

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 regime change

頑

Putonghua pronunciation: *wan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *waan4*

Meanings: stubborn, obstinate, naughty

頑 = stubborn/unyielding: 頑愚 (*wan2 yu2* = obstinate~stupid), 頑童 (*wan2 tong2* = naughty~kid). Chronic patient fights 頑疾 (*wan2 ji2* = stubborn~illness). Teacher punishes 頑皮 (*wan2 pi2* = naughty~skin = naughty) pupil. 頑劣 (*wan2 lie4* = ill-behaved~bad-quality = unruly) youths can benefit from community service. 冥頑不靈 (*ming2 wan2 bu4 ling2* = dark~dumb~not~intelligent) describes people who won't listen to reason. 頑石點頭 (*wan2 shi2 dian3 tou2* = stubborn~stone~nod~head) describes hard-hearted listeners convinced/moved by master's preaching.

Protestors have 頑強意志 (*wan2 qiang2 yi4 zhi4* = unyielding~strong~notion~will = strong willpower), 頑抗 (*wan2 kang4* = unyielding~resist = persistently fight back against) police's clampdown. Dictator is nicknamed “老頑固” (*lao3 wan2 gu4* = old~stubborn~stiff = “old bigot”).

by Diana Yue