

# 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 Qing Dynasty

清

Putonghua pronunciation: *qing2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ching1*

Meanings: pure, clean, plain, name of Chinese dynasty

清 ( ) = 水 *shui3*, water + 青 *qing1*, blue/green) means clear/pure/clean: 清潔 (*qing1 jie2* = pure~clean), 清水 (*qing1 shui3* = plain~water without additives), 清理 (*qing1 li3* = clean~tidy-up). Locusts 吃清光 (*chi1 qing1 guan1* = eat~clean~finish = eat up all) crops.

清高 (*qing1 gao1* = pure~lofty = principled, uncompromising) official refuses bribes, 兩袖清風 (*liang3 xiu4 qing1 feng1* = two~sleeves~fresh/cool~wind = has little money).

漢滿蒙回藏 (*Han4, Man3, Meng2, Hui2, Zang4*) are China's major ethnic races. 滿人 (*Man3 ren2* = Man~people = the Manchus/Manchurians), northeastern nomads earlier called 女真 (*Nü3 Zhen1*) and 金 (*Jin1*), conquered 漢人 (*Han4 ren2* = Han~people = the Han-Chinese), established 清朝 (*Qing1 Chao2* = the Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911).