

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

包

Putonghua pronunciation: *baol*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baaul*

Meaning: wrap, packet, package, bundle, contain, bun, tent

包 (radical 勹 = 包 *baol*, wrap) means 包裹 (*baol guo3* = wrapped-parcel), 包圍 (*baol wei2* = enwrap-encircle = surround), 包括 (*baol kuo4* = contain-include), 包容 (*baol rong2* = over-embrace-tolerate). 包袱 (*baol fu2* = wrapped-cloth-bundle) also means burden. 收紅包 (*shou1 hong2 baol* = take-red-packet containing money) means taking graft/bribes. 包 is steamed/baked dough: 叉燒包 (*chai shaol baol* = fork-roast-wrap = steamed bun with barbecued-pork filling). Mongolians live in 蒙古包 (*Meng2 Gu3 baol* = Mon-gol-bun = dome-topped felt tents = yurts). Mongolians pray and make offerings to 敖包 (*ao2 baol*, Mongolian term meaning heaps of stones/earth/grass, landmarks believed to be abode of local deities).

Manchurian nobles owned 包衣 (*baol yi1*, Manchurian term meaning subordinates/slaves from lower class).

by Diana Yue