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 Chinese moon goddess

升
Putonghua pronunciation: sheng1
Cantonese pronunciation: sing1
Meanings: rise, ascend, hoist, raise, promote, elevate

升 = 上升 (shang4 sheng1 = ascend-rise) = 升高 (sheng1 go1 = rise-high). Sun daily升起 (sheng1 qi3 = rise-lift-up = rises).
Inflation makes prices 急升 (ji2 sheng1 = urgent-rise = rise rapidly). Luckily, RMB 升值 (sheng1 zhi2 = rise-value/worth = appreciates).

Students升學 (sheng1 xue2 = rise-school/study = move up to higher stage of education). Employees 升级 (sheng1 ji2 = rise-class = get promoted). Ambitious bureaucrat wants to 升官 (sheng1 guan1 = rise-official = rise to higher position).

Christians celebrate Jesus’ 复活 (fu2 huo2 = resume-life = resurrection from the dead), 升天 (sheng1 tian1 = rise-sky = ascension). Fairy immortal 白日飞升 (bai2 ri4 fei1 sheng1 = white-day-fly-rise = ascends/flies into the sky in broad daylight).

by Diana Yue