

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 heat waves

浪

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long6*

Meanings: wave, unrestrained

浪 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 波浪 (*bo1 lang4* = waves~waves). 浪花 (*lang4 hua1* = wave-flower) = spray. Tsunami creates 巨浪 (*ju4 lang4* = huge~waves). 熱浪逼人 (*re4 lang4 bi3 ren2* = hot~wave~oppress~people) describes oppressive heat-wave.

Ocean-liners 乘風破浪 (*cheng2 feng1 po4 lang4* = ride~wind~break~waves = cross rough seas). 無風無浪 (*wu2 feng1 wu2 lang2* = no~wind~no~waves) describes uneventful/steady marriages/careers/progress.

Poet 蘇東坡 (*Su1 Dong1-po1*) sighs: “大江東去 (*da4 jiang1 dong1 qu4* = big~river~eastward~flows), 浪淘盡 (*lang4 tao2 jin4* = waves~wash-away~completely) 千古風流人物 (*qian1 gu3 feng1 liu2 ren2 wu4* = thousand~ancient~wind~flow~person~things = history's distinguished characters).” = “The mighty river eastward flowing ushers into oblivion history's most gifted heroes.”

by Diana Yue