

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 Buddha's sacrifice for eagle and dove

代

Putonghua pronunciation: *dai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *doi6*

Meanings: represent, replace, substitute

代 = representative. National flag 代表 (*dai4 biao3* = represent-mark = represents) country. 代理 (*dai4 li3* = represent-handle = agent) handles affairs for client. Coup leader 取代 (*qu3 dai4* = take~replace = replaces) deposed ruler. 代罪羔羊 (*dai4 zui4 gao1 yang2* = substitute~sin/crime/fault~kid~lamb) = scapegoat. 代人受過 (*dai4 ren2 shou4 guo4* = substitute~person/other~receive~mistake) means punished for another's mistakes.

Buddhist story says highest god 因陀羅 (*yin1 tuo2 luo2* = "Indra"-transliterated) became 鷹 (*ying1*, eagle), chased 鴿 (*ge1*, dove) to test 佛祖 (*fo2 zu3* = Buddhism~ancestor = Buddha). Buddha measured dove's weight on 秤 (*cheng4*, scales), 割肉 (*ge1 rou4* = cut-flesh = cut his own flesh), 代替 (*dai4 ti4* = replace/substitute) dove to 餵鷹 (*wei4 ying1* = feed-eagle).