

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 furniture

椅

Putonghua pronunciation: *yi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yi2*

Meaning: chair, stool, bench

Ancient 胡人 (*Hu2 ren2* = northwestern-tribes) brought 胡床 (*Hu2 chuang2* = Hu-people's-bed = 椅 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood = stools/chairs) into China. Servants carried travellers/hunters on 交椅 (*jiao1 yi3* = foldable/movable cross-legged-stools/chairs). 坐第一把交椅 (*zuo4 di4 yi1 ba3 jiao1 yi3* = occupying-first-cross-legged-chair) describes top authority.

Artists design 餐椅 (*can1 yi3* = dining-chairs), 沙發 (*sha1 fa1* = "sofas"-transliterated), 旋轉椅 *xuan2 chuan3 yi3* = spin/swivel-chairs), 扶手椅 (*fu2 shou3 yi3* = hold/support-arm-chairs). Park-strollers enjoy 長椅 (*chang2 yi3* = long-benches).

Oldsters use 安樂椅 (*an1 le4 yi3* = peaceful-happy-chair = 搖椅 *yao2 yi3* = rocking-chairs), 按摩椅 (*an4 mo3 yi3* = press-rub/massage-chairs), 輪椅 (*lun2 yi3* = wheel-chairs). 電椅 (*dian4 yi3* = electric-chairs) execute prisoners.

by Diana Yue