

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 Chief Executive Election

豬

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jue1*

Meanings: pig, hog, swine

豬 (radical 豕 *shi3*, pig) is one of twelve 生肖 (*sheng1 xiao4* = born~resemble = animal signs) of the twelve-year-rotating Chinese Zodiac. Born in 豬年 (*zhu1 nian2* = pig-year), you 屬豬 (*shu2 zhu1* = belong-to~pig = have pig's attributes).

Chinese word 肉 (*rou4*, meat) means 豬肉 (*zhu1 rou4* = pig~meat = pork): 肥肉 (*fei2 rou4* = fatty~pork), 燒肉 (*shao1 rou4* = burnt/roasted~pork). 豬牛羊 (*zhu1 niu2 yang2* = pig~cow~sheep) are 三牲 (*san1 sheng1* = three~sacrificial-animals) in ancient China.

Pigs are personifications: 蠢豬 (*chun3 zhu1* = stupid~pigs/people), 懶豬 (*lan3 zhu1* = lazy~pigs/people). Novel Journey to the West describes Monk Tripitaka escorted by 朱八戒 (*zhu1 ba1 jie4* = pig~eight~commandments), a clumsy pig-fairy, and others to seek Buddhist scriptures.

by Diana Yue