

# 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 funerals

祭

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jai1*

Meaning: offer animal sacrifice, offering, libations, sacrificial/funeral ceremony

Pictogram 祭 (meat on left, hand on right, altar-table in middle) means 獻祭 (*xian4 ji4* = offer-sacrifices), 祭奠 (*ji4 dian4* = offer-sacrifices-and-wine), 祭祀 (*ji4 si4* = offer-sacrifices-in-worship). Ancients 祭天 (*ji4 tian1* = sacrifice-to-Heaven), 祭鬼神 (*ji4 gui3 shen2* = sacrifice-to-ghosts-deities), 祭祖 (*ji4 zu3* = sacrifice-to-ancestors). Leading army on military expedition, general executes traitor to 祭旗 (*ji4 qi2* = sacrifice-to-army-flag = assert military authority).

大祭司 (*da4 ji4 si1* = big-sacrificial-ceremonies-master = high priest) performs 祭禮 (*ji4 li3* = sacrificial-ceremony). 祭品 (*ji4 pin3* = sacrificed-items) include 活祭 (*huo2 ji4* = live-sacrifices). Many Chinese ancient bronzes are 祭器 (*ji4 qi4* = sacrificial-vessels). At deceased founding-father's 公祭 (*gong1 ji4* = public-funeral/memorial-ceremony), prime-minister reads 祭文 (*ji4 wen2* = mourning/elegaic-address).

by Diana Yue