

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 burning the linked ships

船

Putonghua pronunciation: *chuan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *suen4*

Meanings: ship, boat, sea vessel

Old-type 船 (radical 舟 *zhou1*, boat/ship) has 舵手 (*duo4 shou3* = helm-hand = helmsman), 船夫 (*chuan2 fu1* = boat-men), 水手 (*shui2 shou3* = water-hand = sailors), is rowed by 槳 (*jiang3*, oars).

上船 (*shang4 chuan2* = up-ship) = embark. 沉船 (*chen2 chuan2* = sink-ship) = shipwreck. 商船 (*shang1 chuan2* = trading-vessels), 戰船 (*zhan4 chuan2* = war-ships) form 船隊 (*chuan2 dui4* = ship-team = fleets). 一腳踏兩船 (*yi1 jiao3 ta4 liang3 chuan2* = one-foot-tread-two-boats) describes person dividing loyalty between two camps.

In ancient China's 三國 (*san1 guo2* = Three-Kingdoms) period (3rd century AD), 魏國 (*Wei4 guo2* = Wei-Kingdom) built large 水師 (*shui3 shi1* = water-army = navy) to invade 吳國 (*Wu2 guo2* = Wu-Kingdom).