonese, Shanghainese), while recent Chinese immigrants seem to exhibit a more pan-Chinese identity (Nyiri, 1999). Given the wide Chinese diversity in immigration, acculturation, and ethnic identities, the statistic that half of Chinese Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher is likely skewed toward some Chinese groups (Pew Research Center, 2013) and, more importantly, overlooks others who may have less than a high school education, as seen in this study. If the goal of AAPI research is to better understand and serve communities, then current approaches that ignore substantial within-group diversity are not as efficient and effective as they could be.

In response to better fine-tuning research on AAPI communities, the purpose of this study is to further disambiguate the pan-Chinese label and understand the unique experiences of Chinese Americans. Using U.S. Census data from the American Community Survey (ACS), we disaggregate sociodemographic characteristics and outcomes—defined in terms of educational attainment, income, and English language proficiency—by the four major Chinese language groups that respondents reported as their main home language. We focus on subgroup (or, in Nyiri's terms, subethnic) trends by Chinese language group in part due to the large linguistic diversity and clear patterns in the languages spoken by different waves of Chinese immigrants. One unique feature of the ACS is respondents write in their primary home language, which, for many Chinese Americans, is simply, in their own words, "Chinese," whereas others specify a definite Chinese language like Cantonese. In addition to investigating differences in Chinese Americans by characteristics such as birthplace, citizenship, immigration period, English proficiency, and educational attainment, we examine which of these factors influence the Chinese language group that these Chinese Americans identify with.

Through analyzing these interrelated factors, we illustrate not only distinct experiences among Chinese Americans but also identify which Chinese groups are facing clear challenges in the country.

Chinese in the United States

Past and Present

The arrival of Chinese Americans to the United States historically is demarcated by multiple immigration waves around the Gold Rush and Transcontinental Railroad era in the early to mid-1800s (Takaki, 1998). Most of these Chinese Americans were young, single men who faced open hostility for labor and wage conditions with laws, including the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, prohibiting U.S. naturalization or immigration. This early era of laborers from southern China, many of whom were speakers of Cantonese varieties and established modern Chinatowns, contrasts with those who came later as a result of refugee legislation during the early Cold War (Hsu, 2012). This later wave consisted of students, technical trainees, intellectuals, and diplomats who remained in the United States after Communist victory in Mainland China. These “uptown” Chinese also included students and educated refugees from Taiwan who were recruited as a counter to the Communist bloc. The 1965 Immigration Act, in favoring family reunification, employment, and technical skills and expertise, increased the number of educated Chinese professionals who arrived with greater access to resources and networks in the United States.

This immigration history is reflected in the ways U.S. Chinatowns have evolved and incorporated varieties of Chinese over time, shifting the *lingua franca* from Cantonese to Mandarin and, most recently, Fujianese (Liang and Morooka, 2004). This shift appears in not only language but community and vocational networks as well. In New York, for example, Chinese immigrants from Fuzhou began arriving after 1985, many smuggled in illegally to work in restaurants, construction, and the garment industry (Guest, 2011). In the process of establishing religious communities and importing social networks from China, the new immigrants revitalized the Chinatowns, but others have noted that these new homes are also traps where many are further marginalized by language and class from the outside world and exploited by business elites from within (Kwong, 1987).

Currently, more than three million adult Chinese Americans live in the United States (U.S. Census, 2010). From 2000 to 2010, the Chinese American population increased nearly 40 percent, compared to about 46

percent for all Asian Americans. Nearly three-quarters of Chinese Americans are foreign born, a rate similar to other AAPI adults but much higher than the 16 percent for all U.S. adults (Pew Research Center, 2013). About 70 percent of Chinese Americans are U.S. citizens, approximately the same as the total AAPI population. Nearly half of Chinese Americans reside in the West, with more than one-third in California alone, followed by New York (15 percent) and Hawaii (5 percent; U.S. Census, 2010). In the twenty metropolitan areas with the largest Asian populations in the country, Chinese Americans are among the top five Asian subgroups. Surveys of social relations in the United States show Chinese Americans are more likely to say discrimination against Chinese is a problem compared to other U.S. Asian groups, and less likely to report optimism about relations with other racial groups (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Ambiguity in “Chinese”

The term “Chinese” can refer to a singular language (e.g., Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese Chinese), a group of languages in the Sino-Tibetan language family (e.g., “I am taking Chinese classes”), and even an ethnic group (e.g., Han Chinese).² The process of lumping these attributes together is one that has occurred over centuries and vis-à-vis different translations. To understand the interrelationships among the different varieties of Chinese, an explanation of the macrolevel processes of how the term “Chinese” came to be singular is necessary. Through the linguistic lens of mutual unintelligibility, a Chinese language like Cantonese is a separate language from Mandarin, but enough overlap in phonology, intonation, and particularly grammar and script might allow for the translating of Cantonese knowledge into assets for Mandarin learning. Yet these linguistic factors are largely quashed from a sociolinguistic lens, as “we usually do not speak of Chinese in the plural” (Ramsey, 1987, 17). This ideology is bolstered by standard written Chinese, which, in matching closely to spoken Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM), overrides all oral varieties of Chinese because it is very similar to the shared writing system of speakers of all varieties of Chinese.

In addition, the name for these varieties of Chinese, called 方言 (MSM: *fangyan*), has long been erroneously translated into English as “dialect.” The meaning is better captured with the term *topolect* (Mair, 1991), referring to language groups by topographic distribution; the mistranslation and perpetuation of “dialect” without cultural and historical prefacing further solidifies the ideology that “[t]he language variety that has the higher social value is called a ‘Language’, and the language vari-

ety with the lower social value is called a ‘dialect’” (Roy, 1987, 234). Keeler (2008) uses the metaphor of palimpsests, where parts of a document are written more than once or erased to make room for more text, to help to characterize the current state of the “Chinese” confusion and how it links back to transnational and historic roots, and why there needs to be more disentanglement of this term.

If we simply assume Chinese is some singular, static entity based on the current state of Chinese immigration and current affairs, then erasing part of the history and legacy of a diverse variety of (non-Mandarin) Chinese speakers in the United States is inevitable. As Kroskrity (2000) notes, “[L]anguage ideology has the potential to promote ‘the language subordination process’ which amounts to a program of linguistic mystification undertaken by dominant institutions designed to simultaneously valorize the standard language and other aspects of ‘mainstream culture’ while devaluing the non-standard and its associated cultural forms” (502). These ideologies also lead to the erasure of other varieties to uphold the variety with most cachet (Irvine and Gal, 2000). While the situation in the United States has not yet reached the gravity of so-called extinction of other varieties of Chinese, the mapping of a simplified notion of culture, language, and language speakers is not only dangerous, but irresponsible.

Socioeconomic Outcomes

The ambiguity in how the term “Chinese” is used complicates not only issues of identity but also our understanding of current socioeconomic realities for Chinese Americans in the United States. On most socioeconomic indicators, Chinese Americans achieve at rates similar to U.S. Asians overall and higher than the U.S. population. In education, 51 percent of all adult Chinese Americans (age twenty-five or older) have at least a bachelor’s degree, at a rate similar to U.S. Asian overall (49 percent) but nearly double the total U.S. population (28 percent; Pew Research Center, 2013). Despite the higher educational level, only about 52 percent report speaking English “very well,” compared to about 64 percent of all U.S. Asians. The median annual personal earnings for full-time Chinese Americans is \$50,000—higher than the \$40,000 medial annual earnings for U.S. adults overall. Chinese American homeownership rates (62 percent) are slightly higher than U.S. Asian (58 percent) but lower than the U.S. total (65 percent). The poverty rate for adult Chinese Americans (14 percent) is about the same as for other AAPIs and the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2013).

The overall success of Chinese Americans, however, belies the diversity within this population, one in which the label “Chinese” may be part of the challenge. As noted earlier, the current U.S. Chinese population represents multiple waves of immigration, each of which arrived with different purposes and resources that are likely to impact their acculturation and social mobility. Given that Chinese Americans represent the largest AAPI group in the country, it is concerning that few studies have examined the extent to which socioeconomic outcomes may vary among Chinese Americans. The consequence of such oversight is current social policies may be overlooking large groups within the U.S. Chinese population who are struggling and marginalized. However, directing attention and resources to a problem first requires understanding its scope. In the case of Chinese Americans, we show that the key to assessing this issue is to first address the ambiguity in “Chinese,” particularly when it comes to *who* constitutes this category. Disaggregating “Chinese” by specific Chinese language varieties, which are associated with past Chinese immigrant groups, is one promising approach to examining potential socioeconomic differences among Chinese Americans.

Conceptual Frameworks

Success Frame and Hyperselectivity

Research on the achievement of AAPIs tends to focus on explaining their higher average outcomes relative to other racial and ethnic groups. Many of these debates center on the role of cultural values and socioeconomic status that may confer advantages to AAPIs within social institutions such as schools and the labor market (e.g., Lew, 2010; Louie, 2004). More recently, Lee and Zhou’s (2015) study of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant children elaborated on AAPIs’ academic advantage using the concepts of the success frame and hyperselectivity.

Frames are a way of understanding how the world works that members of different groups employ in their decision-making process. For AAPIs, the success frame is a strict and narrow narrative that immigrant parents articulate to their children, which entails earning straight As in school, graduating from a prestigious university, and securing a well-paying job in a high-status profession. Hyperselectivity, in contrast, refers to immigration policies that have historically favored highly educated AAPI immigrants who arrive with greater capital than U.S.-born families. The hyperselectivity of AAPI immigrants enable them to better instill the success frame to their children using supplementary academic resources within ethnic enclaves, such as tutoring and other forms of cultural capital.

Although Lee and Zhou (2015) use the success frame and hyperselectivity to explain AAPI achievement relative to other groups, we believe these concepts can also help address why socioeconomic outcomes may vary across Chinese language groups in the United States. In the case of the success frame, it seems unlikely to differ widely among Chinese families to the extent that it would lead to different outcomes. However, parents' commitment and ability to enact the success frame may vary depending on their access to resources. This variability in resources is likely to stem more from hyperselectivity in immigration, which in the case for Chinese Americans also reflect distinct language groups. Early Chinese immigrants to the United States were speakers of Cantonese from southern China who came as laborers to escape famine and poverty. Through the lens of hyperselectivity, they were less "selective" in terms of education and capital such that the enactment of the success frame would be more challenging compared to other Chinese groups who arrived later. In contrast, those who identify as Chinese Americans and speak Taiwanese are likely to trace their history to the early Cold War and post-1965 wave of more educated and skilled immigrants. This advantage would probably lead to higher levels of achievement than Cantonese-speaking Chinese Americans. Another group of immigrants from Mainland China speaking Mandarin is part of a more recent wave of Chinese immigrants, many in search of lower-status manual jobs (Chang, 2004). This less selective form of immigration—holding constant the success frame and access to capital within ethnic communities—would likely mean lower socioeconomic outcomes for this group than Taiwanese speakers. Thus, the self-identification of Chinese Americans by Chinese language group can be used to assess whether success has been distributed across this population based on the lens of hyperselectivity.

Language Identity Frame and Performing Language Identities

For many ethnic groups, membership may mean different access to resources that can lead to intergroup variations in educational attainment and earnings. For Chinese Americans, intragroup variation is likely to manifest along linguistic lines, given how closely language is related to identities and immigration histories. For instance, the Romanized naming of Chinese American surnames reflect Chinese language, area of origin in China, and U.S. arrival period (Leung, 2011). Asking Chinese Americans about their home language, as in the ACS Census report, can provide insight into these interconnected issues. However, it is important

to note that the ambiguity in “Chinese” as a language is a function of how Chinese Americans may refer to their own language as either monolithic or as a specific Chinese language variety. Although immigration history indicates distinct Chinese language groups, it cannot be assumed that Chinese Americans will consistently identify with a Chinese language variety, even if they speak one. How and when Chinese Americans disclose their language may differ upon the context and audience.

One theory about language and identity is that one’s willingness to specify a language may depend on the extent to which the majority population is familiar with the language. Linguistic identities are negotiated and “performed” into being (Bauman and Briggs, 1990) and can also be viewed through the lens of frames (Goffman, 1974). For instance, if the larger population subscribes to the language ideology of “Chinese” as a monolithic language and culture, then the distinction among Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Fujianese, or other varieties is not only unclear but confusing when such conversations first take place. As such, in these occasions and contexts where Chinese Americans are asked “What language do you speak?,” they may simply refer to their language as “Chinese” to avoid the cognitive dissonance that would come with “breaking frame.”

In contrast, in communities with a large and diverse Chinese population, not only is the majority population likely more aware of these distinctions, but also Chinese Americans may feel a greater need to be more precise in disclosing and distinguishing their language identity for practical purposes, such as asking for translator assistance. In these communities, where language ideologies of multiple “Chineses” exist, a question about home language would likely prompt specific Chinese language varieties. Thus, while the state diversity in Chinese language groups may be similar in California versus Florida, the actual self-reported representation may look different in both states. Analyses attempting to disaggregate by Chinese language group must account for regional geography to better describe what other factors may influence their language identities.

Present Study and Hypotheses

This study makes several contributions to Asian American studies, sociolinguistics, and public policies, three fields that are not always examined together. First, as an additional heuristic to counter the model minority stereotype, the study identifies areas where speakers of a variety of different Chinese languages struggle in terms of educational attain-

ment, employment and income, and English proficiency. This type of analysis is critical to ensure that subgroups receive appropriate resources and assistance from local and federal agencies. Second, the study assesses factors that influence *how* Chinese speakers choose to identify themselves linguistically on paper. Given that labels are often created for groups by external institutions, this study examines when Chinese individuals identify as Cantonese or Mandarin speakers or simply as a lumped “Chinese.” Lastly, in describing the demographic backgrounds of different Chinese speakers, this study provides a more accurate portrayal of Chinese American history and, in doing so, produces a more nuanced and dynamic discourse of U.S. history as well.

We examined the following research questions and hypotheses concerning population trends and identities among speakers of Chinese language varieties in the United States:

Q1. To what extent are there differences in demographic characteristics and socioeconomic outcomes among speakers of Chinese language varieties?

H1a. Cantonese and Taiwanese speakers will have higher rates of U.S. citizenship and earlier arrival time than Mandarin speakers.

H1b. Taiwanese speakers in the United States will have higher levels of socioeconomic outcomes than Cantonese speakers, followed by Mandarin speakers.

Q2. To what extent do individual factors, including state residency, citizenship, and birthplace, influence ethnic Chinese speakers to identify with certain language groups?

H2a. States with larger and more diverse Chinese populations will have a greater percentage of Chinese Americans identifying with a specific Chinese language variety.

H2b. Birthplace will predict the Chinese language identification of Chinese Americans.

Methodology

Data Source

We analyzed census data on “Chinese” speakers from the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). The PUMS is a set of untabulated records about individual people or housing units collected annually from responses to the ACS that contain data on 1 percent of the U.S. population. Also available are PUMS files covering a five-year period that contain data on about 5 percent of the population. All PUMS files, however, are *weighted* samples that generalize estimates to the national

population. In this study, we used PUMS data from the 2010–14 five-year ACS, the most recent data available to the public. The complete PUMS dataset, containing surveys from all fifty states and the District of Columbia, is available for free download from the ACS website. The availability of detailed records on demographic characteristics, including language and income at the individual level allowed us to examine the population of ethnic “Chinese” speakers and their language varieties in the United States. To our knowledge, the PUMS is the only national dataset to disaggregate information on Chinese languages. Due to the size of the dataset and for our research purposes, we restricted the sample to only individuals who identified as “Chinese” speakers ($n = 90,246$).

Measures

Our analyses focused on describing the following background characteristics and individual outcomes of various “Chinese” speakers. All variables are summarized in Table 1.

Language

To describe the languages in the United States, the ACS asks respondents to list the main language spoken at home. For speakers of various Chinese varieties, this open-ended question means a range of responses. However, the ACS groups the possible responses into four main categories: Cantonese (16.2 percent), Mandarin (16.8 percent), Formosan (2.4 percent), and Chinese (64.7 percent). The latter two are particularly revealing in terms of the respondents’ views. “Formosan” is a language group of indigenous people in Taiwan. Though many Taiwanese immigrants to the United States speak Holo (also known as Southern Min or Hokkien; Wu, 2011), the choice to select “Formosan” likely reflects an identity among Taiwanese speakers different from Mandarin and Cantonese. The broader “Chinese” response may include the other three languages or other, less frequently spoken Chinese languages. More importantly, and as a result fraught with research potential, this means that a majority of speakers of Chinese responded to the ACS question about home language with the term “Chinese” rather than specify a Chinese language. One question is when do respondents identify their language as this broader term. In restricting our sample to those who identify a Chinese language as their main language spoken at home, it is important to note this excludes those who are bilingual speakers. Unfortunately, the latter was not an option in the survey.

Table 1: Summary of Chinese Language Speakers by Background Characteristics (n = 90,246)

	"Chinese"	Cantonese	Mandarin	Formosan	Wald χ^2 means test
Proportion	0.647	0.162	0.168	0.024	***
Age	40.935	43.814	37.803	49.633	***
Female	0.478	0.466	0.460	0.460	
Citizenship					
U.S. born	0.193	0.254	0.227	0.140	***
U.S. territories	0.011	0.013	0.013	0.012	
Naturalized	0.419	0.533	0.393	0.641	***
Not U.S. citizen	0.377	0.200	0.367	0.206	***
Decade of entry					
Before 1960	0.011	0.011	0.003	0.011	***
1960–69	0.028	0.032	0.011	0.066	***
1970–79	0.067	0.093	0.060	0.177	***
1980–89	0.146	0.197	0.146	0.254	***
1990–99	0.193	0.197	0.183	0.174	
2000 or later	0.362	0.216	0.372	0.178	***
U.S. born	0.193	0.254	0.227	0.140	***
Place of birth					
China	0.599	0.404	0.431	0.059	***
Hong Kong	0.044	0.194	0.012	0.003	***
Taiwan	0.069	0.004	0.262	0.715	***
Vietnam	0.036	0.100	0.007	0.012	***
Other Asia	0.051	0.034	0.052	0.066	***
U.S.	0.193	0.255	0.228	0.142	***
Other	0.008	0.010	0.007	0.003	***
English Proficiency					
Not at all	0.088	0.145	0.066	0.066	***
Not well	0.197	0.217	0.155	0.173	***
Well	0.283	0.203	0.254	0.339	***
Very well	0.431	0.435	0.526	0.421	***
Education					
Less than HS	0.291	0.355	0.198	0.159	***
HS diploma	0.134	0.171	0.122	0.103	***
Some college	0.112	0.135	0.131	0.087	***
Associate's	0.048	0.049	0.050	0.082	***
Bachelor's	0.195	0.208	0.250	0.266	***
Master's or higher	0.219	0.082	0.248	0.303	***
Income (median)	15631	15361	17204	19583	***

Source: American Community Survey PUMS 5-Year Estimates, 2010-014, authors' calculations.

Note: Estimates include individual-level replicate survey weights to account for complex survey design. "Chinese" is one the four language groups that respondents selected and may also include Cantonese, Mandarin, or Formosan. Sample size for income (n = 81,553) does not include individuals under age 15. *p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001.

Wald chi-square tests the null hypothesis that the means across groups are equal.

Background Characteristics

In addition to characteristics such as age and gender, we examined differences in Chinese speakers in terms of citizenship (1 = not U.S. citizen, 2 = U.S. born, 3 = U.S. territories, 4 = naturalized), birthplace (1 = China, 2 = Hong Kong, 3 = Taiwan, 4 = Vietnam, 5 = Other Asia, 6 = United States, 7 = other country), and decade of entry for immigrants (1 = before 1960, 2 = 1960–9, 3 = 1970–9, 4 = 1980–9, 5 = 1990–9, 6 = 2000 or after). The state of residency for each respondent is also available and can be used to assess the extent to which the representation of “Chinese” language speakers varies by geography.

Outcomes

We focused on three outcomes to understand the socioeconomic status of Chinese speakers: self-reported level of English proficiency (1 = not at all, 2 = not well, 3 = well, 4 = very well), educational attainment (1 = less than high school, 2 = high school diploma, 3 = some college, 4 = associate, 5 = bachelor, 6 = master or higher), and individual income. Due to the skewness in income level, we categorized the variable into four quantiles (1 = \$0 to \$1,331; 2 = \$1,333 to \$16,364; 3 = \$16,384 to \$52,426; 4 = more than \$52,438).

Analysis

For our first research question regarding the demographic characteristics and outcomes of speakers of various Chinese varieties, we examined differences across language groups for each background variable using basic descriptive statistics. We also used regression models predicting each background characteristic or outcome and conducted post-hoc Wald chi-square tests to identify statistically significant differences across language groups. To examine differences in representation by geography, we plotted the distribution of speakers of Chinese varieties by state. For our second research question on assessing the influence of different background factors on Chinese language group identification, we used multinomial logistic regression to predict the four Chinese language categories while controlling for individual traits. The multinomial logistic regression model compares the effect of the predictors on respondents identifying with each specific Chinese language group (Cantonese, Mandarin, and Formosan) relative to the broader “Chinese” language group as the reference outcome. All analyses were conducted in Stata 14.1 using the “mlogit” command for multinomial models and incorporate the complex survey design of the PUMS. Be-

cause missing data were only detected on the income (9.6 percent missing in the sample) and birthplace (0.2 percent missing) variables, we did not use multiple imputation in our analyses. The income variable was not available for individuals under the age of fifteen.

Results

Demographic Differences among Chinese Language Speakers

In Table 1, we present descriptive summaries of each background variable by the four Chinese language groups. The last column presents an overall test of whether differences between groups are statistically significant. As noted earlier, nearly two-thirds of Chinese speakers identified with the broader “Chinese” category about home language, nearly twice as high as combined for Cantonese and Mandarin. The question is whether this disparity is reflected in other characteristics. In terms of age, Mandarin speakers were the youngest ($M = 37.8$ years old), while Formosan speakers were the oldest ($M = 49.6$ years old). The gender distribution was similar across language groups but indicated slightly fewer females (47 percent) than males. Larger differences between the language groups are apparent when examining citizenship status. About 63 percent of “Chinese” and Mandarin speakers were U.S. citizens, compared to about 81 percent of Cantonese and Formosan speakers. The latter two groups were also more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens. This pattern of citizenship is related to the decade of entry to the country. Formosan speakers, for instance, were more likely to arrive during earlier decades with nearly half coming before 1990. In contrast for “Chinese” and Mandarin speakers, more than one-third (37 percent) arrived in 2000 or after. The differences by language groups were more expected for place of birth. With the exception of Formosan speakers, the majority of all other Chinese language speakers, especially those who identified with the broader “Chinese” category, indicated Mainland China as their birthplace. However, a proportion of Cantonese speakers indicated birthplaces in Hong Kong (19 percent) and Vietnam (10 percent), while more than 70 percent of Formosan speakers selected Taiwan. In short, these background differences suggest greater overlap between those who identified with “Chinese” and Mandarin and more distinct patterns for Cantonese and Formosan speakers.

Geographic Trends

How speakers of varieties of Chinese identify themselves in the United States may be due to geographic region and interactions or prox-

imity with other “Chinese” and non-Chinese speakers. When examining the distribution of different Chinese speakers as a percentage of all Chinese speakers within each state in Figure 1, the results appear to support this hypothesis. In California and Hawaii, two states with the largest representation of Chinese Americans, only about 52 percent and 58 percent of Chinese speakers identified with “Chinese.” About half of Chinese speakers in California specified Cantonese, Mandarin, or Formosan. In 37 states, more than 70 percent of Chinese speakers identified with “Chinese” broadly.

There are also substantial regional differences in which language Chinese speakers identify with. In Figure 2, we display the percentage of all speakers of varieties of Chinese by state for each of the language groups. Those who reported speaking “Chinese” broadly were more likely to reside in Midwest states like Kansas and Oklahoma. More than 80 percent of speakers of any variety of Chinese in these states reported only “Chinese.” The highest percentage was in Wyoming and Iowa, two states with small ethnic Chinese populations. Less than 60 percent of speakers of any variety of Chinese in Utah and California identified with only “Chinese.” Most Cantonese speakers were represented in coastal states, particularly in California, Washington, and New York. More than 20 percent of speakers of any variety of Chinese selected Cantonese as their language in these areas. Interestingly, a high percentage of Cantonese speakers resided in Alaska. Less than 5 percent of speakers of any variety of Chinese reported Cantonese in states from the Midwest and South. Mandarin speakers, in contrast, were well represented in most states. Among speakers of any variety of Chinese, more than 20 percent identified as Mandarin speakers along the West Coast, the South, and the Midwest. North Dakota had the highest percentage of Chinese speakers who identified Mandarin as their home language. Formosan speakers were most represented (as a percentage of all Chinese language speakers) in Idaho, which is also a large trade partner with Taiwan (U.S. Taiwan Connect, 2015).

Outcomes: English Proficiency, Education, and Income Trends

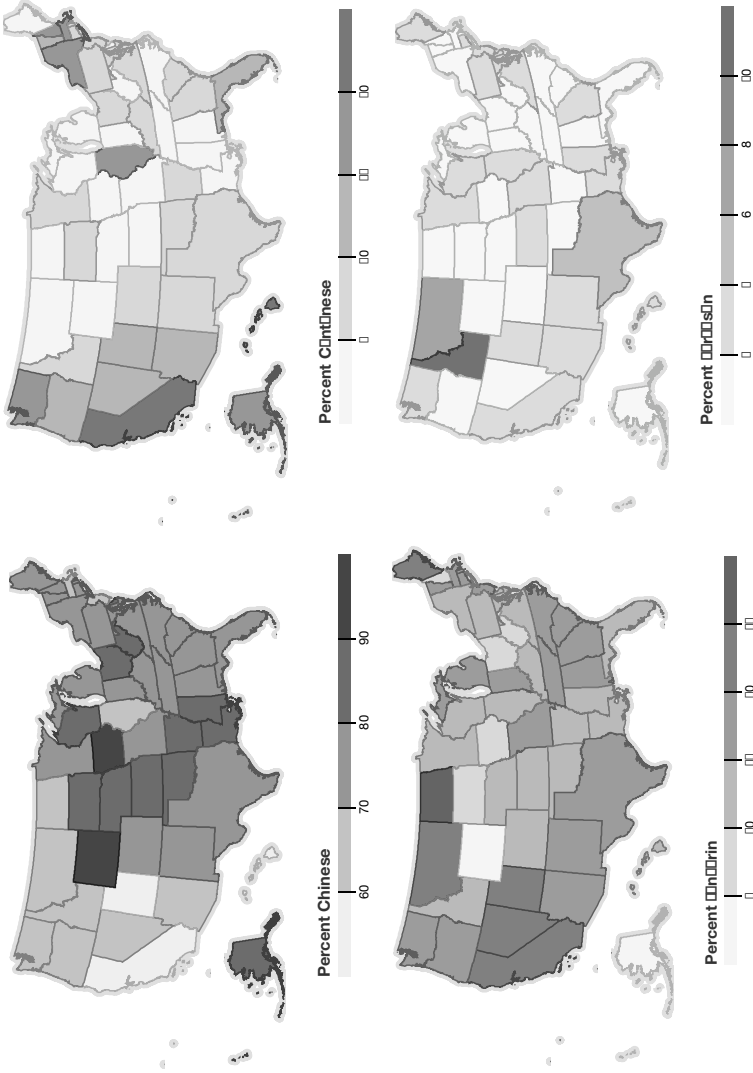
In the bottom of Table 1, we present differences in English proficiency, educational attainment, and median income for each language group. More than 20 percent of all Chinese speakers reported not speaking English well or at all. For Cantonese speakers, this figure is about 36 percent. The limited English proficiency rates were the lowest for Mandarin and Formosan speakers (26 percent). In terms of education

Figure 1: Distribution of Speakers of Varieties of Chinese within States by Language Group



Source: American Community Survey PUMS 5-Year Estimates, 2010-2014, authors' calculations.

Figure 2: Comparison of Chinese Language Groups among Chinese Speakers within Each State



Source: American Community Survey PUMS 5-Year Estimates, 2010-2014, authors' calculations.

level, more than half of Mandarin and Formosan speakers had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to less than 25 percent for "Chinese" and Cantonese speakers. Most striking is that more than one-third of Cantonese speakers had less than a high school diploma. The median income level for individuals fifteen years and older was highest for Formosan speakers (\$19,583), followed by Mandarin speakers (\$17,204), and similar for "Chinese" and Cantonese speakers (\$15,000). As a point of reference, the median personal income in the United States in 2015 was about \$30,000 (U.S. Census, 2015). In summary, these results suggest that Mandarin and Formosan speakers were similar in terms of education and income, while Cantonese and "Chinese" speakers broadly tended to report lower outcomes.

Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

To assess the influence of the different demographic variables on when respondents identified one of the four Chinese language groups, we fitted a multinomial logistic regression model with language group as the outcome. The results are displayed in Table 2 with "Chinese" as the reference group. Compared to those who identified as a "Chinese" speaker, respondents on average were more likely to select Cantonese (odds ratio [OR] = 1.74, $p < .001$) and less likely to select Mandarin (OR = 0.86, $p < .001$) when they were naturalized U.S. citizens than non-U.S. citizens, holding all else constant. When examining the influence of English proficiency controlling for other predictors, respondents were less likely to select each of the three language groups relative to "Chinese" when they reported greater levels of English proficiency. Individuals with higher education levels were less likely to identify as speaking Cantonese and more likely to identify as speaking Mandarin compared to "Chinese" only. Respondents were more likely to select Cantonese than "Chinese" when they reported higher income levels.

By far the strongest predictor of each language group was place of birth. The odds of Cantonese was 6.5 times greater than for "Chinese" when respondents reported Hong Kong as their birthplace compared to Mainland China ($p < .001$). Respondents were more likely to identify with Mandarin than "Chinese" when Taiwan (OR = 5.03, $p < .001$) or the United States (OR = 4.10, $p < .001$) was their birthplace. The role of birthplace is strongest for Formosan speakers where the odds of identifying with the language were more than 100 times greater than "Chinese" when Taiwan (OR = 115.8, $p < .001$) or the United States (OR = 170.9, $p < .001$) was reported as the birthplace in comparison to

Table 2: Multinomial logistic regression model predicting Chinese language group controlling for select background characteristics with results in odds ratios (n= 90,246)

	Cantonese	Mandarin	Formosan
Age	0.994 ^{***}	0.984 ^{***}	1.016 ^{***}
Female	0.964	0.956 [*]	1.092
Citizenship (ref: Not citizen)			
U.S. born	1.331	0.313 [*]	0.097 ^{**}
U.S. territories	1.969 ^{***}	0.919	0.907
Naturalized	1.738 ^{***}	0.856 ^{***}	1.032
Birthplace (ref: China)			
Hong Kong	6.562 ^{***}	0.361 ^{***}	0.767 ^{***}
Taiwan	0.084 ^{***}	5.028 ^{***}	115.800 ^{***}
Vietnam	2.454 ^{***}	0.285 ^{***}	3.084 ^{***}
Other Asia	1.087	1.546 ^{**}	15.530 ^{***}
U.S.	2.923 [*]	4.098 ^{**}	170.900 ^{***}
Other country	2.542 ^{***}	1.049	6.715 ^{**}
English (ref: Not at all)			
Not well	0.551 ^{***}	0.693 ^{***}	0.595 ^{***}
Well	0.379 ^{***}	0.554 ^{***}	0.529 ^{***}
Very well	0.457 ^{***}	0.715 ^{**}	0.479 ^{**}
Education (ref: Less than HS)			
HS diploma	0.935	1.535 ^{***}	0.926
Some college	0.858 ^{***}	1.632 ^{***}	0.967
Associate's	0.701 ^{***}	1.563 ^{***}	1.310 [*]
Bachelor's	0.685 ^{***}	1.766 ^{***}	1.208
Master's or higher	0.335 ^{***}	1.668 ^{***}	1.204
Wages (ref: quartile 1)			
Quartile 2	1.483 ^{***}	1.045	1.215 [*]
Quartile 3	1.526 ^{***}	0.993	0.970
Quartile 4	1.492 ^{***}	0.964	0.866

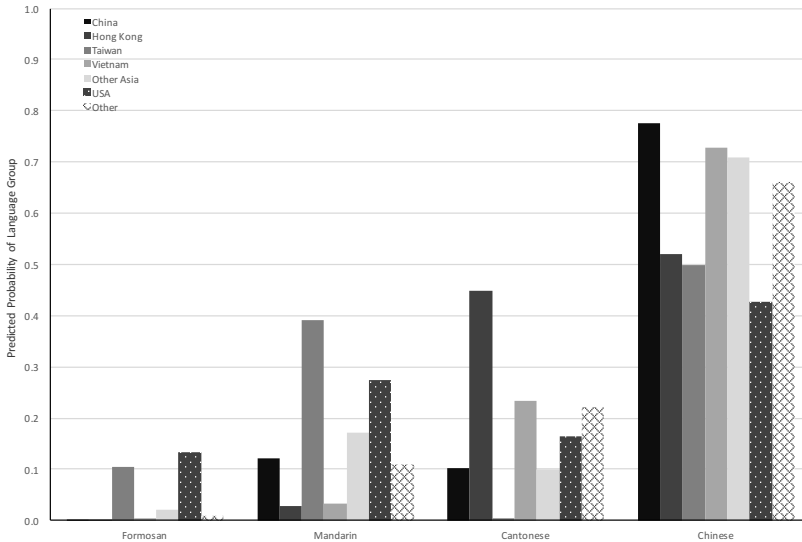
Source: American Community Survey PUMS 5-Year Estimates, 2010-2014, authors' calculations.

Note: Odds ratios for each language group compared to "Chinese" (reference). All models control for state of residency. Wages quartiles: 1 = \$0 to \$1,331; 2 = \$1,333 to \$16,364; 3 = \$16,384 to \$52,426; 4 = more than \$52,438. Estimates include individual-level replicate survey weights to account for complex survey design.

*p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001.

Mainland China. To better interpret these results, we plotted the average predicted probabilities (with all other variables set to the mean) of choosing each language group by birthplace in Figure 3. As expected, the probabilities across groups reflect their general representation within the ethnic Chinese population (i.e., highest for "Chinese" and lowest for Formosan). More interesting is the differences within groups by birthplace. For instance, the predicted probability of selecting "Chinese" is highest when respondents were born in Mainland China (0.78) but lowest if respondents were born in the United States (0.43). In contrast, the predicted probability of selecting Cantonese is highest for Hong Kong-born respondents (0.45).

Figure 3: Predicted Probability of Each Language Group by Place of Birth, Controlling for Age, Gender, Citizenship, English Proficiency, Education Level, and Income



Source: American Community Survey PUMS 5-Year Estimates, 2010-2014, authors' calculations.

For Mandarin speakers, the predicted probability is highest for Taiwan-born respondents. Lastly, the predicted probability of selecting Formosan is highest for those born in Taiwan and the United States.

Discussion

In this study, we analyzed the most recent ACS data to answer the call from researchers and policy makers for more in-depth studies that disaggregate the AAPI population. We extended previous research by examining the diversity in experiences within one specific AAPI group, Chinese Americans, and disaggregating trends by language group. Our study also explored factors that influence language identities among Chinese Americans. We found that most ethnic Chinese speakers identify only “Chinese” as their home language, followed by Mandarin, Cantonese, and Formosan. Among these four language groups, we found differences in representation by geography and citizenship status. Most striking was the lower levels of English proficiency and education for Cantonese speakers compared to the other three Chinese language groups. However, the strongest predictor of each language group was birthplace

where being born in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan clearly influenced stated language identity.

Hyperspecificity and Language Identities in Context

The results in this study support theories about hyperspecificity in immigration and language ideologies for AAPI populations. Our finding that Chinese Americans were more likely to specify a Chinese language in states with large Chinese populations supports the hypothesis that proximity to large minority groups (e.g., majority minority settings) may lead individuals to highlight within-group diversity in terms of language and culture. This serves a practical purpose as individuals within the Chinese American population may need to distinguish their language with each other in certain settings to communicate, such as in contexts where multiple varieties of Chinese encounter each other (e.g., Chinese supermarkets or restaurants, translation services). In contrast, in states with smaller Chinese populations there may be less need to specify a Chinese language, especially if individuals share similar backgrounds and have a common understanding of how they are viewed by the non-Chinese population (i.e., simply as “Chinese”). Chinese Americans may specify their language for each other and in response to those outside the Chinese American population; in other words, they perform their linguistic identities based on the frames of a context.

In communities or states with larger and more diverse Chinese populations, Chinese Americans may feel the need to clarify their own language with non-Chinese groups or address common misconceptions about “Chinese” as a singular monolithic language. This speaks to a context-dependent disclosure (or collapsing) of linguistic identity, wherein in contexts where multiple Chinese varieties are in existence, ethnic Chinese speakers seem to be resisting pan-Chinese lumping; concomitantly, where the population consists of more homogenous Chinese varieties, pan-Chinese lumping becomes more prevalent. While research has shown that pan-ethnicity has worked in favor of diverse national-origin groups who come together for collective interests and to fight against racism (Espiritu, 1993; Ocampo, 2016), it seems here that ethnic Chinese are selectively choosing to opt into (or out of) a pan-Chinese label for language. As Yoshikawa and colleagues note, pan-ethnic labels obscure the heterogeneity “along critical boundaries of difference” (2016, 1040) and are only sometimes useful. We would venture to say the same for the pan-Chinese language category.

Citizenship and Birthplace

The patterns in Chinese language identification based on U.S. citizenship status and decade of arrival reflects each group's unique history in the country. As is relatively well known in immigration history, the earliest Chinese immigrants to the United States came from southern China in the 1800s (Chang, 2004, among others) and most spoke varieties of Cantonese; unsurprisingly, among the four language groups in the study, a higher percentage of Cantonese speakers were U.S. citizens (80 percent). Although most Formosan speakers were also U.S. citizens (80 percent), nearly two-thirds were naturalized. In contrast to Cantonese and Formosan speakers, those who identified as speaking Mandarin and "Chinese" were less likely to be U.S. citizens (about 63 percent). This indicates that Mandarin and Chinese speakers are more recent immigrants, a finding consistent with trends by decade of entry to the country. Of Mandarin- and "Chinese"-speaking immigrants, about 36 percent arrived in 2000 or after, compared to less than 22 percent for Cantonese- and Formosan-speaking immigrants. These findings further confirm distinct subgroups among Chinese Americans and the need for disaggregation.

The multinomial logistic regression results show that place of birth was by far the strongest predictor of Chinese language group when controlling for other background factors. As expected, the predicted probability of selecting Cantonese and Formosan was the highest when individuals were born in Hong Kong and Taiwan, respectively. In contrast, the predicted probability of choosing the broader "Chinese" language was highest among individuals born in Mainland China. This is not surprising according to language ideologies about majority groups who may view their language/language variety as the standard or pan-ethnic default (Kroskrity, 2000). That is, immigrants from Mainland China are perhaps more likely to view their own language as authentic "Chinese" and representing all Chinese people, and in upholding this discourse, erase the numerous Chinese language groups around them. Thus, the multinomial logistic regression analysis helps disentangle which Chinese Americans are more likely to identify with "Chinese" as their home language. Although the use of "Chinese" as a language group is problematic for many reasons, it does appear to capture certain ideologies and histories of a subgroup of

Chinese Americans. One advantage of allowing ACS participants to complete an open response about home language is this type of language ideology is captured in the surveys.

Disparities in Socioeconomic Outcomes

The major finding in this study highlights the need to examine within group diversity among AAPIs. Our study shows that nearly one-third of Cantonese speakers did not speak English well or at all, and a similar percentage had less than a high school education. As a point of comparison, about 22 percent of all respondents from the same 2010–14 ACS who spoke a language other than English at home reported speaking English less than well and about 14 percent had less than a high school education. Although research on the demographic characteristics of the Cantonese-speaking population is limited, data on areas with a large proportion of Cantonese speakers can be informative. In San Francisco Chinatown, for example, where many residents historically and currently are Cantonese speakers, the demographic trends are consistent with this study, but more extreme. For instance, nearly 70 percent of residents in San Francisco Chinatown have a high school education or less and about 30 percent live in poverty, compared to 29 percent and 11 percent for the overall city (San Francisco Planning Department, 2011). Linguistically, San Francisco Chinatown is a community that has been historically monolingual Cantonese speaking, with only 14 percent of its households headed by a person who speaks English fluently (Green, 2015). Although Chinese Americans tend to have higher educational attainment and income than other AAPIs and racial groups (Pew Research Center, 2013), the findings in this study show that these trends obfuscate the real economic and linguistic struggles faced by those who speak Cantonese as a home language.

Why might Chinese Americans who speak Cantonese as a primary home language have lower educational attainment and English proficiency than other Chinese Americans? The concept of hyperselectivity suggests that selective immigration patterns among Chinese Americans means differential access to various capital, which impacts social mobility. The lower level of success is surprising because a higher proportion of Cantonese speakers are born in the United States than other Chinese groups. However, research has found that second-generation youth (i.e., native-born children of foreign-born parents) perform better academically than higher-

generation counterparts in part due to immigrant optimism, while those who live longer in the country may become disillusioned with the prospects of social mobility and discrimination (Kao and Tienda, 1995). Recent immigrants from China are also more likely to be a selective group with higher education and skills than the average American, a trend that reflects past U.S. immigration policies that have favored educated immigrants (Lee and Zhou, 2015). For Cantonese speakers who have lived longer in the country, one expectation is they would have less socioeconomic success than more recent Chinese immigrants who arrive with greater social and human capital. This is consistent with the narrative for Formosan speakers in the ACS data, many who arrived from Taiwan after 1960 and are more successful in terms of educational attainment and income and were not always subject to the immigration quotas because they were often seen as “desirable” migrants: students, professionals, and skilled laborers (Hsu, 2015). This disjunction between timing of arrival and skilled migration of Chinese immigrants speaks to the need to disambiguate this diverse group of people and their experiences in the United States.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study demonstrates the advantages of examining within group diversity in terms of language among AAPI groups and highlights the unique experiences of Chinese Americans. However, there are several limitations to the study. First, the ACS PUMS dataset only included four Chinese language groups, even though there are many other varieties, including Hakka, Teochew, and Fujianese. These other Chinese language groups also have distinct immigration patterns and experiences in the country that would provide a more comprehensive picture of the diversity within the population. Second, we focused on educational attainment and income as measures of social success and integration, but other measures may be appropriate. Civic and community engagement, for instance, may differ across Chinese language groups and capture additional heterogeneity in life experiences. Third, our study examined Chinese Americans who spoke a primary language other than English at home based on the ACS. Of course, this excluded respondents who identify as bilingual or speak English in addition to other languages. These individuals form another Chinese language group category and would likely have differ-

ent experiences in the country in comparison to the four groups in this study. Unfortunately, the ACS only allows respondents to select one home language. Fourth, although our statistical analyses revealed patterns in how Chinese Americans identified their language, we have little follow-up information about why or under what specific contexts do some Chinese Americans identify with “Chinese” and not a specific Chinese language variety. This further prevents an accurate estimate of the size of each Chinese language group and calls for more qualitative, interview-based work to investigate local-level understandings of this term.

The findings in this study provide several avenues for future research. Clearly, more attention should focus on the unique experiences of Cantonese speakers and why many continue to struggle relative to other Chinese groups and the general U.S. population. This finding further challenges the model minority perception of AAPIs and Chinese Americans and the use of broad racial and ethnic categories when describing a population. For Cantonese speakers, future studies should consider the extent to which local contexts (e.g., access to neighborhood services), acculturation into U.S. society, and family history or immigration patterns may impact long-term outcomes. In particular, qualitative research and interviews can better capture the challenges that Cantonese speakers face and inform local policies or services for this population. Researchers should also examine bilingual English-Cantonese speakers and how their experiences may differ from those who speak Cantonese primarily in the United States.

This focus on the diversity within the Chinese American population in this study is one example of the importance of examining heterogeneity within and across AAPI groups. The latter has attracted more policy attention in recent years but the former is important and underexplored. A similar study could explore trends for the third-largest AAPI population, Indian Americans, a group that speaks more than a dozen languages, including Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. Studies show that educational attainment and income are high for Indian Americans, but it is unclear the degree to which this is true for Indian subgroups (Pew Research Center, 2013). A comparison of the different waves of Vietnamese immigrants and their experiences in the country would also be compelling.

Another implication of this study is to encourage more research regarding language groups in data collection efforts like the

ACS. The home language question in the ACS is unique in that it asks respondents to write in a language in their own terms. The results from this study indicate that most Chinese Americans respond with “Chinese,” but the question is whether many would answer with a more specific language if encouraged. Future surveys should consider including wording in the home language question that reminds respondents to consider all dialects and local varieties as legitimate languages. An example in the text (i.e., providing examples like “Cantonese” and “Mandarin”) may help prime respondents to provide a more specific response about their home language. Future studies should explore whether this type of priming can encourage respondents to include more detailed information about their language.

The goal of this article and future studies is not to disaggregate data on AAPIs for its own sake. Some may question whether this level of disaggregation is necessary and invasive, especially as data collection improves. However, as this article shows, there are clear advantages of focusing on within-group diversity to understand individual identities and socioeconomic challenges. One clear example is the case of employing the wrong translators and interpreters (of “Chinese”) when distributing information to diverse local communities. With the refinement of data management systems in governments and the availability of large data like the ACS, a better question is *why not* examine the diversity within and across AAPI groups if the main goal to better serve communities remains the same.

Notes

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1. We use the pan-ethnic term *Asian American and Pacific Islander*, rather than Asian American alone, to more accurately describe the population. However, we do acknowledge that term is politically contested among scholars and not all groups align with the pan-ethnic term.
2. We use the term “Chinese” in quotations to refer to the lumped, disambiguated variety of Chinese, which is also used in the ACS dataset in this study. Without quotations, the word will be used as an adjective or as an ethnicity.

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