

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 filial piety

孝

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haau3*

Meanings: filial piety

儒家 (*ru2 jia1* = scholar~school = Confucianism) advocates 孝道 (*xiao4 dao* = filial-piety-way/code). 父慈子孝 (*fu4 ci2 zi3 xiao4* = father~kind~son~love~parents) describes harmonious father-son relationship.

Child shows 孝心 (*xiao4 xin1* = filial-piety-heart = willingness to love/obey/serve parents) by 盡孝 (*jin4 xiao4* = exhaust-filial-piety = doing the best for parents). Christianity's Fifth Commandment is 孝順父母 (*xiao4 shun4 fu4 mu3* = love/serve-obey-father~mother = honor your parents).

When parent dies, children 穿孝 (*chuan1 xiao4* = wear-filial-piety), i.e. wear 孝服 (*xiao4 fu2* = filial-piety~dress = black/white mourning dress). Chinese praise 孝子賢孫 (*xiao4 zi3 xian2 sun1* = obedient~sons~good~grandsons), regard 無後 (*wu2 hou4* = no~afterwards = lacking male descent) as 不孝 (*bu4 xiao4* = not-filial-piety = violating filial code).

by Diana Yue