

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 diet abstinence

齋

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jaai1*

Meanings: fast, abstain from meat etc., vegetarian diet

齋 (= 素 *su4*, vegetarian diet) is opposite of 葷 (*hun1* = non-vegetarian). 吃齋 (*chi1 zhai1* = 吃素 *chi1 su4* = eat-vegetarian) = go vegetarian. Chinese 齋菜 (*zhai1 cai4* = vegetarian~dishes) feature 蔬菜 (*shu1 cai4* = grasses~leafy-vegetables), 豆腐 (*dou4 fu4* = bean~curd/tofu). 菌類 (*jün1 lei4* = fungus~type = fungi/mushrooms).

齋 also means fasting. 伊斯蘭教 (*yi1 si1 lan2 jiao4* = “Islam”-transliterated~religion = Islam)’s followers 守齋 (*shou3 zhai1* = keep~fast) during 齋月 (*zhai1 yue4* = fasting-month = Ramadan).

Buddhists oppose 殺生 (*sha4 sheng1* = killing-of~lives), advocate 吃長齋 (*chi1 chang2 zhai1* = eat~long~vegetarian = always eat vegetarian). However, hypocrites 齋口不齋心 (*zhai1 kou3 bu4 zhai1 xin1* = vegetarian~mouth~no-vegetarian~heart = eat vegetarian but have unclean/bad thoughts).