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 heroes

剛 (radical 刀 dao1, knife) describes material/texture/personality: 剛硬 (gang1 ying4 = strong/hard), 剛直 (gang1 zhi2 = uncompromising-straightforward), 剛正 (gang1 zheng4 = firm-just/fair/principled), 剛毅 (gang1 yi4 = unbending-courageous).

外柔內剛 (wai4 rou2 nei4 gang1 = outward-gentle-inward-hard) = gentle-looking but firm-hearted. 以柔制剛 (yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1 = with-gentleness-control-hardness) = using soft tactics to manipulate/control powerful/stubborn opponent.

金剛鑲 (jin1 gang1 zuan4 = gold-hard-diamond) = diamond.

Buddhist deity 金剛 (jin1 gang1 = gold-strong = Sanskrit-“vajra”) is fierce/warrior-like. In art/literature, 金剛怒目, 菩薩低眉 (Jin1 Gang1 nu4 mu4, Pu2 Sa3 di1 mei2 = Vajra-angrily-stares, Pusa/Bodhisattva lowers-eye-brows) describes two opposite types/attitudes: stern/condemning versus gentle/merciful. 鐵金剛 (tie3 jin1 gang1 = iron-Vajra/warrior) is James Bond’s Chinese name.

by Diana Yue