

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 moving

根

(radical 木 *mu4* = wood, tree)

Putonghua pronunciation: *gen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gan1*

Meanings: root, base

根鬚 (*gen1 xu1* = roots-beard = roots) give plants anchorage/nourishment. Banyan trees have 氣根 (*qi4 gen1* = air-roots). Words have 詞根 (*ci2 gen1* = word-root = radicals). Chronic patient seeks ailment's 根治 (*gen1 zhi4* = root-heel = thorough treatment/eradication).

Civilizations have 根源 (*gen1 yuan2* = root-source = origins). Traditional thinking/habits are 根深蒂固 (*gen1 shen1 di4 gu4* = roots~deep~bud~firm = deeply rooted/entrenched).

根據 (*gen1 ju4* = root-evidence = according to) surveys, many foreign settlers feel 失根 (*shi1 gen1* = lose-roots = uprooted/lost), 無根 (*wu2 gen1* = have-no-roots = rootless/drifting), cannot re-establish career's 根基 (*gen1 ji1* = root-base = base/foundation). Overseas Chinese 尋根 (*xun2 gen1* = search-roots = visit ancestral village/town to find sense of identity/belonging).