

# 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 Los Angeles

裔

Putonghua pronunciation: *yi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yui6*

Meanings: descendant, offspring

裔 (radical 衣 *yi1*, clothes) means 後裔 (*hou4 yi4* = posterity's~descendants). Chinese want 子裔 (*zi3 yi4* = sons~descendants) to 延續香燈 (*yan2 xü2 xiang1 deng1* = prolong~continue~joss-sticks~lamp = continue ancestral worship and family line).

洛杉磯 (*luo4 san1 ji1* = "Los Angeles"-transliterated)'s population is 多族裔 (*duo1 zu2 yi4* = multi~race~descendent = multi-ethnic): whites, blacks, 西語系 (*xi1 yü3 xi4* = "S"panish-transliterated~language~line = Hispanics), 亞裔 (*ya3 yi4* = "A"sian-transliterated~descendants = Asians).

華裔 (*hua2 yi4* = Chinese~descendants) are from 台灣 (*tai2 wan1* = Taiwan), 香港 (*xiang1 gang3* = Hong Kong), 大陸 (*da4 lu4* = big~land = Mainland China). America's aborigines — 印第安裔 (*yin4 di4 an1 yi4* = "Indian"-transliterated~descendants = native Indians) — are pitifully out-numbered.

by Diana Yue