

# 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 the Hui people

Putonghua pronunciation: *si4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji6*

Meaning: court, office, temple, monastery

寺 (radical 寸 *chun4*, inch) meant court/office: 大理寺 (*da4 li3 si4* = big-judge-office = ancient China's highest criminal court); now means 寺廟 (*si4 miao4* = monastery-temple): 佛寺 (*fo2 si4* = Buddhist-temple), 寺院 (*si4 yuan4* = monastic-building), 寺僧 (*si4 seng1* = monastery's-monks). Slangy term 謀人寺 (*mou2 ren2 si4* = cheat/harm-people-monastery) means rip-off shop/restaurant.

回教 (*Hui2 jiao4* = Hui-religion = Chinese Islam) is also called 清真教 (*qing1 zhen1 jiao4* = clean-pure/true-religion), from Muslims' eating/hygiene rules.

清真寺 (*qing1 zhen1 si4* = Islamic mosque, from Arabic root meaning 拜倒 *bai4 dao3* = worship/pray-prostrate) has 拱頂 (*gong3 ding3* = domed-top), 呼拜塔 (*hu1 bai4 ta3* = call-to-worship-towers). i.e. 喚禱塔 (*huan4 dao3 ta3* = call-to-prayers-towers), i.e. minarets.

by Diana Yue