

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 Boxer Uprising

Putonghua pronunciation: *quán2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *Keun4*

Meanings: fist, boxing

拳 (radical 手 *shou3* = hand/arm) = 拳頭 (*quán2 tou2* = fist-head) = fist. 磨拳擦掌 (*mo4 quán2 ca1 zhang3* = scrub-fists-rub-palms) describes person's aggressive/militant posture. 拳打腳踢 (*quán2 da3 jiao3 ti1* = fists-beat-feet-kick) = beat up somebody. 西洋拳術 (*xi1 yang2 quán2 shu4* = west-ocean-fist-method) = western boxing/pugilism. Chinese kung-fu has 拳法 (*quán2 fa3* = fist-combat-methods). 太極拳 (*tai4 ji2 quán2* = Taijiquan/Tai-Chi-Chuan) combines 氣功 (*qi4 gong1* = breathing-method) with fist-combat.

In 1900 China, 義和團 (*Yi4 He2 Tuan2* = Righteous-Harmony-Group, aka 義和拳 *Yi4 He2 Quán2* = Righteous-Harmony-Fists = nationalistic, superstitious mobsters) attacked western Christians and churches, called for 扶清滅洋 (*fu2 Qing1 mie4 yang2* = support-Qing-destroy-ocean = support Qing/Chinese empire, eliminate foreigners).

by Diana Yue