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

广
Putonghua pronunciation: guang3 Cantonese pronunciation: gwong2
Meanings: broad, expansive

廣 means broad: 廣場 (guang3 chang3 = broad-field = square/plaza), 廣播 (guang3 bo4 = broad-disperse = broadcast).

Hongkong is in 廣東省 (Guang3 Dong1 sheng3 = Guangdong-Province), traditionally called 粵 (Yue4). Guangdong’s 省會 (sheng3 hui4 = provincial capital) is 廣州 (Guang3 Zhou1 = Guangzhou), which westerners once called “Canton”. However, adjective “Cantonese” means “of Guangdong Province”.

Guangzhou and Hongkong people speak 粵語 (Yue4 yu3 = Yue-speech = 廣東話, Guang3 Dong1 hua4 = Cantonese-dialect), eat 粵菜 (Yue4 cai4 = Yue-vegetables = Cantonese dishes/cuisine), enjoy 粵劇 (Yue4 ju2 = Cantonese-opera).

Guangzhou stands on 珠江 (Zhu1 Jiang1 = Pearl-River), is part of prosperous 珠江三角洲 (Zhu1 Jiang1 san1 jiao3 zhou1 = Pearl-River-three-angles-island = Pearl River delta).

by Diana Yue