

# 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 conversion to Buddhism

渡

Putonghua pronunciation: *du4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do6*

Meanings: pass, cross, transport

渡 ( ) = 水 *shui3*, water + 度 *du4*, transport) means cross/carry across. 渡河 (*du4 he2* = crossing~the-river) needs 渡船 (*du4 chuan2* = transport~boat = ferryboat/barge). Couple 渡過 (*du4 guo4* = passed/went-through) decades together. 過渡期 (*guo4 du4 qi1* = through~cross~period) = interim.

Retiree 渡假 (*du4 jia4* = pass~vacation = goes on vacation). Prisoner 渡日如年 (*du4 ri4 ru2 nian2* = pass~day~resemble~year = passes each day with great difficulty). Old-maid 芳華虛度 (*huang1 hua2 xu1 du4* = fragrance~glamour~empty~pass = passes years/prime emptily).

Buddhism describes enlightenment as到彼岸 (*dao4 bi3 an4* = reaching~the-other/opposite~shore). Buddhists should 自渡 (*zi4 du4* = self~transport = attain enlightenment by own effort), 渡人 (*du4 ren2* = transport~people = bring others to enlightenment/redemption).

by Diana Yue