

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

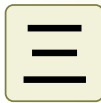
2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 Third World



Putonghua pronunciation: *san 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saam 1*

Meanings: three, third

三角 (*san jiao 13* = three~corners/angles) = triangle/triangular. 珠江三角洲 (*Zhu Jiang san jiao zhou 11131* = Pearl~River~triangular~water-surrounded-land = Pearl River delta). 三位一體 (*san wei yi ti 1413* = three~entities~one~body) describes Christianity's Holy Trinity. “三思!” (*san si 11* = three~think) means “Think thrice/more before you commit/act!” 三毛 (*San Mao 12* = Three~Hairs) = little beggar-boy in Adventures of San-mao, a popular 1940s cartoon series. 亞洲 (*Ya zhou 31* = “A”-of-Asia-transliterated~continent), 非洲 (*Fei zhou 11* = “f”-of-Africa-transliterated~continent), 拉丁美洲 (*La Ding Mei zhou 1131* = “Latin”-transliterated~“me”-of-America-transliterated~continent) form acronym “亞非拉” (*Ya Fei La 311* = Asia~Africa~Latin~America), i.e. 第三世界 (*di san shi jie 4144* = numerical-order~third-world~boundary = the Third World).