

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 *Journey to the West*

Putonghua pronunciation: *mo2*
Cantonese pronunciation: *moh1*
Meanings: demon

Buddhism defines 魔 (*mo2* = Sanskrit-“Mara”-transliterated) as 惡魔 (*e4 mo2* = wicked-demon), 妖魔 (*yao1 mo2* = evil-demons) which destroy Buddha’s followers. Christianity’s 魔鬼 (*mo2 gui3* = demon~ghost) is Satan.

In *Journey to the West*, Tripitaka’s disciples vanquished 妖魔鬼怪 (*yao1 mo2 gui3 guai4* = evil-fairies~demons~ghosts~monsters): 蜘蛛精 (*zhi1 zhu1 jing1* = spider~fairies), 白骨精 (*bai1 gu3 jing1* = white~bones/skeleton-fairy), 牛魔王 (*niu2 mo2 wang2* = bull~demon~king). Wise men say: “魔由心生!” (*mo2 you2 xin1 sheng1* = demon~from~heart-born = “Our imagination creates our own demons!”)

Women fear 色魔 (*se1 mo2* = color~demon = rapist/women-killer). Hostile media 妖魔化 (*yao1 mo2 hua4* = evil-fairy~demon~transform = demonize/blacken) target. 魔術師 (*mo2 shu4 shi1* = demon~power~master) = sorcerer/magician/illusionist.

by Diana Yue