

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 Dragon Boat Festival

五

Putonghua pronunciation: *wu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ng5*

Meanings: five, fifth

五 = five/fifth: 五年 (*wu3 nian2* = five-years), 十五 (*shi2 wu3* = ten~five = fifteenth), 五哥 (*wu3 ge1* = fifth-elder-brother). 第五 (*di4 wu3* = order~five = fifth on list).

五官 (*wu3 guan1* = five-organs) = eyes-nose-mouth-ears. Farmers plant 五穀 (*wu3 gu3* = five-cereal-grains). 五指山 (*wu3 zhi3 shan1* = five-fingers~mountain) means Buddha's cosmos-gripping hand or superior/tycoon's over-powering/inescapable control. 倒翻五味架 (*dao3 fan1 wu3 wei4 jia4* = pour-over-five~tastes/condiments~rack) means getting all kinds of indefinable feelings.

Dragon Boat Festival falls on 五月五日 (*wu3 yue4 wu3 ri1* = fifth-month~fifth-day = fifth day of fifth lunar month) of 陰曆 (*yin1 li4* = moon/lunar~calendar), i.e. 農曆 (*nong2 li4* = farmers'calendar/almanac), after 五月 (*wu3 yue4* = fifth-month = May).