

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 empires

朝

Putonghua pronunciation: *chao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chiu4*

Meanings: facing, pay homage visit, emperor's reign-period, court, dynasty

Verb 朝 = facing: 朝東 (*chao2 dong1* = facing~east). Vassals 朝見 (*chao2 jian4* = facing~see = pay homage/tribute visit to) king. Christian calendar's 三王來朝 (*san1 wang2 lai2 chao2* = three-kings~come~pay-tribute) = Epiphany.

Noun 朝 means emperor's reign-period, 朝廷 (*chao2 ting2* = reign/royal-court), 朝代 (*chao2 dai4* = reign-generation = ruling dynasties: 秦 *Qin2*, 漢 *Han4*, 唐 *Tang2*, 宋 *Song4*, 元 *Yuan2*, 明 *Ming2*, 清 *Qing1*). Emperor holds 早朝 (*zao3 chao2* = morning-court = morning court hearings). 兩朝元老 (*liang3 chao2 yuan2 lao3* = two-reigns~principal~elder) = minister/executive who served two successive emperors/bosses.

在野黨 (*zai4 ye3 dang3* = at-countryside-party) = non-ruling party. Combating national crisis requires 朝野 (*chao2 ye3* = court~countryside = ruling politicians and non-ruling political groups)'s co-operation.

by Diana Yue