

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san1*

Meanings: body

身 = body/body's condition. 身體好 (*shen1 ti3 hao3* = body~body-good) = healthy. 身份 (*shen1 fen4* = body~role) = status. Boyfriend/rapist makes girl 失身 (*shi1 shen1* = lose~body = lose her virginity). 過身 (*guo4 shen1* = pass~body) = die. 身後事 (*shen1 hou4 shi4* = body~behind/afterwards-affairs) = deceased person's funeral arrangements.

After 健身 (*jian4 shen1* = strengthen~body = doing physical/body-building exercises), athlete 一身是汗 (*yi1 shen1 shi4 han4* = one/whole~body-is~sweat = sweats all over). Model 轉身 (*zhuan3 shen1* = turn~body = turns around), displays good 身材 (*shen1 cai2* = body~trunk = figure).

單身漢 (*dan1 shen1 han4* = single~body~man = bachelor) sticks to 獨身主義 (*du2 shen1 zu3 yi4* = alone~body~main~meaning) = principle/practice of remaining single.

by Diana Yue