

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 外

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 foreign maids

外

Putonghua pronunciation: *wai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngo16*

Meanings: outside, beyond, external, foreign

外 (夕 *xi2*, evening + 卜 *bu1*, forecast = forecasting faraway events) means outside/foreign. 門外 (*men2 wai4* = door-beyond) = outside door. 海外 (*hai3 wai4* = sea-beyond) = overseas. 外國人 (*wai4 guo2 ren2* = foreign-country-person/people) = non-Chinese/foreigners/aliens.

外交官 (*wai4 jiao1 guan1* = foreign-relations-official = diplomats) study 外國 (*wai4 guo2* = foreign-countries), 外語 (*wai4 yu3* = foreign-languages). 媚外 (*mei4 wai4* = please/lure-foreigners = kowtowing to foreigners), 排外 (*pai2 wai4* = rejecting/turning-away-foreigners) affect 中外交流 (*zhong1 wai4 jiao1 liu2* = China-foreign-cross-flow = Chinese-foreign exchange).

Hong Kong attracts 外資 (*wai4 zi1* = foreign-capital), 外商 (*wai4 shang1* = foreign-traders/businesses), 外傭 (*wai4 yong1* = foreign-workers), 外國間諜 (*wai4 guo2 jian4 die2* = foreign-country-between-spy = foreign spies).

by Diana Yue