

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 faith

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gin1*

Meaning: firm, strong, hard, sturdy

堅 (radical 土 *tu3*, earth/soil) means hard/strong/firm: 堅果 (*jian1 guo3* = hard-fruit = hard-shelled nuts), 堅實 (*jian1 shi2* = firm-solid) muscles, 堅強 (*jian1 qiang2* = firm-strong) personality. 攻堅 (*gong1 jian1* = attack-strong) means picking hard problems to solve.

堅毅 (*jian1 yi4* = firm-courageous) people 堅守 (*jian1 shou3* = firmly-defend/uphold) principles. Colonial power 船堅炮利 (*chuan2 jian1 pao4 li4* = boats-strong-cannons-sharp = has strong navy). Charging tanks 無堅不摧 (*wu2 jian1 bu4 cui1* = nothing-firm-not-destroy = crush everything).

堅決 (*jian1 jue2* = firm-decide) describes firm/determined attitude. 堅貞不二 (*jian1 zhen1 bu4 er4* = firm-virginity-not-two/another) describes woman/subordinate's unswerving fidelity to husband/superior. Priest conducts 堅信禮 (*jian1 xin4 li3* = firm-faith-ceremony = confirmation) for converted Christians.

by Diana Yue