

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 beginning and end

始

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi2*

Meaning: first, earliest, ensue, begin, beginning, only then

始 (radical 女 *nü3*, woman) = 開始 (*kai1 shi3* = start-begin), 原始 (*yüan2 shi3* = original-primitive). Ape/Adam is 人類始祖 (*ren2 lei4 shi3 zu3* = man-kind's-first-ancestor). 秦始皇 (*Qin2 Shi3 Huang2* = Qin-Dynasty's-First-Emperor) founded 秦朝 (*Qin2 Chao2* = Qin Dynasty, 221-207 BC). Summer Solstice is 夏之始 (*xia4 zhi1 shi3* = summer's-beginning).

Heartless lover 始亂終棄 (*shi3 luan4 zhong1 qi4* = begin-disrupt/invade-end-abandon = sexually exploits girl, eventually abandons her). Faithful husband 始終如一 (*shi3 zhong1 ru2 yi1* = beginning-end-resemble-one = is always constant to wife).

創始人 (*chuang4 shi3 ren2* = create-start-person) = founder. Deity proclaims: "I am Alpha and Omega, 我是始 (*wo3 shi4 shi3* = I-am-the-beginning), 我是終 (*wo3 shi4 zhong1* = I-am-the-end)."

by Diana Yue