Character Builder

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

偽
Putonghua pronunciation: wei3
Cantonese pronunciation: ngai6
Meaning: fake, false, untrue, sham, hypocritical, forged, unauthentic, illegitimate

偽 (偽 = 人 ren2, person + 為 wei2, do/make) means 虛偽 (xūi wei3 = pretense-falsehood). Spy 偽造 (wei3 zao4 = false-make = fakes) passport, works under 偽裝 (wei3 zhuang4 = false-make-up = camouflage). 偽君子 (wei3 jün1 zi0 = false-honorable-man = hypocrite) 偽善 (wei3 Shan4 = pretends-to-be-kind/righteous), uses 偽鈔 (wei3 chao1 = faked-banknotes).

In WWII Japanese invaders supported Wang Zhaoming’s 偽政府 (wei3 zheng4 fu3 = illegal-administration-bureau = collaborative government, 1940-45) and Pu Yi’s 偽滿洲國 (wei3 Man3 Zhou1 Guo2 = illegitimate-Man-churia-state = Japanese “Manchukuo”, 1932-45).

Painting carries 偽冒 (wei3 mao4 = false-pretend = imitated) signature. Expert examines its 真偽 (zhen1 wei3 = true-false = authenticity), pronounces it 偽品 (wei3 pin3 = faked-item).

by Diana Yue