

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 beggars

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hat1*

Meanings: beg, implore, plead, supplicate, pauper, mendicant

乞 (radical 乙 *yi3*, second) = 行乞 (*xing2 qi1* = practice-begging), 乞丐 (*qi1 gai4* = beg-beggar) aka 叫化 (*jiao4 hua4* = call-to-obtain-alms) because Taoist/Buddhist mendicants say 化緣 (*hua4 yuan2* = transform/obtain-from-lucky-fate = receive whatever fate brings) for alms-begging.

Besieged country 乞援 (*qi1 yuan2* = beg-for-help) from ally. On 七夕 (*qi1 xi1* = seventh-evening of seventh lunar month), i.e. Chinese 乞巧節 (*qi1 qiao3 jie2* = beg-for-talent/skills-festival), Chinese girls/women offer fruits/prayers to goddess Seventh Sister, pray for talent in sewing/embroidery.

丐幫 (*gai4 bang1* = beggars-gang) is traditional underground organization of beggars. Beggars 乞食 (*qi1 shi2* = beg-for-food), 乞錢 (*qi1 qian2* = beg-for-money), but don't 搖尾乞憐 (*yao2 wei3 qi1 lian2* = wag-tail-beg-for-pity = do antics to win favor/pity).

by Diana Yue