

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

振

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhen* 4

Cantonese pronunciation: *jan* 3

Meanings: shake, vibrate, oscillate, rouse

振 = 振動 (*zhen dong* 44 = vibrate-move). Birds 振翅 (*zhen chi* 44 = flap-wings) to fly. Company bankruptcies make stock-market indices 振蕩 (*zhen dang* 44 = shake-sway = fluctuate/oscillate). Rally speeches 振奮人心 (*zhen fen ren xin* 4421 = rouse-excite-people's-hearts = are very stirring).

Losers may 一蹶不振 (*yi jue bu zhen* 1244 = one-fall-no-rouse = once knocked down, never rise again). We encourage them: “振作起來!” (*zhen zuo qi lai* 4432 = rouse-act-up-come = “C’mon, pull yourself together!”)

Leader of Chinese revolution 振臂一呼 (*zhen bi yi hu* 4411 = rouse-arm-one-cry = shout with arm raised): “振興中華!” (*zhen xing Zhong Hua* 4112 = rouse-rise-Middle-Flower = “Make China strong again!”)