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 Beijing

京

Putonghua pronunciation: jing1
Cantonese pronunciation: ging1
Meanings: north, northern, northward

Character 京 (pictogram resembling artificial mound) means京城 (jing1 cheng2 = capital-city): Japan's 東京 (dong1 jing1 = east-capital = Tokyo), ROC's 南京 (nan2 jing2 = south-capital = Nanjing/ Nanking), 北京 (bei3 jing1 = north-capital = Beijing, previously spelt "Peking", capital of Yuan, Ming, Qing dynasties and PRC). 京官 (jing1 guan1 = pre-1912 Beijing-ministers/bureaucrats) = mandarins. 京片子 (jing1 pian4 zii0 = capital-piece-diminutive) is indigenous, melodious Beijing dialect (aka mandarin). 京派 (jing1 pai4 = Beijing-style) describes Beijing culture/tradition. 京劇 (jing1 jü2 = capital-drama) = Beijing/Peking opera.

Millions 上京 (shang4 jing1 = travel-up-to-capital/Beijing) for work/sight-seeing. 京菜 (jing1 cai4 = Beijing-cuisine) includes烤鴨 (kao3 ya1 = roast-duck = Beijing/Peking duck), 燉羊肉 (shuan4 yang2 rou1 = instant-rinse-boiled-lamb-meat = hotpot featuring lamb-slices).

by Diana Yue