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 regime change

圍

Putonghua pronunciation: wei2
Cantonese pronunciation: wai4
Meanings: enclose, surround, contain

Character 周 shows square enclosing something. Planets 周繞 (wei2 rao3 = surround-go-around) sun. Garden has 周牆 (wei2 qiang2 = enclosing-wall). 周爐取暖 (wei2 lu2 qu2 nuan3 = surround-stove-take-warmth) = huddle around stove for warmth. 周堵 (wei2 du3 = surround-block-off = containment) = a political strategy. 周棋 (wei2 qi2 = enclose-chess = Go) players 周地吃子 (wei2 di4 chi1 zi3 = block-off-territory-capture-pieces/stones). Onlookers 周觀 (wei2 guan1 = surround-watch = surround them, watch).

Protesters重重圍困 (chong2 chong2 wei2 kun4 = layer-layer-surround-confine = lay heavy siege on) parliament, 周攻 (wei2 gong1 = surround-attack) officials. Officials cannot 突圍 (tu1 wei2 = protrude-enclose = break through siege), call army to 解圍 (jie3 wei2 = untie/dissolve-surround = break up siege).

by Diana Yue