

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 regime change

壓

Putonghua pronunciation: *ya1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *aat3*

Meanings: press, pressure

壓 = 壓力 (*ya1 li4* = weight~strength = pressure): 電壓 (*dian4 ya1* = electricity~pressure = voltage/V), 血壓 (*xue3 ya1* = blood~pressure), 掌上壓 (*zhang3 shang4 ya1* = palm~on~press = push-ups), 壓抑 (*ya1 yi1* = pressure~suppress = psychological repression).

Mating lion 壓著 (*ya1 zhe0* = weigh-ing = is on top of) lioness. Depressed government 壓縮 (*ya1 suo1* = press~contract = compresses/shrinks) spending. Mao Ze-dong predicted: 東風壓倒西風 (*dong1 feng1 ya1 dao3 xi1 feng1* = east~wind~weigh~topple~west~wind = East will overtake/outshine West!)

Protesters condemn tyrant's 壓榨 (*ya1 zha4* = pressing~squeezing), 壓迫 (*ya1 po1* = suppression~oppression), 高壓 (*gao1 ya1* = high~press = repression), 鎮壓 (*zhen4 ya1* = weight/guard~press = suppression/crackdown), complain: “We’re 壓扁 (*ya1 bian3* = crushed!)”

by Diana Yue