

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 呀

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 beggars

赤

Putonghua pronunciation: *chi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chek3*

Meanings: red, bare, pure, intense, exposed, uncovered

赤 (土 *tu3*, earth on 火 *huo3*, fire) means red/hot/pure/intense/bare: 赤色 (*chi4 se1* = red-color), 赤紅 (*chi4 hong2* = intense/dazzling-red), 赤字 (*chi4 zi4* = red-words/figures = recorded deficit), 赤化 (*chi4 hua4* = red-transformation) means Communist occupation/influence on region/thinking, 赤道 (*chi4 dao4* = red-path) = Equator.

Tai-ji master 赤手空拳 (*chi4 shou3 kong1 quan2* = bare-handed-empty-fisted = with bare hands) captures gun-man. Nudists show 赤子之心 (*chi4 zi3 zhi1 xin1* = pure-child-'s-heart = innocence), go 赤條條 (*chi4 tiao2 tiao2* = bare-body-body = naked).

Beggars 赤身赤腳 (*chi4 shen1 chi4 jiao3* = go naked-and-bare-footed). Report 赤裸裸 (*chi4 luo3 luo3* = bare-nake-nake = nakedly) describes city's 赤貧 (*chi4 pin2* = bare-poor = extremely poor) districts.

by Diana Yue