

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 PIGS



Putonghua pronunciation: *xi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gan1*

Meanings: First word in Greece's Chinese name

Greece's Chinese name is 希臘 (*xi1 la4*). These two *zi* are chosen for their sounds, not their literal meaning “hope~wax”.

古希臘 (*gu3 xi1 la4* = ancient~Greece) is 搖籃 (*yao2 lan2* = rock~basket = cradle) of western civilization. 荷馬 (*he2 ma3* = “Homer”-transliterated)'s epics described gods and heroes. 濟慈 (*ji4 ci2* = “Keats”-transliterated)'s Ode On A Grecian Urn praised 真 (*zhen1*, truth), 美 (*mei3*, beauty).

Modern Greece has 船運業 (*chuan2 yun4 ye4* = ship~transport~industry = shipping industry), 旅遊業 (*lü3 you2 ye4* = travel~tour~ industry = tourist industry). 2010's 金融危機 (*jin1 rong2 wei1 ji1* = gold~merge~danger~opportunity = financial crisis) required serious 節約 (*jie2 yue4* = economize~control = austerity) measures, causing riots in 雅典 (*ya2 dian3* = “Athens-transliterated).