

# 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 the myth of the ten suns



Putonghua pronunciation: *liu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lau4*

Meanings: leave, remain, keep, retain

留 = stay/keep, not depart/expel: 留宿 (*liu2 su4* = stay-the-night), 留學 (*liu2 xue2* = stay~study = study abroad).

羿射九日 (*Yi4 she4 jiu3 ri4* = Hou-yi~shot-down~nine~suns). 第十個太陽 (*di4 shi2 ge4 tai4 yang2* = number~ten~unit~ultimate~yang = the tenth sun) yelled: 手下留情! (*shou3 xia4 liu2 qing2* = hand~under~keep~feeling/kindness = Restrain your blow, don't hit/shoot/kill me!)

Hou-yi 留有餘地 (*liu2 you3 yu2 di4* = retain~has~remain~land = left room for manoeuvre/negotiation), 留下 (*liu2 xia4* = leave~down = kept) one sun, warns him: 留意! (*liu2 yi4* = keep~notion = attention!) 留在天下 (*liu2 zai4 tian1 shang4* = stay~in~sky~above), 為人民服務 (*wei4 ren2 min2 fu2 wu4* = for~human~people~serve~chores = serve the people!)