

Character Builder 您好學？

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 the Manchurian people

北

Putonghua pronunciation: *bei3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bak1*

Meaning: north, northern, northward

北 (radical 匕 *bi3*, spoon) means north: 北方 (*bei3 fang1* = north-direction/region = the North), 北風 (*bei3 feng1* = north-wind), 北京 (*Bei3 Jing1* = Beijing), 北極 (*bei3 ji2* = north-ultra = North Pole). Compass shows 東南西北 (*dong1 nan2 xi1 bei3* = east-south-west-north).

Manchu/Manchurians are 東北人 (*dong1 bei3 ren2* = east-north-people = NE Chinese) from 東三省 (*dong1 san1 sheng3* = east-three-province = three northeastern provinces): 遼寧 (*Liao2 Ning2*), 吉林 (*Ji2 Lin2*), 黑龍江 (*Hei1 Long2 Jiang1*).

Heilongjiang's 北大荒 (*bei3 da4 huang1* = north-big-wilderness = the Great Northern Wilderness) is now wheat-belt. 發展大西北 (*fa1 zhan3 da4 xi1 bei3* = develop-extend-great-west-north = "Developing the Great Northwest", i.e. northwestern provinces) is 21st century goal.

by Diana Yue