

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 islands and atolls

界

Putonghua pronunciation: *jie4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaai3*

Meaning: limit, rim, border, frontier, territory, sector, demarcation

界 (radical 田 *tian2*, cultivated field) means 界線 (*jie4 xian4* = limit-line = rim/border), 界限 (*jie4 xian4* = border-limit). However, 世界 (*shi4 jie4* = world-border) means world/global. 無國界醫生 (*wu2 guo2 jie4 yi1 sheng1* = none-national-border-medicine-sir/doctors) = Médecins Sans Frontières.

工商界 (*gong1 shang1 jie4* = industrial-commercial-sector) is social 界別 (*jie4 bie2* = defined-sector). However, 陽界 (*Yang2 jie4* = Yang/male-principle-sector) means the living, 陰界 (*Yin1 jie4* = Yin/female-principle-sector) means the dead.

Taiwan (ROC) and China (PRC) unanimously 界定 (*jie4 ding4* = border-determine = define) jurisdiction in South China Sea with many 島礁 (*dao3 jiao1* = islands-atolls): 九段線 (*jiu3 duan4 xian4* = nine-segment-line = Nine-dotted Line) is China's legal 國界 (*guo2 jie2* = national-border).

by Diana Yue