

# 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

## 族

Putonghua pronunciation: **zu2**

Cantonese pronunciation: **juk6**

Meaning: clan, tribe, race, ethnic group, group of chemical elements

族 (containing character 矢 **shi3**, arrow) suggests bunched-together arrow-heads. 種族 (**zhong3 zu2** = seed/breed-tribe) = race. 閃族 (**Shan3 zu2** = "Sem"itic-transliterated-race) = Semites. 種族歧視 (**zhong3 zu2 qi2 shi4** = seed-race-sideways/incorrect-look = racial discrimination) causes 滅族 (**mie4 zu2** = eliminate-race = genocide).

民族國家 (**min2 zu2 guo2 jia1** = people-race-country-family) = nation state. China's five major ethnic groups are 漢 (**Han4** race), 滿 (**Man3**, Manchus), 蒙 (**Meng2**, Mongols), 回 (**Hui2** = Hui people including 維吾爾族 **Wei2 Wu2 Er3 zu2**, "Uighur"-transliterated-race), 藏 (**Zang4**, Tibetans).

族長 (**zu2 zhang3** = clan-leader) keeps/updates 家族 (**jia1 zu2** = family-clan)'s 族譜 (**zu2 pu3** = family/clan-records/charts). 上班族 (**shang4 ban1 zu2** = mount/attend-shift-tribe) describes blue/white collar class working regular hours.

by Diana Yue