

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

慈

Putonghua pronunciation: *ci2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi4*

Meanings: kind, loving

Characters 慈, 愛 (*ai4*, love), 悲 (*bei1*, grief) all have radical 心 (*xin1*, heart/emotions). 仁慈 (*ren2 ci2* = benevolent~kind), 慈祥 (*ci2 xiang2* = kind~peaceful) describe person't kind/loving expression/heart. Philanthropists support 慈善事業 (*ci2 shan4 shi4 ye4* = kind~good~things~industry = charity work).

Parents split roles: 嚴父 (*yan2 fu4* = strict~father), 慈母 (*ci2 mu3* = loving~mother), but 慈母多敗兒 (*ci2 mu3 duo1 bai4 er2* = loving~mother~often~failed~son = indulgent mother usually breeds spoilt son).

Buddhists chant 大慈大悲觀世音菩薩 (*da4 ci2 da4 bei1 guan1 shi4 yin1 pu2 sa3* = great~kind~great~grief~Guanyin~Pusa = “Oh Bodhisattva Guanyin of Mercy and Compassion”, begs her to 大發慈悲 (*da4 fa1 ci2 bei1* = big~issue~kindness~grief = pour out mercy generously).

by Diana Yue