

# 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:

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 antiques

代

Putonghua pronunciation: *dai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *doi6*

Meaning: generation, period, era, epoch, dnasty, represent, replace

代 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, people + 弋 *yi4*, move), verb, means 代替 (*dai4 ti4* = replace-substitute), 代表 (*dai4 biao3* = represent-express/represent), 取代 (*qū3 dai4* = take-over-replace). Noun 代 means 時代 (*shi2 dai4* = time-age/era/epoch) = historical period: 古代 (*gu3 dai4* = ancient-times), 現代 (*xian4 dai4* = modern-times), 朝代 (*chao2 dai4* = dynasty's-ruling-period).

Carbon-14-dating determines 年代 (*nian2 dai4* = year/age-period) of 青銅器 (*qing1 tong2 qi4* = green-bronze-vessels/utensils = bronzes) from 周代 (*Zhou1 dai4* = Zhou Dynasty, 1046-256 BC). Auction-price of 青花瓷器 (*qing1 hua1 ci2 qi4* = blue-on-white-porcelain-ware) from 元代 (*Yüan2 dai4* = Yüan Dynasty, 1271-1368 AD) is USD10,000,000.

絕代風華 (*jüe2 dai4 feng1 hua2* = extinct-period-wind/airs-glamor) describes unparalleled glamor/beauty of woman/objet-d'art,

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