

# 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 China's economic take-off

建

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gin3*

Meanings: build, construct, formulate, inaugurate, erect, establish

建 (radical 聿 *lu4* = 律 *lu4*, law) originally meant formulate/establish legal code. 建立 (*jian4 li4* = formulate-stand/erect = establish): counselor's 建議 (*jian4 yi4* = formulate-discuss = suggestion/proposal), hero's 建樹 (*jian4 shu4* = establish-tree/erect = achievements).

In 1949 PRC 建國 (*jian4 guo2* = build-nation = inaugurated new nation), 建都 (*jian4 du1* = established-capital at) Beijing, 建軍 (*jian4 jun1* = built-army). In 1979 中美建交 (*Zhong1 Mei3 jian4 jiao1* = China-A“me”-rica-transliterated-build-cross/friendship = China and the US established diplomatic relations).

建築 (*jian4 zhu1* = build-construct) = construction/architecture. 基建 (*ji1 jian4*), short for 基本建設 (*ji1 ben3 jian4 she4* = base-origin-build-facility), means infrastructures. Country's economic base determines its 上層建築 (*shang4 ceng2 jian4 zhu1* = upper-level-build-construct = superstructure/ ideology/culture.

by Diana Yue