

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: *jing3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeng2*

Meanings: well

Character 井 (= well) resembles enclosed hole: 水井 (*shui2 jing3* = water~well), 礦井 (*kuang4 jing3* = mining~well), 油井 (*you2 jing3* = oil~well). Traditional houses have 天井 (*tian1 jing3* = sky~well = patios).

Desert people 打井 (*da3 jing3* = hit~well = dig well) for 井水 (*jing2 shui3* = well~water). 井底蛙 (*jing2 di3 wa1* = well~bottom~frog = frog inside well = poorly-informed/ignorant person) 坐井觀天 (*zuo4 jing3 guan1 tian1* = sit-in~well~watch~sky = has limited vision). Lazy people 臨渴掘井 (*lin2 ke3 jue2 jing3* = upon~thirsty~dig~well = make effort only when really urgent).

孟子 (*Meng4 Zi3* = Mencius) tells story: Toddler playing near 井沿 (*jing3 yan2* = well's~brink) is about to 墮井 (*duo4 jing3* = plunge/fall-into~well).