

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 Dunhuang

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging1*

Meaning: warp, principle route, text, classic, scripture, sutra

經 (radical 纟 = 絲 *si1*, silk/thread) means route/principle. 經緯 (*jing1 wei3* = warp-and-weft) also means longitude-and-latitude. Acupuncturist pricks needle into energy-spots in human body's 經絡 (*jing1 luo4* = nervous system's channels- meridians). 經歷 (*jing1 li4* = pass-through) = experience/adventure.

經典 (*jing1 dian3* = principle-thome) = classic: Daoism's 道德經 (*Dao4 De2 Jing* = Way-Virtue-Classic = Daodejing), Christianity's 聖經 (*Sheng4 Jing1* = Holy-Bible), Islam's 古蘭經 (*gu3 lan2 jing1* = Qoran). 馬經 (*ma3 jing1* = horse-classic/ authority) = racing tips.

Chinese monks translated 佛經 (*fo2 jing1* = Buddhist-sutras/ scriptures) from Sanskrit/Pali. Preachers 講經 (*jiang3 jing1* = expound-on-scriptures). Worshipers 唸經 (*nian4 jing1* = recite-scriptures/prayers). 藏經洞 (*cang2 jing1 dong4* = storing-sutras-caves) in Dunhuang is where millennium-old Buddhist scriptures were discovered in 1900.

by Diana Yue