

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 housing

Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meanings: give offerings, support, supply

供 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 共 *gong4*, communal) = 供給 (*gong1 gei3* = offer/supply~give). Reservoirs 供水 (*gong1 shui3* = supply~water). Parents 提供 (*ti2 gong1* = raise~support = supply/give) living/education expenses to their children. Grown-up children 供養 (*gong1 yang3* = supply~feed = support) parents.

Developers 供應 (*gong1 ying4* = supply~echo = supply) apartments. Middleclass 供樓供車 (*gong1 lou2 gong1 che1* = pay apartment and car mortgages): 抵押資產 (*di3 ya1 zil can3* = exchange~pledge~capital~property = mortgage property), obtain 銀行貸款 (*yin2 hang2 dai4 kuan3* = money~firm~loan~money = bank loan), 分期還款 (*fen1 qi1 huan2 kuan3* = divided~periods~return~money = pay back by installments).

Recession-hit mortgagees 斷供 (*duan4 gong1* = stop/break~pay~installments = default mortgage).

by Diana Yue