

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 Chinese painting



Putonghua pronunciation: *hua* 4

Cantonese pronunciation: *wa* 2

Meanings: draw, drawing, paint, painting

書 (*shu*1) means writing/calligraphy/books. In China, historically 書畫同源 (*shu*1 *hua*4 *tong*2 *yuan*2 = writing~painting~same-source = writing and painting originated together). Both use 紙 (*zhi*3 = paper), 筆 (*bi*3 = brush), 墨 (*mo*4 = water-soluble black ink).

國畫 (*guo*2 *hua*4 = nation's~painting = "our country's painting") means 中國畫 (*Zhong*1 *Guo*2 *hua*4 = middle~state/nation~painting = Chinese painting). 國畫家 (*guo*2 *hua*4 *jia*1 = nation~painting~ masters = painters using traditional medium) paint 山水 (*shan*1 *shui*3 = hills~waters = landscapes), 人物 (*ren*2 *wu*4 = person~object = people/portraits).

畫畫 (*hua*4 *hua*4 = paint~paintings) is 風雅 (*feng*1 *ya*3 = wind~elegance = elegant/refined/scholarly) activity/pursuit. 古畫 (*gu*3 *hua*4 = ancient~paintings) in Beijing's and Taipei's Imperial Palace Museums are 國寶 (*guo*2 *bao*3 = national~treasures).

by Diana Yue