

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 migrant workers

護

Putonghua pronunciation: *hu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo6*

Meanings: protect

護 = 保護 (*bao3 hu4* = conserve~protect): 護士 (*hu4 shi4* = protect~person = nurse), 護衛 (*hu4 wei4* = protect~guard = guard), 護短 (*hu4 duan3* = protect~short = unfairly protecting/defending wrongdoers/poorly-justified causes). 護法 (*hu4 fa3* = protect~law/tenets = senior clerics upholding religious creeds). 護苗 (*hu4 miao2* = protect~young-shoots = protecting young children) is the goal of Hongkong's End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) protects 瀕危物種 (*pin2 wei1 wu4 zhong3* = nearing-edge~danger~things~species = endangered species). Tigers, killed for 虎骨 (*hu2 gu3* = tiger's~bones), 虎爪 (*hu2 zhao3* = tiger's~paw), 虎鞭 (*hu3 bian1* = tiger's~whip = tiger's penis), are 受保護動物 (*shou4 bao3 hu4 dong4 wu4* = receive~conserve~protect~moving~thing = protected animals).

by Diana Yue