

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 dragons

龍

Putonghua pronunciation: *long2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lung4*

Meanings: dragon

In Chinese iconography, 龍 and 鳳 (*feng4*, phoenix) symbolize Emperor-Empress or marvelous/handsome people. Decorative motif 龍翔鳳舞 (*long2 xiang2 feng4 wu3* = dragon-soars~phoenix~dances) symbolizes universal harmony/celebration. 龍顏大悅 (*long2 yan2 da4 yue4* = dragon's~visage~great~cheer) means "The Emperor/Boss is very pleased!"

Martial artists perform 舞龍 (*wu3 long2* = dance~dragon = Dragon Dance), 舞獅 (*wu3 shi1* = dance~lion = Lion Dance) during festivities. 賽龍舟 (*sai4 long2 zhou1* = compete~dragon-boat) = dragon-boat race. 生龍活虎 (*sheng1 long2 huo2 hu3* = alive~dragon~living~tiger) describes athlete's virile movements.

Multiple-participants' project needs 龍頭 (*long2 tou2* = dragon-head = initiator/leader). Many extraordinary/legendary characters/talents keep low profiles in Hong Kong, like name of movie “臥虎藏龍” (*wo4 hu3 cang2 long2*, “Crouching~Tiger~Hidden~Dragon”).

by Diana Yue