

# Character Builder 您好學？

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 San Francisco

西

Putonghua pronunciation: *xī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sai1*

Meaning: west, westward, western

西 means west. China is 中國 (*Zhong1 Guo2* = Middle-Kingdom), with 東南西北 (*dong1 nan2 xi1 bei3* = east-south-west-north) regions. 21st century's target is 開發大西北 (*kai1 fa1 da4 xi1 bei3* = open-develop-big-west-north = developing the huge northwestern region).

東洋 (*dong1 yang2* = region across eastern-ocean) means Japan, 西洋 (*xi1 yang2* = region across western-ocean) means Europe/Americas, i.e. 西方 (*xi1 fang1* = west-direction/region = the West).

US territory expanded 由東至西 (*you2 dong1 zhi4 xi1* = from-east-to-west). Whites 打紅番 (*da3 hong2 fan1* = fought-red-Indians), 搶地 (*qiang3 di4* = snatched/took-land), won 西部 (*xi1 bu4* = west-part/region = the West), 殖民 (*zhi2 min2* = plant-people = established settlements/colonies), developed 西岸 (*xi1 an4* = west-coast).

by Diana Yue