

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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 lonely people

寂

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jik6*

Meanings: empty, silent, soundless, noiseless, still, lonely, lonesome

寂 (radical 宀 mian2, roof) indicates person working silently under roof. 寂靜 (*ji4 jing4* = quiet-soundless) describes hushed landscape/atmosphere. 寂寥宇宙 (*ji4 liao2 yu3 zhou4* = silent-sparse/spacious-all-dimensions-all-time = the soundless universe/cosmos) fascinates astronomers. Before Harry Potter, Rowling was 寂寂無名 (*ji4 ji4 wu2 ming2* = silent-silent-no-name = unknown/unheard-of).

Buddhists say 寂滅 (*ji4 mie4* = silent-extinction) for life's passing. Commemorating great monk's 入寂 (*ru4 ji4* = entry-into-silence = 圓寂 *yuan2 ji4* = round/perfect-silence = passing away), 全場寂然 (*quan2 chang3 ji4 ran2* = whole-field/hall-silent-so = congregation is speechless/motionless).

Phone-in program 寂寞的心 (*ji4 mo4 de0 xin1* = silent-quiet-'s-heart = Lonely Hearts) airs singletons' wish to find boyfriend/girlfriend and end 枯寂 (*ku1 ji4* = wilted/deadened-silent/lonely = inactive/dull) life.

by Diana Yue