

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *fan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *faan4*

Meanings: sail, sailing boat

帆船 (*fan1 chuan2* = sail~boats) range from 西班牙大帆船 (*xi1 ban1 ya2 da4 fan1 chuan2* = “Spain”-transliterated-big~sail-boat = Spanish galleons) to Chinese 舢舨 (*shan3 ban3* = sampans) in Victoria Harbour. 帆影 (*fan1 ying3* = sails~shadows) means sailing boats, poetically speaking.

Jeans are made of 帆布 (*fan1 bu4* = sail~cloth = denim). 帆船運動 (*fan1 chuan2 yun4 dong4* = sail~boat~turn~move = sailing~sport) = yachting. 滑浪風帆 (*hua2 lang4 feng1 fan1* = slide~wave~wind~sail) means wind-surfing. 青島 (*qing1 dao3*) hosted the 2008 奧運會 (*ao4 yun4 hui4* = Olympics-transliterated~sports~meet = Olympics) 帆船賽 (*fan1 chuan2 sai4* = sail~boat~competitions = sailing events).

一帆風順 (*yi1 fan1 feng1 shun4* = one~sail~wind~smooth) describes someone’s smooth road to success.

by Diana Yue