

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 Chief Executive Election

狼

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long4*

Meanings: wolf

狼 (radical 犭 = 犬 *qūan3*, dog) is character 狠 (*hen3*, pity-less) plus a dot, so 狼 is 兇狠 (*xiong1 hen3* = fierce~pity-less = fierce/violent). Sheep fear 狼嗥 (*lang2 hao2* = wolf's-howling). 狼入 (*lang2 ren2* = wolf-human) = werewolf.

Wolves are personifications. 狼心狗肺 (*lang2 xin1 gou3 fei4* = wolf-heart-dog-lungs) describes cruel/ungrateful people. 豺狼當道 (*cai2 lang2 dang1 dao4* = small-wolf~wolf-astride~road) = bad/cruel people are in power. 色狼 (*se1 lang2* = color/women-wolf) = man who harasses/molests women.

狼 are highly intelligent. 狼群 (*lang2 qūn2* = wolf-crowd = pack of wolves) has 領袖 (*ling3 xiu4* = collar~sleeve = leader), hunt 獵物 (*lie4 wu4* = hunt-object = prey) together. Nomadic Mongols worship 狼圖騰 (*lang2 tu2 teng2* = wolf-totem).

by Diana Yue