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 missing persons

Putonghua pronunciation: zong1
Cantonese pronunciation: jung1
Meanings: trail, track

Noun 蹤 = 足 (zu2, foot) + 從 (cong2, follow). 蹤跡 (zong1 jil1 = track-trace) means person’s/animal’s tracks. 失蹤 (shil zong1 = lose-tracks) = disappear. Unrecovered stolen property 無影無蹤 (wu2 ying3 wu2 zong1 = no-shadow-no-tracks = simply vanished).

Hunter trails 獵蹤 (shou4 zong1 = animal’s-tracks). Detective追蹤 (zuil zong1 = pursue-tracks = pursues) suspect to find 賊蹤 (zei2 zong1 = thief’s-tracks/whereabouts). Submarine 跟蹤 (gen1 zong1 = follow-tracks = tails) carrier. MI6 traces 諜蹤 (die2 zong1 = spy-tracks = spy’s whereabouts).

芳蹤杳杳 (fang1 zong1 yiao3 yiao3 = flower’s-tracks-gone-gone) = “Ah, she’s nowhere to be found!” 緑野仙蹤 (lü ye3 xian1 zong1 = green-wild-meadows-fairies’tracks) is poetic Chinese title of movie The Wizard of Oz.

by Diana Yue