

# 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 pretty women

Putonghua pronunciation: *xian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sin1*

Meaning: fairy, magical, immortal, celestial being in folklore

Ideogram 仙 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 山 *shan1*, mountain) means beyond mortal world: 神仙 (*shen2 xian1* = deities/spirits-fairies), 仙境 (*xian1 jing4* = fairy-realm), 仙山 (*xian1 shan1* = fairy-mountain), 仙草 (*xian1 cao3* = fairy/magic-herbs), 仙樂 (*xian1 yue4* = heavenly-music). Daoists take 仙藥 (*xian1 yao4* = fairy-elixir), 仙丹 (*xian1 dan1* = fairy-pills), 煉仙 (*lian4 xian1* = practice-alchemy-to-attain-fairyhood).

In Chinese folklore 百花仙子 (*bai2 hua1 xian1 zi0* = hundred-flowers-fairy-person) is fairy lady in charge of all flowers. Beautiful 狐仙 (*hu2 xian1* = fox-fairies) bewitch men. Orgasm/LSD produces 欲仙欲死 (*yü4 xian1 yü4 si3* = feel-like-fairy-feel-like-dying) effect.

Beauty queen 貌若天仙 (*mao4 ruo4 tian1 xian1* = visage-resemble-heavenly-fairy = is as beautiful as a fairy/goddess).

by Diana Yue