

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

牧

Putonghua pronunciation: *mu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *muk6*

Meaning: let graze, herd, animal herding, herder, governor

牧 (radical 牛 *niu2*, cattle/ox) means 畜牧 (*cu4 mu4* = breeding-herding of grazing animals) or herder/ruler: 牧人 (*mu4 ren2* = herds-man), 牧童 (*mu4 tong2* = shepherd/buffalo-boy), 州牧 (*zhou1 mu4* = prefecture's-governor in ancient China). Christians call Jesus 牧羊人 (*mu4 yang2 ren2* = shep-herd), call vicars 牧師 (*mu4 shi1* = past-ors).

遊牧民族 (*you2 mu4 min2 zu2* = roam-herd-people-tribe = nomadic people) move around 牧場 (*mu4 chang3* = grazing-grounds), seeking 牧草 (*mu4 cao3* = grazing/herbage/forage-grasses) for 放牧 (*fang4 mu4* = free-range/letting-animals-graze). Ancient song lyrics “風吹草低見牛羊 (*feng1 cui1 cao3 di1 jian4 niu2 yang2* = wind-blows-grass-lowers/bends-see/appear-cattle-sheep)” suggest sweeping landscape on 壩上 (*Ba4 Shang4* = Bashang Plateau = meadowland escalating to Mongolian plateau).

by Diana Yue