

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *ai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *oi3*

Meanings: First word in Ireland's Chinese name

Ireland's Chinese name is 愛爾蘭 (*ai4 er3 lan2*). These three *zi* are chosen for their sounds, not their literal meaning “love-you-orchid”.

Ireland experienced 1840s' 大饑荒 (*da4 ji1 fang1* = big-hunger-waste = Great Famine), 移民潮 (*yi2 min2 chao2* = move-people-tide = emigration wave), 1922's 南北分裂 (*nan2 bei3 fen1 lie4* = south-north-separate-break = north-south partition). 喬伊斯 (*qiao2 yi1 si1* = “Joyce”-transliterated)'s novels described 都柏林 (*dou1 bo2 lin2* = “Dublin”-transliterated)'s social unrest. 爭議 (*zheng1 yi4* = conflict-discuss = debate/controversy), 武力抗爭 (*wu3 li4 kang4 zheng1* = military-force-resist-conflict = armed resistance) over British-ruled 北愛 (*bei3 ai4* = Northern-Ireland) continue.

1990s' 經濟繁榮 (*jing1 ji4 fan2 rong2* = planning-irrigation-multiply-prosper = economic boom) ended in 2009.

by Diana Yue