

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 housing

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji3*

Meanings: place, put, buy, install, settle

置 = 設置 (*she4 zhi4* = put/establish-in-place). Grown-up man 置家 (*zhi4 jia1* = establish-home = marries), 置業 (*zhi4 ye4* = establish-estate = buys house). Designer 佈置 (*bu4 zhi4* = plan-place = decorates) interiors.

To 遷徙 (*qian1 xi3* = move-exile/move) and 安置 (*an1 zhi4* = safe-place/settle = settle) squatters, government built multi-storey 徙置大廈 (*xi3 zhi4 da4 sha4* = move-settle-big-mansion = resettlement blocks) in 徙置區 (*xi3 zhi4 qu1* = move-settle- area = resettlement estates), i.e. today's 公共屋邨 (*gong1 gong4 wu1 cun1* = public-communal-house-village = public housing estates).

Inflation-hit government 擱置 (*ge1 zhi4* = put-idle-place = stalls) mega housing project but stresses budget-cut rumors 不可置信 (*bu4 ke3 zhi4 xin4* = no-can-place-trust/belief = are unbelievable).

by Diana Yue