

# 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 marine life

族

Putonghua pronunciation: *zu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juk6*

Meanings: race, tribe, clan, species

族 in humans means 種族 (*zhong3 zu2* = ethnic-race-tribe), 民族 (min2 zu2 = people~race), 氏族 (*shi4 zu2* = surname~tribe = clan). China has five major ethnic races: 漢 (*Han4*), 滿 (*Man3*, Manchus), 蒙 (*Meng2*, Mongolians), 回 (*Hui2*, Uighurs), 藏 (*Zang4* = Tibetans). 少數民族 (*shao3 shu4 min2 zu2* = few-number~people-tribe) = ethnic minorities.

上班族 (*shang4 ban1 zu2* = go-up-to~shift~tribe) means white-collar workers. Open societies accept 異族通婚 (*yi4 zu2 tong1 hun1* = different~race~through~marry = exogamy). 滅族 (*mie4 zu2* = eliminate~race = genocide) is universally condemned.

水族 (*shui3 zu2* = water~species) means marine life. Hongkong's 海洋公園 (*hai3 yang2 gong1 yuan2* = sea~ocean~public~garden = Ocean Park) has 水族館 (*shui3 zu2 guan3* = water~species~house = aquarium).