

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 Chinese moon goddess



Putonghua pronunciation: *dan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daan1*

Meanings: medicinal pill, red

丹, 朱 (*zhu1*) both mean vivid red color. 丹砂 (*dan1 sha1* = 朱砂 *zhu1 sha1* = red-grain) = red pigment made from cinnabar. 丹青 (*dan1 qing1* = red-blue/green colors) means art/skill of painting. Patriot 一片丹心 (*yi1 pian4 dan1 xin1* = one-piece-red-heart = is fervently loyal). But terms 丹田 (*dan1 tian2* = red-field = diaphragm) and 牡丹 (*mu3 dan1* = male-red = peony) do not mean red in any way.

丹 also means pill. 靈丹妙藥 (*ling2 dan1 miao4 yao4* = magical-pill-wonderful-medicine/elixir) = panacea. Emperor wants 仙丹 (*xian1 dan1* = fairy/magic-pill = pill which can make eater immortal), orders Taoist priest to 煉丹 (*lian4 dan1* = distil/concoct-pill = heat chemicals in burner to concoct pills).

by Diana Yue