Character Builder 您好嗎？桉

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 Buddha subduing Monkey

Putonghua pronunciation: zhang3
Cantonese pronunciation: jeung2
Meanings: palm of hand, paw, grasp, manage, control

掌 (radical 手 shou3, hand) means 手掌 (shou3 zhang3 = hand’s-palm), 掌握 (zhang3 wó1 = grasp/control): 拍掌 (pái1 zhang3 = clap-hands), mafia-boss’s 魔掌 (mó2 zhang3 = evil-control), 掌權 (zhang3 qún2 = control-power). 仙人掌 (xián1 rén2 zhang3 = fairy’s-palm) = cactus.

Monkey 翻跟斗 (fán1 gēn1 dòu3 = turn-heel-bin/bushel = turns somersaults) all over heaven, sees 五指山 (wǔ zhǐ shān1 = “Five-Fingers-Mountain” with five peaks resembling fingers), 小便 (xiǎo3 biàn4 = little-convenience = pisses/pees/urinates) on it. Allmighty 如來佛 (Ru2 Lái2 Fó2 = Ru-lai/Sanskrit-“Tathagata”-Buddha) appears, shows his 手掌 (shou3 zhang3 = hand’s-palm = palm) dirtied by Monkey’s piss.

Even Monkey cannot escape from 佛祖掌心 (fó2 zuò3 zhang3 xīn1 = Buddha-ancestor-palm-center = Buddha’s omi-present power).

by Diana Yue