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 Manchurian people

滿 Putonghua pronunciation: man3 Cantonese pronunciation: moon5
Meaning: full, Manchuria, Manchurian, Manchu

滿 (radical 氵 = water shui3, water) means full: 滿載 (man3 zai4 = fully-loaded), 滿足 (man3 zu2 = full-adequate = satiated/satisfied/appeased).

China’s five major ethnic groups are 漢 (Han4 race), 滿 (Man3, Manchu/Manchurians), 蒙 (Meng2, Mongols), 回 (Hui2 = Hui people), 藏 (Zang4, Tibetans). Northerners 滿人 (Man3 ren2 = Man-people/race = the Manchus/Manchurians), previously called 女真 (Nü3 Zhen1, Jin), proclaimed in 1536 AD their territory was 滿洲 (Man3 Zhou1 = Man-continental = Manchu/Manchuria).

Manchurians conquered Han-Chinese’s 明朝 (Ming2 chaot2 = Ming-Dynasty), established 清朝 (Qing1 chaot2 = Qing-Dynasty, 1644-1911 AD). During Japan’s invasion of China (1931-1945) Japan established its puppet regime 滿洲國 (Man3 Zhou1 guo2 = Manchu-state = Manchukuo = Japanese “Manshu-koku”, 1932-1945) in NE China and Inner Mongolia.

by Diana Yue