

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 Qin Dynasty

秦

Putonghua pronunciation: *qin2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chun4*

Meanings: Chinese place name, name of Chinese dynasty, Chinese surname

秦 (radical 禾 *huo2*, rice-crop) is in today's 甘肅 (*Gan1 Su1* = Gansu province), 陝西 (*Shan3 Xi1* = Shaanxi province). 秦腔 (*Qin2 qiang1* = Qin~singing) = Shaanxi opera.

Under 封建制度 (*feng1 jian4 zhi4 du4* = bestow-title-and-land-build~system/institution = feudalism), 諸侯國 (*zhu1 hou2 guo2* = noblemen's~states = dukedoms/earldoms) obeyed/served 周天子 (*Zhou1 tian1 zi3* = Zhou's~heaven's~son = Zhou Dynasty's Emperor with Heavenly Mandate). 秦國 (*Qin2 guo2* = Qin~state)'s ruler raised title/rank from 公 (*gong1*, duke) to 王 (*wang2*, king), 滅六國 (*mie4 liu4 guo2* = extinguished/conquered~six-other~states), overthrew Zhou Dynasty, founded 秦朝 (*Qin2 chao2* = Qin~Dynasty, 221-207 B.C.)

秦始皇 (*Qin2 Shi3 Huang2* = Qin's~First~Emperor) ruled tyrannically. 避秦 (*bi4 Qin2* = avoid~Qin) describes refugees fleeing/hiding from political turmoil/oppression.

by Diana Yue