

# 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

廢

Putonghua pronunciation: *fei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fai3*

Meanings: dispose, depose, neglect, maim, disable, waste, ruin, abandon, abolish, useless

廢 (radical 广 *yan3*, collapsed house) means ban/ruin/waste/useless. Country 廢除 (*fei4 chu2* = abolishes-ousts) monarchy, banishes 廢王 (*fei4 wang2* = deposed-king). Post-war 廢墟 (*fei4 xū1* = collapsed-marketplace/ruins) 百廢待舉 (*bai2 fei4 dai4 jū3* = hundred/many-ruins-wait-for-raise = need massive rebuilding), 廢氣 (*fei4 qi4* = waste-gas) = cars' exhaust. Re-cycling 廢水 (*fei4 shui3* = waster-water = effluent), 廢鐵 (*fei4 tie3* = water-iron = scrap iron) is 廢物利用 (*fei4 wu4 li4 yong4* = abandoned-things-advantageously-use). 因噎廢食 (*yin1 ye1 fei4 shi2* = because-once-choked-stop-eating) is stupid logic.

Beggar: "I'm 殘廢 (*can2 fei4* = maimed/disabled), 廢人 (*fei4 ren2* = useless-person)." Sage: "廢話! (*fei4 hua4* = nonsense-talk!" Stop being 頹廢 (*tui2 fei4* = dispirited-inactive = defeatist/decadent!)

by Diana Yue