

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

祖

Putonghua pronunciation: *zu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jo2*

Meanings: ancestry

祖 = ancestor/ancestral. 人猿 (*ren2 yuan2* = human-ape = apes) are mankind's 始祖 (*shi3 zu3* = first-ancestors). Patriots praise 祖國 (*zu3 guo3* = ancestral-country = fatherland/motherland). Genghis Khan received posthumous title 元太祖 (*Yuan2 tai4 zu3* = Yuan-earliest-ancestor = founder of Mongolian Empire and China's Yuan Dynasty, 1271-1368).

Traditional Chinese keep 族譜 (*zu2 pu3* = clan-record = record of family trees), erect 祖廟 (*zu3 miao4* = ancestral temples), 祭祖 (*ji4 zu3* = offer-libations/sacrifices-to-ancestors), 拜祖先 (*bai4 zu3 xian1* = worship-ancestors-predecessors = worship ancestors).

四世同堂 (*si4 shi4 tong2 tang2* = four-generations-share-hall) means 曾祖父母 (*zeng1 zu3 fu4 mu3* = previous-ancestral-father-mother = great-grandparents) and 祖父母 (*zu3 fu4 mu3* = ancestral-father-mother = grandparents) living with younger generations.

by Diana Yue