

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 PIIGS

葡

Putonghua pronunciation: *pu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *po4*

Meanings: First word in Portugal's Chinese name

Portugal's Chinese name is 葡萄牙 (*pu2 tao2 ya2*). These three *zi* are chosen for their sounds, not their literal meaning “grapes~teeth”.

歐盟 (*ou1 meng2* = “Eu”-transliterated~alliance) = short for 歐洲聯盟 (*ou1 zhou1 lian2 meng2* = “Eu”~continent~united~alliance = European Union). PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) are countries in 歐羅區 (*ou1 luo2 qu1* = “Euro”-transliterated-region = Eurozone). PIIGS' Chinese translation is “歐豬五國” (*ou1 zhu1 wu3 guo2* = Europe~pigs~five~states).

Portugal's 國債 (*guo2 zai4* = nationl~debts) and 政府赤字 (*zheng4 fu3 chi4 zi4* = administration~bureau~red~words = government deficits) soared during 2007-10's global 金融海嘯 (*jin1 rong2 hai3 xiao1* = gold~merge~sea~sough = financial tsunami). Is 破產 (*po4 chan3* = break~assets = going bankrupt) inevitable?