

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *chen2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cham4*

Meanings: sink, heavy, deep

沉 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) means sinking/sunken/heavy/deep: 沉重 (*chen2 zhong4* = heavy~weighty) load/heart, 沉靜 (*chen2 jing4* = sink~quiet = quiet) character/mood, 沉痾 (*chen2 ke1* = heavy/chronic illness).

Titanic 下沉 (*xia4 chen2* = downward~sank), 沉沒 (*chen2 mo4* = sank~vanished). River-bed has 沉澱物 (*chen2 dian1 wu4* = sink~settled~object = sediments). 浮沉 (*fu2 chen2* = floating~sinking) describes half-floating half-sinking object or person's unstable circumstances/career.

Ancient poet 屈原 (*Qū1 Yüan2*), disliked by King, felt 消沉 (*xiao1 chen2* = dissolve~sink = low/dejected), 抱石自沉 (*bao4 zhi2 zi4 chen2* = embrace~rock~self~sink = holding rock, jumped into river, drowned himself). His poetry made readers 沉思 (*chen2 si1* = sink/deep~think = think deeply), 沉醉 (*chen2 zui4* = sink/deep~drunk = feel enchanted/intoxicated).