

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 Narcissus

Putonghua pronunciation: *yǐng3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yǐng2*

Meanings: shade, shadow, reflection, silhouette

光 (*guāng1*, light) casts 影 (*yǐng3* = shadows): 人影 (*rén2 yǐng3* = persons' shadows), 樹影 (*shù4 yǐng3* = trees' shadows). 影響 (*yǐng3 xiǎng3* = shadow~sound) = influence. 電影 (*diàn4 yǐng3* = electric~shadows) = cinematography. 影子內閣 (*yǐng3 zi0 nei4 ge2* = shadow~diminutive~internal~pavilion) = shadow cabinet.

Tabloid-story 捕風捉影 (*bū4 fēng1 zhuo1 yǐng3* = catch~wind~grab~shadow = picks up rumors), 影射 (*yǐng3 shè4* = shadow~shoot = allude to) celebrities. Pot-smoker sees 幻影 (*huàn4 yǐng3* = illusions~shadows), 鬼影 (*guǐ3 yǐng3* = ghostly/eerie~shadows). 陰影 (*yīn1 yǐng3* = un-lit~shadow) means dark shadows or traumatic memory.

Love-birds 形影不離 (*xíng2 yǐng3 bù4 lí2* = form~shadow~no~separate = are always together). Narcissus admired his own 倒影 (*dào3 yǐng3* = inverted~shadow = reflection).

by Diana Yue