

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

通

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung1*

Meanings: pass, through, link, connect, unimpeded

通 (radical 辶 = 舟 *zhou1*, boat) means link/through/unimpeded. China-Taiwan's 三通 (*san1 tong1* = three~links) means 通郵 (*tong1 you2* = link-up/permit~postal-exchange), 通商 (*tong1 shang1* = link-up/permit~trading), 通航 (*tong1 hang2* = link-up~sail/fly = permit~traffic).

Person who 想通 (*xiang3 tong1* = think~through = realizes/grasps rationale) becomes 通情達理 (*tong1 qing2 da2 li3* = through~feelings~reach~reason = sensible/understanding). Stupid people 不通 (*bu4 tong1* = no~through = don't make sense).

Chinese patrol ships 通過 (*tong1 guo4* = pass~through) sea-passage to 釣魚台列島 (*Diao4 Yü2 Tai2 lie4 dao3* = angling~fish-terrace~row-of-islands = the Diaoyütai Islands). To 溝通 (*gou1 tong1* = ditch~through = communicate) with China, Japan needs 通透 (*tong1 tou4* = through~thorough = sensible/penetrative/thorough) understanding of China's historical perspective.

by Diana Yue