

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:

- 1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4th 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: *wang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wong6*

Meanings: flourishing, prosperous, vigorous, robust, vibrant

旺 (日 *ri4*, sun + 王 *wang2*, king/supremacy) describes fire/energy/luck. Youths are 精力旺盛 (*jing1 li4 wang4 sheng4* = sperm/essence-strength-robust-prosperous = strong/energetic). Traditional Chinese praise women whose horoscope can 旺夫益子 (*wang4 fu1 yi1 zi3* = prosper~husband-benefit-son = help husband and sons succeed). Idiom 人有三衰六旺 (*ren2 you3 san1 shuai1 liu4 wang4* = person~has~three-fall/droop~six-rise/prosper) means everyone is subject to unpredictable wax/wane of fortune. Loser hopes his luck will 轉旺 (*zhuan3 wang4* = turn-prosperous/good).

Guangzhou's 工商業 (*gong1 shang1 ye4* = industry~commerce~profession = industries and commerce) are 興旺 (*xing1 wang4* = rising~prosperous = flourishing). December is 旺月 (*wang4 yue4* = prosperous-month) for retail business. 旺鋪 (*wang4 pu4* = prosperous~shop) = shops enjoying good customers/business turnover.

by Diana Yue