

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 ancient philosophers

Putonghua pronunciation: *ru2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue4*

Meanings: scholar, soft-mannered, Confucianism

儒 (radical 亻 = 人 ren2, person) means scholar: 儒生 (*ru2 sheng1* = scholar-student = scholar), 大儒 (*da4 ru2* = great-scholar), 儒將 (*ru2 jiang1* = scholarly-general), 儒商 (*ru2 shang1* = scholarly-businessman) have 儒雅 (*ru2 ya3* = learned-elegant) manners/diction/flair.

孔子 (*Kong3-zi3* = Confucius, 551-479 BC), 孟子 (*Meng4-zi3* = Mencius, 372-289 BC) preach 仁 (*ren2*, benevolence), 義 (*yi4*, righteousness), 儒家 (*ru2 jia1* = scholar-school-of-thought = Confucianism)'s principle doctrines, 四書五經 (*si4 shu1 wu3 jing1* = the Four-Books-Five-Classics) = the Confucian classics, 秦始皇 (*Qin2 Shi3 Huang2* = Qin's-First-Emperor, 259-210 BC) 焚書坑儒 (*fen2 shu1 keng1 ru2* = burnt-books-buried-scholars = persecuted Confucian teachings/teachers). Later emperors promoted 儒學 (*ru2 xue2* = Confucians-studies/doctrines) because it advocates 忠 (*zhong1*, loyalty/obedience-to-master/ruler).

by Diana Yue