

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 grasslands



Putonghua pronunciation: *meng 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mung 4*

Meanings: Mongol, Mongolian, Mongolia

蒙古 (*Meng2 Gu3* = Mon-gol) people were 東胡 (*dong1 Hu2* = eastern-Hu-people = eastern non-Han tribes) living in 蒙古包 (*Meng2 Gu3 bao1* = Mon-golian-tents) on Asia's northeastern steppes.

成吉思汗 (*Cheng2 Ji2 Si1 Han4* = Genghis Khan) led cavalrymen riding 蒙古馬 (*Meng2 Gu2 ma3* = Mon-golian-ponies), 馬上得天下 (*ma3 shang4 de2 tian1 xia4* = horse-on-wins-heaven-below = conquered the world on horseback). His grandson 忽必烈 (*Hu1 Bi4 Lie4* = Kublai Khan) founded 元朝 (*Yuan2 chao2* = Yuan-Dynasty, 1271-1368, capital 大都 *Da4 Du1* = big-capital = today's Beijing), built vast 蒙古帝國 (*Meng2 Gu3 di4 guo2* = Mon-gol-emperor-state = Mongolian empire).

Mongolian 摔跤 (*shuai1 jiao1* = thrust/throw~fall = wrestling) is a well-known sport.

by Diana Yue