

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 pine-trees

脂

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji1*

Meanings: fat

脂 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, meat/flesh) = 脂肪 (*zhi1 fang2* = fat-fat-at-waist = fat): 豬油 (*zhu1 you2* = pig-fat = lard), 鵝脂 (*e2 zhi1* = goose-fat). 羊脂白玉 (*yang2 zhi1 bai2 yu4* = lamb's-fat-white-jade) is oily-white jade. Tyrant snatches 民脂民膏 (*min2 zhi1 min2 gao1* = people's-fat-people's-grease = people's output/wealth).

松樹 (*song1 shu4* = pine-tree)'s 樹皮 (*shu4 pi2* = tree-skin/ bark) excretes 松脂 (*song1 zhi1* = pine-fat = resin). Painter dilutes oil-pigments with 松節油 (*song1 jie2 you2* = pine-section-oil = turpentine). Violinist greases violin strings with 松香 (*song1 xiang1* = rosin).

琥珀 (*hu3 po4* = jade-translucent = amber) is 松脂化石 (*song1 zhi1 hua4 shi2* = pine-fat-transformed-rock = fossilized resin) containing insect remains.

by Diana Yue