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 Halloween**

**聖**
Putonghua pronunciation: sheng4  
Cantonese pronunciation: sing3  
Meanings: holy, sacred, saint, supreme

聖 = 神聖 (shen2 sheng4 = god-saint = holy/sacred); 聖經 (sheng4 jing1 = holy-scriptures/bible), 聖地 (sheng4 di4 = holy-land). 聖 also means supreme: 针灸聖手 (zhen1 jiu4 sheng4 shou3 = needle-singe-supreme-hand) means celebrated acupuncture-moxibustion doctor.

儒家 (ru2 jia1 = scholar/Confucian-family/school = Confucianism) worships聖賢 (sheng4 xian2 = saint-virtuous = sages), honors 孔子 (Kong3 zi3 = Confucius), 孟子 (Meng4 zi3 = Mencius) as 聖人 (sheng4 ren2 = saint-person = sages of supreme virtue).

Christians worship 聖三一 (sheng4 san1 yil = holy-three-one = the Holy Trinity), observe 萬聖節 (wan4 sheng4 jie2 = 10,000-saint-festival = All Saints Day) which commemorates all 聖徒 (sheng4 tu2 = God’s-disciples) and 殉道者 (xun4 dao4 zhe3 = die-for-way/teaching-persons = martyrs).

by Diana Yue