

# 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 adultery

偷

Putonghua pronunciation: *tou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tou1*

Meanings: steal

偷 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, man + 俞 *yü2*, shortcut) suggests theft/stealth/secret: 偷聽 (*tou1 ting4* = steal+thily-listen = bugging), 偷竊 (*tou1 qie4* = steal-theft), 偷盜 (*tou1 dao4* = steal-rob). 小偷 (*xiao3 tou1* = small-thief) 偷錢 (*tou1 qian2* = steals-money).

偷渡 (*tou1 du4* = steal-crossing) = cross border illegally. 偷襲 (*tou1 xi2* = steal-attack) = ambush. 偷偷摸摸 (*tou1 tou1 mo1 mo1* = steal-steal-feel/finger = secretly/stealthily) 偷情 (*tou1 qing2* = steal-love = have secret rendezvous).

Chinese say 妻不如妾, 妾不如妓, 妓不如偷 (*qi1 bu4 ru2 qie4, qie4 bu4 ru2 ji4, ji4 bu4 ru2 tou1* = wife-can't-compare-with-concubine, concubine-can't-compare-with-prostitute, prostitute-can't-compare-with-steal), i.e. Pleasure-wise, secret/hushed sex affair by far surpasses prostitute/concubine/wife.

by Diana Yue