

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 hair

染

Putonghua pronunciation: *ran3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yim5*

Meanings: stain, dye, infect, contaminate

染 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) means 染色 (*ran3 se1* = dye/stain-with-color), 污染 (*wu1 ran3* = pollute/contaminate-stain), Greying woman 染髮 (*ran3 fa3* = dyes/colors-hair), 染黑 (*ran3 hei1* = dyes-it-black). Tycoon 染指 (*ran3 zhi3* = dye-finger = extends ambition/influence to) TV-broadcasting.

扎染 (*za1 ran3* = tie-dye = 蠟染 *la4 ran3* = wax-dye = batik) is 染布 (*ran3 bu4* = dyeing-cloth) using 靛藍 (*ding4 lan2* = indigo-blue), a natural 染料 (*ran3 liao4* = dye-substance). 染缸 (*ran3 gang1* = dye-jigger) also means environment that contaminates person's habits/character.

Man and VD-infected woman 有染 (*you3 ran3* = has-stain = has adulterous affair), 染上 (*ran3 shang4* = stain-up = contracts) 傳染病 (*chuan2 ran3 bing4* = transmit-infect-illness = infectious disease).

by Diana Yue