

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*



Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging1*

Meanings: classic

經 means principle route/text. Acupuncturist pricks energy-spots in human body's 經絡 (*jing1 luo4* = channels-meridians). 經典 (*jing1 dian3* = authoritative-code) = classic/bible: 佛經 (*fo2 jing1* = Buddhist-sutras/scriptures), 《聖經》 (*sheng4 jing1* = Christianity's Holy-Bible), 《古蘭經》 (*gu3 lan2 jing1* = Islam's Qoran). 天經地義 (*tian1 jing1 di4 yi4* = heaven-authority-earth-significance) = something indisputably rightful/deserving.

唐僧 (*Tang2 seng1* = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xuanzang/ Tripitaka) 上西天取經 (*shang4 xi1 tian1 qu3 jing1* = mount-west-heaven-get-scripture = went to Western Heaven, i.e. India, to find Buddhist scriptures). Today, 取經 (*qu3 jing1* = get-scripture) describes junior seeking knowledge/advice from senior/teacher.

Worshippers 唸經 (*nian4 jing1* = recite-scriptures). Preachers 講經 (*jiang3 jing1* = talk/preach-scriptures). Bettors study 馬經 (*ma3 jing1* = horse-classic = racing tips).

by Diana Yue