

# 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 the Manchurian people

Putonghua pronunciation: *guan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwaan1*

Meaning: shut, close, imprison, mountain pass, check-point, entry-exit point

關 (radical 門 *men2*, door) means 關隘 (*guan1 ai4* = pass-narrow = narrow-mountain-pass) or shut/close. At customs 關卡 (*guan1 qia3* = pass-block = checkpoint), entrants 報關 (*bao4 guan1* = declare-at-pass belongings), 通關 (*tong1 guan4* = go-through-pass = clear customs).

關門 (*guan1 men2* = close/shut-door) also means close operation. PoWs 被關 (*bei4 guan1* = are-shut-up/imprisoned). 關口 (*guan1 kou3* = pass-mouth) means crucial frontier-pass/check-point/juncture. Competitor 闖關 (*chuang3 guan1* = attack-guarded-pass = challenges blocks/red-lines/difficulties), 過關斬將 (*guo4 guan1 zhan3 jiang4* = cross-guarded-pass-chop/kill-knight = passes blocks/stages/difficulties).

In 1644 Manchurian armies/invasers passed through 山海關 (*Shan1 Hai1 Guan1* = Shanhaiguan Pass) on eastern section of 長城 (*Chang2 Cheng2* = long-wall = the Great Wall), marched south, overthrew Ming Dynasty, established Qing Dynasty.

by Diana Yue