

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 China's economic take-off



Putonghua pronunciation: *fu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo3*

Meanings: abundant, rich, become rich, wealth

Pictogram 富 shows roof under bulging house, means 富有 (*fu4 you3* = rich~have = wealthy). Super-rich 富可敵國 (*fu4 ke3 di2 guo2* = rich~can~enemy/rival~country = can rival small countries in wealth).

China wants to become 富強 (*fu4 qiang2* = rich~strong) country, achieve 小康 (*xiao3 kang1* = little~healthy = relative abundance), minimize 貧富懸殊 (*pin2 fu4 xuan2 shu1* = poor~rich~suspend~different = great gap between rich and poor). But 富二代 (*fu4 er4 dai4* = rich~two/second-generation = sons/daughters of rich families) 炫富 (*xuan2 fu4* = flare/flaunt~wealth), make public 仇富 (*chou2 fu4* = hate~rich-people).

Sage condemns 為富不仁 (*wei4 fu4 bu4 ren2* = is/are~rich~not~benevolent/kind = unprincipled millionaires), warns 富不過三代 (*fu4 bu4 guo4 san1 dai4* = family's-wealth~won't-last-beyond~three-generations!)

by Diana Yue