

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 military parades

彈

Putonghua pronunciation: *dan 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daan 6*

Meanings: shoot, bounce, hullet, cannon-ball, bomb

Verb 彈 means shoot/bounce. Guns fire 子彈 (*zi3 dan4* = son/seed-shoot = bullets). Cannons fire 炮彈 (*pao4 dan4* = cannon-balls). War-planes drop 炸彈 (*zha4 dan4* = explosive~balls = bombs).

Nuclear warfare features 彈道導彈 (*dan4 dao4 dao3 dan4* = bomb~route~guided~bomb = ballistic missiles) with 核彈頭 (*he2 dan4 tou2* = nuclear~bomb-heads = nuclear warheads).

China pursued “兩彈一星” (*liang3 dan4 yi1 xing1* = two~bombs~one~star) defense policy, developed 原子彈 (*yuan2 zi3 dan4* = original~seed~bomb = atomic bomb), 氫彈 (*qing1 dan4* = hydrogen~bomb), 導彈 (*dao3 dan4* = guided~bomb = guided missiles), 運載火箭 (*yun4 zai4 huo3 jian4* = transport~carry~fire~arrow = carrier rockets), 人造衛星 (*ren2 zao4 wei4 xing1* = man~made~guard~star = satellites).

by Diana Yue