

# Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

## This week: Words about Guangdong Province



Putonghua pronunciation: *yang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeung4*

Meanings: sheep, goat, ram, ewe, lamb

羊 has good associations. Radical 示 (= 示, *shi4* = god) + 羊 = 祥 (*xiang2* = good omen/fortune). 羊 + 大 (*da4*, big) = 美 (*mei3*, beauty/beautiful). Northwestern China's 羌 (*Qiang1*) tribe worships 羊圖騰 (*yang2 tu2 teng2* = sheep/goat~"totem"-transliterated).

Legend says five fairy goats relieved Guangzhou's famine, hence city's other name 羊城 (*yang2 cheng2* = goats~city). 羊 and 洋 are homophones. Guangzhou Asian Games' 吉祥物 (*ji1 xiang2 wu4* = luck~fortune~thing = mascot) is five goats, symbolizing 喜氣洋洋 (*xi3 qi4 yang2 yang2* = joyous~air/atmosphere~flow~flow = joy/cheer).

China's cartoon series 喜羊羊與灰太狼 (*Xi3 Yang2 Yang2 yu3 Hui1 Tai4 Lang2* = merry~sheep~sheep~and~grey~big/huge~wolf) is TV hit featuring Big Grey Wolf's clan clumsily trying to hunt/eat smart Happy Sheep/Goats.