

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 Chinese national anthem

危

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngai4*

Meanings: high, dangerous, menacing, endanger, danger, dying

Pictogram 危 shows person kneeling on dangerous cliff, hence 危害 (*wei1 hai4* = endanger~harm), 危難 (*wei1 nan4* = danger~suffering/calamity), 危樓 (*wei1 lou2* = unsafe/toppling~building), 病危 (*bing4 wei1* = ill-dangerous/dying).

Doomsday preacher 危言聳聽 (*wei1 yan2 song3 ting4* = menacing~words~stir~listen = spread alarmist message). Sage warns: 居安思危 (*ju1 an1 si1 wei1* = living-in~safety~think~danger): Although enjoying comfort/safety, think/worry about possible 危機 (*wei1 ji1* = danger~chance = crisis).

Chinese 國歌 (*guo2 ge1* = state~song = national anthem), written in WWII, describes invaded nation at 最危險的時候 (*zui4 wei1 xian3 de0 shi2 hou4* = most-dangerous-time), i.e., 危急存亡之秋 (*wei1 ji2 cun2 wang2 zhi1 qiu1* = dangerous~urgent~survive~perish~'s~autumn = dangerous time/juncture of either surviving or perishing).

by Diana Yue