

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 foreign currencies

外

Putonghua pronunciation: *wai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngoi6*

Meanings: outside, external, foreign

中 (*zhong1*, centre/internal) also means 中國 (*Zhong1 Guo2* = Middle-kingdom = China). 外 (*wai4*, external) also means 外國 (*wai4 guo2* = foreign-countries): 外交 (*wai4 jiao1* = foreign-make-friends = foreign diplomacy), 外幣 (*wai4 bi4* = foreign-currencies).

外商 (*wai4 shang1* = foreign-merchants/businesses) bring 外資 (*wai4 zi1* = foreign-capital) into China through 中外合資 (*Zhong1 wai4 he2 zi1* = China-foreign-unite-capital = joint-investment of Chinese and foreign capital).

外匯 (*wai4 hui4* = foreign-transfer) = foreign exchange (Forex/FX). Countries have 外匯儲備 (*wai4 hui4 chu3 bei4* = foreign-exchange-save-prepare = Forex reserves) in 美元 (*Mei3 yuan2* = American-dollars), 黃金 (*huang2 jin1* = yellow-gold = gold). Rich people have 海外資產 (*hai3 wai4 zi1 chan3* = seas-outside-capital-property = overseas assets).

by Diana Yue