

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)



(radical 竹 *zhu2*, bamboo)

Putonghua pronunciation: *qian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chim1*

Meanings: bamboo stick, signal, label, sign

簽 = bamboo strip. Temple worshipper 求簽 (*qiu2 qian1* = beg/pick~foretunetelling-strip) which carries oracle's prediction/guidance: 上簽 (*shang4 qian1* = top~strip) predicts luck, 下簽 (*xia4 qian1* = bottom~strip) predicts misfortune.

書簽 (*shu1 qian1* = book~strip) = bookmark. 標籤 (*biao1 qian1* = label-strip) = mark with label. Verb 簽名 (*qian1 ming2* = mark/label-name) = sign one's name. Noun 簽名式 (*qian2 ming2 shi1* = sign-name~style) = signature. Business partners 簽約 (*qian1 yue4* = sign~contract). Embassy 簽發 (*qian1 fa1* = signs/stamps~releases) passports/visas. 冒簽 (*mao4 qian1* = falsely-assume~sign = forging someone's signature) is a crime.

After 簽署 (*qian1 shu3* = sign~put-down-name = signing) and 確認 (*que4 ren4* = sure~recognize = ratification), ECFA 生效 (*sheng1 xiao4* = born~effect = became valid/effective).

by Diana Yue