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 Han people

擴 (radical 手 = hand/arm) means expand/enlarge. Auditorium 擴建 (kuo4 jian4 = expand-build = builds more structures), 擴充 (kuo4 chong1 = expands-adds) equipments, adds 擴音器 (kuo4 yin1 qi4 = augment-sound-equipment = amplifiers).
血管擴大 (xue3 guan3 kuo4 da4 = blood-vessels-widen-enlarge) = vasodilation. 癌擴散 (ai2 kuo4 san4 = cancer-grow-spread) = spreading of cancer cells. 核擴散 (he2 kuo4 san4 = nuclear-expand-spread) = nuclear weapons’ proliferation.

Han empire (202-220 BC) 擴軍 (kuo4 jun1 = expanded-army), 擴張版圖 (kuo4 zhang1 ban3 tu2 = expand-stretch-page-picture = expanded territories), 西擴 (xi1 kuo4 = westwards-expanded), defeated the 匈奴 (Xiong1 Nu2 = Xiongnu, nomadic tribes in current Mongolia). European Union 東擴 (dong1 kuo4 = east-expand = extends influence eastwards).

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