

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 the Manchurian people

旗

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kei4*

Meaning: flag, banner, Manchurian military/administrative division

旗 (radical 方 *fang1*, square) means 旗幟 (*qi2 zhi4* = flag-pennant): 國旗 (*guo2 qi2* = national-flag), 軍旗 (*jün1 qi2* = army-flag/standard), 旗手 (*qi2 shou3* = flag-hand = standard-bearer/waver), 旗艦店 (*qi2 jian4 dian4* = brand-name's flag-ship-store). 旗鼓相當 (*qi2 gu3 xiang1 dang1* = flags-drums-match-equal) describes equally-strong camps/sides.

Old Manchuria had 八旗 (*ba1 qi2* = eight-banners = eight military/demographic/administrative divisions): two 紅旗 (*hong2 qi2* = red-banners), two blue/yellow/white, hence terms 旗人 (*qi2 ren2* = banner/Manchurian-people), 八旗子弟 (*ba1 qi2 zi3 di4* = eight-banners-sons-younger-brothers = banner/Manchurian men), Qing Dynasty established 盟旗 (*meng2 qi2* = league-banner = Mongolian-Manchurian regional administration) system.

Banner-men kept 辮子 (*bian1 zi0* = queue/pigtail-diminutive = queues/pigtails). Banner-women wore 旗袍 (*qi2 pao2* = Manchurian/Chinese-style-long-gowns).

by Diana Yue