

Character Builder

您好學？

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 ancient philosophers

道

Putonghua pronunciation: *dao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do6*

Meanings: path, way, road, approach, direction, truth, doctrine

道 (radical 辶 *chuo4*, walk) means 道路 (*dao4 lu4* = path-way/road), 通道 (*tong1 dao4* = passage-way), 陰道 (*yin1 dao4* = yin/female-passage) = woman's vagina.

Good/righteous people follow 正道 (*zheng4 dao4* = righteous-doctrine/way-of-life). Sensible people 講道理 (*jiang3 dao4 li3* = talk-way-reason = argue/treat others reasonably). 治國之道 (*zhi4 guo2 zhi1 dao4* = rule-state-'s-way/art) = statesmanship. 柔道 (*rou2 dao4* = soft/gentle-way) = Japanese Judo.

老子 (*Lao3-zi3*, 5th century BC) wrote 道德經 (*Dao4 De2 Jing1* = way-virtue-classic = the Dao-de-jing), explained 道 (*dao4*, nature's way), 德 (*de2*, human nature), inspired 道家 (*dao4 jia1* = Daoist-school-of-thought, Daoism). Religious converts 修道 (*xiu1 dao4* = cultivate-understanding-of-truth/virtue, study/practice spiritual meditations/exercises). Today 道德 (*dao4 de2* = nature-human-nature) means morals/morality.

by Diana Yue