

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 warlords

Putonghua pronunciation: *jūn1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwan1*

Meanings: army, soldier

軍 has radical 車 (*che1*, cart/chariot). Youths 當兵 (*dang1 bing1* = be~soldier = join army) as 士兵 (*shi4 bing1* = man~soldier = pawns/privates), aspire to be 軍官 (*jūn1 guan1* = army~officers), 將軍 (*jiang1 jūn1* = lead~army = generals) commanding 軍隊 (*jūn1 dui4* = army~team = armies), 軍艦 (*jūn1 jian4* = army~ship = battleships).

Napoleon was brilliant 軍人 (*jūn1 ren2* = army~person = soldier). 勇冠三軍 (*yong3 guan4 san1* = brave~win~three~army) describes ablest/bravest soldier/athlete.

Republican China's 黃埔軍校 (*huang2 pu3 jūn1 xiao4* = yellow~port~army~school = Whampoa Military Academy, founded 1924) was modeled on US' 西點 (*xi1 dian3* = West~Point). During Japanese invasion (1931-1945) 國軍 (*guo2 jūn1* = nation's~army = Chinese army) fought 日軍 (*ri4 jūn1* = Japanese Army).

by Diana Yue