

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 underclass

僕

Putonghua pronunciation: *pu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *buk3*

Meanings: servant

僕 (亻 = 人 *ren2* carrying things) means 僕人 (*pu2 ren2* = servant-person = servant). Nobleman's home 僕婢如雲 (*bi4 pu2 ru2 yun2* = maids~servants~resemble~clouds = had countless servants): 管家 (*guan3 jia1* = manage-home = butler/housekeeper), 侍婢 (*shi4 bi4* = serving-girls/maids), 廚師 (*chu2 shi1* = kitchen-master = chefs/cooks), 園丁 (*yuan2 ding1* = garden-man = gardeners), 轎夫 (*jiao4 fu1* = sedan-chair-men/carriers).

僕從 (*pu2 cong2* = servants-aides/assistants) surround tycoon. Sancho Panza was Don Quixote's 老僕 (*lao3 pu2* = old/longtime-servant), 忠僕 (*zhong1 pu2* = loyal/dedicated-servant). In olden-day China's western establishments/restaurants, calling “僕歐!” (*pu2 ou1*) meant “Boy!” (servant/waiter).

公僕 (*gong1 pu2* = public-servants) means 政府僱員 (*zheng4 fu3 gu4 yuan2* = administration-bureau-employed-members = government employees).

by Diana Yue