

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 royal weddings

奢

Putonghua pronunciation: *she1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *che1*

Meanings: excessive, extravagant

奢 = 奢侈 (*she1 chi3* = excessive~big/luxury) = extravagance. 名牌 (*ming2 pai2* = name~brands) are 奢侈品 (*she1 chi3 pin3* = extravagant~items = luxury goods). Nouveau riche love 奢華 (*she1 hua2* = luxurious~grandeur). Mouse 奢望 (*she1 wang4* = excessive~hope = unrealistically hopes to) beat cat, 奢談 (*she1 tan2* = excessive~talk = brags about) becoming king of beasts. Puritanical couple 不驕不奢 (*bu4 jiao1 bu4 she1* = not~arrogant~not~extravagant = act/spend modestly), dislike 窮奢極侈 (*qiong2 she1 ji2 chi3* = exhaust~luxury~ultimate~extravagant = extremely extravagant) weddings.

Sage warns: 由儉入奢易 (*you2 jian4 ru4 she1 yi4* = from~frugal~into~luxurious~easy = increasing spending is easy), 由奢入儉難 (*you2 she1 ru4 jian4 nan2* = from~luxurious~into~frugal~difficult = cutting spending is hard).

by Diana Yue