

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 Qin Dynasty

始

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi2*

Meanings: first, initial, beginning, only then

始 (radical 女 *nü3*, female) means 開始 (*kai1 shi3* = open-initiate = begin). 原始 (*yüan2 shi3* = original-beginning) describes primitive man/society/forests. 始祖 (*shi3 zu3* = first-ancestor) = earliest ancestor.

Enterprise's 創始人 (*chuang3 shi3 ren2* = create-begin-person = founder) tells 始末 (*shi3 mo4* = begin-end = the whole story) of achieving success. 始亂終棄 (*shi3 luan4 zhong1 qi4* = begin~sexually-abuse~finally~abandon) describes man abandoning girl after sexual relationship.

秦朝 (*Qin2 chao2* = the Qin-Dynasty) 始於 (*shi3 yü1* = began-in) 221 B.C. 秦始皇 (*Qin2 Shi3 Huang2* = Qin's-First-Emperor)'s tomb contains 兵馬俑 (*bing1 ma3 yong3* = soldiers-horses-funerary-figurines = terracotta army). 始作俑者 (*shi3 zuo2 yong3 zhe3* = first-to-make-funerary-figurines-person) describes the first person who started a bad/troublesome practice.

by Diana Yue