

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 Chinese moon goddess

Putonghua pronunciation: *han2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hon4*

Meanings: cold, chilly, humble, poor

寒 = 寒冷 (*han2 leng3* = chilly-cold). In 寒冬 (*han2 dong1* = cold-winter), 寒衣 (*han2 yi1* = cold-clothes = winter clothes) can禦寒 (*yü4 han2* = resist-cold). 寒假 (*han2 jia4* = cold-holiday) = winter vacation. Ghost story makes listener 不寒而慄 (*bu4 han2 er2 lü4* = not-feeling-cold-yet-tremble).

寒 = poor/humble/cheap. 寒暄 (*han2 xüan1* = cold-make-noise) means chat superficially. 寒窗苦讀 (*han2 chuang1 ku3 du2* = cold-window-bitter/hard-read/study) describes poorly-financed student studying persistently. 寒酸 (*han2 suan1* = cold-sour) = cheaply attired/mannered.

Chinese myth says beautiful lady 嫦娥 (*Chang2 E2*) stole, swallowed 靈藥 (*ling2 yao4* = magical-medicine) and 奔月 (*ben1 yue4* = ran/escaped-to-the-moon), now lives in 廣寒宮 (*guang3 han2 gong1* = expansive-cold-palace = Moon Palace).

by Diana Yue