

# 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 PIIGS

Putonghua pronunciation: *yi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yi3*

Meanings: First word in Italy's Chinese name

古羅馬 (*gu3 luo2 ma3* = ancient~"Roma"-transliterated) built 帝國 (*di4 guo2* = emperor~state = empire), fostered 基督教 (*ji1 du2 jiao4* = "Christus"-transliterated~religion = Christianity), 文藝復興 (*wen2 yi4 fu4 xing1* = literature~arts~again~propser = the Renaissance). Modern Italy has 重工業 (*zhong4 gong1 ye4* = heavy~work~trade = heavy industries), 時裝業 (*shi2 zhuang1 ye4* = time~costume~industry = fashion industries), 旅遊業 (*lü3 you2 ye4* = travel~tour~industry = tourist industry). 經濟衰退 (*jing1 ji4 shuai1 tui4* = planning~irrigation~decline~recede = economic recession) reminds Italians of 二戰後 (*er4 zhan4 hou4* = two/second~war~after = post-WWII) hardship days.