

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 antiques

瓷

Putonghua pronunciation: *ci2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi4*

Meaning: porcelain, china

瓷 (radical 瓦 *wa3*, pottery/roof-tile) means porcelain/china. 陶瓷 (*tao2 ci2* = pottery-porcelain = ceramics) include 陶 (*tao2*, low-fired pottery-ware), 瓷 (*ci2*, high-fired porcelain-ware).

Artisans mix water into 瓷土 (*ci2 tu3* = porcelain-clay); shape 胎 (*tai1*, embryo/body); 上釉 (*shang1 you3* = mount/cover-with-glaze); put inside 瓷窯 (*ci2 yao2* = porcelain-kiln); 燒瓷 (*shao1 ci2* = fire-porcelain). Ancient Chinese 外銷瓷 (*wai4 xiao1 ci2* = foreign-sold-porcelain = export china) were 日用瓷 (*ri4 yong4 ci2* = daily-used-china) e.g. 瓷碗 (*ci2 wan3* = porcelain-bowls), 瓷瓶 (*ci2 ping2* = porcelain-bottles/jars).

宋瓷 (*Song4 ci2* = Song-dynasty-porcelain-ware) include 青瓷 (*qing1 ci2* = light-blue-glazed-porcelain), 白瓷 (*bai2 ci2* = white-glazed-porcelain), 青花瓷 (*qing1 hua1 ci2* = blue-on-white-porcelain). Ming Dynasty produced 彩瓷 (*cai3 ci2* = multi-colored-porcelain).

by Diana Yue