

Character Builder

您好學? 好

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 adultery

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaan1*

Meanings: adultery, rape

Ideogram 姦 (showing three 姦 *nü3*, female/girl/woman) means illicit sex, e.g. 強姦 (*qiang2 jian1*), also written as 強奸 (*qiang2 jian1*), = forced-rape. (But 奸 also means sly/evil, e.g. 奸賊 *jian1 zei2* = cunning/evil-thief). 強姦民意 (*qiang2 jian1 min2 yi4* = forced-rape-people's-opinion) describes irresponsible bureaucrats who deliberately distort prevailing public opinion. 迷姦 (*mi2 jian1* = hypnotic-drug-rape) = drug and rape someone (drug-facilitated sexual assault). 姦污 (*jian1 wu1* = rape-dirty/stain) means rape a woman/處女 (*chu4 nü3* = reside/home-bound-girl = virgin), staining/breaking her purity/virginity. 雞姦 (*ji1 jian1* = chicken-rape) = sodomy.

奸夫淫婦 (*jian1 fu1 yin2 fu4* = adulterous-man-lascivious-woman = illicit couple) 通姦 (*tong1 jian1* = connect-adultery = have adulterous affair). Tabloids expose 姦情 (*jian1 qing2* = adulterous-love-affair).

by Diana Yue