

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: *luan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *luen6*

Meanings: untidy, unrestrained, illogical, disturbance, disorder, turmoil

亂 = disorder. Wind 吹亂 (*chui1 luan4* = blows~untidy) hair. Kids 亂吃 (*luan4 chi1* = unrestrainedly~eat), 亂說 (*luan4 shuo1* = falsely/illogically~say), 亂來 (*luan4 lai2* = unrestrainedly~come = act stupidly/wildly).

亂世 (*luan4 shi4* = disorder~world) = world in turmoil. Mobsters 搗亂 (*dao3 luan4* = rouse~disorder = make mess/trouble), 作亂 (*zuo4 luan4* = cause~riot/disorder/rebellion).

When economy 亂七八糟 (*luan4 qi1 ba1 zao1* = disorder~seven~eight~terrible = goes all wrong), finance 出亂子 (*chu1 luan4 zi0* = emerge~disorder~diminutive = runs amuck). People 心慌意亂 (*xin1 huang1 yi4 luan4* = heart~scared~ideas~turmoil = feel bewildered/panicky). Sage advises: “小不忍則亂大謀!” (*xiao3 bu4 ren3 ze2 luan4 da4 mou2* = small~no~patience~then~upset~big~plan = Lose patience and you lose your game!)

by Diana Yue