

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 Victoria Harbour

深

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sam1*

Meanings: deep, depth

深 = 深度 (*shen1 du4* = deep~degree) = 深淺 (*shen1 qian3* = deep-to~shallow) = depth. 水深 (*shui3 shen1* = water~deep) = water's depth. Chinese city “深圳” (*shen1 zhen4* = Shenzhen) literally means “deep ditch”.

深 = adjective/adverb 深深 (*shen1 shen1* = deep~deep): 深夜 (*shen1 ye4* = deep~night), 深思 (*shen1 si1* = deep~think = seriously ponder), 深愛 (*shen1 a4* = deeply~love). 深刻 (*shen1 ke1* = deep~incise) describes impressions/analysis. 深不可測 (*shen1 bu4 ke3 ce1* = deep~no~can~measure/guess = unfathomable) describes abyss or mysterious/profound ideas.

China's national principles are “深挖洞，廣積糧，不稱霸” (*shen1 wa1 dong4, guang3 ji1 liang2, bu4 cheng1 ba4*), i.e. deeply~dig~holes (defense), widely~accumulate~grain (economy), no~claim/become~hegemony (foreign policy).

by Diana Yue