

# 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

Putonghua pronunciation: *mi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mat6*

Meaning: tight, secret, hidden, occult, Tantric Buddhism

密 (山 *shan1*, mountain + 宀 *mi4*, place, suggesting narrow/hidden locale in mountains) means tight/hidden: 密雲 (*mi4 yūn2* = thick-clouds), 嚴密 (*yan2 mi4* = tightly-closed/sealed), 私密 (*si1 mi4* = personal-privacy).

Agents 密談 (*mi4 tan2* = secretly-talk), exchange 密碼 (*mi4 ma3* = secret-codes = cryptograms). Lovers are 親密 (*qin1 mi4* = dear-and-close = intimate).

藏傳佛教 (*Zang4 chuan2 fo2 jiao4* = Tibet-inherit/transmit-Buddha-religion = Tibetan Buddhism) is mainly 密宗 (*Mi4 Zong1* = secret-sect = Tantric Buddhism) which emphasizes 秘密 (*mi4 mi4* = secretive-intimate) teaching/transference of doctrines, 儀式 (*yi2 shi1* = rituals-formalities), 咒語 (*zhou4 yu3* = vow-words = secret incantations), 冥想 (*ming2 xiang3* = dark/deep-think = meditation), devotion to 上師 (*shang4 shi1* = high-teacher/master = guru).

by Diana Yue