

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 Peach Blossom Fount

Putonghua pronunciation: *yin3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yan2*

Meanings: hide, conceal, covered, secret, retire, recluse, vanish

隱 means 隱藏 (*yin3 cang2* = hide~conceal), 隱蔽 (*yin3 bi4* = secluded~sheltered), 隱約 (*yin3 yue1* = faint/faintly). Patient 隱瞞 (*yin3 man2* = hide~cover-up) 隱疾 (*yin3 ji2* = occult~disease). 私隱 (*si1 yin3* = private~hidden) = privacy. 隱身術 (*yin3 shen1 shu4* = vanish~body~method) = magician's self-vanishing technique. 隱形 (*yin3 xing2* = hide~form) = invisible.

Poet 陶淵明 (*Tao2 Yuan1 Ming2*) 退隱 (*tui4 yin3* = retreat~hide = retired) from officialdom, 隱居 (*yin3 ju1* = hidden~live = became hermit/recluse), wrote 桃花源記 (*tao2 hua1 yuan2 ji4* = peach-blossom~fount~record = account of fisherman's venture into Peach Blossom Fount).

大隱隱於市 (*da4 yin3 yin3 yu1 shi4* = big~recluse~hide-in~city) describes city-dweller keeping true hermit's calmness/alooftness, detached from surrounding bickerings/turmoils.