

# 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: *yin1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yam1*

Meanings: Yin, moon, female, dark, shadowy, ghostly

Taosim's 日 (*ri4*, sun) means 太陽 (*tai4 yang2* = ultimate-masculinity), 月 (*yue*, moon) means 太陰 (*tai4 yin1* = ultimate-femininity). 陰曆 (*yin1 li4* = moon-calendar) = lunar calendar.

Philosophical term 陰陽 (*yin1 yang2* = Yin-Yang) denotes opposite principles/forces: 男女 (*nan2 nü3* = male-female/man-woman), 剛柔 (*gang1 rou2* = hard/strong-soft/gentle), 明暗 (*ming2 an4* = bright/open-dark/secretive). 陰毛 (*yin1 mao2* = Yin-hair) = pubic hair. 陰盛陽衰 (*yin1 sheng4 yang2 shuai1* = Yin-prosper-Yang-decline) describes party/population with many women and few men. Body's 陰陽失調 (*yin1 yang2 shi1 tiao2* = Yin-Yang-lose-harmony) = hormone/sexual imbalance.

陰 = dark/evil: 陰影 (*yin1 ying3* = dark-shadow), 陰謀 (*yin1 mou2* = dark/evil-plot), 陰森 (*yin1 sen1* = dark-eerie). 陰間 (*yin1 jian1* = dark-area) = hell.

by Diana Yue