

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: *zhou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jau1*

Meanings: boat

舟 is radical for 船 (*chuan2*, boat), 艇 (*ting3*, small dinghy), 艦 (*jian4*, big ship). 舟子 (*zhou1 zi3*) = boatman. 挪亞方舟 (*Nuo2 Ya4 fang1 zhou1* = “Noah”-transliterated~square~boat) = Noah’s ark.

Angler on 一葉輕舟 (*yi1 ye4 qing1 zhou1* = one~leaf~light~boat = a weightless little boat) is picturesque scene. 泛舟湖上 (*fan4 zhou1 hu2 shang4* = loosen~boat~lake~on = rowing on the lake) is leisurely activity.

At 端午節 (*duan1 wu3 jie2* = begin~noon~festival = fifth day of fifth lunar month) people 賽龍舟 (*sai4 long2 zhou1* = compete~dragon~boat = hold dragon boat races). Teams 划艇 (*hua1 ting3* = row~boats), 鳴鑼打鼓 (*ming2 luo2 da3 gu3* = sound~gongs~beat~drums) lest fish disturb deceased poet 屈原 (*Qü1 Yüan2*)’s body.