

# 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



Putonghua pronunciation: *xin1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sam1*

Meanings: heart, centre, urge, mood, inclination

Pictogram 心 resembles shape of 心臟 (*xin1 zang4* = heart-internal-organ = heart). 心 has sentimental/moral connotations: 心情 (*xin1 qing2* = heart-feelings = mood), 好心 (*hao3 xin1* = good/kind-hearted), 愛心 (*ai4 xin1* = loving-heart = love/concern), 良心 (*liang2 xin1* = good-heart = conscience).

Monks/nuns 修心 (*xiu1 xin1* = repair/refine-heart = practice improving moral/spiritual awareness/toughness). 清心 (*qing1 xin1* = clear/clean-heart) means pure in heart.

In novel Journey to the West, 唐僧 (*Tang2 seng1* = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xūanzang/Tripitaka)'s 白馬 (*bai2 ma3* = white-horse) and disciple Monkey sometimes disobey him. Expression 意馬心猿 (*yi4 ma3 xin1 yuan2* = thought-horse-heart-monkey) describes someone with restless longings e.g. lusts, urge to escape/rebel. Buddhists recite 《心經》 (*Xin1 Jing1* = Heart-Sutra) to subdue temptations/demons.

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