

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 military parades

槍

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiang 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheung 1*

Meanings: spear, gun

Armies have 槍炮 (*qiang1 pao4* = guns~cannons). Policemen 佩槍 (*pei4 qiang1* = wear-guns). Snipers 槍擊 (*qiang1 ji1* = gun-strike = shoot at) targets.

Soldiers advance amidst 槍林彈雨 (*qiang1 lin2 dan4 yu3* = guns~forest-bullets~rain = heavy shooting). Traitors 槍口向內 (*qiang1 kou3 dui4 nei4* = gun~mouth~towards~inside = threaten/attack their own side).

Mao Zedong said “槍杆子裡出政權” (*qiang1 gan1 zi0 li3 chu1 zheng4 quan2* = gun~barrel~diminutive~inside~emerge~rule~power = “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun”). Instead of “槍指揮黨” (*qiang1 zhi3 hui1 dang3* = guns~finger~wave~party/CCP = “The gun commands the Party”), now “黨指揮槍” (*dang2 zhi3 hui1 qiang1* = party/CCP~finger~wave~guns = “The Party commands the gun”).

by Diana Yue