

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

剩

Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing6*

Meanings: remaining, remnant, left, left behind, surplus

剩 = 剩餘 (remaining~surplus). 剩下 (*sheng4 xia4* = remain-down) = leave/left behind. Sale clears 剩貨 (*sheng4 huo4* = remaining~goods). 剩餘價值 (*sheng4 yu2 jia4 zhi2* = left-over~price~worth) = surplus value.

Diners pack 剩菜 (*sheng4 cai4* = remain~cooked~vegi/dishes = leftovers). Refugees lament demolished motherland's 殘山剩水 (*can2 shan1 sheng4 shui3* = incomplete/ruined~hills~leftover~waters = devastated territory/landscape).

男大當婚, 女大當嫁 (*nan2 da4 dang1 hun1, nü3 da4 dang1 jia4* = man~big~should~marry, woman~big~should~wed = When men/women grow up, they should get married). However, 剩男 剩女 (*sheng4 nan2 sheng4 nü3* = leftover~men~leftover~ women = bachelors/spinsters who missed marriage chances) are common because eligible candidates 所剩無幾 (*suo3 sheng4 wu2 ji3* = what's~left~not~many = not too many are left).

by Diana Yue