

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 gourmet dining



Putonghua pronunciation: *hua 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wa 4*

Meanings: splendid, glamorous, grand, luxurious

Etymologically, 華 = 花 (*hua 1* = flower). 中華民族 (*zhong hua min zu 1222* = central-flower~people~tribe) is the Chinese race. 水木清華 (*shui mu qing hua 3412* = water~wood~clear/unpolluted~luxuriant) describes spots with lovely streams/ponds and tress/shrubs, e.g. the site of Beijing's 清華大學 (*qing hua da xue 1242* = Clear~Luxuriant~big~school = Qinghua University).

繁華 (*fan hua 22* = elaborate~grand) describes cities' splendor/prosperity. 華衣美食 (*hua yi mei shi 2132* = glamorous/ expensive~clothes-beautiful~food) describes an extravagant lifestyle. 豪華 (*hao hua 22* = /expensive~grand = de luxe) restaurants host 華筵 (*hua yan 22* = grand~banquets).

華 is opposite of 實 (*shi 2* = fruit/solid/practical). 華而不實 (*hua er bu shi 2242* = grand~and/but~not~solid) means superficial grandeur without substance.