

# 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 old family money

基

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gei1*

Meanings: base, foundation

基 (radical 土 *tu3*, earth) depicts base made of rammed earth. 根基 (*gen1 ji1* = roots~base) = 基礎 (*ji1 chu3* = base~column's-stone-base) = base. 基本 (*ji1 ben3* = base~origin) = basic/fundamental. 地基 (*di4 ji1* = earth-land~base) = building's foundation. 基本建設 (*ji1 ben3 jian4 she4* = fundamental-basic-erect~facilities) = infrastructures.

基地 (*ji1 di4* = base~earth/area) = organization/activities' home-base. 基地組織 (*ji1 di4 zu3 zhi2* = base~area-form-knit = base organization = "The Base") is Al-Qaeda's Chinese translation. 基因 (*ji1 yin1* = base~factor) = "gene"'s-transliterated.

Self-made man rose from 基層 (*ji1 ceng2* = basic-layer = poor classes), built 基業 (*ji1 ye4* = base-achievement = enterprise), donated to 慈善基金 (*ci2 shan4 ji1 jin1* = loving-good-base-gold/money = charity funds).

by Diana Yue