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

壓 壓 Putonghua pronunciation: ya1 Cantonese pronunciation: aat3 Meanings: press, pressure

壓 = 壓力 (ya1 li4 = weight-strength = pressure): 電壓 (dian4 ya1 = electricity-pressure = voltage/V), 血壓 (xue3 ya1 = blood-pressure), 掌上壓 (zhang3 shang4 ya1 = palm-on-press = push-ups), 壓抑 (ya1 yil = pressure-suppress = psychological repression).

Mating lion 壓著 (ya1 zhe0 = weigh-ing = is on top of) lioness. Depressed government 壓縮 (ya1 suo1 = press-contract = compresses/shrinks) spending. Mao Ze-dong predicted:東風壓倒西風 (dong1 feng1 ya1 dao3 xil feng1 = east-wind-weigh-tobble-west-wind = East will overtake/outshine West!)

Protesters condemn tyrant’s 壓榨 (ya1 zha4 = pressing-squeezing), 壓迫 (ya1 po1 = suppression-oppression), 高壓 (gao1 ya1 = high-pressure = repression), 鎮壓 (zhen4 ya1 = weight/guard-press = suppression/crackdown), complain: “We’re 壓扁 (ya1 bian3 = crushed)”

by Diana Yue