

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *laam6*

Meanings: military vessel, battleship

艦 (舟 *zhou1*, boat + 監 *jian1*, watch/monitor) means 戰艦 (*zhan4 jian4* = war~battleship = warship). 巡洋艦 (*xün2 yang2 jian4* = patrol-ocean-battleship) = cruiser. 驅逐艦 (*qū1 zhu2 jian4* = chase~pursue~battleship) = destroyer. 艦隊 (*jian4 dui4* = battleship~team) = fleet.

Britain defeated Spain's 無敵艦隊 (*wu2 di2 jian4 dui4* = no~enemy/rival~ battleship~team = the Spanish Armada) in 1588, used 炮艦外交 (*pao4 jian4 wai4 jiao1* = canon-battleship~external-relations = gunboat diplomacy) to take Hong Kong in 1841. US's 第七艦隊 (*di4 qi1 jian4 dui4* = number-seven~ battleship~team = Seventh Fleet) watches Taiwan.

To patrol her 領海 (*ling3 hai3* = taken/lead/rule~sea = territorial sea/waters), China needs 航空母艦 (*hang2 kong1 mu3 jian4* = fly-sky~mother-battleship = carriers).

by Diana Yue