

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 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 Beijing

橋

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kiu4*

Meanings: bridge

橋 (木 *mu4*, wood + 喬 *qiao2*, tree) = 橋樑 (*qiao2 liang2* = bridge-beam = bridge). Engineers 修橋 (*xiu1 qiao2* = build/repair-bridges). Pedestrians/cars 過橋 (*guo4 qiao2* = pass-bridge) = cross bridge. Having crossed 奈何橋 (*nei4 he2 qiao2* = tolerate-how-bridge = "Helpless/Sighing Bridge"), dying souls forget world/memories.

China has beautiful ancient 拱橋 (*gong3 qiao2* = arched-bridges) e.g. 蘆溝橋 (*lu2 gou1 qiao2* = reeds-stream-bridge = Marco Polo Bridge) outside Beijing, where Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) began. 金水橋 (*jin1 shui3 qiao2* = gold-water-bridge) strides moat encircling Beijing's 紫禁城 (*zi3 jin4 cheng2* = purple/imperial-Forbidden-City).

天橋 (*tian1 qiao2* = sky-bridge) means old Beijing's Tianqiao District offering folk entertainment/acrobatics/food/fun, or modern cities' 立交橋 (*li4 jiao1 qiao2* = stand/three-dimensional-cross-bridge = overpasses/flyovers).

by Diana Yue