

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 fox borringw tiger's majesty



Putonghua pronunciation: *hu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo2*

Meanings: tiger

虎 (= 老虎 *lao2 hu3* = old-tiger) is 百獸之王 (*bai2 shou4 zhi1 wang2* = hundred-beasts~'s-king = king of beasts). 東北虎 (*dong1 bei3 hu3* = east~north-tiger) = Manchurian tiger.

Nobody dares 捋虎鬚 (*luo1 hu3 xu1* = stroke~tiger's~whiskers = irritate/taunt powerful bully). 虎口餘生 (*hu3 kou3 yu2 sheng1* = tiger~mouth~remain~alive) means narrowly escaping from peril.

Chinese call tiger “山君” (*shan1 jun1* = mountain's~ruler). Ministers know 伴君如伴虎 (*ban4 jun1 ru2 ban4 hu3* = accompany~ruler~resembles~accompany~tiger = serving a tyrant closely is like serving a tiger — it's dangerous/scary! 與虎謀皮 (*yu2 hu3 mou2 pi2* = to~tiger~ask-for~skin) means asking a dangerous person to cede/sell to you his close interests — it's naïve/dangerous and can't be done!