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 counting your blessings

數 (radical 亻 wen2, script/writing) means 數字 (shu4 zi4 = numerical-figure), 數目 (shu4 mu4 = number-quantity): 奇數 (qi2 shu4 = odd-number), 偶數 (ou3 shu4 = pair/even-number).

數算 (shu3 shuan4 = count-calculate): 從一數到十 (cong2 yi1 shu3 dao4 shi2 = from-one-count-to-ten), 數人數 (shu3 ren2 shu4 = count-person-number = do head-count).

數學 (shu4 xue2 = numbers-studies) = mathematics. 數據庫 (shu4 ji4 ku4 = calculation-evidence-tank) = database.

Ancient Indian expression 恒河沙數 (Heng2 He2 shai1 shu4 = Ganges-River-sand-number) means infinite numbers.

命數 (ming4 shu4 = life-numbers) = fate/destiny. Losers have 數以百計 (shu4 yi3 bai3 ji4 = number-by-hundred-count = hundreds of) new chances, shouldn’t 數落 (shu3 luo4 = count-down = reproach/blame) competitors/system.

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