Character Builder

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 making selections

選
Putonghua pronunciation: xūan3
Cantonese pronunciation: suen2
Meaning: select, pick, choose, opt, elect, election

選 (radical 卜, chuo4, walk + 異 xün4, assist) indicates sending/selecting: 選擇 (xūan3 ze2 = choose/select-choice): swimming選手 (xūan3 shou3 = selected-hand = swimmer chosen to represent region), 選美 (xūan3 mei3 = select-beauty = beauty contest), 詩選 (shi1 xūan3 = poems-selected or poetry-anthology).

選舉 (xūan3 jū3 = select-raise/nominate) = election. 競選 (jing4 xūan3 = compete-select) = run/compete/campaign for office. 競選人 (jing4 xūan3 ren2 = compete-person = candidate) 當選 (dang1 xūan3 = gets-elected) or 落選 (luo4 xūan3 = fall-elected = loses election).

Girl 選男友 (xūan3 nan2 you3 = picks-boy-friend): 首選 (shou3 xūan3 = first-choic), 次選 (ci4 xūan3 = second-choice).
Handsome millionaire is 上上之選 (shang4 shan4 zhi1 xūan3 = up-up-'s-choice = best choice).

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