

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 high-speed trains

Putonghua pronunciation: *hong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wang4*

Meanings: grand, magnificent, macroscopic

宏 = big/grand: 宏偉 (*hong2 wei3* = great/majestic) stature, 寬宏 (*kuan1 hong2* = spacious~large = magnanimous) spirit. 全國一盤棋 (*quan2 guo2 yi1 pan2 qi2* = whole~nation~one~board/game-of~chess) describes 宏觀 (*hong2 guan1* = grand-view = macroscopic), nation-wide manoeuvres.

Trains using 電 (*dian4*, electricity) generated by 煤 (*mei2*, coal), 風 (*feng1*, wind), 水 (*shui3*, water) are 節能 (*jie2 neng2* = save~energy = energy-saving). China has 宏圖 (*hong2 tu2* = grand~picture/vision/plan) to build 低碳 (*di1 tan4* = low~carbon = low carbon-dioxide emission) railway network.

By 2020 China will have 四縱四橫 (*si4 zong4 si4 heng2* = four~vertical~four~horizontal = four north-to-south, four east-to-west) high-speed 客運專線 (*ke4 yun4 zhuan1 xian4* = guest~transport~exclusive~lines = passenger-dedicated railway lines) totalling 25,000 km.

by Diana Yue