

# Save Cantonese at Stanford

## Why Cantonese?

1. Cantonese language and cultural heritage are vital to the University's [IDEAL values](#) (inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in learning). As Cantonese language is under threat by powerful nation-states and anti-Asian violence is on the rise in the US, now more than ever Stanford must uphold its commitment to diversity and inclusion.
2. Cantonese people have a unique role in [Stanford's history](#). Chinese railroad workers from Guangdong province are the reason Stanford exists as we know it today. Their sacrifices while building the Central Pacific Railroad generated the wealth that allowed Leland Stanford to establish the University in 1885.
3. Cantonese language is spoken by ~84.9 million people worldwide, yet only a handful of Cantonese programs exist at US colleges and universities. Stanford's location has been profoundly shaped by immigration from the Canton region, as Cantonese is used by [60% of Chinese speakers in the Bay Area, and 48% in California](#).
4. Cantonese language is vital to cutting-edge, transnational research and cultural exchange at Stanford. Research projects such as the [Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarters](#), [Chinese Railroad Workers Project](#), [Candong Village Project](#), and [Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project](#) study early Chinese immigrants whose primary language was Cantonese or a dialect of Cantonese. Cantonese language also has an important role in research on Hong Kong, Southern China, and US-China relations.
5. Stanford's Cantonese language program has been changing students' lives since 1997. It has evolved to offer multiple proficiency levels, with ~31 students enrolled each fall quarter. Countless [testimonials](#) speak to its profound impact on students and alumni, including heritage speakers, Mandarin speakers, and Asian-American community leaders and scholars.

## What happened?

Dr. Sik Lee Dennig's position as the leader of the Cantonese language program will be terminated in August 2021 as part of COVID-19 budget cuts. The decision effectively ends the program that she has carefully developed and nurtured for over two decades. Over 3,600 individuals signed the [petition](#) urging Stanford to commit to four Cantonese classes taught by a full-time benefits-eligible lecturer, and to allow Cantonese to fulfill the language requirement, which would further boost student enrollment. However, the University only plans to offer [two courses](#) taught by a part-time temporary hourly wage instructor who would not be eligible for benefits. This threatens the long-term viability of the Cantonese program.

## What's next?

Our vision for **The Cantonese Studies Initiative** is two-fold: (1) an endowed full-time, benefits-eligible lectureship position to lead Cantonese language education and (2) programming to support the study of Cantonese history, culture, and peoples at Stanford. This would secure and entrench Stanford's successful and long-running Cantonese language program, allowing future generations of students to gain proficiency in Cantonese. The Initiative would furthermore elevate the quality and reach of scholarship dedicated to the study of Cantonese people and cultures, bringing together faculty, students, staff, and alumni from a wide variety of disciplines, and hosting cultural programs, speaker series, and collaborative research initiatives. Faculty members whose research intersects with the field of Cantonese studies are found in the departments of History, East Asian Languages and Cultures, History of Art, Religious Studies, Economics, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, and Linguistics. This Initiative would amplify the work of scholars and graduate students who are building understanding of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Asian American diaspora.