

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

性

Putonghua pronunciation: *xing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing3*

Meanings: quality, nature, sex

性 (radical ↑ = 心 *xin1*, heart) = quality/nature: male/female 性別 (*xing4 bie2* = sex/gender~distinction), person's 個性 (*ge4 xing4* = individual~character), car's 性能 (*xing4 neng2* = quality~function/efficiency). Daoism/Taoism categorizes 物性 (*wu4 xing4* = things' nature/essence) into 金 (*jin1*, metal), 木 (*mu4*, wood), 水 (*shui3*, water), 火 (*huo3*, fire), 土 (*tu3*, earth).

Novelists describe 人性 (*ren2 xing4* = human~nature), characters' 性格 (*xing4 ge2* = nature~type = personalities). Fickle women 水性楊花 (*shui3 xing4 yang2 hua1* = water's~nature~poplar~flower = drift/change like water/poplar filaments). Speeding drivers are 性急 (*xing4 ji2* = nature~urgent = impatient). Killer/rapist 獸性大發 (*shou4 xing4 da4 fa1* = beast~nature~big~explode = turns wildly aggressive).

Mencius has positive view of mankind's 天性 (*tian1 xing4* = heaven/natural~quality = innate nature).

by Diana Yue