

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 Han people

漢

Putonghua pronunciation: *han4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hom3*

Meaning: man, Han race, Han Dynasty, Chinese

Common noun 漢 (radical 讠 = 水 *shui3*, water) means man/ chap: 懶漢 (*lan3 han4* = lazy-man), 笨漢 (*ben4 han4* = stupid/clumsy-man), 好漢 (*hao3 han4* = brave/upright-man), 偷漢 (*tou1 han4* = steal-man) describes woman's adulterous behaviour.

漢朝 (*Han4 chao2* = Han-Dynasty, 202-220 BC) established empire and powerful cultural influence, hence 漢 means Chinese. 漢人 (*Han1 ren2* = Han-people/race) repeated 漢化 (*Han4 hua4* = Han-transformed = Sinicized) other race/cultures/religions. 漢學 (*Han4 xue2* = Han studies) = Sinology. 漢奸 (*Han4 jian1* = Chinese-traitor) = collaborator who betrays China.

漢水 (*Han4 shui3* = Han-River) is tributary of 長江 (*Chang2 Jiang1* = Long-River, aka Yangtze River). 漢白玉 (*Han4 bai2 yu4* = Han-white-jade) is white marble used since Han Dynasty.

by Diana Yue