

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 civil wars

戰

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jin3*

Meanings: fight, battle, war

戰 (radical 戈 *ge1*, spear) means war/battle/fight: 戰士 (*zhan4 shi4* = fight-er = warrior/soldier), 戰場 (*zhan4 chang3* = battle-field), 戰鬥 (*zhan4 dou4* = fight-vie = battle). 二戰 (*er4 zhan4* = two/second~war) = Second World War. 竹戰 (*zhu1 zhan4* = bamboo~battle) means mahjong game.

內戰 (*nei4 zhan4* = inside~war) = civil war. 鴿派 (*ge1 pai4* = doves-faction = doves) 主和 (*zhu3 he2* = advocate~peace), 鷹派 (*ying1 pai4* = eagle-faction = hawks) 主戰 (*zhu3 zhan4* = advocate~war). Tolstoy wrote 戰爭與和平 (*zhan4 zheng1 yu he2 ping2* = war~fight~and~friendship~harmony = War and Peace).

Brilliant strategist 不戰而屈人之兵 (*bu4 zhan4 er2 qu1 ren2 zhi1 bing1* = not~fight~and~but~bend~people/other~'s~soldier/army = crushes opponent's military strength without actually fighting.)

by Diana Yue