

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: *shan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sin6*

Meanings: good

善 = 善良 (*shan4 liang2* = good-kind), is opposite of 惡 (*e4*, bad/evil). Smiles indicate 善意 (*shan4 yi4* = good/friendly feeling/intention). 行善 (*xing2 shan4* = walk/do-good) = perform good deeds. 善終 (*shan4 zhong1* = good-end) = die a natural/peaceful death. 惡報 (*e4 bao4* = bad-return) = fate's punishment to evil-doers.

Mencius tells story: Seeing 孺子 (*ru2 zi3* = young-child) about to 墮井 (*duo4 jing3* = fall-into-well), we all rush to 搶救 (*qiang3 jiu4* = snatch~save = rescue). Hence his 性善說 (*xing4 shan4 shuo1* = nature~good~saying = doctrine about man's innate good/benevolent nature).

Maxim “人之初，性本善” (*ren2 zhi1 chu1, xing4 ben3 shan4* = person~'s~beginning, nature-originally~good) means “Children are born with good/sweet nature”.

by Diana Yue