

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 self-improvement

齊

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi*1

Cantonese pronunciation: *chai*4

Meaning: level, same, neat, together, uniform, complete, assemble, trim, govern

齊 (radical 齊 *qi*2, level) means 齊整 (*qi*2 *zheng*3 = neat-tidy), 齊備 (*qi*2 *bei*4 = fully-equipped). 到齊 (*dao*4 *qi*2 = arrive-complete) = have all assembled. 齊心合力 (*qi*2 *xin*1 *he*2 *li*4 = together-heart-combine-strength) = joining souls/efforts. 百花齊放 (*bai*2 *hua*1 *qi*2 *fang*4 = hundred-flowers-together-bloom) describes springtime's glorious blooms.

Philosophically, 齊 means uniform/organized. Confucian ethics stresses order/priorities: 格物 (*ge*2 *wu*4 = contend-matter = apply reason/analysis to things), then 致知 (*zhi*4 *zhi*1 = attain-knowledge), then 修身 (*xiu*1 *shen*1 = mend-body = cultivate strict personal morals), then 齊家 (*qi*2 *jia*1 = organize/govern-family = put family in order).

But Taoist philosopher 莊子 (*Zhuang*1 *zi*3)'s 齊物論 (*qi*2 *wu*4 *lun*4 = Equality-of-Things-Treatise) stresses the equality/sameness of all existences in the universe.