

# 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 diplomatic relations

Putonghua pronunciation: *mèng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mang4*

Meanings: ally, alliance

Character 盟 (日 *ri4*, sun + 月 *yue4*, moon + 皿 *min3*, vessel) means vow sworn by sun-moon reflected in vessel of water. Sworn brothers 滴血為盟 (*di2 xue3 wei2 meng2* = drip-blood-make~vow/alliance). Lovers 海誓山盟 (*hai3 shi4 shan1 meng2* = sea~swear~mountain~vow = exchange love vows). Traitor 背盟 (*bei4 meng2* = turns-back-on/betrays~alliance).

盟主 (*meng2 zhu3* = alliance~master = allies' leader), 盟友 (*meng3 you3* = ally~friend = allies) formulate 盟約 (*meng2 yue4* = alliance~agreement/covenant), form 聯盟 (*lian2 meng2* = united~alliance/coalition), e.g. WWII's 盟軍 (*meng2 jun1* = allied forces).

不結盟國 (*bu4 jie2 meng2 guo2* = no~tie~alliance~country = Non-Aligned Countries) do not join power blocs. 東盟 (*dong1 meng2* = east~alliance) = Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

by Diana Yue