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 scandals

Putonghua pronunciation: chou3
Cantonese pronunciation: chau2
Meaning: ugly, unsightly, hideous, repulsive, shameful, disgraceful, scandalous, ugliness

醜 (酉 you3, west/wine/old + 鬼 gui3, ghost) means 醜陋 (chou3 lou4 = ugly-rough/vulgar), 醜惡 (chou3 e4 = ugly-evil/bad). 美醜 (mei3 chou3 = beautiful-ugly) are aesthetic standards. 美八怪 (chou3 ba1 guai4 = ugly-eight-monster) means ugly person.

Biographer 美化 (mei3 hua4 = beautiful-transform = white-washes image) or 醜化 (chou3 hua4 = ugly-transform = smears image) of subject. Frank person 說醜話 (shuo1 chou3 hua4 = speak-ugly-speech = says unpleasant/ear-grating words) to warn friend.

醜事 (qun2 chou3 = crowd-ugly = despicable clowns) come together, 醜態畢露 (chou3 tai4 bi3 lu4 = ugly-gestures/ways-all-revealed = look/behave absolutely repulsively). VIP’s 醜聞 (chou3 wen2 = ugly-news = scandal) include 醜事 (chou3 shi4 = disgraceful/scandalous-acts/behaviour),

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