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 Hui people

禱 (radical 礻 = shi4, reveal) = 祈禱 (qi2 dao3 = beseech-pray = pray/prayers): 默禱 (mo4 dao3 = silent-prayers), 公禱 (gong1 dao3 = public-prayers), 代禱 (dai4 dao3 = represent-pray = pray for/on behalf of sinners/patients/others). Christians 主禱文 (zhu3 dao3 wen2 = master/lord-pray-text) = The Lord's Prayer.

Five times daily, Muslims perform ritualistic prayers: kneel on 禱毯 (dao3 tan3 = prayer-rug), face 麥加 (Mai4 Jia1 = Mecca-transliterated), 禱拜 (li3 bai4 = honor/pay-homage-worship), 禱告 (dao3 gao4 = pray-speak/confess) to 真主 (zhen1 zhu3 = True-God) 安拉 (An1 La1 = Allah - transliterated).

回教徒 (Hui2 jiao4 tu2 = Hui-religion-followers = Chinese Muslims) use term “乃瑪子” (nai3 ma3 zi0 = Persian word namaz - transliterated) for prayer-worship.

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