

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: *ge1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *got3*

Meanings: cut

割 = 切割 (*qie1 ge1* = incise/cut-cut/sever with knife). Farmer 收割 (*shou1 ge1* = collect~cut = reaps) harvest. Butcher 割肉 (*ge1 rou4* = cuts/chops-meat). Surgeon 割去 (*ge1 qu4* = cut-away = removes) patient's appendix. 割腕 (*ge1 wan3* = cut-wrist) is suicidal act.

Estranged friends 割席 (*ge1 xi2* = cut-bed = separate, keep distance), 割斷 (*ge1 duan4* = sever~break) links/ties. 割愛 (*ge1 ai4* = cut-love) = reluctantly give one's beloved person/thing to another. Humiliated nation 割讓 (*ge1 rang4* = cut~yield = cedes) territory to invaders. 心如刀割 (*xin1 ru2 dao4 ge1* = heart~resemble~knife~cut) = feel heartbroken/shattered.

National army's 1926-8 Northern Expedition ended warlords' 軍事割據 (*jün1 shi4 ge1 jü4* = military~affairs~cut/carve~possess = military occupations) and unified China.

by Diana Yue