

# 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 1949 Liberation

議

Putonghua pronunciation: *yi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yi5*

Meanings: discuss, comment, remark

議 (radical 言 *yan2*, words/speech) = 議論 (*yi3 lun4* = discuss~comment), 商議 (*shang1 yi3* = talk-about~discuss = discussion). 議會 (*yi3 hui4* = discuss~meet) = parliament/congress, 議員 (*yi3 yüan2* = discuss~member) = parliamentarian/congressman. American Congress has 參議院 (*can1 yi3 yüan4* = participate~debate~court = Senate) and 眾議院 (*zhong4 yi3 yüan4* = many~debate~court = House of Representatives).

Many 議題 (*yi3 ti2* = discuss~title/topic = topics) are discussed in China's 人大 (*ren2 da4* = people~big = National People's Congress) and 政協 (*zheng4 xie3* = political~unite~strength = Political Consultative Conference).

Dropping 爭議性 (*zheng1 yi3 xing4* = fight~discuss~nature = controversial) issues, opposing factions 議和 (*yi3 he2* = discuss~harmony = discuss peace/reconciliation options). Nay-voters get 非議 (*fei1 yi3* = condemnatory~remarks).

by Diana Yue