

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 Achilles

Putonghua pronunciation: *dun4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tun5*

Meanings: shield

盾 (= 盾牌 *dun4 pai2* = shield-plate = shield) can ward off 矛 (*mao2*, spear), 劍 (*jian4*, sword), 箭 (*jian4*, arrows). 後盾 (*hou4 dun4* = back~shield) means supporting force behind operation.

Warrior boasts of having strongest spear and shield. Sage asks: What if I 以子之矛攻子之盾 (*yi3 zhi3 zhi1 mao2 gong1 zhi3 zhi1 dun4* = with~your~spear~attack~your~shield)? Hence 矛盾 (*mao2 dun4* = spear~shield) means contradiction/contradictory: 自相矛盾 (*zi4 xiang1 mao2 dun4* = self-contradicting), 前後矛盾 (*qian2 ho4 mao2 dun4* = early~later~contradict = illogical). Rival groups 有矛盾 (*you3 mao2 dun4* = have~contradiction = harbor differences/antagonisms/grudges).

Homer described beautiful shield of Achilles: 盾面 (*dun4 mian4* = shield's-upper-face) showed natural elements, cities, people working, dancing, tending animals.

by Diana Yue