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 Peach Blossom Fount

漁

Putonghua pronunciation: yü2
Cantonese pronunciation: yue4
Meanings: to fish, fisherman

Verb 漁 (, water-drops + 魚 yü2, fish) means 捕魚 (bu4 yü2 = catch-fish). 漁民 (yü2 min2 = fishing-people = fishermen) operate拖網漁船 (tuo1 wang3 yü2 chuan2 = drag-net-fishing-vessel = trawlers), bring in漁獲 (yü2 huo4 = fishing-harvest = catch).


Legend says 漁夫 (yü2 fu1 = fisher-man) discovered世外桃源 (shi4 wai4 tao2 yün2 = world-outside/beyond-peach-source = peaceful village sheltered behind peach-trees near a stream's source, in a forgotten corner of the world).

by Diana Yue