Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 stupid search

刻
Putonghua pronunciation: ke4
Cantonese pronunciation: hak1
Meanings: incise, carve, engrave

刻 (radical 刃 = 刀 dao1, knife) = 雕刻 (diao1 ke4 = sculpt-carve/engrave). 刻意 (ke4 yi4 = carve-idea) = deliberately. 深刻 (shen1 ke4 = deep-engrave) describes deeply moving/analytical art/observation.

Artisans 刻石 (ke4 shi2 = carve/engrave-on-stone), copying images/calligraphy. Ancient Chinese authors published 刻本 (ke4 ben3 = carved-editions = books/writings carved on woodblocks and printed on paper). However, 刻版 (ke4 ban3 = carve-block) describes routine/unimaginative activity.

Artists make 木刻 (mu4 ke4 = wood-carve = woodcuts/woodblock prints). 刻印 (ke4 yin4 = engrave-print/seal = carving characters on stone seal = seal-carving) is an art-form in China. 刻劃入微 (ke4 hua4 ru4 we1 = incise-draw-into-tiny) = detailed/fine description. 刻骨銘心 (ke4 gu3 ming2 xin1 = carve-bone-engrave-heart) describes unforgettable romantic relationship.

by Diana Yue