

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 raising families

妻

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chai1*

Meanings: wife

妻 (radical 女 *nü3*, woman) = 妻子 (*qi1 zi0* = wife~diminutive = wife): 夫妻 (*fu1 qi1* = husband~wife = married couple), 娶妻 (*qū3 qi1* = marries/takes~wife). 一夫多妻制 (*yi1 fu1 duo1 qi1 zhi4* = one~husband~many~wives~system) = polygamy. In old China, man has 髮妻 (*fa4 qi1* = hair~wife = first/legal wife whose hair-lock is presented at wedding), 妾 (*qie4*, concubines).

Cruel man 虐妻 (*nüé4 qi1* = maltreats/abuses~wife), 休妻 (*xiu1 qi1* = rest/disengage~wife = divorces wife), eventually 妻離子散 (*qi1 li2 zi3 san4* = wife~leaves~son~disperse) = family breaks up.

Decent man appreciates 賢妻 (*xian2 qi1* = good/supportive~wife), calls her “愛妻” (*ai4 qi1* = love~wife = “My beloved~wife”, doesn't 搯 bad-mouth 前妻 (*qian2 qi1* = ex~wife).