

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

浪

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long6*

Meanings: unrestrained, roaming

Noun 浪 means wave. Verb 流浪 (*liu2 lang4* = flow~wave) = roam/wander. 流浪漢 (*liu2 lang4 han4* = flow~wave~man) = tramp. 浪人 (*lang4 ren2* = roaming~person) is Chinese translation of Japanese term “ronin”.

浪費 (*lang4 fei4* = unrestrained~spend) = waste/wasteful. 浪得虛名 (*lang4 de2 xu1 ming2* = waste~obtain~empty~name) describes much-praised person who doesn't deserve his fame.

浪子 (*lang4 zi3* = wandering~son = prodigal son) 浪跡天涯 (*lang4 ji1 tian1 ya2* = roam~steps~sky~edge) = roams far away), 生活放浪 (*sheng1 huo2 fang4 lang4* = born~live~release~roam = leads unrestrained/wild life-style). 浪子回頭金不換! (*lang4 zi3 hui2 tou2 jin1 bu4 huan4* = prodigal~son~return~head~gold~not~exchange) = A prodigal son's repentance and self-reform cannot be purchased even with gold!