

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 more animal stories

猴

Putonghua pronunciation: *hou2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hou4*

Meanings: monkey

達爾文 (da2 er3 wen2 = “Darwin”-transliterated)’s 進化論 (*jin4 hua4 lun4* = advance-transform-theory = theory of evolution) says man came from 猿 (*yuan2*, apes).

猴子 (*hou2 zi0* = monkey~diminutive = monkeys), 黑猩猩 (*hei1 xing1 xing1* = black~chimpanzees) are intelligent. Chinese literature invented 孫悟空 (*Sun1 Wu4 Kong1* = 美猴王 *Mei3 Hou2 Wang2* = Beautiful-Monkey-King) who escorted Tripitaka to India to 取經 (*qu3 jing1* = seek~Buddhist-sutras). Japanese movie-makers invented giant gorilla 金剛 (*Jin1 Gang1* = King Kong). 沐猴而冠 (*mu4 hou2 er2 guan4* = bathe~monkey~and~give-it-hat) describes ugly/cheap guy glorified by expensive clothes or impressive titles. 樹倒猢猻散 (*shu4 dao3 hu2 sun1 shan4* = tree~fall~monkeys~disperse) means when rich/powerful house/institution collapses its dependents will desert it.

by Diana Yue