

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



Putonghua pronunciation: *chi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi4*

Meanings: gallop, speed, spread, look forward to

馳 (radical 馬 *ma3*, horse) means gallop. Mongolian horsemen 馳騁 (*chi2 cheng3* = gallop-ride freely) on steppes. Race-cars 風馳電掣 (*feng1 chi2 dian4 zhi4* = wind~speed-electricity/lightning~charge = speed along). 遠近馳名 (*yuan3 jin4 chi2 ming2* = far~near~spread~name) describes well-known/reputable brands/products.

奔馳 (*ben1 chi2* = run~gallop), meaning gallop, is also “Benz”-transliterated, i.e. Mercedes-Benz’s Chinese brand-name. 為口奔馳 (*wei4 kou3 ben1 chi2* = for~mouth/eat~run~gallop) means rushing around, working for livelihood.

秦 (*Qin2*) unified China, implemented 車同軌 (*che1 tong2 zhe2* = carts~same~axle = standardized carts’ axle lengths), built network of 馳道 (*chi2 dao4* = chariots/cavalry-highways). Reminiscing on ancient 秦帝國 (*Qin2 di4 guo2* = Qin~emperor-state = the Qin Empire) makes tourists 神馳 (*shen2 chi2* = spirit-gallop = imagination roams).

by Diana Yue