

# 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 Tibetan people

佛

Putonghua pronunciation: *fo2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fat6*

Meaning: Buddha, Buddhist, Buddhism

佛 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 弗 = 拂 *fu2*, brush, suggesting person brushing away dirt) is 佛陀 (*fo2 tuo2* = Sanskrit "Buddha"-transliterated) abbreviated, means 覺者 (*jue2 zhe3* = awakened/enlightened-one). 佛祖 (*fo2 zu3* = Buddha-ancestor = the first Buddha i.e. Sakyamuni, 5th century BC) founded 佛教 (*fo2 jiao4* = Buddha-religion = Buddhism).

Tibetan voodoo-ism 苯教 (*ben3 jiao4* = "Bon"-transliterated-religion = Bon) merged with China's 大乘佛教 (*da4 cheng2 fo2 jiao4* = big-cart-Buddha-religion = Mahayana Buddhism), formed 藏傳佛教 (*Zang4 chuan2 fo2 jiao4* = Tibet-inherit/transmit-Buddha-religion = Tibetan Buddhism, since 7th century AD).

喇嘛 (*la1 ma2* = "Lamas"-transliterated i.e. Tibetan Buddhist monks) teach 佛經 (*fo2 jing1* = Buddhist scriptures/sutras/canon) to 佛教徒 (*fo2 jiao4 tu2* = Buddhist-followers/practitioners).

by Diana Yue