

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 blossoming trees



Putonghua pronunciation: *cha2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cha4*

Meaning: tea, camellia

茶 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) = tea: 茶壺 (*cha2 hu2* = tea-pot), 茶杯 (*cha2 bei1* = tea-cup), 喝茶 (*he1 cha2* = drink-tea): 茉莉花茶 (*mo4 li4 hua1 cha2* = jasmine-flower-tea = jasmine tea), 英式奶茶 (*ying1 shi1 nai3 cha2* = “Eng”lish-transliterated-style-milk-tea).

茶花 (*cha2 hua1* = tea-flower = camellia), aka 山茶花 (*shan1 cha2 hua1* = mountain-tea-flower), has 碗形花瓣 (*wan3 xing3 hua1 ban4* = bowl-shaped-flower-petals).

Novelist 小仲馬 (*Xiao3 Zhong4 Ma3* = little/young-“Du-mas”-transliterated = Dumas fils) portrayed courtesan 茶花女 (*cha2 hua1 nü3* = tea-flower-woman = La Dame aux Camélias) wearing 白茶花 (*bai2 cha2 hua1* = white-tea-flower = white camellia), 紅茶花 (*hong2 cha2 hua1* = red-tea-flower = red camellia).

by Diana Yue