

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

南

Putonghua pronunciation: *nan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *naam4*

Meanings: south, southern

南半球 (*nan2 ban4 qiu2* = south~half~ball) = southern hemisphere. 東南亞 (*dong1 nan2 ya4* = east~south~“A”sia-transliterated) = southeast Asia.

中國 (*Zhong1 Guo2* = middle~kingdom = China) + 華夏 (*hua2 xia4* = splendour~Xia-Dynasty = China’s traditional name) = 中華 (*Zhong1 Hua2* = middle~splendour = China/Chinese).

Guangdong Province is in 華南 (*hua2 nan2* = China~south = southern China). Guangzhou is China’s 南大門 (*nan2 da4 men2* = south~big~door/gate = southern gateway to China).

Birds/migrant workers 南下 (*nan2 xia4* = south~downwards = go to southern regions) for attractive weather/wages.

Guangzhou’s 南站 (*nan2 zhan4* = south~stand/terminal = Guangzhou South Railway Station) is centre of 高鐵 (= 高速鐵路 = *gao1 su4 tie3 lu4* = high-speed-iron~road = high-speed railway) network.