

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 Solomon's wisdom

婦

Putonghua pronunciation: *fu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo5*

Meanings: mature/married woman

Ideogram 婦 shows 女 (*nü3*, female/woman) with 帚 (*zhou3*, broom/sweep): woman/wife doing housework. 婦女 (*fu4 nü2* = woman~female) = woman/women. When married, 少女 (*shao4 nü2* = young~girl) becomes 少婦 (*shao4 fu4* = young-woman). 孕婦 (*yün4 fu4* = womb~woman = pregnant woman) visits 婦科 (*fu4 ke1* = woman~subject = gynaecology) doctor.

夫婦 (*fu1 fu4* = man/husband~woman/wife) = married couple. 夫唱婦隨 (*fu1 chang4 fu4 sui2* = husband~sings~wife~follows) describes compatible/happy couple. Society praises 節婦 (*jie2 fu4* = virtuous~women/widows), despises 淫婦 (*yin2 fu4* = lascivious~women/whores).

Slogan 婦女能頂半邊天 (*fu4 nü2 neng2 ding3 ban4 bian1 tian1* = woman~female~can~hold-up~half~side~sky = Women can shoulder half of society's burden/responsibilities) reflects essence of 婦解 (*fu4 jie3* = woman~untie/liberate = women's lib).

by Diana Yue