

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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: **san1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **saam1**

Meanings: three

三 (three strokes) means three/third: 三人 (**san1 ren2** = three-people), 三月 (**san1 yue4** = third-lunar-month or March), 三次 (**san1 ci4** = three-times).

Car-owners buy 第三者保險 (**di4 san1 zhe3 bao3 xian3** = number-three-person-protect-danger = third-party insurance). A, B, C hold 三方會談 (**san1 fang1 hui4 tan2** = three-sides-meet-talk = trilateral talks). 三角戀愛 (**san1 jiao3 lian4 ai4** = three-corners-amour-love) = triangular love-relationship.

第三者 (**di4 san1 zhe3** = number-three-person = a third person) hurts couple's harmonious relationship. Mainland Chinese term 小三 (**xiao3 san1** = sma-**three**/third) means married man's 情婦 (**qing2 fu4** = love-affair-woman = mistress), i.e. Hongkong term 二奶 (**er4 nai3** = second-woman), i.e. 小老婆 (**xiao3 lao3 po2** = sma-/minor-old-granny = ex-marital "wife").

by Diana Yue