

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 dragons



Putonghua pronunciation: *kong3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung4*

Meanings: fear, terror

恐 = 恐懼 (*kong3 ju4* = fear~fear). “我恐怕 ...” (*wo2 kong3 pa4* = I~fear~fear) = “I’m afraid ...”

恐嚇 (*kong3 xia4* = fear~terrorize) = threaten. 恐怖主義者 (*kong3 bu4 zhu3 yi4 zhe3* = terror~main~meaning~person = terrorists) create 恐慌 (*kong3 huang1* = fear~fear = panic), necessitating 反恐 (*fan2 kong3* = anti-terrorism) measures.

恐怖 (*kong3 bu4* = fear~terror). “Dinosaur” (ancient Greek “dino”, terrible/huge + “saur”, lizard = “terrible lizard”) is translated into Japanese kanji “恐竜” and Chinese “恐龍” (*kong3 long2* = fearful~dragon).

Dinosaurs leave 化石 (*hua4 shi2* = melted/transformed~stones = fossils). To Hongkong parents, kids are “化骨龍” (*hua4 gu3 long2* = melt~bones~dragons — they devour/consume their parents to the bones!)

by Diana Yue