

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *guo2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwok3*

Meanings: country, state, nation

Character 國 shows square □ enclosing 戈 (*ge1*, spear/weapon). 國家 (*guo2 jia1* = country~home) = country. Forefathers 立國 (*li4 guo2* = stand/found~dynasty/state), 建都 (*jian4 du1* = build~state-capital), establish 國會 (*guo2 hui4* = national~assembly = parliament).

國民 (*guo2 min2* = country~people = country's nationals) have 愛國心 (*ai4 guo2 xin1* = love~country~heart = patriotism), respect 國旗 (*guo2 qi2* = national~flag), 國歌 (*guo2 ge1* = national~song/anthem).

A century ago 中國 (*Zhong1 Guo2* = middle~kingdom = China) almost 亡國 (*wang2 guo2* = die~country = was conquered/destroyed/wiped out as a country). Now it is 經濟大國 (*jing1 ji4 da4 guo2* = administer~irrigate~big~country = a big economic power). 國貨 (*guo2 huo4* = own~country's~goods = goods made in China) have worldwide market.

by Diana Yue