

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 Buddha's sacrifice for eagle and dove

死

Putonghua pronunciation: *si3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *si2*

Meanings: die, death

死 = die/death: 死去 (*si3 qu4* = die-gone = die), 死亡 (*si3 wang2* = death~extinction), 死屍 (*si3 shi1* = dead~corpse). Requiem mourns 死者 (*si3 zhe3* = die-person = the dead).

死士 (*si3 shi4* = die~soldier/worker = volunteers prepared to risk/sacrifice life) believe 生死有命 (*sheng1 si3 you3 ming4* = life~death~has~fate = keeping/losing life is predestined).

In 食物鏈 (*shi2 wu4 lian4* = eat~things~chain = food chain), 鷹 (*ying1*, eagle) eats 鴿 (*ge1*, dove) to live. Buddha 救度眾生 (*jiu4 du4 zhong4 sheng1* = save~transfer/deliver~many/all-lives = redeems all living creatures), offered to 代鴿受死 (*dai4 ge1 shou4 si3* = substitute~dove~receive~death = die in dove's stead). Indra spared dove, moved by Buddha's 慈悲 (*ci2 bei1* = kindness~grief = mercy).