

# 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 territorial disputes



Putonghua pronunciation: *tu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to2*

Meanings: earth, soil, land, ground, crude, indigenous, local, native

Ideogram 土 shows earth/ground with plant above: 泥土 (*ni2 tu3* = soil/mud~earth = soil), 土地 (*tu3 di4* = earth~land = land), 陶土 (*tao2 tu3* = pottery~earth = potter's clay), 稀土 (*xi1 tu3* = rare~earths). 土包 (*tu3 bao1* = earth~bun) = country bumpkins. 出土文物 (*chu1 tu3 wen2 wu4* = out/from~ground~cultural~ objects) means archeological finds or, facetiously, people/ scholars already passé.

Pioneers 開疆拓土 (*kai1 jiang1 tuo4 tu3* = open~borders~expand~land = expand frontiers). Patriots stand by 本土 (*ben3 tu3* = origin/own~land = own country).

Country's 國土 (*guo2 tu3* = country's~land = national territory) covers 領土 (*ling3 tu3* = taken/lead/rule~land = land territory), 領海 (*ling3 hai3* = taken/lead/rule~sea = territorial sea/waters), 領空 (*ling3 kong1* = taken/lead/rule~sky = airspace).

by Diana Yue