

Character Builder

您好嗎? 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 foreign maids

約

Putonghua pronunciation: *yüe1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeuk3*

Meanings: agree to, contract, agreement

約 (radical 系 *xi4*, strap) means strapping/binding. 約定 (*yüe1 ding4* = agree-determine) = agree. 約會 (*yüe1 hui4* = agree-to-meet) = appointment/date: 守約 (*shou3 yüe1* = keep-appointment), 失約 (*shí1 yüe1* = miss/skip-appointment).

Parties 訂約 (*ding4 yüe1* = formulate-agreement), 簽約 (*qian1 yüe1* = sign-agreement): 國際條約 (*guo2 ji4 tiao2 yüe1* = states-among-term/item-agreement = international treaty), 國際公約 (*guo2 ji4 gong1 yüe1* = states-among-common-agreement = international convention), 買賣合約 (*mai3 mai4 he2 yüe1* = buy-sell-joint-agreement = purchase contract).

僱傭合約 (*gu4 yong1 he2 yüe1* = employer-employee-joint-agreement = employment contract) 約束 (*yüe1 shu4* = contract-bind = binds/restricts) parties' actions. Party which 毀約 (*hui3 yüe1* = breaks-contract) or 違約 (*wei2 yüe1* = disobeys/violates-contract = defaults) is penalized.

by Diana Yue