

Character Builder 您好嗎？嘆

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 burning the linked ships

嘆

Putonghua pronunciation: *tan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *taan3*

Meanings: sigh

嘆 = sigh: 讚嘆 (*zhan4 qi4* = praise~sigh = sigh with admiration), 驚嘆 (*jing1 tan4* = fear~sigh = sigh with astonishment/wonder).

Before 赤壁之戰 (*Chi4 Bi4 zhi1 zhan4* = Red~Cliff~'s~Battle) on the Yangtze River, Wei Kingdom's ruler 曹操 (*Cao2 Cao1*) 嘆息 (*tan4 xi1* = sigh~breath = sighed) to soldiers: “對酒當歌 *dui4 jiu3 dang1 ge1* = facing~wine~should~sing, 人生幾何 *ren2 sheng1 ji3 he2* = man's~life~how~much = Let's drink and sing, how long does life last?”

三國 (*san1 guo2* = the~Three~Kingdoms: Wei, Shu, Wu) became history. Poet 詠嘆 (*yong3 tan4* = sing~sigh = wrote lamenting poem): “大江東去!” (*da4 jiang1 dong1 qu4* = mighty~river~eastward~go = the Yangtze flowing eastward washed all heroes away!”