

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 capital cities

都

Putonghua pronunciation: *du1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do1*

Meanings: capital

都 = 都市 (*du1 shi4* = city~market/town = city). 都市人 (*du1 shi4 ren2* = city~town~person) = urban-dwellers. New York is 國際都會 (*guo2 ji1 du1 hui4* = countries~inter/between~city~converge = international metropolis). Chinese call Paris “花都” (*hua1 du1* = flowers~capital = metropolis of fashion/extravaganza).

Old-fashioned term 京城 (*jing1 cheng2* = capital-city) means 首都 (*shou3 du1* = first~city = capital). Ming Dynasty 定都 (*ding4 du1* = decided/chose~national-capital = established capital in) 南京 (*Nan2 Jing1* = Nanjing/Nanking), 遷都 (*qian1 du1* = moved~capital to) 北京 (*Bei3 Jing1* = Beijing/Peking). 京劇 (*jing1 ju2* = capital~drama) = Beijing opera.

京都 (*Jing1 Du1* = capital-city) is Japanese kanji for Kyoto. 東京 (*Dong1 Jing1* = eastern~capital) is kanji for Tokyo.

by Diana Yue