

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 willow trees

依

Putonghua pronunciation: *yi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yi1*

Meanings: lean on, rely on endearing

依 shows 亻 (= 人 *ren2*), 衣 (*yi1*, clothes) side-by-side: 依靠 (*yi1 kao4* = lean~rely), 依賴 (*yi1 lai4* = lean~depend), 依據 (*yi1 ju4* = depending~evidence), 依戀 (*yi1 lian4* = lean-on~love = loving endearingly), 依舊 (*yi1 jiu4* = relying-on~old = still/unchanged).

Willow-trees signify gentleness/endearment. 楊柳依依 (*yang2 liu3 yi1 yi1* = Yang~willow~leaning~leaning) = hanging branches of weeping willow clinging on to departing traveler. 依依不捨 (*yi1 yi1 bu4 she3* = leaning~leaning~no~forsake) = reluctantly watching friend/lover depart. 小鳥依人 (*xiao3 niao3 yi1 ren2* = little~bird~lean-on~person) describes girl's sweet hug.

After hopelessly groping, traveler/struggler sees 柳暗花明又一村 (*liu3 an4 hua1 ming2 you4 yi1 cun1* = willows~shaded/hidden~flowers~bright/exposed~again~a~village = dramatic turn of events leading to good prospects ahead).

by Diana Yue