

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 islands

陸

Putonghua pronunciation: *lu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *luk6*

Meanings: land, ground

陸 (radical 壚 *lu4* shows two 土 *tu3*, soil/earth heaped together) means 陸地 (*lu4 di4* = continents~land): 陸上 (*lu4 shang4* = land~above = on land), 登陸 (*deng1 lu4* = go-on~land), 陸路 (*lu4 lu4* = land~route).

Poet John Donne wrote: “No man is an island, ...each man is 大陸的一部份” (*da4 lu4 de0 yi1 bu4 fen4* = big-land~'s~one~part~share = “a part of the main”). 英倫三島 (*ying1 lun2 san3 dao3* = “England”-transliterated~three~islands = the British Isles) is part of 歐洲大陸 (*ou1 zhou1 da4 lu4* = “Eu”-rope-transliterated~big~land = the European continent).

Hong Kong's tourism relies on 陸客 (*lu4 ke4* = mainland~guests/tourists) from 中國大陸 (*zhong1 guo2 da4 lu4* = middle~kingdom/country~big~land = Mainland China).

by Diana Yue