Character Builder 你好嗎?

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:

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 the nouveau-riche

戸

Putonghua pronunciation: hu4
Cantonese pronunciation: woo6
Meanings: door, house, household, abode

Pictograms 戶 (door-panel) + 門 (men2, facing door-panels) = 門 戶 (men2 hu4 = doors/house). 戶外 (hu4 wai4 = house-outside) = outdoors.

Immigrants obtain 戶籍 (hu4 ji2 = house-abode-registration = right of domicile), 安家落戶 (an1 jia1 luo4 hu4 = furnish-home-settle-house = settle down), open 銀行戶口 (yin2 hang2 hu4 kou3 = silver/money-firm-house-mouth/unit = bank accounts). City lights show 千門萬戶 (qian1 men2 wan4 hu4 = thousand-doors-ten-thousand-households = countless households).

個體戶 (ge4 ti3 hu4 = unit-body-household = individual running private/non-corporate business) makes money, becomes暴發戶 (bao4 fa1 hu4 = abrupt-rich-person = nouveau riche). Ruined 大 戶人家 (da4 hu4 ren2 jia1 = big-house-person-home = big/rich family) becomes 破落戶 (po4 luo4 hu4 = bankrupt-fallen-family).

by Diana Yue