

Character Builder 您好學? 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: *zhang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeung2*

Meanings: palm of hand, paw, grasp, manage, control

掌 (radical 手 *shou3*, hand) means 手掌 (*shou3 zhang3* = hand's-palm), 掌握 (*zhang3 wo1* = grasp/control): 拍掌 (*pai1 zhang3* = clap-hands), mafia-boss's 魔掌 (*mo2 zhang3* = evil-control), 掌權 (*zhang3 quan2* = control-power). 仙人掌 (*xian1 ren2 zhang3* = fairy's-palm) = cactus.

Monkey 翻跟斗 (*fan1 gen1 dou3* = turn-heel-bin/bushel = turns somersaults) all over heaven, sees 五指山 (*wu3 zhi3 shan1* = "Five-Fingers-Mountain" with five peaks resembling fingers), 小便 (*xiao3 bian4* = little-convenience = pisses/pees/urinates) on it. Almighty 如來佛 (*Ru2 Lai2 Fo2* = Ru-lai/Sanskrit-"Tathagata"-Buddha) appears, shows his 手掌 (*shou3 zhang3* = hand's-palm = palm) dirtied by Monkey's piss.

Even Monkey cannot escape from 佛祖掌心 (*fo2 zu3 zhang3 xin1* = Buddha-ancestor-palm-center = Buddha's omni-present power).

by Diana Yue