Character Builder

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 One Belt One Road

Putonghua pronunciation: zheng1
Cantonese pronunciation: jing1
Meaning: summon, call for, invite, levy, march, expedition, launch war against

征 (zheng1) share radical 亠 (chi4, limbs walking). 徵求 (zheng1 qiu2 = call-for-seek) = invite/summon: 徵文 (zheng1 wen2 = call-for-papers, essay competition), 徵税 (zheng1 shui4 = levy-taxes). 徵兵制 (zheng1 bing1 zhi4 = enlist-soldiers-system) = conscription.

征 (征’s simplified character) means 出征 (chu1 zheng1 = go-out-conscripted-soldiers = launch march/expedition), echoing 徵’s military connotation: 十字軍東征 (shi2 zi4 jün1 dong1 zheng1 = "+cross"-shaped-character-army-east-march = the Crusades), Chinese Red Army’s 長征 (Chang2 Zheng1 = Long-March, 1934-35).

China 徵調 (zheng1 diao4 = brings-together-deploys) resources for 一带一路 (yi1 dai4 yi1 lu4 = One-Belt-One-Road): 遠征 (yuan3 zheng1 = distant-march = go long way into) Central Asia, 征服 (zheng1 fu2 = march/fight-against-conquer) difficulties.

by Diana Yue