

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 World War II

Putonghua pronunciation: *mèng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mang4*

Meaning: alliance, pact, league

盟 (日 *ri4*, sun + 月 *yue4*, moon + 皿 *min3*, vessel) means alliance/pact sworn to sun/moon reflected in vessel of water: 盟約 (*mèng2 yue4* = alliance-agreement/covenant), 背盟 (*bei4 mèng2* = turn-back-on/betray-alliance). Lovers 海誓山盟 (*hai3 shi4 shan1 mèng2* = sea-swear-mountain-vow = exchange love vows). Comrades 滴血為盟 (*di2 xue3 wei2 mèng2* = drip-blood-make-alliance).

China is 不結盟國 (*bu4 jie2 mèng2 guo2* = no-bind/form-alliance-state = Non-Aligned Country). 東盟 (*dong1 mèng2* = east-alliance) = Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

WWII's 盟軍 (*mèng2 jun1* = allied-forces) fought 軸心國 (*zhou2 xin1 guo2* = Axis Countries). In 聯盟 (*lian2 mèng2* = united-alliance/coalition), 盟主 (*mèng2 zhu3* = alliance-master = allies' leader) commands 盟友 (*mèng3 you3* = ally-friends/members).

by Diana Yue