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 Peach Blossom Fount

隠 means 隱藏 (yin3 cang2 = hide-conceal), 隱蔽 (yin3 bi4 = secluded-sheltered), 隱約 (yin3 yue1 = faint/faintly). Patient 隱瞞 (yin3 man2 = hide-cover-up) 隱疾 (yin3 ji2 = occult-disease). 私隠 (si1 yin3 = private-hidden) = privacy. 隱身術 (yin3 shen1 shu4 = vanish-body-method) = magician’s self-vanishing technique. 隱形 (yin3 xing2 = hide-form) = invisible.

Poet 陶淵明 (Tao2 Yuan1 Ming2) 退隠 (tui4 yin3 = retreat-hide = retired) from officialdom, 隱居 (yin3 ju1 = hidden-live = became hermit/recluse), wrote 桃花源記 (tao2 hua1 yun2 ji4 = peach-blossom-fount-record = account of fisherman’s venture into Peach Blossom Fount).

大隠於市 (da4 yin3 yin3 ju1 shi4 = big-recluse-hide-in-city) describes city-dweller keeping true hermit’s calmness/aloofness, detached from surrounding bickerings/turmoils.

by Diana Yue