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:

1\(^{st}\) tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2\(^{nd}\) tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3\(^{rd}\) tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4\(^{th}\) 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 washing

浴
Putonghua pronunciation: rou4 Cantonese pronunciation: yuk6
Meanings: bathe, bath, wash

浴 = 沐浴 (mu4 rou4 = bathe-wash). 浴室 (rou4 shi1 = bathroom) has 浴缸 (rou4 gang1 = bath-tank = bath-tub), 淋浴 (lin2 rou4 = pour-bath = shower). 出浴 (chu1 rou4 = go-bath = take bath/shower) requires 浴帽 (rou4 mao4 = shower-cap), 浴巾 (rou4 jin1 = bath-towel), 浴衣 (rou4 yi1 = bath-robe).

海浴 (hai3 rou4 = sea-bathing) is summer past-time. Patient takes 藥浴 (yao4 rou4 = medicinal-bath). 男女同浴 (nan2 nu3 tong2 rou4 = man-woman-same-bath = men and women sharing communal bath) is old Japanese practice.

Warriors 浴血 (rou4 xue3 = bathe-in-blood = engage in bloody fighting). Buddhists 齋戒沐浴 (zhai1 jie4 mu4 rou4 = fast-abstain-bathe-wash = fast and bathe) to show devotion.