

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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: *fa2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fat6*

Meanings: powerful family/person, valve

閥 (radical 門 *men2*, pictogram showing door-panels) originally meant column carrying eulogies about a distinguished family's meritorious achievements. In feudal China 門閥 (*men2 fa2* = door/house~eulogy-column = powerful families/lineages) dominated politics.

Today 閥 has derogatory meaning. 軍閥 (*jün1 fa2* = army~powerful-persons) = tyrannical warlords. 財閥 (*cai2 fa2* = wealth~powerful-persons) = money tycoons. 學閥 (*xue2 fa2* = study~powerful-persons) = powerful/dictatorial academics.

辛亥革命 (*xin1 hai4 ge2 ming4* = Xin-Hai~change~fate = Revolution of 1911, the Xinhai year) established 中華民國 (*Zhong1 Hua2 Min2 Guo2* = Middle~China~People's~State = the Republic of China). But 統一 (*tong3 yi1* = unite~one = unification) was difficult because 軍閥橫行 (*jün1 fa2 heng2 xing2* = army~powerful-men~crosswise~walk = warlords went around arrogantly bullying and victimizing people).

by Diana Yue