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 One Belt One Road

Putonghua pronunciation: shang1
Cantonese pronunciation: seung1
Meaning: trade, commerce, negotiate, businessman

商 (radical 口 kou3, mouth) means 商議 (shang1 yi4 = negotiate-discuss), 商貿 (shang1 mao4 = business-and-trading), 商人 (shang1 ren2 = business-men = merchants).

Countries develop 工商業 (gong1 shang1 ye4 = industry-trade-profession = industries and commerce), 通商 (tong1 shang1 = through-commerce = trade among themselves), import/import 商品 (shang1 pin3 = commercial-goods). 儒商 (ru2 shang1 = scholar-businessman) means businessman with refined education/tastes.

Many countries see 商機 (shang1 ji1 = business-opportunities) in China’s 21st-century 一帶一路 (yi1 dai4 yi1 lu4 = One-Belt-One-Road = Belt and Road Initiative, abbr. OBOR): 陸上絲路 (lu4 shang4 si1 lu4 = land-based-silk-road = Silk Road Economic Belt, abbr. SREB), 海上絲路 (hai3 shang4 si1 lu4 = sea-based-silk-road, abbr. Maritime Silk Route, MSR).

by Diana Yue