

Character Builder

您好嗎? 呀

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 subduing Monkey

Putonghua pronunciation: *fan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *faan1*

Meanings: flip, turn, turn over, somersault

翻 (番 *fan1*, turn/round + 羽 *yü3*, feathers) means flip/turn-over. Waves 翻滾 (*fan1 gun3* = turn-roll = roll). Cook 翻動 (*fan1 dong4* = flips-moves/stirs) pancakes. Designer 翻新 (*fan1 xin1* = turn-new = remodels/renovates) apartment. Liberated slaves 翻身 (*fan1 shen1* = turn-body = get new/better status).

Researcher 翻閱 (*fan1 yüe4* = flips-through-reads) journals, 翻來覆去 (*fan1 lai3 fu1 qü4* = flip-come-repeat-go = repeatedly) checks data, 翻譯 (*fan1 yi4* = turns-over-translates = translates) records.

孫悟空 (*Sun1 Wu4 Kong1* = surname-Sun-understand-emptiness = Monkey) 翻白眼 (*fan1 bai2 yan3* = turn-white-eyes = rolls eyes), 翻跟斗 (*fan1 gen1 dou3* = turn-heel-bin = turns somersaults), causes 天翻地覆 (*tian1 fan1 di4 fu1* = heaven- turns-over-earth-falls = great havoc) in Heaven.

by Diana Yue