

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 Halloween

聖

Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing3*

Meanings: holy, sacred, saint, supreme

聖 = 神聖 (*shen2 sheng4* = god~saint = holy/sacred): 聖經 (*sheng4 jing1* = holy~scriptures/bible), 聖地 (*sheng4 di4* = holy-land). 聖 also means supreme: 針灸聖手 (*zhen1 jiu4 sheng4 shou3* = needle~singe~supreme~hand) means celebrated acupuncture-moxibustion doctor.

儒家 (*ru2 jia1* = scholar/Confucian~family/school = Confucianism) worships 聖賢 (*sheng4 xian2* = saint~virtuous = sages), honors 孔子 (*Kong3 zi3* = Confucius), 孟子 (*Meng4 zi3* = Mencius) as 聖人 (*sheng4 ren2* = saint~person = sages of supreme virtue).

Christians worship 聖三一 (*sheng4 san1 yi1* = holy~three~one = the Holy Trinity), observe 萬聖節 (*wan4 sheng4 jie2* = 10,000~saint~festival = All Saints Day) which commemorates all 聖徒 (*sheng4 tu2* = God's~disciples) and 殉道者 (*xun4 dao4 zhe3* = die-for~way/teaching~persons = martyrs).