

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 stupid search



Putonghua pronunciation: *zhou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jau1*

Meanings: boat, skiff

Pictogram 舟 means 船 (*chuan2*, ship/boat). 舟子 (*zhou1 zi3* = boat~son) = boatman. 舟車勞頓 (*zhou1 jü1 lao2 dun4* = boat~car~labor~pause) = laborious/tiring travelling. 同舟共濟 (*tong2 zhou1 gong4 ji4* = same~boat~together~irrigate) = similarly constrained, hence sharing resources.

一葉輕舟 (*yi1 ye4 qing1 zhou1* = one~leaf~light~boat) = a light skiff. 月下泛舟 (*yue4 xia4 fan4 zhou1* = moon~below~float/drift~boat) = leisurely boat-ride under moonlight. Chinese' 賽龍舟 (*sai4 long2 zhou1* = compete~dragon~boat) = Dragon Boat Race. Hebrews' 挪亞方舟 (*no2 ya3 fang1 zhou1* = "Noah"-transliterated~square~ship) = Noah's Ark.

Public opinion is fickle/unreliable: 水能載舟亦能覆舟 (*shui3 neng2 zai4 zhou1 yi4 neng2 fu4 zhou1* = water~can~carry~boat~also~can~overthrow~boat) = it can make you or break you).

by Diana Yue