

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 *Journey to the West*

師

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *si1*

Meanings: teacher, master

In China's 唐朝 (*Tang2 chao2* = Tang~Dynasty, 618-907AD), Buddhist monk 玄奘 (*Xuan2 Zang1*) travelled through Xinjiang to India for nineteen years, wrote travelogue 《大唐西域記》 (*Da4 Tang2 Xi1 Yu4 Ji4* = Great-Tang-Western-Regions-Records), became 一代宗師 (*yi1 dai4 zong1 shi1* = one-generation-leader-master = age's great master) of Chinese Buddhism, translated many Sanskrit 佛經 (*fo2 jing1* = Buddhist sutras/scriptures) into Chinese.

In novel 《西遊記》 (*xi1 you2 ji4* = west-travel-record = Journey to the West) he is called 唐三藏 (*Tang1 San3 Zang4* = Tang-Dynasty~three~sutra-collections = Tripitaka).

His three disciples 護師 (*hu4 shi1* = protect-teacher) throughout the perilous journey, called him 師父 (*shi1 fu4* = "teacher-father"), 恩師 (*en1 shi1* = grace-teacher = "magnanimous teacher/mentor").

by Diana Yue