

# 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 Peach Blossom Fount

源

Putonghua pronunciation: *yüan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen4*

Meanings: source, origin, fountain head, cause

源 ( ) = 水 *shui3*, water + 原 *yüan2*, origin) means river/stream's source: 源頭 (*yüan2 tou2* = fountain-head), 起源 (*qi2 yüan2* = begin~source = origin/cause), 根源 (*gen1 yüan2* = root~source = origin). Desert travelers seek 水源 (*shui3 yüan2* = water~source = spring/stream). 黃河源 (Huang2 He2 yüan2 = Yellow~River's~source) is in Qinghai Province.

源遠流長 (*yüan2 yüan3 liu2 chang2* = source~distant~flow~long) describes age-old traditions/customs. 源源不絕 (*yüan2 yüan2 bu4 jue2* = flowing~flowing~no~cut-off = endless) supplies/help make charity-recipients 飲水思源 (*yin3 shui3 si1 yüan2* = drink~water~think~source = feel thankful for blessings/favors).

桃花源 (*tao2 hua1 yüan2* = peach~blossom~fount = source of stream hidden among peach-trees) 源於 (*yüan2 yü1* = originates~from) Chinese literature, is Chinese version of utopia.

by Diana Yue