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 The Water Margin

泊
Putonghua pronunciation: bo2, bo1
Cantonese pronunciation: bok6
Meanings: to park, anchor at, stay, lake, marsh

Verb 泊 (bo2, radical氵 = 水 shui3, water) means parking/anchoring boat/vehicle. Boat 泊岸 (bo2 an4 = parks-at-shore).
泊位 (bo2 wei4 = park-seat) = car/boat’s parking space. Exiles 飄泊 (piao1 bo2 = float/drift-park = drift, staying here and there). Colloquially, 泊碼頭 (bo2 ma3 tou2 = park-at-pile-head = park at wharf) means finding boss/sugar daddy.


Novel The Water Margin is set in 梁山泊 (liang2 shan1 bo1 = Liang-Mountain-Marsh) in Shan-dong Province.

by Diana Yue