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 bachelors and spinsters

徵
Putonghua pronunciation: zheng1
Cantonese pronunciation: jing1
Meanings: summon, levy, recruit, advertise for

Verb 徵 = seek: 徵求 (zheng1 qiu2 = recruit~seek = seek) mentor's opinion, 徵兵 (zheng1 bing1 = seek~soldiers = recruit/draft soldiers). Magazine 徵稿 (zheng1 gao3 = seek~manuscripts = openly invites/welcomes contributions), organizes 徵文比賽 (zheng1 wen2 bi3 sai4 = seek~writings~compare-competes = essay competition).

Government 徵税 (zheng1 shui4 = levies~taxes), explains: 寓禁於徵 (yü4 jin4 yü1 zheng1 = imply~ban~in~levy) = To discourage/ban smoking, we impose tax on cigarettes.

Bachelor/spinner posts advertisement to 徵友 (zheng1 you3 = advertise~friends = invite women/men for dating), 徵婚 (zheng1 hun1 = advertise~marriage = invite candidates for marriage). 誠徵男友 (cheng2 zheng2 nan2 you3 = sincerely~seek~man~friend) = “Boyfriend wanted”. 誠徵淑女 (cheng1 zheng1 shu2 nü3 = sincerely~seek~decent/feminine~woman) = “Lady-friend wanted”.

by Diana Yue