

# 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 ancient philosophers

韓

Putonghua pronunciation: *han2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hon4*

Meanings: name of state, Chinese surname

韓 = ancient 韓國 (*Han2 guo2* = Han-state, 11th-8th centuries, then 403-230 BC, Warring States Period). Today, 韓國 means Korea.

Philosopher 韓非 (*Han2 Fei1*, aka 韓非子 *Han2 Fei1-zi3*, 281-233 BC) was prince of 韓 and diplomat to 秦國 (*Qin2 guo2* = Qin-state). He believed men were 性惡 (*xing4 e2* = nature-evil = born with bad nature), advocated tyrant's use of 法 (*fa3*, law), 術 (*shu2*, methods/schemes), 勢 (*shi4*, power).

His fable: Vendor brags his 矛 (*mao2*, spear) and 盾 (*dun4*, shield) are both strongest. Counter-argument: Which will prove stronger if 以子之矛, 攻子之盾 (*yi3 zi3 zhi1 mao2, gong1 zi3 zhi1 dun4* = with-your-spear, attack-your-shield)? Hence modern term 矛盾 (*mao2 dun4* = spear-shield = paradox/paradoxical, contradiction/contradictory).

by Diana Yue