

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 bachelors and spinsters

獨

Putonghua pronunciation: *du2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *duk6*

Meanings: single, alone

獨 means single/unique/alone: 獨自 (*du2 zi4* = single~self = unaccompanied), 獨子 (*du2 zi3* = only~son), 獨坐 (*du2 zuo4* = single~sit = sitting alone). 獨唱 (*du2 chang4* = single~sing) = solo. 唱獨腳戲 (*chang4 du2 jiao3 xi4* = sing~single~role~opera) describes activist rallying his cause alone without getting support/response.

獨裁者 (*du2 cai2 zhe3* = single~judge~person) = dictator. 獨立 (*du2 li4* = alone~stand) = standing alone or having independent means/status. China will not tolerate 台獨 (*Tai2 du2* = "Tai"-wan~independence).

Bachelor 獨來獨往 (*du2 lai2 du2 wang3* = single~come~single~go = goes places alone), feels 孤獨 (*gu1 du2* = orphan~single = lonely), sighs: 獨酌無歡! (*du2 zhuo2 wu2 huan1* = single~pour~wine~has~no~mirth = "Drinking/eating alone is no fun!")

by Diana Yue