

# 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 presidential elections

Putonghua pronunciation: *lu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *loh3*

Meanings: donkey, ass

驢 (radical 馬 *ma3*, horse) is cousin of 馬 (*ma3*, horse), 騾 (*luo2*, mule). 驢子 (*lü2 zi0* = donkey~diminutive) = donkey: 野驢 (*ye3 lü2* = wild~ass), 家驢 (*jia1 lü2* = home~ass = bred donkey), 笨驢 (*ben4 lü2* = stupid~ass/person).

Chinese villagers keep 毛驢 (*mao2 lü2* = hairy~donkey = small donkeys) for 拉車 (*la1 che1* = pulling~carts), 推磨 (*tui1 mo2* = pushing~mill-stone). 驢肉 (*lü2 rou4* = donkey~meat) is edible. Idiom 非驢非馬 (*fei1 lü2 fei1 ma3* = not~donkey~not~horse) describes something not done/imitated properly, i.e. neither here nor there.

驢 is mascot of 民主黨 (*Min2 Zhu3 Dang3* = people-master-party = the Democratic Party). 漫畫 (*man4 hua4* = random~picture = cartoon) shows 象 (*xiang4*, elephant/Republicans), 驢 (*lü2*, donkey/Democrats) campaigning.

by Diana Yue