

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 Mongolian people



Putonghua pronunciation: *meng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mang4*

Meaning: ally, alliance, regional administrative unit in Inner Mongolia

盟 (showing 日 *ri4*, sun, 月 *yue4*, moon) means alliance sworn by sun/moon. 盟主 (*meng2 zhu3* = alliance's-master/leader), 盟友 (*meng3 you3* = alliance's-friends/members) sign 盟約 (*meng2 yue4* = alliance-agreement/covenant), establish 聯盟 (*lian2 meng2* = united-alliance/coalition), 盟軍 (*meng2 jun1* = allied-forces). Traitor 背盟 (*bei4 meng2* = turns-back-on/betrays-alliance). Mongolian term 盟 (*meng2*, pronounced "ayimay") means prefecture/league with 盟長 (*meng2 zhang3* = league-leader). Qing Dynasty's Manchurian regime established 盟旗制度 (*meng2 qi2 zhi4 du4* = league-banner-system = Mongolian-prefecture-Manchurian-county administrative system).

PRC's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has three leagues: 興安盟 (*Xing1 An1 meng2* = Xing'an League), 錫林郭勒盟 (*Xi4 Lin2 Guo2 le4 meng2* = Xilinguole League), 阿拉善盟 (*Al1 La1 Shan4 meng2* = Alashan League).

by Diana Yue