

# 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 *Journey to the West*

徒

Putonghua pronunciation: *tu2*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *to4*  
Meanings: student, apprentice

Novel's protagonist 唐僧 (*Tang2 seng1* = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xuanzang/Tripitaka) crossed 沙漠 (*sha1 mo4* = sandy-deserts) riding on a 白馬 (*bai2 ma3* = white-horse), escorted by three 徒弟 (*tu2 di4* = disciple-young-brother = disciples): Monkey (monkey-demon 孫悟空 *Sun1 Wu4 Kong1* = surname-Sun-understand-emptiness), Pigsy (pig-demon 朱八戒 *Zhu1 Ba1 Jie4* = surname-Zhu-eight-abstinences), Sandy (sandy-rapids-demon 沙僧 *Sha1 seng1* = surname-Sha-monk).

The disciples had 法術 (*fa3 shu4* = magic-methods = magical powers). Monkey had 七十二變 (*qi1 shi2 er4 bian4* = seven-ten-two-change = seventy-two/innumerable ways of transfiguration).

The disciples were naughty/unruly, often 意馬心猿 (*yi4 ma3 xin1 yuan2* = thought-horse-heart-monkey = swayed by temptations), but finally 得成正果 (*de2 cheng2 zheng4 guo3* = achieve-become-correct/orthodox-fruit/result = achieved enlightenment).

by Diana Yue