

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 man's innate good nature



Putonghua pronunciation: *tong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung4*

Meanings: child

童 = 兒童 (*er2 tong2* = child-child = children), 孩子 (*hai2 zi0* = child-diminutive = child). 童心猶在 (*tong2 xin1 you2 zai4* = child's-heart-still-exist) describes fun-loving adults. 童子身 (*tong2 zi3 shen1* = child-diminutive-body) = boy's virginity. 童貞女馬利亞 (*tong2 zhen1 nu3 ma3 li4 ya4* = child-virginity-girl/woman- "Maria"/"Mary"-transliterated) = the Virgin Mary. Poets praise 童年 (*tong2 nian2* = child-years = childhood), 童真 (*tong2 zhen1* = child-true/frank = children's innocence/naivety). Society deplores 戀童癖 (*lian3 tong2 pi3* = love-children-obsession = pedophilia).

Philosopher 孟子 (*Meng4 Zi3* = Mencius) used 孺子 (*ru2 zi3* = young-child) to demonstrate human nature. 孺子牛 (*ru2 zi3 niu2* = young-child's-buffalo) means loving teacher/parent who, like a tame buffalo, lets pupil/child ride him.