

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 the Third World

弱

Putonghua pronunciation: *ruo 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeuk 6*

Meanings: weak

弱 = weak: 弱點 (*ruo dian 43* = weak-points = weaknesses), 弱者 (*ruo zhe 43* = weak-persons/parties = weaklings), 弱隊 (*ruo dui 44* = weak-team). Invalids 體質弱 (*ti zhi ruo 344* = body-essence~weak = are physically weak). D-students 成績弱 (*cheng ji ruo 214* = achieve-record~weak = have poor grades).

Internationalists sympathize with 弱小民族 (*ruo xiao min zu 4322* = weak-small~people-race = weak races), want to 鋤強扶弱 (*chu qiang fu ruo 2224* = rake-strong~support-weak = eradicate bullies, help victims).

Ambassadors of 積弱 (*ji ruo 14* = accumulate~weak = perennially weak) countries sigh: “弱國無外交!” (*ruo guo wu wai jiao 42241* = weak~state-no~foreign~friendship = “For weak states, doing diplomatic work is useless!”)