

# 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 austerity measures

債

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jai3*

Meanings: debt, borrowing, obligation

Ideogram 債 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 責 *ze2*, duty/obligation) means debt. 債務人 (*zhai4 wu4 ren2* = debt-duty~person = borrower), 欠債 (*qian4 zhai4* = owes~debt), signs I.O.U. to 債權人 (*zhai4 quan2 ren2* = debt-right-person = lender), promises to 還債 (*huan2 zhai4* = repay~debt).

For 人情債 (*ren2 qing2 zhai4* = person/human~feeling-debt = kindness/favor rendered/received), receiver must return kindness/favor. Avenger yells: 血債血償! (*xue3 zhai4 xue3 chang2* = blood~debt~blood~repay = Blood for blood!)

國家債券 (*guo2 jia1 zhai4 quan4* = state~home~debt~coupons) = national bonds. Impoverished government 債台高築 (*zhai4 tai2 gao1 zhu1* = debts~terrace~high~build = accumulates huge debts), 大量發債 (*da4 liang4 fa1 zhai4* = big~amount~issue~中鐵 debts/bonds = issues/sells massive amounts of bonds).