



# Cantonese: The Biggest Endangered Language?



Cherry Lam & Ricky Chan  
DTAL, University of Cambridge

# Overview

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- I. **What is Cantonese?**
- II. **Why should we care?**
- III. **Language endangerment (in the case of Cantonese)**
- IV. **Socio-political situation of Cantonese**
  - ❖ Language policies
  - ❖ Reactions towards 'endangerment'
- V. **Conclusion & implications**



# I. What is Cantonese?

- ❖ Nomenclatures
- ❖ Locations
- ❖ History

# What is Cantonese?

## Nomenclatures

粵語

Jyut jyu  
Yue yu  
'Yue'

Academic  
classification

廣東話

Gwongdung waa  
Guangdong hua  
'Canton language'

Hong Kong,  
Macau

白話

Bak waa  
Bai hua  
'plain language'

Mainland China

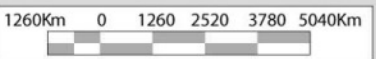
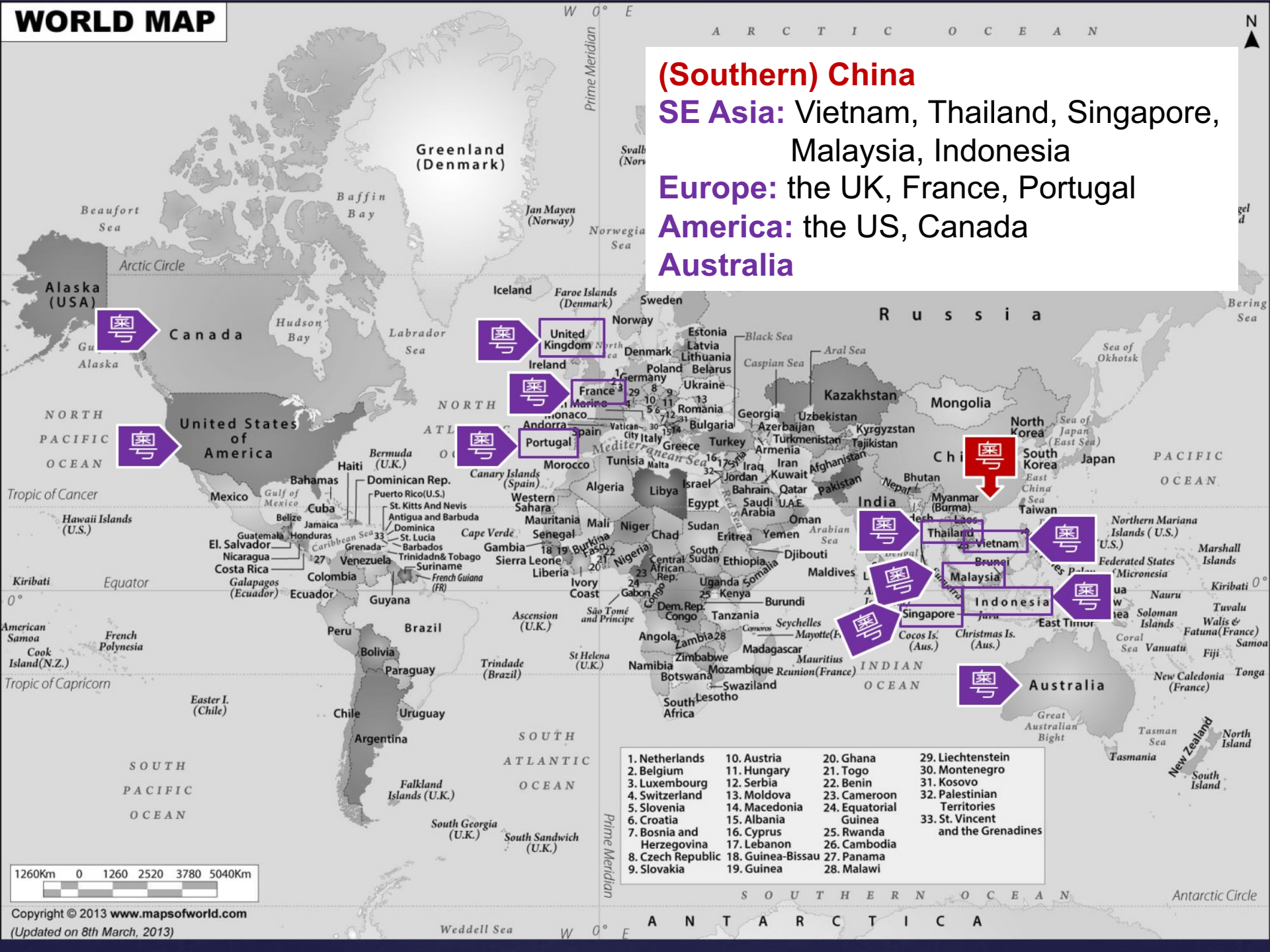
官話

Gwun waa  
Guan hua  
'Official language'



# WORLD MAP

**(Southern) China**  
**SE Asia:** Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia  
**Europe:** the UK, France, Portugal  
**America:** the US, Canada  
**Australia**



# CHINA

DESERT - LOW - HILLS - PLATEAU - MTNS

# China: Geography



Guangdong Province  
Guangxi Province  
Hong Kong  
Macau





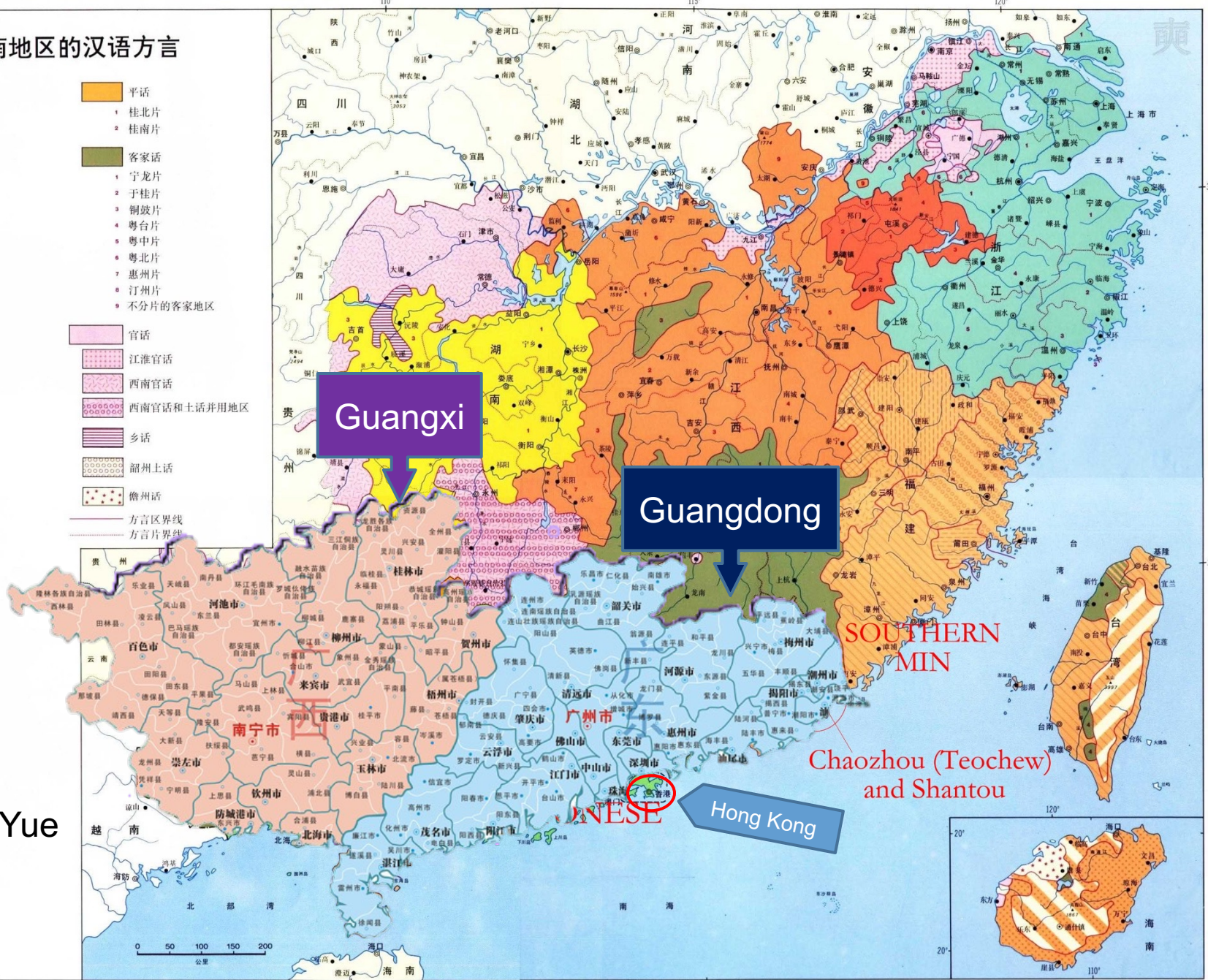


(Click to enlarge)



# 东南地区的汉语方言

- 吴语**
    - 太湖片
    - 台州片
    - 瓯江片
    - 婺州片
    - 处衢片
    - 宣州片
  - 徽语**
    - 休黟片
    - 祁德片
    - 严州片
    - 绩歙片
    - 旌占片
  - 赣语**
    - 昌靖片
    - 宜浏片
    - 吉安片
    - 抚广片
    - 鹰弋片
    - 大通片
    - 未瓷片
    - 洞绥
    - 怀岳片
  - 湘语**
    - 长益片
    - 娄邵片
    - 吉溆片
  - 闽语**
    - 闽南区
    - 莆仙片
    - 闽东区
    - 闽北区
    - 闽中区
    - 琼文区
    - 邵将区
    - 雷州区
  - 粤语 Yue**
    - 广府片
    - 四邑片
    - 高阳片
    - 勾漏片
    - 吴化片
    - 钦廉片
    - 邕浔片
  - 平话**
    - 桂北片
    - 桂南片
  - 客家话**
    - 宁龙片
    - 于桂片
    - 铜鼓片
    - 粤台片
    - 粤中片
    - 粤北片
    - 惠州片
    - 汀州片
    - 不分片的客家地区
  - 官话**
    - 江淮官话
    - 西南官话
    - 西南官话和土话并用地区
    - 乡话
    - 福州土话
    - 徽州话
- 方言区界线  
 方言片界线





# What is Cantonese?

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- ❖ Speaker population: (global) 62 million; (China) 52 million (Ethnologue 1984)
- ❖ One of the three more archaic varieties of Chinese
  - Dates back to 214BC (the Hundred Yue in Qin Dynasty)
  - Resemblance to Old Chinese (ca. 1122-256BC) and Middle Chinese (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century AD)

## II. Why should we care?

- ❖ Diversity
- {
  - ❖ Identity
  - ❖ Cultural heritage
  - ❖ Knowledge
  - ❖ Linguistic features



# Why should we care?

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- ❖ Because we need diversity
- ❖ Because languages are sum of human knowledge
- ❖ Because languages express identity
- ❖ Because languages are repositories of culture
- ❖ Because languages are interesting in themselves

(Crystal 2014)

# Identity

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- ❖ Cantonese has increasingly been linked to the Hong Kong identity.
- ❖ As tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China escalate, a distinct sense of identity is growing – particularly among young people.
- ❖ People in Hong Kong are using the language as a symbol to distinguish themselves from China
- ❖ The status of Cantonese has been a contentious political issue





# Culture: e.g. Cantonese Opera

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- ❖ One of the major styles of Chinese opera
- ❖ Colourful costumes, extravagant sets and famously unique style of singing.
- ❖ Included as part of UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009





# Cantopop

- ❖ Hong Kong as the most significant hub of the genre; multinational fanbase especially in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and in the Guangdong province of mainland China.
- ❖ Define the identity of Cantonese-speaking communities.





# Cantonese is interesting



- ❖ “The Great Canton and Hong Kong Proverbs” by Ah To.
- ❖ 83 Cantonese Proverbs illustrated



## Proverbs related to “ghost”

- ❖ 鬼搵眼 (A ghost covers one's eyes)
- ❖ 呃鬼食豆腐 (To trick a ghost into eating tofu)
- ❖ 鬼拍後尾枕 (A ghost slaps the back of one's head)



## Proverbs related to “Chicken”

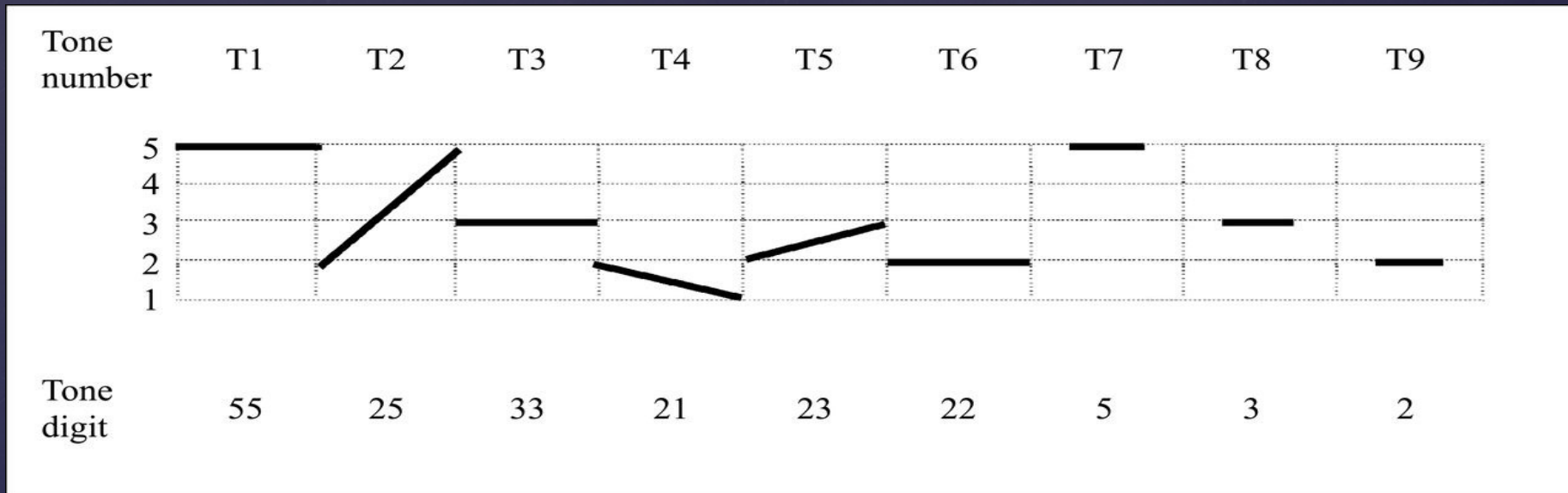
- ❖ 執死雞 (To pick up a dead chicken)
- ❖ 死雞撐飯蓋 (Using a dead chicken to push back the cooking-pot lid)
- ❖ 冇掩雞籠 (A doorless chicken coop)





# Tone System

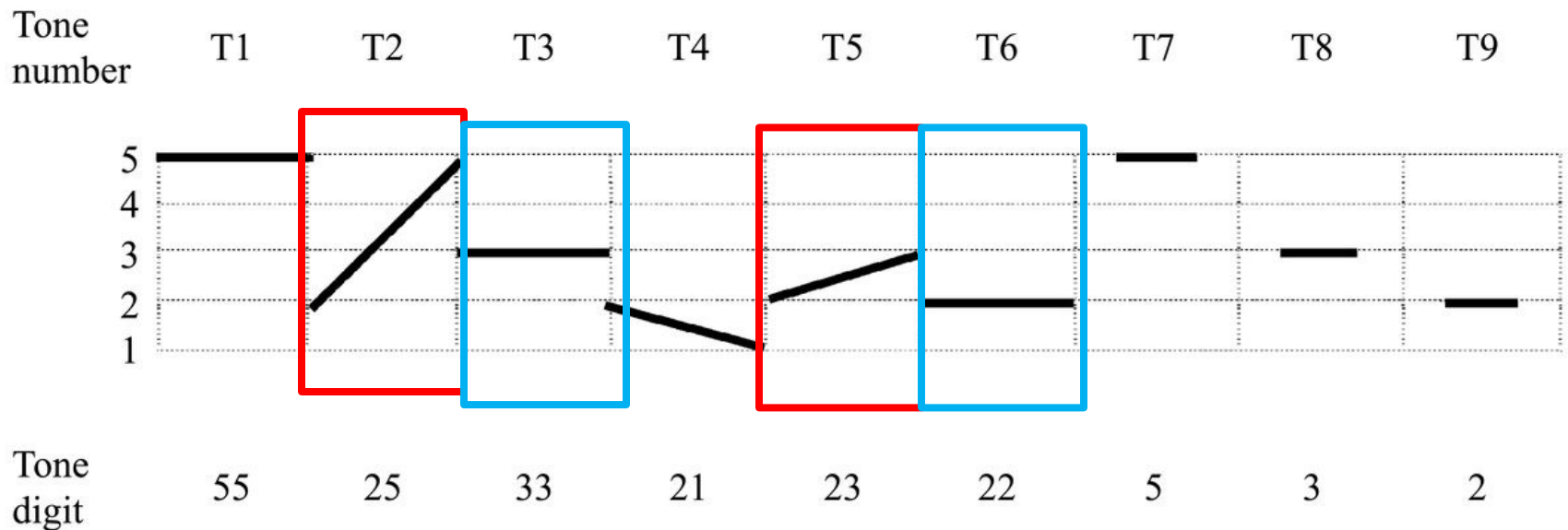
- ❖ Cantonese is notorious (?) for its complicated tone system.



- ❖ Some varieties of Cantonese even have an additional high falling tone [51]...

# Tone System

- ❖ Some of the tones are found to be merging  
(cf. Mok et al. 2013).





# Lyrics in Cantonese songs

- ❖ Lyrics often have to correspond to the tones
- ❖ Often close to how one would speak

別再管誰咒你 曾經荒謬 闖蕩異地 亦未枉相戀超  
出煩惱的禁忌 視世上人不理想 早晚能見你 曾經反叛  
也 是我運氣 天與地 年老了不再 飛無那份勇氣

Source: 衛蘭 - 離家出走 (2006) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKeN0P3nkY8>

# cf. Lyrics in Mandarin songs



雨下整夜 我的愛溢出 就像雨水 院子落葉 跟我的思念  
厚厚一疊 幾句是非 也無法將我的熱情冷卻 你  
出現在我詩的每一頁 雨下整夜 我的愛溢出  
就像雨水 窗臺蝴蝶 像詩裏紛飛的美麗章節 我接著寫  
把永遠愛你寫進詩的結尾 你是我唯一想要的瞭解



# Chinese Poetry

- ❖ Debate over whether poems in Tang/Song dynasties are better read in Cantonese or Mandarin

「尋尋覓覓，冷冷清清，淒淒慘慘戚戚」

---- 李清照(Song 1084-1155AD) 《聲聲慢》

- Cantonese: entering tones
- Mandarin: non-entering tones



# III. Language endangerment: the case of Cantonese

- ❖ General understanding
- ❖ Working definition for Cantonese and the like



# Language endangerment

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- ❖ Safe > Endangered > Extinct
- ❖ Viable > Viable but small > Endangered > Nearly extinct > Extinct
- ❖ (Krauss 1992; Wurm 1998)  
Potentially endangered > Endangered > Seriously endangered > Moribund > Extinct
- ❖ (Crystal 2014)  
Domains of use?  
Lexical erosion?

# Language endangerment

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- ❖ **UNESCO: 9 factors of language vitality (2003:7-17)**
  1. Intergenerational language transmission;
  2. Absolute number of speakers;
  3. Proportion of speakers within the total population;
  4. Shifts in domains of language use;
  5. Response to new domains and media; and
  6. Availability of materials for language education and literacy
  7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use
  8. Community members' attitudes towards their own language
  9. Type and Quality of Documentation

**NB:** *“none of these factors should be used alone. A language that is ranked highly according to one criterion may deserve immediate and urgent attention due to other factors.”*



# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission		
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group		
Domains of use		
Response to new domains		
Written material		
Official attitude		
Speakers' attitude		
Documentation quality		

# UNESCO Factor 3:

## Population proportional to group

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Proportion of Speakers Within the Total Reference Population
safe	5	All speak the language.
unsafe	4	Nearly all speak the language.
definitively endangered	3	A majority speak the language.
severely endangered	2	A minority speak the language.
critically endangered	1	Very few speak the language.
extinct	0	None speak the language.



# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission		
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group	Group = Nation = 1 billion (1982): 5.2% Group = Region = 98 million (1982): 53.1%	2 3/4
Domains of use		
Response to new domains		
Written material		
Official attitude		
Speakers' attitude		
Documentation quality		

# IV. Socio-political situation of Cantonese

- A. Language policies in China, HK, and overseas
- B. Speakers' attitude towards Cantonese in China, HK, and overseas



# IV.A) Language policies in China, HK, and overseas

- ❖ Language laws
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Mass media

# China language policy

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**1913:** Discussion began for 國音Guoyin (National Pronunciation)

**1932:** KMT established 國語Guoyu (National language)

**1949:** PRC renamed 國語Guoyu as 普通話Putonghua (Common Language)

**1956:** Mandarin was established as the official language

**1982:** **Constitution Article 19** – “The state promotes the nationwide use of Putonghua (common speech based on Beijing pronunciation)”

Source: <http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html>

**1990s:** aggressive Mandarinisation with an ideology that speaking Putonghua is being civilised –

**"Speak Mandarin, Be a Civilized Person (講普通話, 做文明人)"**



# China language policy

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1 Jan 2001:

《中華人民共和國國家通用語言文字法》

## Law of the Peoples Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language

(Adopted at the 18th Meeting of Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on October 31, 2000)

Source: [http://big5.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2005-08/31/content\\_27920.htm](http://big5.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2005-08/31/content_27920.htm)

“For purposes of this Law, the standard spoken and written Chinese language means **Putonghua** (a common speech with pronunciation based on the Beijing dialect) and the **standardized Chinese characters**.” (Article 2)

The State (Article 3) and local governments (Article 4) at all levels should take measures to popularise them.

# China language policy

Putonghua & standardized Chinese characters are the basic language in:

- ❖ **Education** (kindergarten to university level) (Article 10)
- ❖ **Publications** (Article 11)
- ❖ **Broadcasting** (Article 12)
- ❖ **Service trade** (Article 13)
  
- ❖ Local 'dialects' are allowed in these domains only with government approval, or with official invitation for performance, or when officially required for educational purposes. (Article 16)





# HK language policy

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- ❖ Official languages (since 1974): English, Chinese
- ❖ Since 1997: 兩文三語 “**Bi-literacy and Tri-lingualism**”

# Overseas language policy

## Malaysia

- ❖ Main Chinese varieties: Hokkein, Hakka, Chiuchow, Cantonese, Hainan
- ❖ Policy: **Bilingualism** (Malay and English)
- ❖ In Chinese schools, **Mandarin** is used as medium of instruction since primary school

## Singapore

- ❖ Main Chinese varieties: Hokkein, Chiuchow, Cantonese
- ❖ Policy: **Bilingualism** (English and 華語 Chinese)  
**NB: Chinese = Mandarin**
- ❖ **1979: 講華語運動 Speak Mandarin Campaign**

多讲华语  
少说方言



Speak More  
Mandarin and  
Less Dialects



# UNESCO Factor 7:

## Official attitude

Degree of Support	Grade	Official Attitudes towards Language
<i>equal support</i>	5	All languages are protected.
<i>differentiated support</i>	4	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
<i>passive assimilation</i>	3	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.
<i>active assimilation</i>	2	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.
<i>forced assimilation</i>	1	The dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.
<i>prohibition</i>	0	Minority languages are prohibited.

# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission		
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group	Group = Nation = 1 billion (1982): 5.2% Group = Region = 98 million (1982): 53.1%	2 3/4
Domains of use		
Response to new domains		
Written material		
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
Speakers' attitude		
Documentation quality		



# Cantonese in education

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## Guangdong Province

Under the **Constitution Article 19 (1982)**:

- ❖ NO Cantonese is allowed in classroom setting
- ❖ Abolished Cantonese courses

**Reason: Cantonese is nobody's mother tongue!**

“Putonghua is the mother tongue of all citizens, what is passed down from parents should be called **mother dialect**. Thus parents should improve children's language planning by learning their mother tongue well”

-- 屈哨兵 Qu Shaobing, Guangzhou City Secretary for Education



# Cantonese in education

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## Guangxi Province (南寧Nanning; 梧州Wuzhou)

Since 1996:

- ❖ NO Cantonese is allowed in classroom setting
- ❖ Propagandized that dialects are vulgar (粗鄙)

**Result: serious marginalisation of Cantonese**





# Cantonese in education

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SCOLAR

語常會

## Hong Kong

- ❖ **2000:** Curriculum Development Council – **Use Putonghua to teach Chinese in HK schools as the long-term goal**
- ❖ **2008/2009:** the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research – **HK\$200 million** would be injected into the Language Fund to kick start a **four-year scheme aimed at helping schools to switch from Cantonese to Putonghua-teaching.**

# Cantonese Mass media

## Guangdong Province



### (1) 廣州 Guangzhou

- ❖ **2009**: first attempt to change to Mandarin broadcasting
- ❖ **5 July 2010**: Ji Keguang (紀可光), a deputy director of the Guangzhou People's Political Consultative Conference, proposed replacing Cantonese with Mandarin on the composite and news channels of Guangzhou Television.
- ❖ **Reason: one-third of the city's population are immigrants from other provinces**
- ❖ **30 June 2015**: 正點報導 News Hour of 廣東廣播電視台 Guangdong Radio & Television Station suddenly changed to Mandarin





# Cantonese Mass media

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## Guangdong Province

### (2) 佛山 Foshan

- ❖ **July 2014:** With the exception of approved cultural programmes, **at least 80%** of broadcasted programmes has to be in Putonghua; otherwise the company and the host of the show will be penalised (扣分 koufen)

### (3) 珠海 Zhuhai

- ❖ **2000s:** Cantonese news cancelled in Zhuhai Television (珠海廣播電視台)



# Cantonese Mass media

Hong Kong

Since 22 Feb 2016



TVB J5新台 普通話新聞時節配簡體字幕

李凌

新一期居屋及房協資助房屋

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT1R80ymL7c>



# Cantonese in transport system

## Guangdong Province

### (1) 廣州 Guangzhou

- ❖ Many attempts to shorten Cantonese stop announcements on **trains and undergrounds**
- ❖ **April 2011**: Cantonese announcement absent in the newly-opened **Guangzhou–Zhuhai Intercity Railway**  
(resumed in Dec 2012 due to vigorous complaints)

### (2) 珠海 Zhuhai

- ❖ **2011**: Cancelled Cantonese stop announcements on **buses**  
(resumed in Aug 2012 due to vigorous complaints)



# UNESCO Factor 4: Domains and Functions

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Domains and Functions
<i>universal use</i>	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions.
<i>multilingual parity</i>	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
<i>dwindling domains</i>	3	The language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
<i>limited or formal domains</i>	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions.
<i>highly limited domains</i>	1	The language is used only in a very restricted number of domains and for very few functions.
<i>extinct</i>	0	The language is not used in any domain for any function.



# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission		
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group	Group = Nation = 1 billion (1982): 5.2% Group = Region = 98 million (1982): 53.1%	2 3/4
Domains of use	China: highly limited domains (mostly private) HK: multilingual parity OR dwindling domains	1 3/4
Response to new domains		
Written material		
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
Speakers' attitude		
Documentation quality		

# UNESCO Factor 5:

## Responses to new domains and media

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	New Domains and Media Accepted by the Endangered Language
<i>dynamic</i>	5	The language is used in all new domains.
<i>robust/active</i>	4	The language is used in most new domains.
<i>receptive</i>	3	The language is used in many new domains.
<i>coping</i>	2	The language is used in some new domains.
<i>minimal</i>	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
<i>inactive</i>	0	The language is not used in any new domains.



# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission		
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
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Response to new domains	China: minimal OR inactive HK: robust	0/1 4
Written material		
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
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Documentation quality		

# Intergenerational transmission?

## Guangdong Province

- ❖ 2009: a newspaper commentary **entitled "Destroying Cantonese, Beginning in Kindergarten?"**, the writer complained that more and more primary school children could only speak Mandarin. Some of her friends spoke Cantonese to their husbands but Mandarin to their infant children.

(Source: <http://gd.news.sina.com.cn/news/2009/12/03/741956.html>)



Girl's poster: "Grandma, please speak Mandarin."  
Grandma (in Cantonese): "You got to be kidding!"



# Intergenerational transmission?

## Singapore



The image shows a YouTube video player interface. At the top left, it says "SINGAPORE NOW" in a stylized font. At the top right, it says "THE STRAITS TIMES RAZOR TV". The main title of the video is "CAN YOU SAY APPLE?" in large, bold, black letters. Below the title, there is a photograph of a whole red apple and a sliced apple core. To the right of the apple, the words "HOKKIEN", "CANTONESE", and "TEOCHEW" are written in large, colorful, stylized fonts (red, blue, and green respectively). At the bottom right of the video frame, there is a "SUBSCRIBE" button. The video player controls at the bottom show a progress bar at 0:08 / 4:28, along with play, pause, and volume icons.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k01np9YMyOc&list=PLZ7-wOleHil7N544ESETW4KSqoT-VjtFp&index=14>

# Intergenerational transmission?

## Manhattan Chinatown



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSOGLJtz1tw&index=11&list=PLZ7-wOleHil7N544ESETW4KSqoT-VjtFp>



# UNESCO Factor 1:

## Intergenerational language transmission

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
<i>safe</i>	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
<i>unsafe</i>	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
<i>severely endangered</i>	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	The language is used by very few speakers, mostly of great-grandparental generation.
<i>extinct</i>	0	There are no speakers.

# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission	China: definitively endangered OR unsafe HK: safe	3/4 5
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group	Group = Nation = 1 billion (1982): 5.2% Group = Region = 98 million (1982): 53.1%	2 3/4
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Response to new domains	China: minimal OR inactive HK: robust	0/1 4
Written material		
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
Speakers' attitude		
Documentation quality		



# IV. Socio-political situation of Cantonese

- ❖ Language policies in China, HK, and overseas
- ❖ Speakers' attitude towards Cantonese in China, HK, and overseas

## IV.B) Speakers' reaction in China, HK, and overseas

- ❖ Guangdong Province
- ❖ Hong Kong
- ❖ Overseas?



# Guangdong Province

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## Recap on related language policies:

- ❖ Since mid-1990s the government has been aggressively promoting Mandarin in government offices, the broadcast media, and schools.
- ❖ Local schools have been pushing the **"Promoting Mandarin 8+8" ("推普8+8") Campaign**, requiring students from kindergarten through middle school to use Mandarin for 8 hours in school and 8 hours outside each day.
- ❖ Perceived as a threat to Cantonese

# Guangdong Province

- ❖ In southern China, the Guangdong National Language Regulations were enacted to restrict the use of Cantonese in the media.



“Speak Putonghua (Mandarin).  
Use simplified written characters. **Be civilized.**”



# Guangdong Province

文明亮点	◇ “早晨!” “多谢!” “对不起!” 文明用语挂嘴边 ◇ 公交车上让座位，老弱病残得关照
<u>不文明的</u> 表现	◇ 牙签随意口中掏，睡衣拖鞋穿出门 ◇ 天上飞的、地上爬的，珍稀野味盘中餐 ◇ 乱穿乱过马路，险象环生全不顾 ◇ 乱丢乱吐乱挂贴，香口胶渣、“牛皮癣”难清除 ◇ “粤语”流行，外地人听得一头雾水

This elementary school textbook lists examples of **uncivilized behaviour** that include spitting on the street; ignoring traffic lights; and **speaking Cantonese**.

# Pro-Cantonese rallies

撐粵語行動 Protect Cantonese Campaign  
11 July, 25 July 25, and 1 August 2010



Thousands of local residents in Guangzhou took to the streets. They were extremely agitated about the government policy of **"Promoting Mandarin, Abolishing Cantonese"** (推普廢粵)

Henanxi Subway Station, Guangzhou, 25 July 2010



# Pro-Cantonese rallies

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Guangzhou Youth Joining in  
"I Sing Loudly for Cantonese  
(我為粵語大聲唱),"  
People's Park, 11 July 2010



A protester holding poster with sign  
"I Love Cantonese;  
I Don't Know How to Cook Winter  
Melon"  
["Cook Winter Melon (煲冬瓜)" is a  
homonym for Mandarin (普通话)],  
1 Aug 2010



# Pro-Cantonese rallies



"Guangzhou natives speak Cantonese;  
if you don't understand Cantonese,  
go back to the countryside"  
(Cultural Revolution poster style)



"Expatriates also support Cantonese"



# State Response to Mass Protests

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- ❖ Government officials reaffirmed that Cantonese is an important component of culture, inseparable from its opera, music, food and other cultural assets. Since the preservation of local culture was an important aspect of the policy of the party committee and the municipal government, there was never any question of the abolition of Cantonese. Promotion of Mandarin and the preservation of Cantonese were not contradictory but complementary.



# State Response to Mass Protests

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- ❖ Emphasized that there was never any official policy of promoting Mandarin to abolish Cantonese (推普廢粵), and that it was a false and fabricated issue.
- ❖ Someone surnamed Yu was arrested as the alleged culprit of spreading the false message.
- ❖ The pro-Cantonese movement went into a lull, despite the fact that the denial of any intention of abolishing Cantonese was met with some scepticism.



# State Response to Mass Protests

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❖ 2015: Second wave of suppression in Guangdong

❖ **BUT this is very noticeable that this time hardly anyone reacted to it**

Reasons:

- Government strategy
- Adverse consequences on the protestors in 2010
- Migration and immigration

# Hong Kong

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## 普教中 Teaching Chinese in Mandarin



- ❖ 2008: using *Putonghua* to teach Chinese in schools is the long-term goal. Many people see that as a threat of cultural genocide.
- ❖ **2013**: around **70% of elementary schools**  
**26% of high schools**  
now use Mandarin as the medium of instruction for Chinese class



# Teaching Chinese in Mandarin

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## Pros & Cons

### ❖ Advocates:

Teaching Chinese in Mandarin could improve students' writing skills

- 我手寫我口 “Helps you write the same way you talk”

### ❖ BUT no concrete evidence that Mandarin is better than Cantonese in Chinese teaching

### ❖ Other problems:

- Extra burden for students
- Classroom interaction
- Mandarin proficiency of Chinese teachers
- Frequent change in medium of instruction



# Teaching Chinese in Mandarin

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## What do parents think?

“I think it’s very important that my son learns Putonghua,” says Mr Chan about his eight-year-old son’s education. “The trend in Hong Kong is shifting towards working in the Mainland due to its economic growth. If you don’t know Putonghua, it’s difficult for you to grow your business in China. If my son is able to become fluent in [Putonghua], this would be an advantage.”

“I’m not worried about him not being able to speak Cantonese because he’ll have opportunities to use it at home.”





# Teaching Chinese in Mandarin

## What do parents think?

### Ms Sun:

“I don’t think it’s okay to make a language switch. Cantonese is Hong Kong’s language. Even though we are Chinese, we’ve been in Hong Kong for so long already. We don’t need Putonghua.”



### Andrew:

“My son goes to an international school and I think Putonghua is good for my son’s future, especially if he chooses to work in Hong Kong.”



# Teaching Chinese in Mandarin

## What do parents think?

### Ms So:

“English, Cantonese and Mandarin are all equally important, but I don’t agree with switching Cantonese to Putonghua in schools. Because at the end of the day Hong Kong needs to protect its culture.”



### Katty:

“I think Cantonese education is very important. If we use our mother tongue, Cantonese, when teaching Chinese, I think it’s more effective. Putonghua should be taught, but it should be taught separately. Cantonese should be taught first, then Putonghua and English.”





# Teaching Chinese in Mandarin

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## Cantonese in local schools

- ❖ Cantonese was demonized in educational TV programs
- ❖ “Spoken Cantonese cannot be used in writing as it is not standardized”.
- ❖ The demon claims “World domination with Cantonese; Putonghua(Mandarin) the hated”
- ❖ Attacks with Cantonese words, and fought back by the protagonist by the Mandarin equivalences.



# Teaching Chinese in Mandarin

## Anti-PMI for Chinese Campaign

- ❖ By the PMI student concern group, July 2015
- ❖ “Hong Kongers may lose their mother tongue and culture in the next generation”
- ❖ PMI disguised as national education





- ❖ Hong Kongers have been increasingly sensitive to the use of Mandarin in Hong Kong

名校 Secrets  
8月7日 14:45 · @

[SSGC] 朕命令你講普通話!  
做好學生!講普通話!

### 好學生守則

- 升國旗、唱國歌時,要肅立,行注目禮。
- 愛護環境,愛惜學習、生活用品,節約資源。
- 如廁用紙不浪費。
- 洗手用水要適度。
- 同學間要說普通話。
- 遵守學校生活制度。
- 集合排隊,要做到快、靜、齊。
- 愛護公物,不擅自取用別人的東西。
- 出入校門課室,順序慢行;上下樓梯,靠左慢行。
- 遊戲時要注意公共安全,不得追逐奔走,亦不應撥及他人。
- 上課鈴聲響,須馬上肅靜,依次步入課室,並預備好上課用品。

讚好 回應 分享

有 1,427 個人都讚這好。 最相關

365個分享

An elementary school was criticized for including “converse in Mandarin” in “guidelines for good students”.

Kid A (in Mandarin): “Mum, I want a *xī hóng shì* (西紅柿).”  
(Mum A has been using Mandarin and English at home.)

Kid B asking mum B (in Cantonese): “What is *xī hóng shì*?”

Mum B (in English): “It means tomato”

Kid B (in Cantonese): “oh that means *faan1 ke2* (蕃茄)”

Kid A (in Cantonese): “Not *faan1 ke2*, but *xī hóng shì*!”

Mum B: “We call it *faan1 ke2* in Hong Kong; *xī hóng shì* in mainland China. They refer to the same thing.”

Kid B: “So you’re from China!”



Excerpt from an online forum “discuss.com.hk”



An article on the Education Bureau's website claiming "Cantonese is not an official language" has been removed after criticism (Feb 2014).

It said: "Although the Basic Law stipulates that Chinese and English are the two official languages in Hong Kong, nearly 97 per cent of the local population learn Cantonese (a Chinese dialect that is not an official language) as their commonly used daily language..."



# UNESCO Factor 8: Speakers' attitude

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Grade	Community Members' Attitudes towards Language
5	<i>All</i> members value their language and wish to see it promoted.
4	<i>Most</i> members support language maintenance.
3	<i>Many</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
2	<i>Some</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
1	Only <i>a few</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
0	<i>No one</i> cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.



# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission	China: definitively endangered OR unsafe HK: safe	3/4 5
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group	Group = Nation = 1 billion (1982): 5.2% Group = Region = 98 million (1982): 53.1%	2 3/4
Domains of use	China: highly limited domains (mostly private) HK: multilingual parity OR dwindling domains	1 3/4
Response to new domains	China: minimal OR inactive HK: robust	0/1 4
Written material		
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
Speakers' attitude	China: hard to determine! HK: mostly supportive	2/3? 4
Documentation quality		

# Can't we just get along?

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- ❖ The arguments and protests about which of Putonghua or Cantonese we should be using in various situations implies that the two are somehow competing.
- ❖ Mounting sense of concern among many in Hong Kong that the increasing political and cultural influence from the mainland could erode the use of Cantonese in the city
- ❖ There are people who hate Cantonese because it's a symbol of Hong Kong's difference from the Mainland, and vice versa.



# Documentation

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## (1) Online Cantonese Dictionary

- ❖ No Cantonese-to-Cantonese dictionary available
- ❖ Traditionally, people have held a kind of derogatory attitude towards Cantonese.
  - schools children speak Cantonese but are not allowed to write in Cantonese because it isn't considered as refined as Mandarin Chinese
- ❖ Not all Cantonese words have a written form; some words have no agreed written form.
  - E.g. “hea” (be idle/slothful/carefree)

# Documentation

## (2) Chinese Character Database

- ❖ By Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)
- ❖ But not many colloquial/informal characters

粵語審音配詞字庫

部首: 鳥 [196] 筆畫: 15  
大五碼: E8E9 倉頡碼: 心十竹日火

音節 (香港語言學學會)	粵音	& 根據	同音字	相關音節	
bou2		黃(p.32) 周(p.208) 李(p.2) 何(p.234)	保, 鵠, 鵠 [9..]	--選擇--	鵠母, 鵠鳥, 老鵠 開妓院的女人

搜索次數: 28606  
配搭點:

Unicode: U+9D07

漢語大字典: Pg.4620 普通話: bao3  
康熙字典: Pg.1412.050 英譯: bustard; procuress  
Matthews: No.4953

對照表: 聲母, 韻母, 聲調  
注音系統: 香港語言學學會



# Documentation

## (3) Words.hk

- ❖ Compilation of a new Cantonese-to-Cantonese dictionary
- ❖ Around **250** volunteers now



Lau Chaak-ming, founder of online Cantonese dictionary words.hk

粵典 查字典 關於我哋

## 查字典

痴 查字典

結果：

白痴 / 白癡	即係蠢，但係用得呢個字通常都係比「蠢」更加嚴重。
白痴 / 白癡	蠢嘅人 (量詞:個)

# Documentation

## (3) Words.hk

- ❖ Publishing one word per day, with its phonemic transcription (粵拼 Jyutping), translation, and sample sentences.

APR  
28

# 三幅被

saam<sup>1</sup> fuk<sup>1</sup> pei<sup>53</sup>

名 重覆、了無新意嘅內容

literally 'three quilts'; the same things unnecessarily repeated over and over

佢講嘢講去咗又係三幅被。

No matter how much he talks about it, he is just repeating himself.

雙方嘅論點得啱三幅被，無咩新嘅理據。

The arguments on both sides are just repetition of their previous points. No new points are introduced.





# Promoting the use of Cantonese

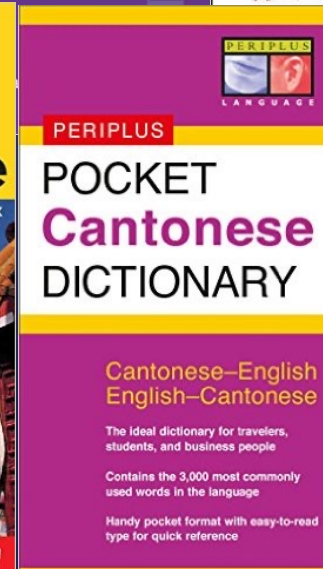
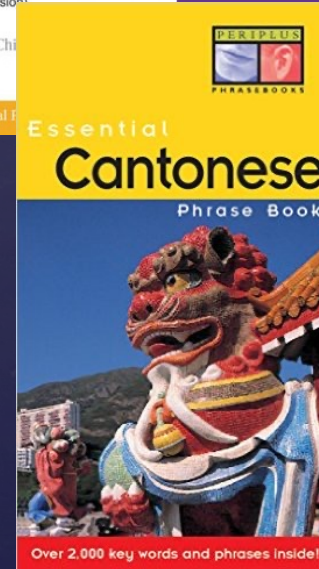
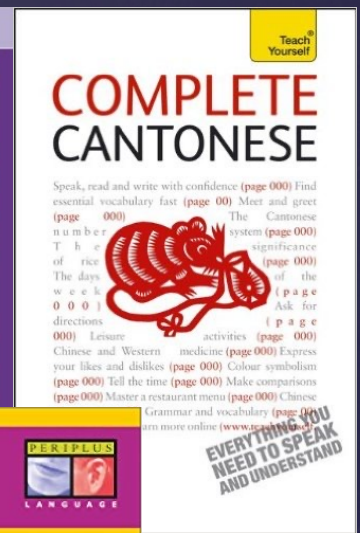
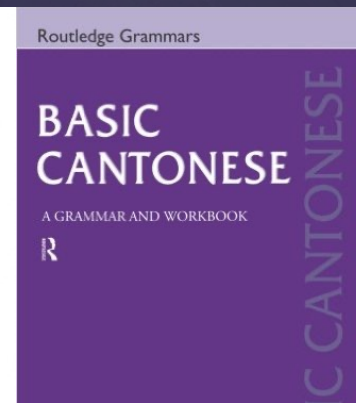
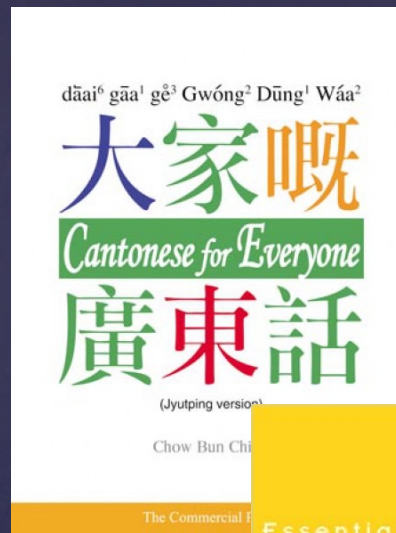
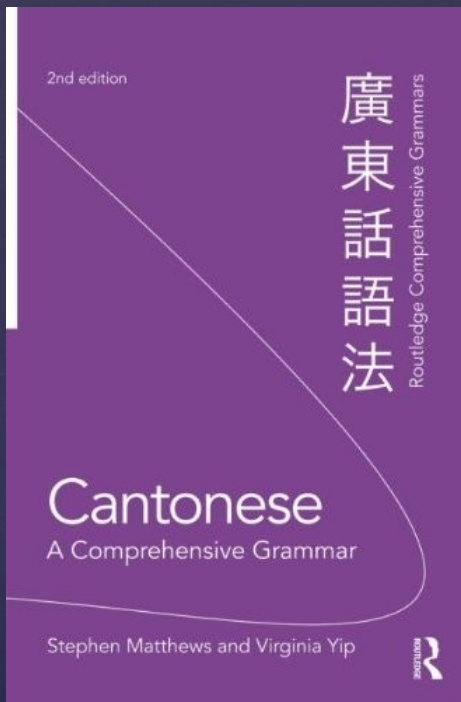
## Inputting Cantonese Words

- ❖ Troublesome to type in colloquial Cantonese
- ❖ Developed by Clifford So, a lecturer at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in 2015.
- ❖ It remains one of the most popular locally developed apps.



# Promoting the use of Cantonese

## Cantonese reference materials





# UNESCO Factor 9: Documentation quality

Nature of Documentation	Grade	Language Documentation
<i>superlative</i>	5	There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts, and a constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high-quality audio and video recordings exist.
<i>good</i>	4	There is one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature and occasionally updated everyday media; adequate annotated high-quality audio and video recordings exist.
<i>fair</i>	3	There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient numbers of grammars, dictionaries and texts but no everyday media; audio and video recordings of varying quality or degree of annotation may exist.
<i>fragmentary</i>	2	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings of varying quality, with or without any annotation, may exist.
<i>inadequate</i>	1	There are only a few grammatical sketches, short word-lists and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are of unusable quality or are completely un-annotated.

# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission	China: definitively endangered OR unsafe HK: safe	3/4 5
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Domains of use	China: highly limited domains (mostly private) HK: multilingual parity OR dwindling domains	1 3/4
Response to new domains	China: minimal OR inactive HK: robust	0/1 4
Written material		
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
Speakers' attitude	China: hard to determine! HK: mostly supportive	2/3? 4
Documentation quality	Good	4



# UNESCO Factor 6:

## Availability of written materials

Grade	Availability of Written Materials
5	There is an established orthography and a literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.
2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.
1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.
0	No orthography is available to the community.

# Cantonese: Vitality points



Vitality factors	Situation	Points
Intergenerational transmission	China: definitively endangered OR unsafe HK: safe	3/4 5
Absolute speaker no.	Very safe: 62 million [52 million in China] (1984)	5
Population proportional to group	Group = Nation = 1 billion (1982): 5.2% Group = Region = 98 million (1982): 53.1%	2 3/4
Domains of use	China: highly limited domains (mostly private) HK: multilingual parity OR dwindling domains	1 3/4
Response to new domains	China: minimal OR inactive HK: robust	0/1 4
Written material	Available but not used officially	4
Official attitude	China: prohibition HK: active assimilation	0 2
Speakers' attitude	China: hard to determine! HK: mostly supportive	2/3? 4
Documentation quality	Good	4



# Conclusion & Implications

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- ❖ Is Cantonese dying/endangered?
  - Absolute number of speakers as a reliable indicator?
  - Regional variation in language situation
- ❖ Is Cantonese under threat?
- ❖ Not pessimistic, but very cautious.
- ❖ We don't know how much longer Cantonese can sustain the pressure from China to promote Mandarin.

# Conclusion & Implications



**144** endangered languages in China

+  
**Cantonese,**  
...



# Conclusion & Implications

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“Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, **language**, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

**-- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Part II Article 2.1)**

*I speak my favourite language  
because*

*that's who I am.*

*We teach our children our favourite  
language, because*

*we want them to know who they are.*

Christine Johnson, Tohono O'odham  
elder, American Indian Language  
Development Institute, June 2002 --  
UNESCO

**Thank you**  
多謝晒

我   
廣東話  
I love Cantonese

