

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 Foolish Old Man

Putonghua pronunciation: *yu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue4*

Meanings: foolish, stupid, dumb

Adjective 愚 = 愚蠢 (*yu2 chun3* = stupid~dumb), 愚鈍 (*yu2 dun4* = stupid-rough/un-refined = slow-witted/dumb).

Verb 愚 = 愚弄 (*yu2 nong4* = stupid/fool~play = trick/deceive). 愚民政策 (*yu2 min2 zheng4 ce4* = fool-masses~political-strategy) = policies which insult people's intelligence. 愚人節 (*yu2 ren2 jie2* = fool~people~festival) = April Fool's Day.

In ancient Chinese parable, 智叟 (*zhi4 sou3* = wise-old-man) has 智慧 (*zhi4 hui4* = cleverness/intelligence~wisdom), high 智商 (= 智力商數 *zhi4 li4 shang1 shu4* = intelligence~quotient = I.Q.), despises 愚公 (*yu2 gong1* = foolish-old-man): “You're 愚昧無知 (*yu4 mei4 wu2 zhi1* = stupid~unenlightened~without-knowledge = ignorant!)” But 愚公 is really 大智若愚 (*da4 zhi4 ruo4 yu2* = big~wisdom~looks-like~stupid = wise underneath foolish appearance).