

Character Builder

您好學？

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 Dunhuang

藏

Putonghua pronunciation: *cang2, zang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chong4, jong6*

Meaning: hide, keep, store, collect, collection, hoard, storage

藏 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) means hide/keep/collect/store. Squirrels 貯藏 (*zhu4 cang2* = hoard-store) nuts. Spy 藏身 (*cang2 shen1* = hides-body/himself) in closet. Museums 收藏 (*shou1 cang2* = acquire-collect) relics/artworks.

Crossing NW China's 戈壁灘 (*Ge1 Bi3 tan1* = Gobi-Desert) on camelback, ancient Chinese/foreign merchants followed 絲綢之路 (*si1 chou2 zhi1 lu4* = silk-satin-'s-road = the Silk Road) along which four settlements 酒泉 (*Jiu3 Qian2*), 武威 (*Wu3 Wei1*), 張掖 (*Zhang1 Yi4*), 敦煌 (*Dun1 Huang2*, ancient meaning: great-prosperous/glorious) flourished.

Buddhists dug hundreds of caves/grottoes in hillside, built 佛龕 (*fo2 kan1* = Buddhist-shrines). 敦煌石窟 (*Dun1 Huang2 shi2 ku1* = Dunhuang-stone-grottoes) house priceless 寶藏 (*bao3 zang4* = treasure-collection) of Buddhist statues and murals over a millennium.

by Diana Yue