

# 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 Chinese sun god

陽

Putonghua pronunciation: *yang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeung4*

Meanings: male, sun, yang

太陽 (*tai4 yang2* = ultimate~yang/male-essence) = 日 (*ri4*, sun). 太陽系 (*tai4 yang2 xi4* = ultimate~yang/male-essence~system) = solar system. 太陽能 (*tai4 yang2 neng2* = sun~energy) = solar energy.

In traditional Chinese philosophy, 日 (sun) symbolizes 陽 (*yang2*, masculinity/strength), 月 (*yue4*, moon) symbolizes 陰 (*yin1*, femininity/gentleness). Taoist symbol 太極 (*tai4 ji2* = supreme~ultimate = Tai-chi/Tai-ji = semi-black semi-white circle) indicates co-existence of Yin and Yang in all things. Man's penis is 陽具 (*yang2 ju4* = male~organ), woman's vagina is 陰戶 (*yin1 hu4* = female~chamber).

陰陽 also means dark and light. 陽台 (*yang2 tai2* = sun~terrace) = verandah. We inhabit 陽間 (*yang2 jian1* = sun/male~area = world of the living). Ghosts inhabit 陰間 (*yin1 jian1* = moon/female~area = hell).

by Diana Yue