Character Builder 4







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:

 1^{st} 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 Japanese Invasion



Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng4* Cantonese pronunciation: *sing3* Meanings: win, conquer, victory

勝 is opposite of 敗 (*bai4* = 負 fu4, defeat). Champion 勝出 (*sheng4 chu1* = win~emerge = wins) match. 勝利 (*sheng4 li4* = win~gain = victory) can be 僅勝 (*jin3 sheng4* = just-made/narrow~victory), 小勝 (*xiao3 sheng4* = small~victory) or 大勝 (da4 sheng4 = huge~victory).

In WWII China 戰勝 (*zhan4 sheng4* = war-win = fought and defeated) Japan, but it was 慘勝 (*can3 sheng4* = woeful-victory = victory costing heart-rending losses).

Veterans warn against 勝利沖昏頭腦 (sheng4 li4 chong1 hun1 tou2 nao3 = victory~swamps~dizzy~head~brain = being overjoyed/blinded by victory), stress: 勝負乃兵家常事 (sheng4 fu4 nai3 bing1 jia1 chang2 shi4 = victory~defeat~are~soldier~practitioner's~ordinary~matters = Take it calmy — in battles there are always winners and losers).

by Diana Yue