

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

憐

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lin4*

Meanings: pity

憐 (radical ↑ = 心 *xin1*, heart) means pity/concern. Parents 憐愛 (*lian2 ai4* = care-for-love) their children. Sentimental girl 憐惜 (*lian2 xi1* = pity-regret) withered flowers. War victims are 可憐 (*ke3 lian2* = can~pity = pitiable).

People in the same boat 同病相憐 (*tong2 bing4 xiang1 lian2* = same~illness~mutual-pity = sympathize with each other). 搖尾乞憐 (*yao2 wei3 qi3 lian2* = wave/wag~tail~beg-for~pity) describes puppies or person's self-debasing gestures to seek help/forgiveness.

Mencius says: Everyone has 惻隱之心 (*ce1 yin3 zhi1 xin1* = sorrow~grief~'s-heart = sorrow/sympathy for the danger/tragedy of others). 弱者 (*ruo4 zhe3* = weak/frail-people) in 危險 (*wei1 xian3* = precipitous~danger), 不幸 (*bu4 xing4* = not-fortunate = distress) need our 憐憫 (*lian2 min3* = pity~commiseration).

by Diana Yue