

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 empires

擴

Putonghua pronunciation: *kuo4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kwong3*

Meanings: expand

擴 = 扌 (= 手 *shou3*, hand) + 廣 (*guang3*, broad): 擴大 (*kuo4 da4* = expand~big) quotas, 擴建 (*kuo4 jian4* = expand~build) premises. 擴音器 (*kuo4 yin1 qi4* = expand~sound~instrument) = loudspeaker.

武力擴張 (*wu3 li4 kuo4 zhang1* = military~strength~expand~open/stretch) = military expansion. 羅馬帝國 (*Luo2 Ma3 di4 guo2* = “Roman”-transliterated~empire) 擴軍 (*kuo4 jun1* = expanded~army), 侵略 (*qin1 lue4* = invade~snatch = invaded) other states, 擴張版圖 (*kuo4 zhang1 ban3 tu2* = expand~open/stretch~plate~picture = expanded territories).

Chemo-therapy patient fears 癌細胞擴散 (*ai2 xi4 bao1 kuo4 san4* = cancer~small~cell~expand~disperse = spread of cancer cells). Some countries refuse to join international 核不擴散 (*he2 bu4 kuo4 san4*) = nuclear-no~expand~disperse = nuclear non-proliferation) treaty.

by Diana Yue