

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 World War II

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhou2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juk6*

Meaning: axle, shaft, axis, roller, spool

軸 (radical 車 *che1*, cart/machine + 由 *you2*, let/rol/turn) means axle/shaft: car's 輪軸 (*jun2 zhou2* = wheel's-axle), loom's 線軸 (*xian4 zhou2* = thread-spool/bobbin). Archaeologists discover ancient 卷軸 (*juan4 zhou2* = reel/coil-shaft/roller = scrolls of writing/painting).

軸線 (*zhou2 xian4* = axle-line = axis) is 直線 (*zhi2 xian4* = straight-line) around which 點 (*dian3*, points) revolve: the Earth's 自轉軸 (*zi4 zhuan3 zhou2* = self-spinning-axis), eyes' 視軸 (*shi4 zhou2* = visual/optical-axis).

Beijing/Paris has 中軸線 (*zhong1 zhou2 xian4* = central/medial-axis-line = long street cutting through middle of entire city). In WWII Germany, Italy, Japan 結盟 (*jie2 meng2* = formed-pact), forming 軸心國 (*zhou2 xin1 guo2* = axis-centre-countries = Axis Countries) with Berlin, Rome, Tokyo as 軸心 (*zhou2 xin1* = axis-centres/cores).

by Diana Yue