

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 shopping malls



Putonghua pronunciation: *dian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dim3*

Meanings: shop

店主 (*dian4 zhu3* = shop-owners) open 商店 (*shang1 dian4* = commerce-shop = shops): 飯店 (*fan4 dian4* = cooked-rice-shop = eateries/restaurants), 書店 (*shu1 dian4* = book-stores), 藥店 (*yao4 dian4* = drug-stores), hire 店員 (*dian4 yuan2* = shop-member = shopkeepers).

Shoppers visit 商場 (*shang1 chang3* = commerce-field = malls), 購物 (*gou4 wu4* = buy-things), 血拚 (*xue4 pin1* = blood-fight = “shopping”-transliterated = buy like crazy).

名店 (*ming2 dian4* = name/famous-shop = brand-name stores) sometimes 店大欺客 (*dian4 da4 qi1 ke4* = shop-big-bully-guest = treat customers snobbishly). 黑店 (*hei1 dian4* = black-shop) means 旅店 (*lu3 dian4* = travel-shop = inn) that 謀財害命 (*mou2 cai2 hai4 ming4* = plot-money-harm-life = rob/kill customers), or shop that cheats/over-charges.

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