

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 Buddha's sacrifice for eagle and dove

Putonghua pronunciation: *ge1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gap3*

Meanings: pigeon, dove, squab

鴿 (radical鳥 *niao3*, bird) = 鴿子 (*ge1 zi0* = dove~diminutive = dove). Army used 信鴿 (*xin4 ge1* = letter/messenger~pigeons). Chinese restaurants serve 燒乳鴿 (*shao1 ru3 ge1* = roast-milk~pigeon = roast baby squabs).

鴿 symbolizes 和平 (*he2 ping2* = harmony~calm = peace), 友誼 (*you3 yi2* = friend~ship), 愛 (*ai4*, love). As the Flood ebbed, dove brought 橄欖枝 (*gan3 lan3 zhi1* = olive~branch) to 挪亞 (*Nuo2 Ya4* = "Noah"-transliterated)'s 方舟 (*fang1 zhou1* = square~boat = ark). Dove also symbolizes Christianity's 聖靈 (*sheng1 ling2* = the Holy~Spirit). La Paloma (The Dove) is an Italian 情歌 (*qing2 ge1* = love~song).

In politics, 鷹派 (*ying1 pai4* = eagle~sect = hawks) opposes 鴿派 (*ge1 pai4* = dove~sect = doves).