

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 myth of the ten suns



Putonghua pronunciation: *shi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sap6*

Meanings: ten

When 堯 (*Yao2*) was king, all ten suns appeared together: 一 (*yi1*, one), 二 (*er4*, two), 三 (*san1*, three), 四 (*si4*, four), 五 (*wu3*, five), 六 (*liu4*, six), 七 (*qi1*, seven), 八 (*ba1*, eight), 九 (*jiu3*, nine), 十 (*shi2*, ten)! This caused 大旱災 (*da4 han4 zai1* = big-dry-disaster = big drought).

草木 (*cao3 mu4* = grass~wood/tree = plants) 稻穀 (*dao4 gu3* = rice-plant~grain = crops) 枯死 (*ku1 si3* = dry-wither~die). 人類 (*ren2 lei4* = man-kind = people) 鳥獸 (*niao3 shou4* = birds~beasts) 餓死 (*e4 si3* = starve-to~death).

The situation was 十分危急 (*shi2 fen1 wei1 ji2* = ten~points-dangerous-urgent = extremely dangerous/precipitous), the people were 十分困難 (*shi2 fen1 kun4 nan2* = ten~points-confined~difficult = in extreme difficulty).