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

迷
Putonghua pronunciation: mi2
Cantonese pronunciation: mai4
Meanings: fascinate, confused, charmed, unconscious, hallucination

迷 (radical 亻 = 走 zou3 = go/boat) = 迷失 (mi2 shi1 = confused-lost): 迷幻藥 (mi2 huan4 yao4 = confused-hallucination-drug = LSD), 昏迷 (hun1 mi2 = faint-unconscious = coma), 迷信 (mi2 xin4 = confused-belief = superstition).

Fox-fairies 迷惑 (mi2 huo4 = confuse-hallucinate = bewitch) men. Star’s 迷人 (mi2 ren2 = charm-people = charming/ enchanting) smile makes 影迷 (ying3 mi2 = shadow-fascinate = movie fans) 入迷 (ru4 mi2 = enter-fascination = spell-bound).

迷宮 (mi2 gong1 = confusing-palace) = maze/labyrinth.
漁人 (yü2 fu1 = fisher-man) rowed up-stream seeking 桃源 (tao2 yuán2 = peach-source = stream’s source amidst peach-trees), 迷路 (mi2 lu4 = lost-his-way). Idiom 指點迷津 (zhi3 dian3 mi2 jin1 = finger-point-lost-stream-source) = counsel/enlighten muddle-headed advice-seeker.

by Diana Yue