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/drop-six-rise/psoper) 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