

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:

- 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 the Tibetan people



Putonghua pronunciation: **shan1**
Cantonese pronunciation: **saan1**
Meanings: mountain, hill, mound

山 (radical in 峰 **feng1**, peak, 嶺 **ling3**, range, 坡 **po1**, slope) means mountains/hills. Cameraman photographs 火山 (**huo3 shan1** = fire~mountain = volcano), 冰山 (**bing1 shan1** = ice~berg), 山民 (**shan1 min2** = mountain~people/rustics). Poet praises nation's 壯麗山河 (**zhuang4 li4 shan1 he2** = brave/grand~beautiful~mountains~rivers = sweeping/beautiful land/landscapes).

爬山隊 (**pa2 shan1 dui4** = climb~mountain~team = mountaineering team) climbs 珠穆朗瑪峰 (**Zhu1 Mu4 Lang3 Ma3 feng1** = Qomolangma Peak = Mount Everest) on 喜馬拉雅山脈 (**Xi3 Ma3 La1 Ya3 shan1 mai4** = "Himalaya"-transliterated~mountain~vein/range = the Himalayas).

Tibetan Plateau has 高山 (**gao1 shan1** = tall~mountains), 雪山 (**xue3 shan1** = snowy~peaks): the 崑崙 (**Kun1 Lun2** = Kunlun), 天山 (**Tian1 Shan1** = heaven~mountain = Tianshan) ranges.

by Diana Yue