

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 the prodigal son



Putonghua pronunciation: *chong3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chung2*

Meanings: love, being fond of, bestowing special favor

Character 寵 shows 宀 (= roof/shelter) + 龍 (*long2*, dragon, symbol of supremacy). 寵 = 寵愛 (*chong3 ai4* = favor-love): 寵物 (*chong3 wu4* = favored~thing = pet), 寵妾 (*chong3 qie4* = favorite~concubine). Celebrities are media's 寵兒 (*chong3 er2* = favorite~child = favorites with the media).

Kids of indulgent parents get 寵壞 (*chong3 wai4* = love~bad = spoiled). After regime change, minister who once 得寵 (*de2 chong3* = gained/was-in~favor) 失寵 (*shi1 chong3* = loses~favor = goes out of favor).

Man of integrity 寵辱不驚 (*chong3 ru3 bu4 jing1* = favor~insult~not~fear = remains calm despite heaping of honors or insults). Praised/invited person exclaims, “受寵若驚!” (*shou4 chong3 ruo4 jing1* = receive~favor~resemble~stunned = “I’m overwhelmed by your compliment/kindness!”)