

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 going to church

拜

Putonghua pronunciation: *bai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baai3*

Meanings: worship, make obeisance

Gesture 拜 means cupping hands, raising/lowering lower arms towards someone respectfully. 拜訪 (*bai4 fang3* = respectful-gesture~visit = visit), 拜年 (*bai4 nian2* = respectful-gesture~year) = pay New Year visit. 拜託 (*bai4 tuo1* = respectful-gesture~delegate) means “Please (do me this favor)!”

拜 = respectfully/devoutly worship: 拜神 (*bai4 shen2* = worship-deities/spirits), 拜佛 (*bai4 fo2* = worship-buddha). 拜祖先 (*bai4 zu3 xian1* = worship-ancestor~previous) = ancestral worship.

Church holds 聖誕崇拜 (*sheng4 dan4 chong3 bai4* = holy~birth~lofty~worship = Christmas service). Christians 做禮拜 (*zuo4 li3 bai4* = do~rite~worship = attend worship/church). Hence 禮拜天 (*li3 bai4 tian1* = rite~worship~day) is Sunday, church-going day, time-period 禮拜 (*li3 bai4* = rite~worship = 星期 *xing1 qi1* = stars~period = 週 *zhou1*, period) = week.

by Diana Yue