

# Character Builder

# 您好嗎? 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 Chinese moon goddess



Putonghua pronunciation: *yüe4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuet6*

Meanings: moon, month

月 = 月亮 (*yüe4 liang4* = moon-bright = moon). 月球 (*yüe4 qiu2* = moon-sphere) = Earth's moon. 月蝕 (*yüe4 shi2* = moon-erode) = lunar eclipse. Astronauts 登月 (*deng1 yüe4* = mount-moon) = land on the moon. Beethoven wrote 月光曲 (*yüe4 guang1 qü3* = moon-light-song = Moonlight Sonata).

Denoting time, 月份 (*yüe4 fen4* = month-share) means month. 五月 (*wu3 yüe4* = fifth-month) = May. 月經 (*yüe4 jing1* = month-passage) = women's menstruation. 月薪 (*yüe4 xin1* = month's-firewood) = monthly salary. 滿月 (*man3 yüe4* = full-moon) also means baby becoming one-month-old.

日月星辰 (*ri4 yüe4 xing1 chen2* = sun-moon-star-star) collectively means stars/planets/moons populating 宇宙 (*yü3 zhou4* = four-dimensions-past-present-future = all space and all time = the universe).

by Diana Yue