

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 territorial disputes



Putonghua pronunciation: *tu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to4*

Meanings: graphic shape, picture, map, plan, contrive

圖 = shows 口 (*wei2*, encirclement/rim) surrounding contents. Verb 圖 = 圖謀 (*tu2 mou2* = plan~conspire = intention~conspiracy). Noun 圖 means 圖象 (*tu2 xiang4* = graphic-image), 圖畫 (*tu2 hua4* = graphic~draw = picture), 圖案 (*tu2 an4* = graphic~record = pattern/motif). Ship-captains use 海圖 (*hai3 tu2* = sea~picture/map = nautical charts). Star-watchers study 星圖 (*xing1 tu2* = star~maps/charts).

Idiom 圖窮匕現 (*tu2 qiong2 bi3 xian4* = picture/scroll~end~dagger~appear) describes assassin unfurling map, revealing concealed dagger to attack, i.e., deceptive/malicious scheme is exposed.

世界地圖 (*shi4 jie4 di4 tu2* = world~border~land~picture = world map/atlas) shows countries' 版圖 (*ban3 tu2* = area~picture = mapped territories). New ruler formulates 治國藍圖 (*zhi4 guo2lan2 tu2* = rule~country~blue~picture = blueprint for governing country).

by Diana Yue