

# 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 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.