

Methodological Challenges in Implementing Comparative Ethnographic Research Across Race/Ethnic Populations in the 2010 Census: An Asian Case Study

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Abstract

The Census Bureau is conducting the “Comparative Ethnographic Studies of Enumeration Methods and Coverage in Race/Ethnic Groups” evaluation to identify reasons why miscounts of some minority groups persist across decennial censuses and to suggest improvements. Expert ethnographers conducted coordinated small-scale field observation/debriefing studies of live Census Coverage Measurement (CCM) Survey interviews to address the same questions with the same methods at the same time in nine U.S. race/ethnic sites. This case study of one San Francisco area site identifies issues that arose while trying to apply the overall aim of maximizing observed interviews in dispersed Asian, primarily Chinese, households, a small hard-to-reach group. Data are from observations/debriefings of 41 live CCM interviews, 17 with Asians. The paper discusses methodological issues shaping the overall evaluation and the field site outcomes. Factors affecting Asians include: finding and engaging enough Asian households; language and cultural barriers; mistrust of outsiders; lack of community liaisons and bilingual interviewers; language card problems; question wording; and on-the-fly translations. Implications of findings for this evaluation and other cross-cultural studies are identified. Evaluation guidelines for pairing ethnographers by fluency in the target group language are proposed.

Key Words: Cross-cultural survey methods, Culture and multiple population research, 2010 Census, 2010 CPEX evaluation, Census Coverage Measurement Survey, Ethnographic studies, Qualitative research, Asians, Chinese, Race

1. Introduction

This paper presents a case study of a cross-cultural qualitative evaluation across diverse race/ethnic groups as it moves from the planning stage in the central office to the implementation in one field site. I identify methodological, procedural and staffing issues that arose at both the overall evaluation and individual field study levels and the changes, compromises, and new insights made as the evaluation moved forward.

I was in the unique position of both designing and overseeing this overall controlled comparison, cross-cultural evaluation of enumeration and coverage across nine race/ethnic sites and also, unexpectedly, conducting one of the component field studies under the umbrella of this evaluation in the Asian site. There are three questions that I address in this paper: What types of methodological issues does a principal researcher face as she/he tries to plan the overall shared design and select the multiple component research sites in a cross-cultural evaluation of survey data collection operations?; What types of methodological issues does a field researcher face as she/he tries to implement

the overall shared design in a real field site?; What are the implications of these results for this comparative study and for qualitative cross-cultural studies generally?

In this paper, I describe the overall controlled comparison evaluation across nine race/ethnic sites during the 2010 Census, focusing on the aims, methods and issues of the umbrella evaluation. This evaluation involved sending contract ethnographers to nine research sites to accompany interviewers and observe and tape (when permitted) up to 35 live Census Coverage Measurement (CCM) Survey interviews, listening for possible census coverage errors and conducting immediate respondent debriefings when indicated. I then describe my experiences and issues that arose when, through the loss of an outside selected ethnographer, I had to change hats unexpectedly and become a field researcher in one of the individual research sites, trying to implement the standardized methodology. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings from the perspective of both the evaluation principal researcher and also field researcher.

2. The Overall Comparative Study

The evaluation I describe here is part of the official 2010 Census Program of Evaluations and Experiments (CPEX) evaluation, “Comparative Ethnographic Studies of Enumeration Methods and Coverage in Race/Ethnic Groups.” This evaluation uses a controlled comparison design of nine small-scale observation sites in two census data collections to address the same research questions, with the same field methods during the same time period and in different race/ethnic group research sites.

The general aim of this evaluation is to increase our understanding of the reasons why Census Bureau research shows persistent differential undercounts of some minorities across decennial censuses. In this evaluation, we wanted to observe live census interviews to identify the types and sources of census coverage errors as well as the characteristics of households and persons affected by coverage error. We wanted to explore to extent to which the answers to these questions are similar or different across race/ethnic groups included in our study and make recommendations for changes and new research to improve coverage for the 2020 Census.

We designed the study to have nine research sites around the country; eight were targeted primarily to a specific race/ethnic group and the ninth was selected as a quasi-control site not targeted to any group. The targeted race/ethnic groups included: Asians; African Americans; American Indians on a reservation; Alaska Natives; Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders; non-Hispanic whites; Middle Easterners; and Hispanics.

2.1 Planning the Design and Methods for the Overall Evaluation and for Field Studies

We planned to conduct our evaluation in two different personal visit data collections associated with the census. The first data collection was the 2010 Census itself in two separate census operations: 1) the Update Enumerate (UE) Operation in which enumerators interviewed persons from all households on Indian reservations and some other selected locations from March to May, 2010; and 2) the Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) Operation in which enumerators interviewed persons in households who did not return their completed mailout census forms. With an overall national mail return rate of 74 percent, roughly 36 percent of all U.S. households were visited during the NRFU Operation. The proportion in NRFU in any one site would depend on its mail return rate.

The second data collection we planned to observe was the Census Coverage Measurement (CCM) Survey, an independent survey of 187,000 sample households, less than one percent of the U.S. population. This type of post-enumeration survey is conducted after each decennial census to provide estimates of census coverage overall, for race/ethnic groups, and for other subpopulations.

2.1.1 Selection of Research Sites

Our aim was to select research sites in which we could observe 2010 Census interviews around Census Day in April (UE) and in May (NRFU) and then later observe Census Coverage Measurement Person Interviews (CCM PI) in August in those same general areas. This would enable us to compare results across different data collections as well as across different race/ethnic groups at different points in time in the same general area.

Our plan to go to the same research site both in the census and later in the CCM Survey had the potential to compromise a core requirement of the CCM Survey: its independence from the census. In consultation with CCM statisticians, we took specific steps to avoid contaminating the independence of the CCM sample. First, to avoid as much as possible the chance that some households would be observed during both the census and CCM operations, we defined the census areas to encompass the CCM sample sites but to be much larger. The census sites were generally at the county, city or intra-city, or Local Census Office (LCO) geographical levels while the CCM sites were at the tract level.

Second, we used one set of ethnographers to observe census operations and a different set of ethnographers to observe CCM operations. Third, we maintained confidentiality of the sample by deliberately not telling either the first set of ethnographers or the local field staff in the research sites that there would be another round of observations in their sites later. At the request of our statistician colleagues, we maintained this confidentiality until the final CCM operation was winding down in the late spring of 2011.

Fourth, because this was an evaluation of data collection operations in pre-selected households, we told our field ethnographers to make no attempt to influence where the interviewer conducted interviews or the time periods of the day in which they did so. The only discussions involved communicating the general research site and requesting that ethnographers be sent to places where they had a higher likelihood of observing interviews with households in their targeted race/ethnic group. It is important to keep in mind that in both the census and CCM, the lists of households to be interviewed had been pre-selected. The field ethnographers could only ask to be sent out to areas with a higher likelihood of observing interviews with households in their target race/ethnic groups.

This controlled comparison design required us to meet some very specific criteria in selecting research sites, since the CCM sample included less than one percent of all households and only those areas with CCM sample would be eligible as research sites in this evaluation. In each site, we had a goal of observing up to 35 interviews, with 18 to 26 (50 to 75%) of them with the target group. We needed a minimum number of households in the CCM sample and at least 50 of the sample households had to be in the targeted race/ethnic group. Further, we wanted to limit the dispersion of the sample to avoid the ethnographer spending a lot of time driving to reach interviews.

The geographical data on the race/ethnic distributions linked to the CCM sample came from Census 2000 data and had limitations. First, the data were ten years old and the race/ethnic distribution may have shifted in unknown ways in some sites since then.

Second, the race/ethnic distributions were in the most general categories: Asian, African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic. This is a significant factor in this paper: we had no way to disaggregate the Chinese from the Asian sample to identify high concentrations of Chinese for our site.

For site selection, we requested and received custom printouts of the CCM sample locations and the number of households in the block clusters, with frequencies of our selected major race/ethnic groups back in Census 2000. We wanted to select locations that showed at least 20 percent of the households in our selected race/ethnic groups.

We compared this list of CCM locations to other Census 2000 data that identified locations with relatively high hard-to-count scores in the Planning Database so that we could winnow down the list of possible research sites to those where we would have a higher likelihood of observing possible coverage errors. The Planning Database classifies census tracts into 10 hard-to-count strata based on variables associated with coverage error in past censuses: tenure (own or rent the housing unit); household type; income level (public assistance program participation); and other factors (Robinson, Bruce, Love, Mills 2008). The higher the score, the higher the relative risk of coverage error.

We also used the Bates and Mulry (forthcoming in 2011) segmentation study that identified eight segments of the population for targeted 2010 Census advertising, based upon clusters of Planning Database scores: American average for owners or for renters; ethnic enclaves 1 or 2; economically disadvantaged 1 or 2; single, mobile and unattached; and advantaged homeowners. Nancy Bates contributed to this effort by using specifications we developed for this evaluation to generate listings of Planning Database scores by tract for each of our standard race and Hispanic groups within the economically disadvantaged, ethnic enclaves, and American average segments she developed. We cross-classified these with the CCM sample frame to select the targeted race/ethnic sites and those in the American average segment to pare down possible sites for our generalized quasi-control site.

Finally, for the generalized site, we looked for a site with a race/ethnic distribution in Census 2000 across non-Hispanic whites, blacks, and Hispanics that roughly mirrored the estimated race/ethnic distribution in early 2010. We felt that the combination of choosing a site from the “American average” segment with moderate hard-to-count scores along with a race/ethnic distribution similar to that in early 2010 would provide us with a quasi-control site for comparison to the other race/ethnic targeted sites in our evaluation.

After selecting a short list of potential sites for each race/ethnic group, we requested permission from our Field Division colleagues to have our researchers accompany census enumerators to observe and tape (when permitted) interviews over a nine-day period. We received approval to conduct our studies in eight of the nine regions we requested.

For the Asian study that is the focus here, we had originally planned to observe in the New York area. We had decided to focus on Chinese households (more on this below) and had mapped out the study to be in one of the Chinatown areas there, assuming that most of the “Asians” on our CCM sampling list in the Chinatown area were Chinese.

However, due to logistical constraints we were forced at the last minute to switch our site to the San Francisco Bay area; this decision defined where both our NRFU and CCM observations of Chinese, and more generally, Asians, would be done. As a result of this last-minute change, we did not have time to map the distribution of CCM sample households to see if the “Asian” sample fell within defined Bay area Chinatowns, though we were able to send the Cantonese-speaking ethnographer to a Chinatown area during the NRFU Operation. As we will explain later, this switch resulted in major changes to the Asian study and implications for the overall evaluation.

Table 1 shows the eight race/ethnic groups and the generalized group in the final research sites selected for this study.

Table 1: Race/ethnic Sites Selected for the Evaluation

<i>Race/ethnic group</i>	<i>Research site location</i>
<i>African American</i>	<i>Chicago, Illinois</i>
<i>Alaska Native</i>	<i>Kodiak Island, Alaska</i>
<i>American Indian reservations</i>	<i>Southwest</i>
<i>Asian</i>	<i>San Francisco Bay area</i>
<i>Middle Eastern</i>	<i>Detroit, Michigan area</i>
<i>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</i>	<i>Hawaii, Hawaii</i>
<i>Non-Hispanic white</i>	<i>Jackson, surrounding counties, Missouri</i>
<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Dallas/Forth Worth area, Texas</i>
<i>Generalized site</i>	<i>Broward County, Florida</i>

2.1.1 Selection of Contract Ethnographers to Conduct Field Studies

In addition to selecting appropriate sites, we also needed to select outside contract ethnographers to conduct the individual observation studies in these sites. We aimed to find ethnographers who had already conducted research with one or more of our race/ethnic populations in the United States and who were fluent in the foreign language, when appropriate. They could apply their personal and professional knowledge and experience with that group to observing interviewer and respondent behavior and identifying wider factors that might affect census coverage.

We used several methods to identify these professionals. First, we contacted several ethnographers who had done prior ethnographic contract research for us during and after Census 2000 on complex households in six race/ethnic groups (Schwede, Blumberg and Chan 2006). Second, we networked at professional conferences and sent out an evaluation flyer on targeted professional association listserves for anthropologists and sociologists. More than 120 ethnographers responded and asked to be considered.

The Asian population is culturally very diverse and no one ethnographer could be experienced with all subgroups. Asians alone or in combination with other race group(s) comprise an estimated 5.6 percent of the total U.S. population (Profile America: Facts for Features May, 2011, citing American Community Survey 2009 data).

Two of our applicants specialized in Chinese, so we chose Chinese as our specific Asian subgroup. Chinese are the largest Asian group in the U.S., with an estimated population of 3.8 million people. Of this total, 2.6 million people above age 5 speak Chinese at home (Profile America: Facts for Features May, 2011 using ACS 2009 data).

Because the majority of Chinese speak Chinese in their homes, we wanted our ethnographers to speak a Chinese language. One of our selected Chinese ethnographers spoke Cantonese and the other, Mandarin. That would work in the New York area.

We matched ethnographers with expertise in one of our selected race/ethnic groups for 17 of the 18 race/ethnic sites shown in Table 1. Due to ethnographer availability, the only Middle Eastern study that we had was in the CCM Operation in August.

We conducted training sessions for ethnographers at Census Bureau headquarters for their respective operations. One objective was to help the ethnographers become familiar with the questionnaire. A second objective was to teach them to recognize cues of potential coverage error that could be exhibited during interviews. This would help them to recognize what they should be watching and listening for in the interviews. A third was to train them to conduct a debriefing immediately following the standard interview. This involved asking targeted questions to resolve any potential coverage errors and decide where each person should be counted, according to the census residence rule and residence situations document we gave them.

We requested that ethnographers observe and audiotape (when allowed) 35 live interviews or as many as they could during one continuous nine-day period in their field site during a set two-week period. We asked them to try to go out with a different interviewer each day so that we could get some sense of the range in variation in interviewer behavior.

We also requested that ethnographers going to targeted race/ethnic sites aim to get 18 to 26 (50 to 75 percent) of their interviews in households of their target race/ethnic group, to enable us to do the cross-site comparisons of the eight race/ethnic groups. Later, in the overall dataset, we can pool all Asian persons across all sites to discern patterns.

Additionally, we instructed ethnographers to take precautions to minimize their own effect on the interviewer and respondent while observing the interview. They were instructed to remain quiet and unobtrusive during the standard interview, and only speak near the beginning of the interview to ask for permission to tape, then, if appropriate, conduct a short debriefing at the end to resolve any potential ambiguities in coverage and/or household structure. We aimed for our contract ethnographers to leave little or no footprint on the interview and interview process as a result of this evaluation.

2.1.3 Issues at the Overall Evaluation Level in Overall Evaluation Planning

As most researchers have learned, even the most carefully thought-out research designs often need to be revised when real life factors intervene, as we had found when we had to switch our research site at the last minute from New York to the San Francisco Bay area. It also turned out that one of the selected Chinese researchers – the Mandarin speaker – notified us later she was no longer available to do the CCM observation study.

At the time, this did not seem to be a large issue, since the transfer of our research site from New York to the San Francisco Bay area meant that we were now likely to encounter more Cantonese- than Mandarin-speaking Chinese respondents. We decided to search for a second Cantonese-speaking ethnographer, but found very few of them and no one able to conduct the observation study for us during our two-week observation window in August. By then, we had no other Mandarin-speaking ethnographer either.

We were confronted with the decision of either not doing the second Chinese observation study in the CCM PI Operation or of my going out to do the observation study myself. Although experienced in conducting anthropological fieldwork and in designing and conducting interviews related to coverage and household structure (e.g., Schwede 2008, Schwede, Blumberg, and Chan 2006), I had no prior experience with Chinese ethnography and no familiarity with either Cantonese or Mandarin. Hence, I would be unable to understand any interviews in either Chinese language, let alone do any debriefings. Rather than lose the Chinese site in the CCM operation altogether, I decided that I should do this observation study as best I could and bring back tapes of Chinese interviews for transcription and translation by one or more Chinese speakers.

3.0 Implementing the Standardized Methods in the Local Chinese Field Site

When I arrived in the Bay area, my local designated contact person had already identified CCM block clusters in areas of the city more likely to include Chinese households. She said she would personally drive me to meet my assigned interviewers each day. This level of personal attention was unsolicited and unexpected, but proved very helpful.

She and the field staff were intensely curious as to why I was so interested in observing interviews with Chinese in their area, rather than respondents more generally, and if “they” (the headquarters evaluation leaders) were so interested in the Chinese, why did they not send out an observer who spoke Chinese? I just shrugged and said “they” could not find a Chinese speaker available during this time period and “they” asked me to go to the site to observe. During my observations there, I acted like a headquarters observer perhaps somewhat connected to this project who comes out for a few days to do some casual observation and kept a low profile, to minimize my effects on interviewers and respondents.

Though not ethnically Chinese, my designated contact person had both lived in the area for a long time and had strong ties to the Chinese community through relatives and prior jobs. She thus had a good idea of the areas of the city where Chinese tend to live and had mapped out those areas with CCM sample as places for me to observe interviews.

But more importantly, she told me that the CCM sample in this area was not within the dense Chinatown areas, but rather dispersed around the Bay area. Chinese who live outside of Chinatown areas are more likely to speak English, she told me. Moreover, she did not have any Chinese-speaking CCM interviewers assigned to her area, so all interviews I observed would likely be with English-only interviewers. This meant that unless we could find a bilingual Chinese-English speaker to help translate interviews, that I might not see any Chinese-only interviews during my stay.

On the one hand, this was good; I could understand interviews with Chinese respondents and conduct debriefings in English, two things that I would not have been able to do in Chinese-only interviews. I could also watch what English-only interviewers tried to complete interviews with respondents with little or no English fluency.

On the other hand, this meant that the CCM field study would only include the segment of the Chinese population that speaks some English, unless we could find informal translators to help with the interviews. Fortunately, our Cantonese-speaking ethnographer

had observed 22 interviews in Cantonese within densely settled Bay area Chinatown areas earlier during the NRFU census operation. She was able to document enumeration problems and coverage issues that arose in Cantonese-speaking interviews. Additionally, colleague Yuling Pan sent Chinese-speaking researchers to observe NRFU interviews in Chinese during her 2010 Census evaluation, “Observing Census Enumeration of Non-English Speaking Households in the 2010 U.S. Census.” We thus have several field studies on interviewing monolingual and bilingual Chinese in the 2010 Census.

The dispersion of the CCM sample in the mixed Bay area population raised another concern. As mentioned earlier, all I could tell from the CCM sampling list distribution by race before I left for the field was that roughly one in five households in this area in 2000 had had an Asian respondent. There was no further breakdown of Chinese in the site, so I had no way to estimate the likelihood of encountering Chinese respondents.

It also became clear over the first few days in the field that working in dispersed areas really meant that we had no idea of what race or ethnicity to expect when we knocked on each sample household door. I was left with a question that some of my earlier NRFU ethnographers working in sites targeted to other very small race/ethnic groups had to contend with: Would I be able to observe enough interviews with Chinese or at least Asian respondents over my nine days in the field to fulfill the objective of getting at least 18 of my observed interviews with my target race group? This became a concern as the days passed and I saw just a small proportion of Chinese and other Asian interviews each day. I ended up observing more than my target of 35 interviews in the hope of boosting my total number of Chinese, and more broadly, Asian households in my sample.

Table 2: Race/ethnic Breakdown of the Observed Interviews

<i>Race/ethnic group</i>	<i>Number of Interviews</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Chinese</i>	11	27
<i>Other Asian</i>	6	15
<i>Other</i>	24	58
<i>Total</i>	41	100

Table 2 shows that I managed to observe eleven interviews with Chinese respondents and another six with respondents from other Asian groups – Asian Indian, Pakistani, Indonesian, and Filipino – for a total of 17 (42 percent) of the total of 41 observed interviews. Even with the extra interviews I observed, I was not able to meet the minimum quota of 18 with my target group, a quota that I, in my other capacity as evaluation manager, had set during the planning stage. This suggests that studies of very small race/ethnic populations living dispersed among the general population need special procedures to achieve desired final sample sizes.

It may be recalled that earlier I had weighed whether I could do a good enough job of understanding interviews without any expertise in ethnographic studies with Chinese or familiarity with their language to justify conducting this observation study myself. For the first several days, I observed a few interviews with Chinese respondents, mostly in English and I could understand the respondents and conduct debriefings. In one, we found an elderly Chinese woman who clearly did not speak English. Fortunately, her adult son and his wife were walking down the hallway with her and the son said he could

translate the interview for her. If he had not been there, the interviewer and I would not have been able to do the interview. In another, an elderly man could barely speak English and asked the interviewer to repeat questions a number of times. I understood enough from his brief answers to decide where he should be counted.

Later in the week, I went out with an interviewer in another block with ten housing units that my designated contact thought would be especially likely to have Chinese households. Decorations on some of the houses looked to be Chinese. We knocked on the doors. In one, an Asian woman who was Chinese told us to come back later when her husband was home. At most other addresses, no one answered the door.

At our second to last house, a duplex, the outside door was open and we could barely see into the house through a closed heavy mesh screen door. After several knocks, an elderly woman came to the door. The interviewer tried to talk to her in English but she did not understand him. As trained, he got out his foreign language card with a few simple words printed in 50 languages. The interviewer was supposed to show the respondents the card and somehow let them know to look down the list and find and point out their language. The interviewer would then be able to identify the respondent's language and arrange for an appropriate translator to come to the house at a later time to conduct the interview.

In this case, the interviewer attempted to signal the respondent that she should open the locked screen door so that he could show her the language card. She clearly did not want to open the door and gestured for him to leave it in the mailbox. He tried to indicate that he could not do that and tried again to signal her to open the door, which she still was unwilling to do. The only thing left was for us to leave and see if we could somehow find a bilingual Chinese-English interviewer to come back and do the interview. We then tried to knock on the door of the adjoining unit in the duplex. We had thought we heard noise behind that door, but our knocks went unanswered. Having knocked on all of the doors in the block without completing any interviews, we stopped for the day.

The designated contact later asked me whether we had gotten any Chinese interviews in this area. I described the incident with the woman behind the screen door and how the interviewer could not find a way to communicate with her. I asked whether she had any bilingual Chinese speaking interviewers and she said that she did not have any. Hiring of CCM interviewers was handled out of the regional census center in another state and she did not control this and did not know they planned to bring on bilingual interviewers.

Meanwhile, this contact told me that the language card actually has two entries for Chinese. The translation of the messages are that one is in traditional writing, while the other is not – this does not distinguish whether the language is Mandarin or Cantonese. This did not seem to meet the purpose of identifying which type of translator to send.

The next day my contact said that she had spoken with a manager in another CCM area and had arranged to “borrow” that manager's bilingual Chinese-speaking CCM interviewer for a day, so that we could go back to that same neighborhood and see if she could conduct the interviews with the Chinese-speaking residents.

So the middle-aged Chinese-speaking female translator accompanied the young white male interviewer and myself, a middle-aged white female nearing retirement, back to the duplex where we had tried, but failed to communicate with the Asian woman behind her screen door. As luck would have it, it just so happened that the elderly woman herself and

another elderly woman were sitting on the stoop within 15 feet of the curb, where the local mailman who appeared to be Chinese, was sorting mail in his truck. The Chinese women and the mailman all straightened up when they saw the three of us Census persons, one of them Chinese in appearance but westernized in dress, approach the stoop. Our bilingual interviewer began speaking Chinese to the women and they responded and the conversation went for several minutes. Then the Chinese interviewer turned to us and said in English that she speaks Mandarin and they speak Cantonese; she was not sure that they would be willing to work with her to conduct the interview across the dialects.

But then the Chinese mailman started talking in Chinese with both the women on the stoop and the Mandarin-speaking interviewer. Incredibly, it turned out that he spoke both Mandarin and Cantonese, as well as English, and he ended up convincing the women that the census was okay and they should cooperate and give their information! The bilingual interviewer then translated the questionnaire on the fly into Mandarin and the mailman helped translate that into Cantonese, and then translated back what the women said. In this way, the bilingual interviewer was able to complete this interview with the help of the mailman. This was quite a tableau – six persons to conduct one interview with one Chinese household – but it worked! There was enough information for me to decide the woman and her husband were properly counted at their duplex.

At that point, the mailman drove away and the interviewers and I knocked on the door of the other part of the duplex. An even older woman opened the door – apparently she had been aware of the interview with her neighbor and was now willing to talk with us. Our bilingual interviewer realized that she would have even more difficulty communicating with this Cantonese speaker, so she took a piece of paper and started translating the basic CCM questions into Chinese characters so that the respondent could read the characters! The interviewer was clearly paring these questions down to the essential core and likely making major changes to the meaning for at least some questions. But there was no other way to complete this interview, and she did complete it. She later explained that the Chinese written symbols mean the same thing in Mandarin and Cantonese, but the way the words are read in the two languages differs and can be mutually incomprehensible.

And then there was another remarkable turn of events. Having completed her interview, this elderly woman did not go back inside, but came out of her house to accompany us around the neighborhood and help us convince her neighbors to participate! She knocked on doors and yelled out to people to answer their doors. At one house, she started talking to an Asian woman who reluctantly came out of her house to talk with us through a gate. Our Chinese “auntie” and our bilingual Chinese interviewer had a long conversation with the respondent, who then made a signal toward the house. The woman’s teenage daughter came out and more discussion ensued. Finally, the girl said in clear English that she would translate the interview with her mother for us. As a result, we got this interview, and later the young woman agreed with us that she would come along and serve as our Cantonese translator in her neighborhood!

An issue here arises over confidentiality and gaining access to an immigrant community likely to be mistrustful of the government and outsiders. On the one hand, census interviews are to be kept confidential and not conducted if someone else can overhear the conversation or see who is being interviewed. On the other, most interviews are done on the doorstep where anyone can see them and two white people with badges and a laptop computer going around and knocking on some, but not all, doors would certainly catch the attention of residents in an immigrant community. Some interviews, such as those

needing translation, cannot be completed at the time without the assistance of another relative, friend or associate. In the cases I observed here, the mailman and auntie were known in this community and made our interviews possible. I watched for signs of unease or discomfort with others and did not see evidence of them. These respondents could have declined the interview or asked that the others go away. In one case I saw the monolingual male English-speaking interviewer ask a respondent if it was okay with her for the teenage translator to hear the interview and she agreed. Nonetheless, we need to be very careful about how interviews are actually done in real field conditions.

In summary, bringing the Chinese-speaking interviewer to this site had a positive domino effect on both completing interviews and gaining the trust of this immigrant neighborhood, even though she could not speak Cantonese Chinese. The mailman helped overcome the hesitance or distrust of the women to cooperate and their participation then influenced the elderly woman to complete our interview and then decide on her own to become our community liaison. That in turn convinced the other Asian woman to bring her daughter outside to complete her own interview, and the following day the daughter agreed to become our Cantonese translator for other Chinese households.

The sequence of events in this neighborhood clearly demonstrates the importance of sending one or more bilingual interviewers of the same race/ethnicity and language as respondents in an immigrant neighborhood. It also demonstrates a positive effect, as initially distant and perhaps mistrustful residents begin to feel secure enough in the purpose of the data collection and our field staff to not only provide their own data, but take on the role of community liaison between the interviewer and the neighbors. Our elderly Chinese auntie who spontaneously adopted us opened the door to her Chinese neighborhood where just one day earlier she had not even opened her own door to us.

Table 3: Interview Language, Respondent, and Data Quality in Observed Asian Households

<i>Interview Language</i>	<i>Who served as respondent</i>	<i>Quality of Data</i>	<i>Number of Asian households</i>
<i>English</i>	<i>HH respondent</i>	<i>Good</i>	8
<i>English</i>	<i>Other HH person</i>	<i>Good</i>	4
<i>English</i>	<i>Nonresident son</i>	<i>Good</i>	1
<i>English</i>	<i>HH respondent</i>	<i>Seemed sufficient</i>	2
<i>Chinese +</i>	<i>HH respondent</i>	<i>Seemed sufficient</i>	2
<i>Total</i>			17

As I observed more interviews in this site, my initial concerns about whether as a non-Chinese ethnographer with no facility in any Chinese dialect I would be able to understand interviews with Chinese respondents in this site were allayed. As shown in Table 3, most of the rest of my observed interviews in this site were with Chinese or other Asians who either spoke at least some English themselves or with others who could translate on the fly, as there was no Chinese version of the CCM interview. The Chinese respondents ranged from those born in the U.S. and native English speakers all the way to those like the auntie and neighbor who appeared to be monolingual Cantonese speakers.

Given the difficulty our Mandarin speaking interviewer had in trying to communicate with the Cantonese speaking women in this site, it would seem wise to develop one or two Chinese versions of the CCM questionnaire in the next census for such situations.

4. Summary of Issues Identified in this Case Study and Implications for other Cross-cultural Studies

We are now ready to address the three questions posed earlier to identify and discuss: 1) issues faced at the overall evaluation level during the planning and design phase, 2) issues that became apparent during the implementation phase and 3) implications and insights of these for this evaluation and cross-cultural studies more generally.

4.1 Issues at the Overall Evaluation Level in the Planning and Design Phase

During the early planning and design stage, a number of decisions and unexpected issues shaped the overall evaluation and the outcomes in the Asian site. Issues at the overall evaluation level included: embeddedness of the evaluation within the survey data collection operations; limitations of pre-selected household samples and associated race/ethnic distribution statistics; linkage of both the census and CCM observation studies to the same research site; size and geographical concentration or dispersion of the target group; language issues; ethnographer characteristics; an unexpected shift to a different, less-known research site and the loss of a selected expert ethnographer.

One of these key issues was how to design and carry out this research to meet our own research objectives across race/ethnic groups while embedded within the context and constraints of the CCM and the 2010 Census operations and samples. The decision to link our observations in both the 2010 Census and the later CCM operations to the same general research site for each race/ethnic group meant that we were limited to those areas of the country that both contained the sample of less than one percent of all households and also had relatively high proportions of the target group.

Moreover, the Census and CCM lists of households had been pre-selected for operation-specific purposes – either because the persons had not sent in their census forms (census) or their households fell in the CCM sample – not on the basis of race/ethnic distributions, which was one of our own key selection criteria. To identify sites with a likelihood of getting at least 18 interviews with our designated group, we had to use Census 2000 race/ethnic distributions linked to the CCM block clusters. Those distributions were ten years old and gave breakdowns only for the major race/ethnic groups, such as Asian.

Our decision to focus on the Chinese by selecting the two ethnographers who specialized in Chinese studies and spoke a Chinese language (albeit different ones) constrained our site selection even more, as Chinese comprise a very small 1.2 percent of the population.

Finding such a small population of people by race/nationality (1.2 percent) in such a small CCM sample of households (less than one percent of the population) presented challenges. Selecting a CCM research site in a Chinatown area with a large proportion of Asians associated with the CCM sample block clusters would presumably give us the best chance of conducting this study with Chinese.

The unexpected issues we faced – the need to switch the site at the last minute from New York to the San Francisco Bay area without knowing whether the CCM sample was in a

dense Chinatown area or not and the loss of the selected Mandarin-speaking ethnographer – led to identifying some interesting questions and findings.

First, when confronted with the choice of either dropping the Asian site in the CCM or conducting it myself, I continued to assume that most of the Chinese interviews would be in a Chinatown area and would be in a Chinese language. During the much larger NRFU Operation, our Cantonese-speaking ethnographer was able to do most of her observations in San Francisco Bay Chinatown areas and observed and taped more than 22 interviews in Chinese. If, during the later CCM operation, the CCM interviewers and respondents again both spoke Chinese, I would not be able to understand any of the interviews in Chinese and would not be able to do any debriefing. I would have to rely on the interviewer to ask permission for taping and for a recounting of what happened. This would not be very productive for the evaluation site targeted to Asians.

4.2 Methodological Issues at the Field Site in the Implementation Phase

At the Field level, the following issues and decisions played important roles in the study outcome: geographical dispersion; higher propensity of Chinese respondents to speak English; the lack of bilingual Chinese CCM interviewers; characteristics of my local field contact and innovative ad hoc strategies employed by field staff to complete interviews.

As mentioned earlier, when I got to the field, I found the very different situation of a dispersed, non-Chinatown sample and no Chinese-speaking CCM interviewers, so the implementation concerns changed from whether I could understand most interviews to whether I would be able to get enough interviews with Chinese and see at least some in Chinese with a translator. I was greatly helped by the local field contact who was familiar with non-Chinatown locations where Chinese tend to live and who took the initiative to arrange for the bilingual Chinese CCM interviewer to come from another CCM area to help us in the mostly Chinese block. The bilingual interviewer was innovative in working with the mailman to build trust with the Chinese respondents and in overcoming the Mandarin-Cantonese language barrier by condensing, translating and transcribing the questions in Chinese characters so the respondent could read them.

4.3 Implications of the Case Study for this Evaluation and for Cross-Cultural Studies More Generally

In assessing the relative positives and negatives of doing this field study myself without prior ethnographic experience with this group or familiarity with its languages, I assess this on the mixed, but mostly positive side. On the one hand, I did not observe the minimum number of interviews with my group and there were likely subtleties in behavior and response that I did not pick up that an expert ethnographer would have. On the other hand, most of the interviews with Chinese and other Asians were conducted in English so I could address the standardized research questions and apply the standardized methodology. In addition, I was able to see some interviews in Chinese, thanks to my contact's success in bringing in the Mandarin-speaking CCM interviewer that day and I was able to document the importance of this ethnically Chinese interviewer's presence and behavior in overcoming respondent mistrust and reluctance. I was able to see the importance of having local ethnic cultural liaisons – the mailman, the elderly auntie and the teenage translator – endorse our survey and introduce us to reluctant respondents.

The overall outcome of the transfer of the site to the San Francisco area for both the NRFU and CCM operations ended up with some positive benefits. Our Cantonese-speaking ethnographer during NRFU was able to conduct survey observations within

dense Chinatown areas, primarily with Chinese-speaking interviewers mostly in Cantonese. I was able to observe interviews with Chinese in a dispersed area, with mostly monolingual English-speaking CCM interviewers in mostly English language interviews. Both yield findings and insights on how to reach hard-to-count race/ethnic minorities. These two very different field outcomes within the same general Bay area site cover more of the potential range of interview outcomes with Chinese than we may have gotten if we had conducted both observation studies within condensed Chinatown areas of New York.

For the field of survey methodology generally, this experience suggests that it may be possible to develop preliminary guidelines, possibly a scale, on the relative acceptability of outcomes in cross-cultural evaluations of interviewer-respondent interactions in personal-visit survey operations, based on language of participants. The key factors would be the languages of 1) the interviewer, 2) the respondent, and 3) the ethnographer. The options are ranked below, starting with the most beneficial combinations.

1. The optimal combination for evaluations is when the interviewer, respondent, and ethnographer all speak and understand the same language during the interview. This is also the best combination for the quality of survey data, other things being equal.
2. An acceptable combination for evaluations is when the interviewer and ethnographer speak the same language during the interview, but the respondent has little or no fluency in that language. The ethnographer can understand the interview and document how the interviewer handles the situation and, if the survey is completed, assess the quality of the data. This combination may or may not produce survey interview data, and the quality of any data collected would vary, depending on how the interview is completed.
3. A combination that varies in acceptability is the one in which the respondent and ethnographer speak the same language but the interviewer is not able to do so. This is the situation that would have happened in some Chinese interviews if our selected Mandarin-speaker had actually done the Chinese CCM study for us with the same interviewers and respondents that I saw during my field observations in the Bay area. There are several possible outcomes. If the interviewer is able to find someone else to translate the interview or tries to muddle through with the interview in English and the respondent can answer at least some questions, this combination can be positive for evaluations, but not necessarily for the quality of the data collected in the survey itself. In contrast, if the interviewer cannot find a way to conduct the interview, the ethnographer is put in a difficult situation. On the one hand, if the ethnographer remains unobtrusive and quiet as trained, they are likely to lose the interview with the ethnographer's target group and both are frustrated. On the other hand, if the ethnographer agrees to serve as translator to complete the standard interview with the target group household, he/she then contaminates the evaluation results by taking an active role in conducting the interview, when he/she is supposed to remain unobtrusive. This combination may or may not lead to quality survey data, depending on how this situation is handled.
4. The worst combination for evaluation purposes is when the the interviewer and respondent speak the same language, but the ethnographer is not able to do so. The ethnographer cannot understand either the interviewer-respondent interactions or the survey questions. This is the scenario I hoped not to confront when I was considering whether to go to the field or not. This combination may result in a complete standard interview with good quality data.

This is the first step in suggesting these preliminary guidelines, and a possible scale, for assessing the acceptability of language characteristics for ethnographers evaluating interview-respondent interactions in surveys, for further development. The next step would be to add into the equation whether the language used in the interview is a standardized interview in that language or an on-the-fly interview.

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