

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 migrant workers

積

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji1*
Cantonese pronunciation: *jik1*
Meanings: accumulate, hoard

積 (radical 禾 *he*, grain-stalk) = 積累 (*ji1 lei4* = accumulate~continuously): 積雪 (*ji1 xue3* = piled-up~snow) on peaks, 積水 (*ji1 shui3* = trapped~water) in gutters. Enemies have 積怨 (*ji1 yuan4* = long-time~animosity). Oppressed people have 積憤 (*ji1 fen4* = accumulated~anger).

Migrants earn 血汗錢 (*xue4 han4 qian2* = blood~sweat~money = money earned by sweat and toil), send 積蓄 (*ji1 xu4* = accumulate~keep = savings) home to 養家 (*yang3 jia1* = feed/support~family). Unethical employers 積壓工資 (*ji1 ya1 gong1 zi1* = accumulate~press/hold~work~money = hold back workers' wages).

處心積慮 (*chu4 xin1 ji1 lü4* = deliberate~mind~continuous~calculation) describes determined/careful planning for later action. 積穀防饑 (*ji1 gu3 fang2 ji1* = accumulate~grains~anticipate~famine) means saving up for a rainy day.

by Diana Yue