Character Builder 您好嗎？你

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 gourmet dining

奢

Putonghua pronunciation: she 1
Cantonese pronunciation: che 1
Meanings: superfluous, extravagant, wasteful

奢 = means superfluous: 奢望 (she wang 14 = overly-hopeful), 奢 談 (she tan 12 = superfluous-talk = brag). 生活奢侈 (sheng huo she chi 1213 = life-live-luxurious-extravagant) = living extravagantly.

法拉利 (fa la li 314 = “Ferraris”-transliterated) are 奢侈品 (she chi pin 123 = luxurious-exaggerate-objects = luxury items). Hosting 滿漢全席 (man han quan xi 3422 = Manchurian-Han-complete-dining-table = three-day banqueting on Manchurian-style and Han-style gourmet dishes) is 窮奢極侈 (qiong she ji chi 2123 = exhaust-luxury-ultimate-extravagance = extreme extravaganza).

Sages teach “由儉入奢易 (you jian ru she yi 24414 = from-frugality-enter-extravagance-easy), 由奢入儉難 (you she ru jian nan 21442 = from-extravagance-enter-frugality-difficult)”: Splurging is easy; economizing is hard.

by Diana Yue