

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 ECFA (Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement)

商

Putonghua pronunciation: *shang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *seung1*

Meanings: commerce, businessman

工商業 (*gong1 shang1 ye4* = industry~commerce~professions = industries and commerce) sustain economy. 商人 (*shang1 ren2* = commerce~person = businessmen/merchants) include 製造商 (*zhi4 zao4 shang1* = make~create~businessmen = manufacturers), 批發商 (*pi1 fa1 shang1* = bulk~distribute~businessmen = wholesalers), 零售商 (*ling2 shou4 shang1* = piece~sell~businessmen = retailers).

台商 (*tai2 shang1* = Taiwan~businessmen) 設廠 (*she2 chang3* = set-up~factories), open 商場 (*shang1 chang3* = commerce~field = malls), find 商機 (*shang1 ji1* = business~opportunities) in Mainland China.

Idiomatic expression 長袖善舞 (*chang2 xiu4 shan4 wu3* = long~sleeves~good-at~dancing) describes business magnates. 儒商 (*ru2 shang1* = scholar~businessman) means businessman with refined/intellectual tastes. Business losers sneer: “無商不奸!” (*wu2 shang1 bu4 jian1* = no~businessman~not~wicked = “All businessmen cheat!”)

by Diana Yue