Character Builder 您好？！

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 Mongolian people

盟 (showing 日 ri4, sun, 月 yue4, moon) means alliance sworn by sun/moon. 盟主 (meng2 zhu3 = alliance’s-master/leader), 盟友 (meng3 you3 = alliance’s-friends/members) sign 盟约 (meng2 yue4 = alliance-agreement/covenant), establish 联盟 (lian2 meng2 = united-alliance/coalition), 盟军 (meng2 jin1 = allied-forces). Traitor 背盟 (bei4 meng2 = turns-back-on/betrays-alliance).

Mongolian term 盟 (meng2, pronounced “ayimay”) means prefecture/league with 盟长 (meng2 zhang3 = league-leader). Qing Dynasty’s Manchurian regime established 盟旗制度 (meng2 qi2 zhi4 du4 = league-banner-system = Mongolian-prefecture-Manchurian-county-administrative system).

PRC’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has three leagues: 興安盟 (Xing1 An1 meng2 = Xing’an League), 錫林郭勒盟 (Xi4 Lin2 Guo2 le4 meng2 = Xilinguole League), 阿拉善盟 (A1 La1 Shan4 meng2 = Alashan League).

by Diana Yue