

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 Mongolian people

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi2, ji4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ke4, kei4*

Meaning: mount, ride, ride horse, horse-and-rider

騎 (radical *ma3*, horse) means 騎馬 (*qi2 ma3* = ride-horse). 騎術 (*qi2 shu2* = riding-method = equestrian art/sport). 騎劫 (*qi2 jie2* = ride-rob) = hi-jack. 騎牆派 (*qi2 qiang2 pai4* = ride-wall-faction) describes un-committed opportunists.

鐵木真 (*Tie3 Mu4 Jin1* = Temü in,) aka 成吉思汗 (*Cheng2 Ji2 Si1 Han4* = Genghis Khan, 1162-1227 AD), led Mongolian 騎兵 (*qi2 bing1* = horseback-soldiers, cavalry) on three westward expeditions, founded four 汗國 (*han4 guo2* = khan-state = kingdoms/khanates).

Temü in's grandson 忽必烈 (*Hu1 Bi4 Lie4* = Kublai Khan), leading Mongolian 鐵騎 (*tie3 ji4* = iron-horse-and-rider = brave/undefeatable horsemen), marched south, conquered Song Dynasty, founded 元朝 (*Yuan2 chao2* = Yuan-Dynasty, 1271-1368, capital 大都 *Da4 Du1* = big-capital = today's Beijing).

by Diana Yue