

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 Buddha's Birthday

Putonghua pronunciation: *ku3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo2*

Meanings: hardship, bitterness, suffering

苦 is noun/adjective meaning flavor/experience/feeling. Learning kung-fu requires 苦練 (*ku3 lian4* = hard/persistent-practice). Underdogs have to 吃苦頭 (*chi1 ku3 tou2* = eat-hard/bitter-head = rough it, take shit). 先苦後甜 (*xian1 ku3 hou4 tian2* = first-bitter-next/last-sweet) describes hard-earned success.

Wounds cause 痛苦 (*tong4 ku3* = pain-suffering). Wars cause 苦難 (*ku3 nan4* = suffering-calamities). Mini-bonds' 苦主 (*ku2 zhu3* = suffering-master = victims) storm banks. Pessimist 苦笑 (*ku3 xiao4* = bitter-smile/laugh = smiles depressively), says "Everything is 苦惱 (*ku2 nao3* = suffering-vexation/worries).

Buddhists preach: "苦海無邊，回頭是岸!" (*ku2 hai3 wu2 bian1, hui2 tou2 shi4 an4* = suffering-sea-no-edge, return-head-is-shore = "There's no end to life's sufferings. Turn back, disengage yourself, and deliverance is straight ahead!")