

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 呀

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

佛

Putonghua pronunciation: fo2

Cantonese pronunciation: fat6

Meanings: Buddha

佛 (fo2, short for “佛陀” fo2 tuo2) means Buddha. Both are transliterations of the original 梵文 (fan2 wen2 = Sanskrit-language) name. 佛祖 (fo2 zu3 = Buddha-ancestor = the first Buddha = Sakyamuni) founded 佛教 (fo2 jiao4 = Buddha-religion = Buddhism).

In novel 《西遊記》 (Xi1 You2 Ji4 = west-travel-record = Journey to the West), 唐僧 (Tang2 seng1 = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xūanzang/Tripitaka) journeyed from 中國 (Zhong1 Quo2 = central-country = China) to 印度 (Yin4 Du4 = “India”-transliterated) to obtain 佛經 (fo2 jing1 = Buddhist scriptures/sutras). 佛法無邊 (fo2 fa3 wu2 bian1 = Buddha's-law/power-no-edge) = Buddha is almighty. 口宣佛號 (kou3 xuan1 fo2 hao4 = mouth-exclaim-Buddha's-title = proclaiming Buddha's name) can vanquish demons.

by Diana Yue