

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 1949 Liberation

紅

Putonghua pronunciation: *hong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung4*

Meanings: red, turn red, leftist

Character 紅 = 纟 (= 絲 *si1*, silk/band) + 工 (= 虹 *hong2*, rainbow). 臉紅 (*lian3 hong2* = face-red) = blush. To Chinese, 紅 symbolizes 喜慶 (*xi3 qing4* = joyful-celebration). 紅人 (*hong2 ren2* = red-person) = someone enjoying hot career. 看破紅塵 (*kan4 po4 hong2 chen2* = see-break/through~red~dust) means tired/disillusioned about life's vanities/follies.

紅 symbolizes 社會主義 (*she4 hui4 zu3 yi4* = club~society~main~meaning = socialism): 紅軍 (*hong2 jun1* = Red~Army), 紅色政權 (*hong2 se1 zheng4 quan2* = red~color~political/ruling~power = socialist/communist regime), “紅旗” (*hong2 qi2* = Red-Flag magazine, CCP's party organ).

紅衛兵 (*hong2 wei4 bing1* = red-guard~soldiers) = Red Guards. 又紅又專 (*you4 hong2 you4 zhuan1* = also-red~also~specialist) describes Red China's politically-correct professionals.

by Diana Yue