Character Builder 4







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 rice-planting



Putonghua pronunciation: *niu2*Cantonese pronunciation: *ngau4*Meanings: ox

牛 means ox/bull/cow/buffalo: 公牛 (gong1 niu2 = male/grandpa-ox = bull), 母牛 (mu3 niu2 = mother-ox = cow), 牛犢 (nui2 du2 = ox's-young-calf), 野牛 (ye3 niu2 = wild-buffalo), 瘋 牛症 (feng1 niu2 zheng4 = mad-cow-disease). 牦牛 (mao2 niu2 = long-haired-buffalo) = yak. 牛耕田 (niu2 geng1 tian1 = oxen-till-fields), harnessed to 犁 (li2, plough). Farmers use 水牛 (shiu3 niu2 = water-cow = water buffalo), 黃牛 (huang2 niu2 = yellow-ox) as 耕牛 (geng1 niu2 = till-ox = plough-pulling oxen). 孺子牛 (ru2 zi3 niu2 = young-child-son-ox = ox for child's riding) means diligent/selfless teacher/official willingly rendering service/sacrifice to pupils/public.

During Cultural Revolution, defamed intellectuals 進牛棚 (jin4 niu2 peng2 = enter~ox~shed = were illegally confined to do forced labor).

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