

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 history

代

Putonghua pronunciation: *dai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *doi6*

Meanings: era, generation

代 = 時代 (*shi2 dai4* = time~generation) = age/era/epoch in history. 石器時代 (*shi2 qi4 shi2 dai4* = stone~utensil~time~generation) = stone age. 古代文明 (*gu3 dai4 wen2 ming2* = ancient~period~writing~enlighten) = ancient civilizations. Actor's 黃金時代 (*huang2 jin1 shi2 dai4* = yellow~golden~era) means his peak/prime.

朝代 (*chao2 dai4* = dynasty~generation) = dynasty's ruling period, e.g. 清代 (*Qing1 dai4* = Qing period/times).

老一代 (*lao3 yi1 dai4* = old~one~generation = old people) and 新一代 (*xin1 yi1 dai4* = new~one~generation = young people) have 代溝 (*dai4 gou1* = generation~gap). Reactionary oldster snarls: “一代不如一代!” (*yi1 dai4 bu4 ru2 yi1 dai4* = one~generation~not~comparable-to~one~generation = The new generation is much worse than us!)