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

**心**

- Putonghua pronunciation: xin1
- Cantonese pronunciation: sam1
- Meanings: heart, centre, urge, mood, inclination

Pictogram 心 resembles shape of 心臟 (xin1 zang4 = heart-internal-organ = heart). 心 has sentimental/moral connotations: 心情 (xin1 qing2 = heart-feelings = mood), 好心 (hao3 xin1 = good/kind-hearted), 愛心 (ai4 xin1 = loving-heart = love/concern), 良心 (liang2 xin1 = good-heart = conscience).

Monks/nuns 修心 (xiu1 xin1 = repair/refine-heart = practice improving moral/spiritual awareness/toughness). 清心 (qing1 xin1 = clear/clean-heart) means pure in heart.

In novel Journey to the West, 唐僧 (Tang2 seng1 = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xuanzang/Tripiṭaka)’s 白馬 (bai2 ma3 = white-horse) and disciple Monkey sometimes disobey him. Expression 意馬心猿 (yi4 ma3 xin1 yuan2 = thought-horse-heart-monkey) describes someone with restless longings e.g. lusts, urge to escape/rebel. Buddhists recite《心經》(Xin1 Jing1 = Heart-Sutra) to subdue temptations/demons.