

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:

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 Buddha's Birthday

佛

Putonghua pronunciation: fo2

Cantonese pronunciation: fat6

Meanings: Buddha

佛 (fo2) is short for 佛陀 (fo2 tuo2 = Buddha). “佛陀” and “Buddha” are transliterated from the same 梵文 (fan2 wen2 = Sanskrit-language) name.

釋迦牟尼 (shi4 jia1 mou2 ni2 = Sakyamuni) was born in 印度 (yin4 du4 = “India”-transliterated) in 5th century BC. He 出家 (chu1 jia1 = exit~family = left his family/home), attained 正覺 (zheng4 jue2 = correct~awakening/enlightenment), 成佛 (cheng2 fo2 = become~Buddha = attained Buddhahood), founded 佛教 (fo2 jiao4 = Buddha-religion = Buddhism), entered 涅槃 (nie4 pan4 = Nirvana) upon death, was honored as 佛祖 (fo2 zu3 = Buddha-ancestor = the first Buddha).

Buddhists study 佛經 (fo2 jing1 = Buddhist scriptures/sutras), celebrate 佛誕 (fo2 dan4 = Buddha's~birthday) every year.