

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

徵

Putonghua pronunciation: *zheng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jing1*

Meanings: summon, levy, recruit, advertise for

Verb 徵 = seek: 徵求 (*zheng1 qiu2* = recruit~seek = seek) mentor's opinion, 徵兵 (*zheng1 bing1* = seek~soldiers = recruit/draft soldiers). Magazine 徵稿 (*zheng1 gao3* = seek~ manuscripts = openly invites/welcomes contributions), organizes 徵文比賽 (*zheng1 wen2 bi3 sai4* = seek~writings~ compare~compete = essay competition).

Government 徵稅 (*zheng1 shui4* = levies~taxes), explains: 寓禁於徵 (*yü4 jin4 yü1 zheng1* = imply~ban~in~levy) = To discourage/ban smoking, we impose tax on cigarettes.

Bachelor/spinster posts advertisement to 徵友 (*zheng1 you3* = advertise~friends = invite women/men for dating), 徵婚 (*zheng1 hun1* = advertise~marriage = invite candidates for marriage). 誠徵男友 (*cheng2 zheng2 nan2 you3* = sincerely~seek~man~friend) = "Boyfriend wanted". 誠徵淑女 (*cheng1 zheng1 shu2 nü3* = sincerely~seek~decent/feminine~woman) = "Lady-friend wanted".

by Diana Yue