

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 Qing Dynasty

末

Putonghua pronunciation: *mo4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *moot6*

Meanings: tip, end, ending, last, final, inessential, unimportant, powder

末 (resembling branch/needle's tip) means unimportant/last/final: 粉末 (*fen3 mo4* = powder~fine-powder), 窮途末路 (*qiong2 tu2 mo4 lu4* = exhausted~path~end-of-road = without resources/future), 末日 (*mo4 ri4* = last-day = Doomsday/Judgment-Day).

Emperors 康熙 (*Kang1 Xi1*), 雍正 (*Yong1 Zheng4*), 乾隆 (*Qian2 Long2*) ruled Qing Dynasty's golden age. Later politicians 本末倒置 (*ben3 mo4 dao3 zhi4* = main-end-reversed-placed = put first things last and last things first). 清末 (*Qing1 mo4* = Qing's~last-years) saw national strength's 強弩之末 (*qiang2 nu3 zhi1 mo4* = strong-bow~'s~end = final decline).

末代王孫 (*mo4 dai4 wang2 sun1* = last-generation~of~nobility) 溥儀 (*Pu3 Yi2*, China's last emperor) abdicated, headed Japan's puppet-state 滿洲國 (*Man2 Zhou1 Guo2* = Manchu~state = Japanese "Manchukuo") in northeastern China.

by Diana Yue