

# 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 gourmet dining

巧

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiao 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haau 2*

Meaning: finely-crafted, dainty, delicate

巧 means 精巧 (*jing qiao 13* = fine~delicate), 巧妙 (*qiao miao 34* = delicate~wonderful = cleverly conceived/arranged). 小巧玲瓏 (*xiao qiao ling long 2322* = small~delicate~well-carved~jade) describes small fineries or petite girls.

On 七夕 (*qi xi 12* = sevens~night = Qixi Festival in autumn), Chinese/Japanese girls 乞巧 (*qi qiao 13* = beg~fine-craft = pray for sewing/embroidering talent). 高級烹飪 (*gao ji peng ren 1214* = high~class~cook~food = haute cuisine), 懷石料理 (*huai shi liao li 2243* = Japan's kaiseki ryori) require 巧廚 (*qiao chu 22* = fine~cooks/chefs).

巧婦難為無米之炊 (*qiao fu nan wei wu mi zhi chui 23222311* = fine-housewife~difficult-make~no~rice~攪~cooking) means no one, however capable, can produce results without basic resources.