

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 fortune-telling

Putonghua pronunciation: *wu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo4*

Meanings: shaman, witch, medium

巫 (ideogram resembling dancing shaman waving sleeves) = shaman. 巫醫 (*wu1 yi1* = shaman/witch-doctor) performs 巫術 (*wu1 shu4* = shaman-method = shamanism) for healing.

巫師 (*wu1 shi1* = shaman-master/wizard), 女巫 (*nu3 wu1* = woman-shaman/witch) are 神媒 (*shen2 mei2* = gods' spirits'-go-between = medium) who communicate with 鬼神 (*gui3 shen2* = ghosts-gods/spirits).

Worshippers 求神問卜 (*qiu2 shen2 wen4 bu3* = beg-gods-ask-fortune-forecast = seek divination), believe 神諭 (*shen2 yu4* = god's-edict = oracle) foretells 吉凶 (*ji2 xiong1* = fortune-misfortune), recite 咒語 (*zhou4 yu3* = bless-curse-words = incantations), wear 符咒 (*fu2 zhou4* = symbol-curse = spells) to 趨吉避凶 (*qu1 ji2 bi4 xiong1* = approach/follow~fortune~ avoid-misfortune = find luck), unaware it is 迷信 (*mi2 xin4* = lost/misled/infatuated~belief = superstition).