

Character Builder

您好學？

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 rejuvenation

萌

Putonghua pronunciation: *meng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mang4*

Meaning: bud, sprout, germinate, begin, start

萌 (艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) means bud/sprout. In springtime, 草木萌動 (*cao3 mu4 meng2 dong4* = grass-wood-sprout-move, i.e. all grasses, herbs, shrubs, trees bear new buds, stir to life). Gardener watches for seedlings' 萌象 (*meng2 xiang4* = budding-sign), nurses them when they 萌芽 (*meng2 ya2* = bud/grow-young-shoot = sprout).

Drug addict 萌生 (*meng2 sheng1* = geminate-born = begin = gets) idea of suicide. After rescue and rehabilitation, doctor warns him: Don't let bad habits 故態復萌 (*gu4 tai4 fu2 meng2* = old/past-conditions/attitudes-again-geminate = develop again).

In tsunami-hit region, economists watch out for 萌兆 (*meng2 zhao4* = budding-sign) of economic recovery, rejoice when market again 萌發生機 (*meng2 fa1 sheng1 ji1* = germinate-grow/develop-life's-opportunity = springs to life).

by Diana Yue