

# 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 PIIGS

西

Putonghua pronunciation: *xi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sai1*

Meanings: First word in Spain's Chinese name

Spain's Chinese name is 西班牙 (*xi1 ban1 ya2*). These three *zi* are chosen for their sounds, not their literal meaning “west-stripes-teeth”.

Spanish/Portuguese 征服者 (*zheng1 fu2 zhe3* = march~subduer = conquerors/conquistadors) established colonies in 拉丁美洲 (*la1 ding1 mei3 zhou1* = “Latin”-transliterated~“Mei”in-“America”-transliterated = Latin America). After 1930s' 西班牙內戰 (*xi1 ban1 ya2 nei4 zhan4* = Spain~inside~war = the Spanish Civil War), Spain evolved from 王權 (*wang2 quan2* = king~power = monarchy) into 共和國 (*gong4 he2 guo2* = together~harmony~state = republic).

Inception of 歐羅 (*ou1 luo2* = “Euro”-transliterated) spurred 內需 (*nei4 xu1* = inside~need = domestic demand), 通脹 (*tong1 zhang4* = money~swell = inflation), housing 泡沫 (*pao4 mo4* = bubble~foam = bubble), finally recent recession.