

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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 Beijing

京

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging1*

Meanings: north, northern, northward

Character 京 (pictogram resembling artificial mound) means 京城 (*jing1 cheng2* = capital-city): Japan's 東京 (*dong1 jing1* = east-capital = Tokyo), ROC's 南京 (*nan2 jing2* = south-capital = Nanjing/Nanking), 北京 (*bei3 jing1* = north-capital = Beijing, previously spelt "Peking", capital of Yuan, Ming, Qing dynasties and PRC).

京官 (*jing1 guan1* = pre-1912 Beijing-ministers/bureaucrats) = mandarins. 京片子 (*jing1 pian4 zi0* = capital-piece-diminutive) is indigenous, melodious Beijing dialect (aka mandarin). 京派 (*jing1 pai4* = Beijing-style) describes Beijing culture/tradition. 京劇 (*jing1 ju2* = capital-drama) = Beijing/Peking opera.

Millions 上京 (*shang4 jing1* = travel-up-to-capital/Beijing) for work/sight-seeing. 京菜 (*jing1 cai4* = Beijing-cuisine) includes 烤鴨 (*kao3 ya1* = roast-duck = Beijing/Peking duck), 涮羊肉 (*shuan4 yang2 rou1* = instant-rinse-boiled-lamb-meat = hotpot featuring lamb-slices).

by Diana Yue