

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: *kang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kong3*

Meanings: high, excessive, firm, haughty

亢 = high. Soprano/tenor's voices are 高亢 (*gao1 kang1* = tall~high). Desert climate is 亢旱 (*kang4 han4* = high~drought = arid). Liquor-drinkers easily get 亢奮 (*kang1 fen4* = high~excited).

Chinese fortune-telling forecasts person/institution/country's fortune by interpreting 卦 (*gua4*, six-line diagrams with cryptic names) from the ancient classic 《易經》 (*yi4 jing1* = I Ching = changes~classic = Book of Changes), e.g. 潛龍勿用 (*qian2 long2 wu4 yong4* = submerged~dragon~not-used = lack of fortune/recognition), 飛龍在天 (*fei1 long2 zai4 tian1* = flying~dragon~in-sky = waxing/zenith of fortune), 亢龍有悔 (*kang4 long2 you3 hui4* = too-high~dragon~has~regret = waning/diminishing of fortune).

Wise/well-bred people's behavior to other is 不亢不卑 (*bu4 kang4 bu4 bei1* = not~haughty~not~lowly = neither haughty nor self-humiliating).

by Diana Yue