

# 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:

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 conversion to Buddhism

剃

Putonghua pronunciation: *ti4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tai3*

Meanings: shave, tonsure

剃 (radical 刂 = 刀 *dao1*, broad-bladed knife/sword) = using 剃刀 (*ti4 dao1* = shaving-knife) or razor. 鬚 (*xu1*, face-hair/ moustache), 鬍 (*hu2*, beard), 體毛 (*ti3 mao2* = body-hair) need 剃 (*ti4*, shaving). 剃鬚水 (*ti4 xu1 shui3* = shave-moustache-water) = after-shave.

Buddhist 出家人 (*chu1 jia1 ren2* = out/leave-family-person = monk/nun) 剃度 (*ti4 du4* = shave-conversion = is tonsured), 落髮 (*luo4 fa3*, = fall/drop-hair = cuts/shaves away hair), 剃光頭 (*ti4 guang1 tou2* = shave-shiny/bald-head = keep bald head), parts with 三千煩惱絲 (*san1 qian1 fan2 nao3 si1* = three-thousand-worries-anger-silk-strands = hair, symbol of human desires/woes).

Cantonese expression 剃眼眉 (Putonghua *ti4 yan3 mei2* = Cantonese *tai3 ngaan5 mei4* = shave-eye-brows) means slighting/humiliating someone publicly, without giving face.