

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 England

Putonghua pronunciation: *ba4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ba3*

Meanings: bully, appropriate, hegemony

Britain/UK, situated on 英倫三島 (*ying1 lun2 san1 dao3* = “England”-transliterated~three-islands = the British Isles), had powerful 海軍 (*hai3 jun1* = sea~army = naval fleet), led Europe’s 工業革命 (*gong4 ye4 ge2 ming4* = work~industry~change~life = industrial revolution).

19th-century Britain 船堅炮利 (*chuan2 jian1 pao4 li4* = ships~strong~canons~sharp = had powerful/advanced navy), established many 海外殖民地 (*hai3 wai4 zhi2 min2 di4* = sea~beyond~plant~people~land = overseas colonies). 維多利亞女王 (*wei2 duo1 li4 ya3 nu3 wang2* = “Victoria”-transliterated~female~king = Queen Victoria)’s 大英帝國 (*da4 ying1 di4 guo2* = big~England~emperor~state = British Empire) was 世界霸權 (*shi4 jie4 ba4 quan2* = world~boundary~bully~ power = world hegemony). 霸道 (*ba4 dao4* = bully’s~way) describes bullies/gangsters/hegemonic powers.

by Diana Yue