

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 Bodhisattva Guanyin

觀

Putonghua pronunciation: *guan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *goon1*

Meanings: watch, observe

觀 (radical 見 *jian4*, see) means watch/observe intently: 觀看 (*guan1 kan4* = watch~look), 觀察 (*guan4 cha2* = watch~note = inspect). Hongkong draws 可觀 (*ke3 guan1* = can/deserve~watch = considerable) income from 觀光業 (*guan1 guang1 ye4* = watch~light~industry = tourism).

Sage 觀人於微 (*guan1 ren1 yü1 wei1* = watch~people~at~micro = observes/judges people by their small things): their 觀念 (*guan1 nian4* = watch~idea = concepts), 觀點 (*guan1 dian3* = watch~point = views).

Buddhists worship 菩薩 (*pu2 sa3* = 1st and 3rd syllables of Sanskrit “bodhisattva”), deities who help mankind attain salvation. Bodhisattva 觀世音 (*guan1 shi4 yin1* = watch~world’s~sounds), i.e. 觀音 (*guan1 yin1* = Guanyin), listens to mankind’s pleas/prayers, shows 慈悲 (*ci2 bei1* = kindness~grief = mercy/compassion).

by Diana Yue