

# 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 Buddha subduing Monkey

猴

Putonghua pronunciation: *hou2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hou4*

Meanings: monkey, ape, gibbon

猴 (radical 犻 = 狗 *gou3*, dog/animal) = 猿猴 (*yuan2 hou2* = gibbons-apes/monkeys). Novel 《西遊記》 (*Xi1 You2 Ji4* = west-travel-record = Journey to the West) immortalized 唐僧 (*Tang2 seng1* = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xüanzang/Tripitaka) and disciples Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy.

孫悟空 (*Sun1 Wu4 Kong1* = surname-Sun-understand-emptiness), aka 孫猴子 (*Sun1 hou2 zi0* = surname-Sun monkey), Cantonese term 馬騮精 (*ma3 liu2 jing1* = Cantonese “ma1 lau1 jing1” = monkey-demon), wields 金剛棒 (*jin1 gang1 bang4* = gold-strong-club = Diamond Club), knows 七十二變 (*qi1 shi2 er4 bian4* = seven-ten-two-changes = seventy-two/endsless ways of self-transforming disguises).

頑皮 (*huan2 pi2* = tough-skin = naughty/playful), 猴急 (*hou2 ji3* = monkey-impatient = restless/impatient) Monkey is acrobatic star-role in Chinese opera.

by Diana Yue