

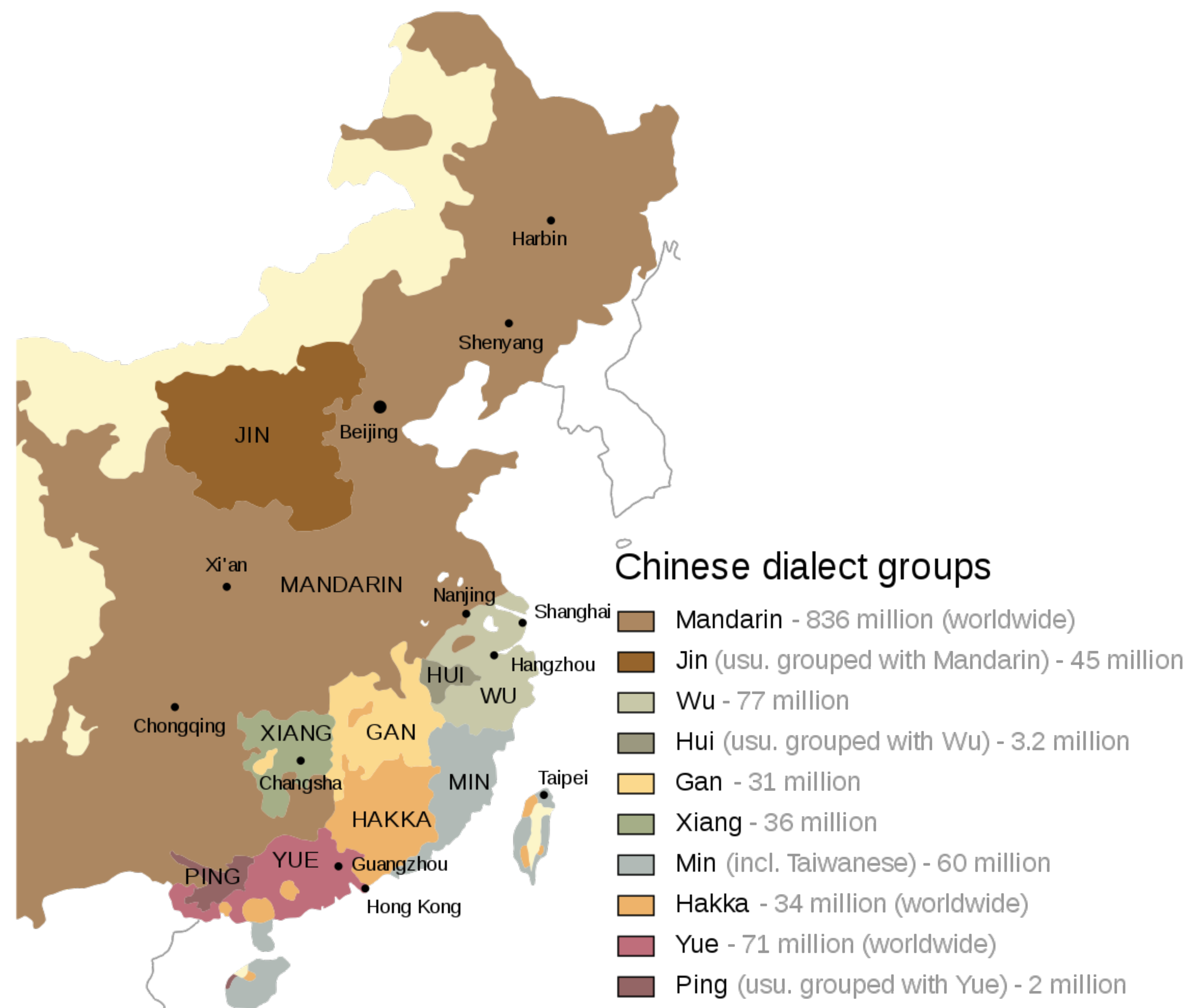
# How Do Chinese Dialects Reflect the Way in Which Chinese Immigrants Settled in the United States?

By Tom Yang

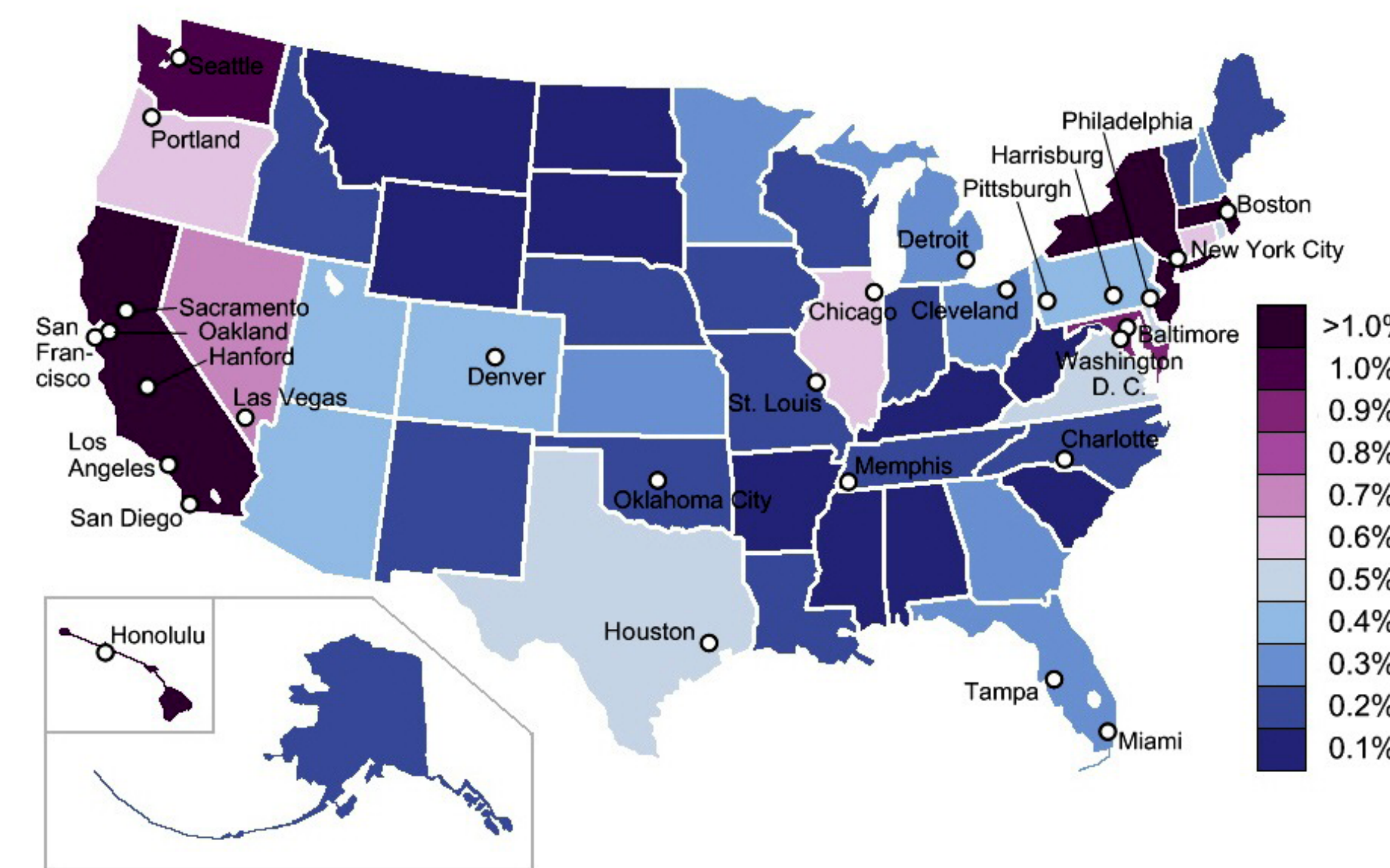
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## Chinese Dialect Groups

As the world's largest ethnic group, **Han** Chinese constitute approximately **92%** of the population of China and near **20%** of the population of the world. With so many people distributed in a vast area, there are several dialect groups which are closely related to the hometown of the different speakers. The **Mandarin** in northern China can be quite easily understood by most Chinese citizens, since it's not much different from **Putonghua**, the **Modern Standard Mandarin**. While the languages spoken in southern China, especially the **Wu**, **Min**, **Hakka**, and **Yue**, may sound like foreign languages to those different dialect groups users. However, the speakers of those four languages have largely immigrated to overseas in more than **150 years**. For the largest group of Chinese immigrants, **Yue** is the most common language that can be heard within Chinese communities in North America, Western Europe, Australia and South-east Asia by those Cantonese immigrants.



## Chinese Immigrants in the United States



Percentage of Chinese population in the United States, 2000.

From the map we can easily see that Chinese Americans are gathered in California, Hawaii and the north-east part of the United States, around New York City and Boston. As early as 1848, the establishment of Chinatown in San Francisco made it be the oldest Chinatown in North America. It was the port of entry for early **Hoisanese** and **Zhongshanese** Chinese immigrants from the **Guangdong** province of southern China from the 1850s to the 1900s. They only spoke **Yue** as their Chinese mother tongue. The majority of these Chinese shopkeepers, restaurant owners, and hired workers in San Francisco Chinatown were **Hoisanese** and male. Many Chinese found jobs working for large companies seeking a source of labor, most famously as part of the Central Pacific on the Transcontinental Railroad. The Chinese came to California in large numbers during the California Gold Rush, with 40,400 being recorded as arriving from 1851–1860.

The Chinese population rose from 2,716 in 1851 to 63,000 by 1871. In the decade 1861-70, 64,301 were recorded as arriving, followed by 123,201 in 1871-80 and 61,711 in 1881-1890. **77%** were located in California, with the rest scattered across the West, the South, and New England. Most came from Southern China looking for a better life, escaping a high rate of poverty left after the Taiping Rebellion. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 largely decreased the number of Chinese immigrants. The second wave of ethnic Chinese immigrants in 1952 and 1965, after the lifting of the ban on immigration in the United States, a large number of **Taiwanese** students went to the United States to study in the United States, and some of them left after graduating from their local jobs to become immigrants and became **Taiwanese** Americans. In 1977, mainland China began to send its students to the United States. Such immigrants grew in the 1980s. The Chinese tend to be concentrated in suburban areas and Chinatowns far from downtown. These Chinese speak **Mandarin** and hometown dialects.

## Chinese language(s) spoken at home according to 2005-2009 American Community Survey

Name	Number of speakers	Margin of error	Speaks English "very well"	Margin of error
Total	2,896,766	13,255	1,600,886	8,527
"Chinese"	1,867,485	13,875	1,054,885	8,578
Mandarin	487,250	7,953	240,810	5,571
Cantonese	458,840	6,487	257,625	4,433
Taiwanese Hokkien	77,675	2,687	44,140	1,939
Wu	2,670	466	1,375	287
Fuchow	1,450	455	1,175	418
Hakka	1,350	307	840	263
"Kan, Hsiang ng"	50	65	(D)	(D)

## Chinatown in NYC

Manhattan's Chinatown holds the highest concentration of Chinese people in the Western Hemisphere. Little **Fuzhou** or The **Fuzhou** Chinatown on East Broadway and surrounding streets, occupied predominantly by immigrants from the Fujian province of Mainland China. They are the later settlers, from **Fuzhou**, **Fujian**, forming the majority of the Chinese population in the vicinity of East Broadway. Areas surrounding "Little **Fuzhou**" consist of significant numbers of **Cantonese** immigrants from the **Guangdong** of China, however the main **Cantonese** concentration is in the older western portion of Manhattan's Chinatown. Despite the fact that the **Mandarin** speaking communities were becoming established in Flushing and Elmhurst areas of Queens during the 1980s-90s and even though the **Fuzhou** immigrants spoke **Mandarin** often as well, due to their socioeconomic status, they could not afford the housing prices in **Mandarin** speaking enclaves in Queens, which were more middle class and the job opportunities were limited. They instead chose to settle in Manhattan's Chinatown for affordable housing and as well as the job opportunities that were available such as the seamstress factories and restaurants, despite the traditional Cantonese dominance until the 1990s. the **Cantonese** dialect that has dominated Chinatown for decades is being rapidly swept aside by **Mandarin**, the national language of China and the lingua franca due the influx of **Fuzhou** immigrants that often speak **Mandarin** and as well as there are now more **Mandarin** speaking visitors coming to visit the neighborhood.

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