

# 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:

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 the civil wars

內

Putonghua pronunciation: *nei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *noi6*

Meanings: inner, internal, inside, within

Ideogram 內 (入 *ri4*, enter + arch/door) indicates entered/ within/inward: antonym 外 (*wai4*, outside/outward). 體內 (*ti3 nei4* = body-inside) = within body. Elegantly-speaking, 外子 (*wai4 zi3* = outside-person) means “my husband”, 內子 (*nei4 zi3* = inside-person) means “my wife”.

Book's 內容 (*nei4 rong2* = inside-contain = contents) reflect writer's 內心 (*nei4 xin1* = inside-heart = heart/mind), 內涵 (*nei4 han2* = inside-abundant-water = solid knowledge/ receptiveness).

Country's 內部矛盾 (*nei4 bu4 mao2 dun4* = inner-part~spear~shield = internal contradictions/antagonisms) cause 內鬥 (*nei4 dou4* = internal~struggles/conflicts). 局外人 (*ju2 wai4 ren2* = game~outside~persons = uninformed/uninvolved outsiders) don't know 內情 (*nei4 qing2* = inside~circumstances/story). Analyst predicts: “一年內 (*yi1 nian2 nei4* = one-year~within = within one year) government will collapse!”

by Diana Yue